

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL CRITERIA FOR A NOTION OF PROGRESS

### AXIOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

The idea of progress is essentially socio-historical. I mean by that that the idea and its meaningful content are the outcome of socio-historical processes in connection with the socio-cultural development of mankind, with which the idea of progress is inextricably linked. Before proceeding to any investigation of its nature it is necessary to dissociate its meaning from two fundamental concepts of modern natural and social science, evolution and change. Evolution is here taken in its strict biological connotation, not in its metaphysical implications. This point is made clear by Bradley who distinguishes between Darwinism as a theory of natural evolution and Darwinism as a metaphysics of existence.<sup>1</sup> From the standpoint of the social universe, within which the idea of progress acquires its meaningfulness, natural evolution is not indeed indifferent, but amoral, and has to be accounted for as an external condition. The same applies to cosmic evolution or changes occurring within the physical universe. Although not indifferent to man, these are devoid of moral content and have to be taken as objectively given conditions.

<sup>1</sup> W.R. Inge, *The Idea of Progress*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1920, p. 10.

J.S. Huxley's attribution of cruelty to nature can have a meaning only in a social and valuational context, for instance in those historical processes in which man struggles against nature and physical forces. This is what makes T.H. Huxley speak of a contradiction between ethical and cosmic process.<sup>2</sup> Huxley resolves this contradiction by assuming the identity of the ethical with the evolutionary process. This could be valid only in a macro-biological-philosophical perspective not on a comparatively micro-socio-historical scale. Human values are conceivable on a subjective basis as against the objective biological condition of man as a natural being. Any criteria derived from the cosmic processes with a view to invalidating the idea of progress are logically inappropriate, despite the fact that man's existence may sink into nothingness as a consequence of cosmic processes. An eventual extinction of the surrounding universe may be invoked as an argument against the operational scope and value of the idea of progress,<sup>3</sup> but this does not constitute an argument invalidating its reality, but only against its final justification in view of an eventually negative conclusion of the cosmic process. The argument is further invalidated by the fact that processes on the scale of the physical universe operate within immense spans of cosmic time, whereas socio-cultural processes can rise, develop, and integrate in further syntheses within the historical and socio-cultural time, which is but an infinite fraction of cosmic time. Human values are further commensurate with the still more infinitely small span of individual life, and the realization of a great number of those values is conceived within the individual life perspective, whether such a realization is a final achievement or contributory to a long-term and collective program of human action. Any conceived and projected materialization of the idea of progress can attain a *teleiosis* within historical time without reasonable fear of being overtaken by cosmic time. The real argument about progress cannot be derived from the external physical world, but from the internal reality of man's individual and social existence. As to the final conclusion of the cosmic process we may oppose the idea, fundamentally inherent in the

<sup>2</sup> Julian S. Huxley, *Evolutionary Ethics*, London, Oxford University Press, 1943, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> See W.R. Inge, *The Price of Progress*, London, University College, 1937, pp. 12-15.

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notion of progress itself, of man's possible emancipation from the cosmic process, an idea further strengthened by the immensity of cosmic time itself, within which man's socio-historical possibilities and potentialities are infinite, including the possibility of the aforesaid emancipation.

Likewise, progress must be dissociated from change. Change is a very general term denoting modification of existing status. In this sense its connotation is larger than that of the idea of progress, which denotes only a particular aspect of change. Change in general is as amoral as evolution, but the idea of change can be value-charged as soon as its effects become subjectively appropriated on account of their significance for man. Progress can be associated only with that aspect of change which has a positive and acceptable meaning for man and society. A notion of progress divested from its axiological content is contradictory. The term would be rendered *ipso facto* unnecessary, 'change' and 'evolution' would meet all requirements in accounting for any successive forms of the socio-cultural status of mankind.

Even though the 'positive' and 'acceptable' meaning may be so only for a section of mankind, the value content of the idea of progress is valid. What represents a progress for a section of the human community may be a regress for another section. This, only means that the notion of progress is immersed in relativity, and that our problem consists in defining criteria of progress transcending the realm of relativity.

### THE ENLIGHTENMENT THEORY OF PROGRESS. HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL LIMITATIONS

The greatest exponents of the idea of progress in modern times are the philosophers of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment theory of progress has been studied either in its historical sequence,<sup>4</sup> or analytically.<sup>5</sup> Both approaches are indispensable, the

<sup>4</sup> J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress. An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, New York, Dover, 1955 (first edition London, 1920).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*. Vol. 1: *The Rise of Modern Paganism*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967; Vol. 2: *The Science of Freedom*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970; Georges Gusdorf, *Les principes de la pensée au siècle des lumières* (Les sciences humaines et la pensée occidentale, IV). Paris, Payot, 1971, pp.310-333.

first in establishing the progressive elaboration of the idea, the second in determining the extent of the field covered by the speculations of the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Under the ingenuous argumentation developed in the quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns<sup>6</sup> we may perceive the beginnings of a critical confrontation of culture and the emergence of an intellectual emancipation based on a critical and comparative treatment of methods and achievements. The outcome of such a comparative treatment is an essentially intellectualist definition of progress, conceived as a state of culture clearly differentiated from that of the classical age and developing on autonomous lines. In Fontenelle's discussion of the matter<sup>7</sup> progress is located at the respective levels at which operates the human intellect (*esprit*) in different places and ages. The modern level is qualitatively differentiated from the one at which the Greek and Roman achievements are located. Condorcet's approach is evolutionary. Progress is conceived as stages of intellectual achievement, no stress being laid on the development of social institutions.<sup>8</sup> Arts and sciences are the main vehicle of progress, and although considerations about the institutional and social values are not foreign to the thinkers of the Enlightenment, these occupy a comparatively secondary place in their preoccupations. Even Turgot, an economist, conceives of progress as taking place in the area of the sciences and arts,<sup>9</sup> the comparative standard being generally set with reference to Greek and Roman culture. This almost exclusively intellectualist approach leaves vast areas of human reality outside the scope of the idea of progress. The

<sup>6</sup> Fontenelle, "Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes" (*Oeuvres de Fontenelle*, Vol. 4, pp. 235-254), Paris, Salmon, 1825 (first edition 1688); Ange Hippolyte Rigault, *Histoire de la querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, Paris, Hachette, 1856; Ferdinand Brunetière, "La formation de l'idée de progrès au XVIIIe siècle," in *Etudes critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française*, Paris, 1922.

