

Value-Judgements and Value-Orientations in Industrial Psychology

A. Buss

Volume 29, numéro 3, 1974

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/028534ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/028534ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Buss, A. (1974). Value-Judgements and Value-Orientations in Industrial Psychology. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 29(3), 592–601.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/028534ar>

COMMENTAIRES

VALUE-JUDGEMENTS and VALUE-ORIENTATIONS IN INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY

A. BUSS

This paper has mainly been written as an analysis of only one book : J.A.C. Brown's « The Social Psychology in Industry »¹. Brown's book is almost twenty years old. Yet it has sometimes been called one of the thrillers of industrial psychology, and it probably has some influence even today, especially in university courses. Moreover, the author of this paper believes, that several of Brown's implicit value – judgement and – orientations are equally represented in many more recent works in the field of industrial psychology. This alone would be justification enough to offer this paper.

The values on which Industrial Psychology as conceived by the abovementioned author is based, will be analysed from the point of view of a sociology of knowledge which has aptly been resumed in the statement that « psychology always presupposes cosmology »², namely a conception of reality, of how things are interrelated and should be inter-related. Indeed, no science exists without some axioms or presuppositions which cannot be proven by scientific means and which form together the value-orientation of that science.

All scientific results of research will be perfectly acceptable if they have been found in conformity with the procedural canons of empirical science. However, they will be of interest only to those who agree with the value-orientation or who believe that the advantages of supplementing the findings of that science outweigh the cost of accepting the value-orientation.

A problem now lies in the fact, that value-orientations and value-judgements are not always easily discernible by the reader, especially the « practitioner », the managers in industry. Moreover, some authors cannot resist the temptation to « prove » their presuppositions. It seems therefore that the value-orientations of the main trends in Industrial Psychology should be of some concern to all those who are studying its findings and try to put them into practice.

¹ James A. C. BROWN, *The Social Psychology of Industry*, (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 310 pp., 1970 ; 1st ed. 1954).

² Peter BERGER and Thomas LUCKMANN, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, N.Y., Anchor Books, 219 pp., 1967). The footnote refers to p. 175.

The values discussed in this paper have been chosen because they are probably more fundamental and important than others. They are interrelated and are in a way different aspects of the same phenomenon : an ethno-centric attitude.

WORK — SOMETIMES A PLEASANT ACTIVITY

Industrial psychologists are mainly concerned with work, work-environment, workers in groups. Certainly, it would be highly unsatisfactory, if their main object of research — work — were considered as an unpleasant activity *per se*.

It is rather more tempting to believe, that work is pleasant, indeed, or — to say it in Brown's words — that « the idea of disliking work has never occurred, as the most superficial study of history or anthropology would make clear, to the vast majority of human beings »³. Brown does not give a definition of work, but his rather apodictic statement is surprising, because the most superficial study of history or anthropology makes it clear that work as we conceive it today, is a relatively new phenomenon, and that the idea that work is good, respectable and pleasant, has only recently come to us, together with other protestant ideals, as described by Max Weber. Certainly, all cultures need to work, but the Greeks, the Romans, e.g. the Stoa, saw leisure rather than work as the ideal of their culture. Work was considered as something to be done by slaves and one is entitled to doubt whether the slaves of antiquity enjoyed their work. Only modern egalitarian ideals have changed the way we look at work, and not even in all countries⁴.

The belief that work is or at least could be pleasant and socially useful may be necessary for industrial psychologists, but it is an ideal, to be chosen and pursued if one wishes. It would be untrue to say, that only unfavorable environment has been the cause for some people (or cultures) to dislike work. A more likely hypothesis is, that other ideals and values have often been preferred to the protestant ethic of work and productivity. This would be true even if work is defined as any sort of social activity, because to this author's knowledge there has never existed an Utopia in which all social activity could be said to be pleasant.

Work is not a basic need, as Brown suggests⁵. A number of people all over the world have been and are perfectly able to live without it. Nor is work necessarily a social activity⁶, as the work done by eremites

³ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁴ Gunnar MYRDAL, *Asian Drama* (abridged), (New York, Vintage Books, 465 pp., 1972). Myrdal describes (p. 159) how menial work is despised in some Asian countries and education is valued only because it may provide an escape from physical drudgery.

