AN ATTEMPT TO PROBLEMATIZE VALUES

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Abstract: *Values are the principle of human existence. They are its proto-principle. Human life runs its course within a world of values, is guided and made meaningful by values. Political action, as a kind of social action, is guided by meaning and – directly or indirectly – by values. The cardinal function of values is to legitimate the social and political (individual and/or group) actions. The devaluation of values leads to a crisis of society, the only solution to which is a revaluation of values. And because – not being subject to natural causality – values are a matter of choice, when they are imposed and coercively required of people, they cannot result in the good, and their devaluation becomes inevitable. Devalued values break down the immune system of a person, a group, a society. The disregard for politics as a value is a symptom of a severely ailing society. Overall, researches on values have revealed a tendency to moral degradation and a shortage of social and political values. Sociologists explain this negative trend with reference to the preceding period that had abruptly placed whole generations of people socialized in one type of society – the Socialist one – into a new reality that required a radical elimination of the conflict areas in their now compromised past socialization. A clarification of the interconnection between attitudes and values such as justice, family, work, politics, etc., gives answers to the question as to how far these values are a resource for meaningful construction and/or consolidation of community ties. The extent to which values are accepted by the community as reference points for personal and social realization depends on the interiorization of supra-individual norms and values. Only a person who has interiorized these norms and values – not as imposed coercively from outside but as his/her own – may simultaneously live in society and be "free" of society. Individualization is the basic characteristic of a healthy society. The individualization in question must not consist of individualism, atomization, and/or highlighting the Self, but should involve a collective and normative style of life. In that case, it may alleviate the contrast between desired values that underlie the actual conduct of people, and the desirable values that are related to the normative requirements of society.*

Keywords: *values, norms, relations, attitudes, legitimacy, power, hierarchy, interests, social action*

1. Instead of an introduction: The essence of values as satisfying ideals, goals and interests

A deeper understanding (and proper scientific explanation!) of a given phenomenon would be impossible without its problematization. This is achieved by asking the question as to how the object of study is possible – in this case, "how are values are possible" The answer to this question sheds light on the direction of analysis and provides a framework for the arguments by which we seek to justify the view that diversity is a fundamental value and a basic principle requiring mutual recognition, the equality and equal value of knowledge, skills and attitudes in social co-participation with that which is different.

The radically distinct feature of human reality is that it is defined by relationships based on meaning and value-based attitudes within an infinity of world events that are, in themselves, meaningless (Weber 1998). According to Weber, the values in effect within a society or a social group are a factor determining the social and political behavior of the individual. Of course, this factor is a specific product of culture. In the theoretical aspect, we may approach values in an axiological or a sociological perspective. They may be related to the comprehension and explanation of everyday life, the social system, individual and group social action, to interests, the conscious response of people, their inclinations when defining the situation, to choice, observation and assessment of the culturally determined facts that surround people.

There exists a great variety of divisions, classifications, and divisions into types, of values. We refer to positive and negative values, relative and absolute values, value judgments vs. facts, study based on values vs. study free of values. In other words, the presence and impact of values is perceptible in practically all social and psychological phenomena. The whole variety of objects of human activity, of natural phenomena and social relationships, including knowledge and creativity resulting from activity, may acquire the quality of "objects of value" or become objects of value relationships. This means they are evaluated as good/bad, true/false, correct/incorrect, beautiful/ugly, permitted/forbidden and/or just/unjust. A value is most often defined as the essence of an object, phenomenon, an attribute, that is necessary to people or to an individual for the satisfaction of their needs; it is also defined as ideas and incentives serving as norms, ideals, goals and interests. Value is immanent to social activity and psychological behavior.

2. Instead of a presentation: Theoretical perspectives on values

Values are stable convictions that from a personal or social viewpoint, a certain mode of conduct or ultimate goal is preferable to another (contrary) goal or mode of conduct. Value may be viewed by researchers as:

➢ An ideal benchmark;
➢ A standard of evaluation;
➢ A basis for life activities;
➢ A motive for activity.