<sup>7</sup> Fontenelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>8</sup> Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, edited by O.H. Prior, Paris, Boivin, 1933.

<sup>9</sup> A.R.J. Turgot, "Recherches sur les causes des progrès et de la décadence des sciences et des arts, ou réflexions sur l'histoire des progrès de l'esprit humain" (*Oeuvres de Turgot*, edited by Gustave Schelle, vol. 1, pp. 116-142). Paris, Alcan, 1913 (first edition 1748); "Tableau philosophique des progrès successifs de l'esprit humain" (*Oeuvres de Turgot*, vol. 1, pp. 214-235). Paris, Alcan, 1913 (first edition 1750).

limitations of the Enlightenment theory of progress should be examined historically and sociologically.

The historical limitations are due to a relativism grounded on an almost exclusively classical traditional view of historical evolution adopted by the theorists of progress. Although foreign peoples and exotic social systems and mentalities are not unknown to them,<sup>10</sup> the work of Guillaume Raynal<sup>11</sup> being an outstanding example of this interest, the non-classical cultural traditions are not assimilated into the pattern of knowledge and study of the Greco-Roman tradition. Non-classical cultures and non-European societies are imperfectly known, misrepresented, and implicitly considered as inferior. Fontenelle, for instance, is skeptical about the possibility of great authors arising from among the Lapps and Negroes.<sup>12</sup> Information about Asiatic and African peoples and cultures is obtained through travelers' accounts and the data collected are usually referred to as curiosities. In universal history Greco-Roman antiquity with its West-European projection occupies an axonic place with the Jewish history frequently enjoying the same privileged status on account of its association with Christianity. Thus according to Turgot progress is illustrated by the intellectual achievements of Greece, Rome, and the Age of Louis XIV, with Christianity as a by-product.<sup>13</sup> But in Bossuet's conception of universal history the role of Jewish religion is as fundamental as that of classical culture.<sup>14</sup> Unless Jaspers "axial" period be conceived in an entirely valuational context, it would suffer from the same limitation.<sup>15</sup> This gives a limited view of universal history which is conceived with main reference to classical antiquity and evaluated almost exclusively according to criteria derived from the classical tradition. The resulting limitation affects the idea of progress, as elaborated by

<sup>10</sup> Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières*, Paris, Maspéro, 1971.

<sup>11</sup> Abbé Guillaume Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, Paris, 1772.

<sup>12</sup> Fontenelle, *op. cit.*, p. 238. Cf. Pierre Salmon, *Le racisme devant l'histoire*, Paris-Bruxelles, Fernand Nathan-Editions Labor, 1973, pp. 56-91.

<sup>13</sup> Turgot, "Tableau philosophique..."

<sup>14</sup> Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, Paris, 1681.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, Munich, Verlag R. Piper, 1949, pp. 19-40.

18th century philosophers, in its very epistemological basis, viz. in the lack of comprehensive historical data susceptible to provide the empirical background required for the elaboration of a notion of universal import. The inadequacy of the idea of progress as affected by such limitation is variously evidenced in the inductions and judgments of value of the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Thus Voltaire's conception of decadence as a succession of growth and decay, decay and growth,<sup>16</sup> fares under the relativism imposed by the empirical data of classical antiquity. Voltaire mistakes for decadence a state of civilization which has never been affected by a cultural achievement. In point of fact cultural achievements do not affect universally the otherwise differentiated socio-historical field, a truth perceived by Hume.<sup>17</sup> What Voltaire mistook for decadence was merely a persisting state of culture antecedent to cultural achievement and, up to his time, unaffected by it.

The sociological limitations of the Enlightenment theory of progress result from an insufficient probing into the anthropology of non-European societies and the values inherent in non-classical cultural traditions. From such insufficiency proceed the erroneous judgments and biased conclusions regarding the nature of progress and its axiological implications.

(a) As to the nature: since the essential content of progress consists in intellectual and aesthetic values, values relevant to social organization, institutional structures, and human relations are likely to be ignored. Emphasis on these values has been given only by recent anthropological theory (for instance, Malinowski 1960, Levi-Strauss 1964-1971, etc.). But also the range of intellectual and aesthetic values inherent in the classical tradition, which inspired the idea of progress to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, was not comprehensive and could easily lead to disregard of important intellectual and aesthetic values contained in non-classical traditions. It was a matter of time for

<sup>16</sup> Voltaire, *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (*Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. XIX-XXV). Paris, Garnier Frères, 1878 (first edition 1751), and *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (*Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vols. XI-XIII), Paris, Garnier Frères, 1878 (first edition 1756).

<sup>17</sup> David Hume, "Of the populousness of ancient nations," in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, edited by T.H. Green and T.H. Grose, London, Longmans, 1875, vol. I, p. 382.

