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## PSYCHOLOGY AND VALUES

DURING the course of the seminar, the concept of value has been referred to by anthropologists, historians and by other social scientists. The psychologist, too, uses the concept of value, and perhaps in ways that at first seem different from those expressed earlier.

The psychologist is concerned with the behavior of individuals in relation to situations or special features of a situation. He notices that some individuals wish to talk to a certain young lady, that others like to drink certain alcoholic beverages, that others will vote for the Republican candidate for president; or, he observes that some individuals avoid starches in their diet, some avoid musical concerts, and others avoid thought whenever possible. The psychologist recognizes that to some

situations different individuals are likely to make different responses, and he also is cognizant of the fact that the same individual makes different responses to presumably similar situations at different times. Perhaps your response to the third slice of lemon meringue pie will be different from the first, or your reaction to a certain political candidate will be different the second time he runs.

The fact that different individuals make different responses to objectively identical situations and that the same individuals make different responses to objectively identical situations is worth noting. The psychologist does not see values; he infers values from performances. from behavior. An individual's behavior favors certain responses or avoids others. He does greet friends, like movies, get satisfaction from good music; he avoids boredom, dislikes swimming, and is annoyed at having to wear formal clothes.

The behavior that satisfies or annoys represents the wants, drives or tendencies to action. At present, even if the psychologist knew all about the history of an individual to age 30, and as much as he could about his environment, he could not make very accurate guesses about the avoiding or favoring behavior of an individual. Nevertheless, the psychologist recognizes that the individual develops his tendency to behavior partly from forces within himself and partly from forces from the outside. The psychologist knows that certain potentialities to act are a function of the individual's genes, just as he knows that the potentialities of the genes are developed by the opportunities the environment affords.

The social scientist recognizes that complex potentialities are in the inherited genes. He tacitly accepts the statement of the geneticist and the biologist about the heritable aspect of behavior. When, however, he comes to the environment, he is likely to consider it simply as a massive force affecting all individuals alike. This is not so. Situations in the external environment will not act similarly upon different persons. It is a commonplace that different parts of the situation will be more

or less potent depending on the sensitivity of the individual, his intelligence and his experience. Just because of such differences, his responses to situations will vary.

The psychologist knows very little about the internal environment of individuals, yet he infers, with good reason, that multiple responses to internal stimuli and situations is the rule.

Differences in responses among individuals indicate differences in wants. Wants are what the individual desires. Wants, in this sense, are preferences. When an individual goes to sleep instead of writing a paper he has shown a preference or a desire. He has valued one kind of response above another. When an individual continues teaching school instead of going into business he has made a value judgment. In this sense, every act, every performance, every bit of behavior indicates a preference, conscious or vague or unconscious.

What an individual wants and what an individual does to realize his wants represent his value or values. Values, therefore, can not be universal for each member of the group. The values of an individual depend not only upon the tendency of potentialities he gets by way of his ancestry, but also upon his own stage of maturation and development, as well as the general ways of life in a man-made or man-chosen environment, and his own particular life history.

In a study of the attitude of individuals to such issues as the Negro, the Germans, and the Chinese, and to Birth Control, Censorship, and Capital Punishment, and to Patriotism, Communism and Law Enforcement, and toward God, the Bible, and Sunday Observance, it was found that attitudes of individuals were different from the different social issues. It was not possible to predict at all accurately the attitude toward Birth Control from an individual's attitude toward Law Enforcement or toward the Bible. Individuals responded to the different issues in terms of different values based on the wide range of differences within the group. Two weeks later, alternate measures of the same scales were given to the same group.

After the second administration, individuals were selected from the total group to form two widely different age groups.

One group was formed of all individuals aged 20 to 25 years; the other group was made up of individuals aged 40 years or more. Each person in the young group had a matched intellectual peer in the second group. The primary purpose was to see if the young or the old group were more consistent in their attitudes. The facts were clear: The older individuals were markedly more stable than their younger intellectual peers. In a few instances, the inconsistency of the young was startling. In attitudes toward the Negro, the young were so changeable and so inconsistent that it looked as if their responses were due to chance at both times.

