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Ambivalence, Social Theory and Modernity:
Investigating the Social Analysis and Social Science in Iran

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Mandatory Declaration

I hereby do solemnly affirm that I have produced this work without the unauthorized help of third parties and without the use of sources or aids other than those cited; the ideas stemming directly or indirectly from external sources are marked as such. I do further declare that I have not enlisted the help of professional thesis consultants or coaches, neither will I use them in future. This work has not previously been submitted to an examining authority in Germany or abroad, neither in the same nor a similar form, and has also not been published.

Bayreuth, 19 Jan. 23

Mahdi Montazeri-Moghaddam

Dedication

*For free spirits from our father Adam and mother Eve, to martyrs of Karbala,
and all the way through to Hafez and Nietzsche and all those who sacrificed
their minds, souls and bodies to make this madhouse liveable.*

Table of Contents

<i>Mandatory Declaration</i>	I
<i>Dedication</i>	II
<i>List of Tables</i>	V
<i>List of Figures</i>	VI
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	VII
<i>Abstract</i>	IX
<i>Introduction</i>	1
The Structure of the Text	3
<i>Chapter 1: One Must Admit this Situation Looks Very Persian!</i>	6
1.1. Iranian Society in the Face of Modernisation	9
1.1.1. Structural Differentiation	11
1.2. The Inauguration of Sociology to the Iranian Academia	23
1.3. Ambivalence: Coexistence of Mutually Exclusive Contradictions.....	32
1.4. Conclusion	36
<i>Chapter 2: On The Summit of Continual Fluctuation; Reading A Society Through The Conception of Ambivalence</i>	39
2.1. Representation of Iranian Ambivalence Through the Eyes of Social Sciences.....	43
2.1.1. Case No. 1. The Villagers Knew Better!	43
2.1.2. Case No. 2. We Have All Been Wondering About You!	48
2.1.3. Case No. 3. The Guidance Patrol and Visiting a Religious Ceremony.....	53
2.2. Turning Away From Conventional Sociology.....	58
2.3. Conclusion	61
<i>Chapter 3: The Intellectual Conditions of the Possibility of Ambivalence</i>	62
3.1. Historical Conditions of Possibility of Sociology.....	63
3.1.1. The Bond Between the State And Society.....	63
3.1.2. Savage and Moderns	65
3.1.3. Sociology, the Social And the <i>Modern</i>	69
3.2. The Intellectual Origins of Doubling of <i>the Social And Society</i>	71
3.3. Kant's Doctrine of the Transcendental Idealism	75
3.3.1. Transcendental Imagination; A Reflection on the Third Term	78
3.3.2. The Necessary Qualifying Conditions.....	81
3.3.3. The Consequences.....	82
3.4. Sociological Schematism: Durkheim's Social Facts	85
3.5. The Kantian Roots of Weber's Sociology.....	92
3.6. Conclusion: The Ambivalent Disposition of Sociological Formal <i>A Priori</i> Conditions.....	99
<i>Chapter 4: Suspended Knowledge; Revisiting Iranian Sociology</i>	103
4.1. Naming of the Suspension: A Research Program for Historical Sociology of Iran	104

4.1.1. Posing the Main Point of Dispute.....	106
4.1.2. Atmosphere of Speech and Archive.....	112
4.2. The Theoretical Approaches In the <i>Naming</i>	118
4.2.1. Kantian Elements of the Suspension of the Present Moment.....	120
4.3. Conclusion.....	122
<i>Chapter 5: The Path to Emancipation.....</i>	124
5.1. Sociology As the Knowledge of Development.....	126
5.2. Sociology And the Morals.....	130
5.3. Redeeming Sociology.....	134
<i>References.....</i>	148

List of Tables

TABLE 1. IRAN'S VITAL STATISTICS.....	17
TABLE 2. FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL DILEMMA	18
TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FEELING OF FREEDOM IN POLITICAL SPHERE	18
TABLE 4. FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SATISFACTION FROM THE POLITICAL DISPOSITION	19
TABLE 5. IRANIANS' ATTITUDE REGARDING THE PRESENT AND FUTURE STATUS OF RELIGIOSITY AMONG THEIR CONTEMPORARIES...	20
TABLE 6. IRANIANS' ATTITUDE REGARDING THE FUTURE STATUS OF MORALITY AMONG THEIR CONTEMPORARIES.....	20
TABLE 7. IRANIANS' ATTITUDE ABOUT THE PRESENT AND FUTURE POLITICAL DISPOSITION.....	21
TABLE 8. IRANIANS' ATTITUDE REGARDING THE PRESENT AND FUTURE STATUS OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY	22
TABLE 9. ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNIQUENESS AND EFFICACY OF IRANIAN CULTURE	42

List of Figures

FIGURE 1. IRAN'S MAP 12

FIGURE 2. SUSPENSION OF THE PRESENT MOMENT 31

FIGURE 3. MOST WIDELY PRACTICED FORMS OF MUSLIM VEILS 54

FIGURE 4. THE SYNTHETIC UNITY IN THE FORM OF A TRANSCENDENTAL SCHEMA..... 82

FIGURE 5. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE THIRD TERM 83

FIGURE 6. THE FORMAL A PRIORI CONDITIONS OF DURKHEIM'S SOCIAL FACTS 90

FIGURE 7. THE FORMAL A PRIORI CONDITIONS OF WEBER'S SUBJECTIVE MEANING..... 95

FIGURE 8. THE FORMAL CONDITIONS OF THE SUSPENSION OF THE PRESENT MOMENT 121

FIGURE 9. THE SOCIOLOGICAL FORMAL A PRIORI CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY..... 137

FIGURE 10. THE CONDITIONS OF VARIOUS CONTINGENT POSSIBILITIES..... 144

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¹ *Psalm 40:2 - I Waited Patiently for the LORD.*

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Abstract

In this study, we have discussed that the inescapable cycle of Iranian sociological descriptions of Iranian society “neither from here nor from elsewhere; driven from here, not arrived there” is a result of the ambivalent feature of Kantian idealism with its significant role on sociology when it attempts to attain a scientific status. However, to explore this impact, we have taken up the work of those founding fathers of sociology who helped our discipline gain academic recognition, namely Durkheim’s *social facts* and Weber’s *subjective meaning* to situate them by referencing Kant’s formalism. This orientation developed a discussion of a principle, i.e., the synthesis of contradictory elements, as the sociological formal *a priori* conditions of possibility. Being equipped with this analytical tool, we critically examined Towfigh’s *suspension of the present time* and argued that the inescapable cycle of Iranian sociological descriptions is in agreement with the general ambivalent character of *formal* conditions of sociology. Consequently, suggesting the sociological formal *a priori* conditions apart from engendering a peculiar disposition in Iran: *a)* in relation to the challenges of modernity and development creates concerns and undercuts the possibility of modernity simultaneously; *b)* concerning value grounds merely makes possible to hold a *relativistic moral* standpoint; *c)* in terms of reality it just makes possible to distinguish things in *a given* formal structure among the numerous conceivable forms; *d)* and as to the objectivity of our academic enterprise, calls into question the findings of sociological studies because the outcome is predetermined before investigation. Finally, as a way of dealing with this situation, it has been suggested that establishing sociology based on a distinct trajectory of thought, such as Nietzsche’s perspectivism, different from Kant’s formalism, could be considered a way out.

Keywords: Sociology in Iran, Ambivalence, Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, Sociological Formalism

Introduction

Nowadays, merely mentioning Iran in research seems sufficient to justify a project. This is not just because US President George W. Bush addressed Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the “axis of evil” on 29 January 2002 (State of the Union Address, 2002), less than 5 months after the 9/11 attacks. It is not merely because Iran has been engaged in exhausting nuclear negotiations with the rest of the world since 2003. It is not just due to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s speech that declared Israel should be “wiped off the map” in 2005 (MacAskill & McGreal, 2005). It is not even because US President Barack Obama, while visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2012, said, “All options to stop Iran developing a nuclear bomb are on the table, including military strikes” (Landler, 2012), or just because of Iran’s military involvement in the Middle East after the emergence of ISIS in 2013 in Syria and Iraq. Nor is it simply due to the fact that tensions between the US and Iran hit a boiling point in 2020 after Washington killed Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani, and Tehran responded with missile strikes on Ayn al-Asad military base housing US troops. Finally, it is not just because International powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany have imposed various sanction regimes on Iran on numerous occasions, the latest of them being set by European countries in 2022, sanctioning Iranian officials connected to Human Rights Abuses.

Iran has become problematic due to the bond between these international political affairs and domestic issues. Not in the sense that Britain and the United States orchestrated a coup d’état in 1953 to overthrow the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh (Byrne, 2013), which caused the public feeling of interregnum. But in a sense that both *Western governmentality* (Foucault, 2008) and *political spirituality governmentality*² (Afary & Anderson, 2005) have found their active sympathizers insofar as in every single significant socio-political incident, the streets of Iran turn into the battlefield of these ideologies. For instance, the recent sanctioning of Iranian officials announced in December 2022 for Human Rights Abuse (Blinken, 2022) was supposed to support pro-Western Iranian civilians who, on the grounds of Iran, were protesting by chanting the slogan “Women, Life, Freedom”³. While simultaneously,

² The terms Western and political spirituality governmentality were coined by Foucault. The former means “the Western liberal advanced state subtle way of controlling its citizens through a set of empowering techniques like autonomy, self-actualization, self-realization, and self-esteem” (Madsen, 2014), and the latter to “stress on spiritual politics and Islamism was the new feature that had emerged in his [Foucault’s] Iran writings” (Afary & Anderson, 2005, p. 128). I have used these terms to refer to the stereotypes that each side has about the *other*. Of course, neither the Western government is homogeneous nor the Iranian.

³ Associated with the death of Mahsa Amini in police custody which brought approximately 90,000-100,000 people to the streets and caused more than 300-400 deaths and 1,160 non-fatal injuries.

the pro-regime families were reciting the “Salâm farmândeḥ” (Salute commander) song in various gatherings and ceremonies, which pledges allegiance to Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, calls for the return of the occulted Shi’i Imam and even addresses assassinated IRGC⁴ Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani. Obviously, each camp has its own lifestyle, clothing, accessibility to means, leisure, occupations, and aspirations, dividing the Iranian territory simply by ideology and how one perceives things. A thought-provoking fact, i.e., two cities that occupy the same space simultaneously, even when presented in a storytelling fashion, makes an exciting and intriguing science fiction novel —cf. *The City & the City* (2010) by China Miéville.

Less than half a century has passed from the days that

[t]roops began to desert, and on 16 January 1979 the Shah flew out of the country. Khomeini returned on 1 February, troops loyal to the Shah’s government gave up the struggle ten days later (the *Daheh-ye Fajr*), and at the end of March a nationwide referendum gave 97 per cent support for an Islamic republic. [Emphasis added] (Axworthy, 2013, p. 16)

However, as of today, European-based polling institutions claim that “88% of the [Iranian] population consider ‘having a democratic political system’ to be ‘fairly good’ or ‘very good’” (Maleki, 2022). Still, Iranian social sciences, during this time (and even before this period), occupied with theoretical and methodological problems, merely functioned for posh inside academic polemics and debates. Not being able to trace, identify and describe the sociocultural significance of events, major shifts, trends, currents of thought, rises and falls, etc., Iranian sociology cannot even positively or negatively comment on such findings. In this sense, Iran’s social sciences cannot perform their basic role in State practical considerations, contributing to the “attainment of value-judgments concerning measures of State economic policy” (Weber, 1949, p. 51). Consequently, it is apt to describe Iranian social sciences in general, and sociology, in particular, to be in *crisis* (Abdollahi, 1996; Mahdi, 2010; Bayatrizi, 2010; Ghaneirad, 2011; Tavakol & Rahimi-Sajasi, 2012; Bayatrizi, 2013; Towfigh, et al., 2019)⁵. To make matters worse, it has been a decade or two since a meta-theory presented by Ebrahim Towfigh termed *suspension of the present moment* (2000) has brought Iranian sociological knowledge to a dead-end. This meta-theory contends that the underpinning motif for the distinct and various Iranian

⁴ Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

⁵ Here, we have merely cited English-written contributions. The Farsi-written works in this regard are countless. I had remarked somewhere that this situation, arguing the crisis of Iranian sociology, could be interpreted as the only tradition in Iranian sociology since every Iranian sociologist has at least once contributed to this topic (Talebi & Montazeri-Moghaddam, 2016).

sociological approaches to Iranian society has been provided by modernisation theory and the notion of transitional society, which principally is silent regarding the current conjuncture or by refusing to face societal realities postpones it to a yet-to-be-realised, indefinite future moment. Eventually, giving rise to a kind of sociology “which is not even capable of providing a typical positivist explanation of the *status quo*, let alone allowing for the possibility of a historical-critical understanding of the social” (Towfigh & Ahmadnia, 2014, p. 313).

In the context of the concerns outlined, the question arises, “How do we have to understand Iranian society?” both in terms of social knowledge and social problems. The initial thesis, based on an understanding of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* (1991 [1967]), was that inasmuch as the social “processes by which any body of ‘knowledge’ comes to be socially established as ‘reality’” (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 15), the *Ausgang*, exit, and way out would be to look for the signs and symbols of the *suspension of the present moment* in everyday Iranian life. But it was soon realized that their framework, which evolves throughout a continuous dialectic process of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation, follows the same logic of Kantian formalistic antinomies and aporias which brought the Iranian social sciences to a state of refuting the present moment in the first place. After turning away from *social constructivism*, we realised that the situation we want to come to terms with is only possible through the notion of *ambivalence*. This is because Iranian society and sociology simultaneously are the cause and cure⁶ for preventing Iranian concrete reality (*Wirklichkeit*) from being grasped. However, since it is argued on various grounds that ambivalence is the main character of modern thought, we began to explore the idea that the Iranian ambivalent disposition might be understood as a consequence of the overall ambivalent characteristics of our era. However, this approach to the problem enabled us to attend to both ambivalent dispositions, i.e., both within the Iranian context and the trajectory of modern thought, and exhibit the similitudes between these two dispositions.

The Structure of the Text

The first two chapters exhibit the peculiar ambivalent disposition within Iranian society and sociology. Chapter 1 offers a detailed chronological reading of Iranian society in the face of modernisation. This is followed by the same historical reconstruction regarding the

⁶ Here, by cause and cure, we simply mean that both conceptions of Iranian society and Iranian sociology carry along with them dual connotations. In this sense, both conceptions involve a general aspect, with reference to their objective and empirical whole, and a transcendental facet which refers to the condition out of which their objectivity becomes comprehensible.

establishment of modern knowledge of society in Iran, i.e., Iranian sociology. The concern of this chapter, though it makes an historical argument, is to specify that since the cause and cure of the problematic disposition that we are facing in society and social knowledge in Iran are the same, we have no other way of relating to this disposition than subsuming it under the notion of *ambivalence*. However, ambivalence for us is based on an ontological interpretation of this term, which on a philosophical level, is equivalent to the *Non-Contradiction Law*. This notion has been taken up in Chapter 2. Reconstructing three different cases from the Iranian context, we demonstrate by what means simultaneous conflicting and contradictory propositions, dispositions, or situations have penetrated the representations of Iranian social sciences of its society.

Chapter 3 discusses how the ambivalent disposition in Iran bears a resemblance to the ambivalent character of modern thought and sociology as the integral character of modernity. An historical examination of the conditions of the possibility of ambivalence in contemporary thought and sociology mainly takes up this task. This historical discussion, it is suggested, identifies Kantian idealism as the source of ambivalence in sociological thinking. However, since the significant role of the ambivalent feature of Kantian formalism for sociology when it attempts to attain a scientific status had brought Iranian sociological knowledge to a dead-end, the mere recognition of this analytical moment was insufficient. To be able to constitute an alternative route out of Kantian idealism, we had first to answer where why and how Kant had incorporated the antinomies and paradoxes. This orientation led to a discussion on the topic of the *formal* conditions of the possibility of Kantian idealism. To be sure that in the moment of establishment, the sociological *a priori* conditions of possibility are constituted of the same formal conditions as those that Kant provides for his philosophical question, in the next step, we take up Durkheim's *social fact* and Weber's *subjective meaning* to situate them by reference to Kant's formalism. Finally, the chapter suggests a principle-like *synthesis of contradictory elements* as the sociological formal *a priori* condition of possibility.

In Chapter 4, we critically examine Towfigh's meta-theory of *suspension of the present time* to reveal its sociological formal *a priori* conditions. Our concern with this chapter is to bring back our critique of the Iranian sociological scene and argue that the ambivalent feature of Iranian sociological knowledge aligns with a trajectory of thought that starts with Kant's idealism.

Chapter 5 concludes the investigation. We try to draw on other implications of the sociological formal *a priori* conditions of possibility. This task has been taken up by addressing the relation

between the two key projects of sociology, *modernity* and *morality*, and the formal sociological conditions. Our primary concern in the rubric of “Sociology as the knowledge of development” is to contend that, on the one hand, sociology is established to create concern about the challenges of modernity and development. However, on the other, sociology, by abiding by formalistic laws, undercuts the possibility of modernity in most non-Western societies, such as Iran. In the following rubric, “Sociology and the Morals”, it has been argued that sociology’s moral perspective necessarily leads to a relativistic moral standpoint — however, it is suggested that this ethical approach maintains the autonomy of this discipline. Finally, in “Redeeming Sociology”, our concern is that we might be able to establish sociology based on a distinct trajectory of thought different from Kant’s formalism. In this regard, Nietzsche’s perspectivism could serve as a guideline for developing a sociology that turns away from the *universal* project, but until a thorough investigation has been conducted, this remains mere speculation.

Chapter 1: One Must Admit this Situation Looks Very Persian!

These sharp observers and layabouts discover that everything is rapidly coming to an end, that everything around them is ruined and creates ruin, that nothing lasts as long as the day after tomorrow except one species of person, the hopelessly mediocre. Only the mediocre have prospects for continuing on, for propagating – they are the people of the future, the only survivors: “Be like them! Be mediocre!” is the only morality that still makes sense, that still finds ears. (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil; Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, p. 160)

A systematic understanding of Iran’s ontological present properties has ever since been what we sought. And at first glance, it appeared to us that sociology as a form of empirical science which is primarily interested in the “concrete reality (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*)” (Weber, 1949, p. 72) would provide a decent lead to this inquiry. But then, the sociological interest in the concrete reality as *the present* has to be reflected in one of the following divergent ways, namely:

- a) The present could be reflected as the moment of an inflorescence of certain events or ideas belonging to the past; an example of this is Weber’s idea which understood the emergence of Capitalism as a result of Protestantism’s ethic.
- b) The present could be reflected as an individual unique event belonging to a particular era of the world, regardless of its past-ness or future-ness. This gives the present some inherent characteristics that distinguish it from other world epochs. An instance of this type could be demonstrated in most ahistorical social theories, such as Schutz’s phenomenologically founded sociology which, by emphasising the individual actor, attempts to establish a pragmatic theory of everyday life.
- c) The present may be represented as a cradle whose signs and symbols must be deciphered in their significance for future and forthcoming events. For example, what is practised in the so-called scientific discipline of *Futures Studies*, tends to explain how people will live and work in future.
- d) The present could bear the meaning of a *transition* point, merely connecting the past and future. Here the present becomes the instance of duty, safeguarding and handing down what has been inherited. That is what Marx describes under his conviction of *historical materialism*, which started with

primitive communism in the past and will end with a *classless society* (a higher form of communism) somewhere in the future.

However, we are not interested in any of these ways of reflecting *the presentness of Iranian society*. Because it has become more and more evident to us, following any of these paths would raise the chance of becoming entrapped in some kind of *sociological ideology*. The disturbing fact is not implementing a particular theory from sociological strands of thought for a specific situation. But instead that social theoreticians (wittingly or unwittingly) have clear philosophical conceptions of the nature of their investigating inquiry that precedes social theory and methodology. Without a philosophical foundation, they can hardly develop the appropriate methods and theoretical apparatus for conducting research. Placing all the research industry in sociology at stake –since before attending the field, clear expectations are to be met. And even though our primary interest in the study of concrete reality was in vain, if there is a fundamental change in philosophical presuppositions, there will also be a change in what counts as a theory and methodology. It will be impossible, in general, to prevent the dilemmas inherent in the philosophical account from infusing into the social theoretical or methodological arguments led by the respective philosophical presuppositions. But then, when philosophical foundations are unreflectively admitted to social theory, they have a way of taking their vengeance. This may emerge, as men of science are acquainted with, by means of ambiguities creeping into fundamental concepts and, in this way, working as an undesirable effect on the theory itself. Thus, in case of vagueness (or at least controversial analytical moments) in the presupposed philosophical foundation, it will eventually find its way to the realm of social theory in any way. But if it were possible and we were not accused of crude *presentism*, we would have said that the only concrete reality that arouses our interest is the immediate reality surrounding us. Not in the sense of an ontological doctrine arguing that *only present things exist*. But instead, in the sense that merely the present things (i.e., the contemporary manifestation of individual events with social impotence and cultural significance) concern us. In this regard, what is to be considered in treating the institutions and events of human culture, through all levels of micro, meso, and macro, is the present self-understanding of man from their practical considerations revealed to the social scientist. In other words, what is the personal evaluation of societal beings of their immediate disposition? Problematic or unproblematic? However, until we can express our intention clearly, and establish a well-articulated argument in response to our colleagues,

we must continue within the borderlines of the conventional sociological knowledge⁷ in reflecting the “concrete *reality*” (*Wirklichkeit*) of Iranian society.

Returning to our argument, although conventional sociology depicts Iranian social reality at both structural and individual levels in their utmost alerting conditions, there have been heated debates about whether we could rely on these depictions and Iranian sociology⁸ altogether. For, according to the assessments of most Iranian social scientists of the discipline, the current situation of sociology in Iran is critical (Abdollahi, 1996; Mahdi, 2010; Bayatrizi, 2010; Ghaneirad, 2011; Tavakol & Rahimi-Sajasi, 2012; Bayatrizi, 2013; Towfigh, et al., 2019). We will shortly argue that this situation is, to a great extent, similar to an ambiguous situation in which its ambiguousness is supposed to be reflected through an ambiguous spectacle of knowledge. It seems to us this situation could be best sketched out by way of an incomplete adoption from one of Montesquieu’s descriptions written in the *Persian Letters* (2001 [1721]): it sometimes makes us Iranians smile to hear people who had hardly ever ventured from their chambers saying to one another: One must admit this situation looks very Persian!⁹

In one of the *Persian Letters* (i.e., the 28th), where Rica, one of the main characters of the whole story, is excited about the European curiosity about himself as an exotic object and typical oriental man, a twist is placed into the story, which provides a good point of departure for our intellectual venture. At some point in the story, Rica puts aside his Iranian clothes and instead puts on some European dress to see what is causing the astonishment; the oriental appearance or his personal values. But as soon as he is stripped out of his exotic finery, the intense attention evaporates with it instantly. Even if in a circle of Europeans, someone had mentioned that Rica was Iranian, he would immediately hear people muttering around him: “Oh! Oh! Rica is Persian? That’s most extraordinary! How can someone be Persian?” (Montesquieu, 2001, pp. 40-41). It seems that Montesquieu’s question regarding the possibility of being *Persian* still resonates today. However, our concern with this issue is not that this moment is among the very first steps

⁷ However, what we imply here of conventional sociology does not intend to neglect the spectrum and the inner tensions between the diverse sociological schools of thought, which form part of a categorically multi-paradigmatic discipline. The simplified typification, under the notion of conventional sociology or, at times, mainstream sociology, merely serves to clarify the argumentation presented, and therefore, using “conventional sociological theory” or “mainstream sociology” as a singular must be read as a convenient shortcut in the course of the book.

⁸ When we refer to Iranian sociology, we are not inferring to a particular way of doing sociology or even we do not suppose a specific theory or methodology of any kind, but rather we are referring to Iranian/Western scholars whose subject of study is the contemporary nation-state of Iran.

⁹ Montesquieu’s original text: “It sometimes made me smile, to hear people who had scarcely ever ventured from their chambers saying to one another: ‘One must admit he looks very Persian!’” (Montesquieu, 2001, p. 40).

which provide a justification for Eurocentrism, although it certainly does perform such a role. For, it is evident that Montesquieu's understanding is a reading which entails the question of "How can someone be Persian without its exotic appearance?". But instead, our concern is with reading the phrase "How can someone be Persian?" which seeks the conditions of the possibility of being Iranian. Because we believe that posing this question regarding the conditions of the possibility of being an Iranian paves the path to address the dual problematic situation of Iranian society along with the problematic disposition of its relevant knowledge (i.e., the knowledge relevant for understanding Iranian society) in one account.

However, before digging any deeper, we would like to outline the present state of affairs of both sides of our problem separately to see the scale of the acclaimed crisis we are dealing with. But to avoid further misunderstandings, the two subsequent sections, following Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), denote the *de facto limitations* we must bear while evaluating Iranian society and its social sciences. From what we understand, the de facto limitation on describing the current state of affairs of Iranian society entails a discussion illustrating the process of Iranian modernisation. Still, suppose one wants to ignore this limitation and construct a history of Iranian society without any reference to modernity and modernisation. In that case, even though it is not unthinkable, but most likely would result in a clumsy and inadequate description. Similarly, the de facto limitation of Iranian sociology in our understanding would be an argument that sees into the critical situation it is experiencing. Yet again, if one were to avoid this limitation and emphasize the Iranian sociological working grounds and achievements, the result would be, as German sociologists say, merely a bad *Zeitdiagnose* of Iranian sociology.

1.1. Iranian Society in the Face of Modernisation

Most scholarly accounts, such as Zibakalam's *How Did We Become What We Are?* (1998) or Madani's "Iranian Sociology and the Selective Translation of Theories of Secularisation" (2014), that want to give historical depth to Iranian's self-awareness of the dawning of a new era called modernity tend to trace its starting date back to the early nineteenth century, to a dialogue that took place between Abbas Mirza (1789-1833), a Qajar prince, and Pierre Amédée Jaubert (1779-1847), a French diplomat and orientalist. According to Jaubert, Abbas Mirza, a prince heir to the crown, was very distressed by the sad memories of his defeat in a series of battles with Russia (i.e., the Russo-Persian Wars) (Jaubert, 1821). His main concern was the reason for his defeat, despite his solid judgement, bravery, intelligence, and the military experiences of the Persian forces (Jaubert, 1821). Abbas Mirza clearly stated that he could not

understand the reason behind Iran's defeat and the progress of Russia, Britain and France (Jaubert, 1821). He said:

Stranger, you see this army, this court and all these apparatus of power. But do not think that I am a happy man. More is the pity! How can I be happy? Like furious waves of the sea, which collapse against the firm rocks, all of my courageous efforts have failed against the Russian army. The people praise me, but I know my weakness. What have I done to earn the admiration of the great warriors? What cities have I conquered? [...] What is that capability that gives you great superiority and dominance? What are the reasons of your progress and our constant weakness? You know the art of governing, the art of being victorious; you know the art of using all man-made tools, while it seems that we are sentenced to ignorance and that we hardly think of the future [...] Speak, Stranger, tell me what should I do to revive Iranians? (Jaubert, 1821, pp. 174-176)

Even if we do not want to consider this historical report a magnitude in the rise of Iranian awareness towards modernity and modernisation, other historical moments, such as the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), the Nationalisation of the Iranian Oil Industry (1951) or even the Islamic Revolution (1979), would be presented to us as the initiation of Iranian modernisation. Modernity and modernisation have been two recurrent notions for explicating Iran's historical trajectory through the last century up to this point. Whether we consider Iranian modernisation as the by-product of the cultural program of modernity as it developed originally in modern Europe or "as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 2) in modernisation theories, there is a general tendency to distinguish between two fundamental elements of the process of modernisation, the *structural differentiation* and the *ideological core*. The more complicated part of recognising these two elements in a given society is the latter since a consensus about what constitutes the ideological core of modernity is missing (i.e., the classical formation as in the Western civilisation in contrast to the more contemporary process of globalisation). Also, we cannot independently verify the distinct factors (i.e., the leading circles of power, wealth, and knowledge in close connection with social, political, and intellectual activists) that constitute the Iranian ideological pattern of modernisation. This might require a different treatment. Therefore, with the help of Abrahamian's *A History of Modern Iran* (2018 [2008]), which reflects on the objective structural differentiation in family life, political structures, urbanisation, modern education, mass communication, and after that, with the aid of *National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes; Third wave* (2016), we will review the more individualistic orientations of Iranians.

1.1.1. Structural Differentiation

Iran's terrain and identity have stayed consistent despite entering the twentieth century with oxen and wooden ploughs and exiting with steel mills, a high vehicle accident rate, and a nuclear programme. Iranians live practically within the same confines as their forefathers. Iran, which is 4.6 times the size of Germany, is bounded in the south by the Persian Gulf, in the east by the deserts and mountains of Khurasan, Sistan, and Baluchestan, in the west by the Arvand River and marshes, and in the north by the Aras River, which runs from Mount Ararat to the Caspian Sea, and by the Atrak River, which runs from the Caspian Sea into Central Asia. Most of this region (three-fifths of the land), particularly the main plateau, suffers from insufficient rainfall to support permanent cultivation. Agriculture is restricted to rainfed Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and the Caspian coast, as well as settlements distributed across the nation that are water-supplied, particularly at the foot of the mountains (Abrahamian, 2018, p. 1). Several scientific publications say that the Iranian identity is a blend of Shi'i Islam and their pre-Islamic past, particularly the Sassanids, Achaemenids, and Parthians, which is also evident in parents' names for their children. Shi'i names include Ali, Mahdi, Reza, Hussein, Hassan, and Fatemeh, whereas ancient Iranian names include Isfandiyar, Iskandar, Rostam, Sohrab, Ardashir, Kaveh, Bahram, and Atossa. Ferdowsi's 10th-century epic *Shāh-nāme* (Book of Kings) is one source that continually feeds Iranians their ancient culture today. Even though nationalism is sometimes traced back to the development of the modern notion of the nation-state, the *Shāh-nāme* named Iran by name over a thousand times. This is why Iranians see the whole epic as a mythical history of their nation (Abrahamian, 2018, p. 1).



Figure 1. Iran's Map (Source: UN Geospatial, 2004)

Despite the continuities, the 20th century brought about an overwhelming transformation in more or less all facets of Iranian lives. The total population at the beginning of the century was slightly fewer than 12 million, of which 60 per cent were villagers, 25-30 per cent nomads, and less than 15 per cent were urban inhabitants. Tehran was a mid-range city with a population of 200,000 residents. The life expectancy at the time of birth was, at best, probably less than thirty years, and the rate of infant mortality was as high as 500 per 1,000 births. But these conditions didn't last long. At the turn of the century (i.e., from the 20th to 21st century), the total population was 69 million. The nomadic population had decreased to less than 3 per cent, and the urban regions had increased to more than 75.5 per cent). Tehran now had turned into a megametropolis with more than 13 million residents¹⁰. The life expectancy rose to more than 70 years, and infant mortality is 10.964 deaths per 1000 live births, a 4.07% decline from 2021. In the early 20th century, literacy rate was approximately five per cent, also restricted to graduates of seminaries, Islamic schools, and missionary institutions. And in the absence of a homogeneous official language, less than 50 per cent of the Iranian people were able to

¹⁰ Where applicable, Abrahamian's statistics have been updated. For example, Tehran's population in Abrahamian's account is 6.5 million, but based on the information provided by the Statistical Centre of Iran, Tehran's population is 13,267,637 people:

<https://amar.org.ir/english/Iran-Statistical-Yearbook/Iran-Statistical-Yearbook-2019-2020>

understand Persian –meaning that others spoke their own mother tongues, such as Kurdish, Arabic, Gilaki, Mazanderani, Baluchi, Luri, and variants of Turkic dialects (e.g., Azeri, Turkman, and Qashqa’i). Popular entertainment usually was athletic shows in local gymnasiums (*Zurkhanehs*); recitation of *Shāh-nāmeḥ* in tea and coffee houses; royal celebrations in the streets; executing the criminals in the public squares, and above all, rituals related to significant days of Shi’i Islam such as Muharram. But on the other side, in the first quarter of the 21st century, the literacy rate had increased to 85.54 per cent; around 3.2 million people were enrolled in higher education institutions, aside from the 19 million who attended primary and secondary schools. And more than 85 per cent of Iranians could speak Persian –although about 50 per cent of the population continued to express their local languages. Now, everyday entertainment comes in the form of football matches, cinemas, shopping malls, sports facilities, films, radio, newspapers, and most importantly, DVDs, internet, and national and satellite television –nearly all urban areas and three-quarters of rural households have TV sets (Abrahamian, 2018, pp. 2-3).

At the start of the 20th century, modern means of transportation were just making their first appearances public –some statistical figures suggest paved roads and railways equalled less than 340 kilometres. As Augustus Henry Mounsey, a diplomat, says, mules and camels were the usual modes of travel because there were no vehicles. In this situation, the Shah was the owner of the only automobile in the entire country. With a little bit of calculation, one would figure out that under favourable terms, it would have taken travellers a minimum of 17 days to go through the 350 miles from Tehran to Tabriz, 14 days to cross the 558 miles to Mashhad, and 37 days for the 700 miles to reach Bushehr. Gas lights, electricity, and telephones were confined to a few people in Tehran who had the luxury of enjoying them. But by the end of the century, the country had been integrated into a national economy by developing roads, an electrical system, and a gas grid. Almost all households, including family farms, had tap water, electricity, and fridge freezers. The railways are now estimated to be 14,000 kilometres, the paved roads 221,000 kilometres, and more than 20 million wheeled vehicles. Travellers from Tehran can directly reach every corner of the country within hours by car, train, or plane (Abrahamian, 2018, p. 3).

When the 20th century began, everyday life concerns were largely compatible with the rest of the overall circumstances. For example, an average person had to be worried about highway robbers and tribal bandits, wild animals, demons, black cats, scarcity of food, pestilence, and disease, namely malaria, diphtheria, dysentery, tuberculosis, smallpox, cholera, syphilis, and

influenza. But then, when the 20th century ended, these fears were replaced with many modern concerns such as unemployment, pensions, housing, old-age infirmities, car accidents, traffic jams, air pollution, crowded schools, and competition to get into state universities. Iran had truly been modernised (Abrahamian, 2018, p. 3). As Abrahamian puts it, “An Iranian Rip Van Winkle gone to sleep in 1900 would hardly have recognised his environment if woken up in 2000” (2018, p. 3).

However, the most noticeable change occurred in the government’s structure. At the start of the century, the government entailed the Shah and his small private retinue (i.e., his ministers and the patrimonial family). Therefore, the source of his power and authority wasn’t bureaucracy nor a standing army, which both were missing. Still, he governed through local notables such as tribal chiefs, landlords, significant clerics, and affluent merchants. By the end of the century, however, the government had become a well-established modern nation-state that permeated every corner of the country. Now, the president, along with his cabinet members, employs more than 850,000 civil servants who have control over around 60 per cent of the national economy; semi-governmental foundations also control another 20 per cent. On top of that, the government is in charge of a military force of more than half a million men.

And what is more, from the classes of notables having a hand in controlling the provinces, merely the clerics have survived. The government has spread so rapidly that it holds the means of legitimate coercion and the apparatus for gathering taxes, administering justice, and distributing social services. A government of this power and size had never existed in Iran before. *Dowlat* (the Persian word for the government) implied royal government for a long time. But now, it has the connotation of an entire state in its modern meaning (Abrahamian, 2018, p. 4).

This transition in the form and structure of the government meant that the political language had also seen similar changes. For instance, at the time around the end years of the 19th century, Naser al-Din Shah Qajar ruled as *Shah-an-Shah* (King of Kings), *Padeshah* (Guardian King), *Khaqan* (Khan of Khans), and *Zellollah* (Shadow of God on earth). And attendants saluted him as the Justice Dispenser, Supreme Arbiter, Commander of the Faithful, Guardian of the Flock, and Pivot of the Universe. You could say the government was an extension of his majesty, and the Shah, like other ancient rulers of the world, had sovereignty. But in the second half of the twentieth century, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was governed with much more creative titles such as *Rahbar-e Enqelab* (Leader of the Revolution), *Rahbar-e Mostazafen* (Leader of the

oppressed), and the *Bonyangozar-e Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran* (Founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran). The change in the political language is not confined to how one addresses the Shah or Ayatollah, but the transformation is also evident in other political family terms. For example, at the beginning of the 20th century, the main terms in the political vocabulary had been *estabdad* (despotism), *saltanat* (monarchy), *ashraf* (nobles), *a'yan* (affluent), *arbab* (landlord), *ra'yat* (subject), and *tireh* (clan). And by the finishing years of the century, the keywords were *demokrasi*, *pluralism*, *modernite*, *hoquq-e bashar* (human rights), *jam'eh-e madani* (civil society), *mosharekat* (public participation), and *shahrivandi* (citizenship). Otherwise stated, nowadays, an average Iranian does not consider himself as the mere subject of the ruler but instead sees himself as a citizen, regardless of gender, with the indisputable right to play a part in national politics (Abrahamian, 2018, p. 4). For example, in 2017, 73.3 per cent of the adult population participated in the presidential election (2017 Presidential Election, 2017).

These changes meant that Iranism and Shi'ism had to be characterised once more (as some suppose these are the two interwoven threads that have created the Iranian national identity). For a long time, the generally accepted belief was that *Shāh-nāme* was a means to legitimise the monarchy. As it linked the crown to the Persian language, glorifying the grand achievement of Iran and early Persian dynasties. Simply put, *Shāh-nāme* was observed as a piece of epic evidence that connected the identity of Iran to the Institution of the monarchy. Therefore, without the Shah, there would have been no Iran. But after the 1979 revolution, some understood *Shāh-nāme* as not an endorsement but a condemnation of the Institution of kingship. They argued this because they claimed that the heroes of *Shāh-nāme* had come from outside the royal class, and most of the monarchs mentioned in the book were depicted as corrupt, despotic, and evil. In this regard, Abrahamian writes,

One writer even argued that the Book of Kings should have been named the Book of Revolt. After all, he argued, its main hero was Kaveh the Blacksmith, who raised the banner of revolt against a tyrannical shah. (2018, p. 5)

However, some argue that shifts in Shi'ism were even more drastic. Previously, Shi'ism was known to be a conservative, quietist, and apolitical doctrine. It was less attracted to the world's affairs than the afterlife and the issues related to personal behaviour and moral principles. One of the most sacred days in the Islamic calendar was Ashura in the month of Muharram, which marked the date when in AD 680, Imam Hussein had wittingly and willingly gone to his martyrdom in Karbala to fulfil God's determined will. And moreover, since Shi'ism became the official religion of the Safavid dynasty in 1501, the government had also used Muharram

for their own benefit to bridge the gap between themselves and their subjects and to strengthen the relationship between their subjects against the outside Sunni countries (such as the Ottoman empire in the west, the Uzbeks in the north, and the Pashtuns in the East). Aside from the Safavids, some say their successors, including the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties, followed the same strategy (Abrahamian, 2018, p. 5). But with the upheavals of the 1979 revolution on the way, Shi'ism suddenly moved towards a highly politicised doctrine in which no sign of its past quietness were to be found anymore. In this sense, the central motto of Ashura changed to a saying of Imam Hussein:

I have not come out, joyfully, revolting, spreading destruction, or to act unjustly. I however, have come out seeking reform in the nation (followers) of my Grandfather, *O Allah, please grant compensation to Muhammad and his family worthy of their services to your cause*. I want people to do what is lawful and stop doing what is prohibited. (Al-Majlisi, 2014, p. 185)

This was later interpreted as a statement of social justice and political revolution. Now, apart from the fulfilment of God's predetermined will, one could observe the rational motifs of Imam Hussein, resulting from the outcome of an *objective situation* to carry out a successful revolution (Abrahamian, 2018, pp. 5-6). In spite of everything, yet up to the present time, Shi'ism and Iranism coupled together continue to be the primary sources of affection in Iranian identity, now receiving more attention than ever after the establishment of the Research Centre for the Islamic-Iranian Model of Progress¹¹ (Main Page, n.d.) in 2011.

	1900-06	2017
Total population	12 million	84 million (2022)
Urban population (% of total)	20%	74%
Nomadic population (% of total)	25-30%	1%
Tehran	200.000	8.4 million
Life expectancy at birth	30	75
Infant mortality per 1,000	500	13
Literacy (above six years)	5%	87%
Government ministries	4 (9)	25 (21)
Provinces	8	31
Government expenditures	\$ 8.2 million	\$ 80 billion
Civil servants	—	890,000
Armed forces	7.000	523.000

¹¹ <https://olgou.ir/index.php/en/> (But little to none of the Iranian state-related websites from inside Iran are displayed if you reside outside Iran. The same is true for the research institute of Islamic-Iranian model of progress.)

