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SITUATIONALLY EDITED EMPATHY: AN EFFECT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE ON INDIVIDUAL CHOICE

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Abstract. Criminological theory still operates with deficient models of the offender as agent, and of social influences on the agent's decision-making process. This paper takes one 'emotion', empathy, which is theoretically of considerable importance in influencing the choices made by agents; particularly those involving criminal or otherwise harmful action. Using a framework not of rational action, but of 'rationalised action', the paper considers some of the effects on individual psychology of social, economic, political and cultural structure. It is suggested that the climate-setting effects of these structures promote normative definitions of social situations which allow unempathic, harmful action to be rationalised through the situational editing of empathy. The 'crime is normal' argument can therefore be extended to include the recognition that the uncompassionate state of mind of the criminal actor is a reflection of the self-interested values which govern non-criminal action in wider society.

Theoretical context

This argument takes place at the interface of three lines of social theory. The first is the tradition that can be called ‘the social manufacture of moral indifference’. This train of thought is evident primarily in the writings of Zygmunt Bauman on ‘postmodern ethics’ (Bauman 1989, 1993, 1995). Crudely put, one of the central rejections Bauman makes is of the image of pre-social man as an immoral individual. In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, of course, his theme is precisely the opposite. He suggests that the traditional view of Nazi atrocities as taking place in a social space in which norms have somehow broken down is empirically unsound given the evidence that most of those carrying out the work of the holocaust were relatively unremarkable people, often performing bureaucratic tasks that were themselves relatively unremarkable other than for the horror to which they were ultimately linked. Bauman therefore turns the argument about the moral socialisation of man on its head – rather than pre-social man being seen as immoral, or amoral, until ‘socialisation’ occurs, Bauman proposes that we would do better to see pre-social man as essentially moral, and cast immoral practices as effects inherent to the socialisation patterns of modernity. Our focus is therefore not a lack of bonding, to use Hirschi’s terminology (Hirschi 1969; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), but *too much* bonding; not a pathological aspect of society, but normality.

Bauman is strongly influenced by Levinas (1969; 1981) in his positing of a pre-social morality. Levinas’s revision of the *cogito* of Descartes is enormously attractive to critical scholars as it provides the possibility of an escape from the current construction of identity in western society through consumption and self-aggrandisement. The possibility

of a Levinasian construction of identity through an ethic of care may hold important possibilities for criminologists – that I know I am an individual not because of my capacity to ponder the question, but because of my capacity to care about others, thereby creating and confirming difference. One does not, I think, need to indulge here in a full exposition of the arguments for and against a pre-social conception of moral man; it is enough for the moment to begin with a diluted version of Bauman's argument which suggests simply that the process of the internalisation of norms through socialisation does not exclude the possibility that unproductive or deleterious norms can be internalised.

The second theoretical influence on this paper's central idea is the positing of the mutual observation of different cultural groups; particularly the perceptive works of writers such as Jock Young and bell hooks around the appropriation of conventional cultural symbols by counter-cultural groups (e.g. Young 1999; hooks 1994). Although taking their roots in observations of cultural motifs adopted in poor black US communities, these writings continue to ring true in the UK, not least in the current middle class concern here with 'chavs'. Chav is the latest media-driven 'yob' identity, typified by a penchant for designer clothes which Middle Britain argues look garishly out of place on local – generally poor – youth. Peculiarly, then, designer clothes have in this circumstance become a sign of a lack of taste. Such was the level of adoption of the Burberry-check cap as a favourite fashion item by 'chavs' that the company has opted to withdraw the line in an attempt to save the integrity of its label in the eyes of the more affluent Burberry patron (The Scotsman 2005).

The third brand of theory which is brought into this argument is prefigured somewhat in the title to this piece. Any theory of individual choice in criminology must take account of rational choice theory. This theory, often criticised for its crass classicism, has been refined greatly since it was first introduced into criminology, and now provides the opportunity for a more fully social discussion of the mechanism of criminal choice.

There is a fourth theoretical element to the argument presented here, although it has not been included in the three-fold division presented above. This is because it is not so much a line of theory which is brought into this synthesis of social and philosophical thought as it is the very foundation on which these observations are grounded. Marx gives us the platform on which to consider the individual emotional effects of socio-economic structure, and I shall in the final section of the main body of this paper draw attention to some of the parts of his work that support, if not foreshadow, what is argued here.

