

## Introduction

Daniel Cefai<sup>2</sup> · Bénédicte Zimmermann<sup>1</sup> ·  
Stefan Nicolae<sup>3</sup> · Martin Endreß<sup>4</sup>

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Is there such a *sub-discipline* as “sociology of valuation and evaluation”? Identifying the main focus, the topics, and the analytical designs, i.e., reflecting on a theoretical profile of such an investigation, is far from complete. The main question is indeed—where to start when addressing the sociology of valuation and evaluation? Is it a specific area of research, analysis, and inquiry, with specific objects? Should we confine it to the many important qualitative and quantitative studies dedicated to the measure of market performance, the efficiency of public policy, profitability of private investment, or identification of best practices in various areas (see on benchmarking: Lascoumes and Le Galès 2005; Bruno and Didier 2013)? Beyond business and administration processes, a huge body of research in economic sociology has developed in recent years that has renewed the investigations on economic experience through a moral lens (Lamont 2000; Vatin 2008; Karpik 2010; Beckert and Aspers 2011; Bidet 2011; Zimmermann 2011;

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✉ Martin Endreß  
endreß@uni-trier.de

Daniel Cefai  
danielcefai@hotmail.com; cefai@ehess.fr

Bénédicte Zimmermann  
benedicte.zimmermann@ehess.fr; bzim@ehess.fr

Stefan Nicolae  
nicolae@uni-trier.de

<sup>1</sup> Georg Simmel Center, EHESS, Paris, France

<sup>2</sup> Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris, France

<sup>3</sup> Department of Sociology, University of Trier, 54286 Trier, Germany

<sup>4</sup> Department of Sociology, Chair of General Sociology, University of Trier, 54286 Trier, Germany

Dubuisson-Quellier 2013). Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy (2007) proposed a synthesis, summing up what we have known since Weber and Veblen, or by Hirschman and Sen, namely that capitalism rests on and generates a moral order as much as an economic order. All these works invite us to consider economics as a “moral science” (Sen 1991), a problem already raised in the works of Viviana Zelizer (1979, 1985). On the other hand, quantitative analysis is becoming more reflexive regarding its own operations. Alain Desrosières’ (1993) history of statistics was crucial in France in transforming researchers’ sensitivity to the question of “measuring the social” and the social construction of figures. And many of his questions anticipate Wendy Espeland and Mitchell Stevens (1998, 2008) elaboration on “commensuration as a social process”. Another area in which the notion of evaluation came to have much saliency is cultural sociology, for a good part, at the beginning, through the reception of Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984/1979) and his works on the field of cultural production (1993) by Michèle Lamont, Paul DiMaggio or Robert Wuthnow. These works ask what constitutes the success and decline of intellectual reputations (Camic 1992)? What makes the hierarchical distribution of wealth, status, and prestige? How are class, gender, and race inequalities dependent on cultural categories (Lamont and Fournier 1992)? And how do moral boundaries work in the organization of institutional life? A number of overviews of this growing area of research is now available (Timmermans and Epstein 2010; Lamont 2012; Lamont and Thévenot 2000; Helegsson and Muniesa 2013; Kjellberg et al. 2013).

Rather than addressing the sociology of valuation and evaluation as a sub-discipline, with its substantive concerns, one can also consider it as a *focus of perspective*, transversal to all the social sciences as soon as they come to terms with the ways actors assign meaning to what they do, and to their transactions with things and people. This is the line we wish to pursue in this issue, along with the following questions: How do people organize their meaning-contexts and how, from the very beginning, do they experience “values”? And in which ways do they define, categorize, measure, compare, value, and evaluate situations around?

These questions are actually as old as sociology. One can begin with Max Weber and study the value-relevant activities (*Wertbeziehung*) and the problem of ends-orientated rationality (*Wertrationalität*), and its legacy in the United States through Parsons; or focus on the logics of “ideal types,” which was later taken up and developed out of a phenomenologically informed perspective by Alfred Schutz into an inquiry on typification. How are types built up in a process of genesis and experienced in face-to-face relationships? How are they activated in value-judgments, for example on “equality” in different domains of relevance (Schutz 1964)? Within the tradition of classical sociology, one can also start with Émile Durkheim and reflect on the groundings of a *sociologie morale et juridique* (one of the sections of *L’Année sociologique* since 1896) and a *science des mœurs* (Lévy-Bruhl 1903); or study social practices of classification, involved in the constitution of the reality in which we live, and their function in social integration and the organization of moral consensus. If one moves to the United States, and takes Robert Ezra Park at Chicago in the 1920s, society is conceived as an ecological order, mediated and tempered as a moral, cultural, and political order (Park and

Burgess 1925). On this view, valuation processes are at work in the mores, opinion, and law, as different instances of social control—a standpoint already present in William Graham Sumner's *Folkways* (1906).

