# REVIEW ESSAYS

The Commercialization and Digitization of Social Movement Society

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In Western democracies, popular political radicalism declined in the wake of the protest cycle of the 1960s and 1970s. What appeared instead is a ''social movement society,'' where protest becomes increasingly institutionalized and ''civic'' rather than disruptive. As the editors of the volume *The Social Movement Society* put it, ''although disruption appears to be the most effective political tool of the disadvantaged, the majority of episodes of movement activity we see today disrupt few routines'' (Meyer and Tarrow 1998:20). A study of over 4,000 events in the greater Chicago area from 1970 to 2000 finds that ''sixties-style'' protest decreased while hybrid events combining public claims-making with civic forms of behavior increased (Samson et al. 2005). Although researchers have since expanded on and revised the ''social movement society'' thesis, Ramos and Rodgers (2015) find it to be still applicable to contemporary society in a new edited volume that aims to reassess the thesis.

## The Commercialization of Activism

What the social movement society thesis does not consider, however, is the extent to which social movements have been commercialized. Several important books have already shown that the commercialization of activism is a notable trend since the 1990s (Fisher 2006; Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014; Walker 2015). Caroline Lee's *Do-It-Yourself Democracy* broadens this scholarship by presenting a beautifully written ethnography of an important new phenomenon—the public engagement industry. Defined as ''facilitation services aimed at engaging the public and relevant stakeholders with organizations in more intensive ways than traditional, one-way public

*Expect Us: Online Communities and Political Mobilization*, by **Jessica L. Beyer.** New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 192 pp. $29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780199330768.

*Do-It-Yourself Democracy: The Rise of the Public Engagement Industry*, by **Caroline W. Lee.** New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 304 pp. $29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780199987269.

*The Coming Swarm: DDOS Actions, Hacktivism, and Civil Disobedience on the Internet*, by **Molly Sauter.** New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 192 pp. $19.95 paper. ISBN: 9781623564568.

outreach and information'' (p. 56), the public engagement industry developed in the 1980s and 1990s as a solution to declining citizen participation. Yet, ironically, as Lee shows, it has produced more professionalization and less public participation.

At one level, *Do-It-Yourself Democracy* is about the passions, energies, and creativity of the individuals involved in a quest for new methods of democratic participation and inclusion. Three of the seven chapters of the book are devoted almost entirely to the stories of these individuals, who are ''process evangelists'' committed to ''spreading the gospel of deliberation.'' Especially fascinating are the ''origin stories'' in Chapter Three. Lee finds that although the engagement field is young, the practitioners are not as young, and many had prior activism experience in the 1960s. Their attitude toward 1960s-style radicalism, however, is ambivalent. They maintain a sense of pride in the

1960s experience but put more emphasis on their personal journeys from being adversarial and anti-institutional to being cooperative and willing to work within institutions. In fact, banishing 1960s language "was seen as necessary to be taken seriously" (p. 79). Yet as some sociologists (Whalen and Flacks 1990; Whittier 1995) have argued and as the Occupy Wall Street protests have shown, 1960s-style radicalism persists among some members of that politicized generation. Exactly how it has come to be banished from the public engagement industry is an interesting question worth further elaboration.

Chapter Five of the book, titled "The Arts and Crafts of Real Engagement," offers a Bourdieusian analysis of how engagement practitioners construct a non-market and anti-commercial professional identity. They shun the terminology of "profession" and "industry" in favor of "a community of practice." They cultivate the appearance of a homemade and caring artisanal craft for their work. Abhorring the logic of rational calculation, they describe a compulsion to share their knowledge and services.

At another level, however, *Do-It-Yourself Democracy* subverts its own story of non-calculating individual passion by charting the growth of public engagement as a new business and its disempowering effects on citizen participation. The book begins by describing the varieties of sponsors of the public engagement industry. The author finds in her survey that a full quarter of the sponsors are local and regional governments, followed by local nonprofits at 22 percent, and business, industry associations, and chambers of commerce at 17 percent. Questions about why the for-profit sector and local governments have embraced public engagement are taken up in Chapter Six, which shows that it is less about empowerment than about ameliorating the harsh results of contemporary capitalism and legitimating decisions to cut services and raise taxes.

Aiming to understand "how public engagement can be authentically real and disempowering at the same time" (p. 29), Lee is unequivocal, and at times meditative and philosophical, about the tensions and contradictions in the public engagement industry. It is the disempowering aspect that comes across more powerfully. In the concluding part of the book, Lee argues that although deliberation processes have positive short-term and individual-level effects, in the long run, they function as a new mechanism of social control. This is because in these deliberative processes, individual citizens are trained to empathize with decision-makers while institutions become collaborative stakeholders ready to "subsidize" individual actions in processes of co-creation. In essence, then, deliberative processes individualize problems and solutions while creating a spirit of authentic sacrifice. This is what Lee calls the spirit of deliberative capitalism in a DIY democracy.

## The Rise of Online Activism

Even as the social movement society was taking shape and before its commercialization had begun in earnest, activists were already turning elsewhere for possibilities of rejuvenating grassroots activism. A natural place to look was the newly but rapidly developing Internet. The result was the birth of cyber-activism, now often called online activism, internet activism, or digital activism.

The earliest practices of cyber-activism started in the 1980s, but it was only in the 1990s that cyber-activism began to catch on. Initially, computer hacking was associated with efforts to bring computing power to the people and thus had a radical politics to it (Jordan and Taylor 2004:13; Lievrouw 2011). Online electronic bulletin boards were used effectively by revolutionaries like the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Wolfson 2014). During the Tiananmen student protests in 1989, Chinese students in North America and Europe used newsgroups on Usenet to mobilize support for protesters in China (Yang 2009:28–29).