In the socio-cultural context, the foremost role of values is their regulatory or sanctioning role as a mechanism for encouraging permitted behavior or punishing the prohibited. Regardless of the variety of their formulations, different scholars agree with this, such as Goren (Goren 2005), Moscovici, Mendras (Мендрас 2002), etc.

The means and criteria, on the basis of which the procedures are for evaluating the respective phenomena are established, are fixed in social consciousness and culture as "subjective values" (definitions and assessments, imperatives or prohibitions, goals and projects appearing in the form of normative representations) that are important as reference points for human activity. "Object" and "subjective" values are like the two poles of human value attitudes toward the world. According to Milton Rokeach, a leading researcher in this field, values are "abstract ideals, positive or negative, not tied to any specific object or situation, representing a person's beliefs about modes of conduct and ideal terminal goals." Also, a value system "is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states [which] exists along a continuum of relative importance" (Rokeach 1973). Rokeach divides values into two basic types according to whether they are connected to the individual's goals or to the means used to achieve those goals. He designates them

respectively as terminal (end) and instrumental values. Terminal values refer to the meaning of existence, and they are the values a person would like to achieve in his/her life. Instrumental values are alternative modes of conduct or means by which we achieve terminal goals. Terminal values are situated in two subgroups – social and personal, while instrumental values are divided into moral and competence values.

Unlike Rokeach, Inglehart does not analyze the mechanisms whereby personal value systems change; he assumes a values system is relatively stable for a mature person. Instead, he analyzes the economic and technological development of societies, together with the processes of modernization and democratization, through the prism of two bipolar dimensions of culture: survival vs. self-expression, and traditional vs. secular rational authority. The first dimension refers to the essential opposition of material vs. post-material values. The dominant needs in materialistic societies are survival, security and material prosperity, while post-materialistic societies display a growing interest in personal and political freedom, independence, and self-expression, tolerance in interpersonal communication, group affiliation, wellbeing expressed in improved quality of life and environmental protection.

The second dimension for measuring cross-cultural diversity refers to people's attitude towards authority. Strongly featured in traditional societies are spiritual and religious beliefs, the prevailing assumption that men should play a leading role in economic and political life, the relatively small tolerance for abortions and divorce. Secularist societies tend towards the opposite views (Inglehart 1990, 1997; Inglehart, Baker 2000).

Another study classifies values under the following types: theoretical (related to discovering the truth by means of a critical and rational approach), economic (aimed at the useful and practical), esthetical, social, political, religious. In the framework of this general typology, knowledge and creativity are part of the theoretical values, but their formats may enter into other types of values as well, such as economic, esthetical, etc. (Allport 1983).

Hofstede's "cultural onion" model depicts culture as a a multi-layered onion, where values are at the core of culture, and rituals, heroes and symbols represent its outer layers (the last three are defined as practices). In the course of social evolution, practices change with comparative ease. Values are divided into desired and desirable. The former are those that may be important or unimportant, preferable or not preferable, and attractive or unattractive to people, and are linked to the individual's actual conduct, while the desirable are related to the normative requirements of society. Hofstede uses factor analysis to define five basic dimensions of national culture, two of which, in my opinion, have especially strong explanatory power for Bulgarian society:

Individualism - Collectivism

This dimension refers to relationships between the individual and the group or community. In individualistic societies, the interest of the individual dominates over the interests of the group to which he/she belongs. The individual strives for personal success, self-realization and self-esteem, and the actualization of his/her individuality. By contrast, in collectivist societies the interests of the group and the feeling of belonging to the group are of priority importance over the interests of the individual.

Masculinity – Femininity

According to the masculinity-femininity index introduced by Hofstede, societies are differentiated according to their predominant value orientation into "masculine" (competitive, assertive, aimed at achievement and material success) and "feminine" (marked to a higher degree by caring for quality of life, modesty). Masculine cultures display a clear differentiation of gender roles, while in feminine cultures, a person's sex and social roles may cross boundaries – both men and women may be ambitious and/or modest, competitive and/or caring (Hofstede 1980).