Enrolled in state schools	2.000	19 million (2006)
Enrolled in Universities	0	1.7 million (2006)
Paved roads	325 km	160.100 km
Motor vehicles	1	2.9 million (2006)
Railroad	12 km	10.000 km
Electrical production	0	129 billion kWh (2006)
Telephones	0	74 million
Radios	N/A	18 million (2006)
Televisions	N/A	5 million (2006)
Public cinemas	N/A	311 (2006)
Internet users	N/A	36 million
Daily newspaper circulation	10.000	2 million (2006)
New book titles		23.300 (2006)
Public libraries	3	1.502 (2006)

Table 1. Iran's Vital Statistics (Source: Abrahamian, 2018, p. 6)

These radical changes in the Iranian modernisation program within the past hundred years or so have had their imprint on individual orientations in the course of life. The birth of an autonomous breed of man, at least as it initially emerged in Western and Central Europe modern societies, capable of breaking ties with traditional political and cultural authorities is among the minor things expected for man's role in this new modern cultural program. At the same time, the conventional sectors of society are not yet ready to give up their legitimate status peacefully to the so-called modern sections. Therefore, the new breed of autonomous individuals had to reconstruct its new self-consciousness in a place of confrontation within the basic antinomies inherent to modernity. Leaving him caught up with alienation, dilemma, and anomie, ready to be the subject of modern psychotherapists, social engineers, social problem-therapists, and the like. And to be sure, these scientist-technicians have a peculiar normative way of treating social deviations and problems. They usually tend to portray these social ordures in the form of massive-scale nationwide surveys or questionnaires to intellectually smear with the economic policy triumphs of their statesman –in turn of their untreated Scatolia. It could be said that the *National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes* (2016) is among this category of scientific works entailing more individualistic tendencies, such as foundational personal values, family norms, satisfaction, perception of the present and expectation of the future, etc., demonstrating the difficulties of the individual in contemporary times. The data for the *National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes* (2016) was gathered through a personal interview survey method where the researchers administered the questionnaire face-to-face to 14,906 people aged 15 years and over living in 31 provinces throughout the country. 68.5% of the studied population

are urban residents, and 31.1% are rural residents. In addition, 49.2% of the population under study are male, and 50.8% are female.

	Yes	No	Not relevant
Going easy on your child or controlling them rigidly	49.5	49	1.6
Recognising good people from bad people	63.4	36.6	-
Acting based on self-interest or based on the collective interest	49.8	50.2	-
Egalitarianism or favouritism	45.4	54.6	-

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Social Dilemma (Source: National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes, 2016, p. 423, author's translation)

Nonetheless, what is essential for us in this approximately seven hundred pages of report, first appears in measuring *social dilemma* (see Table 2.). In evaluating social dilemmas, by constructing four seemingly conflicting dual solutions, the respondents have been asked to answer whether they experience confusion, doubt, and hesitation while thinking about any of those issues.

Typically, the abovementioned data would be interpreted, for example, as in the case of child fostering, that 49.5% of the population feel the dilemma and 49% do not experience such doubt and hesitation, and 1.6% may not find it relevant. In such cases, some might read these as a sign of the maturation of a society towards accepting polar ideas insofar as both sides of the constructed extreme are legitimate. However, in the aggregate, the data can also be read as responses of society as a whole. Therefore, we are confronted with an ambivalent society that, when bringing up a child, does not know what attribute to hold, should it go easy or be restricted. For, it is simultaneously carrying within itself contrary value propositions. Apart from the index of judging others, i.e., recognising good from evil, which, more than measuring social dilemmas, probably measures moral dilemmas, the same pattern of confusion could be read into the responses (i.e., concerning the indices of self-interest versus collective interest, egalitarianism versus favouritism and so on).

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Iranian citizens fear criticizing the government	4	17.2	33.3	33.6	14

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Feeling of Freedom in Political Sphere (Source: National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes, 2016, p. 329, author's translation)

Variables	Frequency	Per cent
Very Dissatisfied	1249	8.4
Dissatisfied	2705	18.1

Neutral	7799	52.3
Satisfied	2570	17.2
Very Satisfied	352	2.4
Valid Response	14675	98.5
Missing	231	1.5
Total	14906	100

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Satisfaction from the Political Disposition (Source: National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes, 2016, p. 144, author's translation)

In this study, however, if one has an eye for details, one might find other traces of the mentioned confusion elsewhere. For instance, under the index of the feeling of freedom in the political sphere, the interviewees were asked, “Iranian citizens fear criticizing the government” (see Table 3.), whereby combining the “strongly disagree” with “disagree” and “strongly agree” with “agree”, the findings are as follows: 45.6% of the respondents agreed with the proposition, 21.2% disagreed, and 33.3% neither agreed nor disagreed, which means that 45.6% of the studied population does not feel freedom in the political sphere. Yet, in the same study, one of the indices for the “satisfaction” index happens to be “satisfaction from the political disposition” (see Table 4.). Again, by combining the table’s lower indicators with each other and upper indicators with each other then, the numerical results would be: 26.5% of the respondents reported low satisfaction, 19.6% said high satisfaction and 52.3% indicated neutral satisfaction, which means that 52.3% of the population under study is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the political disposition. However, it is by pressing these two sets of data against each other that the confusion pattern emerges again. In the former, almost half of the population under study reported their fear of having freedom of political action, which reasonably must lead to dissatisfaction with the political system. In the latter, when the issue of satisfaction from the political situation has been put forth, more than 50 per cent of the population has yet to decide whether it is satisfied or not. For us, what raises our interest in these represented data is the state of confusion that the respondents have between contradictory dispositions where the simultaneous co-existence of both situations becomes possible. However, this is not the logic and argument that technician-scientists adopt. By inferring from other data sets alike, they tend to come to terms with and interpret these emerging properties.

For example, a contingent explanation for the state of confusion could be provided by considering the index measuring the “attitude towards the present and the future” from the same study (see Tables 5.,6.,7., and 8.).

Religious status		Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
Current status compared to 5 years ago	Increased	1371	9.2	9.7
	Reduced	9314	62.5	66.2
	No difference	3382	22.7	24
	Valid	14067	94.4	100
	Not relevant	648	4.3	-
	Missing	191	1.3	-
	Total	14906	100	-
The status in the next five years	It will increase	1470	9.9	10.2
	It will reduce	9382	62.9	64.8
	It will make no difference	3617	24.3	25
	Valid	14469	97.1	100
	Not relevant	-	-	-
	Missing	437	2.9	-
	Total	14906	100	-

Table 5. Iranians' Attitude Regarding the Present and Future Status of Religiosity Among their Contemporaries (Source: National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes, 2016, p. 187, author's translation)

Moral status		Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
Prevalence of negative moral attributes in the next five years	It will increase	10171	68.2	79.4
	It will reduce	1203	8.1	9.4
	It will make no difference	1441	9.7	11.2
	Valid	12815	86	100
	Not relevant	-	-	-
	Missing	2091	14	-
	Total	14906	100	-
Prevalence of positive moral attributes in the next five years	It will increase	1697	11.4	13.5
	It will reduce	8931	59.9	71
	It will make no difference	1955	13.1	15.5
	Valid	12583	84.4	100
	Not relevant	-	-	-
	Missing	2323	15.6	-
	Total	14906	100	-

Table 6. Iranians' Attitude Regarding the Future Status of Morality Among their Contemporaries (Source: National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes, 2016, p. 199, author's translation)

In this case, the conceivable argument would be that Iranians, having experienced a rapid modernisation process, have lost their ties with traditional *Gemeinschaft* sources of meaning and values such as religion and morals (see Tables 5. and 6.). And have yet not reached the state where *Gesellschaftliche* sources of meaning and values replace the traditional orders of things. Therefore, for instance, in the domain of religiosity, 66.2 % of Iranians under

investigation *felt* that in 2014 the current status of religiosity among their contemporaries compared to its previous five years had experienced a downfall, with 64.8% of the study population expecting to experience a similar flow for the next five years (see Table 5.). A trend which, if the moral status is considered, becomes even worse. As in the domain of morals, not only do 79.4% of Iranians foresee an increasement in the pervasiveness of negative moral attributes in the next five years but also 71% anticipate a reduction in the prevalence of positive moral attributes (see Table 6.).

Political disposition		Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
Current disposition compared to 5 years ago	Improved	6490	43.5	46.4
	Deteriorated	3112	20.9	22.2
	No difference	4387	29.4	31.4
	Valid	13989	93.8	100
	Not relevant	648	4.3	-
	Missing	269	1.8	-
	Total	14906	100	-
Its disposition within the next five years	It will improve	6636	44.5	46.4
	It will deteriorate	2956	19.8	22.2
	It will make no difference	4843	32.5	31.4
	Valid	14435	96.8	100
	Not relevant	-	-	-
	Missing	471	3.2	-
	Total	14906	100	-

Table 7. Iranians’ Attitude About the Present and Future Political Disposition (Source: National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes, 2016, p. 191, author’s translation)

However, the pattern that the political disposition reveals is hard to read. It is challenging to realise where the positive attitude of 46.4% of the population comes from believing that their current political conditions – that they had experienced in 2014 – had improved compared to five years earlier and will keep improving (see Table 7.). Presumably, this is the period in which Iranians were still optimistic about their (now former) president Hassan Rouhani due to his achievements with P5+1¹² over the negotiations of Iran’s nuclear program. One may also find in this a trace of Iran’s patriarchal culture towards a *homo superior* to emancipate them from

¹² The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States—plus Germany.

their state of misery, despair or backwardness, be it in the form of dictator Reza Shah Pahlavi¹³ or President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Poverty and inequality condition		Frequency	Per cent	Valid per cent
Current condition compared to 5 years ago	Increased	9761	65.5	76.3
	Reduced	991	6.6	7.7
	No difference	2037	13.7	15.9
	Valid	12789	85.8	100
	Not relevant	648	4.3	-
	Missing	1469	9.9	-
	Total	14906	100	-
The condition in the next five years	It will increase	9522	63.9	76
	It will reduce	1059	7.1	8.5
	It will make no difference	1951	13.1	15.6
	Valid	12532	84.1	100
	Not relevant	-	-	-
	Missing	2374	15.9	-
	Total	14906	100	-

Table 8. Iranians' Attitude Regarding the Present and Future Status of Poverty and Inequality (Source: National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes, 2016, p. 203, author's translation)

With manifesting similar patterns regarding levels of poverty and inequality (see Table 8.), i.e., 76.3% of the population under study perceive poverty and inequality levels have increased compared to the previous five years, and 76% expect the increasing levels of poverty and inequality to continue in the subsequent five years, there is no wonder that society is enduring societal dilemmas and not being able to decide between contradictory dispositions. And in the case of a moral duality, the institutions or “the guardians who have kindly taken upon themselves the work of supervision” (Kant, 1991, p. 54) have not been able to direct the common mass through their spiritual authority.

Nevertheless, we might disagree with the underlying logic of such data, methods, or interpretations. But as stated earlier, these indices could be read as signs of severe problems in Iranian social reality at both structural and individual levels, which demand more attention. Yet, the Iranians' state of confusion where holding contradictory dispositions becomes possible has, from the outset, occupied a central place in our study. We will return to this topic later. Before

¹³ “Reza Shah, God bless you” was one of the famous slogans in the 2017-2018 Iranian protests against economic hardship.

that, however, the following section will examine whether Iranian sociologists have been able to explore and explain this contradictory situation.

1.2. The Inauguration of Sociology to the Iranian Academia

Before its academic phase, the social sciences in Iran, as Hamīd Enāyat, a political scientist and translator, had observed, were more like Molière in writing *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (The Bourgeois Gentleman). Molière had not realised until the late stages that he had unconsciously made prose all his life. Similarly, Iranian scholars have long been engaged in writing, translating and conducting research on social issues or using sociological concepts without being aware of themselves as social scientists (Enāyat, 1974). In this respect, some scholarly accounts about the history of social thought in Iran are inclined to consider Iranian classical literature¹⁴ as sources of inspiration which “if looked at from the viewpoint of their commentary on their own times, would yield considerable insights into contemporary social and historical conditions” (Tehrani, et al., 1987, pp. 181-182). Thomas Luckmann argued that social science as we know it is a child of modernity, and “it traces its descent into the nineteenth, perhaps as far as the late eighteenth century. Beyond that begins the prehistory of social lore and isolated philosophical speculation” (Luckmann, 1973, p. 157). Therefore, the non-academic intellectual contributions that have historical significance in the emergence and development of the academic social sciences in Iran date back to the early 20th century. The Iranian scholars pioneering “in the introduction of modern social thought in modern Iran from the twenties onward formed a medley group and adhered to widely divergent schools of thought which roughly corresponded to their place in the political spectrum of the times” (Enāyat, 1974, p. 6). In Iran, the three dominant and conflicting political ideologies, i.e., the conservatives, the revolutionaries, and the liberals, were very much comparable to those in the Western countries at the threshold of World War II. The conservative school was represented by Moḥammad-‘Alī Forūgī, whose intellectual deliberations, translations, and articles helped educated Iranians to acquaint themselves with European thought. The first volume of his *History of Philosophy in Europe* was published in 1931. The second and third volumes were published in 1939 and 1941,

¹⁴ Iranian classical literature such as Ferdowsi’s *Shāh-nāmeḥ* (1010; Book of Kings), Rūmī’s *Mašnavī-yi Ma’navī* (1254-1273; Spiritual Couplets), Sa’dī’s *Gulistān* (1258; The Rose Garden) and *Būstān* (1257; The Orchard), Niẓām al-Mulk’s *Seyāsāt-nāmeḥ* (c. 1090; The Book of Government), Onṣor ol-Ma’alī Keykāvūs’s *Qābūs Nāma* (c. 1080; A Mirror for Princes), al-Bīrūnī’s *Taḥqīq mā li-l-hind* (c. 1020; Verifying All That the Indian’s Recount, The Reasonable and The Unreasonable).

respectively. It is known that these are the first accurate and systematic works regarding modern Western philosophy in Iran.

Tāqī Arānī represented the revolutionary school, a German-educated scholar who induced the communist movement in Iran. Along with a circle of left-wing academics who were also educated in Western Europe, he founded the first Marxist periodical journal in Iran entitled *Donyā* (the World). Finally, the liberal school was initiated by Aḥmad Kasravī, who was a prominent historian. He was not popular among the conventional religious class because of his writings on religious reformism. In Enāyat's eye, he is described as

[a] prominent historian and an aggressive iconoclast, Kasravī presented in his numerous works a powerful indictment of nearly every aspect of Iranian social life, but combined his plea for reforms with an advocacy of agrarian and authoritarian values. While such a comprehensive sweep of social issues was bound to be at times superficial, Kasravī's legacy made a lasting contribution to the creation of the right psychological environment for the growth of social sciences by establishing a critical approach towards many a received cultural notion whose usefulness or sanctity was hitherto taken for granted. (Enāyat, 1974, pp. 6-7)

In the highly polarised atmosphere of the 1930s and 1940s, social thought was closely tied to political and moral issues. However, in parallel with the non-academic activities in the mid-30s (i.e., 1936) was the insertion of a course titled *Sociology of Education* into the syllabus of the École normale supérieure for the students of Philosophy and Pedagogy. Following that, in 1939, a chair was created for *Educational Sociology*, which for a considerable time gave the only course of sociology accessible to the students of the University of Tehran. Initially, one hour was weekly for the sociological course, and then after the increase of exposure in 1942-43, it was raised to three hours per week (Tavassoli, 1974). The sociological outcome of these years was the first Persian book in the field of sociology entitled *Sociology: Fundamentals and Principles* (1942), written by Yaḥyā Mahdavi (1902-2000), a professor of philosophy at the University of Tehran. In fact, this book served as the only Persian coursebook in sociology for the next twenty years. The book was an introduction to the sociology of Comte and Durkheim and "was a summary of pre-war French sociology" (Tavassoli, 1974, p. 118).

However, the non-academic phase of Iranian sociology concluded by the end of the 1950s with the return of the first group of Iranian sociological graduates from French and Swiss universities. This small group, namely Ehsān Narāghi, Jamshīd Bihnām and Shāhpūr Rāsikh, founded the Institute of Social Studies and Research in 1958 as an autonomous field of inquiry and

department of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Tehran University. They were helped in this by a former French-educated professor of sociology at Tehran University, Gholām-Hosseīn Sadīghī, who had kept the interest in the discipline alive with his vast knowledge of Irano-Islamic culture. Later they were accompanied by the French-educated anthropologist Nader Afshār-Naderī, Swiss-educated Firūz Towfīgh, and American-educated Ahmad Ashraf, both sociologists. In this year (i.e., 1958) also, the first seminar on social sciences was held in cooperation with UNESCO¹⁵ (Tavassoli, 1974). In its official statute, the Institute has indicated that its objective is to combine theoretical aspects of social sciences with applied research and implement social research in Iranian society (Faculty of Letters, 1958). But as Narāghī, one of the founding figures, states, the Institute aims to understand the traditional Iranian society as it is entering a phase of rapid transformation caused by modernisation, westernisation, and the conversion of agriculture and industry through modern technology, leading to profound changes not only in the structure of society at large but also in the psychology of each individual member of it. Therefore understanding these changes is crucial for controlling and orienting them in the right direction (Narāghī, 1968).

The Institute of Social Studies and Research has become the leading organisation in Iran for teaching and research in social sciences. Hamīd Enāyat believed the recognition of the Institute had two particular reasons:

First, the Institute flourished at a time where, following the restrictive measures taken against the intellectuals after the leftists' defeat in 1953 there were limited possibilities of self-expression and meaningful discussion on social problems. This background, coupled with the dynamic personality of the Director of the Institute, Ihsan Naraqī, enabled the Institute to enjoy the cooperation of a small, but influential number of writers and scholars who had otherwise no opportunity for systematic research. Second, the Institute, from the moment of its creation, adopted a deliberate policy of assigning priority to applied, sponsored research connected with the country's development schemes. Consequently, it was less hampered than other university bodies by financial and administrative difficulties. (Enāyat, 1974, p. 8)

¹⁵ Some believe not only Iranian social sciences are mere exportation from its Western origin, but also contend that the process of exportation was aided by Western Organization as well, leaving no room for Iranian scholars either in the emergence of the Iranian sociology or its organization. For instance, Bayatrizi, a native Iranian doing sociology at University of Alberta considers the foundation of academic discipline of sociology in Iran as a result of co-creation of the UNESCO and the University of Tehran (Bayatrizi, 2013). A fact (i.e., UNESCO's involvement in the establishment of the Institute of Social Studies and Research) that I did not encounter in the early reports on the emergence of Institute. For more of Bayatrizi's discussion see: Bayatrizi, Z. (2013).

This phase of Iranian academic sociology was mainly focused on conducting research in three different sociological subdisciplines: demography, urban sociology, and anthropology of rural life and tribes. The study results in these fields were recorded in more than 500 reports, most of them in Persian, with a few in French and English. Most of these initially unpublished studies –as part of the sponsor’s agreement with the Institute– are now accessible via the Institution’s website¹⁶ (List of library resources, 2022). Today, many of these monographs and research reports are considered classics of their field in Iranian sociological knowledge and have been a substantial asset to experts¹⁷.

In 1972, the Institute entered into a new phase and was incorporated into the newly formed Faculty of Social Sciences and Cooperative Studies. This was the period when social sciences were given wide academic recognition by the emergence of departments for Political Science, Sociology, and Economics in universities all over the country (Tehrani, et al., 1987). And as for nowadays, based on the reports of the Institute for Research & Planning in Higher Education¹⁸ (Data and Statistics, n.d.), in twenty-nine state universities, just in the year 2016, 2,707 students had enrolled in various subdisciplines of sociology, such as cultural studies, Islamic social knowledge, sociology of sport, social work, anthropology and political sociology.

Iranian sociological knowledge seems to have been struggling with some difficulties from the outset. For instance, the documents evaluating the Institute contend that the Institute had a particular weakness. As the Institute became the source of applied research and data gathering on active concerns with the living problems and concrete features of the social structure of modern Iran with a task of responding to immediate problems arising from new policy initiatives (i.e., social engineering), it neglected to conduct the foundational research and theoretical issues (Enāyat, 1974). This turned the Institute into a de facto consulting agency and a source of applied studies, often responding to urgent problems arising from new policy initiatives with no time to set its own agenda in committing to a rigorous and independent pursuit of knowledge (Narāghi & Ayati, 2000). It has been argued that this has resulted from an anti-theoretical stance that some of the founders and associates of the Institute had held. For example, Narāghi says that the social scientists’ role in developing countries does not consist

¹⁶ <https://isr.ut.ac.ir/>

¹⁷ These reports include Firūz Towfigh and Bagher Parham’s surveys on carpet weaving in distinct regions of Iran (1965), Nader Afshār-Naderī’s surveys of tribal life in Iran (1966), Vieille’s study in the field of urban sociology (1964), Mahdi Amāni’s demographic studies evaluating the censuses of 1956 and 1965 (Amāni, 1968), and Zahrā Šaji’s book on the social and family background of the representatives of the national assembly in twenty-one legislative assemblies (1966).

¹⁸ <https://irphe.ac.ir/index.php?sid=1>

of creating original works to assist in understanding processes through which a rapidly changing and developing society is passing, i.e., to develop concrete proposals for social change. Instead, in the face of the public authorities, the social scientist should occupy a place for elaborating social policies (Narāghi, 1968, p. 130). Nonetheless, the negligence of the Institute in theory formation, then after in the subsequent assessments, seemed to be considered a feature of the Iranian social sciences at large. Gholam-Abbas Tavassoli, a former president of the Institute, in his essay “Growth and Significance of Social Sciences in Iran” (1974), writes:

While research in social sciences in Iran has begun, much remains to be done. A great effort is required to bring research in any field to the level of *internationally recognized standards*. While the work so far is quite useful, one of the present tasks is *to bridge the gap between the empirical data available its usefulness for theory development. It is in the direction of conceptualization, and theory building that Iranian social science has yet to move*. [Emphasis added] (Tavassoli, 1974, p. 126)

Or similarly, in an analysis of “Social Science Research in Iran” in the pre-Islamic Revolution era conducted by a group of sociologists, the absence of solid historical roots and theoretical foundations is considered a typical quality of social research in Iran which is “characterized by the conduct of social surveys pre-dominantly modelled after Western prototypes, using questionnaire and interview techniques” (Tehrani, et al., p. 184), just as Taqi Azadarmaki’s evaluation of post-Islamic Revolution sociology in Iran which also considers: a) The lack of attention to critical social problems and b) The lack of theory creation in Iranian sociology to be the main reasons for its failure (Azadarmaki, 1997). To this list must be added the accounts of Iranian social scientists in the diaspora, such as Aramesh Doostdar, Homa Katouzian, Asef Bayat, Ali Akbar Mahdi and Zohreh Bayatrizi. The significance of these accounts is usually due to the international English-speaking audience’s interest in them. Ali Akbar Mahdi, an Iranian-American professor of sociology at Ohio Wesleyan University, has contributed to *The ISA Handbook of Diverse Sociological Traditions* (2010) with an article named “Sociology in Iran: Between Politics, Religion and Western Influence”, where he remarks:

The weakest aspect of Iranian sociology is *theory construction*, as the country remains a consumer of Western sociological knowledge. *In-depth and original analysis of theoretical sociology is not available*. The success of sociology departments remains in the production of necessary personnel for the state bureaucracies and service industries. [Emphasis added] (Mahdi, 2010, p. 276)

Or Bayatrizi, an Iranian-Canadian professor in the Sociology department at the University of Alberta, in an essay entitled “Knowledge is Not Power; State-Funded Sociological Research in Iran” (2010), argues:

I argue that sociology in Iran is defined by this *persistent gap* between theory and technique, vision and detail, history and data. *In the five decades since sociology’s institutionalization in Iran, the gap between descriptive and theoretical work has not been successfully transcended. There are mountains of data but no sustained attempts at synthesis.* [Emphasis added] (Bayatrizi, 2010, p. 814)

Whatever this gap between empirical data and theoretical work might imply¹⁹, it is not the only deficiency that has been attributed to Iranian sociology. The range includes Seyed Javad Tabatabai’s *abstention from thinking* (2000) to Mohammad Abdollahi’s *methodological reduction* (1996). In this case, Ebrahim Towfigh, an Iranian scholar, who has dedicated his professional career to investigating the Iranian sociological problem, has a fruitful classification in a co-authored article with Alireza Javadi of the sort of problems which Iranian sociologists consider as the cause of this situation. They believe, in the eyes of Iranian scholars, the problematic situation of Iranian sociology reflects that sociology as a scientific discipline has not been able to be ascertained with philosophical roots, logical methodologies and theories linked to the Iranian social reality. Therefore, it cannot problematise and conceptualise its immediate social phenomenon, let alone theorise the Iranian social disposition (Towfigh & Javadi, 2012). In their perception, we are able to categorize all the research and studies addressing this issue into two main approaches: 1) *Theoretical approach*: this approach argues the historical conditions of abstention from thinking which have taken place throughout the Iranian society as an aftermath of the decline of The Islamic Golden Age. Their resolution for overcoming the problem is to pose questions regarding the conditions of the possibility of acquiring any knowledge in Iranian society in general and in sociology in particular. And it is evident that posing any questions about the conditions of possibility of knowledge, for them, merely emerges in a particular philosophical apparatus which has to be established accordingly. 2) *Practical approach*: on the other hand, those scholars who see the problem at a more pragmatic level argue the existing organisational and practical problems of Iranian sociology.

¹⁹ Although we might have some assumptions and speculations with regard to this gap, still we cannot concretely say what the lack of theory means in this context. For, it seems to be lucid for all associates with Iranian sociology that not only the modernisation theory is the overarching dynamics of Iranian sociology but also that all gathering empirical data are theory-laden. Therefore, given these facts, what could the lack of theory imply is still a mystery for us.

Therefore, their studies take into account the main elements in the construction of the structure of social sciences in Iran, factors affecting the developmental process of the structure of social sciences, as well as the relationship between these factors in the internal and external dimensions. These studies pursue the problem among all the levels, i.e., micro, meso and macro-level, of the structure of social sciences in Iran (Towfigh & Javadi, 2012). Examples of the latter approach would be those studies that reveal the absence of research infrastructures, the free flow of information, or even the fragility of a scientific value system in Iranian social sciences. However, Towfigh and Javadi contend that despite the differences, the common denominator of the two approaches is that both consider the disposition of Iranian sociology problematic. Put differently, Towfigh and Javadi argue that although many scholars have examined the situation of the social sciences in Iran through different sociological traditions, they all agree that the social sciences in Iran are in crisis. All scholars have reached a similar diagnosis because, in its current situation, Iranian sociology cannot play its role in finding law-like regularities in Iranian society (Towfigh & Javadi, 2012).

From its beginning, particularly during the last three decades, Iranian sociology has faced challenges that sometimes appear in the form of heated and antagonistic debates which are particular to the Iranian society (i.e. the controversies around ideological/Islamic sociology vs scientific sociology). Most of them are similar to the challenges sociology and sociologists encounter in other societies (i.e., the debates around indigenous vs global, quantitative vs qualitative, critical and actionist vs academic, etc.). In addition, a peculiar disposition of the Iranian social sciences exists that almost all Iranian sociologists have sensed and encountered. Ebrahim Towfigh has been able to label and describe it accurately, pointing to the problematic situation that Iranian sociology and sociologist encounter as the problem of *suspension of the present moment* (see figure 2.). He believes suspension of the present moment is not an empirical study nor a methodological agenda; instead, it is an *ontology of ourselves*²⁰. The concept describes a scene where comprehension has become possible for many Iranian sociologists. He believes this initial naming is a verbalisation of the horizon in which our experience as actors in the field of Iranian social sciences has become possible (Towfigh, et al., 2019). Towfigh, with the analytical instrument of suspension, in a critical approach, criticises

²⁰ This term is originally a Foucauldian conception which claims to reject all projects that claim to be universal. However, Foucault claims "[t]he critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" (Foucault, 1984, p. 50).

the broader social sciences in Iran for their lack of authenticity and adoption of Modernisation Theory as the main framework for understanding any social problem in Iran (Towfigh & Ahmadnia, 2014). He argues that social sciences in Iran not only suffer from a distinct *orientalist* worldview at the moment of its establishment – an attribute that, perhaps ironically, it being an Eastern country, it shares with its counterpart in Western countries. But it also involves a sort of suspension of the present (Towfigh & Ahmadnia, 2014), which is not typical of Western sociology. In this respect, Towfigh argues, non-European societies, in confronting the West/modernity, inevitably find themselves in a new historical situation that converts their society into a *transitional society*²¹. Therefore, for most local scholars, Iran turns into a society standing in two boats at once, one foot in the traditional standpoint and the other in the modern (i.e., neither traditional nor modern). In his understanding, a transitional society's evolutionary logic and dynamic are mainly based on the confrontation between Western modernisation and Eastern tradition. A kind of modernisation that is not indigenous but rather is credible merely by imposing the values, institutions, and relations of the modern West, which challenges the apparent static and stabilised tradition. This implies a silence regarding the current conjuncture or postponing modernity to a yet-to-be-realised, indefinite future moment. Through this perspective, the humanities and social sciences in Iran, in general, and sociology in Iran, in particular, suggest a history haunted by chronology, malestream and mainstream tales such as sociology that is reduced to non-functional positivism and grapples with narrowing down descriptive accounts (e.g., general concepts such as state, society, family, etc., are taken for granted) and systematically neglects the Iranian historical individuality. The consequence of such social scientific knowledge is the rise of “a sociology which is not even capable of providing a typical positivist explanation of *status quo*, let alone allowing for the possibility of a historical-critical understanding of the social” (Towfigh & Ahmadnia, 2014, p. 313). As Nader Talebi writes in his PhD dissertation, indeed, by applying imported Western theories to their unique subject, Iranian scholars acted differently from the House of Bourbon when it returned to France: they have forgotten nothing and learnt nothing (Talebi, 2018). If we neglect the

²¹ It is needless to assert a number of intellectual endeavours consider the conception of transitional society to be a characteristic of modern society and a vital feature of the process of modernisation. And although the theories of modernisation cover a wide range of social reality and phenomena under the term of transitional society, it could be summed up under the two following versions: The first version involves the theories which disregard the internal, primarily cultural mechanism of development of societies, and instead interprets the culture formed (i.e., the operative culture), in a particular society as a potential historical hindrance to modernisation. And the second version, employing the idea of delayed modernisation, includes theories that give more attention to problems of development of value-motivational structures, pointing out the inscrutability and the instability of a culture's inner core of values, as well as the optimal nature of mixed (traditional-modernised) cultures (Naumova, 1996).

knowledge that Iranian social sciences have this specific feature in the suspension of the present moment, the rest would be merely phrasing and rephrasing the same fact about Iranian society.

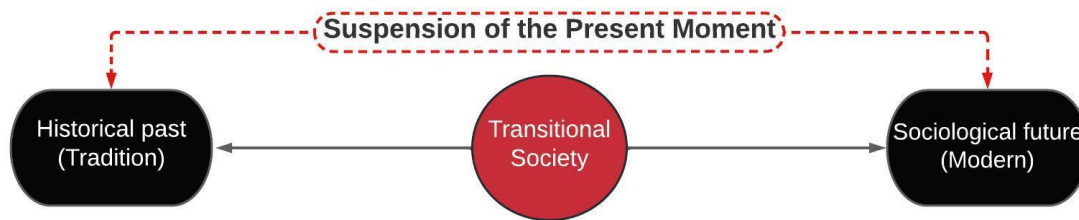


Figure 2. Suspension of the Present Moment

Towfigh, having been educated in the tradition of critical theory/postcolonial studies at the University of Frankfurt am Main, argues that sociology in Iran has been overloaded with orientalist ideas, beliefs and conceptions (Towfigh & Ahmadnia, 2014). Instead of this naïve general frame, Towfigh’s main recipe for overcoming Iranian *Oriental Sociology* is to take Iran’s history and its experience of modernity seriously. He invites Iranian academics to pursue a theory of the Iranian historical individual in the Weberian sense and urges other scholars to reflect on the most crucial question that Iranian sociology is faced with: “How is it possible to write the Iranian history un-orientalistic?” (Towfigh, et al., 2019). Towfigh contends that conditions of possibility of (re)writing such history must emerge throughout the current and existing structure of knowledge.

However, we still have to deal with the ruins of despair and misery, pointing to our next issue. Both the problematic situation of Iranian society along with the problematic disposition of its relevant knowledge (i.e., the knowledge relevant for understanding Iranian society) are signs of ambiguity and opacity, which makes posing any question regarding the conditions of the possibility of Iranian-ness challenging. The opaqueness lies in the fact that we do not know whether we are facing a population (i.e., Iranian citizens) on its toes getting ready for another significant upheaval or a society like a docile puppy subject to an iron fist theocratic system. We do not know whether modern *knowledge itself is power* or a source of the crisis. And if the contemporary knowledge of social sciences in Iran itself is not power, as Zohreh Bayatrizi suggests in an article with a similar title, “Knowledge is not Power; State-Funded Sociological Research in Iran” (2010), then how are we able to engender its antithesis, i.e., un-orientalistic and un-developmental sociology, as Towfigh has in mind.

Observing the whole story from another angle, isn’t this what all modernity is all about: *melting down the solid*. A state of *fluidity* or *liquidity* becomes a fitting metaphor when we wish to come to terms with the nature of the present moment (Bauman, 2000). In this respect, Bauman writes:

The famous phrase ‘melting the solids’, when coined a century and a half ago by the authors of *The Communist Manifesto*, referred to the treatment which the self-confident and exuberant modern spirit awarded the society it found much too stagnant for its taste and much too resistant to shift and mould for its ambitions - since it was frozen in its habitual ways. If the ‘spirit’ was ‘modern’, it was so indeed in so far as it was determined that reality should be emancipated from the ‘dead hand’ of its own history - and this could only be done by melting the solids (that is, by definition, dissolving whatever persists over time and is negligent of its passage or immune to its flow). That intention called in turn for the ‘profaning of the sacred’: for disavowing and dethroning the past, and first and foremost ‘tradition’ - to wit, the sediment and residue of the past in the present; it thereby called for the smashing of the protective armour forged of the beliefs and loyalties which allowed the solids to resist the ‘liquefaction’. (Bauman, 2000, p. 3)

A way of breaking down the present moment and exposing it to the flow through a modern spirit is to make it possible to designate an object or an event into more than one category. This feature in social sciences literature is called *ambivalence*, “which is the acute discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions” (Bauman, 1991, p. 1). Here too, if we are to ask any questions regarding the conditions of the possibility of being an Iranian on both levels (i.e., the problematic situation of Iranian society and the problematic disposition of its relevant social knowledge) in one account, it has to come through the notion of ambivalence.

1.3. Ambivalence: Coexistence of Mutually Exclusive Contradictions

Thus far, we have assigned the de facto limitations of reflecting the conditions of the possibility of being an Iranian along with a state that best can be described as ambivalent. The ambivalence of human attitudes and conduct, initially coined by Eugen Bleuler in the early 20th century, has been continually investigated ever since (Merton & Barber, 1976). Merton and Barber consider Bleuler’s definition and classification to be in the Aristotelian vein. Because Bleuler

identified three types of ambivalence: the emotional (or affective) type in which that same object arouses both positive and negative feelings, as in parent-child relations; the voluntary (or conative) type in which conflicting wishes make it difficult or impossible to decide how to act; and the intellectual (or cognitive) type, in which men hold contradictory ideas. (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 11)

Robert K. Merton, in a joint article with Elinor Barber entitled “Sociological ambivalence” (1976 [1963]), considers that ambivalence could also appear to incorporate the structure of social statuses and roles (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 13). Merton and Barber assert that sociological ambivalence, unlike the psychological approach, “directs us to examine the processes in the social structure that affect the probability of ambivalence turning up in particular kinds of role-relations” (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 13), and “directs us to the social consequences of ambivalence for the workings of social structures” (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 13). While psychological ambivalence might cause personal affective or cognitive difficulties, social ambivalence has the aftereffect of triggering the social situation to become hostile, distrustful, and resentful, which might, in turn, cause the emergence of deviant behaviour. “[T]hey are on different planes of phenomenal reality, on different planes of conceptualisation, on different planes of causation and consequences” (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 14). Sociological ambivalence, Merton and Barber believe, “refers to incompatible normative expectations of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour assigned to a status (i.e., a social position) or to a set of statuses in a society” (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 14). *The core of it lays the contradicting normative inclinations in the social description of a role.*

For this reason, they add that we have to take note of “how roles are to be characterised to permit the analysis of ambivalence” (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 20). Although they suppose there is no standardised set of categories for delineating the social role, in the final analysis, they understand this concept to include “a dynamic organisation of norms and counter-norms” (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 25). From the perspective of sociological ambivalence, Merton and Barber argue that it is only by way of such structures of norms and counter-norms that a variety of functions of a role could be effectively implemented.

[C]onflicting norms are built into the social definition of roles that provide for normatively acceptable alternations of behaviour as the state of a social relation changes. This is a major basis for that oscillation between different role requirements that makes for sociological ambivalence. (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 27)

On the other hand, according to Zygmunt Bauman in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), ambivalence is a *language-specific disorder*. He remarks:

Ambivalence, the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category, is a language-specific disorder: a failure of naming (segregating) function that language is meant to

perform. The main symptom of disorder is the acute discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions. (Bauman, 1991, p. 9)

Bauman continues that we experience ambivalence as a disorder because of the anxiety accompanying it and the following indecision. And moreover, although there is either language to blame for lack of precision or ourselves for misuse of language, he contends that “ambivalence is not the product of the pathology of language or speech” (Bauman, 1991, p. 9). Bauman believes the grounds that give rise to ambivalence are naming and classifying, which is one of the key functions of language. By the function of performing language, he means that we first assume that the world consists of distinctive and discrete entities and then consider that each individual entity has a group of similar or adjacent entities to which it belongs and other groups of entities to whom it is opposed to. And finally, to put the postulated to work, it links “differential patterns of action to different classes of entities” (Bauman, 1991, p. 9). Bauman argues that by classifying, we give structure to the world and

[t]hrough its naming/classifying function, language posits itself between a solidly founded, orderly world fit for human habitation, and a contingent world of randomness, in which human survival weapons – memory, the capacity for learning – would be useless, if not downright suicidal. Language strives to sustain the order and to deny or suppress randomness and contingency. An orderly world is a world in which ‘one knows how to go on’ (or, what amounts to the same, one knows how to find out – and find out *for sure* – how to go on), in which one knows how to calculate the probability of an event and how to increase or decrease that probability; a world in which links between certain situations and the effectivity of certain actions remain by and large constant, so that one can rely on past successes as guides for future ones. Because of our learning/memorizing ability, we have vested interests in maintaining the orderliness of the world. (Bauman, 1991, pp. 9-10)

According to him, it is for the same reason that we experience ambivalence as distressful and dangerous in the sense that ambivalence perplexes the calculation of worldly events and obscures the relevance of memorised patterns of action (Bauman, 1991). Bauman thinks that if the linguistic means of structuration prove inadequate, the situation turns ambivalent. This happens in such a way that either the linguistically distinguished naming does not fit the situation or it falls under several classes simultaneously. The consequence of such a situation is that

[n]one of the learned patterns could be proper in an ambivalent situation – or more than one of the learned patterns could be applied; whatever is the case, the outcome is feeling indecision,

undecidability, and hence loss of control. The consequences of action become unpredictable, while randomness, allegedly done away with by the structuring effort, seems to make an unsolicited come-back. (Bauman, 1991, p. 10)

What is essential for the present purposes is that ambivalence is, first and foremost, a consequential feature of modernity, as many have pointed out (Bauman, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994; Smelser, 1998; Smart, 1999). To assign conflicting propositions to one category, which has the aftereffect of causing discomfort in reading the situation, may have been caused mentally by the coexistent contradictory convictions.

