Ten Proposals on Values

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Abstract

This article offers a summary of the book *Des valeurs. Une approche sociologique* (*Values: A sociological approach*) (Gallimard, 2017) through a discussion of 10 controversial issues. It thereby allows the dismissal of various reductive notions of value, in particular those found in classical or neo-classical economics, the quantitative sociology of values, and most philosophical theories.

Keywords

Economic value, evaluation, philosophy of values, pragmatics of values, sociology of values, valuation, value, values

Dix propositions sur les valeurs

Résumé

L'article propose un condensé en dix points de l'ouvrage *Des valeurs. Une approche sociologique* (Gallimard, 2017), dont ont été extracts les passages les plus susceptibles d'entraîner des discussions voire des controverses. Y sont notamment ciblées les réductions de la notion de valeur opérées par l'économie classique et néo-classique, par la sociologie quantitative des valeurs, et par la plupart des approches philosophiques de cette notion.

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In this article I shall present 10 extracts from my book *Des valeurs. Une approche sociologique* (*Values: A sociological approach*) (Gallimard, 2017) which were chosen to provoke debate given their counter-intuitive, paradoxical and even intentionally polemical character.

The first extract concerns the increasingly negative view of certain preconceptions about the notion of value: its reduction to statistical evaluation; its reduction to the result of evaluations, namely worth, to the detriment of two other dimensions, namely good and principles; the reduction of values to right-wing values alone; their assimilation with religious or 'sacred' entities; their reduction to hidden interests; values being invalidated by a lack of universality or of reality.

The second extract proposes a definition of the notion of value as 'the result of the whole set of operations through which a quality is assigned to an object'. This definition enables a pragmatic approach to be taken, centred on valuation operations which depend on the nature of the object being evaluated, on the nature of the evaluating subjects and on the nature of the context of valuation.

The third extract highlights the three meanings of the word *value* – as worth, as a good, as a principle – and uses them to develop implications, particularly of the methodological kind.

The fourth extract deals with four categories of objects likely to be submitted to valuation (either through attachment, measuring or judgement) and, consequently, to be credited with possessing some worth. These are things, people, actions and states of the world. Thus, the aim is to avoid the aporia brought about by the reduction of the issue of value solely to the value of things, as found with the roadmap created by economic science and too often followed by sociology, while the other three categories are excluded.

The fifth extract focuses on the third meaning of the word *value* – its valuation principles – and proposes some criteria enabling their identification. The aim here is to move away from the reduction of the issue of values to just the second meaning of the term – good – which too often affects quantitative surveys in the sociology of values.

The sixth extract argues in favour of a pragmatic approach to values through the empirical study of valuation processes. This kind of study is the only way to convey effectively the complexity of these processes and produce a sociological analysis that is neutral, descriptive, empirical and comprehensive.

The seventh extract explains the 'grammatical' turning point, which, in the wake of the inflexions of pragmatism in the last generation of French sociology, enables the adoption of a qualitative, pluralist and comprehensive approach.

The eighth extract situates the approach adopted regarding the three major theoretical options – structuralism, interactionism and constructivism – while arguing in favour of a non-exclusive form of usage which, on the contrary, is perspectivist and adapted to the different facets of the object of research.

The ninth extract clarifies the aporia involved in the sterile choice between a universalist (or objectivist) conception or a relativist (or subjectivist) conception of values. This choice has greatly preoccupied philosophical conceptions of the notion of value while also making them much more sterile.

The tenth extract proposes a truly sociological approach to the notion of value, which provides a way out of this dichotomy.

I hope that these 10 proposals will help to open up discussion of this matter.

1. To Put an End to Certain Preconceptions

Let us first make clear what readers should not look for in this book.

To begin with, we should stop focusing on the 'fair price' of things. As we shall see in the first chapter, value cannot be reduced 'as a last resort' to a figure-based evaluation of the object's price. This can clearly be seen in the case of art in which the recurring questioning of 'the value of artworks' tends to obscure both the intrinsic relativity of determinations of this value and the variety of ways of assigning value – through words and actions and not just by a price evaluation (see Heinich, 2016). The monopolisation of the term 'value' by economics and its correlative reduction to the question of measuring it through its cost, and the way this corresponds to the supposed intrinsic 'value', can be meaningful in a utilitarian approach. However, if the aim is to understand what a value actually is, this is tantamount to concluding that a tree is the forest.

It is even less plausible to reduce value to price alone because it is not limited to what an object is 'worth'. It also extends to examples of good which are given a value and to the principles which enable that value to be attributed. As we shall see in the second part, the 'value' is thus part of a plurality of objects 'of' value and results from a plurality of 'values' which are used to judge it. This means that, prior to considering the question of 'the' value which tends to be the focus of most debate, it is necessary to go back to 'the values' which founded it. These plural values will consequently take priority over the singular value, and among these plural 'values' we shall take more interest in those which derive from principles than in the better-known values which possess the status of goods, as we shall see in the third part.

A third preconception of which this book should rid us consists of thinking that these plural 'values' – goods or principles – are particularly in phase with a right-wing position in politics. Admittedly, the vocabulary of 'values' has been heavily used by right-wing parties in France in the last generation with such parties focusing on the family, the nation, religion, authority etc.[1] However, while a progressive orientation fits less easily with the word 'value', it is just as present in, for example, the importance accorded to equality, human rights or – in a more complex manner today – secularism.[2] In short, values are neither right nor left wing, and multiple confirmations of this can be found in 'axiological sociology' as presented in the third part.

A fourth idea which disturbs thought about values consists of assigning them a 'sacred' character, either to give them weight or, on the contrary, to discredit them, as in the implicitly negative usage of reducing them to the religious dimension which has imposed itself in the humanities and social sciences. However, this involves confusing the large-scale sharing of a common aim with a system of approval through a separation from the ordinary world. This also involves the supposition that all transcendence would have to be religious or, in other terms, that 'religion' has a monopoly on transcendence when in fact religion is only one form among others – a typical error of reasoning from a school of thought which is still modelled on the religious mould (see Heinich, 2012). To understand a somewhat mysterious object like values, it is better to avoid reducing it to an object which is even less elucidated, such as 'the sacred', mention of which enables lazy thinkers to present themselves easily as cleverer than their average readers. The religious

paradigm is not relevant to the question of values and often hinders thought more than it opens it up.