The different categories of values form two orders of values:

First order – "Others and the Self" (development, a ranking from "Self" to "Others"): security, conformism, tradition, benevolence, universalism. The values in this group characterize the individual's relation to environmental factors external to him/her.

Second order – "Self and Others" (development, ranking from "others" to "Self"): self-orientation, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power. These values are related to the self-orientation in the individual.

According to Abraham Maslow, the potential of human nature lies in the being- values of experience (B-values), which break through the individual's need-based relation to the world. Marlow has defined the values typical for self-actualizing persons not on the basis of single terms but by expanding prototypes into orders of associated terms (Maslow 1968). The values presented in these orders reflect the needs, motivation and ultimate goals of being. They are largely abstract and ultimate, and primarily comprise the terminal (in Rokeach's terms) values. Maslow's B-values are viewed as mutually complementary elements of a single whole, and they express with greater precision the value nature of knowledge and creativity (Todorova 2012).

Values are an important category for the research fields of various scientific disciplines. Among their multiple dimensions, the most fundamental is that values provide an axiological basis for any cognitive process and contain the system of criteria for assessing objects, acts, people, and events. As generalized standards, values are accepted as "criteria that individuals use to choose and justify actions and to assess people (including themselves) and events" (Schwartz 1992). Despite the wide agreement as to the key role of values in society, there is no similar consensus regarding the meaning of the term not only across the social sciences but even within their separate disciplines (Van Deth, Scarbrough 1995). Here are some more examples. In sociological literature, the phrase "norms and values" is usually attached to explanations of human behavior in such a way as to suggest a self-evident process by which social structures regulate the actions of the individual. Here, sociologists often show an uncertain understanding of the nature of the concept, assigning it to a wide range of social phenomena; even more often, they overlook values as something that is too subjective and difficult to measure empirically (Hitlin, Piliavin 2004). At a very early stage of research, some authors noted the tendency for the term to be used indiscriminately to describe any general model, situation or aspect of human conduct, society, culture, the physical environment or the mutual relations between these (Folsom, 1937). Unfortunately, greater clarity on the concept has not been achieved over time. During the 1970s, a meta-analysis of over 4,000 publications discussing values has found approximately 180 different definitions used (Van Deth, Scarbrough 1995). The main obstacles to the study of values are that:

- They cannot be directly observed;
- The existing theories are not able to convincingly explain how values shape conduct;
- The behavior-based argumentations are not convincing, as the process of generation of values is unknown;
- There are considerable difficulties in measuring values (Hechter et al. 1993);
- Values are often confused with other social-psychological phenomena (attitudes, traits, norms, needs, etc.);
- The content of values is characterized by historical and cultural variablity, and sociologists must not assume historically variable phenomena to be primordial human characteristics (Hitlin, Piliavin 2004).

Conclusion: First, values are a priori categories. They should be thought of not as empirical concepts formulated on the basis of experience, but as theoretical constructions which cannot be given a strict verbal definition. Consequently, values cannot be observed directly but only indirectly, in terms of attitudes and conduct that are their empirical manifestation. Second, values are manifest

through action, but are not a component of that action – they must become linked to a wide range of ideas, beliefs, concepts, and understandings before displaying their effect on action. In other words, values are built into ways of thinking, speaking, acting, assessments, decisions, relations, etc. We can conceptualize values as separate from those things, but we cannot reach them outside their location in other things. Thus, values cannot be studied independently, because they are not independent things (Van Deth, Scarbrough 1995).

In a general perspective, the characteristics that can be assigned to values are:

❖ Values are convictions inseparably linked to affect and emotions;
❖ They are desired goals that motivate action;
❖ Unlike norms and attitudes, which usually refer to concrete action, objects and situations, values are trans-situational and abstract;
❖ Values function as standards or criteria. They guide the choice or assessment of action, policies, people, and events;
❖ They are ranked by order of importance and form a hierarchical system of value priorities, which also distinguishes them from norms and attitudes;
❖ The relative importance of separate values guides action. Each attitude or way of conduct usually influences more than one value.

