

# The “Values” Discussion Group at the University of Toronto, February–May 1949

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## **Background and introduction**

On June 18, 1948, the trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) approved an appropriation of \$25,000 “for use by the officers for the Social Sciences in the development of opportunities in the general area of Moral Issues in the Economic Order.” This funding was to “enable the officers to invite memoranda from thoughtful students and men of affairs who, it is believed, may have significant ideas to contribute to the Foundation as to directions in which work in this area [the field of morals and ethics] may be most profitably prosecuted” (RF, RAC, 1949). One of the “thoughtful students” who was evidently invited to submit a memorandum was Harold Adams Innis, professor of political economy at the University of Toronto, he had established himself as the Rockefeller Foundation’s most trusted advisor on matters pertaining to the social sciences in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Innis duly submitted a letter to his friend Joseph Willits (director of the RF Social Sciences Division), in which he requested support for “a small discussion group which has been set up in response to a suggestion from [Pendleton] Herring [president of the American Social Science Research Council] of an interest in the problem of value. He has intimated that you are expecting a request from me and I now write to say that we think \$200 will be sufficient to cover the expenses of a rapporteur. If this amount seems too trivial for you to handle, I might be able to find other sources but I am following Herring’s instructions” (Innis, 1949). Innis’ request, not surprisingly, was approved, with the stipulation that the officers in the social sciences would be “provided with a report on ethical values in the economic order” that presumably would summarize the group’s deliberations (RF, RAC, 1949).

Innis was obviously quite confident that his proposal would be accepted. By the time he had written the letter requesting support from the RF, the group had already met twice (on February 8 and February 15); it would meet (usually on a

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weekly basis) seven more times, concluding its work on May 10, 1949. The following persons took part in the discussions:<sup>2</sup>

Samuel Delbert Clark (1910-2003), Department of Political Economy, University of Toronto.<sup>3</sup>

Donald Grant Creighton (1902-1979), Department of History, University of Toronto.<sup>4</sup>

Douglas Poole Dryer (born 1915), Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto.<sup>5</sup>

William Thomas (Tom) Easterbrook (1907-1985), Department of Political Economy, University of Toronto.<sup>6</sup>

Jean-Charles Falardeau (1914-1989), Department of Sociology, Université Laval.<sup>7</sup>

Morris Ginsberg (1889-1970), Morton White Professor of Sociology, University of London.<sup>8</sup>

Karl Ferdinand Helleiner (1902-1984), Department of Political Economy, University of Toronto.<sup>9</sup>

Harold Adams Innis (1894-1952), Department of Political Economy, University of Toronto.<sup>10</sup>

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), Department of English, University of Toronto.<sup>11</sup>

David Savan (1916-1992), Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto.<sup>12</sup>

William John Waines (1901- 1991), Department of Economics, University of Manitoba.<sup>13</sup>

The “Rapporteur” for the meetings was John H. “Jack” Sword (1915-2001), Secretary, School of Graduate Studies.<sup>14</sup> In addition, a person named “Shore” attended one of the meetings. This may have been Professor Taylor Shore, who taught German at the University of Toronto during the 1940s.

The only trace of the Values Group meetings I have come across is Harold Innis’ copy of the reports of the discussions. Evidently, multiple copies of the report were produced each week and circulated to the participants. Innis’ copy bears numerous marginal comments and emendations to the text, suggesting that a corrected version of the reports was to be produced. The heading for the report for each meeting contained the same information: the date, the place (Hart House), the time of the meeting (7:00 p.m.), and the last names of those who took part. Beyond that, judging from the reports, the sessions varied a great deal in their form. On some occasions, a particular member would present a brief paper and the others would respond. At other times, they seemed to move more quickly to a discussion of a particular issue. Perhaps because of their seniority, both Innis and Ginsberg presented their ideas more at length; indeed, Ginsberg led off the discussion on three different occasions, including a detailed statement of his views on moral progress and evolution.

There appears to have been no particular agenda behind the papers presented and the themes addressed; each session seemed to simply emerge out of the pre-

vious week's discussion. Unfortunately, the reports do not indicate which of the participants was responsible for a particular position that was taken. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the views expressed by the presenter and those of the participants; the reports largely consist of summaries of the statements that were made, followed by overviews of the issues covered in the discussion. Nevertheless, by virtue of clues provided by the remarks, it is sometimes possible to make reasonable guesses as to who was responsible for a particular intervention. While there appears to have been a good deal of agreement about the issues that arose, there are also signs that views sometimes differed sharply and that some of the claims made were considered to be extreme.

What follows are brief accounts (based on the weekly reports) of what took place at each meeting along with lists of those who attended. For the meetings at which Innis and McLuhan presented, the entire statements of their talks have been reproduced. The original texts have been enclosed in quotations marks to separate them from the summaries I have provided.

