

The Polish Peasant in Europe and America

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Now there are two fundamental practical problems which have constituted the center of attention of reflective social practice in all times. These are (1) the problem of the dependence of the individual upon social organization and culture, and (2) the problem of the dependence of social organization and culture upon the individual. Practically, the first problem is expressed in the question, How shall we produce with the help of the existing social organization and culture the desirable mental and moral characteristics in the individuals constituting the social group? And the second problem means in practice, How shall we produce, with the help of the existing mental and moral characteristics of the individual members of the group, the desirable type of social organization and culture?¹

If social theory is to become the basis of social technique and to solve these problems really, it is evident that it must include both kinds of data involved in them namely, the objective cultural elements of social life and the subjective characteristics of the members of the social group and that the two kinds of data must be taken as correlated. For these data we shall use now and in the future the terms "social values" (or simply "values") and "attitudes."

By a social value we understand any datum having an empirical content accessible to the members of some social group and a meaning with regard to which it is or may be an object

of activity. Thus, a foodstuff, an instrument, a coin, a piece of poetry, a university, a myth, a scientific theory, are social values. Each of them has a content that is sensual in the case of the foodstuff, the instrument, the coin; partly sensual, partly imaginary in the piece of poetry, whose content is constituted, not only by the written or spoken words, but also by the images which they evoke, and in the case of the university, whose content is the whole complex of men, buildings, material accessories, and images representing its activity; or, finally, only imaginary in the case of a mythical personality or a scientific theory. The meaning of these values becomes explicit when we take them in connection with human actions. The meaning of the foodstuff is its reference to its eventual consumption; that of an instrument, its reference to the work for which it is designed; that of a coin, the possibilities of buying and selling or the pleasures of spending which it involves; that of the piece of poetry, the sentimental and intellectual reactions which it arouses; that of the university, the social activities which it performs; that of the mythical personality, the cult of which it is the object and the actions of which it is supposed to be the author; that of the scientific theory, the possibilities of control of experience by idea or action that it permits. The social value is thus opposed to the natural thing, which has a content but, as a part of nature, has no meaning for human activity, is

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treated as "valueless"; when the natural thing assumes a meaning, it becomes thereby a social value. And naturally a social value may have many meanings, for it may refer to many different kinds of activity.

By attitude we understand a process of individual consciousness which determines real or possible activity of the individual in the social world. Thus, hunger that compels the consumption of the foodstuff; the workman's decision to use the tool; the tendency of the spendthrift to spend the coin; the poet's feelings and ideas expressed in the poem and the reader's sympathy and admiration; the needs which the institution tries to satisfy and the response it provokes; the fear and devotion manifested in the cult of the divinity; the interest in creating, understanding, or applying a scientific theory and the ways of thinking implied in it all these are attitudes. The attitude is thus the individual counterpart of the social value; activity, in whatever form, is the bond between them. By its reference to activity and thereby to individual consciousness the value is distinguished from the natural thing. By its reference to activity and thereby to the social world the attitude is distinguished from the psychical state. In the examples quoted above we were obliged to use with reference to ideas and volitions words that have become terms of individual psychology by being abstracted from the objective social reality to which they apply, but originally they were designed to express attitudes, not psychological processes. A psychological process is an attitude treated as an object in itself, isolated by a reflective act of attention, and taken first of all in connection with other states of the same individual. An attitude is a psychological process treated as primarily manifested in its reference to the social world and taken first of all in connection with some social value. Individual psychology may later re-establish the connection between the psychological process and the objective reality which has been severed by reflection; it may study psychological processes as conditioned by the facts going on in the objective world. In the same way social theory may later connect various attitudes of an individual and determine his social character. But it is the original (usually unconsciously

occupied) standpoints which determine at once the subsequent methods of these two sciences. The psychological process remains always fundamentally a *state of somebody*; the attitude remains always fundamentally an attitude *toward something*.

