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# Nietzsche's Sociology<sup>1</sup>

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*The aim of this article is to present that part of Friedrich Nietzsche's work that is of special interest to sociologists. To do this, I discuss the relationship between Nietzsche's work and the sociology both of today and of his own time. The most important idea is that he saw reality as a social construction. The idea of social construction is related to the beliefs and values, power and interests of the actors. Nietzsche's discussions of power and of the individual vs. the collective are also analyzed.*

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**KEY WORDS:** Nietzsche; power; social construction; sociology; theory; values.

## INTRODUCTION

In this article I will present Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844–1900) sociological ideas and, more specifically, relate his “sociological” thinking to contemporary issues. The article focuses on Nietzsche's sociological insights and indicates how these may be useful today. I shall not emphasize the many historical points about the development of his ideas that can obviously be made.

I argue that Nietzsche's ideas are useful to sociologists in two ways. First, he contributes to the sociological discussions on, for example, culture, theory, and being. Nietzsche's work is valuable because his ardent

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antisociology in fact highlights how much of human being is conditioned by the social. I will show, for example, that both Nietzsche's critique of contemporary social thinking and his own ethical development reveal the social underpinning of human beings. A central theme of this sociological analysis is Nietzsche's discussion of what we today call "social constructivism," a viewpoint now well accepted in the social sciences (Schmidt, 2001). What do we mean by "social construction?" The idea of social constructivism has given rise to a major debate in the last couple of decades. The concept is traceable to Berger and Luckmann, ([1966] 1991), and their discussions of how meanings emerge in interaction, become sedimented, and finally become taken for granted over time. The result is a social world of institutions (entrenched meanings). Though it is obvious, in a sense, that the world is manmade, religions and positive science in contrast share a view of a world that is there to be discovered, though in different senses. Nietzsche, however, argued that religion and science themselves have been formed by human beings over time, and so one should regard these ways of approaching the world only as two possibilities among others.

In contrast to the enlightenment project formulated by Comte as a progression from religion to a final positive stage in which the world will be governed by science, Nietzsche saw degeneration in contemporary society. On this theme I shall show how Nietzsche debunked ideas of external legitimacy, values, and truth, which he claimed had been constructed within the framework of social processes.

There is an enormous literature on Nietzsche, but the portion of it that deals with his relationship with sociology is limited. Antonio (1995:3), for example, declares that he is "glaringly absent" from sociological discourse, particularly in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Antonio's article, indeed, comes close to being an introductory text, and it includes a thorough overview and discussion of the sociologists influenced by Nietzsche, relating him to much of the contemporary discussion (see also Runciman, 2000). But Antonio puts less emphasis on Nietzsche's sociological ideas, and this applies to most articles dealing with relations between Nietzsche and various sociologists (e.g., Turner, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> There is a section on Nietzsche in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* of 1933 (Seligman, 1933) (the section on Nietzsche was written by Charles Andler), but not in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* of 1968 (Sills, 1968). He is also included in *Soziologisches Jahrbuch* (1989:409–425). One explanation for this absence is that Nietzsche was fairly unknown, even as a philosopher, in the United States before about 1960 (Kaufman, 1974:vii–viii). Unfortunately, few sociologists have studied Nietzsche, which means that his life is less known, too. Those interested in Nietzsche's life will have no problem finding relevant books (such as Hollingdale, 1965; Kaufman, 1974). To all the books published on Nietzsche, one must add his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, written in 1888 and published in 1908. See Megill (1996) for a critical review of the Nietzsche literature since 1988.

We shall look at Nietzsche's relevant philosophical ideas as part of his thought in general, and not single them out as a topic in their own right. There is more than one way of making sense of Nietzsche's sociology. I shall focus on his later writings, in which he speaks more explicitly about sociology. More concretely, to say something about this article's "method," the idea is not to identify the "real" Nietzsche, whatever that may be, but to interpret his texts within a circle of understanding that is partly composed of contemporary sociology (cf. Heidegger, 1982:1–13). Necessarily, this process of understanding will be conditioned by our preconceptions of Nietzsche, which constitute both a problem and a possibility for our understanding of him (cf. Gadamer, [1960] 1990:270–272). In presenting the sociological components of his thought I shall proceed as follows. First, I shall briefly discuss how sociologists have viewed Nietzsche. I shall then present Nietzsche's relationship to the sociology of his own time, more specifically, to Comte and Spencer. The next section deals with a key idea in Nietzsche's thinking: the will to power (*Wille zur Macht*). In this and subsequent sections, I present some of Nietzsche's main sociological ideas and show how they are related. The article ends with a conclusion.

## NIETZSCHE AND SOCIOLOGY

Nietzsche was, of course, first and foremost a philosopher, though he was also a professor of philology. He was never seen as a sociologist during his lifetime, and knowledge of Nietzsche among contemporary sociologists is scant at best. A reason for the neglect shown by the sociological community is most likely the tendency among sociologists to reject individualism, of which Nietzsche was a strong proponent. The elitist morality Nietzsche advocated appears to be a further ground for rejecting him. Moreover, Nietzsche thought that life was inherently contradictory and, indeed, apparently occasionally contradicted himself.

Regardless of this general neglect, some sociologists have taken note of Nietzsche's thought (see Antonio, 1995).<sup>4</sup> Among earlier thinkers,

<sup>4</sup> A full-text search for Nietzsche in the JSTOR database indicates his position in sociology. I restricted the search to *The American Journal of Sociology* (1895–2000); more global searches are possible but this is an indication of Nietzsche's presence in the sociological debate in the United States. To give the reader a point of reference, I have included the results of the same type of search conducted for Simmel and Weber in parentheses. Being a full-text search, every article that mentions Nietzsche is included. From 1895 to 1950, Nietzsche was mentioned in 48 articles (Simmel in 105; Weber in 85). Between 1951 and 1990, he was mentioned in only 12 articles (Simmel in 138; Weber in 312). Over the 10 years from 1991–2000, Nietzsche was mentioned in seven articles (Simmel in 36, Weber in 103). This at least indicates that sociologists have included Nietzsche in their work. It is a task of its own to analyze in more detail Nietzsche's role in these texts and in other journals.

Weber, Simmel, Scheler, and Pareto might be mentioned (see Thon, 1897; for even earlier ones). Modern thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, Bourdieu, and Joas should also be mentioned (Antonio, 1995; Lepenies, [1985] 1988).<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, moreover, is often seen as the “prophet of the postmodern” (Gemes, 2001:337), and he is an important figure when it comes to the streams of European thought that stress the role of irrationality (cf. Aron, [1965] 1968). Some (Stauth and Turner, 1988) have tried to make a sociology out of Nietzsche's thought: and according to Collins and Makowsky, “[i]n his explorations ... Nietzsche ranks among the most heroic of the discoverers of society” ([1972] 1978:78).

