

Value-Judgments in Our Conceptual Apparatus

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I

The legitimacy of value-judgments in science in general and in social sciences in particular has been the object of a lively controversy since the time when Max Weber in 1904, outlining a programme for a new sociological periodical called "Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik," banned value-judgments from articles which were to be admitted in its future issues. It was an attack preceding the attack of the neo-positivists who contributed to the well known revival of the problem.

I do not intend to give a detailed account of the controversy raised by this opinion. I shall return to it for a while at the end of my paper, in which I have adopted a moderate opinion similar to that professed by G. Myrdal in his *American Dilemma* and in his other works, i.e. the opinion that, while it cannot be the duty of a scientist to avoid all valuations, it is his duty to be fully aware when and where they intervene in his argumentation.

In order to realise this requirement I shall review four different ways in which values are involved in our conceptual apparatus. Examples will be taken first of all from the field of moral valuations, as it is a domain with which I am particularly familiar, but my remarks could be, I think, generalized. Ch. Stevenson in his *Ethics and Language* and in his book *Facts and Values* dealt with a similar subject when speaking of persuasive definitions, but my distinctions do not overlap with his and our interests are somehow different.

1. In his essay on the standard of taste Hume wrote what follows: "There are certain terms in every language, which import blame, and others praise, and all men who use the same tongue, must agree in their application of them." To misregard this emotional tone is — according to Hume — to show an inadequate knowledge of the given language. Hume as well as Mandeville were fully aware of the persuasive force of these emotionally loaded terms. Mandeville in the Dialogue VI of the *Fable of the Bees* affirmed that "Speech was invented to persuade." Hume wrote in the quoted essay "People who invented the word 'charity' and used it in a good sense, inculcated more clearly and much more efficaciously the precept 'Be charitable' than any pretended legislator or prophet, who should insert such a maxim in his writings."

The emotionally loaded terms which cannot be properly understood without taking into account the praise or blame involved in their meaning will constitute the first group of terms which illustrate the intervention of value judgements in our concepts. Whenever we intend to define a term of this kind, we have to start by assuming a value-

judgment and then adjust the purely descriptive adjectives constituting the definiens so as to justify the valuation by which we began. It was the way in which value-judgments intervened in the definitions of Socrates in Plato's dialogues.

In *Laches* Socrates takes as a start the assumption that courage is a noble quality. He disapproves of Laches contending that courage is a sort of endurance of the soul because there exists a foolish endurance which is evil and hurtful. Socrates: "You would not admit that sort of endurance to be courage — for it is not noble, but is courage noble?" Laches: "You are right."

The same technique is used in *Charmides*. Socrates urges Charmides to acknowledge temperance to be of the class of the noble and good and this assumption allows Socrates to reject the definition of temperance as quietness, because quickness is sometimes better than quietness. Temperance cannot be modesty either, if temperance has to be good, and modesty is as much evil as good.

This kind of definitions is frequently in use in ethics and not only in ethics. Let us take, e. g. the definition of egoism. We consider inadequate a definition which would characterise an egoist as a man who has his own good in view, arguing, that there is nothing wrong in taking care of oneself. This argument proves that in conformity with our language we wish to make egoism bad. Thus we are rather inclined to accept a definition which treats as egoist a man, who, in case of conflict of his own interests and interests of others, shows a tendency to sacrifice the second. In a similar way who ever defines murder and wishes to be in conformity with the language must shape his definiens so as to respect the fact that we speak of murder only in cases of disapproved killing.

In his essay on charity and charity schools Mandeville starts with a definition of charity which would account for the fact of its being meritorious. "Charity — we read — is that virtue by which part of that sincere love we have for ourselves is transferred pure and unmixed to others, not tied to us by the bonds of friendship or consanguinity and even to mere strangers, whom we have no obligation to, nor hope or expect anything from. If we lessen any ways the rigour of this definition, part of the virtue must be lost." In order to make this virtue still more praiseworthy Mandeville adds in his previous considerations a condition: the charitable man must give away things which he values himself. This proposal makes clear that, when defining value-loaded terms we can not only respect their emotional content but make it more or less laudative or pejorative by adding new conditions to be fulfilled.

