



Hierarchy of political values and their communication

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Because there is no worldwide value system, there is no shared interpretation or any other similar agreement on the symbols of humanity, as for example the Human Rights Charter. Human orders exist side by side, all values are oriented vertically, from highest values to lowest unvalues. This essay deals therefore with the idiosyncrasies of verticalism, the hierarchies of interpreters, and the horizon of orders in a world of “endlessly eased communications”. There is a need for corresponding symbols, not for “higher” values.

The horizon of orders

Since the beginning of human culture, the foundations of social orders relate primarily to three spheres: the relations of social groups to their surrounding nature, the “interior” relations of the social units, and their “exterior” relations to other groups, families, clans, tribes, peoples, and the like.

In practice, the relations develop horizontally, as determined by the ground. Human orders exist *side by side*. But they are determined by imaginations and evaluations that are oriented vertically from highest values to lowest unvalues. This is the case for cultures, which evolve from repeated experience of the same spaces, objects, and persons. It is also the case for the resulting modes of behavior in respect to nature, relatives, and strangers. Human beings experience the meaning of the horizontal relations of side-by-side existence on the basis of the vertically structured hierarchy of their value beliefs in all beliefs of social practice.

Just like value beliefs, meanings are immaterial. They achieve dimension through their material carriers, which mediate their signals. Signal and meaning together make “something” (a thing, a person, or a constellation of both) a *sign*.





A sign is something that stands for something else and that can be interpreted according to this relationship. Signs that refer to a hierarchy of other signs and which express values are called *symbols*.

Idiosyncracies of verticalism

Every sign of an existing order is a symbol in relation to this hierarchy of values. No symbol can exist alone. It is always referring to, and is referred to, by a hierarchical position. “High” and “low” are metaphorical expressions of this vertical value orientation. This is also the case in the sciences.

Metaphorical language, symbolic representation at different levels in buildings and other objects and in nonverbal communication, strengthens this orientation. In thousands of years this has become manifest in idiosyncrasies, a hypersensitivity to the stimulations of “verticalism” in public life. In capitalism and socialism, to be “on top”, in the “higher ranks”, or at least to be on the “top floor”, seems to be the goal of politics as well as everyday life. To find one’s name at the top of a list is as important for publicity as a front-page story in the newspaper. Alone at the top seems to be the “highest” praise, if I understand the 10-year-olds correctly.

The hedonism of verticalism conditions the ideas and imaginations not only of this age group. But also of the attitudes toward world cups in sports, ranking the local amateurs lower. The same holds true for the competition of ideologies within and between states and for the aspirations within the higher floors of the bureaucracies. These spheres are only apparently distinct from each other. Verticalism initiates categorical commonnesses, which in turn permit comparisons between them. It is, in other words, the measuring device of world civilization; the deduced principle of categorical systems enforces its symbolic violence by becoming a measuring scale in the everyday lives of peoples.





Validity and education

Signals have one, two, or three dimensions, but meanings do not have any at all. Meanings are social facts or social reality only when they become perceivable or communicable through material signs.

The ability to interpret something as a sign depends on the psychophysical construction of the human mind and its capacity to learn. The capacity to learn is assessed according to the given vertical value hierarchies and their symbolic orderings. Validity determines the social reality of symbols.

Effectiveness and validity cannot be separated. Effectiveness refers to the actual employment of the validated; what is validated can be employed, and this validity is deduced from first principles or “high” standards, and it is often, because of this, predetermined in the direction of its effectiveness. The “higher” the validity claims anticipated, the more symbolic deductions from this first principle must be grasped by those who want to achieve it, and the smaller the probability that this principle will become a fact and be followed.

The hierarchy of interpreters

The verticalism of value orientation, which interprets communicative practice from the highest values to the lowest unvalues, necessarily also creates a hierarchy of its interpreters, which roughly corresponds to the separation of clerics and laymen, or to the historically developed, clerical hierarchy of distinctions between academics and dilettantes, professionals and amateurs. The transfer of this value hierarchy to the professions and their designated titles always means, simultaneously, unequal access to information which forms judgment. Access is relayed in an intentionally chosen pictorial





expression, and the highest competence belongs to a few, who, by instruction and education admit, according to their own standards (candidatures, examinations) the many; these are allowed to “move up” from their hierarchical step. Because the validity that they represent is deduced from a “higher” validity, it can never question the latter. Rather, it is bound to reinforce it. As a consequence, the symbolism predetermined by the verticalism of value orientations, has to reproduce the values of “high” and “low”.

Reproduction of verticalism

In regard to the capacity for learning, this means that active education reproduces its own verticalism and that passive, endured education expresses itself in training for recognition of the verticalism of values. If mastering the alphabet is the *conditio sine qua non* for societal respect, it becomes, without reference to its content manifestations which are drawn out with the help of the alphabet, the measuring scale for the learning capacity of individuals who include themselves or are included in a culture. Likewise it becomes the measuring scale for the inability to communicate for the analphabetic. It is true that validity is not conceivable without at least a minimum of effectiveness, but a maximum of validity corrupts every other effectiveness and thereby demarcates the potential level of aspiration of any other conceivable claims. The boundaries set between ancient Hellenes and the barbarians, between Christians and heathens, and between “the barbarian nations” and “the civilization”, as formulated in the Communist Manifesto of 1849, are but different forms of one and the same principle of praised commonness in opposition to those who do not share it, and who postulate different highest values or first principles of their own.





From statement to state

Order is not the expression of something metaphysical. Rather it is a constellation of physical signs that someone gives to someone else, along with a more or less comprehensible interpretation, which therefore achieves validity.