## NIETZSCHE ON SOCIOLOGY

Nietzsche was an ardent critic of contemporary sociology, which, of course, differed significantly from today's sociology. Nietzsche mentions two sociologists explicitly, August Comte and Herbert Spencer, and it is a toss-up which of the two he disliked most. Comte and Spencer were the heirs of two different intellectual traditions, while Nietzsche's thought emanated from yet another European tradition, idealism. The point of departure for Nietzsche's thought, which can be called antisociology, is

<sup>5</sup> The best study of Nietzsche's relationship to sociology is by Baier ([1981] 1982). Simmel is related to Nietzsche, especially Nietzsche's ideas on modernity, such as the instrumentality of life and the transformation of qualitative into quantitative values. In addition, Simmel used the idea of the “pathos of distance” in his discussion of subordination, which is a key topic in Nietzsche's thought (Levine, 1997:177). Simmel even wrote a book partly on Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche* ([1907] 1986). But one may not restrict Simmel's influence to sociology; it is also possible to consider him as a philosopher or economist. The influence on Weber is well known: his famous piece “Science as a Vocation” is clearly indebted to Nietzsche (Albrow, 1990; Gerth and Mills, 1946:142–143, 148; MacIntyre, 1984:26). More generally, one can argue that Weber's epistemology and philosophy of social science were influenced by Nietzsche's thought (Holton and Turner, 1989; Stauth and Turner, 1988:4). In addition, Weber's copy of Simmel's book *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche* is full of annotations (Sica, 1988:480, §42). However, Weber seems not to have admired Nietzsche as a person (Zetterberg, 1997:25). Others influenced by Weber have argued that: “[Nietzsche's] sociological tools were so crude that only the psychological mechanisms were fruitfully brought out in his analysis” (Gerth and Mills in Weber, 1946:61).

Though Pareto only mentions Nietzsche once in his magnum opus, *Mind and Society*, it is clear that he was heavily indebted to Nietzsche (Aspers, 2001; Carroll, 1973; cf. Martindale, 1960:99–106). In France, Nietzsche was rediscovered in the 1960s and since then many publications have dealt with him. Foucault and Derrida are the two most prominent writers influenced by Nietzsche (Schrift, [1988] 1994). Nietzsche is the main source of inspiration for the French postmodernists and poststructuralists, especially his notion of “the death of God,” and thereby the undermining of the ground on which traditional values and thought systems in general rested, is important. Many members of the Frankfurt School were also affected by Nietzsche's thought (Stauth and Turner, 1988:7). Bourdieu, too, uses Nietzsche: for example, to explain the elitist idea of culture ([1979] 1984:252).

the individual. Spencer's and Comte's analyses, in contrast, barely take the individual into account.

What, more exactly, has Nietzsche to say about the sociology of his time?<sup>6</sup> His dislike for sociology is clear, and Nietzsche thinks that sociologists have failed to understand under what conditions the individual grows strong and increases his or her autonomy. Nietzsche argues that instead of positive effects on mankind, these "sociologists of the future" (such as Alfred Fouillée) will produce a weakening and an impoverishment of mankind ([1887–1888] 1980a:12:63, §782).<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, this social organism advocated by sociologists is one in which "herd virtues" (*Heerdentugenden*) prosper (Nietzsche, [1887] 1980a:12:357, §901). Following this train of thought, Nietzsche's hostile response to the mediocre man and the "Christian cowards" whom Comte and Mill present is understandable ([1883–1884] 1980a:10:659, §130; [1887] 1980a:12:558, §340).

But it is not just the problem of the mediocre man (*mittlere Art Mensch*) that irritates Nietzsche; more serious is the fact that Comte, Spencer, and others put the collective first when they discuss development. Comte, according to Nietzsche, has got it completely wrong: "Not Mankind, but the *overman* [*Übermensch*] is the goal! Misunderstanding by *Comte!*" ([1884] 1980a:11:210); Spencer is accused of the same mistake ([1887] 1980a:12:525; [1888] 1980a:13:475, §944). One should add that Nietzsche in no way adhered to Darwin's theories (cf., e.g., Kaufman,

<sup>6</sup> A good starting point is to look at the sociological books he read. Of the 1,083 books that were part of his library, one finds books by both Comte and Spencer (Berhold, 1900), though there is limited information about his reading of these books (Brobjer, 1997). The library was collected from many sources by Nietzsche's sister after his death and it is unlikely to be complete. Of sociological relevance one finds the following items, A. Comte: *Einleitung in der positive Philosophie* and H. Spencer's *Die Tatsachen der Ethik* and *Einleitung in das Studium der Sociologie*. Also in Nietzsche's library are books by Schopenhauer, Hume, Plato, Aristotle, Emerson, Mill, Fichte, Dühring, Fouillée, and Machiavelli. The library can be found in the Nietzsche-Archive in Weimar, Germany.

<sup>7</sup> References to Nietzsche's books are first and foremost to the German original texts in *Friedrich Nietzsche, Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Colli and Montinari (1980), and Volumes 15 and 16 of *Nietzsches Werke* (Kröner Verlag edition of 1911, which includes the "book" *Der Wille zur Macht*). Despite the great problems with *Der Wille zur Macht* as a textual unit (and its translation into English), I have also included references to it in the text, since it is read by English-speaking social scientists.

I refer to paragraphs from the *Nachgelassene Fragmente* (Volumes 7–15 of Colli and Montinari (eds.), *Friedrich Nietzsche, Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*) in the following manner: the reference [1887–1888] 1980:12:63, §782 refers first to the year the paragraph was written; then to the year this edition was published; 12:63 is the volume and page number in Colli and Montinari; I refer to *Der Wille zur Macht* (Kröner Verlag) and to *The Will to Power* (1967, ed. Kaufman and the edition of 1924 translated by Anthony Ludovici) by paragraph. Other texts by Nietzsche published in English are easy to find in the Colli and Montinari edition, and as a consequence I have not included detailed references to these texts.

1974:149; Nietzsche, [1888] 1980a:13:315–316, §685); the goal, according to Nietzsche, is not the human species (and its survival as such), but the individual and his or her development.

Nietzsche does not stop at this critique, but goes on to discuss how decadent society is, arguing that sociology is an expression of this decadence. He says that “[o]ur entire sociology simply does not know any other instinct than that of the herd, i.e., that of the *sums of zeroes*—where every zero has ‘equal rights’, where it is virtuous to be zero” ([1880] 1980:13:238, §53). The dominance of the herd is a theme that reappears throughout Nietzsche’s writings. The following quotation is characteristic of the critique he directs at Comte and Spencer: “August Comte is a continuation of the eighteenth century (domination of *coeur* over *la tête*, sensualism in the theory of knowledge, altruistic dreaming)” ([1887] 1980a:13:441:§95). The result of this mode of thinking, Nietzsche argues, is that in the end sociology becomes “a doctrine of the forms of domination” (1911: §462): the morals of the majority are manifested in sociology; the theories and the “discovered” laws are simply forms of domination.

