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# Milton Rokeach's Experimental Modification of Values: Navigating Relevance, Ethics and Politics in Social Psychological Research

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In a 1967 address, Milton Rokeach called for a new direction in social psychological research - one that took human values as its core research construct. The occasion for this proposal (a version of which would see print as the psychologist's first publication on the subject the following year; Rokeach, 1967d, 1968a) was Rokeach's presidential address to the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). In several ways, this was a high-point in a long and prolific career for Rokeach. He had served a fruitful term as SPSSI president, during which he had helped to coordinate such activities as Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1968) address to the American Psychological Association's annual conference (King, 1967; Rokeach, 1967a), and was enjoying the success (despite some controversy) of his then recently-published book *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti* (Rokeach, 1964b).

Despite the prominence that he had achieved within social psychology, his 1967 address sought to challenge one of the discipline's core characteristics. From the beginning of social psychology, attitudes had been understood to be the discipline's "most distinctive and indispensable concept" (Allport, 1935, p. 798). To Rokeach, this focus had been misplaced. The predominance of attitudes in the literature, as he saw it, had produced a social psychology that struggled to offer practical solutions for the social problems facing the nation and the world, such as racial and ethnic discrimination, poverty, and war and genocide. In Rokeach's view, in order for psychologists to provide solutions to such problems, they needed to develop techniques for affecting change in individuals' belief-systems on a structural level, and an understanding of human values was key to this endeavor. Such techniques, he anticipated, could involve humanistically-grounded and non-coercive strategies for affecting individual change and would eventually help to bring psychologists out of the laboratory and into applied settings where they could demonstrate their relevance to real-world problems. It would also encourage interdisciplinary work, serving as a unifying force for the social sciences. Rokeach would dedicate the ensuing two decades of his career to developing the program of psychological research that he had proposed in this speech. This effort would not only require new research tools and techniques, but would also draw renewed attention to considerations related to the ethical obligations and social role of researchers in the field of psychology.

### **Background and Early Career**

Milton Rokeach was born Mendel Rokicz in Hrubieszów, Poland in 1918. In 1925 he and his mother immigrated to the United States, joining his father - an orthodox Hassidic rabbi - in Brooklyn. In an interview with Larry Gross in which he discussed his personal background, Rokeach (1964a) described his father as a harsh disciplinarian, prone to angry outbursts, and enforcing the expectation that Rokeach and his siblings carry on their family's orthodox Jewish traditions and beliefs. He

identified his upbringing in this environment as influential for his later psychological and social interests, once commenting "The orthodoxy of my background is to play an extremely important role in my professional life... My interest in [psychological research on] dogmatism -- you don't have to do much psychoanalytic interpretation to see the influence" (p. 49). More generally, he described his budding political interests as emerging from his reactions against what he saw as dogmatism in his family and religious education, but also as a reaction against the dogmatic Marxism that he observed among friends and peers as he grew beyond these settings (Rokeach, 1989).

Having completed his Orthodox yeshiva education, Rokeach would receive his Bachelor's degree in psychology in 1941 from Brooklyn College, then notable for its inclusion of a number of prominent Jewish professors among its faculty despite the anti-Semitism that characterized most comparable universities. Among these faculty, Rokeach studied under the tutelage of such influential mentors as Abraham Maslow and Solomon Asch (Rokeach, 1964a). The year of his graduation, he would begin doctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley, only to be interrupted a year later by the period of U.S. involvement in WWII, during which time Rokeach was enlisted in the Air Force Testing Program. By 1947, he would complete his doctorate with a specialization in Social Psychology, having collaborated with Else Frenkel-Brunswik and Nevitt Sanford in their research program on anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, and authoritarianism. These mentors, in collaboration with renowned sociologist and philosopher Theodor Adorno, would be among the first prominent psychologists to seek to use their research to respond to the atrocities of the Holocaust, producing the influential book *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) with sociologist and philosopher Theodor Adorno and their colleague Daniel Levinson. As a Polish Jew, Rokeach himself had been deeply affected by the events of the Holocaust. It would take two decades from the end of the WWII before Rokeach felt emotionally prepared to return to his childhood home of Hrubieszow, whose formerly substantial Jewish community had been decimated, with only one Jew remaining in residence (S. Ball-Rokeach, personal communication, March 5, 2017; Korn, 1965).

In a later interview, Rokeach (1980) recalled deep interest in the questions that Frenkel-Brunswik's and Sanford's research raised. Most particularly, he was interested in understanding how similar research could furnish solutions to the real-world problems - such as racial and ethnic discrimination - that appeared to be associated with their notions of authoritarian personality traits. Indeed, the greater importance of this work for Rokeach lay not in what it revealed about past fascist regimes, but in how it might be generalizable to other phenomena which touched his personal life. Encounters with anti-Semitic ethnocentrism in Rokeach's childhood, college education, and military career, for instance, had certainly left

significant marks (Christie, 1990; Rokeach, 1964a). However, for Rokeach, such discrimination shared a common root with other ideologies which he viewed as rigid and unquestioning. "I hate not only fascism," he noted in an interview, "but anything that is going to enslave me" (Rokeach, 1964a, p. 68). For Rokeach, this included religious and political dogmatism in a variety of forms that he had encountered throughout his life - from fascism, to Orthodox Judaism, to the communist party. Following the completion of his doctorate, Rokeach's research career would begin by extending the themes he had helped to investigate at Berkeley, advancing theory and research on ethnocentrism and dogmatism beyond *The Authoritarian Personality's* focus on fascism and anti-Semitism.