More trivially, a somewhat directed conception of sociology has spread another prejudice: that of reducing values to hidden interests. In this conception, values are therefore supposed to be nothing more than an 'ideology' used by those who 'dominate' to base their privileges on principles that they impose on the 'dominated'. In the first part, we will see the extent to which this simplistic politicisation of the question of values is far from reality by observing actual value judgements as they are tangibly expressed within their contexts (because it is there alone that values show themselves).

Another particular favourite of critical sociology consists of reducing values to their contextual anchoring foundations and therefore invalidating them because of their lack of universality. A given value might 'only' appear in current western society, for example, and could therefore not legitimately stake a claim to the title of a 'value'. However, we will see that all values are contextual, just as, moreover, all forms of human experience are contextual. This in no way prevents them from being presented as aims to be shared in the society to which they belong. The fact that a representation is neither a substance nor an objective fact existing outside the human mind and that it is therefore 'socially constructed' or even 'mythical' does not detract from its effectiveness and efficiency, because life in society is not just made up of material things and institutions but also involves more or less shared conceptions, whether these are expressed in words, figures or actions. 'Axiological' representations – or in other words, values – are not the least widespread or the least effective among these representations. Between an actor affirming his values and a sociologist criticising them in the name of their lack of objectivity or universality, the more naive of the two is not always the one we might initially believe.

It would therefore be just as naive to imagine that what a value is can only be understood by looking at values 'in themselves'. Contrary to what a spontaneous metaphysical approach might demand, sociology can enlighten us on this point by focusing on what values are 'for those involved', in other words, for actors. This book therefore addresses the relationship between actors and values and how they use their own valuations. This is thus 'analytical sociology', and thus analogous to 'analytical philosophy', insofar as this way of thinking involves the study of 'the ways in which we think about the world and talk about it' as Arthur Danto (1985: xv) puts it, rather than of the world itself.

Finally, by resisting the temptation to reduce values to objective 'facts' – either to validate or invalidate them by pointing out their relativity or subjectivity – we shall avoid the error of believing that a value can be disqualified by demonstrating that it 'does not exist', in the sense that it could never actually be implemented (for example, 'equality does not exist'). Thus, those who persist in attempting to prove that equality in schools is an illusion because the French *Éducation Nationale* system cannot successfully ensure equality in life chances are actually putting forward a highly questionable reality. This persistence requires overlooking how the education system actually could be enabled to progress as well as ignoring the fact that sharing the value of equality as a mission given to schools is fundamental in democracies, even if schools fail to fulfil this role. Also, this therefore undermines, by disqualifying it, the only resource that would enable the demand that schools properly implement their inherent mission. Thus, some believe they are

working towards democratisation but are conversely clipping its wings in the name of a conception of democracy which has been stripped of any serious notion of values. Here again, those who debunk such ideas the most may actually be the less insightful. This should in fact encourage even more interest in the question of values.

<div align="right">('Introduction')</div>

2. Defining Value

It would be prejudicial to reduce the issue of value to that of price, which is a familiar idea both in economics and according to common sense. This would prevent us from observing and understanding the multiple ways in which actors manage to coordinate their attachments, measurements and judgements by valuating objects – not only things but also persons, actions and states of the world. That valuation is done in the name of an intrinsic 'worth' that they establish as its cause, whereas sociologists only have empirical access to its consequences and modalities through the valuation processes.

Admittedly, price has the advantage of being directly observable, unlike value. This is not a reason to reduce value to an illusion or a strategy used by actors to contest or justify a price, as Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerré do in their criticism of the notion of value. Although it has no material reality apart from its tangible manifestations, a collective representation which is discussed, argued about or even institutionalised is not an illusion, although critical thinking based on the notion of 'social construction' would like to reduce the notion of mental representation to, at best, a blind spot for the social sciences, or to, at worst, an illusion which should be discarded (see Heinich, 2009, 2015).

Having established this framework, it is then possible to propose the following definition of 'value' in the first meaning of the term, that is 'worth'. Worth is the result of all operations by which a quality is assigned to an object, with varying degrees of consensuality and stability.[3] These operations depend on the nature of the *object* being evaluated, on the nature of the actors carrying out the valuations, and on the nature of the *context* of valuation. In other words, value as worth is not objective, but neither is it subjective or arbitrary, and the same can be said for the operations that produce it. Instead, it is driven by the views that the object offers for valuation, by individuals' collective representations, and by the possibilities offered by contexts regarding the activation of such representations.

Thus, a strictly sociological definition of value as worth can be constructed, which makes it possible for analysts to study its manifestations empirically and concretely as long as they implement 'values' in the third meaning of the term – as value-principles – thus creating 'values' in the second meaning of the term – value-objects or, in other words, 'goods'.

<div align="right">(Chapter 7: 'Value-worth: What things are worth')</div>

3. The Three Meanings of the Word 'Value'

The first meaning essentially uses the singular article ('the value') while the other two also accept the indefinite article ('a value') and the plural ('the values', 'some values').

According to the first meaning, 'value' means the intrinsic worth of any object and is therefore appreciated positively. According to the objects it is applied to, the term can be synonymous with 'importance', 'merit', 'quality', 'quantity', 'virtue' (in the ancient sense of *virtus*) or even 'price' in the figurative sense. The literal meaning of this last term also has its place herein insofar as this 'value' can often (but not always, as we will see) be measured in particular by the price assigned to the object. This is the most familiar meaning for a commonsense outlook as well as for economists: 'What is the value of this watch?' In other words 'What is this watch worth?' 'What price are we willing to pay for it?' We shall call this first meaning of the word value 'value-worth'.[4]

In the second meaning, 'a' value is an object credited with a positive appreciation, in other words an object which is commonly considered to have value in the first meaning of the term. In banking terms, a 'value' is typically a bill of exchange, a share, a bond or a bank note. More generally, it is also called a 'piece of property'. The purpose of this term 'property' tends to apply to tangible values (for example, a watch can be said to constitute a 'property' or 'value' when inherited, at least if it has a 'high cost') but there are also more abstract 'values'. For example, 'family', 'work', 'religion', 'art', can be considered as 'values', or in other words entities to which importance or cost are attributed. The discourse theoretician Chaïm Perelman thus underlines 'the importance of a too often neglected discourse between abstract values, such as beauty or justice, and tangible values such as France or the Church. Tangible value is attached to a particular being, object, group or institution which are conceived of in their *uniqueness*' (Perelman, 1977: 48).[5] Opinion surveys tend to focus on abstract values and ask respondents, for example: 'For you, is the family a very important, important, unimportant or not at all important value?' Or: 'Among these values, tell us which is the most important for you: family, work, love. . .?' etc. This second meaning of the word 'value' is therefore quite familiar within the economic sphere with regard to tangible values and this is even more the case in the political world with regard to abstract values for ordinary citizens, politicians and political scientists ('right-wing values' will thus be differentiated from 'left-wing values'). We shall call this second meaning of the word 'value' the 'value-object'.

