

Deshun Li

Value Theory

A Research into Subjectivity

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Preface to the English Edition

It is a long-cherished wish of my own and many of my foreigner friends that this book, *Value Theory*, could be translated and published in English. This book was indeed the result of interaction with Western philosophical thinkers.

The tradition of Chinese philosophy since ancient times customarily takes the interrelationship between “the heaven”, “the earth” and “humankind” as its starting point for all theoretical thinking; and its ultimate goal has always been to construct various theoretical systems of ethical politics that deal with the society and the state. As evidence of the existence of this tradition, for almost all the important schools of thought in history, the most important concepts were usually those that belonged to the category of value, such as “moral”, “kindheartedness and justice”, “good and evil”, “beauty and ugly”, “rich and poor”, “fortune and misfortune”, “weal and woe” etc., while the central concepts for European philosophy usually fell into the categories of ontology and epistemology, such as the most often discussed concepts of “existence”, “entity”, “reason”, “experience”, “knowledge” and “truth”. This means, when compared with the European philosophy, the Chinese philosophy has a stronger tradition in examining the philosophy of values and evaluations. The Chinese way of thinking as a result of this tradition, then, tends to attach more importance to how things “should be”, and thus has developed an ample resource of sophisticated ways of wisdom in dealing with people. By comparison, there is a relative lack of a systematic pursuit and construction of how things actually “are”. Perhaps this is the reason why for a long time the Chinese philosophical wisdom traditions had stopped at the level of normative thinking and failed to develop a systematic self-criticism and logical analysis. This has led to the situation where Chinese philosophy had long been neglected or even denied eligibility as a school of “philosophy” by its Western counterparts, who always lay much emphasis on logos and logic.

But now the situation has changed, not only because the importance of the philosophy of value has been receiving an increasing appreciation in general and the condition for value studies is also improved correspondingly; but also because changes in the ways of thinking and expression of Chinese philosophy

happened along with the transformation in Chinese social practices. By introducing and learning from Western philosophy, we are now able to analyze and present contemporary Chinese philosophy on a new level of rational criticism and reflection.

This book in front of you is a work of philosophical thinking which not only draws on the Chinese cultural tradition, but also utilizes a new analytical method. The goal of this new method is to replace traditional “physical thinking” with “relational thinking”, and to take the social existence of people and their rights and responsibilities in being subjects of practices as the objective evidence for understanding value phenomena and concepts about value. The new method also tries to answer all kinds of questions about value by analyzing practices and subjectivities. This method originated from the “practical materialism” by Karl Marx. Since, for various reasons, Marx’s historical materialism is still not fully understood, applied or tested, it is so far still a whole new method.

The starting point for the intellectual inquiry of this book is to draw as much as possible attention to the living practices of humankind itself, rather than resorting to some existing closed systems of discourse. For the author, values and value relationships are universal and essential phenomena that are connected to the universality and essentiality of existence and human practices; thus it should definitely not be confined to the narrowness of moral or cultural concepts such as “intentions” or “standards”. Constructing our analysis on the basis of an understanding of the rights and responsibilities lying in human agency activities could help us to better understand the reality and complexity of value and value relationships. But also, when taking the concept of value by such a broad definition, this book will unavoidably touch on several realistic areas. In each of these areas, theoretical self-proving often takes place at the same time with dialoguing and communicating with others. Thus this book has to include some apparent re-interpretations of common sense; therefore, readers of this book are kindly reminded to be aware of this situation.

And the main point of this book is to dialogue with some of the well established Western philosophical theories: mainly empiricism and pragmatism in Western analytical philosophy. This is because, on the issue of how to understand and treat value, these two theories of philosophy very well represent two typical but different ways of thinking. Undeniably, the disputes and arguments between these two theories have led to the emergence of the nature of value and truth and their interrelationship as a universal philosophical question, and thus promoted it to the forefront of recent thought. In effect, it was the analysis and discussions of Bertrand Russell, John Dewey and others that provided the theoretical basis for my further thinking and explorations. The ideas and opinions raised in this book are not to be simply ascribed to any of these existing schools or theories, but rather an independent exploration.

Discussions of frontier philosophical issues often happen within the intellectual community that takes Western discourse as its native language. Chinese scholars starting to take part in such discussions is itself illustrative enough. When Professor Jürgen Habermas visited China during 16–29 April 2001, he shared some of his observations with me. He said that according to his experience, there was “a

significant inequality” in effect existing in the academic dialogue between China and the West. That is, westerner scholars’ understanding of works by Chinese scholars is much inferior to the Chinese scholars’ understanding of their Western counterparts. Such a comment significantly encouraged me in further pursuing my own academic endeavors. It was also out of such desire to boost academic dialogue and mutual understanding that in 1987, shortly after the publication of the original edition of this book in China, several researchers from Germany, the former USSR and Japan noticed this book and offered to translate it into their respective languages. But later experiences proved this a difficult task. Apart from language and other technical difficulties, the cultural context and ideological differences between Chinese and foreign academic worlds also made such dialogue even more difficult.

But now we are ready to face these difficulties. This book is translated from the second edition of my book in Chinese, published in 2007 by Renmin University press. Some necessary changes and adjustments to the original manuscript had to be made for the English edition. I must take this chance to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Sun Meitang and Dr. Susan Yan Chen who had made this English edition possible, and Springer who agreed to publish this book.