⁵ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁶ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 189 (« any definition which leaves out the fact that work is a social activity, is no definition at all »).

should prove. If Brown simply means that work should always be a pleasant and social activity (in the sense of socializing), this could be considered as a value-orientation of Industrial Psychology, perfectly acceptable as such, but not as a scientific statement. Any historical « proof » would evidently be impossible.

CONCEPTS OF SOCIETY AND MAN

Let us now turn the analysis to the concept of a « healthy society ». Ancient society, says Brown, had its advantages : anxiety and sense of insecurity, which are inseparable from a competitive society with mobile status, were avoided, everyone had a secure awareness of belonging, peace, comfort and self-respect ⁷.

Ancient society in all its supposed harmony seems a better ideal to him, in this respect, than today's world of competition. According to him, happy primary groups should be reconstructed in the work-environment in order to fulfill the « universal needs of status, security and appreciation ». The number of foreign workers, probably because they destroy this harmonious in-group-feeling, should be limited to 10% of the total work-force ⁸.

Should the workers be protected against too many foreigners or, to state it more broadly, against any uprooting of their feeling of belonging ?

At stake is the social function of industry, a social function which, according to Brown, is to create an environment, where the individual can take root, where he belongs and has a function, a social function which is supposed to be no less important than technical efficiency ⁹ and quite apart from the production of goods.

If these propositions of Brown are taken as what they are : as ideals to be attained, and not as facts, they are certainly acceptable as such. But even then one should not forget the following implications. One implication is based on Cooley's theory of primary groups. (Cooley states that primary groups are the instrument of society through which in large measure the individual acquires his attitudes, opinions, goals and ideals, and that they are the major source of discipline and control) ^{9a}.

It is implicitly suggested by Brown, that an atmosphere of primary groups should be created in the working environment. This, however, gives rise to some difficulty on the side of the workers : the choice of their reference-group. For the sake of consistency one should think that for anybody whose reference-group is his family, some friction and compromise between the values of his family and those of his work-group are often unavoidable. If, on the other hand, one reference-group is replaced

⁷ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁸ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁹ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

^{9a} Charles H. COOLEY, *Social Organization*, (New York, Schocken, 1962).

by the other, this is perhaps not impossible, but it involves a moral choice and not a scientific proposal.

The other implication results from my opposition against the statement of Brown that « there is not the slightest reason to suppose that one function of industry (its social function) need be carried out at the expense of the other (production of goods) »¹⁰.

On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that these values are often contradictory, at least in the long run, because of the principle of the hierarchy of values. In fact, why should the self-imposed discipline of the we-group be directed towards the same goals as the externally imposed discipline of the autocratic group? This may exceptionally be so, but not as a rule. Means often tend to become goals, and in the fight for better means (better working-conditions etc.) goals of the firm might easily be changed or forgotten¹¹.

But let us now go back to anthropological studies. These studies can raise other doubts concerning a « healthy society », doubts which are in line with criticisms of functional anthropology raised by British ethnographer E. Leach :

« English social anthropologists have tended to borrow their primary concepts from Durkheim rather than from either Pareto or Max Weber. Consequently, they are strongly prejudiced in favor of societies which show symptoms of functional integration, social solidarity, cultural uniformity, structural equilibrium. Such societies, which might well be regarded as moribund by historians or political scientists, are commonly looked upon by social anthropologists as healthy and ideally fortunate. Societies which display symptoms of faction and internal conflict leading to rapid change are on the other hand suspected of anomie and pathological decay. »¹²

Leach then goes on, explaining that when the anthropologist attempts to describe a social system, he necessarily describes only a model of the social reality. The different parts of the model form a coherent whole, a system in equilibrium, and if it were not so, it would certainly appear to the reader that the analysis was incomplete. But this does not imply, he says, that the social reality forms a coherent whole. On the contrary, the reality situation in most cases is full of inconsistencies.

¹⁰ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹¹ My argument goes farther than in : George STRAUSS, « The Personality vs. Organization Theory ». (L. R. Sayles : *Individualism and Big Business*, pp. 67-80, McGraw-Hill, 1963). Strauss suggests here that, what he calls the « personality-organization-hypothesis » fails to balance carefully the costs and gains of power equalization.