Finally, the third meaning of the word 'value' does not refer to a judgement of worth, like the first, or to a tangible or abstract object, like the second, but instead to a valuation's underlying principle. For example, the statement 'This film is very beautiful' implies that, for the speaker in the context of the enunciation in question, and about the object in question, 'beauty' is a value. Other values, in this sense of valuation principles, lead to other judgements. Examples of this idea are: the morality-based value in the statement: 'This film is completely indecent'; the efficiency-based value in: 'We believe in it from start to finish'; the pleasure-based value in: 'It's a real treat'; the responsibility-based value in: 'It has a great political message'; the value of authenticity in: 'It lacks sincerity'; or the economic value of: 'It will bring in a lot of money'. We shall call this third meaning of the word 'value': 'value-principle'. The difference between 'the' value in the first meaning (value-worth) and 'a' value in the third meaning (value-principle) is homologous to the difference between 'the' quality of an object and 'a' quality of that object, or in other words, a feature which motivates its valuation.[6]

The 'value-object' (second meaning) and the 'value-principle' (third meaning) are sometimes very close to each other, such as when the first refers to an abstract rather than

a tangible object. They only differ because the value-principle has the capacity to put a stop to argumentation. For example, saying 'It is good because it is art' makes art a value in the third meaning – a principle governing a valuation – whereas saying 'Art is a value because it portrays beauty' makes it a value in the second meaning, i.e. a good, an object with a positive evaluation – beauty being here a value in the third meaning, i.e. the principle of this valuation. This is the so-called autotelic character of the value-principle, that is, the fact that it is to itself its own goal and necessity: 'A value is presented as an end when it puts an end to the series of "whys" which justify the action', noted the French philosopher Célestin Bouglé (1922).[7] Value, taken in this sense, is what *causes* valuation, while value-worth and value-object *result* from valuation. This is why studying these 'value-principles' is of major interest; they are more abstract, unfamiliar to a common-sense approach and little analysed in the academic world. The third part of this book will be dedicated to them.

(Chapter 6: 'The three meanings of the word "value"')

4. Objects of Valuation

Things, people, actions and states of the world are the four categories involved in the attachments, measurements and judgements that attest to (for the actors involved) or confer (for sociologists) 'value' in its first meaning of worth, importance, quality.[8] Once valued, things become (tangible) goods, i.e. 'values' in the second meaning of the term. People become valuable and endowed with virtues such as cheerfulness, honesty or courage,[9] markers of excellence such as luxury objects and leisure (see Veblen, 1970 [1899]) or with distinction providers like 'economic capital', 'cultural capital' or 'social capital'(see Bourdieu, 1979). Actions (a smile, an act of rescue or attending a bullfight for example) become valued actions in that they are justified by their conformity to norms or even heroic acts. And states of the world (from climate to peace to democracy) also become abstract rather than tangible goods.

It is all the more important to make these distinctions between valuated objects since they continue to be ignored or underestimated.[10] Thus economic science focuses on the cost and therefore implicitly tends to reduce the issue of value to the value of things,[11] whereas moral philosophy focuses on ethics and therefore tends to reduce the issue to the value of people,[12] and by focusing on norms sociology tends to reduce it to the value of actions. None of these ways of studying the issue are wrong, but they are only partially complete. To understand what an axiological expertise actually is, it is important to take into account all the possibilities it is likely to bring into play.

It is interesting to note that the first proven meanings of the word value concerned the attribution of value to people (particularly through bravery[13]) rather than something measurable and exchangeable. It should also be noted that some beings possess an intrinsically ambiguous status between thing and person. This is the case with 'person-objects' such as relics, fetishes and works of art (see Heinich, 1993); and this is especially the case with animals, which can shift from one status to another depending on whether they are treated as utilitarian goods (quasi-things) or as pets (quasi-people). This explains the recurrence and virulence of debates on how animals should be treated, such as in the debate about bullfighting, as we shall see. It also shows the importance of the contextual

dimension, without which there is no worthwhile sociology, and which is made particularly unavoidable by the question of values.

While economic science focused on the value of things, important advances in the history of the humanities and social sciences were made when the problem of value was extended to other categories of objects. These were: the states of the world, with quantified sociological investigations into values (we shall discuss this in the next chapter); people, as prompted by the work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1986) who 'postulates that the value of things must be analysed in relation to the value of people . . . invested with different values and placed on the same level as the value of things' (Warnier, 2008); and actions, whose conformity to values is regulated by standards. Actions were studied from an axiological perspective by the sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot in their book on the 'justification' of actions, i.e. on the validity granted to them according to the different categories of standards – justification thus constituting a subset of valuation when applied to actions. The anthropologist David Graeber (2001: 49) has also proposed to 'create a theory of value starting from the assumption that what is ultimately being evaluated are not things, but actions', without however seeming to consider that there need not be a choice between the two, as actors are able to evaluate both things and actions albeit certainly in different ways.

