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978-0-521-17164-9 - Why Things Matter to People: Social Science, Values and Ethical Life

Andrew Sayer

Frontmatter

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## *Why Things Matter to People*

Andrew Sayer undertakes a fundamental critique of social science's difficulties in acknowledging that people's relation to the world is one of concern. As sentient beings, capable of flourishing and suffering, and particularly vulnerable to how others treat us, our view of the world is substantially evaluative. Yet modernist ways of thinking encourage the common but extraordinary belief that values are beyond reason, and merely subjective or matters of convention, with little or nothing to do with the kind of beings people are, the quality of their social relations, their material circumstances, or well-being. The author shows how social theory and philosophy need to change to reflect the complexity of everyday ethical concerns and the importance people attach to dignity. He argues for a robustly critical social science that explains and evaluates social life from the standpoint of human flourishing.

ANDREW SAYER is Professor of Social Theory and Political Economy in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University. His most recent publications include *The Moral Significance of Class* (2005) and *Realism and Social Science* (2000).

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Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.

(George Eliot, *Middlemarch*)

We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched.

(Wittgenstein, 1922, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*)

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[More information](#)

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page viii
1 Introduction: a relation to the world of concern	1
2 Values within reason	23
3 Reason beyond rationality: values and practical reason	59
4 Beings for whom things matter	98
5 Understanding the ethical dimension of life	143
6 Dignity	189
7 Critical social science and its rationales	216
8 Implications for social science	246
<i>Appendix: Comments on philosophical theories of ethics</i>	253
<i>References</i>	264
<i>Index</i>	279

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[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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ix

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