Examples of such constellations are the landmarks and monuments in physical space which make it a territory. The signs confer a spatial gestalt to a domain. Often it is set by the creator of the sign. Originally, therefore, the state consists of signs. First of all, it is nothing but a statement: a verbal design of a constitution (polity). Through recognition this statement acquires monuments; i.e., a new order of signs becomes institutionalized. There is a simultaneous declaration: Thus it shall be; this *is* established; this shall have validity. In the end, the subjects accept this as a “state”. If we look at the details to see what reifies the abstract “state”, we find signs, symbols, and the power to suppress those who are unable or unwilling to respect these signs.

The “explosion of states” in the twentieth century shows that the founders of the states first destroy a given constellation of signs to dictate a different, new symbolic constellation. The uncompromising and – in verbal communication – law-like configuration of the new order generate different values by way of equipping existing signals with new interpretations. Thus the successful revolution and its new order relies on signs previously available. These can be humans, buildings, icons, radio stations, and other media, especially those that were accepted in their communicative function before (empire buildings, old uniform, TV, newspaper headquarters). For example: Ayatollah Khomeini conducted his inauguration show in 1979 in Teheran in front of a monument of the Iranian monarchy, which, on the occasion, received a new name.





Fundamental order

Values posit validity in connection with signs. Because of this, the constellation of signs, which we call order, is empirically qualified. We can touch it because we can touch the signals of its symbolism. The state, originally only a statement, now achieves a geometrical quantity. It becomes a spatial unit because it is limited by signs. The conditions now seem to be real, but, of course, we can never touch the reasons for this order. In this way, the state remains a symbolic order, a statement made by humans, who have gained recognition for their “constitution” by other humans, and finally by other states.

This means that the state must be reordained from time to time. Its appearance and existence do not guarantee perpetuity. Like the human subject, the state is only possessive and not a property. It needs rationales, reasons, proofs. Permanent discussion remains inevitable.

Because every existing order is empirically a constellation of signs, interpretations in time are basic to it. It must renew itself through the communication process, wherein subjects renew their recognition of the order.

Because every status is based on limitations in space and time, it has intrinsic qualities of inside and outside. Values are without boundary in space, but the idea of a value system is oriented to hierarchical systems, with insiders and outsiders. The hierarchy of values is directed to the inside. It is closed for strangers and interpreters tend to cast off skeptics. Identification with a human group always includes identification with a the vertical value system of its members. This can be expressed by knee-bending or other symbolic gestures specific to high and low. In the case of nonidentification, privation, which is the same as social isolation, i.e. the loss of communication, threatens.





Verticalism means cooptation

If it is correct that value hierarchies follow a vertical orientation from the highest to the lowest values and, if it is true that in contrast, empirical communication follows the horizontal orientation given by signs and symbols, then conflicts and tensions arise because of this contradiction of sequence.

It might be the so-called inner conflict of persons, who have to gain their within the *dementia praecox* of a given societal order. These inner conflicts are often the beginning and end of social communication.

Such conflicts are constitutive for the collective behavior of voluntary unions, where the high-low orientation translates into the horizontal category “inside” and “outside” – actually, “inside” is the same as “high”, and “outside” is the same as “low”.

Systems of cooptation which have been developed by social groups are the expression of the rigor of verticalism. We even find it in such “equalizing” institutions as primaries, workers councils, or revolutionary clubs. Big organizations such as the churches and the political parties have cooptations, which are regulated as candidatures. Those who go through them identify automatically with the higher values.

We can detect the same conflict in the juxtaposition of “light” and “dark”. “High” and “inside” correspond to “light”, and “outside” and “low” to “dark”. Since we have television as a daily ritualized interpretation of the state and social conditions, the expression of “light” is facilitated by electronic cameras, and it depends on time and space, offered to a particular subject on the screen, who in turn becomes an object.

Through the technical construction of a square field, the screen reiterates the tension between vertical and horizontal orientations. The presentation of single sequences piles up layers of high-low, light-dark, inside-outside images. This is facilitated by camera positioning and film cutting, which are oriented toward the professional values that direct everyday, routine work. The busy attempt to be “in” on the screen, rather than





“outside” of it, is not restricted to television. It mirrors the political verticalism of the electronic and technological culture of our societies.

Current ineffectiveness

Because there is no shared worldwide value system, there is no shared interpretation or any other similar agreement on the interpretation of the symbols of humanity, as, for example, the Human Rights Charter. Inversely: As long as the symbols of a worldwide syndicate have not materializes somewhere in the world, shared value systems cannot come into being. What exists “naturally” are the common symbols of alienation, like turnpikes, passports, borders, or other limitations on communication. They represent the limits of authority within certain value systems, represented by symbols, by visual signs, including officials in their official clothing; i.e., they are incarnations of the ruling value system and therefore the executors of its “highest” values in the “lowest” positions – guards of the order¹.

I can only mention here that great psychological problems result from the tension between the highest values and the vital existence of their living signs. The vitality of these subjects appears to be deformed more or less by the weight of the symbols they have to carry. The consequences are conflicts in loyalty, and in particular, conflicts between the “guards of order” and subjects who are conscious of the relativity of all predications of content and who do not take the symbol for the thing itself- which, on the other hand, is a plausible way to come to universally valid values.

¹ For “symbolic violence” see: Harry Pross, *Politische Symbolik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974); and “Analyzing symbolic violence. A political communication model” presented at the Internacional Political Science Association Congress, Moscow, 1979.

