

DEMOCRACY VERSUS VALUES?

FRANZ-XAVER KAUFMANN

SUMMARY

The concept of democracy has a much clearer historical record than that of values. Thus the inquiry starts with a history of the concept and develops the issues of the paper in that framework.

Four positions are taken into consideration:

1. Democracy is itself a cultural value;
2. Democracy is the institutional means to protect cultural values;
3. Democracy is a way of destroying the obligatory validity of values;
4. Democracy is dependent upon common beliefs and values.

The concept of values is a late construct which seeks to solve the problem of the legitimization of a social order. But it is at the same time a diffuse concept of political rhetoric. The different approach to values in the American utilitarian tradition and in the European post-metaphysical tradition is emphasized.

The second part of the paper gives a short account of some aspects of a sociological analysis of historical processes of modernization. Modernization is considered above all as a secular process of institutional differentiation and of organizational development within the realm of the emerging institutional spheres. Cultural values become bound more and more to particular institutions and hence the internalization of these values as individual motives declines in social importance.

The alleged "decay of values" is discussed within that framework. The dominant change is the disentanglement of culture, the individual and the organizational structure. By the interference of organizational dynamics individuals learn to dissociate from the obligatory claims of external norms and accept them more and more only in the form of a self-commitment or as external constraint. The apparent loss of individual normative commitments is by and large compensated by the institutionalization of rules and procedures by which comparable effects upon the social expectations of behaviour are achieved.

The alleged loss of efficiency of democratic procedures is due less to the growing pluralism of interests, attitudes and motives than to the growing complexities of government. The differentiation of policies gives rise to the emergence of specialized policy communities whose expertise often dodges the democratic process. The growing influence of the transnational economy, especially

of financial markets, puts new constraints on the political autonomy of governments which, in the case of the European Union, try to cope by creating transnational levels of political decision-making and by pooling their resources into a common currency. The intricacies of these new forms of multi-level policy-making are among the main sources of the loss of trust in democratic decision-making.

This paper deals not with the relationship or tension between democracy and certain values, but with the ways of thinking about democracy in terms of values. What does it mean to speak about questions of social order in terms of value?

So this paper is a kind of second order reflection. Sociologists are sometimes said to have a wicked view on reality. They are observing society with a bad eye, emphasizing those aspects which are normally suppressed or hold in latency. Although at least French sociology started as a “science morale”, I identify more with the German tradition of Georg Simmel and Max Weber, emphasizing the tension between a moral and a sociological view of the world. This does not mean, however, a questioning of the sense of moral obligation, but rendering the moral inquiry less easy and more demanding.

I start with the assertion that to speak about democracy in terms of value does not mean the same thing on both sides of the Atlantic. I then develop four dimensions of the question about democracy and values. The second part of the paper refers to contemporary worries about the future of democracy and the alleged “decay of values” in modern or postmodern societies. Again, the reaction to these challenges seems to be not the same in the United States and in Continental Europe, the remnants of the British Empire remaining somewhere in between the two mainstreams.

1. DEMOCRACY

In general terms, democracy refers to the idea and the procedures of participation in the steering of a social system by those concerned with it. I restrict the usage here to the realm of political theory where the idea was shaped for the first time. But political theory starts from different assumptions in the Continental European and in the Anglo-Saxon traditions. For the Continental tradition, the core concept of political theory is ‘the state’, and this means the idea of the unity between the political, the administrative and the legal systems. The Anglo-Saxon tradition is much less

stamped by Roman law and its core concept is 'government' which does not include the judiciary.¹ Therefore, 'democracy' refers in the Continental case to 'the state' and in the Anglo-Saxon case to 'government', and this is not only a question of names but concerns basic assumptions about the structure of society and concomitant differences in historical experience.

In a nutshell: the Continental state emerged in the form of absolutism and gained its strength through the development of a competent administration. The transition to democracy here was a posterior process linked essentially to the establishment of a written constitution. In England, by contrast, the principle of "King in Parliament" preceded the establishment of a civil service by two centuries, and the United States has not yet established a professionalized civil service at all. Local government was always stronger than in the leading countries of the Continent. The concept of the state presupposes the unity of government, administration, and the legal system which consists essentially of written parliamentary law binding also on the judiciary. On the European Continent, the principles of legality and constitutionality preceded that of democracy, as democratization was a slow process, especially in the German case. In the case of the United States, on the other hand, the foundation of the federation was already a democratic process, and government is presumed to be accessible more directly to various forms of political participation and public debate.²

These differences in the concept of political order also make for a different place of 'values' in both political traditions. Continental Europe was shaped by a strong metaphysical tradition which emphasized the "givenness", the indisputability of the essentials of human order. The United States, by contrast, emerged from below, and its culture was nourished by a dissenting faith which had found no place for worship in traditional British society. The basic experience was not that of an authoritative order but that of the New Frontier: emphasizing freedom, self-reliance and subjectivity, Jeremy Bentham is more important to the sense of propriety in American culture than Aquinas or Immanuel Kant.

2. VALUES

The concept of democracy has a much clearer historical record than that of values. The latter is linked with the history of modern philosophy in

¹ See KENNETH DYSON, *The State Tradition in Western Europe* (Oxford 1980).

² I am aware about the idealization implicit in this comparison. My subject is, however, more linked to the history of ideas, representing the 'value' - aspect of democracy, than to its practice, which is quite multifarious.

a quite confusing way. Thus, the history of the concept leads us directly to the issues at stake in this paper.

The concept of value originated in economics and referred to the utility of goods. Aristotle had already split the concept into 'value in use' and 'exchange value'. In Anglo-Saxon philosophy the term value is not so far from economics since the prevalent perspective remains utilitarian. In Anglo-Saxon sociology, "the term 'values' may refer to interests, pleasures, likes, preferences, duties, moral obligations, desires, wants, needs, aversions and attractions, and many other modalities of selective orientation".³ One easily perceives the utilitarian background to this definition too.

On the other hand, the German conception of values ('*werte*') has strong normative or moral connotations. The history of this term originated only in the nineteenth century in the tradition of Kantian philosophy and is thus meant in a strictly anti-utilitarian sense.⁴ '*Werte*' has become a central concept for discussing problems of human order, and it is obviously in this sense that the concept is used in the programme of this meeting.

