

THE ROLE OF VALUES IN HUMAN LIFE

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1. Instead of Foreword

The author deems it expedient to single out the specific framework of the following reflections. A considerable portion of human beings who live, move, work and create around us, at least most of those who regard themselves as active members of the human society, view the realm that results from their own aspirations, requirements and preferences, hence the world we can describe as the “teleological world”, as more important than the actual world around them. Nothing is changed in this finding even by the fact that such a teleological world is just an alternative to the world which people know, in which they live, where they pursue their activities and experience their destiny. Moreover, they are convinced – often succumbing to an illusion – that this teleological world is or can be better and more perfect, that it can help them make their wishes and requirements come true and meet their goals. Also many personal and especially social problems are caused by a discordance in the interpretation of what is or what should be the objective of our action, by the profound differences in the notion of what is or what should be a desirable or required state or, generally speaking, by the conflicts of different teleological worlds. The system of notions, objectives and visions of what we call a “teleological world” is not only a product of our own knowledge but is invariably influenced by the system of values or rather by specific integration of values and knowledge.

2. Human Sciences and Values

The question about the actual place of the sphere of values and their impacts on the life of man and society within the human sciences and the related themes of various branches of the humanities may be answered quite simply: it belongs to virtually all of them. This holds true not only of such traditional disciplines as sociology, economy, psychology, pedagogy and the related educational branches, aesthetics and other sciences studying different cultural fields, complexes of generally conceived and thematically specialized branches of history. Even though each of these and many other – more or less specialized – disciplines pursue their own special interests, have their own specific approaches and methods, application of values concerns primarily those topics and problem fields in which man decides, selects goals and means, considers the possible, known or available forms and procedures of his interventions. In actual fact, it is no coincidence that the leading lights of the human sciences and authors of major theoretic concepts, notably in sociology and economy, have always emphasized what they call the “structure of social action”, “target orientation” of such action, its “rationality”, having highlighted the importance of the concept of goals and links and choices of relations between objectives and means, having accentuated the key role played by “intentionality” and anticipated results and impacts. At the same time, historic experience coupled with the brutality of many processes and events in the 20th century have yielded convincing evidence that any glorification, pathos and enthusiasm fabricated by self-complacent ideologies cannot sanctify unlimited and irresponsible choice of goals. Just like the promises of a “divine kingdom on earth” they could hardly sanctify and still less justify religious wars, crusades and the Inquisition. Their promises of wealth and well-being given to their own nation and race, promises of “shining tomorrows” and “happy future” for all “working” people could not justify the establishment of concentration camps, the Holocaust and the “gulags”. Indeed, the contradictoriness and – seen in hindsight – almost inconceiv-

able antagonism of the enthusiastic pathos and profound domination and virtually total strait-jacketing of enormous human masses by the fundamentalist ideology on the one hand, and an atmosphere of control by fear and the flood of brutality and utter ruthlessness may be today understood perhaps only by the oldest generation, a generation that had first-hand experience of the mercilessness and savage cruelty of the foreign occupiers and the resultant atmosphere of fear and hopelessness.

But there are other branches of the humanities, especially those associated with communication processes, with a number of spheres involving creative activities, that can hardly ignore the key role of values and value orientations played in their thematic fields. Looking at the branches which are connected with the attainment of knowledge, its extension and distribution and primarily with its application, we realize not only that knowledge is invariably the knowledge of something, whether it is the knowledge of a specific state or a situation, the knowledge of a specific rule or the knowledge of a pertinent procedure or an instruction to achieve specific goals but also the knowledge of somebody for whom it has a specific value. It guarantees his ability or competence for a set of demanding activities. We are, therefore, justified to consider what the theory of information describes as the “information value” of a given knowledge-laden statement.