Taking this fundamental distinction of standpoint into account, we may continue to use for different classes of attitudes the same terms which individual psychology has used for psychological processes, since these terms constitute the common property of all reflection about conscious life. The exact meaning of all these terms from the standpoint of social theory must be established during the process of investigation, so that every term shall be defined in view of its application and its methodological validity tested in actual use. It would be therefore impractical to attempt to establish in advance the whole terminology of attitudes.

But when we say that the data of social theory are attitudes and values, this is not yet a sufficient determination of the object of this science, for the field thus defined would embrace the whole of human culture and include the object-matter of philology and economics, theory of art, theory of science, etc. A more exact definition is therefore necessary in order to distinguish social theory from these sciences, established long ago and having their own methods and their own aims.

This limitation of the field of social theory arises quite naturally from the necessity of choosing between attitudes or values as fundamental data that is, as data whose characters will serve as a basis for scientific generalization. There are numerous values corresponding to every attitude, and numerous attitudes corresponding to every value; if, therefore, we compare different actions with regard to the attitudes manifested in them and form, for example, the general concept of the attitude of solidarity, this means that we have neglected the whole variety of values which are produced by these actions and which may be political or economical, religious or scientific, etc. If, on the contrary, we compare the values produced by different actions and form, for example, the general concepts of economic or religious values, this means that we have neglected the

whole variety of attitudes which are manifested in these actions. Scientific generalization must always base itself upon such characters of its data as can be considered essential to its purposes, and the essential characters of human actions are completely different when we treat them from the stand-point of attitudes and when we are interested in them as values. There is therefore no possibility of giving to attitudes and values the same importance in a methodical scientific investigation; either attitudes must be subordinated to values or the contrary. ...

And thus social theory is again confronted by a scientifically absurd question. Assuming that individual activity in itself is the cause of social effects, it must then ask: "Why does a certain action produce this particular effect at this particular moment in this particular society?" The answer to this question would demand a complete explanation of the whole status of the given society at the given moment, and thus force us to investigate the entire past of the universe.

The fundamental methodological principle of both social psychology and sociology the principle without which they can never reach scientific explanation is therefore the following one:

The cause of a social or individual phenomenon is never another social or individual phenomenon alone, but always a combination of a social and an individual phenomenon.

Or, in more exact terms:

The cause of a value or of an attitude is never an attitude or a value alone, but always a combination of an attitude and a value.²

It is only by the application of this principle that we can remove the difficulties with which social theory and social practice have struggled. If we wish to explain the appearance of a new attitude whether in one individual or in a whole group we know that this attitude appeared as a consequence of the influence of a social value upon the individual or the group, but we know also that this influence itself would have been impossible unless there had been some preexisting attitude, some wish, emotional habit, or intellectual tendency, to which this value has in some way appealed, favoring it, contradicting it, giving it a new direction, or stabilizing its hesitating expres-

sions. Our problem is therefore to find both the value and the pre-existing attitude upon which it has acted and get in their combination the necessary and sufficient cause of the new attitude. We shall not be forced then to ask: "Why did this value provoke in this case such a reaction?" because the answer will be included in the fact in the pre-existing attitude to which this value appealed. Our fact will bear its explanation in itself, just as the physical fact of the movement of an elastic body *B* when struck by another elastic moving body *A* bears its explanation in itself. We may, if we wish, ask for a more detailed explanation, not only of the appearance of the new attitude, but also for certain specific characters of this attitude, in the same way as we may ask for an explanation, not only of the movement of the body *B* in general, but also of the rapidity and direction of this movement; but the problem always remains limited, and the explanation is within the fact, in the character of the pre-existing attitude and of the influencing value, or in the masses of the bodies *A* and *B* and the rapidity and direction of their movements previous to their meeting. We can indeed pass from the given fact to the new one ask, for example, "How did it happen that this attitude to which the value appealed was there?" or, "How did it happen that the body *A* moved toward *B* until they met?" But this question again will find its limited and definite answer if we search in the same way for the cause of the pre-existing attitude in some other attitude and value, or of the movement in some other movement. ...