### **Social Relevance in Social Psychology**

By the late 1960s, Rokeach's social psychological research, particularly his development of the influential Rokeach Dogmatism Scale, had earned him prominence within the field. Despite this recognition, he expressed discontent with the research he had generated. In a talk given at the University of Pennsylvania entitled *Toward a More Relevant Social Psychology*, he indicated in broad terms the guiding principles which had organized his life's work: "In all my work these past two decades I have tried to keep in mind two major criteria of what is significant... worth investing my time in as a social psychologist. One criterion is theoretical relevance; the other is social relevance" (Rokeach, 1969b, p. 1). However, while social relevance served as a point of departure for Rokeach's research, he had now begun to question whether the findings it produced had any real meaning for, or impact on, the social problems that had inspired them. Rokeach remarked with dissatisfaction that with one isolated and somewhat narrow exception, he had never been gratified with direct knowledge that his research had been put to a practical application that he viewed as truly socially relevant. For Rokeach, this state of affairs signaled that his work was missing its intended mark; though theoretically influential, his research had failed to furnish genuine solutions for real-life social issues.

Rokeach did not limit this reproach to himself, however. On the contrary, he generalized the critique to the field of social psychology as a whole. In his University of Pennsylvania speech, he expressed agreement with former APA president Carl Rogers' identification of academic psychology as "socially hopeless," and "leading every field in dogmatism, rigidity, narrow orthodoxy, and scorn of social involvement" (as cited in Rokeach, 1969b, p. 2). Indeed, the sense that psychology, and especially social psychology, had drifted into irrelevance was growing increasingly widespread in the United States during the late 1960s and into the 1970s, as a state of crisis within the field was diagnosed by numerous commentators. Concern about irrelevance was driven in part by scrutiny from government and funding agencies which began to inquire more critically into the

utility of social scientific research. A 1967 House Subcommittee investigation of federally-funded social science research, for instance, concluded that the findings produced by such research were often trivial or unsuitable for practical application (Faye, 2011).

Public opinion also drove this sense of disciplinary crisis. With civil rights demonstrations, student protest, and increasing involvement in the Vietnam War producing a mounting sense of social tension, the social sciences and humanities - having successfully established their expertise in questions related to the kinds of social issues the nation now confronted - were subject to particular scrutiny. Such concerns were particularly salient within Division 9 of the American Psychological Association, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). As the 1960s drew to a close, the editors of SPSSI's *Journal of Social Issues* David Krech and Nevitt Sanford (1968) noted with alarm the declining membership of the division and the "apparent shortage of social psychologists willing and able to work on major social problems."

Not content simply to vocalize his qualms with social psychology, Rokeach explored a number of strategies for taking socially relevant action during this period. In his personal life, Rokeach was a vocal advocate for the same social issues that he spoke on professionally, participating in multiple civil rights marches, and once joining a sit-in protest of the Vietnam War (S. Ball-Rokeach, personal communication, March 5, 2017). In 1967, Rokeach was elected president of SPSSI. That year, he was responsible for inviting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. - on behalf of the division - to speak at a conference of the American Psychological Association on the role of psychologists in the Black Civil Rights Movement. In one letter, he suggested that Dr. King might urge his audience to play a greater role in communicating to activists, on the grounds that "the concrete gains of the Civil Rights Revolutions owe practically nothing to the American intellectual, or social scientist" (1967c). Through his platform as SPSSI president, Rokeach thus sought to mobilize his colleagues toward increasingly socially relevant work.

### ***The Legitimation of Evil***

An APA conference in 1965 provided the basis for another of Rokeach's efforts at mobilizing his fellow psychologists towards social action and activism. This was only two years after Hannah Arendt's publication of her famous work on the "banality of evil" in 1963, which portrayed Adolf Eichmann's orchestration of the Nazi concentration camp system as a function of his psychological normalcy or banality operating within an evil system, rather than attributing his behavior to a fundamentally monstrous, sadistic or authoritarian personality. That year had also marked Stanley Milgram's (1963) *Behavioral Study of Obedience*, which seemed to show that ordinary individuals were willing and able to inflict considerable harm on others when such actions were demanded and sanctioned by an authority. At

the APA conference, Rokeach (1965b) contrasted these perspectives with the dominant body of psychological research. To Rokeach, it appeared that other psychologists had remained content to keep distant from the question of whether such evils as genocide, poverty, systematic discrimination, and oppression were caused by inevitable and intractable aspects of personality, or whether they were a result of psychological processes which were more subject to change. With Milgram as a notable exception, psychologists who had commented on this question - as had the researchers responsible for *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950) - seemed to Rokeach content to seek explanations which assumed the former. His own contention, however, was that such an analysis only led psychologists to take for granted or ignore a variety of homegrown evils, such as the atrocities of war perpetrated by U.S. forces in Vietnam and the oppression of Black communities domestically. If such problems were seen as intractable and inevitable, then psychologists would be unlikely to advance efforts at understanding and mitigating them.

In contrast, Rokeach displayed considerable optimism about the capacity of social psychology to address domestic incarnations of these problems. Unlike Nazi Germany, Rokeach perceived the culture of the United States to be deeply torn over its own social ills of racism, poverty and the like. While he had yet to complete any systematic study of the subject at the time of this APA talk, he suggested that the U.S. was home to "conflicting values" (Rokeach, 1965b). Although the United States' culture harbored values which reaffirmed or legitimized evil, many American values also favored *resistance* to forces that threatened to limit freedom and equality. Given the heterogeneity of U.S. values, Rokeach hoped that the nation would be replete with opportunities for psychologists to tip the scales in favor of resistance, musing "could not a social system which legitimizes goodness rather than evil produce thousands of banal Schweitzers and Martin Luther Kings rather than Eichmanns?" (p. 4).