In the sections that follow, therefore, I shall consider the nature of the interaction of social context with individual psychology in relation to the effects of social structure on the formation and use of empathy. A factor common to the commission of nearly all crime is that the criminal cares more about him or herself in the seconds, minutes, days or hours over which the crime is committed, than he or she does about the victim(s). The exceptions to this rule prove its importance. Euthanasia, for example, is a crime which attracts much controversy precisely because it is difficult for many to see a person punished as a criminal for apparently caring too much about their victim. Crime which is apparently not self-interested, such as the thief who steals to support his family, the youth

who fights for the honour of his gang, or the State which contrary to international law and convention effects pre-emptive war to protect its citizens, can all be brought within the bounds of an argument based on the situational editing of empathy through the observation that each involves a linking of the actor's self-definition with his group, and each involves the prioritisation of the interests of that group over the interests of the victim. The matter of caring for the effects of one's action on others can be categorised as involving both psychological and social elements and therefore demands a criminological analysis which addresses both of these. Empathy – the capacity and desire to consider the situation of others – is, as such, a psychosocial concept.

A suitable conception of how social affairs affect what people think, and therefore influence the choices they make, is indispensable to criminology. This paper argues that market capitalism has such an effect, through its cultural influence and its power to define the meaning structures within which actors perform their agency. These meaning structures are understood as dualistic in the structuration sense (Giddens 1984, 1990, 1991); made by and making agents, and interpretable by them as objectified social context. Through an understanding of this interface of macro-economics and micro-level agency, we can begin to contextualise the choice mechanisms implicated in the manifestation of harmful action.

Socio-economic conditions and situational empathy

The globalising, capitalising world is one of rampant double standards. Never before have citizens of the world been brought so closely together in terms of the capacity

directly to perceive, through burgeoning media, the plight of those in other countries. It is apparent that we live in a world divided by vast chasms of economic inequality: between neighbours, between neighbourhoods, between cities and towns, between countries and between continents. Yet, somehow, we the privileged go on with our lives, shut it all out, go to work every day, just get on with the process of living. We insulate ourselves from other people's problems, and prioritise our own lives and happiness. This is not true for everyone, of course. Some choose to limit their personal economic aspirations, to pursue a career or course of action positively beneficial to others and actively detrimental to themselves; to sacrifice what they might otherwise have been able to achieve fiscally or in terms of status. These, however, are the extraordinary minority. It therefore seems indisputable to say that we in the West are, in general, a grossly selfish society, and show no obvious signs of improving on this depressing mode of existence.

Inequality in Britain has increased since New Labour came to power in 1997, according to an update paper recently released by the Institute of Public Policy Research. The IPPR found that 'fewer people are living in poverty than in 1997, but the proportion of wealth held by Britain's richest 10% rose from 47% to 54% during the 1990s' (Wintour 2004). In the report's words: 'wealth distribution is more unequal than income distribution, and has continued to widen in the last decade' (Paxton and Dixon 2004: 32). Even although wealth inequality outshines income inequality, the latter is still a problem: the richest 1% of the population have increased their share of income from 6.7% in 1981 to 13% in 1999 (Paxton and Dixon 2004: 32).

Upon the plinth of a neo-liberal political economy, I will begin to unpack the concept of empathy, ask when and how it is applied, and consider its relationship to socio-economic structure, inequality and crime. It appears axiomatic that there are social forces at work in Western capitalist democracies today which encourage the situational application of, and on the other hand abandonment of, empathy:

Market forces generate a more unequal and less meritocratic society, market values encourage an ethos of every person for themselves: together these create a combination which is severely criminogenic (Young 2002: 459).

Corporate capitalism generally demands that any empathy felt for competitors is not allowed to interfere with the pursuit of profit. Employers demand professionalism from their employees, which leads to detachment, objectively justifiable practices (that is, the possession of impersonal reasons for taking a course of action), and the creation of a business world in which the normal rules of social life, including practical etiquette, are suspended in favour of an acknowledgement that what is at stake is survival in the face of competition. The situation is mutually defined by employer and employee as one in which too much empathy is counter-productive.

