VALUES, EDUCATION, AND THE FUTURE

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Abstract

Individuals, organizations, and whole societies can be viewed as value-driven decisional systems. The values that drive them are inherently future-oriented and their analysis is an unavoidable aspect of futures studies. How can such values--and the preferable futures that they define--be validated? Such validation appears especially difficult in a world that is, on the one hand, increasingly secular and that is, on the other hand, wrought with recurrent religious and other fanaticisms. In answer, I show that values need not be arbitrarily chosen. They can be justified objectively and rationally, especially by Keekok Lee's method of epistemic implication.

Keywords: Values, Future, Preferable Futures

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is two-fold, first, it is to show that values contain an inherent futures component, that they function as steering mechanisms for decisions and actions aimed at shaping the future. Second, it is to show that the only valid way to teach and justify values for living in a global society is by the use of objective and rational principles that are subject to verification and falsification both by internal logic and empiricism. One implication of this view is that ethical relativism is not a useful nor viable alternative to the critical examination of values, except in the early stages of moral development when it encourages questionning the received values of one's own society.

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Values and the future

There is an affinity between values and futures thinking. Judging consequences, for example, involves futures thinking, because consequences always occur in the future from the time some action is being contemplated. Thus, for "a consequentialist the future must matter" (Sumner, 1987: 207). Judgments of alternative plans of action are based "upon the anticipated relative long-term good" (Charnov, 1987: 5).

Harman (1977: 153) points out that utilitarianism, too, is forward, not backward, looking. What is important, he says, "is not what has happened in the past, but what might happen in the future as a consequence of the various things you might do."

Not just consequentialism and utilitarianism, but all ethical statements involve a futures orientation. That is because values underlying ethical statements involve motivation. For example, Sprigge (1988: 150) says, "There is no real recognition that something is good or bad unless it embodies some degree of motivation to pursue or shun it, do or refrain from it." Motivation involves goals desired but not yet achieved and, for present actors, such goals are in the future. Motivation, thus, is always future oriented.

Moreover, the motivation to behave in a moral way, for example to help another person when you have no reason not to, comes partly from the belief that it may help you to satisfy your own desires in the future. Some kind of reciprocity might occur. Or it simply may make you feel good about yourself, which, as we have come to learn, may benefit your future health. Value judging means caring and "you are irrational if you do not care about the future, if you know that in the future you are going to care" (Harman, 1977: 71).

Imperatives, a form in which ethical principles are often given, also are future oriented. Smart (1984: 56) says that "Do X" is short for "You ought to do X" which itself is short for "Doing X will bring about what you want to happen" (my emphasis). To achieve brevity, then, we often speak in imperatives or "ought" statements, but they substitute for longer, more accurate statements framed in the future tense.

Additionally, the concept of "social norm" contains a future-oriented idea. Thus, in addition to the belief by members of society that the norm is obligatory and that it is socially sanctioned in some way, that is, either rewarded or punished, a social norm is defined as an <u>expected</u> regularity of behavior. Present expectations, of course, refer to anticipations about some future time.

Applied to past actions, the futures component of values remains relevant since the consequences of any choice and action, past or present, always occur at a time after a choice is made and an action taken. Moreover, a latent, if not always manifest, purpose of communicating ethical judgments, including those about past actions, is to influence people's future behavior. For example, when correcting the behavior of a child, we "usually add to our ethical judgment the remark, 'see that you don't do it again.' Even when they are made of past or imaginary acts, they still serve a dynamic purpose--that of discouraging (or encouraging) similar acts later on" (Stevenson, 1963: 143).

Objectivity and values

It is considerably more difficult to demonstrate the validity of rational and objective argument in the ultimate justification of ethical principles than to show that value judgments necessarily have a futures component. The validity of ethical principles is, afterall, an age-old problem and the subject of seemingly endless and inconclusive philosophical controversy. A skeletal outline of the argument follows:

Processes of Learning Values

We know a great deal about how individuals acquire values. The processes of socialization are reasonably well understood. They involve significant others, the formulation of a normative generalized other, the internalization of social norms and such self-feelings as guilt and shame (leading to a conscience), the development of both self- and other-expectations, both positive and negative sanctions, and empathy, both self-oriented and altruistic. Although there is no inherent conflict between cognitively arrived at moral principles and socialization processes, the latter fail as a justification of morality. "My mother--or

my father, teacher, priest, attorney, members of my tribe, or whomever--told me" may be an explanation of how we came to believe in the values we do, but it is not a justification of them. Moreover, it illustrates that in the short run the individual in the early stages of development simply tends to learn the morality of his own group, for better or for worse, with little critical cognitive analysis of his own.

