

## IS A SCIENCE OF VALUES IMPOSSIBLE?

by *Kirtley F. Mather*

The article to which Professor Margolis refers in the opening paragraphs of his essay entitled "Facts and Values and Sciences of Value" dealt with "The Emergence of Values in Geologic Life Development."<sup>1</sup> In it I tried to set forth a synthesis of certain factual data in the geologic record and to specify some of the inferences concerning man's cultural evolution that seem to me to be valid. It was in no sense an analysis or critique of a "science of values." Even so, it contained statements of a kind that should be considered by anyone attempting to make such an analysis or critique.

In my view, Margolis's statement that "a science of values is quite impossible" is altogether too inclusive, and therefore erroneous, even when he qualifies that assertion by the two "senses" he denotes. Certainly, "science" has something quite significant and important to say concerning what men *ought* to be doing about pollution of air, water, and soil, about the population "explosion," and about the spoliation of landscape. Of course, any such recommendations involve a prior assumption that it is a good thing for mankind to continue to inhabit the earth for just as long a time as possible. That assumption is akin to the other assumption that underlies the entire scientific enterprise: that human senses are competent to report correctly to human minds the nature of the physical universe. It is moreover fortified by the many observations leading to the conclusion that every kind of living creature strives to maintain the existence of its kind of life in perpetuity.

Communication concerning any "science of values" would be greatly clarified and expedited if someone would come up with a valid and useful classification of "values." Neither the philosopher's "normative values" nor the paleontologist's "survival values" designate a basic category of values. Perhaps "esthetic values," "ethical (or moral) values," and "physical (or material) values" should appear in the classification. Some, but not all, of the values subsumed under those three rubrics are amenable to scientific study.

The illustration used by Margolis to make "entirely clear" the distinction between "factual judgments and value judgments" fails to clear the muddied waters: "To judge that Peter murdered Paul is to judge

Kirtley F. Mather is professor emeritus of geology, Harvard University.

what may be true or false." Did he not mean to say *killed* rather than *murdered*? The killing may be judged in a court of law to be first- or second-degree murder or justifiable homicide, and in the minds of the "great silent majority" there is probably considerable difference of opinion as to whether the killing of a Viet Cong soldier by an American soldier is murder. The point is that the "factual judgment" and the "value judgment" are not made "at once" but are made quite separately and in sequence.

NOTE

1. *Zygon* 4 (1969):12-23.