### **The meetings**

#### **First meeting: February 8. (Clark, Creighton, Easterbrook [Chairman], Helleiner, Innis, McLuhan, Savan, Shore, Waines)**

David Savan provided an overview of some of the issues involved in defining values. Drawing on Kant's discussion of moral values, he distinguished between the two approaches that have been commonly used, namely, the philosophical and the empirical. He went on to distinguish various levels of concreteness in considering values, and emphasized that values and value judgments varied according to time and space. Savan's statement formed the basis for a discussion about the empirical approach to the discussion of values. At the end of the session it was agreed that at the next meeting S. D. Clark "would discuss areas where the question of values impinges on social theories" (Values Discussion Group, February 8, 1949, p. 1, hereafter VDG).

#### **Second meeting: February 15. (Clark, Dryer, Easterbrook [Chairman], Helleiner, Innis, McLuhan, Savan)**

"Mr. Clark dealt with an empirical problem—What is wrong with the American Value System?<sup>15</sup> He defined values as objectives toward which people strive. The problem he described as failure to agree on objectives. He analyzed some 'soft spots' in the value structure in American society" (VDG, February 15, 1949, p. 1). The "soft spots" included the weakening of a value system in a frontier society, the passing of the rural community involving "the divorce of city from country," the lack of an aristocratic tradition, "the irresponsibility of religious institutions, the failure of higher education, ... the break-down of the family system in America," and "the irresponsibility of mass communication" (p. 1). Clark's statement led to a wide-ranging discussion about the implications of the points that he had raised, including the "efficiency in modern means of communication as a factor in the inter-action of value systems" (p. 3).

**Third meeting: February 22. (Clark, Creighton, Dryer, Easterbrook [Chairman], Falardeau, Helleiner, Innis, McLuhan, and Savan)**

“Mr. Helleiner introduced this discussion with a statement on ‘Secular Changes in Man’s Cognitive Objectives.’ Mr. Helleiner pointed out that in the development of science and learning from pre-mediaeval to recent times there has been an increasing dissociation of facts and values, a separation of the ‘ought to be’ from the ‘to be.’ The value sphere has tended to be absorbed by the factual sphere” (VDG, February 22, 1949, p. 1). Helleiner went on to describe this trend within some branches of the natural sciences as well as in the social sciences. A discussion followed about the place of objectivity within the social sciences, and how the natural and the social sciences related to one another.

**Fourth meeting: March 1. (Clark, Creighton, Dryer, Easterbrook [Chairman], Ginsberg, Helleiner, Innis, McLuhan, and Savan)**

“Professor Ginsberg was asked to comment on points arising from the report of the last meeting of the group. He suggested that some aspects of values such as events and processes can be studied as facts. It is possible to investigate the methods by which objectives are sought. Dealing with values philosophically is a different question. Validity is an ethical or philosophical matter. The problem is to dissociate the assumptions involved and test them” (VDG, March 1, 1949, p. 1).

Ginsberg went on to address issues related to the personal bias of the investigator and the dangers in quantitative studies of generalizing. His remarks precipitated a reaction that may well have come from Innis, as it was quite consistent with his views:

“The question was raised in general discussion: Are not the motives of many sociologists in their utilization of the quantitative method, the control of sections of the population; for example, in advertising and in the use of public opinion polls? It was suggested that whether or not this is the motive encouraging the use of quantitative method it remains a valid method for certain areas of investigation. If one wishes to control or to understand he must use the quantitative as well as other relevant methods” (p. 1).

Following this exchange, the members of the group examined how the prevailing social, economic, and political conditions affected the writings of economists and philosophers. In particular, they gave consideration to “what extent do certain conditions of change cause these scholars to deal with more or less highly abstract propositions than at other times they would?” (p. 2). This led to a discussion of the way in which various scholarly fields, including history, economics, and philosophy, dealt with questions of standpoint, premises, and bias. Finally, consideration was given to the sorts of factors, which affected areas of agreement and disagreement.

**Fifth meeting: March 8. (Clark, Dryer, Easterbrook [Chairman], Ginsberg, Helleiner, Innis, McLuhan, and Savan)**

“Arising from the report of the previous week’s meeting,” this meeting began with a brief discussion about how the notion of economic man arose as “a unit apart from political and social considerations” (VDG, March 8, 1949, p. 1). The

members of the group then turned their attention to a statement made by Marshall McLuhan on the role of the artist in society.

"The discussion for this meeting centred upon the questions raised in an introductory statement presented by Mr. McLuhan:<sup>16</sup> The Arts as a storehouse of values. Mr. McLuhan treated the topic historically. Attitudes to the Arts have at various periods undergone changes. At the present time there is a common practice among laymen to consider art as separate from life, that the two subjects are strongly opposed. This may have begun with the possibility of the sale of the products of the artist and craftsman. This commercialism in turn led to an exaggerated emphasis on some aspects of the Arts: dress, crafts, and architecture. Many people today accept the dichotomy between art and life too readily. In fact, the Arts present a medium for unifying many fields. There is, however, nothing inevitable or necessary about this capacity for uniting being realized.