The study of the stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Rest, 1986) reveals that a shift occurs from the uncritical adoption of social norms in the first stages to an independent cognitive analysis on the part of each person reaching the highest stage. This shift toward autonomy of judgment opens the door for a search for justifications of morality beyond appeals to tradition, authority, or the normative behavior of one's group and for the settlement of moral disputes without resorting to bribes, threats, or brute force. It opens the door for free and mutual understanding through communication.

The Origins of Values

<u>Biological origins</u>. A search for justifications is fruitful, because human values are not arbitrary nor capricious. Their origins are partly found in human biology and its interaction with the natural environment. The human body and brain are programmed with a variety of sensors, such as taste, smell, sight, and touch, and of drives, such as hunger, thirst, and sex. Individuals feel pain and pleasure, and experience emotions, such as fear, joy, sorrow, anger, contempt, shame, and pride. Thus, human values originated and developed over the millenia of human experience, in part, as a result of the basic design of the human body and brain. People have similar basic needs and they exist in environments, whatever their differences of climate and topography, that are subject to the same physical and chemical principles (such as gravity and the nature of fire).

Other values, such as those we place on money or morality, develop secondarily, in part from the reinforcement they receive from the satisfaction of basic biological drives. Receiving and classifying sensory data, remembering and refining, transforming reflex action to rational thought, learning routines and placing habits under rational control are all part of the process of originating and re-confirming values and of going beyond conditioned responses and unconscious learning. For example, almost "all the experiments which purport to show

behavioral changes as a result of operant conditioning can also be explained as a purely rational response to learning experience which changes the animal's world model" (Pugh, 1977).

<u>Social origins</u>. Values also originate, are selected, retained, or modified through social interaction and group living. Because of the tremendous payoffs to individuals from group living, in the course of human evolution there has been a selective retention of only some of the logically possible variations in human values as organized norms. There are prerequisites of group life and they exist equally for all humans, whatever their differences of skin color and language.

Societal evolution has tended to produce certain universal values everywhere in successfully surviving societies. Values such as honesty and trust, for example, everywhere make social learning possible. Other contenders for universal values include industriousness, surplus production, abstinence from indulgence, obligations to share with others, loyalty, and respect for both authority and knowledge (Campbell, 1965).

This is not to say that values never change. Certainly, the increasingly man-made environment in which group life takes place and the consequences of technological development may reshape some values as social evolution continues. Nor is it to say that there is no variation in the way values are manifested. For example, respect for authority may be shown by bowing in one culture, kneeling in another, and standing in still another, but all express respect for authority. Much of what passes for cultural relativism is simply an expression of alternative ways of affirming basically similar underlying values.

In sum, to "justify our moral choices," we must consider (a) "the sort of natural being we are, (b) the kind of environment. . . such natural beings as ourselves inhabit" (including both the natural and social environment as well as other species of natural beings), and (c) the complex interrelations between natural beings such as ourselves and the environment (Lee, 1990).

The Evolution of Cooperation: An Example

Another example of a value necessary for the maintenance of group living is cooperation. Research on cooperation illustrates that individuals do not necessarily have strictly opposing interests, but, rather, can all gain by working together. Moreover, <u>the key to cooperation is believing that there is a future to influence by the reaction of other people to one's own behavior</u>. Cooperation is stable only when the future is important relative to the present; if the future is heavily discounted, then cooperation suffers. It evolves most surely from the possibility of a long-term set of repetitive social interactions with other individuals, where individuals meet--and expect in the future to meet--each other again and again (Axelrod, 1984).

Axelrod (1984) has shown that cooperation can emerge even in a situation without central authority and even "where each individual has an incentive to be selfish." What evolves is a strategy of reciprocity, that is, of tit-for-tat, based upon a variety of related principles which include, as examples of what can be learned from rational analysis, the following imperatives:

1. Do not be envious of the success of others, because most of life is not a zero-sum game; thus, the more another person gets, the more you may get.

