

## A Cognitive Approach to Values

MARIA MICELLI AND  
CRISTIANO CASTELFRANCHI

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Value is among the most fuzzy concepts of the social sciences. It seems to play the role of a *passé-partout* in the explanation of a number of phenomena, either intrapsychic or interactional or macrosocial. Values are supposed to affect important choices and pursuits of an individual, interpersonal attraction and social exchanges, norms and standards of behavior. As a *passé-partout* replaces many different keys, so the concept of value seems to substitute for different, and more precise, concepts. One might be tempted to declare that it causes confusion, and to propose to do without it. However, we do not think this solution desirable. As we will try to show, once some preliminary work of conceptual clarification has removed some confusions and ambiguities, there is indeed a use for the concept of value.

We believe that a cognitive approach to values is particularly needed. In fact, before analyzing the role of values in social life, or within different personality structures, it seems necessary to examine what is—i.e., which type of mental object is—a “value”, how it is represented in an individual's mind, and what are its relationships with other mental objects such as goals and evaluations.

To these ends, we will try to briefly analyze the most common readings and uses of *value* in the social sciences, showing its close (and, because of this closeness, often confused) relationships with other concepts, such as *valence*, *goal*, *need*, *standard*, and *norm*. Then a definition of value will be proposed, in terms of a particular kind of *evaluation* with a specific and distinctive role, both cognitive and social. The cognitive function will be the object of special attention, since, in our view, it has been particularly neglected. It will be related to some features of values, such as their generality and generative power.

## VALUE AND RELATED CONCEPTS

Value, especially in its verbal form, is often used as a synonym of *evaluation*, or of *to evaluate*. (See for instance Aschenbrenner, 1971; see also Williams, 1964.) We will deal with this central view of value later, because in many ways it requires a preliminary comparison with the other meanings.

*Value and valence*

One of the most common uses of value is in terms of valence, that is, the (degree of) desirability/undesirability of a certain object for an individual. The value of something is in fact defined as "the property of being desirable and hence preferable when a choice is possible", while a negative value is "the property of a thing of being undesirable and hence of being avoided . . ." (Dalla Volta, 1961, pp. 459-460). A valence is defined with almost the same words: "The property of an incentive of being either desirable, and hence preferred and asked for (*positive valence*), or undesirable, and hence avoided and rejected (*negative valence*)" (Dalla Volta, 1961, p. 459). In a word, according to this view a value is anything good or bad, or anything of interest to an individual (Pepper, 1958; Perry, 1954).

*Value and goal (desire, need)*

In other instances value appears redundant with respect to *goal*. As Kohler (1938) observes, a value is whatever is of interest for an individual, whatever an individual strives and looks for. In other words, if something is a goal of the individual, it acquires eo ipso a value for that individual. Some author (see Pepper, 1958) proposes typologies of values — conative (desire, liking), achievement (success vs. frustration), and affective (pleasure vs. pain or unpleasantness) — that consist of general categories of human goals. Or, at least, values seem to identify certain kinds of goals, general and long-term (see for instance Hollander, 1967; Rokeach, 1974). More recently (von Cranach, Kalbermatten, Indermuhle & Gugler, 1982), within the domain of Goal-directed Action Theory, a value is still defined as a general, abstract, "stable", and not necessarily conscious goal.

Since the notion of goal itself is often far from being clearly specified, value cannot expect a better fate: sometimes it resembles *desire*, more often *need*. Think for instance of the famous typology of values proposed by Maslow (1959).

*Value and standard*

We turn now to more sociological and anthropological readings of value. In these domains (social) values often stand for "shared cultural standards

according to which the relevance — moral, aesthetic, or cognitive — of the objects of attitudes, desires, and needs can be compared and judged. There is the belief among those who share a set of such standards that they are valid and should be employed in valuing an object . . ." (Becker, 1968, p. 744; see also Williams, 1951/1960). Also Parsons (1951) holds that "an element of a shared symbolic system which serves as a criterion or standard for selection among the alternatives of orientation which are intrinsically open in a situation may be called a value" (p. 12).

*Value and norm*

The boundaries between standards (or criteria) and norms are often not clearly fixed. Williams' (1964) previous definition of values in terms of standards explicitly stresses the "normativeness" of the latter ("should be employed"). Moreover, standards and norms are often used interchangeably (see again Williams, 1964). So values are often identified with both standards and norms indifferently.

The sole difference between values and norms (or standards) seems to be in terms of the generality/specificity dimension. Values are indeed defined as "broad, fundamental norms, which are generally shared by the members of a society or subgroup and which serve to integrate as well as to guide and channel the organized activities of the members, in part by giving rise to complexes of derivative norms regulating functionally important areas of life" (Becker, 1968, p. 744). A similar perspective is taken by Williams (1964): "Values are standards of desirability that are more nearly independent of specific situations. The same value may be a point of reference for a great many specific norms" (p. 284). Also Rokeach (1974) observes that, unlike norms, values transcend specific situations. As Riecken and Homans (1954) put it, values would differ from norms in that, unlike norms, they can hardly be fulfilled: "A *norm* is a person's idea of what behavior ought to be in given circumstances, and norms can often be realized. A *value* is a person's idea of what is desirable, what he or others ought to want, not necessarily what he actually wants (Kluckhohn, 1951). Values are hardly ever fully attainable" (p. 788).

*Value and belief*

Values are sometimes identified with certain kinds of assumptions (either concepts or beliefs). The core of such definitions (often coexisting with one or more of the previous ones) is that values are *conceptions of the desirable* (Williams, 1964; Kluckhohn, 1951; English and English, 1959; Krech, Crutchfield & Ballachey, 1968; Cooper and McGaugh, 1963; Rokeach, 1974), where the "desirable is often kept distinct from the "desired". In other words, the

normative component again plays its role: values are concerned with what *should* be desired, not with what is desired tout court.

#### *Value and attitude*

Finally, values have been identified with, or strictly related to, attitudes. These are among the most vague and extensible concepts in social psychology, since they seem to consist of beliefs as well as motives, goals and emotions (see for instance Newcomb's (1964) definition of attitude: "... the individual's organization of psychological processes, as inferred from his behavior, with respect to some aspect of the world which he distinguishes from other aspects" (p. 40)). Being so, attitudes are likely to include also values among their constituents. Anyway, in some instances value and attitude are defined interdependently: "A value is the objective counterpart of the attitude" (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927, p. 22). In such cases, a value is "objective" because it stands for any social object, or, to be more precise, "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" (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927, p. 21), which is another nice example of a vacuous definition.

