

A Value Judgment on Value Judgments (1941)*

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Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme.

—Rabelais, *Pantagruel*

I

Economics is full of problems which seem to find no rest. They are being turned over again and again and seen now in this light, now in another. Problems of this sort are such which do not admit of any dogmatic answer in one sense or another. Instead, they seem to demand solutions which follow some “reasonable middle course” and which are embroidered by a number of variable qualifications and reserves.

To this group of problems belongs the question of *the scientific legitimacy of judgments of value*. It has so long and so feverishly been discussed that it appears tedious to make any attempt to stir up the discussion again. Recent personal experiences, however, suggest that a fairly general consensus on a dangerously *dogmatic* answer has become crystallized in our academic world, a dogmatism

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which is not far from being a real impediment in our academic activities.¹ To a great number of social scientists it seems to be beyond any possible dispute that every judgment on what ought to be in economic life must be scientifically illegitimate. For them the question appears to be settled once and for all while in our view it is and will remain an extremely delicate and intricate problem.

It seems, therefore, useful to reconsider this methodological problem and to give some idea of the state of mind of those who thoroughly disagree with what appears to be the prevailing attitude today, i.e. the positivist puritanism with regard to value judgments and the reproachful insistence on so-called scientific "Objectivity."² This task is deemed all the more necessary as the dogmatic attitude in question is closely connected with the present unsatisfactory state of social sciences in general, to which more and more fellow economists are growing alive.³ This attitude, moreover, is one of the grave symptoms of the general intellectual and moral-desorientation and of the decadence of "liberalism" from which our civilization is manifestly suffering.⁴ Relativism appears, in fact, to reflect the deliquescence of the "liberal" bourgeois world, the growing spiritual emptiness of our civilization, and the vanishing of absolute values and compelling convictions. If seen in this large perspective, an attempt at restating the

¹ The personal experience to which I allude is particularly the criticism which has been directed by some friends against a report on "International Economic Disintegration" which I prepared as part of a research programme sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. Some critics to whom this report has been sent in mimeographed form have raised a warning finger against my way of calling bad things bad and good things good. In fairness to these critics it must be added that this happened before the outbreak of the war. In the final form of the report, which will shortly be published (by Hodge & Co., London), I have tried to meet these criticisms as far as possible, without bothering, however, about the deeper methodological questions involved.

² The word "positivism" is being used here in its narrower anti-axiological, not in its wider anti-metaphysical meaning. Though the use has become quite common in Anglo-Saxon literature it may lead to regrettable misunderstandings. Therefore, it should be replaced by other terms like "axiological relativism." Cf. Herbert Spiegelberg, *Antirelativismus, Kritik des Relativismus und Skeptizismus der Werte und des Sollens* (Zürich, 1935).

³ See e.g.: E. F. M. Durbin, "Methods of Research—A Plea for Cooperation in the Social Sciences," *Economic Journal* (June 1938).

⁴ This view has been forcefully expressed by President Harry D. Gideonse (Brooklyn College) in his Inaugural Address. October 19, 1939 (printed by the Brooklyn College) with which I find myself in cordial agreement.

problem of value judgments seems tantamount to struggling with the solution of the spiritual crisis of the Western world.

The question of value judgments in social sciences is, unfortunately, also an example of the melancholy tendency of man to swing from one extreme to another without coming to rest at the “reasonable middle course”—an example of the “loi de double frénésie,” as *Henri Bergson* has called it.⁵ There was a time when many economists had assumed the habit of muddling economics naively with hygiene, politics or theology demanding for their personal views the authority and dignity of science, a time when one had really to remind economists of the absurdity to construct a system of economics e.g. from the point of view of the non-smoker. It was against this indiscriminate use of value judgments that men like *Max Weber* raised their voice, but then the reaction went much further until it reached the opposite extreme of stigmatizing as “unscientific” to express any definite views on values, ends and “oughts.” It is probable that not even the leading advocates of axiological relativism are quite happy under this austere régime, but very few seem to know how to answer the seemingly irrefutable argument that the scientific measure of truth cannot be applied to values and ends.

II

The argument of axiological relativism appears so plausible that there will hardly be any economist who, in the course of his intellectual development, has not felt compelled to accept it at least for some time. Therefore, even those who are past this almost inevitable stage cannot fail to have sympathy with the honorable scruples of the relativists. They know that the problem is a complex one, and they also appreciate some of the reasons prompting the positivists.