Mr. McLuhan proceeded to make several assertions about the Arts and the artist:

- a. "The artist is an explorer, and an innovator, one who restlessly seeks new areas; as [James] Joyce and [Marcel] Proust.
- b. The artist is a man for whom the cliché, the banal, is intolerable. The artist is given to concern with freshness, precision and immediacy in the plying of his craft. His object is to renew human awareness of itself and of the world; a renewal of the experience of perception through sight, sound, smell, touch.
- c. The artist is concerned to present a precise demarcation of things. Ordinary human experience is vague, sloppy, confused. The artist's life is taken up with the ordering of things. He wants to select, to add, remove, to make vivid details.

The artist requires the exact equivalent; the precise formula for every emotion or combination of emotions. Mr. McLuhan illustrated by citing a passage from Dante's *Inferno* in which Dante had employed an image suggesting victory against the forces of Hell. It was the introduction of a flood of emotion into a passage of objective description.

The artist seeks to make ordinary observations precise, and to develop taste. His function is the function of an educator. His values are existential; immediate enjoyment of arts. The critical judgment of scholars is that the Arts train perception and develop judgment.

Contemporary education practices are deficient in not using the Arts effectively. These values are not being achieved because the training methods insulate the subject against these values.

- d. Developments in the Arts occur; but they never improve. In the hands of an artist, painting, music, sculpture, achieve a kind of excellence at one leap that cannot be improved upon. The artist must sacrifice early excellence in proceeding to new fields of development. The components of human experience don't change. The themes of Homer's *Iliad*—war, pathos, sorrow, tragedy, defeat, and of the *Odyssey*—man wandering in exile—are as valid today as

they were for Homer. These two modes used by Homer are unchanging; they appear to be basic to human experience.

- e. There is no discussion in the Arts.
- f. The Arts present a possibility of extending the range of one's experience." (VDG, March 8, 1949, pp. 2-3)

McLuhan's statement led to a discussion of "the meaning of improvement in the Arts and Sciences" with particular reference to whether technique in the arts could be viewed as cumulative (p. 3). The extent to which cumulation in the arts and the physical sciences, respectively, was addressed. The group then considered how children's acts, in relation to art, compared to those of "trained persons." This was followed by a general discussion of the nature of artistic expression, how the artist is viewed by society, and how people respond to art exhibitions. The session concluded with a discussion of the historical relationship between artistic achievement and broader social factors, with specific attention given to "the existing climate of opinion and artistic or scientific expression" and "[w]ith the conflict between ecclesiasticism and science, science and Nazism, and science and nationalism generally" (p. 6).<sup>17</sup>

**Sixth meeting: March 15. (Clark, Dryer, Easterbrook [Chairman], Helleiner, McLuhan, and Savan)**

"The discussion was introduced by the Chairman [Easterbrook] who presented a number of educational problems which are being considered by a committee of business men. The problems relate to secondary education in Canada" (VDG, March 15, 1949, p. 1). Easterbrook briefly stated what problems the group detected, and the sorts of solutions it proposed. The discussion that followed "was concerned with an attempt to analyze the committee's motivation and to assess its values with a view to offering constructive suggestions about policies for such a group" (p. 6).

**Seventh meeting: March 29. (Clark, Dryer, Easterbrook [Chairman], Ginsberg, Helleiner, Innis, McLuhan, and Savan)**

This session began with a presentation by Morris Ginsberg based on two Romanes lectures: "the first delivered in 1893 by T.H. Huxley; the second presented in 1943 by Julian Huxley" (VDG, March 29, 1949, p. 1).<sup>18</sup>

Ginsberg began his presentation with an overview of Herbert Spencer's theory of evolution (Spencer, 1897-1906). He argued that Spencer's account was limited because it mistakenly derived an ethical theory from a general theory of evolution. In doing so, he noted T. H. Huxley's claim that "one can't move from the evolution of ethics to ethics of evolution. Ethical theory can't be deduced from the facts of evolution. The latter fail to supply us with criteria" (p. 3). Ginsberg went on to examine the argument of Julian Huxley for an ethics of evolution, grounded in the view that in human societies evolution is carried on by " 'social heritage' " and "through cooperation, the pooling of resources and organization." It thus becomes possible to " 'inject' into the evolutionary process such qualities as faith, courage, love of truth, goodness—in a word—moral purpose" (p. 3).

According to Ginsberg, Julian Huxley failed to adequately address the issues originally raised by his grandfather: "[he] has not removed the antithesis between the cosmic process and ethical process nor has he established that one can move from the evolution of ethics to an ethics of evolution." (p. 4). Ginsberg's statement led to a discussion about such issues as "the relationship between freedom and efficiency in such an authoritarian society as the Nazi one," as well as "the relation between freedom, coercion, and survival" overall (p. 5). The discussion then moved toward a more general register, addressing issues such as how moral judgments could be validated and the role of values in social investigation. The session concluded with some critical commentary about functionalist theory, which was held to be lacking in precision and to wrongly assume that harmony is a central characteristic of social phenomena.