2. The case of terms associated in the given language with an emotional taint ought to be distinguished from pseudo-neutral terms whose meaning is incomplete without referring to valuations. In the second chapter of *Utilitarianism*, J. St. Mill introduces the term "happiness" as psychological, empirical term. "By happiness — we read — is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness pain, and the privation of pleasure." But when in the following chapters Mill tries to convince the reader that virtue is a part of happiness, so that it is its necessary and perhaps even its sufficient condition, the concept of happiness ceases to be a psychological one. Its description turns to be a description of the so-called true happiness. Long ago ethical writers

pointed to the fact that the concept of true happiness implied an ideal of personality. In Mill's opinion true happiness was the happiness of a man who preferred "pleasures of the intellect of the feelings and imagination and of the moral sentiments as opposed to those of mere sensation."

A. Smith tried to derive all virtues from the fact that men have a tendency to fellow-feeling. An infant replies with a smile to a smile and the weeping of one child makes the whole nursery weep. But it never occurred to Smith that it was impossible to derive virtues from this fact unless the fellow-feeling, i.e., sympathy in the ethymological sense of the word, assumed a quite definite direction. Nothing in the concept of fellow-feeling did prevent people witnessing a case of cruelty to sympathize with the cruel man and not with his victim. But it was taken by Smith for granted that our sympathy takes always part of the right cause. Thus the fellow-feeling, supposed to be neutral, was in fact guided by values.

Whenever we hear the well-known slogan that men ought to be given such conditions as to make them develop all their capacities, or such conditions as to satisfy their needs, we really think only of capacities which we approve and of needs which we consider respectable. Capacities like sadism and needs like the need to humiliate are not taken into account. In his dialogue *Oikonomikos* Xenophon asserted, that the notion of property includes a valuation, as to possess something is not only to dispose of it freely. The thing possessed must be also valuable. The word "functional" has been often used to name only positive effects of a given custom or a given norm for the life of the society. It was used in this sense by Kluckhohn in his statement "Any cultural practice must be functional or it will disappear before long." The proposal to replace the term "functional" used in this sense by the term "eufunctional" as opposed to the term "dysfunctional" was intended to make clear the element of valuation hidden in the term.

A normative use of the pseudo-empirical concept of human nature can be observed in the writings of Marx when he speaks of alienation as of something which deforms human nature, or when he points out the contradiction existing between human nature of the proletarians and their living conditions, which constitute, according to him, a manifest negation of their nature. In both cases the human nature of the proletarians was not composed of characteristics which the proletarians really possessed, but of characteristics which they had to possess in order to live a life worthy of man.

The evaluative character of the concept of human nature was well known since the antiquity. Recommending to live in conformity with nature, the ancients — as has already been pointed out by some writers, were guilty of a vicious circle, since in order to know what was right, one was supposed to know what belonged to nature and in order to decide what belonged to nature it was necessary to know what was right.

3. While in the first case value-judgments in our concepts were quite explicit, and in the second they were tacitly assumed, in the third case we have to do with genuinely empirical concepts, whose denotation, however, was made narrower or wider in order to satisfy some desires, to fit some valuations. Here the value-judgment is not contained in the

meaning of the term, but its extension depends on a value-judgment of a person. It is, e.g. the case with the definition of labour by Marx. In order to define labour there is no need to refer to value-judgments. Our language does not suggest here a definite orientation. Some people consider work as a blessing, others as a punishment for our original sin. Marx, who had great respect for work and wanted to inculcate it to others, delineated the concept so as to reserve work only for man and exclude from its scope such activities as the activities of a spider, of ants, bees or beavers. The condition that work has to be an activity conscientiously planned was expected to make out of it a honourable privilege of man.

The concept of responsibility is in a similar position. I can take here as an example a book of a Polish psychiatrist who was particularly interested in the concept of moral insanity. As the head of an asylum for many years, he could use a large material to decide, whether there is something like moral insanity and, in the case of a reply in the affirmative, what could be its characteristics. After elaborate considerations he proposed to call moral insanity a complete indifference for human suffering exhibited from early childhood. As he was often called to court as expert, he tried in the end of the book to reply to the question, whether a person morally insane, in the accepted sense, had to be considered responsible or not. His argumentation could be roughly summarized as follows; I do not see any reason why a repulsive person of that kind should be treated with leniency and be acquitted. A person morally insane ought to be punished and therefore he is responsible. The notion of responsibility was here extended so as to fit the moral indignation of the psychiatrist. It does not seem the only case when psychiatrists consulted as experts in psychiatry, give us a reply not as psychiatrists but as moralists.

