ICRES 2022: 7th International Conference on Robot
Ethics and Standards, Seoul, South Korea, 18-19 July 2022.
https://doi.org/10.13180/icres.2022.18-19.07.026

ENCOUNTERING THE COMPLEX VALUE SYSTEMS OF THE LIFE-WORLD

ENDRE ERIK KADAR
University of Portsmouth, UK
E-mail: kadar_e@yahoo.co.uk

About a century ago, Husserl coined the term "life-world" to highlight the limitations of standard scientific methods in handling the problems of life-world (Husserl, 1936/1970). A key methodological problem in the sciences dealing with living systems is how to use of objective scientific methods for investigating the "subjective perspective" of living systems. Phenomenology was proposed and developed for this purpose but that was insufficient to solve the problem because of the complex value systems living systems rely on. Different species have different value systems (preferred habitat, hiding places from danger, favorite food source, time of mating, etc.) and there is also variability in the use of a value system within species. Human societies also have their complex value systems with differences for various social groups and for each individual. Moral principles are part of the value systems of human societies. Ethical behavior is guided by these principles but there is no evidence of unified morality across different societies even though there are some similarities across culture with respect to some abstract values such as conformity, hedonism, security (Schwartz, 1994). Differences between ethical principles of various cultures are evidenced by differences in religions. These differences create tension and possible conflicts between cultures and social groups, but globalization seemed to facilitate reducing these tensions and during the past few decades international organizations made some progress in establishing common principles in human rights, international laws, etc. Nevertheless, managing and understanding the value systems humans rely on in everyday life is a difficult task. In sociology and social psychology, empirical research of value systems relied on the assumption of static values and multidimensional scaling was their popular research method from the 1980s (Bilsky & Janik, 2010). Despite fine-tuning this method for 2-3 decades, it became apparent that the use of human value system is highly contextual and the relations between different values are not fixed (Tormos et al., 2017). However, context-dependency is not sufficient to understand the complexity of value systems. Some researchers, for instance, distinguish between fixed and fluid values (Sirris, 2020), but even fundamental human values such as human life and human freedom do not seem to be fixed. Recent pandemic experiences provided numerous examples how various countries tried to minimize mortality whilst trying to find a trade-off between human freedom and restriction of freedom to save lives. Political decision-making is only one side of the same coin. The other side is the social acceptance of and compliance with the political decisions. Countries with similar cultures (e.g., Scandinavian countries or Anglo-Saxon countries such as Australia, U.S. and UK) had different policies and the majority of population accepted their government's policies even though there were different associated risks to human life (different levels of expected and actual mortality). These differences seem to suggest fluidity of the core value of human life. Nevertheless, it was shocking to realize that large number of people showed rigidity in favoring freedom at the cost of human lives (e.g., in mask wearing, compliance with lock down rules, accepting the need for vaccination, etc.). Robotic

researchers should be keenly aware of these complexities of value systems whilst designing autonomous agents that fit into the life-world. In particular, it is imperative to take the value systems of the life-world seriously in safe and ethical designs of robots and their reliance of ultimate responsibility of human controllers. However, empirical findings suggest that the fluidity of using value systems (including objective social rules and norms of behavior control) is often biased "subjective interpretation" for the benefit of the specific agent. This is in contrast with the behavior control of autonomous robots that are expected to comply with safety and moral standards. In addition to assess these issues from scientific perspectives, it is important to keep an eye and learn about the views and concerns of the public on the use of robots.

References

Bilsky, W & Janik, M. (2010) Investigating value structure: Using theory-based starting configurations in Multidimensional Scaling (Research Note), International Journal of Social Psychology, 25:3, 341-349, DOI: 10.1174/021347410792675606

Husserl, E. (1936/1970). The crisis of the European Sciences.

Schwartz, S.H. (1994). Are there universal aspects in the content and structure of values? Journal of Social Issues, 50, 19-45.

Schwartz, S. H. (2010). Values: Individual and cultural: In F. J. R. van de Vijver (Eds), Fundamental questions in cross-cultural psychology (pp.463-493). Cambridge University Press.

Sirris, S. (2020). Values as Fixed and Fluid: Negotiating the Elasticity of Core Values. In: Askeland, H., Espedal, G., Jelstad Løvaas, B., Sirris, S. (eds) Understanding Values Work. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37748-9_11

Tormos, R., Vauclar, M. & Dobewall, H. (2017). Does Contextual Change Affect Basic Human Values? A Dynamic Comparative Multilevel Analysis Across 32 European Countries. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 48(4). DOI:10.1177/0022022117692675.