Clearly, corporations must use empathy to put themselves in the place of the consumer in order to identify how best to get their money, and front-line employees must pretend to care deeply about the circumstances of customers who engage them, again in pursuit of their financial divestment. Both of these practices have - without reference to the term

'empathy' - recently been acknowledged as problematic for consumers in a report on doorstep selling (Office of Fair Trading 2004). While some employees are required to fake empathy, some categories of employee are paid to truly empathise, such as professional carers, or 'Samaritans'. The requirements of these caring professions have beget a discourse around 'emotional work', heavy with the suggestion that once switched on the exercise of real empathy is difficult to switch off at the end of the working day, and that therefore these roles are financially undervalued by the market (Hochschild 1983). 'Being for the Other' (Levinas 1981) is a full-time job, and the market is ill-equipped to deal with the commodification of emotions in this way. Care has been transformed into a product, but the costs to the worker are higher than the exchange value placed on the unit of labour required to create that product. There is, in other words, a conflict between the phenomenology of interpersonal care and the fondness of the market for time-bound and situation-bound units of fiscal measurement and production.

Very recently we have seen the emergence of a discourse of Corporate Social Responsibility, which the evidence predictably suggests companies use as a marketing tool: style takes precedence over substance as global conglomerates illustrate how much they care about the environment, and by extension about us, its inhabitants, while failing to mention the more environmentally deleterious elements of their trade (Bakan 2004). Much of the empathy we see in the marketplace is therefore paper-thin, and what true empathy exists is imbued with a financial value. An appeal to values of fair play, honesty, and concern for the welfare of others without financial reward seems increasingly to ask for the reinstatement of the outmoded.

The individual businessman or woman, if 'successful', may well display very low levels of empathy when considering methods through which to realise the company mission. In the home, however, the matter is different, and much empathy is likely to be displayed towards family and friends. Insofar as this is an accurate synopsis of the application of empathy, it suggests that empathy is not a single, unitary facet of personality, present in equal measure in any one individual over time. Rather, empathy can be seen as situational; its presence in informing action is influenced by the definition the actor holds of a social moment as being one in which empathy is or is not appropriate. This makes problematic any study that attempts to measure empathy as if a cross-section were a stable reflection of psychological make-up over time (I shall mention two such studies later in this section).

Jock Young identifies the main problem with the concept of 'social exclusion' as being that it carries with it a sense of demarcation – a 'series of false binaries' which amount to the impression that society is riven by a conceptually impermeable boundary between the included and the excluded (Young 1999). This, he observes, fails to capture the shifting social positions of some individuals within an ever-mobile social and economic world, and ultimately reduces our analysis of deprivation, exclusion and despair to a hopelessly simplified – and quite imagined – model of civilised society versus the underclass.

In fact, the divisions of wealth which segment society from moment to moment are permeable not only in terms of individual transition, but in terms of the mutual

observation, appropriation and consumption of culture. Following Nightingale (1993), Young identifies the strong beat of the heart of white, racist, consumptive America in that country's sizeable black urban poor demographic:

Here is full immersion in the American Dream: a culture hooked on Gucci, BMW, Nike, watching television 11 hours per day, sharing the mainstream culture's obsession with violence, backing, at the time of the study, Bush's involvement in the Gulf War, lining up outside the cinemas, worshipping success, money, wealth, and status – even sharing in a perverse way the racism of the wider society (Young 2003: 394).

Many other writers have noted a similar reflection of dominant cultural values in the ghetto; bell hooks (1994) is an example of one such account, which adds the feminist insight that the misogyny of the dominant capitalist culture is adopted, and indeed perversely amplified. Attitudes to women among the ghettoised, as expressed by monikers like 'my bitch', reflect both the lure of property and the subjection of a perceived lesser gender evident in wider 'respectable' society.

It is not, therefore, beyond the realms of credibility that empathy – discouraged in free market trading by contemporary socio-economic structure (Sennett 1998) – is situationally edited in the pursuit of satisfaction deemed criminal, as it is situationally edited in the pursuit of satisfaction deemed legitimate. On this view, the criminal act is seen as making sense to the actor as a situation in which empathy for the victim may be

justifiably abandoned. And this situational editing of empathy is a reflection of wider social practice. If certain social spheres in the 'upperworld' are culturally defined as 'zones without compassion', and if the aspirations, meaning structures and cultural constructs of the upperworld are reflected, and in some degrees amplified in the 'underworld', it is not unthinkable that the situational editing of empathy might pass through that fractured glass divide.