Early online activism thus had a radical side, but it also had a moderate, civic side. In the United States and other western democracies, online activism was born into a well-established civil society of nonprofit, community, and social movement organizations. A notable feature of online activism at that time was the use of the Internet by civic associations for carrying out routine organizational activities (Burt and Taylor 2000; Bach and Stark 2002; Hick and McNutt 2002). Although one of the most influential

books on web activism published by sociologists (Earl and Kimport 2011) shows how the low cost of online participation and the possibility of online organizing reduce the roles of traditional social movement organizations, the four main e-tactics studied in their book—online petitions, boycotts, e-mail campaigns and letter-writing—are on the civil side of the spectrum of online protest. The examples in that study also fall on the more institutional end of activism rather than the more extra-institutional and radical end.

Meanwhile, public discourse has produced a binary image of online activism. While the Arab Spring protests are called Twitter or Facebook Revolutions, a discourse of ''clicktivism'' and ''slacktivism'' denies that online activism can be meaningful political action. Against the background of this confused public discourse, Jessica L. Beyer's *Expect Us: Online Communities and Political Mobilization* and Molly Sauter's *The Coming Swarm: DDOS Actions, Hacktivism, and Civil Disobedience on the Internet* are forceful statements that online activism is not at all about the clicking of a mouse.

## The Suppressed Online Radicalism

Molly Sauter studies distributed denial of service (DDoS) actions, which she defines as ''concerted efforts by many individuals to bring down websites by making repeated requests of the websites' servers in a short amount of time'' (p. 2). She calls them *actions* rather than the more common name of DDoS *attacks* in order to avoid any negative connotations. Many of the cases examined in her book, such as actions by Anonymous, have been studied by others (Downing 2001; Coleman 2013, 2014). Yet unlike other studies, Sauter's book is a focused analysis of one single tactic. By tracing the history and politics of DDoS as a tool of protest, Sauter's book serves as a strong and timely reminder of a nearly forgotten history of Internet radicalism and a reclamation of DDoS as a legitimate tool for civil disobedience.

In seven short chapters, Sauter presents a spirited and vigorous argument that DDoS actions can be a meaningful and powerful form of civil disobedience consistent with the principles of democratic politics. She cites theorists and practices of civil disobedience from Henry Thoreau and Hannah Arendt to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the American Civil Rights movement to show that DDoS actions, like acts of civil disobedience in the street, use public disruptions to challenge power. Because power has moved online in the digital age, acts of civil disobedience have to go online as well in order to have any efficacy.

The most interesting chapters of the book examine examples of major DDoS actions and show how they are stigmatized by mass media and criminalized by states and corporations. Chapter Two studies several cases of DDoS actions since the 1990s, starting with the publication of the Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) manifesto by the Critical Art Ensemble in 1994. The chapter also examines DDoS actions in Spain in 1997 to force the Institute for Global Communication (IGC) to stop hosting the Basque publication *Euskal Herria Journal*, the DDoS action by the British organization *the electrohippies* against the WTO in Seattle in 1999, and the ''Deportation Class'' DDoS action against Lufthansa airlines for letting the German government use its flights to deport immigrants. Both in the scale of participation (easily tens of thousands) and their impact, these cases stand on a par with ''traditional'' forms of street protest. Although Sauter points out that not all DDoS actions are legitimate political protest and many are criminal activities, she is explicit about the moral legitimacy of DDoS actions as a method of civil disobedience.

Chapter Seven shows how states and corporations criminalize DDoS actions. For example, the activists of *the electrohippies* involved in the protest against the WTO in 1999 were declared terrorists. The main activist in the ''Deportation Class'' action against Lufthansa airlines in 2001 was arrested on charges of coercion and found guilty by a lower court in Frankfurt in 2005 (the verdict was later overturned by a higher court).

Sauter notes there is no such precedent-setting case in U.S. courts, but there are several cases where individuals pleaded guilty after being arrested for DDoS actions. For example, two individuals were arrested in connection with Anonymous DDoS actions against the Church of Scientology in 2007

and 2008. They were sentenced to serve a year in prison and to pay $37,500 and $20,000 respectively in restitution to the Church of Scientology. In another case, Wisconsin truck driver Eric J. Rosol participated in a DDoS action against the Koch Industries website in 2011. In 2013, Rosol pleaded guilty to one misdemeanor count of accessing a protected computer and was sentenced to two years' probation and ordered to pay $183,000 in restitution to Koch Industries. Anonymous's Operation Payback DDoS actions against MasterCard and PayPal and other firms in 2010 resulted in 14 individuals being charged.

Sauter explains that DDoS actions are prosecuted as fraud under Title 18, Section 1030 (a)(5) of the U.S. Code, also known as the CFAA. In 46 of the 50 U.S. states, defendants may be subject to joint and several liability, meaning that one individual may be held liable for damages caused by large numbers of individuals. This is an effective method of suppressing online collective action.

## The Forgotten Online Community

In what Wellman (2004) calls the ''first age of Internet studies,'' online community was a new phenomenon of great research interest (Rheingold 1993; Wellman 1997; Calhoun 1998). The views about online communities were sanguine, reflecting both optimism about the new technologies and the actual conditions of online communities in the 1990s. While research on online communities continues to appear, more attention has since shifted to the study of the relationship between information technologies and political activism (Castells 1997; Earl and Kimport 2011; Lievrouw 2011). In focusing on how internet technologies link individual voices into collective action, however, the connections between online activism and online communities have not been systematically studied.

In this context, Jessica Beyer's book *Expect Us*, an ethnography of four online communities, bridges a major gap. Two of the communities, the massive, multiplayer, online role-playing game World of Warcraft (WoW) and the posting boards of IGN Entertainment, are communities of entertainment. The third community, Anonymous, according to Beyer, had been mainly a community of entertainment before it launched a protest movement against the Church of Scientology in 2008. The fourth one, Pirate Bay, is a popular file-sharing website where people exchange music, movie, and TV show files. Beyer finds that political conversations take place in all four communities, but political mobilization occurs only in two of them.

