

# SOKA GAKKAI'S THEORY OF VALUE

— An Analysis —

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Sōka Gakkai is based on a utilitarian philosophy of life or theory of value which was originally formulated by Tsunesaburō Makiguchi. It is from this theory that the Society derives its name: *Sō* (Creation), *ka* (Value), *Gakkai*<sup>a</sup> (Society), in other words, “The Value Creation Society.”

## I. The Irrelevance of Truth and the Relevance of Value

Makiguchi's theory claims to be a correction of the alleged aberrations of the traditional platonic values — truth, goodness, and beauty — by the substitution of the concept of “benefit” for that of “truth.” The reason for this is said to be that truth and value are entirely different concepts. Truth reveals that which is; value connotes a subject-object relationship. Truth makes epistemological statements about an object. Value relates the object to man. Truth says, “Here is a horse”; value says, “The horse is beautiful.” Truth remains truth regardless of any human relationship. Truth is unchanging. Value, on the other hand, is altered by time and space.

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a. 創価学会

\* *Kachi-ron* (*Theory of Value*), Tsunesaburō Makiguchi, Sōka Gakkai, 1956 (4th ed., by Jōsei Toda), 255pp.

### **Creation of Value**

Truth is not created ; it remains always as that which is, that which is discovered. In contrast to this, value is created. There are, in fact, innumerable values which remain to be created. All the materials man uses in his daily life are the products of nature. During uncounted centuries, through man's own effort and for his own benefit, these have been improved and transformed into the form in which they exist today. This is what is meant by the *creation of value*.

Creation involves the discovery of a relationship which nature has to man, evaluating it, and by human effort making that relationship closer or more important. Man alters nature to make it beneficial to him. By this definition creation is a term relevant only to value ; it is not relevant to truth.

Thus man creates values and in this lies man's greatness. Man finds happiness — the goal of human life — in the pursuit of values. Happiness is the ideal state which is realized by means of the possession of values. Scientific history is the record of values as they are related to man's culture.

### **The Separate Realms of Truth and Value**

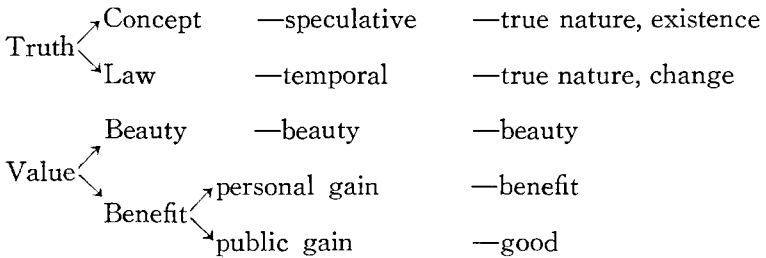
The truth or falsehood of a thing or an occurrence cannot be decided upon the basis of human emotion or sentiment. At times human emotion will reject the true and believe the false. Similarly the true-false realm does not coincide with the good-evil realm. Because a thing is true does not make it good, nor is the false to be equated with evil. Sometimes the true is evil to us ; sometimes the false is good. For example, we

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hear a rumor of an earthquake and subsequent fire. If the rumor is substantiated, it is not good but evil. If the rumor is proven to be false, it is good.

In like manner it can be shown that the true-false realm is distinct from the two other realms of values: beauty-ugliness and benefit-harm. Truth and falsehood have their independent existence apart from their effect upon man, but the values beauty-ugliness, good-evil, benefit-harm are determined in the context of their relation to the evaluating subject.

The two separate realms of truth and value may be charted as follows:



Pragmatism is mistaken because it confuses truth and value. To say “true value” is to imply that the opposite, that is, “false value” or “mistaken value” also exists. Actually, truth neither manifests nor contains value. Pragmatism, however, claims that truth and value are alike and equal. Pragmatism is based on the false premise that if a thing is true it is beneficial to man. This premise is not born out in experience. In fact, some things are true which are of no benefit to man at all. Ultimately the investigation of truth must be made irrespective of its usefulness to man.