(Chapter 7: 'Value-worth: What is the worth of things')

5. Recognising a Value-Principle

Values are multiple even though they are not infinite in number: each object evaluated can be attributed several values rather than just one, according to the properties of the object in question, the aptitudes of the evaluating subject and the characteristics of the valuation context. Unlike 'value' in its first meaning, which is not suited to being unique (and, if this is the case, this inevitably leads to conflicts about 'fair' value), 'values' in the third meaning coexist without difficulty within the same valuation process. A dish in a restaurant can easily be judged 'good', 'beautiful', 'healthy' and 'cheap', or even 'beautiful but not very good', 'excellent but too fatty', or 'good and beautiful but too expensive'. Determining 'value', in the first meaning of 'worth', thus becomes more complex. Values are exclusive to each other and not necessarily inseparable although they can be combined or reinforced as is the case with ancientness and authenticity, or functionality and modernity. They can also contradict each other as is the case with individuality and solidarity. Hence the complexity of valuation work.

This plurality of values is constitutive of any evaluative act, whatever the proponents of a unicist vision of the world may think.[14] As Raymond Polin (1944: 102) pointed out, 'evaluation is a hierarchy in actions' which 'takes the form of a choice between two terms. A value is never invented alone, invention lies in preference and the creative choice of the terms being compared. We think of one value as opposed to another': in other words, there is indeed a plural, hierarchical, oppositional and therefore interdependent system of values. And this plurality is not limited to the triad of beauty, good and truth, which is dear to 'philosophical rationalism': 'The atomic pluralism of values makes this unity mathematically improbable. The largest dispersion is the most likely' (Polin, 1944: 228). Contrary to the spontaneous claims of logicist reductionism,

pluralism is always more suited to human affairs than monism, and this applies to values as well as causality.

Now, how can a value be recognised in practice?

There is a purely semantic answer to this question in French, but it is only indicative. Many French words for values end in '-té', such as *liberté, egalité, fraternité beauté, authenticité, propreté, fonctionnalité, legalité* (equality, fraternity, beauty, authenticity, cleanliness, functionality, legality), etc.[15] However, this is not an absolute rule as *décence, travail, plaisir, savoir, force and élégance* (decency, work, pleasure, knowledge, strength, elegance) can also function in speech as values. It is therefore necessary to use less formal but more discriminating and more complex criteria. Let us proceed negatively and look at what a value *is not*.

Firstly then, a value is not a norm, a rule or a law. These are applications of values, which justify their creation. A first consequence of this specific feature is that for a value to function as such, it must be comprehensible and usable by all. It is possible that people are not aware of a law or regulation, but every adult who is part of social life knows what 'honesty', 'solidarity' and 'goodness' are. A value has a broad spectrum, both temporal and spatial: it implies both the long term and at least a presumed universality. In other words, it only plays its role as a value if it is more or less common to all participants within the same culture. As a result, it is not accessible to voluntary or short-term modification. Unlike a standard and, even more so, a rule or a law, a value cannot be rendered obsolete or, on the contrary, valid: the most that can be done is to encourage its relinquishment or adoption. This is why value changes result from long, diffuse and collective processes. Take for example the value of decency in the western world; laws and, above all, the standards concerning the exposure of the body in public space have become considerably more flexible over the last two or three generations, and the importance given to this value has probably decreased, but decency remains a value, albeit a weak one.

Moreover, a value – in the sense of the principle of valuation and justification – is, as we have seen, neither 'the' value (worth) nor a good, an object of 'value'. As a valuation factor, a value is the origin rather than the result of the valuation, as for worth and for goods. However, this is complicated by the fact that transfers are possible from good to principle or from principle to good, depending on the form of the judgement, as it is possible to find the same term in one or the other enunciative position. For example, in 'It's great, he finally has a job', work is seen as a good thing, the object of a positive evaluation (second meaning). On the other hand, in 'This painting is good, at least some work went into it', work is a value, a principle (third meaning) allowing to positively evaluate the object in question and thus give it some value (first meaning), while also making it 'a' value in the sense of good (second meaning).

However, in the latter example, does the word 'work' function as a value-principle or as a simple criterion? In the mind of the person making this assertion, is work not one of the criteria used to establish the extent to which an object possesses this 'value' – in the sense of the principle of valuation – of beauty? In the next chapter, we shall discuss what distinguishes a criterion from a value in more detail and why this distinction matters. For the moment though we can make the following affirmation: *a value is itself its own end*, unlike a factual criterion such as, for example, the time taken to make an object, its patina or date. Thus, the value of this painting lies in the work it required and this work does not

have to be valued by anything other than itself. So again, once it has been established that, say, a vintage toaster works perfectly, there is no need to take the argument any further as long as the value of functionality is relevant in the situation – 'It works: I'll take it!'. The same can be said of an object's age ('It's a fifties model, don't hesitate!'), rarity ('There aren't many like that anymore: you won't find another one anytime soon!'), authenticity ('It's got a trademark, you should buy it!') etc. A criterion may always be questioned (the trademark is not necessarily the original one, the patina may be false, the date may be wrong), but the principle that makes that criterion a reason to attribute value is only authorised by itself. If I appreciate the functionality, the age or the authenticity of an object, nobody can convince me that I am wrong.

In short, a value is based on nothing other than itself, it is its own end (indeed, it is sometimes called an 'end' as Putnam (2004: 11) noted). It puts an end to argument; this is what is called the autotelism of values. Célestin Bouglé (1922: 138) gave the example of beauty with respect to this point: 'Our soul is more easily absorbed by a painting, a statue, a drama or a symphony. The soul is invaded by aesthetic emotion and thus refuses to wonder what beauty is for or what it shows. Beauty is the type of value that is sufficient in itself'. This example was not chosen at random; beauty is an essential value in the world of art, which is 'the creator of ideal values *par excellence*. For it seems we see value most clearly in works of art as an end in itself' (Bouglé, 1922: 138), especially with 'art for art's sake' which has replaced 'religious ends' (Bouglé, 1922: 56).

This feature of values, whatever they may be, i.e. their capability of putting an end to argument, has already been identified, particularly by the Indian economist Amartya Sen (1967: 50) who refers to the 'elementary' nature of value judgements: 'A value judgment can be called "basic" by people if no conceivable revision of factual assumptions can make them revise the judgment. If such revisions can take place, the judgment is "non-basic" in their value system'. In other words, axiology is about conviction rather than demonstration, about support for an idea rather than truth. At best, someone could try to persuade me that I am wrong to be attached to the value of this object (because functionality is valid for new design but not for old objects, or because affective reactions are only suitable for teenage girls, or because rarity is a snobbish value); but nobody can deny that it is indeed this very value which makes me appreciate the object, for better or for worse, nor prevent me from appreciating it. In other words, any value is autotelic and, indeed, this is the main way of recognising it.

