Values and Value Judgments: New Perspectives

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We human beings are incorrigible valuers. Value judgments are ubiquitous in our daydreams and nightmares, in our discourse and thoughts. Unfortunately, however, we disagree about these judgments. Moreover, we have a strong propensity to form deep-seated beliefs about whether (some or all) value-judgments are subjective or, on the contrary, objective. This is a very troubling situation in so far as considerations pertaining to the value of things have implications for morals, aesthetics, economics, justice, and politics and, yet more generally are part and parcel of our interactions with others and with the world. It is not surprising, then, that philosophers persist in their efforts to gain a better understanding of the nature of our evaluative judgments, the sorts of reasons we can adduce in their favor as well as the conditions under which such judgments may be regarded as correct.

The idea that these issues cannot be investigated independently of an examination of our sensibilities, subjective responses, and emotions is hardly new. Nevertheless, contemporary discussions place a particular emphasis, perhaps more than ever before, on their uttermost importance for our evaluative practices and their multifarious relations with value judgments. One of our main tasks, in this connection, consists in clarifying the precise nature of these relations, and it would be by no means an exaggeration to say that the explanations that have been proposed so far are highly varied. For this reason, although the principal aim of this special issue is to contribute to research in this area, one of its main secondary aims is to display the diversity of topics related to values and approaches to evaluation.

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The main fields in which these questions have been reopened recently are metaethics and philosophy of language, as well as aesthetics and epistemology. It is fair to say, however, that discussions and debates within these different areas of research remain by and large isolated from one another. Another important goal of this volume, then, is to bring together different research traditions on values so as to allow them to enrich one another, but also to determine the extent to which they should be kept apart. Since significant progress often results from transferring analytical tools from one domain to another, we believe that such an approach is not only fruitful, but also necessary, if we are to integrate the various aspects of values and value judgments.

This special issue is structured as follows. The first three papers concern the relationship between emotions, values, and value judgments. The two papers that follow start from the observation that some divergences in our values and moral judgments seem impossible to overcome. This raises the question of whether a contextualist or relativist semantics should be adopted to make sense of these judgments. What characterizes the sixth and the seventh papers is a shared interest in the philosophy of taste. Their purpose is to explain how judgments of taste bear similarities to moral judgments or judgments that are only applicable to human beings. The final paper testifies to a renewed interest in the value of knowledge and the nature and role of epistemic values.

1. The Intricate Epistemology and Ontology of Values

Ever since John Mackie (1977) argued that value properties are queer, the ontology of values has been the locus of heated debates, and there have been continual efforts to naturalize these values by making them more amenable to a naturalistic framework or, at the very least, to steer away from the queerness Mackie emphasized. An attractive strategy has been to understand values as the object of rational desires, or more generally, of fitting attitudes. The fitting attitude analysis (FAA) of value claims that an object has a certain value if and only if there is an attitude toward this object that is appropriate or fitting. In this volume, Christine Tappolet and Stéphane Lemaire discuss such accounts of values. More narrowly, they are concerned with the analysis of emotional evaluative predicates such as admirable, despicable, fearsome, disgusting, amusing, etc. The two disagree, however, on how to solve the major challenge that fitting attitude analyses face, which targets the notion of 'fittingness' that appears in the *analysans*. One major trend in recent research has been to present fittingness as an epistemic notion. The idea, then, is that an emotion fits an object if it is correct. Christine Tappolet defends a form of this view, arguing that emotions represent values. Accordingly, she argues that the epistemic notion underlying fittingness should not be understood as normative, but instead as a descriptive notion akin to truth.

An important feature of this approach to fittingness is that it implies that FAA is not reductionist. If emotions are fitting in so far as they correctly represent values, we have made no progress in understanding the nature of values. In

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contrast, an analysis which claims that an object has a value if and only if there is a reason to have a certain attitude toward this object is reductive. The obvious gain of such a reduction is that it dispels the air of mystery that surrounds values and their ability to produce reasons. Indeed, there is no need further to explain how values provide reasons if they *are* reasons. On Tappolet's view, however, such a reduction would conflict with the idea that reasons are grounded in values, rather than identical to them. Moreover, she claims that her view better fits the epistemological role of evaluative concepts, which is to give access to values, not to describe their nature.