Kant radicalized the conditions for the objective cognition of truth, in the sense that only the natural sciences could meet them. All moral realities remained now in the realm of practical reason. Consequently, the question was raised about how to ensure their obligatory character.

Kant himself tried to solve the problem by the categorical imperative: the sentence of a subject putting himself in the position of a legislator not bound to situational factors or subjective preferences should be the ultimate criterion. The mediation between the particular and the universal presupposes here the operation of universalistic reason. The '*Wertphilosophie*' (philosophy of values) originating with Hermann Lotze and culminating with Max Scheler and Eduard von Hartmann, objected to the subjectivism of the Kantian solution and postulated instead the existence of a separate realm of objective values which was obligatory for everybody. As 'existence' is the mode of truth for things and facts, so 'validity' is the mode of truth for values and norms. To understand the remaining intricacies of the term it is helpful to draw on the Kantian distinction between 'dignity' and 'price'. Both meanings are covered by the English term 'value'.

Although arguments about the validity of particular values or even of a

³ ROBIN M. WILLIAMS, Jr., 'The Concept of Values', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York-London 1968), Vol. 16, p. 283.

⁴ See for the following JÜRGEN GEBHARDT, 'Die Werte. Zum Ursprung eines Schlüsselbegriffs der Politisch-Sozialen Sprache der Gegenwart in der Deutschen Philosophie des Späten 19. Jahrhunderts', in RUPERT HOFMANN u.a. (Hrsg.), *Anodos. Festschrift für Helmut Kuhn* (Weinheim 1989), pp. 35-54.

hierarchy of values remained unconvincing,⁵ the concept of values has been widely accepted in official language throughout the world. In comparison to the quoted all embracing sociological definition it has been restricted to the sense of *standards of the desirable and/or of "oughtness"*, and it has been freed from its essentially obligatory character in the sense of the philosophy of values. But nevertheless the appeal to 'values' suggests a kind of self-evidence, of non-disputability. The dominating meaning now links values to culture: "more and more 'value' has come to denote the broader standards of a shared symbolic system of behavioral orientations and expressions. In such a concept 'values' serve to integrate as well as to guide and channel the organized activities of the members of a society".⁶ It is remarkable that the author, a high official of UNESCO, refers to *organized* activities only, and not to individual choices. Clyde Kluckhohn, and following him Talcott Parsons, emphasized the process of internalization of cultural values and hence their individual significance.⁷ This shift from the level of the individual to that of organizations will be addressed later.

3. DEMOCRACY AND VALUES

The relationship between democracy and values depends upon the content given to the two terms. The subject of the present paper, "Democracy *versus* Values", suggests an opposition between both terms. From the point of view of most theories of democracy, such an opposition is far from being evident. There are at least four positions to be taken into consideration:

1. Democracy is itself a cultural value. It represents the aspiration of Western peoples to combine peace, freedom, and order and to grant the political self-determination of a commonwealth.
2. Democracy is the institutional means by which to protect cultural values and to make them effective in the ordering of human affairs.
3. Democracy as the claim to self-determination is a way of destroying the obligatory validity of values, since values are not a matter of decision but of "oughtness".

⁵ Martin Heidegger even termed 'values' a positivistic compensation for the loss of metaphysics! (Holzwege, Frankfurt, 1957, p. 203).

⁶ MAKAMIN AN MAKAGIANSAR, 'Preservation and Further Development of Cultural Values', *Cultures IV*, No. 1 (1979), p. 11 (quoted by GEBHARDT, *loc. cit.* p. 36).

⁷ See WOLFGANG RUDOLPH, *Die Amerikanische 'Cultural Anthropology' und das Wertproblem* (Berlin 1959), p. 164.

4. Democracy is dependent upon common beliefs and values since reasonable majority votes cannot be expected without a kind of basic consensus.

3.1. *Democracy as a Value*

This topic has been dealt with in the paper by Professor Di Iulio and needs not be elaborated here further. Suffice to note that in the Continental tradition the ethical substance of the state has often been elaborated without reference to democracy. The rule of law and the principles of modern constitutionalism, as well as the programme of the welfare state, are considered to be by themselves expressions of generally accepted values.⁸ Democracy is considered here as *an element* of the right constitutional order which paves the ground for peace, security, freedom, and justice, not as its essence as in the Anglo-Saxon interpretation. Thus, the functioning of democracy is considered to be dependent upon its embeddedness in the constitutional order. This restrictive interpretation dates from the terrible experiences of the French revolution and was corroborated by the 'democratic' transition to the Third Reich.

This position implies the strictly binding character of the constitutional order, but not necessarily in the form of a metaphysical obligation as the philosophy of value had postulated.⁹ As the constitution is a written document and considered as the basis of the political and legal system one can elude the issue of the moral sources for obligation. The constitution is almost indifferent as to the reasons why citizens accept it. The only serious challenge to it would be either a civil war or a seizing of political power by forces which undermine the rule of the constitution. This means, on the other hand, that democracy nevertheless needs political support from those who live with it. In that sense one may say that "democracy, more than institutions and principles, is a state of mind. ... It is the fruit of an education. ... It is a second nature which is first the product of culture. ... There is no city without citizens, democracy without democrats; hence the formation of the citizens is part of the defense of the progress of democracy".¹⁰

⁸ See ERNST-WOLFGANG BÖCKENFÖRDE, *Der Staat als sittlicher Staat* (Berlin, 1978).

⁹ The German *Grundgesetz* even declared some essentials as inalterable (Art. 79 III) in order to escape the trap of relativism without recourse to metaphysics.

¹⁰ RENÉ RÉMOND, 'Democracy in Western Europe', in Hans Zacher (ed.), *Proceedings of the Workshop on Democracy* (12-13 December 1996) (Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Rome, 1998), p. 518.

3.2. *Democracy as an Institutional Means to Fostering Values*

As far as I can see, the Anglo-Saxon idea of democracy is much more optimistic than the Continental. One expects from the democratic process itself the fostering of values in society. This implies a much more open concept of values. Values have here no objective meaning but are considered as a generalised expression of utilitarian value judgements within the population or constituency.