For many non-criminal social actors, most of whom are, to further press what has quickly become a sociological cliché, 'ontologically insecure' (Giddens 1991), that is (in part) unsure of the permanence of their position on the social scale, there is a confronting juxtaposition between inculcated notions of meritocracy and fairness, and the perceived lottery of rewards allocated without any reference to social progress by the housing boom, the stock markets (less so latterly for investors, but still for brokers and analysts, destroying even the spurious justification of inflated salaries based on effort and result), the chummy distribution of comfortable and lucrative non-executive directorships and of course in Britain, the National Lottery itself. This latter might be a suitable metaphor for the chime of British politics under the increasingly Americanised neo-liberal discourse of New Labour: money is happiness and we should have no philosophical issue with the propositions that some should enjoy greater happiness than others, and that the ethically frail hand of the market should determine who those people will be. Envy, particularly envy of unmerited wealth, is highly destructive of empathy. In a society where nobody seems to care enough about the good work of nurses, teachers, social workers, etc, a

climate is created in which the citizen is subtly advised to repress whatever pro-social motives she might possess in favour of a course of self-promotion.

A telling statistic can be found in the most recently published results of the British Social Attitudes Survey (National Centre for Social Research 2002). Question 339 asked respondents what quality above all others they would advise a young respondent was important in deciding on a career. The options were: good starting pay; a secure job for the future; opportunities for promotion; interesting work; good work conditions; and a chance to help other people. A weighted frequency distribution run on SPSS for this question reveals that a mere 1.9% of the interviewees chose the last option. The overwhelming majority answered 'a secure job for the future' (40.2%) or 'interesting work' (35.8%): both highly self-interested responses. The point of considerable importance to a discussion of structural reproduction through predictable individual choice is that the question asked not what the respondent would choose in a job, but what they would advise a young advice-seeker to choose. This removes the personal self-interest which would colour a response on behalf of the individual themselves, and gives us an insight into the agents' understanding of the necessity of self-interest dictated by social structure. The question is not what they would do, but what someone else would be best advised to do, and this clearly does not involve helping others as a primary motive.

In this light, the first step toward an adequate identification of the concept of empathy will involve acknowledging that its situational dimensions link it incontrovertibly to normatively-constructed, and as such widely shared, social meaning structures. Moving,

therefore, from a 'traditional psychology' which measures empathy using a variety of testing instruments, all of which have in common the ability to produce a score which supposedly tells us how much empathy a person has (Hogan 1969; Mehrabian and Epstein 1972; Davis 1980, 1983, 1991; Mehrabian 1997), to a more sophisticated psychosocial understanding of empathy as an unstable function of personality comprised of disposition and (situational) definition, we might begin to make progress.

One can find in the statistical literature examples of studies which have found low empathy to be a weak risk factor for crime (e.g. Andrews and Bonta 1998) and examples of studies that can be interpreted as suggesting it might be a strong risk factor. In respect of the latter, Halpern, using the World Values Surveys, has found young people, males and those living in large cities to be more self-interested than older people, females and rural populations respectively; a finding which fits with the age-related nature of desistance (the WVS has an entry age of 18, so it is not possible to examine the age-crime curve in relation to self-interest using Halpern's data), the gender bias in offending, and higher urban crime rates (Halpern 2001: 241). He also found that 'self-interest' increased across Europe in the 1980s, a decade of rising crime (Halpern 2001: 242-3). It would be fatuous to cite either those studies for the self-interest/crime link or those against as definitive in resolving the problem, however, as both can be seen as flawed in their conceptualisation of the independent variable. Given the situational element of this paper's hypothesis, the data contained in the WVS and the British Attitudes Surveys are not sufficiently sophisticated to test the matter appropriately.

Empathy and choice: disposition and deliberation

The Rational Choice criminal-as-calculator approach is not so devoid of theory as is often alleged. It is simply that the theory is a particularly narrowly-conceived one, insofar as it speaks of human action. It prioritises deliberation (choice) over disposition, and has attracted much criticism for this bias. In ‘traditional’ rational choice theory, motivated criminals choose targets based on opportunity and a cost-benefit calculation of the probable outcome (Clarke and Cornish 1985; Cornish and Clarke 1986; Clarke 1995). The individual is seen as deliberating, and although social and developmental factors are not ruled out in the constitution of the actor who arrives at the scene of the contemplated crime (see Cornish and Clarke 2003), such determinism is viewed as outwith the immediate scope of the theory of the calculations he performs once there. The conscious deliberations of the criminal can be altered through target hardening, increasing risks (for example by surveillance), and decreasing rewards (as seems to be occurring in any event in relation to burglary as electronic goods grow ever cheaper) but his disposition towards crime – that which makes crime an acceptable moral choice for him in the conversations he has with himself – is, for the situational crime preventer, somebody else’s problem.

