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COMMENT ON I. A. BLÁHA'S CONCEPTION OF EVALUATION

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As a scientist I. A. Bláha sought for a maximum of objectivity in sociology, for true knowledge ruled by the laws of logic solely. Bláha realized the difficulty of this effort. "Only the abstract ideal of truth is absolute. All its concrete realization, i. e. our approaching to this ideal is relative."¹ This statement of Bláha contains an element of relativism as well as of optimistic belief in the possibility of man's approaching to absolute truth. If dialectically conceived, the connection of these elements certainly is the most productive starting-point for any scientific work.

I. A. Bláha, however, was no neutral passive observer of social reality. He (and the whole Brno School of Sociology under his guidance) distinguished himself by his active attitude towards the society in which he lived. Accordingly, social reality is not but an object of knowledge to Bláha, but also one of evaluation as to a social and moral ideal. Not only the positivism of E. Durkheim but also the activistic philosophy of T. G. Masaryk are Bláha's constant sources of inspiration. Besides the personal interest by which the young Bláha had been once induced to become a student of theology, it was obviously Masaryk's influence which in later years led him to the study of moral phenomena. And in connexion with questions of morality, in his work on the philosophy of morality² he also deals with the problem of evaluation.

Relating the problem of evaluation to that of ethics, Bláha did not intend to exclude other forms of spiritual culture from the application of his theory of evaluation. He only took ethical evaluation to be the centre, the core around which all other values are concentrated. Ethical evaluation penetrates the other values, therefore "all of them can be appreciated and judged from this central (i. e. ethical — St) point of view...".³

Blahoslav Zbořil, Bláha's admirer at the Brno faculty of philosophy, called Bláha's conception of evaluation positivistic and realistic and followed its roots through Masaryk and Mill up to Comte and Hume; referring to younger contemporaries, he mentioned the influence of C. Bouglé.⁴ Bláha himself refers in a

¹ I. A. Bláha: *Filosofie mravnosti*, Brno 1922, p. 7.

² Op. cit.

³ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴ B. Zbořil: *Poznání, hodnocení a tvoření norem*, Ostrava 1947, pp. 93—94.

positive sense to several further authors; to Lotze, Ridert, Windelband, Durkheim, Höffding, Münsterberg, Krejčí and others. Although he appreciates the contributions of representatives of various schools, his preference of positivism and realism (in masarykist interpretation) is evident.

In Bláha's conception, the difference between knowledge and evaluation has a psychological foundation above all. Knowledge is a matter of reason, whereas evaluation is a matter of feeling and will. "As far as the world with its phenomena forms the object of our rational interest, it represents a fact to us; as far as it satisfies some of our interests, as far as we let it pass through our feeling, relate it to our will, it becomes a value, eventually a purpose to us. In the former case we speak of knowledge, in the latter of estimation, evaluation, eventually of setting aims."⁵

Let us put forward two remarks to this conception: Firstly, Bláha obviously uses here the psychological category of interest, not the sociological one. To him interest means a dynamic psychical directedness of a subject. In this respect "rational" interest cannot be different from "our" interest. Rational interest is the interest of *our* reason, consequently it is *our* interest too. The difference is that in the case of the so called *rational* interest we deal with a psychical dynamic which aims at acquiring some objective notions about reality, at the satisfaction of some investigative curiosity, whereas in the case of "our interest" this psychic dynamic aims at the satisfaction of some subjective (*practical* or *biotic* in Bláha's terms) needs. Certainly, knowledge also may be a need — though one of a special type. The psychological criterion from which Bláha starts in the beginning and which can also be found with Hume (from where Bláha, according to Zbořil, took it over), Pascal, Lotze and Brentano is therefore not absolutely reliable.

Secondly, if on the one hand feeling and will can be stated to take part in processes of knowledge (and this after all is involved in Bláha's formulation, in his relating knowledge to *interest*) on the other hand reason can be said to take part in evaluation too. Referring to Bouglé, Bláha corrects explicitly his psychological starting-point for that very reason. What operates in the process of evaluation is also "rational estimate as can be seen from the expression 'value judgement'. Values have their worth independently of our moods, impressions, likings and their force is increased by the rational calculation of pleasures they have been giving us in the past, present and future. Consequently, Simmel is not right when saying that value is merely a matter of feeling or will and that it escapes all scientific verification".⁶ Then what validity has Bláha's psychological distinction between knowledge and evaluation?