#### WHAT IS A VALUE?

What, then, is a value? Does it deserve any right of citizenship either in the cognitive or in the social domain? Or would it be better to replace it by other, more precise, concepts? As already mentioned, we hold that values are mental and social objects endowed with precise requirements. So, values can, and should, be assigned clear conceptual boundaries. We identify value with a special type of evaluation. Thus, since an evaluation is a special kind of assumption, by and large we share the view of values in terms of beliefs, ideas, etc. But let us try to clarify, first of all, what we mean by evaluation, and then specify the relationship between evaluation and value.

#### *Evaluations*

In our view, evaluations are pieces of knowledge with a special relationship with goals: an evaluation of an entity X (be it an object, an action or event, an institution, an organism, a person) consists of an assumption of E (the "Evaluator") about X's power (means, properties, capabilities, skills) to reach a certain goal G (Castelfranchi, Miceli & Parisi, 1980). Let us say, for instance, that X is a pair of scissors and E gets information — from direct experience or someone else's communication — about its power with regard to the goal of cutting a piece of cloth: in so doing, E is in fact evaluating the scissors with

regard to that goal. A formal representation of an evaluation might be, as suggested in Miceli and Castelfranchi (1986):

- (1) POTEEST (X<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>1</sub>)  
WANT P<sub>1</sub>

where, going back to our example, X<sub>1</sub> will be the scissors, and P<sub>1</sub> the fact of cutting a piece of cloth; WANT indicates that P<sub>1</sub> is a goal in somebody's (E's or someone else's) mind; POTEEST indicates the relationship between X<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>1</sub>. It is a causal relationship, in which "causal" has a very broad meaning, implying any of the following descriptions of the possible relationships between X<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>1</sub>: X<sub>1</sub> may "produce", "favor", "allow", "be good for", "fit", etc., P<sub>1</sub>. Such a "causal" relationship, however, has a special restriction on its second argument: P<sub>1</sub> is not only a possible state (or event) of the world — it is a state that somebody wants to be realized. In other words, POTEEST could be decomposed into a general CAUSE plus a WANT predicate.

The term POTEEST could be replaced by other, more current, ones, such as CAN (or ALLOW, or BE GOOD FOR, or whatever). The reason for preferring such an obsolete term is simply that our predicate is intended to be very general and abstract, in order to cover *any* causal relationship (with the sole restriction that it implies a WANT). CAN, as well as other terms of common usage, might in fact convey more specific meanings.

The close relationship between evaluations and goals is stressed in what can be called a rule of "goal generation".

- (2) IF (POTEEST (X<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>1</sub>)) THEN (WANT X<sub>1</sub>)

According to this rule, if there is a POTEEST relationship between two arguments (and a WANT on the second argument), there will be also a WANT on the *first* argument. In other words, if I have a certain goal, and I assume that a certain X is a means for achieving it, I will also have the goal of acquiring (possessing, using, etc.) that means. If these scissors POTEEST cut a piece of cloth, and I WANT to cut it, then I also WANT to have (possess, use) the scissors.

In Miceli and Castelfranchi (1986) a distinction is proposed between explicit and implicit evaluations. An explicit evaluation directly expresses E's knowledge about X<sub>1</sub>'s power with regard to P<sub>1</sub>. For example, "these scissors are good for this piece of cloth" is an explicit evaluation. On the contrary, implicit evaluations convey information about X's properties, features, qualities from which one (either E or others) can *infer* X<sub>1</sub>'s power with regard to P<sub>1</sub>. For example, "these scissors are sharp" is an implicit evaluation.

A second distinction introduced in Miceli and Castelfranchi (1986) is between "performance evaluations" and "prototypical evaluations". A performance

evaluation stems from (E's or others') experience of X<sub>1</sub>'s power with regard to P<sub>1</sub>: in other words, E uses (or sees others using, or gets others' information about the performance of) these scissors, thus assuming whether (and in what degree) they are good for cutting this piece of cloth.

However, prototypical evaluations are much more common and, in some sense, 'intelligent'. They indeed imply E's ability to make generalizations and predictions, and, first of all, to put forward possible explanations of an event. Actually, E is likely to try to explain *why* X<sub>1</sub> POTE<sub>ST</sub> P<sub>1</sub>, which means looking for what enables X<sub>1</sub> to perform in a certain way. So E will look for the specific properties and qualities of our scissors (their sharpness, heaviness, etc.) that make their performance possible. In addition, E will try to generalize from X<sub>1</sub> to the class of "scissors" in general. At the end of such a process, E will be able to say that, in order to cut this (kind of) cloth, "scissors" must be sharp, heavy, etc. (and in what degree). We call *standards* of X<sub>1</sub> relative to P<sub>1</sub> those pieces of knowledge about the powers (characteristics, properties) that should be possessed by the class of objects X<sub>1</sub> belongs to in order to achieve P<sub>1</sub>: sharpness, then, will be a standard for scissors. As one can see, standards are very helpful in evaluation. More precisely, they radically modify evaluative activity. When standards are available, evaluation can do without either "trial and error" or analogical procedures. In fact, E will not have to empirically test X<sub>1</sub> with respect to P<sub>1</sub>. Nor will E have to see whether X<sub>1</sub>, more or less vaguely, resembles a certain X<sub>16</sub> which used to be "good" for P<sub>1</sub>. On the contrary, E will do nothing but compare the specific X<sub>1</sub> with its class or prototype, to see whether X<sub>1</sub> possesses the required properties described in the standard. Such a comparison is what we call a prototypical evaluation.

Implicit evaluations (e.g., "these scissors are sharp") and standards (e.g., "sharpness enables scissors to cut well") have much in common. The fundamental difference between the two is that standards make explicit and explain what is contained in implicit evaluations. While the latter simply mention X<sub>1</sub>'s qualities, properties, etc. from which one *could infer* X<sub>1</sub>'s power with regard to P<sub>1</sub>, standards, first of all, give the inference ("being sharp allows these scissors to cut this piece of cloth"), and, second, generalize from the specific entity under examination to a class of entities of the same "kind" (sharpness allows scissors in general...).

#### *Evaluations and emotions*

As one can see, such a "cold" approach to evaluation is very far from other views, which stress the emotional components of evaluative activity (see for instance Mandler, 1982). We cannot discuss in detail here our position with regard to the general topic of evaluation; but since "evaluation" is so strictly tied to "value", and even confused with it (these terms are often used

interchangeably), it may be useful to summarize our points relevant to the relationship between emotion and evaluation.

*Evaluations do not necessarily imply emotions.* It is true that many evaluations imply some emotional component. For instance, if I believe that a certain food (book, person) is good, I am likely to feel attracted to it. But this does not mean that *any* judgment about the goodness/badness of X should imply an emotion, or an attraction/rejection. If I believe that John is a good runner, this does not necessarily imply that I feel attracted to him.

