

## Values as Phenomena of Culture

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### *Abstract*

This article offers a version of understanding values as elements of culture. As a fundamental idea, Adam Smith accepted the classical theory of labor value, but with a significant generalization of this idea from the economic context as a special case to the general theoretical level of social philosophy, in which values are understood as products of any, both practical and intellectual activity. The principle of social egocentrism and interpretation of the main categories of values are also proposed.

*Keywords:* value, product of labor, person, thing, sign, institution.

### 1. Prolegomena

The body of philosophical knowledge called *axiology* (from Greek *ἀξία* – value, and *λόγος* – word, theory) deals with the issue of values. Everything created by people, that is the product of their work, is *valuable* because people can not remain indifferent to the fruits of their labor. If I spent part of myself, my time, my energy, my talent to create some thing or some idea, then in them, as in the mirror, I see myself. I am biased towards the fruits of my labor as to *incarnation* of myself, embodiment into flesh, objectifying of my ideas, to the fruits of my labor, I admire them, or turn away from them, I love them or hate them, I see something mine or someone else's in them, i.e. created by other people and not for me, and thus alien and strange, and perhaps hostile (Kryukov, 2015: 56-60).

In *existential* (from Latin *existentia*) aspect, the value consciousness has an emotional nature, and therefore it is binary, dual: “yes – no”, “good – bad”, “bonum – evil”. However, values are not personal, but social in nature and they are components of social psychology, and therefore in social ontology they are social emotions, i.e. experiences that have acquired a social character.

In the *essential* (from Latin *essentia*) aspect of values, it is permissible to formulate the principle of social egocentrism: I value something else because in this other I see myself, I can not remain indifferent to myself. Everything else in society is myself in the transformed form of the product of my activity, the result of my efforts, and, consequently, I myself am in the external – an objectified, embodied form. Of course, the pronoun “I” is used here more figuratively: I am a man. But in the everyday sense this principle is fully applicable to each of us, including me personally.

## 2. Values as elements of culture

In regard to the values, it is acceptable to formulate the principle of *social egocentrism*: I appreciate anything else, because there I see myself, and I can not remain indifferent to myself. Everything else in society is myself in a converted form of the product of my work, the result of my efforts, and, therefore, it is me in the outer, i.e. objectified, materialized form. Of course the pronoun “I” is used here in a more figurative way: “I” is a human. But in the everyday sense, this principle is fully applicable to each of us, including me personally.

To *define* the value we can formulate the following proposition: *the value is a measure of the cost of physical or spiritual efforts of human to the creation or development of elements of the natural or social environment* (Kryukov, 2018: 75-81).

Firstly, it’s not about how many calories a person spends in the process of creating a product. Take a sculptor: he works very hard physically, but the result of his work is the artistic image. On the other hand, a person can spend some minutes, so it seems. For example, Byron or Shakespeare could write an impromptu ballad or sonnet. But to write a valuable line, it took them years and years of the formation of the poet’s personality, improving poetic skill and blossoming of the talent.

Secondly, it should be noted that the mastering of whatsoever – natural or cultural – is also a very time consuming job. Think of yourself when you were become comfortable with the new shoes bought in the store; or wearing a “too tight” new dress or pants that do not perfectly fit; the “disturbance” with the fingers when you just started to learn how to use the computer keyboard. To master a thing to means stop to notice it, to achieve such a position that it does not interfere, to make the thing became a part of yourself. I remember being in the first form when we were taught to hold pens for writing. The wooden sticks with steel feathers seemed to be the logs to us; fingers went numb, and we stuck out our tongues and panted with the effort to write hooks and ovals. But month and years passed by and here I do not notice a pen in my fingers: the movement became automatic, the stereotypes work, the fingers do not need to be controlled – literacy became *mine*: it went into the shadows, and I stopped to notice it. It is akin to me and became a continuation of the hand.

Thirdly, mastering occurs equally in respect of the natural objects as well as the artificial culture products. If nature initially appears as something external and alien, the alien and external to society is something that has been created by other people, but it may become mine, if I spend time, effort and will to master it. I learn from other people to repair anything in the house; I read books written by other unfamiliar to me people; I admire the images created by strangers; finally, I suffer or become happy, depending on how a work of art influences me, whether social environment helps me to achieve something in life or creates obstacles.