I hope this English translation of my book will bring more critiques and discussions from the international academic community. Such dialogues will greatly help me to deeper my research.

July 2011, Beijing
People’s Republic of China

Deshun Li

Preface to the Chinese Edition

The original title of this book was “Value, Truth and Freedom: an Introduction to a Marxist Theory of Value”. This edition was the author’s Ph.D. thesis completed in 1986. Parts of the manuscript were revised before being put into publication under the new title “Value Theory: A Research into Subjectivity”. The change of title was mainly due to two technical reasons: to make it shorter; and to more clearly stress the author’s theoretical major points and methodological characteristics.

Principally, this book is based on the dialectic of the interrelationship between subjects and objects, and tries to understand the nature and character of value from the position of subjects. Judged from this perspective, the content of this book lives up to its title. But of course, whether or not this perspective and this methodology is valid in a scientific sense, is open to question. You, the reader, will reach the conclusion when you finish reading this book.

As is widely noticed, recently there have been more and more academic discussions around the topic of value and subjectivity among Chinese scholars. Different people have different understandings of this situation. According to my careful studies, I think this tendency is not merely coincidental—there are deep-rooted factual and scientific causes behind the increase of academic interests in value and subjectivity. I also believe that the issue of value and the issue of subjectivity are inherently highly consistent with each other. To put it in a simple way, this consistency is: theoretically, the issue of value is one of the most typical aspects of subjectivity, while the issue of subjectivity is a key question in the study of value. Generally speaking, the study of value will be able to transcend its current level only when it is approached from the perspective of subjectivity, or is based on an accurate understanding of subjectivity.

A prominent characteristic of the phenomenon of “value” is that the nature and level of values are determined by the conditions of the subject in value relations, instead of objects. For example, people always say that “floods and fires have no mercy”. But water and fire are neither necessarily harmful nor useful, they just follow their natures. Values of water and fire are ultimately determined by the conditions of people, by the relationship between people and water or fire. This

characteristic of value is already widely accepted by researchers in related areas, but judgments deduced from this commonly acknowledged fact vary. Some call it “the subjectiveness of value”, but I call it “the subjectivity of value”. “Subjectiveness” and “subjectivity”, these two concepts appear to be similar enough, but they lead to substantially different theoretical assumptions and conclusions. For supporters of the “subjectiveness of value” theory, the objectivity of value and the validity of value as an object for scientific scrutiny all become the most dubious issues, or even are completely denied. Thus, value becomes a concept that is completely irrelevant to scientific principles. But for me, the objectivity of value, the objective basis of evaluation, the reflective nature of people’s consciousness of value, and the possibility of establishing a scientific theory of value are all firmly rooted at the heart of social existence of humanity as subjects. Thus I can proudly predict that value theories, an emerging and important philosophical subject, will be able to achieve some unparalleled, scientific development under the Marxist theoretical system.

From the perspectives of Marxist philosophy, it is not very difficult to distinguish “subjectivity” and “subjectiveness”. “Subjectiveness” only refers to the spiritual character of a subjective person. But the subjective person as the actor in an object relationship must be a complete and real person. That is, an objective social existence that could not be reduced to isolated spirit, consciousness and subjectiveness. Thus, the concept of “subjectivity” is, in the first place, connected to the social existence (objectivity) of human beings, and it should not be equated with “subjectiveness”. The seemingly nuanced difference between the two words is exactly where the Marxist understanding of “human being” fundamentally differs from those of other theories.

The concept of “subjectivity” could only gain an independent form and position when the nature, position and meaning of subjectivity are properly understood and receive sufficient theoretical attention. Our past effort in this respect is insufficient. Of course, establishing the concept of subjectivity is not the end of the question, it is the start. Research articles discussing subjectivity are not rare in China. And among these contributions, there is an apparent dispute in the understanding of the question of subjectivity itself and its meaning. According to my experiences in studying value theories, it appears that the establishment of the concept of subjectivity, and its development, has had the effect of changing people’s way of thinking and improving analytical methods. This means that it has some great impact on the conventional way of thinking. For a long period of time, many of us have been so used to taking materialism as something similar to “subjectivism”, or taking “primacy of matter” as “the primacy of object”, attributing the objectivity, the originality of material, the definitive power of natural law and everything else to the object. This bias actually neglects or ignores the position and function of people as subjects. Such a way of thinking is incapable of explaining many of the scientific discoveries achieved so far (for example, the Quantum uncertainty effect and the principle of relativity), nor could it explain the complex and diverse phenomena of values. For example, this way of thinking would not accept the fact that “value differs from person (the subject) to person”. This is because it tries to settle the issue once and for all by attributing the character of value to the nature of the objects.

Otherwise, it assumes, it falls into traps of subjectivism, idealism or pluralism. But when emancipated from the meme of this “subjectivist” way of thinking, one will reach the opposite conclusion. This is the most important of gains in my study into the issue of value.

To establish and to expound a philosophical theory of value that can suit and explain Chinese practices is a pressing demand of the era of reforms. Since the 1980s, more and more academic works are being published in the effort to expand this area of study. The entry of the issue of value onto center stage for academic endeavors is itself a significant event. And at the same time, these academic works have contributed significantly to a series of important issues, such as the theoretical position of value theory, the practical and scientific merits of the theory of value, the nature and philosophical meaning of value, objectivity and other characteristics of value, characteristics of value cognitions, value and truth, the evolution of contemporary notions of values, and a critical revisit to the oriental and western traditional notions of value. Together they make for a firm base for a proliferation of value theory studies.