Just as with various forms of knowledge manipulation, in other types of activities, too, we have to take into account different sorts or forms of values, consider them when selecting possible alternatives of future steps, when deciding and discussing other proposed or available alternatives in choosing goals, adequate means in various nodal points of sequences of follow-up activities. In one way or another, man – in his life, in his actions and in his lifelong efforts – considers a relatively wide-ranging spectrum of different values and value sets. He does this absolutely spontaneously and as a matter-of-course; on other occasions he realizes that this is necessary and useful, and – in extreme cases – he does so under pressure, since his activity is monitored, checked and usually also somehow evaluated

and judged. Such inputs of values and evaluation are known to manifest themselves very distinctly in those human actions that result in a specific work, in a specifiable and distinguishable result, and hence in an artefact. This applies both to artefacts of intellectual nature, especially results of cognitive, research and scientific activities, literary works, designs and projects involving organizational, cultural or artistic solutions as well as artefacts that are results of creative work, production and technical activities in general etc. But even human works of whatever nature are and must be not only received but also accepted and judged against a gamut of various acknowledged and defined values. A comparatively great multitude of different values, both functional, technical and economic ones, as well as aesthetic, environmental, health-related and many other values is known to manifest and assert itself in these contexts, too.

It is quite beyond doubt that values are at work in those spheres of human activities and branches that deal with areas whose substantial component is decision-making, primarily decision-making performed by subjects of such activities. Having said that, we naturally rule out such procedures or proceedings in which decision-making is replaced by established rules that determine the actual sequence of procedures or proceedings, especially by means of making such procedures unequivocally algorithmized, thus creating the possibility of their automation.

3. Values and Decision-making Procedures

The well-known metaphor about the difference between man the creator and other living creatures, which says that man as a builder differs from a bee that also builds complex structures inside the beehive primarily in that the former creates his work first in his thoughts, in his head, hence ideally as an image, as a depicted vision, as a plan, project or another type of pictorial layout, does not, quite undoubtedly, offer a complete and exhausting description of human creativity. Indeed, action aimed at creating a thought image, a plan or a project is always preceded by a decision-

making process, i.e. choice between yes and no, and if the answer is yes, then how, when, where and with what etc. Decision-making is invariably a choice between alternatives, which is based on their assessment, comparison or evaluation proceeding from values, criteria or criterial functions selected to meet that particular purpose. This also encompasses selection of possible means, procedures or methods acceptable in the given problem situation. But not even the choice of the noblest and highest-toned objectives can justify and sanctify any choice of means. In other words, the same serious and requisite responsibility of the decision-making subject is vital and necessary for both sides of decision-making. Decision-making procedures are associated with a substantial feature of man and hence of humanity in general, namely with that particular characteristic of human efforts and strivings expressed by terms such as “intentional”, “target oriented” or “teleology”.

These terms spell out a substantive aspect of human endeavours, acts or strivings which may be briefly depicted by the following image. True to say, man moves, lives and pursues his activities in this world, which we usually describe as the “actual world”. But human thinking, reasoning and wanting seems to be keen on flying away into a realm of visions, imagery and thought or desired states and situations, which we call (in keeping with the old philosophical tradition) “possible worlds”. Human thinking is truly unbridled in this flight of thoughts and imagination (since – as expressed by the old Latin formula – “spiritus flat, ubi vult”). However, substantial restrictions apply to all moves aimed at transforming such thought steps and related intentions into genuine measures. These are always bound up with and restrained by our own responsibility for the future of the human race and its members, and by other competent values.

As a rule, decision-making procedures in most situations, where we decide about the choice of the best or most suitable alternative, which also applies to the field of optional possibilities, goals and means, unfold under the conditions of specific social, economic and also generally civilizational

frameworks. At the beginning of the past century, an adult inhabitant of a small village did not have to decide at which seaside or mountain resort and spa he would spend his summer holiday. First and foremost, he had no holiday at all; he was well aware that there was a lot of challenging work in store for him after the harvest and that he could afford some rest only late in the evening and on Sundays, after finishing his duties and taking care of household animals. This is a graphic example showing that the decision-making process and, in actual fact, any decision-making has a structure of its own whose substantial component is a well-defined or at least anticipated space for the given decision-making or the specific type of decision-making. To put it in a nutshell, decision-making delineates possibilities, eventual alternative choices the subject of decision-making has at his disposal. As a rule, the subject is characterized by the scope and quality of his competences, knowledge-related goals and anticipated impacts of eventual decisions, by the knowledge of adequate and available means. The subject also integrates possible and – within the given space – permissible decisions with anticipated impacts and also with possible risks posed by individual decisions.

