Some of the Universal "Good Things of Life" Which the Implementation of Social Role Valorization Can be Expected to Make More Accessible to Devalued People

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Quelques-unes des "bonnes choses de la vie" qui deviennent accessibles à des personnes dévalorisées avec la mise en oeuvre de la VRS.

À l'occasion, les buts et méthodes de la Valorisation des Rôles Sociaux sont remis en question par la suggestion qu'il s'agit de l'imposition des valeurs et normes de la classe moyenne. Bien que la VRS propose de faire participer les personnes dévalorisées à la vie des classes valorisées par l'attribution et l'établissement de rôles sociaux valorisés, il reste que les "bonnes choses de la vie" dont parle la VRS sont universelles et transcendent l'histoire et les cultures. Les "bonnes choses" peuvent inclure la famille, un foyer, l'appartenance à un groupe social, l'amitié, un système de croyance, le travail, et la sécurité. En tout les auteurs décrivent dix-sept "bonnes choses de la vie" qui sont liées à l'attribution

Not uncommonly, people who teach—or attempt to implement—Social Role Valorization (SRV) are confronted by the assertion that they (and SRV) are trying to impose on devalued people what they—the teachers and implementers—value and want, but without regard for what devalued people themselves want and aspire to; and in fact, that devalued people would pursue different things than what valued society aspires to and values. Sometimes, this challenge is phrased in terms that SRV promotes "white middle class values," or that SRV proponents are trying to "impose alien values." (Both these things also used to be said about normalization.)

Promoters of SRV who are thus challenged often feel uneasy. Some of them desire to various degrees to be "politically correct" (which these days means, among other things, exalting "choice," "self-determination," "diversity" and "multi-culturalism"), and therefore they may concede that perhaps SRV is indeed "imposing" values that are "white middle class." At the very least, SRV promoters and would-be implementers can become confused and consternated, and may not reply well to the challenge.

However, a recent article (Wolfensberger, 1995) on the empirical nature of SRV and its boundaries should help decisively to address this issue. This article makes clear that SRV can only describe—on the basis of social science knowledge—what is likely to happen to a societally or personally devalued person, group, or class if particular courses of action are taken. What course of action is then actually adopted is determined by one's values, which are outside and above SRV. In other words, SRV describes, values prescribe. Thus, a person's own value system would inform questions about whom one should value (if anyone), and under what circumstances; whether someone "deserves" the good things of life; whether one should do good or bad things to a person; etc.

However, there is also a great deal that one can say on the contested issue of whether devalued people would choose the same "good things in life" as people in more privileged circumstances.

While there are certainly differences in what is valued by people in different cultures and subcultures, and at different points in history, there is also a tremendous amount of agreement or convergence among people as to what they desire. This convergence on what people consider the good things of life is also brought out by some on the work (e.g., Maslow, 1959) on universal needs that people share, such as for security, belongingness, and

self-actualization. Too often these days, the differences between people are highlighted, and the similarities or shared universals are played down, ignored, or even denied. But when we look at human history broadly, we find that there has been much de facto consensus as to what constitutes "the good life." While some differences must be expected, due to such things as people's highest-order world views and religions, and specificities of culture and time, we still find that for the vast majority of human beings, the good life is intertwined with at least 17 things, some of which could actually be yet further broken down into separate points. The following is a list of those things, not necessarily in order of importance:

- 1. Family, or an equivalent small intimate group for those who have no family. Most of the latter would prefer a real family to a substitute intimate group.
- 2. For most people, a place they can call home. This is often where one has family, but not necessarily so.
- 3. Belonging to an intermediate but still relatively small-scale social body. In many societies, or for many people, families are too small—and sometimes too far away—to provide the broader and yet intimate sense of belonging that is so important to the good life. Nations are too large and abstract. Somewhere closer to what humans need and desire are tribes or clans, small local communities (such as closely-knit villages or neighborhoods), or communalities (such as a worship community, an intentional community with a common goal or purpose, a fraternal-type society, perhaps people with whom one works closely over a long period of time, etc.), even if these are not local bodies.
- 4. Friends. Even if one has a family, most people still desire the acceptance and companionship of others who are like-minded, who are not duty-bound by obligations of kinship to accept and relate to them, but who do so voluntarily out of affinity with, or affection for, them. Friendship is not necessarily the same as belonging to an intimate group, since one can have friends without being a member of such a group, or be a member of such a group but without deeper friendship with a few specific members.
- 5. A transcendent belief system that gives the human being spiritual anchors. Such a belief system has the greatest appeal when it reflects the human wisdom traditions and insights that have a great deal in common even when they evolved relatively independently in different locales and cultures over the course of history. Since many of these share a large number of insights and moral principles, one can conclude that each has grasped some portion of universal truth, or at least of universal human higher aspirations. Such a belief system not only gives a person a sense of belonging and continuity with the larger human community, but also helps a person to cope with the mysteries and tragedies of life.
- 6. Work, and especially work that can be invested with meaning other than, and usually in addition to, merely a way to gain money or comparable material gain. For many people, this is likely to be work that is of the nature of primary or secondary production, or that is life-enhancing to others or the environment, that hopefully has readily visible results, and that is recognized as valuable by others.
- 7. Absence of imminent threats of extreme privation (e.g., via penury, starvation, homelessness) and of violent death. One might call this a sense of reasonable safety and security, and perhaps some kind of "insurance" against awful things happening.
- 8. Opportunities and expectancies that enable one to discover and develop one's abilities, skills, gifts, and talents. In most societies today, this would also include schooling. Probably no one ever develops all their abilities to the fullest, and we are not talking about getting to "actualize" oneself in every way and in every aspect of life. But most people do want to be able to contribute at least something, to be good at one or more things.
- 9. To be viewed as human and treated with at least a basic level of respect, and by more than just a very few people.
- 10. To be dealt with honestly.
- 11. A reasonable assurance that one will not be a victim of gross injustice, even if perfect justice is not to be had. Some people might phrase this as "a fair shake," "a level playing field," or "not having the deck stacked against one."
- 12. Being treated as an individual.
- 13. Having a say in important decisions affecting one's own life.

- 14. Access to at least many of the sites of conduct of everyday life; not to be excluded from such places of normal human intercourse.
- 15. Access to at least many of the ordinary activities of human social life, including their associated opportunities.
- 16. Being able to contribute, and have one's contributions recognized as valuable.
- 17. Good health. Though most people would agree that one can lead "a good life" even with illness, still most people would count good health as one element of "the good life."

It seems self-evident that people who fill valued roles in society are vastly more likely to attain the things that society values (or to have others accord these to them) than people who do not fill valued roles. However, we are, of course, speaking only in probabilistic terms. After all, the good things in life are not accorded or attained only by people in valued roles; some people devalue social roles that most other people value; some people will accord others at least some of the "good things in life" out of moral imperatives rather than because of the roles those people hold; and yet other people will have other good and bad motives for according some people some of the time the good things in life. For instance, someone may accord a person good things merely in order to spite a third party, as when a separated parent does good things for his/her child merely in order to spite the other parent who is not in a position to do so. Nonetheless, on an overall and societal basis, we can say that whether people are accorded the good things of life by others depends heavily on their social roles: how many valued roles they hold, how valued these roles are, how narrow or broad (i.e., how life-defining) these roles are, and to what degree people's valued roles are balanced off by their incumbency of devalued roles.

Therefore, while SRV does indeed have dimensions that are culturally relative (because it is tied to what is valued by a particular society in a particular time), we can still say that people who fill roles that are valued in whatever society at whatever time are apt to have access to many good things, including a great many—such as the 17 listed above—that are likely to be valued in any culture. Further, we can say with confidence that almost everyone would agree that the 17 goods listed above are a big part of the good things in life that everyone would like for him or herself.

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The citation for this article is:

Wolfensberger, W., Thomas, S. & Caruso, G. (1996). Some of the Universal "Good Things of Life" Which the Implementation of Social Role Valorization Can be Expected to Make More Accessible to Devalued People. The International Social Role Valorization Journal, 2 (2), 12-14.