Truth is unchanging. Though the Copernican theory seemed

to upset the truth, actually it only upset false theories concerning the truth. Truth and the common law which controls the universe are essentially one and the same thing. The Copernican theory itself is not the truth, but only the explanation of that common law which is fixed and unchanging.

But values change. Since values are the product of the relation between an object and a subject, if either of these factors changes then the value itself changes. The eternal argument started between Socrates and the Sophists has echoed until this very day. Socrates held that truth is unchanging; the Sophists held that man is the measure of all things. This conflict can be resolved only when we realize that the realm of truth and the realm of value are separate.

## II. The Importance of Evaluation.

### **Evaluation and Cognition**

Evaluation is the consciousness of the influence of an object upon the subject. Cognition is the grasping of the meaning of an impression. Evaluation, therefore, is subjective; cognition is objective. For example, cognition asserts "A is B," or "A is not C." Thus cognition receives an object as it is without relating it to the subject. Evaluation, on the other hand, says "A is beautiful," etc., and relates it to the evaluating subject.

Cognition, therefore, is concerned with truth while evaluation is concerned with values. Truth is a qualitative concept grasped by intellectual response to the stimuli of phenomena; that is, by cognition. Value is a quantitative concept relating the influence of phenomena to man through emotional and

intellectual responses; that is, by evaluation. Cognition is mental reception or intellectual activity; evaluation is sense reception or feeling activity.

Cognition comes by the relation of a new perception to a past experience. Kant says that man perceives by *a priori* standards; but the truth is that man first decides whether something is the "same or different" on the basis of his experience. It isn't necessary to adopt the method of some philosopher (such as Kant) when we have the time-tested method of "same or different."

The relation of cognition to external phenomena we call "experience." This term experience is defined to mean the sensual, intellectual connection of subject and object. The relation of evaluation to external phenomena we call "intercourse." Intercourse is defined as the emotional, sentimental connection of subject and object. In the case of the former, the external world has its independent existence and is not directly connected with our personal world. In the case of the latter, the external world has a vital, intimate connection with our world. The latter is like the meeting of lovers:

<p><i>Shinoburedo</i>  <i>iro ni ide ni keru</i>  <i>waga koi wa</i>  <i>mono ya omou to</i>  <i>hito no tou made.*</i></p>	<p><i>My love,</i>  <i>though I try to hide it,</i>  <i>shows in my face, until</i>  <i>people begin</i>  <i>to question.</i></p>
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No matter how they may try to suppress their feelings for one another, lovers cannot deny or escape the influence of each

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\* A poem by Taira no Kanemori 平兼盛 in the *Hyakunin Isshu* 百人一首, "One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets."

other.

In order to know the external world it is necessary to employ both cognition and evaluation. If either is neglected one's understanding is incomplete. But science has pursued the objective method of cognition, and has analyzed and classified phenomena until we are left with only the pieces. This is why Bergson contends that science cannot get beyond the outer wall.

The truth is that cognition and evaluation do not need to be in conflict. When they appear to conflict in describing phenomena, it is essentially only a conflict arising out of the opposition of the whole to the parts, and not a basic conflict.

The ability to determine values is a human attribute. An object touches us — we react ; this is a value judgment. There are thus three relationships between object and subject : non-value — when an object has no value to any one ; value — when an object has value to someone ; and non-value — when value is ascribed to something that has no intrinsic value.

### III. The Three Values : Beauty, Benefit, Goodness

There are three values : beauty, benefit, and goodness. The value "beauty" is an emotional value relative only to a part of a man's life. It is a temporary value appropriated through one or more of the five sense organs. The value "benefit" is an individual value relative to the whole of human life. It describes the relationship which the individual has with an object that contributes to maintaining and advancing his life.

The value "goodness" is a social value relative to the life of the group. It describes the meaningful acts which man performs that contribute to the formation and development of a unified society, that is, goodness is public benefit.

**Benefit** Marx and other economists have said: "All which has utility is wealth." But Marx confuses value and wealth. Others have confused property and wealth. Property is anything of utility which man possesses. Wealth is the accumulation of property for the satisfaction of human desires. "Benefit" concerns the extent to which property has importance to man. Man can create "benefit" by arranging all factors so that they will contribute to his well-being.

