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Can the Search for Social Values be Supported by Science?

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BE SUPPORTED BY SCIENCE? *

I assume that all kinds of political, social and other group (as well as individual) conflicts arise not only on the basis of different material conditions and needs but above all because people and nations are at variance about moral principles. These are always determined by social conditions and by man's (more or less rational) understanding of his life situation. This does not mean that I neglect the materialistic causes of conflict. I only wish to state frankly that all other than value conflicts can be resolved peacefully only when there is consensus about moral values.

Modern philosophies have rejected the hope of discovering some universally accepted values. Consequently, nobody can state that he knows how a given state ought to be organized, or which type of political behaviour, as well as individual behaviour, is the most valuable in terms of morality.

Before coming to the main subject of this discussion, I wish to emphasize that being aware of the importance of definitions in intellectual discussions I also know the limitations of using them. I am sure that in our social reality (as well as in the natural sciences) there are problems which can be discussed by employing only intellectual intuition (common at a given time) rather than precise definition. Thus, the definition of value which I will quote in this paper is, at least for me, of tentative significance only. Similarly, I would like to avoid an interminable discussion of human nature, not because it is meaningless but because I do not feel reluctant to use scientifically undefined terms or notions to be able to move forward. And it seems to me that such a pro-

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* I do not intend to give a conclusive answer to the problem which is taken up in the paper. Only a sketch is presented here of a complex subject matter which seems to be of growing significance to our age.

cedure is common for all sciences despite their tendency to precision. The problem is very deep and linked with the very nature of language. But let us turn back to values.

In the case of values, definitional problems are especially serious. The philosophical discussion of values is as long as the intellectual tradition of mankind.

Depending upon our subjective or objective standpoint we treat values as a content of our sensation or as the object of our cognition. But the further implications of these two view-points have caused a discussion that has been going on for twenty-five centuries. I do not wish to be involved in purely philosophical problems of values. I prefer to approach the problem from a sociological point of view, because it treats values as social facts which exist and have a decisive influence on our life without our philosophical understanding of them.

In order to be able to deal with them in such a way, it seems necessary to add an adjective before the term "value". It is easier to discuss problems of "technical values", "economic values", "organizational", "medical", "sport" values and many other kinds of values than without these qualifications. Here I would like to consider social values.

These can be divided into two basic categories: material and moral values. Simultaneously, both categories can be divided into instrumental and intrinsic values. This category is the most controversial. But when we deal with moral values within a social frame of reference the problem becomes a little more comprehensive for sociologists. Thus, when using the term "social value" I mean moral values living in society; values which can be denied by individuals but never by society as a whole.

The value-orientation in the modern world is based upon the idea of "cultural relativism". It wants to show us the evolution of ethical principles; that the social values which are of importance for the survival of a primitive tribe do not play the same role in a complex society. For example, the duty of helping the weak and the old may have to be pitted against the duty of preserving the primitive tribe. In the more advanced societies the principle of individual charity for the weak and the poor became the first principle of moral life. However, in the affluent societies of our time, where the abolition of poverty has become highly organized, "individual charity might again be deprecated as weakening the drive to hasten the full emergence of the welfare state." [1] It is easy to show that the social values are very relative when we treat the human being only on the cultural level, and when we neglect the organic metabolism as the basis for culture. It seems that only a holism which will join the biological aspect of life with the cultural and social aspects can help us in a search for universal social values.

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[1] W. H. Thrope, *Science, Man and Morals*, London 1965, p. 118.

In the holistic approach to the problem, it is very easy to realize that obligations are also those behaviours which condition our existence and which simultaneously are dependent upon our own volition. For instance, "to eat" is a necessity and, at the same time, an obligation. It is only an obligation because we can resist this necessity because this action is dependent upon our will, although such resistance would push us beyond the boundaries of life. Thus, the descriptive sentence "man has to eat" is also a normative sentence "man ought to eat". Of course, it could be said: "this is nonsense, because he who does not want to live will not eat and this does not change obligation into necessity". This is true, but not when considered from a social point of view. This is true for the individual, but not for society, to the extent that it wishes to be a subject of sociological rather than archaeological study.

Again, if I treat human life as a value, one can say: "life is of value to you but I'm going to commit suicide"; and he is right — from an individual standpoint, even life cannot be assumed to be a „universal value". However, when we look upon individual life from the social point of view, human life appears as a value in both cases because society needs live members and because life for society as well as for an individual is the only platform for the discussion of social problems. And whoever puts himself beyond its boundaries excludes himself from the discussion.