Among the significant but dispersed pieces of research which address valuation and evaluation issues, our choice has been to focus on approaches coming from Germany and especially from France, where this research perspective has been, and is still particularly lively.

In Germany, drawing on Peter L. Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's perspective on a communicative construction of social reality (1996), extensive studies were devoted to the interconnections between communicative acts and an implicit moral dimension of evaluation practices. This stance becomes decisive in the works of Thomas Luckmann. Continuing Alfred Schutz's inquiries on social action as well as Durkheim's intuition of the relationship between the communicative evaluative acts and their moral basis (Durkheim 1963/1903), Luckmann understands moral communication as an evaluative performance transporting value judgments pertaining to an acting individual or a group of actors, choosing between different actions (Bergmann and Luckmann 1999). Influenced by Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis, Jörg Bergmann takes up "gossip" as a form of moral communication and highlights its particular "social organization" (Bergmann 1993/1987). In contrast to Luc Boltanski's analysis of "denunciation" (Boltanski et al. 1984), Bergmann not only aims at identifying a specific "grammar" of gossip, but he also concentrates on the ways in which the "moral identity" of a third party is constantly judged, evaluated, and put to the test. Nevertheless, a constitution analysis of what Luckmann (2000) would call a "proto-moral," grounding phenomenologically both evaluations and normativity, was not the only path followed by German sociologists. The problem of asserting value and analytically reconstructing the processes of categorization in everyday life was intensively discussed. Thus, new perspectives on valuation and evaluation are eminently represented in the empirical studies on gender and gender construction (Gildemester 1989; Hirschauer 1993; Lindemann 1993), on the social function of comparison in evaluative practices (Heintz 1993) as well as the ways of asserting value in school (Kalthoff 1997).

In France, the question of valuation and evaluation made its comeback in the social sciences from the 1970s on. In *Distinction* (1979/1984) and *Practical Reason* (1981/1998) Bourdieu actively participated to this resurgence by the way of his analysis on judgment and classification. He contributed to fuel a constructivist concern for categorization as a relevant, even if disputed, object of social sciences inquiry. This turn deeply influenced subsequent approaches to categories and categorization, among which the French socio-historical approach (*Socio-histoire*) became particularly lively in political sciences (Noiriel 2006). Beyond their specific disciplinary anchoring and theoretical differences, these approaches share a common concern for categories, as a product of socio-cognitive processes. These categories may be embodied in the agents' *habitus* and *ethos*, and support their practical judgment, for example their reciprocal sympathies or antipathies in terms of social taste. They may also be part of symbolic systems, to which Bourdieu (1977) attributed functions of cognition, communication, and power and operate in

language performances as symbolic schemes of perception, discourse, knowledge, and action.

Very clearly, Raymond Boudon's (1995, 2001) questioning of values went in the opposite direction. According to him, actors do not live in a state of illusion or alienation (principle of axiological rationality) but have good reasons to state value-judgments. The problem is to disentangle the dilemmas of rational action in which they often get caught (they are not moral dopes, but submitted to contradictory requirements). According to Boudon, value-judgments, even if they cannot be deduced from an axiom, have an objectivity which challenges social constructivism and relativism (e.g., people agree on many features of a good government). He contends that value-judgments, even if shaped by history, have a strong validity and that value innovations are cumulative and irreversible, not differently from scientific discoveries which stood the test of experiment (e.g., separation of powers, human rights, or political elections are a good thing). Lastly, Boudon defends an argument which is close to Dewey's consequentialism: value-judgments about what is "good, right, just, legitimate" are in many cases as founded as fact-judgments about what is "true". A value-judgment is considered valid if it generates consequences that are acceptable or desirable for many, if not all (the greatest amount of good for the greatest number).