In a similar vein, decision-making itself, primarily decision-making performed by specific subjects within a delimited decision-making space, may be judged, evaluated and qualified. Even though the results or impacts of such decision-making are most important for the resultant assessment, it is indisputable that the quality of such decision-making depends on two spheres that are governed and employed by the decision-making subject. These spheres are as follows:

- the field of necessary knowledge, i.e. requisite in view of the given decision-making space;
- the field of values that always do or should respect the pertinent decision-making subject.

Up to now, the focus of attention in the concepts of educational and qualification systems has been turned on necessary knowledge. This has

been – and mostly still is – the case in the system of training for demanding professions that require high levels of qualification. The realm of necessary knowledge should cover not only that particular thematic or problem area, which is decided upon, but also its assignments, modes or forms of manipulation with phenomena and processes in those areas. This particular requirement usually anticipates the need of integrating the knowledge of several different branches. But it also involves the necessity of coping – in a qualified fashion – with the possible risks posed by interventions into those spheres etc. or preventing them. In a sense, a good example of such integrating aspects is offered by medicine, presenting not only its well-advanced forms of consultation and cooperation involving several medical disciplines but also cooperation between the technical, laboratory and experimental sectors covering forms of testing, clinical verification etc. The medical branches are also the only field that consistently incorporates the subject of professional ethics into the specialist training of its qualified experts. Also under consideration is the importance of another thematic field, namely communication between the doctor and the patient, and the training of medical personnel in subjects that may be characterized as co-participation in communication forms in comprehensive therapy, encompassing also the psychic, cultural and aesthetic dimensions of such a treatment.

While highlighting the field of medicine and medical decision-making as a good example of desirable integration of different thematic spheres, of the integration of knowledge of different nature and provenance and, at the same time, also of the integration of knowledge and values, we should also bear in mind that this is a profession with a thousand-year history and development, a discipline which also comes under the glare of sensitive public attention by many generations and by many people with great demands. As a result, it is a sphere of decision-making with demanding activities pursued by qualified specialists, a branch which is even today being extended by incorporating problem areas that may be characterized

as a “value and/or safety culture”. But the past few years and decades have witnessed the emergence and broad application of many other demanding and specialist professions, usually associated with the development and wide-ranging use of new technologies. These include new transportation systems, energy networks, biotechnologies and last but definitely not least information technologies (IT). Considering those contexts, we can hardly escape the question whether the thousands of specialists entering and engaging themselves in those new and undoubtedly crucial and demanding professions are sufficiently equipped with that we have called the “value and security culture”. Asking such a question is also justified by the well-known fact that most accidents, victims and human losses in the past decades have not been caused by technological but rather by human failures. Likewise, an analysis of the causes of deaths in the United States, recently published by the popular magazine “National Geographic”, shows that accidents on American roads and highways have mowed down more – or at least comparable number of – lives than the current most-feared civilization ailments, i.e. cardiovascular diseases and cancer. But these are not only problems concerning knowledge and qualification training and related requirements, a wide-ranging application of the so-called professional ethics in the system of training a qualified engineering personnel, executives, demanding technical artefacts connected with a higher level of potential risks. This also involves the actual human, moral and cultural profile of those who can discharge such professions, the question whether the society should entrust such challenging managerial and decision-making activities to individuals who have failed in moral and human terms, who have been implicated in drug dealings, dishonest acts etc. It is natural that not only technical decision-making but also major political, social and cultural issues and considerations are involved.