It is well known that no other part of the body of empirical studies is so deeply immersed in the problem of values and evaluation as are the social sciences. Gunnar Myrdal wrote: "Scientific terms become value-loaded because society is made up of human beings following purposes. A disinterested social science is, from this viewpoint, pure nonsense. It never existed, and never will exist. We can make out thinking strictly rational in spite of this, but only by facing the valuations, not by avoiding them." [2]

There exists a strong impression that our valuation depends only on our will. This is true for the individual only. We can prefer things which are commonly disapproved and damned, but it is different in the case of social values. Each society accepts values which are recognized as enforcing its social welfare. Of course, social welfare could be differently understood, but there is always a set of basic goals desired by people, goals which are necessary in the structure of any society. I call them universal social values.

I want to present here the problem of social values treated from the point of view of the sociology of knowledge. In order to do this, I should explain in what particular sense I use the "value". I think it would not be wrong to say that it approximates the Marxian point of view, represented by T. H. Tawney. Namely, a standard of values "must be based

[2] G. Myrdal, *Value in Social Theory*, New York 1958, p. 164.

on some conception of the requirements of human nature as a whole, to which the satisfaction of economic needs is evidently vital, but which demands the satisfaction of other needs as well, and which can organize its activities on a rational system only insofar as it has a clear apprehension of their relative significance." [3] If the acceptance of this point of view is a choice which contains certain valuations, I would like to see a pure scientist who never evaluates. As for me, I am compelled to make a choice. And, still worse, I am sure that it is impossible to make an analysis of facts without the guidance of some accepted values. This is true of both natural and social sciences. The difference between the former and the latter in regard to intrinsic and instrumental value premises lies only in the fact that they are characterized by different relationships between these two kinds of premises. Clearly separated in the natural sciences, in the social sciences they are obscured to such a degree that in the process of carrying out social research we are sometimes unable to distinguish between them. Natural scientists must deal with intrinsic values only when they decide upon the selection of particular problems for research, but social scientists always deal with aspects of human activity which cannot be set free from intrinsic values. However, in both fields we use value premises in making scientific observations and later in the analysis of facts. Just as the Cartesian "cogito ergo sum" is very true on the cognitive level of experience, on the practical level of everyday eÑistence I think this to be true: "I choose *ergo* I am."

Here I ought to add that I consciously mix up values, valuations and choice. They are so closely linked that for our sociological and non-philosophical discussion we can omit the problem.

The idea of excluding the consideration of values from scientific activity sometimes leads to a conflict between the needs of society and the behaviour of scientists, as is clearly shown in the following example recorded by Howard Selsam during the Roosevelt administration. The U.S. Department of Agriculture organized a series of conferences to solve certain problems of the national society and of rural life with a participation of representatives of all branches of the social sciences. However, these specialists were willing to discuss questions concerning the selection of desirable social objectives because, they maintained, they were competent to discuss only matters of fact, not of value, which lie within the domain of philosophy and religion. In result of this situation, the Department of Agriculture rallied together philosophers and religious leaders to resolve agricultural problems. Therefore, Selsam asked: "How can philosophers and religious leaders determine 'the desirable objectives of our national society or our rural life?' They must do

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[3] R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, London 1938, p. 231.

so by deduction from some abstract principles concerning either man's ultimate good in this world or the prerequisites for his salvation in the next, or else they must become social scientists and seek to do the job that those who are technically better trained and equipped have so woefully neglected." [4]

There is a feed-back relationship between science and values. In other words, there is the impact of science on values as well as the impact of values on science. But here I will focus on the impact of science on values rather than on the inverse one.

People are interested in the value-problem not only for purely intellectual reasons. Our conscious or unconscious hierarchies of values designate our norms of behaviour. And in everyday life we have much more to do with norms than with values.

It is necessary to point out that social life is impossible without norms; it begins with the creation of norms. In order to pass over from certain values to certain norms we usually base our valuation or our value opinions and premises on the judgments about facts; and therefore science has always a stronger or deeper impact on our systems of norms than is commonly assumed.

It seems to be possible to say: the deeper our empirical knowledge of a given reality and the greater the prestige of this knowledge, the greater the impact of it on our system of norms and social values.

I suppose that we can seek them by way of empirical research.

We cannot discuss social values without certain conceptions of human nature, but in order to avoid an endless discussion about "human nature", I treat this term as a conventional one, where deeper analysis is unnecessary. For my purposes it will be sufficient to say that apart from metabolic processes, common to all people, we can find certain human cravings expressed in different ways and degrees, but common at least to the peoples of all complex and known civilizations.