But the landscape of possible approaches to value, valuation, and evaluation is much richer than the opposition between Bourdieu and Boudon. In 1978, François Isambert, Paul Ladrière and Jean-Paul Terrenoire published a programmatic article, "For a sociology of ethics," in the wake of Georges Gurvitch's interest for a "science of mores, customs, or habits" (Isambert et al. 1978). Their plea in favor of a specific approach to ethics, and its connections with aesthetics, religion, and politics paved the way for many empirical works, as on biomedical ethics (Bateman Novaes 1991). In parallel, escaping the "tutelage" of Bourdieu, Boudon, or Touraine, young researchers in France found their inspiration in American sociology, in particular the legacy of the Chicago tradition, Ethnomethodology, and Interactionism, as well as emerging cognitive studies. Along with their German colleagues, some of them also resumed dialogue with philosophy, especially, Wittgenstein, phenomenology and hermeneutics, and analytic philosophy. As a result, new sociologies of action took shape, all of them interested in the philosophical problem of practical reason and its translation into sociological statements and inquiries. Some went back to Park and Goffman and developed research programs on ordinary ethics in urban experience (Joseph 1997); others renewed the questioning of civilities, civism, and citizenship transferring G. H. Von Wright's (1971) deontic logic to the interaction order (Pharo 1985); some tried to develop a praxeology and a semiology of public opinion (Quéré 1983), others kept on practicing history and documented the normative activities of labor courts in France and their creation of specific laws (Cottureau 1987); while in Belgium, Jean-Louis Genard started his investigation on a *Sociologie de l'éthique* (1992) and scholars in Louvain, as Jacques Lenoble, Jean De Munck, François Ost developed an original reflection on ethical and legal norms, in a fruitful dialogue with Habermas and law studies.

It is in this very rich French and international context that Boltanski and Thévenot, after rethinking the question of categories (1983), developed their research on orders of worth and grammars of public justification (1991/2006) and that Desrosières and Thévenot wrote their influential book on “socio-professional categories” (1988). They trained or influenced young scholars, who would later develop research particularly relevant for the sociology of evaluation—see, for example Nicolas Dodier on medical expertise (1993), Cyril Lemieux on journalistic activities (2000), Francis Chateauraynaud on professional misconduct (1991) or Nathalie Heinich’s studies in the sociology of art (2009, 2012). In close connection with this reconsideration of moral issues in sociology, the *economics of conventions* flourished, a research trend which grew up outside sociology and claimed to belong to a heterodox economy (Dupuy et al. 1989; Eymard-Duvernay 2006). Interested in the study of the coordination of action, these scholars underlined the moral dimension of economics, and the importance of moral judgments, norms, and institutions. They explored the plurality of the conceptions of what is considered good and fair in economic transactions (Storper and Salais 1997), expertise (Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1995) or in skill assessment and hiring processes (Eymard-Duvernay and Marchal 1997).

During the same period, research on categorizations flourished within French political sciences, referring to Bourdieu’s legacy and, for some researchers, to Boltanski and Thévenot’s. Young scholars started focusing on the constitution of institutionalized modes of classification, and categorization in public policy (among others: Dubois 1999; Zimmermann 2001; Laborier and Trom 2003; Mariot 2006; Rowell 2006). One of the common features of these studies was the mobilization of an empirically embedded socio-historical approach in order to grasp the various factors and interactions involved in the constitution of categories of public action. This concern for history, not only as an element of context, but as a genuine matter for inquiry to be combined with sociology, gave rise to the so-called *socio-histoire* (for its differences with historical sociology, see Noiriel 2006; Zimmermann 2015). Most of these socio-historical studies relied on a critical appropriation of Bourdieu’s sociology, going beyond his structuralist framework and his focus on class struggles, habitus, and capitals. They devoted a strong attention to agency and situated interactions that shape the social world as well as to the plurality of operations of valuation. On this view, the struggle for ranking, categorization, and classification never stops in society. It is the outcome of interactions between different principles, as well as between persons with differentiated skills, expertise and background. Power balances and imbalances are certainly at stake, but they coexist with other forms of social relations such as deliberation, negotiation, coordination or cooperation. Taking on board this whole range of possible relationships between people opens a space for accounting for the small arrangements and adjustments that shape categorization and classification processes. All these studies show how operations of valuation, such as qualification, codification and judgment, do not only require theoretical skills, but involve adequacy to logics of action and practical reason that are situation and temporal.

One of the last episodes of this story is the rising interest for “pragmatism”—not to confound with the so-called French “pragmatic” sociology initiated by Boltanski

and Thévenot. Charles S. Peirce has been widely read since the 1990s for his logic of inquiry (in association with Dewey's *Logic* 1938). Antoine Hennion aligned himself with William James to reelaborate a pragmatics of taste and attachment (2004, 2007) at the *Centre de sociologie de l'innovation*. George H. Mead was rediscovered for his philosophy of time perspectives and the genesis of the Self (Cefai and Quéré 2006). But the most successful of these pragmatist authors is certainly John Dewey's *The Public and its Problems* (1927) which inspired many researchers regarding the definition of problematic situations and the constitution of public problems, including the most basic affective and moral operations of valuation involved in this process (Cefai and Gardella 2011; Cefai and Terzi 2012). It also fuelled recent studies on participation and democracy (Zask 2011; Ogien and Laugier 2014; Borzeix et al. 2015). Dewey's *Theory of Valuation* (1939) also had an impact on the understanding of how emotional valuations affect the experience of public problems (Quéré and Terzi 2013) and has been used in workplace studies to understand the "creativity" and "reflexivity" involved in work activities (Bidet 2011), and helped to operationalize approaches focusing on people's capabilities (Zimmermann 2006, 2011) in studies moving beyond the double trap of subjectivism and essentialism (Bidet et al. 2011). This reception of pragmatism in the analyses of valuation is worth mentioning, since it is a notable development in most recent French studies on valuation and evaluation.