Besides, a similar question can be asked with respect to the distinction between the individual biopsychical or social essence of values and evaluation. In the spirit of positivism, Bláha starts his research from the biopsychical qualities of the human individual. "Our biopsychical interest forms the basis of our evaluation of reality."⁷ On the other hand, he stresses the significance of the social factor for evaluation and creation of ideals: "The more is value a value for me the more other people endeavour after it . . . An ideal is an ideal to me not only

⁵ I. A. Bláha, *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25

because it is *my* ideal but because it is the ideal of all, because we all have created it," because — as Durkheim said — it is "an emanation of collective life".⁸

A nearer approach to Bláha's conception of values and evaluation shows indeed that these contradictions between the emotional and rational as well as those between the individual and the social need not be understood to be symptoms of an inward inconsistency of Bláha's theoretical system. Bláha tries to solve these contradictions by means of an evolutionary approach to the problem. Only in its earliest origins, evaluation is purely subjective and hedonistic, being determined by immediate biotic needs. The growth of social man is simultaneously a learning process by which, on the basis of experience, man gradually finds out "that not everything that is agreeable is beneficial to the defence of his vitality at the same time".⁹ On the basis of this conviction man sacrifices "relative agreeability to absolute usefulness". The process of cognizing "absolute usefulness" (in fact of acquiring knowledge of the more remote objective interests of man — St.) consequently implies not only the task of "overcoming oneself for oneself's sake", but also of "overcoming oneself for the sake of the whole".¹⁰ In other terms: the individual learns to subordinate its narrow personal interests under the collective ones. Consequently, the social side of evaluation is historically secondary. Thus, man appears primarily as a biopsychical unit. His sociability is a result of his development. It cannot be clearly deduced from Bláha's words, whether or not he considered as a sort of evaluation even the elementary biopsychic tendency of an organism to select what is useful to its life from its surrounding. Such a conception would deprive evaluation of its specific human quality, because this tendency is characteristic for *all* living organisms. This vagueness which gives an opportunity to adjudge reductionist tendencies to Bláha certainly is due to Bláha's partial liability to organismic positivism.

In a similar way Bláha links the psychological side of evaluation to historical evolution. Evaluation is exclusively a function of psychic interest, of feeling and not of reason, on the lower stages of human individual or generic development. Bláha uses here the ideas of the unconscious and subconscious. "Man has values quite unconsciously and earlier than he is aware of them."¹¹ The function of reason with the creation of values is mentioned by Bláha as late as in connexion with the question, how the originally purely individualistic and subjective way of evaluation changes into a collective one.¹²

Conceived as a means of theoretic or ideologic thinking, reason certainly emerges in the development of the human genus later than the affective sides of mind. But Bláha seems to ignore, or underestimate, the empirical reason of everyday life which, together with sensual perception, is proper to the human mind in the same way as its emotions — even on its primitive stages of evolution. The ability of acquiring knowledge of some kind as well as that of experiencing feelings is proper to the human mind on *all* its stages. The object of

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30—31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23

¹² "... reason cooperates at the birth of values, especially indeed at the birth of collective values" (*ibid.*, p. 31).

our feeling is not the outer object, but its reflexion in our mind, a reflexion in the creation of which our reason takes part as well as our senses. Sensualness may prevail on the early stages, but as soon as it is a sensual reflexion in the head of *man*, reason participates in it. The same applies to evaluation. Even the most elementary human evaluation implies a value *judgement*. Absolute unconsciousness and evaluation exclude each other. Bláha's stress on the emotional side of evaluation appears to be exaggerated, even if his evolutionary approach is accepted. The transition from a purely affective mind to a reasonable one would be impossible. Bláha underestimates the complexness of the lower (or lowest) link of evolution so that between this link and the higher one a hardly surmountable discontinuity occurs.

Apart from this one-sidedness, the evolutionism applied by Bláha to the problem of evaluation reminds — in some respect — of the marxist dialectic or historical approach. The evolution of values and evaluation appears to him as a unity of continuity and discontinuity (discontinuity being overstressed in certain cases). Every higher stage is related by origin with the lower one and gets into contradictions to it; a struggle between lower and higher values is the result. The discontinuity in this process does not go so far as to liquidate what is lower. On the lowest stage of the evolution of value standards, Bláha sees the standard of agreeableness, on the second that of usefulness, on the next outer social authority and on the highest spiritual authority and inward joy. With the first and second stage ("the scale of organic and economic values the satisfaction of needs in the material way) is connected, with the third the norms of law, with the fourth intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and religious norms".¹³ Since man lives neither exclusively an organic life nor an economic or a spiritual one, he cannot have one single criterion of evaluation only. Nevertheless, Bláha considers ethical evaluation as central and subordinates all other values to those of ethics.