The concept of ambivalence for us labels the situation we want to illustrate further. Classification of this term here to the psyche, language or society is merely to exhibit how conventional social theory comes to terms with this situation. However, for us, applying this conception has the function of not only describing both situations under the umbrella of one term (i.e., one arrow, two targets) but also describing the situation as an attribute of our time, as “an era of particularly bitter and relentless war against ambivalence” (Bauman, 1991). By accepting such, we can address the constructive conditions of the possibility of ambivalence in Iranian society, such as “Why is the only consistent account that we can address the Iranian society under the notion of ambivalence? How did it come about? How is it constituted? What are its origin and history?”²². Therefore, we are interested in *the conditions of the possibility of ambivalence* in Iranian society. Again one might say that this way of structuring the research question is more in the Foucauldian manner in his study in *The Order of Things* (2002), as he claims:

I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today’s science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the space of

²² It is noteworthy to say the formulation of the logical (*prinzipielle*) distinction between two orders of inquiry regarding anything. These two orders respectively are based on two ways of bringing into question the phenomenon under study. For instance, a) if we ask questions concerning the nature of the subject under investigation (i.e., the knowledge of what “is”)? How did it take place? What are its constitution, origin, and history? We are pursuing a line of inquiry that will result in existential judgment, proposition, or knowledge, and b) if we raise questions revolving around the importance, meaning, or significance of the subject under study, once it is at our disposal (i.e., the knowledge of what “should be”), we are constructing a line of reasoning that will eventually generate proposition of value or normative knowledge (Weber, 1949; James, 2002).

knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an ‘archaeology’. (Foucault, 2002, pp. xxiii-xxiv)

In our approach, ambivalence has the simple definition of *simultaneously admitting conflicting and contradictory propositions, dispositions, or situations to an existing object, event, or person*. Consequently, to say that the nature of sociology in Iran is ambivalent is to say that the source of *crisis* and *emancipation* is assigned to Iranian sociology simultaneously. The same is true for the problematic situation of Iranian society.

1.4. Conclusion

Despite the developments of the last hundred years or so in Iran, which ostensibly and by Western standards might have suggested that Iran has progressed as an increasingly prosperous modern nation-state, a sense of hopelessness and failure among Iranian thinking men has reappeared. On the one hand, according to studies, Iranian citizens, compared to other countries which have experienced a rapid process of modernisation, are disturbed by modern societal problems of high rates of unemployment, inflation rates, poverty and lack of resources, economic difficulties, injustice and discrimination, and drug addiction, etc. (cf. National Report on Iranian Values and Attitudes, 2016). On the other hand, after implementing five development plans under the second Pahlavi reign and seven development plans²³ from the beginning of the Islamic revolution, social scientists have failed to prove profitable in resolving or at least reducing the atrocities of these policies. This has resulted in an accumulated sense of despair on the parts of the public²⁴ and a sense of distrust in the social sciences on the parts of academia.

Although the statement that Iran has transformed is logically a tautology, this claim has not always been evident and continues to have many critics. This criticism becomes clearer when the transformation is summarized under the notion of modernisation. On one side, religious fundamentalists and traditionalists consider everything in contemporary Iran, from urbanisation, industrialisation, and bureaucratisation to mediatization and digitalisation, not genuine and constructive but rather as a basis that leads to the destruction of traditions and alienation of

²³ <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/476661/Leader-outlines-general-policies-of-7th-National-Development>

²⁴ For instance, the Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA) in August 2021 interviewed 1570 Iranian citizens over 18 years of age with the question, “How do you see Iran 2022?”. According to the results, 41.3 per cent of people said that the country’s situation will be better next year than it is now. 14.8% said that the country’s disposition would not change, and 28.8% believed that the country’s condition would worsen next year. And 14.3 per cent do not know how the country will be in the next year (The Most Important Findings of the Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA) in 2021-2022, 2022, author’s translation).

Iranian culture. In some revolutionary intellectual circles²⁵, the transformation and change promoted in Iran are considered mere indiscriminate imitations. It is an imitation of and dependence upon the West to the extent that it detracts the traditional, historical, and cultural Iran, which then gets the label *Westoxification*²⁶ (in Persian *Gharbzadegi*), albeit with resentment. The critics of the idea of transformation and modernity hope that by denying change to return to the previous values, which constitutes some sort of Utopia of the Islamic Golden Age.

However, on the other side, some academic scholars believe change has done what it was meant to do. Therefore, we have long passed the stage where regress is possible, and transformation has taken root in Iranian society. Abbas Amanat, for instance, argues in *Iran: A Modern History* (2017) that we have experienced Iranian modernity over a period of 500 years. Amanat considers the Safavid era as the starting point of Iranian transformation, during which the “Persianized version of modernity” was created, and, of course, “not without many trials and errors” (Amanat, 2017, p. ix). In line with Amanat, many other Iranian scholars and historians have exhibited modernity in Iran, such as Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi’s *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (2001) and Ervand Abrahamian’s *A History of Modern Iran* (2018).

Although there have been various evaluations of Iranian modernisation, such as *Cultural Schizophrenia* (1992) or “The Short-Term Society” (2004), what is more crucial than re-evaluating these judgments is that there is not even consensus or general agreement on the experience of transformation and change itself. This lack of agreement on the discernment of the concrete reality (*Wirklichkeit*) expressed in the form of competing discourses has determined the Iranian feeling towards transformation and change as something ambivalent. As Nematollah Fazeli puts it, an instantaneous experience of love and hatred (Fazeli, 2022, author’s translation).

According to Fazeli, however, one has to bear in mind that this ambivalent experience of modernity reflects both the comprehension of Iranian elites and the knowledge of ordinary

²⁵ Involving revolutionary scholars such as Ali Shariati, Jalal Al-i Ahmad and Morteza Motahari.

²⁶ “I SPEAK OF BEING AFFLICTED WITH ‘WESTITIS’ THE WAY I would speak of being afflicted with cholera. If this is not palatable let us say it is akin to being stricken by heat or by cold. But it is not that either. It is something more on the order of being attacked by tongue worm. Have you ever seen how wheat rots? From within. The husk remains whole, but it is only an empty shell like the discarded chrysalis of a butterfly hanging from a tree. In any case, we are dealing with a sickness, a disease imported from abroad, and developed in an environment receptive to it. Let us discover the characteristics of this illness and its cause or causes and, if possible, find a cure” (Ahmad, 1982, p. 3).

Iranians in everyday life. He believes, indeed, that both ordinary people as “labourers of transformation and change” and political and intellectual elites as “Architects of transformation and change” are hesitant regarding any alteration altogether due to this feature (Fazeli, 2022, author’s translation). In a way, the experience of Iranian citizens is understandable as we all are acquainted with these dual feelings of love and hatred, the desire to change and not to, fear and hope, and a sense of living in the twilight of modernity. The most exciting and surprising aspect about the Iranian case is the encounter of the political and intellectual elites. They, too, have had a contradictory, double, conflicting experience of modernity with love and hatred, which could be explained by the twin concepts of “desire to change” and “fear of change” (Fazeli, 2022, author’s translation).

In line with Fazeli, we also accept these schizophrenic attributes of Iranian society in the face of modernisation. But there is no need to consider these experiences as something idiosyncratic. We can read this seemingly peculiar ambivalence in agreement with the experience of the rest of the world as a consequential feature of modernity, as many have pointed out (Bauman, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994; Smelser, 1998; Smart, 1999). This approach to the problem enables us to attend to the ambiguity of our time both as a socio-historical attribute of the Iranian context and as an intrinsic element contributing to the trajectory of modern thought in order to investigate the resemblances between them. However, to avoid certain narrow sociological strands of thought based on particular epistemological concerns, we have strictly defined ambivalence as the simultaneous attribution of conflicting and contradictory propositions, dispositions, or situations to an existing object, event, or person. In the next chapter, we will clarify our philosophical perspective on ambivalence while pointing out and reconstructing sociological examples from the Iranian context.

Chapter 2: On The Summit of Continual Fluctuation; Reading A Society Through The Conception of Ambivalence

What we do is never understood but always merely praised and reproached. (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 151)

Iran is a very ironic society. It almost does not matter how one perceives objects (solely or collectively) or what is the theoretical scope or level of analysis; it appears as if some things have never been susceptible to change and never will be; from the very private spaces of life, the inner whispers of one's own conscience, to the broadest spheres of the public, the sudden burst of intense feelings of a collective conscience; from making a reflexive turn to *I*, becoming the subject of one's own study, to a zoological revealing of self to the *other*, becoming the subject of their research. An everlasting resonance of certain beliefs that have become solidified and rigorous has filled all the spaces and spheres, with all the rooms and areas in and between them, while dominating and embracing them. This results in a history in which the past would appear as the future, the future as the past and the present as an *enigma*—persuading some, namely orientalists, such as Marvin Zonis, to see Iran as “rare among developing societies, in the intensity of its dilemma” (1968, p. 133).

But on the other hand, not all change is virtuous, and not all stabilisation performances are evil. One of the benefits of not being subject to change, which is also in conformity with Zipf's law²⁷, a principle of least effort, is that it makes the act of repeating the process of a scientific investigation, once solved, unnecessary and redundant. In this regard, one can follow various

²⁷ George Kingsley Zipf, in his book *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort* (1949), theorised that the distribution of word use was due to the tendency to communicate efficiently with the least effort.

cases in different levels of the social sphere directing one's attention to a repetitive static idea: *ambivalence*.

Depicting the history of ambivalence in Iran in the pre-modern era (i.e., in the Renaissance or the Age of Enlightenment), the period which Thomas Luckmann labels "the prehistory of social lore and isolated philosophical speculation" (Luckmann, 1973, p. 157), faces the problems of interpretation itself. In this respect, there is no clear record of the origins of ambivalence in Iranian socio-political life, no historical moment when, as with Columbus's discovery of America, we can declare that Iranian ambivalence was discovered or invented. To try to identify a point where this ambivalence appeared in Iranian life involves massive challenges in interpreting Iran's ancient culture. Even though in the Age of Enlightenment (or even before that), practical principles in the sphere of science and political action urged the exigency of travelling to Persia (one of the earliest civilisations), along with documenting them in the form of travelogues to reveal the mysteries of Iranian-ness (e.g., Pietro Della Valle's *The Travels in Persia* [1658], *The Six Voyages of John Baptista Tavernier* [1678], *Sir John Chardin's Travels in Persia* [1724], *The Three Brothers; Travels and Adventures of Sir Anthony, Sir Robert and Sir Thomas Sherley in Persia, Russia, Turkey and, Spain* [1825], etc.), methodological disputes make the act of interpreting these narrations challenging. Still, some critical intellectual speculations promote the idea that the modern representation of Iranian-ness, both in terms of personal and social character, nature, and image, is based on determining psychological qualities rooted in the period mentioned above. And although this claim might make a good case for several genealogies, it faces the threat of articulating a history of the past through those moments of the present, which reflect the problems of *modern scientific cosmology*²⁸, let alone the dangers of the inherent Eurocentrism.

However, another story can be told when we enter modern history. In the contemporary era, the birth date of the idea of ambivalence in Persia traces its descent to the moment of the inauguration of social sciences in the Iranian academia in 1958, as part of UNESCO's mission to promote a well-established Western scientific apparatus in the developing countries to aid these nations in detecting the law-like regularities in their society. From this point forward, every instance of social theory in/about Iran marked a moment that mirrors a facet of ambivalence, making the difficulties admitted to interpretation and hermeneutic approaches

²⁸ For more insight regarding this term see:

Luckmann, T. (1973). *Philosophy, Sciences and Everyday Life*. In M. Natanson (Ed.), *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences* (pp. 143-185). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

irrelevant since the mere juxtaposition of the mass body of social literature in/about Iran in a historical sequential order would suffice to reveal the point. For example, a study by Morteza Kotobi and Michel Villette entitled “Problems Concerning the Methodology for Surveys in Developing Countries: the Iranian Case” (1974) attempted to explicate rules essential for studying attitudes in a rapidly developing nation. In doing so, they re-evaluated a series of studies conducted in the 1960s at the Institute of Social Studies and Research, University of Tehran. They claim that differentiating between two expression levels in Iran is essential for general social research in Iran. In the early stages of their study about fertility, mortality and sexuality, conducted in Tehran, Torbat-Heyfariyeh and Shahsavari, they noticed that Iranians apply two levels of ambivalent expression²⁹. They suggest it could have also been detected in other areas of Iranian behaviour if one considered widening the scope of the research.

According to their understanding, the first of these two levels is “frontal expression”, which is conventional and does not bring any inconvenience, repercussions or risk for the respondent. This expression is adopted while speaking with outsiders and those who do not belong to the inner group or tribe, with the characteristic of being “rational” without creating commitment. The second level is termed “spontaneous expression,” revealing individual preoccupations. And it is an expression of action which is, to a great extent, compatible with the realities of life. This mode of expression is only embraced while engaging with group members. The case that the authors present for these two forms of expressions are:

Question: “What is the preferable child gender for parents? Boy or girl?” [...] *Frontal answer:* “It does not make any difference” or “We have to place our faith in God’s hands and so on” [...] (Kotobi & Villette, 1974, author’s translation).

However, Kotobi and Villette contend that if the interviewer is not surprised by this kind of answer, does not accuse the respondent of anything, and gains the respondent’s trust by presenting themselves as an unbiased person of science while repeating the question once more; then the answer will be:

Spontaneous answer: “Though you know that there are some people who prefer boys over girls and so on” [...] “And now, this person can lecture about the advantages of having a boy and the fact that girls are weak, skinny and less valuable” (Kotobi & Villette, 1974, author’s translation).

²⁹ In particular they refer to a survey concerning fertility, sexuality, and mortality, and also to a study of the problems of new university students: the first, drawn from semi-guided interviews; and the second, based on open written questionnaires (Kotobi & Villette, 1974).

Although it seems to Kotobi and Villette that ambivalence is an evident phenomenon in every culture around the globe, they argue that this phenomenon has statistical significance in Iran by virtue of being explicit, systematic and frequent concerning the subjects that this principle could explain them (Kotobi & Villette, 1974).

Another instance of this phenomenon could be observed in Marvin Zonis's essay "Educational Ambivalence in Iran" (1968), yet in another level of analysis. Zonis argues that the Iranian political elite manifests ambiguities, contradictions and ambivalences, the reflection of which could be studied in Iran's educational system. He depicts how Persian elites have experienced personal opportunities for socialisation into Western culture and technology through high levels of education in Europe and the United States, acquisition of foreign languages (mainly French and English), and travelling to the capital cities of the modern culture. But on the contrary, when they have a chance to introduce, through their positions of political power, the cultural and ideological basis of Western progress, they tend to invigorate their own indigenous cultural heritage, resulting in a "fascinating and seemingly contradictory amalgam of the traditional and the modern" (Zonis, 1968, p. 138). Zonis's data is based on 167 quantitative interviews with the Iranian political elite identified through a two-stage reputational analysis. The type of questions asked from these elites was, for example, the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the notion that "Iranian culture is so unique that it has always subverted would-be conquerors and 'Iranized' them" (Zonis, 1968, p. 138).

Attitude	%
Strong agreement	31.7
Moderate agreement	27.5
Slight agreement	13.8
Slight disagreement	5.4
Moderate disagreement	6.6
Strong disagreement	5.4
Don't know, no answer	<u>9.6</u>
TOTAL	100.0% (167)

Table 9. Attitudes Towards Uniqueness and Efficacy of Iranian Culture (Source: Zonis, 1968, p.138)

As is also noticeable in Table 9., Zonis argues that three-quarters of the political elite support the idea that Iran has consistently absorbed and ultimately conquered its conquerors through the strength of its culture. However, he claims, at the same time

[w]hen asked to assess the roots of Iran's past greatness, only thirteen percent of the responses pertained to culture, learning, knowledge, or learned men. The overwhelming percentage of responses attributed Iran's past greatness to "great and wise kings," "strong leaders," etc. The elite alternately attributed Iran's historical greatness, then, to individual leaders and to education and culture. While this may partly reflect a projection of contemporary political realities to the past, it is also symbolic of the deep-seated ambivalence of the elite towards education. (Zonis, 1968, pp. 138-139)

As demonstrated in the examples, for articulating the ambivalent feature of the Iranian atmosphere, it is difficult to choose what aspects of more than seven decades of social theory in/about Iran to reflect on and which to ignore, the same as what we are encountering within the current manuscript. On the other hand, since the act of placing the frames of the modern Iranian social thought history next to each other, in our opinion, drives out of scholars' sheer arbitrary decision-making –which in Weber's terminology might be called practical value-judgments–, and, thereby, differs from study to study, this study refrains from further tracing ambivalence in the history of social thought in Iran. As mentioned earlier (i.e., under rubric 1.3.), there are discrepancies in approaches toward ambivalence in social sciences, i.e., psychological, linguistic, and sociological, which do not have a central topicality in our study. To point this out merely serves to name a typical situation in the contemporary era characterised by ambivalence (Bauman, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994; Smelser, 1998; Smart, 1999).

The main purposes of reading Iran's problematic situation (i.e., Iranian society and its pertinent social knowledge) with the existing theoretical instrument of ambivalence are to evaluate the conditions of the possibility of ambivalence and to seek possibilities for the next step of the present inquiry. Thus, the following pages reflect upon the instances that have come to our attention, and we will reconstruct them to reveal the moment that we consider ambivalent.

2.1. Representation of Iranian Ambivalence Through the Eyes of Social Sciences

2.1.1. Case No. 1. The Villagers Knew Better!

The case to be discussed here concerns the selection of a *kædkhoda* (the traditional village official) for the Iranian village of Gavaki,³⁰ presented in William O. Beeman's *Language, Status and Power in Iran* (1986). However, we must analyse the case with the rigid analytical

³⁰ For research purposes Beeman has concealed the actual name of the village. The actual village is a large rural area located about 30 kilometres from Shiraz (a city in south-central Iran).

tools of conventional sociological knowledge to see how mainstream sociology comes to terms with the ambivalent instance. What follows is the description of the issue by Beeman:

In the Iranian village of Gavaki there was continual difficulty in determining who would serve as the *kædkhoda* (official) of the village. [...] The difficulty revolved around the fact that the *kædkhoda* would be the one individual who government officials would be in contact with in their dealings with the village. [...] On the one hand, the majority of the villagers, who were for the most part small landowners and day laborers, wanted a person to represent them in government dealings who would not misrepresent their interests. On the other hand, they were anxious to have an individual serve as *kædkhoda* who was powerful, effective, and able to entertain urban officials on their occasional sojourns to the village. Unfortunately, the few persons who were powerful, wealthy, and effective enough to deal with the government were also large landowners who were likely not to want to operate in the best interests of the small landowners [...] The end result was that two individuals came to be known as *kædkhoda* [...] In conversation, depending on the content and nature of the discussion, either one or the other of the men would be referred to as *kædkhoda*. The regional government of Shiraz was not willing to confirm either man, as both were unacceptable as village officials for differing reasons, but the villagers were unwilling to select others in their place. Eventually, however, regional government officials came to deal with both the men on an unofficial basis, depending again on the nature of the business to be transacted. The two *kædkhodas* would each have been happy to have had the issue resolved in his favor (because this would represent an increase in status and power), but they were perfectly able to live with their official status “in limbo,” each acknowledging tacitly the authority of the other in its proper context [...] To further add to the complexity of the situation, the former *kædkhoda*, who had been designated by the former landlord, was still resident in the village. Whereas he now had none of the influence that he once had, he lived in the best house and had the greatest amount of land of anyone currently residing in the village. In the situation where the regional government had not designated an “official” *kædkhoda*, he too was still identified as *kædkhoda* in particular contexts, although he himself denied that he had any authority when questioned by me [...] An outside observer would be told on one occasion that one individual was *kædkhoda*; on another occasion that another of the three was *kædkhoda*; on yet another occasion that two, or all three, held office; and finally, on some occasions, that the village didn’t have a *kædkhoda* at all. These multiple versions could be given as an account of the *kædkhoda* situation by the same individual on different occasions. Far from reflecting manifest uncertainty, the eventual state of affairs demonstrated the flexibility with which villagers were able to deal with the demands of different situations and value systems. Only an outside observer determined on knowing “the single truth” about the matter would try

to fix on any one statement about the *kædkhoda* as the actual state of affairs. The villagers knew better. (Beeman, 1986, pp. 23-24)

In conventional sociology, we might be able to employ the fifth typification of Merton and Barber's sociological ambivalence, i.e., *opportunity structure*, to explain this situation. This sociological ambivalence is found in separating culturally prescribed objectives and socially structured opportunities for realising these objectives. As they remark, this type of ambivalence

is neither cultural conflict nor social conflict, but a contradiction between the cultural structure and the social structure. It turns up when cultural values are internalized by those whose position in the social structure does not give them access to act in accord with the values they have been taught to prize. (Merton & Barber, 1976, p. 19)

Merton believes their direction in articulating sociological ambivalence is firmly against those theories rooted in the Freudian theory (such as Erich Fromm's), which argues that the structure of society primarily restrains the free expression of man's fixed native impulses (Merton & Barber, 1976). Therefore, man periodically breaks into open rebellion against these restraints to achieve freedom (Merton, 1968). In contrast, they claim that functional analysis is more apt to comprehend the social structure because it also observes motivations that cannot be predicted merely based on our understanding of man's native drives. Merton is convinced that if the social structure confines some possibilities of action, it creates others (Merton, 1968). Therefore,

[t]he functional approach [...] abandons the position, held by various individualistic theories, that different rates of deviant behavior in diverse groups and social strata are the accidental result of varying proportions of pathological personalities found in these groups and strata. It attempts instead to determine how the social and cultural structure generates pressure for socially deviant behavior upon people variously located in that structure. (Merton, 1968, pp. 184-185)

Thus Merton and Barber argue that, as mentioned before, in the social description of a role, the significant norms and the minor counter-norms govern role behaviour in producing ambivalence. It is obvious that for them, major norms are institutional requirements, and minor counter-norms are the pattern of behaviour of all groups and strata in the society, which do not always conform to social structure regulations and may also give way to new patterns of behaviour (Merton, 1968; Merton & Barber, 1976).

Arguably, the study of the bureaucratic structure of Iran and the historical background of selecting a *kædkhoda* for the Iranian villages supports the functional analysis. By considering

and reconstructing the details in Beeman's example by means of the Mertonian theoretical framework, one might figure out that conventional sociology has made a good suggestion. The research was conducted in the pre-revolution era (i.e., before the 1979 Islamic Revolution), during the reign of the second Pahlavi monarch (Mohammad Reza Shah) in Persia. In this period, the Pahlavi dynasty employed the 1935 Parliament *Act of kædkhoda*³¹ to select a kædkhoda. This Act vividly declares that each kædkhoda of a village was the representative of the landlords and had the duty of enforcing the law and regulations assigned to him by the government (Yousefi-far & Jangjo, 2014). On the structural level, this implied that cultivators and peasants had no part in selecting a kædkhoda, and their consent or approval was unwarranted.

On the other hand, the status of kædkhoda in the Iranian villages is historical and impossible to be undermined by any legislation whatsoever. Moreover, traditionally, rural areas in Iran were isolated from governmental predominance for the most part (Keddie, 1968; Beeman, 1986; Yousefi-far & Jangjo, 2014), which made the kædkhoda, before the land reform³², unlike most large landlords who resided in the cities, the only official political administrator living among the villagers, facilitating the relations between them and the more affluent landlords. This practical situation, coupled with the necessity of working with the small landowners, cultivators, and peasants to keep the village's economy alive and running, at the end of the day, placed that subgroup of small landowners and day labourers in a position that all the parties involved felt these groups needed to have a say in this specific matter too. This then meant that the kædkhoda wasn't merely the regulator of the bilateral relationship between the landlords and government but instead was in a position which had to have an eye on a multilateral relationship (i.e., between government, landlords, and cultivators and peasants). In fact, analysing this case through the functional theory would probably fit perfectly within the classic example of the bureaucratic structure and personality (cf. "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality" in Merton, 1968), which assumes that the structure constrains individuals diversely situated within it to develop cultural emphases, social behaviour patterns and psychological inclinations. Furthermore, Merton's functional analysis does not consider deviations from the structural norms dysfunctional.

³¹ Which was eliminated in 1975 from Iran's administration system.

³² A major reform in January 1962, "which required landlords to sell land above 'one village' to the government, who in turn would sell it to certain categories among the cultivators" (Keddie, 1968, pp. 70-71).

Deviations are not necessarily dysfunctional for a social system, as we have seen, any more than conformity is necessarily functional. From the functional analysis of bureaucratic structure, it is clear that, under determinate conditions, conformity to regulations can be dysfunctional both for realizing the objectives of the structure and for various groups in the society which the bureaucracy is intended to serve. Regulations are in such cases applied even when the circumstances which initially made them functional and effective have so materially changed that conformity to the rule defeats its purpose. (Merton, 1968, pp. 186-187)

However, our concern is the example's immediate (i.e., existential) constructive knowledge components. Therefore, what constitutes the vagueness or opaqueness of ambivalence in the example is revealed through the logical theorem of *reductio ad absurdum*³³. For example, Aristotle's Law of Non-Contradiction is a *reductio ad absurdum* which, according to him, is the firmest law in the first philosophy, or metaphysics, which deals with ontology (Gottlieb, 2019). As Aristotle argues, "the principle of non-contradiction is a principle of scientific inquiry, reasoning and communication that we cannot do without" (Gottlieb, 2019). For the present purposes, our focus is on the ontological version of the law, which considers the things that exist in the world. According to Aristotle, "[i]t is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect (with the appropriate qualifications)" (as cited in Gottlieb, 2019). Thus our concept of ambivalence, in the social world, as the existence of mutually exclusive contradictions, which points to an ontological feature of the objects under study, is based on such philosophical perspectives. In our understanding, by principle, it is impossible to belong and not to belong.

Although Gavaki village is presumably faced with ambivalence on different levels, the level identified here lies at the structural level. At the structural level, the task is to select a person from the village or elsewhere and assign them to the structural position of *kædkhoda* under the Act 1935, who then becomes the representative of the landlords with the duty of enforcing laws and regulations admitted to him by the government's administrative body. Otherwise stated,

- (1) Based on the Act 1935, a *kædkhoda* was the official representative of a village which had to be confirmed by the government. **(Premise)**
- (2) It is either the case that a village has an officially confirmed *kædkhoda*, or it cannot be the case that a village has an unofficial unconfirmed *kædkhoda*. **(Premise)**
- (3) But in the Iranian village of Gavaki, the result of selecting a *kædkhoda* for the village was that "two individuals came to be known as *kædkhoda*". **(Supposition)**

³³ *Reductio ad absurdum* "arguments are naturally called indirect arguments. We don't go straight from premisses to conclusion, but take a side step via some additional supposition which we temporarily add for the sake of argument and then eventually 'discharge'" (Smith, 2020, p. 37). In the formal logic its scheme is demonstrated as follows: $\neg(\alpha \wedge \neg\alpha)$

- (4) Therefore, “The regional government of the province of Shiraz was not willing to confirm either man”, as both were unacceptable as *officially confirmed* kædkhoda. (From 1,2)
- (5) However, regional government officials of the province of Shiraz came to deal with both men *unofficially*. (Supposition)
- (6) Contradiction! (From 1,2)

This state of contradiction amounts to a vagueness which we label as ambivalence. In this respect, although the two *kædkhodas* could perfectly live with their (un)official status *in limbo*, which is perhaps a personal quality, the perspective of an outside observer on this disposition would still be inconclusive. In the final analysis, the experience of an outside spectator (be it a citizen of the village, a researcher, or even a reader of this text) of the event would probably be constituted of an impression that tolerates the co-existence of inconsistent propositions (in its all logical *propositional variables*):

[O]n one occasion that one individual was kædkhoda; on another occasion that another of the three was kædkhoda; on yet another occasion that two, or all three, held office; and finally, on some occasions, that the village didn’t have a kædkhoda at all. (Beeman, 1986, p. 24)

Yet, the property that “villagers knew better” could simply be a post hoc psychological quality development in terms of how to act towards the situation, which then does not have anything to do with the nature of the vagueness or opaqueness of the ambivalence experienced.

2.1.2. Case No. 2. We Have All Been Wondering About You!

In her travel memoirs entitled *Revolutionary Ride: On the Road in Search of the Real Iran* (2017), Lois Pryce writes that after stumbling into a group of friends in their late twenties and early thirties, both men and women from Tehran, who had come out to the mountains to escape the city for a few days, she got to understand more of the Iranian underground life. By this, she mainly means a party gathering of the young, to which she was also invited. While this might appear rather unusual for the Western mind, given the tenor of the Iran coverage in mainstream media, it is not a peculiar situation at all. Pryce describes the events as something one simply did not see in public places (Pryce, 2017). In fact, she is so surprised by this group that she defines them as a *different breed of Iranian*.

In the dim light of the carport I could see that they were a different breed from the Iranians I had met so far. Their clothes and hairstyles suggested an arty, bohemian flair, and beneath the

women's regulation manteaus³⁴ I could see evidence of skinny jeans and trainers. (Pryce, 2017, p. 71)

As the author continues to depict the party, there comes an instance when all have “settled down on the sofas and the qalyān³⁵ was passed around”, where she starts to speak with Jafar (the person who was more fluent in English) about their first meeting and the “misconceptions, on both sides” (Pryce, 2017, p. 74) It is worthwhile, here, to reflect on a lengthy quotation from Pryce's writings and then clarify its connection with the notion of ambivalence. She remarks:

When the tea was finished, the mysterious unmarked bottles were uncorked.

‘Now let's get the party started,’ said Jafar. ‘This is *araq*, like home-made vodka but made from raisins, and this is home-made wine. The Armenians make it – they are allowed to drink alcohol in Iran, you know?’

‘So, everyone should have an Armenian friend?’ I said.

‘Ha! You would make a good Iranian!’ said Jafar, laughing and nodding.

The *araq* was lethal moonshine, almost undrinkable, and the wine dark and sickly, both as unpalatable as homebrew the world over, but in Iran you take your booze where you can find it. The strange brew flowed along with more tea, laughter and conversation, translated mainly by Jafar for some of the others who were not so fluent in English. He explained to me that they were a group of old friends who were involved in music, the arts and film. Back in Iran for a short holiday from his teaching job abroad, he had rounded them up for the weekend, the plan being to get away from Tehran and head to the mountains. There was definitely a sense of illicit escape about their trip, and out here, away from the city, it was easier to elude the Gashte Ershad, the dreaded ‘morality police’³⁶.

A couple of other guests wandered in and out of the room on occasion, sometimes staying for a glass of tea and a little conversation. They seemed unperturbed by the un-Islamic activities going on around them, and I noticed the women did not rush to cover their hair as they entered. One of them, an elderly man from Tehran, spoke fluent English and German and explained that before the revolution he had been a chemical engineer for Mercedes, travelling the world, setting up plants and systems.

‘And then—’ he trailed off and smiled sadly.

I nodded expectantly, but he stood up, clearing away his empty tea glass, ‘Well, you know, everything changed then—’

³⁴ A long, loose coat or overshirt worn by Muslim women.

³⁵ Qalyān or Kalian is the Persian word for Shisha or water pipe.

³⁶ Or the Guidance Patrol is a kind of Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the task of observing the implementation of dress code, both for men and women, in the public sphere.

This was the narrative I was beginning to hear again and again. ‘Before the revolution’ was the opening line of so many life stories in Iran, always with a weary shake of the head or a sorrowful gaze into the distance. (Pryce, 2017, p. 75)

Although what Pryce says about the “before the revolution” is worth consideration, she merely reflects on one of the existing ways of using this phrase. The meaning of the phrase “before the revolution” depends on whom it employs. If a pro-regime activist says, “before the revolution”, they are usually statistically referring to an uneven process of modernisation in the Pahlavi dynasty evident between big cities and rural eras. If a contra-regime, as Pryce points out, speaks of “before the revolution”, they mainly have a nostalgic sentiment towards the lost past glory. However, other groups make their own usage of this phrase, such as Dan Shadur’s documentary entitled “Before the Revolution”, released in 2013, describing the last days of the Israeli community in Tehran. Nevertheless, Pryce has confronted one of these contingent ways of applying this phrase. Let us return to the rest of the story.

‘Oh, they all thought it was a good idea at the time,’ he said. ‘They thought life would be better: no more Shah, no more SAVAK torturing people! It is hard to imagine now, how angry the people were back then. But I never believed it, not with this donkey, Khomeini, in charge! I would have left but it was not possible for me.’

As he turned and left the room he gave a resigned shrug. ‘I never wanted this— this Islamic Republic!’

‘Is this how most people feel about the revolution nowadays?’ I asked Jafar.

He pondered for a moment but his friend butted in, angry.

‘These old guys, they say this now, but they forget, they wanted it, they wanted the revolution.’

He jerked his thumb after the man. ‘He would have voted for Khomeini, everybody did. This is the generation that have made it like this for us. Now they are all sorry and say it was a mistake. But it is too late now!’

‘Yes, this is true,’ Jafar was nodding thoughtfully. ‘But now I would say it is like this: maybe five per cent of the population still support the revolution and the regime – these are the hardline religious; often they are poor, working people. They will be the ones you see on BBC and CNN, burning the flags and shouting “Death to America” and all of that crazy stuff. Then another five per cent, they are actively against the regime, they are protesting, demonstrating, getting arrested [...]’

‘Are they part of the Green Movement protests that happened a few years ago?’

‘Yes, they would have been involved with that protest, but you know, thousands of those people are in prison or have disappeared. So, the remaining population – say, ninety per cent – they are unhappy with the situation but they will not do anything, or say anything.’

‘Because they are scared of what would happen to them?’

‘Yes, they are scared but it’s not just that. Life in Iran is bad in many ways, but in some ways, for many people, it is quite comfortable, just comfortable enough for them to not want to, how would you say, “rock the boat”?’

‘Yes. You mean they have too much to lose? It is easier to just carry on as it is?’

‘Yes, the middle classes will probably have a job, a house, good food, and if they know the right people they will have satellite television and’ – he motioned to the bottle of wine

‘they will know where to get alcohol, and the authorities will ignore this most of the time. The women will probably be well educated, maybe have a good job and can send their children to a private school [...]

‘So everyday life is just about bearable?’

‘Exactly, and this is not by accident. Sometimes when there is unrest the government will make a show of relaxing certain rules, maybe about clothing, or they will stop arresting people for small crimes, like having satellite television, or they will stop raiding house parties, and then people feel like things are getting better.’

‘But you mean it’s just for show?’

‘Exactly. And of course, if people have children, they do not want to make a protest and then be arrested, questioned, tortured, locked up. This is the reality if you take a stand against the government in Iran.’ He looked me in the eye. ‘Would you take that risk?’

It was a difficult question. I liked to think I was the kind of person who would make a stand, but it was easy for me to say, coming from a democratic country with its unarmed policemen and the reassuring notion of habeas corpus enshrined in law. Taking a stand in Iran was a life or death decision [...] ‘There is always a way,’ Jafar said.

This, I was beginning to understand, was the unofficial motto of Iran. (Pryce, 2017, pp. 76-77)

There are several similarities in our second case to the example mentioned before. First, it appears that Iranian social life works with a motto: There is always a way (generally in getting on with life and particularly in dealing with social problems) that Iranians know better. The second similarity is that both authors tell a story from the first-person viewpoint, in which a sense of vagueness arising from an ambivalent disposition (i.e., in the way we define ambivalence) could be realised, regardless of the hermeneutic origins of the problem (i.e., the perfect understanding of the utterances).

Despite the archness of Lois Pryce’s journalistic account regarding the analogy between Iranian and British law enforcement, several instances are arguable in the case in question. We suppose again addressing one of the issues will suffice. Through this example, we want to refer to an underlying rhetoric, which is mainly in line with the highly sophisticated political writings

in/about Iran and the everyday life socio-political conversations one hears randomly in the street. In this respect, during the dialogue between Lois and Jafar, she asks, “Is this how most people feel about the revolution nowadays?” Jafar answers, “Now I would say it is like this:” 5% of the population support the revolution, then another 5% are against the regime, and the remaining 90% are unsatisfied with the situation, but they will not do anything. What concerns us with these statistics is not the ten per cent of political activists who are for or against the system. Because in our perception, this political adherence could be well interpreted as a conventional situation between different and incompatible political standpoints with conflicting interests on the issue of “what should be/is the appropriate art of governmentality?” turning the situation into a generic phenomenon, losing its uniqueness for us to be deciphered through an ontological approach.

What is more controversial is the remaining ninety per cent. Some might object to the statistical validity or reliability, the underlying truth of Jafar’s expression, or even the correctness of Pryce’s paraphrase and account of Jafar’s utterance. Our crucial contention here is the possibility of a vague and opaque disposition that has been described as ambivalent. For us, the uncertain nature of the lingering 90% lies in the fact that,

- (1) It is either the case with this ninety per cent that they “rock the boat”, or it cannot be the case that this ninety per cent do not “rock the boat”. **(Premise)**
- (2) But if they rock the boat, they have caused problems by changing a situation that is considered satisfactory³⁷. And if they do not rock the boat, they have caused no problems by changing any situation that is considered satisfactory. **(Premise)**
- (3) However, they will not rock the boat; they will not do anything or say anything. **(Supposition)**
- (4) So, life is quite comfortable for them. Because this ninety per cent has a job, a house, and good food, and if they know the right people, they will have satellite television and will know where to get their alcohol, and the authorities will ignore this most of the time. The women will probably be well educated, maybe have a good job and can send their children to a private school. **(From 1,2)**
- (5) But, life for this remaining ninety per cent is bad in many ways. **(Supposition)**
- (6) Contradiction! **(From 1,2 and 3)**

We should bear in mind that there is a considerable inclination in the social sciences in/about Iran that, as soon as it approaches this stage of the analysis, it tends to veer away from the subject and politicise the whole situation (e.g., Asef Bayat’s *Life as Politics* [2013]). This issue will be discussed below after the presentation of the third example (see Section 2.2.).

³⁷ As this is how Macmillan Dictionary defines “rock the boat”, we presume the situation is considered satisfactory from a common-sense perspective. Moreover, in our case, the same 90% acts based on common-sense knowledge.

2.1.3. Case No. 3. The Guidance Patrol and Visiting a Religious Ceremony

The last case can be found in an interview conducted for this study with two objectives: First, to get an insight into the field under investigation and second, to empirically seize the analytical moment of ambivalence in action. Even though the research strategy was altered from an empirical approach to a theoretical one in the later stages, it is still worthwhile to include the data. My original empirical focus was to find instances in which the borderlines between the system's structural regulation and an individual's cultural preferences might not be clear or even might collide. In particular, I focused on ladies' reactions while entering a religious site (e.g., a mosque, a holy shrine, etc.). Since the female's Islamic dress code³⁸ is more evident than men's, it may be that in the women's section, a moment would arise when the lady's appearance is not following the requirements of the site (see figure 3.), and this may give the path to an ambiguous disposition. I decided to reach out to Ava based on the snowball sampling technique. She is³⁹ an old friend in her 30s who holds an MBA and, according to my knowledge of her, is a conventional Muslim with typical religious faith uninterested in actual political activities (i.e., activities other than regular citizenship practices such as voting for the presidential elections). After contacting her and fixing a time and date, she sympathetically accepted to be interviewed.

³⁸ Women's Islamic dressing code or Hijab is defined as "the entire ensemble a woman wears in front of non-intimates covers her whole body - except for her face, hands and for some, feet - in loose, opaque, non-distinctive clothing" (Javadi-Faraz, 2008, p. 9). In Iran, the more practised way of Hijab usually consists of a headscarf covering the head and a Manteau, a loose-fitting garment covering the body. Though Manteaus used to be only worn closed in the front, over the last decade, there has been a growing interest in wearing Manteaus that are open in the front. Against this background, although the law of compulsory Hijab is practised in Iran, not all women wear the same style or have the exact reasons for wearing Hijab. There is a diversity in the forms of Hijab, ranging from Shayla to Chador (Or even to Burqa and Niqab in southwest parts of the country). To be more detailed, the Shawl or Shayla is a type of veil that consists of a long scarf covering the head to mask the hair and neck (it is vital to know that this style tends to be the most revealing, as it can be worn loose so that a good portion of the hair and neck remain uncovered). The Khimar (or Magh`nae in Persian) is a type of veil that is considered more proper than the shawl due to its coverage (this is the form required for most occupations and organisations, such as school teachers and students, university students and employees, and those who work for the government). The Chador is the most religious type of veil in Iran, with a traditional and historical background. A Chador is a blanket covering the head and entire body except for the face and hands to the wrist. An alternative to the Chador is considered to be the "Manteau", which may be worn to cover the body (Bayat & Hodges, 2022, pp. 2-3).