In connection with this point we may quote an example given by Stevenson in his book *Ethics and Language*.¹ Many motorists drive during their vacations to a camping spot and spend their time in a trailer. The question arises, whether or not they have to be taxed and this depends upon the decision to consider trailers as dwelling places or as vehicles. In the last case they are free from tax. According to Stevenson, the question of the definition of a dwelling place is connected here with an ethical problem, namely the question, whether people spending their vacations in trailers ought to be taxed or not.

Value-judgments on which the extension of the concept of work, of responsibility and of dwelling place depend, may not be the only one in the case of the first two concepts. They can be treated as concepts which in fact are not neutral in the sense in which the concept of a dwelling place is. Namely, somebody may contend that we call work only an activity whose product has some value. A useless exertion may not be called work. One can refuse the name of work to the action of the prisoners in a concentration camp, who were ordered to dig holes in the ground and to fill them again. An extra valuation seems also contained in the concept of responsibility. X seems responsible for an action or for abstaining from doing it whenever Y (who can be an individual as well as a whole group) can rightly disapprove of him or punish him for it.

¹ See p. 295.

If we agree with these interpretations the evaluative element would be double in the case of the notion of work and the notion of responsibility.

4. The fourth and last kind of intervention of valuations in our concepts is represented by concepts involving tacitly a reference to a given rule. The notion of exploitation of one man by another may be treated as an example. The notion of exploitation, like the concept of egoism is associated with disapproval which must be taken into account in our attempts at a definition. But at the same time every exploitation is an exploitation in reference to some rule. He who admits that a married woman, working in her profession, is often exploited, as she has still her housework to do, when she returns home after a laborious day, tacitly assumes that in marriage the husband and wife, both working in their professions, must have an equal share in the burdens of their household. When an employer requires from the employees an additional work without an extra pay, we speak of exploitation by reference to a rule which requires from people a respect for contracts and prohibits to take advantage of the fact that the employees may be in a compulsory situation, which happens, e.g. under the threat of unemployment.

As another term which is in an analogous situation to that of the term "exploitation" we may quote the term "right" when we are speaking of human rights. He who has a right to something, say the right to freedom of expression, has this right always in virtue of some valuation or some rule. Bentham, in his well known severe criticism of the French Declaration of Rights of 1789 was fully aware of this fact, and this was the reason why he disapproved of beginning the Declaration by a list of rights, which were secondary, which were mere applications of more fundamental principles of moral order. To support the right to freedom of expression we have to refer to the fact that people who are deprived of this right suffer and cannot realise an ideal of personality. In an article entitled *On Deceiving the Public for the Public Good* the author, Lyman Bryson,² is against this practice as the public has the right to be well informed. "Nations that encourage their citizens to be open minded, skeptical, questioning, free, are not good candidates for hegemony" he concedes. But they have, according to him, something else which he obviously considers more valuable. It is easy to guess that only those nations can realize an ideal of personality cherished by the author

II

After having distinguished four ways in which value-judgements may interfere in our concepts I should like to say a few words about the concept of persuasive definition introduced and popularized by C. Stevenson. The use of any concept emotionally loaded can be treated as an instance of persuasion, if by persuasion we mean the moulding of attitudes without reference to a rational argumentation. We recall here the words of Hume, whom I quoted above, who believed that the use of the word "charity" as laudatory term was more efficacious in modelling our attitudes than the teachings of prophets and legislators. But when

² *Conflict of Loyalties*, ed. by R. M. MacIver, N. Y. and London 1952.