4. Values and Value-related Attitudes

A specific portion of man's contacts with objects and events of the external world, including some manipulative acts involving such objects and events, is bound to evoke responses, innermost feelings and sometimes external manifestations that assume evaluating properties. We experience a pleasant feeling when returning to a warm room on a frosty and windy day in winter; we feel satisfaction when sipping a cold drink on a hot summer day. We also experience feelings or inner states which we perceive as negative, unpleasant. But this does not involve only contacts with objects or states or events. We are pleased when meeting an old friend we have not seen for a long time, we respond to some messages or statements with joy or pain, positively or negatively. We feel admiration or enthusiasm when seeing a beautiful work of art; each of us definitely knows experiences or responses to states and situations which we perceive as unpleasant and often as painful. As a result, we may accept, perceive and experience objects, phenomena or situations of diverse origin and nature concurrently with innermost states that may be described as value-related attitudes. These attitudes are or may be not only positive and negative; many objects, events or situations are indifferent to us, evoking no value-related attitudes at all, for instance because they do not interest us, since we view them as matter of course, because we have grown accustomed to them etc.

However, value-related attitudes are primarily inner states of one's mind and consciousness, which need not always be expressed externally and still less so verbally. Some of them are retained as a permanent component of our memory and some kind of our innermost wealth. (I will hardly ever forget my feelings of profound respect and admiration for the majesty of nature as I was looking down from the top of the lookout tower "Needle of the South" at Europe's highest peak – Mont Blanc.) Only some internal states or states of mind are manifested in specific forms of behaviour, whether it is a smile, lit up eyes or shows of pain, tears etc. But value-related attitudes may be expressed, manifested together with verbal

expression of certain values and related attributes. Essentially, three key forms of verbal expressions of evaluating attributes indicating connection with specific values may be distinguished:

- qualitative evaluating attributes,
- comparative evaluating attributes,
- quantitative evaluating attributes expressing the rate of ensuring or implementing given values.

Qualitative evaluating attributes are especially those attributes that spell out aesthetic values, the actual level or quality of knowledge and skills, and characteristics that cannot be converted to suitable scales, yardsticks or similar forms of quantification. Such attributes are for instance adjectives “beautiful”, “pleasant”, “perfect”, “professional” etc., or their negation.

Comparative evaluating attributes are verbal characteristics based on a comparison with something that is, if possible, generally known, with what is regarded as a model for comparison of the given type of object, activity or its result. A seminal role is played in this context by models or patterns for comparison, scope or boundaries of practicable or guaranteed performances, which may prove to be very important for the task of assessing and checking the quality of some products, e.g. in industrial production. In case of comparative attributes, just as with most evaluating attributes, it is necessary to note that assessment and a verbally expressed evaluating attitude is always an evaluation carried out by a specific evaluating subject, hence somebody’s assessment. This practically means that evaluating attributes are not additive, their transitivity cannot be relied upon. (To put it in other words, the objections the author of this article has spelt out in his works on logical and the semantic of preference are still valid.)

Quantitative evaluating attributes are attributes expressing the rate of evaluation on a conventionally selected scale. These need not only be scales depicting the results of measurements. Such evaluating attributes

are expressed in systems of physical measurements, i.e. in weight, length, distance, speed etc. However, results of evaluation may also be depicted on other types of scales. Some may use the points systems and the number of points scored. Also, many classification scales naturally fail to meet the strict requirements of quantification based on physical measurements. Similarly, it is not only difficult but in a number of major situations outright impossible to convert the rates of values depicted on different scales to a single universal or integrating yardstick. This also concerns attempts at converting such measures, whether expressed by different numerical devices, sequences or preferences in reviewing various evaluating subjects or by other means, to a single universal scale perceived as an expression of the rate of completely different values in financial equivalents of those values. The fact that we reject converted rates of all values to the financial equivalents of those measures does not mean to say that we actually deny the importance of integrating different evaluating attitudes in crucial life situations, and thus deny the significance of not only a multidisciplinary attitude but also a multi-value one for the solution of such situations.