2. Never be the first to fail to cooperate, because your own behavior may be echoed back to you.

3. Reciprocate both cooperation and failure to cooperate, the first to maximize cooperation and the second to prevent both your exploitation and the exploitation of others by teaching the exploiter that he cannot get away with it. Reciprocity, in other words, is a better foundation for morality than the unconditional cooperation implied in the Golden Rule.

4. Be forgiving. Remember your past experience with particular individuals and act accordingly, but, when a former adversary is ready to cooperate, then forget the past, and cooperate. Otherwise, you may end up in a relationship of permanent retaliation in which everyone loses.

5. Do not be too clever, because if you are, then other people cannot figure out what you are doing and may fail to cooperate because they find your behavior incomprehensible, hence unreformable.

6. Teach people the facts of cooperation theory, because people with foresight can understand the advantages of cooperation and the evolution of cooperation can be speeded up (Axelrod, 1984).

Cognitive Relativism Is Inadequate

Knowing the origins of values in human biology and social interaction aids cross-cultural understanding. But it does not necessarily lead to acceptance nor tolerance, nor should it, because at any given time and place existing cultural practices may violate both human biological and social needs and may ruinously damage the natural environment. Some societies continue to exist at suboptimal levels, surviving despite some of their cultural practices that oppress, handicap, and damage their practitioners, and others have failed to survive at all or may be on their way to extinction.

A related point is that the chief argument in support of cultural relativism is an example of the Naturalistic Fallacy. That is, because cultural diversity <u>does</u> exist, we cannot conclude, therefore, that it <u>ought</u> to exist. Obviously, such a conclusion is an irrational leap from "is" to "ought." For example, in the name of cultural tradition, 90 to 100 million women now living in Africa have had all or part of their clitoris removed with crude cutting tools and without anesthesia resulting in pain and sometimes death. These cliteridectomies not only violate human biology, but also the social values of justice and caring. They are mutilations and, since they are done to children, they are also child abuse (Konner, 1990).

Justifying Values Objectively: Three Models

Considering the conditions of human survival and the biological and social origins of values takes us a step toward the objective justification of values, but such considerations are overly general and require specific procedures of applications to help us decide what is right in particular instances. What detailed methods for the evaluation of values can we find in what appears to some writers to be the wasteland

of modern moral philosophy? Elsewhere (Bell, n.d.), I have suggested three models for the objective assessment of values: commitment-deducibility, means-ends, and, following philosopher Keekok Lee (1985), epistemic implication.

<u>The commitment-deducibility model.</u> The commitment-deducibility model relies on the logic of internal consistency. Make a sincere commitment to a basic value, e.g. freedom of speech. Then, ask whether or not given acts—e.g., shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theatre, speaking publicly against current government policies, peaceably marching in protest of an employer's labor practices—are instances of it. Although the logical process of determination may not always be completely unambiguous, the ground is prepared for rational discussion. Arguments can be made for or against, the evidence weighed, and a judgment reached. If there is agreement about the worth of a basic value, then logical discourse is possible to resolve disagreements about what specific behaviors embody it or do not and, thus, are right or wrong.

<u>The means-ends model.</u> The means-ends model relies on the logic of cause and effect. Once an end or goal has been selected, then it becomes a matter of fact whether or not it is attainable, what the most efficient means are, what side effects might be produced, and whether several proposed ends can be achieved simultaneously. The basic model is most simply, "If you desire x, then you ought to do y," on the grounds that y is a means of attaining x.

For example, if you do not want to die of lung cancer, then you ought not to smoke. The question of whether or not you ought to smoke, once you have accepted the goal of not dying of lung cancer, becomes a matter of fact. Does smoking contribute to causing lung cancer? For smokers, will stopping reduce one's chances of dying of lung cancer? The examples are endless. Moreover, in everyday life ordinary people do in fact reduce many moral choices to factual questions of means-ends.