But what is the criterion of ethical evaluation? Bláha sees the specificity of ethical evaluation in the fact, that no outer material: vital, administrative regards predominate in it, as it is the case on the lower stages. What prevails is "the joy of the inward permanent creativeness of the spiritual part... of vitality... By ethical evaluation evaluation has got intrinsic, spiritual... In ethical evaluation the rule holds: goodness for the sake of goodness, virtue for the sake of virtue".¹⁴

This wording can be understood in different ways: it either means, that man *experiences* ethical evaluation differently from the other types of evaluation, viz. through an inward emotional satisfaction which emanates from moral activity as such. Another possible interpretation is that the inward moral satisfaction is supposed to be the *criterion* for goodness and virtue. Bláha's formulation may mean the one or the other or both.

With regard to the introspective method which Bláha admits in social science, especially in ethics, and which he apparently uses in this place, one may accept the first of the above interpretations in any case: ethical evaluation is one that gives inward satisfaction. But does that also mean that there are no outer criteria of morality? Bláha decidedly refutes being suspected of extreme subjectivism, of

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

mistaking the motive of moral action for its criterion.¹⁵ Though he holds to the view that "morality cannot be comprehended fully in the rational, objective way"¹⁶ he feels the necessity of finding also the objective side of the criterion of morality. Referring to J. St. Mill, he starts from the *principle of the gradation of life by serving a higher spiritual order*; but simultaneously he states that this criterion is not purely objective, as gradation of life means action and action (especially moral action) is closely connected with spirituality. On the other hand, he says, spirituality is not purely subjective, it is the revival of the objective superindividual spiritual order in the subject. Morality can be understood neither from a purely objectivistic nor from a purely subjectivistic point of view. A moral action is one "that grows out of our conscience, intensifies our life and the lives of other beings and ranges itself in an organic way into the objective order which we conceive as superindividual".¹⁷ By objective order Bláha means the social order in a very abstract and general sense. Its essence is supposed to be spiritual and — according to *Filosofie mravnosti* and other ethical writings of Bláha — it is a manifestation of cosmic laws.

As Karel Hlavoň points out, here Bláha leaves the field of science and passes over to philosophy and ethical utopism.¹⁸ In his last synthetic work on sociology,¹⁹ Bláha returns once more to the problem of ethics trying, however, to avoid philosophy and to use sociologic methods only. Nevertheless, he again introduces the idea of spiritual order; though he does not mention any dependence of it on cosmic laws here he associated it with such principles as truth, love and justice which he supposes to form the foundation of spiritual order.²⁰ Thus, neither here is the category of order explained sociologically, the contents of the ideas of "truth", "love" and "justice" depending on their philosophical interpretation.

It can be concluded that, trying to unite the objectivistic and the subjectivistic point of view, Bláha in fact starts from an extremely abstract and philosophical idea of spiritual order which he supposes to govern society and to project itself into the individual conscience. Such a formal criterion can be filled up with very diverse contents. It is in no necessary relation to the concrete social structures. The promising tendency towards a historical approach has thus been abolished. The spiritualisation of man is simultaneously a break of continuity with the preceding material stages of development. If primordial man was underestimated as to his abilities of knowledge, ethical man is "overestimated" as to his spirituality. It is true, Bláha can see social man from the material side too, but the highest stage of evaluation, moral evaluation is by its content independent of these sides.

The attention paid in *Sociologie* to the economic order — as one of many component parts of culture which influence morality — changes but little in the general conception. The significance of economy for morality is only conceived as a condition which materially enables (or not) people to live up to moral

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁸ K. Hlavoň: "Etika I. A. Bláhy", *Sociologický časopis*, 1968, p. 354 ff.

¹⁹ I. A. Bláha: *Sociologie*, Academia, Praha 1968, p. 264 ff.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

standards. The standards themselves, however, are not considered as to depend on the economic order in any way.²¹ Bláha's internalisation and spiritualisation of ethical evaluation then means not only a shift of the motivation but also the loss of any reliable objective criterion of evaluation.

The spiritual order of society and reality, according to Bláha, is by its very essence one of harmony. The insertion of any class or other group standpoints into the process of evaluation opposes this order and is therefore incorrect, un-objective and immoral. Bláha explicitly refutes the idea of class morality ascribing it to authoritarian and dogmatic socialism only. He accepts "socialist solidaritarian morality" (which advocates the cooperation of classes) considering it to be a principle of liberal and critical socialism.²² According to this, all-embracing love is the focus of morality and moral evaluation in the conception of Bláha. "Not every kind of love is moral," he says, "we all love in our family, estate, church, community, political party, nation. But if such a love of ours is to be really moral... it must rid itself of the family egoism, class egoism, national egoism, it must be de-estated, de-policed, de-classed, . . . by rational thinking it must be brought to the level of a general human type."²³