³⁹ I have changed the name for maintaining the anonymity of the interviewee.



Figure 3. Most Widely Practiced Forms of Muslim Veils (Source: Rumaney & Sriram, 2021)

When I started my first question about the control gates at the entrance of a religious site, she told me it is less likely that you observe an ambiguous moment while people are entering. This was because, according to her experience, the entrance regulations for visiting a shrine or a mosque are not only explicitly defined but also apply to everyone in the same way, with no exception. In this sense, there are specific criteria for visiting an Islamic site that one does not expect to enter otherwise than acknowledging them⁴⁰. Therefore, I suggested, “Let’s leave this issue for the moment and move on to the next question. But please let me know if anything comes to your mind regarding this issue⁴¹”. And then, as if she was waiting for this conversation to take place, she immediately responded:

A: Well, there is one thing. Some time ago, I attended an Islamic religious ceremony where the Guidance Patrol⁴² arrested me on one of the city’s main Squares before arriving [laughing]. It was a very stupid paradox. Imagine going to an Islamic ceremony where the police detain you for wrongly dressing according to the Islamic dress code [laughing]. It was an ironic situation. They would have probably laughed their heads off if I had told the officers that I was going to a prayer session.

M: “So you didn’t say anything to the officers?”

A: No, I didn’t say anything. I was laughing all-time [...]

⁴⁰ Ava’s explanation was not only in harmony with my own experience, but also, when I had asked other friends and acquaintances, they presented the same reasoning.

⁴¹ This interview had initially been conducted in Persian. Therefore, what is presented here is a translation of the interview’s transcript.

⁴² See footnote p.48 on this issue.

M: “What was the exact reason that they arrested you?”

A: They told me that your Manteau has no buttons on the front. Then you know what was fascinating? Before my sister had arrived at the station. The superior lady officer, who knew I was waiting for my family to bring me another cloth, came close and said, “Well, it seems you’ve changed your dress already. Then you’re free to go.” But I hadn’t changed any of my clothes yet.

M: “So you mean before changing, she told you you’re free to go?”

A: Yes. In the police station, my clothes didn’t seem inadequate to her according to the Islamic dress code. And I told her, “No, this cloth is inappropriate and is the one that you had arrested me for. You had brought me here in the same clothes”. She surprisedly looked at me and said: “Mh-hmm. No. I didn’t see that this Manteau doesn’t have buttons in the front”. Uh-huh, then you start thinking, my dress doesn’t have any problems at all. How could it be that wearing the same Manteau indicates wrongness for some officers and is acceptable for others? So, wouldn’t it be the case that they are wrong? They even cannot hold to their own words for five minutes. In my perception, everyone acts according to their own taste.

M: “How do you explain the contradictions for yourself?”

A: I have an impression, but it could be wrong; in my understanding, a group of people with power define religion in a way that suits them best. They interpret it as they wish and force others to follow their version [...]

However, I will never stop attending religious ceremonies. At least I haven’t stopped so far. It could be because of the conditions I was raised in; I don’t know. But certainly, I know the right way and the right way to understand religion. I can separate right and wrong and say they [the police officers] do not represent my religious values. And I won’t tell myself that because some act like this, I will abandon the Islamic religious service.

M: “Does this mean you believe your religious conviction is more accurate?”

A: Yes. Because, at least in my version, this kind of coercion has no place [...] But on the other side, some may not care about accepting the oppression. In this case, when they are told to wear the Chador, they simply do; whenever they are guided not to wear it, they simply don’t. In this sense, they might not even feel bad about it.

M: “What is this bad feeling you are talking about?”

A: It’s a feeling that damages your personality. That somebody wants to force you to change and make you something other than what you really are. I would not accept this. But, well, many don’t care about it, I suppose.

M: “But isn’t what the Guidance Patrol is doing according to the law? Isn’t it legal?”

A: Well, the problem is the law. Yes, this is the law, and the principle is that one should act in line with the law. But then again, the issue is that I think this is terrible legislation. And I won’t accept it myself. As you said, I think this direction is wrong, but it’s the law.

M: “What is the difference between the Guidance patrol and the guidelines regarding the entrance of an Islamic religious site? Why is it that you observe one and not the other? Aren’t both based on Islamic principles?”

A: They are clearly different.

M: “What is the difference? Can you explain further?”

A: As I said before, there is no other way to go to a holy place than to accept the principles. Principles which are not confusing at all. Practically every female, even foreigners, must wear a Chador to visit a religious site. However, when we speak about the public sphere, the boundaries are not clear-cut or implemented correctly. For example, if ladies are expected not to wear open-front Manteaus according to the dress code, why do all the shops sell open-front Manteaus? If it’s a law, it must also be implemented in other places as well. If the law says I don’t have to wear short-leg trousers or pants, then why does everybody sell these trousers or pants? What happens next? People would merely say we didn’t find any other clothes except these short-leg trousers or open-front Manteaus. The government is giving people an excuse for wearing these kinds of dresses. But then the system accuses us of conducting an illegal act. If the government wants to fulfil this law, why doesn’t it resolve the bags of problems of the clothing industry? The government must do that first and then ask people to act as such and such. Or, if the clothing industry is immune from the Islamic dress code, what do they expect from lay people [...]

Besides, I have repeatedly seen ladies with much worse clothing than me, which the Guidance patrol had ignored completely. Why? Probably because they know someone or have a power connection. Therefore, you cannot compare these two principles; they are totally different.

M: “What do you prefer to do when the boundaries are unclear?”

A: To be me.

M: “Sorry. I didn’t get your point.”

A: To be me. As I am. I will neither force myself to the system’s rules nor would I show more skin to express my protest. For instance, I will not wear a Manteau that is so revealing, or I will not dress to reflect my resistance to the system. Some people take off their headscarves and walk on the streets or any other weird clothing style. But, neither will I show interest in their side, nor because there is a Guidance Patrol, I will force myself to the dress code. I am who I am.

M: “What do you do in your interpersonal relationships daily with all these issues you face?”

A: I have lots of problems.

M: “What sort of problems do you mean?”

A: I have serious problems. I mean, for example, most people think that I am not a religious person. I don’t have any spiritual considerations. Many people who contradict my thoughts approach me, and then, because of our clashes in our way of thinking, struggles began. And on

the other hand, for instance, a person I know thinks as I do, and we share common thoughts [laughing] because my appearance is like this, doesn't approach me. I'm merely in limbo. My biggest problem is this [long pause]. I think the problem is society [laughing]. No, I mean it. If in our country, the dress code was like other Islamic states and everyone could choose their style, there wouldn't be a problem anymore. Right now, many countries where religious people don't wear obligatory Islamic dress are considered religious. But here it's if the situation is previously defined; a religious person has to be like so and so, and the person who is not like that is not considered religious.

In this section, there are several points significant to our investigation. However, there exists a clear display of the disposition that carries along the vagueness of ambivalence on an individual level. Ava's inability to fully explain her experience may not have the same implication for her as it does for us. Through our ontological reconstruction apparatus, the contradiction appears as follows:

- (1) For women to wear, the Hijab is an Islamic norm. Therefore, all Muslim women are obliged "to lower their gaze, guard their chastity, and not reveal their adornments except what normally appears. Let them draw their veils over their chests and not reveal their [hidden] adornments except to their husbands, their fathers, their fathers-in-law, their sons, their stepsons, their brothers, their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, their fellow women, those [bondwomen] in their possession, male attendants with no desire, or children who are still unaware of women's nakedness. Let them not stomp their feet, drawing attention to their hidden adornments"⁴³. **(Premise)**
- (2) In this case, female Muslims are mandated to cover themselves according to the Islamic principle of the Hijab, or it cannot be the case that they do not cover themselves according to the Islamic dress code. **(Premise)**
- (3) Ava is a female Muslim. **(Supposition)**
- (4) So, Ava knows the right way and the right way to understand religion. **(From 1 and 2)**
- (5) But then Ava wants to be herself too. In the sense that no authority forces her in any particular direction. Therefore, she will neither force herself to the system's rules nor show more skin to express protest. She is who she is. **(Supposition)**
- (6) Contradiction! **(From 1,2 and 5)**

After having gone through the cases and revealing the immediate (i.e., existential) constructive knowledge components, as promised earlier, it is the appropriate moment to discuss how social scientists politicise the ambivalent instance briefly. Going through this discussion will also serve as the primary reason we avoided articulating the ambivalent disposition through conventional sociological methods and theory. For, as demonstrated, the traditional social sciences have a taste for pointing out this feature within the Iranian context. Thus, "What could be the reason to refrain from such tradition?" In the following section, we will shortly discuss this issue.

⁴³ (An-Nur 24:31 [Juz 18 / Hizb 36 - Page 353]).

2.2. Turning Away From Conventional Sociology

Our initial understanding for turning away from conventional sociology, in the first place, was not the fact that conventional social theory entails axioms, postulates, or assumptions that have clear philosophical conceptions of the nature of their investigating phenomena before social theory and methodology. However, later, we also reached such an understanding. Or it was not because the conventional social theory could not recognise these ambiguities and ambivalences at the structural and individual levels. But instead, our refrain from the conventional social theory is the logical consequence of their discussion regarding the ambivalent disposition. In other words, how they justify and rationalise the uncertain and ambivalent disposition in the Iranian context makes us turn away from conventional sociological theories. Mainstream sociology pursues a line of inquiry that wants to observe how society is possible despite an omnipresent ambivalence in Iran. And we are following a string of investigations that question why understanding the Iranian social context under a notion of ambivalence is necessary. Therefore, in the former, several sociological concepts exist to explain – or explain away – the ambivalent disposition in Iran. Weber’s idea of *Patrimonialism* may be applied, as well as Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* and, more recently, James Scott’s *everyday resistance* to teleologically justify the ambivalent-ness as something normal and ordinary in a transitional society.

[T]here is the problem of certainty or predictability: people in transitional societies can take almost nothing for granted, they are plagued on all sides by uncertainty and every kind of unpredictable behavior. In their erratically changing world, every relationship rests upon uncertain foundations. (Pye, 1962, pp. 54-55)

But no matter how various conventional sociological theories could get in terms of language, subject of study and orientations, their variousness could simply be understood as mere variations upon a theme “which provides the leading motif for the separate and jarring discourses of various sociological approaches” (Stauth & Turner, 1988, p. 29). Stauth and Turner (1988) believe this umbrella term (*Überbegriff* in German) that covers the separate conventional sociological traditions is the *Nostalgic paradigm of sociology*.

The nostalgic metaphor suggests that we live in a world which lacks moral unity, in which individual autonomy is overwhelmed by administrative rules from a centralized state, where direct expression of feeling is no longer possible because need and desire have been rendered

artificial and superficial by the spread of a consumer culture which exploits false needs. (Stauth & Turner, 1988, p. 32)

The questionable focus on Iran's dreaded political organisation may therefore be explained, in part, as a result of this disposition characterizing the governing political system in Iran as *totalitarian* (Keddie & Richard, 2006; Amanat, 2017; Abrahamian, 2018). In this perspective, although the Islamic Republic has continued the process of modernisation during the last four decades, the gap between the authoritarian means employed by the governments and what is considered the more egalitarian and collaborative relationships in the political process and other areas of life is still significant.

Governments, whether monarchical or clerical, however popular or tolerated they may have been initially, have over time shown themselves in most matters to favor the interests of a narrow group in society rather than the interests of the great majority of the population. In addition, they have taken advantage of increasingly modern means of governmental coercion and control. (Keddie & Richard, 2006, p. 317)

Thus, the Iranian theocratic state with “a hierocracy headed by an authoritarian guardian jurist and buttressed by an oligarchy with militant clergy at its core” (Amanat, 2017, p. 905) renders it an object for social scientists to diagnose a *lack of political modernisation*. This focus also paves the way for essentialist ideas suggesting psychological qualities (or characterological orientations) such as political cynicism, personal mistrust, uncertainty, insecurity, and interpersonal exploitation (cf. Zonis, 1971). These psychological qualities are then not merely attributes realised by the men of science but are characteristics, as would be observable in Ava's case, that explain personal experiences of daily life. However, “nostalgic” sociology identifies the same sense of homelessness for the East as it does for the West. The difference lies in the intensity of the problems. The destructive socio-political processes, such as capitalist industrialisation, the collapse of rural communities, the bureaucratic state dominance, the increasing differentiation and the complexity of social structures, are categorical phenomena defining our experience of the modern era. But when it comes to the East, Iran and the like become rare among societies facing an intense dilemma (Zonis, 1968, p. 133).

There is one thing that the nostalgic metaphor does not fully explain: “How can we illustrate the changes, transformations, or alterations in the East (i.e., the Middle East) given the

dictatorial *Raisons d'État* of its political organisations?”⁴⁴ “How can we designate any significant role for the individual in these states of political unrest as the individual was described before as a wretched species?” in other words, “How are we able to raise this wretched species renewed, revitalised, or reborn after having being sunk in devastation?” The answer to such questions could be found in intellectual works such as Asef Bayat’s *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change The Middle East* (2013), which states:

During the last three decades or so, Middle Eastern societies have been transforming economic, social, cultural, and religious domains, [...] these changes have been associated with and resulted in deep social cleavages and conflicts, generating social groups with demands, desires, and political subjectivities that the dictatorial regimes were unable to tackle. More significantly, [...] the discontented subaltern groups — the poor, the youths, women, and the politically marginalised — do not sit around passively obeying the diktats of their police states, nor did they tie their luck to the verdict of destiny. *Rather, they were always engaged, albeit in mostly dispersed and disparate struggles in the immediate domains of their everyday life* — in the neighborhoods, place of work, street corners, courthouses, communities, and in the private realms of taste, personal freedom, and preserving dignity. *By engaging such social “non-movements,” they can take advantage of moments to turn misfortunes into advantage and, when the opportunity arises, shift their mostly quiet and individual struggles into audible and collective defiance.* [Emphasis Added] (pp. x-xi)

The concept of non-movements traces back to James Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). He introduces a notion of resistance performed by the relatively powerless groups in everyday life, such as “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth” (Scott, 1985, p. 29). In this sense, we are faced with an embodiment of resistance that, unlike the institutionalised form of political resistance, which is formal, overt, and concerned with systematic, de jure change, is informal, often covert, and concerned with immediate, de facto gains (Scott, 1985). Moreover, its most distinctive attribute “from other forms of resistance is in its implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals” (Scott, 1985, p. 33). One might even claim that the relationship between this *everyday form of resistance* and human beings is analogous to that of an individual and thin air, present all over space and time, yet invisible. Now that everything is in place, i.e., the tyrant and the expansion of resistance to every domain of life, we can illustrate the Orient as if we were describing a

⁴⁴ Here, we are mainly referring to political turbulence in the Middle East, which happened at the opening of the 21st century, mainly after the United States of America gained a foothold in the region in late 2001 by invading Afghanistan.

battlefield, a “war of everyone against everyone”; starting with the style of one’s veil. In this view, it is believed that specific ways of wearing a hijab indicate resistance and that it is used “to compensate for the inability to express the self through appearance freely, as well as to dissociate from messages communicated by hijab” (Bayat & Hodges, 2022, p. 2). As a corollary to this perspective, expounding the idea that the operative political mechanism is a historical barrier to society’s modernisation necessitates the act of development. But because of the lack of theory in describing the internal mechanisms of the development of a specific society as a complex system performe, it is necessary to interpret political development as a movement towards some form or model, for example, from tradition to modernity (Naumova, 1996). Thus, the endpoint of this line of reasoning coincides with what Towfigh labels as the suspension of the present moment.

2.3. Conclusion

In the end, what emerges from these examples is that regardless of what importance and meaning ambivalence might have for society, the way sociological accounts are articulated entails existential ambivalent knowledge components. As said, social theory in/about Iran widely reflects on the causal relation of ambivalence. Thus, by way of arguing, the rapid process of modernisation in Iran contends that

[t]hese developments were fatally marred. Expectations were aroused which could not be fulfilled. More dangerous was the risk that cherished traditions would be overwhelmed by what was considered progress, but conceived according to neither fully understood nor applicable foreign criteria, by the *weight of repression* and by the ubiquity of western agencies. [Added Emphasis] (Avery, Hambly, & Melville, 1991, p. xxiii)

However, in our understanding, these accounts make us become entangled in unnecessary theoretical difficulties. Therefore, by distancing ourselves from the conventional social theory, for the next step of our study, we intend to pursue the conditions under which, in these sociological accounts, ambivalent components of knowledge become possible.

Chapter 3: The Intellectual Conditions of the Possibility of Ambivalence

Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and standing still. (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 7)

In the first chapter, we tried to argue that both Iranian society and Iranian social sciences are experiencing ambivalence. However, in the second chapter, we attempted to practically exhibit and explain the state of ambivalent-ness according to our understanding. Yet, in the preceding chapter, we focused on social scientific perspectives concerning the ambivalent situation. This is because in our working hypothesis, if Iranian social sciences, as the legitimate arbiters of normative knowledge of describing the socio-historical lives of Iranians, remain in crisis, no matter what Iranians really do in their everyday life, the representing apparatus would present them deformed. Like a curved mirror, either convex (i.e., bulging outward) or concave (recessed inward), it would have a surface in which the reflection of images through it would be distorted. Therefore, in the present chapter, we will explore the conditions of the possibility of an ambivalent disposition embedded in Iranian social sciences. To speak of Iranian social scientific knowledge does not imply a particular way of doing sociology nor a specific theory or methodology. We are referring merely to Iranian/Western scholars whose subject of study is Iran's contemporary society. This means that the Iranian conditions of the possibility of social sciences in general, and sociology in particular, are but a reflection of the general conditions of the possibility of these disciplines in the West. By pursuing the conditions of the possibility of the ambivalent disposition in Iranian sociology, we have to expand our scope to the conditions which make this disposition possible for sociology in general. In this sense, it is required to

reconsider the historical conditions of the possibility of sociology to identify the origins of the ambivalent disposition. We start with a brief historical account regarding the conditions of the possibility of sociological knowledge to the extent that it concerns our argument.

3.1. Historical Conditions of Possibility of Sociology

David Owen offers a concise historical account entitled “The Postmodern Challenge to Sociology” regarding the conditions of possibility of sociology in his introduction to *Sociology after Postmodernity* (1997). He ties the development of sociology to the establishment of *the modern discourse of governance, modernity, and the social*. The interplay of these conceptions and placing them in one row as the necessary conditions that make possible the establishment of sociology allows us to find out in which segment of this process the possibility of an ambivalent disposition was established. Therefore, as Owen explains, to make sense of the establishment of sociology, we must first realise the relationship between politics and society. In his remark:

[T]he historical conditions of possibility of sociology as an intellectual enterprise can be traced to the reconceptualization of society which emerges alongside the development of the modern theory of the state in European political thought during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (Owen, 1997b, p. 1)

3.1.1. The Bond Between the State And Society

Owen states that the modern European theory of the state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the political writings of scholars such as Johannes Althusius, gives rise to a conception of *the social* that initially relates to *consociatio* (association). Such a political understanding of society implies that society is primarily regarded as a form of fellowship to establish, cultivate, and conserve social life. Three particular political notions of the social follow from this. In the first instance, society denotes its initial meaning of fellowship; secondly, it refers to the developing theme of society as a commonwealth; and thirdly, it encompasses the idea of man as a social/sociable being (Owen, 1997b, p. 2). According to Owen, the emergence of this new understanding of politics as the art of associating men resulted in a specific and general sense of society⁴⁵ and a closely linked to the specific and general sense of state. The gradual separation of these themes, i.e., the specific and general sense of society and the specific

⁴⁵ Society, in its general sense, refers to association and fellowship, and its abstract refers to the condition out of which relations develop.

and general sense of state, opens the space for the distinction between state and civil society. This steadily establishes the necessary conditions for the possibility that a conception of society requisite to the development of sociology as an existence distinct from political arrangements emerges. The intellectual works of scholars such as Rousseau and Locke accelerated this process. For by introducing a concept of society as a self-activating unity capable of generating common will and recognising property as a pre-political social institution, they articulated the opposition of state and civil society (Owen, 1997b, pp. 2-3).

This concept served as an instrument of polemic with French and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to attack “the identity of state reason and governmental reason characteristic of the conjunction of the reason of state and police within European absolutism” (Owen, 1997b, p. 3). To illustrate the importance of the French and Scottish Enlightenment, Owen elaborates on the identification of state reason and governmental reason at which these thinkers directed their attacks. Quoting Foucault, he writes that the doctrines of *raison d'état* and *the theory of police* are facets of a specific trajectory in the project of establishing an understanding of the modern state between the end of the 16th and the end of the 18th centuries (Foucault, 1981). The doctrine of *raison d'état* is defined as “a rationality specific to the art of governing states” (Foucault, 1981, p. 243), which aims to strengthen the state. The state’s government, which in this perspective is not distinguishable from society in the general sense, would require sufficient knowledge of intervening aspects that make up the state. German cameralist and English and French mercantilist states focus on developing statistics or political arithmetic and *Polizeiwissenschaft* (administrative/ policy science). This focus aimed to demarcate the population as an object of state government, which itself derived from the application of *popular* as a lawful and political theme signifying “belonging to people” during the 16th century. In this context, the term referred to the entirety of individuals as living components of the state.

The centrality of the doctrine of police to the absolutist theory of the state lies in its articulation of government in terms of the identity of state and society in which the idea of an utterly detailed determination by the state of all its own elements and mechanisms is combined with an equally rigorous regulation of these elements and mechanisms. It is against this background that the French Physiocrats’ and the Scottish Liberals’ contributions to the delineation of the modern concept of society can be grasped. (Owen, 1997b, p. 3)

In this, liberal thinkers were not totally apart from theorists of absolutism. For instance, they shared concerns about external security in the eighteenth century. But the Physiocrats argued for the quasi-natural character of society, and Scottish Liberals opposed that by claiming “the

opacity of the totality of the interactions which constitute the self-regulating natural processes of society” (Owen, 1997b, p. 4). As a result, the Physiocrats put constraints on the sovereign’s capability to direct things at will, whereas the Scottish Enlightenment denies the capacity of the sovereigns to know or direct things. An example of the latter would be in the domains of the economy (Smith), population (Malthus) and civil society (Ferguson), who see these realms as the spontaneous and relatively vague productions of society (Owen, 1997b, p. 4). This sense of society corresponds to the abstract meaning of society, which is the natural condition of human existence out of which institutions develop. This character of the Scottish Enlightenment, coupled with its security concern,

is oriented to maintaining society as an association of free individuals who are subjects of interests, desire, opinions and sentiments with an emerging juxtaposition of the right to govern and knowledge with which to govern well that emphasizes restraint against unnecessary intervention - and, thereby, requires the production of forms of knowledge (and expertise) capable of determining the proper place and occasions of intervention. (Owen, 1997b, p. 4)

Owen believes these entrenchments were a radical turn for developing general and abstract definitions of society. The Scottish Enlightenment entered the nineteenth century by effectively having been able to articulate a twofold notion of *society*: *a*) a general idea of society as a system of everyday life characterised by institutions, customs and conventions, *b*) the abstract notion of society as a natural condition out of which institutions (including the state), customs and relationships arise. Having attained this formulation (i.e. the modern concept of society), unsurprisingly, the next step was merely to “locate society as an object of knowledge and articulate the necessity of such knowledge” (Owen, 1997b, p. 4).

3.1.2. Savage and Moderns

In addition to arguments revolving around governance, two other themes incorporating the idea of man’s nature and human history were central to the eighteenth century. These ideas were conceptual shifts in defining humans and history. Regarding the first topic (i.e., the nature of man), a separation was introduced between *human(e)* as some set of qualities and *human* as a universal term. Also, the word *humanity* appeared as a neutral and descriptive general sense which referred to human characteristics. Similar conceptual shifts were introduced to the conceptual character of *history*. Firstly, the emergence of a general idea of history as human self-development in the early 18th century appeared, revealing itself in the universal history project. Secondly, an abstract notion of history unfolds where history is observed as a process

of humanity's self-development. These conceptual shifts were significant in the eighteenth century due to their relation to the problem of reconciling the "unity and diversity of mankind in the context of the quarrel between the ancients and moderns and the relationship of Europe to 'native' peoples in its colonial territories" (Owen, 1997b, p. 5).

The dispute between the ancients and the moderns in the 17th century was mainly understood as a response against the Renaissance and *the authority of the dead* and against a doctrine of degeneration that applied equally to both man and nature. Although Tassoni in Italy, Boisrobert in France and Hakewill in England were engaged in debating the modern case before the publication of Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637), without no doubt, the influence of Cartesian thought coupled with the previously significant role of Bodin's and Bacon's idea, played an essential role in the development of this argument, chiefly through figures such as Perrault (*Paralleles des Anciens et des Modernes*, 1688-96), Glanvill (*Plus Ultra*, 1668) and Fontanelle (*Dialogues of the Dead*, 1683 and *Digression on the Ancients and Moderns*, 1688). Of those who contributed, Fontanelle's works are the most profound ones since he grounds his case on the Cartesian devotion to the unchangeability of the laws of nature to formulate the argument in favour of the natural equality of ancient and modern man. The consequence of such a claim is that time, political institutions and the general state of affairs account for any existing differences. Although this idea concerning knowledge gave rise to the continual intellectual progress of humankind, it was not till the second half of the next century (i.e., the 18th century) that the idea was fully developed. Yet, in the 18th century, elements of the general concept of uniformity of nature were adopted (Owen, 1997b).

Nevertheless, this thought of the sameness of humanity across time and space (and thus, the conversion of the notion in relation to human(e) and humanity) had a flip side too, which opened a space for considering the diversity of humankind across space and time. This becomes evident in two key intellectual developments in the 18th century

On the one hand, the emergence of the idea of man as a *social* animal in a relatively general and abstract sense; on the other hand, the emergence of the modern idea of history and the idea of universal history which eventually develops into the understanding of man as a *historical* being. (Owen, 1997b, p. 5)

The first of this intellectual progress could be traced in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) and *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), where he argues for human diversity in terms of different forms of "spirit" (culture), which is caused by the influence of natural (such as climatic)

circumstances and social (such as religious) factors. Montesquieu's argument in the *Persian Letters* that "Man is born in society and there he remains" later becomes the central motif of the French and Scottish Enlightenment way of thinking. There, the argument is taken in the general and abstract sense of referring to society as the natural state of man. In France, the idea was developed by Rousseau in the *Discourse on Inequality* (1750), *The Social Contract* (1762) and by Voltaire in the *Lettres sur les Anglais* (1733) and *Essai sur les mœurs* (1765), where he wrote: "There are two empires, the Empire of Nature, which unites all men on the basis of certain common principles; the Empire of Custom, which [...] spread variety through the world" (Owen, 1997b, p. 6). In Scotland, the development of the idea of man as a social animal is mainly related to Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) and Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771), in which he crystallises the need to study man through society. This idea is also supported by more anthropological works of Lord Kames (Henry Home) and Lord Monboddo (James Burnet), which highlighted the urge "to sift the sensationalised account of exotic cultures for the real gold: the common features of mankind" (Owen, 1997b, p. 6).

The subsequent emergence of man as a historical being reveals itself simultaneously in Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV* (1751), which he takes to be the most enlightened age thus far by sketching the *I'esprit des Hommes* and in his criticism of Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire Universelle*, which he meant to merely correct the fault four or five-person through appealing to Providence rather than providing an entirely naturalistic account. This modern concept of history as the naturalistic study of history as human self-development is very much linked to Abbé de Saint-Pierre's claim of historical progress, which is made in his *Observations on the Continuous Progress of Universal Reason* (1737) as well as to Turgot's view of history in terms of developmental stages which is articulated in a series of essays and plans written in 1751-2. Although the dispute between the ancients and moderns in the 17th century was mainly concentrated on two periods in European history, the increase of these periods of history in numbers, along with the need to accommodate non-European history into the same universal framework, resulted in a production by Turgot which fostered a linear view of history conceptualised in terms of a single path of development. In this sense, "the task became one of detecting among the varieties of human experience the true or natural condition and course of history and depicting them by an arrangement of selected types" (Owen, 1997b, p. 6).

A significant aspect of this historical progress, which is also pertinent to our study, is when the modern concept of history connects with the idea of man as a social animal and constructs a

universal developmental account of history that focuses on the development of society. The French Enlightenment intellectuals (except for Rousseau) stressed the unavoidability of progress (e.g. Condorcet 1793). This connection of man, society and history with a narration of development allows envisaging the perfectibility of humankind within a rational society since humanity can control its own historical development through an understanding of the laws of history (a theme later reproduced in Marx's work). The Scottish Enlightenment thinkers developed an account that viewed history as a succession of stages. At the same time, they remained far more equivocal regarding the inevitability of progress since they were uncertain about progress costs and sceptical regarding the possibility of controlling historical development. This is why Ferguson, in his *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), considers the possibility of decline or regression (a theme which French scholars also recognised) and expresses doubt about the views that progress merely involves happiness and that the state can be in control of the course of progress. Our immediate concern here is the general emergence of the view of history as a process developing through stages. Examining societies is the prerequisite for coming to terms with these stages because man is fundamentally a social animal (Owen, 1997b).

Another aspect of this shift toward modernity is Europe's relationship with the non-European other. In the 17th century, a clear distinction was already made between the *savage* and *civilised* sectors of the human race, for instance, in Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). Still, the thought that contemporary savages could be seen as representative of the early stages of the process of progress of human society and Europeans as representatives of the highest stages of development fully emerged only in the 18th century in the accounts of figures such as Abbé de Saint-Pierre. This account played an essential part in the disputes on ancient and modern constitutions in the context of colonialism. Many of the classic theorists of contemporary constitutionalism, such as David Hume, Smith, Sieyès, Paine, Kant, and Constant "took as their starting point the premise that a modern constitution must recognise the institutional and sociological conditions of a modern society and the type of liberty and equality that corresponds to them" (Tully, 1995, pp. 63-64). This point could be highlighted through the main feature of modern constitutionalism, defining a modern constitution by way of constructing a contrast with a historically earlier constitution which

[r]efers to pre-modern European constitutions [...] and, secondly, to the customs of non-European societies at 'earlier' and 'lower' stages of historical development. These two contrasts ground the imperial character of modern constitutionalism. The contrast is made in

reference to two aspects of pre-modern European and non-European constitutions: their stage of development and their irregularity. (Tully, 1995, p. 64)

Although this argument can potentially justify colonisation (in this sense, then Marx's remarks on British colonialism would become interesting), Owen's primary concern is other issues that developed from this debate. The conceptual shifts are the central plane for the development of the conception of *modern society*. By the time Constant published *The Liberty of the Ancients compared with that of the Moderns* (1819), there was a distinct understanding of modern society as intertwined with a developmental view of history and universal in scope. Although this understanding of the term "modern society" remains a salient concept at play in situations like the one sketched at the outset of this work, the more important fact is

the concern with matching constitutional arrangements to the form and stage of societal development acts as a demand for appropriate forms of knowledge of the social processes that act as the real indicators of the stage of development – and, increasingly, as sites of active intervention on the part of governments. (Owen, 1997b, p. 8)

3.1.3. Sociology, the Social And the *Modern*

Owen concludes his historical reflections by attending to the relations of sociology to the conceptions of the social and the modern as these developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. The end of the eighteenth century marks the date that demanded a new form of knowledge of society "to define the relationship between *man and society* or *the individual and society* as a problem" (Williams, 2015, p. 231). In other words, the end of the 18th century sees *modern society* as an object. This makes necessary the engendering of what will come to be known as *sociological* knowledge of this object. Owen analyses this moment by focusing on the relationship between sociology and the family of concepts that emerge from the modern idea. In doing so, he recalls the conceptual shifts in the terms such as *modernise*, *modernisation*, *modernism*, *modernist*, and *modernity*. These terms emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries, and their usage was mainly pejorative and restricted to architecture, fashion, and spelling issues. However, in the 19th century, the modern conception denoted improved, progressive, highest, and best ideas, which is an integral element of the view of history as a series of stages that generates the concept of modern society. Apart from the positive implication of this family of terms, they also underwent a general transformation. By the mid-nineteenth century, the notion of *modernise* became more prevalent, meaning *making modern*, providing the routes for the concept of *modernisation* in the 20th century in terms of a deliberate process of making modern. This development marks

the particular production of *modernity* in the 1950s and 1960s programmes of *modernisation* concerning the Third World.

Furthermore, between 1890-1940, the terms *modernism* and *modernist* acquired a specialist meaning that denotes an artistic and literary movement. Around the mid-twentieth century, the term *modernism* became generalised, referring to both a social and political ideology and a socio-cultural formation of beliefs, values and self-understanding. Otherwise stated, *modernism* and *modernist* in the late 20th century reflect an intellectual endeavour of a theoretical articulation and defence of *modernity* as an epoch and/or project, which Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) can be considered an excellent example of this category. The conception of *modernity* has gone through two related, yet, distinct developments from the first half of the 19th century: "At some point during the first half of the 19th century, an irreversible split occurred between modernity as a stage in the history of Western civilisation [...] and modernity as an aesthetic concept" (Owen, 1997b, p. 11). This concept referred to *modern society* and, thereby, to a specific historical era with salient features contrastable to previous periods. But *modernity* also refers to a distinctive aesthetic, evident in Baudelaire's article on modern life in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (1964), which reflects on our experience of our relationship to the present as modern as well on a particular mode of relating to the present, which is modern (a theme taken up later by Foucault in his criticism to Kant's essay on "What is Enlightenment?" (1984)) (Owen, 1997b).

A crucial connection of sociological knowledge to this family of terms driven by *modern* is that an understanding of *modernity* as an epoch articulated an idea integral to sociology's perception of its own identity as a distinctly modern form of knowledge.

[F]rom the mid-nineteenth century onwards, sociology's *assertion* of itself as a modern form of knowledge, that is, as a feature of modernity, is predicated on its foundation of itself in a determination of modernity. Thus, the concern with determining the character of modernity is integral to the emergence and development of sociology as a discipline. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that, alongside *and related to* the philosophical and methodological debates on the character and status of sociological knowledge, the question of modernity becomes a central problematic for sociology discourse. [Original emphasis] (Owen, 1997b, p. 12)

A series of theoretical accounts focusing on the conflicting determinations of modernity, such as Marx's capitalism, Durkheim's organic solidarity, Weber's disenchantment, etc., appeared,

which are bonded to a progressive account of the history of human society articulated in terms of a *social dynamic* along with entailing a set of methodological categories and modes of analysis (Owen, 1997b, p. 12). For instance, we can point to Marx's mode of production, Durkheim's division of labour, and Weber's diverse rationalisation process for social dynamics (Owen, 1997b, p. 12). For methodological categories, Marx's social relations, Durkheim's social fact, and Weber's social action could be addressed (Owen, 1997b, p. 12). Owen considers Marx and Durkheim's intellectual projects as *generating a determination of modernity* in a universal developmental history bonded to political programmes, namely *revolutionary socialism* and *solidarisme* (Owen, 1997b, p. 12). Others assert that Weber's works are also closely tied to the political programme of *liberalism* (Lukács, 1972). In the more recent decades (i.e., by the end of the 20th century), the sociological efforts which received more attention in terms of reflecting the topic of modernity as the theme of sociology's assertion and foundation, itself are demonstrated in the accounts offered in Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984), Giddens' *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), and Beck's *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992).

3.2. The Intellectual Origins of Doubling of *the Social And Society*

Thus far, we traced the conceptual development of terms such as *state*, *man*, *history*, *society*, and *the social* between the 16th and 20th centuries, with all these changes contributing to the emergence of sociology as a new intellectual discipline. The doubling of the category of *the social*, along with the conception of *society*, in particular, relates directly to our research question about the ambivalent disposition. Because it has been said that this dual notion, in our vernacular and formalism, in Ahmed Gurnah and Alan Scott's (1992) remark, has caused sociology and its theoretical status to be ambiguous. In Ahmed Gurnah and Alan Scott's (1992) own words, the state of sociological ambiguousness derives from it being formalist:

[i]t is abstract and aprioristic while at the same time it clings to an historical and contextual view of social entities. Since it is ambiguous, it also fails to be consistently self-critical. Sociology becomes formalist when it confuses the study of empirical social entities with the metaphysical study of *nature* and essential social reality. But more importantly, sociology becomes formalist because, unable to have an intuitive passage from analysis to these natures, sociologists confuse their *theories* of nature with history. In other words, having identified their views of history as correct, they turn to interpret history accordingly. (Gurnah & Scott, 1992, p. 35)

Identifying the dual and ambiguous status of sociological knowledge could perhaps be sufficient to explain the double disposition of love and hatred, the sense of fear and hope, and the feeling of experiencing the coexistence of mutually exclusive contradictions by Iranian citizens and Iranian sociology. In other words, we might be able to say that the ambivalent disposition of sociology has resulted in nothing but ambivalence in Iran. Owen also admits that

the double status of ‘the social’ or ‘society’ as both the transcendental condition of possibility, the foundation or ground, of sociological knowledge and the empirical object of sociological knowledge opens up a problem with respect to the status of sociological knowledge which entails that philosophical and methodological debates on this topic become an integral element of the disciplinary development of sociology. (Owen, 1997b, p. 11)

If we go along with this line of argument, at best, it will explicate the cause of the ambivalent disposition in sociology and, after that, in Iran. But then, after our criticism which would probably lead to the refutation of mainstream sociology, we cannot say anything about our immediate experience of the world. Therefore, even though the origins of the ambivalent disposition of sociological analysis have been identified, we have to go beyond the limits of historical discussions to return to the concrete social reality. To do so, it appears that sociological knowledge’s dual disposition must be interrogated further. The first step in this regard would be to ask, “What was the intellectual reason that sociology adopted the dual disposition?”

According to Ahmed Gurnah and Alan Scott in *The uncertain science* (1992), there are two intellectual reasons why the dual disposition becomes an integral part of sociology: psychological and philosophical reasons (p. 36). They argued that in the eighteenth century, the psychological insecurity caused by the fast-changing world of developing capitalism encouraged philosophers to seek secure grounds for knowledge. In their perception, the firm foundations for knowledge were linked to the fact that “humans had a rational capacity to sense, comprehend and adhere to rational standards” (p. 36). In that spirit, positivists transformed the *beau idéal* from the natural human to the natural world and argued the possibility of true knowledge by “the distillation and formalization of fundamental principles of the workings of that world” (p. 36). Likewise, sociologists keen on constructing a truth-seeking science by the mid-nineteenth century “drove classical sociologists to seek similar security in the steadier ‘forms’” (p. 36). In this sense, sociologists like Weber, by building a pragmatic compromise from the two formalist perspectives of positivism and rationalism,

[t]hought if the mind and science cannot give us truthful classifications of our ever-shifting social world and of the physical world, the subjective meaning that attach to objects and events in that world, plus the scientific organization of the phenomenal data we collect from it, would make aspects of its reality comprehensible to us. Thus, any method we use will ensure that knowledge is accrued; but for the best results we shall need the scientific method. (Gurnah & Scott, 1992, pp. 36-37)

Despite these psychological grounds, philosophical considerations were also connected to what is recognised as “the problem of knowledge”. This topic is typically stated in terms of a set of basic questions in conventional philosophy. First, how can we have truly trustworthy knowledge independent of historical context or interest? Second, where can we discover infallible moral norms to govern our acts across all of our social and individual relationships, despite the constraints imposed by societal customs, personal and social history, and lust? Furthermore, how can we recognize the proper knowledge and moral standards in the relative universe of cultures, religions, languages, nations, habitats, power relations, and positions in both cases? (p. 37) Western philosophers attempted to answer these problems by deriving solutions from the fundamental nature of humanity and the physical universe. They reasoned that by distinguishing human and physical nature, they might deduce how both function. And then, the dilemma of what constitutes true knowledge and good morals is thus quite simple (p. 37).

Although liberal philosophers, such as Weber, recognised that following this line of inquiry will eventually lead to a dead end, they were not sufficiently troubled by its implications to abandon formalism altogether. However, giving up on this philosophical problem was due to the need for scientific security.

