

HUMAN VALUATIONS AND MOTIVES

The prediction of human behavior must be based on knowledge of both the situation in which the behavior occurs and the nature of the individuals involved. If social situations were constant or were repeated in identical form, it would be possible to predict for any given individual on an actuarial basis. But this is not the case, and the crucial questions of modern society require an understanding of behavior in new and different situations. In order to predict behavior in changing contexts we must know a great deal about the relatively permanent forces in the individual -- his capacities and skills, his knowledge, his motivations, his basic attitudes and his valuations.

Substantial progress has been made in the study of capacities, skills and knowledge, but science has relatively neglected the more important factors of motives and valuations -- the basic attitudes which determine an individual's choices.

Objective:

To construct adequate measures of human motives and valuations; to understand the psychological, cultural and social forces which determine these basic attitudes; and to survey for the total population and its component parts the distribution and intensity of basic attitudes which are important for national policy and social well-being.

The effective functioning of a democratic form of society is based on the assumption that the institutions and national policies of that society reflect the true desires of the people. This assumption has always been a tenuous one. Bold individuals often undertake to describe and interpret the character and ideology of the people, but their efforts are necessarily based

on limited information and are subject to the inevitable difficulties of personal bias. Extensive attempts have been made to gauge public opinion by means of quantitative surveys, but in this area the effort has generally been restricted to superficial and topical opinions. No one is willing to claim that this type of public opinion constitutes a reliable guide. It has been frequently noted that a single event or announcement can shift public opinion to an extent that indicates that it is indeed superficial and topical.

To get at the basic and fundamental features determining the attitudes of the American people is an undertaking of much greater scope and much greater promise. Intensive work with individuals would be necessary in order to determine the concepts most useful for description and measurement. In this phase of the work it would be necessary to enlist the cooperative efforts of anthropologists, psychiatrists, philosophers and psychologists, since each of these disciplines represents a different but supplementary approach to the same basic problem. Translation of these findings into a form which made it possible to survey representative samples and segments of the population would require a tremendous amount of ingenuity and effort, although many of the basic techniques are now in various stages of development. Repeated surveys would indicate which of the measures are getting at the relatively permanent and pervasive motives and valuations and which ones are merely tapping the superficial and fluctuating opinions. Analysis of sequential measurements would also bring to light significant trends and long-term changes and by relating these changes to social events and developments, it would be possible to work out a scientific theory of the dynamics of basic attitudes. Possibilities for the experimental manipulation of factors determining attitudes become immediately apparent.

Is the Significance of the Program Area Recognized?

With the exception of a preliminary project at the Laboratory of Social Relations at Harvard University and a discussion at the Social Science Conference of RAND, there is no explicit recognition of the possibilities of an objective scientific attack on this problem. On the other hand, no philosopher, social scientist, or person concerned with national welfare has ever overlooked the necessity for a better understanding of the basic goals and values of our society. This is sometimes termed the "American way of life", the "democratic ideology" or the "western philosophy of life" but however it is named, it is a basic ingredient in any thoughtful consideration of the directions of the development of our society and the limitations and potentialities for social change. The problem has often recently been expressed as a conflict between democratic and authoritarian philosophies or as the dilemma of East and West.¹

Present Progress:

Although there is increasing concern with the necessity for a clearer picture of the American character, there has been very little work directed toward this objective. Two or three anthropologists and philosophers have written thoughtfully about the problem but few have seen the possibilities of a factual approach.²

In the sphere of public opinion measurement there has been tremendous advance in methodology of sampling, interviewing, and study design, so that many of the techniques necessary for the study are available. None of this

1. Northrop, F.S.C., Ed., Ideological differences and world order: Studies in the philosophy and science of the world's culture. New Haven, 1949.

2. Mead, Margaret, And keep your powder dry.
Gorer, Geoffrey,
Northrop, F.S.C.,
Lynd, Robert, Middletown.

work, however, has been focused on values and motives of the more basic and pervasive sort, and the task of devising adequate measures for such variables lies ahead.

Limitations on Further Progress:

The basic factor which has probably prevented the undertaking of this program is the compartmentalization of scholarly effort. Social and political philosophers are keenly aware of the need; anthropologists write descriptions of the basic mores of relatively small primitive societies; psychiatrists probe the deeper motivations of individuals in therapeutic work; and opinion polls measure accurately the attitude of representative groups of citizens on current political and social issues. But the needs and the methods have not come into the optimal conjunction which would provide an attack of the sort described.

Two specific limitations are further apparent: (1) the program is one which is large in scope and which can not effectively be attacked in a piecemeal manner. No agency has the facilities to undertake the long-range research on the necessary scale; (2) there is probably a wariness on the part of scientists to undertake a study of values. Traditionally fact and value have been clearly distinguished, with the realm of fact assigned as the proper realm of science, and with the realm of value assigned to the moral philosopher and the practical politician, preacher and reformer. Nothing in this proposal contradicts the current assumptions that the choices among alternate values can not be decided by scientific means. It is proposed only that the basis of choices by individuals be described and studied scientifically in the same way as any other aspect of human behavior is recorded and analyzed. The prescription for science of value questions has possibly led to a confusion

resulting in overlooking the possibilities of an objective study of people's values.

Support from other Sources:

The necessary scope and financial cost of such research takes it out of the realm of possible support by a university. Government support is unlikely to be forthcoming for a project which is so controversial and novel, so that the principal remaining possibility is that of foundation support. There is reason to believe that foundations other than Ford are interested in any feasible approach to this significant problem, but no large scale work has been undertaken to date.

Method:

A project of this sort requires the integrated coordination of individuals in many lines of work and might best be undertaken by establishing a research center in one of the larger university communities where the resources of research personnel would be adequate. Portions of the work could very well be carried out in other places providing there was integration and coordination through the central planning unit.

Time Dimension:

The best estimate is that it would require 3 or 4 years to develop and pre-test the necessary measures of basic motives and values. The survey work with these instruments would then be a continuing function on a smaller scale.

Donald G. Marquis
April 26, 1949