

Forthcoming in Tobias Brosch, David Sander et al., (dir.), *The Handbook of Value: The Affective Sciences of Values and Valuation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

## **What is value? Where does it come from? A philosophical perspective**

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### *Abstract*

Are values objective or subjective? To clarify this question we start with an overview of the main concepts and debates in the philosophy of values. We then discuss the arguments for and against *value realism*, the thesis that there are objective evaluative facts. By contrast with *value anti-realism*, which is generally associated with sentimentalism, according to which evaluative judgements are grounded in sentiments, value realism is commonly coupled with rationalism. Against this common view, we argue that value realism can be combined with sentimentalism, and we suggest that a plausible account, which we call ‘sentimental realism’, and according to which evaluative judgements are closely related to emotions, can be developed.

### *Keywords*

anti-realism, cognitivism, constructivism, emotion, motivation, objectivity, rationalism, realism, sentimentalism, subjectivity

### *Introduction*

A philosopher loves a distinction as much as any other theorist. When asked what value is, philosophers are likely to point out that this question splits into several distinct ones depending on what is considered. In common parlance, talk of values is often about what is deemed good, such as when we say that knowledge or justice are values, which ought to be promoted. Talk about values is also often talk about ideals that guide one’s actions, such as when we maintain that democracy and autonomy are western values, or when we speak of reliability and integrity as someone’s personal values. Ideals, things that are considered to be good and, more generally, substantive claims about values, are important topics in philosophy and ethics, but they are far from the only ones. The prime focus in the philosophy of values is on more abstract questions. Philosophers commonly distinguish between evaluative concepts, evaluative judgements, evaluative sentences, and evaluative facts. These are the items at the heart of philosophical debates about values. For each of these, there is room for asking what it is, and there are no grounds for expecting that the answers to the question about their nature should be exactly the same. This simply follows from the fact that concepts, judgements, sentences and facts are very different kinds of things, so that even if the questions they raise are connected, they cannot but be distinct.

Suppose we agree that pain is bad. Is there an objective fact of the matter as to whether this is so or is the badness of pain a purely subjective matter? This question, which concerns the nature of evaluative facts, is the topic of this chapter. As will become apparent, however, there are important connections between this question and the issues concerning evaluative concepts, evaluative judgements and evaluative sentences. We will proceed as follows. Our main aim is to present the arguments for and against the claim that there are objective evaluative facts (section 3). In the last section (section 4), we will sketch what seems a promising account, according to which evaluative facts are fully objective, and yet closely tied to subjective responses. Put in a nutshell, the suggestion is

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that evaluative concepts are response-dependent, although they aim at picking out an objective evaluative reality. Before we launch into the arguments, we will start with a bit of groundwork. We will begin with a sketch of the different questions that are raised by the several items that need to be distinguished within the domain of values (section 1). On the basis of these distinctions, we will then present the main debates in the philosophy of values (section 2). These two sections will allow us to introduce the fundamental concepts in the philosophy of values. They will also help clarify what is at stake in the controversy about the nature of evaluative facts.<sup>1</sup>

### 1) *The many questions*

To begin with, consider evaluative concepts, such as the concepts of the good, the desirable, the admirable, the courageous, the generous and the kind, on the positive side, and the concepts of the bad, the shameful, the despicable, the disgusting, the coward and the malevolent, on the negative side. Quite generally, concepts, and the propositions they form, are what we have in mind when we think; they constitute the contents of our thoughts. Concepts are often considered the main objects of interest for philosophers. Thus, many philosophers use thought experiments and other similar tools with the aim of establishing conceptual (or analytical) truths regarding our concepts.

A number of questions are raised by evaluative concepts and their relation to other concepts. What are concepts such as *good*, *desirable*, and *admirable*? How do they differ from other kinds of concepts, such as colour or shape concepts? What is required to possess evaluative concepts? And how are they related to other kinds of concepts? A question that has been central in philosophical discussions is that of the relation between evaluative concepts and natural concepts. Natural concepts can be defined as the ones in which natural sciences, as well as – on a liberal conception of natural concepts – social and human sciences, including psychology, are couched (Moore 1903, p. 92; Smith 1994, p. 17). Insofar as concepts such as *approbation*, *desire* or *admiration* are considered to be natural concepts, the question of how to conceive of the relation between evaluative concepts and emotion concepts is a question that raises the broad question of *naturalism*, that is, the question of how values fit into the natural world. As many have noted, there seems to be a tight connection between evaluative concepts and concepts picking out affective states (Mulligan 1989). It seems difficult to deny that *admirable* and *shameful*, for instance, must be closely related to the concepts of admiration and shame, respectively. After all, there is no doubt that the terms used to pick out the evaluative concepts are lexically connected to terms referring to emotions. The question of how to conceive the exact relation between evaluative concepts and emotion concepts has thus been one of the foremost questions in the philosophy of values. It is noteworthy that these questions regarding evaluative concepts are analogous to, but distinct from, questions