Stéphane Lemaire holds the opposite view, arguing instead that the epistemic approach is misguided and that it would be preferable to adopt a practical approach to the FAA of emotional concepts. His concerns centre on whether the epistemic approach is even capable of justifying the claim that at least some emotions are fitting responses to objects for all agents. Lemaire argues that the epistemic approach does not have what it takes to overcome our divergent and unbiased responses. Moreover, it would appear that the epistemic approach turns facts about our dispositions into norms about what our emotional responses ought to be. In order to avoid these difficulties, Lemaire argues that if emotions are fitting, this must be for prudential or moral reasons. Accordingly, he proposes a practical approach to FAA. However, he points out that this practical approach is revisionist in so far as predicates such as admirable, fearsome, and shameful no longer represent final values, but point either to instrumental value or deontic concepts indicating what is generally but defeasibly advisable.

As we have seen, a central issue underlying the above-mentioned debate is whether emotions represent values. One very strong thesis, in this connection, is that emotions are perceptions of values. If this were true, then the epistemic approach to FAA might receive supplementary support. Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni, however, are of the opinion that that such a view should be taken with a grain of salt. They emphasize the following disanalogy: whereas the justification of sensory perceptual judgments reaches rock bottom when reference is made to a perceptual experience that there is no good reason to distrust, justified evaluative judgments require more than the occurrence of the corresponding emotion. To wit: It is not sufficient and perhaps not even relevant to appeal to our admiration of an object in order to justify the judgment that this object is admirable. In response to this concern, Deonna and Teroni argue that only justified emotions justify the corresponding evaluative judgments. They then proceed to offer an account of justified emotions. In short, their claim is that an emotion is justified if and only if the subject is made aware, via the belief or perception that triggers this emotion, of properties that constitute an exemplification of the evaluative property constitutive of the correctness conditions of this emotion type. One of the major advantages of this response is that when we point to the features of an object, we can argue that these features provide reasons that justify the evaluative judgment while also explaining

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why we are legitimate in deriving an emotional evaluative judgment from a justified emotion.

2. Semantics and Disagreements

As we have seen above, the debate surrounding the FAA of value and the idea that emotions are perceptions of value is not completely unrelated to questions about the objectivity of values. Moreover, the plausibility of objectivism also depends on the feasibility of devising a coherent relativism and thus also a coherent relativistic semantics that would make sense of our disagreements about taste, values, and moral judgments. The first stage of the debate, however, has shown that the simplest indexicalist versions of relativism about values and morality are unable to make sense of disagreements. If "It is wrong to kill" involves a hidden indexical implying that the proposition expressed actually stands for something like "It is wrong to kill for me" or "It is wrong to kill in my community," then people who appear to disagree in fact do not, or the dispute turns out to be about the norms of a community, in which case it seems that we have lost track of the real topic of disagreement. We therefore need to understand how relativism is conceivable when our ways of expressing our views about values and morality clearly presuppose the possibility of disagreement. In order to account for this possibility, it has been suggested (Kölbel 2003; Lasersohn 2005) that faultless disagreements can be accounted for within the framework of a relativist semantics in which emotional values, for instance, are one-place predicates, but in which sentences are evaluated for their truth value with respect to a 'judge' parameter. Isidora Stojanovic advances arguments against this approach, and both she and Pascal Ludwig propose alternative strategies to provide a plausible account of relativism that is consistent with the phenomenology of moral disagreement.