These achievements being recognized, it should also be noticed that research and application of value theory in China is still in its early stage. Related works have not yet fully developed and, correspondingly, broad understandings and appreciations that could match its potential theoretical and practical importance are not yet gained. One example could illustrate this situation well: not long ago, the most popular concept in the area of value theory studies was ‘the truth of value’, and related topics such as ‘whether the truth of value has its class nature’, and ‘whether there are diverse truths of value’, all received a lot of discussion. Strictly speaking, these are truth issues and are not typical value issues. Thus, no matter what answers they reach, the status of the discussion itself showed that the theory of value had not yet sufficiently developed in its own scope. Later on, discussions on ‘evaluative cognition’ and ‘reflexive cognition’ have become more advanced and developed into the area of epistemological study of value. But, of course, the depth (into the specific issue of value) and scope (both in term of topical variety and in term of social impact) of these discussions still need improvement.

Value study is a demanding task. It is not the aim of this book to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework in just one go. And not in any respect could it be said that this task is being, or has already been, completed. At the most, this book could be regarded as a continuous preparation: try to clear out the wide territory of value theories by picking and removing those (concepts, categories and methods etc.) that I think do not belong here, leaving only those that are correct for here. There is also some classifying and categorizing work done here so that these elements would be more easily located when needed in building something bigger. For this reason, this book adopts an approach that critically revisits all the major concepts one by one. Thus it unavoidably has a somewhat scholarly style and a heavy dialectical character. This might make reading this book a bit more difficult.

When this book is eventually published, I wish it will lead to more and more discussions and contributions to the philosophical study of values. Then, with the concerted efforts of many, a comprehensive theoretical frame work for

contemporary value studies will be eventually established. By that time, this book will find its highest purpose.

For this reason, I would like to dedicate this book to those of my intellectual colleagues who have been working on this territory for a long time, and to all the readers and researchers who care about the construction of value theory, about the reform of the principle theoretical framework, and are willing to give comments or criticisms in all formats. This book is also dedicated to my teachers, my colleagues and my family who have always been supportive.

I also give my most sincere gratitude to all the people whose effort greatly helped the publication of this book: the editorial board of 'Renmin University Research Series', editors from Renmin University press, and Luo Jia who kindly translated the Table of Contents of this book into English.

March 1987, Beijing
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Deshun Li

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Issue of Value and Philosophy

The nature and meaning of the study of values can be assessed at two different levels: scientific discipline and specific theory.

In the sense of scientific discipline, the issue of values is not a lower-order, local or individual research topic, but is rather a general and universal theme of a higher-order. The fact that value has been one of the universal and principal aspects throughout the course of human existence and development determines that the theory of value, or Axiology, is one of the most important components of the primary theoretical framework of philosophy.

While on the level of specific theories, the self-defined aim of this research is to articulate and establish contemporary Chinese Axiology by providing rational and responsible answers to the question of value.

1.1 Theoretical Status of the Issue of Value in the Philosophical Framework

Until recently, the philosophical concept of “value” has been both familiar and strange at the same time for many people. It is familiar because the term is widely used in our daily language. And yet it is strange, because few people truly understand what are the fundamental meanings of “value” and so many related questions. For example: what is the use of Philosophy? This is one of the most frequent questions. As a matter of fact, “being useful” is itself a very obvious value concept, but people who ask this question are often ignorant of this fact. Thus, people are often posing and answering philosophical questions without being aware of the meaning of these practices.

Another example: the judgment of good and bad is perhaps the most typical and most popular representation of value issues in our daily life. The term “good and bad” is, perhaps, the most loosely defined concept, and is used in the most diverse meanings. As has been proved so many times, what is “good” and what is “bad”, is

Translated by: Yan Li

not always so straightforward, and is not immutable. Thus, people start to search for a philosophical explanation. And the philosophical formulation of “good and bad” is value; “good” and “bad” in daily language can be translated into “positive value” and “negative value”.

The concept of value that we are using in Chinese is the counterpart of “value” in English; “valeur” in French, “wert” in German and “ценность” in Russian. Marx had once conducted an etymological investigation of the concept. According to his research, the word “value” originated from the ancient Sanskrit Latin word for dyke and dam, meaning “cover, protect and reinforce”. The word “value” comes from its derivative meaning of “respect, revere and like”. The primary meaning of “value” is “protective, precious, respectable and important.” This is also the basic meaning of value in general context.

In our daily language, the word “good” has the most diverse meanings. It could mean “yes” in a yes-or-no judgment, or “kindness” compared to what is evil, “right” compared to what is wrong, “beautiful” to ugly, “merit” to demerit, “luck” to ill omen, “fortune” to misfortune, “gain” to loss, and “what should be” etc. All these meanings, “yes, right, kindness, beauty, merit, luck, fortune, gain, and should” are to be called “good” because they are the positive or valuable condition for the subject of judgments, the person who says these are “good”, and “bad” is the opposite. “Good” and “bad”, all together represent the two conditions of general “value” phenomena: positive value and negative value.