*Do emotions imply evaluations?* The other side of the coin, that *any* emotion should imply an evaluation, is a different matter, since it leaves room for non-emotional evaluations. Anyway, as far as the evaluative component of emotion is concerned, we believe that different levels of analysis and explanation are confused in this perspective. An individual can feel attraction/rejection for X for two different "reasons": either *because* he/she has evaluated X as good/bad with regard to a certain goal, or just "because" he/she feels attraction/rejection for X. Now, what does it mean to say, in the latter case, that "feeling attraction/rejection for X" *implies* an evaluation of X? Nothing but identifying attraction/rejection with evaluation. No doubt, emotional appraisal and evaluation have much in common — namely, their function. What is indeed the use of evaluation but one of favoring the acquisition of good means for one's goals, and of avoiding bad (useless, dangerous) means? The same holds true with emotions: let us think, for instance, of a flight reaction engendered by the immediate alarm a gazelle feels when it gets sight of a lion. So, emotional appraisal can be thought of as the evolutionary forerunner of evaluation: the more complex (either in terms of number of goals and situations to handle, or in terms of different interrelations among these goals and contexts) and changeable the world becomes, the less sufficient simple emotions prove to be for warranting adaptive responses. Of course, a proper analysis of emotions would show that they are much less "simple" than suggested in the sketch above. Think for instance of the role of social factors in determining or "modelling" emotions. However, for our purposes it is sufficient to stress the *relative* simplicity of emotions compared with evaluations: in particular, the latter seem less "rigid" and global than emotions. Evaluations are more flexible and analytical judgments because they enable us to distinguish between similar goals and means, to find the right means for new goals, etc. Anyway, to be the evolutionary "heir" to emotion does not mean in any way to maintain the same "nature". On the contrary, one is entitled to think that the same function has developed *different* means, at different levels of complexity.

*Evaluations and subjectivity.* Not surprisingly, then, evaluation has been viewed as an affective, subjective and holistic phenomenon (if compared, for instance,

with description; see again Mandler, 1982). A classical view of most social psychology makes evaluations overlap with such concepts as "reaction" or "interpretation" (see for instance Jones and Nisbett, 1971). While perception and description are typically considered as correct "apprehensions", evaluation would be a personal, biased reaction to some object or event. This view of evaluation is due to at least three factors: the kinship between evaluation and emotion, which, as we have just pointed out, engendered the erroneous identification of attraction/rejection with evaluation; the confusion between value and evaluation (that will be discussed later); and the intuition that evaluations "are somehow contributed by the 'self', while perceptions are driven by the evidence of the environment" (Mandler, 1982, p. 11). In one sense, this intuition is right: the "self" is more present in evaluation than in description because, while a description of X includes (at least, at first sight) only characteristics of X, an evaluation implies some individual other than X itself, i.e., the Evaluator, because it implies the goal with regard to which E believes X is good (bad). However, this does not mean that an evaluation is subjective, in the sense of idiosyncratic, emotional, and irrational (and, moreover, it does not imply that it should be treated as such by a social agent; for a discussion of this aspect see Sabini and Silver, 1980). It is worth observing that our notion of goal has little to do with that of wish, and with the domain of wishful thinking (see Pears, 1984). A goal is just a mental representation that regulates behavior. In view of such a represented state, a given X can be evaluated as more or less good (bad). Moreover, evaluations do not necessarily occur solely in view of the Evaluator's goals. I can evaluate this pair of scissors relative to John's goals, or to a hypothetical goal ("if one wanted to cut a piece of cloth, these scissors would be a good means for that goal"). Anyway, the objectivity and rationality of an evaluation is not touched by the possible "personal" taint of the goal in question: given a goal G<sub>1</sub>, however strange (say, to eat locusts), the judgement (say, "going to the desert POTEEST G<sub>1</sub>") can be rational.

We do not believe the dimension rational/irrational to be particularly insightful from a psychological point of view. However, since it recurs quite often when evaluations (and especially values, as we shall see) are mentioned, it might be useful to dwell a little more on the subject of rationality, even though very synthetically and roughly. In our view, an evaluation is typically rational, in the sense that its "structure" — the means-ends relationship — is *typically rational*, if compared with others, such as emotional appraisals or absolute judgments, in which conclusions are not derivable from premises. Of course, this does not imply that evaluations are always right. Evaluations can be wrong, as well as right. Assuming a relationship between a certain means and a certain goal does not imply that this relation must be real. If I believe that my pen is a means for making a hole in a wall, I evaluate my pen with regard to that goal, even though what I believe turns out to be wrong. But a mistake does not necessarily entail irrationality. To be irrational, a wrong assumption should be

either not grounded on some (more or less sufficient) evidence, or affected by some personal interest (see again Pears, 1984, for a discussion on this subject). Let us see the latter case, which is particularly relevant here. If, for some reason, I *want to believe* that my pen is a means for making a hole in a wall *and* I believe it *because of that goal* (or, better, wish) — and not, say, because of some failure to acquire the right information on the matter — then my evaluation will be irrational. Now, what must be stressed is that, if there is a goal implied in the production of the irrational evaluation, it is the goal of *wanting to believe* the evaluation in question, and not the goal internal to the evaluation itself (i.e., making holes in a wall). That is the same as saying that evaluations are *not* intrinsically irrational. They can be irrational to the same extent as any other kind of assumption, insofar as assumptions can be affected by wishful thinking.

*Double meaning of "positive" and "negative".* Also the concept of positive and negative evaluation suffers from the "affective" view of evaluation. Since, generally speaking, congruity between a given experience of the world and one's own schemas is pleasant while discrepancy produces a certain degree of arousal and uneasiness, a *positive* evaluation of X is thought to result from the congruity between the "expected" characteristics of X and those actually found in it. The reverse (discrepancy) would produce a negative evaluation (Mandler, 1982). Here, the evaluation of X relative to its use for a given goal is confused with a sort of meta-evaluation about congruity. Let us suppose that I think that people are bad, and my experience happens to prove my sad belief: two different evaluative levels are implied here, the former relative to "people" — where I express a *negative* evaluation; the latter relative to the congruity between my expectations and the facts — where I express a positive evaluation.

#### *Evaluations and values*

In everyday language, there are two fundamental uses of *value*, one which is "relative", i.e., the value of something for *something else*; the other which is "absolute". Both present close, but different, relationships with the concept of evaluation. The value of *something for something else* is indeed nothing but the result of an evaluation: if something is thought (not) to be a means for something else, it acquires a (positive or negative) value. In other instances (see Rokeach, 1974), value stands directly for a synonym of *means* — an object (or action) useful for achieving a goal, fulfilling a need, solving a problem.