**Goodness** Good and evil are concepts which belong exclusively to society. The term "good" is equivalent to the term "public benefit." Instinct, man's common life-drive, is the absolute standard for judging all values. However, man possesses not only individual instinct but also the herd instinct. Therefore, social evaluation is necessary; but the common benefit of the mass cannot be the maximum benefit, it must be the lowest common denominator. The common benefit of the mass is only objective and negative. Thus moral value (good-evil) is fixed by the negative criterion: not desirable for the masses.

In contrast to this, however, is the Western adage, "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you." This is not based on the lowest common denominator and, thus, does not have universal validity or appropriateness. The personal standard of what is good for one cannot be forced onto

another. This is certainly not a scientific standard for morality. On the other hand, the Eastern adage, "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you," is a truth which science can accept, since it is based on the lowest common denominator. It is possible to set the line below which all men can say, "This is undesirable." Hence, the Eastern adage has universal validity, and, as such, is scientific.

Socrates says that the purpose of action is not to achieve pleasure but to attain good. How does he measure good and evil? The answer is, when a thought is right, it is good; when it is not right, it is evil. The Socrates-Plato idea is: pleasure and good are not to be equated. Pleasure is pursued for the sake of good. If we, or things, are good this is only because we, or things, possess some virtue. But we cannot agree with this idea. If the sense of right judges the good, and if all things possess this sense, then we are left with the question: what is right? That by which we judge right and wrong is not truth but the general benefit (as opposed to individual benefit).

As for good, the individualist defines this as love of others. The ancient Greek said good equals might. Thus we see that the concept of good has changed with social history. The one fact which does not change is that good has its background in society. Good is therefore a social concept.

**Beauty** That which reaches us through an object of the sense belongs to the value beauty, which is a temporary, sensory value. But the aesthetic object is not limited to physical phenomena. Experience tells us that beauty can be found else-



where, as, for example, in human behavior. However beautiful, behavior is not equivalent to good behavior, nor is ugly behavior to be equated with bad. The fact that a thing is ugly or morally bad does not keep it from having an aesthetic value. The standard, then, even for aesthetic value, is the judgment of whether or not a thing is beneficial to man.

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The importance of the *Theory of Value* as the founding principle of Sōka Gakkai cannot be overestimated. It has been made the authoritative statement for the Sōka Gakkai interpretation of the meaning of human life and a standard against which to judge the validity of all religious faiths. It is used by the members as proof of the scientific validity of their faith. For the scholarly-minded, Makiguchi's *Theory of Value* is an intellectual challenge. Non-intellectuals are satisfied to be conversant with a paraphrase of these ideas which appears in the *Manual for Conversion* (*Shakubuku Kyōten*).<sup>a</sup>

Though the *Theory of Value* as it stands is ascribed to Makiguchi, it was compiled posthumously by his successor, Jōsei Toda (1900—1958), from a series of articles entitled "A System of Education based on the Value Creation Principle" ("*Sōka Kyōikugaku Taikei*").<sup>b</sup> However, there are a number of inconsistencies in its argument which lead to the inescapable conclusion that the editor took the liberty of bringing what may have been originally a purely utilitarian philosophical treatise into conformity with the teachings of the Nichiren Shō Sect.

Such inconsistencies were pointed out in a book called *Sōka*

a. 折伏教典    b. 創価教育学体系

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*Gakkai Hihan*<sup>a</sup> (*Criticism of Sōka Gakkai*) which was published in 1955 by the rival Nichiren Sect. The gist of this criticism is that the argument in *Theory of Value* follows logical lines to the end of the chapter entitled "What is Religious Value?" ("Shūkyōteki Kachi to wa Nani-ka?"),<sup>b</sup> but then the reader turns the page to find that the author "haughtily defies" the reader and brings a complete stop to the process of thought.