“Value” as a philosophical concept is a theoretical abstraction from daily living practice. And this abstraction draws from theorizations from various aspects of peoples’ living practices. For example, the concept of “use value” was extracted from the realm of material economic life. Its immediate meaning is “the use-value of things for people, those qualities which make them useful or agreeable etc. to people” [67, vol. 26, III: p. 327]. While fundamentally, “Use-value expresses the natural relationship between things and men, in fact the existence of things for men.” [67, vol. 26, III: p. 326].

There are still other value relationships between objects and people which are more general than use value, such as exchange values for products, and aesthetic values of objects etc. Yet there are other value relationships in material economic life that are wider and more complex than the values of objects, such as economic relationships between people, production relationships, interest relationships etc. In the comprehensive social relationships between people, there are relationships based on the material economic relationship, such as class relationship, ethnic relationship, individual relationship, political relationship and ethical relationship etc., they all generate certain kinds of value concepts, such as class interest, national interest, political value, ethical value and so on. This is an intertwined net of value relationships. At every knot on this net are the coordinates of value measurements on which people rely for formulating their own specific value systems. So there is a rich collection of various systems of sense of values, including those value concepts incorporated into our aesthetic life, such as “beauty” and “ugliness”, “elegance” and “vulgarity”.

In the case of scientific research, the nature and social attribution of science determined that the criterion for evaluating the contents of knowledge and theories is truth. So, for science, “truth” is the ultimate goal, is the life of scientific research, and is the most important value.

Universality resides in particularity, abstract comes from specifics, theory reflects reality. Because various domains and realms of social lives share some universal issues and some common perspectives, the living practices and theoretical pursuit of humanity could arrive at a new research area that is of universal interest. Such is the logical foundation for the formation of axiology, or value theory, as a branch of scientific studies.

The historical development of axiology as a branch of science is the process where philosophy first became increasingly differentiated, when each individual subject area matured, and then started to develop towards a new level of integration. Conditions that directly led to the birth of axiology were the evolution of ethics and aesthetics, that is, the formation of “meta-ethics” and the metaphysical study of principle theories of aesthetics.

Ancient philosophy, being the confluence of ancient knowledge, had already included the pursuits of goodness, beauty and the optimum living conditions. Later on, when the natural sciences, social sciences and other scientific areas gradually grew out of philosophy and became independent subject areas, these schools of thought on goodness, beauty and the optimum living conditions also gradually evolved into various specific disciplines, such as ethics, aesthetics, economics, sociology, politics, law, literature and arts, and religions. Among them, ethics and aesthetics are still branches of philosophy, and the issue of kindness and beauty that they deal with have a general interest in all other areas of social scientific research. But for a long period of time, ethics, aesthetics and other areas of study have all been mainly engaging in their respective subjects, thus didn’t establish a general theory that is applicable across disciplines.

By the eighteenth century, Hume and Kant raised the “is-ought” problem and differentiated the causality order of objects from the action goal, factual judgment and value judgment of humans. Such differentiation was often formulated and expressed as “Existence and Value”, or “Facts and Values”. The fundamental contribution of Hume’s and Kant’s work was that they established and popularized the philosophical concept of “value”, and also granted the concept its metaphysical meaning.

Such establishment was firstly reflected in the development of aesthetics. The eighteenth century German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten re-defined aesthetics as “a science of the sense of beauty”, or a science of the values of beauty. His work brought aesthetic study into a level of meta-theory. And it is generally accepted that this also marked the naissance of aesthetics as a branch of science.

The concept of value was also introduced to ethics. The German philosopher Hermann Lotze, basing on Kant’s work, proposed placing the issue of value and evaluation at the center of philosophical studies. His students tried to develop a “philosophy of values” to realize Lotze’s idea. In the early twentieth century, the English philosopher G. E. Moore started the study of “meta-ethics” by presenting

his idea of “value intuitionism” and his linguistic analysis of “good”. During this period of time, the independence of value studies was also growing. Many philosophers, such as Franz Brentano and Friedrich W. Nietzsche started to publish on the topic of value. The term Axiology was created to name a scientific discipline different from epistemology. Von Hartmann first used the term for his book title (1911). Because most of the above mentioned early exponents of axiology are also ethicists, they often approached the study of values from an ethics perspective. Thus until today, many people in the Western still see axiology as a type of ethics, or meta-ethics. This only proves the close relationship between axiology and ethics. But it is also obvious that this new theoretical realm co-created by aesthetics and ethics has already in effect entered their common metaphysical level – philosophy, and is already sufficient to be a new branch of meta-philosophy.

Then, what kind of philosophy is axiology? My answer to this question is: on the scientific level, axiology took its shape later than ontology and gnosiology, but has developed to the same level as the other two disciplines and become a branch of principle philosophical theories. In the history of philosophy, the time line of the establishment of these three areas is roughly the following: ontology was conceptualized and established in the seventeenth century, gnosiology in the eighteenth century and axiology in the twentieth century. Axiology was established the latest because it has to deal with the most complex set of phenomena and questions, and it relies on the development of other areas of the humanities and social sciences for its own theoretical basis.

The key criterion marking the definition of a new scientific discipline is its research object and research question. And the formation of a philosophical branch depends even more strongly on the presence of a central question with universal meaning. The nature and theoretical level of this central question determines the theoretical position of the discipline. Thus, when we look at the above mentioned three branches of philosophy, we can see that each of them actually deals with a set of universal questions. And these questions are logically related to the development of history. To put them in the simplest language:

The question for ontology is: “What is existence, and what is non-existence? What exists? And how to exist?”