The theoretical acknowledgement which might be uncovered even in this self-confessedly sociologically blinkered (see, for example Clarke 1992; and the introduction to Clarke and Felson 1993) early economic brand of rational choice/opportunity theory is that the motivated offender is motivated by personal gain. It is inherent in this assumption that the individual sees his personal gain as more important than the situation of others, and the loss or harm that he might cause to them through effecting his gain. One of the

unwritten laws on which rational choice theory is based is therefore that the criminal with whom it wishes to engage is, at the moment of crime commission, low on empathy. He cares more about himself than others. This is a proposition worth exploring, as it may hold the key to the integration of dispositive impetus into the theory of choice.

Clearly, we cannot hope adequately to explain crime purely in terms of deliberation - in other words through a classical conception of free will - since dispositions affect the choices we make, and are likely to make, to the point that any notion of 'rational' choice demands an analysis of the historical, the subjective, the circumstantial, the developmental; in short, many things which are antithetical to the objective deliberation which underlines the basic impression of the rationally choosing individual. Yet neither can we look for an explanation for crime based solely in disposition – a caricature at the extremes of the positivist conception of man whose choices are determined by his nature and/or nurture. Individuals have after all been observed to make criminal choices that are subjectively quite rational; and perform non-criminal acts that are properly characterised as based entirely in disposition. Both of these observations might be interpreted as running contrary to any assertion that a phase of rational deliberation is useful or necessary in preventing the manifestation of an otherwise harmful dispositive human impulse to self-interest.

In respect of the first point, one need only mention the growing literature around the apparent truism famously observed by Jack Katz (1988) that many forms of crime have considerable attractions for their perpetrators – attractions which make sense to them

after some level of deliberation. In respect of the second point, we might turn to Goffman (1959; 1969) and Bourdieu (1990a; 1990b). We are all creatures of habit, and insofar as our dispositions shape our 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990a: 61) many social events can be seen as coming to pass without the presence of an internal stage of quiet reflection by participant actors. Of these deliberation-free interactions, the vast majority will be beneficent. Both of these points problematise any claim to universal validity that might be made by theories of criminal action, such as those based on impulsivity (e.g. Eysenck 1964; Eysenck and McGurk 1980; Wilson and Herrnstein 1985; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), which portray crime as an act following insufficient or no deliberation.

The resolution of the disposition versus deliberation problem might be that, as Bourdieu suggests, deliberations themselves are informed by individual dispositions. One should be careful not to push this argument to the extreme. Simply because all apparent choice is argued in effect to be (pre)disposition in disguise does not entirely remove the process of rational choice from our field of inquiry.

Dispositions are described by Bourdieu as structured, structuring structures (Bourdieu 1990b: 53). This is a parallel to the duality of structure in Giddens' conception. Dispositions are structuring insofar as they make up the generative basis of practices, which are then interpretable by agents as objective 'structure'. This structure then contributes to the structuring of further dispositions: 'structured' systems of cognitive and affective factors.

Existentialists from Kierkegaard, through Nietzsche, to Sartre (see particularly Sartre 1956 [1943], 2002 [1939]) have held that in the project of constructing our identities we make choices sometimes in regard to who we wish to *be*; that is, we can at times decide in imperfect but active ways which dispositions we shall internalise. Bourdieu would not disagree; although he would accentuate the impurity of these choices depending as they always do upon the agent's (already structured) dispositions as operative in informing the choice:

We can always say that individuals make choices, as long as we do not forget that they do not choose the principals of these choices (Wacquant 1989: 45).

Disposition is therefore in some respects a choice, albeit a structured choice. In this semi-purposive structuring of our dispositive structuring structured structures, we find the cognitive opportunity for social reference in our process of self-definition. Here, at these moments, we make our decisions about who to become through a comparative social exercise. The question 'are you a caring person?' is therefore both always interpreted as 'do you want to be a caring person?' and as 'compared to the society you know, are you a caring person?', amongst other things.

The corollary of this is that we do not have always to act in empathetic ways to preserve our self-perception as persons with 'normal' levels of empathy. The social form of deliberation identified above allows us to consider the ways in which deliberative strategies may be employed by the individual to make sense of a criminal choice through social reference. The meaning of the situation to the actor therefore depends of course

upon the internal psychological structure he brings with him, through which prism he interprets the world, but it also depends upon social, contextual factors, which 'cue' the action appropriate or possible in the circumstance (Bennett and Wright 1984; Vaughan 1998). The social context is both a field which actors must interpret, and a provider of opportunities, restraints, feedback signals and normative suggestions (Shover and Wright 2001), and therefore has a climate-setting capacity for the psychology of the individuals who engage with it, and with whom it engages.