The values are binary in their modality, i.e. they can have both positive and negative sides for the people, that is why that all values appear in pairs: good and evil, beauty and ugliness, glory and shame, honor and dishonor, fairness and self-will, justice and voluntarism, etc. However, negative values are values too, because humans create them too, so the term “anti-values”, which can be found in different contexts, is no more than a figure of speech. The anti-values are like antimatter in physics: it is the same substance, but differs only in the electric charge of the micro-particles. However, like matter and antimatter, values of positive and negative charges annihilate, destroy each other in a collision.

Karl Marx introduced a great formula: human works together with others even when apparently he’s doing it alone. Take as an example the hero of the novel by Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Once on a desert island, Robinson built a house there, shepherded a herd of goats, cultivated the field and made boats. Moreover, with him the storm cast ashore a toolbox, but he had to be able to use these instruments of labor! Therefore, it can be argued behind working

Robinson had been a huge crowd of people who had invented ax and saw, had thought of a way of building houses and had selected varieties of cereals, which eventually were grown, had brought up Robinson and, more importantly, had taught him to hew and saw, to build and to plow, to shepherd and to shoot, to boil and to fry: in short, to *live actively!* Hence the *principle of Marx* is that labor as a specifically human activity has a public character.

### 3. The types of values

Typology of the social values unfolds in the *social square*: four components of the structure of the social system. They are *people, things, signs, and institutions* (Kryukov, 2014: 523-527).

*People* are reasonable human beings, who become like this due to mastering things as a result of practice. Man refers to things objectively, i.e. he identifies the vital, essential content in them, makes the object of activity an item of production. People are themselves products of labor of their parents, grandparents, nannies and caregivers, teachers and educators, masters and tutors, lecturers and professors. And because education of the human person requires a lot of time and effort of many people, the man is the most labor-intensive product, and therefore the greatest value, which *type* is called *personalized* (from Latin *persona*).

*Things* are artificial objects, created by people as a result of processing of natural materials, made from this materials to meet the vital needs of people. These are values, bearing the imprint of human attachments and means to achieve human goals. People acquire human quality solely by virtue of the mastering of things, and things become artificial solely by virtue of the creation and mastering of them by a human. Because man does not do anything “for no special reason”, and all his actions have a very definite meaning, i.e. the purpose as the idea of the future as the product of labor, the artificial things unlike fragments of nature are informative, because in them invisibly (Implicitly! Virtually!), there is a human himself. Due to the fact that things are designed to meet our material needs, i.e. needs in matter and energy, they form a special type of values: *utilitarian* (from Latin *utilita* – use) values.

People and things are the primary elements of society. However, on the basis of primary cells arise secondary elements of society, or *modified* form of people and things. Institutions and signs act as such.

*Institutions* (from Latin *institutum* – establishment) are the organizational forms of social life, the aggregate *social roles* as matrices of human behavior, where these roles are represented as transformed, i.e. people modified into secondary product. Assume that there is a certain social role: for example, a post of a Dean of the Faculty. So, there are service instructions prescribing all actions to the dean, defining his rights and responsibilities, and it is a form. Who will do it all – John Smith – is important, but under the indispensable condition of performance of these official functions. There is a human as a “natural person” like any of us; and there is a human as a “legal person”, i.e. an official in the office, a defendant in court, a deputy in Congress, etc. And a human as a legal person behaves not as he would like to, but as he is prescribed to. This is a social role (Kryukov, 2016a: 84-87).

We all play a variety of social roles on a daily basis. Having come to the university, you are a student or professor. Out into the street you are a pedestrian. Having got on the bus, you are a passenger. Having come home, you are a son or a father, a husband or a son in law, and in each case there are its own rules of conduct: one can be rude to one's mother-in-law, but not to one's wife; one needs to command a son, but not a mother, etc. Social roles and social status define the person as they are usually recorded in the documents. The fact that the person is a citizen of the state is certified with a passport; a diploma confirms the completion of higher education; special certificate proves that a person is a professor. Thus, the document is a form of objectification of

social roles.

Similarly, public institutions themselves are objectified and reified for the most part. A university has not only legal, but also the actual address, academic buildings, sports center, cultural center, campus and so much more. All of this is not just a property, but the “body” of this organization. On the pediment of the entrance to the main building the large letters make up the *name* of the organization, in all buildings, there are plates with the name of the University, on the doors of classrooms and offices, there are pointers of what is located there, or what kind of officer works there. So the space of university is organized.