**Eighth meeting: April 5. (Clark, Dryer, Easterbrook, [Chairman], Ginsberg, Helleiner, Innis, McLuhan, and Savan)**

Most of this session appears to have been given over to a presentation by Harold Innis, followed by an unusually brief period of discussion. The themes discussed by Innis foreshadowed those that were addressed in two talks he gave later (on April 18 and 19, 1949) at the University of Michigan.<sup>19</sup>

"Professor Innis introduced the discussion with a statement on communication and values systems. He stated that systems of communication emphasize the problem of value systems. If one looks at them broadly he can see the effects of technological changes in communications. Liddell Hart [Sir Henry Liddell Hart (1895-1970)] has suggested that increased savagery has followed developments in aviation, radio, etc. New technologies upset the old and leave no means for controlling them. This is illustrated by the introduction of bombing into modern warfare. There are no laws to control such innovations. Humanitarian interest is lost. Hart says that the same result followed the introduction of gunpowder. After such periods of significant innovation there follow periods of stability in which value systems are worked out.<sup>20</sup>

The break-down of values belongs to these inventive periods, especially those productive of instruments of war but also those producing innovations in systems of communication such as the fast press, telegraph, etc.

The beginning of printing is associated with a tendency to decentralization; the emphasis was on nationalism and on the vernacular in language. Central control was challenged; countries and regions were being broken up. This is illustrated by the story of the press in the United States where it is subsidized by the Bill of Rights, which in guaranteeing the freedom of the press actually provides the press with a guarantee of monopoly. Powerful urban newspapers have been concerned with the control of space (i.e. domination of a particular region) and also with the domination of time (they can release information when they choose). It is virtually impossible to start a newspaper now, and the type of monopoly enjoyed by the press is difficult to break down because of the protection it enjoys under the Bill of Rights. Under the guise of democracy freedom of the press has

led to the defense of monopoly. These monopolies exert an important influence on the news. News can be selected and even made by a powerful journalist.

One of the results of this situation is an obsession with the immediate. Our civilization is dominated by this. Nothing lasts. Everything must change. Civilization becomes cut off from a concern with continuity, with the long-term approach. Values in this situation take on the same complexion as their surroundings. This monopoly has brought about its own downfall by creating the necessity for a new medium. Radio is now taking over and it has assumed some of the characteristics of the press because it is fighting against and taking over from the press. Radio must in some sense be governmental whether in the allocation of frequency channels, greater control through regulation and/or in government broadcasting systems. These features of radio lead to centralization. Before the era of radio four terms for a President of the United States were unheard of. With the advent of radio, dictatorships have flourished. In a situation where both press and radio are exerting influences that conflict; confusion results, including confusion about values.

The new technique leads to central control, to planning, to socialism—tendencies that are impossible under a decentralized, regionally-important, press.

It was pointed out in discussion that corporate units have now taken over the symbolic representing individual freedom; for example, free enterprise, a term, which has become a fighting word in the new setting.

Observations were added concerning the comparative control exercised by the press on the one hand served by national news services and by radio on the other with individual stations and chains of stations appealing for public interest. It was pointed out that the national news services used by the press can be counteracted by the individual newspaper through the use of local features, regional emphasis, comic strips and other devices. The limitations imposed by time and the number of wave lengths make radio less flexible.

Social Credit Party political success in Alberta was cited as an illustration of a regional radio monopoly dominating the press. This illustration serves also to confirm the development of the breakdown of a monopoly from the marginal area first. Marconi's invention, it was pointed out, occurred in Italy when Italy was not a newspaper centre.

Radio offers even less opportunity for the exercise of the individual's critical faculty than the newspaper does. The press cannot prevent the reader stopping critically over a particular article. The radio opinion is spoken and lost amongst succeeding programmes. People have learned to exploit the radio technique very effectively. [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt attacked the press and used the radio. The magic of the voice is more effective politically [than] the force of the written word. The reporting of the Moose River Gold Mine disaster,<sup>21</sup> Orson Welles' drama<sup>22</sup> and the story of Munich;<sup>23</sup> all illustrate the disturbing emotional power possessed by radio. This contributes to the change to centralization and strengthens the existing government in so far as it can make use of this instrument for controlling emotion.

Comparisons between North America and Europe in the use of the press and radio were suggested. It was pointed out that the public influences the type of press at the same time as it is influenced by the press. Radio attempts discussion programmes but the listener cannot talk back to the same audience that the participant does, nor is the broadcast discussion completely uninhibited.

The place of tradition in respect to communication was mentioned. Europe possesses a book tradition which North America does not. This fact was considered to be related to the frontier nature of North American civilization. The newspaper seems to reflect and accentuate this situation.

The necessity for clarity in the meaning and use of the idea of communication was urged. Is it not necessary to distinguish advertisements, non-political features, news and other elements of the newspaper? In answer to this question it was stated that analysis of the material being communicated discloses a bias in the type of news. The bias reflected arises from the means of collecting and getting out the news. Radio also has a bias; but it is a different one.

Press news services are monopolies. [William Randolph] Hearst had to establish his own service because existing ones were not available to him [see Innis, 1951, p. 179]. The other services damned Hearst and Hearst's news service reciprocated. Public confusion was the only possible result. The ordinary reader cannot have any idea of what is really going on.