The question for gnosiology is: “Can humans comprehend or grasp existence, and, if so, how?”

The question for axiology is: “What is the meaning of the existence of the world to human beings? What is the consciousness of the existence of the world to human beings?”

Such is my understanding and summary of the few “primary questions” of philosophy after years’ of research. Of course, such summary and naming of the “three basic branches”, and even the understanding of what is philosophy, are all subject to different opinions among philosophers. But I do believe that questing, developing, answering, criticizing and rethinking these questions can touch on most areas of philosophical studies, it can also provide criteria for identifying and understanding various schools and theories in philosophy. At least, this is the conceptual framework and logical presumption for this book. When I elaborate my own gains

from the study of values, I feel that this way of understanding and identifying the scientific position of axiology is not only helpful in extending one's theoretical horizon, but also is helpful in strengthening the logic of arguments and clarifying ideas.

There are still quite some doubts and uncertainties on the scientific position of the philosophy of value. This is partly the result of different understandings of the meaning of value problems. For example when axiology started in the West, it had names such as "meta-physics" and "meta-aesthetics". This proves that axiology is the product of studies into the principle theories (meta-theories) of ethics and aesthetics, and it provided new theories or new methods for these areas of study. This is simply fact. In China, for a long period of time, people have been studying aesthetics from an epistemological approach and understanding morality and ethics from the stand point of class struggle. Such bias led to a serious problem of theoretical and ideological impoverishment. So the emerging of the philosophical study of values can obviously shoulder the historical mission of providing new theoretical foundations and new ways of thinking.

Internationally, there is still not a clear and unified definition of axiology as formulated above. Many scholars only see axiology as a part of ethics (meta-theory), thus in their text books, axiology is often replaced by ethics. This situation is possibly related to the following two points: first, these philosophers generally do not attach much importance to the systematic character and overall structure of philosophical theory, but focus more on empirical studies and applications. Of course this does not necessarily mean lowering the scientific status of axiology. Second, there is a tendency towards generalizing ethics, that is, to exaggerate the scope of ethics to a wider extent, that almost overlaps with that of axiology.

In China, some scholars misunderstood previous studies and took axiology to be part of epistemology. This misunderstanding has to do with the research methods and standard formulations of certain periods of time. I myself also entered the area of value studies from an epistemological approach. But as I went deeper and closer to my conclusion, I got rid of that approach. As I have stated above, I am now fully convinced that axiology, or the philosophy of value, is a relatively independent and high-level theory area. Besides ontology and gnosiology, it is the third of the three principle branches of philosophy and it is not subject to any other branches of philosophy.

In reaction to the misunderstanding of reducing axiology to epistemology, some scholars proposed another argument: value theories should "belong to the view of history", or "to enhance value theory to the realm of historical materialism". I think this argument is still trapped in the old way of thinking and ignores the independent meaning of value theories on the meta-theoretical level. It only tries to find an accommodation for value theory. As a matter of fact, it was only when the study into values went deeper, that we came to realize defects in the previous view of history, the defects being that it only takes the philosophy of truth as history's basis (overstressing the inevitability and objective laws of history), but lacks a perspective of value (neglecting the impact and meaning of humanity's value choices on the development of history). Before a critical re-examination of the view of history can be done, the statement, "view of history is higher than value theory". still lacks evidence, and in effect is of little theoretical significance.

1.2 The Issue of Value and the History of Thought

Since any philosophical category, “At best, its place can only be taken by a summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which arise from the observation of the historical development of men. Viewed apart from real history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever.” [66, vol. 1: p. 31], it is necessary that we go over the evolution of human history and the history of thought in retrospect one more time.

The main content of the concept “value” is a representative type of universally existing relationship in our daily lives, that is, meanings of the existence, nature and changes of objects to human subjects. Humanity relies on the natural world to meet its needs to be able to survive and develop. But Nature would not cater to these human needs spontaneously, people have to take action. It is not hard to imagine that such interrelationship between people and the natural world started from the very beginning of humankind. Thus the issue of value, representing the interrelationship between humans and the natural world, is inherent in the nature of human beings, and value relation is a primary relationship within human practices from the very beginning.

In the practice of interacting with the natural world, people have to understand natural rules and to follow them. Thus, the consciousness of understanding objective realities together with the consciousness of meeting subjective needs make up the two basic aspects of human consciousness. Engels depicted the formation of human consciousness as follows: “step by step with the development of the hand went that of the brain; first of all, consciousness of the conditions for **separate practically useful actions**, and later, among the more favoured peoples and arising from the preceding, insight into the **natural laws** governing them.” [66, vol. 3: p. 457]. According to this statement, the sense of practical benefits (belonging to the category of value) and the sense of objective conditions and natural orders (belonging to the categories of knowledge and truth) are two inseparable aspects in the formation and development of human consciousness. And this is just a fact.

But fact is not equal to peoples’ perception of it. People’s understanding of their own practices and consciousness is far from clear and straightforward as the fact itself is. Generally, people’s understanding of value problems has gone through a process from spontaneous reactions to conscious actions and from simple to complex. And the intellectual perception of the relationship between value and truth started from being consensus, then became diversified or even antagonized, and then developed toward unity again. This process is reflected in different forms during different stages in the history of human thought, and altogether, they contain an important clue for the evolution of value consciousness.