There is, however, a clear awareness of the dangers of majority vote too. As every individual's value judgement is, in principle, of equal worth, the protection of minority rights is no less an expression of democracy. One sees here the strong liberal and individualistic gist of American democracy. Democracy is here not only a form of government but the essence of the free polity. Democracy means the fostering of individual values by designing and implementing *procedures, checks and balances* which foster political participation as well as the protection of individual rights and the control of government. There is no idea of collective welfare beyond the safeguarding of liberties. Values are continuously emerging out of civil society and become political through democratic processes. Their character is much less consensual than on the Continent. *Values are less considered a matter of consensus than a matter of conflict.* It is then up to the judiciary to settle the conflicts by ruling on the case in question, not by establishing a general rule in the form of law.

The Continental state, by contrast, is considered the trustee of the preservation of values. Some of them, e.g., human rights, are embodied in constitutional norms. Others are not circumscribed, but nevertheless supposed to be valid, although no clear reason is given for their obligatory character. A typical example is the French *Education Nationale*. Public responsibility is defined more extensively than in the United States – Great Britain being the battlefield between the two traditions.

The strong concept of the state in most parts of Continental Europe¹¹ thus correlates with a strong concept of transpersonal values. Individuals are not deemed to follow purely subjective preferences but to be members of interest groups which organise themselves by free association. The representatives of these associations are publicly acknowledged as representing aggregated individual interests. Thus the political influence of the constituency seems to be in most countries more indirect than in the United States.

¹¹ For the idea of different degrees of 'stateness' see first J.P. NETTL, 'The State as a Conceptual Variable', *World Politics*, XX (1968) 4, pp. 559-552.

3.3. *Is Democracy Endangering Values?*

The argument that democracy might undermine existing values presupposes the objective validity or 'existence' of values and is therefore a typical European argument. Its roots go back to the transition from traditional to modern society and especially to its radicalized climax, i.e. the French Revolution.

Traditional societies are stabilized by the general acceptance of a rather homogeneous culture whose 'values' are shared within the community or at least within the leading strata of society. The normative core of such cultures usually has a religious legitimation and is considered as self-evident. Therefore 'values' (which in that context would even not be differentiated from belief and custom) are presented as objective and unchangeable. Against that background, the idea of the autonomous competence of the people or of parliament to decide about the essence of the social order seems subversive and against the 'real order'!

The transition from traditional to modern society in the West, however, was not only restricted to the last quarter of the eighteenth century but had a long-standing phase of preparation. The setting of the new course began in the eleventh century with the investiture struggle and the emergence of scholasticism.¹² Scholasticism was decisive for the issue of values, since this was the first strong movement towards a universalistic understanding of the world. For the first time scholasticism broke with the self-evidence of traditional society and developed *reasons* to legitimize the social order. They followed the hierarchy of *jus divinum*, *jus naturale*, *jus gentium*, and positive law was bound by these pre-existing orders. It was considered as obligatory only insofar it was not in opposition to them. The norms of the *hierarchy legum* were considered as objective, eternal and hence unchangeable. This was in obvious contrast to the idea of the limitless sovereignty of the people.

The cultural complex of modernity had its origins in the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* at the end of the seventeenth century. This aesthetic debate was about whether the code of the Classics should be of perennial validity or if it was possible to develop new codes of aesthetics. In more general terms it concerned the issue of the binding character of

¹² Harold Berman *Law and Revolution. The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge Mass., 1983), p. 4, states that "there was a radical discontinuity between the Europe of the period before the years 1050-1150 and the Europe of the period after the years 1050-1150". For a fuller exposition of the argument see FRANZ-XAVER KAUFMANN, 'Religion and Modernity in Europe', *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* (JITE), Vol. 153 (1997) 1, pp. 80-96.

tradition. Whereas *tradition* implies the obligatory character of the past as legitimization for the present order, *modernity* is the legitimization of continuous change.¹³ The essence of modernity is – in my perspective – a cultural complex which negates the authority of tradition. The semantics of modernity comprise progress, innovation, plurality, adaptation, and learning.

It is in that respect that the legislation of the French Revolution was essentially modern, whereas the Catholic Church can never be modern since its faith is founded on tradition. And in the context of modernity positive law is considered as valid insofar as it has been decided upon in legal procedure, and it can be changed by that same procedure.¹⁴

As we have already seen, there was a strong conservative backlash in the nineteenth century against the arbitrariness of democratic as well as of other individualistic decisions. The German philosophy of value was one of the attempts to escape from the paradoxes of modernity. And the problem is still with us, although mitigated by the constitutional restrictions on democratic arbitrariness. But there is no longer an even minimal consensus about the metaphysical foundations of the social order. Contemporary attempts to overcome the fallacies of utilitarianism remain within the framework of human fallibility and try to found the postulates of justice on rational argument.¹⁵

To sum up: it seems rather evident that the general acceptance of an 'objective' obligatory order or of the general validity of 'values' weakened during the period of the emergence of democracy, but it is not obvious that this took place *as a consequence* of democratization. It is rather plausible that democratization and the growing subjectivity of values are due to the same processes of transition which we now call modernization (cf. Sect. 4).

3.4. *Democracy as Dependent upon Common Beliefs and Values*

If we have to assume that in the process of modernization the plausibility of metaphysical foundations for the social order, as well as the authority of

¹³ Thus the *Encyclopedia Universalis* (Paris 1973) defines modernity as "morale canonique du changement". See (with other references) FRANZ-XAVER KAUFMANN, *Religion und Modernität - Sozialwissenschaftliche Analysen* (Tübingen, 1989), p. 38.

¹⁴ See NIKLAS LUHMANN, *Rechtssoziologie* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1987), p. 207.