This invalidates attempts to create values either by consequentialism or justification by consequences (what would happen if one contravened such a value?), utilitarianism or justification by utility (we could adopt such a value because it would be useful to us).[16] Indeed utilitarianism is moreover only consequentialism on the individual level, assuming the benefit for a subject of applying a value. Indeed, the rational calculation of consequences has no effect on value: taking in a large number of refugees must have negative effects on the host country, but solidarity remains an important value. The only way to invalidate a value is contextually to prefer another value: an example would be to place safety or comfort ahead of solidarity. But it is the implementation of a value that is questionable rather than the value itself.

Finally, autotelism invalidates any attempt to justify a value by reference to a transcendent authority or conversely to invalidate it because of its relativity. An appeal to

divine law or national identity only involves the argument of dogmatic authority ('God wants . . .', 'It is in our DNA to . . .') but not rational deduction. Conversely, the fact that a value is not universal ('It is not a value for everyone . . .') does not weaken the fact that those who adhere to it consider it to be a value. Conversely to all attempts to rationalise the relationship with values, adherence to a value does not require justification or appeal: 'It must be the case because that's the way it is'. Of course, this does not mean that values are inarguable, as is demonstrated by the countless discussions about the worth of assigning a particular value to a particular object. This means that they are considered by the speaker to be indisputable and non-negotiable valuation principles: 'Surely you are not going to deny that freedom is a value!'

This, then, is a serious obstacle to rationalist reductionism which, despite the efforts made by some, does not stand up to the assertive, non-demonstrative and autotelic nature of values: 'Values cannot be demonstrated. They exist and are imposed. They are necessary precisely because they are values' (Coenen-Huther, 2006).

(Chapter 9: 'Value-principles: The basis for attributing value')

6. From Value to the Act of Valuating: The Pragmatist Turn

Several conclusions can be drawn from the case studies in which experts valuate objects submitted to them. The first conclusion is that they themselves do not have complete access to the axiological logic of their own actions. They could not spontaneously explain all the valuation principles that had been revealed here, either because they were not aware of them, or not completely, or because they do not consider them interesting or legitimate. This means that actors' reflexivity does not suffice to effectively account for the work carried out in providing expertise. Even the qualitative method involving interviews only produces quite poor results compared to the method involving observation of situations, which is specific to the pragmatic approach.

The second conclusion is that, to study value judgements, it is not necessary to aim for an explanation of actors' positions through their properties. This explanatory standpoint may well be of relevance, but is it really of interest? Is close observation really required to guess that in a municipal commission an elderly Parisian critic will totally dominate younger provincial women with his authority? A comprehensive approach is much more enlightening as it makes explicit the axiological resources available to actors, the constraints of a situation and the ways of approaching the objects under valuation. It is a completely different 'style' of sociology, which is heuristic in this context, and which breaks with the doxa inherited from three generations of statistical surveys and two generations of Bourdieu's paradigm.

The third conclusion is that to understand these evaluative acts three parameters need to be taken into account: namely the resources of the valuating subjects (their axiological equipment), the properties of the valuated objects (the aspects they provide for observation), and the characteristics of the valuation situation (the normative constraints specific to the test of decision). Subject, object, context: value is produced within the relationship between these three operators at the end of all the operations which serve to assign a quality to an object.

Hence the phenomenological reversal which makes value a creation rather than a given. The phenomenologist Raymond Polin (1944: 72) highlighted this: 'The characteristic of value is therefore never to be a given but is to be reinvented, continuously recreated or, better still, to be an invention and creation in the making, a conscious transcendence which is continually being thought about and put into practice'. However, conversely to the vulgate conveyed by phenomenology which is both solipsistic (each for his/her own) and individualistic (no institutions, no external constraints, no stabilisation process), values are not created *ex nihilo* and are instead reconfigured and tested from existing corpora. They are not the product of individuals' free actions and are strongly constrained by institutions, regulations as well as cognitive, legal, administrative, relational frameworks, etc. In other words, they do not only derive from psychology, contrary to German philosopher Heinrich Rickert's suggestion when he rightly proposed subjecting the ontology of value to valuation.[17]

Therefore, as long as the collective, instituted and structural dimensions are put back into the analysis, then this necessary return from value to valuation[18] can escape the illusion of the *homo clausus* so effectively denounced by Elias – the man closed in on himself, defined independently of any relationship or any exogenous determination. It thus becomes possible to develop a sociology of values that reflects the complexity of valuations produced by actors, by being neutral, descriptive, empirical, pragmatic and comprehensive.

(Chapter 4: 'The sociology of valuation: How experts evaluate')

7. From the Pluralist Turn to the Grammatical Turn

Highlighting the constraints and regularities specific to each of these plural value systems led Boltanski and Thévenot to build up what they themselves call a 'grammar' of the justification of actions by the actors involved. This explains the underlying regularities which are shared but not spoken and (more or less) known by all, and which enable actors to feel that an action is 'fair'. In this way the sociologist's aim is no longer to *explain* behaviour or representations by the position of actors in the social space, but instead to *understand* them by uncovering the resources and constraints at their disposal. By focusing more on what actors have in common (a grammar) than on what differentiates them (social positions), and by aiming more at making their representation systems explicit rather than at explaining their actual behaviour through external parameters, this sociology makes a profound break with the explanatory and, fundamentally, critical project, which became the dominant paradigm in sociology with Bourdieu's work.[19]

This grammatical project was carried out by Boltanski (1990) in the axiological field when he studied the evaluative 'skills' of actors who are no longer concerned with 'justice', as in justification, but whose aim is 'love'; or the issue of empathy and, more generally, the conduct to be adopted in the face of others' suffering (Boltanski, 1993); or else, abortion and the values underpinning controversies on this issue (Boltanski, 2004). A certain amount of work carried out in the continuity of this school of 'pragmatic sociology', based on a comprehensive analysis of the evaluative 'tests' encountered by the actors, or of public 'affairs', also stems from this grammatical project. One example is Cyril Lemieux's (2000) study of journalistic deontology which he analysed

according to a model using three 'grammars': the 'public grammar', or distanciation grammar, which supports acting on the basis of collective representations allowing judgement by a third party; the 'natural grammar', or commitment grammar, which supports action backed by 'attractions' that cannot be justified to a third party (as well as the exchange of services, friendships, etc.); and finally the 'grammar of realisation', or realism principle. My own investigations into controversies about contemporary art also stem from the same project.