The situation is the set of values and attitudes with which the individual or the group has to deal in a process of activity and with regard to which this activity is planned and its results appreciated. Every concrete activity is the solution of a situation. The situation involves three kinds of data: (1) The objective conditions under which the individual or society has to act, that is, the totality of values economic, social, religious, intellectual, etc. which at the given moment affect directly or indirectly the conscious status of the individual or the group. (2) The pre-existing attitudes of the individual or the group which at the given moment have an actual influence upon his

behavior. (3) The definition of the situation, that is, the more or less clear conception of the conditions and consciousness of the attitudes. And the definition of the situation is a necessary preliminary to any act of the will, for in given conditions and with a given set of attitudes an indefinite plurality of actions is possible, and one definite action can appear only if these conditions are selected, interpreted, and combined in a determined way and if a certain systematization of these attitudes is reached, so that one of them becomes predominant and subordinates the others. It happens, indeed, that a certain value imposes itself immediately and unreflectively and leads at once to action, or that an attitude as soon as it appears excludes the others and expresses itself unhesitatingly in an active process. In these cases, whose most radical examples are found in reflex and instinctive actions, the definition is already given to the individual by external conditions or by his own tendencies. But usually there is a process of reflection, after which either a ready social definition is applied or a new personal definition worked out. ...

The social system which develops on this basis naturally tends to reconcile, by modifying them, the two originally contradictory principles – the traditional absorption of the individual by the group and the new self-assertion of the individual against or independently of the group. The method which, after various trials proves the most efficient in fulfilling this difficult task is the method of conscious cooperation. Closed social groups are freely formed for the common pursuit of definite positive interests which each individual can more efficiently satisfy in this way than if he worked alone. These organized groups are scattered all over the country in various peasant communities, but know about one another through the press. The further task of social organization is to bring groups with similar or supplementary purposes together for common pursuit, just as individuals are brought together in each particular group.

The more extensive and coherent this new social system becomes, the more frequent, varied and important are its contacts with the social and political institutions created by other classes and in which the peasants until recently

had not actively participated (except, of course, those individuals who became members of other classes and ceased to belong to the peasant class). The peasant begins consciously to cooperate in those activities by which national unity is maintained and national culture developed. This fact has a particular importance for Poland where for a whole century national life had to be preserved by voluntary cooperation, not only without the help of the state but even against the state, and where at this moment the same method of voluntary cooperation is being used in reconstructing a national state system. The significance of such a historical experiment for sociology is evident, for it contributes more than anything to the solution of the most essential problem of modern times – how to pass from the type of national organization in which public services are exacted and public order enforced by coercion to a different type, in which not only a small minority, but the majority which is now culturally passive will voluntarily contribute to social order and cultural progress.

Elsewhere we have outlined the standpoint that a nomothetic social science is possible only if all social becoming is viewed as the product of a continual interaction of individual consciousness and objective social reality. In this connection the human personality is both a continually producing factor and a continually produced result of social evolution, and this double relation expresses itself in every elementary social fact; there can be for social science no change of social reality which is not the common effect of pre-existing social values and individual attitudes acting upon them, no change of individual consciousness which is not the common effect of pre-existing individual attitudes and social values acting upon them. When viewed as a factor of social evolution the human personality is a ground of the causal explanation of social happenings; when viewed as a product of social evolution it is causally explicable by social happenings. In the first case individual attitudes toward pre-existing social values serve to explain the appearance of new social values; in the second case social values acting upon pre-existing individual attitudes serve to explain the appearance of new individual attitudes.

NOTES

- 1 Of course a concrete practical task may include both problems, as when we attempt, by appealing to the existing attitudes, to establish educational institutions which will be so organised as to produce or generalize certain desirable attitudes.
- 2 It may be objected that we have neglected to criticize the conception according to which the cause of social phenomenon is to be sought, not in an individual, but exclusively in another

social phenomenon (Durkheim). But a criticism of this conception is implied in the previous discussion of the data of social theory. As these data are both values and attitudes, a fact must include both, and a succession of values alone cannot constitute a fact. Of course much depends also on what we call a "social" phenomenon. An attitude may be treated as a social phenomenon as opposed to the "state of consciousness" of individual psychology; but it is individual, even if common to all members of a group, when we oppose it to a value.