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Marià Corbí

Principles of an Epistemology of Values

The permutation of collective cohesion
and motivation



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Preface

Axiological refers to values and human qualities, in their diverse modalities, at the collective and individual level. We set ourselves to create a knowledge about that which is axiological, an axiological epistemology, for knowledge societies in continuous change.

Pre-industrial societies thought and lived secure in the belief that their collective axiological projects had been passed down to them by their sacred ancestors or the gods.

In the first wave of industrialisation, societies were convinced that they received their collective axiological projects from the very nature of things or the inevitable course of history, through philosophy and the sciences. In modern industrial knowledge societies, we now know and live in the knowledge that we do not receive anything from anyone. Rather, we must construct it ourselves.

What we need to build is a collective life project that will tell us:

- how to organise our symbiotic association.
- how to organise our procreation in physical, cultural and axiological terms.
- how to act, within our environment, in a manner consistent with our survival and sustainable for ourselves and the environment.
- how to live together in a globalised society.
- how to cultivate our dual access to the real. We will expand on this dual access when we address the need for a new anthropology.

The axiological crisis that we are currently experiencing is the most severe to affect humanity in its very long history. What is this claim based on? It is based on the fact that we must make an unprecedented transition: a shift from programming ourselves not to change and obstructing any potentially significant change and all potential alternatives, to having to programme ourselves to foster, preserve and incite constant change.

Pressing questions arise with respect to this transition, which is so inevitable for us. Is this sort of programming for constant change possible for living creatures? Is it possible for humans to live free from any and all adherence to models? Where would we need to find a foothold, both socially and individually, to be able to live

free from submission to models and inviolable patterns and to be able to make necessary changes when appropriate? Is it possible for a group of poor living beings such as ourselves to live in such a manner, perpetually void of fixed points of reference and in a state of constant creativity?

Experience tells us that some individuals are perfectly able to do so without any mental imbalance occurring. This is the life approach of true scientists and artists, and we would even venture to suggest that the truly spiritual also live in this manner. However, is this possible for entire communities? These weighty concerns do nothing to ease the severity of our current axiological crisis, which underpins all our other crises: moral, political, economic, social, family and religious crises, as well as the crisis of the individual.

The problems posed to us by the axiological in general are very serious, and we lack any know-how on how to convincingly approach the issue, which is utterly basic and fundamental for the creatures with needs that we are.

Our ancestors constructed their own collective projects, which formed their value systems, over thousands of years. They constructed them, rather than receiving them, although they must have believed the latter to be the case. How do we know this? We know this because analysis of their projects, expressed and lived through myths, symbols and rituals, shows that all peoples that lived in the same manner essentially possessed myths, symbols and rituals that were identical at their deepest core, although they sometimes differed greatly at a superficial level. This was the case with hunter-gatherers, crop farmers, farmers organised into large estates using irrigation systems and livestock breeders (Corbí 1983).

We have observed that their myths, symbols and rituals were modelled on their ways of life and in order to better adapt to suit these ways of life. When the pre-industrial way of life changed, their collective projects also changed in accordance with it.

Our ancestors thus constructed their own projects, although they were not aware, nor could they be, of this fact. For their collective constructs to be suitable for static, pre-industrial societies, they needed to impede significant changes and other alternatives. They did this by declaring their constructs to be inviolable. To firmly establish this inviolability, they attributed them to holy ancestors or gods. This made them sacrosanct and immutable.

Our ancestors could not have been aware that they were building their own axiological projects, because they did so over a period spanning millennia. Nor should they have been aware of it, because to have been so would have shattered this inviolability. It could be said that the procedures used to enshrine this absolute inviolability were tactics of a system of programming for static societies.

Of these collective programmes, the first industrial societies modified only what was strictly necessary, but continued to hold them inviolable, both in terms of what had been changed and what had been preserved. They attributed this to the very nature of things themselves.

We must construct ours in full awareness that we ourselves are the builders. We need to programme ourselves for motivation, to build sense for our lives, to build our collective connection. We need to build a solid base of quality in order to make

suitable use of our technoscience, putting its exponential growth and enormous power to work for the good of humanity and for every living creature on the planet.

As our ancestors were builders who were unaware that they were building, they failed to leave us a legacy of know-how on how to build collective projects. They would not have been able to conceive of doing so because this would have voided the principle that these projects were sacrosanct. We, therefore, find ourselves in serious axiological crisis, without any knowledge of how to build our own projects. We need to overcome a complete, complex crisis and to be able to change our projects at the same rate as the rapid advances in our science and technology, without adequate knowledge of how to do so.