The capacity for reproducing illustrations developed during the depression. Newspapers like the *Star* moved into illustrated features to avoid competition with the radio. Newspapers are no longer effective fighters. The muck-raking is now done in novels such as *The Snake Pit* [Ward, 1947] and *Earth and High Heaven* [Graham, 1944]. This is the press [*sic*] job being taken over by the novel. The necessity for very widespread appeal by the newspaper publisher has left gaps in the news he can treat, and these gaps have been filled by small class and interest journalistic monopolies such as leftist newspapers and scandal magazines.

It was pointed out that newspapers are less scurrilous now than formerly possibly because the individual is no longer as important as he was once considered.

Both the radio and the press have to be careful in their selection of material. Abuse of this consideration led to the coining of the epigram that the 'power of the press is *suppress*.' The liberal tradition in the press is a myth. The short term view is all that matters. Democracy has been said to sacrifice the past and the future to the present. Democracy was to a large extent the fight for freedom of the press; [the goal of which, when] partially achieved, provided a shelter for many other things. If one keeps talking about freedom of speech and of the press the public will forget other things. The newspaper really gets down to business only on such relevant concerns as the price of newsprint.

The contribution to raising the general cultural level of the press and radio was mentioned. It was suggested that the radio can contribute to this much more significantly than the press has. This was considered to be particularly true in relation to music, both with respect to widening immeasurably the audiences and contributing to increased technical skill in performance.

It was observed that the newspaper and radio have destroyed serious discussion. The establishment of a public opinion and general literary work were mentioned as the two positive features resulting from the growth of the press. Early press interest in improving the school system bore a relation to the increase in the literacy of the population for the sale of newspapers.

Influence over the content of newspapers appears to be falling increasingly into the hands of the publishers and thus to the dictators of profits. The attitudes of the business community were considered to reflect this in the influence of advertisers.

Are areas of fanaticism beyond the influence of newspapers? Do newspapers tend to destroy fanaticism? It was stated that rumours as a contribution to fanaticism are almost completely destroyed by the newspaper. This influence becomes noticeable when newspapers are not available over an extended period of time: for example, during the Winnipeg strike of 1919.

In relation to the effect of newspapers on fanaticism it was pointed out that [Thomas] Jefferson talked about the scurrility of newspapers in preventing union between the North and the South.

The ability of the press to divert public attention was mentioned. It was pointed out that there was some reliable evidence that a Toronto newspaper had glossed over the recent visit of the Prime Minister to Toronto by giving exaggerated prominence to the sociological study of Windsor not due for publication until the next week.

A representative of an American news service was reported to have said that one of the news services' biggest problems was shifting its men about. As soon as they came to know a particular city or district and were intelligent about its problems they became too serious, and their 'copy' lost its freshness. Brisbane's dictum to newspapermen: 'Never forget superficiality' was quoted.<sup>24</sup>

The problem of the effect of large-scale technological discoveries on morals was raised again. The massacres in the recent war pose unanswered questions. It is difficult—if not impossible—to form an opinion to explain what had happened in this apparent decay of morals. Already, it was pointed out, there are people in North America who have forgotten the atrocities. It was suggested that these events go beyond the experience of most North Americans. They can't be fitted into the experiences of men and women who have not witnessed them. Moreover, the numbers are large; too large for people to comprehend. These explanations, however, do not account for those who took part in them and lost their moral senses or even those who saw the consequences. It represents a breakdown of international code. The scale of it is so shocking that perspective is lost. The use of the atomic bomb was sufficiently disturbing to the moral sense of Anglo-Saxons that [Winston] Churchill had to say that it was necessary. People do not like a comparison of its effect with what happened in concentration camps. It was suggested that distance in the hierarchy between the decision and the act was sufficiently great that the sense of personal responsibility was lost.

What correlation is to be found between shifts in the means of communication systems and political systems? Is there pressure that brings innovations? Each medium builds up a monopoly that creates a bias, which ultimately breaks down. The invention of paper reflects the Church monopoly on parchment. In some instances, it was pointed out, a coincidence of inventions was essential to development; for example, the invention of an ink that would work on printing presses.

An argument was made that while the press is in a sense a financial monopoly it has not altogether a monopoly of ideas. Most people read something which communicates news: for example a small party or Church paper. There is an increase in the number of sources of information to the type of person who wasn't formerly struck by them.

It was pointed out in relation to this that the small news sheets exploited areas which can't be covered by this newspaper, but this gap is seldom wide enough to allow the production of another newspaper; for example, during the depression the Toronto *Star* took up a position sufficiently far to the 'Left' that the development of a C.C.F. daily newspaper was prevented.

Some time was given to discussion of the influence of the press in preventing the development of new ideas. The place of the newspaper in relation to social crises was also mentioned. [Newspapers tend to flatten out in their sensationalism, which at certain stages may become incendiary]."<sup>25</sup> It was decided that a final meeting to consider the future of the group would be held on Tuesday, May 10.