<u>The epistemic implication model.</u> The difficulty with both the commitment-deducibility and the means-ends model, however, is that they are of limited utility. For the "sincere commitment" in the one case and the "end" in the other case are not themselves justified. That is, although logic and fact can be used once the commitment is made

and an end is chosen, neither the commitment nor the end can be validated within the models. A Hitler can make a commitment to territorial conquest or choose the end of murdering six million people and the models work just as rationally as in the case of a Martin Luther King making a commitment to equality of access to public services or choosing a goal of securing voting rights for millions of Americans. The commitment and the end in each case may be arbitrary. Thus, something else is needed.

The epistemic implication model suggested by Lee (1985) may be that something else. It is similar to the logic of verification-falsification of Karl Popper's fallibilism. Every moral assertion, Lee argues, contains descriptive as well as prescriptive elements. These descriptive elements are subject to test and, if they fail, then the "ought" assertion in them fails as well. If they are confirmed, then the "ought" assertion is confirmed, although contingently and corrigibly. She gives five criteria for acceptable evidence: seriousness, referential relevance, causal relevance, causal independence, and empirical truth. Subjective judgment or a description of a speaker's state of mind are not acceptable.

As an example, let's take an assertion of a male chauvinist: "Women ought to obey men's will."

The evidence he cites is: "Women are less intelligent than men."

This is serious evidence because it is objective and can be tested by others by using various intelligence tests and comparing the results for men and women. It is referentially relevant, dealing with women as does the assertion. It may not be causally relevant, however, because it is not clear that people who are less intelligent than others, therefore, ought to obey others. Thus, the evidence may fail to satisfy this condition. Let's assume that it is causally independent, that obeying others doesn't make a person less intelligent, that the value assertion does not cause the evidence. But the evidence is simply false. The facts are that women are not less intelligent than men. Therefore, on the ground of empirical truth, women ought <u>not</u> to obey men's will. The assertion fails. The male chauvinist must find other evidence for his assertion, if he can, or accept that it is irrationally held.

The point is that an "ought" statement has been rejected on the basis of empirical evidence. By the use of epistemic implication, moral

discourse can be transformed into rational and critical discourse. Moral conflicts can be negotiated by logic and fact.

Conclusion

In a world that is increasingly secular and devoid of faith in absolute values of any kind on the one hand and wrought with recurrent religious, racial, ethnic, national, and other ideologies and fundamentalism on the other, how can the values underlying decision-making, both private and public, be assessed in some objective way that invites discourse, revision, and consensus? What should futurists teach their students and clients about the underlying morality that <u>ought</u> to govern their actions and shape the future? What can such a morality be tested against? How can the nihilism of ethical relativism as well as the maniacal absolutism of true believers be countered? How can open-minded, but rational and critical, moral discourse be fostered and carried out within the norms of civility and mutual respect on a worldwide basis?

Clearly, such questions must be faced by futurists because the purposes of the futures field include discovering or inventing, examining, evaluating, and proposing not only possible and probable futures, but also preferable futures. Having some way to judge what is preferable, obviously, is a necessary part of carrying out that purpose.

Futurists, of course, appear to be working toward some set of coherent values in advancing such images of preferable futures as the sustainable society; a protected environment; a global community; world peace; and a world in which power is shared and equal participation is encouraged, in which the length and quality of human life are enhanced, and in which the rights of future generations are considered in planning present actions. But they have not yet worked out a systematic justification of the values underlying such images.

What I have tried to do here is to call attention to the need for such a justification not only for futurists' work, but also for the socialization of young people for life in a global society. I suggest, first, that moral discourse by its very nature has an unavoidable futures element in it, which has seldom been exploited by moral philosophers, but can be fruitfully exploited by futurists.

Second, I propose a start toward validating images of preferable futures by critical analysis of the values on which they are based. Such an analysis may involve recognizing the origins of values in human biology, the nature of the physical world, and the prerequisites of society. It certainly involves some specific methodology of validation, such as the three models--commitment-deducibility, means-ends, and, the most powerful, epistemic implication--I describe.

Using them, futurists can assess the values underlying their preferable futures objectively, rationally, and critically. Such futures may be taken seriously by large numbers of people, debated, revised, and eventually accepted only if futurists have the capacity for collectively initiating and carrying forward such critical moral discourse. Otherwise, futurists' visions of preferable futures run the risk of being seen as a mish-mash of unjustified good intentions, unexamined moral commitments, emotional pleading, unwarranted intuitive judgments, and shallow and unsystematic analysis.

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