Beyer argues that this disparity is due to the structural features of the four online communities. She finds that the two communities where mobilization took place had higher levels of anonymity, lower levels of formal regulation, and minimal access to small-group interaction. These features result in distinct communities with their own norms and behavior expectations. When community norms conflict with offline norms and realities, normative conflict results, leading to mobilization. Beyer's analysis shows that website ownership and management significantly influence the nature of online participation.

Although Beyer suggests that community norms and beliefs are the result of the structural features of the websites, at times she notes that the values that community members bring to the community also influence the nature of the communities (p. 104). Thus it is not entirely clear whether it is external or internal norms that shape mobilization. Whether and how the goals of online communities may influence mobilization is another question of interest left unexplored. In a sense, it is not surprising that the two cases of mobilization took place in Anonymous and Pirate Bay and not in WoW or IGN, because the former two are more politicized communities than the latter in the first place.

*Expect Us* is most fascinating in its ethnographic narrative of the operations and interactions in the individual online communities, a narrative that can only come from long periods of immersion. For example, it illuminates the otherwise dark and mysterious social world of WoW by providing a clear sense of the hierarchies of its complex group structures as well as its internal culture and the importance of reputation to WoW players. The analysis of the long conversation threads in IGN shows clearly the

politicized topics on IGN posting boards. The riveting ethnographic details present a strong argument that meaningful civic engagement takes place in online communities, including in nonpolitical communities. *Expect Us* leaves readers with no doubt that there is serious and impassioned politics to be expected of online communities.

## The Future of Social Movement Society

The three books under review convey mixed messages about the future of social movement society. Caroline Lee's book suggests that the institutionalized social movement society of the 1990s has undergone significant commercialization, to the extent that even civic engagement has become a profitable industry. Initially, online activism offered some new hope of repoliticizing the social movement field, but as Molly Sauter shows, the radical wing of online activism, represented in her book by the use of DDoS actions for civil disobedience, has been tamed through criminalization by the state and stigmatization by an ideological media discourse. Jessica Beyer's book directs our attention back to a taken-for-granted aspect of online space to reveal both impassioned political conversations on a daily basis and occasional contentious political mobilization. While *Expect Us* conveys a note of cautious hope in everyday political participation and *The Coming Swarm* reclaims the moral legitimacy of radical protest, *Do-It-Yourself Democracy* offers a deep and sensitive critique of the contemporary conundrum between achieving individual authenticity and collective social change in American society.

Of course, three books that landed rather randomly on my desk for review cannot be expected to represent the complexity and diversity of political activism, civil engagement, and social movements in contemporary American society. I have suggested, however, that they have each captured an important trend. Together, they delineate an image of contemporary social movement society as commercialized, digitized, and nostalgic for a bygone era. Although the digitalized social movement society has a radical side (such as in the use of DDoS actions),

the broader trend is one of containment and moderation.

The conundrum of contemporary activism was revealed thoroughly in the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. One of the most radical moments of contemporary protest, OWS brought forth a new form of ''political disobedience''—''a type of political as opposed to civil disobedience that fundamentally rejects the ideological landscape that has dominated our collective imagination, in the United States at least, since before the Cold War'' (Harcourt 2013:46). Harcourt continues:

> The Occupy movement rejects conventional political rationality, discourse, and strategies. It does not lobby Congress. It defies the party system. It refuses to align or identify itself along traditional political lines. It refuses even to formulate a reform agenda or to endorse the platform of any existing political group . . . . Occupy Wall Street is politically disobedient to the core—it even resists attempts to be categorized politically. (Harcourt 2013:47)

Nothing can be more radical than a complete rejection of the existing system, and for this reason alone, OWS was radically revolutionary. Yet it is supremely ironic that the political disobedience of OWS had to be expressed in non-conventional forms in order to resist attempts ''to be categorized politically.'' It is ironic that it had to be non-political in order to pronounce a new politics. The full implications of this irony begin to unravel in the three books under review. It is the same kind of irony that is captured in Caroline Lee's analysis of ''how public engagement can be authentically real and disempowering at the same time.''

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## A Collective Object for the Sociology of Morality Project

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Gabriel Abend's *The Moral Background* is the most important book in the sociology of morality published since the field has been ''rediscovered'' in the wake of the ''new sociology of morality'' movement that emerged in the last few years. Abend's intervention in this book is both theoretical and meta-methodological, and his contribution is both empirical and substantive. At the level of theory, Abend provides a stimulating and, at most points, convincing argument

*The Moral Background: An Inquiry into the History of Business Ethics*, by **Gabriel Abend.** Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014. 416 pp. $29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780691171128.

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for the substantive importance of a new object of social-scientific inquiry that he refers to, not surprisingly, as *the moral*

*background*. At the level of meta-methodology, Abend argues, also convincingly, that the ''new science of morality'' would be summarily impoverished if it were to remain trapped within the confines of individual moral judgment and the methodological tools designed to tap these judgments.

Substantively, Abend provides a demonstration of how sociologists may go about coaxing this new object into shedding light onto otherwise empirically puzzling phenomena, such as why actors may be found to be (sometimes astoundingly) repetitive at the level of explicit moral claims, while justifying these claims using wildly incompatible (''incommensurable'' in the Kuhnian sense) presuppositions, procedures, lines of reasoning, and even metaphysical assumptions. Abend's empirical case is the discursive field of American ''business ethics'' roughly covering the eighty-year period from the middle of the nineteenth century to the years immediately preceding the Great Depression. Abend takes a catholic approach to the definition of business ethics so that the term comes to include all individuals and organizational actors who engage in the production and dissemination of moral discourse regarding the bases of proper (and improper) conduct of business practice.