European science to explore the cultural traditions of India and China and evaluate their importance within the system of human culture.<sup>18</sup> Probing into the mental structures of still less known peoples and assessing their significance was a much later occurrence.<sup>19</sup>

(b) As to the axiological implications: since in the idea of progress projective action is implicit, the axiological content of the Enlightenment theory of progress is liable to serious misapplications and ill-directed policies.

The lack of pragmatism and analytical probing into non-European cultures on behalf of the thinkers of the Enlightenment results in a defective problematics and partial or utopian solutions to the questions raised. This imperfectness is illustrated by Sebastien Mercier's anticipations as *naturally* following from the dictates and applications of reason.<sup>20</sup> But also Condorcet's axioms concerning the future progress of mankind, although strongly sociological, do not derive from an investigation of social origins and structure.<sup>21</sup> The explanatory defect is apparent in Turgot's interpretation of the decadence of oriental cultures, which is attributed to their "mysterious character".<sup>22</sup> The final position about the Enlightenment theory of progress is that it is grounded on a fragment of the historical experience, while its analytical import rests on a superficial knowledge not only of non-European societies and cultures, but also of the ethnological foundations of European culture itself. This accounts for the strong historical and socio-cultural relativism under which the theory fares.

Despite the above weaknesses the effort to transcend the ethno-historical and socio-cultural relativism is only too evident among the thinkers of the Enlightenment. The philosophy of reason is necessarily universalistic and any attempt to apply the principles of rational philosophy has to be universal. This is the purport of

<sup>18</sup> For instance, Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*. Vols. I-IV. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954-1965; especially IV-3, XLV-LVII.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques*, vols. I-IV. Paris, Plon, 1964-1971.

<sup>20</sup> Bury, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-198.

<sup>21</sup> Condorcet, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-239.

<sup>22</sup> Turgot, "Recherches sur les causes des progrès..." pp. 124, 133.

Montesquieu's doctrine, who searched for laws of universal import regulating the evolution of human societies. It should be remembered that Montesquieu defines laws as the necessary relations deriving from the nature of things, which implies uniformity of structure and evolution. Laws may be natural or positive, i.e. social.<sup>23</sup> The concrete historical instances studied by Montesquieu are intended to exemplify the operation of such laws.<sup>24</sup> Rousseau, by examining the question of cultural progress from a moral point of view as well as the social implications of civilization, initiated the sociological analysis of the problem of progress. His argument, for instance, that civilization is a deviation from the natural state<sup>25</sup> is raising a question of social import. So much the sociological approach as the comparative study of culture were initiated by philosophers of the Enlightenment, but remained at an early stage of systematization. Likewise, it is to the credit of the thinkers of the Enlightenment that they attained a universalistic outlook, extended even to the study of the terrestrial universe,<sup>26</sup> but this outlook remained vague and speculative, because it could not be substantiated by pragmatic content.

#### THE TRANSITION TO UNIVERSALITY

The problem of progress is differently approached by the critical philosophy of Kant. The fundamental ideas directly affecting progress are the moral nature of teleological action and the principle of universalization. Progress in terms of Kantian philosophy is to be conceived within the developmental historical process and has a concrete content consisting in the gradual elimination of those negative forces standing in the way of

<sup>23</sup> Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois (Oeuvres complètes)*, edited by Roger Caillois, vol. II, pp. 227-995), Paris, Gallimard, 1951.

<sup>24</sup> Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence (Oeuvres complètes)*, edited by Roger Caillois, vol. II, pp. 69-209), Paris, Gallimard, 1951.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Discours," (*Oeuvres complètes*, edited by De Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, vol. III, pp. 1-30), Paris, Gallimard, 1966; and "Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes," (*Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, pp. 109-237).

<sup>26</sup> Fontenelle, "Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes," (*Oeuvres de Fontenelle*, vol. IV, pp. 121-252). Paris, Salmon, 1825.



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attainment of the final goal of historical development. This end is essentially ethical, since it is an all-embracing ideal of moral perfection and political unification of mankind. Despite its idealistic ends the Kantian philosophy of history anticipates in many respects modern anthropological realism.

1. It apprehends the differentiating effect of racial features, but obviates the possible projection of this purely physical differentiation into the social and moral world by means of the logical argument of the unity of species.<sup>27</sup> The empirical content of race is treated on a rational basis independent of moral considerations.<sup>28</sup>

2. The principle of universality is carried into the realm of world history, viz. in the realm of empirical realizations and potentialities, in which are elaborated the conditions for the development of a unified universal society. These include (a) the possibility of development of the natural faculties of man towards their full realization<sup>29</sup> (*Erster Satz*); (b) the attainment of this end by means of the natural antagonism and the eventual transcendence of these possibilities (*Vierter Satz*); (c) the teleological principle implicit in nature which poses as a necessary axiom the achievement of a civil government which in its turn would give rise to the international political constitution (*Fünfter-Achter Satz*); (d) theoretical action conforming to the plan of nature, which is possible and practically advantageous to this plan (*Neunter Satz*). This proposition sanctions the scope and method of theoretical action with reference to the underlying historical process of international unification.

3. Theoretical activity is assigned a function quasi axiological: to further nature's plans. This is made more explicit in the elaboration of a project of perpetual peace. The project proceeds from the realistic recognition of a state of conflict inherent in *status naturalis*. To overcome this deficiency and achieve

<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Von den verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen," *Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, pp. 7-30), Frankfurt am Main, Insel-Verlag, 1964.

<sup>28</sup> Kant, "Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrasse," (*Werke in sechs Bänden*, Vol. VI, pp. 63-82).

<sup>29</sup> Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht," (*Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, pp. 31-50).

permanent peaceful symbiosis it is necessary (a) to model the civil constitution of each state according to democratic principles<sup>30</sup> (*Erster Definitivartikel*), (b) to model international society according to a principle of federalism (*Zweiter Definitivartikel*), (c) to guarantee free intercourse and traffic in foreign territories (*Dritter Definitivartikel*). This right to 'hospitality' runs counter to tribal hostility and watertight delimitation of national territories.