#### **The aftermath of the "Values" Discussion Group meetings**

In his role as chair of the "Values" Discussion Group, Tom Easterbrook wrote to Joseph Willits, director of the Social Science Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, conveying what had transpired at the meetings and what plans had been made for future initiatives. This was in accordance with the stipulation in the original grant-in-aid of March 16, 1949, that the officers in the social sciences would be "provided with a report on ethical values in the economic order" (RF, RAC, 1949). As it provides a concise account of the Group's activities, Easterbrook's letter to Willits has been reproduced in its entirety.

August 19, 1949  
Dr. J. Willits,  
The Rockefeller Foundation  
49 East 49<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, 20, New York

Dear Dr. Willits,

I am forwarding under separate cover a set of the notes taken at the meetings of our "values" discussion group here at Toronto. Mr. J. H. Sword was the recording secretary. I had considered revising the notes or at least condensing them but, on second thought, decided that, to leave them as they are, would give a much clearer idea of what the group is trying to do. No definite conclusions, no "constructive proposals" or detailed program of action emerged from our sessions. Progress consisted rather in seeing the 'value problem' from diverse standpoints and in clarification of individual points of view. I think it is

fair to say that the members of the group now understand each other and that a solid base has been laid for discussions of value along more specific lines. At our concluding session we decided to see what could be done about freedom as one sort of value and individual members made themselves responsible for the handling of various phases of this subject. The usual practice has been a fifteen-minute review of "value" from the standpoint of a forewarned member of the group with discussion proceeding from that point.

We have tried to keep the sessions as informal and spontaneous as possible without allowing them to become unduly diffuse, discursive or general. There is also the problem of making the membership a fairly representative one and yet keeping it within discussion limits. Of the members, Innis you know, Savan and Dryer are in the philosophy department, Ginsberg and Clark in sociology, Helleiner in medieval history, McLuhan in [the] English Department (a Thomist) and myself in economic history. There are omissions and gaps here and it is planned to add two or three members next term, but to keep the group within such limits that discussion will not give way to speech making and the presentation of formal papers.

I understand that Innis will outline the work of the group at the S.S.R.[C.] committee meeting so I shall not go into further detail. If it is felt that the 'notes' should be edited or revised, we are prepared to put them in more manageable (and readable) form. Any suggestions as to procedure and possible avenues of action in the future would, of course, be appreciated.

Sincerely,

W. T. Easterbrook<sup>26</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the absence of a detailed archival examination, it is difficult to know how the "Values" Discussion Group meetings may have affected those who took part in them. Nevertheless, for the three figures who would eventually leave their mark on the emergent field of communications—namely Innis, McLuhan, and Easterbrook—the series of discussions appears to have been of some consequence. For Innis, the meetings undoubtedly provided him with the opportunity to explore questions of values and economic life with a group of hand-picked colleagues; the issues examined were very much in line with his own ongoing investigations into how communications were implicated in the rise and fall of civilizations.

For McLuhan, the meetings gave him more familiarity with Innis' approach to the study of communications, which he incorporated into the grant application that he and Edward Carpenter submitted to the Ford Foundation: "The proposal cited the work of Innis as demonstrating that changes in the media of communication resulted in vast social, political, and economic change" (Marchand, 1990, p. 117). Moreover, the experience of the Values Discussion Group meetings may have helped to allay McLuhan's suspicion that foundations were little more than institutions "dedicated to tax loopholes and public relations" (Marchand, 1990, p. 117).

Easterbrook's subsequent trajectory also appeared to have been directly affected by the meetings. Having been the chair of the group, he seemed to have developed a commitment to help ensure that its goals were carried on (as revealed by his letter to Joseph Willits). In terms of his own work, during the year following the Values Discussion Group meetings (1949-50), he spent part of a sabbatical at the Center for Entrepreneurial History at Harvard University, where he took an active part in discussions about "entrepreneurial values," a theme that was very much in line with the underpinning leitmotif of the Values Discussion Group meetings. Easterbrook's research at Harvard was related to a book-length project on "the climate of enterprise" that he had begun in the late 1940s.<sup>27</sup> He was able to secure funding to work on this manuscript in the early 1950s as part of a "grant of \$4,000 to be used as a general fund for furtherance of research in the social sciences" at the University of Toronto (Higginbottom, 1951). During the summer of 1952 he worked with Innis on the manuscript and drafted the first section "aided by [a] grant of \$500." He found that the close study of communications was invaluable "for the insights Innis's work ... provided for [his] own research."

After Innis' death in November 1952, Easterbrook "took over Innis's course on communications and [the] bulk of his graduate students." In teaching the course, Easterbrook "found several others working on communications and had some in to lecture ... classics, humanities, anth[ropology], psychology." Among those who contributed, he found McLuhan to be "the most aggressive." He also noted that McLuhan was applying for a grant for a seminar "on communications among those interested, and several of us have agreed to act on such a committee to the extent that it will help with research under way and get others, particularly graduate students, interested in research problems" (Easterbrook, 1953). Hence, when McLuhan and Carpenter were successful in their application for funding support from the Ford Foundation, Easterbrook was in the inner circle of those who took part in this unique collaborative effort. In this sense, like McLuhan, Easterbrook carried on the "clarification" of differing points of view from the earlier Values Discussion Group meetings into the later Communications initiative.