Spencer’s philosophy—a “huckster’s philosophy” (*Krämer Philosophie*) in Nietzsche’s words—is consequently suitable only for those who are mediocre ([1888] 1980a:12:525, §382, [1888] 1980a:13:475, §944). Nietzsche thinks that Spencer’s idea that sociology is an objective science makes it passive, reactive, or “adaptive.” The implication, Nietzsche says, is that sociology does not deal with the “essence of life,” namely, the will to power. Sociology denies activity and stresses reactivity (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:II, §12), and its mechanical and organic theories lack meaning and purpose. There is thus no possibility that the mechanical tradition of thought can guide man in life (e.g., Nietzsche, [1885] 1980a:11:564–565, §618).

It is clear from the above quotations that Nietzsche thinks that sociology represents a threat to the development and freedom of the individual, and that the discipline has become the theory of domination (Pankoke, 1984:1017). He was, however, of the opinion that sociology had contributed to the demystification of social phenomena (*Soziologisches Jahrbuch*, 1989).

Can we understand Nietzsche’s critique of sociology in a broader frame? Nietzsche’s critique of sociology corresponds to the critique of modern society, which is expressed in the writings of, for example, Weber and Simmel. What sets Nietzsche apart is his strong emphasis on the individual, and against all kinds of theoretical and normative approaches that stress “collective welfare,” almost regardless of ideology (Nietzsche, [1889] 1980b:§§38–39). With this as a background I shall now turn to his ideas, which will also enable us to better understand Nietzsche’s critique of sociology.

## NIETZSCHE ON POWER

To grasp Nietzsche's thinking, including his sociology, one must scrutinize his central idea, the will to power.<sup>8</sup> The importance that Nietzsche attaches to the will is clear: "man still prefers to will *nothingness*, than *not will*" ([1887] 1994:III, §28). One way to interpret Nietzsche on this score is to say that it is life itself that gives meaning to life (Simmel, [1907] 1986:136), or, in Nietzsche's words: "Life is will to power" ([1885–1886] 1980a:12:161, §254, [1887] 1980a:12:344–345). It follows that power is the ultimate "value" sought by actors; all other values, such as causality, morality, logic, and even truth, are less important (cf. Nietzsche, [1873] 1980a:623–626). That logic and truth are valued may indicate their usefulness, but not their truth (Heidegger, 1989:48; 2004:256). A consequence of this is that values must be understood in relation to the more basic value of power.<sup>9</sup> But if power is the ultimate foundation, how are other concepts and, especially, values related to power?

Let us take truth as an example, generally considered to be a sacred value in society. According to Nietzsche, truth can be only one more example of the will to power. To understand this one must notice that Nietzsche argues for the nonexistence of universal values.<sup>10</sup> The statement "God is dead" ([1882] 1960:§108) summarizes this view. It implies that legitimacy is lacking for values or statements that are held as sacred or true. These values have been devalued (*entwertet*) (cf. Heidegger, [1943] 1977:219ff). Although authority has been eliminated, and its position remains vacant, Nietzsche is not merely suggesting a replacement of old values with new (Heidegger, [1943] 1977:225); he talks about a totally new form of values (Heidegger, [1943] 1977:226) and, more importantly, a new way of establishing values (*Wertsetzung*) (Heidegger, 1985:37–38). This

<sup>8</sup> That Nietzsche was influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer is well known (e.g., Kaufman, 1974). Schopenhauer's thesis is that life itself is nothing but will, and so it is best described as valueless (Simmel, [1907] 1986:5–6). Nietzsche, in contrast, argues that one must understand all activities as will to power.

<sup>9</sup> There is thus a similarity between reducing everything to a matter of utility, as utilitarians do, and Nietzsche's reduction of everything to power. According to the utilitarians, everything can be measured, and hence compared, in terms of utility. This also means that utility can be aggregated. These ideas, however, are totally foreign to Nietzsche. Nietzsche argues that valuation means that only the highest result or achievement is measured; thus the two systems of evaluation are totally different from each other and also incommensurable (Simmel, [1907] 1986). One can understand the critique of utilitarian thinkers such as J. S. Mill because of Nietzsche's rejection of pleasure as the ultimate goal of man. Instead, Nietzsche argues that power constitutes the nonreducible foundation of human activity; people strive for power, and human action cannot be understood without this idea as a background.

<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that Nietzsche himself is a nihilist. His own theory, though it must also be understood "within the field of struggle over moral values," to paraphrase Bourdieu, implies that he does advocate a doctrine of morality (Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§346, cf. 477:§3, n18).

new way also correlates—as we shall see—with his idea of the *Übermensch* (overman). Life itself is valued when we are forced to establish values.

The consequence of the fact that there is no validating institution in society means that arguments and standpoints cannot be further grounded than in “taste,” or, in Zeitlin’s words: “Nietzsche ... rejects both reason and metaphysics, thus leaving only taste as the criterion by which to choose between moralities, socio-political systems and other human products and values” (1994:vii; cf. Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§184).<sup>11</sup> It is at this point that one must locate Nietzsche’s discussion of art—more generally, aesthetic values—as a way of reestablishing meaning in the world, an issue to which I shall return. Nietzsche argues that aesthetic values are more profound than moral ones, but that the latter have come to dominate (cf. Heidegger, 1996:121). In the next section I shall try to show how, according to Nietzsche, certain values arise and how power is related to interest and values. Thus, once the naïve idea of the “discovery” of a real or ideal world, “made by God” or discoverable by positivistic science, is abandoned, we can begin to analyze how these values were constructed. The final step Nietzsche takes, one that sociologists have been less eager to follow, is to ethics, that is, how man should be and behave.

## THE EMERGENCE OF VALUES

I shall first examine how values emerge. On this basis we shall be able to discuss Nietzsche’s view of a number of specific values that have emerged in history. To this end I shall study the social process, or social mechanisms, which Nietzsche sees as explaining values and, ultimately, his account of how man has come to be in his present situation. Nietzsche focuses on change of concepts but, far from being a discourse theorist, he does not seek such explanation in discourse, but in social processes, for example, in connection with social classes. Nietzsche’s level of analysis refers to collective and social processes. Thus, the discussion of power at this level should at least analytically be separated from the individual level, which refers to Nietzsche’s discussion of the will to power.