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<sup>1</sup> Our focus will be on the nature of evaluative facts, rather than on their origin. Two reasons explain our choice. First, in order to ask where something comes from, it is important to know what that thing is. Put differently, the question of the origin depends on the question of the nature of the thing under consideration. Second, depending on the account of what something is, the question of the origin can turn out to be irrelevant. For instance, even if one might ask what the origin of our concept of shape is, it seems irrelevant to ask where shapes come from. On most accounts, shapes are there in the world, instantiated by ordinary objects; they do not go anywhere and they do not come from anywhere in any philosophically interesting sense.

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about the relation between evaluative properties and affective states, to which we will turn shortly.<sup>2</sup>

A distinct but related set of questions concern judgements like the judgements that knowledge is good, that Sarah is admirable, or that cheating is shameful.<sup>3</sup> Such judgements clearly mobilize evaluative concepts. While concepts specify the content of judgements or, more generally, the content of thoughts, judgements are usually considered to be mental acts. Evaluative judgements raise the following questions. What is the nature of such judgements and do they differ from other types of judgements? Can evaluative judgements be assessed in terms of truth? More generally, can they be considered to be cognitive, in the sense that they are on a par with judgements regarding matters of fact? How do they relate to other psychological entities, such as other types of judgements, as well as emotions, moods, desires, intentions, and decisions? In particular, a question that has been central in philosophical debates is whether it is true that evaluative judgements have a tight relation to motivation and action. If this is the case, what relation is it, exactly?<sup>4</sup> As we will explain, this question is important because many have argued that the close relation between evaluative judgements and motivation sets them apart from other sorts of judgements.

Similar questions arise about evaluative language, that is, evaluative words and the sentences they compose. Since the way we use evaluative language is easily observable – in particular, it is easier to observe than concepts and mental acts – the study of evaluative sentences and words has often been considered the best way to make progress in the philosophy of values. The central question regarding evaluative language is that of the meaning, or more generally, the function of terms such as ‘good’, ‘admirable’ and ‘shameful’, and more generally of sentences involving such terms, like ‘knowledge is good’, ‘she is admirable’, or ‘what you did is shameful’. How does the function of evaluative sentences compare to the function of sentences such as ‘this is red’ and ‘this is triangular’, which appear to aim at describing how things are, and which can be assessed in terms of truth? If evaluative sentences do not aim at describing things and are not genuinely truth-assessable, for what other purposes do we use them? Do we aim at expressing positive and negative emotions, such as when we use interjections like ‘hurrah’ or ‘boo’? Or do we recommend or even prescribe courses of actions, such as when we use imperatives? On both these accounts, one would have a ready explanation of why the sincere assertion of evaluative sentences is closely connected to motivation.

Finally, philosophers have also been interested in the nature of what could make evaluative sentences true, on the assumption that such sentences can be true. In consequence, philosophers have been questioning the nature of evaluative properties, such as the property of being good or that of being admirable, and the corresponding evaluative facts. The debate about naturalism, which we mentioned above, is one that mainly concerns evaluative properties and facts. Hence, an important question in the philosophy of values is whether one can make room for such items in the natural world, and if this is not the case, whether it is a problem to postulate non-natural entities. However, the question that has worried philosophers most is whether there are objective

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<sup>2</sup> See Deonna and Teroni, this volume, for a discussion of the relation between evaluative properties and emotions.

<sup>3</sup> These are what psychologists call ‘valuations’.

<sup>4</sup> See Phelps and Sokol-Hessner, this volume, and Maio et al., this volume, for this question.

evaluative properties which, when instantiated by things, would constitute genuinely objective evaluative facts, i.e. facts that are part of the fabric of the world. On the face of it, it might well seem that talk of evaluative properties and facts is entirely wrongheaded. Values, it is often believed, are in our head, not in the world.