The ideas contained in the project of perpetual peace fringe the domain of anthropological theory. The *status naturalis* may roughly be taken to correspond to the *status ethnologicus*. Here the axiological propositions are intended as a means to transcend ethnological differentiation of mankind under a universal constitution. The clearance of the theoretical ground is a necessary antecedent to the elaboration of a world policy of unification. However, this is only a step forward, still far removed from the stage of practical applications.

#### DIVERGENCE BETWEEN STATE OF KNOWLEDGE AND ETHNO-CULTURAL CONDITION

The problem of progress being an immediate concern of man and society as a whole; any theoretical elaborations concerning it have to be appraised with reference not exclusively to the level of knowledge attained, but also to the contribution they can make towards the practical advancement of the solution of the problem of progress taken as a world problem. More particularly, the scientific and scholarly contribution will be measured by its effort to bridge the gap between theory and practice and the resulting efficiency of this effort. The contribution of the Enlightenment in this respect remained at the purely theoretical level and suffered from an intense relativism. But also Kant's universalism was conceived in too broad terms to be of immediate practical use. Both contributions mark the stage of theoretical elaboration, the first as regards the conception and formulation of the problem, the second as regards the extension of its terms. In both, the

<sup>30</sup> Kant, "Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf," (*Werke in sechs Bänden*, vol. VI, pp. 193-251).

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heterogeneous and differentiated reality they were called upon to treat had not as yet disclosed itself in its immense complexities and inner particularities.<sup>31</sup> In their case, the distance between theory and realization could be roughly compared with the distance separating a fictional anticipation of a travel to the moon (even though conceived on sound principles) and the actual execution of the project, with an important difference of kind: whereas the gap between scientific fiction and actualization can be bridged by quantitative expansion and improvement of existing theoretical and material equipment, the bridging of the gap in the case of human problematics of the kind discussed is not easily conceivable in other than qualitative terms, which means an immensely higher complexity of human reality unaccountable by way of laws of the kind operating in the physical universe. Moreover, social and historical experience indicates that the rate of qualitative progress lags behind the rate of quantitative-technological expansion.

Even though Kant contributed a further advance in the process of theoretical systematization by universalizing the bearing and effects of the idea of progress, thus providing a more realistic orientation to the theoretical prospection of the problem, an immense distance remained to be covered by theoretical knowledge before human reality could be reached in its full extent and complexity, which is a presupposition of practical applications.<sup>32</sup> In the process of achieving an integral knowledge of human reality in its social, ethnic, and cultural differentiation anthropology had to play a dominant role, since only through it did it become possible to assess the exact dimensions of the problem of reconciliation and unification. The contribution of anthropology to the theoretical understanding of the problem of universality is, in the first place, descriptive, consisting in the accurate exposition and analysis of the data of ethno-cultural differentiation. In the second place, anthropological theory has scientifically exposed the theory of ethnocentrism. In this way anthropology has laid the premises of the problem of universality. It has not offered any practical solutions to the problem of

<sup>31</sup> See my *Le droit international dans un contexte ethnohistorique*, Wetteren, Cultura, 1965, pp. 6-58. ,

<sup>32</sup> See my "Sur la nature axiologique des jugements sociologiques," *Revue de Sociologie*, n. 4, 1961, pp. 701-704.

universality. It has investigated the negative aspects of it, viz. ethno-cultural pluralism, heterogeneity, and differentiation. Its contribution continues to remain mainly theoretical, without immediate practical results, but it has tremendously helped, bridging the gap between theory and applications by bringing to the surface the real *status socioculturalis* of mankind, with reference to which any policy of unification has to be formulated and elaborated. The practical implications flowing from anthropological theory may be also the concern of anthropologists, but putting them into effect is the task of makers of policy, eventually of political leaders. Up to this point the task of anthropology is descriptive and analytical, and anthropologists would like to confine their role to expressing judgments of reality, not judgments of value. At least anthropologists believe so, and their belief is backed by the descriptive nature of their research. What anthropologists are not aware of is that their perfectly descriptive science has axiological implications.

Once this fact of axiological implications is acknowledged, it does not follow that anthropological inquiry (other vitiating factors excluded) is defective. I believe, on the contrary, that once the axiological implications come up to the surface the social role of anthropology as a *science of man* will be correctly appreciated. For no science of man has ever emerged out of an empty ground, viz. without a specific motivation of the inquiries to which it gives rise. Since any science of man is motivated by human problematics, none can pretend to remain unresponsive to the implicit claims made upon it by the social environment which favoured its birth. This fact does not mean that the sciences of man are or should be normative, although they have been called upon to deal with some problem and are expected to provide some answer to that problem. Their *raison d'être* lies in this implicit mission assigned to them by the community, but in best carrying out that mission they have to be objective and exclude the interference of subjective criteria or the enunciation of judgments of value. But while their *method* is scientific, their *mission* is, in the last place, axiological, since it has to serve human needs. As explained, it is not on their method but on their implications that their axiological character is grounded. Once statistical investigation has established the inequality of income or the high frequency of crime, and once economics has

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probed into the origin of inequality or sociology into the causes of crime, the axiological implications of their conclusions, reached by way of objective research, are immediately evident, in fact so self-evident that we pass them by, taking it for granted that the community through its social and political leaders will take care of giving effect to the conclusions reached, that is to the axiological claims of those conclusions. In point of fact the social scientist and the economist have initiated normative action by way of objective research, and it is only the dictate of division of labor that prevents them from giving effect to their conclusions by projecting them in the realm of practical applications.

