finding causal laws of human behavior" (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999, pp. 12-13). However, the value that it is best to be free from subjectivity and moral constraint to be purely objective is not without limitations. Bernstein (1976) emphatically states that "'Objectivism' in the study of social and political life is not an innocent mistaken epistemological doctrine. It has dangerous consequences insofar as it tends to distort and reify 'facts' which are historically conditioned – 'facts' which reveal only one among the many different possibilities that human action may take" (p. 112).

Another consequent view of the objective and disengaged values that natural scientists assume is that of *atomism* (Slife & Williams, 1995). Atomism is based on the philosophy that all things are reducible to the atoms which comprise it. In the case of criminology, it is the view that criminals and criminal behavior are ultimately reducible to a set of variables which cause this behavior. Advocates of this view invest a great deal of faith in the belief that if we could just accurately uncover, operationalize, and measure these variables (atoms), we could then determine what causes criminal behavior and deviance.

Although admirable in aspiration, this perspective has troubling implications for our understanding of humans and human behavior. If we are reducible to the atoms that comprise our nature and our behavior, those atoms also consequently determine our being (this determinism is the underlying law that would make our behavior predictable and controllable if we knew all the atoms). If our atoms determine everything about us, then who we are and what we do is not under our control. According to some critics, however, our culture and society rests on the foundation that people are not creatures whose being and actions are determined by a certain set of variables in the manner natural scientists assume. Instead, our cultural assumption

is that people are instead creatures of agency (or agentic beings) (Williams, 1994). Williams (1992) defines "agency" as "one could have done otherwise, all things being the same" (p. 755).

This crucial distinction between deterministic thinking and agentic thinking comes into focus most sharply when we look at criminally deviant behavior. On the one hand, if a criminal could have done otherwise than commit the crime, then he is morally responsible for choosing to behave criminally. He should therefore be punished for his transgression. On the other hand, if variables outside of a criminal's control determined his criminal behavior, then he is not morally responsible for committing the crime—the variables caused the crime, rather than the criminal. For example, poverty, a history of child abuse, population density, and being the victim of a crime earlier in life, all could have been the atoms that caused the deviant act.

This viewpoint has two implications. First, it implies that we could change the variables which determine the criminal's behavior (and thereby change the criminal) by preventing poverty, child abuse, etc. Second, we can conclude that because the individuals are not responsible for their behavior, punishment models are problematic. It makes no sense to punish somebody for something he had no control over, and hence is not morally responsible for. This approach has a decided advantage, however; by upholding this assumption, criminologists can offer a great deal of hope that they can change the lives and circumstances of human beings whose behavior is controlled by these disparate, atomistic variables. Critics of this perspective, on the other hand, argue that deterministic models rule out such cherished concepts as moral accountability and responsibility, as well as a sense of a fuller and deeper human engagement with the social world.

Some theorists and philosophers of social science express concern about the disengaged morality so common in the social sciences and how this leads us to view human beings (Bellah,

Madsen, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Cushman 1990; 1995; Gergen 1985; 1994; Sandel 1996).

Paradoxically, many social-science theorists assume the moral value of a disengaged view, and

build models of the determinants of human behavior, while simultaneously assuming that they

are un-determined in their own efforts to do so. They value disengagement from troubling

subjective elements, and feel free from any arbitrary external constraint that would somehow

influence their perspective or their findings (such as politics, religion, or deep moral feeling). As

mentioned previously, this felt need to remain free from arbitrary value sources has developed

roughly at the same time as our assumptions about science and the natural world, and has left the

legacy of anti-authoritarianism to modernity (1996). This anti-authoritarian philosophy grew

with the Enlightenment notion that human beings have individual autonomy, and with the ideas

of human rights and the inherent worth of the individual.

What social scientists have inherited today is an implicit moral value that operates behind

the scenes—a stance that is most evident in criminology. "Modern social scientists generally

intend – even while claiming to be value-free or value-neutral – to aid in the active re-

engineering of human society in directions indicated by fundamental Western ideals of freedom,

dignity, and inalienable rights for all individuals" (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999, p. 48).