One can divide Nietzsche’s argumentation into three parts: (1) a description of how values emerge, (2) an explanation of why this happens,

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche must be recognized among the thinkers who argue that science cannot provide us with ends, it can only tell us what means to use, a view that is embraced completely by Weber (Zeitlin, 1968:156). Science cannot be based on itself and, consequently, needs a value base (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:III, §§24-25). Nietzsche is not alone in this view (cf. Hume, [1939–1940] 1969:521; Myrdal, 1972:147–154; Pareto, [1915–1916] 1935; Quine and Ullian, 1978:134–138; Weber, 1946:129–158, [1917]; Weber, 1949).

and (3) a normative critique of values (cf. Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:Preface, §3). He focuses on the social situation and presents what can be described as a sociological analysis of the emergence of values. The emergence of values in Nietzsche's discussion is in most cases presented as the inversion of existing values (cf. Zeitlin, 1994).

I shall start by discussing how Nietzsche thinks that the values "good" and "evil" (*Böse*) emerged. Nietzsche says these values emerged under the nobility in Egypt ([1887] 1994:I, §§2–3, III, §11). The nobility described itself as "good," and from this it followed that the lower classes were "bad." But the priests—or, more exactly, the priestly caste—opposed the "knightly-aristocratic" values. Furthermore, priests, according to Nietzsche, are dangerous and they also hate the most: they hate "the noble," "the powerful," "the masters," and "the ruler." This hate is due to their impotence. Nietzsche goes on to say that the Jews were the most priestly people. To cite Nietzsche at length:

the Jews, that priestly people which in the last resort was able to gain satisfaction from its enemies and conquerors only through a radical revaluation of their values, that is, through an act of the most deliberate revenge ... It was the Jews who, rejecting the aristocratic value-equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = blessed) ventured, with awe-inspiring consistency, to bring about a reversal and held it in the teeth of their unfathomable hatred (the hatred of powerless), saying, "Only those who suffer are good; only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly are the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!" ([1887] 1994:I, §7)

According to Nietzsche, this "declaration of war" has been successful. The victory, which started with a reinterpretation of history, took over 2,000 years to achieve, and this may be a reason that it is so difficult to detect and comprehend. All of this grew out of Jewish hatred of the Egyptian oppressors (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:I, §8; Zeitlin, 1994:58). Nietzsche ([1887] 1994:I, §16), also stresses that struggle (*Kampf*) occurs between social groups.

The general mechanism of *ressentiment*—of which the above case is an example—works as follows: the group that feels repressed (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:III, §16) directs its hatred toward another group, which is considered as part of the "hostile external world."<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, to continue

<sup>12</sup> The discussion of *ressentiment* is found in *Towards a Genealogy of Morals* ([1887] 1994), though some of the arguments were already presented in *Beyond Good and Evil* ([1886] 1998). For the historical background of this part of Nietzsche's writings, see Zeitlin (1994:chs. 4–5) and Owen (1997:44–48). The word *ressentiment* does not have exactly the same meaning in French and English (resentment); German has adopted the French word (cf. introduction to Max Scheler's *Ressentiment*, 1998).

the discussion of values, gives several examples of when *ressentiment* has been a force in creating new values. Christianity, socialism, and democracy—different examples of what he calls “slave morality”—are all value systems created in this way. Anarchism is another example (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:II, §11).

In the end, the slave morality that grows out of *ressentiment* can be summed up as “making a virtue of necessity” (Kaufman, 1974:372). The inversion of the value order ultimately depends on power relations, but also on the form through which power is exercised. Power (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:II, §§9–10), though not necessarily in the same sense as his own theory of the will to power, is a central notion. This means that Nietzsche has a profoundly sociological idea of social change. He argues that the power relation between debtor and creditor gives rise to a feeling of guilt and personal obligation on the part of the debtor ([1887] 1994:II, §8). Originally, man was measured against other men in the marketplace: prices were set, values were designed, and Nietzsche says:

Buying and selling, with their psychological accessories (“*Zubehör*”), are older even than the beginnings of any kind of social form of organization or association: it is much more the case that the germinating sensation of barter, contract, debt, right, duty, compensation was simply *transferred* from the most rudimentary form of legal rights of persons to the most coarse (“*gröbsten*”) and preliminary (“*anfänglichsten*”) community-complex (“*Gemeinschafts-Complexe*”) (in their relations with similar complexes), together with the habit of comparing power with power, of measuring, of calculating ([1887] 1994:II, §8, italicized text indicates where I have modified the translation).

Nietzsche argues that values emerge out of a rudimentary social process of economic exchange, as an unintended consequence. He thereby differs from those who argue that there must be a morality prior to exchange.

Moreover, Nietzsche uses the idea of dichotomy, in terms of both meaning and value and between debtor and creditor, to examine community. He says that the citizens of a community are bound together by a pledge; a promise to accept the laws and to enjoy the advantages of, for example, assistance and protection. The relationship between individuals and the community of which they are a part is first made salient when the pledge is broken. Then the community—or, as Nietzsche puts it, the “disappointed creditor”—wants repayment; the lawbreaker is a breaker of the contract and is henceforth a debtor. This means that he or she will be reminded of the value of the contract. The punishment depends on the strength of the creditor (the community); the stronger the community, the milder the punishment (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:II, §§9–10).

I will now turn to Nietzsche's explanation of how ascetic ideals emerged, the topic of the third essay in *Towards a Genealogy of Morals*. The priests depend on ascetic ideals because their right to exist "stands or falls" with such ideals ([1887] 1994:III, §11). Nietzsche says that "*the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instinct of a degenerating life which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence,*" adding that "the ascetic life is an artifact for the *preservation of life*" ([1887] 1994:III, §13). But this idea is contrary to what the proponents of the ideals themselves believe. The priest is a creative force in preserving life because he wants man to live differently, but it is only because of the power that the priest has that this can actually happen. This, Nietzsche says, is a sign of the sickness of man, because in the end it is a sign of man's *ressentiment* and the desire for an end of the subjugated man. The power of the priests—who are the leaders of the herd—allows them to change the way that *ressentiment* is directed. These are examples of how Nietzsche argues that values and meaning are constructed in social processes, in a way that resembles, as already mentioned, Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1991). Another word for this is the "institutionalization" of certain values or social orders, often based on meanings that are already established.

Not only is the construction of values and meanings possible, according to Nietzsche, but also the reconstruction of values. Nietzsche ([1887] 1994:III, §§15, 20) makes the point that someone has to be blamed for the position of the individual, but the priests succeed in redirecting *ressentiment* toward man himself. Subsequently, members of the herd, with the help of the priests, move closer together; a community is formed, encouraged by the values people are taught, "mutual reciprocity," "mechanical activities," and "the blessings of work." Nietzsche thinks that this was easily accomplished because the weak people who the priests addressed were used to slave work and to taking orders (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:III, §18). This illustrates how the tensions of the individual decreased and how they were transferred onto the community. This process also laid a foundation for the collective action of the weak ([1887] 1994:III, §18). The explanation of the activities of the priests, according to Nietzsche, is general. He claims that all actions can be reduced to the purpose (*Absicht*) of power (1911:XVI, §663). Of course, what is interesting is that Nietzsche views rulers as egoists, who try to increase their power by shaping others, by imposing rules and values.