On the analogy of the other sciences of man, anthropology, by establishing the objective status of socio-cultural and ethnic differentiation and defining the phenomenon of ethnocentrism as one of the main sources of ethno-cultural relativity, poses *ipso facto* some axiological claims having a direct bearing on the problem of universality.

#### GENERAL CRITERIA OF PROGRESS

Having distinguished progress from evolution and change on the ground of its axiological content, i.e. a content meaningful with reference to human ends and values, we have to search the criteria by which it has to be defined as a theoretical and working concept. Progress, as a subjective notion, consists in the actualization of those values, the attainment of which constitutes a move towards desirable ends and conditions conceived in an ideal form. Even though those ends are infinite and never attained, they provide, nevertheless, an absolute term of reference on a scale of valuations. In fact, what confers on an ideal end its significance is not a concrete content, which remains unconceivable in positive terms and incomprehensible (cf. the epistemological thesis of Cesari<sup>33</sup>) but its ultimateness and absoluteness which gives a meaning to any particular action defined with reference to it. Let us consider, for instance, progress in wealth or knowledge. It is an ascertained fact of experience that man aspires incessantly to the acquisition of material wealth, and also to increase his stock of knowledge. Any further accumulation of wealth, or any increase in knowledge,

<sup>33</sup> Paul Cesari, *La valeur de la connaissance scientifique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1960, p. 229.

is considered a progress towards that end. It is equally admitted that there is no final end to both pursuits, each advance being final only in a temporary sense. Once what is considered a goal is attained, the end is transposed to a more remote point on the scale of values. This might be defined as the forward moving margin of progress. If somebody be asked what is the ultimate end of the process of acquiring wealth or increasing one's knowledge, the answer would be an embarrassing one. For we cannot perceive in clear terms the concrete content of that end, unless we define it as 'absolute wealth,' or 'absolute knowledge,' which means that such an absoluteness is not susceptible of further progress. Now, though the content of this ultimate end escapes our capacity of positive comprehension, it is important to note that the absolute quality, which confers on the ultimate end its distinctive property, has, nevertheless, a very concrete and definite function, which is to provide a teleological orientation and a standard of valuation of the individual actions and achievements by which wealth and knowledge are acquired and increased.

The functional role of the absolute or ideal end provides a secure basis upon which to found a notion of progress even though conceived in terms of quantitative expansion of values. The next and more important step is to consider whether progress in subjectively conceived values can achieve validity in the realm of objective reality. This is to say that, in order to achieve such objectivity, progress has to go through a process of universalization, which means that human values have to undergo a gradual emancipation from the state of relativity to which they are subjected. Let us consider some implications of the relativity of human values for progress.

The anthropological study of culture reveals the fact that while many cultural values are common to mankind (if this were not the case coexistence of human groups would be probably impossible), many others are specific to individual culture or to some of them. In the process of expansion, diffusion, contact, and unification of culture component individual values may undergo any of the following conditions:

1. Survive in parallel coexistence without mutual influence.
2. Be replaced by other values and disappear.
3. Be universalized.

A survival in parallel coexistence is possible when the respective contents of two or more cultural values are different from each other as to their nature, scope, and application, which means that there is no scope for contradiction or competition. Antagonism between cultural values occurs in the second case, when, for instance, two cultural values cover a common pragmatic ground, but they are differentiated by the degree of their respective efficiencies. Unless other factors intervene, contributing towards the perpetuation of an inefficient value, the latter will be replaced by the one possessing a greater potentiality of universalization. Out of this process results the third case, in which a cultural component survives as a more or less universally prevailing value. From this simplified scheme it should be apparent that progress within a local, tribal, or ethnic system of values does not necessarily represent universal progress, but only an advance within the frames of that local, tribal, or ethnic universe. Relativity of progress results, therefore, from relativity of values.

The implications of the relativity of values are essential for a definition of criteria of progress. The demographic expansion of mankind has given rise to a gradual expansion, diffusion, and interpenetration of ethnic and racial groups, pointing to a further rise in demographic density over the inhabitable surface of the earth. The logical corollary of such expansion is unification under universal organization. But this is only a conceptual anticipation, the objective actualization of which stumbles against the conflicting values of heterogeneous and differentiated racial, ethnic, and cultural traditions. The conflicting background of international history provides the *status quo* against which a criterion of progress should be defined at the level of universality. For it is clear that the transcendence of international relativity would result in universality. Let me point out that in such a conception of universality the criterion for the definition of progress is essentially ethical. If this be not the case, there is a risk of admitting among our criteria the negative aspect of universality, which can be conceived as a forced imposition of negative values on a universal scale. We can, for instance, conceive of one people imposing by violent action upon the rest of mankind a regime of inequality and discrimination in application of a subjective system of ethnic, racial, or religious values, a system postulating the universalization of those values. Now, if the

notion of universality be taken as an amoral one, there is no ground for speaking of positive or negative universality. But the 'values' of inequality and discrimination, the postulation of universalization of which may be contained in the ethical code of a certain human group, are definitely negative, at least in relation to that part of mankind which has to undergo their effects. Since their forced imposition entails automatically the reaction of the people affected, their universality cannot be considered as positive, because it does not affect positively the fortunes of mankind as a whole. It is, therefore, a negative universality. Kant's criterion for moral action clears the way for a definition of positive universality by claiming that an action is moral only if it can, by general application, be established as a universal law, that is a law freely acceptable by the totality of mankind. By this means we secure a criterion (*a*) for the ethical nature of universality, which confers on it its positive meaning for man, (*b*) for the transcendence of the relativity of ethnic, racial, and cultural values; such relativity being abolished by attainment of positive universality, which is inherently absolute and, by universal projection, objective.