While it seems that he had already begun to reconceptualize social problems previously attributed to dogmatism, authoritarianism or mental-rigidity as problems of values (Ball-Rokeach, personal communication, May 10, 2017; Rokeach, 1965b), Rokeach's desire to mobilize his colleagues toward social change and social relevance would lead him towards another project which would feature more prominently in his professional activity shortly after the talk. Early the following year, SPSSI would respond to Rokeach's call for psychologists to openly oppose domestic instances of legitimized evil as it related to issues of race and social class (Weichlein, 1966). Additionally, division leaders cited the need to "dispel the apathy of the American people toward the torture aspect of the war in Vietnam" (p. 3) as its most urgent and pressing goal in responding to this call. Among other proposed initiatives, SPSSI planned to sponsor a committee led by Dr. Rokeach to

produce a book- or journal-length volume assembling commentary from a variety of authors on the problem of the legitimation of evil in the U.S.

The *Legitimation of Evil* project began promisingly, with at least a dozen psychologists and other scholars - including such prominent authors as B. F. Skinner, Kurt Wolff, Nevitt Sanford, and Stanley Milgram - offering to contribute (Milgram, 1966; Rokeach, 1968c). Rokeach showed considerable enthusiasm for the endeavor, identifying it as one of his most important activities as a representative of SPSSI during his presidency for the division, to which he had been elected while organizing the project (Rokeach, 1967b). By 1968, however, only a handful of would-be contributors had met their commitments, with several declining or withdrawing their intent to contribute. While some cited time constraints and other barriers to completion, one writer, psychiatrist Jules Masserman, responded to a solicitation for his contribution by discouraging the continuation of the project. Noting that he was sympathetic to the committee's aims, Masserman (1966) suggested that such a work's primary consequence would nonetheless be "to lull the consciences of its authors while they are diverted from more direct and useful work."

Expressing deep disappointment, Rokeach was eventually forced to call for the abandonment of the project. M. Brewster Smith (1969), a close colleague of Rokeach's and among the few authors to complete a submission for the *Legitimation of Evil*, attributed the project's difficulties to a social climate that was unreceptive to scholarly and intellectualized approaches to social problems. Rokeach, however, took the failure more personally. To Thomas Pettigrew, a fellow SPSSI leader, he wrote:

This is the first time I have attempted to bring together various other people's contributions in some intellectually competent way and I feel that I am not cut out for the role of badgerer-editor. I now realize that it was a mistake for me to have agreed to this in the first place (1968d).

Throughout this period, however, Rokeach had maintained his parallel desire to understand the role of values in shaping the social problems he had hoped to ameliorate through the *Legitimation of Evil* project. With his efforts at editorship ending unsuccessfully, Rokeach would return to research as the primary strategy by which he sought to affect social change, now with values and value modification at the center of his work.

### **Precursors to the Psychological Study of Values**

Rokeach was not the first to propose that a psychology of values could be an important tool for bringing about social changes. Such views were especially prominent within SPSSI, an organization whose founders were motivated in part

by Marxist, socialist or otherwise left-wing political views, accompanied by the pragmatic analysis of values advanced by John Dewey (Stagner, 1986; Winston, 2011). In its fifth year of publication, for instance, an issue of SPSSI's *Journal of Social Issues* was devoted to questions about the role of values in psychological science, calling for a new "science of valuation" (Benne & Swanson, 1950). The volume prominently featured the views of psychologists aligned with pragmatic philosophy and Lewinian action research, alongside disputing perspectives which questioned whether values constituted a valid subject of scientific inquiry (e.g., Feigl, 1950).

Many of Rokeach's key claims echoed assertions made by SPSSI membership dating before the end of World War II. For instance, SPSSI's third president, George Hartmann (1939), had given a presidential address titled *Value as the Unifying Concept in the Social Sciences*, anticipating Rokeach's suggestion that a psychology of values would be more open to interdisciplinary work. Paving the way for Rokeach's social action endeavors, scholars such as Woodruff and DiVesta (1948) argued that an understanding of human values was indispensable to any efforts to produce lasting social and behavioral change. Similarly, the notion that values were central to the formal and informal processes of education - which would feature prominently in Rokeach's later research - had been suggested by a number of earlier scholars. For instance, Rokeach's use of the phrase "re-education," appears to have been borrowed from Kurt Lewin and Paul Grabbe (1945), who used it to denote the process of bringing about changes in values, standards and habits, the aim of which "is essentially equivalent to changes in culture" (p.55), although these authors lamented the paucity of effective methods for bringing about such change. In contrast, authors such as Benne & Swanson (1950) were more optimistic, expressing hope that it may only be a matter of time before the practical details of a psychology of values would be worked out.

Although a number of scholars had proposed that psychologists direct greater attention to values, such proposals were not immune to controversy. For some psychologists, discussions about human values seemed to fall more under the jurisdiction of spiritual and religious doctrine than that of scientific inquiry (Evans, 1980). For others, values seemed too overtly political to be a safe subject matter for psychologists. The notion of a psychology of values - particularly as it might relate to political and social issues - would grow increasingly controversial in the decade following WWII. Winston (2011) attributes the push towards "value neutrality" in SPSSI during this period to the influence of McCarthyism. Rokeach (1965b) himself, in recollecting the impact of McCarthyism on academia, would later recount "all too many American liberals and intellectuals understood clearly the dangers of McCarthyism in this country but took a seat far in the back of the struggle against McCarthyism... because of fear" (p.5). Indeed, Rokeach's own experiences make clear that McCarthyism was a salient political reality for him as

well as other psychologists. At least one psychologist in his acquaintance - fellow SPSSI member Ralph Gundlach - would be tried by a State Un-American Activities Committee on accusations of affiliation with the Communist Party in the years after WWII, with Gundlach (1948) even soliciting Rokeach for a written testimony speaking to his good character to be used in his legal defense. Gundlach would be dismissed from his university position the following year as a result of the investigation, later serving a brief jail sentence after being convicted of contempt in connection with the case (Sargent & Harris, 1986).