Having originated in a broad spectrum of diverse situations, value-related attitudes are or may be stimulated both by internal states or feelings of the subject of assessment, its spontaneous or more or less conscious experience, physical states or a whole number of external circumstances. Many evaluating attitudes are fashioned by social, civilizational and cultural conditions and by related social models. The actual importance of social models is usually realized quite distinctly in those aspects of our civilization and culture, which we often describe as a “fad” or perhaps – to be more precise – “fads”. However, value attitudes constitute only a specific necessary link within intricate, usually intertwined and mutually influenced components of those facts or factors that are modified and that partly determine man’s action and behaviour, selection of his goals and means, and their overall direction.

Consequently, the following different and hence terminologically differentiated entities figure among those facts or factors in particular:

- value attitudes as a primary evaluating response to specific stimuli or situations, such as frame of mind, feelings, inner mental states;
- manifestations of evaluating attitudes, including not only manifestations as expressed by external behaviour, gestures or other ascertainable shows but also by verbal expression;
- values conceived as abstract terms on the basis of a verbal attribute, such as principles spelling out the meaning of values,
- standards usually created just for some specific values, or rather to reflect more detailed specifics of some values.

Mutual links and impacts, which are usually two-way affairs anyway, are known to assert themselves among those basic components (whose complex of impacting actions and behaviour need not necessarily contain all the given components) so that value attitudes may affect manifestations and, on the other hand, manifestations of some objects often strongly influence attitudes of other subjects. In this way, we touch upon a major trait of the role and impact of values and assessment: These above-mentioned evaluating components and factors are always attitudes taken by somebody, by specific subjects which may differ – and sometimes do so considerably – from the attitudes assumed by other individuals. The same applies to manifestations and also to the recognition or respecting of certain values. Only the norms themselves or – to put it more precisely – their verbal formulations go beyond the framework of given subjective contingency. That is probably also one of the key reasons – at least for some areas of human action – why such norms are necessary, why standards have emerged and begun to be applied in life and in the development of different human and social communities in the history of human civilization.

5. Values and Value Systems

Man is confronted with values virtually at every step of his life, whenever he encounters alternatives, decision-making, application of his aspirations, wishes, and needs. We do not meet only individual, completely isolated values, but – as a rule – specific sets of values, values constituting elements of value complexes or systems. For instance, the following groups of values are known to figure among such value complexes:

- The contemporary model of civilization, as developed in advanced countries of the Euro-American civilizational domain, recognizes values associated with different periods of human life, such as youth, old age, birth, death, work, entertainment, health. Mostly these are values and value sets, which we accept and recognize, and mostly also respect as something given, as matter of course, something that simply belongs to our life, what we have accepted and with what we have lived since our first steps in life, with our educational systems etc.
- Sets of values are associated with different types of human activities, primarily with activities requiring demanding professional training. Once again, we may single out the values of the medical profession and some other types of professions. Professional values figure prominently among the traditions respected and maintained for centuries, as corroborated by the traditions of medieval guilds associating craftsmen.
- There are also values associated with the functioning of small and larger social groups. Our present-day civilization is known to recognize values connected with the family and family life, birth of a child, marriage and other family events, such as various jubilees, birthdays, wedding ceremonies etc. Also larger types of communities and groups have their own specific values. This category includes various hobby and special-interest, physical training and sports organizations, cultural and art groups, political parties and movements.

Of stimulating importance for a healthy and salubrious social development of our society are aesthetic, cultural values and prizes the society awards to distinguished scientific, technological and generally creative initiatives. It is precisely in those contexts that our society owes its greatest debts of gratitude, probably due to its prevailing attitudes that are also reflected by the mass media. The past communist regime in this country appreciated especially major physical performances in material production, manual work. True to say, this tendency had been overcome, but it has often been replaced by the practice of giving distinctions and awards to outstanding athletes and popular mass media “entertainers”.

An indisputably positive feature of value changes is the enhanced attention given to the quality of the environment, to the sophistication and quality of housing, to the appearance and beauty of our towns and cities, housing estates and also rural settlements, their natural environs, to civic and cultural amenities in our towns and smaller communities. This serves to demonstrate that even during the lifetime of a single generation, visible and ascertainable changes may be effected in the concept and role of values and value structures. Such visible and easily ascertainable changes have also been confirmed by opinions expressed by foreign visitors to our cities, especially those who still remember them from the early 1990s.