First of all, it seems impossible to refute the argument that there is something peculiar about value judgments which separates them from other scientific statements. Of these there are three classes which can be ranged according to the degree of stringency appertaining to each of them. The first on the list are the strictly logical and logically cogent conclusions of the type “A cannot be non-A.” Next in order come the statements on facts the truth of which can only be established by empirical ascertainment with all its sources of possible errors. The last group is that of judgments of value. It is not only indisputable that these different kinds of statements have a different logical structure, but also that the degree of stringency is least in the last group. Moreover, it is obvious that it is the last group which passes into the sphere of unscientific statements. So much

⁵ H. Bergson, *Les deux sources de la Morale* (Paris, 1934), 319–320.

is undebatable. The only question is where to draw the line; whether between group two and three as the relativist demands or *within* group three. The latter seems to be the right answer.

Furthermore, if by strict elimination of value judgments the relativists want to free scientific discussion of disputes which cannot be settled by rational arguments and to bridge irreconcilable disharmonies of opinions one is bound largely to agree with this sort of scientific pacifism. The question remains, however, whether this “appeasement” is not bought at a high price without ultimately securing the peace. For either the disagreement concerns highly subjective views on ends and values merely of subordinate importance, whereas there is agreement on ultimate ends and values—then the dispute ought to be capable of being settled with a view to these common valuations. Or the disagreement concerns really ultimate ends and values in which case (a) either party may still have a chance of convincing the other by rational arguments, or (b) any hope of restricting the discussion to a peaceful exchange of views on technicalities may easily prove an illusion, or (c) there may be no point in any discussion at all. The present state of the world certainly suggests the previously forgotten truth that no really fruitful and worthwhile discussion is possible in the absence of a common scale of ultimate values. If this fundamental agreement is lacking scientific intercourse is impossible. If it exists, however, all disputes on ends and values appear to be those on intermediate (not ultimate) ends and values which can be judged by the common measure of the ultimate ones. In other words, if scientific intercourse is possible at all because there is a tacit agreement on the ultimate values, rational discussions and judgments on intermediate values are possible too and, being rational, perfectly legitimate from the strictly scientific point of view.

So much on the pacifist intentions of the Relativists—intentions which, by the way, are based on a rather dubious value judgment on “peace at any price.” Equally polite must be our attitude with regard to the argument that we must not abuse the authority of science for expressing purely political convictions which, if not clearly marked as such, may be smuggled into science. Everybody will whole-heartedly agree with this demand which is nothing else than that for intellectual probity, but it is hard to see what it has to do with the question of the scientific legitimacy of value judgments. Nobody has questioned and ever will question the fact that, truth and honesty being the prime conditions of science, the least cheating, even if it be subconscious, is a deadly sin in this “game.”⁶ If nobody can be called a true scientist who is not most ruthlessly criticizing himself,

⁶ On this important aspect see now: J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens, Versuch einer Bestimmung des Spielelementes der Kultur* (Amsterdam, 1939), 171–191, 327–329.

if, in other words, every scientist *must* be honest and sincere with himself it goes without saying that he must also be so with others. All these are commonplaces on which there is universal agreement precisely because we all feel the value judgments implied by them to be unshakably true.

On this occasion it seems necessary to unravel a confusion which has become very common today, i.e. the indiscriminate use of the term “*ideology*” which, under the influence of Marxist philosophy and its modern version of the “sociology of knowledge,” has assumed a dangerously wide significance. It is a useful and even indispensable term to denote the pseudological character of phrases and conceptions masking behind respectable and high-sounding words much less respectable ends, and therefore a term making us deeply suspicious against pompous declarations covering crude political aims or sectional interests.⁷ If such ideological phrases creep into science—and, unfortunately, they do very frequently—they must be exposed and eliminated with utmost vigour, and it can surely be doubted whether so far we have been vigorous enough in this respect. In this sense, nothing could be more welcome than “pure economics” or “pure law.” It is, however, only another case of the “loi de double frénésie” if this discovery of “ideologies” leads us to the extreme conclusion that all ideas and value concepts are mere ideologies which, being highly subjective and deceptive fancies, must be ousted from science.⁸ Such a conclusion, which would let us end in total scepticism and complete nihilism, seems wholly unwarranted. Everybody, for instance, is familiar with monopolistic ideologies appealing to the “common interest,” “justice” or “patriotism,” and we can hardly do enough to fight them. But that does not mean that “common interest,” “justice” or “patriotism” are ideologies themselves. They are value concepts the essence of which will be approved by all normal men; they contain, therefore, that degree of objectivity which makes them presentable at the court of science. That is exactly an additional reason why we grow so indignant at the sight of “ideologies” sneaking into this court

⁷ In order to show that I tried to do my part in demolishing “ideologies” I may be permitted to refer to my forthcoming book on “International Economic Disintegration” (part III) and to my paper on “International Economics in a Changing World,” *The World Crisis*, ed. the Graduate Institute of International Studies (London, 1938), 275–292.