How did the idea of God and of priests become so powerful? That is: How could the values that legitimate their actions be constructed? This leads us to Nietzsche's sociology of authority. The priests gain authority

and power by claiming to mediate between God and man (1911:XV, §275). And authority, as a form of legitimate power, is a condition for ruling, and for imposing Christian values and thinking on people, a task facilitated by the use of music and dance (Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§§84, 106, 120). The second condition is that they must have control of the “course of nature” (i.e., they must be able to account for the events observed in the world). Third, they must have power over what happens after death. This means that they can interpret the world (because only they know the truth), or better, create the world as they please (Nietzsche, 1911:XV, §§139–141). It also means that the priests will argue for an ethic that stresses the purposes of the actor, with God as judge. The priests, in other words, can impose “thou shalt” on mankind. The people, by obeying the orders of the priest, help create (construct) and later reinforce the position that the priests hold. Moreover, people can never meet the demands imposed on them: they are in constant guilt. This guilt, which frequently turns into self-punishment, is what Nietzsche calls “sickness” (of the bad conscience), and it has made the earth into a madhouse ([1887] 1994:III, §22).<sup>13</sup> Priests were able to reinforce priestly values and virtues.

But how can the weak—for example, the slaves—defeat the strong? Nietzsche alludes to the solution by mentioning that the men of *ressentiment* become clever ([1887] 1994:III, §10). He says that over two or three generations, man will change as a result of *ressentiment* and become more equal, cowardly, and represent the slave morality—in sum “mediocre” and honoring the word “liberal” (Nietzsche, [1888] 1980a:13:365–370, §864). But this is not enough; to this must be added the fact that the strong are outnumbered by the weak (Nietzsche, 1911:§401).

Hereby Nietzsche explains not only how these values were constructed in social processes, but also looks at the social consequences of these values and processes. There are two aspects of power that must be separated. The first is power as a driving force for human activity. The second has to do with the possible usage of power. That is to say, once a group—for example, the priests—has power, it can alter the direction of society, and even the values of society. This is so because of the people’s demand for meaning in life in combination with their belief in the power of the priests and, naturally, the interests of the priests. These ideas, and

<sup>13</sup> It must be emphasized that Nietzsche separates what he sees as the valuable ideas underlying Christianity, which are expressed in the Old Testament (which he liked), and the practice of Christianity, which he disliked. His dislike is thus more related to the sociological and historical “reality” of Christianity (including the new texts), than to the old texts (cf. Nietzsche, 1911:XV, §§158–159).

in particular the emergence of values as a result of *ressentiment*, have attracted the attention of some social scientists.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, two different mechanisms for the emergence of values can be identified in Nietzsche's writings. First—and the most well-known and discussed idea—is that values are created through *ressentiment*. But also interesting is the idea that values emerged in the economic sphere and were later transferred to the legal sphere for implementation. These two spheres have both been important for the emergence of values (cf. Zeitlin, 1994).

## COLLECTIVISM

Knowing Nietzsche's conception of how values emerge is a necessary condition for understanding his critique of collectivism, which I have already touched on. The underlying mechanism of society, Nietzsche argues (1911: XV, §269), is that individuals come together and constitute a community and from this grows a common feeling and a common consciousness. The idea of custom is essential in understanding Nietzsche's conception of how society emerged. According to Nietzsche, custom creates civilization and culture. The idea is that customs bring about communication, which leads to concepts, and a form of stability built on the calculability of communal life (Owen, 1997:36). However, a consequence of this unification is that actions that are "in an incomparable manner altogether personal, unique and absolutely individual—there is no doubt about it; but as soon as we translate them into consciousness, they do not appear so any longer" (Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§354), lose their uniqueness once they have been transformed into a communal system of signs of generalizations. Language means that people are able to fix their impressions, but this also means that a mood of thinking is lost. Moreover, the social

<sup>14</sup> Weber, for example, discusses the idea of *ressentiment*, which he considers useful, but says that it cannot be applied to Buddhism (as Nietzsche did, 1946:190, [1921–1922] 1978:934). Max Scheler (1998), who was a Christian, argued that Nietzsche was wrong about attributing *ressentiment* to the Christian religion, though he was not against the idea of *ressentiment* as such. Hans Joas argues that Nietzsche's idea and critique originates in his ethical thinking rather than in scientific considerations. Joas, however, finds no answer in Nietzsche's writings on *ressentiment* concerning how values emerge (1997:37–57). Also Simmel ([1907] 1986) seems to think that Nietzsche has misinterpreted Christianity. Bourdieu uses the concept of *ressentiment* to explain how values change completely as a result of "disappointed ambitions and lost illusions" ([1992] 1996:192). One may connect the discussion of *ressentiment* to the discussion of envy, and this has been done by, for example, Mises ([1969] 1981) and Elster (1999). These thinkers have not discussed the possibility of applying *ressentiment* to socialism, though it has been applied to the rise of the right (*Front National*) in France (e.g., Perrineau, 1997:182–184).

component of the development of consciousness and language is fully acknowledged by Nietzsche: “the development of speech and the development of consciousness (not of reason, but of reason becoming self-conscious) go hand in hand ... consciousness does not properly belong to the individual existence of man, but rather to the *communal* and *herd* nature in him” ([1882] 1960:§354).

The idea of community also plays an important role in Nietzsche's view of how consciousness emerged, which is driven by man's need for communication in the social group. Ultimately, this can be reduced to the need for communication between masters and those who obey (Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§354). According to Nietzsche, nothing is good or bad in itself; values can only be means that tend to preserve certain communities ([1885–1886], 1980a:12:168, §789). Out of community, Nietzsche furthermore proposes, grow myths and even the idea of gods; but the latter can happen only in strong tribes, where the fear of the ancestors' power has become “immense” ([1887] 1994:II, §19). By using the collective narratives of religion, a community can create and maintain customs by punishment. This is also the way memory is maintained (Owen, 1997:36, 44), and the reason why those in power can impose certain customs on other members of society. What Nietzsche presents is consequently not only a theory of how values and other social phenomena emerge, but also what conditions must be present for this to happen.

So far I have discussed Nietzsche's ideas on how values can emerge, and how groups can acquire power out of initiating and taking advantage of these processes, but I have not said much about why Nietzsche dislikes Christianity, socialism, anarchism, and even liberalism. Nietzsche argues like this: each of these theories, with liberalism as an exception, grows out of *ressentiment*, and has gained ground because of the persistence, hatred, and strength of the collective supporting the doctrine. All strong individuals have been suppressed and the reason for this is that the weak have imposed their belief system—religious or democratic—on everybody. Moreover, Nietzsche claims that moral doctrines have been forced on people through more or less violent means. These doctrines can therefore be described as imperialistic collective doctrines, which destroy the possibility for self-creation by the individual.