Contemporary sociologists like Habermas and Lévi-Strauss, while even more aware of these negative implications of liberalism, similarly refuse to give up formalism’s structuring rationality. (Gurnah & Scott, 1992, p. 37)

What is our immediate concern with the double status of sociological knowledge does not involve identifying the definite reflective causes, which made social scientists incorporate it into our discipline. Whatever the reason for adopting the dual status may be⁴⁶, what concerns

⁴⁶ To give an impression of the kind of reasoning deployed, it is worth mentioning that, for instance, Simmel advises us to deal with the question of the conditions of possibility of society in an analogous manner to Kant’s way of dealing with the fundamental question of his philosophy, “for here too there are individual elements that continue to exist apart from one another in certain sense, operate as sensations and undergo a synthesis into

us most is that this issue is principally concerned with establishing the discipline. However, we like to think that not every intellectual component is of equal value and weight in establishing our discipline. In this sense, it appears that in the development of sociology, when our field of knowledge attempts to attain a scientific status, Kantian idealism and formalism have had a more significant role (Gurnah & Scott, 1992; Owen, 1997b). This influence, we believe, has caused the dual status or formalistic grounds of sociology. This is why Simmel, in his *Excursus on the Problem: How is Society Possible?* (2009[1908]), attributes the same double meaning to his question as Kant when he asked *How is nature possible?* (Simmel, 2009). The double meaning of sociological a priori conditions

will on the one hand determine completely or incompletely the actual social interaction processes as functions or forces of mental developments; on the other hand they are the ideal logical presuppositions for the complete society, although society is possibly never perfectly realized in this completion. In the same way the law of causality on the one hand dwells and works in the actual cognitive process; on the other hand it constructs the form of truth as the ideal system of completed knowledge, independent of the process, whether or not this is realized through that transient relatively random mental dynamic, and independently of the true reality, more or less consciously and effectively approximating the ideal. (Simmel, 2009, p. 43)

To clarify any misunderstanding, formalism as a philosophical doctrine and position has caused the dual status of sociological knowledge and, thus, the ambivalent disposition. Yet our criticism of Ahmed Gurnah and Alan Scott in *The Uncertain Science: Criticism of Sociological Formalism* (1992) is that they define formalism by its characteristics which they believe to be: a) the search for certitude b) the use of formal theoretical procedure, and c) guaranteed by naturalism or logic (pp. 38-39). However, these are three characteristics of formalism in general and not sociological-specific. In our understanding, to discuss of sociological formalism, we must drive at a formal principle totally abstracted from meaning and content, which deductively would provide so-called valid statements. And to be sure, with regard to Kantian formalism

[i]t is true that Hegel was later to expose the static nature of Kantian formalism, and propose a *dynamic* form of internal criticism and Marx further sociologized the insights of both. But Kant remains important for his synthesis of the major trends in the modern period, which begins to approach important philosophical and sociological preoccupations about thought, experience, and action; and about method and history. The significance of Kant for the development of

the unity of society only through a process of consciousness that places the individual being of the one element in relation to that of the other in definite forms according to definite rules" (Simmel, 2009, p. 40).

sociology arises from (i) his insistence on the role of experience; and (ii) his argument for the necessity of fixed laws. (Gurnah & Scott, 1992, p. 45)

Given the establishment challenges sociology faces as a discipline and the influence of Kantian formalism, any alternative discourse has to consider the sociological formal *a priori* conditions of possibility. Yet, in identifying the sociological formal structure going to the roots of Kantian idealism may prove instructive. Besides, if the conditions of possibility of sociology necessitate the existence of a priori judgments in the same double meaning Kant was suggesting (which we believe it does), then by deconstructing` Kantian formalism, discussing the intellectual properties of sociological ambivalent disposition would be more well-founded. Such a discussion presupposes understanding the intellectual properties of the Kantian theory of knowledge outlined in the *Critique*. Yet, among Kant's three Critiques, *the Critique of Pure Reason* (1998[1781]) is crucial for us. And among all the subtle philosophical discussions embedded in this book, the claims regarding transcendental idealism are essential. Although we intend to call into question a slight fraction of the Kantian theory of knowledge, we might also need to consider other elements of human knowledge described by Kant while doing so.

3.3. Kant's Doctrine of the Transcendental Idealism

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* and at various points throughout the two subsequent *Critiques*, Kant articulates his critical and famous doctrine of transcendental idealism. In the initial *Critique*, under the rubric of "Transcendental Aesthetic," he poses that although space and time are empirically real, they are transcendently ideal, and so are the objects given in them, meaning that it is only from the human beings' viewpoint that we can talk about space and time and the spatiotemporality of the objects of experience. In this sense, we can cognize the objectivity of the thing insofar as they appear under the conditions of our sensibility (i.e., for itself) and not as they are in themselves (Stang, 2022).

This way of division of objects into *appearance* and *things in themselves* (Ding an sich) results in "On the Ground of the Distinction of All Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena," in which Kant contends that since the categories have a determinate usage only when applied to spatiotemporal data, and yet the forms of space and time themselves are transcendently ideal, the categories also have a determinate cognitive use merely when applied to appearances (i.e., phenomena). This means that by way of the categories, things, as they are in themselves (i.e., noumena), might be thought but not known (Guyer & Wood, 1998). But Kant did not intend to leave the objects of cognition worlds apart. Therefore, in the "Antinomy of Pure

Reason,” in which he discusses the deficiencies of rational cosmology, he brings them together once more again. In the *Antinomies*, Kant primarily considered that he is able to demonstrate all of the inaccuracies of metaphysics in the form of these antinomies. Thus he articulates an argument that natural illusions of reason are not simply uncovered through subtle philosophical analysis, but instead, they inevitably are revealed in the form of actual contradictions – in the Kantian terminology antinomies – which each side of it seems naturally plausible. In this sense, Kant asserts that unless we acknowledge the transcendental idealist differentiation between appearances and things in themselves, we will be compelled to accept mutually contradictory arguments,

arguments both that there must be a first beginning of the world in time and that there cannot be, that there must be limits to the world in space and that there cannot be (the two halves of the first antinomy), both that there must be a simple substance and that there cannot be (the second antinomy), both that there must be at least one first or uncaused cause and that there cannot be (the third antinomy), and that there must be a being whose necessary existence is the ground of all contingent beings and that there can be no necessary being (the fourth antinomy). (Guyer & Wood, 1998, p. 16)

However, the two first antinomies, which Kant calls *mathematical*, do not concern us right away because they have to do with size and duration. The *dynamical* antinomies are more crucial for us (i.e., the third and fourth antinomies). For not only do they deal with the causation of the world and its events, but also, *the dynamical antinomies propose a distinct resolution*. This different solution incorporates the argument that both sides may well be true, “if the denial of a free cause or necessary being is restricted to the natural and sensible world and their affirmation is taken to refer to what might exist in a noumenal or super-sensible world of things in themselves” (Guyer & Wood, 1998, p. 17). Simply put, as it is embedded in these theses, it implies the contention that, in line with the principle of sufficient determination, the notion of causality itself obliges the existence of a free causality (a first or final cause). However, the antitheses argue in accordance with the principle of non-contradiction. The notion of a free causality undermines the idea of causality itself because all causes are already effects. Kant overcomes these antinomies by postulating two distinct realms of reason while articulating the transcendental idealism concept. The first realm is the realm of theoretical reason, described as a phenomenal realm of appearances or things-for-itself governed by the laws of nature. The second is the realm of practical reason known as the noumenal realm of things-in-itself determined by the law of freedom. For Kant, the reciprocally exclusive positions manifested in

the antinomy evolve out of the inclination of the theoretical reason to transgress its boundaries. Nonetheless, in determining the parameters within which theoretical reason may legitimately make knowledge claims, Kant revolutionizes the status of humanity. Since, in Kant's reading,

in contrast with the rest of nature, we know ourselves not only through the senses but also through 'pure apperception' (the faculties of understanding and reason); thus one, knows oneself both as a determined sensible (phenomenal) object and as a free intelligible (noumenal) subject. (Owen, 1997a, p. 11)

Therefore, by way of this resolution, the individual's double status is constructed in the Kantian theory of knowledge. For Kant, the individual is constituted both as an empirical self and as a transcendental self. He is able to postulate his account of the individual as both natural and supra-natural and, more importantly, as both a being derived by natural desires existing within the chains of cause and effect which define nature and as a being constituted by rational will capable of initiating casual sequences within nature and, thereby, transforming nature (Owen, 1997a).

Although thus far, we have delineated Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism along with its emphasis on the dual states of the Kantian individual. But we must take our inspection further to be able to reveal the Kantian idealism properties. We have to take our inquiry into the realms that provide knowledge about human beings, though this knowledge has to argue the essence of human nature and the human condition following Kantian idealism. Similar to that of Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology, which poses the problem of human existence to be "the problem of the inner disproportion within human beings or of their antinomical structure, wherein they find themselves distended between an infinite and a finite pole" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 2). Because in this account, despite the ultimate objective of transgressing the Kantian project, an analytical moment is brought to light that "reveals the fundamental unity of the understanding and sensibility through its projection on a 'thing,' an 'object'" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 6). Or in other words, by exegesis of Kant's idealism makes a phenomenology of will possible, one which gears into the world of the living and constitutes the world for and in the experience of the active consciousness. To verify our working hypothesis regarding the locus of the ambivalent disposition, the Kantian dual meaning must be inspected in action. The double meaning of sociological a priori conditions, be it at the structural level or at the individual level, possess the attribute of interacting or engaging in real life. Therefore, we will degrade our subsequent discussion from the whole scheme of transcendental idealism to the part of it which is termed *transcendental imagination* while focusing on the problem of *the third term*. In our

understanding, this is the analytical moment in which the intervention and resolution of the double status are composed. But also, this significant instant has an immediate effect on the ambivalent disposition of the sociological *a priori conditions* of possibility.

Before going into more details, two preliminary remarks are necessary: *firstly*, the difference between transcendental imagination and transcendental idealism is that for Kant, “*imagination*” is the faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition” (Kant, 1998, p. 256), such as imagining the shape of a triangle without its outer experience and *transcendental imagination* as a crucial element of the entire concept (i.e., transcendental idealism) is in charge of *the synthesis of manifold a priori* (i.e., unifying empirical self and transcendental self as one unit) which then is the ground which makes possible the pure form of all possible cognitions (Kant, 1998). *Second*, in presenting the arguments concerning transcendental imagination, we have adopted Ricoeur’s description of this analytical moment, which will also prove helpful when analysing the properties of Kantian transcendental idealism further below.

3.3.1. Transcendental Imagination; A Reflection on the Third Term

The starting point for discussing transcendental imagination is the shortcoming that reflection creates between sensibility and understanding through transcendental deliberation. Once reflection intervenes, the human being is split. “[I]t is one thing, it says, to *receive* the presence of things, it is another to *determine* the meaning of things” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 19). To receive is to hand over oneself *intuitively* to their existence – the realm of theoretical reason governed by laws of nature that are fulfilled intuitively (i.e., the determined realm). On the other hand, to determine or to think is to dominate the experienced presence in a discourse that *discriminates by denomination and connects in articulate phrasing* – to think them under the laws governed via practical reason known as the noumenal realm (i.e., the indeterminate realm). All signs of progress in reflection are based on this division. The receptivity is based on the faculty of sensibility, which itself suffers from the incurable limitation of perspective. In this sense, the thing unilaterally presents itself from a certain angle. Therefore, to perceive is to apprehend the object from some point of view which could be called the *zero point of the origin of my spatial dimension* that designates I am here, and everything else is there. And on the other side, intellectual determination of things is transcended by a signifying intention that transgresses every point of view and that “reveals every point of view as a point of view” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 7). If the privileged site of every perspective is the gaze, then language is the privileged site of the transgression of perspective. In addition, language encompasses the twofold supra-

signification. Saying something surpasses the mere signification of naming by adding an existential signification, positing existence and, with it, the intention or pretention of truth, which could be called the *vehemence of affirmation* (Ricoeur, 2016). Thus,

for reflection, the disproportion between the word that speaks of being and truth, and the gaze tethered to appearance and perspective, is the ultimate manifestation of scission between understanding and sensibility. It is the new form of the Cartesian dialectic of the infinite and finite. No longer between two faculties, the will on one side and the understanding on the other, but running through each faculty, which are at the same time both finitude and transcendence, both of view and intended truth, both goodness and being. (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 7)

Having said that, the problem of *the third term* intervenes through reflection on the thing. Since in a transcendental reflection on the thing, human beings create only its synthesis over *intentionality*. As the synthesis occurs, the thing is realized in the unity of speech and point of view. Thus, the objectivity of a thing emerges in the synthesis. In this sense,

objectivity is nothing other than the indivisible unity of an appearance and an ability to express; the thing shows itself and can be expressed. An appearance which could in no way be expressed, which would exclude itself from the realm of discourse, and which would not allow itself to be anticipated in any “sense” would literally be the fleeting appearance that Plato compares to the statues of Daedalus, which nothing can tie down. The unbound appearance is as nothing. (Ricoeur, 1986, pp. 37-38)

Moreover, each of these facets refers to the other in that speaking about the thing’s objectivity determines its appearance, and appearing is its power of being spoken of. That is making the thing’s objectivity *universalized in communicable*, compelling discourse. Hence, it is by starting from the synthesis of the thing that reflection can grasp the inadequacy of perception⁴⁷ and the meaning of this flux of silhouettes that transcends them. The thing’s objectivity points back reflexively to the human as both a point of view and as speaking. Therefore, the objectivity of an object is not in consciousness; it stands over against human beings as that to which it relates itself. This feature “can serve as a guideline in looking for the synthesis it points to *within* human beings” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 8). So, the reflection does not prejudge the *real unity* of human beings for themselves since such unity is totally intentional. Therefore,

It is by projecting themselves into the mode of being of the thing that humans make themselves intermediary. They make themselves a “middle ground” between the infinite and the finite in

⁴⁷ What Ricoeur calls the appearing of disconnected silhouettes.

laying out this ontological dimension of things, that is, that they are a synthesis of meaning and presence. (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 8)

Subsequently, we can say that a thing is a thing insofar as it corresponds to this synthetic constitution, insofar as it can appear and be spoken of, and insofar as it can affect me in my finitude understanding and infinitude will (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 8). The next step in the transcendental imagination is to turn to ourselves. This function of paying reflexive attention to ourselves makes it possible to make ourselves synthesis on the thing.

If I make myself the synthesis of speaking and perspective by bringing about, even before the appearance of this or that, before any discourse about this or that, the space of appearance and of discourse, what is this power to open this space within me and for me? (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 8)

The problem we are referring to here is that of *the given*, which Kant tackled under the name of the transcendental imagination. In Kantian terms, the unity of the category of the given (i.e., the categories of the understanding which apply to phenomena and intuitions) abide by the rules of the third term:

Now it is clear that there must be a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter. This mediating representation must be pure (without anything empirical) and yet *intellectual* on the one hand and *sensible* on the other. Such a representation is the *transcendental schema*. [Original emphasis] (Kant, 1998, p. 272)

In line with Ricoeur, what attracts our attention to the transcendental imagination is that there is *no for itself* in this third term. Since, in this third term, to constitute the unity of meaning and presence, “it is exhausted completely in there being objectivity” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 8). Therefore, the imaginative synthesis is *obscure* from the beginning. To put it in Kant’s own words,

This schematism of our understanding with regard to appearances and their mere form is hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty. (Kant, 1998, p. 273)

Therefore, while the objectivity of the object should be at least, in theory, the most precise and manifest, the transcendental imagination which stands over against us remains *an enigma*. The poles of feeling and thinking now show themselves in the synthesis. Moreover, although both these two faculties (i.e., understanding and sensibility) are commonly rooted in the mind, they cannot exchange their functions in the Kantian perception. Therefore, in this line of argument,

the synthesis of these faculties, which constitutes the humanity of human beings, would stay unknown to us, much like a blind spot at the centre of our field of vision, which Kant describes as “a blind though indispensable function of the soul” (Kant, 1998, p. 211). Consequently, if we follow Kant’s theory of knowledge, not only is everything about the transcendental imagination obscure but also the fruitfulness of reflection is absorbed in the synthesis of the object (Ricoeur, 2016).

Now that this analytical moment has been processed further via Ricoeur’s reading of Kant, we must halt and clarify our take on this subject. Our key contention with Kant’s transcendental idealism, which we believe assigns the intellectual properties of sociological categories of self-foundation and self-assertion, is to reflect on the *necessary conditions for qualifying as the dual status* and *the consequences of having a dual status*. If our claim that the sociological *a priori* conditions of possibility are constituted of the same double meaning as those that Kant provides for his philosophical question, then the sociological knowledge would probably have the same formal conditions of having *a dual status*. If Kant’s *a priori* condition reveals ambivalent features as we defined, then we can be confident that the sociological *a priori* conditions of possibility also entail ambivalence. Thus, we must illuminate the analytical moment of necessary qualifying conditions and consequences.

3.3.2. The Necessary Qualifying Conditions

The characteristic that appears to us as the necessary condition for qualifying as the dual status is the *synthetic unity* in a transcendental schema. In Kant’s understanding, schematism is a cognitive operation with the power of imagination. Therefore, Kant does not seem to consider schematism to be about observable images. But rather, the visible images are only the product of schematism. Kant explicates “schemata as the *a priori* conditions of possibility for having the experience of epistemic pictures; schemata are not pictures or images unto themselves” (Moser, 2021, p. 107). But what necessitates this schematism is the dissimilarity of the *concept* and *intuition*, and in order to make them similar, schema intervenes. This also implies that although these two faculties synthesize in the schema, they must have something in common before combining. This is the reason why in the Kantian reading, the schemata are third elements, which on the one hand, bear some resemblance to the category of understanding and, on the other, to the perceived appearance (Moser, 2021). This makes schemata the mediating representations, which remain transcendental in nature since they are “without anything empirical” (Kant, 1998). As our rendition in fig. 4 shows, any transcendental schema consists

of sensibility, understanding and the synthetic unity of sensibility and understanding as the mediating representation.

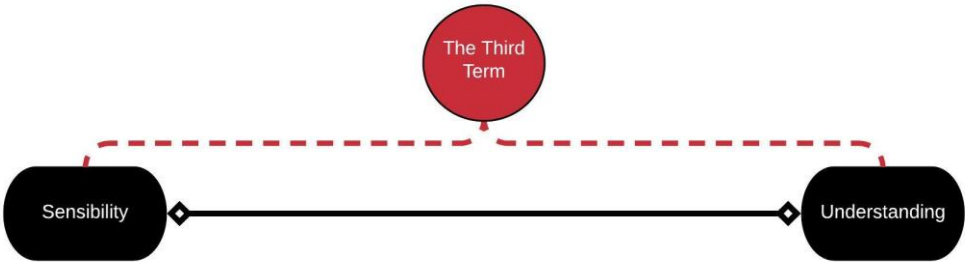


Figure 4. The Synthetic Unity in the form of a Transcendental Schema

This resolution of understanding and sensibility in the third term as the necessary conditions for qualifying as Kantian idealism paves the path for discussing the result of such a synthesis.

3.3.3. The Consequences

The result of this synthetic unity is what we may call metaphorically *neutrality*, and it is, to an extent, the same problematic issue that, in Ricoeur’s terminology, is identified as the *intermediary characteristic* of the Kantian third term with regard to the transcendental imagination. While there are several differences between these two terms, we still find Ricoeur’s conception of the intermediary fruitful and detailed enough to partially elucidate our main point with the consequences of Kantian idealism. In an essay entitled “The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of a Philosophical Anthropology” (2016), Paul Ricoeur argues that the main issue in philosophical anthropology is the problem of the inner disproportion within human beings, wherein they find themselves distended between an infinite and a finite pole. This is the same problem that, for Kant, appears in the problem of the third term with regard to the transcendental imagination (Ricoeur, 2016).

For Ricoeur, as mentioned earlier, the problem of the *intermediateness* of the third term intervenes through reflection on the thing. When the synthesis takes place, it does not prejudge the real unity of human beings for themselves since such harmony is intentional. In this sense, by projecting themselves into *the mode of being of the thing*, human beings make themselves disproportional (i.e., intermediary). In this sense, Ricoeur argues, they make themselves *a middle ground* between the infinite and the finite in outlaying this ontological dimension of things, making them a synthesis of meaning and presence. But in this third term, to constitute the unity of meaning and presence, they (i.e., meaning and presence) have been consumed

entirely in their objectivity. Therefore, the imaginative synthesis would be obscure from the beginning (Ricoeur, 2016). Consequently, if we follow Kant’s theory of knowledge, not only is everything about the transcendental imagination obscure but the fruitfulness of reflection is absorbed in the synthesis of the object. Ricoeur supposes that “there is no direct intelligibility for this mediating term” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 9).

Ricoeur’s intellectual project is to move beyond this consequence of transcendental philosophy, the blind spot at the centre of our field of vision, and shift his focus to philosophical anthropology. In his understanding, “the synthesis which transcendental philosophy accounts for things is merely intentional, merely formal. It is merely intentional since it exhausts itself in the unity of the object, merely formal in that is prior to any content” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 10). Therefore, if we do not take this step, he believes we are trapped with merely a *fanciful ontology* of being and nothingness (Ricoeur, 1986). Adopting Ricoeur’s argument, this ontological in-betweenness character of transcendental idealism constitutes the vagueness and ambiguity of the Kantian theory in the first place, and it is also what could be termed neutrality. We believe the idea of neutrality has explanatory potential beyond determining the ontological in-between character of the third term.

Kant’s third term not only answers the question of whether there is a mediating representation in the form of the third term but also tells us how the third term constitutes the knowledge we know and whether it is valid (see figure 5.). Stated differently, knowledge, as conceptualised in Kant’s notion of a third term, is neither identical to absolute idealism nor radical empiricism. In a way, it reconciles or synthesizes both.

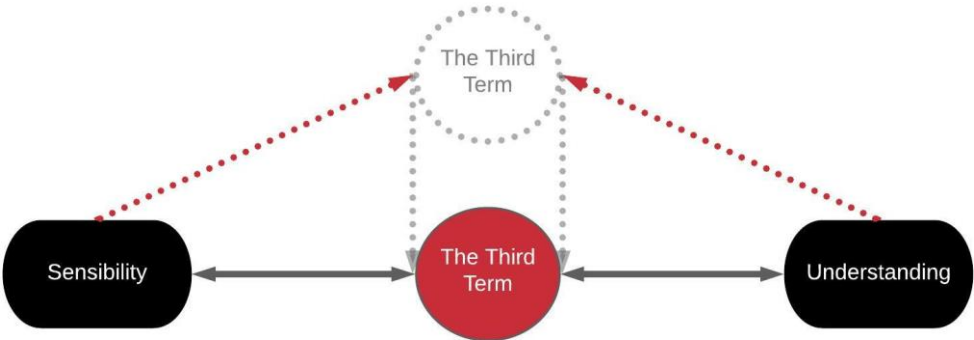


Figure 5. The Epistemological and Ontological Dimensions of the Third Term

Consequently, it occupies the neutral – in the sense of middle – ground between sensibility and understanding and also neutralises – in the sense of rendering them ineffective – them by way

of engendering a neutral – in the sense of not engaging with either side – account of knowledge. However, it appears to us that we have to pick up this metaphoric point for further clarifications elsewhere. But, to be sure, in our understanding, these three attributes of synthesis unity, in-betweenness, formal structure, and the metaphor of neutrality constitute the formal conditions of possibility Kantian idealism. Serving as descriptive guidelines to determine the formal *a priori* conditions of sociological knowledge and not as a way out of the boundaries of Kantian theory of knowledge.

In this stage, by taking into account the main features of Kantian idealism, i.e., the synthetic unity in the form of transcendental schema and neutrality, we are able to move on to the next step of our analysis to see whether the sociological *formal a priori* conditions of possibility, the dual status of this discipline (i.e., self-foundation and self-assertion), demonstrate the same features as Kant’s formalism. What we initially defined⁴⁸ as ambivalence matches the main features of Kantian idealism, i.e., the synthetic unity in the form of transcendental schema and neutrality, which results in a blind spot in the soul of human beings (Kant, 1998). The next step in our argument is to cross-examine sociological knowledge to reveal the moment where the property of ambivalence of transcendental idealism intervenes. This will show that the ambivalent disposition of our discipline is due to its intellectual conditions of possibility.

However, like forms of Bacon which are the immediate causes or the general principles or laws that govern phenomena in natural life, there is no underlying convergent idea for pursuing our study further (i.e., What core idea of sociological knowledge should be interrogated for the formal conditions of its possibility?). Therefore, we have transformed what was meant to act as a criticism against social science in the first place into a guideline for reaching the imperative sociological idea(s). John R. Searle, in an article entitled “Language and Social Ontology” (2009), argues

I believe that where the social sciences are concerned, social ontology is prior to methodology and theory. It is prior in the sense that unless you have a clear conception of the nature of the phenomena you are investigating, you are unlikely to develop the right methodology and the right theoretical apparatus for conducting the investigation. (Searle, 2009, p. 9)

⁴⁸ See p. 36

This priority of social ontology, coupled with what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1991[1966]) consider to be the marching orders of sociological knowledge, might provide the necessary opening. In Berger and Luckmann's eyes, there are two famous and influential marching orders for sociology. Two principles which,

One was given by Durkheim in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, the other by Weber in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Durkheim tells us: 'The first and most fundamental rule is: Consider social facts as things'. And Weber observes: 'Both for sociology in the present sense, and for history, the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action'. (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 30)

In this respect, with these dual guidelines, in the sociological knowledge, one can acknowledge that two social ontology a priori notions, namely social facts and the subjective meaning-complex of action, are recognizable. In our understanding, these two terms have the function of those theorem-like principles in social science, which the majority of sociological theories would have been impossible without them, including the streams of structural approaches, interpretive theories, and even some of the prominent integrational ideas. Thus, the pages that follow these two marching orders of sociological knowledge in their initial definition will occupy the focus of our study to observe whether they embrace the formal conditions of possibility assigned to Kantian idealism.

3.4. Sociological Schematism: Durkheim's Social Facts

Presenting Durkheim's thought as affected by the Kantian theory of knowledge may be surprising, given the commonly held viewpoint of Durkheim as a pure and simple empirical sociologist of *facts and things*. But we view Durkheim as heir to a tradition of European philosophy and take into account the extent to which he was "influenced by Kant and the neo-Kantian Charles Renouvier (1815-1900), who was, in fact, the only thinker that he openly declared he had studied assiduously" (Pickering, 2000, p. 4). In this, our point of departure is not the first basic rule of Durkheim's sociology, i.e., to consider social facts as things (Durkheim, 2013), but rather Durkheim's own starting point.

The knowledge that Durkheim was pursuing was a knowledge external to him. In other words, the knowledge he sought was not self-knowledge. In his understanding, what was worth knowing existed out there. This implies, for Durkheim, what was to be known was not

dependent on individuals' attitudes, characteristics, or intuition. In this sense, knowledge for Durkheim

was something to be acquired, to be discovered, and in so many cases very laboriously, for that is the nature of scientific knowledge which Durkheim saw as the surest of all knowledge. He held that science bestows autonomy and it supremely imparts the way to recognize the nature of things and to understand them. (Pickering, 2000, p. 11)

But how was this knowledge of the external world obtainable for Durkheim? As far as he was concerned, gaining such knowledge passes through the gates of representations⁴⁹ (i.e., representations of the phenomena of the world), which, indeed, are elements that exist in the mind of human beings. Thus, for Durkheim, knowledge begins with the hypothesis that representations of the exterior objects of the world constitute the key to knowledge, logic, and an understanding of humankind (Pickering, 2000). However, despite representation's central and epistemological role in the Durkheimian concept, he does not offer an exact definition of this term. This omission seems to be due to the common usage of the term representation amongst artists, lawyers, philosophers, and the general public at his time. For, in those days, "a representation meant quite simply a mental or intellectual idea – a picture or projection held in the mind" (Pickering, 2000, p. 12). This shows that Durkheim's understanding of representation is similar to that of most Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophers (Pickering, 2000).

Going beyond the general, Durkheim tells us in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]) that representations are the basis of religion, moral life, gods and spirits, communication, law, science, and social institutions. And to be sure, "it is not only in moral life that representations are necessary but in all areas where man uses his mind. Human beings are essentially representational" (Pickering, 2000, p. 13). In his interpretation, "a man who did not think with concepts would not be a man, for he would not be a social being. Limited to individual perceptions alone, he would not be distinct from an animal" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 440). According to Durkheim, representations can be divided into subsections, as all generalized knowledge have this feature. In his account, for example, we can distinguish representations relating to science, morals, law, religion, family, etc., to name but a few. The logic of this classification is based on representations according to the realm of experience, culture, and thought in which they are involved. Still, in Durkheim's eyes, these ways of recognizing representations are not the most important way of breaking down representations.

⁴⁹ Its German equivalent would be *Vorstellung*.

The central division has to be between collective and individual representations. By collective representations, Durkheim means representations that a group or a society holds at large. And with individual representations, he refers to ways of psychologically handling exclusively personal experiences. If one traces this dichotomy in his works, one can observe that this classification is “constantly used from the very beginning of his excursion into sociology” (Pickering, 2000, p. 14). To Durkheim, collective representations have more importance than individual representations, which is, among other things, because “individual representations are imperfect reflections of collective representations” (Pickering, 2000, p. 15). In this sense, for Durkheim, collective representations are of a superior order to individual representations, not merely because of their social origin but also due to their broader scope in time and space, resulting from their being social in form and content. This is why he is able to claim that collective representations are external to individual minds, varying in quality, character, and kind. Because as Durkheim is concerned: “The group thinks, feels, and acts entirely differently from the way its members would if they were isolated” (Durkheim, 2013, p. 86).

Focussing on Durkheim’s views of collective representation brings about some difficulties. For instance, it cannot be denied that in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (2013[1895]), Durkheim states: “The first and most basic rule is *to consider social facts as things*” (Durkheim, 2013, p. 29). What is the relation between the Durkheim of the social facts and Durkheim of collective representation? Pickering argues that some scholars, such as Davy and Parsons, have argued that Durkheim’s approach to sociology reveals an extreme shift in his thoughts (Pickering, 2000). In his early works, as in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, social facts are the basis of sociology Durkheim’s approach, and then he turned away to representations and focussed on mental constructs as its basis. The “new direction was blatantly apparent in *Les Formes élémentaires*, which they [Parsons and Davy] argued implied the embracing of idealism and rejection of realism” (Pickering, 2000, p. 2). Contrary to this view, we agree with W. S. F. Pickering, who believes that Durkheim used the conception of representation

at the very beginning of his work, and if there is any change at all it is that, in his later writings, he finds the term more fruitful and uses it much more extensively. There is no sudden change from A to B: it is a matter of greater utility. (Pickering, 2000, p. 2)

Of course, collective representations “are closely related to the social, to society itself” (Pickering, 2000, p. 22). In his analyses of religion and morality, Durkheim demonstrates his focus on representations (Pickering, 2000). This again indicates that “Durkheim saw collective representations as facts – social facts” (Pickering, 2000, p. 19). Facts that Durkheim, in *The*

Rules of Sociological Method (2013[1895]), puts forward as the elements that were fundamental for sociology and constructed its subject matter. For him, social facts

consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him. Consequently, since they consist of representations and actions, they cannot be confused with organic phenomena, nor with psychological phenomena, which have no existence save in and through the individual consciousness. (Durkheim, 2013, p. 21)

Although the emphasis is on action in this definition, it is not exclusive. When Durkheim holds later that collective representations are very much the subject matter of sociology, it does not necessarily imply that he has shifted the grounds of his analysis (Pickering, 2000). Instead, the differences between collective representations and social facts are “only differences in the degree of consolidation they present. In this classificatory scheme, the *représentations collectives* were, then, social facts located in the superstructure” (Lukes, 1973, p. 10).

Having reconciled the two seemingly unrelated aspects of Durkheim’s work by emphasizing the element of representation turns the focus away from associating him with American sociological functionalism and classical positivism. The next step is to clarify the connection of Durkheim’s representation with Kantian idealism. In doing so, we refer to an article by Sue Stedman-Jones entitled “Representations in Durkheim’s Masters: Kant and Renouvier” (2000). In this essay’s first part, Stedman-Jones’s argument revolves around the problem “by what means representation becomes the central conception of Durkheim’s sociology and Kant’s theory of transcendental idealism?” Stedman-Jones follows a line of thought that shows that Durkheim follows Kant by arguing against empiricism, materialism, and absolute idealism to establish representations as analytical means. By refuting alternative positions, Durkheim constitutes the position of reality and its relevant knowledge similar to the intellectual path that Kant had taken.

After explicating his concepts of reality and science, Durkheim articulates the discussions relevant to the nature of representations (as the prominent reality), just as Kant does (Stedman-Jones, 2000). This second analytical moment demonstrates that the nature of representation is mental and the same for both scholars. Stedman-Jones argues that Durkheim denied that he had excluded the mental elements from the sociological discipline by pointing to its representational nature. “While we had expressly stated and reiterated in every way possible that social life was made up entirely of representations, we were accused of eliminating from sociology the element

of mind” (Durkheim, 2013, p. 6). Stedman-Jones is convinced that the same is true in *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim’s last book, since here, too, one would find that “man is nothing but...from the mental point of view, a system of representations” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 229). She concludes that Durkheim while referring to representation, sees the activity of the mind as central to reality. Consequently, the interconnectedness of reality and consciousness are central to Durkheim’s notion of culture (Stedman-Jones, 2000). In the European philosophical tradition, Kant established the identification of the mental with representation. For Kant, “representation is the sum total of the activities of sensibility, understanding and reason” (Stedman-Jones, 2000, p. 49).

The significance of the identification of representation with the mental capacity of human beings in both Durkheim and Kant, for our purpose, reveals itself in the second part of Stedman-Jones’s text, where she claims a distinct logic to representation. One of these philosophical qualities of the logic of representation, which is based on the foundation that representations are mental in nature, is that “for Durkheim, synthesis is a crucial aspect of representation” (Stedman-Jones, 2000, p. 69). For Durkheim, synthesis is the key element of the mental activities of an individual, which form representations. But this is not all for Durkheim: “Every creation [...] is, in fact, the product of a synthesis” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 447). Synthesis is not merely essential to individuals, but also society is described by its richness of various materials. Because “society is a synthesis of human consciousnesses” (Durkheim, 1995, p. 432).

If the syntheses of particular representations that occur within each individual consciousness are already, in and of themselves, productive of novelties, how much more effective must societies be—these vast syntheses of entire consciousnesses! (Durkheim, 1995, p. 447)

So, in Durkheim’s mental representations, incompatible elements of the world are reconciled to form significant wholes. Yet it was Kant who made the connection between mental activities with synthesis (Stedman-Jones, 2000). To Kant, synthesis, in its broadest sense, is the act of placing different representations together with each other and grasping their manifoldness in one cognition (Kant, 1998). In this respect, in Kant’s theory of knowledge, understanding is identified with the faculty of representation, and synthesis is the critical aspect of the act of understanding. And moreover, the autonomy and power of understanding are essential to the synthetic nature of reality. Because it is the force of concepts to synthesize the manifold of intuition into experience and knowledge (Stedman-Jones, 2000), and to this end, it is obvious “that for Durkheim the activity of synthesis is central to his concept of *conscience*, and thus, as for Kant, it is central to the activity of mind” (Stedman-Jones, 2000, p. 69).

There is yet another way to identify social facts as an incarnation of Kantian idealism. Social facts, as a lower degree of *representations collectives* that are synthetic realities, are constructed of dual elements of experiences that are analytically non-identical and incompatible. For, by definition, a social fact, on the one hand, “*is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint*” (Durkheim, 2013, p. 27) and on the other hand, “*is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations*” (Durkheim, 2013, p. 27). We interpret the element of *external constraint* as a translation of the Kantian faculty of sensibility and the element of *independent existence* as an exchange for the Kantian faculty of understating, which synthesise in a structure termed the social facts (see figure 6.).

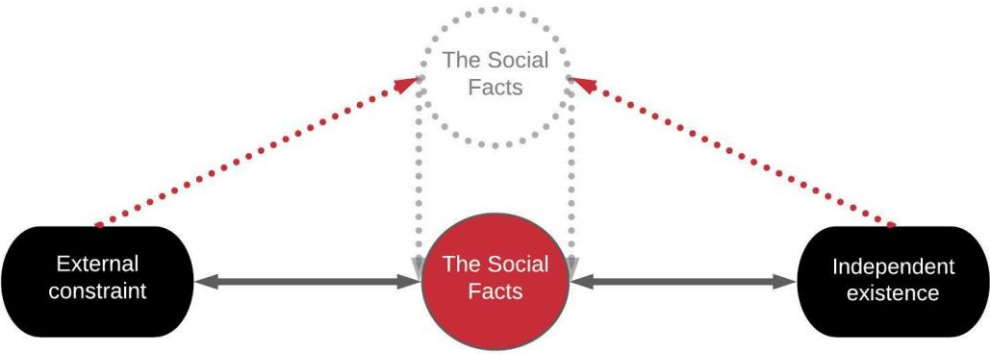


Figure 6. The Formal A Priori Conditions of Durkheim's Social Facts

The active consciousness for constituting the experience of *the social facts* has to refer to its constitutive elements (i.e., *external constraint* and *independent existence*). And in doing so, to comprehend an object that possesses the element of *external constraint*, it relates to an object that has previously constituted the typifications of *external constraint* through experience (i.e., sensibility) in our sedimented stock of knowledge, for instance, most of the natural forces. And similarly, in order to discern an object that possesses the element of *independent existence*, it refers to a phenomenologically taken-for-granted cognitive style in the natural attitude in which one of its characteristics is belief in the existence of the outer world and its objects (i.e., the special *epoché* of the natural attitude in the Schutzian sense (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974), which in turn are components of consciousness brought about by way of understanding. Durkheim gives an example of the composite nature of social facts using an apodictic judgment or a confirmed theory⁵⁰ that air has weight. “[I]f the willingness with which we let ourselves be

⁵⁰ A positive description of what it is for something to count as evidence giving support to a hypothesis. For more insight into the theory of confirmation, see:

carried along disguises the pressure we have undergone, it does not eradicate it. Thus air does not cease to have weight, although we no longer feel that weight” (Durkheim, 2013, p. 22).

A final point in associating Durkheim with Kantian idealism is highlighting the neutrality of Durkheim’s sociology. Neutrality in all its bearings is the logical result and corollary of an entity that is constructed through synthetic unity in the Kantian sense – meaning that if an entity’s synthetical feature is recognized, its neutrality will follow. We will shortly address this issue in Jacques Donzelot’s *L’Invention du Social* (1984). Donzelot’s initial concern in the *L’Invention du Social* is the development of the Welfare State in France through the invention of the political doctrine of *solidarisme* and the conception of the social in the 3rd republic. As far as he is concerned, Durkheim’s new discourse, through its legal and political initiative, which consisted of the juxtaposition of social rights and the technology of insurance, helped to resolve the dilemmas which had been caused by the increasing struggles between the French working class and the advocates of the original republic (Donzelot, 1988). Donzelot explores the Durkheimian political doctrine of *solidarisme* – which is not conceivable without the interplay of a family of terms such as sociology, the social, the social facts, insurance, and statistics – as a technology of governmentality that firstly has been engendered in-between two contradictory political poles of Left and Right (i.e., neutral stance) and secondly by way of creating a hybrid genre has made them ineffective (i.e., neutralisation).

The interest of republicans in the idea of solidarity stems from the fact that it allowed a positive role for the State to be defined while maintaining its neutrality vis-à-vis the forces dividing society. Now, the State’s intervention through social rights, by operating towards the extinction of these forces, necessarily tends to transfer back to itself responsibility for the general movement of society. (Donzelot, 1988, p. 397)

In what follows, we will refer to Weber’s sociology, particularly with the widespread sociological belief that regards Weberian interpretive sociology as rooted in the (neo-)Kantian tradition.

Crupi, V., “Confirmation”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 ed.). Edward. N. Zalta (Ed.) Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. Retrieved from The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: [https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/confirmation/\(date of access April, 2022\)](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/confirmation/(date of access April, 2022))

3.5. The Kantian Roots of Weber's Sociology

Kant is often mentioned as one thinker who inspired Max Weber (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018; Coser L. A., 1977; Aron, 1971). However, when one immerses oneself in the literature arguing the Kantian roots of Weber's sociology, one finds little content to back this claim. It may even be described as a historio-mythological construct that existed once upon a time but not anymore. To be sure, there are linkages between Weber's works and Kant's. But these have to be weighed against statements that would make one sceptical of Weber's Kantian roots – leaving the reader with an ambiguous picture.