The ethnohistorical context within the frames of which we have considered the idea of progress makes of the latter a value-charged notion sharply differentiated from the amoral status it acquires when viewed either as a mere change of agnostic import,<sup>34</sup> or as a form of biological evolution, save that in the latter case what is described as higher levels of organization<sup>35</sup> bears a conceptual analogy with the notion of higher levels of universality. It is equally important to note that, although the developmental process in culture differs profoundly from the evolutionary process in nature, it is generally agreed that the attainment of a stage of development by the hominids was a precondition of culture.<sup>36</sup> Despite this connection and the analogies invoked between natural organisms and social organization,<sup>37</sup> it is not possible to retain them from the moment we perceive the axiological nature

<sup>34</sup> Hume, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-382.

<sup>35</sup> Huxley, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>36</sup> Julian H. Steward, *Theory of Cultural Change. The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, London, William and Norgate, 1885 (3rd edition), pp. 437-450.



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of the transcendence of ethno-cultural relativity and the teleological character of the universalizing principle.

The limitation of the concept of progress to individual improvement<sup>38</sup> is not contradicting the idea of universalization, since the relativity of values rests ultimately on the individual bearers of social values and their capacity of transcending their own subjective limitations. More serious are the limitations to which progress is subjected from the moment its objective manifestations are confined to narrow areas of social life and evolution.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, a narrow conception and application of the descriptive method may lead to sheer anthropological agnosticism.<sup>40</sup> Aspects of progress can also be isolated and investigated with reference to particular areas of social, economic, and intellectual activity,<sup>41</sup> but such isolation can elicit the empirical manifestations of progress, not its meaning and comprehension. The criterion of universalization helps to dispense with a number of limitations of the idea of progress, especially the subjection of it to narrow categories. Under some of these categories we easily perceive more or less universalized values disguised as specific aspects of social ethics. The limitation of the content of progress to specific areas such as order, social integration and improvement,<sup>42</sup> or the moral values,<sup>43</sup> does not advance the determination of the required criteria, since the instances of specific values susceptible of universalization are numerous and, moreover, the scope and content of each specific area of values can vary not only according to their bearers, but also according to the level of their integration and degree of universality. Moreover, progress in one area does not necessarily coincide with historical progress taken as a total process,<sup>44</sup> but this criticism must not be accepted as a refutation

<sup>38</sup> Inge, *The Idea of Progress*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>39</sup> A.L. Kroeber, *Anthropology*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948, pp. 298-303.

<sup>40</sup> Robert H. Lowie, *Primitive Society*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1921, pp. 427-428.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur James Todd, *Theories of Social Progress*, New York, the Macmillan Company, 1918.

<sup>42</sup> Auguste Comte, *Système de politique positive, ou Traité de sociologie instituant la religion de l'humanité*, Paris, 1851-54.

<sup>43</sup> L.T. Hobhouse, *Morals in Evolution*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1915 (3rd edition), p. 30; Morris Ginsberg, "The Idea of Progress," in *Evolution and Progress*, London, William Heinemann, 1956, pp. 47-48.

<sup>44</sup> Nathan Rotenstreich, "The Idea of Historical Progress and its Assumptions," *History and Theory*, n. 10, 1971, p. 219.

of progress. For progress in general, if formally defined, is the sum total of partial advances *less* the sum total of regression, and this definition does not exclude the possibility of a negative final result, regress. Unless the latter result be produced, the empirical facts of history should show “an increasing rationalization of moral values,” and “a tendency towards universalism”.<sup>45</sup>

The ultimate goal of progress cannot be defined without reference to relativity. An implication of this is that progress is meaningful only within a relative human universe, i.e. within an ethno-cultural group and a system of ethno-cultural groups. The emphasis in this connection is not to be laid on the relativity of the value in respect of that group or that system of groups, viz. on its imperfectness from a universal point of view, but on its potentiality in respect of universalization. Such potentiality may be revealed in the historical process of confrontation and diffusion of values and result in the universal adoption of the value. If the value cannot be universalized for the benefit of the totality of mankind, its validity will be confined within the ethno-cultural area in which it obtains, and its survival will depend on the survival of the bearer group. No attempt at conferring a meaningful basis on relative values by reference to other criteria<sup>46</sup> than the universalization potentiality of a value can stand the test of progress. A value can be relative and, therefore, imperfect, yet it is meaningful and valid in respect of progress if it possesses the potentiality of universalization. The relativity of values explains also the possibility of differentiated rates of progress among distinct sections of social activity.<sup>47</sup>

We have pointed out the indeterminateness and quasi irreality of the ultimate end of progress, but we have also admitted its *functional reality* as a teleological reference in the process of universalization of values. Although logically undefinable and concretely unseizable this absolute end has nevertheless been variously conceived, in the context of different systems of culture and thought, as God, Nature, Society or only as a logical notion,

<sup>45</sup> Ginsberg, “Moral Progress,” in *Reason and Unreason in Society*, London, William Heinemann, 1947, p. 320.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Frankel, “Progress, the idea of,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1967, vol. VI, pp. 486-487.

<sup>47</sup> Louis Weber, *Le rythme du progrès*, Paris, Alcan, 1913.

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even though vague and contestable, of absolute. The difference between these various concepts can be reduced to a difference of degree in abstraction. It is thought, for instance, that Nature is less abstract than God, and Society than Nature. But all notions are pervaded, whether, their proponents like it or not, by an ethical principle or, better, they constitute *ethical ideals* and as such they determine a teleological principle. On all of them can be conferred the attributes of the notion of ὑψιστον ἀ γαδον (*summum bonum*), a notion elaborated by ancient philosophy to make more explicit the teleological function of progress.