This is where the concept of the “herd” comes in, and Nietzsche characterizes Christianity and socialism as herd religions that teach submission (1911:§§209, 216). Christianity is a socialist doctrine in that it wants to abolish property, rank, and status and other aristocratic institutions. Nietzsche, moreover, speaks of Christian tyranny, and also of socialism as a consequence of the tyranny of the lowest and stupidest people, adding that the so-called good man is a tyrant (1911:§125). At the

same time, he calls the good man the future slave because he, like the “moral man,” follows the values decided for him (1911:§§351–361). People who embrace these values, Nietzsche says (1911:§319), are not individuals; they are not different from each other—they do not dare to be different—and he calls them cowards and weaklings.

Thus, when the will to power is directed at others, and demands that others ought to obey the morality of the rulers, a collective morality is established. This type of morality impinges on others. But what Nietzsche says is not reducible to liberalism (Owen, 1995). Though he says that individualism can free the individual from societal domination (which can be due to the state or the church) (Nietzsche, 1911:§784), it is based on the assumption that men are equal. Thus, there is only a difference in degree between individualism on the one hand, and socialism, anarchism, and democracy on the other (cf. Nietzsche, [1889] 1968:§38).

Nietzsche’s point that many doctrines, some of which may appear individualistic, are in fact alike becomes clearer if we focus on his concept of the “herd.” The herd doctrine grows out of society. Once this unit of evaluation is created, the herd morality will rule: the morality that is good for the “commune” (*Gemeinde*) or herd (*Heerde*) will dominate (Nietzsche, [1882], 1960:§116). This, as may be seen, is the result of the herd coming to power and of the way it exercises its power. One consequence of all this is that the average man becomes the norm. In the case of democracy, it is the majority that rules or, in Nietzsche’s words, “[e]veryone is equal to everyone else,” and therefore democracy is seen as a form of weakness (1911:§§752, 762).<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche also rejects the culture of “the West,” which he views as an invention of the herd, simply because the collective process of creating culture is seen as decadence (Antonio, 1995). Here, Nietzsche is attacking the entire project and culture of modernity.

But it is not primarily the values of the herd that Nietzsche opposes; rather, it is their social consequences. Crucial for understanding his critique is how these values become universal; how everyone is compelled to obey these norms. Nietzsche declares that the meaning behind the will to power can be seen as three instances of power: (1) the instinct of the herd against the strong and independent; (2) the instinct of the suffering and underprivileged against the fortunate; and (3) the instinct of the mediocre against the exceptional (1911:§§274, 345). These instincts lead the individual to be constrained and forced to relinquish autonomy because of power regime. This may have severe consequences because of the demand not to contradict the present order: ““Mr. Unbeliever, you are disturbing my

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche (1911:§753) is opposed to socialism because it advocates, among other things, “equal rights” and democratic “institutions,” such as governments and the press, since these institutions help the herd to gain dominance.

morality with your unbelief; as long as you do not believe in my bad reasons, which is to say in God, in a punishing beyond, in freedom of will, you hinder my virtue ... Moral: one has to get rid of all unbelievers: they hinder the moralization of the masses” (Nietzsche, 1911:§313). Furthermore, these instincts mean that the morality of the herd develops out of the thinking of the herd. This morality will benefit the herd and the moral claim “one ought to act thus” is merely another way of saying “thus and thus one acts among us” (Nietzsche, 1911:§346). As a result, Nietzsche completely rejects the values of the herd instinct, for example, “equality” and “altruism” (e.g., 1911:§§283, 286).

One can also understand Nietzsche's concept of the state in this light. The state, he says, emerged as a result of a process of taming carried out by a conqueror. The conqueror can best be seen as a robber band (Nietzsche, [1887] 1994:II, §§17–8). Nietzsche—not surprisingly—dislikes the state because it constrains the individual and his or her realization of the self, resulting in conformity (Hunt, 1991:36–38; Kaufman, 1974:162–163). The power the collective has over the individual, which enables it to force the individual to conform, is the key idea that underlies Nietzsche's critique (cf. 1911:§784). But the state also contributes to weakening individuals by lifting responsibility from their shoulders or, in Nietzsche's words: “How does a multitude attain many things which an individual would never *manage*?” (1911:§717). This is done, Nietzsche answers, through a division of responsibility, and by constructing and imposing the virtues of obedience, duty, patriotism, and loyalty. It follows that only by taking responsibility away from the individual can one kill another; not primarily because, for example, the state gives him strength, but because this lessens the pressure on the individual. This, for example, can be done by alluding to higher ideals (e.g., “God” or “the nation”).

This must be connected to the idea of collective actions discussed above. Thus, out of the need for communication grew a common language, and hence thinking, and out of society as a moral unit came values, created by the priests, which strengthened society through the use of myths and laws (cf. Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§358). The consequence of all this was that people became more similar, and that the goal—or meaning—of social life was “elevated” to the level of society, which meant less responsibility for each individual.

This means that the “lack” of meaning in life becomes related to collectivism, society, and supra-individual values. As already mentioned, Christianity was successful, and the priests were able to invoke the values of their doctrine; this was made easier because of the need for life to have a meaning (cf. Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§347). The meaning of life in this

case was found in the collective. Nietzsche strongly disliked the Christian collective ideas of equality and sacrifice of the individual. Christian “virtue” and “charity” are key values of Christian altruism, which Nietzsche calls “the mass-egoism of the weak” (1911:§246).

## INDIVIDUALISM: SELF-CREATION, VALUE, AND MEANING

Nietzsche’s thinking is not yet fully comprehensible. His critique of sociology for stating that the ultimate goal in life is at the level of mankind or society, and his argument that herd-ruled societies make it impossible for the individual to flourish, must be related to his doctrine of the *Übermensch* or “overman.” This sovereign being cannot be understood simply in terms of “pure” individuality. It encompasses broader questions of identity and values and, more generally, of culture and society at large. This, I argue, is the first part of his argument concerning the *Übermensch*. The second part is less interesting to a sociologist and involves his ethical theory, which few seem to embrace.