But value is also used "absolutely". Honesty, for instance, does not *have* a value for "something else", it *is* a value. What does this mean?

In our view (Miceli and Castelfranchi, 1986), a value in its absolute meaning can be represented as:

(3) POTEEST (X<sub>1</sub>, \_\_\_\_\_).

In other words, we hold that a value is an evaluation which leaves its second argument unspecified. When we say that honesty is a value of ours, we are saying that honesty is "good" (see Parisi, 1975), i.e., it has the power to achieve "something", but we are not specifying that "something". We are not saying *what* honesty is good for.<sup>1</sup>

Dewey (1939/1966) identified two meanings of *in value* which seem to be implied by the distinction between evaluation in the strictest sense and value: "... in ordinary speech the words 'valuing' and 'valuation' are verbally employed to designate both *prizing*, in the sense of holding precious, dear (and various other nearly equivalent activities, like honoring, regarding highly), and *appraising* in the sense of *putting* a value upon, *assigning* value to. This is an activity of rating, an act that involves comparison, as is explicit, for example, in appraisals in money terms of goods and services. The double meaning is significant because there is implicit in it one of the basic issues regarding valuation. (...) Valuation as *appraisal* (...) is primarily concerned with a relational property of objects so that an intellectual aspect is uppermost of the same general sort that is found in '*estimate*' as distinguished from the personal-emotional word '*esteem*'." (p. 5) Here, a distinction is proposed between the objective, rational component of some kinds of "valuations" and the subjective, irrational, emotional color of others. Now, if a value is, as we state, a special sort of implicit evaluation, where the goal for which X1 is good is left in the mist of potentials, values easily evade the control of objective and rational (in the sense of falsifiable) reasoning. Since the link between means and ends has been broken, nobody can actually prove that X1 is (not) "good" — it is impossible to show that X1 POTEEST achieve... whatever.

Dewey (1939/1966) also brings up the dimension means/ends which we have just referred to. Discussing the view that identifies valuation with "appraisal", he observes: "The objection brought against the view just set forth is that it fails to distinguish between things that are good and right in and of themselves, immediately, intrinsically, and things that are simply good *for* something else. (...) This objection definitely puts before us for consideration the question of the relations to each other of the categories of *means* and *ends*. In terms of the dual meaning of 'valuation' already mentioned, the question of the relation of *prizing* and *appraising* to one another is explicitly raised. For, according to the objection, appraising applies only to *means*, while *prizing* applies to things that are *ends*..." (pp. 24-25). In some sense, we share this distinction. An evaluation is in fact an evaluation of means: E assumes that, given a goal, a certain X is (not) a means for it, i.e., has (not) the power to achieve it. Conversely, a value mentions just the means, without the goal; but what is a means without its goal? A goal. If, according to the rule of goal generation, an evaluation can be translated into something like "X1 is to be pursued because it is good *for* P1", a value becomes "X1 is to be pursued, because it is good".

In the meantime, however, it must be stressed that the distinction means/ends should be thought of as a "psychological" dimension, rather than a logical one. According to our analysis, in fact, the difference between evaluations and values is not a difference between things good *for* something else, on one hand, and things good in themselves, on the other hand. The semantics of *good* always implies "for something". The sole difference between evaluations and values is that values *leave unspecified* the "something" they are good for.<sup>2</sup> So, values *appear* as absolute (with important psychological consequences, as we shall see), by producing a sort of artificial break in the means/ends continuum.

What is an end in a certain proposition may turn out to be a means in another, and vice versa. What is a value for one person may be an evaluation for another (or for the same person in another situation). For a child, for instance, brushing one's teeth can be a value, while it is the object of evaluation for the child's mother or for a dentist. The child may in fact be ignorant of the advantage of such an activity; he (she) simply learns that it is good, that it must be done, etc. The mother (or the dentist), on the other hand, treats the activity as a means for something else, like having healthy teeth. (Of course, the child may also treat brushing his/her teeth as a means for something, say, making mum happy, or avoiding punishment. In such cases, the child is *evaluating* the activity in question. In other words, as already observed, evaluations can be more or less extrinsic, as well as more or less grounded on empirical evidence or logical necessity.)

On the basis of this view of value in terms of a special type of evaluation, let us see how value differs from such concepts as goal, norm, and standard.

#### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VALUE AND RELATED CONCEPTS

##### *Values are not goals*

Perhaps, something in our previous discussion could allow us to identify values with (certain kinds of) goals. We have just stated that values mention means without their goals, and that a means without its goal turns out to be a goal... Actually, there exist a number of terminal goals, i.e., goals that, at least within the mind of an individual, are not represented as means for a higher goal, but as ends "in themselves". What is the difference between such goals and values? For instance, what is the difference between "having children" as a terminal goal and "having children" as a value?

Values are not goals, they are *assumptions* (more precisely, *evaluations*). A value is a judgment, though very general and vague. It says of something that it is good or bad. A goal is a regulatory state in someone's mind. If having children is a goal of mine, I just want to have children (and will try to reach my goal): if having children is a terminal goal of mine, I will have this goal as an end in itself (i.e., I will not want to have children as a means for something else, say, getting

a subsidy from the State). On the contrary, if having children is a value of mine, I will, first of all, *believe* that having children is "good" (even though I may not ask myself "for what", or "for whom"); since this is what I believe, I will *also* be likely to want to have children, but as a *consequence* of my belief.

As already mentioned, values are often defined as general and stable goals. However, either the generality/specificity or the stability/instability dimension do not seem to help distinguish between values and goals. Survival, for instance, can be thought of as a very general and stable end-goal, but it is not a value by itself. It comes to be a value if it is included in some judgment of the sort "survival is good" (or bad, in case of a negative value). There do indeed exist terminal, general and stable goals which have nothing to do with values, or even conflict with them. An individual can come to pursue the goal of, say, being a good cheater as an end in itself (because he/she likes the challenge implied by the threat of being unmasked). This goal may be in conflict with the value of honesty that this person still harbors. On the other hand, some very specific values may happen to exist. For instance, a child may acquire "eating apples" (or "brushing one's teeth") as a value, that is, he/she may believe that eating apples is "good" (even though he/she does not know — or has forgotten — the purpose of such a behavior).