Ludwig suggests a different approach that does not rely on semantics. In his view, the relativity of moral judgments it not "encoded in linguistic conventions." As an analogy, someone may say "It is five o'clock" without knowing that time is relative to location. Similarly, one may say that "it is wrong to kill to defend one's honor" using a monadic concept of wrongness, although states of affairs are wrong only in relation to communities. In such cases, the propositions are relative, not by virtue of the relativity of the expressions they use, but by virtue of the properties that are denoted by these expressions. An obvious benefit of this strategy is that it allows for disagreements that are genuinely about a same proposition with absolute truth conditions. However, a deeper description of the property in question shows that its truth conditions are in fact relative. It is thus possible to develop a sensible interpretation of the claims of two disagreeing parties that makes it possible to understand them as making claims that are not in fact incompatible, even though the disagreeing parties may not realize this themselves. Accordingly, their disagreement should finally dissipate. To this extent, it is not entirely genuine.

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In contrast, Stojanovic retains the semantic approach and, more precisely, remains committed to the contextualist approach. Her leading hypothesis is that the lexical meanings of value terms—she focuses on emotional values—involve a hidden argument that is under-specified. One of the interesting implications of the under-specification hypothesis is that a disagreement may turn on what ought to be considered valuable. In such a case, the dispute is really a kind of practical disagreement, that is, a disagreement on how to best shape or extend a certain evaluative concept that is still under construction. This is not to say that the question as to how the concept ought to be shaped will remain open forever. If an answer emerges, then one of the parties will appear retrospectively mistaken. In the meantime, however, the disagreement is faultless.

3. The Diversity of Values

The papers from Barry Smith and Cain Todd both take as their starting point problems in the philosophy of taste. In spite of a certain tradition that claims that *de gustibus non disputandum est*, Smith argues that an objective conception of taste judgments remains defensible if we look more closely at our experiences of taste and our ability to distinguish what composes the taste of a wine, for example. He argues that taste can be perceived, because we can overcome the divergences in our experiences through a shared conception of the conditions under which an experience can be trusted. He then argues, in line with Tappolet, Deonna, and Teroni, that one can make a similar point in favor of objectivism with regard to value and moral perception. In particular, our disagreements about what should be done in a given situation rely heavily on our appreciation of the mental states of others, which in turn depends on our ability to experience empathy with those involved in a given situation. Thus, it may be argued again that on the basis of a shared degree of empathy, our moral appreciation could converge.

Todd also tackles… human beings, but he does so from a different standpoint. He wonders whether we can make sense of sentences that attribute expressive properties to inanimate objects when it initially seems that they have no such properties. For instance, how should we interpret sentences such as "the second movement of this quartet is sad," "This wine is fresh and joyful," or "the mountain is peaceful." After discussing several attempts to deal with this problem, Todd argues in favor of a solution initially presented by Paul Noordhof to the effect that expressive properties are those that have accompanied the process of creation (real or imaginary) that gave rise to the object to which we attribute such expressive properties. Interestingly, since the role of imagination is not constrained, it follows that divergent judgments about the expressive properties of objects are equally legitimate.

Finally, Julien Dutant's paper focuses on the value of knowledge. In the *Meno*, Plato argues that knowing something is better than merely having a true belief about it. The benefits of knowledge, however, seem to be the benefits

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gained from believing the truth. But if this is correct, then the *Meno*'s thesis is wrong: There seems to be no gain in having a justified true belief over a true belief. There have been several strategies to salvage the *Meno*'s thesis. One attractive solution relies on an externalist view of knowledge: Since knowledge is the result of reliable dispositions to acquire true beliefs, the possession of these reliable dispositions enhance the probability of having more true beliefs in the future. However, Dutant emphasizes that this higher expected value of knowledge is only probable. It does not add value to knowledge under any circumstance and, as a consequence, it does not warrant the *Meno*'s thesis as a universal claim about knowledge. Moreover, expected value is not value. Arguing that other strategies to salvage the *Meno*'s thesis are similarly defective, Dutant contends that knowledge in and of itself has no more value than true belief. This is not to deny, however, that we ought to prefer knowledge to true belief, since knowledge does have higher expected value in general.

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