As mentioned above, values cannot be studied independently, because they are not independent things. Values share some common conceptual characteristics with attitudes and ideologies:

♦ All three are evaluative – they express a positive or negative attitude towards an object;
♦ All three are subjective – they reflect the way in which a given individual understands the surrounding world, but do not necessarily show what that world really is;
♦ All three may exist at a conscious and subconscious level – in some cases they may enter the field of attention, in other cases, not;
♦ Neither of the three may exist separately from the others. For instance, a person's ideology influences his/her values, which shape his/her attitudes, and vice versa, attitudes may influence values, which in turn influence ideologies. Thus, there are two-way cause and effect relations connecting them (Maio et al. 2006).

There are also differences between the three:
o First, they differ in their levels of abstraction. While values are generalized conceptions focused entirely on abstract ideals, (for instance, liberty, solidarity, equality), attitudes are "groupings of several convictions around a specific object or situation" (Rokeach 1973). Ideologies, for their part, are more abstract than values. For instance, the liberal ideology may encompass the values of freedom and solidarity together with negative attitudes to censorship and the restriction of social expenditures;
o Unlike attitudes, values and ideologies are normative/prescriptive in character (Feather 1995; Maio, Olson 1998);
o While values and ideologies uphold standards, attitudes reflect multiple, in many cases changing, opinions (Spates 1983);
o While the number of separate attitudes is practically unlimited (inasmuch as they are focused on concrete objects or situations), values are fewer in number. Ideologies, for their part, being broader in scope than values, are even fewer than values;
o Values and ideologies are considered relatively stable. This quality is necessary in order for them to provide

sustainable standards for evaluation. Value priorities may change slowly over the course of time in order to correspond to a changing environment but they must be sufficiently inert to ensure stability of assessments and conduct (Feldman 2003).

Two main approaches to the study of the structure of values may be distinguished:
1. Enumerating a theoretically limited number of values;
2. Categorizing these values under separate types.

The first approach is based on the assumption that, unlike attitudes, which are practically countless, values are much fewer in number. The most frequently used and cited are the value listings by Rokeach – 36 items (Rokeach, 1973) and Schwartz 10 items (Schwartz, 1992) and 19 items (Schwartz, 2017).

Schwartz groups ten values categories into four super-groupings of values:
- Self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence), which emphasizes the recognition of others as equals and the care for their well-being;
- Self-enhancement (power and achievement), in which the emphasis is on personal success and domination over others;
- Openness to change (self-direction and stimulation), where the emphasis is on independent thought and action and a positive attitude to change;
- Conservation (security, conformation and tradition), with an emphasis on exercising self-restriction to preserve the status quo.

These four types, in turn, form two bipolar dimensions, which serve to describe the conflictive relations between them. The first dimension, *self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement*, characterizes the relation of the individual towards others. Here, the values focused on recognition of others as equals and the care for their well-being are opposed to values stressing personal success and domination over others.

The second dimension, *openness to change vs. conservation*, describes the attitude of the individual towards risk. It opposes the values of independent thinking and action and the desire for changes to the values of self-restriction, maintaining traditions, and stability (Schwartz 1992, 1994, 2007; Schwartz, Sagiv 1995).

3. Instead of a conclusion: Mutual recognition of values

A main goal of the European Union is to promote values such as tolerance, respect and understanding for multicultural differences, human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and respect for human rights. These general goals are complemented by the promotion of social justice, respect for otherness, and the acceptance of the high value of difference, together with the fight against social exclusion and discrimination. In modern multicultural societies, democratic political culture must not stop at the boundaries of ethno-cultural and religious differences. The sustainable integration within society is impossible without trust, tolerance and mutual recognition of cultural-esthetical, ethno-cultural, ideological and/or religious values. It is inadmissible to permit assimilation tendencies at the level of political culture, or tendencies towards differentiation, at the level of ethno-religious everyday life. A minimal condition for public mutual understanding is the possibility for on-going translation that would enable the building of a common language for the (political) value system. There must also be a certain amount of shared knowledge in history that might nourish collective (political) identity. Here, socialization, education, and knowledge have an important role to play.

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