The paradox of this work belonging to pragmatic sociology is that the very term 'values' is not, or very seldom, mentioned therein (sometimes the term '*grandeur*' (worth) is preferred, as in the subtitle of *De la justification*). This issue of values is only indirectly addressed even though such works constantly refer to the axiological principles which guide actors' evaluations. This caution can be explained by their authors' attempts to avoid confusion with the 'sociology of values' through statistical surveys, whose importance and limits we have discussed. They are also careful to avoid confusion with 'moral sociology' aiming at normative purposes, which we have also seen to be only a variant of moral philosophy or even just plain morality. Moreover, the spontaneous assimilation of the word 'value' with 'moral values', or even these days to right-wing parties' values (since the expression 'defence of values' immediately refers to traditional, family and religious values in this context) does not make it easy for the axiological issue to be taken seriously as an object of sociological investigation assumed as such in an academic world which often markedly leans to the left of the political sphere.

However, if the triple turn – qualitative, pluralistic, grammatical or comprehensive – is a true break with the 'sociology of values' specific to opinion polls, this is because its form of surveying is empirically based on the observation of real situations and on moments of controversy or difficulty. This double condition must be fulfilled for plurality of values to appear in its problematic, conflictual dimension rather than as a catalogue of consensual axiological resources which are too general to provide access to the reality of actors' axiological choices. Here, we are at the heart of the contribution made by the so-called 'pragmatic' sociology born in France in the 1990s around both Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, on the one side, and around Bruno Latour, on the other.

<div align="right">(Chapter 8: 'Value-objects: What people assign value to')</div>

8. Structuralism, Interactionism, Constructivism

Analysis of a few cases of axiological dissonance has enabled us to verify the fact that axiological representations – 'values' in the three meanings of the term – depend on the object's properties (the characteristics of the object being judged), on the axiological skills incorporated by the actors concerned, and on the contexts in which the specific form of interaction between objects and subjects that makes up a valuation occurs. (It is indeed an interaction because objects can facilitate or hinder what can be done with them because of their specific features.) However, this triple dimension of axiological experience also concerns its temporality and, correlatively, the status of the theoretical tools likely to reflect this.

Indeed, values are present three times during a valuation. First, they exist *before* the valuation, as part of a repertoire of representations shared by actors within the same culture transmitted by education and incorporated into their habitus. This is the structural, deterministic dimension of common experience, which is comparable to a grammar used by speakers of a language. It is also comparable to the 'frames of experience' explicated by Erving Goffman (1992 [1974]), which structure and predetermine the way in which we perceive and process moments of lived reality without us being aware of this happening. 'Value registers' do exactly the same. From this standpoint, the issue of values fits perfectly into the framework of structuralist social science.

In the second palce, values are also developed *in* valuations as they apply tangibly to a given object with variable effectiveness. As we have just seen, this depends to a large extent on the balance of power between the different representatives of the values brought into play. Here we are dealing with the pragmatic and interactionist dimension of sociological studies of the tangible nature of actions, their contexts and the wide variety of resources actors can use to negotiate among themselves, especially in situations of conflict. The interactionist tradition in sociology truly belongs here, even if it is, theoretically, opposite to the structuralist tradition.[20]

Third, values are constructed *after* valuation because they have been tested with regard to objects while influenced by contexts. They can thus be modulated, refined and asserted or conversely weakened or made obsolete, which leads to a permanent reworking of the repertoire available for actors, in exactly the same way as with the use of a language. This is the constructivist dimension of the sociological programme, which leaves room for historical evolution and actors' capacities for invention.

This all goes to show that it is not necessary to impose any theoretical approach a priori. The relevance of approaches above all depends on the moment of the experiment involved. Rather than indulging in sterile tribal struggles between supporters of different theoretical programmes, it is better to make sure that these three moments – before, during and after the test – as well as the three dimensions – object-based, representational, contextual – are taken into account as this is all part of sociology's specific contribution to the question of values. This opens up a whole new field of knowledge of the plurality of qualification modes and even probably to perception of experience by enabling us to move from the essentialism of values to the contextualisation of valuation operations.

(Chapter 13: 'Minor adjustments regarding values')

9. Putting an End to Universalism and to Relativism

Refraining from pretending to make a definitive ruling on the origin or nature of value, or a value 'in itself' or values 'in themselves', requires the adoption of a truly agnostic standpoint about a supposed 'essence' of values. The only certainty we have about them is that, as we have seen, they are both individual and collective representations, or, more precisely, axiological representations. They are therefore 'cultural' in these two respects. Similarly, they are humans' mental representations of that which is worthy of appreciation or praise and are irreducible to facts of nature. Also, as they are collective representations, they are irreducible to individual opinions even though they manifest themselves through individual expressions.

Values are created by culture rather than nature, and they possess a collective rather than individual dimension. Thus, they cannot be labelled as possessing any form of universality, because cultures themselves are plural both in time and space. It is therefore futile to launch a quest for universality or objectivity of values, and the same can be said for their origins or basis. Historical and sociological investigation cannot reveal invariants but just phenomena involving lesser variation or, in other words, values which are more constant or more widespread than others.

This kind of programme may seem disappointing to those who expect the humanities and social sciences to provide them with access to the universality of the human experience's components. However, for those interested in the actual modalities of this experience rather than its ultimate foundations, the search for phenomena with the least variation is a programme full of exciting promise, among which is, at least, the promise to take sociology out of the sphere of the 'humanities' and definitely bring it into the sphere of the 'social sciences'.

It is problematic that, to avoid the trap of universalism and essentialism which tend to make values substantial, objective and intangible entities,[21] sociology has largely preferred to throw the baby out with the bathwater by sacrificing this problem on the altar of constructivism, relativism and, more generally, criticism of naturalism. This has absolutely no place in an experience which is as completely and radically social as the relationship with values, as Raymond Polin (1944: 141) pointed out.