¹² Edmund LEACH, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 324 pp., 1968 ; 1st ed. 1954). The footnote refers to pp. 7-8.

A healthy society is an idea which has been in our philosophy long before Rousseau and has been used again and again by philosophers and builders of utopias. What has been a model for the study of society, has been raised in Industrial Psychology to the status of an ideal which we should tempt to achieve in the working-context.

Similar observations can be made about Brown's concept of man. Laissez-faire is over, he believes, we must build our new society on other assumptions of man and his nature¹³. This means : men are not like savage animals any more, as Hobbes believed, each fighting for his own self-interest. The assumption becomes now, that man is good, at least a *poteriori*. « There are no bad soldiers, only bad officers »¹⁴, there are no problem-children, only problem-parents »¹⁵, are well-known statements in criminology. Rousseau's *bon sauvage* comes to our mind. In the same way as primitive societies perished in the contact with modern culture when they met western sailors or soldiers who invaded their beautiful islands and sold them alcohol, — so children who could possibly be good become bad with problem parents, and so workers, who under different conditions would be the nicest people in the world, become intolerable, simply because they have to work under bad managers.

It is rather surprising to find mankind divided into two parts : the workers who are good a *poteriori* and managers who are bad and ignorant and consequently need the help of the industrial psychologist.

Selffulfilling Prophecy is evoked by the defendants of this theory : because of managements behavior workers behave as management thinks that workers always behave. This explanation is, to say the least, mono-causal and therefore incomplete. There is always some environmental determination and always some individual determination and it is improper to exclude either. The utopia of a healthy society is looming again in the background : the argument is that if management behaves well the workers will be happy and good. Let it be clear that I do not argue against such an utopia, but it should be evident, that here again a value-orientation is implied.

CONSIDERING DEMOCRATIC IDEALS

Let us now consider the of the term « Industrial Democracy ». Not only do we learn that under existing conditions « industrial democracy is becoming a necessity »¹⁶, and that « the trend of history is leading into that direction »¹⁷, we are also told that the superiority of democratic control has been proven in experiments. The study mentioned (by Lewin, Lippit and White) concerns the behavior of schoolboys in the United

¹³ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

¹⁴ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁵ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

¹⁶ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

¹⁷ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

States and Brown adds, it must be admitted, that whether the results would have been the same with children brought up under different cultural conditions, its a matter of doubt ¹⁸.

That democratic control is best, with the abolition of hierarchical organization and bureaucracy which this implies, seems to be a common place in modern Industrial Psychology. Underlying this trend, we definitively have a concept of man who is unwilling to support any sort of hierarchy (or even to conceive of hierarchy as a valuable mean of organization), a concept which clearly relates to modern western egalitarian ideology. « The growth of different groups within the organization might lead to conflict. That is, it would encourage a lack of reliance on overall company identification, a growth of the we-they orientation as opposed to the us-system of thinking », says a representative of this ideology ¹⁹.

There is little of those conceptions to be found in other civilizations, e.g. India or even Japan.

Agarwala ²⁰, writing on India, tells us that consultative management needs basically group planning and execution, an egalitarian man-to-man juxtaposition . . . , assumptions which have little cultural traditions and which are new to all levels of management in India. « There has been some attempt of introducing workers' participation, but one suspects, that is has little chance of operations success. »

Another example with hierarchical values is Japan ²¹. According to Cole, *giri*-relationships have an important role to play in Japan's industry. This means that workers regard favors from superiors as creating an obligation to serve on their part. Favors and good treatment are not considered as human rights. *Giri*-relations link persons of unequal status, they imply a willingness of the subordinate to sacrifice his self-interest to a superior.

It is evident that, if a sharply hierarchical social structure is to persist beyond a coercive level, those with subordinate status must accept as legitimate the authority of those above them. Cole explains this hierarchical ethic by the persisting hierarchical social order throughout Japanese history.

Recently, according to Cole, informal relationships are decreasing in large Japanese companies, being replaced by impersonal bureaucratic standards. Japanese managers make no attempt to avoid increases of

¹⁸ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

¹⁹ Abraham K. KORMAN, *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 398 pp., 1971). The footnote refers to page 91.