Before discussing this point, I want to mention the historical process which W. Stark calls "an evolution of science and an involution of religion." [5]

In all so-called "sacred" societies the hierarchy of values has been determined by religious or quasi-religious beliefs. But the religious universalism of the Christian world, as well as of others has been destroyed by the growth of national powers with their own local moralities and by the development of modern science, which has influenced many spheres of the psychic and social life of man. Religion is becoming more and more a phenomenon in its own field, or, following A. N. Whitehead's thought, religion is what one does with his solitude. Under the

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[4] H. Selsam, *Socialism and Ethics*, New York 1943, p. 100.
[5] W. Stark, "The Sociology of Knowledge and the Problem of Ethics," *Transactions of the Fourth World Congress of Sociology*, Vol. IV, 1959, p. 85.

impact of scientific knowledge religious morality has given way to
a wide extent to lay morality. Unfortunately, lay morality linked with
neo-positivist ideology has lacked universality by definition.

The reason seems to be not only the lack of a stable point of referen-
ce, which religious moralities have usually had in the idea of God. An
important role is played by the fact that for the last three centures,
philosophers have agreed with D. Hume's statement that there does not
exist any logical transition between facts and values. That is, of course,
true. But the sociology of knowledge reminds us that logic is not only
a method or measurement of our correct, reasonable thinking. It is also
a separate discipline of great prestige, and this prestige sometimes has
an overwhelming impact on our conceptions of reality. Thus, even
scientists are inclined to forget that there exist many other ties and
links which are not illogical but extra-logical, that could be a basis at
least for suggestions for the reasonable selection of values and above
all "social values".

David Hume, being a follower of the subjective conception of values,
also wrote: "When you pronounce any action or character to be vicious,
you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you
have a sentiment or feeling of blame from the contemplation of it." [6]

Hume's moral philosophy was of great significance. It liberated the
development of modern science from religious and ideological burdens.
His point of view became generally accepted in European philosophy.
After him, another British thinker, Edmund Burke, expressed the same
idea in these words: "Nothing universal can rationally be affirmed of
any moral or any political subject."

Contemporary followers of the objective value theory can easily
challenge these opinions. Statements such as "a beautiful thing is that
which I like" and "a good thing is that which I crave for" — are simpli-
fications only. The adjectives "beautiful", "true", "good", and "bad",
are, on the morphological level, similar to predictors, but on the level
of syntax they are something else. Maybe it will be more comprehensible
if I add that such terms as necessity, beauty, goodness, possibility, are
not the characteristics of a given subject, but they belong to the sub-
jects as their designations which can be certified in modal senten-
ces. However, these statements which I have borrowed from a Polish
philosopher (Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz), are only of marginal significance
for the present discussion.

Due to the development of the sociology of knowledge and science,
we know that science is conditioned by the values accepted in society.
The question is to what extent can empirical science be a source of the
propositions of values, or to what extent can it be a platform for the
selection and acceptance of values?

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[6] Quoted from T. D. Weldom, *States and Morals*, New York, London 1947, p. 1.

I am afraid to be accused of advocating "moral totalitarisnism" or an ideal social order of the "Brave-New-World" type. Therefore, I have to emphasize that I only hope that in this age, which is often said to have witnessed "the end of ideology", a set of ideals which received scientific support could play an important social role. It is also necessary to point out that the same ideals could be arranged in different hierarchies in particular societies. The discovery of at least a few of those values which are not temporally or spatially determined may be of great importance for modern social life, which is increasingly influenced by the value-free natural sciences and technology.

At the present time we have to keep in mind L. von Bertalanffy's warning: "Military hardware, including the most advanced superbombs, will not save us when the will to live, the guiding ideas or values of life, have subsided." [7]

Is it not a paradox that despite this situation, which mankind is now facing, science, the most integrating factor of modern civilization, is not interested in seeking common social values and universal value goals? Today, even among natural scientists, we can hear many voices in favour of value-goals research: "... in human behaviour goal-seeking and purposiveness cannot be overlooked, even if we accept a strictly behaviouristic standpoint." [8]

Despite the fact that all values are of extra-scientific origin by their very nature, it seems that the social sciences ought to integrate their efforts on this problem in order to assist those social and political processes in which social value goals are chosen arbitrarily by irresponsible people motivated by emotion.

Turning to the above mentioned cravings, I would like to recall that just twenty years ago R. Lynd pointed to nine human cravings on the level of personality which he defined as synonymous with values. Let me recall them in abbreviated form:

"1. The human personality craves to live not too far from its own physical and emotional tempo and rhythm. ... As a part of this craving to maintain a tempo and rhythm natural to it, the personality craves periods of latency and private recoil during which time space and other persons can be taken on its own terms without coercion.