¹⁵ See e.g. JOHN RAWLS, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge Mass., 1971); OTFRIED HÖFFE, *Politische Gerechtigkeit* (Frankfurt A.M., 1987); GERALD F. GANS, *Value and Justification - The Foundations of Liberal Theory* (Cambridge, 1990).

the past, are waning, how then is it possible to reach a minimal consensus necessary for the functioning of democracy? As far as we can see, this question has been better answered in practice than in theory. As a matter of fact, the established Western democracies have never experienced civil wars or other signs of political deterioration. The problematic cases – e.g. the transition to the Third Reich or the Austrian *Anschluss* – concern states with only a short and problematic democratic tradition. Even France as a society with lasting social conflicts has overcome the switch of regimes and has evolved with the succession of democratic constitutions. There seems to be a practical strength in democracy which supports the belief that it is (as Winston Churchill used to say) the worst of political regimes – with the exception of all others. If government fails, the debate is about reforming the electoral system or the rules of decision, but no one really questions the principle of universalized political participation. The belief in democratic procedures is a central element of the minimal consensus in the Anglo-Saxon world, whereas constitutional rules make for it in Continental Europe. Of course, our experience with modern democracies has lasted for little more than a century, and even its contemporary diffusion throughout the world is no guarantee for the future. The sociologist may ask about the conditions for this stability in order to make more reliable conjectures about the future.

We have to restrict ourselves here to the issue of values, i.e. of accepted cultural standards for the desirable, and/or of “oughtness”. It is rather obvious that the acceptance of constitutional democracy is itself a strong aspect of political culture, and hence democracy is to be considered as a value in itself: democracy is considered a morally necessary civic expression of the spiritual brotherhood of humankind.¹⁶ The limits of democracy emerge where profound cultural cleavages disunite whole communities, as it is now the case in Northern Ireland. Democracy presupposes a kind of trust in the capability of the existing political institutions to provide for peace and justice. Thus far there seems to exist a virtuous cycle between democratic institution building and internal peace. But it could also turn into a vicious cycle should the opposite occur. Democracy seems to be the most tolerant regime for cultural and political pluralism, but it needs nevertheless some minimum of intrinsic acceptance or belief in its normative value (independent of individual interest) to be trustworthy.

There have been recent worries about the future functioning of democracy even in its country of origin, the United States. This is especially true of

¹⁶ See JOHN J. DI IULIO, JR., ‘Three Questions about Contemporary Democracy and the Catholic Church’, in this volume pp. 71-82.

the so-called Communitarian movement and its fear that the commitment of American citizens to their communities, and America's 'social capital', are so much in decline that political and social life will be severely hampered.¹⁷ In Germany several years ago there was a dispute about *regierbarkeit* (governability) which voiced similar fears, whereas the actual block of fiscal and social legislation is attributed more to institutional inertia than to a decline in civic virtues. There is, however, an intense debate about 'individualization' and 'pluralism' or even 'multiculturalism'. Some fear that these developments will lead to the 'erosion of solidarity' or to a 'decay of values' which could undermine the functioning of democracy in the long run. Others see in these trends an increase in personal reflexivity and a maturation of modernity.¹⁸

4. IS THERE A DECAY OF VALUES IN WESTERN SOCIETIES?

It is not easy to judge these arguments from the viewpoint of a politically independent sociologist, as they refer to poorly operationalized trends and to an unknown future. But some observations and references to theoretical debates within sociology may help us to understand the situation better.

Obviously, the ambivalence of our judgments on modernity is not new. Controversies about the conditions and prospects for society and its polity have accompanied the process of modernization in Europe since its onset. This is not only true for the well-known controversies between conservatives, liberals, and socialists. The ambivalence goes deeper and concerns the very act of negating the existing order, as well as the utopian approach of the philosophy of the Enlightenment towards reality.¹⁹ Of course, this intellectual turn was not accidental but expressed the deficiencies of the existing absolutistic order in early modern Europe which proved to be too narrow for the emerging forces of the bourgeoisie, of science, and of trade. But its revolutionary drive was necessarily utopian since it involved the projection of a new and not yet existing order. It expressed the belief and hope that the future would be better than the

¹⁷ See e.g. AMITAI ETZIONI, *The Spirit of Community* (New York, 1993); ROBERT D. PUTNAM, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1995) 1, pp. 65-78.

¹⁸ The debate is very dissipated. A representative title is ULRICH BECK, *Die Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986).

¹⁹ See the forceful study by REINHART KOSELLECK, *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der Bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt a.M., 1973).

present and the past. This belief in progress was nevertheless nourished by the bad experience of the past, and not of the future. And the course of history did not always confirm the hopes of the believers in progress, although some 'progress' was evidently achieved. There was evidently *some* reason in this outset, but was it *the universal reason* which its advocates claimed to represent? This debate is still going on and remains behind the contemporary debates about postmodernity, as well as about liberalism versus communitarianism (or welfare statism in Europe).

4.1. *Values Reconsidered*

As we have already seen, the German philosophy of value was an attempt to escape the ambivalence of modernity through the construction of a new metaphysical 'order of values' which would leave orientation to the wanderings of ongoing social and political transformations. This attempt did not prove to be successful since the presumed evidence of value feeling was not confirmed by collective assent. There has been, however, some convergence upon the definition of human rights, as the UN Declaration on Universal Human Rights of 1948 shows. There was some natural law background in its motives and content, but the Assembly declined any justification for its declaration.²⁰ This is the way political consensus is normally achieved in contemporary conditions: no reason is given for consensus, which remains *ad hoc*, but operates as a premise for later decisions.

The term 'value' is normally used to denote individual attitudes or preferences as measured by opinion polls and similar surveys. Much attention was given to the studies on "Changing Values" by Ronald Inglehart.²¹ Moreover, since 1978 the "European Value Systems Study Group" has repeatedly tried to measure and to compare the values in various populations with standardised instruments.²² These and other results remain far from being conclusive with regard to the structure of a

²⁰ See PETER A. KÖHLER, *Sozialpolitische und Sozialrechtliche Aktivitäten in den Vereinten Nationen* (Baden-Baden, 1987), p. 271.

²¹ RONALD INGLEHART, *The Silent Revolution. Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton N.J., 1977); and *Cultural Change* (Princeton N.J., 1989), also in German: *Kultureller Umbruch* (Frankfurt/New York, 1989); for a good resumé of the German debate see MARTIN und SYLVIA GREIFFENHAGEN, *Ein schwieriges Vaterland. Zur politischen Kultur im vereinigten Deutschland* (Munich, 1993), p. 156.