If it is necessary, and especially during preparation for large-scale investment projects, in decision-making processes pertaining to serious changes encompassing not only techno-economic but also human, health-care, aesthetic and environmental contexts, to pay heed to various types of values and value systems, this does not mean that we can proceed in all the decision-making situations, in all the thematic and problem areas according to a universal pattern, that all the applied values and value criteria have the same weight in all the situations. It is also impossible to take into account only the actual force of the voice or vigorous campaigning of those who represent the individual systems of values and criteria in the relevant evaluating and decision-making commissions and boards.

Principally, we should realize that the individual values and value-related or critical systems do and must have different weight in different problem situations or – as most frequently expressed – a different rate of relevance. Indeed, determination of the actual weight of the individual criteria or the rate of their relevance is justly regarded as one of the most difficult problems in interdisciplinary decision-making and multicriterial evaluation. The rate of relevance depends primarily on the nature of the problem situation under scrutiny, and on the character of proposed or anticipated solutions. That is why it is possible to consider as justified the fact that the rate of relevance is not determined universally, by means of a universal pattern. Needless to add perhaps, this does not rule out the possibility that under normal circumstances some values and related criteria may prove to have absolute preference. This holds particularly true of the values of life, society's health security and prospects of the development of the human species, the role and importance of the further direction in time and time perspectives. It is, therefore, appropriate to determine the rate of relevance ad hoc, in view of the given situation and considered procedures in the given solution and its perspectives. A responsible, qualified and multidisciplinary team of experts should be given a greater say in this crucial component of multicriterial decision-making and assessment. While summarizing the major principles of the process of integrating values, we should single out the following aspects:

- For various evaluating tasks and related problem situations it is vital to count with the use of different sets of greater number of values and criteria, and with a varying rate of relevance of applicable criteria.
- There is no “supreme subject” in human decision-making and assessment. That is why it is appropriate to rely on teamwork and on different forms of interdisciplinary expert teams.
- There are no guarantees of the position held by the so-called majority and hence guarantees of the universal application of referendums. (This is borne out by the well-known cases of manipulated masses and

thus majorities known from recent history. This naturally does not remove the burden of responsibility from the shoulders of ordinary citizens and human individuals.)

When pointing out the needs and usefulness of a certain arrangement of values, their incorporation into systems or rather a hierarchic arrangement of partial systems into higher networks, it is vital to touch upon the following question: which particular requirements reflecting the current social level should be incorporated into an arrangement of the system of values. The following requirements should be seen as the most important ones placed on the quality of the systems of values:

- System must be consistent, i.e. it should not allow a differently defined value in the system or anything else that could be interpreted as negation of acknowledged values.
- System of values must not tolerate – in view of the delineation of thematic areas, and especially in view of the specific area of activities – the so-called empty spaces, i.e. something “forgotten or neglected in terms of values” which could cause doubts, a high rate of indeterminateness or indecidability.
- System of values, i.e. related to phenomena, procedures or activities, which are “practicable” (the feasibility condition).

6. Integrating Values and Knowledge

We regard it as a matter of course that people should decide only about what they know or at least what they know sufficiently well. Since decision-making always includes and presupposes evaluation, this particular postulate also concerns assessment. At the same time, we know only too well – and can document that with a multitude of personal experience – how often that postulate is far from reality and how often it is ignored. We also know the simple saying about “setting the fox to keep the geese”. That is why the development of human society has been accompanied since its early days by two different and basically contradictory tendencies:

- a tendency to appropriate knowledge and with it related competences, which justify or should justify decision-making competences and evaluation of problem situations and their solution;
- a tendency to entrust decision-making and evaluation of complex problem situations to those persons or subjects whose competences in the given social conditions are acknowledged or viewed as justifiable.

