

INTRODUCTION

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This second issue of PHILOSOPHICA dealing with various aspects of social indicators and quality of life research and their philosophical ramifications completes our critical survey of this emerging multidisciplinary field of social science.

Lack of space has kept us from including contributions dealing with certain important topics. Thus it would have been nice to have papers on the use of social accounting techniques in normative societal forecasting, or on environmental quality (probably the most intricate domain of application). Nonetheless, we think a fairly representative picture of the field has been drawn, conveying a flavour of the current state of the art and of its pitfalls.

The direct relevance to our subject of most contributions to the previous issue was rather obvious. Jan Drewnowski and Karl Fox, two economists, reported on their ongoing work : the construction of a workable "quality of life function" and the elaboration of a fairly sophisticated social accounting system, respectively. Friedhelm Gehrman's paper was a critical discussion of the actual application of social accounts in urban and regional planning by a sociologist. Storrs McCall and Ephraim Ben-Baruch, both professional philosophers, dealt with conceptual and methodological issues respectively. McCall argued that QOL should be constructed as an objective category wholly different from the utilitarians' notion of subjective collective welfare. Ben-Baruch discussed the various functions of classifications, rankings and measurements in the social sciences in general. From their quite distinct perspectives, Drewnowski, Gehrman and McCall also glanced at the future collaboration between some of the disciplines concerned with SI/QOL research (in particular, sociology, psychology and the

“dismal science”). Fox treated the problem of multidisciplinary collaboration quite extensively. With the possible exception of Drewnowski, all authors also seemed to feel that the question of objective SI vs. indicators reflecting perceived satisfaction with living conditions cannot be settled in an “either/or” fashion, and that SI/QOL research will have to devise adequate methods enabling to deal with both types of indicators in a complementary, yet un-arbitrary way.

Michelle Durand (this issue) addresses the problem of objective vs. subjective QOL assessment from the perspective of a sociologist primarily interested in the way new concepts such as “environment”, “nuisance” or “QOL” are “appropriated” by certain social groups and adapted to their specific short- and long-term interests and purposes. She discusses ways to escape from the “technocratic circle” that characterizes the bulk of current research on “social needs”: These needs are intrinsically correlated with life styles; one is then apt to consider only life styles reflecting the current state of economic development and to project them into the future, yielding serious biases. This brings her to a discussion of methods as currently used. In the subsequent contribution to this volume, Yvette Harff, also a sociologist, looks in more detail to the way the French Communist Party (PCF) and the French Communist trade union (CGT) have defined and articulated their position vis-à-vis the QOL discussion. The principal terms of this debate she considers to be pro and con options as to capitalist development and scientific-technological rationality as sources of progress or deterioration. A third sociologist, Walter Van Trier, points to and analyses the malaise Marxist sociology and theory in general display when they must come to grips with the new challenges posed by the QOL debate (which is intrinsically related to the “use value” problematique).

Compared with the contributions mentioned hitherto, which were all written “from within” the field, Gilbert Rist’s paper (included in the twin volume) was of a rather different tenor. Written from the perspective of someone viscerally at odds with the various “developmentalist” schools that have consecutively become fashionable, his contribution was a vehement criticism of their philosophical premises: statism, exchange liberalism and “anthropocentrism”. In many respects, he took a stance not unlike Ivan Illich’s in his thought-provoking contributions to this volume. The first of Illich’s papers analyses the long-neglected category of unpaid activities an

industrial society demands of its members as a necessary complement to the production of goods and services (“shadow-work”). The second paper is a venture into at present largely drowned land, an exploration of what Illich claims to be the positive counterpart to servile and degrading shadow-work: subsistence-providing “vernacular” activities¹. Language reform, the imposition of taught mother tongue is discussed at length as a paradigmatic case of the imposition of bureaucratic control over vernacular values. Illich also analyses what he considers to be the three fundamental dimensions of social choice in contemporary world society: “left-right”, “soft-hard” and “doing-having”.

To some readers, the inclusion of Rist’s and Illich’s highly critical papers under the heading “SI/QOL research” may seem paradoxical or beside the mark. After all, isn’t the SI movement supposed to be “a liberal reformist response to the failures of capitalist development”, deemed to remain “utopian” as it refuses to consider “the socio-economic context, production relations, the class structure of the society which after all determine the shape of the development process as well as the distribution and allocation of resources” ?² More generally, aren’t social accounting systems, like all other formal models of societal structure and process, essentially *mystifying* ?³

Our answer to this or related criticisms is a conditional “yes but ...” Models can mystify; they can also clarify a great deal. With a view to the present organization of SI/QOL research (its principal sponsors: governmental and international bureaucracies; its typical producers: often narrow-minded, politically naive, technocratic specialists; its consumers: mainly incrementalist planners) critiques such as those just mentioned are probably true in general; though one could point to some notable exceptions, e.g. approaches rooted in unionist or consumerist preoccupations. Yet we think that to discard a priori the possibility of influencing the future development of SI/QOL research, of changing its form and content to cope better with features such as socio-economic and political organization and participation, or international dependencies, would mean to succumb to the same mechanism of *reification* the left is always eager to expose in its adversaries. There is an even stronger argument: If they do not want to relapse into vacuous verbiage, opponents in a debate over societal concerns — regardless of their political/ideological attitudes — *must* sooner or later appeal to the very kind of arguments discussed in SI/QOL research⁴. Thus *Pauschalargumente*, as Germans

call them, such as "history does not proceed by consensus" (Rist) or (in Rist's discussion of Third World poverty and dependency) "one must recognize that if the situation changes, it is generally in the sense of a deterioration rather than of progress", true as they may be, stand in need of further qualification and quantification. To paraphrase Ben-Baruch's words : dichotomous thinking (classification) and measurement do not exclude each other. Nor is the latter necessarily superior to the former (or vice versa) in social research : *both* are necessary and mutually complementary. To be justified to say that "undesired externalities exceed benefits in present day industrial society" (Illich), someone must actually have measured both !

To sum up, at the level of *rational* arguments, the borderline between "critical" and "positive" approaches to some phenomenon is often slippery. In the short synthesis paper which concludes this issue, we have argued that SI/QOL research as currently practiced may gain from an epistemological reflection on its praxiological preconceptions.

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NOTES

¹"Shadow-Work" and "Vernacular Values" as published here are drafts of two chapters of a major book (*War against Subsistence*) Illich hopes to finish by 1982.

²C.A. Mills, "Identification of social concerns and social indicators relevant to development planning in Africa", in *Final Report of the Regional Seminar on the Applicability of Socio-Economic Indicators for Analysis and Planning in Africa*, Paris, Unesco, Analytical and Methodological Studies SS-79/WS/5, 1979, p. 36.

³See, e.g., R. Carr-Hill, "Models and Mystification : The Use of Mathematics to Support Vested Interests" and the subsequent discussion in S. Cole & H. Lucas (eds.), *Models, Planning and Basic Needs*, Oxford ..., Pergamon Press, 1979, pp. 165-171.

⁴Of course, they may prefer to call the same things by different names !