I believe the book is largely successful, both as an agenda-setting theoretical statement and as an empirical contribution to the history of American business ethics. The book is less successful (but only because of its ambition) when it comes to providing a clear meta-methodological statement of how exactly the approach ''plays'' with alternative interdisciplinary approaches that see themselves as charged with the study of moral phenomena and with cognate efforts within sociology to study both morality and similar ''collective objects'' in other domains (e.g., knowledge, beauty). The tensions remaining in the meta-methodological argument resolve themselves into ambiguity (and sometimes outright silence) at the level of plain old (first-order?) methodological claims. These ambiguities call into question the inferential validity of some of Abend's substantive statements (such as whether there existed two and only two broad ''forms'' of business-ethical argumentation during the period and how exactly

Abend finds this out) but are not sufficient to threaten the overall contours or blunt the appeal of the project as a whole.

In this essay, I will focus primarily on Abend's overall theoretical and meta-methodological project. This is for three reasons. First, this is the level at which Abend makes some of the most ambitious and (for that reason) controversial claims and therefore on which the long-term potential for this book to be part of the intellectual conversation depends (it is also the level that is closest to my expertise and interest). Second, I believe that the validity of Abend's more narrowly empirical questions, such as the pervasiveness and recurring cycles of public concern with business ethics during the historical period in question, the rather old provenance of discursive concern with the ethics of business, and the emergence of elite business schools primarily around projects of moral reform of business practice, are convincingly demonstrated (to the extent that my limited expertise in the subject allows me to ascertain). Finally, the utility and validity of Abend's more ''theory-laden'' empirical claims, such as whether what he refers to as the ''Christian Merchant'' and ''Standards of Practice'' approaches represent two distinct ideal-typical variants of moral background supporting, enabling, and facilitating particular types of public discourse around the ethics of business practice in the United States during the period in question, depend on the reader buying into the notion of moral background in the first place and being convinced that the notion designates a novel and unique object of study, one that is liable to be examined with the historical and textual approaches implicitly endorsed in the book.

In this respect, it is important to note that Abend's theoretical intervention does not simply resolve itself into the announcement of a new object of study, but makes (sometimes fully articulated and well-reasoned, sometimes less so) assumptions about the nature of morality itself as well as the sorts of arguments that sociologists may help themselves to in order to find things out (or even to say meaningful things) about this object. It is at these points that some cracks begin to show in Abend's overall argument. I will begin by laying out the

basics of Abend's proposal for the study of the moral background. I will then return to more controversial issues at the level of "moral ontology," naturalism, and meta-methodology that Abend only begins to allude to but which ultimately he self-consciously decides not to pursue fully or defers for future discussion.

Abend's key argument is that when it comes to dealing with concrete empirical materials (what could more prosaically be called "data"), the scientist of morality is actually confronted with two ontologically and practically distinct types of phenomena. On the one hand, we have what Abend refers to as *first-order morality*, which is constituted by the sum total of moral claims and behaviors related to a specific practical domain characteristic of a given collectivity at a particular time. Abend argues that many naturalistic, ethnographic, survey-based, social psychological, and/or individualistic approaches to morality (e.g., those characteristic of the "new science" of morality in neuroscience, moral psychology, and—in his view—most of sociology so far) reduce the empirical domain of morality to the study of the specific content and determinants of first-order moral claims and behavior.

While Abend does not disregard the value of scientific inquiry into first-order morality, he argues (convincingly) that ultimately the science of morality is incomplete unless it also pays attention to what he refers as *second-order morality*. To simplify what is undoubtedly a much subtler argument, second-order morality stands to first-order morality as Kantian (categorical) form does to (experienced) content—except that the categorical form in question does not lie in a non-empirical (transcendental) realm only amenable to conceptual analysis; nor does it manifest itself as a purely individual phenomenon at the level of mind and experience. Instead, second-order morality is primarily found, in empirically accessible ways, as sets of collective and historical forms that (like first-order morality) exhibit variation across both time and place (in this sense, the moral background is a concept with a very good post-Kantian—e.g., Hegelian—pedigree).

For Abend, second-order morality is composed of the sum total of presuppositions, premises, metaphysical commitments, and (lay or expert) "theories" about the underlying nature of the human, social, and natural worlds that undergird, support, and enable the articulation of specific first-order moral claims. As such, second-order morality includes those presuppositions that make possible the inclusion (or exclusion) of certain entities as belonging to the moral domain in the first place, the categorization of a given overt act or internal motive as moral or immoral, or the characterization of a given project as serving the collective good or contributing to societal decay. In addition, second-order morality underlies prescriptions governing the way that moral questions are asked, as well as the procedures by which we may go about coming up with answers to those very same (and sometimes vexing) moral questions.

This characterization should give the reader a sense of the type of object the "moral background" is. A distinction (well established in the Durkheimian tradition) taken from the sociology of collective memory between "collected memories" as an aggregate of individual memories and "collective memory" as shared *frameworks* for remembering at the collective level is useful to fix the intuition. Accordingly, the moral background is the shared underlying collective framework that supports specific acts of moral judgment, discourse, reasoning, and behavior in a given time and place. Like collective framework theorists in the sociology of memory, Abend's basic argument in *The Moral Background* is that the sociology of morality in particular and the new interdisciplinary science of morality in general should go beyond cataloging individual acts of moral judgment and begin to delineate, describe, and take into account the causal effects of the underlying presuppositional frameworks that make particular acts of first-order motives, judgment, and behavior matters of morality.