Nietzsche argues that many ideas have been contrived and imposed on mankind. The subject, the actor (the “doer”), logic, truth, causality, necessity, action, purpose, love, and morality are examples of social constructions (1911:§§481, 552, 666, [1882], 1960:§§111–112, 334). The most important construction, at least from a sociological point of view, is the subject, which Nietzsche deals with in the section “Belief in the ‘Ego.’ The Subject” (1911:§§481–492; [1881] 1982:§116). Nietzsche, in fact, sees persons as essentially defined by their social roles and thus constructed in social processes. This is expressed in the following famous Nietzschean quote: “the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed” [*es gibt kein ‘Sein’ hinter dem Thun*] ([1887] 1994:I, §13), which postmodernists and deconstructionists have parroted. Nietzsche also claims that consciousness, the notion of a “goal,” and the belief in the possibility of viewing an actor’s “subjective intentions” as a cause are “projected” onto the actor; these are invented for the sake of representing man as a unit ([1882] 1960:§§11, 360; [1888], 1980a:13:457). Moreover, reason cannot provide a “criterion” for reality since it is just a means of mastering “reality” (Nietzsche, 1911:§584); science, with its presuppositions, cannot do this either (cf. Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§344). The most strongly believed assumptions, Nietzsche says, are nothing but “provisional assumptions” (1911:§497).<sup>16</sup> Man has invented signs, and later causality and all the other “provisional

<sup>16</sup> In typically Nietzschean fashion, he asks rhetorically: “[T]rust in reason—why not mistrust? The true world as opposed to the good world—why?” ([1887] 1980:12:430, §578).

assumptions,” to grasp reality in a simpler way (1911:§§584, 675). The subject, according to Nietzsche, has gained a strong position in our thinking for evolutionary and pragmatic reasons. This means that the subject has a pivotal role in the organization of different impulses and is responsible for them.

Nietzsche sees the body (*Leib*) as the source of knowledge and reasoning ([1892] 1954). One may even describe the body as a pole of resistance to the socially constructed values, norms, and traditions that impinge on man and make him or her a social being: what sociologists conceptualize as socialization and internalization. In this context, art is the principal means available to those who want to become what they are. This idea was developed in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871). The argument, in brief, is that it is possible to avoid rationality by turning to art. What Nietzsche, in essence, argues is that the sphere of art—and, more concretely, artists—can, through creativity, suspend the social constructions that people normally cannot think and act without (Seffler, 1974). Art is a last resort for activities without a socially designated purpose (Nietzsche, [1889] 1980b:§24). As soon as there is a purpose, it is possible to value and evaluate actions according to socially constructed moral standards.

Art is seen as a possible way of reconstructing the self (Nietzsche, [1889] 1980b:§§8–9). The condition of *Rausch*, which I here translate as “state of excitement” or “rapture” (and not only intoxication due to drugs), triggers the will to power and actions that can move mountains (Nietzsche, [1889] 1980b:§11). This implies that artworks are instances of the will to power (Heidegger, 1996:122). One may say that the combination of art and the body, using *Rausch*, enables man to get outside the socially constructed roles he is shackled by. Both art and *Rausch* can be seen as attempts by Nietzsche to identify ways of finding one’s self”—to become what one is”—by bracketing the socially constructed “subject.”

It is in this light that we must understand the artist, whom Nietzsche ([1878] 1986:§169) sees as an exceptional creature, capable of doing something radical, such as creating a new path (Nietzsche, [1878] 1986:§231). Artists are also seen as geniuses (Nietzsche, [1878] 1986:§378). There are, in fact, two kinds of genius: those who “draw on resources that are their own,” and the more “dependent nature, the so-called talents,” who are “full of recollections of everything imaginable” (Nietzsche, [1878] 1986:§165). More generally, art is man’s way out of the oppression of society (Heidegger, 2004:189). It is a way out since art is the means of creation and a possible means of creating new tables of values (Heidegger, 1985:84–86; Nietzsche, [1878] 1986:§159).

The world, to simplify, does not come in ready-made bundles; instead, it is constructed in social processes. Nietzsche’s ontological

position is best described as antirealistic (cf. [1882] 1960:§§57–8), which means that he rejects traditional ontological positions—such as realism and idealism—which assume there is a world that exists independently of us. The most fundamental principles of human thinking are manmade in social processes that constrain man, though Nietzsche seldom provides empirical evidence for his claim. But by outlining an ontology that accounts for construction and also for his own ideals, he sets the stage for what later came to be called “social construction” (cf. Gemes, 1992:48–51).

An important question that I have already discussed at some length is the role of value. To organize life, man must have values to guide him in what is important, what is the right action to take, and so on. Furthermore, there are no values inscribed in the world; instead, man is left to himself to inscribe values in his environment. Only when inscribing values can one speak of meaning in history (Nietzsche, 1911:§1011).<sup>17</sup> In a sense this means that there is a constant chaos out of which “reality” is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. I have so far stressed that Nietzsche sees this as a social process. In this light one must understand the tension between collective ideals, which provide man with meaning in life, and the strong individual, who creates his or her own tables of values (*Schöpfung neuer eigener Gütertafeln*) ([1882] 1960:§335). To do this, a new center must be sought, which can be done only if man acts as the destroyer of the old values (Nietzsche, 1911:§417). This means that the individual takes control of life, to destroy—and thereby to create—with the *Übermensch* as one’s goal. This is the core of the morality Nietzsche advocates ([1892] 1954:135–136; 1911:§1001). That is, Nietzsche suggests that “we” can become what we are (*Wir ... wollen Die werden, die Wir sind*) ([1882] 1960:§335; cf. the subtitle of *Ecce Homo*, “How one becomes what one is”). This means not listening to one’s conscience because it only reflects what one has been taught to say and do (cf. Nietzsche, 1911:§205). The ambition is much more to free man of the values and the determination of values under which he is oppressed (cf. Heidegger, 1997:276). The idea of values itself, however, is retained. There is an important existential implication here: man cannot escape responsibility, there is no God and no truth that could confirm the judgments of the world that people, including scientists, make.

There are two basic ways that order can be constructed out of chaos. First, the authorities impose order; second, man himself creates values

<sup>17</sup> A similar argument is used by John Searle (1995, 1998) when he writes about functions: one can only value a thing once it has been assigned a function in society. The meaning of a “thing” is understandable only in relation to values. The closeness of Nietzsche’s thoughts to phenomenological analysis on this issue is also clear.

and in this way brings order to the world. The latter way—man takes responsibility for his life and creates values, controls his impulses, organizes the chaos, and gives style to his “character”—is of course what Nietzsche advocates (Heidegger, 1997:276; Hunt, 1991:178). By trying and managing to do this, man exercises power (Kaufman, 1974:280). This is the strong way of exercising power, which must be contrasted with the weak form that is used by the herd, that is, the collective.

It is difficult to understand how this individualistic idea can be reconciled with the existence of societies. This is because the individual is brought up and socialized in a society that has ascribed value, and thus meaning, to certain things and activities. These decisions made by one's predecessors have long-lasting effects because they are deeply rooted in the means of communication and thinking, such as language (cf. Schütz, [1932] 1976:74–75). Man, that is to say, lives in a world that others have created and so is caught up in this socially constructed framework.