And yet objectivism blends very well with the relativity of points of view given that value is not within the object (a principle that Polin (1944) still called 'neutrality of works'[22]) but instead in a system of shared representations which are contextually applied to an object. This is what Hume's famous parable about the taste of wine in *Don Quixote* meant. One person might find a slight taste of leather in the wine while another tastes a trace of iron. All that was needed was to empty the barrel to find a key and a leather strap in the bottom to understand that both were right. Subjective tastes, like value judgements, are rooted in objective properties, the perception of which is relative to the observer. This is what Yves Michaud affirmed in his own way in his comments[23] and conclusion: 'If we look for absolute and universal criteria, let us reassure ourselves – we will not find any and it is not worth us being sad about it' (Michaud, 1999: 102).

Thus, regarding values, the absence of absolute objectivity does not in any way mean that there is only subjectivity. It means there is variability in the axiological repertoires available and in the temporal and spatial contexts. This variability in no way prevents agreement on principles and practices, the construction of collectives, routines and intellectual traditions, the stabilisation of shared norms and criteria or even the creation of institutions – in other words, what a certain philosophical tradition likes to call 'rationality'. This agreement is simply based on the belief, of the actors involved, in universal values, while it is constructed through the effective interaction between objects, humans and contexts.

This is why the observation of the effective relativity of values in no way implies relativism, which postulates the absence of any objectivity, universality or necessity in value judgements. Descriptive relativism merely observes variations and has nothing to do with normative relativism, which concludes that it is impossible to choose between values and therefore to justify subscribing to them or forcing people to respect them.[24] However, to

become aware of this it is necessary to accept the specific nature of the sociological stand-point, which describes something without taking sides, including when describing the sides taken by the actors. It is easy to understand why this specific nature of sociology may remain somewhat foreign to politicians and ordinary citizens, but unfortunately, we must acknowledge that it also continues to be ignored by many sociologists.

This is because, to adopt the exclusively descriptive and analytical posture of a researcher who reconstructs a system without any normative aim, it is necessary to give up any attempt to base morals on knowledge. Morals help us act fairly, whereas the point of knowledge is to know. This autotelism also stresses that knowledge is a value, at least in our western cultures, and therefore the production of knowledge does not have to be justified by something other than itself. This means that the sociology of values has nothing to do with any kind of ethics.

<div align="right">('Conclusion')</div>

10. A Sociological Solution

We have just discussed how the group of problems arising from the issue of values spreads. In addition to their reduction to interests or norms, which risks them becoming relatively invisible, most of these problems stem from the recurrent opposition between two conceptions. One is 'realistic' and postulates the intrinsic, factual, objective, necessary and rational character of values. The other is 'nominalist' (in the sense of the 'quarrel of universals') and considers them to be properties which are extrinsic to the things being judged, related to human representations and, in the most radical versions, tainted with subjectivity, arbitrariness or even irrationality.

Readers will no doubt have understood that the author of this article has opted for the second option, provided that, at the very least, a certain number of nuances are accepted. It must therefore be accepted, first of all, that things have intrinsic properties which are more or less suited to a given valuation. Second, axiological representations must be accepted as 'social facts' nonetheless and therefore should be treated 'as things' to be studied, according to Durkheim's precept. Third, we must accept that the absence of objectivity in values does not mean they are subjective, because the eminently social reality of representation systems and the institutions that stabilise and make them active interferes between objects and subjects. Fourth, we must accept that the absence of transcendental necessity (whether natural or divine) of values in no way implies they are arbitrary in nature, because the requirements essential for societies to function are infinitely more powerful than forces of nature (not to mention the divinities, which are not 'probable' in the literal sense of the word). Fifth and finally, it should be accepted that imperatives of coherence and arguability inherent to the practice of values more than suffice for them to be part of rationality, provided that we do not reduce rationality to an intellectualist and logicist 'reason'.

In short, with regard to values, a 'relativism under constraint of rigour' needs to be imposed, i.e. a 'descriptive relativism' (Heinich, 1998) which notes and analyses the variations of axiological systems without concluding, as the post-modern doxa would suggest, that 'everything is of equal worth'. One cannot shift from 'is' to 'must be' and therefore from 'is relative' to 'must be relativised'.

<div align="right">(Appendix: 'Humanities and social sciences: The proof of values')</div>

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Notes

1. 'The notion of value always seemed linked to the notion of tradition. This is probably because of the considerable activity of those who are frightened by social change and evolving mentalities and work to restore the force of moral rules whose power to restrain people seems to them to have been weakened. For those who subscribe to this conservative way of thinking which is strongly based on the worth of heritage and the need to transmit this with its inherent dream of purity, values are the pillars of the world order and scrupulous attention needs to be paid to making sure they are respected – authority, family, religion, normal procreation and sexuality. It is even more essential to make sure this is the case because this order is presented as divine or natural. In this way of reasoning, rejecting these values actually means dissolving society or destroying civilisation' (Ogien, 2016: 23–24).

2. 'Partisans of modernity are opposed to this old-fashioned vision of the eternal, immutable character of values and are determined to take back the word value to make a different voice heard in public discourse. For them, values do not come from an immemorial collection which should be perpetuated identically forever. On the contrary, they are directed towards the future and advocate emancipation, humanism, equality, the rights of a person, secularity, the Republic or Reason' (Ogien, 2016: 24).

3. A similar definition was proposed regarding the notion of identity. Identity is seen as the result of the set of operations through which a predicate is assigned to a subject (Heinich, 1996).

4. *Grandeur* or 'worth' is the term used by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]) in *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (*De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*) to avoid the semantic uncertainty associated with the word 'value' (even though this could not be avoided in the English translation of their book, in which the translator chose the term '*worth*' which is equivalent to 'value'). Other researchers have also tried to get around this obstacle. The philosopher Bruno Latour (2012: 434–435) (English translation, *An Inquiry Into the Modes of Existence*) followed by the anthropologist Thierry Bonnot both proposed to replace '*valeur*/value' with '*valence*/valency', a term borrowed from chemistry where it refers to the 'number of links an atom makes with other atoms in a combination' and from psychology where it means the 'power of attraction or repulsion exerted by an object' (Bonnot, 2014: 188). Rather than attempting to get around the obstacle of polysemy, we shall stick as closely as possible to the vocabulary used by actors in the field while making sure to carefully differentiate between the different meanings.