⁸ As a well-known example of the sweeping conclusion referred to in the text Professor Kelsen’s “pure theory of law” may be mentioned (cf. Hans Kelsen, “The Pure Theory of Law: Its Method and Fundamental Concepts,” *The Law Quarterly Review*, vol. 50 and 51). In a somewhat less rigorous sense, Professor Robbins’ forceful *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London, 1935) may be called a treatise on “pure economics.”

under false pretences. There is another motive of the relativists which, though highly respectable in itself, seems to rest on a misunderstanding, i.e. the fear of the “politicalisation” of science after the example of the totalitarian countries. True science as we understand it was born when the early Ionian philosophers established the principle that science must be autonomous in the sense that in the search for truth the conscience of the scholar is to be the ultimate authority, independent of the heteronomous authority of the worldly or ecclesiastical rulers. *Galilei’s* “*eppur si muove*” will remain for ever one of the noblest expressions of this principle with which science indeed stands or falls. To bow to authorities other than that of truth itself is a disgrace to science; it is the “*trahison des clercs*” of which *Jules Benda* is speaking in his famous book bearing this title, and heaven knows how many today are committing this treason. Heteronomy and science are forever incompatible with each other, and no fine-spun sophistry or thunderous bullying can make them compatible. No iota can be taken away from this evident truth. But here is a snare in which the advocates of scientific heteronomy might hope to catch some inattentive birds: It is obvious that the autonomy of science can never mean that scientific work is a creation “*ex nihilo*” depending on no subjective conditions whatever. “*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*” in this strict sense is, of course, an illusion or even an absurdity which no fairly modern philosophy of science will defend any longer. Every scientist has his personal equation, his perspective determined by place and time, his inner experience, his peculiar milieu, his valuations some of which he is sharing with others while some are more or less his own. He is pursuing his researches as a child of his age and as a member of his community, and all we must ask for is that he is honestly conscious of all these pre-scientific determinants and weighing the degree of subjectivity which they give to his researches.

Now, the advocates of heteronomy might be tempted to claim this “concession” as a proof of their assertion that there can never be such a thing as an autonomous science. On the other hand, the relativist—in his laudable effort to forestall this retreat to pre-Ionian archaism—might become all the more determined in his endeavours to purify science of all pre-scientific determinants and to make social sciences as exact as he believes (probably without justification) natural sciences to be.⁹ Both, however, are wrong, the Heteronomist as well as the Relativist. They are drawing opposite conclusions from a common misconception of the “autonomy” of science: the Heteronomist throwing out the child with the bath-

⁹ “Exactness” in moral sciences, which have to do with man as a moral and intellectual being, is a dubious ideal betraying an inferiority complex towards the natural sciences; it must be bought at the price of emptiness and lack of vital significance.

water, the Relativist bathing no child at all in spite of a vast expense of soap and perfume. The latter course is perhaps a shade better than the former and, at all events, of a different moral calibre, but we still think a middle course would be the best. This middle course consists in recognizing that “Voraussetzungslosigkeit” and autonomy of science are entirely different things so that the absurdity of the former does not disprove either the feasibility or the necessity of the latter, and vice versa.¹⁰ I may, on perfectly scientific grounds, defend e.g. the proposition that a large number of family farms is essential for the health of a society, and in doing so I am, of course, under the influence of certain valuations and pre-scientific determinants; my proposition is certainly not “voraussetzungslos.” It is quite another thing, however, if in one country (Russia) the scientist will lose his chair by defending my proposition while in another like Germany he will likewise suffer for denying it. Then the autonomy of science is lost and therewith its prime condition. If it is a “trahison des clercs” to submit to heteronomous pressure it is hardly less a betrayal of science to interpret its autonomy as a duty to behave as if the scientist had no valuations at all. It is more than likely that the self-castration of science as practised by axiological relativism will create a vacuum which will be filled by the demagogues and dilettanti and sooner or later engender the wild reaction of the “politicalisation” of science.¹¹ Relativism and Heteronomism are not only based on a common misconception of autonomy, they are playing hand in hand like all opposite extremes.

Let us develop a little further what has been said on the “determinants” of science. Relativism, like any other philosophy, is not a bus which can be stopped at any intermediate station. It must be pursued to its ultimate consequences, but these appear logically untenable. Relativism has that in common with the materialistic conception of history that it is a negative statement which “comprises itself,” and that as such a statement it is self-defeating. As it is the obvious objection to the Marxist interpretation of history that, if all philosophies are merely an “ideological superstructure” and therefore only of relative value, Marxist philosophy

¹⁰ Cf. Ludwig von Mises, *Nationalökonomie. Theorie des Handelns und Wirtschaftens* (Geneva, 1940), 745–746.