The first of the afore-mentioned tendencies is usually associated with the holding of a major power position, an office or a managerial post in an important authority or institution. Such an interconnection and interplay of vast powers and hence practical possibilities on the one hand and quality knowledge, complete with an adequate level of responsibility, on the other may generate important positive changes, major initiatives. But it also has its pitfalls, dangers or possible adverse effects. That is why even far-reaching powers should not be exercised without checks and balances, and not only checks by specialists but also by means of public control by citizens and the right to criticism and control. Still more important is the other of the given tendencies, i.e. application of considerable knowledge and competence requirements in solving demanding tasks, complex activities and procedures. After all, already in the Antiquity, treatment of diseases was entrusted to trained physicians who were capable of performing even complicated operations. At present, training of qualified medical specialists ranks among the more demanding educational programmes, which, furthermore, covers permanent and virtually lifelong education. It also encompasses medical ethics, making it so far the only branch providing training in the field of values on a traditional and long term basis.

Integration of knowledge and values and thus integration of specialized and professional erudition on the one hand, and high civic and moral standards on the other seems to be less thoroughly ensured in some other types of qualified activities. But this does not mean only professional ethics of other qualified professions and a synthesis of the humanities, natural sciences and technical education, the application of such branches

as technology assessment (TA), subjects dealing with mastering complex technical equipment, the “human dimension” of such devices. There are also activities that should be made inaccessible to psychically or morally impaired individuals, for instance in case of activities requiring a high rate of responsibility due to the risks typical of the present-day civilization. As a result, it is no accident that a branch usually characterized as HR or human resources is beginning to assume an ever greater role in the conditions of our civilization grappling with a high rate of risks.

A major impetus for the task of integrating values and knowledge was and still is the growing extent of risks accompanying the life of man and society, the necessity of knowing the nature and dangers posed by those risks, and the need to ensure prevention against them. Originally, this involved primarily those risks that can be described as the risks posed by nature, the risks of storms, natural disasters, inclemency, risks of diseases and epidemics. A substantial portion human endeavours and strivings has always been associated with efforts to design protective measures against risks, to lessen their dangers and overcome them, as illustrated by the difficult path humankind has travelled from caves to stone houses, from life around open fires to heated buildings and air-conditioning systems, as shown by the struggle waged by medicine against accidents, diseases and epidemics. However, the current development stage of the human society is also marked by the fact that man-induced risks are assuming an ever greater share of overall risks, while their danger is rising. This applies to social conflicts, wars, threats posed to the society by criminals etc. Consequently, this gave rise to city walls, to the towns of old Etruscans perched on inaccessible hillsides, to the Roman “limes”, such as the well-known walls protecting the Roman-occupied England from attacks launched from the northern parts of the country, and last but not least to the famous Great Chinese Wall. It was the eminent contemporary thinker J.-J. Salomon who has demonstrated that the contemporary civilization, which prides itself on such attributes as “advanced”, “modern” or even “postmodern” etc., is

actually a civilization typified and characterized by a high level of different types of risks. (He called them metaphorically “seven new Egyptian disasters”, alluding to the Old Testament “Egyptian disasters” with which the supreme being punished the arrogant and proud Egyptians.) In the first place, these are tremendous risks posed by contemporary technology, the vulnerability of the existing large-scale technological systems, the dangers of pollution connected with a flood of useless messages, offers, advertisements and other forms of “touting for customers”, the risks associated with changes of the world climate etc.

When considering the need to integrate knowledge and values, we tend to relate that postulate primarily to major decision-making committees, commissions of experts and specialists set up for decision-making and assessment of major investment projects in the transport infrastructure and power sectors, and far-reaching technical changes. But not only specialists are and must be involved in such processes. The current situation calls for what could be described as the task of “expanding the sphere of competent, responsible and adequately qualified subjects of decision-making, assessment and evaluation”. Decision-making by incompetent and unqualified persons, even though such people may have at their disposal vast and formally secured powers or competences confirmed by their wealth, may cause untold and often irreversible damage. Of crucial importance for the current situation requiring coexistence of different concepts, ethnic groups and religions is a principle that may be called “emergence and development of global responsibility”. The following can be regarded as the key components of this particular principle:

- rejection of a practice called “appeasement”, i.e. bribing and assuaging criminals, trying to “buy” them with various gifts or rewards;
- outright rejection of the principle “this does not concern me”, i.e. attitudes of indifference or apathy to evident evil or connivance at criminal offences;

- necessity of promoting a creative synthesis and consonance or consistency of general values on one hand, and values or principles bound up solely with specific situations and specific professions.