In this climate of political neutrality, research on values - particularly those closely linked with controversial social issues - may have been particularly discouraged as inviting accusations of scientific or political bias (Winston, 2011). Nonetheless, by the late 1960s, Rokeach found sympathetic interest in his call for a more value-sensitive psychology among at least some of his colleagues. Fellow SPSSI member Stuart Cook (1969) - commenting on the published version of Rokeach's SPSSI address - indicated that "An emphasis on the significance of values is not new among social psychologists, and few will wish to argue with the points Rokeach makes" (p. 11). What was unusual about Rokeach's proposal, according to Cook, was not his assertion that values were important, but his provision of concrete methods by which social psychologists might actually begin the work of experimentally studying changes in human values - in particular, by experimentally inducing such changes in a research setting.

### **Re-centering toward Values in Social Psychology**

Rokeach's interest in research on human values appears to have emerged early in the 1960s from his work on an *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* chapter on attitudes (Mayton, Ball-Rokeach, & Loges, 1994; Rokeach, 1968c). However, he would become increasingly convinced of, and vocal about, the importance of values as a research construct in the late-1960s - around the time that social psychologists began to express concerns about a state of "crisis" in their field. Some social psychologists, seeking to furnish solutions to this crisis, urged that the most appropriate response to psychology's apparent social irrelevance was to abandon traditional experimental research methodologies in favor of more sociological or even historical methods (Faye, 2011). For Rokeach, however, the discipline's problems were not primarily methodological. Rather, minimal social relevance was attributed to the subject matter that social psychologists had selected as the preferred targets of their inquiry. Specifically, Rokeach asserted that social psychology had remained mired in irrelevance because of their misplaced emphasis on attitudes and attitude change.

Rokeach had already grappled with questions about the most suitable objects of study for an action-oriented research program early in his career, when he had distanced himself from work on more change-resistant personality traits -

such as authoritarianism and dogmatism - in favor of cognitive variables, especially attitudinal ones such as ethnocentrism and opinionation (Rokeach, 1960; 1989). Three decades after Gordon Allport's (1935) identification of attitude as social psychology's core construct, attitudinal variables remained dominant as one of the most important constructs employed in the field when his research career began. But while attitudes were conceptualized as being more susceptible to influence than innate personality traits, they also seemed too often to be frustratingly resistant to social psychologists' efforts to affect lasting change. To Rokeach (1969b) social psychology seemed to be unduly "fixated" on attitude change, despite its limitations, predicting that theories addressing themselves to this process - such as Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory - would soon be abandoned.

Rokeach's (1968a) view of this problem was shaped by his theoretical understanding of what he termed attitude-value systems, in which the thousands of attitudes that a given individual might display were all organized around something like a few dozen core values. In his view, the limitations of attitude change efforts were partly attributable to their misplaced focus on the content of these systems (attitudes themselves), while failing to acknowledge the underlying structure provided by values. In the absence of these structural changes, attitude changes were anticipated to be relatively small and transient. Rokeach (1968a; 1973) described such efforts as being characterized by "persuasion" - a process that he associated with such phenomena as group pressure, forced compliance, advertising, and propaganda. In contrast, he used "education" or "re-education" to refer to changes in values and identified these processes as among the primary change-agents in schooling, psychotherapy, and everyday socialization and cultural change. In contrast to attitudes, values were furthermore seen as closely bound with motivation, implying an intrinsic "imperative to action" (Rokeach, 1968a, p. 16).

Rokeach made clear his feeling that social psychology had settled prematurely on the wrong core concept by prioritizing attitude change. In hopes of dispelling this "fixation," Rokeach made the centerpiece of his SPSSI address an entreaty for a "re-centering" of the field towards the prioritization of values, with particular attention being devoted to the process of value change (Rokeach, 1968a). This approach would characterize much of Rokeach's work in the ensuing two decades of his career.

### **Experimentally-Induced Value Change**

Unlike prior calls for a psychology of values which had failed to prompt much research activity, Rokeach did not stop at an account of the benefits that could be anticipated to follow from such a program. By the time of his SPSSI address, he had already developed a measure of relative rankings of individuals' or groups' values, the Rokeach Value Survey. In earlier letters to M. Brewster Smith, Rokeach acknowledged that many of his decisions in defining and conceptualizing values

were made with an eye toward elegant operationalization and measurement. His bold assumption that all attitudes – without exception – could be attributed to the manifestation of a relatively small number of values, for instance, was made in part in an effort to “side-step” the task of differentiating values from “functionally autonomous attitudes,” which he viewed as insurmountable otherwise (Rokeach, 1964c; 1965a). He also introduced a method for experimentally inducing value change - what he would call "self-confrontation" (Rokeach, 1973). Rokeach viewed self-confrontation as non-coercive, and suggested it might escape some of the ethical concerns that other popular research methods for inducing change in attitudes or behaviors had prompted from both academia and the public.

Rokeach's (1973) next book, *The Nature of Human Values*, would outline in greater detail his theoretical understanding of values, and presented findings from his initial investigations based on new methods for their study. Although his project was a decidedly practical one, Rokeach's pragmatism did not restrain him from making enthusiastic predictions about the benefits to be anticipated as a result of this work. Regarding his value measure, for instance, he noted: “The danger of such an instrument is that... the Value Survey might be seen as ‘good for everything.’ Ironically, though, it can be suggested that the measurement of values is relevant to virtually any human problem one might be able to think of” (p. 52). In this book alone, he would put his developing value theory to use in analyzing such wide-ranging phenomena as political ideology, religious involvement and belief, consumer product preferences, individual ethical conduct, crime, choice of academic major, career choice and occupational roles, the Black Civil Rights movement, student and antiwar protests, the hippie counterculture, and others.

