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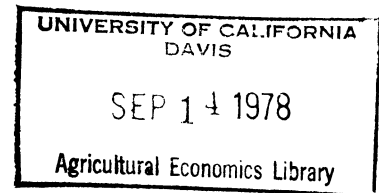
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THE POSSIBILITIES OF OBJECTIVE NORMATIVE
AND PRESCRIPTIVE KNOWLEDGE

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"Real world" development requires that numerous real world problems be defined and solved. Real world problems are defined on the basis of both normative and positive information. And, in turn, prescriptions to solve such problems are based on both positive and normative information. Therefore, the question of whether objective normative and prescriptive knowledge can be obtained through research is critical. If it cannot be obtained all problem definitions and solutions are arbitrary and emotional which in effect puts Hitler's and Stalin's decisions on a par with those of Lincoln and Gandhi.

I. There are at least three broad philosophic positions with respect to the possibility of attaining objective descriptive knowledge of values themselves (as contrasted to knowledge about value concepts held by a specific person or groups of persons). Individuals tend to reflect mixtures of these three but with an emphasis on one, particularly when considering methodology in a formal way (Mitroff and Turoff).

A. Positivism (including logical positivism) holds metaphysically that goodness and badness are not experienced and that, hence, there can be no undefined primitive terms to use in converting formal analytic statements into descriptive synthetic statements (Carnap, Pearson, Northrup, Popper). The positivists are simply unwilling to make the leap of faith that there are real world values which could correspond to value concepts in the minds of men. They do, however, make a similar leap of faith with respect

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to positive as contrasted to normative knowledge. For positivists facts and values are dichotomous.

- B. Various forms of normativism exist which take the position that descriptive knowledge about goodness and badness is possible. Some normativists accept the idea that goodness and badness are experienced. These experiences, they argue, permit the emergence of primitive, undefined experiential terms about goodness and badness to use in converting formal analytic statements into objective, descriptive (synthetic) normative statements (Moore, Lewis). Obviously such normativists are willing to take the leap of faith that there "really is" something that corresponds to such concepts as: justice is good, a healthy body is good, racial inequality is bad, or a lingering death from being burned is bad. For such normativists there are normative facts. For them facts and values are not dichotomous.
- C. By contrast the pragmatists believe (again metaphysically) that normative and positive concepts are interdependent and that to study them independently is inappropriate or impossible (Dewey, Parsons). This leads to an emphasis on the problematic context in which a study is conducted and to acceptance of workability as a test of truth. The real interest of pragmatists is in prescriptive knowledge (Kelso).

II. In general, positivistic and pragmatic economists have not distinguished clearly between the normative and prescriptive (Machlup).

- A. C.I. Lewis distinguished between the good and the bad (on one

hand) and the right and the wrong (on the other). It is not always right to do that which is good as it may be possible to do a greater good. Similarly, it is not always wrong to do that which is bad if it is the least bad which can be done. Good and bad are normative. Right and wrong are prescriptive and, as such, are a function of both the normative and positive, the function being a decision rule.

B. The question before us is: Is there an objective basis for researching the normative? Historically, economists have been in the lead in answering this question. Among the leaders were and are Ricardo, Bentham, J.S. Mill, Marx, Marshall, Pareto, Hicks and Arrow, i.e., much of the classical literature on philosophic value theory was written by economists:

1. The labor theory of value as expounded by Ricardo, Mill and Marx.
2. Utilitarianism as expounded earlier by Bentham.
3. Production as the creation of time, form and place utility.
4. Values in exchange as developed by Marshall and Clark.
5. Pareto-optimality as expounded by Pareto and Hicks.
6. Institutional economics as developed by Commons from the works of Dewey and Singer and drawing on the German historical school which was influenced by Hegel.

III. An eclecticism is possible which:

- A. Rejects the metaphysical presuppositions of positivism about the impossibility of normative experiences.
- B. Accepts the possibility of real world normative experiences

and hence the development of undefined, experiential, normative primitive terms to use in making descriptive (synthetic) normative statements independently of the positive.

- C. Partially acknowledges the pragmatic argument by recognizing that normative and positive knowledge may be interdependent but does not insist that they always are. The qualifier permits positive and normative knowledge to accumulate in the various disciplines to make it unnecessary to "reinvent the wheel" to solve every single problem.

IV. An eclecticism such as is outlined in III. would:

- A. Simplify the pragmatic institutionalist "view of the world."
- B. Permit the powerful, descriptive techniques used by the physical and biological scientists to be used in doing normative as well as positive research in the social science disciplines.
- C. Along with A. and B. immediately above, modern computer technology permits efficient modeling of the multidisciplinary domains of:
 1. practical problems and
 2. subjects relevant to social issues
 in an interactive, iterative way which acknowledges the
 3. social and political processes stressed by pragmatic institutionalists (Mitroff and Blankenship, Churchman 1961, Churchman and Ackoff, and Churchman 1968) without
 4. failing to use the powerful techniques which econometricians and statisticians have borrowed from the biological and physical scientists and adapted to the needs of social scientists. It should be noted

that the eclecticism of III. would permit these techniques to be used both to

- a. accumulate both positive and normative knowledge and
- b. use existing positive and normative knowledge
- c. without always being constrained by the pragmatic metaphysical presupposition of interdependence.

V. The above four sections make normative knowledge:

- A. The result of logic and experience
- B. though religious teaching, moralizing, emotion, dogma, and arbitrary assumption are not precluded.
- C. That part of normative knowledge based on logic and experience is subject to the tests of
 1. coherence (sometimes called validation),
 2. correspondence (sometimes called verification)
 3. clarity, unambiguity being a prerequisite for applying the tests of coherence and correspondence, and workability in the same manner as for positive knowledge.
- D. With respect to normative knowledge, two fallacies are stressed by Moore:
 1. The first is called the naturalistic fallacy. It consists of assuming that that which is experienced to have the characteristic of goodness or badness is, itself, goodness or badness rather than that which possesses such a characteristic. An example is life --

just because one experiences the goodness of life does not mean that life is goodness.

2. The second is the metaphysical fallacy which occurs when one concludes without recourse to experience and logic that something, some condition or some situation is good. This fallacy is inconsistent with pragmatism and with those forms of normativism which use reason and experience to reach descriptive normative conclusions. However, it is commonly committed by positivists when driven by circumstances to define and solve practical problems (Myrdal). Also it is often committed by normativists who disregard experience in reaching normative conclusions.

When these fallacies are committed normative knowledge is not testable by the tests listed in V. C. above because in Popper's terminology they are not falsifiable.

V. I conclude that:

- A. It is possible for researchers to produce objective normative knowledge (Johnson and Quance, Chapter 4; Rossmiller et al., Chapter V, pp. 43-46; and Rossmiller, ed., Chapter 3, pp. 36f).
- B. However, such knowledge, like positive knowledge, will always be tentative and subject to modification and disproof
 1. as society (and its knowledge) evolves to permit more and more stringent application of the tests of coherence, correspondence and clarity, and

2. as the pragmatic problem solvers test it for workability in solving additional problems.

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