Wholly extraneous material seems to have been forcibly wedged into an otherwise coherent argument. The section called "Standards of Religious Value" ("Shūkyō no Kachi Hantei")<sup>c</sup> is a case in point. It begins:

Why, at this point, is it necessary to discuss religion? It is because value and happiness, the object of this treatise, absolutely cannot be considered apart from religion. Furthermore, scholars up to now, as well as the ordinary people, have not known how to judge religion in the light of the evaluation standard of beauty-ugliness, benefit-harm, good-evil, and so have all been led astray by religion and fallen into suffering and despair, failing to grasp the happiness which they sought. One has no right to talk about happiness if he is ignorant of religion, or, seeing it only partially, is under the illusion that he has grasped the whole.

Religion is believing (and acting on this belief) that the object of faith has the values beauty, benefit, and goodness, even though the individual himself cannot judge through his own intelligence.\*

This last sentence is a direct refutation of the entire preceding section, "The Creation of Personal Value" ("Jinkaku Kachi no Sozo")<sup>d</sup> in which no mention is made of "belief," but value creation seems to be entirely in man's power to control.

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a. 創価学会批判    b. 宗教的価値とは何か    c. 宗教の価値判定

d. 人格価値の創造

\* *Kachiron*, pp. 207—8.

Contrast, also, the following quotations :

Vanderband, in addition to truth, goodness, and beauty, distinguished a value called holiness, and set it up as a religious value. Many philosophers who follow this stream of thought think it impossible to establish a system of value without this classification. But where is there any grounds for establishing a religious value?

Does not this condition of calm resignation which man reaches when he has been saved from the burden of life's extremity correspond to the social value of morality which we have postulated? Or, if it is viewed from the personal standpoint, is this not the same as the value of benefit? There is no social meaning to religion outside its reference to the salvation of man or the salvation of the world. The salvation of man is benefit value, and the salvation of the world is goodness value. Whether we call it reward (*kudoku*) or merit (*goriyaku*), we may use an elegant word but the content of these words is the same . . . . I repeat, after all we cannot distinguish any other values than the values benefit, goodness, and beauty,\*

There are some who deny the *kami* and buddhas and say they can live by their own conscience and faith. Or, they say, since they cannot have faith in anything save themselves, it is enough to live believing in self . . . . But nothing is as undependable as a man's conscience, especially in Japan . . . . The answer is in Buddhism's doctrine of ultimate reason, "the three thousand worlds exist in one intent thought of the mind" (*ichinen-sanzen*) . . . . Man has in himself the basis for existing in all the three thousand worlds; man can realize the buddha-world in this human world . . . . Man cannot 'know thyself' unless he faces the Worship Object of Nichiren.†

Whatever may have been the original argument of the *Theory of Value*, as it stands today it reads very much like an exposition of utilitarian philosophy, interspersed with dogmatic statements from time to time on the indispensability of the Nichiren Shō faith for the realization of the goal of human life, happiness.

\* *Kachiron*, pp. 166—7.

† *Kachiron*, pp. 211—212.

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The truth of the matter is that the basic faith of the Nichiren Shō Sect, namely, that implicit faith in the Worship Object is sufficient for the individual believer to enter the state of buddhahood in his present existence, is dichotomous with utilitarian philosophy. The *Theory of Value*, as edited, attempts to fuse these two basically antithetical teachings. It appears that Toda accomplished this fusion with a dual purpose in mind; first, because of his own personal blind devotion to Makiguchi, his teacher, in an effort to make him immortal through his teachings (as he swore in his "prison vow"); and second, because he saw an opportunity to build up Makiguchi as a martyr for the faith and thus provide the dynamic for renewed fervor of the group which he had started before the war.

Pure textual criticism reveals the hand of the redactor, as, for instance, the anachronism of a reference to the atomic bomb (Makiguchi died in prison during the Second World War). Critics have pointed out errors in the transliterations of names of Western philosophers which occur in the text. However, the basic weakness of the work, as has been stated above, is in the attempt of the editor to fuse the basically humanistic philosophy of utilitarianism with belief in the teachings of the Nichiren Shō Sect. To the Sōka Gakkai believer, though, this is not an inconsistency at all, but a logical development of the basic argument of the book. For him the utilitarian philosophy behind the *Theory of Value* has found its ultimate fulfilment in the "Orthodox" faith of Nichiren.