To develop the notion of moral background, Abend draws on a variety of philosophical sources, including influences of "continental" (Heidegger), "analytical" (Searle), and "mixed" (Taylor) provenance. In this respect, it is clear that the moral background, as its names implies, belongs to a family of notions (along with presupposition,

paradigm, collective representation, *episteme*, and others) that have been referred to by such analysts as Stephen Turner as ''collective objects.'' It is also clear that by postulating this new type of collective object, Abend aims to do for the sociology of morality what classical accounts in both the collective epistemology and critical social theory tradition have done for the status of knowledge claims. Abend's notion of the moral background is a bit more supple than previous attempts to define collective objects, which have tended to narrow these down to a single set of elements (e.g., categorical, or cognitive). Instead, Abend's ''six facets'' of the moral background (although the reason why only six are provided does not seem principled) actually include shared elements belonging to the category of ''collective forms'' (such as abstract theories, meta-ethical principles, and moral procedures) and ''collected contents'' (such as stores of moral concepts and categories).

However, it is important to note that analytical recourse to notions like the moral background (or second-order morality) is not undertaken in isolation from other theoretical and metatheoretical commitments, nor is it completely devoid of problems. Instead, we know from the history of allied efforts that theoretical recourse to these type of ''second-order'' collective objects for sociological explanation does bring up a set of analytical issues that theorists who have postulated similar ''shared background'' objects in other domains have faced in the past (not very successfully). This includes issues of socio-historical genesis and of the synchronic structure of the cultural transmission mechanisms through which elements of the moral background come to be shared and acquire their ''background'' (second-order) status. The detailed treatment of any of these is beyond the scope of Abend's discussion, but users of the notion of the ''moral background'' must be aware of them and handle with care, as the history of the sociology of knowledge, collective epistemology, and critical theory is littered with ultimately unworkable postulations of collective objects that cannot pass empirical muster due to their reliance on impossible-to-adjudicate quasi-transcendental arguments to justify both their existence and their presumed empirical efficacy and reliance on question-begging arguments to justify their shared status.

One appeal of Abend's approach lies precisely in the care that he takes to stay away from the worst excesses of this tradition. Yet, at key points in his exposition Abend does resort to argumentative devices that clash with some of his more ''pragmatist'' appeals to the always provisional, ontologically non-mysterious status of the moral background as a plain old empirical object among others (i.e., accessible to the usual social-scientific methods of inquiry) and as such not necessarily requiring a special set of approaches and methods that go beyond empirical observation. For instance, Abend is never quite clear as to what he ultimately is getting at by saying that first-order morality ''depends'' on second-order elements, vacillating between non-naturalistic (i.e., transcendental) and ontological interpretations of the proposed dependence and enabling relations. At other times, we see Abend coming close to quasi-dualistic talk, separating ''material'' and ''behavioral'' happenings in the ''biological'' or ''psychological'' world from the ''social presuppositions'' that give these spatio-temporal events social and cultural intelligibility as moral happenings. This is an old strategy of argumentation taken from a tradition in the philosophical analysis of ''action concepts'' and ''mentalistic'' talk, which leads straight to an (unworkable in my view) anti-naturalist position.

For instance, after Abend is done with a fairly effective (but ultimately somewhat inconclusive) critique of current approaches to moral science that emphasize the neural, biological, and evolutionary underpinnings of (first-order) moral judgments (and, to a lesser extent, moral action), the compatibility of the notion of the moral background with a *naturalist* approach to moral phenomena remains up in the air. At some points Abend gives fairly strong indications that while first-order moral claims may be susceptible to a naturalist strategy, second-order morality may not be a (completely) natural object located at the same observational or even theoretical level. These are thorny epistemological and ontological issues that are not quite resolved in the book and that Abend wisely skirts around for more pragmatic (and workable) aims.

This leads to a final observation. Oddly enough, while the book is rich in *meta*-methodological arguments (what, turning Abend against Abend, we may refer to as ''second-order methodological questions''), especially those having to do with the first-versus second-order contrast, as well as the relation between this distinction and analytical efforts in the study of morality outside of sociology, Abend is oddly silent when it comes to first-order methodological arguments related to the social scientific study of second-order morality within the discipline. The reader emerges from the book with the impression that Abend has no particularly strong methodological commitments in this respect and that he subscribes to an unstructured eclecticism in regards to social scientific method. But this is both unlikely and illogical. First, most of the substantive empirical claims in the book itself are established using a fairly consistent strategy of historical/interpretive analysis. Second, given the theoretical nature of the moral background as described (primarily composed of collective presuppositions), it stands to reason that it is also more likely to yield to methodological approaches calibrated to deal with these types of ''thick'' phenomena and to be resistant to those approaches attuned to capturing the ''thin'' veneer of first-order moral claims.

In this last respect, it is surprising how much the ghost of Clifford Geertz hangs over the entire project (and not just in the thin/thick contrast) but is never directly exorcised. To take one instance, many of the meta-methodological and anti-naturalistic elements of Abend's argument have a lot in common with the famous ''eye-wink'' example in Geertz's (1973) classic essay on thick description that has a common root in the mid-twentieth-century philosophy of action tradition alluded to above (and clearly definitive in the intellectual formation of some of Abend's sources such as Taylor [1989]). In this respect, it seems like Abend may have missed an opportunity to connect his meta-methodological line of argumentation not only to a more coherent set of practical methodological concerns (remaining always an implicit interpretivist) but also to connect this work to similar efforts on the nature of sociological explanation more generally (as in the recent work of Isaac Reed).

In all, *The Moral Background* is the most incisive and theoretically sophisticated entry into the ''new sociology of morality'' movement that has consolidated in recent years. Every serious analyst of morality in sociology will have to grapple with the first/second-order morality distinction and attempt to develop their own methodological strategies for teasing these two dimensions of moral phenomena apart. All analysts will also have to clarify their theoretical language in order to specify when they are referring to one or the other (or both). More broadly, Abend joins a group of scholars who are beginning to specify the center of moral action in sociology not on specific contents, but on some *formal* set of practices and procedures that make possible the specificity of moral judgment and classification in the first place (here I am thinking of Tavory's [2011] recently articulated ''formalist'' argument).

