

Introduction

We don't have to conduct in-depth inquiries to realize that humanity (for the most part), everywhere on our planet, betrays a widespread distressing situation, confusion, perplexity, a lack of contact with the ideal of civilization. A sad and unthinkable state of affairs seems to prevail throughout the planet. Violence becomes the universal panacea for interpersonal and international relationships. A few old-fashioned thinkers keep whispering the voice of wisdom, mutual understanding and love for others; but, openly, many people have welcomed these expressions by cold scientific objectivism, indifference, irony or sarcasm. More than ever, contrary to what we may have expected, discrimination, sectarianism and intolerance have turned commonplace. Small-minded leaders have expressed opinions full of hatred.

This atmosphere unsuited to genuine human progress on a large scale spares no nation throughout the planet. It affects Industrialized or developed countries; poor or underdeveloped communities; nations belonging to the free world or the ones which belong to the totalitarian world (not long time ago also called the communistic or socialist world).

It also affects everybody: Whites, Blacks, Reds, Yellows (or any other skin color) have experienced a not too rosy situation and lived in fear.

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This sad state of affairs results in economic collapse, unemployment, famine, war, poverty, waste, immorality, urban guerilla warfare, administrative mess, global warming and other natural disasters (many of these derive, in some extent, from human misdeeds and mismanagements).

I maintain that I believe that such preliminary assessment of the world state of affairs does not describe a simple academic position or a frame of mind motivated by my *temperament* or *cultural reality*.

Indeed, I have spoken to thousands of people from all social and occupational sectors.

I have also observed, since childhood, the unpleasant unfolding of human contemporary history and conditions throughout our beloved planet. At last, I have read many negative historic accounts of past generations.

Indeed, many observe a real state of widespread pessimism stemming from the potential of a worldwide alarming atmosphere, capable of ending up in apocalyptic outcomes.

The same observers also have apprehension about the possibility of a much somber future and the impression that humanity and its institutions have reached a dangerous impasse that may lead us to a highly disastrous future, without the endeavor of men and women of good will throughout the world.

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Let me point out that I don't draw this essay from systemic pessimism; for, I accept the existence of values and sources of values that may—we believe—contribute to positive changes on this planet.

In other words, it's possible, based on values, to reach optimism as the French thinker, Alain, has suggested, according to which we may have the will to organize the real in a more meaningful and humane fashion.

Similarly, we may do wonders based on some kind of positivism à la Dewey (the American philosopher), suggesting genuine effort allowing the passing from an acceptable situation to another one more dynamic and promising.

Overall, the notion of value presupposes an ideal, an organized representation of reality and a priority of carefully chosen types of actions.

Then, it implies the willingness to raise our expectations, an invitation to face debilitating obstacles and to strive for overcoming them, from previously assessable reflection data, and the belief in the possibility of changing the world for the better, in some extent.

Then, our desire to improve our planetary existential conditions implies that reality stands for an alterable given.

Without that constant optimism, we have no justification for expressing any regret for not having chosen a better way of life for all; because, as would argue William James, regret wouldn't make any sense.

The reason seems obvious,

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What sense can there be in condemning ourselves for taking the wrong way, unless we need have done nothing of the sort, unless the right way was open to us as well? I cannot understand the willingness to act, no matter how I feel, without the belief that acts are really good or bad. I cannot understand the belief that an act is bad, without regret for its happening. I cannot understand regret without the admission of real, genuine possibilities in the world. Only then is it other than a mockery to feel, after we have failed to do our best, that an irreparable opportunity is gone from the universe, the loss of which we must forever after mourn (1).

Then, the notion of *value* leads to the idea, according to which, we should regard some ways and courses of actions as good, helpful, salubrious, and we should draw our inspiration from them or welcome them. Shouldn't we?

Such suggestion implies the determination to reject, as much as one can, the *non-value*, to avoid wrong and evil, to profess disgust for whatever (by nature) may harm others and ourselves.

Similarly, we should prefer knowledge to ignorance for several reasons. Knowledge increases the scope of our actions. It brings us inexhaustible spiritual satisfactions.

In addition, whoever devotes himself to it may enjoy an exciting life and escape from boredom.

Ignorance, on the contrary, brings limitations to our intellectual horizons.

It clearly aims at hampering our material and intellectual development.

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It often leads us to ill-considered deeds.

Thus, a lover of *values* should advocate the spreading of knowledge for himself and others, and participate in the decline of ignorance in any sense we want to take it.

We may take a simple example we all may be familiarized with: ignorance of others' sufferings may lead us to sadism, ethnic cleansing, lynching, torture, genocide and all the misdeeds one may think of.

We may endlessly list comparison of this kind between what we call *values* and *non-values*: between virtues and vices, good and bad faith, prejudice and tolerance, objectivity and fanaticism, love and hatred, sound public administration and administrative mess, compromise, dialogue, respect for human lives, peace and violence, war and a host of other miseries.

Having awareness of all the possibilities available to us, it's understandable that we should have a feeling of regret à la William James, because of our obvious failure.

Indeed, I can't get over the fact that human conditions keep worsening, in spite of the current belief that mankind, benefiting from past generations' rich experiences and traditions, should give the image of a more advanced world because of its alleged intellectual, material and moral betterment.

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In an effort to measure this prediction and belief, I assert that advancement has occurred at the level of technology.

What does that prove?

I may have to wait and see.

I understand that human conditions along with confusion, perplexity, apprehension about the outcome of an improved future, originating from the existing value systems, constitute overwhelming evidence that these sources of values have failed. A great number of men, women and children, from a material, social and spiritual viewpoints have lost hope. Then, they have developed, in the end, a distrust of ineffective and doubtful directives suggested by these value sources.

I don't intend to present an exhaustible list of human activities, which I may easily label *sources of values*.

I rather mean that such classification rests on the conclusion one may want to arrive at.

However, in this essay, for reasons that will appear as the essay goes along, I tend to restrict my inquiries to politics, science, art, religion and philosophy.

I don't think I can easily find someone with no preference for a political direction, for a scientific paradigm, for a religious creed, for a type of art, for a philosophical tenet.

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Followers and members of any of the organizations claiming to hold these values or to behave under the guidance of these sources of values, will go defending their respective beliefs and claims.

They may also go as far as to justify their leaders' actions even though *objective observers* have found out or will find out that some of these actions heinous or highly blamable, childish under normal circumstances.

Again, within the parameter of this essay, the human activities I have mentioned represent the main sources of values and include all the possible and imaginable ones.

Before looking into the failure of the sources of values, I will consider their presumed functions, the positive roles they should have intended to play.

I may not have too much headache to fulfill this task, since so many books, dealing with these human activities and other ones, have clearly defined rationale behind them.

Only after this cursory reminder, I will attempt to show that we have neglected the roles of these sources of values, we have forgotten them or we have remained purely and simply unaware of their ineffectiveness.

By way of foreword, let me point out that an overuse of references for a book like this would bore the readers.

A few examples and statements could sufficiently confirm the claims made by this essay.

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I have no other choice but to trust the readers' judgment to assess its realism or not.

Additionally, I don't intend to claim victory or to feel big. I simply want to present the results of my observations and reflections that, as a *witness*, a *student* and an *actor*, I am entitled to.

From time to time, I use a reference for the purpose of clarification.