### **Value Self-Confrontation**

The notion of confrontation as a strategy for affecting change had featured prominently in Rokeach's (1964b) controversial *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti*. In this book, he recounted a study in which he had arranged for three schizophrenia patients, each of whom believed himself to be Christ, to participate in a program led by himself and his research assistants in which they confront one another with their delusional and mutually incompatible identities. Through carefully facilitated "confrontation with others," Rokeach had hoped to identify techniques for affecting changes in some of our most fundamental beliefs - those related to self-concept. While the study concluded that this kind of confrontation was insufficient to produce the intended changes, he would later cite this experience as influential for his work on value change. In an interview in which he discussed this study, Rokeach (1980) reflected:

I think I learned what it is to confront other people with contradictions, and I also think I learned what it means to confront one's self. Basically, this

work laid the groundwork for the work that I'm now doing on changing values, and with it changing behavior with the method I now call self-confrontation (p.118).

In an afterward for the book written some twenty years later, Rokeach (1981) also acknowledged his sense that this style of confrontation had resulted in needless distress to the study's participants, citing his ethical qualms as another reason for the shift to self-confrontation in his later work.

The self-confrontation method Rokeach (1973) developed in his research on values sought to prompt change while avoiding the defensiveness and sense of coercion which could occur in confrontation with others. The method was predicated on the notion that internal contradictions within our attitude-value systems (most especially highlighting contradictions of our values with our self-concepts, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors or other our values) were normative phenomena. Each of us was assumed to harbor numerous such contradictions, often without our awareness. The self-confrontation method relied on making research participants aware of these contradictions, resulting in a state of "self-dissatisfaction" (p. 226). Rokeach attributed this notion to John Dewey's concept of a "felt difficulty," conceptualized as a precondition for any learning, change or growth. For instance, in a study intended to affect value change among Michigan State University students, Rokeach provided participants who had completed his value survey with the following prompt:

Now I would like to tell you some things we have already found out about the value systems of Michigan State students... The students, on the average, felt that *freedom* was very important - they ranked it 1; but they felt that *equality* was considerably less important - they ranked it 11. Apparently, Michigan State students value freedom far more highly than they value equality. This suggests that MSU students, in general, are much more interested in their own freedom than they are in freedom for other people. Feel free to spend a few minutes comparing your own rankings on the preceding page with those of the... students (p. 425).

Upon reading this prompt, it was anticipated that many participants would feel that they ought to have rated *equality* more highly, becoming dissatisfied with their own ratings of *equality* as reflected by the survey. This dissatisfaction would make these participants aware of an internal contradiction or incongruence between their present values and their self-concepts. Although no explicit instructions were given for how to resolve their sense of dissatisfaction, Rokeach expected that participants made aware of similar internal contradictions would be motivated to reprioritize their own values in a direction that lead to greater congruence between those values

and their preferred conceptualizations of themselves as moral and competent individuals.

Contrasting this approach with persuasive methods of attitude change, Rokeach saw self-confrontation as educative and informative in nature, intended to facilitate growth and the approach of "self-actualization" (Rokeach, 1975). While changes in values resulting from self-confrontation tended to occur in specific, predictable directions, Rokeach cautiously asserted that change would only be observed if participants themselves genuinely experienced the indicated contradictions as problematic and wished to resolve them. Indeed, whereas persuasion research in Rokeach's (1973) conceptualization involved participants passively receiving an experimental manipulation, self-confrontation required that participants take an active part in the change process. This process was thus distinctly humanistic in its conceptualization, with the participants' development of increasing congruence between values and self-concept at its center. Furthermore, because the psychologist took the drive to be moral and competent to be universal or near-universal (Rokeach, 1964b; 1973), self-confrontation could always be predicted to steer participants' values *away* from those compatible with self-defeating, evil and harmful ideologies.

In his own estimation, Rokeach had identified a powerful tool for affecting social change. In *The Nature of Human Values* (1973), he indicated that a single-session using self-confrontation and emphasizing the value *equality* had produced increases in replies to solicitations for donation to the NAACP, as well as enrollment among student participants in social science and education courses related to issues of ethnic and religious diversity. Students' responses to open-ended questions indicated other changes, including increased involvement in activist work, changes in educational enrollment, and modified political beliefs. Rokeach (1980) viewed the study as a successful attempt to "change the values that underlie civil rights behavior" (p. 120), he thus viewed the study as a success. For the author, these findings suggested that value changes produced by self-confrontation were no mere academic curiosity, but rather reflected participants' willingness to invest in issues of social importance. This success was made all the more resounding in Rokeach's eyes by findings suggesting that changes produced by exposure to a single self-confrontation session remained observable months or even years later.

Rokeach would initiate numerous applications of this self-confrontation method using his value scale, both in and out of research settings. Less formal applications of this approach were carried out in talks before groups ranging from Lutheran ministers (Rokeach & Regan, 1980) to specialist assistants to White House cabinet members (Rokeach, 1969a) and to "top level scientists and administrators with [NASA]" (Henderson, 1968). Rokeach's procedure when giving talks to groups of non-psychologists seems to have been to request that

attendees complete his values scales prior to the discussion. During his presentation, attendees could then be prompted to reflect on their own value rankings in light of research findings he presented (for instance, highlighting an apparent contradiction between one attendee's low ranking of the value "salvation" and his career choice in ministry; Rokeach & Regan, 1980). Rokeach would also introduce procedures for educators (Rokeach, 1975) and counselors (Rokeach & Regan, 1980) to make more intentional the value change processes that he saw as implicit in these institutions. Other authors appearing in a publication edited by Rokeach (*Understanding Human Values*; 1979) would make recommendations for the use of value self-confrontation in a still greater range of settings, extending the approach to procedures for leaders of public health organizations, the Black Civil Rights movement and other social movements.