The experiment demonstrates that maturational level makes a difference. As a matter of fact, the concensus of data suggests that the younger the person the less consistent his attitudes, the more variable his values, the less secure his judgment. But age differences may cover differences in the cultural environment or in personal life histories.

The attitudes, interests, and appreciations of an individual represent his values just as surely as do his more overt acts and behavior. Values for an individual indicate desires or drives to change either nature or themselves in certain ways, such as ploughing land or increasing justice. These values may vary from knowledge of what satisfies wants to symptoms only vaguely felt. The analyst is particularly wise in showing how certain behaviors satisfy wants or values that the individual not only does not know, but that he can never know without some guidance.

Linguists, philologists and psychologists, among others, have suggested many different theories to account for the origin of language. These theories, ingenious and provocative though they are, do not account fully for any single language system, let alone, the multiplicity of language families.

Psychologists, of course, would prefer an explanation that suggests that language originates by the same process as that by which members of the community learn the language. The child, however, learns a language that exists in the community into which he is born. One important difference is that the language exists with its stock of sounds and pitches, its forms and inflections, and its stress patterns.

Nearly every normally endowed child learns at least one language during his childhood. Usually the learning takes place within a local family unit. Whether the language be Spanish, English, Chinese or Hungarian, the child learns the language. As such the language represents not only the words and syntax, but also the concepts and attitudes that the language carries.

Yet, though every normal child learns the language of his family unit, the amount of language learned or acquired differs from child to child. The variations in the amount and quality of the acquisitions depend upon the potentialities for learning that the infant has by way of his heredity and upon the opportunities for utilizing those potentialities afforded by the environment.

Thus, within any society, individual differences will be expected, ranging from the minimal ability to communicate to the ability to stir whole peoples by words and ideas. Psychologists and anthropologists, sociologists and linguists, however, can only infer the group language from the communications of individuals. In this sense, language is not possessed equally by all individuals in a community, but differs, perhaps even widely, within the group. As long as individuals can communicate within the group, the group possesses language.

Values, within a society, too, are inferences from the behavior of individuals within it. Only by observing the behavior in specific situations can the abstraction of a group value be inferred. Values can only be judged by the choices or preferences of individuals in the group. As in the case of language, the preferences and choices will vary greatly among individuals due

to differences in their genes or in the opportunities afforded them or in both.

In any society, therefore, value as a performance must be contrasted. The fact that, within a group, differences in preferences and choices exist, indicates that the society may have to protect its stability by eliminating its extreme deviates or may wish to maximize its tendency to change by encouraging the extreme deviations.

Psychologists, however, do not know too much about the acquisition or the elimination of specific values. Nevertheless, occasional experiments have been illuminating.

Several years ago, Doctor Thorndike and I engaged in an experiment to estimate the changes in behavior on repeating an obnoxious task. Although a variety of tasks such as drinking rancid cod-liver oil or completing couplets before an audience was used, I shall illustrate the process by an experiment in learning to handle snakes.

Several non-poisonous snakes were lent to us by Professor Deimars of the New York Zoological Park. Then, thirty adults were hired to participate in some psychological experiments. The group was told what they were to do in general terms. Then they were told: "You are to handle a snake. Just before you handle the snake, you are to record on this blank your own feeling about handling a snake. If you do not handle the snake, you will lose twenty-five cents each time." Each individual just prior to being given the snake to hold recorded his rating on a scale which ranged from + 100 thru 0 to — 100. On the blank, + 100 meant "I'd rather handle a snake than do anything else;" zero meant "It makes no difference whether I handle a snake or not;" and — 100 meant "I'd rather die than handle a snake."