Everywhere are the indicator boards showing the start and end of services, office hours of the officials or there is also a timetable of lectures and seminars at the dean’s office. So the work of the university is organized. All institutions are functioning likewise: shops and cafes, administrative bodies and cultural institutions, and so on. We can never confuse a function of two adjacent buildings in the city center: the City Hall and the theatre. Architecture structures clearly tell us: here is the theater!

*Signs* are the represents of things. If the word “presentation” means “submission”, the demonstration, the prefix “re” means “again”, “once more”. When we show someone not the thing itself, but what replaces it, we use the sign. In the science of signs *semiotics* (from Greek *sema* – sign pointer), there is the basic definition of sign: *it is a thing that stands for another thing*. It is in this sense we say that the sign is a transformed, i.e. the secondary form of things. What are the signs for? (Kryukov, 2016b: 36-40).

In *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift, there is a wonderful episode when Lemuel Gulliver finds himself on the flying island of Laputa. Where he, among other things, meets a group of philosophers, skeptics, who are struggling with the ambiguity and even polysemanticism in language. For example, when we say the word “hand”, then what actually do we mean? What is it: a part of the body at the end of the arm, consisting of a thumb, four fingers, and a palm? The cards dealt to one or all players in one round of a card game? A pointer on a dial, indicator, or gauge, especially on a clock? Or we come in the hours of attendance and ask if is it possible to see Mr. Whatshisname? And his secretary answers: it is not here and will not be! What does it mean? Who, then, is the head of the department? The meaning of words and expressions are detected in the contexts, but Laputa skeptics started to solve the problem radically. They suggested to opt out of words and point the finger at the right thing or show it to the interlocutor, so to speak, “live”.

It turned out that skeptical philosophers at first filled their pockets with all sorts of gizmos, then began to drag behind the knapsacks and sacks with various objects, but then took the hand carts and finally cartloads of different stuff. And what if the thing we want to speak about is very heavy and non-transportable, is far away or left in the past and now it has disappeared? What to bring? Of course, as a satirist, Swift caricatured the situation, but philosophers-skeptics really existed in ancient Greece, for example Pyrrho, but the Greeks did not reach such extremes as in Laputa.

Meanwhile, some skeptics were right somewhere. If any sign of things figuratively “stands on its behalf and on its behalf” it is quite possible to argue that the original in the origin of signs is the *autosemiotic relation*, namely: *every thing is a sign of itself*. Indeed, if in a shop window we see the hat, we understand that this store sells hats and in it you can buy a hat and a cap, and a panama. If we see on the road at the side of the pedestal a battered car, then we are likely slow down on a dangerous part of road. If we see the installed sculpted statues of buffalo and bear in front of a building, it is clear that this a stock exchange, and not a hotel or a swimming pool. Signs are invented when autosemiotic relation is difficult or even impossible to implement. Then people create new things, the only purpose of which is to represent the first kind things that we can not have, as such, but of which we can know, that is to have an idea about them, their image. Correlating with the latter, we will be able to understand what is meant.

You can use anything you like as signs: sounds, images, smells, gestures, but *symbols* (from Greek *σήμα* – *semion*, and from Latin *symbolon* – sign, contrast ) are the most commonly used as specifically designed and well adapted to meet the challenges of communication, exchange of signs. Symbol is not a part of the subject, as *indication signs*, say, traces on the ground or fingerprints on the surface of things, even though such signs are particularly interest criminalists. Symbol is not a “portrait” of things like image signs: drawings, paintings, photos, pantomimes. A symbol is something entirely relative, which relation to the subject, to the primary set thing is purely conventional (from Latin *conventia* – agreement). We just had agreed – and all agreed with this – that the \$ sign is a dollar sign, & replaces the word “and”, and % expresses the percentage or hundredth of a certain value.

#### 4. Totals

From the foregoing, we can conclude that values are social phenomena, which are determined by the active nature of man. A person loves or hates something in which he embodies himself, whether it be children, things, signs or social roles. In the products of activity, the existence of man himself continues as an exercise, as an objectification of himself – his forces, energy, talents, genius.

#### 5. Conclusion

The proposed concept of values allows us to understand the source of values and the essence of the value relationship as the emotional experience of any human achievement - as the success or failure of the result of efforts and therefore as a matter of pride or regret and disappointment.

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