While recourse to this type of quasi-transcendental argumentation does not come without costs (as noted above), I believe that the questions and problems that this orientation raises, while thorny, are worth the price of admission and may move theoretical reflection and empirical work on moral phenomena to a new level. This effort may also serve to push the sociology of morality away from purely internal reflection on the (spuriously) ''unique'' status of its object and toward a more concerted engagement with analogical issues and problems in both the sociology of knowledge and the resurgent sociology of aesthetics, subdisciplines that also grapple with allied distinctions between the first- and second-order character of some of their core phenomena.

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Privileged Pathways for Privileged Students: Class Reproduction at the Top

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If working-class lads turn into working-class men, many elite children also turn into elite adults. With a nod to Paul Willis's classic *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, Lauren Rivera reverses the usual question of why the disadvantaged remain disadvantaged. Instead, she asks: In an era when elite class positions cannot be handed down by title or property, how do elites maintain their advantage?

The answer Rivera provides is that they do so in a way that is systematic, thorough, and extremely expensive. By studying the hiring practices of firms that award 22-year-olds with salaries that double to triple the income of the median American household, Rivera traces the ways that privileged students are escorted from privileged schools to privileged jobs. Jobs that are out of reach to the majority of Americans are the same jobs that are obtained through the path of least resistance by the children of the elite.

Drawing on rich ethnographic detail and revealing interviews, *Pedigree* shows that the process of obtaining a job at an elite professional services firm (EPS)—in banking, consulting, or law—is biased in favor of the privileged. Rivera points out that half of Harvard students come from families in the top 4 percent of household income, while only 4 percent of Harvard students come from families in the bottom 20 percent. Elite professional service firms recruit students exclusively from universities whose student population, like Harvard's, is dominated by the well-off. Firms saturate elite campuses, spending up to a million dollars per school to convince these graduates to work for them. Yet, not only do EPS firms not make an appearance at less elite schools, they do not even bother to read the résumés of students who attend them.

Firms do read the résumés of students who attend elite schools, but this badge of merit alone is not enough to grant students

an interview. Firms consider the grades of students at the most elite schools to be irrelevant; students' admission into a top school, not their performance there, is what counts. Instead, those in charge of hiring reward excellence in expensive and time-intensive activities. Applicants who participate in these activities are viewed as driven and passionate. Applicants who work to support themselves are given a nod, but often overlooked as they are not also Olympic athletes or concert violinists. Students who focus on job-related clubs—often working-class students—are dismissed as uninteresting suck-ups. As high achievement in expensive activities takes substantial resources to cultivate, it is usually those born into privilege who provide the signals of ambition and drive that firms reward.

The one in two applicants who pass the résumé screening are advanced to the interview round. Here, untrained interviewers assess candidates' merit by considering their fit with the company. Fit is never neutral, and applicants are effectively assessed on their class-based activities and presentation styles. Interviewers ask applicants to talk about ''their story,'' then evaluate some stories as more valuable than others. Stories that suggest that applicants repeatedly made choices to prepare themselves for their selected career are admired. Such stories of individual choice, purpose, and triumph are stories the class-privileged can easily tell. Stories that include luck, constraint, and diversions—stories more common among the less privileged—are evaluated less favorably. Admitting to constraint by suggesting that one wants the job because

one needs the money is a surefire way to be shown the door.

Interviewers do not only focus on cultural capital and fit; they assess human capital as well. Yet despite these exercises, smarts and skills are de-emphasized. Though the firms sell themselves as employing the ''best and the brightest,'' they also believe that the intellectually mediocre can do the job well. They then pass over students with 4.0 GPAs because they assume they will not fit into a culture that focuses more on fun. Consulting firms also use case study interviews. While these questions can test applicants' math skills, interviewers do not care if applicants get the math right. They are more interested in how the applicant presents herself while tackling the problem and if she follows a particular script. Embodied knowledge of the right script is often obtained by repeated interactions with EPS insiders, a process that favors the advantaged. Applicants with the right connections are also hired even if the interviewers think that their math or social skills were weak.

In sum, Rivera shows that each stage of the hiring process ushers the elite into elite jobs while largely excluding the working class and the poor. From who is recruited, whose résumé is read, how résumés are evaluated, the definitions of merit used in interviews, and whose social capital can override their lack of other skills, the process of getting hired at an EPS firm helps elite college students become employees at elite firms. Rivera's eye for detail, ability to interweave nuanced distinctions into her analysis, and skill at maintaining relationships with firms who are often skeptical of researchers allow her to provide a rich addition to the literature on social class inequality. In doing so, she reveals the many mechanisms by which ascription can shape opportunities as much or more than achievement.

Rivera's empirical contribution also extends to highlighting what types of cultural capital are rewarded by segments of elites. Much of the class literature on exclusion focuses on tastes for art, music, food, and theater, with the debate being whether high culture or omnivorousness matters more for exclusion. Rivera shows, however, that these debates miss the point, as they do not measure the right aspects of culture. The criterion for exclusion in EPS firms is not a lack of familiarity with or participation in the high arts; in fact, the reverse is at times true, as men who show too much involvement with the high arts are dismissed as unmanly. The criteria also do not include familiarity with a large array of music, theater, arts, and foods. The more relevant markers, instead, include participation in country club sports, telling the right kind of personal stories, and embodying polish, presence, confidence, and normality. Rivera's work then pushes against the current literature, asking us to rethink what counts as cultural capital. It also serves to highlight the diversity of ways that gatekeepers use culture to define merit. Some of the markers of merit business elites use likely would be markers of demerit when viewed by elite academic hiring committees.