### **A New Ethics of Value Change**

Rokeach seems to have prepared for a greater volume of critical response to the research ethics guiding his work on values than it would actually receive. In his account of the study with Michigan State University students described above, for instance, he noted: "It was anticipated that many experimental subjects would now protest having been unduly influenced or manipulated. To our surprise, not a single one of them reacted this way" (Rokeach, 1973, p.304). Rokeach also appears to have preemptively defended against the kinds of ethical criticisms toward his work that he expected to receive from fellow scholars. In a later passage in *The Nature of Human Values*, Rokeach described the sort of backlash that he anticipated:

...Every teacher who takes professional pride in his work would like to think that his teaching has affected the values, attitudes, and behavior of his students in some significant way. So long as he cannot prove that what he does in the classroom has in fact resulted in such a change, his assertions that it has will go unnoticed and unchallenged. But as soon as he can demonstrate that his teaching methods have indeed resulted in enduring effects on his students, especially on their values, he risks the criticism that he is unethically manipulating them without their informed consent (p.335).

### **Ethics Controversy in Social Psychological Research**

In an era in which some of the most celebrated psychological works were also among the most sharply criticized for alleged ethical lapses, Rokeach's caution may be unsurprising. Rokeach (1980) himself referred to the ethical controversy - like that surrounding the work of social psychologists Stanley Milgram and Phillip Zimbardo, or B. F. Skinner - as a problem "that plagues... psychology, now more than ever before in history" (p. 122). Ring (1967) critiqued what he saw as a "fun-and-games approach" to psychological research - a challenge that Rokeach (1973) appears to have taken seriously. The author accused followers of Kurt Lewin's

humanistically-grounded, action-oriented approach of having drifted toward a preference for flashy, dramatically-staged and needlessly-counterintuitive research designs which, for all their novelty, provided little utility or real-world insight (Ring, 1967). For the author, this raised serious questions about whether psychologists were exploiting the trust of their participants, not to mention the faith of their students that what they were learning was meaningful.

Rokeach's attentiveness to these concerns may also be attributable at least in some part to his personal experiences with the controversies surrounding his own use of deception in research. In his research for *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti*, Rokeach (1964b) had employed deceptive methods ranging from misleading his participants about the purpose of the study, to forging letters to participants allegedly written by real individuals or fictional ones within their delusional belief systems. He would later note that his ethical concerns about the distress resulting from these deceptions, and from the study's "confrontation with others" approach, contributed to his decision to end the study early (Rokeach, 1981).

Another controversy emerged surrounding an article published by Rokeach and Louis Mezei (1966) in the journal *Science*, which addressed the roles of similarity and difference in belief systems in racial discrimination. The controversy pertained to the authors' use of unwitting job applicants as its subjects. The participants were prompted to complete surveys and engage in a group discussion with confederates of the researchers posing as fellow applicants, with observations from these sources later being used as data in the study without their knowledge. The use of deception and omission of informed consent procedures in this study sparked a number of critical responses received by the journal and the authors. One commentator charged that Rokeach and Mezei's study was a reflection of the failure of psychology as a field to adequately protect human rights and privacy, noting that similar practices in medical research had resulted in strict censures against the experimenters (Miller, 1966). While Rokeach (1966) defended his research design as scientifically necessary in his response, he also acknowledged his sense of being caught in a "moral dilemma" (p. 15) between the conflicting demands of scientific inquiry and participants' rights.

### **Ethics in Self-Confrontation**

In Rokeach's (1981) view, it was not only crucial that self-confrontation represent an advancement in the technical task of affecting psychological and behavioral change, but it was also equally important that it escaped the kinds of moral dilemmas which had dogged past psychological research conducted by himself and others. Accordingly, he devoted considerable effort to articulating how self-confrontation avoided these pitfalls. Indeed, if this method was more efficient than these competing techniques of value, attitude and behavior modification as Rokeach (1980) suggested, than this eliminated the need for either deceptive

research designs, attitudinal persuasion or other forms of experimental manipulation which placed less priority on the individual's agency in affecting change. Indeed, Rokeach (1973) attributed the "fun-and-games approach" to psychological research described by Ring (1967) as being directly tied to the overreliance on such approaches.

At the same time, research on value self-confrontation would introduce a new host of ethical concerns. Psychologists had begun to voice questions about the ethics of a psychology of values long before Rokeach's work in this domain began. For instance, Ronald Lippitt (1950), editor of the *Journal of Social Issues* volume dedicated to the topic of values in psychology, had posed the question of whether the development of techniques for value change would provide social scientists with the means to exert "an undemocratic control of our lives" (p. 1). Indeed, although B. F. Skinner framed his own methods of behavior modification in behavioral terms, rather than value-oriented ones, he would find himself subject to similar accusations of exerting an anti-democratic or totalitarian influence during the cultural crisis of the 1960s and 70s (Rutherford, 2003). Elsewhere, accusations of ethical misconduct had been directed towards psychotherapists for their roles in changing values even when this change was unintentional, with critics suggesting that psychotherapists could be viewed as "crypto-missionaries" or "hidden preachers," and accusing them of "indoctrination" and "brainwashing" (see Tjeltveit, 1986).