There is certainly no doubt about the humane motives which lead the author to formulate these words, but they can be essentially true and effective as desired only in a society whose structure — especially the material structure — is harmonious. If this is not the case, if the social order is antagonistic, they become part of the false consciousness of this society. Bláha's error was that he presupposed an essential harmony in a society where it did not exist.²⁴ In his last work Bláha is aware of the powerlessness of moral norms if people live in misery, if they are deprived of the joys of life, work and culture. In this connexion, he highly appreciates the ethical significance of socialism.²⁵ He never understood, however, that a socialist change of the social structure could not be realised by people who would be bound to subordinate their respective social and political activities to the principles of this powerless morality.

²¹ Ibid., p. 278 ff.

²² Ibid., 280.

²³ I. A. Bláha: *Filosofie mravnosti*, p. 77. Cf. also: A. I. Bláha: *Sociologie*, p. 278.

²⁴ Reviewing Bláha's work on the sociology of the intelligentsia, J. L. Fischer has criticized Bláha for not distinguishing sufficiently between the ideal criterion of social formations and the forms of their real existence, for mistaking the ideal for reality. (Cf. J. L. Fischer: "I. A. Bláha, *Sociologie intelligence*", *Sociologická revue* 1937, pp. 336—337.) In our opinion, Bláha's error lies deeper, viz. in the underestimation of the objective determining significance of the economic structure in society and, consequently, in a wrong estimation not only of the actual state of society but also of the states into which it could possibly change and of the means by which these changes could be accomplished. The criterion itself is wrong. Bláha considered the economic factors to be normally subordinated to culture and morality. (In this respect, Fischer's conception did not differ from Bláha's.) He was not aware that what he called an "hypertrophic functioning of the economic and political order" was the normal, necessary state of things.

²⁵ I. A. Bláha, *Sociologie*, pp. 279—280.

Problematikou hodnocení se zabývá I. A. Bláha především ve Filosofii mravnosti z r. 1922 a v polemice s J. L. Fischerem o Bláhově Sociologii inteligence v r. 1937.

Při řešení základních otázek používá Bláha vývojového přístupu: u prvobytného člověka je hodnocení věcí citu, nikoli rozumu, věcí individuálních biotických potřeb, nikoli společnosti. Teprve na vyšších vývojových fázích se stává hodnocení také záležitostí racionální a sociální. Bláhovo vývojové hledisko obsahuje důležité dialektické prvky: vývoj hodnot a hodnocení je jednotou continuity a diskontinuity; každý vyšší stupeň hodnot a hodnocení je (v hegelovsko-marxovské terminologii) dialektickou negací stupně nižšího. Vývoj měřítek hodnocení postupuje od příjemnosti přes prospěch (hodnoty organické a hospodářské) k vnější autoritě společenské (hodnoty právní), a konečně k vnitřní duševní radosti (normy intelektuální, etické, estetické a náboženské). Dnešní všestranně žijící člověk má proto mnoho měřítek hodnocení, avšak tato hodnocení mají podobu hierarchie, na jejímž vrcholu je hodnocení etické, které je nadřazeno veškerému hodnocení. Morální hodnocení chápe Bláha jako čistě duchovní záležitost, jako projev nadindividuálního duchovního řádu pravdy, lásky a spravedlnosti.

Bláhovo vývojové hledisko na dvou místech přeceňuje moment diskontinuity: za prvé tam, kde charakterizuje prvobytného člověka, jenž se jeví jen jako bytost afektivní, hodnotící bez účasti rozumu; za druhé tam, kde charakterizuje člověka vývojově nejvyššího, jemuž připisuje ryze duchovní kritéria mravního hodnocení. V prvním případě (kde se projevuje Bláhova poplatnost organicismu) je těžko vysvětlitelný přechod od člověka afektivního k člověku racionálnímu s jeho hodnotícími soudy; v druhém se porušuje návaznost zduchovnělého, etického člověka na člověka materiálně podmíněného. Zduchovněním se ztrácí podstatně souvislost mezi etickým typem hodnocení a předchozími materiálními vývojovými stupni hodnocení.

Tím, že etické hodnocení v Bláhově pojetí je závislé jedině na subjektivním prožitku morálního uspokojení a na spekulativně předpokládaném duchovním řádu, odtrženém, fakticky od sociální reality, nemá skutečně spolehlivého objektivního kritéria.

“Nadindividuální duchovní řád” je řádem harmonie; proto jsou normy jednání z něj vyvozované principiálně nevhodné a bezmocné pro řešení konfliktů plynoucích ze zákonitě disharmonických společenských struktur.