A partner to rational choice theory has been routine activities theory, with its focus on the mechanics of 'everyday life' (Felson 1994). It is apparent, however, that in addition to the geographical awareness-space aspects, there are psychosocial aspects to everyday life which these theories have overlooked. Among these are Sykes and Matza's techniques of neutralisation (1957), representing internal discourses through which individuals interpret the world and make sense of their choices. The manipulation of internal dialogue is an aspect of the mechanism through which decisions are produced that I have discussed more fully elsewhere (Mackenzie 2005). Suffice to say here that the widespread employment of cognitive distortions in the internal balancing of choices of action leads to a view of choice as 'rationalised' more than 'rational'. The conscience may provoke feelings of guilt when action thought wrongful is contemplated or performed, but the actor possesses deliberative strategies with which to argue with the conscience, and overrule its prescriptions. The individual psyche is seen as a site of *intervention* into the relationship between social cues and action, through agents' ability to alter the weighting of various factors in the choice equation, thus producing a 'rationalised' internal

argument that justifies courses of action beneficial to the actor. Once we make the break from a theory of rational choice to one of rationalised choice, we can see that social context becomes of central importance. The question is now not ‘what decision is the actor likely to make?’ but ‘how does (the dominant) social discourse affect the mechanism of rationalisation which actors use in making decisions?’

Many developments have been made in rational choice theory since its inception. Herbert Simon famously uncovered ‘bounded rationality’ which, when such bounds are recognised by the actor or organisation, lead to ‘satisficing’ in decision making – aspiring to what might reasonably be hoped by way of achievement bearing in mind the limits of what is known (Simon 1957; March and Simon 1958; Simon 1976). I argue here for an addition to rational choice theory which sees emotions as bounded; not by the impossibility of omniscience as with bounded rationality, but by the improbability of their universal application. Following Sartre, who from an early stage in his writing viewed emotions as psychologically manipulable by the individual, to be deployed strategically as coping mechanisms (Sartre 2002 [1939]) - in other words, something we control, rather than something that controls us – empathy can be conceptualised as a ‘caring emotion’ over which the individual has some level of control in its manifestations. The concept of situationally edited empathy suggests a satisficing with the self, and with society; that temporal lapses in consideration for others do not affect the general narrative of one’s life; that some empathy, some of the time, is good enough.

Against Wilson and Herrnstein's suggestion that impulsivity correlates to criminality – that deliberation can be seen as a positive stage in over-ruling criminogenic emotional dispositions (Wilson and Herrnstein 1985) – we might argue that deliberation can over-rule constructive emotional dispositions such as empathy. Rational choice theory gives us the conceptual base on which to consider how this deliberation neutralises emotion, and to analyse the social texture of this process of rationalisation. Emotion becomes a choice; a choice which is exercised through social reference. Emotions such as empathy come to be seen as 'irrational' merely because they conflict with corporate norms which have hijacked the definition of 'rationality'. Acting rationally has come to mean bracketing one's emotions. And how far this is from a progressive humanity. To deconstruct: 'rational' must mean 'based in reason'. Are our emotions not reasonable? Is it not reasonable to love? To be for the Other? We have, in the current social climate, a cold view of reason indeed.

Coleman started with this cold view of reason. He accepted the selfish nature of individuals and asked what we could do to employ that selfishness in the creation of a better society (Coleman 1990). In taking such an apparently obvious observation of the status quo as their point of departure, however, the arguments that emerge fail to capitalise on the potential for unwinding a rationalised choice in which the over-ruling of ethical modes of being through discourse-based, socio-economically situated neutralisations becomes a process of rationality. Where socio-economic structure is implicated in the creation and maintenance of this process of rationality, to ask that structure to implement incentives for the exercise of selfishness toward socially

beneficial ends is both internally conflicted in its locking of society into an eternal battle to control its own errant creations, and dystopian in its abandonment of a hope that the human spirit might be capable of more than self-centred avarice. We must start before Coleman did and argue for an engagement with causes rather than effects. The free rider problem (Olson 1965), for example, must be seen through the lens of situationally edited empathy: not as an inevitable manifestation of human nature, but as a contextualised choice to disown any perception of social responsibility. Economic free riders are always also emotional free riders, unprepared in certain contexts to engage their care for others.