*Pedigree*, however, does not match its new empirical framework with a new theoretical one. In fact, the book's theoretical framework can be summed up simply: Bourdieu was right. As Bourdieu wrote, gatekeepers have class-based preferences and tastes and use these to define merit. The people who have these ''meritorious'' qualities will be people who share their social class, while people from the lower classes will be rejected for reasons that are ostensibly related to their skills but in actuality are related to their class. The violation of meritocracy is hidden, as gatekeepers do not actively talk about class or even think of it but hire based on it anyway. In *Pedigree*, we see that each of these aspects of Bourdieu's theory of class reproduction is enacted by hiring managers. Yet, by reminding us of Bourdieu's theoretical contributions, Rivera makes her own empirical contribution. Too often social scientists assume that employers hire based on job-relevant skills that will maximize their profits. Conjuring up Bourdieu, Rivera instead reminds us that hiring agents, like other gatekeepers, reward not only job-relevant skills but class-based ones. They maximize not only profits but also the feeling of affection that occurs when two similar habitués meet. Elite reproduction is not a result of superior skills but of a well-developed infrastructure that routes elites toward high-paying jobs and then defines merit in their image.

*Pedigree* also serves to highlight a large gap in sociological research: the lack of attention to class discrimination. Too often the class literature describes ''barriers,'' ''resources,'' ''access,'' ''opportunities,'' and ''mismatches'' without also suggesting that discrimination occurs. Even Rivera, who expertly shows how systematically employers favor the class-privileged over the underprivileged, does not use the word ''discrimination'' to describe what she sees. But *Pedigree* uncovers elements of several types of discrimination: taste-based, statistical, and the perpetuation of inequality that occurs through classism without classists. She also highlights that even though we live in a time when social closure is particularly stark when considering individuals' class position as adults, discrimination is also leveled against individuals with low class origins. This is a powerful statement, given that the working-class-origin students who are considered by EPS firms have the ultimate badge of achievement—a degree from an elite university. Others should build on Rivera's work, not only by creating carefully crafted, well-written, deeply important ethnographies, but also in uncovering the ways that class discrimination occurs. In doing so, we can better understand how class reproduction and mobility occur in an era when class animosity, segregation, and inequality are particularly entrenched.

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## Fighting Words

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Sociologists know that the enduring impacts of social movements are often cultural ones. Movements change the way we live and work; they make some behaviors socially inappropriate and others newly appealing. They create new collective actors and altered lines of social cleavage. And yet scholars have been remarkably bad at capturing and explaining movements' cultural consequences. Or perhaps it is not so remarkable, since movements' cultural influence is often slow and indirect, and hard to disentangle from the effects of cultural shifts that would have occurred even in the absence of protest.

Sidney Tarrow wades into this tangle with scholarly panache. Rather than choosing a set of cultural impacts and tracing them to their sources or choosing a movement and trying to identify its cultural influence, Tarrow examines changes in the language of contention. That is, he traces the spread of a number of terms across place, time, and issue. Some terms, like ''working class,'' ''patriot,'' and ''male chauvinist pig,'' are identities. Others, like ''occupations,'' ''conventions,'' ''demonstrations,'' and ''sexual harassment,'' are practices. And still others refer to feelings, such as the language

> *The Language of Contention: Revolutions in Words, 1688–2012*, by **Sidney Tarrow.** Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 263 pp. $27.99 paper. ISBN: 9781107693289.

of hate and love that Tarrow studies in genocide and in campaigns for same-sex marriage. In chapters on contention around work, gender, sexuality, race, and nation, Tarrow traces the emergence and diffusion of key terms, along with their utility: that is, what each term won and did not win for those using it.

The wealth of cases covered in *The Language of Contention* is stunning: from Parisian sans-culottes to post-World War II Israeli Zionists to the Tea Party (both eighteenth and twenty-first century versions); from the nineteenth-century Irish Land Wars to the Harlem Renaissance; from battles over land to battles over suffrage, work, birth control, and what a group or nation should call itself. Tarrow draws on the work of many scholars, but his unique talent is to integrate diverse perspectives into a nuanced and thick

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historical account. It is an account marked by surprising continuities and striking reversals. To oppose the exorbitant rents landlords were extracting from Irish farmers in the 1870s, reformers targeted a land agent and convinced merchants not to trade with him. The agent's name, "Boycott," rapidly spread across Europe and to the United States. Several decades later, the term "sabotage," referring to the destruction of an employer's property, spread in short order from France across Europe.

Terms' meaning have flipped from one side of contention to the other. The term "terror," for example, referred to violence perpetrated by the state during the French revolution, but by the late nineteenth century had come to mean violence used by non-state actors. "Patriotic" was first used by upper-class gentlemanly critics of the British Tories but became more subversive as it crossed the Atlantic, animating American opposition to the British. After the American Revolution, the term became newly popular in Europe, and twenty-nine German newspapers used the word "patriotic" in their mastheads. The "convention" in its early American use was anything but the performance of routine electoral politics that we associate with nominating conventions today. Rather, its power came from its very illegality: conventions were mechanisms for asserting natural-born rights against the constraints of existing law.

What to make of these shifts? Tarrow argues that many of the political terms we take for granted today have their source in "critical junctures"—moments when often long-simmering tensions between challengers and authorities erupt into outright opposition, public attention to the issues sharpens, and spirals of protest and response generate new forms of action and names for them. Movements thus have had an important impact by shaping a repertoire of protest, which has then gone on to influence people outside movements as well. For example, a "working class" identity in England did not come from industrial workers' daily experience of antagonism with managers, Tarrow argues. Rather, the working class was forged in and produced by a national movement over suffrage. In the late 1820s, workers' middle-class allies

in the movement turned against them as they sought to protect their own access to the vote. The working class would have to be its own advocate, and Chartists in the 1830s framed electoral reform as a class issue. Another example of a movement setting the terms for subsequent contention: Feminists won recognition of the concept of "sexual harassment" in the United States in 1986. The term then diffused rapidly and widely; first, to the Anglo-American democracies in the early 1990s, then to Europe more broadly, and, eventually, even to China.