2. The human personality craves the sense of growth of realization of personal powers and it suffers in an environment that denies growth, or frustrates it erratically or for reasons other than similar needs for growth in others.

3. The human personality craves to do things involving the felt sense of fairly immediate meaning.

[7] L. von Bertalanffy, "World of Values and World of Science," *Teachers College Record,* 6, 65, March 1964.
[8] L. von Bertalanffy, "General System Theory," *Critical Review.*

4. The human personality craves physical and psychological security (peace of mind, ability to 'account on' life's continuities, and so on).

5. But human personality is active and cherishes, in varying degrees, the right to exercise these optional insecurities. It craves novelty. It craves risk as exhilarating—when it is exhilarating.

6. As a corollary of the preceding, the human personality craves the expression of its capabilities through rivalry and competition; with resulting recognition of status.

7. But if rivalry and the status it yields provide some of the arpeggios of living, the more continuous melody is the craving of the personality for human mutuality, sharpening of purposes, feelings, and actions with others. The personality craves to belong to others richly and confidently and to have them belong, in turn, to it.

8. The human personality craves coherence in the direction and maning of the behaviour to which it entrusts itself in the same or different areas of its experience.

9. But the human personality also craves a sense of freedom and diversity that gives expression to its many areas of spontaneity without sacrificing unduly its corresponding need for a basic integration of continuities." [9]

These cravings are similar to the "four wishes"—for security, experience, recognition and emotional response—originally set forth by W. J. Thomas and F. Znaniecki in the "Methodological Note" to *Polish Peasant in Europe and America,* which Lynd mentions in a footnote.

It seems to me that such kinds of personal cravings are actually synonymous with values, but there is no equation mark between them. I assume only that certain carefully selected cravings on the level of human personality could lead us to certain "social values".

I use the term "social values" mainly for two reasons:

1. I would like to distinguish as "social" values only those which can fulfill the function of guideposts in social behaviour.

2. Some of them are attainable only in society, as a result of given relations among people.

One typical social value of universal extent seems to be solidarity. People not only cannot live alone, by definition, they struggle for existence in groups. One value, and at least one norm (as derivative from this value) is founded upon this fact. The value is that of solidarity, which is expressed by the norm "do not betray the group." Obviously, no group can exist without this norm. Of course, one can argue that this is tautological, because the idea of fidelity is included in the very notion of group. However, the logical status of such a statement cannot change reality. All groups at all times and places have to accept this norm in order to exist.

[9] R. S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What?*, Princeton 1945, pp. 193-197.

Knowing how complex and difficult the problem of value is in its philosophical aspect I think that we ought to take into account just such a sense of values if we deal with them for practical goals.

On the other hand, we ought to be especially careful with the troublesome relation between common sense language and the language of our scientific structures if the systematic deliberation on social values is to have some practical meaning. [10]

The problem is not only a scientific one. If science were to select some set of basic values accepted in all known societies and at all times—that would be its most integrating idea for the social life of our world.

The history of science allows the recognition of an interesting process: changes in the scientific approach to the problem of valuation. Depending upon the changing composition of the basic factors of a given civilization, in the span of ages scientists are more or less included to make up the problem of values and evaluation.

But we know better now than before that in a similar way as the social sciences all other branches of human endeavour arc conditioned by values dominated in a given time and place. Therefore, the following opinion of Myrdal published nine years ago is becoming more and more valid: "The most important thing is to make this unavoidable conditioning a conscious and deliberate situation, to change an uncontrolled general bias into a set of explicit and specific viewpoints."[11]

It seems to me that there is only one way to fulfill this program: to revise our intellectual tradition dominated by the positivistic conception of science with its deeply rooted idea of the unavoidable gap between the world of science and the world of values. Further it is necessary to begin a serious holistic investigation of the social values among which exists—as most of us instinctively feel regardless of our scientific viewpoint—a set of undiscovered universal values.

Those who do not like to assume that rejection of the idea of looking for universal values is only a result of the particular development of science and a reaction against many religious ideologies, must be reminded that different hierarchies of values were created and accepted in different and separated cultures. Now, for the first time in history, mankind is becoming an unseparated whole, and modern mass media create a basis for a future universal culture. A basis which is being established today in the ugly form of the so-called mass culture.

The search for universal social values seems to be in Toynbee's terms, the very "response" to the "challenge" which our civilization is facing now.

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[10] H. Garnfinkel, "Some Contributions of Dynamic Psychology to the Sociology of Knowledge," *Transactions of the Fourth World Congress...*, pp. 67-84.
[11] G. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 54.