#### THE CONTRIBUTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY TO THE ELABORATION OF CRITERIA OF PROGRESS

We have traced the pragmatic content of progress to the ethno-historical process, by which term we seek to avoid the dissociation of the analytical study of cultural systems from the dynamics inherent in the diffusion of culture and the ethnic, racial, and political contacts, conflict, and integration, which are purely historical phenomena. By means of anthropological study realism is carried to its extreme limits since (*a*) anthropology covers the full range of human societies and cultures, (*b*) it treats every human group and cultural system on equal terms without comparative evaluation. The implication of (*a*) is that the inclusion in the historical stage of the totality of mankind permits the elaboration of integral international policies without left-over factors liable to perturb or dislocate the international organization. All great empires, including the Roman, have suffered from the deficiency of imperfect ethno-cultural integration. Anthropology can boast that it can provide the theoretical foundation for an organization of mankind and human resources on universal lines. The implications of (*b*) are essentially ethical. They can be analyzed as (1) attribution of semantic content to each culture, which amounts to a vindication of cultural pluralism; (2) exploration of the semantic content and values contained in each culture; (3) availing the international community of values which can contribute to the promotion of man *qua* man. The abolition of the notion and status of racial, ethnic, and social inferiority

follows upon the recognition of the semantic content of culture, not vice versa.<sup>48</sup>

It follows from the above implications that to the inferences of anthropology about various cultures correspond, in the first place, judgments of value. Now, anthropology being a descriptive science, it allows to itself neither jurisdiction nor competence in expressing judgments of value. In point of fact this is not the precise meaning of the statement that judgments of value underlie anthropological propositions. What is argued is that the descriptive statements of anthropology possess an implicit axiological content which may or may not be rendered explicit. When anthropologists refuse to express judgments of value in respect of the societies and cultures they study, or deny themselves competence to do so, in fact they avoid making explicit the axiological implications of their descriptive statements. When at times they do make explicit these implications (which happens on such occasions as the issue of manifestoes and recommendations to governments, or when they take sides on the racial question), they usually do so by means of separate literature, carefully avoiding to produce judgments of value in their 'scientific' descriptions of culture.

Even when the anthropologist totally avoids venturing in the domain of judgments of value, the axiological implications of his statements exist all the same. It is indifferent whether these are made explicit and availed upon by people other than the anthropologists. The instance of the anthropological treatment of the racial question is a case in point. A racial policy, obviously inspired by judgments of value, may conceivably derive its theoretical justification from anthropological ascertainments and conclusions which simply and objectively indicate the fact that no immanent differences disqualifying one or the other racial stock exist. But such a conclusion has the immediate implication that racial discrimination should be barred. The fact that the proponent of the implicit axiological corollary about equality of race is not an anthropologist (he may be a politician) does not invalidate the axiological implications of the anthropological inquiry about race. It is only the implementation of these implica-

<sup>48</sup> Jean Poirier, *Histoire de l'ethnologie*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, p. 120.

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tions that passes out of the control of the anthropologist. We might properly speak of a division of labor, the anthropologist assuming the task of description and analysis, the politician the materialization of the axiological projections of the anthropological results. From this dual character of the anthropological knowledge we may extract the nature of the contribution of Anthropology to the science and problematics of man. This contribution operates at two distinct levels:

1. at a level of judgments of reality. Anthropology being qualified to describe and analyse the various human societies and cultures, it provides the objective premises upon which to found any policy intended to deal with mankind as a whole;

2. at a level of judgments of value. By virtue of its axiological implications anthropology sets up norms for action immediately affecting the inter-ethnic and inter-cultural problems of man and points the way towards preservation and integration of cultural values in an all-embracing system of human organization.

At the descriptive and analytical level the contribution of anthropology consists in the elucidation of the premises upon which should rest a policy of rational and ethical treatment of human affairs. Within the international system it is the function of the descriptive and analytical part of anthropology to educate the individual and collective consciousness in the realities composing the social and cultural status of mankind. In this its function the descriptive and analytical study of man and culture is in itself the most complete material justification of the Socratic dictum that virtue is knowledge. Anthropological knowledge provides the fundamental means of collective self-consciousness which is the basic presupposition of human organization on the national and international levels. To any degree of human organization on universal lines should correspond a proportional amount of anthropological knowledge, and the attainment of full universality has to be backed by as universal knowledge as is possibly attainable. In this intimate relationship between state of knowledge and degree of universalization we can perceive the ethical meaning of anthropological knowledge considered in its descriptive and analytical form. If virtue is knowledge, reciprocally, knowledge is virtue by reason of the fact that it becomes a necessary presupposition to the promotion of human organization in the modern demographic, technological, and

ethno-cultural context. In this context the anthropological criterion of progress can be defined as the criterion of anthropological knowledge with reference to the promotion of international organization on the scale of universalization. In this particular respect the anthropological criterion requires that any policy or action intended as a treatment of inter-racial, inter-ethnic, and inter-political problematics should rest, in addition to any other relevant data, on knowledge provided by anthropological description and analysis. Violation of the anthropological data in dealing with any peoples affected by international policy and action is liable to produce regressive conditions and lead to conflicting human relations.

At the axiological level the contribution of anthropology consists in the theoretical sanctioning of values susceptible of universalization, and therefore capable of enriching and extending the range values at the disposal of mankind. In the process of integration of values the anthropological criteria are not exclusive. Anthropologists do not reject any of the values encountered and studied, even though, from the point of view of mankind, some of these values may be negative. But anthropology provides the basic criterion for the conservation and eventual universalization of a social and cultural value, that of its positive contribution to the function and promotion of the society in whose system that value operates. But also anthropology can provide a negative criterion for any value the operation of which, within a social and cultural system, is proven to be suspensive, even destructive of the society, the existence of which it is supposed to promote.