A version of this moral assumption about human nature is what Sandel, (1996) describes as

liberal individualism. Liberal individualism is the notion that people are inherently free from

outside and external arbitrary constraint ("liberal" as in "liberated from") and ultimately that an

individual is likewise disengaged from external contexts and constituencies. These individuals

have both inherent worth and dignity, an assumption so strong that questioning it seems

irrational or irresponsible. A consequence to this view, however, is that human choice and action

(whether criminal or not) is "about more or less efficient means-ends relations and leaves the

choice of ends to innate promptings or individual preference" (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, p. 49). Under the weight of this assumption, there is no morally universal or greater good that we can aspire to, or judge the behavior of others in light of; instead, all value reduces to merely each individual's choices. This informs the thinking of the scientists, as well as their assumptions about the people they study. It informs which research questions they pursue, how they phrase the questions, and how they choose to interpret the results.

The underlying moral assumptions of value-neutrality have other detrimental effects in the social sciences. Because social scientists assume that their approach is value-neutral, whatever other morals inform their research remain implicit and unexamined. This makes social science seem, to some observers, ideological rather than scientific, while at the same time hiding behind the legitimacy they claim on the basis of being "scientific." As Fay, (1996, p. 199) asserts,

> The use and abuse of IQ testing in psychology; much Soviet historiography, creationism
> in paleo-anthropology; racist sociologies of the African-American experience;
> ethnographies of native peoples written by imperialist apologists are but a few of the
> many instances when propagandistic social science promoted certain values even though
> in so doing it forsook the truth as best could be determined.

Some social scientists believe that our peer-review system and better adherence to true objectivity would prevent such ideologies from creeping into their research. But such a belief is hubris, according to some critics. Our very goal in criminology is to study, and ultimately to predict and control, criminal behavior—and we seek that understanding and control because we implicitly value enjoying the benefits of living in a society bound by moral guidelines and the codification of moral guidelines into criminal law. When we study criminals and criminal

behavior, we bring the assumptions of criminality with us into the research, with the common-sense assumption that criminal behavior is bad for individuals and for society. We also carry the assumption that our definitions of criminality are right, good, or correct in an uncritical and unquestioning way—definitions of criminality which may themselves be limited, biased, or unjust. Foucault argues that those bent on normalizing those they study, use social science to pacify and force them to conform. It is an exercise of power by those with an implicit moral agenda which they hide behind the veil of scientific rhetoric and of claims of objective truth (Foucault, 1977).

Another consequence to the moral assumption that science reveals objective truth in a value-free fashion is that any discussion about what a morally good thing to study or the best method of applying the research findings becomes puzzling at best or incomprehensible at worst. Many of us would agree, for example, that scientifically studying the best methods of torture is morally questionable if not downright abhorrent. There is nothing, however, in a value-free social science that would inform us that such research would be somehow bad or inappropriate. In essence, a value-free social science gives us no tools we can use to study the worth of the ends we seek as we do research (Richardson, Fowers & Guignon, 1999). Because some social scientists value being value-free, there is no reason, other than ultimately arbitrary ones, that they cannot research whatever they wish, regardless of whether others find it enlightening, helpful, hurtful, or morally repugnant.

The Qualitative Response

Qualitative thinkers critique, rebel against, or challenge the moral assumptions that scientists are disengaged observers of the objects of the natural world, objects which include human beings. Although the theoretically disengaged position of scientists yields

technologically advantageous results when applied to physical principles, human beings are not objects in the natural world, their behavior determined by forces outside of their control. A methodology that developed from a philosophy assuming objectivism fails as an epistemic strategy to use in studying human behavior "because such phenomena are morally constituted, agentically controlled, contextual and uncertain" (Martin & Sugarman, 1999, p. 47). To study people as objects does not accurately reflect the nature of the individual, for a given individual is "not a thing at all, but an engaged participant in the world. Perceptions and judgments are less fundamental to this process than practices – ways of doing things" (Polt, 1999, p. 84).

