

Emotional Reactions and Ascriptions of Value

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§1 The Puzzle:

Two Background Assumptions:

1. Questions and judgments of value play an important role in the critical scrutiny of commitments and other conative attitudes
2. The canonical method for identifying basic value is roughly as follows: Get clear on what an object is like and see whether one emotionally and motivationally responds to it so as to give one at least a vicarious experience of valuing it for its own sake, when valuing is construed as a first-order conative attitude that grounds stable, across time and circumstances, motivational and emotional dispositions as well as deliberative and some other cognitive dispositions, such as the disposition to pay attention to that object and to things the agent believes to be related to it.

A Puzzle for a Theory of the Concept of Value:

How could it possibly make sense that we both appeal to value in the critical scrutiny of our conative attitudes and rely on the kind of emotional and motivational responses that these attitudes ground for ascertaining what has value?

A Two-Pronged Adequacy Condition on Theories of the Concept of Value:

- it has to jibe with the role that the concept of value plays in framing questions and judgments that initiate and drive critical scrutiny of conative attitudes, and
- jibe with the fact that the canonical method for identifying basic value is to get clear on what the object is like and see whether one emotionally and motivationally responds to it so as to give one at least a vicarious experience of valuing it for its own sake.

Applying the Condition to a Dispositional Theory of the Concept of Value of the Following Form:

The concept $\langle x \text{ has value} \rangle =$ the concept $\langle x \text{ evokes a subjective response } R \text{ under } C \rangle$, when

- R is the kind of motivational or emotional response that figures into the canonical method for identifying value
- C is the condition under which what x is like is as clear as is feasible to the subject of R given her epistemic situation with respect to x .

My Project: A study of how the dispositional theory of value meets the two-pronged adequacy condition. It does so surprisingly well, and there is a general lesson to be drawn from that.

§2 Application of the Second Prong of the Adequacy Condition to the Dispositional Theory of Value:

- Meets the condition
- Is designed to do so
- Yet, comes at a cost

The Cost:

- The peculiar implication
- David Lewis's defense: "In investigating values..., we ignore any alleged possibility that values differ from what we're disposed to value. The dispositional theory explains nicely why we ignore it: no such possibility exists."
- My first challenge: concerned about having one's surroundings super clean and neat, yet doubtful that it is of great value
- A clarification of Lewis's project: an *informative* analysis
- A clarification of my challenge: a challenge to a datum that Lewis claims that his informative analysis explains
- An anticipated response from Lewis: "...counterexamples are not *obviously* impossible. That is not yet much evidence of possibility. Better evidence would be a detailed story of just how it might happen that something—something specific—is after all a value that we are not disposed to value, or a non-value that we are disposed to value. But I have no idea how to flesh out the story. Without 'corroborative detail', insistence that there exist such possibilities is 'bald and unconvincing'. This time, nothing outweighs the niceness of explaining the ignoring by denying the possibilities allegedly ignored."
- The contrast with the concept of a mental state
- My second challenge: the theological 'corroborative detail'
- My conclusion: Lewis has not successfully defended the dispositional theory as an *informative* analysis of our ordinary concept of value.
- A possibility: bear the cost and defend the dispositional theory as a conceptual reform proposal.

§3 Application of the First Prong of the Adequacy Condition to the Dispositional Theory of Value:

- The "So What?" objection to the dispositional theory of value
- Does it show that the dispositional theory fails the first prong?
- A second look at the critical scrutiny of commitments in light of the value of their intentional objects
- Assuming the dispositional theory of value, can justice be done to such a critical scrutiny of commitments?
- Two ways of understanding such a critical scrutiny of one's commitments and other attitudes.
- *The first understanding*: The point of raising the question of value is simply to get the correct answer to it. If an oracle entered onto the scene and gave the correct answer to the question, so much the better. It would spare one the trouble of undertaking the inquiry.
- *The second understanding*: The point of raising the question of value is to go through *a certain kind of thought and emotional exercise* rather than to learn a certain fact about one's disposition to value or empathize with those who value. An oracle who entered onto the scene and gave the correct answer would be no more welcome than the oracle who reveals the name of the killer when one is on the first page of a thriller and wonders aloud who committed the crime.
- A suggestion: Proponents of the dispositional theory should offer the second understanding
- A reason for opting for the dispositional theory as a conceptual reform proposal

§4 The Lesson