One of the thirty individuals recorded herself as —100 and never during the next two weeks did she come near the room in which the snakes were caged. The other twenty-nine individuals recorded themselves as around —90 just before the

first trial. Each of these, however, held the snake for the required sixty seconds. Just before the second trial, there was a marked improvement in the average rating. The record for the thirty trials showed that the ratings increased until for the last few days the scores hovered around + 20. Of course, the person who never handled the snake recorded herself as — 100 for the fifteen days. The individuals who did handle the snake overcame their marked aversion and achieved a mild liking for the task.

The simple experiment in the modifiability of human behavior is commonplace in psychology. It was used, however, to demonstrate three points. First, it shows that each person had an initial aversion toward the task of handling snakes. This attitude had been learned, perhaps early in life. As far as their testimony was concerned, they indicated that snakes were dirty, slimy, crawling and biting things. This attitude had been formed although none had ever handled a snake before. For one person at least, the verbal stereotype was so strong that not even money deprivation could bring her to even try to do the task.

Second, the experiment demonstrates that success in doing the task either changes the nature of the task itself or changes the nature of the behavior toward it. The sense of satisfaction, the confirmation by accomplishment, changed the performance. Toward the end of the experiments, a few of the women asked for "Petey," indicating that they were handling not a snake but a pet. Others, however, were quite elated at the fact that they could and did handle a snake.

Third, the experiment shows that even in the same group variations in reaction and in behavior about tasks do exist. The range from complete avoidance to actually trying the task is not unusual. If no experimenter had required these individuals to handle snakes, perhaps they would have continued throughout life without handling a snake.

The process by which the individuals had acquired their initial aversion to the task does not differ significantly from

the way they learn to speak their language, to respect their superiors, to accept the folkways, or to acquire knowledge, skills or values. The individuals learned by the consequences of their acts. When they were successful, either their own satisfaction or the confirmation from others reinforced the acceptable behavior. Yet differences in the amount of change or the stability of the change in liking did exist among the individuals in the group. Initial differences in the strength of the aversion, differences in the amount of confirmation maintained or even increased the range of individual differences.

Here is illustrated how members of a group have a specified attitude or stereotype and how such a stereotype can be changed. The change comes by the consequences of the behavior. When the consequences of the behavior are satisfying, the individual continues that behavior then and there or behaves in the same way in a similar situation later.

The explanation by confirming the behavior and tendencies of the individual does explain the acquisition by individuals of facts such as  $2 + 2 = 4$ , of skills like writing, of attitudes toward governmental spending, of world views like faith in reincarnation, of values like justice, democracy, beauty and truth.

The paradigm, and it is only a paradigm, is that confirmation reinforces behavior. It should be pointed out, however, that punishment is not nearly so potent as reward. Money deprivation for not handling the snake did not cause the woman to do the required act. She continued with a negative attitude toward the situation and as long as she avoided the situation she could not get a sense of success or mastery or confirmation for her behavior. In this sense, punishment allows for less predictability about behavior than does reward. In general, reward maintains the approved behavior, but punishment does not necessarily eliminate negative behavior.

In the paradigm that successful consequences confirm the tendency that caused it, we have the basic explanation of the acquisition of values, or wants, or needs. Moreover, the psy-

chologist has means at his disposal for estimating the relative strength of these values. Since values are preferences, he can develop a calculus of choices. Do you prefer to read a book or listen to the radio, or, go hunting or sit doing nothing, or, fight for democracy or avoid being drafted? Values, however, can be appraised by the amount of energy, or time, or money a person will spend to get certain satisfactions or to avoid certain frustrations.

The greater the number of choices available to any individual, the greater the probability of conflict among equal or almost equivalent values. Society must recognize that some government employees may find it difficult to choose a party dedicated to efficiency in government because for them other values may loom as larger or more important. In general, the concept of values recognizes the possibility of conflict in the individual even to the point of suspended action.

The psychologist, therefore suggests that the reification of values for groups represents a level of abstraction that is only slightly valid. Some historians impute to a large group values that are really held by a small minority; some anthropologists discuss values as if they were universally held by all members of the culture and some economists have made value, the unchanging universal. As a metaphor, these notions are helpful, yet if taken literally they tend to reject reality.