¹¹ “The masses ... have just reached the point where the ancestors of today’s scientists were standing two generations back. They are convinced that the scientific picture of an arbitrary abstraction from reality is a picture of reality as a whole and that therefore the world is without meaning or value. But nobody likes living in such a world. To satisfy their hunger for meaning and value, they turn to such doctrines as Nationalism, Fascism and revolutionary Communism”: Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London, 1938), 269.

is bound to fall under this same verdict of relativity, so axiological relativism must be judged also by its proper philosophy and gracefully accept the result.¹² Evidently, there is no getting away from the fact that a scientific methodology condemning value judgments, contains itself a value judgment while intolerantly forbidding all others as unscientific.

This is only a striking example of the fact that science in its very foundations rests on value judgments. That men pursue science at all, that the science of economics has been developed as a special branch, that we select worthwhile subjects of research from the endless number of possible ones, that we economists decided to devote ourselves to this science, that we regard truth as an inviolable scientific principle—all this implies judgments of value. We do not discuss them because no sane person is questioning them, and we do not care for the small minority of those suffering from moral insanity, just as medicine starts from the value judgement that life is better than death and health better than sickness without regard to suiciding neurotics or nosophile hysterics. If the Relativist is not satisfied with this let us ask him whether he is seriously prepared to devote his life to discovering the means for impoverishing a nation in the quickest possible way or for improving the much neglected “fine art of murder.”¹³

Science—above all, moral sciences of which economics is a part—is indeed inseparably mixed up with value judgments, and our efforts to eliminate them will only end in absurdity. If we look properly it is not difficult in economics to discover a value judgment lurking behind theories and propositions which give the outward appearance of innocent neutrality.¹⁴ Every time that such a discovery is made many economists seem to be thoroughly shocked, but instead of recognizing the value judgment involved and examining it on its proper merits they seem to hesitate between two courses which are equally dubious. Either

¹² Cf. Johan Akerman, *Das Problem der sozialökonomischen Synthese*, Publications of the New Society of Letters at Lund, no. 21 (Lund, 1938), 57–58.

¹³ In order not to be accused of oversimplifying the problem let us admit that those ultimate “value relations” (H. Rickert) underlying all scientific activities are somewhat different in structure from the value judgments proper. The difference, however, is not such as to deprive our argument of its force.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Akerman, *Das Problem*; G. Myrdal, *Das politische Element in der nationalökonomischen Doktrinbildung* (Berlin, 1932); Harvey W. Peck, *Economic Thought and Its Institutional Background* (New York, 1935). The last-named two books evidently start from the curious assumption that the reader will be shocked to learn that economic doctrines have always been “impure” from the relativist point of view. After what has been said above it would be more surprising if they were not.

they abandon hastily the contaminated proposition or they go out of their way to prove that there is no value judgment involved (or that the proposition can be restated without a value judgment). It has been always obvious, for instance, that all theories working with an optimum concept belong to this class of propositions whose neutrality is spurious. But it has also long since been discovered that terms like “inflation” or “deflation” can hardly be used without an implicit reference to a value judgment about what should be regarded as “normal” in the monetary sphere.¹⁵

A further good illustration is the recent discussion about the scientific legitimacy of interpersonal comparisons of utility. After the concept of marginal utility had been indiscriminately used for proving “scientifically” the advantage of a more equal distribution of incomes or of progressive tax rates it was later discovered that it is an illusion to believe that such a proof is possible without recourse to the value judgments which every interpersonal comparison of utility implies. Individual and interpersonal comparisons of utility are indeed on entirely different levels, and those who reminded us of this irrefutable truth did a great service to our science. The new situation which ensued, however, is highly unsatisfactory. Some reject sternly the whole proposition of “welfare economics” as political and therefore unscientific¹⁶ while others are racking their brains to find some way of reconciling it with the relativist ban on value judgments.¹⁷ It seems, however, a logical impossibility to defend the scientific legitimacy of interpersonal comparisons of utility on the ground set by relativism; in such a dispute one is bound to take sides with the relativists. The only possible way is to refuse to meet relativism on its own grounds. The same applies to all efforts to defend free trade on purely “economic” grounds and, in fact, to all “inherently

¹⁵ It is not difficult to show that all moral and to some extent even natural sciences abound with concepts and terms which, at closer analysis, reveal an axiological and volitional element. We cannot define “law,” “state,” “art,” “big cities,” etc. without thinking at the same time of some preferences, values and wishes. The Austrian philosopher K. Rortz has made the commendable suggestion to call these terms “vital concepts” (“Ueber Vitalbegriffe”). See *An den Quellen unseres Denkens, Studien zur Morphologie der Erkenntnis und Forschung* (Vienna, 1937), 95–103.