Of course, this does not prevent values from having a very close relationship with goals, especially terminal goals. Actually, it is a necessary relationship, if it is looked at from the direction of values to goals. We have already referred to the rule of goal generation (see p. 173): if something is "good" (or bad), it must be pursued (or avoided). In other words, values, as well as evaluations, offer grounds, or give rise to goals. If I happen to believe that having children is good, I will try to have children (unless some other question arises, for instance conflicting values and goals). The reverse may occur, too. If I happen to want to have children, I may come to think that it is something good, which ought to be done; in other words, I may come to make a value of this goal, in order to, say, justify why it is so important to me. Moreover, I will be likely to think it should be a goal and a value for other people. Actually, this type of perspective is part of an old tradition of thought, starting from Spinoza: We regard as good — and transform into values — those things we like and desire (Ethica, part III, prop. 9). Among Spinoza's modern heirs, see Kohler (1938).

#### *Values are not norms*

If values are not goals, for the same reason they are not norms. Norms are indeed goals with particular constraints (namely, they are goals external to the individual's mind; ideally, they are established for the individual's good; they are socially shared). Like goals, norms regulate behavior, while values are, first of all, assumptions.

According to a classic view (see Riecken and Homans, 1954; Williams, 1964), norms could be distinguished from values in terms of the well-known generality/specificity dimension. Also Ross (1968), who seems likely to propose a distinction in terms of judgments (values) and goals (norms), is unfortunately inclined to trace back this distinction to the same dimension: Values would differ from norms in that the former are general (where "general" means "not implying a definite pattern of behavior"); norms, on the contrary, are specific, saying what an individual should do. In our view, norms can not be distinguished from values in terms of their degree of generality/specificity. "Be honest", "Honour thy father and thy mother" are norms, even though they do not specify the particular conduct one should follow (for this purpose, other more specific sub-norms may come into play).

The notion of norm in terms of behavioral prescription is indeed quite limiting. To prescribe mere behaviors is neither necessary nor useful. In fact, many social and moral norms prescribe states of the world rather than specific actions. This, in our view, answers to a function: a system like a human being is endowed with self-regulatory and choice mechanisms; the environment is equally complex and changeable. It is more useful, then, to prescribe states of the world, which can be realized through different strategies and in different contexts, rather than specific behaviors, which are less flexible and context-free.

While "be honest" is a norm, "to be honest is good" is, in our analysis, a value. One might be tempted to see no sensible distinction between the two, apart from the different ways of expressing them. On the contrary, there is indeed a cognitive difference: While norms are goals, and in particular *prescriptions* (relative either to behavior or to states of the world, including states of mind), values are assumptions, and in particular *types of evaluation*.

However, as in the case of goals in general, norms also present a close relationship with values. Values in fact offer grounds for, or give rise to norms. Hence the "normative" facet of values: If something is good, it *should* be pursued. This should be stressed: It is not simply that something good actually *becomes* a goal (norm); it *must* become a goal of the individual. That is why values are seen as "conceptions of the desirable", as opposed to the actually "desired".

But, if the previous observation is correct, some refinement of the rule of goal generation is required. Until now, in fact, this rule has conveyed no normative meaning. It just says that if something is good (either for something else, in the case of evaluation; or absolutely, in the case of value), it happens to become a goal. In the case of evaluation we had

(2) IF (POTEST (X<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>1</sub>)) THEN (WANT X<sub>1</sub>);

so, in the case of value, the corresponding rule of goal generation would be

(4) IF (POTEST (X<sub>1</sub>, —)) THEN (WANT X<sub>1</sub>)

which, again, shows no normative component.

Now, in order to imply such a component, (2) and (4) might be rewritten respectively as follows:

(5) IF (POTEST (X<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>1</sub>)) THEN (WANT (WANT X<sub>1</sub>))

and

(6) IF (POTEST (X<sub>1</sub>, —)) THEN (WANT (WANT X<sub>1</sub>)).

The double WANT that has been introduced could suggest the idea of a "must": there is the goal to make X<sub>1</sub> become a goal. Of course, how to express a normative component is an interesting and puzzling problem, that we do not claim to solve here. Several predicates might be suggested, including a simple MUST left as a "primitive". However, we do not believe MUST to be a primitive, and, for our purposes, we see the double WANT (ie., the goal of wanting) as an acceptable normative expression.

It is worth observing that we believe (2) and (4) to be necessary, even though not sufficient. In some sense, they stand as a poorer descriptive version of (5) and (6). In fact, it is still true that if something is thought to be good, if (often) happens to become a goal (though not necessarily a pursued one); however, this is a partial view of the phenomenon, because it leaves unspecified the fact that X<sub>1</sub> has become a goal *in virtue of* the superordinated goal to make a goal of X<sub>1</sub>.

A second refinement of the rule of goal generation could be suggested, to stress a difference between (5) and (6), that is, between goal generation by evaluation and goal generation by value. In evaluation, both WANTS are, so to say, conditional: *if* there is P<sub>1</sub>, *then* there is, and there must be, X<sub>1</sub> as a goal. In the case of value, however, the WANTS are no longer conditional, because P<sub>1</sub> is implicit, presupposed, in some sense, taken for granted. The "if" takes on the shade of a "since": *since* there is P<sub>1</sub>, which is obvious, known and shared by everybody, hence not to be mentioned, *then* there is, and there must be, X<sub>1</sub> as a goal. So in order to make explicit such a difference between (5) and (6), one could provide a more analytical version of (5):

(7) IF ((POTEST (X<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>1</sub>)) AND (WANT P<sub>1</sub>)) THEN (WANT (WANT X<sub>1</sub>))

while (6) remains as before:

(6) IF (POTEST (X<sub>1</sub>, —)) THEN (WANT (WANT X<sub>1</sub>)).

(7) makes explicit what is already contained by (5): the fact that P<sub>1</sub> is a goal. This is indeed implied by any POTEST relation: by definition, the second

argument of POTEST must be a goal (see p. 173). But here it turns out to be helpful to make explicit the WANT P<sub>1</sub>, in order to stress that it is subordinated to an IF, and to show that, on the contrary, the dependency on such a condition is impossible in the case of value, because there is no explicit P<sub>1</sub> one could mention.

The difference between (7) and (6) is just one of the possible attempts to come to terms with the greater normativeness of the goals generated by values in comparison with those generated by evaluations.

Actually, values are strongly normative; that is why they are seen as so close to norms. In addition, they seem to be "preferred" to norms, in the sense that one is more likely to follow the indirect strategy of conveying norms via values, rather than directly presenting norms as such. Values are indeed much more acceptable than pure norms, for at least three reasons: first, they do not look like arrogant precepts, they do not say what one should do: they are just evaluations about states of the world; second, they in some sense justify the tacit precepts they contain, that is, they give a reason (however generic, like the "goodness" of something) for following such norms; third, they also involve the conveyor: while the conveyor of a norm says nothing but "Do X" to the receiver, and gives no information about his/her own compliance with the norm, the conveyor of a value, communicating a judgment like "X is good", shows him/herself to share the value (he/she declares he/she believes that X is good); hence, the conveyor of a value shows that he/she also shares the norm implied by that value.

