

Foss, Dennis C. *The Value Controversy in Sociology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977, 131 pages.

This book professes four goals: 1) to summarize and clarify current positions on the value controversy; 2) to suggest the weaknesses of such positions; 3) to present two current, but contrasting, standpoints; and 4) to offer a proposed orientation that goes beyond these positions in order to stimulate and set a focus for debate.

The first half of this work is a review of the literature centering around the notion of a value-free social science. This notion is characterized by an emphasis on increasing knowledge for its own sake while systematically excluding questions of value, i.e., "extra-epistemic values." Foss argues that this position is both inaccurate and inadequate. "Inaccurate" because sociologists inherently betray their extra-epistemic values in their work, e.g., by the particular subject and focus of study, by the particular method chosen, or by the means of knowledge dissemination. "Inadequate" because it ignores questions of value, even though these concerns do, in fact, arise. Thus, for Foss, the real question confronting sociologists is not *whether* to adopt an extra-epistemic value orientation, but *which* orientation should be adopted. He utilizes reference material from various viewpoints, criticizes them, and makes his own stance known. A clear, neatly argued, although not particularly original, presentation is made.

In chapters Three and Five, the skeptic's view and the naturalistic-evolutionary view are considered. The skeptic asserts, following Weber et al., that questions of value cannot be empirically answered, that one cannot derive "ought" from "is". Foss largely ignores other critics of this position, criticizing it himself on the grounds that it still fails to address the problem, *viz.* that extra-epistemic values inevitably enter into sociological inquiry.

The naturalistic-evolutionary view presented here is a summary of C.H. Waddington's *The Ethical Animal*. In contrast to the skeptic's position, Waddington holds that ethical systems can be chosen according to factual criteria. Ethics arise out of societal interaction and have survived because they promote survival and

evolutionary developments in that society. Thus, ethical systems may be judged "good" to the degree that they promote group survival and evolution. Humans, he continues, have a unique system of adaptation—"socio-genetics." Values, knowledge, beliefs, etc., vary and are transmitted and selected in much the same way genes are. Also employed from evolutionary theory is the concept of "opening anagenesis". This term refers to an evolutionary movement that results in a change that increases the potential for future development. Diploid sexual development can be seen as such a change because it increases the genetic variability relative to asexual reproduction.

With these concepts in mind, Foss proposes his new orientation for the profession. He makes no explicit recommendation for either the skeptic's or the naturalistic view, but he seems to favor the latter. He attempts to offer an extra-epistemic value orientation compatible with both. Consequently, no in-depth criticisms are put forth.

The social sciences, argues Foss, should first seek out through theory and research those types of social structures that optimize the alternatives available to their members, and then disseminate and apply such knowledge in order that one's own society might actually embody this optimization. What is being suggested is a concept of general freedom: "the optimization of alternatives open to every individual compatible with equal optimization of alternatives open to all" (p. 63). Freedom is having a maximum number of behavioral choices without jeopardizing the choices of others. Foss holds that this orientation is compatible with the naturalistic view because it is an opening anagenesis, an increase, if you will, of the socio-gene pool. Therefore, it is based factually upon its tendency to promote societal survival by increasing adaptability. Compatibility with the skeptic's view arises from the absence of value impositions through the expansion of value choices.

In describing his proposed orientation, Foss is exceedingly ambiguous and redundant. Major thinkers have frequently concerned themselves with the goal and definition of freedom. This criticism is anticipated by Foss who points out that it has never been explicitly proposed as a professional orientation. His

rebuttal rests upon the clarity of his proposal—something which, in fact, it lacks. The major questions which remain are: Exactly what is freedom? How do we know when we see it? How do we achieve it? While an interesting compatibility between both the skeptic's and the naturalistic-evolutionary views regarding the value of freedom is pointed out, freedom is left ill-defined. For instance, is there a difference between quality and quantity of choices? Does the imposition of means to freedom constitute a breach of it? Is the orientation itself a value imposition to those traditional cultures, etc.? Foss skirts these issues by stating that the profession should first agree on his broad orientation as a starting point for debate and clarification. However, debate is stimulated by clear, provocative arguments, not suggestions for discussion. In addition, the inclusion of his proposed orientation seems misplaced if aimed at the profession, since this work is largely a summary and an introduction to the value controversy.

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