The establishment and application of anthropological criteria of progress is attended by a number of difficulties, the complexity of which is equal to their importance. The source of such difficulties can be traced either to the descriptive and analytical field of anthropology, or to its axiological implications. Up to the present anthropologists have mostly paid attention to one set of difficulties, those deriving from the subjective criteria, conscious or subconscious, applied to the descriptive and analytical study of human societies and cultures, the intervention of which may produce distorted and prejudiced accounts of those societies and cultures. Anthropologists are rightly concerned about the possibility that any distorted descriptions, or even insufficient knowledge, may result in either a devaluation of the

culture studied, or negative axiological implications regarding the bearers of that culture. Founded as this criticism may be, it is necessary to point to its one-sidedness and insist on a more comprehensive formulation of the problem by taking into account not only its pertinence to the descriptive content of anthropology, but also its close relevance with the axiological implications of the discipline. We may tentatively expose the difficulties attendant upon the establishment and application of the anthropological criteria of progress under the twofold aspect of vitiation of the descriptive and analytical content, and misapplication of the axiological implications.

The vitiation of the descriptive and analytical content of anthropology has two different aspects. The first is indicated by the above noted negative consequences flowing from a distorted description or insufficient knowledge of a culture. This aspect is so evident and generally recognized, that there is no need to insist on it. The second aspect, scarcely touched upon, if ever, by anthropologists, concerns the treatment of the axiological content of the cultures studied. In their zealous preoccupation for exact and objective description, but also in their conscious or subconscious inclination for defense and justification of the traditional cultural systems which are faced with the destructive impact of modern technology, anthropologists are apt to neglect the negative aspects of those cultures and the operation, among their positive values, of destructive elements. In the present writer's view it is a serious shortcoming of the functional theory to have completely diverted attention from the axiological content of culture by confining anthropological interest to the demonstration of the meaningful functions of cultural values. In itself this is not the blameworthy aspect of functional anthropology. The criticism launched here is aimed at the implications of the functional theory, the first of which is that since all cultural components have a function in a given social system, their existence is justified as such. The second implication flows from the first, and although it is not usually recognized as such, it is clearly projected as an axiological claim: the fact that cultural values are justified by their function in a certain social system implies that they are inherently good. Now, these functionalist implications are the product of a double fallacy. Firstly, the justification of a cultural value by virtue of its function acquires

in functionalist theory a moral content which it does not *necessarily* have. Despite functionalism's pretension at scientific method, a serious confusion occurs when what amounts to *explanation* (the discovery of function) is availed upon as a principle of *justification*. Secondly, the further projection of the notion of justification into the virtual assertion of the goodness of cultural values is uncritical, for the reason that the only criterion for expressing such a judgment seems to be the justification, that is the explanation of the existence and operation of a cultural value. This criticism does not affect the truth, partial or general, of the functionalist explanations, but only its axiological implications. For even though the function of a cultural element be established, it does not follow that this element has an ethically positive content. A cultural element may have a definite function, even though it be intrinsically negative or neutral. The custom of killing old people in certain cultures has a definite function, but the custom viewed as a cultural 'value' has a negative content and as such it cannot be universalized. The operation of a negative value in a social and cultural system does not mean necessarily the destruction of that system, since the negative effects may be offset by those of the positive values. However, an accruing number of negative values *may* cause the disintegration of a social and cultural system, and in this connection Toynbee's thoughts about the breakdown and disintegration of civilizations, if not acceptable to their full extent, can be suggestive to anthropologists.<sup>49</sup>

The above considerations will help elicit what I have described as the second aspect of the vitiation of the descriptive and analytical content of anthropology. This is the aspect concerned with the negative values in culture and the negative effects of those values on human society and progress. The regression of culture and the passing away of its bearers remains at a most elementary level of investigation despite the legitimate interest of anthropology to it and its competence to undertake its study. The mere historical,<sup>50</sup> or philosophical<sup>51</sup> treatment of the subject

<sup>49</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, London, Oxford University Press, 1939, vol. IV-VI.

<sup>50</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Munich, C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1918-1922; Toynbee, *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Decay and Restoration of Civilization*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1932 (2nd edition).



without the intervention of anthropological probing into the facts may deprive any conclusions reached by such treatment of the realistic inferences of the latter. The importance of an anthropological investigation of the negative values in culture will be made explicit in the course of elaboration and application of the second category of criteria referred to above, those deriving from the axiological implications of anthropology. The data on the negative values and the decay of human societies consequent upon their operation point to the logical conclusion that not all cultural values can be universalized. In this connection the role of anthropology is fundamental, since the discipline is expected to clear the ground for the determination of positive and negative aspects of culture. However, this role is not exclusive, because the question of values is of universal concern, many other disciplines and factors being equally involved in the procedure of adoption and assimilation of culture. Nor is it decisive, because such universalization is not a matter of theoretical prescription, but of gradual adoption, assimilation, and integration in the social and international system. Nevertheless, the theoretical elaboration keeps its full practical meaning as a prerequisite to the establishment of criteria for progressive action.

The function of anthropology is thus viewed in a far wider perspective than many anthropologists are prepared to admit. Without in the least impairing its descriptive and analytical content the acceptance of the axiological implications of its inferences will mean for anthropologists the assumption of a responsibility towards mankind considered in its unity. Should anthropology decline its axiological responsibilities, should it confine itself to the sterile security of a value-free apathetic scientism, it will do so at the risk of losing its *raison d'être*, which is to act as a science of man.