¹⁶ That is the position taken by Professor Robbins and probably by most members of the Austrian school.

¹⁷ That is what Professor Hicks tried to do in his interesting article on “The Foundations of Welfare Economics,” *Economic Journal* (December 1939). One has the definite impression that, in spite of his ingenuity, he has been compelled to let in new value judgments at the backdoor. It could hardly be otherwise.

economic” value judgments, i.e. those based on criteria which are taken from economics itself.

III

It seems that the Positivist is being torn between his intellectual honesty and the moral and intellectual difficulties which his position involves. He is uneasily and restlessly shifting on the uncomfortable chair he has chosen. We would have the highest respect for his martyrdom if he would not interfere with our own scientific work and if we did not believe his position to be scientifically untenable. Enough, it is hoped, has been said now to suggest that the whole problem of value judgments has been wrongly stated. The question is not whether we are to have value judgments at all, for to dispense with all of them would lead us to sheer absurdity. The real question, instead, seems to be *what kinds of value judgments are scientifically legitimate and on what grounds*. In other words, the relativist is deceiving himself if he believes himself to be above the normative sphere, and it makes it all the worse if he is not even aware of it. He is in the unsatisfactory position of a man who draws the line somewhere without telling us on what principle. *There can be no dispute about the necessity of drawing a line, but it must be done on the basis of a rational principle, not in a subconscious or arbitrary fashion*. The real task is to find this principle and then draw a new line. By stating the problem in this manner we realize that, like so many debatable questions, the dispute about relativism is capable of being settled on a higher level.

The popular indignation of scientists at value judgments seems to suggest that it were more or less like a matter of the taste in neckties. In the case of neckties our judgments—perhaps very fortunately so—will be highly various, arbitrary and subject to individual fancies.¹⁸ Here the degree of subjectivity in the judgment of value is particularly high, and all the higher the more it is a question of details in colour combinations and designs. But taking all possible value judgments

¹⁸ The example sounds ludicrous but it has also its serious side. In fact, aesthetic values are not mere subjective fancies which we can always dismiss with the adage “de gustibus non est disputandum.” The beautiful is certainly an objective quality of thing though always related to the apprehending subject. The same applies to the “Numinous” which, according to Rudolf Otto’s terminology, denotes the religious value. See R. Otto, *Das Heilige* (Munich, 1917). Cf. A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York, 1926), 285–293; Alexander Rüstow, *Zur geistesgeschichtlichen Ortsbestimmung der Gegenwart* (manuscript).

together we observe that the degree of subjectivity may range from anything like zero to 100 per cent. In a great number of cases, i.e. in that of the more vital and comprehensive judgments of value, the degree of subjectivity becomes so negligible as to give them an objective character.¹⁹ Save again for the “idiotic fringe” we all agree on them because they are part of the normal make-up of man. It is these ultimate values (like truth, justice, peace, social coherence, etc.) which are guiding us also in our judgments on the desirability of this or that form of society or on the pathological character of a certain economic or social development. The fact that we cannot state the “health” of a society by simply inspecting its tongue cannot do away with the other fact that there *are* healthy and unhealthy societies. The great difficulty, to be sure, is the question of *criteria*. Since this is a serious obstacle in social nosology as compared with the medical nosology of individuals we get a much larger margin of indeterminateness, subjectivity and arbitrariness than it exists in medicine, though a good amount of this may be found there too.

Now the important point is that the difficulty of social nosology varies with the degree of abnormality which we encounter. The margin of indeterminateness in social pathology will be large under microscopic and negligible under macroscopic conditions. It is, for instance, difficult to determine whether a small increase in the monetary circulation may be inflationary and even more difficult to decide whether something ought to be done about it; there is the largest scope for disputes on index numbers, on niceties of monetary theory and on the right balance of advantages and disadvantages. This margin of indeterminateness, of qualifications, of reserves and of agnosticism grows smaller and smaller the more we are approaching macroscopic conditions until we come to the case of the colossal German inflation when it was absurd to deny the existence of inflation in the most disparaging sense of this term and the indisputable necessity of combating it. Then the crudest index numbers and the most sweeping formulations of the quantity theory did their service and all discussions about possible qualifications (e.g. the influence of an adverse balance of payments, the possibility of “self-inflamatory” price movements, etc.) sank into insignificance.²⁰

¹⁹ Cf. also Felix Kaufmann, “The Significance of Methodology for the Social Sciences,” *Social Research* (November, 1939).