Rokeach was proactive in clarifying the ethical nature of his new research methods, raising the question of appropriate ethical precautions in value change research as early as his presidential address to SPSSI (1968a). In *The Nature of Human Values* (1973), he presented three criteria, developed in collaboration with an ethics committee at Michigan State University, which could guide research based on his methods, also noting that he saw them as equally relevant for applied uses of self-confrontation outside of research. Any deceptive feedback was identified as flatly indefensible, a criterion both consistent with the method's humanistic conceptualization and the contemporary reactions against the "deception-research paradigm" (e.g. Ring, 1967). The remaining two criteria specified that any intended value change be "compatible with the basic assumptions of a democratic society and, even more important, in the interest of all humanity" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 336). At a minimum, this meant that self-confrontation ought to foster or at least preserve such humanitarian values as *a world at peace*, *freedom*, and *equality*. These designations were explicitly political in nature; in Rokeach's scheme, high ratings of the values *freedom* and *equality* constituted a "moderate left" or "socialist" (p. 171, 184) political orientation, with Capitalism ("Moderate Right"), Fascism ("Extreme Right") and Communism ("Extreme Left") each being identified with low ratings in one or both of these values.

Despite his precautions, Rokeach noted that a new technology of value change might entail certain "uneasy" or even "frightening" implications, particularly with regard to the possibility of modifying political and religious values. Could values be manipulated in any direction that researchers chose? Could this be used to sway the odds in political elections, or to promote the kinds of fascist, dogmatic and ethnocentric social ideologies that Rokeach sought to counteract? He expressed cautious optimism, on theoretical grounds, that self-confrontation could only produce changes that improved one's self-conception as competent and moral. To Rokeach, this suggested that human values were intrinsically resistant to modifications that would lead to dogmatically anti-humanistic or anti-democratic ideologies, as such ideologies were seen as depending upon a certain degree of incongruence between these values and self-concept. However, Rokeach (1973) also believed that the matter could only be settled through empirical investigation. Because his own research ethics would proscribe against direct investigation of the most troubling of these possibilities (to attempt to use self-confrontation to try to promote fascist attitudes by reducing participants' rankings of such "democratic" values as freedom and equality would be clearly unacceptable), such questions would have to remain uncomfortably unresolved. Being keenly attentive to the ethical nature of his work, however, Rokeach would seek new ways of gaining insight into these questions as his career progressed.

### **Value Change on a Mass Media Scale: *The Great American Value Test***

A significant development for questions about the role of psychologists' value change interventions in society would be prompted by a 1979 study that Rokeach contributed to with his wife - Sandra Ball-Rokeach, a sociologist and professor of communications - as lead researcher. The study provided the focus for their book *The Great American Value Test* (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach & Grube, 1984). The project aimed in part to test Ball-Rokeach's media dependency theory, positing that techniques for affecting individual change using media will be most effective for individuals whose dependency on the media is greatest. Because Rokeach's self-confrontation was the method used for affecting change in this study, the researchers would simultaneously have the opportunity to observe its effectiveness in a mass media setting - a first for the method (Ball-Rokeach, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

Changes in values and associated attitudes and behaviors (measured as donations to corresponding charitable causes) would be observed over a period of several weeks among participants in two matched Washington areas. In the Tri-Cities area consisting of Richland, Pasco and Kennewick, Washington - referred to throughout the study as "Experimental City" - the researchers arranged to broadcast a 30-minute television program that they had written and produced. The nearby

city of Yakima, Washington would serve as the "Control City." The program included information about value distributions in America and prompted viewers to reflect on their own values, borrowing directly from the self-confrontation procedures described in *The Nature of Human Values*. Comparing survey results for residents of the experimental and control cities before and after the broadcast, the researchers found changes in values, attitudes and behaviors in the expected directions, some of which seemed to persist at least two to three months after the experimental manipulation.

### **Second Thoughts on the Ethics of Value Change**

Even though findings were consistent with the study's objectives, the researchers expressed concern about what these findings might mean, devoting a chapter at the end of their book to the studies' ethical implications. They concluded that their effort to facilitate increases in values of *equality* and *a world of beauty*, and in stimulating increased giving to charities for social egalitarian and environmentalist causes, were consistent with the social scientists' "legitimate role in bringing about a better society" (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984, p. 166). Indeed, the project had passed through the university review board without controversy (S. Ball-Rokeach, personal communication, June 15, 2017). What raised concern was the ease with which their methods appeared to produce such change on a mass scale.

Can a Hitler, or any politician, or Madison Avenue apply our work for their benefit? In responding to this question, we take a position that is substantially different from a position we took in earlier discussions (Grube, 1982; Rokeach 1973; Rokeach & Grube, 1979). We now think that the experimental findings... do not necessarily imply that *only* the maintenance and enhancement of a person's self-esteem will be served... They may also serve the noble or ignoble purposes of those doing the influencing - for instance, appeals for funds to support public television or the KKK, appeals to teenagers to buy speedy cars, or appeals for money or votes by politicians of either the left or right. (p. 169-70).

Similarly, in the book's preface, the authors - acknowledging the irony of the book's 1984 publication date - suggest that their findings ought to draw attention to the capacity of television as a tool of Orwellian control. The gravity of this concern for the authors was such that in the book's final paragraph they note that "we entertained the possibility... of *not* reporting the outcome of this research" (p.171-172), explaining that they ultimately arrived at the decision to do so only because they found the prospect of suppressing scientific findings to be still more dangerous or distasteful.

Given that the findings of this study generally conformed to the researchers' predictions, to what can this change in position be attributed? Although the researchers had sought to observe what changes beliefs, attitudes and values their television program might produce, they repeatedly note their surprise, and near disbelief, in the magnitude of changes produced by just a single exposure to the 30-minute program (Bell-Rokeach et al., 1984). For instance, they reported a 75% greater rate of donation per person to non-profit organizations associated with the target values of *equality* and *a world of beauty* over the three-month follow-up period in the Experimental City as compared with the Control City. Furthermore, the project had been considered by many of their colleagues to be a hopeless one given the conservative political climate in the eastern region of Washington where their data was collected, making their findings all the more striking (S. Ball-Rokeach, personal communication, June 15, 2017).