In primitive times, concepts such as “value” and “truth” could not be created because human consciousness was not yet able to differentiate between subject and object. Numerous archaeological excavations have indicated that humans in prehistoric times were not able to tell external objects existing in Nature from their own feelings, desires and emotions. For them, the reality and its utility, perception of

objectives and subjective feelings are all mixed up. For them, in their collective perceptions, the images of objects are mixed up with peoples' subject feelings about them. People have in their mind the forms of objects, and at the same time experience feelings that are always generated by the impression of the object, such as fear, hope, gratitude, urge to escape and so on [52]. Totem worship, magic, and primitive painting, dance and songs, these are not merely entertainment or self-deceptions of the primitive people, but are activities inherent in their efforts for the purpose of survival. In their heart, these activities are necessary for getting protection from Nature, and thus they are inherent in Nature and required by Nature. For example, many primitive tribes had always attributed the fruits of their hunting activities to some mysterious power of Nature or some characteristics of the hunted objects. Thus, to secure a harvest, they resort to rituals such as dancing, fasting or execrating before going hunting to cast some magic spell, in the meanwhile, the hunter and his family have to follow some strict taboos. After hunting, some rituals are to be carried out, again to calm the soul of the killed animals [52: pp. 220–235]. Primitive people's dining activity was also full of rituals, this phenomena shows their reverence to the food and the mercy of heaven [64: pp. 24–26]. Now it is pretty obvious that the actual effects of these mysterious rituals are only psychological. But for primitive peoples, they are undoubtedly connected with the objects themselves. Such confusion of objective beings and subjective experiences is characteristic of the primitive consciousness, and it contains the primitive understanding of the unity of subjective and objective, of subjectiveness and objectiveness, of needs and conditions, and of concrete existence and their effects. These are the subconscious perceptions of the unity of goodness and truth, and of value and facts.

With the development of human practice and abstract thinking, the needs of human beings and their reflex in consciousness also developed. "Needs" are no longer only material needs from the natural world, but also included needs for social relations and spiritual needs. Thus, the question of the inter-relationship between the object facts and human needs, or the inter-relationship between truth and value, become a permanent theme throughout history and a topic for endless disputes and arguments.

In the history of both ancient Chinese philosophy and ancient European philosophy, the idea of the unity of goodness and truth held dominant for a long period of time. This is already different from the chaotic unity in the primitive idea, but unification on the basis of differentiation, by which one factor conforms to the other. Roughly speaking, there are two major types of ancient thinkers' ideas about the unity of truth and goodness: (1) goodness eventually conforms to truth, thus values of the human world are one with the nature of the world. (2) Truth eventually conforms to goodness, thus all worldly matters are unified in people's value activities or certain ideas of value. Belonging to both types, there are both materialists and idealists.

For example, Pythagoras and Democritus of ancient Greece both believed goodness eventually conforms to truth, but goodness is explained by the fact of "numbers", while truth is guided by the fact of atomic movements. The ancient Greek notion of "justice" can well explain the difference between these two different

unities: for ancient Greeks, the inherent order of the world determined all the goodness and badness, beauty and ugliness. “Justice” (meaning similar to today’s “obligation”) means never to go beyond the ultimate boundary. This is a theory based on an assumption of the truth of Nature, here goodness conforms to truth. While for other thinkers such as Plato, justice and virtue represent people’s pursuit of the ultimate “goodness”. Everything in the world is a reflection of the ultimate “goodness”, and eventually all of human knowledge about things in the world is recognition of the “goodness” inherent in objects. Such a theory is based on the ultimate spiritual value and here truth eventually conforms to goodness.

During pre-Qin dynasty China, the ideology of “harmony of heaven and human” (tian ren he yi) is rather prominent. The meanings of “heaven” and “human” are complex and various. Here we take one: where “heaven” represents the ultimate rule or logic of the world (order of the heaven, rule of the heaven and nature), while “human” represents the barrier of mundane values such as morality, ethics (human behaviors, desires and demands), the unity of heaven and human means the unity of truth and goodness. Under this logic, ideologies that take “heaven” as the principle which determines goodness and badness of the human world and thus argue that humankind’s seeking of value results eventually in following orders from heaven, are in line with the notion of goodness conforming to truth. While the rest of the schools that see “heaven” as incarnating some moral ethics of the supreme will and thus define heaven’s will by human values, are actually conforming truth to goodness. The first group argues for “following Nature” or “returning to one’s original nature”, while the latter believed that “heaven must follow what the people want” etc.

Thus, no matter in pre-Qin dynasty China or ancient Greece, the ideal unity of truth and goodness were both established on the bases, where the concept of truth and value are still not accurate and comprehensive. People had only some primitive sense of the difference between the two but were not yet able to define them strictly. This is more prominent with ancient Chinese thinkers.