²⁰ It should be added that in medicine it is hardly otherwise. Doctors might quarrel whether a slight cold or a small fever are really diseases which ought to be cured, and it is well known that in this respect there exist different schools. But there is no disagreement in the case of pneumonia and of a temperature of 40°.

Those who overlook this difference are rightly blamed for their lack of the sense of proportion which is so essential in any science and above all in economics.

What is true with regard to monetary phenomena applies also to other fields of economic and social life. So it would be a value judgment with a high degree of subjectivity to say that the distribution of incomes, the commercial policy or the tax system ought to be such and such, but it is quite otherwise if such postulates can be related to a wider conception of economic policy which is based on more ultimate and "objective" judgments of value. The latter are final "points of relation" which give orientation to the more subjective postulates. It would surely be defensible to suppose an agreement between all morally sane men on the conviction that a society is in a pathological state if, let us say, 90 per cent of its surface belongs to a few feudal estates, or if 20 per cent of its members are involuntarily unemployed for a long time, or if 70 per cent are proletarianized job-hunters, or if suicide and divorces become mass phenomena, or if there is a hyper-inflation like the German one, or if the family is in complete dissolution. It can also be safely assumed that it is not a wild fancy of the present author to believe that a healthy society is characterized by a "normal" degree of integration (as the human body is best adapted to a certain range of the outside temperature) so that the "sub-integration" of France during the last decade appears just as pathological as the "super-integration" of totalitarian countries.²¹

Let me explain my meaning still further by the example of *autarky*. Some Relativists may be surprised or even shocked if I make no secret of my belief that to say indiscriminately that autarky is condemnable implies a highly subjective judgment of value which, personally, I would not dare to make. Under certain circumstances, I confess, I would be very much in sympathy with it while under others I would condemn it. The point is that autarky as such cannot be judged without reference to a wider system of ultimate values. It may be either the indispensable means of defending a healthy society of primitives against the deadly contagion of Western civilization or the symptom of an utterly pathological state of a civilized society. I for one have no scientific scruples whatever in saying that the latter is that case with which we have to do today. Autarky in our time is only a part and a manifestation of the universal process of economic and social international disintegration. How to judge this process? Is it possible to suggest that international disintegration may be after all a wholesome readjustment to new conditions and the forerunner of a new arrangement in international economics

²¹ Cf. Professor Rüstow's paper on the reasons of the decline of liberalism in "Compte-Rendu des séances du Colloque Lippmann," (Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 1939), 77-83.

and politics? It is not; for the evident reason that the international disintegration of our time is linked up with the wider process of general social disintegration which implies the destruction of the ultimate foundations of our society. It is a social catastrophe which has now culminated in a world war as its logical end, a war which, in its confusion and brutality, appears the true expression of this age of moral dissolution and of social disintegration.

IV

The long and short of it is that *value judgments are to be classified according to their degree of subjectivity* which is tantamount to classifying them according to their vital and ultimate character. It is this classification which determines the degree of their scientific legitimacy and therefore the amount of reservation or peremptoriness with which they may be pronounced in science. This is not a new and bold proposition but precisely what we are doing all the time (the relativists included, as we saw), only with more or less consistency and consciousness.

Moreover, this classification implies the *reason* for the scientific legitimacy of the higher orders of value judgments. They are simply *anthropological facts* which science has to respect just as it has to respect the meaning of words in the human language. This reference to the language seems useful in order to indicate the real structure of the problem and to answer the obvious question of how to ascertain and to prove those anthropological facts. The meaning of the word "jealousy," for instance, cannot be ascertained and proved like the behaviour of stock exchange prices; we find it in ourselves where it has been formed by social contact from childhood on; our statement that the word "ought" to mean this or that is simply one about a fact. Without this tacit convention on the meaning of words no social intercourse is possible. It is hardly otherwise with our elementary normative concepts regarding the forms and ends of social and economic life. They are *anthropological constants* which, after careful examination, we are bound to accept as facts. Even the sternest relativist knows quite well that there are "right" and "wrong" relations to property, to the other sex, to one's children, to work and leisure, to nature, to time and death, to youth and age, to the sequence of generations, to the pleasures of life, to the holy and unworldly, to the beautiful, the true and the just, to reason and sentiment, to society as a whole, to war and peace. We also know that in our disjointed world of today most of these relations are dangerously wrong. The individual who lost his sense of the "normal" in all these respects will be found sooner or later in the consulting-room of the nerve specialist or even in an asylum while a society

made up of too many of such individuals will end in war and revolution.²² Such is the terrible penalty for disregarding those anthropological constants which the relativist believes to be scientifically unascertainable. The neurologist and psychiatrist,²³ the ethnologist²⁴ or the sociologist²⁵ know better, and the economist can hardly afford to ignore what they know. The demand that things ought to be “à la taille de l’homme” is imperative. The famous dictum of the Digest, “hominum causa omne ius constitutum est,” applies to all institutions of society. Ours is the world of man; we cannot go beyond it, and it is this which gives us measure and norm. If we keep this in mind we shall know how to find our way between relativism on the one hand and the abuse of value judgements on the other. In doing so, we shall follow that “reasonable middle course” which itself corresponds to human nature.