²² See e.g. JEAN STOETZEL, *Les Valeurs du Temps Présent: Une Enquête* (Paris, 1983); SHEENA ASHFORD and NOEL TIMMS, *What Europe Thinks. A Study of Western European Values* (Aldershot, 1992).

“value system” in different populations. The standards of desirability and/or of “oughtness” are not so much at variance or even contested, but the *preferential ordering* among these standards is²³ (and strongly depends upon the statistical operations). The conclusions can be drawn from the empirical results. To be sure, one may notice some substantial changes in the importance of the tested scales, and in this respect it makes sense to speak of a “change in value priorities”. Very profound changes have been measured for the period 1963-1972 caused by the impact of the international student movement. Or should one say that this movement was the gist of a deeper transformation, the consequence of the long-lasting rise in the standard of living during the 1950s and 1960s, as Inglehart would argue? Despite the inconclusive results in terms of interpretation, there seems to be an interesting trend with regard to the clustering of different attitudes: whereas one can measure high correlations for ‘traditional values’ (e.g. religiosity, work ethics, authoritarianism, traditional sex roles), the correlations are much lower or even inexistent for ‘modern’ values (e.g. postmaterialism, self-reliance, political participation, modern sex roles). The negative correlations of modern attitudes to traditional attitudes are stronger than the positive correlations among the modern attitudes. One may conclude *that modern attitudes draw their consistency more from their opposition to traditional attitudes than from a common vision of the future.*²⁴

But what are the consequences to be drawn from such studies with regard to the subject of ‘democracy versus values’? The answer will essentially depend on the position of the interpreter towards the term ‘value’. If one accepts the utilitaristic definition given above (sect. 2), then all these attitudes are indeed values. The substantial importance given by many politicians to opinion polls suggests that they would adhere to this definition. A test of this *Vox populi - vox Dei* argument could be the growing opportunism among younger German managers when it comes to e.g. tax evasion or obtaining subventions surreptitiously.²⁵ Is the growth of such opportunism a ‘value’ to be taken into consideration by democratic politicians? As the issue of capital punishment e.g. shows, there is a substantial difference in this respect between Europe and the US, although opinion polls in Europe also show occasional majorities for it. In Europe

²³ Even Inglehart speaks about “value priorities ... changing” (*The Silent Revolution*), p. 21.

²⁴ See HEINER MEULEMANN, ‘Religion und Wertwandel in Empirischen Untersuchungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland’, *Religion und Gesellschaftlicher Wandel, Loccum Protokolle* 8/1984, p. 112. Similar results have been found by FRANZ-XAVER KAUFMANN, WALTER KERBER and PAUL MICHAEL ZULEHNER, *Ethos und Religion bei Führungskräften* (Munich, 1986), pp. 91, 267.

²⁵ See KAUFMANN et. al., *ibid.* pp. 48, 104.

the inviolability of life is considered a *cultural* value whose validity cannot depend upon contemporary popular majorities.

At this point, we have to consider the issues of ideology and of social movement. Ideologies like liberalism and anarchism, conservatism and fascism, socialism and communism²⁶ emerged as post-traditional social movements and as systems of thought with strong and apparently contrasting value orientations. It is important to see that *the emergence of post-traditional cultural values is dependent upon their promotion by social movements at the onset*. Social movements do not emerge by the simple clustering of interests (as associations do), but by *moral* indignation, and by protest, as the movements of the sixties as well as the ecological movement have shown in recent times.²⁷ Social movements use morals to develop and to promote new values. To be sure not all movements succeed, and this is the way in which the existing cultural compound and public opinion select from among the proposed ideas, if, that is, they are not repressed by violence.

Social movements differ widely in the scope of their protest, in the complexity of their claims, and in the degree of sophistication of their arguments. Ideological movements exhibit a broad scope and an elaborated 'vision of the world' which tries to link theory and practice. Some ideologies do not leave room for other approaches to how to understand the world or even aspects of it. Thus they become necessarily polemical against other ideologies and tend to contest the value orientations of them. Where such ideologies clash one can speak indeed about *value conflicts*. It seems, however, that such fundamental differences in values are decreasing as democratic procedures and other mediating structures become generally accepted.²⁸ Thus social movements in pluralist societies do not claim totally opposing views but normally concentrate on a limited set of political issues.

The assumption that cultural values have their unequivocal equivalent at the level of attitudes deserves a deeper scrutiny. This is plausible under the conditions of a tightly-knitted collective consciousness, in the same way as it is present under rather static social conditions typical of traditional societies. The stage of the 'big ideologies' (or meta-narratives in the sense of

²⁶ The pairing concerns the moderate and the radicalized version of classical families of thought. It is a favorite game in ideological battles to suggest the radicalized form in order to blame the moderate form too.

²⁷ See e.g. BARRINGTON MOORE, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains N.Y., 1978). For a more analytic approach see KAI-UWE HELLMANN, *Systemtheorie und Neue Soziale Bewegungen* (Opladen, 1996).

²⁸ See PETER L. BERGER (ed.), *The Limits of Social Cohesion. Conflict and Mediation in Pluralist Societies* (Boulder Col., 1998).

J.F. Lyotard) seems in this perspective a transitory stage in which the remembrance of the overarching 'conscience collective' of traditional society was still vivid. But *under the pressures of modernization one has to expect a growing contingency between cultural values and individual attitudes*. This was already suggested by the empirical evidence of the higher contingency of 'modern' attitudes as compared to traditional attitudes. However, one needs stronger arguments from sociological theory.