Whatever the discipline or theoretical framework they belong to, a common feature of the different lines of inquiry that delineate the area of research on valuation and evaluation is their *openness to interdisciplinary dialogue*. This dialogue, varying in scope according to the authors and issues at stake, involves besides sociology, philosophy, anthropology, history, political science and economics. This interdisciplinary configuration provides the background for a set of challenging investigations of current valuation/evaluation studies, as shown by the papers gathered in this issue.

This special issue is not just another collection of case studies. The following articles engage in current theoretical issues, critically reflect on them, and develop them for further research. The presentation of empirical data is embedded in far-reaching theoretical and interdisciplinary debates. The sociology of valuation and evaluation is not only concerned with a specific sector of social life or a minor segment of grand theories. It opens an intellectual space in which core issues in the social sciences such as interaction, agency, values, norms, collective action, and the role of institutions are discussed. The papers that follow give not only an insight into the complex character of valuation and evaluation issues in society—their empirical focus running through questions as different as financial accounting, peer reviewing, victims compensation, family accounting, workplace evaluation, social care, or economic value. They also shape methodological and theoretical discussions of the tools that make it possible to address such issues. "Normative repertoires," "(e)valuation as practical judgment," "adverbial approach" to value, "ethno-accounting," and "moral ethnography" are some of the many concepts and approaches that are explored and elaborated in this issue, with the goal of fueling future debates on valuation and evaluation studies.

Ève Chiapello discusses the phenomenon of “financialization” of valuation practices and its evolving profile. Both monetary and non-monetary quantifications are involved in this study, along with the public policies in the European Union. Chiapello reconstructs this “financial view” in valuation, points at its specific instruments, and shows how this view changes the way economic and financial quantifications are being produced. But her thesis has a wider scope that explores how this way of assessing things, people and facts invades progressively the various spheres of human life, extending to non-financial activities such as social, artistic, cultural, and ecological ones. These activities tend to be profoundly reshaped by the financial market standards and procedures. This specific process of “colonialization” has, the author argues, a deep impact on the redefinition of human activity and public action.

In an ethnographic perspective, Stefan Hirschauer gathers empirical data on the peer review sessions of a German sociological journal. He addresses questions such as: What are the stages of the review process? What is actually at stake in this “operative nucleus”? And which strategies do the editors employ in evaluating the quality of a submitted paper? Starting with the procedures of pre-evaluation and pre-selection of papers, continuing with the act of reading, ending with the post hoc reasoning about the text in oral communication with the other members of the board, Hirschauer depicts the series of operations of journal peer reviewing as a case of professionalized and highly reflexive evaluation. He shows how a shift occurs from an evaluation of the *texts* towards an evaluation of peers’ *judgments* in a context of “reciprocal observation,” in which personal, rhetorical, and factual elements are taken into account.

David Pontille and Didier Tornay are looking for a more general view on the peer-review process. Recounting the history of the “technology” of evaluation in academic journals, the authors reconstruct the evolution of four evaluating stances involved in the review process: the editor-in-chief, the editorial committee, outside reviewers, and the readers. They come back to the debates and controversies that have marked this evolution, as to the necessity of an editorial board, the introduction of reviewing procedures (blind reviewing, secretly evaluating, open review), and the growing importance of readers as evaluators (see the creation of new journals such as PlosOne, the development of online bibliometric tools, the diffusion of articles through social networks). Whatever these arrangements may be, they show how journal peer review is always the nexus of competing valuation processes, reflecting different conceptions about what doing science means.

Is it appropriate to use financial compensation to repair harm? Relying on an empirical inquiry they conducted on the scandal that erupted in France after children who were injected with a growth hormone in 1980s died, Janine Barbot and Nicolas Dodier examine the way victims value compensation devices. Their analysis of the parents’ reactions to governmental financial compensation shows how valuations involve a wide set of moral expectations and bring up multiple ways of dealing with monetary equivalences of harm: they delineate expectations of justice, of suitable compensation, and of assistance. As the authors argue, none of these expectations can be reduced to singular principles, nor are these expectations

meeting the intentions of the compensation fund. They show how multiple “normative repertoires” combine in the evaluating process by the victims’ families.