²² “We are living in a crazy world, and we know it. Nobody would be surprised if one day the madness suddenly broke out in a frenzy from which this pitiful European mankind would sink back, stunned and demented, while the engines are still humming and the flags still fluttering though the spirit has gone.” J. Huizinga, *Im Schatten von morgen* (Bern, 1935), 9. (The English translation entitled “In the Shadow of Tomorrow” has not been accessible to me.)

²³ Out of the vast literature on psychopathology special mention may be made of C. von Monakow Mourgue, *Biologische Einführung in das Studium der Neurologie und Psychopathologie*, trans. E. Katzenstein (Stuttgart, 1930) (the French original was not at my disposal). The relativists would do well to consult this book of a leading neurologist of our age. Cf. also: W. Riese and A. Réquet, *L’idée de l’homme dans la neurologie contemporaine* (Paris, 1938); G. Villey, *La psychiatrie et les sciences de l’homme* (Paris, 1939). Dr. Carrel’s popular book on “Man-The Unknown” is based on the same trend of thought.

²⁴ As an example I mention the researches of the so-called Viennese school of ethnology on the concept of the “normal” with regard to property. See Wilhelm Schmidt, *Das Eigentum in den Urkulturen* (Münster, 1937).

²⁵ See especially C. Bouglé, *Leçons de sociologie sur l’évolution des valeurs* (Paris, 1922), as well as M. Halbwachs and other French sociologists.

In this connection, the family as the normal nursery and the most natural community of men should be mentioned as a good example of the anthropological constants. Throughout the ages and under all latitudes, the institution of the family can be considered as such a constant, in spite of the miserable experiment of Sparta and of the modern totalitarian countries. It is highly significant that in Soviet Russia today the indispensability of the family seems again to be recognized (cf. a leader in the “Isvestia” of September 21, 1940).

In order to prevent a possible misunderstanding let us add that it would, of course, be too much to expect that all value judgments which are anthropologically “valid” must always be such that they are generally accepted by the overwhelming majority. The optimist belief that you cannot fool all the people all the time may be justified in the end but it is obvious that at least temporarily large discrepancies between what is anthropologically true and what is commonly accepted are possible. Common opinion in a society may, for instance, be completely wrong in what ought to be the right place of women because it is blind to some anthropological—or, specifically, to some gynaecological—facts and to the subtle sociological functions of women which follow from their unalterable natural functions. We must squarely face such a divergence in order to see quite clearly that it can be scientifically settled by a last appeal to anthropological facts. Hence the “validity” of value judgments must not ultimately be based on current acceptance alone.

Finally, a possibility of supplementing the anthropological interpretation of value judgments must at least be mentioned though it is here that we feel especially the urgent necessity of getting beyond the field of mere tentative suggestions. What we have in mind is the *morphological interpretation* and justification of value judgments. As everybody fairly familiar with the “Gestaltphilosophie” and its general drift (which is not without its pitfalls) will readily understand the morphological approach could be based on the assumption that values may be capable of being interpreted in terms of *forms* and *functions* which give everything its significant and appraisable place as part of a definite social structure. In this way we arrive, in the social sphere, at *morphological judgments* as they are known as perfectly legitimate in other sciences like history, botany, crystallography, etc. As it were, we are reducing the higher plane of values to the lower one of forms, just as a logarithmical operation enables us to reduce a multiplication to a mere addition.

V

This suggested solution of the intricate problem of the scientific legitimacy of value judgments seems so obvious that, as I said, not the slightest originality can be claimed for it. Moreover, it is in accord with a line of thought which can be traced through the centuries despite the recurrent waves of relativism. The germs may already be found in scholastic rationalism as represented especially by *St. Thomas Aquinas*. It is beyond my own competence and the scope of this article to give a correct and detailed picture of the complicated way in which rationalism and the doctrine of the “*jus natural*” develop, secularize or contradict,

during the 17th and 18th century, the early scholastic rationalism. To do this would involve a discussion of the difficult problem of rationalism in general and an account of the excesses of rationalism and antirationalism which are again a melancholy example of the “loi de double frénésie.” It is indeed in an excess of rationalism that Relativism is rooted: in one of the aberrations which, unfortunately, have deprived the age of Enlightenment of some of its best fruits and which have given to rationalism the pejorative sense it has today. From the 17th century onward, rationalism shows the tendency to become unbridled analytical criticism which, by disregarding the vital data of thinking, is bound to end in futility and self-destruction.²⁶ In a description of this development even such venerable names as *Descartes* and *Kant* must not be left unmentioned.²⁷ It is in this world of uncontrolled criticism, of Pyrrhonic scepticism, of solipsism that our relativism has been born.