Qualitative researchers hold a very different moral assumption about human beings. Human beings are not creatures that social scientists should study in a disengaged fashion to discover the atomistic variables that determine their behavior, but are instead creatures living agentic lives, thoroughly immersed and inseparable from the world that contextualizes them, and inherently subjective in worldview and behavior. As Taylor (1985a) argues, for us to truly understand a human's behavior, we have to understand her "vision of things" because how she perceives things and what she thinks of them, "the meanings things have" for a that individual, inform her behavior, whether it be criminal or law-abiding. The implication for this is that "personal interpretations can enter into the definition of the phenomenon under study" (pp. 120 – 121).

If a social scientist chooses to theorize apart from the people she studies, she builds her theory apart from them, operationalizes her variables apart from them, studies them in an experience-far manner, and interprets her results in a disengaged fashion, she is in no way capturing or accurately looking at the very phenomenon she sought in the first place to study—a phenomenon that the participants actually experienced in a richly subjective way. If she refuses

to acknowledge this and dogmatically values scientism over the subject matter, she will always fail in her endeavor to understand. Additionally, her contributions will be of limited utility, because unlike the natural world, the social world is one of language, emotion, moral values, and other subjective experiences. This language-based subjectivity is an important part of how we frame what is "true" both within the field and within the culture at large. To use natural-science methods to study creatures that do not conform to natural-science assumptions seems inadequate to critics. "[T]he difference between the natural and the social sciences thus becomes quite clear. The distinguishing mark of the social sciences is that the semantic field that is relevant to understanding is that of the society or community under study whereas the natural sciences have only their own norms and conventions with which to contend" (Warnke, 1987, p. 142).

The challenge then, for qualitative researchers is to truly get into the "semantic field that is relevant to understanding" and to thoroughly understand the phenomenon they are studying from the subjective perspective of those experiencing said phenomenon. Our epistemic values as an academic culture only increase this challenge, because we value the veracity of our research findings (whether or not they are "true" in some meaningful or consistent way), as well as their consistency (we wish our findings to be credible or dependable). Attempting to serve both masters (studying the subjective but being systematic), qualitative researchers have developed their own sets of methodologies, methods designed to assist social scientists who truly wish to understand the experience of the participants in a manner that limits the researcher's own subjective opinion about that experience. The understandable fear is that if the researcher does not follow a given method, the result of their study will ultimately be merely a reflection of their personal opinions about the experience of the participants. Therefore, the qualitative researcher

"adopts an attitude that is disinterested, objective, and aloof. He must discipline himself to bracket the cares and pragmatic interests that govern his everyday life" (Bernstein p. 167).

Critique of the Qualitative Moral Perspective

I note a double-bind in qualitative researchers who attempt to adopt that aloof attitude. On the one hand, they acknowledge and embrace the subjectivity of the participants and themselves. On the other hand, they often try to disengage their own subjectivity, to bracket it, or to employ various distancing methods in the hope that they can tell the most authentic story about their participant's experiences with no taint of the researcher's own agenda or opinion. They both embrace their participants' subjectivity and try to limit or control their own. If qualitative researchers truly value the subjective experiences of the people they study, it seems to follow that they should also (being people themselves) embrace their own subjectivity, rather than attempting to methodologize it or bracket it away. Indeed, some qualitative researchers move in that direction, relying on the subjectivity of the observer to complete the picture of the phenomenon they study (McLeod, 2001).