4.2. *Modernization and Individualization*

There are many strands of sociological theory. The subsequent argument draws upon a historical sociology as traced by classic authorities such as Georg Simmel, Max Weber or Norbert Elias. They all emphasize the pressures upon the development of a more rational and more self-controlled attitude in modern men stemming from historical developments. Especially valid seems to me the argumentation of Simmel who on the one hand shows how the spreading of a money economy draws a distance between people and things and therefore furthers the development of more abstract representations.²⁹ He also emphasizes, on the other hand, the individualization of people as a consequence of the structural-functional differentiation of society and the growing mobility of subjects: whereas under traditional conditions people normally are members of one social group alone and therefore intimately linked to its common culture, modern man combines a plurality of affiliations often with different normative orientations. As men and women experience the conflicts of norms and interests of the different groups they belong to, they become more aware of their subjective identity.³⁰

Simultaneous to individualization is the growing division of labour or – to use a more analytic term in the tradition of Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann – the functional differentiation of society. Whereas in the ranked society of pre-modern times the basic structures of society followed the differences of status of various positions (clergy, nobility, free men, serfs), these differences lost importance during the processes of modernization; new limits and differences emerged, especially between church (religion) and state (politics) as well as between business (economy) and households (family). This disentanglement of functional realms has been performed by

²⁹ GEORG SIMMEL, *Philosophie des Geldes* (Munich and Leipzig 5.A.), p. 551.

³⁰ GEORG SIMMEL, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, 3.A. (Munich and Leipzig, 1923), p. 313 (The relevant chapter on the web of group affiliations is translated: GEORG SIMMEL, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations* (Glencoe Ill., 1955).

institutional differentiation – i.e. by the formation of specified legal norms and corresponding cultural representations. Thus, the modern economic system emerged not only as a consequence of generalized private property and of the spread of a monetarized exchange economy, it also needed the cultural legitimation of market and price theory as developed first by Adam Smith, Jean Baptiste Say and David Ricardo and its promotion by the liberal movement. The autonomy of the political system emerged only insofar as it became separated from religious influence (secularization), and made independent of family connections (ban on nepotism) and of economic influences (ban on corruption).

With modernization, additional 'functional systems' have emerged: e.g. science, education, medicine, social security, the mass media, or the military complex. With the exception of the family, the other functional systems operate by characteristic *organizations* with specified norms, patterns of communication and *legitimizing ideas*: truth in the case of science, human development in the case of education, health in the case of medicine, protection against the basic risks of life in the case of social security, public information in the case of the mass media, or external security in the case of the military. The wide and unquestioned public acceptance of these highly expensive services makes it evident that there is a wide national and international consensus about their *value*, and this value is *symbolized by these legitimizing ideas*. To be sure, these basic value ideas are not identical to the operating goals or programs of the organizations within a specified functional system, but their public acceptance rests on the *assumption* that there is a substantial link between their programme and their legitimizing value.³¹

To sum up: from a sociological point of view *modernization may be understood as the disentanglement of cultural values and personal motives or attitudes through the emergence of a complex organizational structure*. Values develop a specific affinity to differentiated forms of organizations and both cluster to form functional systems which are generally accepted in modern societies. Individuals are linked to these systems by organizational rules, as members or clients of particular organizations. They typically belong to a multiplicity of organizations, but typically to only one organization in one functional system. From the point of view of the organization their membership remains contingent, although it may be of vital importance to the individual. But the fate of individuals and of organizations has only a contingent overlapping.

³¹ Contentions which undermine this link are therefore suppressed. There is e.g. no public acknowledgement that hospitals are probably the places with the highest infection risk in modern societies.

There is no longer a social 'whole' to which the individual belongs, as was the case in traditional societies. Instead he or she accumulates a multiplicity of memberships and roles either at the same time or in subsequent biographical phases, which are often badly co-ordinated and make conflicting claims upon the individual. Thus role conflicts become an ubiquitous fact of life, and it is up to the individual person to develop 'responsibility' in order to co-ordinate his or her different accountabilities.³² This is the basic *structural* aspect of what is actually discussed under the headlines of 'individualization' or 'atomization'. In particular, the waning of the breadwinner-housekeeper model of marriage has led to a generalizing of this experience which *seems* to be a new condition. As a matter of fact, the structural process of individualization goes along with the emergence of multiple affiliations following the abolishment of fixed settlements and the establishment of personal rights for everybody. The *cultural* process of individualization had its origins in the Middle Ages and had its heyday in the eighteenth century. Hence it preceded structural individualization and made it acceptable.

There was strong resistances against the individualistic programme of the Enlightenment throughout the nineteenth century and until World War II in Europe. And even in its aftermath individualization became acceptable only with the concomitant of welfare state developments. The contemporary opposition to a revival of market liberalism goes together with a continuing drive towards individualization in the private sphere. There remains an ambivalence concerning both individualism and values which will not be explored further here.³³ In the remaining part of this paper we can only relate the topics to the issue of democracy.

4.3. *Democracy between 'Attitudes' and 'Values'*

One may call the ambiguity of the term 'value' a paradox. In political discourse 'values' are said to represent the self-evident part of our normative commitments. There is a widespread opinion, at least in Germany, that we need "a new debate about basic values" in order to overcome the present-day crisis of political decision-making.³⁴ The problem is

³² See FRANZ-XAVER KAUFMANN, *Der Ruf nach Verantwortung. Risiko und Ethik in einer Unüberschaubaren Welt* (Freiburg i.Br., 1992), p. 66.

³³ For an important reappraisal of the debate see HANS JOAS, *Die Entstehung der Werte* (Frankfurt a.M., 1997).

³⁴ A first "Grundwertedebatte" took place in the 1970s and emphasized the 'basic values' of liberty or freedom ('*Freiheit*'), justice or equality ('*Gleichheit*', '*Gerechtigkeit*'), and 'Solidarity'.

thus defined as a problem of 'solidarity', i.e. as a problem of social and political cohesion.

Similar, albeit differently expressed arguments, are to be found in the communitarian debate in the United States. In both contexts there is a complaint about the noxious spread of individualism and privatism which erodes the basis of democracy. This is another paradox since democracy has always been praised for its capacity to integrate the individual wills of the many into the general will of the law.