²⁰ Amar N. AGARWALA, *The Emerging Dimensions of Indian Management*, (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 215 pp., 1970). The footnote refers to p. 99.

²¹ Robert E. COLE, *Japanes Blue Collar Workers*, (Berkeley, U. of California Press, 300 pp., 1971). The footnote refers to pp. 202-218.

bureaucratic, formal organization. If I had to offer an explanation for this development, which is in opposition to statements like that of Korman, I would suggest that, because informal relations in Japan are based on a hierarchical rather than egalitarian ideology, the Japanese people might find it easier to accept the formal hierarchical organization of bureaucracy than their American counterpart.

Furthermore, according to Cole, it is not surprising to find that formal bureaucracy in Japan leads to higher productivity than informal democratic organization, because, to quote Cole, worker response often depends on more factors than simply the management choice between the punishment and representative mode of bureaucracy.

All this is quite contrary to what Brown says when he believes to oppose his theories to Weber's conception of bureaucracy²².

One suspects that much depends on the context where one of the organizational theories (theory X or theory Y in McGregor's terms) is applied. However, whichever the context, whichever the ideals of one's final decision are, it should be realized, that industrial democracy and democratic control imply the necessity of compromise. The wish to make compromises is by no means a self-evident values, superior to so-called extrêmes, although it is a value which underlies many cultures, but not all. Weber thought, that it is the business of the politician, not of the may have changed, but even a generally accepted value (like compromising) is still a value²⁴.

²² Reference to Weber's thought on bureaucracy seems unavoidable. Present-day psychologists seem to take him as a scapegoat, who is said to have preached a now outdated bureaucratic ideal. This is a fallacy. Let us make it clear that Weber did not preach bureaucracy, on the contrary, the man who said: « the passion for bureaucracy is enough to drive one to despair... , what can we oppose to this machinery in order to keep a portion of mankind free from this parcelling-out of the soul », could hardly have been a protagonist of bureaucracy. What Weber said, however, is, that bureaucracy is technically superior to all other forms of administration, in the same way as machine producing is superior to non-mechanical methods. This did in no way imply a value-judgement. The term bureaucracy, for Weber, is an ideal-type (useful for describing reality), and not an ideal. The reference has been taken from p. 455 of Reinhard BENDIX, *Max Weber, an Intellectual Portrait*, (London, Heinemann, 480 pp., 1960).

²³ MYRDAL, *op. cit.*, p. 150, talking of political democracy, mentions that all leaders of South Asian countries embraced democracy. The western countries regarded this choice as perfectly natural and normal: « a strange example of ethnocentrism and lack of historical perspective. »

²⁴ Of importance to this chapter is the conception of the political domain as developed by Julien FREUND, *L'essence du politique*, Paris, Sirey, 764 pp., 1955. Of particular interest is a note on p. 158 : *Derrière la conception coopérative de l'obéissance se dissimule le vieux rêve de l'humanité d'une politique non politique. De même qu'on a cru autrefois pouvoir atténuer la singularité et le résolution d'une*

GENERAL WELL-BEING AND OBJECTIVITY

General well-being and social efficiency belong together in Brown's book. Both are important in the sense that they are believed to be what the industrial psychologist is working for in the final analysis.

We have reached a state of affairs, says Brown, in which it is possible to measure not only the economic and technical efficiency of an organization, but also its social efficiency²⁵. Social efficiency, so it is implied, is favorable to the general well-being, and it should not be forgotten, that earlier sins have now been overcome (« even Mayo was still a bosses' man » and « psychologists are not any more concerned with production but with general well-being »²⁶).

General well-being (whatever this means), however, is a term which should be treated very carefully. It should certainly not lead to the surprising conclusion that, because of this pursuit, the « Industrial psychologist can like the industrial physician be on nobody's side »²⁷. This may be true for University professors, who think but do not act, but is otherwise hardly possible. Brown rightly defends Mayo against his critics, with the argument, that Mayo's researches were conducted to help management solve its problems and that consequently one cannot accuse him of taking sides with management²⁸. I do not quite see why the same argument should not apply for today's psychologists. Stating clearly, why and for whose sake research is being undertaken is very much needed in all fields, and it is either dishonest or sign of a lack of perspective to cover up one's reasons and values by saying that research is being done for the « General Well-being ».

