

VALUES AND IDEOLOGY

I would like to set down some thoughts on what seems to me to have been a continuing theme in many of the discussions we have had in the last year and which are relevant to what our position should be (or whether we should have one at all) with respect to the 'outside world'. This theme can be approached by several roads each bearing different signposts; one says 'Use/Abuse', another 'Value free Science?' another 'What use are Experts', all lead to the same area of argument. The debate about the role of values seems to me to lead most directly to the heart of the matter so it is here that I shall start.

The argument that Social Science (if not also Physical Science) is ultimately predicated on value choices can be accepted while not accepting the usual judgement about the level at which these choices operate. The usual level is that of competing political ideologies, more or less completely articulated and more or less total in scope. I would argue that the value choices are made at a less theoretically developed level and, further, that they can be made more independently of each other than is usually assumed.

If this is the case the way is opened for agreement, or at least for meaningful argument between individuals who adopt different political stances provided that this agreement or argument is couched in terms of the basic value choices. There are, of course, questions that require a more fully articulated political theory for their proper discussion and in these cases simple value choices are not a sufficient basis for argument or evaluation but even in these cases judgement in terms of 'primitive' values can be illuminating. Indeed it is by just such a process; analysing a real problem with the aid of theory and comparing the consequences against one's intuitive value system, that both theory and values are strengthened and elaborated.

The fixing of the founding value choices at the political level may be convenient but it confuses the issue in a number of ways. Most seriously it closes minds to possibilities outside the chosen ideology and suggests that outsiders to the ideology have necessarily made different value choices. That this may not be the case is, I think, evidenced by the fact that people adopting very different ideologies may agree on specific programmes of action - for example the Catholic and Marxist critics of the present Brazilian regime - suggesting that agreement on (some) values appear in specifics more readily than in intermediate theoretical structures.

It will be clear that I attach more importance to specific problems and to basic value choices than to ideological theories. Not because the latter are unimportant but because they are, for me, primarily tools for applying values to problems. It follows that I do not regard theories as monolithic and that it seems to me perfectly legitimate to use whatever theory or part theory appears to be most appropriate to the problem in hand.

From this point of view, then, how do the 'Use/Abuse' and 'Experts' debates look? On the former the implication is that the nihilistic view (for a Statistician) that Statistics as we know it is so thoroughly shot through with reactionary values that its techniques are useless for mounting any radical critique of society should be rejected. Indeed the above analysis suggests that even within the terms of the 'status quo's' own theories and techniques radical voices can be raised (though there is no implication that they should speak only in those terms). And while mystification and the cult of the expert should certainly be rejected my argument indicates that there are areas where expertise is important and should be valued as a radical weapon.

John Hodgson

+An interesting attempt to tie political judgements (in the realm of 'Development') to rather primitive value choices is made by Peter Berger in his 'Pyramids of Sacrifice' where he suggests a 'calculus of pain' and a 'calculus of meaning' as aids in evaluating development programmes or strategies in terms of suffering imposed (or permitted) and of traditional value systems destroyed.