Words introduced in struggle often have become "normalized" in a way that has made them a part of popular discourse. Consider the term "male chauvinist pig." First used by the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s, the term had by the 1990s become a popular epithet: 63 percent of women in a national survey reported having used it, and 58 percent of women who did not identify as feminist reported using it.

To be sure, as the last example of a feminist term detached from a feminist agenda suggests, movement actors do not always retain control over the terms they introduce. More generally, as Tarrow sees it, the language of political contention is shaped by the political environment in which it unfolds. So a working-class identity like the British one did not emerge in the United States, because urban political machines sought to forge cross-class alliances based on race, ethnicity, and religion. These categories, not class, formed the bases for collective identities and action.

In other cases, movements have succeeded in gaining recognition for new terms, but have lost influence when it has come to implementing them. In the United States, feminists' success in gaining recognition for sexual harassment led employers to institutionalize dispute-resolution processes that would limit firms' legal liability. Human relations specialists took over the adjudication of sexual harassment, blunting the concept's legal force. In Europe, although the European Commission recognized the concept of sexual harassment, very different groups were responsible for rendering judgments about it: "state feminists" in Scandinavia, legal theorists in Germany, political

parties and unions in France. As a result, the term took on very different meanings. In France, for example, sexual harassment was redefined as a violation of a person's dignity. That seemingly more capacious term ended up making the concept so vague as to be unenforceable.

Another example of paradoxical consequences: The language of individual rights that was responsible for the American civil rights movement's most important victories has lately been used by opponents to challenge African Americans' bids for equality. Rights' resonance made them useable for diametrically opposed agendas. Indeed, the power of rights-talk has been variable. Marriage equality activists who invoked a right to be free from discrimination made little headway with the American public. When they turned instead to demonstrating that gay and lesbian couples were just as loving, committed, and family-oriented as idealized heterosexual ones, they won the public support that preceded groundbreaking victories.

*The Language of Contention* is rife with paradoxes like these, and they make for fascinating reading. What the episodes add up to is more difficult to ascertain. Tarrow's admirable refusal to downplay the messy contingency of events makes it difficult to extract broad patterns from the episodes he describes. The book's central argument, laid out briefly in the introduction and the conclusion, is that terms diffuse when they are "resonant," that is, when they are congruent with culturally familiar ideas; and when they are "modular," that is, when they can easily be adapted for use by other actors in other places and around other issues. However, without saying how we would know in advance whether a term is resonant or modular, the criteria describe dynamics of diffusion more than they explain them.

In any event, Tarrow does not rely on logics of modularity and resonance much in his discussion of the cases; and he recounts a number of episodes that seem to defy those logics. For example, why "sabotage" was more modular than Luddism, which also involved breaking machines but did not spread beyond England, is somewhat unclear. The term "male chauvinist pig," redolent of the anti-establishment

1960s, would seem an unlikely candidate to resonate in the 1990s, and yet it did. "Sexual harassment," Tarrow points out, was an exotic and unappealing concept to many European feminists and encountered all kinds of obstacles when it was implemented. Did that mean that it was modular or that it diffused in spite of its modularity?

So I am not convinced that the concepts of resonance and modularity tell us that much about why some terms diffused and others did not. The fact that almost all the terms Tarrow examines *did* diffuse makes that question harder to answer. In addition, as Tarrow points out, activists have sometimes adopted new names for strategies they were already using or have used the same name as another group but then defined it in a new way. Americans' use of the term "boycott" is a good example, since the practices that it named were already in use. The question, then, is just what diffused? If it is just the word that is diffusing, without carrying any stable meaning, what does that tell us? Do words actually matter?

It would be easy to simply take the diffusion of terms as indication of the power of language, and it is to Tarrow's great credit that he does not do so. His recognition of the slipperiness of language lays down the challenge. People are constrained by language—and by culture more broadly—but they are also creative and instrumental in their use of it. The activists, officials, and ordinary people who adopted new terms often interpreted them in ways that suited their purposes. This does not mean that their purposes were not also cultural, nor that the new term did not influence how they understood their purposes. But it does mean that identifying the cultural impact of movements is no easy task. This is why those of us interested in the question need the theoretical and methodological insights of cultural sociologists, who have worked mightily to capture the mix of creativity and constraint that shapes people's use of culture. When are the terms introduced in contention more or less easily detached from their original meanings? When are groups able to use the popularity of a new idea to give that idea teeth?

*The Language of Contention* not only pushes us to ask the right questions, though. It also

provides leads to answering them. More promising than the broad notion of ''resonance'' is a claim winding through the book: that new forms of action and identity spread when they are symbolically associated with groups that are perceived as radical and, in the short term at least, successful. Terms gain power from their symbolic association with *people*, whether American revolutionaries (''patriot''), British abolitionists (the ''boycott''), Gandhi and his followers (''passive resistance''), or African American nationalists (''Black''). So to understand why a term diffuses, one should look to the perceived status and success of the groups associated with it.

Over time, of course, strategies' social associations weaken. Who remembers now that political conventions were once radical events? Sometimes, the original meaning fades gradually, but more interesting is a process Tarrow documents wherein particular groups are granted control (or win it) over how a term will be used. The fact that sexual harassment in the United States was originally adjudicated in court gave it a set of meanings that the term did not have in European countries where unions rather than legal advocates controlled the term's implementation. Groups' power here is instrumental rather than symbolic, and it is lodged in their institutional position.

Appraising these possibilities demands the combination of broad historical sweep and fine-grained analysis that *The Language of Contention* so masterfully displays. Those qualities, along with a determination to ask the hardest questions, will make the book a vital resource as we think about how to conceptualize, identify, and explain movements' cultural impacts.