## CONCLUSION

This article is an attempt to present and clarify Nietzsche's contribution to sociology. The approach to sociology that I present here is not merely analysis of the sociological ideas of a nonsociologist, but also a kind of “confrontation” (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Nietzsche, which is the highest form of respect one can pay an author (Heidegger, 1985:6). This confrontation—different from a merely historical exposition—must include basic sociological questions.

Friedrich Nietzsche is arguably one of the most interesting thinkers. A thinker, to adopt another thinker's—Martin Heidegger—definition, is a person who bases his or her thinking on his or her own thoughts and who addresses the fundamental question of what is in its totality (*das Seiende im Ganzen*) (Heidegger, 1989:7). This way of reading Nietzsche involves acknowledging that he had to use language and conventional means of communication to be heard: exactly what he saw as part of the problem. His distinctive style of writing can thus be interpreted as a way of breaking the spell of language, while still being forced to use it.

In this article I have tried to present Nietzsche's sociology. That Nietzsche should not be seen as a sociologist is supported by his own comments; it is obvious that Nietzsche disliked the sociology of his time. The connection between the moral ideas of the time and a sociology directed toward changing society in accordance with its doctrines were strong grounds for his dislike. I have shown that Nietzsche makes a number of

sociological points, but he was not a sociologist like Weber, Pareto, or Durkheim, although in some ways he was a much more radical social thinker than Durkheim who, especially in his early writings, saw social science as a science of social facts or, in other words, almost as a branch of social physics. Nietzsche, in contrast, discusses society in a much more “critical” way. One may say that he raises more questions than he answers about social relations.

Naive social realism still has supporters (e.g., Bunge, 1998). Nietzsche, who wrote more than 100 years ago, represents an approach that in recent times has been developed, in various forms, by Foucault, Derrida, Bourdieu, and many others, and that has gained strength pushing back naive realism, namely, constructivism. It is worth stressing the connection, at least when it comes to ideas, between Nietzsche and the constructivist idea among phenomenologists, such as the later Husserl ([1954] 1970); Schütz ([1932] 1976); and Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1991). But Nietzsche’s thought goes much further than most of the ideas (e.g., Hacking, 1999) current in this debate.

Nietzsche addresses the question of fundamental ontology, but his analysis is not framed within a realist or idealist ontology; Nietzsche ([1878] 1986:I, §18) is critical of the very idea of an ultimate ontology. Ontology, as we know, is manmade, which to an important extent depends on language, that fixes the meanings of “right,” “wrong,” “ethical,” “good,” and “bad,” and so on. Nietzsche regards the social domain in particular as socially constructed, though the body and its organs may resist. One may therefore talk of a radical social constructivism, which I call socio-ontology, that is, a man-made ontology that acknowledges the researcher as co-creator. It addresses the most fundamental question of ontology, the study of being (Heidegger, 1988:1), though this cannot be pursued further here. To discuss this traditional philosophical question from a sociologically relevant horizon, as Nietzsche does, is more radical than what sociologists usually do (e.g., Ruef, 1999).

Nietzsche presents a form of social constructivism that clearly implies that actors take part in the making of the world, and that their activities maintain its values, structures, and other social constructions. To grasp the consequences of this fundamental revision of the preconditions of thinking at the same time as one is reasoning is not easy. Nietzsche’s claim that consciousness and language are the results of social processes means that man’s thinking is socially conditioned. Nietzsche’s approach leads him to study the social processes and presuppositions that underpin the social sciences. One contemporary sociologist who has presented developed ideas of social reality as a construction is Bourdieu (1987; [1992] 1996). He argues that actors act within the framework of their power

situations in the different fields that constitute society, and by doing so they create or recreate social fields.

The social constructivism in Nietzsche's thinking covers both morality and ideology. To say that morality is a social construction does not imply that it is without interest to the social scientist or, in the words of Nietzsche: "A morality could even have grown *out of* an error: but with this knowledge, the problem of its worth would not even be touched" ([1882] 1960:§345, cf. §151). The question of morality, which Nietzsche ([1882] 1960:§345) calls the "most celebrated of all medicines," is of the utmost importance. And it is what people perceive to be of importance that determines their actions (cf. Nietzsche, [1882] 1960:§44), an idea that later came to be known as the "Thomas theorem."

Is it possible to connect Nietzsche's ideas to broader sociological topics? Weber's famous account of how capitalism emerged draws on similar ideas to those that Nietzsche presents, namely, certain actions were legitimated by authority, and this led to further, though unintended, consequences. Another way of understanding this process is to say that the priests reconstructed the conditions of "economic actions," and simultaneously what counted as religiously acceptable actions.

A major sociological point in Nietzsche's work is that values and beliefs can be seen as the result of struggle between actors striving to increase their power. Weber's definition of the two concepts of conflict (*Kampf*) and power (*Macht*) is related to Nietzsche's discussion of this collective power (though Nietzsche sees this as a power of the weak collective). Conflict, according to Weber, is a social relationship in which an "action is oriented intentionally to carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of the other party or parties" ([1921–1922] 1978:38). Weber says that power is "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" ([1921–1922] 1978:53). Nietzsche's discussion of power, in the case of a collective imposing its value system on others, resembles Weber's account, which, of course, was written later. The creation of new tables of values must be carried out against the resistance of others, and this presupposes a strong individual. In both cases, the action and exercise of power are oriented toward others.

These values and beliefs are constructions, and the main idea is that the result could have been different and that values change over time; they are also reconstructed. A broader point follows from this. Nietzsche's key notions—for example, power, values, beliefs, and interest—are closely related and, taken together, constitute a means of explaining how social reality is constructed. Social constructions in the Nietzschean sense are

embedded and cannot be changed at a stroke, as hard-core postmodernists claim (cf. Gemes, 1992:51, 2001).

Nietzsche stressed the role of art as a source of resistance and also a possible way of unraveling, an idea that reflects the indeterminacy of aesthetic values or the problem of ordering them. Aesthetic values have today become an accepted aspect of postmodern society or of what has been called “reflexive modernity” (cf. Lash, 1994). Social scientists such as Ronald Inglehart have also presented empirical evidence for a shift toward postmodern values (Inglehart, 1990, 1997; cf. Bell, 1973; Lash and Urry, 1987). Thus the heightened role of the aesthetic principles of evaluation (taste), reflects as well as creates a social order that cannot be maintained by strongly entrenched conventions.

Furthermore, the increased importance of aesthetics in contemporary society has been argued (Fuenta, 2000). Nietzsche’s thought, I claim, is a very important source for those who want to study the intersection of the aesthetic sphere and other spheres, such as the economic sphere (Aspers, 2005). This general insight is useful in studies of the art world, but also for more direct studies of aesthetic production markets. An “aesthetic logic” has been found to exist in markets that are normally assumed to reside solely in the economic sphere. Nietzsche’s approach, all in all, is more like a toolkit that facilitates further questioning of a sociological nature, beyond the issues he raised himself, rather than a ready-made theory.

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