Given the broadly held view that paints Weber as a Kantian, or at least has to have some connection to the neo-Kantian camp, the intelligent mind would not accept our claim without going through some examples. In this case, as a first example and to demonstrate the ambiguity of scholars regarding the Weberian intellectual roots, we would like to start with “Max Weber and the Legacy of Critical Idealism” (1994) by Christian Lenhardt:

Apart from the biographical fact that Weber, both as a student and professor, was associated with the neo-Kantians at Heidelberg, his ideas share some powerful structural affinities with Kantianism. Weber's theory of rationalization makes more sense within a Kantian philosophical paradigm of idealism than in any other. (Lenhardt, 1994, p. 22)

But when he analysis both Kant's and Weber's *value dynamics*, Lenhardt concludes that there is no resemblance whatsoever between Kant and Weber regarding the propositions on the value dynamics (Lenhardt, 1994). What about weber's relationship with the neo-Kantian camp? Here too, Lenhardt, after comparing Rickert's *value theory* with that of Weber's, writes:

All things considered, Weber had a rough-and-ready value theory which found only scant philosophical backing in Rickert. It would hardly distort the truth to state that Weber owed a large, unacknowledged debt to positivist value theory and a rather small one to his neo-Kantian friends. (Lenhardt, 1994, p. 44)

These statements do not seem to justify speaking of “powerful structural affinities”? Instead, all there seems to be is “scant philosophical backing”. This latter diagnosis can be employed as a step in initiating a new interpretation like that of Eliaeson's in “Influences on Max Weber's Methodology” (1990), where “Weber is more a bridge-builder than an innovative challenger” (p. 17). For Eliaeson, Weber's work must be understood in terms of building a bridge between the neo-Kantian Southwest German School and the positivist Austrian Menger School

(Eliaeson, 1990). Aiming to overcome a deadlock between history and theory provided by Schmoller by adopting Dilthey's *Verstehen* (1883), Rickert's *Wertbeziehung* (1902), and Carl Menger's *rationale Evidenz* (1883) (Eliaeson, 1990). If this is true, Weber's work no longer appears as a "unique production of an astonishing genius" (Schutz, 1967, p. 5), as Schutz addresses Weber, but as a bricolage at its best potential. For not only does Weber's *Verstehen*, *Wertbeziehung*, and *rationale Evidenz* lack authenticity, but also his central methodological concept *ideal type* has been taken from the physicist and physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz's theories of optics and aesthetics (Wagner & Härpfer, 2015). And moreover, Weber's use of the theory of objective possibility and adequate causation is an adoption of the conceptions that Johannes von Kries had developed (Wagner & Härpfer, 2015).

However, social scientists such as Rutgers and Schreurs still contend that it is appropriate to compare Weber to Kant. As they, for instance, have claimed in "The Morality of Value- and Purpose-Rationality: The Kantian Roots of Weber's Foundational Distinction" (2006), placing Weber in a (neo-)Kantian context contributes to a better understanding of him. Arguing a correspondence between different types of rationality in Weber with varying types of *volition* in Kant, they state that the Weberian distinction between *wertrational* (value rational) and *zweckrational* (instrumental/purpose rational) is linked to a Kantian context. In their interpretation, the distinction between Weber's *wertrational* (value rational) and *zweckrational* (instrumental/purpose rational) indicates different orientations that motivate action.

Wertrational action is motivated by an inner orientation, whereas zweckrational action is motivated by an external orientation. This reflects Kant's statements about autonomy and heteronomy. Indeed, in the case of autonomy, the will is determined by itself, whereas there is heteronomy in case the will is determined by something external to it. (Rutgers & Schreurs, 2006, p. 414)

However, such a textual exegesis of Weber does not amount to an explanation of Weber to consider his intellectual heritage Kantian. What would constitute a Kantian Weber is an articulation that reveals in Weber's foundational ideas the usage of the underlying logic of the *Critique* (i.e., the logic of transcendental idealism). This is the logic that stresses "contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity" (Foucault, 2008, p. 42). It seems to us that this unclear situation regarding Weber's intellectual background has developed because almost all of the literature investigating the question of "who has inspired Weber the most?" starts with the same argument of the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic (Windelband), or generalizing and individualizing (Rickert). In this regard, we are

in line with Wagner and Härpfer's argument stating: "It should be clear that justice cannot be done to either Neo-Kantianism or the social sciences by classifying scientific disciplines on the basis of an antinomy: nomothetic and idiographic or generalizing and individualizing sciences" (Wagner & Härpfer, 2015, p. 185). For us, what makes Weber a (neo-)Kantian does not begin with Weber's individualizing approach to social science, which, if it is anchored to a generalizing approach, we get confused. In our opinion, if Weber wanted to be known as a (neo-)Kantian, he would have most probably uncovered this fact in the "Basic Sociological Concepts," where he introduced his *interpretive sociology*. There, "Max Weber stated that this interpretive sociology sought to understand and causally explain meaningful social action via a typological approach; that is, through the use of rationally constructed ideal types" (Rosenberg, 2013, p. 39). Weber himself wrote:

Sociology, in the meaning understood here of a word often used in quite different senses, shall mean: a science that in constructing and understanding social action seeks causal explanation of cause and effects of such action. By "action" is meant human behaviour linked to a subjective *meaning* on the part of the actor or actors concerned; such action may be either overt, or occur inwardly—whether by positive action, or by refraining from action, or by tolerating a situation. Such behaviour is "social" action where the meaning intended by the actor or actors is related to the behaviour of *others*, and the action is so oriented. [Original emphasis] (Weber, 2019, pp. 78-79)

In the above quotation, what concerns us is the conception of *subjective meaning*. The way Weber uses subjective meaning has long been at the centre of commentators' attention. Because his lack of clarity on the term "has resulted in varied and diverse interpretations of what he meant by 'subjectively intended meaning' as commentators have sought to fill in the gaps in his discussion and clarify its ambiguities" (Rosenberg, 2013, p. 42). One attempt to overcome the Weberian ambiguities was by Schutz in his *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (1967) (The Phenomenology of the Social World). In this opus, Schutz's preliminary survey and point of departure for establishing a phenomenologically founded sociology is a certain interpretation of Max Weber's theoretical limitations, evident in how he uses subjective meaning. In the Schutzian understanding, Weber fails to distinguish

between the meaning of the producer of a cultural object and the meaning of the object produced, between the meaning of my own action and the meaning of another's action, between my own experience and that of someone else, between my self-understanding and my understanding of another person. (Schutz, The Phenomenology of Social World, 1967, p. 8)

Nevertheless, I believe these perplexed understandings of Weber’s subjectively intended meaning (*subjektiv gemeinter Sinn*) are because his “Methodic Foundations” in the first chapter of *Economy and Society* have not received the attention it deserves. At the outset of the Methodic Foundations, Weber actually argues what he considers to be meaning. For him, meaning is either

a) the actual meaning that is

α) subjectively *intended* by one actor in a historically given instance, or

β) subjectively *intended* by several actors in approximating the average of a given number of cases; alternatively it is

b) in a conceptually constructed *pure* type, the meaning subjectively *intended* by actor or actors *conceived* as a type. [Original emphasis] (Weber, 2019, p. 79)

Weber continues, “But it is not, for instance, some kind of objectively ‘correct’ meaning, nor any such ‘real’ meaning arrived at metaphysically” (Weber, 2019, p. 79). Thus, Weber through recognizing three types of subjective meaning (historical, average, and pure conceptual) as necessary for the empirical sciences of action, namely sociology and history, and refuting any “correct” and “valid” meanings which are the object of dogmatic sciences such as jurisprudence, logic, ethics, and aesthetics, both announces the epistemological components (i.e., what comprises meaning epistemologically) and the ontological origins of what he means by subjective meaning (see figure 7.).

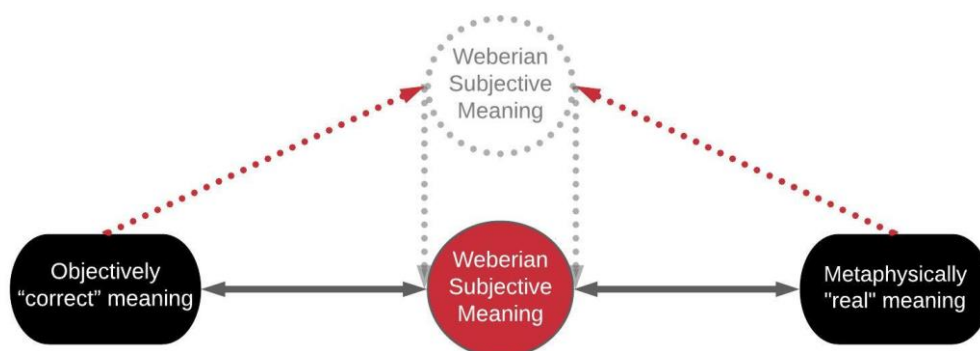


Figure 7. The Formal A Priori Conditions of Weber's Subjective Meaning

This bears a resemblance to a pattern we had encountered several times before, which has already been retraced back to Kantian transcendental idealism. This is because Kant’s understanding of his transcendental idealism also, on the one hand, “concerned the *form* but not

the existence of external objects” (Guyer & Wood, 1998, p. 67) and, on the other hand, refuted the *dogmatic* and *problematic idealism* by way of reasoning that “the very possibility of our consciousness of ourselves presupposes the existence of an external world of objects that are not only represented as spatially outside us but are also conceived to exist independently of our subjective representations of them” (Guyer & Wood, 1998). In Kant’s perception,

[i]dealism (I mean *material* idealism) is the theory that declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be either merely doubtful and *indemonstrable*, or else false and *impossible*; the *former* is the *problematic* idealism of Descartes, who declares only one empirical assertion (*assertio*), namely *I am*, to be indubitable; the *latter* is the *dogmatic* idealism of Berkeley, who declares space, together with all the things to which it is attached as an inseparable condition, to be something that is impossible in itself, and who therefore also declares things in space to be merely imaginary. [Original emphasis] (Kant, 1998, p. 326).

Furthermore, the way Weber treats his concept of ideal types reveals that he is a true Kantian. This is because, in the same manner, for him, on one side, “ideal types are generalizations which synthesize or ‘accentuate’ empirical phenomena” (Rosenberg, 2013, p. 39), but on the other side, they are not a pure conceptual idealization of a given *form* or institution. This is why ideal types, being defined as neither/nor conception, possess the same in-betweenness that we diagnosed before regarding the Kantian formal knowledge structure. In this regard, Keith Tribe’s explanation of ideal type in the “Translation Appendix” of his translation of *Economy and Society* is also illuminating:

The Weberian “ideal type” is not actually an idealization of a given form or institution, but rather a *Gedankenbild*, a thought-image of the leading characteristics associated with a form or institution employed in ordering historical reality. As such, it is a heuristic instrument used in historical investigation, and not the outcome of such investigation. It is not a model of a given historical reality, nor is it the essential nature of that reality; it is far looser, unhierarchised, and preliminary than that would suggest. Weber wrote to Rickert in 1904 suggesting that he had taken the term from Jellinek’s *Allgemeine Staatslehre*, noting, however, that while Jellinek’s usage was perfect “in a *logical* sense,” it was not serviceable as a “model.” In fact, Weber’s own use of the “ideal type” is closer to what Jellinek himself called an “average type,” a distillation from the variety of phenomena. Jellinek himself defined the “ideal type” normatively, as the “best state” of a given form or institution, that is, an idealization of an institution rather than a delineation, and so consequently not an analytical category. (Tribe, 2019, p. 473).

Hence, this brings us to our conclusion regarding Weber's subjective meaning. For as far as we are concerned, Weber's *Sinn* is a synthesis of contradictory elements reconciled into one unit. However, we have yet to address the consequences (i.e., neutrality) of adhering to the Kantian way of describing subjectivity. The sense of despair that Weber saw in the fate of modernity could be referred to as the neutral ground of the modern individual. Weber believed "the future would be a polar night of icy darkness" (Stauth & Turner, 1988). Though the difference is that, for him, the loss of grounds of meaning and value is a consequence of modern culture. Yet, for us, the hopelessness and despair of the modern individual are profoundly a result of constructing a new breed of autonomous human beings in the Kantian sense.

Nevertheless, Weber's sociology of fate constructs an account in which, first, the loss of grounds that lend objective meaning to science and politics is addressed (Owen, 1997a). After that, the transformation of the direction of scientific and political activities is institutionalized (Owen, 1997a). In each case, the legitimation of these activities, which used to be distinct modes of expressing God's will, is challenged by the logic of secularisation (Owen, 1997a). But this also had another side to it as well, which resulted in undermining the notion of fulfilling God's will, which gave a new direction to these activities (e.g., in science disclosing the divine creation of the universe and, in politics, changing the world in the sense that God's will may be expressed) such that science is progressively altered in the direction of technical knowledge concerning the realisation of material interest and politics is increasingly ruled by technical decision-making on the foundations of material interests. In Weber's perception, both the loss of ground of meaning and value of these activities and their transgression *en route* towards material interests have pivotal implications for modern culture (Owen, 1997a). Therefore, under the influence of Protestantism, Weber believes:

There is bred a human type with the capacity for the reflexive construction of inner distance and that, in so far as the logic of secularisation undermines the grounding of values in a transcendent deity, this entails the possibility of constructing inner distance through adherence to self-determined values for the modern individual, that is the possibility of autonomous individuals being produced by modern culture. However, as a result of this disenchantment of the world, modern culture lacks a ground of meaning and value capable of facilitating the realization of this capacity which results in an ethos of flight from the meaninglessness of the world, either into mysticism or onto an instrumentalization of the self as, for example, a cog in the scientific or political machine (Owen, 1997a, p. 121).

It is this analytical moment that, we suggest, in Weber's work in which the autonomous individual is constructed could be better explained by means of the neutrality metaphor. Since not only has the neutral ground (i.e., intermediary; 1st meaning) between meaning and values (or in our embraced vernacular between sensibility and understanding) but also neutralizes them (i.e., makes them ineffective; 2nd meaning) by way of generating a neutral account adherent to self-determined values (i.e., not engaging on either side; 3rd meaning). As Owen argues, Weber contends that the transgression of science and politics on the road toward material interests creates a dialectic of domination. On the one side, technical and political decision-making as the pursuit of material ends increases the power of the bureaucracy. And on the other hand, scientific knowledge as technical knowledge of how to achieve material interest creates a world in which the individual is perceived as means to material ends (Owen, 1997a). Thus,

[t]ogether these combine in that scientific knowledge increases the efficiency of the bureaucratic apparatus and, thereby, its power, while the growing power of the bureaucracy expresses itself in the increasing domination of rational discipline over social life and, thereby, transforms the world in a direction ever more subject to scientific prediction and control. (Owen, 1997a, pp. 121-122)

This implies that, for Weber, as far as the modern individual enjoys the capacity for autonomy, the possibility of recognizing this capability is being increasingly undermined by a process whose ultimate end is the reduction of the individual to a locus of absolute powerlessness (Owen, 1997a). This is why Weber's political problem is not the possibility of *utopia* but instead, the ways in which the resistance against the dialectic of domination becomes possible. For, in his understanding, it is only through such resistance that the conditions of possibility of enabling the emergence of the autonomous individual (as the dominant human type of modern culture) can be present. Yet, what concerns us in the Weberian sociology of fate is that despite coming to an end in his investigations, Weber is not willing to question how the autonomous modern individual is intellectually constructed. For him, the taken-for-grantedness of the autonomous modern individual is beyond question. Gurnah and Scott's remark in this regard that

While recognizing the dead-end that this type of enquiry may lead to, Weber as a philosophical liberal was not sufficiently troubled by its implications to abandon formalism. For he was well aware that human nature is not essential but existential. Yet the need for scientific security troubled him sufficiently to abandon what he knew was problematic. (Gurnah & Scott, 1992, p. 37)

We have come full circle with this thorough analysis of the sociological *a priori* conditions of possibility and realizing the necessary qualification conditions and the consequence of a synthetic structure in the Kantian sense. However, there remains a final point that we will need to discuss shortly.

3.6. Conclusion: The Ambivalent Disposition of Sociological Formal *A Priori* Conditions

Thus far, we have pointed out that the marching orders of the sociological discipline, at least in Berger and Luckmann's understanding, inherit the same formal conditions which make Kantian idealism possible. We have tried to demonstrate this fact by analysing Durkheim's representations (social facts) and Weber's subjective meaning through two specific features that Kantian idealism enjoys (i.e., the necessary qualifying conditions and the consequence). But inheriting the ambivalent features of Kantian idealism, what urgent effects does it have on sociology? Supposedly, sociology is remarkably in Kant's debt. How does that affect doing sociology?

As Aristotle's Law of Non-Contradiction tells us, it is impossible to hold to contradictory and paradoxical elements of knowledge and reconcile them in a synthesised unit without any fundamental problem. And apart from the Societal Knowledge problem in the Iranian social context, which we will address in detail in the next chapter, there are more general issues related to sociology caused by the formal *a priori* conditions of possibility. One of these problems that have come to our attention is that, and has a direct concoction with the issue of the establishment of our discipline is that in a state where philosophical debates and complications remain an integral element of sociological knowledge, a subdiscipline in the *philosophy of science*, termed *Social Ontology*, has been on the rise with the task to "study of the nature and properties of the social world" (Epstein, 2021), which consequently also deals with the kind of practical philosophical complications addressed in this chapter. For the philosophers of sciences view social ontology as

that part of a nonredundant inventory of reality that includes social individuals, properties and kinds. The relation of constitution, with different social S-favorable⁵¹ circumstances for different social entities, provides a schema for the whole "motley crew" that belong to social ontology. (Baker, 2019, p. 12)

⁵¹ The term *S-favorable circumstances*, in Baker's article, is used for the different kinds of circumstances in which a social entity S comes to be constituted.

The problem here is that sociology, which was supposed to be unique in terms of its subject and object, is losing its *legitimate status*. There have been some attempts, such as C. Mantzavinos's *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (2009),

to push the frontiers of the philosophy of the social sciences as a sub-discipline of the philosophy of science by presenting the results of cutting-edge research in the main fields, along with their critical discussion by practicing social scientists. (p. 1)

But still, apart from these small attempts, which also usually come from the other side, social sciences seem relatively negligent towards the specific scientific practices being conducted out of its realms –which could be interpreted as practical strategies that sociologists have adopted to deal with the impediments of their field.

Nonetheless, to abide by the ambivalent laws of Kantian idealism has four effects on sociology as a scientific discipline: *First*, “by virtue of a faculty, which is to say: *enabled by an ability*⁵²” [Original emphasis] (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 12), formal condition of perceiving objects which carries along with it ambivalent features is constructed intellectually. This has been demonstrated. By differentiating reality as it is grasped through the lens of sociology from that of biology and psychology on the one hand and that of jurisprudence, logic, ethics, and aesthetics on the other hand, a particular scheme of reality becomes recognizable in sociological studies. The relation of this peculiar intellectually constructed reality, which has the formation of “contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity” (Foucault, 2008, p. 42), to observable reality still needs to be explored. This formal condition of knowledge can describe merely one specific *form* of reality amongst the many other *possible* forms and shapes that reality might have. Some scholars, such as Daniel W. Rossides, even consider that conducting sociology unreflectively within the boundaries of philosophical formalism has made

[v]arious studies of the development of sociological theory distort our view of the past by their failure to recognise the metaphysical and ideological nature of that theory, they also distort our view of the present. (Rossides, 1978, p. xviii)

Secondly, because sociology does not recognize such a limitation in its understanding of reality, it *neutralises* other social realities (i.e., absorbs them and makes them ineffective) that are not constructed following the formal structure of Kantian idealism, be it on the level of individual

⁵² In German: *Vermöge eines Vermögens*

subjects or social structure⁵³. For instance, most political radicalism and religious fundamentalism or even an integration version of both, such as traditionalism, fascism, puritanism, Quakerism and Jihadist Salafism etc., do not suppose the neutral and formal ways of value judgment. *Third*, this particular characteristic of sociology might even bring into question the objective of such academic enterprise since the result of any/many inquiries within this discipline is determined before its investigation (i.e., simply because with a particular formal condition, a certain way of reality would be perceived). Four, sociology in most developing countries under the discourse of *transitional society* was developed with the aim of understanding the changes overtaking their traditional societies as a result of modernization, urbanization, westernization, and industrialization to regulate these changes and orientate them in the desired direction (i.e., the idea of transition from tradition to modernity). But given the formal conditions that sociology establishes with the value-spheres (i.e., the extremes), the synthesized unit (i.e., constructed social ontology), be it society or individual subject, with its in-between or middle ground characteristic, is unable to be encouraged towards a certain trajectory, even if the encouraged trajectory is modernity itself. Resulting in the reconstruction of a repetitive formal structure to explain various socio-political alterations that an underdevelopment nation has endured in the modern era; two solid moments, one before (tradition) and one after (modernity), and a long moment between, which fills the gap (Towfigh, et al., 2019). Daryush Shayegan describes it in his most significant opus *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (1992), as a disposition of “neither from here nor from elsewhere; driven from here, not arrived there” (p. 129). This feature is most evident in Iranian sociology, which Ebrahim Towfigh considers as its crucial feature involves *the suspension of the present* as an explanation of Iranian society. In his perception:

This suspension is realised by –and reflected on– its dominant approach (modernisation theory), and the notion of “transitional society” and consequently gives rise to a sociology which is not even capable of providing a typical positivist explanation of *status quo*, let alone allowing for the possibility of historical-critical understanding of the social. [Original emphasis] (Towfigh & Ahmadnia, 2014, p. 313)

Evaluating other local sociologies in this regard would probably make a decent topic for a number of studies, similar to what was published more than a decade ago under the name of

⁵³ In fact, we think there is a lot of resemblance between the potentiality for self-correction, what Nilüfer Göle considers to be the most important characteristics of modernity and neutralisation which I consider to be the significant feature of modern sociology of knowledge. See Göle, N. 1996. *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

The ISA Handbook of Diverse Sociological Traditions (2010), but this time, within the scope of the logic mentioned above, considering the object of sociological cognition to have multiple varieties. Nonetheless, to this end, we would like to reopen the question concerning the possibility of having an autonomous discipline of society whose aim is to reflect the social realities as it is rather than as it should be. For, if our working hypothesis is acceptable (which we consider it to be), then the sociologies situation is at stake.

Chapter 4: Suspended Knowledge; Revisiting Iranian Sociology

Fear, after all – that is a human being’s original and basic feeling; from fear everything can be explained, original sin and original virtue. From fear my virtue also grew, it is called: science. (Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 246)

Our main idea, as developed thus far, is that the ambivalent disposition of Iranian sociological knowledge is derived from the general conditions of the possibility of sociology as a scientific discipline. We traced the historical and intellectual conditions of the possibility of sociology to a series of interwoven developments, among which the double meaning of sociological *a priori* conditions proved to be most significant. By interrogating the dual status of sociological knowledge, it was suggested that the intellectual sociological *a priori* conditions of possibility are founded on the same double meaning Kant provides for his philosophical question of “How is nature possible?” Subsequently, we questioned Kant’s transcendental idealism, as we considered it the most effective thesis among the three *Critiques* and the necessary condition that makes the *a priori* dual status possible. However, reconstructing the *a priori* dual status phenomenologically within Kant’s knowledge theory revealed the emergent properties of *necessary qualifying conditions* and *consequences* of Kantian formalism. In the next step, we laid out our working hypothesis that if the intellectual sociological *a priori* conditions of possibility are founded on the same *a priori* dual status as Kant’s, then the sociological *a priori* conditions must bear the same emergent properties of necessary qualifying conditions and consequences within it. By analysing the Durkheimian *social facts* and the Weberian *subjective meaning*, we concluded in the last chapter that the various and partially incongruent discourses of sociological approaches (e.g. between structural functionalism and interpretive sociology) could be seen as simply variations upon a philosophical *ethos* rooting in Kantian formalism.

However, one thing remains to be clarified (or at least to be argued in depth) to conclude the argument: the link between the ambivalent disposition of Iranian sociology and the idealistic philosophical ethos, the logic that stresses “contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity” (Foucault, 2008, p. 42). It had already been said in the first chapter that Ebrahim Towfigh’s *suspension of the present time* is a convincing description of the ambivalent disposition of Iranian sociology. Therefore, if there is a relation between the general philosophical ethos of sociology and Iranian sociology, it must also be recognisable in Towfigh’s description (because of its accuracy in describing the situation). In the following pages of this chapter, comparable to what we did previously, we will try to provide a Kantian understating of Towfigh’s *suspension of the present time*. In doing so, after introducing the *Naming of The Suspension* (2019), Towfigh’s recent elaborated work on the issue, we will try to reveal its idealistic elements.

4.1. Naming of the Suspension: A Research Program for Historical Sociology of Iran

Before the publication of the *Naming of the Suspension: A Research Program for Historical Sociology of Iran* (2019), which is said to be the result of a five-year collective reflection on the problematic issue of “How can Iran’s history be rewritten in a non-oriental way?”, Towfigh had other contributions which act as the preliminary versions of the idea of *suspension of the present time*. Although most of these contributions are coauthored, it seems that the coinage of this term roots in Towfigh’s own 1998 dissertation in social sciences at the University of Frankfurt am Main with the title of *Modernisierung und postkoloniale Herrschaft in Iran: Versuch über den Staat* (1998). In his PhD thesis, Towfigh follows a line of argument that claims modernisation theory cannot explain Iran’s permanently postcolonial situation and thereby provides an inadequate reading of the post-revolutionary regime as a *traditionalist-fundamentalist* (re)action to the modernisation policy of the Pahlavi dynasty. Thus, to explain Towfigh’s dissertation’s central contention in a nutshell, he questions the definition of Third World countries as *transitional societies* with its concomitant model of *nachholender Entwicklung* (*catch-up* development), postulating a successful *transition* from *Oriental tradition* to *Western modernity*. In this way, he makes an understanding of modernity possible based on a dichotomous view of *modern* versus *traditional* as two separate units.

Furthermore, although Towfigh, in his thesis, accepts dependency theory's⁵⁴ views that the metropolitan capitalist market continues to hinder the (post-)colonial states' capitalist transgression, he criticises its focus on *universal factors* and its view that in postcolonial states, capitalist and pre-capitalist elements exist separately, i.e., in a non-simultaneous way (*ungleichzeitig*). The author's alternative theoretical account relies on the *tradition of materialist state theory*, in line with postcolonial approaches for a global sociological perspective, and especially in the form of the theory developed by his thesis co-advisor Reinhart Kößler, the theory of international civil society and solidarity. In this line of reasoning, the *rational core* of dependency and modernisation theories is maintained. In other words, the postcolonial state/society's structure is explained as a function of its position in the global economy and the constant urge to innovate inherent to modernity. But on the other hand, the latter postcolonial approaches criticise the former for its teleological stance and *Ungleichzeitigkeit* by arguing that modernity has to be understood as consisting of *gleichzeitige gegliederte Gesellschaftsformation* (simultaneous structured social formation). In this view, within the postcolonial society, capitalist and pre-capitalist aspects are bound to each other via an unequal relationship, and the state's role is to force the pre-capitalist sectors to support the capitalist sector in any way possible. The system developed based on this *theory of global modern society* also implies that the dependence of the postcolonial polities on the world market sets up structural restrictions to the state's complete de-possession and the formation of an internally integrated and homogeneous capitalist economy which eludes extra-economic forces. Consequently, the separation of politics and economy, state and society which is a characteristic of industrial-capitalist societies, cannot fully unfold in postcolonial societies (Schayegh, 2003).

Between Towfigh's first and last contribution to the idea of *suspension*, there are other versions of the concept, such as "The Transitional Society and the Post-Colonial Discourse; Reflections on the Social Science's Crisis in Iran" (2011), "An Epistemological Reflection on Academic

⁵⁴ it is said to that "[d]ependency theory emerged in the 1960s in reaction to modernization theories of development, arguing that international inequalities were socially structured and that hierarchy is a central feature of the global system of societies. It sought to explicate the institutional structures by which powerful core states continued to exploit and dominate less powerful states even after decolonization and the establishment of official sovereignty in peripheral nations. Ignoring the core/periphery hierarchy is a mistake not only for reasons of completeness, but also because the ability of core capitalist states to exploit noncore resources and labor has been a major factor in deciding the winners of global competition. A key insight of dependency theory is that capitalist globalization has occurred in waves and that waves of integration are followed by periods of globalization backlash. Although industrial production has largely moved from the core to the noncore, rather than flattening the world this trend has been accompanied by the extension and reorganization of modes of control and exploitation based on financial transactions and foreign investment" (Chase-Dunn, 2015, p. 196).

Sociology in Iran” (2012), coauthored with Javadi and “How to Overcome “Oriental” Sociology?” (2014), coauthored with Ahmadnia. However, the latest version is the best articulated and coherent in claims. The last comprehensive edition of the idea, the *Naming of the Suspension: A Research Program for Historical Sociology of Iran* (2019), published in a book format, mainly blends previous attempts to articulate the concept while eliminating inconsistency.

The *Naming of the Suspension: A Research Program for Historical Sociology of Iran* (2019) (henceforth, the *Naming* would be used instead of the full title of the book) takes a fresh look at what we have addressed under the conception of the problematic disposition of Iranian sociology. However, reflecting on two subsections from all discussions within the book suffices to grasp and come to terms with the idea of suspension of the present time and to reveal the Kantian elements of that conception. One of these subsections, with the title of “Posing the Main Point of Dispute”, belongs to chapter one, and the other, with the title “Atmosphere of speech and Archive”, relates to the third chapter. We believe that after systematically going through these two rubrics, we will be able to designate the necessary conditions for qualifying and the consequences of abiding by Kantian idealism in the idea of suspension. But first, Towfigh et al.’s key contention (as we will mainly rely on Towfigh et al.’s *Naming* with our own translation throughout this chapter to avoid redundancy, we will leave aside all references to the book. However, the rest of the quotation will be presented accordingly).

4.1.1. Posing the Main Point of Dispute

The *Naming* is collaborative work by Towfigh and his colleagues, starting with the question, “How can Iran’s history be rewritten in a non-oriental way?” Although they believe they have reached a theoretical resolution, they claim it is still far from a *systematic empirical study*. For them, the *Naming* does not define a research plan in its conventional sense; it is merely an expression of different but, at the same time, similar issues that each of the authors had encountered, either in their individual or collective projects, with regards to the Iranian society. In this respect, under the claimed *research program*, they have tried to find a name for the problem of reading the Iranian society and reflect on the general strategies for removing problems. To encapsulate the whole argument, for them, the problematic issue of Iranian society comes down to the *suspension of the present time*, which the *production system of socio-historical knowledge* has caused as one of the substantial elements of constructing the social reality and, therefore, to *exit* this disposition would be to *rewrite the Iranian history in a non-*

oriental fashion. However, from our point of view, this is a bold claim whose feasibility we must study further.

Going beyond the general, they outline that the *Iranian production system of socio-historical knowledge* has been formed in such a way that renders impossible not only historical and critical understanding of *the present time*⁵⁵ but also any other way of understanding, analysing and explaining the present time. This knowledge system prevents conceptual thinking about the present time by suspending it. It is this tendency or performance that Towfigh has named the *suspension of the present time*. They suppose this performance has several epistemological characteristics and components: *universalism, fundamental comparativism, absenteeism and subjective empiricism*. In writing this, they do not adopt a typical logical classification of features that separate each function and possible attitude. They use characteristics in the sense that the co-existence of specific attributes in the current state of Iranian socio-historical knowledge constructs an incomparable performance termed the suspension of the present time. The tendency of Towfigh and colleagues to merely juxtapose these characteristics has led to a form of writing that avoids giving any subheadings, which may confuse the reader. For instance, although the following pages of the book speak about universalism, fundamental comparativism, absenteeism and subjective empiricism, no subsection indicates the beginning of a discussion. Therefore, if one does not know that the idea of transition from tradition to modernity is one of the attributes of those sociological theories that claim universal properties for the social world, such as the 1950s and 1960s modernisation theories concerning the Third World, one would not comprehend the arguments related to this characteristic. However, based on our understanding of the idea of suspension, we presume the common denominator of the identified characteristics is the idea of transition, at least in the *Naming*.

4.1.1.1. The Core Idea of Transition And Its Orbits: Universalism, Comparativism, Absenteeism, and Subjective-Empiricism

In the *Naming*, they describe the convergence of social scientists on the point that Iranian social sciences are not problem-oriented and are in *crisis* as a reason for their inability to problematise the present time. They argue that when Iranian social sciences face an unbridgeable gap

⁵⁵ Towfigh has designated “Lahzeye Hal” in Persian to describe his notion. However, in the Farsi Dictionary, “Lahze” means for a short moment, shorter than blinking eyes. And “Hal” means the present as a period. In this sense, when “Lahzeye Hal” is jointly pronounced, we might be able to translate it as “the present moment”. But Towfigh in an article co-authored with Ahmadnia (2014) which is in English uses “the present time” phrase for its Persian equivalent. However, this could be because of his *ontological* interpretation of this expression. Though for us, both not only have the same interchangeable function but rather moment is a more accurate translation.

between understanding regularities of the social via theoretical traditions, re-evaluative thinking and criticism becomes inevitable. By way of their career experiences, as most of the authors of this book are academics, they consider that the formation of *Sociology of Iranian Sociology* in the last two decades indicates such an urgency. They also see the establishment of interdisciplinary fields in Iran, such as women's studies and cultural studies, the growing inclination to study *everyday life* in Iran as methodological shifts, and the uptake of sociological-historical studies as signs of opening new fields of action in Iranian academia. They even perceive the reception and application of critical schools such as the Frankfurt School, Birmingham cultural studies, and the related approaches arising from the postmodern-post-structuralist waves, such as feminist studies, subaltern studies, postcolonial studies, etc., among students of social sciences as an expression that they are seeking new forms of explication. All of these, in their belief, play a significant role in both the situation becoming critical and gaps becoming visible in Iran's socio-historical knowledge production system. However, Towfigh argues that *a critical and practical history* begins where others have already found an answer by questioning the conditions of the possibility of these answers and their association with the production system of socio-historical knowledge. For them, based on the facts just mentioned, the questions are: "Aren't these wholesale criticisms in the Iranian social sciences part of the entity or realm which is being criticised?" "Don't these criticisms themselves play an important role in the field so that the result becomes the current state of social sciences in Iran?" "Isn't this generated critical literature a part of the form of knowledge production that is being criticised, or does it not fall into that?" In their understanding, raising these issues makes it possible to ask the following questions: "What knowledge production does the criticism of Iranian academic social sciences offer for the Iranian academia here and now?" "How does this criticism return to the critics themselves, and what outcome or change does it make possible?".

Naming argues that apart from various ways of criticising the Iranian social sciences and their corresponding contingent answers, all become possible because of the idea of *transition*. In this sense, the notion of transition acts both as the magic formula for pathological responses and as the condition of the possibility of those pathologies. The idea of transition is not merely confined to inquiries of pathology; the entire production in the realm of humanities and social sciences in Iran could be subsumed under the idea of *transition from tradition to modernity*⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ They suggest that all who have been present in the field of Iranian social sciences at different moments have encountered the explanation that we are in a situation of transition from tradition to modernity. And if one

Towfigh and his colleagues believe what explains this long intermediate-ness between the two concrete moments does not lie within itself, but rather its *evaluative logic* is either projected to the earlier (i.e., past) or the later (i.e., future) analytical moments. This long present time is, in this sense, defined negatively, not from within and based on its internal logic, according to its characteristics. Yet they write that in comparison with the past and future moments (which carry along an imposed *false* precision and transparency), the only solidified explanation of the present would be: *we are neither this nor that, neither traditional nor modern*. To the authors of the *Naming*, this mechanism of skipping the present time is named the suspension of the present time. For them, suspension of the present time has an internal linkage with transition discourse.

As far as the authors of *Naming* are concerned when the academic social sciences of Iran stress the negative definition of transitions or discontinuities⁵⁷ and the relatively stable space between them, then the following twofold repercussions would be foreseeable: *first*, the focus would be on the *recurring patterns of order* amidst the disposition towards transitions or discontinuities and *second*, deriving at the inner-logic governing this repetition or focusing on the *differences* which generate change and the formation of a new order. They say that in both cases, within

reflects on one's memory of the social sciences atmosphere in Iran, one would observe that the same scheme is imprinted in their minds too as an explanation of Iranian society: *two solid moments, one before (tradition) and one after (modernity), and a long moment between them which fills the gap*.

⁵⁷ Against this background, they claim in the *Naming* that the idea of transition does not necessarily lead to the suspension of the present; if, by transition, we imply the slow or rapid transformations which all the societies in the modern era are dealing with; or if we consider the character of the modern era as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848 [2010]) suggest to be: "All that is solid melts into air" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 487). In this latter sense, they argue that we must identify where and what is *not* in transition. Therefore, for them, the concept of transition could also refer to *the ruptures and discontinuities* that occur at different (macro, meso, and micro) levels of social reality in a *simultaneity of the asynchronicity*. Furthermore, they consider that *transitions/discontinuities* could also be interpreted as the *emergence of a difference*: what had been hitherto either not here or transgressed to a new form, disturbing the existing order by constructing the possibility of establishing a transformed situation compared to the previous. In this sense, they maintain that sociology has been formed in the face of these emergent differences. All it has claimed has been to figure out conceptual solutions to formulate these discontinuities. However, they also assert that sociology has always presented a *Janusian* thinking process regarding discontinuities and transformations. On the one hand, there have been tremendous efforts in social sciences – though without success – to illustrate the transitional processes in a positive and immanent manner within their singularity and historical individuality. At the same time, on the other side, in conventional sociology, there have been massive intellectual endeavours to explain the transformations negatively and by referring to something external to the process, for example, the development of productive forces, augmentation of rationality/differentiation, or generally *with the idea of progress*. In this negative sense, Towfigh and others contend that the transitions or discontinuities arising from the emergent differences are measured with external criteria and expressed in concepts corresponding to *universal* social-historical principles. Thus the transitions or discontinuities (or, in other words, the materialised forms of universal evaluating principles) demonstrate deficiencies or deviations from the path that can also be explained and resolved based on the *universal* social-historical principles. In this negative sense, transitions or discontinuities are stations in an assumed progressive timeline with a beginning and an endpoint, manifesting the fulfilment of capabilities present in an undeveloped form at the outset.

the negative definition of transition, the *tautological* logic prevails, the compatibility of repetitions and differences, orders and changes with universal principles that have determined the evolution path in a teleological manner and in advance. In this way, a historical periodisation becomes possible within which the disposition of transitions or discontinuities turns into the milestones of demarcating the universal and general periods. Then, each epoch is understood as a *homogeneous spatiotemporality* consistent with the universal governing principle of yet-to-becoming, whose specificity is merely meaningful under the universal rules.

Towfigh and others reason that sociology has implicit and solid roots in an orientalist idea of the world. They argue that the most crucial indicator of the orientalist approach is its explicit *fundamental comparativism*, which is evident through the following conjectures:

- a) Transgression from *individual moral judgments* towards *social moral judgments* (from the species evolution to human evolution in Comte/from psychology to sociology in Durkheim) represents earlier stages of society had been deficient;
- b) Transgression of social *categorisation* into social *classification* (from *Zeitlichkeit* to class in Marx or Spencer's degree of differentiation) demands an exterior taxonomic criterion.

To clarify this term, by relying on Said's opus *Orientalism* (2003), the *Naming* points to *comparative studies* and their role in the progress of the Western sciences. They believe that all sociological notions presuppose the image of an *imperfect Orient*⁵⁸, without which knowing Western civilisation and its interior differentiation would be impossible.