For when one says that the goal is increased satisfaction for everybody (or, as some welfare-theorists have it : general welfare is a function of the growing welfare of each individual), one has not made a statement which is compatible with all possible values. One rather has made a definition, which, although sounding self-evident, is strictly speaking a norm —, and nobody is obliged to accept it²⁹. In most cases the « General

décision politique en la subordonnant successivement à des normes religieuses, éthiques ou économiques, on met de nos jours l'espoir en une organisation techno-scientifique. Malgré l'importance actuelle du courant technocratique il n'y a guère de chances qu'il puisse supplanter un jour la volonté proprement politique.

²⁵ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

²⁶ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

²⁷ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²⁸ BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

²⁹ For a more developed argument on this compare Hans ALBERT, « Das Werturteilsproblem im Lichte der logischen Analyse », *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, Band 112, Tübingen 1956, Mohr-Siebeck, p. 410-39.

Well-being » simply means the implementation of those values which the individual psychologist happens to have.

CONCLUSION

This then is the cosmology for which Brown strives: A « healthy » society without faction and internal conflict where, because of favorable circumstances everybody is good and pleased to work — disliking of work never occurs, — a democratic society, where decisions are being taken in perfect harmony through compromises and where the « General Well-being » (its meaning and definition are agreed upon by everybody) is valued higher than productivity or anything else. If this picture does not correspond with reality, it is at least an ideal to be achieved and it is assumed that this Utopia will make the workers happy. Perhaps !

But a healthy and democratic society are ideals and models which can be defined in many ways and which probably have never existed in real life. And the idea that work can and should be pleasant for everybody (assuming that people want to give it at least a try) and that a « General Well-being » exists, are simple presuppositions and value-judgements.

If we feel that this is the society which we are striving for, then and only then it makes sense to implement findings of an Industrial Psychology like the one proposed by Brown. The importance of stating these value-orientations becomes even clearer, if one realizes, that psychological theories not only interpret reality but also create it. When people (workers) believe, that a theory is accepted and « true », they will behave accordingly and in this way create a reality which necessitates implementation of that theory³⁰.

It has also become clear, that other societies, having different values, will probably need other management techniques (and it should certainly not be forgotten, that the same statement applies for minorities in North America). The education of people of other cultures towards our ideals, as McClelland tries to do it, is only one possible solution³¹.

Finally, by implication, the question of leadership becomes dominant. Who should solve the grave problems of our society (intense stimulation of desires and the limitations imposed on satisfying them, according to

³⁰ BERGER & LUCKMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

³¹ David McCLELLAND, « Achievement Motivation can be developed », *Harvard Business Review*, Nov.-Dec. 1965.

Brown³²), and where do we find a new philosophy of life, so much needed according to Brown ?

I certainly do not know the answers. They constitute value-judgements as before, and consequently should be left out of the scope of scientific inquiry. Each scientist may have his personal opinion. But perhaps it is useful to remember that « bad » leadership in history has sometimes turned out to be beneficial in the long run. It is useful to remember that it is possible to educate to new ideals and to personal responsibility — and that every education implies not only pleasure but also some suffering.

RÉSUMÉ :

À l'exemple du livre de J. A. C. Brown « The Social Psychology of Industry » l'auteur essaie de montrer que la psychologie industrielle, comme toute science d'ailleurs, même si elle est fondée sur la recherche empirique, part d'axiomes et de valeurs. Il est important que non seulement les hommes de science mais aussi les praticiens dans l'Industrie connaissent les valeurs et les axiomes qui sont les fondements de la psychologie industrielle.

En particulier, l'auteur a examiné le concept du travail en tant qu'activité plaisante et sociale, le concept d'une société saine, et les concepts d'organisation démocratique et du bien-être général. Il a essayé de montrer que ces concepts sont souvent des idéaux et des valeurs plutôt que les résultats d'une recherche.

Les théories psychologiques et la recherche non seulement interprètent la réalité sociale, elles créent aussi cette réalité. C'est cet aspect de la recherche scientifique qu'il ne faudrait pas perdre de vue, bien qu'il soit extrêmement difficile de l'évaluer en pratique.

³² BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 210.