If such robust changes in values, attitudes and behaviors could be so efficiently facilitated by using self-confrontation via mass media, then any risk that these techniques might be abused had to be taken all the more seriously. Around this time, a number of events suggested that this risk might be greater than Rokeach's theoretical grounds for optimism had previously suggested. Empirical findings by Rokeach and his colleagues (e.g. Grube, 1982; Rokeach & Grube, 1979) led to a reformulation of the researchers' assumptions. Since increases in all values included in the Rokeach Value Survey, for instance, could sometimes be consistent with individuals' self-concepts, it might be possible to prompt individuals to prioritize other values *over* values like freedom and equality - perhaps decreasing their salience for such purposes as political decision-making. Thus, it was not until after the *Great American Values Test* study began that certain theoretical limitations began to suggest directly the possibility that the self-confrontation method might be used for ends contrary to those for which Rokeach had intended them.

Even these theoretical problems, however, may not have been the most significant drivers of the heightened sense of urgency about ethical matters in this work. More frightening still to the researchers, it began to appear that interest in their techniques was growing among political groups which they saw as directly opposed to the kinds of social change that Rokeach hoped to facilitate using self-confrontation. Ball-Rokeach and Rokeach had begun to receive solicitations to consult with groups from the political "right" and "far-right," apparently hoping to explore the use of self-confrontation methods to advance their own political aims (S. Ball-Rokeach, personal communication, June 15, 2017). Read in this light, the final chapter on "Ethical Implications" in *The Great American Values Test* can be seen not only as a reflection on the ethics of self-confrontation in general, but as an assertion of the authors' unwillingness to aid efforts which ran counter to their own values and progressive vision of social change. Sandra Ball-Rokeach (personal

communication, June 15, 2017) later recalled their particular worry that right-wing political groups might seek to include "fake data" in their self-confrontation prompts, seeking to affect value change on the basis of misinformation. Thus, the shift in tone observed in this work seems primarily attributable to concerns that self-confrontation might be used by politicians or activists without regard to Rokeach's ethical criteria.

The study's authors were not alone in remarking on the dangers that their research might forewarn. Indeed, the increasing interest in Rokeach's work in the realms of politics and mass media seem to have exposed it to qualitatively different kinds of discourse. In the social psychology realm, Rokeach's critics or would-be critics were mostly concerned with research designs that relied on such elements as deception and manipulation, and he had been able to clearly differentiate his work from the targets of these attacks. But whereas ethical questions surrounding Rokeach's previous uses of self-confrontation seem to have raised few eyebrows, popular and scholarly reviews for *The Great American Values Test* repeatedly follow the authors in emphasizing the "disturbing" character of the research findings (e.g. Kidder, 1984; Wright, 1986). While there was relatively little public fear or discourse about the ways that paper-and-pencil tests could affect peoples' values or political attitudes, the idea that television could be a medium for changing the nation's view of the world was apparently already salient to the public imagination. In this context, the study's reception was shaped by fears of political propaganda and other already-familiar concerns about the media's influence - concerns which appear to have raised fewer eyebrows among the authors' more laboratory-oriented social psychologist colleagues, despite Rokeach's own care in seeking to distinguish his methods from attitudinally-oriented propaganda techniques.

### **Conclusion**

Whereas earlier psychologists had written enthusiastically about the potential that inquiry into values might have as a tool for affecting social change, Milton Rokeach stood out among his predecessors and contemporaries by providing a sophisticated theoretical and methodological framework for making this program of research a reality. This framework promised to strike at the very roots of social problems by shaping the values which underlay the cultural crisis of the 1960s, 70s, and beyond, all while seeking to avoid persuasion, coercion or methods that smacked of totalitarian control. Rather, it was conceptualized as affecting change by facilitating self-confrontation, allowing individuals to grow towards greater internal consistency and self-awareness in the process of motivating social change and strengthening democracy.

Rokeach's initial optimism about the promise of a psychology of values would be tempered over time. Although he developed and applied techniques for

affecting value change, plausibly contributing to social change in small ways, some of his grander research aspirations raised concerns that were too troubling for investigations to probe further. A critical assumption for Rokeach's research program was that the self-confrontation method was intrinsically suited to the promotion of democratic values, while contrary values could not be facilitated by that process. By at least the early 1980s, however, a number of circumstances began to shed doubt on the safety of this assumption – not least of which was the interest in Rokeach's technology of value change expressed by political groups whose own values conflicted with the psychologist's. Rokeach's humanism and social concern - characteristics which helped to impel him towards the study of values - would ultimately also place limitations on how far he was willing to go with that study. While Rokeach took great pains to evade the ethical pitfalls which plagued his colleagues in constructing his approach to the experimental study and modification of human values, these steps failed to prepare him for the kinds of concerns that would be raised in a mass context outside of applied psychology's traditional scope.

Though he attracted numerous students and colleagues to this pursuit during his lifetime, values would never come to occupy the central role in social psychology that Rokeach had hoped they would. Indeed, the social psychological "crisis" of the late 1960s and '70s seems to have concluded without any of the sweeping reorientations called for by its discussants becoming actualized (Faye, 2011). Rokeach seems early on to have recognized the possibility that his value research might never have the unifying effect on social psychology that he imagined at his most optimistic. In preparatory notes for his 1969 speech on the state of the field, he wrote "I do not at the present see the likelihood of synthesis of all the work in social [psychology]. Most realistic is to expect more sophisticated little theories and more social relevance, rather than more sophisticated big theories with little social relevance" (Rokeach, 1969b, p. 7). Although his theoretical conceptualization of values has had a tremendous and lasting influence on the way that values are studied by psychologists today, that statement perhaps best anticipated the finite but measurable impact that his work would have on society and psychologists' ongoing effort to understand values in relation to ourselves and to science.

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