However, the story does not end here. Towfigh et al. claim that sociological knowledge fails to maintain its differentiating quality while travelling from its *homeland* to an oriental country. One of the consequences of such a process is that all conceptions related to the experiences of modernity, such as the nation-state, national economics, capitalism, civil society, etc., lose their explanatory and illustrative force for the subject matter of *Oriental Sociology*. Given the prevalence of its orientalist tendency, sociology seems essentially inclined to subject all judgements to the normative presence of a superior being, namely the *West* (in contrast with the *East* as the inferior). Simultaneously, this inherited orientalism does not allow for identifying any differentiation of what is out *there* – in this case, the West. Consequently, the

⁵⁸ An image of the East based on the fundamentals of static and inertia, which has no prospect for an internal transition and natural process to modernity.

concept sees a torn-apart present attached to an oriental past with a sociological future. While the former is orientalist in nature, the latter stays sociological. Due to this formation through which sociology becomes oriental, coming to terms with an evolutionary process or any historical path that ties together the future and the past becomes impossible. For Towfigh and the rest, this form of orientalism is rooted in the same transition logic mentioned before. They argue that conventional and positivist sociology – in a broader sense, the whole *genre of social sciences* – based on the *idea of progress* and its corresponding philosophy of history, deal with the *rational* articulation of academic orientalist knowledge of the *East*, turning the comparative studies into the mere geographical expansion of social sciences to the *East*. From the beginning, as far as Towfigh et al. are concerned, the idea of progress and its sociological articulation has been based on the idea and concept of *Eastern* social static and stagnation. Therefore, one would see on one side that in all forms of orientalism (i.e., academic orientalism, comparative studies and modernisation theories after World War II), the *East* is a negative definition of the *West* and the conditions for rewriting the affirmative Western history. On the other side, writing the history of the *East* is based on the idea of *absence*: the absence of all those things that were present in the Western past and made its transition to modernity possible. Based on the positive history of the West, which is considered *world history*, i.e. the standard path, the *Absentography* of the present time in societies experiencing a transition from tradition to modernity is portrayed as the struggle between the past and a heterogeneous future, i.e. between an orientalist past and a sociological future. They believe that *absenteeism* could not have emerged if such comparative studies did not exist. The *Naming* supposes that Iranian *absenteeism* is established via the division of labour between the two most significant disciplines of social sciences, namely *history* and *sociology*. In the absence of dialogue, they argue that these two disciplines in the Iranian system of knowledge turned the Iranian past into orientalist stasis and the Iranian future into an instance brought forth by sociological knowledge embodied in the *West* as a unified and homogeneous image.

Towfigh and his colleagues argue that their key contention is to mark the juxtaposition of these components (i.e., universalism, fundamental comparativism, absenteeism and subjective empiricism) under the *discourse of transition from tradition to modernity*, which gives rise to the refusal of thinking in the history of the present and the suspension of the present time. In their opinion, the mechanism of suspension of the present time is that *emergent property* that gives special meaning to the discourse of the transition from tradition to modernity and forms the historical individuality of Iran's production system of socio-historical knowledge. Therefore,

in Towfigh et al.'s approach, it could be said that the idea of transition as a discourse based on the mechanism of suspension of the present time is a rare and recurring proposition that regulates Iran's knowledge systems *archive* (i.e., discursive formation) while at the same time bearing a reciprocal relationship with the Iranian production system of socio-historical knowledge and its unique orientalism. Depending on what it makes possible, this distinctive orientalism makes it impossible to present a critical and compelling history of the here and now. Therefore, there is no other chance to pose an Iranian non-oriental history except by genealogically problematising the socio-historical knowledge system.

4.1.2. Atmosphere of Speech and Archive

This section articulates the conditions that the authors of the *Naming* consider a state where the Iranian social science crisis is overcome. "If the presentness of Iranian society cannot be identified through the transitional society discourse, what other possibilities do we have?" Towfigh and the rest believe the objective of studying Iran's knowledge system should be an immanent recognition of the *Social*. But then again, they would like to think that only *radical historical sociology* can allow for problematising the disposition of Iranian social sciences, which Iranian sociologists are entrapped in. They assert their proposed radical historical sociology has nothing to do with current comparative historical studies. In their perception, historical sociology as a primary concern can be accomplished exclusively by radicalising the idea of Weber's *historical individual*. By radicalising, they imply a liberation of the present from the past and *vice versa*. In their understanding, this twofold liberation results in extreme criticism of all evolutionist approaches and the family theories of stagnation and decline. They contend that instead of these theories, a discontinuous conception of modernity as a historical, social formation is needed, which gives way to exploring diverse and varied encounters of modernity as historical individuals.

By way of an example, in the *Naming*, Towfigh and his colleagues argue that Giddens' theoretical way of dealing with modernity might be able to help achieve this objective. A particular point they find interesting in Giddens is that he argues that comprehending and portraying modernity is conceivable through *a discontinuist understanding of modernity*. In line with Giddens, they perceive the development of modernity as a socio-historical formation that is not the consequence of an essential change in the traditional society. Instead, they argue that modernity results from a progression of historical discontinuities that develop independently,

enabling the transition to modernity through a course of mutual and cumulative contingencies.⁵⁹ As far as Towfigh and others are concerned, although Giddens acknowledges the emerging point of this historical discontinuity in Western Europe, the socio-historical formation resulting from this discontinuity, i.e. modernity, for him, does not have a global characteristic. In this respect, the main feature of modernity turns out to be *constant social change*, while the pre-modern social systems were all based on social stagnation.

Thus the consequence of modernity, for Towfigh and the rest in the *Naming*, is a situation in which, as Marx phrases it, “[a]ll that is solid melts into air” (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 487). Therefore, from their point of view, the process of modernity, which emerges from total discontinuation, develops a social system that keeps changing based on and due to gradual discontinuities. The notion of discontinuity best describes the experiences of so-called Islamic/oriental societies. In Towfigh et al.’s perception, these societies have been formed in the process of confronting European modernity in their discontinuation from the traditional era social system within the framework of nation-states. Therefore, they suggest that Marx’s phrase “[a]ll that is solid melts into air” (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 487) should be understood regarding such a situation and not concerning the confrontation between tradition and modernity (i.e., the negative definition).

Moreover, the discourse of transitional society from tradition to modernity provides no means of understanding and description. Besides, they want us to remember that while entering the modern era, the tradition of pre-modern relationships finds no space to reveal itself. Therefore, they, referring to Marshall Berman, say modernity as a constantly changing state develops its traditions in a way that, on the surface, appears similar to pre-modern traditions. As demonstrated by Giddens, as soon as space and time tend to become empty, a possibility arises for generating traditions through the processes of disembedding (see below). Put simply, what Towfigh et al. call tradition has nothing to do with the pre-modern era but is a result of the modern disposition. In this sense, they believe that as the spatiotemporality gradually becomes dense and empty through modernisation, the actors are enabled to seize and *disembed* the pre-modern traditions and *re-embed* them in some other spatiotemporality. In this way, the disembedded traditions get different meanings and characters, which can only be explicable concerning the necessities and requirements of the present moment.

⁵⁹ This is why we claim we have to understand the whole project of *Naming* through Towfigh, as you see non-simultaneous (ungleichzeitig) approaches to modernity that he revealed in his PhD thesis are showing themselves again, but this time through Giddens’ theory of modernity.

In the *Naming*, the authors have reached an understanding of the sociological problem in countries such as Iran that does not focus on the lack of modern critical theories not being applied in their respective social knowledge systems. Instead, the problematic issue is that, from their perspective, their socio-historical knowledge system does not have the proper means to make good use of them. They explain this claim by addressing Giddens' theory of *disembedding*. In Towfigh et al.'s perception, disembedding is the endless translation of the traditional/pre-modern era's values and institutions into modernity. They see Giddens' modernity theory as a framework of reference and not a theoretical framework for measuring certain realities, which are always special and unique. Therefore, in their belief, Giddens' theory of modernity does not tell us how the translation process occurs. Instead, it tells us that under certain conditions of modernity, such translation takes place and that the *structuration* of the present time has an internal relation to this translation. In Towfigh and others' accounts, understanding and interpreting its occurrence's form and content is possible through *a posteriori* study of a specific situation. Following Giddens, they believe that we need access to the translated text to know the mechanism and logic of the translation.

The *Naming* claim's that what immediately concerns us with Giddens's disembedding regarding the problem of Iranian socio-historical knowledge is that there is no access to the text of tradition in its broad sense. This does not mean that, in their understanding, the historical documents have been lost, but rather it implies that the documents have been *archived* so that the only possible way to access them is through the logic of modernisation within the transitional discourse. Thus, they believe this makes possible the repletion of the same statement that our historical past has always followed the logic of stagnation or decline, and therefore it could not move into modernity. To give a reminiscence and example of this instance, Towfigh and his colleagues have repeated the claim more than a hundred times throughout the *Naming* in various syntactical structures.

Towfigh et al. see Iranian history as being archived in an orientalist manner, necessarily resulting in *Oriental Sociology*, as described previously. Therefore, the first and foremost step towards overcoming *Oriental Sociology*, from Towfigh et al.'s point of view, is to problematise the current *archive* in reading the Iranian historical past. In this analytical moment, the problem of Naming is reduced to *deciphering the Iranian orientalist archive*. However, the authors of *Naming* do not consider the Iranian archive as a homogeneous surface but instead contend that the analytical breaks within it are the conditions that have made their discussions possible. In this sense, the suspension of the present moment results from diverse and different processes

within the archive, which do not necessarily follow the same logic but generally have no result other than the suspension of the current situation. Towfigh et al. seek to highlight the points that make it impossible to talk about the present moment. Therefore, they set the next goal of their research program to explain how the current archive de-materialises the present moment.

The *Naming* claims that these ruptures in the archive of the Iranian system of knowledge are merely analytical. When Towfigh et al. speak of ruptures, they argue that through the irreversible events that have occurred in Iran's knowledge system as ruptures, we can pose a hypothetical distinction within the archive of Iran's knowledge system, dividing it into a) *the archives at our disposal* and b) *the archives pre-rupture*. They argue that these ruptures can be recovered in different contexts. In other words, various arbitrary historical events can be recognised as the early stages of the archival rupture. Towfigh and the rest consider the following as the most critical turning points of rupture and discontinuity in Iran's knowledge system:

- A. *The fundamental shifts in the status-dominant language relationships in Iran's knowledge system have formed various types of cultural translations*; For instance, they argue that the division of labour between Arabic, Persian, and local languages for a long time formed the Iranian knowledge system. But, following certain historical events, this linguistic order has changed, and a different relationship emerged between European languages, local Persian dialects, and Arabic, shaping a hierarchy between these languages, which meant the translation process found a different origin and destination. In addition to creating different and distinct orders in the archive of knowledge, these irreversible historical events also created new rules, classifications, rituals and goals to access the archive of the past, which undoubtedly is an essential beginning for the current state of our knowledge.
- B. *The Imposition of stagnation on particular branches of knowledge*; The *Naming* believes it can be easily shown that parts of the archive have moved towards becoming obsolete at different speeds, and parts of it have been strengthened, coupled with new orders and have found different meanings. In this sense, they say, since the establishment of new branches of knowledge, such as social science, psychology, clinical medicine, etc., are clearly identifiable, perhaps recognising their emergence and discussing their rupture is not so complicated. On the other hand, branches of knowledge and wisdom, such as the science of *rijal*⁶⁰, Astronomy, Alchemy, *Oikonomia*, etc., are not spoken of in the circle of our

⁶⁰ The science of evaluating the narrators of *Hadith*.

understanding today. This omission is not meaningless. Naturally, Towfigh et al. do not consider their goal to recover ancient and forgotten wisdom; This work has its caretakers. Their purpose, perhaps in the opposite direction, is to point out that such silence does not simply mean that these knowledge sources have suddenly dried up. Instead, it implies shifting the focal points of the archive, raising some voices to hide others, and changing the meaning and function of other disciplines that have a historical link with these silenced pieces of knowledge. Such changes undoubtedly indicate numerous breaks in our knowledge system.

- C. *The formation of new types of encyclopaedias to summarise the tradition*; Towfigh et al. consider that among the different kinds of writing that were published in the 13th and early 14th centuries (Islamic calendar / equivalent to 19th and early 20th centuries AD), which saw a shift in their meaning and status, perhaps more than anything, we have to mention new types of encyclopaedias, which are characterised by the significant changes of this era. This change can be seen in many branches of knowledge, and among its various forms, with the desire to summarise past archives. For instance, influential books, such as *Al-Dharī‘a ilā taṣānīf al-Shī‘*⁶¹ by Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī, *Jawāhir al-kalām*⁶² by Mohammad Hassan Najafi, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*⁶³ by Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī, *Amsal o Hakam*⁶⁴ and *Dictionary* by Ali Akbar Dehkhodā etc., despite the many different contexts, are all encyclopaedias that strive to put together the records of the traditional epoch. Naturally, each of these books has examples and precedents in the past, or they have defined reference points in the archives of the past. However, a similar shift in processing these books indicates a break in the knowledge system. For example, the difference between an encyclopaedic dictionary and a vocabulary list of old Persian words should be clear.
- D. *The establishment of institutions which produce modern knowledge*; Simultaneously with these changes, the *Naming* contends, new educational centres and institutions were established. The most famous and characteristic of which is *Dār ul-Funun*⁶⁵ in Tehran. If we understand the archive broadly as the system of formation and transformation of speech and the order of production and accumulation of knowledge, obviously, the establishment of these new centres and their increasing importance can indicate a profound break with the

⁶¹ The most excellent encyclopaedia of Shi'a bibliography in 25 volumes.

⁶² An encyclopaedic work on Islamic jurisprudence.

⁶³ The most popular manual of Islamic devotional observances and prayer texts in the Shi'a world.

⁶⁴ Is the encyclopaedia of Iranian Proverbs.

⁶⁵ The oldest Western-style "polytechnic college" in Iran was established by Nasereddin Shah in 1851.

archives of the past. Each of these institutions is an example which reveals a fundamental shift in the order of knowledge. However, Towfigh et al. consider that the issue here is not only about the establishment of modern institutions. For them, such a distinction between modern and traditional would merely result in what has been criticised. Therefore, for example, the *hawzah 'ilmīyah* or *seminary of Qom* has to be also considered one of the new institutions of knowledge production that should not be ignored in the Iranian historical knowledge at the cost of an essentialist distinction between the traditional and the modern.

- E. *The change in the status and significance of the bearers of knowledge*; The Naming contends that contemporary Historians of the middle ages of the Qajar dynasty, circa between 1850 and 1900, have demonstrated how *Intellectualism* took shape and power as new bearers of knowledge during this period. This new group includes a heterogeneous group of journalists, writers, teachers, and scholars who, along with many people such as consultants, educated people, engineers, doctors, lawyers, etc., appeared in diverse forms in different parts of the archive and made possible the new orders of things.
- F. *The creation of a distinction between new and old knowledge*; The last point, as Towfigh and his colleagues say, is the idea that there is a distinction between traditional and modern things, the idea that traditional knowledge is different from modern knowledge and these contrasting form of knowledge placed in juxtaposition to each other is a new sign that did not exist before the Qajarian dynasty. For example, this view affected different parts of the archive for a long time. However, their emergence has not happened simultaneously. It can be chronologically demonstrated that the opposition of modern/traditional medicine, old/new geography and conventional/contemporary poetry did not appear at once. In addition, it could be said that the meaning of traditional and modern (i.e., new) is also different in each of these knowledge segments. As a result, it is not possible to presuppose a discontinuity of time and form in all these fields. However, the differentiation between the present moment and pre-rupture can be analysed by assuming this discontinuity.

The *Naming* believe the cases mentioned above are only cases that simultaneously have experienced fundamental shifts in the Iranian knowledge order. By rupture, the co-existence of such things is in question, creating a new order and not the definite discontinuity from a homogeneous order to an alternative one. Recognising this rupture, they believe, allows them to highlight points in the Iranian socio-historical knowledge archive that carry along with forms of refusal of thinking (or, in other words, suspension of the present moment).

By analysing *the transcendental systems* of the archive, in the *Naming*, the authors argue that they have highlighted the points in the archive that have made it impossible to talk about the current situation. They believe the purpose of (re-)writing critical history is to pay attention to the gaps and cracks in the archive, to observe the moments of birth and eruption of new forces that do not follow the logic of previous forces. These forces of resistance are not simply the forces pushing in the opposite direction of the forces of power. The resistance forces do not have an existence separate from the powerful forces. But instead, they are a result of the system's regulatory functions, which have arisen from another source of power, and the plane of its origin has a specific relationship with these regulatory functions. Towfigh et al. are confident that resistance is an internal element of power. Power without resistance cannot be logically explained and distinguished from strain. Thus, Towfigh et al. say that when these resistant forces are defined at their internal level concerning the power imposed on them, the *governing order* could be criticised for its individuality and specificity. The purpose of such criticism, Towfigh and the others believe, then is no longer to uncover or compensate the speech but to *temporally and historically bind* all these instances of speech to show the moments of historical birth (i.e., accidental and arbitrary) of everything that connects itself with a necessary and trans-historical origin.

For this very reason, Towfigh et al. contend that the *historical sources* of knowledge should be replaced by what is thought to be the origin of the current knowledge. To this end, Towfigh and the rest argue that their study aims to identify the historical sources of knowledge in contrast to the existing knowledge system, which has its own construction built around *historical stereotypes*. However, these historical stereotypes merely explicate the birth of knowledge at the level of *pure* historical moments such as *rationalism, the West, tradition, modernity*, etc. The deepening of archival *gaps and ruptures*, Towfigh et al. believe, allows for other connections beyond reproducing the suspension of the present moment. In this sense, all this theoretical speculation as research strategies in the *Naming* serves to establish some conditions, in contrast to the existing narrative and the standardised order of the archive, to make the genealogy of the present moment possible.

4.2. The Theoretical Approaches In the *Naming*

Since the main arguments of the *Naming* have been put forward, now we can ask, “Is Towfigh’s description of the Iranian academic social sciences in congruence with the ambivalent disposition rooted in sociological knowledge? Is Towfigh’s sociology in harmony with the

sociological formal *a priori* condition of possibility?”. By bracketing the *Naming*'s theoretical reasonings and historical groundings, we can analytically reduce all its theoretical speculation and endeavour to two analytical moments, diagnosis and resolution. The first moment of diagnosis is where *Naming* argues that Iranian academic social sciences, under the influence of the idea of transition, are merely able to explicate Iranian society as two solid moments, one moment before (tradition) and one moment after (modernity), and a long moment between them which fills the gap. And the second moment of resolution is when Towfigh and his colleagues consider the Iranian system of knowledge to be regulated through a particular *archiving system* and, thereby, carry out an analysis of the transcendental system of the Iranian archive system, identifying two aspects *a)* the archives at our disposal and *b)* the archives pre-rupture, to genealogically pursue the points in the archive that have made it impossible to speak about the current disposition. Both of these analytical instants could be read as containing the logic of “contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity” (Foucault, 2008, p. 42). But then, a viewpoint convinces us only to interrogate the former moment of these two. And that is *first*, Towfigh et al. have claimed that to *overcome* the crisis of Iranian sociology, we have to analyse the transcendental system of Iran's knowledge system's archive, which makes it a fantasied *modo futuri exacti* in the phenomenological sense. They anticipated a future state of affairs, setting the next task for themselves. Therefore, evaluating and considering its merits would not be very sensible until at least one empirical study following this theoretical framework has been carried out. *Second*, the ingeniousness of Towfigh and the other's contribution in the *Naming*, which seems impossible to avoid, lies in the fact that they (i.e., namely Towfigh) have subsumed the wholesale criticism of Iranian social scientists within the modern era (i.e., approximately 70 years history of Intellectual works) under the notion of suspension of the present moment or time. In this regard, by recognising the underlying theme of the idea of transition from tradition to modernity within the history of modern social thought in Iran, as they claim, they merely have given *a label, tag* and *naming* to the shared experience of Iranian social scientists by way of verbalising it and bring it to light. Thus, with the emergence of the *Naming*, this milestone in Iranian sociological knowledge reflects a sort of *maturity* within the Iranian social sciences. Iranian sociology, at this point, cannot only render self-criticism, but also its self-criticism points back to a deficiency that, generally, sociology as scientific discipline experiences. Let us explain this latter point further while addressing the Kantian elements of the suspension of the present time.

4.2.1. Kantian Elements of the Suspension of the Present Moment

In the previous chapter, we stated that if a sociological theory, concept or explanation abides by the rules of Kantian philosophical ethos, it must indispensably entail *the necessary conditions of qualifications* and *the consequences*. Therefore, in the following section, we want to re-evaluate Towfigh's suspension of the present moment by considering these characteristics. Before proceeding, clarification of one issue is essential to avoid possible misunderstandings. There might arise an objection that Towfigh's theoretical contribution is, as said earlier, merely labelling a collective intellectual approach to Iranian society; thereby, it might be possible that he does not read the Iranian society under the notion of the suspension itself. We might be confronted by the fact that Towfigh has mainly tagged a label on a common scholarly experience. Although this might be the case, we have to take into consideration that in the act of *overcoming*, surmounting and surpassing a problematic way of discerning a disposition, initially, one must have traversed and passed through the problem already and by flesh and bone discerned that the disposition could not be comprehended otherwise. As Foucault says, "now it is precisely at this moment that the critique is necessary" (Foucault, 1984, p. 38). As demonstrated in the second chapter, any possible way of relating to Iranian society dissolves under the discourse of transitional society, as Towfigh et al. claim. But even to overcome it, as in Towfigh's diagnosis, one has to define itself within this paradigm primarily, even if it implies presenting a description in the form of "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 487).

Nonetheless, in my view, reading the mechanism of the suspension of the present moment under the conception of the philosophical ethos of sociology is, to a great extent, easier compared to what we did about Durkheim and Weber. Because although in the postcolonial tradition, language-wise, more complicated syntax and semantics are employed. But reading between the lines becomes much more straightforward when the text's codes are cracked. Therefore, for instance, the case of the suspension of the present moment along with the suspension of the existence of the outer world and its objects, in Towfigh's understanding, is a *synthesis* of two solid moments, one moment before (tradition) and one moment after (modernity) (see figure 8.).

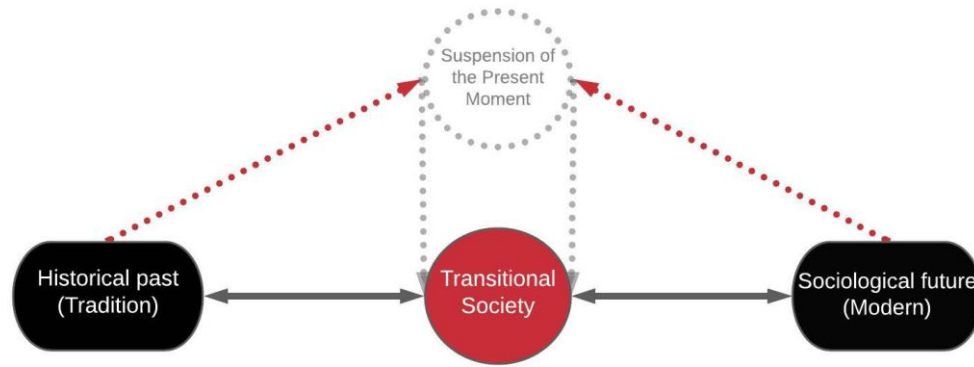


Figure 8. The Formal Conditions of the Suspension of the Present Moment

Therefore, as shown in the figure, the suspension of the present moment reveals the synthetic unity characteristic, which is the necessary condition for qualifying as an element complying with the Kantian transcendental schema. But let us continue our discussion for the next criterion.

The following criterion is the consequence of abiding by the rules of Kant’s transcendental idealism. As stated in the third chapter, we believe the consequence of the reconciliation of contrary elements in the form of a synthetic unity is the emergent property of *neutrality* in all of its extensive meanings. Supposing that neutrality could be assigned to Towfigh’s diagnostic idea: suspension of the present moment by way of making itself the synthesis of both moments of before (tradition) and after (modernity), not only would inhabit in the neutral ground (i.e., intermediary; first meaning) between tradition and modern but also would neutralise them (i.e., make them ineffective; second meaning) via engendering a neutral account of knowledge (i.e., not engaging on either side; third meaning). But how could we claim such an emergent property in the suspension of the present moment? In the *Naming*, Towfigh et al. argue that specific historical societal moments resemble a mare’s nest. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran is experiencing such a disposition that it appears as if “[a]ll that is solid melts into air” (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 487). After that, they state, “How could one possibly read such a situation?” Towfigh et al. answer that a generalised common sense/intellectual understanding clarifies this disposition as a case of being in purgatory (i.e., being in limbo), though instead of being between hell and heaven, it is situated amid tradition and modernity. And then, by quoting from Daryush Shayegan’s widely read opus *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (1992), they claim this is a disposition of “neither from here nor from elsewhere; driven from here, not arrived there” (p. 129). This *neither/nor* situation articulated under the discourse of transition that, for Towfigh and others, amounts to the suspension of the present time. Undoubtedly, being influenced by Shayegan, as both are Weberian and Post-structuralist,

Cultural Schizophrenia refers to “the mental distortions afflicting those civilisations that have remained on the sidelines of history and played no part in the festival of changes” (Shayegan, 1992, p. vii). Although cultural schizophrenia is a personal problem, Shayegan considers it to be a *universal* syndrome. Therefore the work focuses on the psychological, philosophical, ontological and, above all, epistemological problems in those countries that the development process has left behind. The author of *Cultural Schizophrenia*, displaying vast knowledge of the Western and non-Western history of thought, refers to diverse cultural models from Latin America to China. For Shayegan, the mental split, or schizophrenia, is the cultural identity of those societies that have been caught between tradition and modernity, “trapped in a fault-line between incompatible worlds, worlds that mutually repel and deform one another” (Shayegan, 1992, p. vii), those societies that “want to be both modern and archaic, democratic and authoritarian, profane and religious, ahead of the time and behind it” (Shayegan, 1992, p. 22). For in Shayegan’s point of view, as these societies have not internalised the *historical breaks* of the modern era, such as the Renaissance and the industrial revolution, “which turned the West into the stronghold of modernity” (Shayegan, 1992, p. 37), they cannot deal with the modern world. As a result, Shayegan believes, in these societies, such as Iran, both spiritual traditions, i.e., tradition and modernity, become distorted. Therefore, for instance, in Iran, both Islamization and Westernization result from artificial *grafting* processes, and thus, hybrids are doomed to fail. What is crucial for us in this latter account is the phenomenon of distortion in the grafting process (i.e., the neither/nor structure).

Because the ‘base’ onto which the new or old discourse is grafted is neither one thing nor the other; it is a hybrid, a mixture of the two, and already a zone of diffraction and confusion. In both cases, what is present is a *mutilated outlook* whose vision is altered and twisted as if reflected in a distorting mirror. (Shayegan, 1992, p. 77)

4.3. Conclusion

We can begin to conclude our examination of Iranian sociological ambivalence by noting that ambivalence is the chief characteristic of sociological formal *a priori* conditions of the possibility. Viewed in this manner, for us, conceptions such as being in crisis, ambivalent, suspended, schizophrenic, et cetera, lose their descriptive force for the historical individual⁶⁶ of Iranian social sciences. However, these descriptions might prove fruitful for elucidating

⁶⁶ As Weber tells us, “in constructing historical individuals I elaborate in an explicit form the focal points for possible ‘evaluative’ attitudes which the segment of reality in question discloses and in consequence of which it claims a more or less universal ‘meaning’” (Weber, 1949, p. 151).

sociology's formal *a priori* structure. Still, we must credit those scholars who argue the intensity of the ambivalent disposition in Iran. Since, analytically, countries such as Iran, which, on the one hand, are not considered modern historically (i.e., before analysis) and, on the other hand, have living conditions based on tradition, manifestly fulfil the dialectic logic. Because “[m]odernity is often characterized in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment” (Foucault, 1984, p. 39). As Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh (1878-1970), a well-known Iranian statesman and scholar, once said, the antidote of such dispositions for countries comparable to Iran is that they ought to become Westernised in every aspect: “from head to toe” (Dabashi, 2017, p. 355). This strategy has the advantage of submerging the manifest ambivalence into the latent constitutive knowledge and moral and power relations, which have been synthesized under a unified conception known as the modern subject.

Nonetheless, from remarking that the underpinning formal principle of sociology has certain features insofar as it represents observable objects in certain ways, it does not necessarily follow that mind-independent objects must also correspond to those features. In other words, our scientific language does not need to correspond to the world. But it also does not necessarily follow that our scientific diagnoses of the things and objects of the world are incorrect and false. All that has been said is irrespective of the properties of the world's objects. This implies that concerning the reported ambivalent disposition of Iranian society, we prefer to suspend judgement about the truth or falsehood of sociological theories (i.e., adopt an agnostic tone). Although we are confident about one thing, based on sociological formal *a priori* conditions of possibility, ambivalence would be merely sociology's representation of Iranian society.

Chapter 5: The Path to Emancipation

The supreme values in whose service man is *supposed* to live, especially when being at their disposal is difficult and costly – these social values have been raised above man for purposes of *amplification*, to convey the impression that they were God's commands or 'reality,' or the world of 'truth,' or the hope of a *future* life. Now that the base origin of these values has become obvious, everything seems to have lost its value and to have become 'meaningless'. . . but this is only *an intermediate stage*. (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 16)

In Chapter 3, we discussed the formal conditions of the possibility of sociological contemplation, focusing on the Durkheimian and Weberian approaches. This formal condition, which has its roots in Kantian idealism, makes the object of sociological deliberation, be it at the individual level or structural, appear in the form of the synthesis of contradictory and incompatible elements while possessing determining attributes that have been metaphorically termed *neutrality*. In chapter 4, by thoroughly analysing Towfigh's *Naming of the Suspension* (2019), we argued that the *formal* conditions of the possibility of sociological thinking, in general, have granted Iranian sociology its indispensable and destructive ambivalent character in particular. It appears to us that having recognised the formal conditions of the possibility of sociology has other important consequences for sociology as a scientific discipline, apart from merely facilitating a peculiar reading of Durkheim and Weber or even situating the ambivalent disposition of Iranian sociology next to the overall formal style of our discipline. Yet the broad expansion of the domain of sociology over the past century to realms we benefit from today⁶⁷ makes it impossible to raise a substantial discussion in terms of other connotations of the formal conditions of the possibility of sociology. In broaching such a broad theme, I seek to return to

⁶⁷ Such as Social anthropology, Sociology of Art and Literature, Sociology of Body, Cognitive sociology, Sociology of Culture, Development Sociology, Social Deviance, Sociology of Education, Sociology of Emotions, Environmental Sociology, Sociology of Family, Sociology of gender, Historical Sociology, Sociology of Information and Communication Technology, Sociology of knowledge, Sociology of Language, Medical Sociology, Sociology of Peace, War, and Social Conflict, Organizational Sociology, Political Sociology, Sociology of Race and Ethnic Relations, Sociology of Religion, Rural sociology, Sociology of Science, Urban sociology, etc.,

the roots of the project of sociology as a scientific enterprise. Though, here, too, there is a lack of a single project to be assigned to sociological knowledge. For instance, In *The Sociological Tradition* (1966 [2017]), Robert A. Nisbet has the conviction that mainstream sociology, with its conservative reaction against the idea of *borderless freedom*, sets the project of sociology, bringing to light all kinds of anarchistic disorders of every life. Therefore, sociology as a doctrine “is firmly connected with the problem of social order and therefore tied up for ordering and organising all the social activities so that they function as rationally as possible when evaluated on the social system’s perspective” (Ahponen, 1990, p. 342). Others believe that the project of sociology is concerned with the moral dilemmas of industrial civilisation first expressed early in the nineteenth century (Levine, 1995). A third party believes that the whole project of sociology is closely tied to the project of the nation-state, “embodying in its epistemology methodological nationalism” (Giri, 2006, p. 227). As far as we are concerned, the project of sociology is *Critique* in the sense that Owen (1997a) delineates the usage of this term in post-Kantian social and political thought. In this sense, the project of sociology is “the pursuit of *maturity* through reflection on *modernity*, where this reflection is articulated via a historical reconstruction of our being in the present” (Owen, 1997a, p. 1). For Kant himself, the act of *Critique* in an *age of enlightenment* meant that humanity was going to emerge from its *self-incurred immaturity* without the guidance of another authority (Kant, 1991), under which conditions the use of reason will be legitimate “to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped” (Foucault, 1984, p. 38). Only after Kant does the act of *Critique* become “historical, and the question of maturity (what is the possibility of achieving autonomy given the conditions of the present?) is tied to the question of modernity (what is the character of our historical being in the present?)” (Owen, 1997a, p. 1). In a more sociological vernacular, given the collapse of traditional morality and the ethic of ultimate ends in the form of the church as the treasury of merit, the conditions of the possibility of a moral agent pursuing an ethic of responsibility to surpass the crisis of social relations under the authority of some form of a secular legitimate institutionalised power pursuing the public polity of modernisation become the object of sociology. In this respect, it appears to us that, on the one hand, with the discovery of the death of God, the formal conditions of the possibility of sociology are related to the conditions of the possibility of morality, transforming “morality into a profane object of science and hence the project of sociology becomes possible as a science of morals, that is the reduction of moral intention to quantifiable social relations” (Stauth & Turner, 1988, p. 102). On the other hand, given the fall of the traditional art of governance of the state, the formal conditions of the possibility of sociology are related to “the development of the modern theory of the state in

European political thought” (Owen, 1997b, p. 1), transforming the legitimised state intervention in the form of a deliberate process of making modern into the object of sociology, and thereby, the project of sociology becomes possible as a science of modernisation and development, that is, the practical product of modernity. In this sense, by understanding the project of sociology as the science of *morality* and *development*, it seems to us that specifying the relation of the *formal* conditions of the possibility of sociology to this dual theme will bear fruitful implications.

5.1. Sociology As the Knowledge of Development

In chapter 3, under the rubric of “Sociology, the social and the modern”, we have explicated the relation between sociology and the family of concepts that emerge from the concept of modernity. Therefore, we are not going to mention these relations once more. Here, we will just address the relation of the *formal* conditions of the possibility of sociology with the current advances in the sociology of modernisation and development.

As it has long been discussed, the classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim and Weber regarding the characteristics and history of the modern era, the convergence of industrial societies common in the 1950s and the classical theories of modernisation have proven to be troublesome. Their common denominator is that modernity, along with its basic institutional constellations that emerged in Europe, “would ultimately take over in all modernizing and modern societies; with the expansion of modernity, they would prevail throughout the world” (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 1). The reason that these approaches have been dismissed is that they reflect

an instance of macro-sociology’s tendency to overgeneralize, or even universalize, a model of historical development that has appeared in the context of the European colonization of those regions which were then referred to as the non-West. (Langenohl, 2010, p. 192)

Today, however, it has been a decade or two since the discourse of contemporary macro-sociology has shifted from the conception of modernisation to the notion of modernity as a cultural program. And the most outspoken approach in current macro-sociology representing this shift is the so-called *Multiple Modernities Paradigm* (Eisenstadt, 2000; Sachsenmaier, Eisenstadt, & Riedel, 2002). The underpinnings of the paradigm of Multiple Modernities can be explained in the following summary:

This paradigm – and also affiliated approaches which differ in detail – abandons the notion of modernization and instead speaks of modernity in the plural. Its basic argument is that historically and culturally specific ways, which are called “traditions,” “cultural programs,” or “culture,” of entering modernity, understood as a set of globally diffused structural and procedural moments which originated in the historical West, have been constitutive for the formation of specific modernities. Thereby processes of transmission and imposition from the European metropolises to other world regions are appropriated and transmogrified in culturally and historically particular ways. (Langenohl, 2010, pp. 192-193)

This paradigm has tried to strike out the Western monopoly on modernity by introducing relative positions and centres of modernity circulating between the West and East. But in our understanding, what the Multiple Modernities paradigm does is that it reduces the antinomies and tensions of the homogenous and hegemonic idea of modernity imagined in the 1950s to small fragments and scatters it all around the globe as the universalistic elements of modernity. In other words, in the classic understanding of Western modernity as the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, prevalent after World War II, the ambiguities of modernity happened to be conceived as either the physical problems (i.e., industrialisation, imperial expansion, modernisation of institutions, etc.) or the metaphysical problems (i.e., modes of rationalisation, the axiological debates regarding the value of modernity, the problem of the thick subjectivism, etc.). These problems had their roots either in an outstanding historical moment of the West or a unique spatiality in the West – even if the ambiguities of modernity had a wider influence than the West itself and affected other so-called nation-states. But now, with this shift of paradigms from homogenous and hegemonic modernity to Multiple Modernities, the antinomies and challenges of modernity are comprehended as internal historical tensions and contradictions of Western and non-Western societies in shaping contours of their specific modernity, developed in the historical spaces of these civilisations. In the classical sociological analyses of modernity and modernisation, the conception of modernity as the object of sociological contemplation was constructed through synthesizing the contradictory elements developed in the West. In the new paradigm, the multiplicity of traditions, cultural programs, or cultures of entering modernity, as in the conception of Multiple Modernities, appears to be an intellectual synthesis constructed of incompatible and various historical experiences of Western and non-Western elements. The formal conditions of the possibility of sociological thinking do not fade away by the act of atomization or aggregation, as many of us might think.

Unfortunately, the fact that both paradigms of modernity can be seen as constructions of the formal conditions of the possibility of sociology holds a piece of bad news for non-Western

civilizations. As mentioned before, sociology in most developing countries, such as Iran, under the discourse of *transitional society* was developed to understand the changes overtaking their traditional societies as a result of modernization, urbanization, westernization, and industrialization to regulate these changes and orientate them in the desired direction. But given the formal conditions of sociology, which are evident in both discourses of modernity, and the relationship that sociology establishes with the value-spheres (i.e., the extremes), the synthesized conception of modernity with its in-between or middle ground characteristic is unable to be convinced to stir towards a modern trajectory. This results in the reconstruction of a repetitive formal pattern to explain various socio-political alterations that an underdeveloped nation has endured in the modern era; two solid moments, one before (tradition) and one after (modernity), and a long moment between, which fills the gap (Towfigh, et al. 2019). Daryush Shayegan, however, describes this characteristic as a disposition for any society trying to come to terms with modernity in his most significant opus *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (1992), as a disposition of “neither from here nor from elsewhere; driven from here, not arrived there” (p. 129).

Believing in the formal *a priori* conditions of the possibility of modernity as an intellectual construct does not undermine its reality as a global phenomenon. We agree with Thomas Lamarre, who believes modernity is, at some level, a *totalization phenomenon*. In this perspective, “to confront the problem of modernity – its impacts, as it were – is to confront totalizing forces, processes, structures, formations or logics – a tireless systematization, homogenization, unification, standardization and globalization of resources, exchanges, institutions and peoples” (Lamarre, 2004, p. 3). But on the other hand, abiding by the formal condition of the possibility of sociology in general and the conception of modernity in particular, as the intellectually constructed way of perceiving reality brings us to affirm the paradoxical elements inherent in the discourses on modernity. That is to say, again, in line with Lamarre, if it is no longer as simple to affirm the temporal and historical ties associated with modernity, it is because claiming the new is intrinsically contradictory (Lamarre, 2004).

The new never seems to arrive definitively or all at once; it is not exactly now, not quite yet. In which case, something new may appear to be no more than ‘just something new,’ that is, more of the same. The result is an eternal present in which everything is ‘just new’ without any particular value. In which case, there is never really anything new. This is the neurosis of modernity diagnosed by Nietzsche: when the new or the modern becomes the dominant value for understanding history, the present no longer succeeds the past but breaks radically with it.

Oddly, modernity then becomes a culture of permanent renewal and comes to deny transience or change itself. Everything is constantly renewed; nothing changes. The moderns start to oscillate neurotically between maximizing and minimizing the relation between past and present. If they minimize their relation to the past, they become consumed by the present, by their inevitable and rapid obsolescence. They may then try to maximize their relation to the past, but this is a futile effort to evade obsolescence, one that effectively disavows change. There is, in other words, a temporal anomaly at the heart of the historical relations championed by the moderns. It is this temporal anomaly that ultimately comes to make historical change seem practically unthinkable. (Lamarre, 2004, p. 2)

What this holds for us is that change may be violent, especially the kind of modernity-related change that is marked by a temporal split or rupture; today's global crisis is what Nietzsche called historical neurosis. One may argue that the West (wherever it is) is taking desperate measures to avert its own obsolescence while the rest of the world is expected to make good on its break from the past. This is accomplished by making the strongest possible appeal to the grandeur and sanctity of the *tradition of God, Reason, Law, or Logos*. Therefore, it is conceivable to encourage the rest of the world to accept the unity of the West, which amounts to a more significant affirmation of the possibility of unity in the face of modernity (ironically or neurotically). In this perspective, it is necessary to continually normalize and deny temporal rupture, historical rupture, and global crises if modernity is to be perpetuated. The politics of everyday fear characterize this temporal contradiction's historical neurosis: everything breaks, nothing changes, and everything is in crisis (Lamarre, 2004).

This state of crisis in the face of modernity takes us to the next significant project of sociology as the science of morality. As said before, from the early years of its establishment, sociology had a close connection with the moral problems of modern society. As Luhmann points out in "The Sociology of the Moral and Ethics" (1996), "Durkheim's dissertation '*De la division du travail social*' of 1893 (1973) is presented as a positive science of the *faits de la vie* and of the moral problems of modern society" (Luhmann, 1996, pp. 27-28). Therefore, as the task of sociology "would not be to follow moral directives but to create norms" (Luhmann, 1996, p. 28), it would be noteworthy to remark on the relation between the formal conditions of the possibility of sociology and moral codes of society.