There is, however, a characteristic difference between the American and the German definition of the situation. The political culture of the United States is imbued by an *atomistic* conception of liberty and of society coined by the contractual theorists of the eighteenth century. The individual is conceived here as being part of the 'natural state' before entering a social order.³⁵ The concept of value as individual attitude or interest is characteristic of this state of mind. There is, so to speak, nothing above the individual judgment, and the emergence of elements of a social order remains provisional upon the insight of common interests. There is indeed no argument for loyalty towards an order which operates against one's own interests, provided that interests are not defined in a shortsighted way. Thus, the communitarian claim is less about substantial 'values' than about the strengthening of social ties which should ease the processes of consensus building.

The German debate, by contrast, sees consensus building less as a democratic process than as an intellectual inquiry into the "right order". And the criteria by which the justness of such an order should be measured are 'values' or 'basic values'! Thus non-partisans may be blamed for not having the "right values" or even "no values but only interests". The whole political sphere thus becomes imbued by moralism.

The sociological perspective presented here conforms with neither of these two positions. The growing complexity and interdependence of social structures invalidates the atomistic position as well as the moralistic.

There are two main arguments against the atomistic position. First, the

Note the affinity to the classic French slogan "*Liberté-Égalité-Fraternité*". The debate disappeared with little political impact although leading politicians had participated in it. See GÜNTER GORSCHENEK, *Grundwerte in Staat und Gesellschaft* (Munich, 1977); and there especially the conclusions of the present president of the German Episcopal Conference, Karl Lehmann, "*daß die Verwendung der Grundwerte-Kategorie auch im Licht eines solchen geschichtlichen Rückblicks erhebliche Unschärfen und Unklarheiten enthält*" (p. 161).

³⁵ See the brilliant inquiry by CHARLES TAYLOR, 'Philosophy and the Human Sciences', *Philosophical Papers 2*, Cambridge 1985, esp. part II.

assumption of a pre-social individual represses the fact that human beings are unable to live from nature alone but are dependent upon culture in a phylogenetic as well as in an ontogenetic sense. The conditions of collective living are therefore not a matter of aggregated individual interests but the precondition of any formation of individual interests. Without a social context individuals would be unable to ascertain any object of interest. Thus the atomistic position starts from invalid anthropological assumptions. Secondly, historical conditions have changed since the formulation of the atomistic position. Whereas in the situation of the 'New Frontier' it made sense to see men as living in a constant battle and exchange with nature, the situation of 'Megalopolis' puts people and their organizations in a highly interdependent context in which the atomistic pursuit of individual interests yields often contra-intuitive results. The long chains of action characteristic of modern conditions of life often transcend the perspective of individual actors. These complex conditions are, however, themselves the outcome of longstanding historical processes of institution-building which arise not out of individual intentions and actions but from the collusion of cultural ideas and structural innovations.³⁶

But the recourse to moral values also falls short of contemporary challenges. Although there is some evidence that the normative commitments of the younger European generations are weakening in terms of traditional 'morals', especially with regard to spontaneous loyalty to legal rules and the norms regulating sexuality, this does not indicate a waning of moral consciousness in general. Morality is now less oriented by 'blind' obedience toward established norms; it presupposes instead the capacity of the individual to decide among *conflicting* norms and 'values'. There is a growing role-distance towards existing commitments which are not rejected but *conditioned* – i.e., their acceptance depends upon an act of *self-commitment*. Whereas traditional ties and commitments are weakening, there seems to be a growing awareness of self-responsibility for the meaning of one's own life. *Self-realization* – or, more analytically: self-referentiality – becomes, so to say, the core value for orientation under the pressures of conflicting claims.³⁷ In this situation, the appeal to specific values (e.g. to "solidarity") falls short of producing a new commitment; it instead amplifies the value conflicts in which individuals are already entangled.

In modern societies the apparent "decay of values" at the level of

³⁶ A good account of this perspective on modernization is given by GEORGE W. THOMAS et al., *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual* (Newbury Park Cal., 1987).

³⁷ The possibility of such self-referentiality is, however, bound to cultural and intersubjective conditions. See the illuminating analysis by Joas (FN 33), esp. pp. 240.

individual attitudes is compensated for by the institutionalization of rules and procedures by which comparable effects are achieved at the level of behavior. The differentiation of morality and legality (Kant) is the expression of this modern shift in normative consciousness. Legal as well as professional rules supersede traditional norms in all areas of public concern. For the private realm, on the other hand, public regulation is increasingly repudiated. There remains, however, an open question: to what extent is privacy of public concern too? E.g. the decision to have and to rear children is generally considered as being private, but, as demographic consequences and human capital considerations show, it is becoming a growing problem for European societies.

The present-day problems of orientation in Western democracies are not due to a decay of values but rather to an *excess of values*. There are so many institutionalized options, and these interact often in rather confusing ways, that it becomes more and more difficult to find out what the best way to solve a problem really is. This is true not only at the level of individual but also at that of collective decisions. This presents substantial challenges for democratic practice as well as for democratic theory.

4.4. *After Value: The Challenges of Complexity*

The progress achieved by the modern transformation of societies consists essentially in institution-building. This is not only true for economic institutions, such as the monetary system or the different types of markets, but also for political institutions and for the various service systems which have emerged “between the market and the state”.³⁸ The success of this institution-building consists among other things in the establishment of long chains of action which enable efficient solutions to problems never thought of before. Compare, e.g., the capabilities of a hospital in the middle of the nineteenth century and at the end of the twentieth century!

Democracy presupposes the capacity of decision-makers to reach good

³⁸ The so-called welfare state essentially consists of various service systems (e.g. social security, health, education) whose products are deemed to be “meritorious”: i.e. their provision corresponds not only to private needs but also to public interests. The never-ending political debate about their regulation is not only an issue of distributive interests but stems from their “mixed” character of being a public and private utility as well as from the specific conditions of efficiency characteristic of personal services. Neither juridical nor price regulations seem on their own to be appropriate devices for steering the systems. Professionalized expertise and reliability as well as corporatistic bargaining systems seem to be indispensable complements. See FRANZ-XAVER KAUFMANN (ed.), *The Public Sector: Challenge for Coordination and Learning* (Berlin-New York, 1991).