In the ancient intellectual contemplation on the unity of value and truth, there are latent conflicts and crises. Thus they faced immediate challenges. For example the ancient Greek skeptic Pyrrho argued that no assertion can be proved to be better than another assertion, and thus pointed out the incommensurability between objective facts and people’s value choices. Protagoras stated that “man is the measure of all things”, but he failed to notice the difference between man “as the measure of existence” and man “as measure of values”, and thus theoretically denied the “truth” that is objective and independent of humanity. Once the difference between truth and goodness is denied, the unity of the two is also denied. Aristotle raised the concept of “goal” and tried to resolve conflicts by stating that the objective world also has a subjective goal. In ancient China, Xunzi’s idea of “distinguish mankind from heaven” had a great impact. He refused to accept the unconditional identity of human and the heaven, but interpreted the value creating activities of humans as a way of controlling and modifying heaven. Such an idea of practical value is undoubtedly a highlight in the history of thought. Protagoras’s idea of “man is the measure of all things” and Xunzi’s idea of “distinguish mankind from heaven”, and “Man by his efforts can conquer nature”, especially the latter, presaged the deepened

inquiries into the issue of truth and goodness or truth and value in the years to come. But because of the different historical conditions and historical routes between China and Western Europe, they resulted in different consequences.

Western Europe first went through the Middle Ages. During that period, religion dominated everything else. Goodness in the sense of ethics and truth in the sense of epistemology were all replaced by God and religious doctrines. Fideism as a belief system of values often means a rejection of truth and reason and it always consecrates religion and religious doctrines as truth. Despite this, for some scholastic philosophers, the discussion of the issue of double truth (philosophical truth and theological truth) still implicitly indicated the difference between reason which pursues objective truth, and faith as a value consciousness.

With the rise of the Renaissance and modern experimental science, the unity of truth and value were replaced by the divergence of the two. In this new age, the overwhelming triumph of science and knowledge led the rational understanding of the truth of the natural world to be the ultimate arbiter of all thought. "Religion, natural science, society, political institutions—everything was subjected to the most unsparring criticism; everything had to justify its existence before the judgment-seat of reason or give up its existence. Reason became the sole measure of everything." [66, vol. 3: p. 56]. Such understanding is based on the experimental scientific methods of that time, ideologically influenced by metaphysics, and thus had distinctive characteristics of that time. Rational critiques on such a basis resulted in an empiricist, or rationalist tendency with respect to knowledge and truth, and voluntarist or irrationalist tendencies in respect to values. Science, knowledge and truth are merely understood to be those that can be tested by experimental methods or that conform to logical argumentations. Since values such as ethics, politics and art are regarded as irrelevant to science, they are merely determined by tastes, contracts or regulations, and are not applicable of being standards of facts and truth. Henceforth, "should be" and "be" are strictly divided, value and truth are treated as two issues with completely different natures that are contradictory to each other.

The positive impact of such differentiation is: on one hand, that science was able to throw off the shackles of social politics, religion and ethics and thus underwent dramatic development. On the other hand, social theories that centered on human values also developed because it they were no longer restrained by methods for observing the natural world. The divergence not only brought academic prosperity, but also planted roots for conflicts: science and value became two irreconcilable antagonists, and the issue of the social value of science and truth became a big problem later on. Theories of society, and of human values were treated as a subject of little scientific merit, thus for a long time couldn't establish credibility and exert their due influence.

In China, the similar process of divergence started earlier but took longer to mature. This is because the development of people's ways of thinking followed a different route. From an early stage, discussion about the interrelationship between man and heaven, the issue about the nature of the world and its relation with human values were centered on the ethical political aspects of the society, and most intellectual quests were focused on the central issue of ethical politics in the

real society. The Confucian idea of “rule of the heaven” (zetian) was more focused on leading people to understand mundane moral standards such as “courtesy” (li) and “kindheartedness” (renyi); Laozi’s philosophy of Dao was summed up in the wisdom of “letting things take their own course” (wuwei); Mozi’s philosophy was summarized in the ideal of “universal love” (jian’ai). They all put aside their quest for “heaven” to some remote meditations, but focused attentions on values of the human world. Thus, the divergence actually took place within the realm of the issue of value itself. Discussions on various forms, standards and activities of value provided major topics for discussion for a long time. The question of the objective reality of values was not completely absent, but it was never the focus of attention.

Of course, this is not to say that the issue of truth was absent from ancient Chinese philosophy, or to say that it was irrelevant to the question of values. This is only to show that, because the issue of truth was somehow covered up, it was subsumed within the issue of values.¹ Although Xunzi’s idea of “distinguishing mankind from heaven” had once created some intellectual impact, it was soon offset by Dong Zhongshu’s theory on the “inductive communication between human and heaven”. Dong’s theory attributed the fundamental principle for the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues (as specified in the feudal ethical code) to heaven, and thus directed the discussion back to the realm of ethical politics. Later on, Wang Chong raised a theory similar to the ideas of experimental science, but because of a lack of corresponding scientific methods, his theories were soon lost in the sea of ethical political thinking. Henceforth Chinese philosophy established its tradition of “weighing ethics over Nature, prioritizing cultivation over knowledge, and believed in inherent intuition rather than rational argumentation”. Despite some occasional interruptions, his tradition was never broken. Consequently, the idea of the unity of value-truth remained on the level of intuitive thinking.