The Marxist conception of the individual and the economy

For Marx, one of the effects of capitalism was to reduce human relations to operations of the market (Bottomore 1964: 193). Personal differences, personal qualities, therefore become imbued with an essence not of artisan diversity, but with a value:

[Bourgeois society] has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment” (Marx and Engels 2003 [1847]: 7).

We can use this notion of the economisation of interpersonal relations to include an acknowledgement of the subtle mechanisms through which market operations influence individual thoughts, dispositions, and actions, outside the confines of the world of trade. Beyond the suggestion, which is surely correct, that employees are seen by their

employers as commodities with varying attributes which are weighed in terms of their capacity to produce profit, it is interesting to consider whether and how this pervasive narrative of the self as a unit of labour is destructive of personal emotions seen by the market as unproductive, unnecessary or of negative weight in the evaluation of the labour unit.

Empathy, compassion, consideration, restraint: these are not the qualities we hear applauded in the chief executive officers of successful corporations. Rather, they are to be admired for their tenacity, ambition, ruthlessness and hard bargaining skills. The economic structure, and the personal attributes it rewards, are written through our lives more strongly than any other social structure. Work, or lack of work, is ultimately defining. Given the strong ontological need to find a definition of oneself through attachment to a category of employment, be it 'creative', 'intellectual', 'professional' or perhaps simply 'highly paid', it should not be surprising that the discourse of competition involved in most of these fields affects the weight given by actors to decision-influencing emotions like empathy, both in the pursuit of business ends and in some areas of their wider social lives. The discourse of amoral competition has become, I suggest, the defining narrative of our times, although there may be undercurrents of resistance to the extreme ontological isolation this involves (Sennett 1998). The situational editing of empathy has become a suitable, indeed necessary, *way of thinking* and with this differential application of moral and emotional norms according to the meaning given by the actor to the social event as it unfolds, comes a capacity to dislocate oneself from

consideration of detrimental effects to victims of harmful action performed in the pursuit of self-gratification which can be painted as entirely *normal*.

For Max Weber, it was not the economic structure which had the effect of alienating man from his emotional nature, but the bureaucratisation of the modern world, which would persist whether capitalism or socialism ruled the economy. The individualism identified throughout this paper as the capacity of the agent to exercise some degree of decision-making power unrestrained, or unprompted, by emotional psychosocial consideration for 'the Other' must be distinguished from Weber's view of individualism as one of the philosophical foundations of Western civilisation (Weber 1978 [1922]). Weber identified capitalist society as conflicted in its formally rational responses to substantively rational problems. To paraphrase, he detected in the increasing formal bureaucratisation of governance a trend which, in such fields as the specialisation of work, denied man access to his destiny as a rounded, cultured, experienced individual. We can therefore see two faces within the concept of 'individuality'. Capitalism, and the rationalisation it involves, both grants the worker his individuality, and at the same time takes it away. The individuality capitalist organisation denies is that the loss of which Weber sees as taking us irreversibly away from "an age of full and beautiful humanity" (Weber 1958 [1905]: 181). Weber saw this full and beautiful pluralism as encouraging, indeed necessitating, an accountability and concern for others in the exploration of one's individuality. The individuality capitalist organisation gives is the freedom to appeal to its formal rationalism as an acceptable reason for departure from substantively rational goals such as interpersonal respect, empathy, and duty. Through removing the prospect of a

Weberian individuality, our socio-economic 'progress' has with it removed the social responsibility that conception of the individual requires. This theme provides an interesting parallel to Marx: of systematised bureaucracy alienating man from his true self; a "mechanised petrification" (Weber 1958 [1905]: 182):

Fully developed bureaucracy stands, in a specific meaning, under the principle *sine ira ac studio*. Its specific character, which is welcomed by capitalism, develops the more perfectly the more the bureaucracy is 'dehumanised', the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business, love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation (Weber, in Gerth and Mills 1958: 224).