decisions by public deliberation and an efficient procedure. "It is the democratic institutions that link the structures and procedures of participation with the structures and procedures of governance".³⁹ Political cultures of various nations differ in relation to the extent of direct popular influence they allow for, but everywhere there are restrictions and privileges in relation to representative government in modern democracies. There was always an awareness of the difficulty of settling complex problems by popular vote. The growing complexity of government, as manifested by the multiplication of ministries, special agencies, and committees, has been a somewhat successful attempt to cope with the growing complexity of its tasks. Moreover, the organizational differentiation of politics has produced differentiated environments in the form of policy communities – of experts, lobbyists, interest groups, etc. – which operate at a certain distance from general public opinion, but develop in their longstanding interaction some kind of specialized expertise which under normal conditions promotes decisions of higher quality than those reached by pure common sense.⁴⁰

Problems emerge first where interests are concerned which are not represented in the respective policy communities. In many instances they receive consideration in the later stages of the decisional process when other ministries or members of the parliament intervene. This is still within the normal functioning of the democratic process. Problems beyond democratic routine emerge, however, where the effects of different policies overlap and where causalities are far from evident. The most prominent example is that of the budget deficits caused by the accumulation of expensive policies. But there are more subtle interactions – e.g. between educational policies and the quality of the labour force, or between industrial policies and the natural environment. It is much easier to establish a new policy than to modify existing policies, for these have lasting side-effects often unknown to the decision makers. Insofar as some policies establish institutions of their own (as in the case of most special agencies, e.g. in social security) they often produce long-term commitments which cannot be arbitrarily changed by subsequent constituencies.

Another implicit assumption of democracy is the sovereignty of government. This means primarily independence from foreign influence.

³⁹ HANS F. ZACHER, 'Democracy: Common Questions', *Proceedings of the Workshop on Democracy* 10, p. 124.

⁴⁰ For differences between strong and weak states in their relationship to policy communities see MICHAEL M. ATKINSON and WILLIAM D. COLEMAN, 'Strong States and Weak States. Sectoral Policy Networks in Advanced Capitalist Economies', *British Journal of Political Science* 19 (1989), pp. 47-67.

In the emerging context of globalization, however, this influence no longer has the character of political power – it is economic and operates *indirectly*, e.g. upon the tax base of an economy. It is quite difficult to cope with such problems as the leverage of political measures remains restricted to only some elements of a long chain of rather contingent connections. Growing interdependence now concerns not only the policies of the same state (and the reactions of those concerned with them) but also the policies and reactions of foreign actors.

In the case of European integration, national states try among other things to mitigate the influence of e.g. international financial markets on their currencies by pooling their resources into a common currency. This, however, leads to other forms of mutual long-term dependency and even to an explicit loss of sovereignty. Thus democratic decision-making is not only hampered by the complexities of the problems to be dealt with but is also structurally inhibited by the competences of supranational bodies beyond democratic control.

The intricacies of these new forms of multi-level policy-making as well as the complexities of inter-institutional politics are the main sources of a loss of orientation in politics and public dismay. The wretched public image of parties and political actors in some countries may be attributed to various factors, but whatever the case the challenges sketched above cannot be coped with by an appeal to values, nor by occasional consensus building. One needs new procedures which enable decisions of higher complexity, or one has to try once again to disentangle the domains of competence in order to keep the issues manageable.⁴¹

⁴¹ For a basic statement see DAVID HELZ, *Democracy and the Global Order. From Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge, 1995); FRITZ W. SCHARPF, *Games Real Actors Play. Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research* (Boulder Col., 1997).

LIST OF LITERATURE

- ASHFORD, SHEENA and TIMMS, NOEL (1992): *What Europe Thinks. A Study of Western European Values* (Aldershot).
- ATKINSON, MICHAEL M. and COLEMAN, WILLIAM D. (1989): 'Strong States and Weak States. Sectoral Policy Networks in Advanced Capitalist Economies', *British Journal of Political Science* 19, pp. 47-67.
- BERGER, PETER L. (ed.) (1998): *The Limits of Social Cohesion. Conflict and Mediation in Pluralist Societies* (Boulder Col).
- BÖCKENFÖRDE, ERNST-WOLFGANG (1978): *Der Staat als sittlicher Staat* (Berlin).
- DYSON, KENNETH (1980): *The State Tradition in Western Europe* (Oxford).
- ETZIONI, AMITAI (1993): *The Spirit of Community* (New York).
- GANS, GERALD F. (1990): *Value and Justification. The Foundations of Liberal Theory* (Cambridge).
- GEBHARDT, JÜRGEN (1989): 'Die Werte. Zum Ursprung eines Schlüsselbegriffs der politisch-sozialen Sprache der Gegenwart in der deutschen Philosophie des späten 19. Jahrhunderts', Rupert Hofmann u.a. (Hrsg.), *Anodos. Festschrift für Helmut Kuhn* (Weinheim), pp. 35-54.
- HELD, DAVID (1995): *Democracy and the Global Order. From Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge).
- INGLEHART, RONALD (1977): *The Silent Revolution. Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton N.J.).
- INGLEHART, RONALD (1989): *Cultural Change* (Princeton N.J.).
- JOAS, HANS (1997): *Die Entstehung der Werte* (Frankfurt a.M.).
- KAUFMANN, FRANZ-XAVER (ed.) (1991): *The Public Sector - Challenge for Coordination and Learning* (Berlin-New York).
- KAUFMANN, FRANZ-XAVER (1992): *Der Ruf nach Verantwortung. Risiko und Ethik in einer unüberschaubaren Welt* (Freiburg i.Br.).
- KAUFMANN, FRANZ-XAVER (1997): 'Religion and Modernity in Europe', *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* (JITE), Vol. 153/1, pp. 80-96.
- KOSELLEK, REINHART (1973): *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt a.M.).
- RUDOLPH, WOLFGANG (1959): *Die amerikanische 'Cultural Anthropology' und das Wertproblem* (Berlin).
- SCHARPF, FRITZ W. (1997): *Games Real Actors Play. Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research* (Boulder Col.).
- STOETZEL, JEAN (1983): *Les valeurs du temps Présent: Une Enquête* (Paris).
- TAYLOR, CHARLES (1985): *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge).
- THOMAS, GEORGE W. et al. (1987): *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual* (Newbury Park Cal.).