Zhang Dainian listed “unity of mankind and heaven” and the “unity of goodness and truth” as the principal characteristics of ancient Chinese philosophy. “Chinese philosophy deems that truth is the ultimate goodness. The pursuit of truth is the pursuit of goodness. Truth and goodness are not two different things; the logic of ultimate truth is also the principle of ultimate goodness. So truth is goodness, goodness is truth. Never pursue truth without goodness. Trying to have only truth without goodness can only result in presumptuousness, not truth. The attitude of seeking knowledge only for knowledge’s sake is rare among Chinese philosophers. Chinese thinkers always believed that cultivation is inseparable from gaining knowledge. The exploration of the truth of the universe and the achievement of the ultimate goodness in human life are two sides of the same coin.” [118: p. 7]. This tradition has its advantages and shortcomings, equally significant. Its advantage is that it created a whole set of unique categories of values and established a rich tradition

¹The fact that in the ancient Chinese philosophy categories, epistemological concepts related to “truth” is rare and are of insignificant theoretical importance can proof this point. See Zhang Dainian “On the Conceptual System of Ancient Chinese Philosophy”. *Social Sciences in China*, 1985, No. 2.

of thought on the issue of mankind's social life, which has been the pivot holding up the Chinese cultural tradition and national psychology. Its drawback is that it dismantled people's interest in knowledge about the natural world and thus blocked the path to learning from understanding Nature.

The tendency of rating goodness over truth in Chinese philosophy, and that of Western philosophy emphasizing truth over goodness seem to be two extremes in a similar process of divergence. But the movement of the two from unity to differentiation was indeed an unavoidable phenomenon in the process of development.

In the history of modern Western philosophy, such differentiation has led to two different types of theoretical tendencies:

One is to continue seeking connections and unities of truth and value, and to explore new ways to re-unify after the differentiation. For example, Spinoza tried to approach this goal by combining philosophical methods with natural scientific methods of that time. In his book *Ethics*, he tried to accurately calculate the outcome of some human activities by using geometrical methods to study human defects and passions; John Locke tried to argue that value issues are also mathematically provable; Kant used a supreme moral order to accommodate practical rationality and pure reason and thus to solve the problem of transmission from the question of "what the world is" to "what it should be"; Hegel uncovered the philosophical essence of various value sectors and thus pointed out their uniformity with truth, such as "goodness is the truth of special wills", "the life of beauty lies in its presence" [42, vol. 1: p. 7] etc. These discussions are generally valuable and they also provided many insights. But because of their limited understanding of the scientific method, their remoteness from social practices and their mentalist theoretical basis for understanding social history, they were not able to provide a real solution.

The other tendency is to lead the differentiation to a complete division, to completely deny the existence or even the possibility of a unity of value and truth, and to argue that the more science develops, the more it proves that value and value judgments have nothing to do with scientific truth. David Hume had a great influence in this respect. His theory of irrational beliefs, while confirming the value of beliefs, also completely eliminated the objective reality in the object of beliefs, and eliminated the objective relation between belief and its object. Nietzsche exaggerated the conflict between humanity and science, life and knowledge; from Schopenhauer's voluntarism, Bentham's utilitarianism until modern pragmatism and intuitionism etc., all these theories argued from various approaches that value has nothing in common with truth. In modern Western philosophy, the dispute between Scientism and Humanism highlighted the sharp contradiction between "truth centralism" and "value centralism". Proponents of Scientism see value questions as some meaningless metaphysical problems, or some evasive problem of emotions and thus keep them beyond the pale of science, while humanists start from social or individual values and raised many arguments against Scientism. But they have one point in common: science, truth and value, these three are irreconcilable with each other. The only way that they could unify must be that one destroys the others completely.

Looking back on the history of ancient China and the West, one can see how the questions about value have appeared. The following quote of Russell can greatly help us to understand this history:

Philosophy, throughout its history, has consisted of two parts inharmoniously blended: on the one hand, a theory as to the nature of the world, on the other an ethical or political doctrine as to the best way of living. The failure to separate these two with sufficient clarity has been a source of much confused thinking. [91, vol. II: pp. 395–396]

His insight into the historical positions of the two problems in philosophy is profound. In the ancient Chinese work “Book of Songs”, there are also poems expressing a similar idea, recognizing the unity of objective realities and mankind’s value standards. In the ancient songs it appeared so simple, so natural and beautiful. But after thousands of years, the question developed into a sharp contradiction. This forces us to realize that in the ancient and simple interpretation of natural phenomena are buried complex meanings; while today’s extremely developed contradictions can also be traced back to some relatively simple conclusions in the long past.

After all, value and truth and their interrelationship are among the primary and universal questions throughout the history of human practice and theory. Responses to these questions not only implicate the inner clues of the development of the history of human thought, but also reflect the available level of thinking and theorization of current human practices.

1.3 The Issue of Value and Marxist Philosophy

The issue of value officially entered the theoretical preview of Chinese philosophy from the 1980s. This was an ideological emancipation movement during the aftermath of the national discussion of “criteria for testing truth” right after the end of the Cultural Revolution. It was also the theoretical accompaniment to the opening up and reform of Chinese society, and a reflection of changes in people’s ideas about values at the end of the century.

But, from the moment axiology entered the theoretical vision of Chinese scholars, a question, or one question, was inevitable: is it necessary or is it possible to establish a unique theory of values for a Marxist ideology? In a philosophical system under the name of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, value theory was, for a long period of time, an uncharted territory. But this does not mean that Marxist theories do not pay attention to, or do not contain theoretical thinking on the topic of value. As a matter of fact, Marxist philosophy has established its own value orientation from the beginning. The problem is, these value related issues have existed or been represented latently, either as the ideological background or intention of, some self-evident logical premise or conclusions. Its theoretical meanings and logical significance were not included as subjects for self examination or formal articulations, thus axiology was barely an integral component of the whole philosophical system.