5. Similarly, some have denounced the 'surreptitious' inference that an object 'which has a value itself becomes a value. Thus there is a totally illegitimate shift from the verb "to have" to the verb "to be". "X has a value" becomes "X is a value"' (C Arnaud, n.d.: 15.)

6. Albert Ogien also differentiates between the second and third meanings of 'values' but he does so by reducing the first meaning to abstract values alone, which he assimilates to institutions, and does not include tangible values or the good: 'Values sometimes refer to social institutions (family, nation, religion, secularism, the Republic) or to principles which underpin what

is considered to be our common humanity (dignity, freedom, equality, honour, responsibility, fidelity, generosity). This difference is important: while institutions are contingent and constantly subject to criticism which may make them obsolete or transform them, principles have a certain permanence and are the invariable resources that serve to elaborate this criticism' (Ogien, 2016: 28).

7. C. Bouglé, *Leçons de sociologie sur l'évolution des valeurs*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1922 (Sociological lessons on the evolution of values, 1922; published in English as The Evolution of Values). Bouglé noted that the term 'autotelism' as applied to values comes from the book *Genetic Theory of Reality: Being the Outcome of Genetic Logic as Issuing in the Aesthetic Theory of Reality Called Pancalism* (1915) by the American philosopher and psychologist James Mark Baldwin.

8. We shall use the word 'thing' to refer to the tangible meaning in which 'things' are inanimate beings, and the word 'object' to refer to the abstract and general meaning (for example, the 'object' of a valuation). This object/thing distinction therefore does not exactly correspond with that proposed by the American sociologist Fernando Dominguez Rubio (2016: 5), who defines 'things' as 'material processes' and objects as the 'positions' assigned to these things when they participate in different regimes of value and meaning.

9. It should be noted that Rickert (2007: 152) goes as far as to assimilate 'ethical good' with people: 'People are examples of ethical good . . . We only speak of ethics when, as a "practical" philosophy, it makes the man who is acting its object'.

10. Conversely, certain dictionaries make a distinction between the two meanings of the word 'value' as assigned to things (such as the price) and 'value' assigned to people (such as bravery) to the point of including two different lexicographical entries (see Guerrini, 2015: 36).

11. Célestin Bouglé had already warned of this problem involving the reduction of the notion of value to economic value (see Bouglé, 1922: 15).

12. Hence the tension, also noted by Bouglé (1922: 63), between a 'realistic' and an 'idealist' pole of value: 'The world of values has two poles. The sense of value has two origins. *Value* is the virtue of a man capable of any sacrifices. And, on the other hand, value is the price of things in the market. Economic realism on the one hand and moral idealism on the other. The distance between them seems difficult to bridge at first view'.

13. The *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* states that this term appeared in French in 1080 and derived, from the classical Latin *valor, valoris*. In *La Chanson de Roland*, a dual semantism can be observed from the first time it is used. Indeed, the word means both '*that a person is valued for his or her merit or qualities*' and is also used about '*the quality, the interest of a thing*' which thus has value. By extension, the first meaning of the term refers to the notion of importance and bravery. It was only from the 13th century onwards that the term was used to refer to '*the measurable nature of a thing, a good, as it is likely to be exchanged*' (Bouchat, 2011: 105). For a detailed analysis of the different ways the word 'value' is dealt with in dictionaries, see Guerrini, 2015: 30).

14. Bouglé (1922: 46) noted that 'Not everyone can easily accept this lack of coordination. Some thinkers suffer from it and want to rediscover at all costs – even within the diversity of tendencies – the principle of unity without which the very integrity of their person would seem threatened'. He himself spontaneously gave 'scientific or economic, aesthetic or moral' values as examples (Bouglé, 1922: 50) and also 'economic or aesthetic, religious or moral' values (Bouglé, 1922: 52).

15. 'Although there is no truly convincing rule on suffixation, the frequency of French words ending in -*té* in our list (61% of de-adjectivals, 24% of the total) demonstrates the strong tendency of value-words to be derived from adjectival roots' (Guerrini, 2015: 265).

16. On consequentialism and utilitarianism in ethics, see Nagel (1983 [1979]).

17. 'However, value is also linked to a subject who evaluates objects and it is a valid opinion to consider that an effective reality only becomes good – that a painting becomes a work of art

– through a subject adding value to it . . . Just as pleasure only exists to the extent that it is felt, it could be said that value only exists to the extent that subjects would evaluate it. Value itself would be an effective reality or more precisely a psychological being and a science of values would therefore be a part of psychology' (Rickert, 2007: 63–64).

18. 'By returning backward in so many words, we must now try to come back from what has become or will become finished objects of good to the act of valuation which assigns value to effective reality and consequently makes an object of good out of it' (Rickert, 2007: 77). This backward journey 'from values to valuation' is also supported by the editors of a collective book whose concluding chapter is actually called 'From values to valuation' (Brosch and Sander, 2016).

19. All of this is discussed in more detail in Heinich (2007b).

20. Paradoxically, although Goffman was a major interactionist sociologist, his *Frame Analysis* is a masterpiece in the field of structuralist sociology (this contradiction was analysed in Heinich (1991) and re-published in Heinich (2007a)).

21. See the Appendix: 'Humanités et sciences sociales à l'épreuve des valeurs' ('Humanities and social sciences: The proof of values').

22. 'A work, insofar as it is real, is axiologically neutral, indifferent and indeterminate in relation to values . . . All evaluations of a given work are possible and equal. Thus, we could affirm the principle of the neutrality of works' (Polin, 1944: 250).

23. 'It seems to me quite possible to maintain both a relativist and an objectivist position which corresponds quite well to the spirit of what Goodman describes as "relativism under strain". Within an evaluation community which is linked to a community of production, evaluations correspond to real features of objects and are also related to the use of language involved. This means that evaluation is relative to the rules and criteria which allow it to exist and express itself' (Michaud, 1999: 24).

24. This idea was developed fully in Heinich (1998).

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