*Values are not standards*

Since standards are often identified with norms, of course values are not standards as well. However, we have distinguished standards from norms (in the sense that we find a conceptual area where standard is not a synonym of norm). In fact, while a norm is a goal, we say (see p. 174) that a standard of X is a piece of knowledge about the powers (characteristics, properties) that X (or, more exactly, the class of objects X belongs to) should possess in order to achieve a goal G. A standard is indeed a piece of information about a particular quality of a prototype useful to achieve a given goal. (By the way, as anybody can see, standards can also give rise to goals and norms—for instance, since sharpness is a standard for scissors, there can be, as does occur, a goal set on scissors: to be sharp, that is, to possess the standard.)

So, standards are quite far from values, too. Standards always imply evaluations in the strictest sense, in that they provide more precise criteria for specifying and assessing the power of X relative to G. Actually, an evaluation which is grounded on a standard is as far from a value as a scientific explanation may be far from a dogma. Nonetheless, a standard (which is a type of evaluation) may also turn into a value. A standard becomes a value as soon as it is no longer specified what the standard is good for, that is, the goal that a given

property of X enables one to achieve. So sharpness would be a value if E believed that sharpness was "good" in a pair of scissors, without any further specification.

#### GENERAL FEATURES OF VALUES AND SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Let us try to sum up the most relevant characteristics of value that come out of our previous discussion.

##### *Values cannot be disproved*

If I do not know *what* a certain X is good for, I can not demonstrate that it is good, or that it is bad. As already stated, the goodness or badness of something, in order to be meaningful, should be translated into the instrumentality of this "something" for something else. Values, taken by themselves, do not provide information about their own instrumentality.

##### *Values are indefinite*

The boundaries of application (use, etc.) of a value are hardly known. Generally, a thing (event, behavior) which is good for something can be bad for something else. Undesired side-effects are indeed quite common. But, again, since a value does not specify which goal(s) it "serves", one can not know *how far* it serves — how far it is good — and in which cases it may come into conflict with other "things" (that is, in which cases it may thwart other goals of the individual).

##### *Values are normative*

If something is "good", it *must* be acquired (possessed, used, pursued, achieved, etc.). If beauty is a value, then one must look for it. This truth matches with the rule of goal generation. The close relationship between values and goals, especially those goals which are raised to norms, has already been pointed out.

##### *Values are terminal*

The goal or norm generated by an evaluation is always instrumental — X becomes a goal *because* it is a means for G. So, if E wants G, he/she will also pursue (look for) X. Conversely, the goal or norm generated by a value is necessarily terminal, an end in itself: G is in fact absent from the beginning. So, once again, there is no (explicit) hypothetical condition (there is no "if") for E's pursuit. Since X is not pursued in view of something else, it is pursued tout court.

#### *Psychological importance of values*

These general features of values suggest some observations. First, an unfalsifiable and indefinite nature is typical of the realm of so-called "irrationality", which is indeed peopled with indescribable, as well as unquestionable entities. Second, the normative and terminal nature of values, if included in an irrational context, will give rise to *dogmas* — absolute and unquestionable assumptions and imperatives. Not surprisingly, an individual's values are often related to his/her relationships with "authority" and "significant others".

From the above one can realize the particular *importance* of values for the individual. Values must be taken into account; the norms they give rise to must be complied with, under pain of serious feelings of guilt.

In the meantime, however, one may not know *how to justify* one's own system of values. To be sure, it is still possible to realize that two or more of these values are conflicting, because one may happen to register the existence of conflicting side effects. For instance, I may know that the value of "professional advancement" implies the side effect of spending a lot of time away from home, while the value of "family supportiveness" implies exactly the opposite side effect: staying at home a lot of time.<sup>9</sup> However the conflict is, first of all, hard to solve, because I do not know what to prefer, since I am unaware of the goals served respectively by the two values, that is, I do not know why it is good to have professional advancement or to be a supportive family member. As is observed by Machlure (1981), "... conflicts between rival values cannot be rationally settled. Instead one must simply choose..." (p. 25). Secondly, the conflict is easier to tolerate, since conflicting side effects do not have the same "dignity" as conflicting goals. Conflicting side effects are just sorts of annoying occurrences: there is no "logical" contradiction to be suppressed, as there would be with conflicting goals (like, say, the goal of exercising power over others (including one's colleagues) — which could be served by the value of professional advancement — and the goal of having warm work relationships — which could be served by the value of "friendship at work").

In fact, people are quite likely to harbor incompatible values, particularly in a complex society such as ours, where goals and values, as well as social environments and "significant" others, multiply. It is not surprising that contradictory behaviors are found to be so common among humans, especially across different contexts, implying different roles, addressees, etc.

In our opinion, this evidence has favored hasty conclusions, namely the view that denies the existence of a need for consonance or coherence. We would like, on the contrary, to give some room to this need, after specifying certain conditions. First of all, what is scarcely enlightening and, in any case, questionable is to talk about "consonance" tout court. As the well-known criticisms of the theory of cognitive dissonance point out, the meaning and explanatory power of the concept of dissonance diminished as it spread out into ever new "territories" (see Aronson, 1978). Dissonance turned in fact into a sort

of empty container for any possible psychological phenomenon. In addition, it should be observed that sometimes (or frequently) an individual is well able to endure high degrees of dissonance. And sometimes dissonance is also found to be functional (see, for instance, Mills, Aronson & Robinson, 1959).

However, it is wrong to conclude from the preceding objections that dissonance does not bother the individual, at least in certain "important" spheres of his/her life. (About the role of dissonance in matters of importance to the self, see for instance Steele & Liu, 1983; Abelson, 1983; Cooper & Fazio, 1984.) And it is precisely these important spheres, the criteria for their importance, and the levels of explicitness of possible cases of dissonance, which should be investigated. Now, values seem to belong to important domains; they also permit us to shed some light on at least some of the possible criteria for assessing "importance", such as the terminal and normative qualities of the goal to be pursued, and on the reasons why certain dissonances could be tolerated, in spite of their severity.