speaking of persuasive definition Stevenson had in mind quite a definite situation of bringing about a change in a person's attitude by changing the descriptive content of a given term without changing its emotional taint. A reverse situation i.e. a situation when a change in the emotional content occurs without a change in the descriptive content is of course also possible, but this case does not interest the author. His examples are examples of the first situation and in his second book entitled *Facts and Values* the author, in addition, quite explicitly requires from a persuasive definition to be motivated by a conscious or unconscious tendency to provoke a change in human attitudes in a definite direction. Thus the neo-positivists made use of a persuasive definition — according to the author — when, preserving the pejorative content of the term "nonsense," they widened its descriptive content so as to treat as nonsensical all statements which could not be empirically proved. And this was done in order to provoke a negative attitude towards metaphysics. The laudatory content of the word "justice" was many times used to provoke a favourable attitude towards a different descriptive content. Plato in his *Republic* admits that a state realises justice when each of the three classes is doing its own work. In adopting this definition he made a propaganda in favour of the aristocracy. Similarly Bentham considered just the realisation of maximum happiness for maximum of people and was, in Stevenson's opinion, making propaganda in favour of democracy, as he recommended to count each person for one and no one for more than one.³ Stevenson would probably agree to treat as a persuasive definition the way in which Hitler used the word "socialism" chosen obviously as a positive term and associated in his propaganda with a descriptive content flagrantly opposed to the content attributed to the term by XIX century socialists.

While in his characteristics of a persuasive definition Stevenson, stressing the element of change in persuasion, was rather interested in the dynamics of the language, his considerations and his examples suggested the possibility of, including into persuasive definitions all definitions of terms emotionally active as they all contribute to the modelling of human attitudes and the example of a trailer which I quoted above would in addition allow to consider persuasive any definition of a neutral term when motivated by a value-judgment. Then my two first distinctions would fall into the categories of persuasive definitions.

III

As I have mentioned at the beginning, the search for value-judgments in our conceptual apparatus was intended to make research workers aware of the presence of values in their considerations. As the role of valuations in science is still controversial and still topical I should like to make some distinctions which could perhaps be useful in the solution of the problem.

One should begin, I think, by distinguishing value-judgments as elements of our research activities and value-judgments as elements of the product of these activities. Nobody can contest that a researcher is

³ *Facts and Values*, pp. 44—47.

fully entitled to have some preferences for some problems, that he may like some methods of solving them rather than other equally efficacious.

Science as a product of these activities may be in turn divided into science and meta-science. The appreciation of truth, verifiability, cohesion, clarity, economy, simplicity, preciseness, the preference for a small number of axioms in deductive sciences, and for making them as short as possible, all these valuations are made in meta-science.⁴ Had M. Weber been acquainted with the distinction of science and meta-science he would probably have extended his postulate of freedom from values (*Wertfreiheit*) only to the first, to the ultimate presentation of the results of research activity. In addition, he was strongly against any value-judgment uttered by a university professor *ex cathedra*. Valuations were — according to him, inadmissible in science as they were incapable of proof. Science could not prove that the golden mean is better than the extremes. Science could denounce the coherence or incoherence of our valuations, could point to the right means to achieve our ends, and show the losses which might be associated with their realization, but it could not help us in our choice of the god we wished to serve and the sense of life could not be demonstrated empirically.

In our university lectures — as Weber contended — intellectual integrity constitutes the chief virtue and this integrity forbids us to take advantage of our privileged position of a lecturer, who can suggest to his audience some values without the possibility of an opposition. The lecturer should be neither a demagogue nor a prophet, even if his lectures have to be, because of his abstinence, less attractive. The properties which make a scientist a good scholar are by no means identical with the properties which make him a good guide of human life. Moreover, one can guide somebody's life outside the University. And in Weber's opinion what was worst was a pseudo-reserve in valuations, masked by the well known slogan: let the facts speak for themselves.⁵

In the light of the distinction between science and meta-science it seems possible to refute some of the critical remarks made by the present day opponents of Weber's attitude. One of them pointed at a contradiction in eliminating valuations from science, as it was supposed to imply a valuation of valuations.⁶ This criticism does not seem valid since valuation of valuations had to be included into meta-science, where it was not contested.

In a recent article entitled *Anti-Minotaur: the Myth of a Value-Free Sociology* the author, A. W. Gouldner, warns against the danger of adopting the postulate of a value-free science, as knowledge may serve as well the man who wishes to spread disease as the man who wants to

⁴ This distinction — so far as I know — has not been taken into account by R. Dahrendorf in his interesting chapter entitled "Sozialwissenschaft und Werturteil" contained in his book *Gesellschaft und Freiheit*, München 1961.