5.2. Sociology And the Morals

Sociology's internal structure can be adequately defined in terms of what it does not do and what it excludes. Aside from sociology's intentional disregard for economic factors, there is another apparent intellectual loss from the internal structure of academic sociological practice: the lack of a sociology of morals or values. Beginning with sociological positivism, academic sociology lauded the importance of shared moral values. Émile Durkheim called for and promised to create such a sociology of morals. A concern with moral values was central to Weber's sociology of religion as well as Talcott Parsons' *voluntaristic* theory. Despite all this, there is still no concentration of scholarship that could be called a sociology of moral values which, in terms of cumulative development, would correlate to specialist disciplines such as the study of social stratification, role analysis, and political sociology, let alone criminology or family studies (Gouldner, 1970). With the demise of *logical positivism*, the unsophisticated and obsolete ethical theories underlying mainstream sociological knowledge that follow the Weberian paradigm⁶⁸ (*Wertfreiheit/Wertbeziehung*) have suffered massive strikes⁶⁹. Still, these debates have not amounted to a critical and reflective understanding of the morality of sociology, and the relations between sociology as science and morality have remained "clearly unacceptable today" (Luhmann, 1996, p. 28). This exclusion is perplexing because academic sociology, as a systematic arrangement of scholarly efforts and attention, has long highlighted the relevance of moral principles for both societal solidarity and individual well-being. Structurally, academic sociology is distinguished both by the significance it places on values and by its failure to develop them—in its unique way of turning almost everything into a subdiscipline. This exclusion from sociology is mainly because "a full-scale analysis of moral values would tend to undermine their autonomy" (Gouldner, 1970, p. 141).

The statement quoted above by Alvin W. Gouldner from his *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970) may seem simple. But we, as sociologists, know how vital the autonomy of our discipline has been from the outset. We might even be able to rewrite the history of the

⁶⁸ For Gabriel Abend (2008), there are two underlying ethical theories in contemporary sociology, one that of the Weberian paradigm, which rejects the idea of moral truth and seeks value freedom in scientific investigation, and the next that of the Durkheimian paradigm, which accepts the conception of moral truth and advocates statements such as "social scientists are moral philosophers in disguise" (Abend, 2008, p. 89).

⁶⁹ For instance, in Gabriel Abend's understanding, these challenges incorporate the following: First, research on the idea of underdetermination has shown that empirical data alone is insufficient to choose between competing scientific theories. Second, the mere sensual sense of the empirical world (i.e., experience, observation, etc.) has proven to be theory- or value-laden in and of itself. Third, and probably most crucially, it is now widely acknowledged that there is no contradiction between facts and values; hence, statements cannot be easily labelled as belonging to either (Abend, 2008).

various sociological approaches and theories from the point of their attempt to maintain the autonomy of sociological knowledge. It appears that if we are to address the question of the relationship between the *formal* conditions of the possibility of sociology and moral values, we must consider Gouldner's proposition seriously and ask: "Why do moral principles undermine the autonomy of sociology?" This inquiry will allow us to dig deeper into the moral challenges that sociology has long faced —albeit we do not have to expect that the current manuscript deals with this issue in depth.

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to sketch the outlines of the term *morality*, which has/will be used frequently. As philosophers of ethics and morals believe, "[m]oral theories are large and complex things" (Gert & Gert, 2020). But, as stated, we are not to look into the details of moral theories to see how their premises and hypotheses are formulated or how they judge specific codes of conduct and norms to argue whether they are distinctively moral or not. In fact, the question of the definition of morality for us is to designate the (re)*source* of ethical theorising. It has been said that, in a broad sense, morality has been used in two distinct ways: in a *descriptive sense* and in a *normative sense*. The former refers to particular norms of conduct proposed by a community or an organisation (such as a religion) or adopted by an individual for their personal behaviour. And the latter refers to a behavioural standard that, under certain conditions, would be proposed by all rational persons (Gert & Gert, 2020).

Although it is commonly overlooked, which of these two definitions of *morality* a philosopher of ethics employs is critical to their ethical theory. For instance, if one uses morality in its descriptive meaning, referring to standards of behaviour proposed by various groups or communities, one will likely deny the existence of *universal* morality that applies to all human beings. When anthropologists discuss the morality of the societies they are studying, they do so in the descriptive sense of the word. In this respect, some evolutionary and comparative psychologists (Haidt, 2006; Hauser, 2006) recently assumed that certain non-human animal species show morality or behaviour that closely resembles it. Accepting that morality has two meanings or uses does not imply that the distance between descriptions and norms, i.e., between what *is* and what *ought to be*, is insurmountable. To grasp this distinction analytically is to take note of the clear, descriptive sense of morality, which means that it is evident that one may explain diverse groups' moralities without making any normative statements. It should also be apparent that one may argue that all rational people, under certain situations, would propose a specific code of behaviour without having any particular beliefs on the nature of the is/ought to gap or the feasibility of crossing it (Gert & Gert, 2020).

Now that the dual usage of the term morality has been illustrated further, we can return to our discussion. “Why do moral principles undermine the autonomy of sociology?” This dual usage of the term morality seems to be within the frame of other dualisms, such as category/appearance, reason/inclination, intentions/consequences, or sensible/intelligible. This makes it easier for us to delineate our discussion’s poles, extremes and margins. The descriptive morality could be easily assigned to the empirical or sensible side of dualism. But we can also locate normative morality on the other side of the duality in the realm of transcendence or understanding. Then it becomes possible to bring into question the moral stance of sociology (i.e., “What is sociology’s locus in this spectrum?”). Moving into this line of inquiry, we have to recall that, given the *formal* condition of the possibility of sociology complying with features of Kant’s conception of transcendental philosophy in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, sociology also refuses *absolute idealism* and *radical empiricism*. An epistemological and ontological standpoint that earlier we had metaphorically described as *neutral*. Still, rejecting the alternative discourses of absolute idealism and radical empiricism is not merely confined to their approach to sociality and how they perceive society (i.e., empirical or idealistic). But instead, this refusal embraces a more general idea of *Menschheit* by “defining the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, *what must be done*, and *what may be hoped*” [Emphasis added] (Foucault, 1984, p. 38). Therefore, by rejecting absolute idealism and radical empiricism, sociology, by abiding by the rule of Kant’s *formalism*, refuses not only these alternative approaches and their respective ethical theories (e.g., *social conformism* and *moral traditionalism* and its opponent, *moral pragmatism*) but also establishes its own moral stance. To put it in another way, sociology, by rejecting social conformism and moral traditionalism and its opponent, moral pragmatism, which sees values emerge from individual experience (i.e., a sense of individualism and critical moral thinking), stays loyal to its intermediary, in-betweenness or neutral disposition. But having a disposition is to have a perspective. And having any perception of the empirical world (experience, observation, etc.) is bound by *the theory-ladenness of observation*⁷⁰ (Ladyman, 2002; Abend, 2008). This means any disposition is only as certain as the theories they take for granted. In sociology, the underlying ethical theory following the Weberian paradigm is, to a great extent, *moral*

⁷⁰ James Ladyman argues, “If this is correct, then when there is wholesale change in scientific theories there will be a change in what counts as an observable phenomenon and it will be impossible, in general, to compare the empirical content of theories from a point of view that is neutral with respect to them” (Ladyman, 2002, p. 86).

*relativism*⁷¹ generally explicated in his *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1949) and particularly in two essays, “The Meaning of ‘Ethical Neutrality’ in Sociology and Economics” and “‘Objectivity’ in Social Sciences and Social Policy” which could be encapsulated in the following moral principle:

Moral judgments are not capable of objective truth or falsehood. Take a sentence like “In 1572 the King of France was Charles IX.” By most accounts this sentence can be true or false, and its being true or false (as opposed to its being believed to be true or false) is not determined by who is uttering it, who is listening, or its social and linguistic context. By contrast, a sentence like “Eating people is wrong” can be believed to be true or false, but cannot be true or false. For moral ideas, beliefs, views, or judgments are just the upshot of social practices and accords, or, as some would prefer to put it, they are “socially constructed.” Thus, they are not the kind of thing to which the concepts of truth and falsehood apply. (Abend, 2008, p. 88)

Yet, despite “what some sociologists and anthropologists seem to suppose, the concept of moral truth is compatible with relativism, and it is even a constitutive component of one of its variants” (Abend, 2008, p. 92). Thus, in following this moral principle, “some sociologists have felt entitled to think that, therefore, the concept of moral truth must be rejected” (Abend, 2008, p. 95) as morals were/are determined in whole or in part by social forces. But, in our understanding, this way of relating to morality is merely a particular way of relating to moral truth. To explain our claim by way of an example, consider if the involvement of the institution of religion in politics and public life five hundred years ago was not morally objectionable. Today, most people, including sociologists, believe that objecting to the institution of religion is ethically justifiable. In this sense, the advocate sociologist of this idea would probably argue that there is nothing wrong or right intrinsic in the involvement of the institution of religion in politics and public life. Therefore, they would simply remark,

⁷¹ Moral relativism is a loose term that misrepresents three separate and independent ideas: descriptive, normative, and metaethical relativism. The unproblematic concept of *descriptive relativism* is that various people and social groupings have conflicting moral opinions. The second thesis is *normative relativism*, which holds that something is not correct or blameworthy if some individual or group, however broadly defined, believes it is not correct or condemnable. According to normative relativists, eating humans is bad for Americans, but it is not immoral for the Iranians. Or, whereas “smoking cannabis is morally bad” applies to X, “smoking cannabis is not morally wrong” applies to Y. The argument is not that Americans feel that eating people is terrible, but the Iranians do not. Instead, the idea is that eating people would be terrible if you were an American but not if you were an Iranian. Alternatively, whether the statement “smoking marijuana is wrong” is true or incorrect depends on who says it. Third, *metaethical relativism* rejects the concept that there is always one accurate moral judgment. While metaethical relativism holds that there are no moral truths, what matters in this context is whether values are *relative* or *universal* rather than whether they can ever be true because their claimed truth may serve to account for belief (Abend, 2008).

People believe that their moral judgments are true, objective, or universally valid because they have been somehow deluded into that illusion (and they ignore how much variation one can find across time and space). The truth is that moral judgments cannot be true. However, this is an obvious non-sequitur. (Abend, 2008, p. 95)

In line with Abend, the underlying reason for this proposition seems to be that if 500 years ago people believed p , today they believe q , thus: “(a) neither p nor q is true, and (b) neither p nor q can be true” (Abend, 2008, p. 95). Therefore, by adopting a *neither/nor* relativistic moral structure, sociologists attempt to demonstrate that none of these statements is better than another. And in the final analysis, it appears to us that sociologists situate the *neither/nor* relativistic moral structure, which incorporates the same in-betweenness or neutralising feature of the overall formal conditions of the possibility of sociology, within the lacuna between *moral traditionalism* on the one hand and its opponent, *moral pragmatism* on the other. We might say that this politics of not taking sides is the technical procedure that sociologists have adopted to maintain the autonomy of their discipline. For by accepting the moral stance of relativism compatible with the in-between and neutral formal conditions of the possibility of sociology, they then are to both strive for values and fail to develop them. As could be expected, breaking this loop and tending towards the extremes of moral principles means sociology has to transgress its boundaries to either ethical theories seeking justification of *pure* transcendentalism or *pure* empiricism. Indeed such an act would imply that it “would possess no subject matter peculiarly its own” (Durkheim, 2013, p. 20). And in this respect, its domain would be either absorbed within the monarchy of metaphysics, within the subject matter of disciplines such as religion, logic and jurisprudence and so on or immersed within the kingdom of empiricism, the domain of fields such as biology and psychology.

5.3. Redeeming Sociology

As I was formulating the research question for the current study, even in the farthest of my thoughts, I would never have imagined that a critical disposition of Iranian society and the way that it is explained via the idea/discourse of *transitional society* would eventually lead into an inquiry in the realm of the Western dilemma of continental philosophy, namely into the realm of controversies revolving around the relationship between causes and reasons, between biological drives and idealism, between the metaphysical morals and contextual values. And as Weber says, although within the field of science, *progressing* and *superseding* the previous scientific endeavour is in the very *meaning* of scientific work (Weber, 2004). But neither did I intend to articulate a problem to resolve the Western classical philosophy dilemma in form or

substance, nor was I seeking a deviation or divorce from the mainstream sociological knowledge. However, through phenomenological proto-sociology, we intended to describe the dual problematic disposition of Iranian society and Iranian sociology in an integral and unified empirical account. Luckily, Weber tells us that in the process of scientific work, we do not have to neglect the matter of luck (Weber, 2004). The new school of sociology of knowledge (Cf. Schnettler, Knoblauch, & Raab, 2017) following Berger and Luckmann's social constructivism (Cf. Knoblauch & Wilke, 2016), directed us towards an understanding of the structure of knowledge in the everyday life-world which is claimed to be "the all-encompassing ground from which other forms of knowledge are but specific derivations" (Schnettler, Knoblauch, & Raab, 2017, p. 238).

However, Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (SCR, 1991[1967]) has various and heterogeneous theoretical and philosophical bases. For instance, they point to Durkheim's argument that the moral order is experienced as a realm of social facts, characterised by their objectivity and externality from humankind. They also refer to Weber's concept of the subjectively intended meaning (*subjektiv gemeinter Sinn*) from the social actor's point of view. They also see Marx's *Praxis* as attractive with the definition of the full range of a repetitive construction of "human conscious activities in the intersubjective and historical world of everyday life" (Luckmann, 1973, p. 147). They also welcome Nietzsche's conception of *resentment* and then elaborate on it in connection with theories of legitimation, i.e., social theodicy. These sociological interpretations of the dialectical relationship between social action and moral facts finally find their underlying foundation in Berger and Luckmann's understanding of man's biological and natural environment as derived from Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner's theoretical biology and philosophical anthropology, along with Alfred Schutz's phenomenologically founded sociology. Using a formulation that is, to a greater extent, similar to the Schutzian *Structures of the Life-World* (1973), their concern becomes establishing an all-encompassing and universal foundation for the social sciences, which is more "orientated to the successive problems of historical social structure and the production of reality" (Schnettler, Knoblauch, & Raab, 2017, p. 238). Thus, a crucial analytical moment in this line of thought is identifying the difference between human nature and non-human animals. More precisely, based on the advances in the biological sciences, they argue that the *unspecialized instinctive structure* gave the human organism an incomplete quality at birth.

The fact that the everyday life-world is not a private, but rather an intersubjective and thereby a social reality, has a series of extremely important consequences for the constitution and structure

of the subjective stock of knowledge. Because an individual is born into a historical social world, his biographical situation is, from the beginning, socially delimited and determined by social givens that find specific expressions. From the beginning, the subjective structures of relevance are developed in situations which are intersubjective, or at the least they are mediately put into socially determinate meaning-contexts. (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 243)

Otherwise stated, because human beings are thrown into a universe far from perfect, they have to construct an ideal environment via a determined social mechanism. This social construction of reality, in turn, will obviously provide man with the kind of stability and coherence that they come short of biologically/ontologically. Thus, through an ongoing social and symbolic reproduction, the formation of social institutions lies at the heart of this development of cultural coherence. The primary element of this institutionalisation of the human world is language itself, which offers a mechanism for the accumulation of knowledge through generations as well as the ability to shape the world in an infinitely flexible fashion. Language is always social because it implies and necessitates communication and shared assumptions (Stauth & Turner, 1988). However, despite the fact that Berger and Luckmann's project has been disputed on numerous occasions, namely having an essentialist and ahistorical view of the human constitution, what made us turn away from this approach for our inquiry was the underpinning *idealistic*⁷² conception in the phenomenology of everyday life (Peritore, 1975; Hall, 1977). This momentous self-enlightenment leads us to understand the bigger picture of sociological knowledge.

In contemporary sociology, the way in which the human agent is presented and described often suggests *a form of dis-embodiment*, since we as sociologists, characteristically talk about the actor in terms of pure choices with reference to norms and values which are evaluated from a solely cognitive and rational dimension. This is the sociological version of economic man as *rational* actor. [Emphasis added] (Stauth & Turner, 1988)

The *formal a priori* conditions of the possibility of sociological knowledge, which then, in our view, are not merely confined to the conception of the human agent, far from being a novel

⁷² To give a complete image of social constructivism, we must denote that a tradition, at times referred to as the "new" circle of sociology of knowledge, encompassing several generations of scholars, mainly of Thomas Luckmann's pupils, believe the explanatory power of the doctrine of the social construction of reality is more than its limitation. Therefore, they based on Berger and Luckmann's understanding and reformulation of the Schutzian phenomenological foundation for social theory have contributed to a sociological tradition constitution which *Video Analysis: Methodology and Methods* (2012), *The Discursive Construction of Realities* (2018) and *The Communicative Construction of Reality* (2021) could be seen as examples of this line of inquiry.

discovery⁷³, became the critical contention of our project. In this sense, we intended to “disturb the dust in forgotten lumber-rooms” (Tawney, 2008, p. 11) and investigate what, in our understanding, has a direct relationship with the historical explanation of the disposition of Iranian society, i.e., the discourse of transitional society.

However, in our viewpoint, this *formal a priori* condition of the possibility of sociological knowledge, as explained in the third chapter, could also be illustrated by a *Formal structure* (see figure 9.).

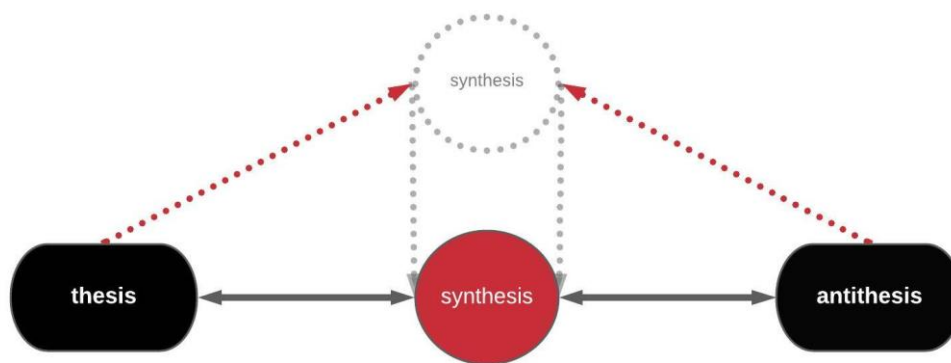


Figure 9. The Sociological Formal A Priori Conditions of Possibility

When reaching this level of abstraction, it would be evident that we are involved in another level of discussion. It may be possible to state the implications of such *formal* conditions for our discipline, as we have tried to clarify under the rubrics of “5.1. Sociology as the knowledge of development” and “5.2. Sociology and Morals”. But there are other possibilities to pursue this perspective further. For instance, one could investigate the compatibility of such *formal* conditions with reality (i.e., the truth). Or, at best, new horizons could be opened for sociological knowledge. What are the conditions under which sociological knowledge would be emancipated from this unbreakable loop? Intellectual honesty compels us to remark that even reaching such a level of abstract argument has, at moments, stretched us to our limits, let alone the preparedness of having to make a judgment of *formal* conditions of human knowledge or even having to establish a new *ism* for the emancipation of sociology. However, to bring our analysis to a conclusion, we will have some clarifications on the two former issues, i.e., the truth and emancipation as we perceive.

⁷³ For instance, see Simmel’s discussion in the “Excursus on the Problem: How is Society Possible?” for the *a priori* conditions sociology:
Simmel, G. (2009). *Sociology: Inquiries into the construction of social forms Volume 1*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. Pp.40-52.

As for judgment regarding *the truth* of such a constitution, which is purely a philosophical matter, following Weber, we presume it does not lay within the boundaries of any empirical social science.

Conditioned competition of numerous possible evaluations in their *practical* consequences, are all that an empirical discipline can demonstrate with the means at its disposal. Philosophical disciplines can go further and lay bare the “meaning” of evaluations, i.e., their ultimate meaningful structure and their meaningful consequences, in other words, they can indicate their “place” within the totality of all the possible “ultimate” evaluations and delimit their spheres of meaningful validity. Even such simple questions as the extent to which an end should sanction unavoidable means, or the extent to which undesired repercussions should be taken into consideration, or how conflicts between several concretely conflicting ends are to be arbitrated, are entirely matters of choices or compromise. There is no (rational or empirical) scientific procedure of any kind whatsoever which can provide us with a decision here. The social sciences, which are strictly empirical sciences, are least fitted to presume to save the individual the difficulty of making a choice, and they should therefore not create the impression that they can do so. (Weber, 1949, pp. 18-19)

Since Kant posed the synthetic *a priori* judgments, philosophical controversies revolving around this issue have never ceased. In analogy to Foucault’s statement regarding the significance of *Aufklärung* in his essay criticising “What Is Enlightenment?” (1984), we suppose the Kantian synthetic *a priori* judgment marks the discreet entrance into the history of a philosophical question concentrate on both modern science and human autonomy that modern philosophy has not been capable of answering, but that it has never managed to get rid of, either. For us, and especially here, it would suffice to remark that we, as sociologists, have to bear in mind that many leading continental philosophers, from Hegel through Nietzsche or Husserl to Heidegger or Horkheimer to Foucault, have confronted the truth of synthetic *a priori* judgment with serious challenges while attempting to surpass the Kantian theory of knowledge. Nietzsche, known for opening up a space to transform the Kantian question of *Critique* from one of *legislation* into one of *evaluation* (Owen, 1997a), comments:

We do not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment; this is perhaps where our new language will sound most foreign. The question is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life, how well it preserves, and perhaps even cultivates, the type. And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments (which include synthetic judgments *a priori*) are the most indispensable to us, and that without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the wholly invented world of the unconditioned and

self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world through numbers, people could not live – that a renunciation of false judgments would be a renunciation of life, a negation of life. To acknowledge untruth as a condition of life: this clearly means resisting the usual value feelings in a dangerous manner; and a philosophy that risks such a thing would by that gesture alone place itself beyond good and evil. (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 5)

Being scientifically agnostic about the truth of synthetic *a priori* judgment and leaving the specialists to render the final verdict is something, and articulating our own opinion regarding the possibility of breaking the sociological loop of the formal conditions is something else. At the current stage, we merely have a thin idea of how the liberation of sociology might look and not a well-articulated thought. It is evident that elaborating on strategies of emancipation of sociology requires investing in a lifetime career or writing three or four similar treaties on the subject.

So the following can only be considered as initial sketches. Before proceeding, we reiterate that we have previously claimed that the formal conditions of the possibility of sociology are intellectually driven by following Kant's theory of knowledge. But this does not imply that we can instantly constitute another efficient constitution compatible with our society. Since, in our understanding, however much it is true that the formal conditions are intellectual constitution, it is equally true that academic social sciences, by way of various quantitative and qualitative methods, from the last hundred years or so, have *constructed* new empirical facts about the human life-world which are compatible with this type of understanding of society. In this sense, although "the leading characteristic of contemporary society is its 'subjectivism' at the individual level, whereby human beings are encouraged to find normative principles within their interior personal lives" (Stauth & Turner, 1988, p. 74), this leading ontological character has to be recognised as a cumulative historical construct. Still, the surprising fact, at least literature-wise, is that finding the signs and traces that draw the line from social constructivism to intellectual constitutivism is becoming harder and harder, as if *subjective reasoning* has existed from eternity without beginning and will continue to infinitude without an ending. If it wasn't for the diagnosis of scholars such as Horkheimer, who shed light on the intellectual shifts in the course of history from an objective theory of reason to a more individualistic sense of reason, the politics of this issue would have dissolved. Horkheimer remarks concerning subjective reason that

[h]owever naive or superficial this definition of reason may seem, it is an important symptom of a profound change of outlook that has taken place in Western thinking in the course of the

last centuries. For a long time, a diametrically opposite view of reason was prevalent. This view asserted the existence of reason as a force not only in the individual mind but also in the objective world-in relations among human beings and between social classes, in social institutions, and in nature and its manifestations. (Horkheimer, 2004, p. 4)

The reason for claiming as such is that if we put aside the restless minds in the realm of contemporary social theory, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Michel Foucault, Niklas Luhmann and Bruno Latour, the mainstream and conventional sociology of knowledge following Schutz's descriptive analysis of the construction of the world of everyday life merely sanctions the social constructivism of knowledge at both levels of common-sense and scientific interpretation. By way of an example, in his essay "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action" (1953), Schutz argues that the knowledge of social scientists and a wide-awake, average adult has the exact nature with merely deferring in the level of abstraction.

The thought objects constructed by the social scientists refer to and are founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thought of man living his everyday life among his fellowmen. Thus, the constructs used by the social scientist are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, namely constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene whose behavior the scientist observes and tries to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of his science. (Schutz, 1953, p. 3)

The subjective reasoning thought of as a social construction intellectually constituted or as a social construct in the existing state of affairs does not change the dynamics between them. And therefore, we have to accept what phenomenology-founded sociology tells us since, here and now, the dialectic logic between the intellectual constitution and social construction confirms each other. And to be sure, although, in the case of subjectivism, in current circumstances, we do not see any difference between the West and the East. I believe that if the autonomy of man as it developed in Western and Central European societies was/has been a cultural and political program from the outset, subjectivism at the individual level in Eastern countries has been the byproduct of the process of modernisation, globalization and mass media/communication. In the Western context, the Foucauldian *discursive formation*, as he uses the term in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (1972), might prove fruitful in revealing the internal antinomies and contradictions of modern culture, such as "the inherently modern tension between an emphasis on human autonomy and the restrictive controls inherent in the institutional realization of life" (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 8). In Eastern countries, such as Iran, where the division of discourses is apparent, and governance of a unified discourse (in all its

dimensions, formation of objects, formation of the subjective positions, formation of concepts, formation of strategic choices) is in a state of yet-to-be-realised, discourse analysis/poststructuralism would merely reflect the scholar's impression of a utopian society. And therefore, in our opinion, in line with Weber, this approach to scientific endeavour will lead to *statesman-like* works that do “not belong in the university —but rather in political programs and in parliament” (Weber, 1949, p. 10).

Now, we can move on by explaining that subjectivism, or in our own vernacular Kantian formal conditions, is not only intellectually constituted but also a social construct. And to emphasise once more, these two levels vindicate each other. But then, one must not think naïve; when it is said that the prominent feature of modern society is its ‘subjectivism’, which the academia of social sciences – and most probably other social institutions – reinforce, it does not simply imply that we are referring to a Goffmanian *total institution* where “a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman, 1961, p. xiii). Even Erving Goffman identifies social non-conformity (or deviation) from an imposed ideal (Goffman, 1961). Therefore, what we understand from the prevalence of subjectivism, as it was also observable in the 3rd case presented in the second chapter (i.e., Case No. 3. about Hijab), is a disposition where a particular person in a specific historical instant explicates themselves while adopting a dialectical logic. In other words, one evaluates one's own prior lifetime successes and failures by way of locating oneself in a *neither this nor that* or *both this and that* psychological situation. However, these psychological dispositions of *neither this nor that* and *both this and that* put contradictory terms to work within a homogeneous self-understanding. Yet, this practical understanding, unlike using the cliché universal conceptions, sees into the differences in which each person constitutes their homogeneous understanding of themselves. This means that my personal psychological evaluation is considerably different from your personal psychological evaluation. And moreover, this is in congruence with the Schutizan fundamental axiom positing “The immediate experience of the Other” in everyday life.

All experience of social reality is founded on the fundamental axiom positing the existence of other beings “like me.” The forms into which my experience of social reality is placed are in contrast very diverse. I experience other men in various perspectives, and my relation to them is arranged according to various levels of proximity, depth, and anonymity in lived experience. The breadth of variations in my experience of the social world extends from the encounter with

another man to vague attitudes, institutions, cultural structures, and “humanity in general”.
(Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 61)

However, we must bear in mind that Schutz seeks to explain how a *universal* form in which another individual is experienced in person is constituted, which is not our concern altogether. Still, this way of defining subjectivism instantly necessitates a discussion of methodology. In this regard, deciding to talk about or start with a *personal psychological evaluation* is a way that, in our understanding, will avoid the Kantian *formal a priori* conditions embodied in already given objects, notions such as society, individuals, and subjects—all those *universal* terms which are employed by conventional sociological knowledge. Therefore, from scratch, by exactly doing the opposite and beginning with the practice of a personal psychological evaluation and describing one’s reflection on oneself as one tries to rationalise oneself, is the path that we seek sociologies redemption. In this sense, we might have to reconsider Gabriel Tarde’s sociology after all, where he argues against Durkheim: “The elementary social fact is the communication or the *modification of a state of consciousness* by the action of one human being upon another” [Emphasis added] (Candea, 2010, p. 29). Let me put it this way, in a similar manner to Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008); sociology has to, instead of deducing concrete phenomena from universals or instead of starting with universals as an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practices, begin with concrete methods of a personal psychological evaluation and, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of personal practices. Although in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), Foucault argues against historicism, explaining why he starts by re-evaluating the history of actual governmental practice at the structural/institutional level, we find his statement useful for our approach, albeit if understood at the individual level. He contends

I start from the theoretical and methodological decision that consists in saying: Let’s suppose that universals do not exist. And then I put the question to history and historians: How can you write history if you do not accept a priori the existence of things like the state, society, the sovereign, and subjects? It was the same question in the case of madness. My question was not: Does madness exist? My reasoning, my method, was not to examine whether history gives me or refers me to something like madness, and then to conclude, no, it does not, therefore madness does not exist. This was not the argument, the method in fact. The method consisted in saying: Let’s suppose that madness does not exist. If we suppose that it does not exist, then what can history make of these different events and practices which are apparently organized around something that is supposed to be madness? So what I would like to deploy here is exactly the opposite of historicism: not, then, questioning universals by using history as a critical method,

but starting from the decision that universals do not exist, asking what kind of history we can do. (Foucault, 2008, p. 3)

It is evident that once the subject matter of sociology becomes personal psychological evaluations, a generous amount of questions immediately confront us. For instance, is this sociology, in the final analysis, supposed to construct some sort of existing societal ideal types? Where lays the sociological interest in evaluating personal psychological status? Isn't this act stepping into the realm of psychoanalysis? Methodologically, how many personal psychological evaluations are considered to be representative of a societal type or group of people? Is there any relation between the personal case and the institutional case? And so on. As said, there has been no prior consideration regarding these issues. The current speculation is in a state of *becoming*. Here, I would like to point out that every personal psychological evaluation is entitled to their personal preferences and tastes, which shape the discrepancies we experience in everyday life. However, this evaluative logic of stressing *unique* differences and distinctions is nothing new, and in fact, Foucauldian poststructuralism tries to move beyond universalism and homogeneity to reveal the *disparate*. He terms this logic the *strategic logic*, though his focus is structural, which marks our deviation from him. For Foucault, a logic of strategy

does not stress contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity. The function of strategic logic is to establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate. The logic of strategy is the logic of connections between the heterogeneous and not the logic of the homogenization of the contradictory. (Foucault, 2008, p. 42)

On the one hand, this strategic logic on a personal level (i.e., observing the differences in self-psychological evaluations) outlines our evaluative logic of everyday life. But on the other hand, we also believe it delineates the task and project of our perception of *future* sociology. By accepting personal psychological discrepancies and disparate in constituting a self-understanding of oneself, the sociologist's task turns into recognising, reporting and profiling personal differences. Through reporting, describing and profiling personal psychological discrepancies and disparate, we can connect between the various and heterogeneous cases which form a societal type or group of people. In this way, the Kantian schema (see figure 5.), as a universal notion of subjectivism, becomes, at best, one contingent way of relating to reality next to other contingent possibilities forming our surrounding everyday life (see figure 10.).

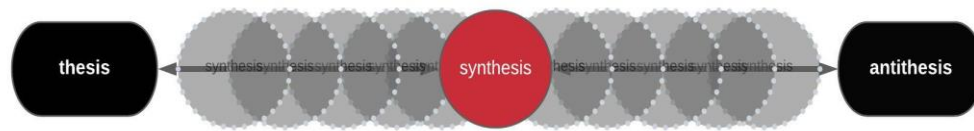


Figure 10. The Conditions of Various Contingent Possibilities

Otherwise stated, in this approach, the task of a sociologist, unlike Durkheim's project to "substitute a moral social order for the traditional God of the Abrahamic faith" (Stauth & Turner, 1988, p. 53) or Weber's project "to root institutions in some form of legitimizing power without the social support of a common morality or a natural law" (Stauth & Turner, 1988, p. 104), turns into that of *perspectivism* as a theory of knowledge and as a methodology.

From the early years of sociology's development, numerous attempts have been made to engage more of Nietzsche's epistemological approach to modern culture. From Tönnies, Weber, and Simmel (cf. Solms-Laubach, 2007) to Freud, Adorno and Foucault, and more recently, Stauth and Turner's *Nietzsche's Dance* (1988). For instance, Stauth and Turner outline their project in *Nietzsche's Dance* (1988) to be

the basis for a Nietzschean criticism of institutional power over the everyday life, rational knowledge over the body and the artificial world of the state over the reality of everyday interaction and reciprocity. This study is, in short, an attempt to bring sociology back to its origins, namely an exploration of fellowship (*socius*) through the analysis of reciprocity against the revenge of institutions and rationalism. (Stauth & Turner, 1988, p. 3)

As David Owen says, this is merely their ambition. Unfortunately, Stauth and Turner offer us a narrative that lacks structural and conceptual consistency in their attempt to integrate Nietzsche's philosophical legacy into sociological thinking (Owen, 1991). Regardless of these unfinished attempts, which seem to be social sciences fashion at the turn of the century seeking fundamental change, following works of Alvin Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970), Immanuel Wallerstein's *Unthinking Social Science* (1991), Ahmed Gurnah and Alan Scott's *The Uncertain Science* (1992), and *Open the Social sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* (1996), the incorporation of a systematic understanding of Nietzsche in social sciences, in general, and in sociology, in particular, is a central need. However, until that day comes, we might have to merely adopt the pragmatic strategy of choosing a few pieces from the Nietzschean philosophy that we can use,

even though Nietzsche himself might disapprove of this strategy and call us *plundering troops*⁷⁴. One of these few things that I find interesting in Nietzsche's philosophy is perspectivism. Much of his reaction to his predecessors is mediated through Nietzsche's concern regarding this term. He believed that previous philosophers had mainly overlooked the importance of their personal viewpoints on their work, failing to manage those perspectival consequences. Commentators have been captivated and confused by Nietzsche's perspectivism, which has been a significant problem in many large-scale Nietzschean assessments (Anderson, 2022). There has been as much debate about which doctrines or groups of ideas go under the heading of perspectivism, but since there are few uncontroversial points, we will also rely on our interpretation.

Nietzsche appeals to the notion of perspective in various ways, but the one that we regard as the theory of knowledge is his remark in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (2007) which is worth quoting at length:

Finally, as knowers, let us not be ungrateful towards such resolute reversals of familiar perspectives and valuations with which the mind has raged against itself for far too long, apparently to wicked and useless effect: to see differently, and to *want* to see differently to that degree, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future 'objectivity' – the latter understood not as 'contemplation [*Anschauung*] without interest' (which is, as such, a non-concept and an absurdity), but as *having in our power* the ability to engage and disengage our 'pros' and 'cons': we can use the *difference* in perspectives and affective interpretations for knowledge. (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 87)

This famous paragraph strongly refutes the assumption prevalent in the philosophy of Plato that knowledge ultimately entails a type of objectivity that penetrates all subjective forms to reveal the way things truly are, regardless of any point of view. Instead, the suggestion is to approach *objectivity* asymptotically by utilizing the difference between one perspective and another, using one to overcome the restrictions of others, rather than presuming that anything resembling a *view from nowhere* is even feasible. Of course, there is an underlying critique of the standard concept of a-perspectival objectivity here, but there is also a set of constructive recommendations about pursuing knowledge as a finite, constrained cognitive actor (Anderson, 2022). Nietzsche proposes a view of incomplete, fragmented, perspectival knowledge rather than absolute truths and objectively neutral knowledge of a supra-empirical universe. Regularly praising Heraclitus' acceptance of *flux* and *becoming* above the Platonic yearning for an

⁷⁴ Nietzsche says: "The worst readers are those who behave like plundering troops: they take away a few things they can use, dirty and confound the remainder, and revile the whole" (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 137).

immutable unseen reality is the theory of knowledge Nietzsche supports. Although, for him, our this-worldly empirical constraints do not preclude us from attaining perfect cognition. But instead, Nietzsche seeks to completely do away with the dualistic distinction between the *apparent* and *actual* worlds. In its place, perspective is somehow related to the nature of truth and, consequently, our understanding of those truths. Nothing can be true outside of or apart from perspectives, and Nietzsche has previously rejected extra-perspectival knowledge as too reminiscent of Kantian or Platonic epistemologies (Hales, 2020). However, defining perspectivism as such is somehow compatible with the desired sociological project that we strive for, disparate personal psychological evaluations in everyday life which remain disparate.

Still, there is another level of significance to this conception as well, one that Hales (2020) terms second-order perspectivism; methodological perspectivism. Because it is something to act in accordance with perspectivism as a *moral agent*, and it is something else to engage perspectivism in the field of human science. For this latter purpose, we are mainly referring to the conception of *the infinite perspectival interpretations* mentioned in *The Gay Science* (2001[1882]). In book five, aphorism 374, Nietzsche speaks of “*Our new ‘infinite’*” which we find worth quoting here:

Our new ‘infinite’. - How far the perspectival character of existence extends, or indeed whether it has any other character; whether an existence without interpretation, without ‘sense’, doesn’t become ‘nonsense’; whether, on the other hand, all existence isn’t essentially an *interpreting* existence – that cannot, as would be fair, be decided even by the most industrious and extremely conscientious analysis and self-examination of the intellect; for in the course of this analysis, the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself under its perspectival forms, and *solely* in these. We cannot look around our corner: it is a hopeless curiosity to want to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there *might* be; e.g. whether other beings might be able to experience time backwards, or alternately forwards and backwards (which would involve another direction of life and a different conception of cause and effect). But I think that today we are at least far away from the ridiculous immodesty of decreeing from our angle that perspectives are *permitted* only from this angle. Rather, the world has once again become infinite to us: insofar as we cannot reject the possibility *that it includes infinite interpretations*. Once again the great shudder seizes us - but who again would want immediately to deify in the old manner *this* monster of an unknown world? And to worship from this time on the unknown (*das Unbekannte*) as ‘the Unknown One’ (*den Unbekannten*)? Alas, too many *ungodly* possibilities of interpretation are included in this unknown; too much devilry, stupidity,

foolishness of interpretation - our own human, all too human one, even, which we know [...].
(Nietzsche, 2001, pp. 239-240)

In this remark, we find three points appealing: *first*, Nietzsche rejects the traditional classification of “all representations (*phantasiae, vira*) into those which are and those which are not plausible, subdividing each of these categories into those which are true, false, or neither true nor false” (Schutz, 2011, p. 102). And instead, similar to the sceptical Greek philosopher Carneades accepts “problematic truths, true for us, in us, and by us” (Schutz, 2011, p. 102). *Second*, he sees the anthropological *hopeless curiosity* of humankind as the basis for our *will to knowledge*. And *third*, he considers the possibility of judgment between the infinite interpretations, i.e., weighing the pro and cons of a perspective. If the first two refer to Nietzsche’s theory of knowledge, the third, we suppose, refers to his methodological perspectivism in the realm of human science. In our understanding, Nietzsche, of all, must have known that despite the differences between human beings in perspective in the realm of everyday life, interpretation is mainly a scholarly endeavour. And it has been said that most of the mundane everyday life is experienced extensively through habitual knowledge, and much of laypeople’s conduct is rooted in a routinised manner. Not that we rule out the *practical* judgments that ordinary people make on a daily basis. However, making practical judgments of everyday life does not cause anyone to tremble, shudder or fear confronting the unknown world. Therefore, we take for granted that apart from distinct perspectival truths here, Nietzsche is outlining the task of interpreting the unknown as a methodological project. In this sense, the task of knowledge, namely in the realm of understanding human life, would not be establishing a moral social order or legitimate power but to elaborate on what is uncertain and problematic. And to this end, it is precisely by acknowledging “*the possibility that it includes infinite interpretations*” that our human-life knowledge will expand.

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