The creation, or adoption of, an ideology which legitimates the position of the ruling class was central to Marx's critique of history and of the social relations capitalism developed (Marx and Engels 1956-67, 1998; Marx 1999). In this, he has been characterised as creating a theory of historical materialism which has been heavily criticised as ignoring the autonomous part of the nature of ideas, and tying their origin and maintenance too closely to the social and economic conditions which constitute the 'base' of the status quo (not the least critics of this construction of Marx's position were Durkheim and Weber: see Weber 1958 [1905]; Durkheim 1965 [1912], although the ghost of Marx has been done a disservice in this attribution of a strong materialist position to writings which in truth created a much subtler relationship between the relations of production and ideology than a simple unilateral influence). Yet we should

not be so quick to dismiss some of the central tenets of his thinking; ideas which have subsequently found their way into mainstream sociological thought of whatever colour (including interestingly, in varying degrees, that of Weber, whose theoretical relationship to Marx has been shown to be closer than many, including Weber himself, thought, see Schumpeter 1950), such as: the conception of individual consciousness as formed in an interaction between the actor and society, and therefore as ultimately in large part socially anchored in praxis; following this, practical consciousness as involving an historical arbitrariness, while always seeming to the individual as natural, internal and pre-social; and following *this*, the adoption of social norms and values by the individual as apparently immutable standards of proper conduct, perhaps gilded with a religious or moral virtue.

Where Marx saw the purposive promulgation of ideas and meaning structures by the ruling class in support of the bourgeois state, we might also see unintended consequences – the inadvertent fallout of an irresponsible ideology of the business ethics of workaday life as differentiated from the social ethics of everyday life. The promulgation of a culture of situational empathy-editing among the professional classes has produced a wider adoption of the ethic of individualism and competition than is conducive to a stable society. This instability is exacerbated by inequality in a society in which some have been allowed to pursue individual wealth and power while those lower on the economic spectrum have been considered best kept in benign obfuscation, trapped in their lot by welfare payments that misleadingly present the system as incorporating an ethic of care which keeps its deleterious social consequences in check. When the practised values of

those at the top begin to influence the thought structures of those at the bottom, as they inevitably do, we can perhaps see an economic and social structure which through the irresponsibility of its praxis is creating problems, including crime, it will not be able to solve. Social structural changes affect identification mechanisms, alterity, the situational editing of empathy, and therefore the definition – on the level of individual meaning – of action as ‘harmful’, ‘justified’, ‘blameworthy’ or ‘normal’.

Conclusion

The interaction between the environment on the one hand and the cognitive-behavioural attributes of the individual on the other are, in truth, what sociological criminology has tried to theorise all along. However, in this analysis the psychological effects of socio-economic conditions have always been given less attention than the observable social trend effects that environmental cues and demands produce. In bringing the individual and her psychology back into the picture, one of the first tasks is to uncover how, and in what proportion, the environment shapes individual cognition (which might be seen as the deliberative precursor to action) and behaviourism (the non-deliberative, dispositional, reactive, inured producer of action). It seems likely that a prevailing culture of materialism, individualism and self-promotion will emerge as in some measure responsible for the creation of actors who are not dissuaded from the performance of action which is harmful to others:

... we must emphasise that crime occurs throughout the structure of society and that its origins lie not in a separate aetiology but in the structure of society and its core values (Young 2002: 484).

What is required is a theory which adequately encompasses both disposition and choice. This will include a satisfactory resolution of the origins of disposition; a recognition that disposition affects choice and an exploration of how that affect is manifested; but also an acknowledgement that while much action functions on the level of 'thoughtless' disposition alone, there is considerable agreement that there is some level of individual choice involved in the production of acts in which criminology shows an interest. In addition to the dispositional influence on choice, there is a social influence which, as suggested in this paper, allows actors a degree of control over the moral or otherwise value-laden process of deciding which course of action to pursue in a given context.

If this is the case, that part of the structure of our society over which those in power have direct control – broadly the political economy – might be directly implicated in the creation of 'empathy-free social zones' which by their existence have a broader effect on the psyche of the population than simply the limited freedom from moral values necessary to encourage economic progress. This effect can be thought to occur both on the level of disposition and on the level of rationalised choice.

In a social structure tending towards this brand of self-interested individualism, the fight against crime cannot be won through social inclusion, for the question then is 'inclusion

into what'? For the majority of those currently punished by the criminal justice system the answer will be inclusion into an unfair society which offers them at best the wholly unattractive prospect of a poorly paid service job, supporting a structure which allows those at the top to prosper in grotesque disproportion to those at the bottom who are fortunate enough to be included in this project. In such a society, acquisitive and expressive crime will always be a more attractive prospect than conformity for some. And further, the psychosocial tools they require to dislocate themselves from 'the moral bind to law' (Matza 1964: 181) - or more accurately the empathic bind to others - are given to them by the same society that condemns their actions, through the promulgation of a culture of consumerism, competition, and the prioritisation of personal and material goals over interpersonal care. The structurally unfair society in which we live provides both the motive and the (psychological) mechanism for self-interested criminality.

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