How to set the right price for baby-sitting? Based on an empirical project aiming at investigating the everyday life and evaluation practices in an Andalusian family, Alain Cottureau introduces his research program of “ethno-accounting,” more widely, an anthropology of valuation that starts with the following questions: What is relevant for people? What counts for them? How do they count? What do they count on? Whom do they count for? Cottureau’s theoretical insights owe a lot to John Dewey and Alfred Schutz. He tries to catch the meaning of social actions in the making, in “accounting for what the actors are taking into account,” privileging what Schutz called the “ongoing action” (*Handeln*), as opposed to “completed action” (*Handlung*). At the same time, Cottureau rediscovers Le Play’s research team and the monographs of *Les Ouvriers européens*, and improves their methods of accounting. In his paper, Cottureau examines the confrontation between the reference frames used by the members of a Moroccan-Spanish family in their different operations of valuation.

There is no value without social processes of (e)valuation in situation. Using the example of evaluation at the workplace, Bénédicte Zimmermann and Jean De Munck pave the way for a new analytical framework of evaluation in sociology. In order to meet the challenge of Amartya Sen looking for a relational, plural, and comparative account of evaluation, they argue for a re-elaboration of some basic insights of Dewey’s theory of valuation. Dialectics of means and ends, prizing and appraising, public deliberation and fact-based comparisons are some of the many pragmatist assets addressing evaluation as practical judgment. Sen suggests that even if often mixed up in sociological theories, norms are different from values but involved in the process of valuation as horizons, resources, or constraints. Considered as a social behavior, practical judgment in situation does not push us toward a new moral philosophy; instead, it calls for new conceptualizations in sociology of knowledge and political sociology.

Daniel Cefai comments on his ethnography in an ambulance service that takes care of homeless people in Paris. He starts with a narrative of the valuation processes that led in the 1990s to a new definition of the public problem of homelessness and to a new public policy: social emergency. He then develops what he calls a “moral ethnography,” inspired by phenomenology and pragmatism. How to account for “moralities” in contexts in which social workers and nurses, members of outreach rescue teams, diagnose the troubles endured by homeless and find practical solutions? How do their valuations draw at the same time on formal requirements of their work procedures “institutional order” and the local exigencies of the given situations “interaction order”? Cefai gives a rich description of what is going on in face-to-face interactions on the sidewalk and then enlarges the perspective to valuation processes in institutional circuits of deliberation and decision. Moral valuations of the homeless situation are therefore not reduced to street encounters. They depend on collaborations and competitions between different occupational competences and organizational segments.

In his paper, Louis Quéré questions André Orléan’s analysis of economic value in which he challenges the neoclassical paradigm. If he accepts that exchange value



is a social institution, Quéré criticizes Orléan's Durkheimian treatment of money as a totem. He disagrees with his conception of the origin of value—the desirability of goods depending on imitation processes, a statement close to René Girard's “mimetic desire”; and he is not convinced by the Spinozist hypothesis of value as the result of the concentration of “power of the multitude”. But above all, Quéré doubts the possibility to develop a general theory of value. Instead of that, he argues for an “adverbial approach” to the problem of value. Drawing on Dewey's pragmatism and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Quéré opposes Orléan's alleged “nominalistic” stance in favor of a “praxiological” perspective, one that be neither essentialist, nor psychological: he proposes to go back to the situated activities through which values emerge and gain authority.

Three influential books are reviewed to complete this special issue. François Vatin's edited book, *Évaluer et valoriser. Une sociologie économique de la mesure* (reviewed by Laura Centemeri), was enriched by a commentary by the late Alain Desrosières and offers a rich and comprehensive map of evaluation processes in the sociology of economics. The problem of economic value receives an extensive treatment by André Orléan in *L'Empire de la valeur. Refonder l'économie* (reviewed by Jörg Potthast). Borrowing from Girard's mimetic hypothesis, he shows how people on the market, struggling around scarce goods, are involved in an infinite quest for power, status, and distinction. And, with an approach that draws on Schutz and Dewey, Alain Cottureau and Mokhtar Mohatar Marzok propose a new ethnographic and analytical frame, called “ethno-accounting,” which illuminates daily practices of evaluation in *Une famille andalouse. Ethnocomptabilité d'une économie invisible* (reviewed by Stefan Nicolae).

Far from being a simple introduction in the sociology of valuation and evaluation, then, this special issue offers a substantial contribution to contemporary topics and issues as well as to theoretical and methodological problems in the field.

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