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### Notes

1. As Anne Bezanson, a Canadian-born officer of the RF Social Science Division noted to the division's director, Joseph Willits, upon Innis' death in November 1952: "As a result of the death of Harold Innis, the Foundation will soon need an overall review of other recent changes among Canadian social scientists.... With his prestige, the advice of Innis was sought without his initiative, because he was thought of as 'Innis of Canada', his colleagues, however unselfish in aim, will be thought of as 'men of Toronto' " (letter to Joseph Willits, November 18, 1952, cited by Fisher, 1999, p. 135).
2. On the basis of a letter written by Tom Easterbrook to Joseph Willits (Easterbrook, 1949), one can conclude that the core of the discussion group was Innis, McLuhan, Easterbrook, Helleiner, Clark, Savan, Dryer, and Ginsberg. This is borne out by the fact that eight copies of the report for each session were to be made and distributed. The basis upon which persons were chosen to take part is not entirely clear. It seems to be the case, nevertheless, that the membership of the group was heavily tilted toward Innis' former students and his colleagues in the social sciences. He had also just made the acquaintance of McLuhan and was evidently impressed by his abilities. I have not been able to find signs of any previous contact between Innis and the two members of the Department of Philosophy (Dryer and Savan). During the 1930s and 1940s, Innis did, of course, have ties with some of the members of the Classics Department, such as Charles Cochrane and Eric Havelock.
3. Clark completed a PhD in political economy at the University of Toronto in 1937 (under the direction of Harold Innis and Alexander Brady). He subsequently became the first full-time sociologist at the University of Toronto, remaining there until his retirement in 1976. In 1944, he assumed the position of general editor of the Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored series on the Social Credit movement in Canada, which reached fruition in the 1950s. At the time of the Values Group meetings he had recently authored a text on religion in Canada (1948). For an account of Clark's life and work in relation to the development of Canadian sociology, see Harrison (1981).
4. Creighton is perhaps best known for helping to develop the "Laurentian thesis" on Canadian history, which emphasized how the St. Lawrence River as linked to the Great Lakes system shaped the development of Canada as a nation (1937). After having studied with Innis, he continued to work closely with him, and eventually wrote a biography of his former mentor and senior colleague (1957). For an excellent overview of Creighton's contributions to Canadian history and historiography, see Berger (1976).
5. A Harvard-trained philosopher, Dryer joined the University of Toronto in 1945, retiring in 1981. He is the author of a text on Kant's metaphysics (1966). I am grateful to Professor Dryer for sharing his recollections of the Values Group meetings with me.
6. Easterbrook was the first PhD graduate from the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto. His PhD thesis was published in a series at the University of Toronto and includes a preface written by his supervisor, Harold Innis (Easterbrook, 1938). A specialist in economic history (Easterbrook & Aitken, 1956; Easterbrook & Watkins, 1967), Easterbrook also had an interest in communications and was responsible for introducing Innis to McLuhan (Cooper, 1989). He chaired the Values Discussion Group meetings. An informative overview of Easterbrook's intellectual interests and career (written by Ian Parker) can be found in his posthumously published monograph (1985).
7. A Chicago-trained sociologist, Falardeau served with Innis on the Canadian Social Science Research Council and attended one meeting of the Values Discussion Group. At the time of the Discussion Group Meetings, he was a guest lecturer in sociology at the University of Toronto (having been invited by S. B. Clark).
8. Ginsberg, one of the most pre-eminent British sociologists of the twentieth century (Fletcher, 1974), evidently spent at least part of the 1948-49 academic year at the University of Toronto. I have not been able to establish what brought him to Toronto, nor how he came to take part in the Values Discussion Group.
9. Helleiner completed his PhD in history at the University of Vienna in 1925 and subsequently worked as an archivist at the city of St. Polten in Austria. He was forced to flee Austria in 1939,

having refused the demands of the Nazis that he divorce his wife, who was of Jewish origin. After a brief stay in England, he secured a fellowship to Canada and became a member of the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto in 1940 (Friedland, 2002). In addition to editing a collection on European economic history (1946), he wrote a number of other books dealing with economic issues. He is the father of Gerald K. Helleiner, who taught in the Economics Department at the University of Toronto.