A traditional negative example illustrating appeasement of criminals is the agreement concluded by the Prime Ministers of Britain and France with A. Hitler and B. Mussolini in 1938, a treaty signed by the two leaders behind the back and to the detriment of other non-participants, i.e. the then Czechoslovakia. The countries of the two Prime Ministers were later made to pay hard for that act of bribery and also for their betrayal. On the other hand, a positive example of rejecting the principle “this does not concern me” is the broadly-based public response in many European countries and shows of human solidarity in response to the recent disastrous catastrophe caused by undersea volcanic eruptions and the resultant tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

While the principle of global responsibility is better known in both above-mentioned areas and is beginning to be applied in other situations as well, namely thanks to an upsurge in the worldwide information society, less attention has still been accorded to the problems of synthesis, harmony and consistence of general values and values associated with only some specific situations. An exception to the rule is to be found in the systems of legal values and related legal regulations, in which focus on their relations, mutual contexts and their consistency has always been regarded in the best traditions of legal thinking and reasoning. A familiar manifestation of such efforts and ambitions is exemplified by the so-called rules of derogation, known from the principles and traditions of the Roman law. (These are the rules according to which a subsequent legal regulation overrides an earlier one with the identical subject, higher norms have precedence over lower ones. In Latin: “*lex posterior derogat priori*” etc.). These rules are still adhered to and respected, as corroborated by the rulings of the supreme, hence Constitutional Court. Similar principles are applied to the development, adjustment and establishment of new relations among

the European legal regulations and those used by the individual nation states in the European Union. The newly developing branch of contemporary logic, i.e. deontic logic, perceived as the logic of normative statements and normative systems, has also had its significance for the monitoring of the contexts and relations of legal regulations.

Values and the standards connected therewith can be arranged according to their subjects and spheres of competence into specific systems, which may constitute relatively complex structures in parallel with hierarchically arranged systems. The difference and often the confrontational nature of those components of different wholes and structures stand out all the more distinctly in the light of the contemporary trends of globalization, shortening distances, growing spread of information technology, and other tendencies of the contemporary world. This, in turn, breeds and spreads new conflicts whose scope and profundity transcend the boundaries of the individual regions, turning them into worldwide and hence global conflicts. Therefore, what some authors describe as a “conflict of civilizations” should primarily be seen as a clash and often as an open conflict between substantially different values, value structures and life goals, wishes and demands affected by those values. These are notably conflicts involving what can be characterized as different and contradictory “teleological worlds”.

Ethical values and ethical standards, too, may be hierarchically arranged. These relate primarily to a conscious, goal-directed human action. Even such behaviour and thus the entire sphere of diverse human activities may be divided into two different areas. The first of these may be seen – very generally – as something that man does with a certain intent or goal, the other area may be perceived as a set of different fields of human actions, target or problem areas in distinctly specified circumstances. The first value area and related rules of human action is regarded as a general ethic governed by consciousness. The other field is made up of specific, most frequently professional ethics, reflecting different types of roles, es-

pecially qualified activities within the framework of different specialized professions. A classical example of a general ethic is offered by the principles and rules governing human behaviour, as set out in the well-known “mountain sermon”, recorded in the gospels of the Old Testament. Specific or professional ethics is exemplified by the Hippocratic oath, stating the code of professional medical conduct and ethics, by professional rules and ethics of some handicrafts or manufacturing and creative professions. Various problems, discordances as well as evident and open conflicts may also arise in the relations among ethical values and ethical standards.

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