It seems, however, that there was never a time when this sort of rationalism completely held the field. It is impossible to overlook the highly normative character of the doctrine of the “jus naturale.” In fact, during the 18th century, rationalism slowly seems to make efforts to find its compass again. When *Montesquieu* says in the preface of his “*Esprit des Lois*”: “I have not drawn my principles from my prejudices but from the nature of things,” he gives evidence of a philosophy of social science which, one hundred years later, we find fully developed in its anthropological meaning in *Tocqueville’s* essay on “Politics as Science” (1852).

During these hundred years between *Montesquieu* and *Tocqueville* the spiritual climate of the West underwent changes which, decisive as they were, can hardly be characterized with a few words. It is safe to say, however, that men like *Rousseau*, *Herder*, the Scottish School of philosophy (*Reid* and others) and later Romanticism did much to forge arms against relativism and to reestablish the

²⁶ See the beautiful book by Paul Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne, 1680–1715* (Paris, 1936).

²⁷ Descartes’ rôle in this process has been properly stressed by A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 280–289. He rightly remarks: “A self-satisfied rationalism is in effect a form of anti-relationalism. It means an arbitrary halt at a particular set of abstractions” (289). As far as Kant is concerned, we know that in his later years he became deeply dissatisfied with “pure science.” A fruit of this dissatisfaction is his famous tract entitled “Zum ewigen Frieden” (1795). There is a touching (undated) letter where he confesses to have been deeply influenced by Rousseau.

factual character of the vital and anthropological data.²⁸ It is again a complicated story how, during the 19th century and under the influence of *Hegel*, *Comte*, the natural sciences, the theoretical and practical materialism, the historicism and other factors, relativism reached a new zenith. Suffice it to say that this zenith has long since been passed until today we have reached a situation which perhaps has been best described by Professor *Whitehead* in his well-known book on “Science and the Modern World” and by *Ortega y Gasset* in his important essay entitled “El tema de nuestro tiempo.”²⁹ It is impossible here to tell the story of this latest development, but let us say at least that the names of *Jacob Burckhardt* and *Friedrich Nietzsche* ought to find in it a prominent place.³⁰

VI

On the present occasion, the subject of value judgments cannot be pursued any further without overtaxing the patience of the reader who may already have asked himself what all this has to do with economics as it is understood today or even with what justification an article like this finds its place in an economic review. It is to be hoped, however, that this article itself will be accepted as a sufficient answer to these questions, for its main purpose is to broaden the scope and field of economics in our time. Refuting that sort of scientific prohibition which relativism wants to impose on us means to push open the door to those wider fields of research where the real roots of the present crisis of Western civilization are to be found. It would be an insult to the relativists to insinuate that they are less aware of the extent to which the foundations of our economic and social system are being undermined and of the necessity of thoroughly exploring the reasons of the disaster and of building up a new substructure. But, unfortunately for them, these problems—which are so gigantic as to require all the available talent and energy—are lying in fields to which the relativists are “painstakingly refusing themselves admission” (*Nietzsche*). Hence the widespread prudery in looking the wider but decisive problems in the face, the reluctance to establish contact with

²⁸ Of particular interest in this respect is the post-Kantian philosopher Jacob F. Fries whose book on *Neue oder anthropologische Kritik der Vernunft* (1807) contains the new programme already in its title.

²⁹ (Madrid, 1923). It is accessible in a German translation: *Die Aufgabe unserer Zeit* (Stuttgart, 1923).

³⁰ See especially the chapter “We scholars” in *Beyond Good and Evil* (ch. 6). That it is possible to name in the same vein catholic writers (e.g. Theodor Haecker or Christopher Dawson) shows how broad the front of modern anti-relativism has become.

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sociology, ethics or political science, the tendency to look askance at demands for “synthesis” and “scientific cooperation,” and the insistence on fiddling while Rome is burning. But the last phrase is perhaps somewhat unkind if the fiddler is honestly and to his own distress convinced that it is sin to help put out the fire. It seems kinder to shake his conviction.