#### THE FUNCTION OF VALUES

While the usefulness of evaluations can hardly be doubted, that of values is not so apparent. As we have already pointed out (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 1986), evaluations are a very precious kind of knowledge. If any piece of knowledge is "power" (being knowledge one of the possible means for achieving one's goals), evaluations manifest this quality to the highest degree and in the most explicit form. While in fact the other kinds of knowledge are, so to say, neutral and static, in that they do not have a direct relationship with an individual's goals, evaluations have precisely this relationship: they fill the gap between knowledge and goals, transforming (by means of inferential processes) the former into means-ends relationships. Evaluations synthesize in the cognitive network what are the means for one's goals, so that the cognitive network ceases to be "neutral" and becomes polarized toward goals, "prepared" for problem solving. Evaluations are, in some sense, traces of problems that have already been solved (by E or others). They are expressed in terms of solutions to problems: if one wants to produce a certain effect, one can succeed by creating a certain cause. We proposed such a predicate as POTEST to represent evaluations. The very advantage of POTEST is that it allows one to keep in one's memory pieces of information about "powers", means, rather than about mere factual relationships (as it would be the case with a simple CAUSE or ALLOW predicate). In addition, by means of the rule of goal generation, it "translates" knowledge into goals — the first argument of POTEST, being a means for a given goal, becomes a goal in its turn.

On the contrary, what is the good, if any, of taking "dogmatic" evaluations as values? They do not provide means for goals, but just goals, with no explicit

reasons but the simple statement of an unproven judgment. Indeed, they are unproven judgments that claim to be taken for granted. In a word, they seem to personify the worst enemy of wise and well-adjusted behavior.

Nonetheless, values seem to serve very important functions, both social and cognitive.

#### *Social function*

Conceivably, values have traditionally been assigned a fundamental social function: to ensure social stability and cohesiveness. As already seen, values are more persuasive than simple norms and prescriptions. In fact they sound like justifications and explanations for the norms they convey: they say that some thing or behavior is "good" — which is why it must be acquired or done. At the same time, values are almost beyond rational discussion: it is hard to demonstrate whether and why a given value is "good" or "bad". Consequently, it is hard to take a rational decision about values — they are more likely to be "instinctively" (and blindly) accepted (or rejected). This is particularly true in the socialization period: introjection of significant figures, including their norms and values, occurs in fact quite early in childhood, when an individual is presumed to have little mastery of critical reasoning. So, if introjected, values and consequent prescriptions have a good chance of surviving and influencing (inducing, regulating) personal and social behavior.

So values fulfill an important social function. However, does this mean that they should be conceived of as fundamentally social objects? First of all, one should examine the possible meanings of *social*, which are many, and seem to suggest various implications. We will try to outline at least some of these meanings, those more relevant to our discussion.

A first, weak meaning of *social* is *socially shared*, or *common* to most (or all) of the individuals of a given society or group. For instance, a number of people — who may not even know of each other's existence — share an interest in, say, a certain football team.

A second meaning of *social* implies people's *awareness of a common interest*. Going back to the previous example, those people discover their common interest. Now they can start to organize themselves in order to jointly (and more easily) satisfy it.

A third, stronger meaning of *social* is: *set by the group for the individual*, who, again, is not necessarily aware of such a demand. For instance, society has a number of different requirements of its members according to their sex; some of these demands are so tacit and implicit (though often peremptory) that the complying individuals cannot imagine they are answering a social demand.

A fourth meaning of *social* implies people's *awareness of the demand by society*, and possibly an agreement with it. It is very likely that such an agreement will also favor people's efforts to make others comply (and agree) with the social demand.

Finally, a fifth meaning of *social* is: *set by the individual for the group*. Here, neither the existence of common interests (as in the first and second cases) nor a social origin or the demand (as in the third and fourth cases) is supposed. Rather, it is the individual who assumes and wants the object in question (be it a goal or a value, or whatever) to be shared by others.

In our view, values may fall into any of these categories of social objects, though by and large they seem to belong to the third and fourth categories, since, as we have already stressed, values can be shown to be a very powerful means for exercising social pressure and control. Anyway, personal values may also exist, which are either just shared by a number of people or (without being shared) are set by the individual for others. It is true that in principle there is no reason to exclude even the possibility of strictly individual values. So values seem to be not "logically", but just empirically and functionally, social.

#### *Cognitive function*

As for the possible cognitive function of values, it might be interesting to take some suggestions from the possible history of their origins (in ontogenetic as well as phylogenetic terms), i.e., from how they could arise in the Evaluator's mind.

*Generalization of evaluations.* We assume that a value arises from a number of evaluations of the same entity (person, physical object, event, etc.) with regard to various different goals. In other words, if a given means  $X_1$  is good (or bad) for a number of different ends, to be pursued in various situations, etc., we assume that it will become a value. From a set of propositions like

- (8) POTEST ( $X_1, P_1$ )
- POTEST ( $X_1, P_2$ )
- POTEST ( $X_1, P_3$ )
- POTEST ( $X_1, P_4$ )
- .....

the Evaluator is likely to generalize:

- (3) POTEST ( $X_1, \text{---}$ )

Of course, generalizations of this kind may derive from personal as well as collective experience. In the latter case, an individual may acquire POTEST ( $X_1, \text{---}$ ) *without* the specific evaluations from which it stems. (This is indeed very common in the socialization period.)

The multifunctionality of  $X_1$  not only justifies, but in some sense invites a generalization. On the one hand, in fact, a generalization can relieve memory of the heavy work of retrieval. If something is useful for many purposes and in

many contexts, it is less expensive to believe that it is "good" tout court and to be pursued in any situation, rather than trying to retrieve the specific piece of knowledge ( $X_1$  POTEST  $K_{27}$ ) that applies to a given context.

On the other hand, saying that generalizations relieve memory of the work of retrieval does not mean that the specific pieces of knowledge are no longer accessible. One does not need to suppose that the value POTEST ( $X_1, \text{---}$ ) must *substitute* for the more specific evaluations of  $X_1$  which gave rise to the value itself. A complete substitution may occur, as it often does, but this is not necessary. The generalization may fulfil the role of a headline, a sort of generic summary of the various "POTESTs". In this case, if necessary, the "list" of specific POTESTs can be examined. This situation, of course, presupposes that the value has not been acquired as a "given" by the individual, but that it has been actually deduced or inferred from the specific POTESTs. In addition, even when the specific evaluations are no longer accessible, the individual may not completely lose the trail of the *class* of goals mentioned by the various evaluations, or at least of a sort of general domain which those goals belonged to. As observed earlier (see note 1, p. 178), the value of "honesty" is not good for *everything*, even when it is not grounded on the specific evaluations from which it could be derived. Honesty is thought of as good for, say "anything which pertains to the general domain of moral matters". So, a trail of the various goals mentioned in the evaluations is still somehow present. Here a process of progressive abstraction is involved, whose levels are very general and hard to express, but not totally indeterminate. (By the way, this is a very interesting problem from a cognitive point of view; in particular, the puzzling problem is how to formally express such a cognitive phenomenon — in other words, what should fill the goal slot in the POTEST proposition?)