⁵ Weber dealt with these problems several times: In 1904 when he was outlining the programme of the periodical "Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozial Politik." In his article *Der Sinn der Wertfreiheit in der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften* ("Logos, 1917) and in his well known essay entitled *Wissenschaft als Beruf* — an address given in Munich in 1918.

⁶ G. Weigand, *Die Berechtigung Sittlicher Werturteile in den Sozialwissenschaften*, Duncker and Humblot, Berlin 1960.

stop it.⁷ But the abstinence from valuations in the ultimate presentation of the result of scientific activities and the abstinence from valuations in the University classroom had nothing to do, in Weber's opinion, with moral indifference and the prestige of the scholar was — according to him — enhanced when people knew that, although engaged in the defense of some values outside the University, he was able to silence his emotions in his role of academic teacher. In order to understand the stress laid by Weber upon this last point we must take into account that his most vigorous defense of a dispassionate and unbiased university teacher was made in 1917 and 1918, i.e. during World War I when there were reasons to fear that German Universities will be the platform of political struggles particularly dangerous in a country of so high a prestige of the academic professor.

In Weber's argumentation there was something like a statement, tacitly assumed, that descriptions convey knowledge, while valuations, rousing our emotions, are influencing our conduct. A university teacher was expected to enlarge our vision of the world, but it was not his job to guide our conduct. This assumption that valuations and only valuations could lead to activity was shared also by the marxist camp, where it provoked a well known controversy. Either the teachings of Marx — it was argued — included emotional value-judgments, but then they could be accused of containing non-scientific elements or, being deprived of valuations, they were scientific but could not stir the proletariat to fight for its rights. This psychological assumption, which initiated a long dispute, was erroneous. In order to incite people to action there is no need to recur to valuations. If I inform somebody by telephone that the meeting he was to attend has been cancelled I shall certainly influence his behaviour although my call was purely descriptive. An information that frost is coming will probably incite the person informed to wear a warmer coat, and the warning that you are followed by a dangerous lunatic with a knife, will probably stimulate the person warned to a quick defensive reaction. Thus, in order to provoke action no value-judgments are needed from the part of the person who wishes to incite an activity. To be sure, the person informed is expected to have some preferences in order to act. He who learns that a meeting has been cancelled will change his plans if he does not like to attend a meeting in vain, and in order to defend oneself against an attack of a dangerous lunatic one must wish to live. A sheer description of the sufferings of small children in factories, a description contained in the *Capital* of Marx, could rouse a revolutionary spirit provided people were not indifferent to children's misery.

In my final remarks I should like to return to the question of valuations in science in its manifold interpretations. Nobody, I think, would contest the role of valuations in our research activities, nor their role in meta-science, nor the right of the scientist and even his obligation to be engaged actively in the world of values. Many of us would probably be willing to follow Max Weber in his tendency to exclude valuations from science as a final presentation of our research and from university teaching, but this proposal does not seem real for purely technical reasons. M. Weber's *Wertfreiheit* postulate assumes that there is

⁷ Address to the Society for the Study of Social Problems made on August 28th, 1961.

a clear line of demarcation between valuations and descriptions, while in fact they are intimately tied to each other. Valuations, are usually mixed statements in which the emotional taint is connected with the information upon which properties we bestow our approval or disapproval. Pure valuations are extremely rare. Whenever we name a person helpful, reliable, aggressive or quarrelsome, we convey an information. At least in the humanities it would be impossible to renounce all emotionally loaded adjectives. In natural languages we are forced, often against our will to give way to our pro- or con-attitudes. Thus — as I have mentioned in the beginning of my paper — it seems advisable to adopt a moderate position such as the one advocated for social sciences in G. Myrdal works. Valuations, according to Myrdal, permeate research in all stages, from its planning to its final presentation. "There is no other device for excluding biases in social sciences than to face the valuations and to introduce them as explicitly stated, specific and sufficiently concretized value premises." "Emotion and irrationality in science — we read in the same author — acquire their high potency precisely when valuations are kept suppressed or remain concealed in the co-called facts."⁸

Our distinctions of different ways in which value-judgments can penetrate into our concepts were meant as a modest contribution to the program advocated by Myrdal. But I am fully aware that in order to reveal all value-judgments involved in our concepts there is still much to be done.

⁸ *An American Dilemma*, Harper and Brothers, N. Y. and London 1944, pp. 1043, 1044 and 1063.