Embracing the subjectivity of the observer, however, is risky, and remains fraught with certain issues. One of these issues is a potentially troubling epistemic and moral relativism. Because these researchers deal with inherently subjective phenomena, and each person's experience is equally as valid as any other's, it is very difficult to claim that any particular perspective on the phenomenon is true, right, or best—including that of the researcher, because it is all relative to the perspective-holder. Potentially then, even if qualitative researchers embrace and use their own subjective understanding in the research, they cannot ultimately claim that their perspective is the truest, most correct, or ultimately best (and many would not). Because of this epistemological and moral confusion, some, unfortunately, retreat into a form of

descriptivism, simply describing, the phenomenon in question to the best of their ability. This, however, moves them back into a detached frame, one in which they must feign intellectual neutrality or moral disinterest which can obscure the phenomenon under study, or even lessen the worth of the ends of the study itself (Bernstein, 1976; Richardson, Fowers & Guignon, 1999). This drive towards pure description, however, lacks any ground for evaluating different phenomenon. In criminology, descriptivism would unfortunately leave the researcher unable to justify whether or not one course of behavior is right or wrong, or even what appropriate behavior ought to be. Describing a criminal phenomenon in a compelling way that seems to be consistent and cohesive does not permit the researcher to evaluate if a given set of behaviors is morally beneficent or malevolent, and whether such behaviors should continue or cease. In essence, "these concepts have no place in a purely conceived, disinterested, aloof phenomenological stance directed at pure description" (Bernstein, 1976, p. 168).

One often unacknowledged factor in the qualitative/quantitative debate is that both quantitative researchers and qualitative researchers hold certain values in common, as different as they may argue they are. One of those core values, as I mentioned earlier, is the value of liberal individualism. Interestingly, proponents on both sides end up assuming a similar value as quantitative researchers, but qualitative researchers inherit this assumption from a different philosophical tradition. Rather than holding that we are disengaged from the world, their tradition argues instead that we are inherently engaged in the world (Gergen, 1991). We each are situated in a cultural, social, and moral context of a broader social world, a world which constructs our understanding.

When we look at what is meaningful, or accepted as "real," however, we find that individualism creeps back into the assumptions behind much of the research. A given society's

view about a certain matter, such as criminal behavior, will be different from another society's view. Within given societies, however, various sub-cultures exist with different perspectives. Within each sub-culture are groups or families that hold a different perspective, and within each sub-group or family given individuals may hold a different perspective. Whose perspective then is true, correct or best? There is no sure and certain way to tell. We can make an assumption when we research criminal phenomenon that "right" is relative to the culture, but that is a conceptually slippery slope. Ultimately what we end up with is that each individual, being a part of society, has her own unique experience and perspectives on matters of import. Because each person's context and situation is ultimately unique, her experience and perspective is just as true and right as any other's. What we assume to be important is the essence of the individual, the individual who is both apart from, yet still related to, the broader world. The consequence is that every individual is endowed with certain capacities, rights, and opinions. Much of the research is undertaken with these moral values about justice and the rights of the individual (be they criminal or victim) unstated but lurking in the back of the researchers' minds.

Beyond the Qualitative vs. Quantitative Debate

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are based on certain moral and philosophical assumptions which criminologists often leave uncritically examined and undiscussed in the debate about method. What we need as a social science is an understanding, even if it is highly complex and incomplete, about the moral situation of all of us, both researchers and participants. We need to be clear about just what people are if we want to successfully study them, for whatever view we have of humans and human nature will necessarily inform the research questions we ask, how we ask them, and how we interpret our results. I do not wish to imply, however, that this perspective on human nature must be dogmatic

and unchanging, but rather that we in the social sciences carry out an ongoing, reflexive, and critical dialogue about who and what human beings are, what they should be about in the world.

The need for this clarifying conversation seems especially crucial for criminology, which is, in essence, the systematic study of marginalized, deviant individuals or groups. This is inherently a subjective and moral endeavor, and we should embrace rather than deny its subjectivity and morality. Wolfe (1989), in his efforts to construct a moral sociology, stated that "moral obligation is a learned practice. If we do not exercise our capacities to act as moral agents, they will atrophy and we will lose them. Living with the contradictory moral impulses of modernity means a great deal of trial and error, imperfect moral decisions, hesitations, and uncertainties" (p. 233). Criminology, as a field, is uniquely situated to be an important part of this moral dialogue. Once we can articulate a common moral understanding of others, we can begin to develop methods to use as we study patterns of behavior, and to evaluate the worth of the ends of our research.

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