Anyway, it is difficult to assess what really happens when an individual is asked to account for a certain value (for instance, what is the good of sincerity?). The fact that E is able to express a number of specific POTESTs in order to "justify" the value does not prove that those POTESTs were already stored in E's memory as both sources of and supports to that value — they might be deduced or inferred *post hoc*, in order to accomplish the task of justification. Moreover, if E happens to know that the terminal goal generated by a value of his/hers is in fact instrumental to other goals, this does not necessarily prove either that the value has been sponged out and replaced by specific evaluations or that the terminal goal ceases to be terminally pursued by E: *knowing* that X is a means for Y does not imply *wanting* X *in view of* Y. For instance, E may know that having children is a means for, say, favoring the stability of a sexual relationship, still he/she wants to have children just because "having children is a good thing to do".

*Open-ended potential.* A second function possibly fulfilled by values has to do with the generative power of generalizations. As already stated, a given X is likely to

become a value when it is the object of several evaluations, that is to say, when it is good for a number of goals. Now, the more an X is multifunctional, the more unlimited its potential. (It may have unexplored destinations, relative to new goals, not yet pursued, or even known, by the evaluator.) Thus, it may be helpful to record that X is "good" tout court, to be pursued in any case, even though at present no destination is foreseen for it.

*Ease of acquisition.* A third cognitive function of values is again connected with socialization and learning. We have just summarized the traditional view according to which introjected values favor social cohesiveness and stability. In the meantime, however, this kind of introjection might bring about an individual benefit, if one assumes that generic and synthetic evaluations such as values can be acquired more easily than single and specific evaluations. For a child it could be easier to learn that X is good, and that X must be achieved (respected, maintained, increased, etc.), than to acquire and to maintain in his/her memory the amount of knowledge pertaining to the specific reasons for the goodness (usefulness) of X. The acquired value would not only reduce the load on the child's memory, but also avoid a difficult task of comprehension. Often, in fact, specific evaluations are not "given", but inferred, through a more or less complex causal chain, from other evaluations, or from simple factual information. (For instance, from a piece of knowledge like "this stool is made of stone" I may infer that "it POTES support a heavy weight".) And the job of inferring them is often far from being easy and immediate.

Our functional view of values resembles that of some utilitarian moral philosophers (Hare, 1981; Baron, 1986), even though a number of important differences between our approach and that of utilitarianism should not be overlooked. Without going into detail, it is sufficient to mention one main difference to which many others are related: the lack of cognitive analysis of the concepts involved in the discussion, namely, goals, norms, and values, that are often confused with each other, while, as already stressed, we aim at keeping them distinct.

Apart from these aspects, however, we find that Hare's and Baron's distinction between normative and prescriptive levels is close to our distinction between evaluations and values. The normative level, in fact, derives moral decisions from long, accurate, and complex cost/benefit calculations, while the prescriptive level implies simple rules, independent of any calculation or reasoning, such as "Honesty is the best policy" or "Murder is a crime" (which resemble values). Moreover, as evaluations give rise to, and in some sense justify, values, so normative theories justify prescriptive ones. To put it in Baron's (1986) words, "A useful way to think about normative models is that they are actually prescriptive models that would be accepted on reflection by a creature who had perfect self-control and infinite time to gather information

and reflect both about the rules to be used and the application of those rules. The normative model then becomes the best justification we have for a given prescriptive rule." (p. 175) In fact, prescriptive theories are those which actually regulate behavior, while normative theories, if considered in any circumstance where a decision should be made, would paralyze the individual, engaging him/her in complex reasoning, calculations, and so on. This is very much like saying that believing and remembering that honesty is "good", and behaving in accordance with this belief, is much easier and effective than trying to evaluate whether honesty is good in that particular instance, for that specific goal. From a social point of view, this is exactly why values are so precious for the maintenance of social cohesion: the individual will not bother himself/herself and others by questioning at any given time whether honesty should be pursued. He/she will believe honesty should be always pursued.

However, this does not imply that the normative level should be completely "unhooked" from the prescriptive one. Of course, one should not think through every little decision, but, at least when some design of a society or a general problem (either of public policy or of private project of one's own life) is in question, a closer relationship between the prescriptive and the normative level, and some feedback from the former to the latter would be desirable. As Hare (1981) points out, good, i.e. socially useful, prescriptions can derive only from a contact with complex cost/benefit calculations. In the same vein, we hold true that the utility of values depends on their relationship with the originating evaluations: knowing or discovering (and remembering) where values come from is indeed precious for designing (or re-designing) a social system, by suppressing, for instance, those values which are not (or are no longer) justified by a real multifunctionality, or by detecting the reasons (i.e., the evaluations) for conflicts between values.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our formal description of values seems to account for the main features and typical phenomena which are commonly attributed to and associated with values.

The unfalsifiable and indefinite nature of value results from a break in the means/ends chain typical of evaluations. On the other hand, value's terminal and normative qualities are the joint effect of the close relationship between values and goals, particularly norms (which, as we said, are a subset of goals). We have stressed that a kinship with goals is also typical of evaluations (through the rule of goal generation). However, while evaluations produce instrumental goals, in that they are represented as means for some ends, values, on the contrary, produce only terminal and absolute goals.

As one can see, this view allows us to account for similarities as well as differences between values and either evaluations or goals. Values denote a

borderline area, which, not surprisingly, has favored the vague definitions and identifications with other concepts that we have examined.

But a borderline mental object is by no means inexplicable or useless. On the contrary, both the social and the cognitive functions we have ascribed to values appear to result from this characteristic: their kinship with absolute imperatives in fact favors the social function; on the other hand, values' cognitive functions are made possible by their being evaluations of a special kind.

Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi

Istituto di Psicologia

Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche

Viale Marx, 15

00137 Rome

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It must be observed, however, that the "absolute" nature of values is indeed not totally absolute. Assuming that honesty is good, without specifying, and probably without knowing (or remembering) exactly *for what*, does not mean assuming that honesty is good for anything. Some sort of "general idea" of the types of goals a value can serve is still present, as we will attempt to outline later (see p. 189).

<sup>2</sup> This view resembles that of utilitarianism in moral philosophy (see Nowell-Smith, 1954; Harré, 1981; Baron, 1986), as we will outline later (see pp. 190-191).

<sup>3</sup> We owe this argument, as well as the example, to an anonymous reviewer.

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