10. At the time that the Values Discussion Group meetings took place, Innis was arguably at the peak of his academic and professional prominence. He was both chair of the Department of Political Economy and dean of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto. He was also in poor health, which likely suffered further decline in the spring of 1949 when he began to serve on the Royal Commission on Transportation, a position that proved to be a highly stressful one (Creighton, 1957).
11. McLuhan, who had joined St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto in 1946, was arguably just beginning to hit his academic stride; shortly after the Values Discussion Group meetings he would publish his first major work, *The Mechanical Bride* (1951).
12. Savan, who held a BA and an MA in philosophy from Harvard, taught at the University of Toronto from 1943 until 1981. He was best known for his work in American philosophy (particularly semiotics) and as an interpreter of Charles Sanders Peirce (1976, 1989). In his honour, the Department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto dedicated the David Savan Philosophy Library (opened September 18, 1996) and the David Savan Dissertation Prize (first awarded in 1996).
13. Waines, a Professor of Economics—who also served as dean of Arts and Science and vice-president at the University of Manitoba—had been on the research staff of the Rowell-Sirois Commission. He also taught for a time in the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto (where he was a member of Tom Easterbrook's dissertation committee). His role as an economic consultant for the Royal Commission on Transportation (of which Innis was a member) during 1949-50 might have brought him to Toronto and could explain his participation in a meeting of the Values Discussion Group. He retired from the University of Manitoba in 1966, spending the next eight years as associate executive director of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, under the auspices of which he authored an influential text on the financing of higher education (1970). He died in 1991 in Listowel, Ontario.
14. Sword, who had served as secretary of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto beginning in 1948, was likely pressed into service as *rapporteur* for the Values Discussion Group meetings by the dean of Graduate Studies, Harold Innis. He went on to hold numerous high-level administrative positions at the University of Toronto, including stints as acting president in 1967-68 and 1971-72. His initiatives included putting together an oral history collection of how University of Toronto faculty remembered Harold Innis. He retired from the university in 1980.
15. Clark's statement was very much in line with the comparisons of Canada and the United States that he had made in his MA thesis in sociology at McGill (1935).
16. McLuhan addressed a number of the same issues in an article that acknowledged his debt to Innis (1954). During the period spanning the Values Discussion Group meetings and the publication of this article, McLuhan was very much engaged with the nature of modernist poetry and literature, which likely was his point of reference for his conception of the "artist."
17. In this regard, mention was made of William Ralph (Dean) Inge's view that "great artistic achievements are made in periods of cruelty," suggesting "there is no relation between art and morals." This intervention was likely made by Innis, who would make the same point in his paper "Industrialism and Cultural Values," read at the meetings of the American Economic Association at Chicago, December 30, 1950 (see Innis, 1951, p. 132).
18. Julian Huxley was T. H. Huxley's grandson. Ginsberg's statement drew on his Fraser Lecture, "Moral Progress," delivered at the University of Glasgow, April 18, 1944 (Ginsberg, 1947, pp. 298-324). He covered some of the same ground in his chairman's address at the first annual meeting of the British Sociological Association held on March 22, 1952 (see Ginsberg, 1953).

19. Revised versions of these were later published, respectively, as "The Bias of Communication" and "Technology and Public Opinion in the United States" (Innis, 1951).
20. He is likely referring to Liddell Hart's *Revolution in Warfare* (1947/1980), which addressed the issues referred to by Innis, in a manner quite similar to that deployed by the Canadian scholar. Hart's advocacy of a new "World federation" to place limits on international warfare bore some resemblance to the "World constitution" favoured by Innis and a number of other scholars, some of whom were based at the University of Chicago.
21. In April, 1936, three men were trapped in a gold mine at Moose River, Nova Scotia. One of the men died but two were saved. The rescue efforts were widely reported by the news media in North America and in Europe. In particular, "the broadcasts of J. Frank Willis of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Company (later the CBC) were carried by over 700 radio stations in Canada, the United States and England, establishing a record for consecutive live broadcasts from one location. These broadcasts represented North America's first major 'media event' and are claimed to have changed the course of radio in Canada" (Nova Scotia Provincial Parks, 1992).
22. This was a CBS broadcast of Welles' radio-play adaptation of H. G. Wells' 1898 novel *War of the Worlds* on October 31, 1938. It induced panic in its audience through its realistic portrayal of an invasion of the United States by Martians (see Cantril, 1940; Wells, 2001).
23. This referred to the imminent Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia, which appeared to have been averted by the British prime minister's policy of appeasement embodied in a deal made in Munich with Hitler on September 27, 1938. Upon his return to Britain, Chamberlain triumphantly announced "peace in our time." The series of events related to the crisis were broadcast by radio and had an enormous following.
24. He is likely referring to Arthur Brisbane (1864-1936), who was the editor, star columnist, and chief editorial writer of the *New York Evening Journal* and other Hearst newspapers. Brisbane was the son of Albert Brisbane (1809-1890), a follower of Charles Fourier, and a major social philosopher of nineteenth-century America.
25. The final sentence was deleted by Innis. In the margin he made the following note: "Mrs. Hoy: P.S. You will have to omit this but will finish it up when I get the other copy back from N.Y."
26. W. T. Easterbrook to Joseph Willits, 19 August, 1949. RF. Record Group 1.2, Series 427S. Box 16 Folder 158.
27. As Ian Parker explains, the project resulted in a book-length manuscript, entitled "Climate of Enterprise: The Study of Entrepreneurship and Bureaucracy in Economic History" that was "never put in shape for publication in spite of Innis's advice" (Easterbrook, 1985, p. xviii).

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