We are faced with having to create new know-how in order to handle the axiological, of having to create an axiological epistemology. With this know-how, we must become able to handle all that is axiological in nature, in order to create our own collective axiological postulates and projects at every level, including that of the individual. We will create them ourselves, drawing support from ourselves and with the explicit knowledge that we do so at our own risk. Nothing and nobody is going to do this work for us.

We have to be able to build our own motivation to live, one that works with the efficiency of the stimulus/response mechanisms of other animals. Our constructs must be capable of suitable change in line with the constant shifts introduced by technoscience to our ways of life, thinking, feeling, organising ourselves, values and action. The need for continual transformation makes it impossible for us to start from a basis of beliefs, whether secular or religious. Beliefs bind and we, in contrast, find ourselves forced into a state of perpetual motion.

Our starting point can be none other than the knowledge of our nature as living creatures that speak. This is our inalienable foundation. Our collective programming must be appropriate for a living creature. It must therefore be axiological. A rational motivation would be inadequate and insufficient. Reason is abstract, and it operates with abstract units. A living creature neither moves nor is moved by abstract forces, but by specific ones, by what enters through the senses and is capable of arousing feelings. Systems of motivation, our value systems, cannot be merely rational. Rather, they must be specific and qualitative, as are our needs.

Some troubling questions arise. Would not the creation of axiological know-how, meaning an axiological epistemology, create new and serious risks? This is because creating know-how on handling the world of the axiological means creating the possibility of handling it well, but also of handling it badly. We had extensive experience of the damage that can arise from handling the axiological during the terrible and bloody dictatorships of the twentieth century, the two world wars and numerous other wars in the same century. We also lived through it in the more distant past, in cruel religious wars. All this violence was created and sustained through axiological manipulation and mass propaganda. This manipulation was primitive in nature, as it was based on the quantitative accumulation of propaganda and the use of violence and repression.

Axiological epistemology, meaning know-how on how to manage axiology, carries the potential to be more refined and effective, without the need to be based on mass propaganda or on coercion, violence and the persecution of dissidence.

Such know-how is admittedly dangerous, but what know-how is not? Furthermore, there is a strong reason for us to ignore our moral scruples, one that obliges us to take the risk while searching for ways to minimise it. We have been stripped of axiological projects and we cannot, in all rationality, wait for them to fall from the sky or sprout from the ground, blossoming out of the very nature of things.

Neither can we hold on to the axiological projects of the past, as these relate to pre-industrial, patriarchal, authoritarian, parochial, exclusivist and exclusive societies which no longer even exist. Nor would it be beneficial to extend the life of such axiological projects under the conditions that apply in the new, globalised industrial societies of innovation and change.

We must build them ourselves, because, without them, we would be incapable of suitably managing the powerful progress of our technoscience, nor could we survive. No other option is possible. We must do this. Furthermore, considering the issue in more detail, when in the past have our ancestors not taken risks with the construction of their own collective projects? They took risks, including significant ones, and they also made enormous mistakes, not only in the twentieth century but also in the nineteenth century on the issue of nationality and earlier during terrible religious conflicts. The list is a long one.

We are faced with the prospect of having to create this know-how to be able to survive our new circumstances, in knowledge societies subject to constant change. We must take on the responsibility and the risks posed, as we did with the creation and development of science and technology, which are aspects, furthermore, that we cannot give up. One matter leads to the other.

We must construct this axiological know-how, relying on ourselves for support and at our own risk. This axiological science must, therefore, be able to tell us how to build our own human quality and what a solid foundation would be from which to build our own axiological postulates and projects, which must also be distinguished by quality, to enable us to appropriately manage and orient our science and technology, our companies and our political, economic and other organisations.

There would seem to be no rational solution for building this human quality other than drawing on the wisdom of our ancestors, but without this entailing our adoption of their ways of thinking, feeling, organising themselves and living, as this would be impossible in societies of knowledge and constant change. We must be able to draw on the human quality of our ancestors and try to find the means to cultivate it, in a manner that is appropriate to our new cultural circumstances.

Axiological epistemology should be able to tell us how to construct our human quality, both individually and collectively, as well as how to cultivate profound human quality. Without a minimum number of people who have profound human quality, there can be no communities with human quality.

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