Philosophers are not likely to rest content with these distinctions. They will underline that questions regarding value split even further because, even if one keeps to one of the above-mentioned categories, other distinctions still need to be made. For the sake of simplicity, let us illustrate this with respect to evaluative concepts. A common distinction is that between the most general evaluative concepts, that is, *good* and *bad*, and what appear to be more specific evaluative concepts, such as *admirable*, *shameful*, *courageous* or *cruel*. As we noted, the lexical connection between terms used to pick out concepts such as *admirable* and *shameful* and emotions terms, ‘admiration’ and ‘shame’ in this instance, suggests that some of the more specific concepts have a tight relation to affective states. This is less clear of other specific concepts, such as *courageous* and *cruel*, which are considered to be paradigm cases of what philosophers, after Bernard Williams (1985, pp. 128-130), call ‘thick concepts’. By contrast with *thin concepts*, such as *good*, which are taken to be purely evaluative or normative, *thick concepts* are thought to involve both an evaluative and a descriptive or natural aspect. For example, the concept *courageous* is such that when we apply it (say) to an action, we not only evaluate the action positively, but we also attribute some specific natural properties, such as being performed in the face of risk.<sup>5</sup> The question of the relation between thin and thick concepts is debated, but most agree that at least ordinarily, if something falls under a thick concept, then it also fall under a thin concept of the same valence. For example, what is considered courageous or generous, is ordinarily considered good. Given these distinctions among evaluative concepts and the corresponding distinctions among different types of evaluative judgements, sentences and facts, if there are such things as evaluative facts, the different questions we have spelt out divide even further. And again, one should be alert to the possibility that the answers might differ, depending on exactly what is considered.

But what is value, one might insist? Is there nothing general that can be said to demarcate what could be called the ‘domain of values’? To put the question differently, what do evaluative concepts, evaluative judgements, evaluative sentences and evaluative facts have in common? There seems to be no way to shed light on what the evaluative is without presupposing some familiarity with it. What can be said, for instance, is that evaluative concepts are used to assess the worth of things, or that evaluative judgements express such assessments. But of course, to assess the worth of things is nothing but to evaluate things. What can be done, additionally, is to specify the relations between evaluative concepts and other kinds of concepts, such as emotion concepts. However, it is far from clear that by doing so, it is possible to spell out a definition of the evaluative that does not presuppose a prior grasp of that category. Not only is the exact relation between evaluative concepts and other types of concepts extremely controversial, but the most promising attempts to draw the relation between evaluative concepts and other types of concepts are openly circular. For instance, it seems a truism that something is good if and only if it makes some positive reaction appropriate, or that it is such as to give reason to

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<sup>5</sup> For further distinctions among thin concepts, such as intrinsic vs. extrinsic values, see Ronnow-Rasmussen and Rabinowicz, this volume.

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have a positive reaction towards it. However, it is notoriously difficult to say what it is to make a positive reaction appropriate without invoking the concept of the good. And the same appears true of the idea of reason to have a positive reaction. How could one explain what it is to give reason to have a positive reaction without making use of the notion of goodness? Given this, it appears that, by contrast to what is sometimes proposed, accounts of this kind cannot aim at reducing evaluative concepts to different kinds of concepts. The best way to understand such accounts is rather to see them as shedding light on evaluative concepts by spelling out the relations between evaluative concepts and other kinds of concepts. Put differently, what such accounts propose, on this interpretation, are not reductions of any sorts, but conceptual elucidations.<sup>6</sup>

On a more positive note, what can be done to further our understanding of the domain of values is to contrast this domain with other domains. A point that is generally acknowledged is that the evaluative is part of the *normative*, where the normative is understood as concerning what we *ought* to do, in contrast with what *is* the case (see Dancy 2000, *inter alia*). Moral claims regarding what we morally ought to do, but also claims about what an agent should do all things considered, are paradigmatic example of normative claims. In so far as the evaluative is taken to be part of the normative, it thus falls on the *ought* side of the divide between the *is* and the *ought*. The evaluative is often taken to constitute a particular class within the normative. Thus, philosophers usually distinguish the evaluative from the deontic (from the Greek *deon*, what is binding), a category to which concepts such as *obligatory*, *permitted*, and *forbidden* belong. An important question is how the evaluative is related to the deontic, and more generally, what unifies the normative domain. To put it differently, how do judgements about what is good or bad relate to judgements about what we ought to do? Most would agree that what we ought to do depends on what is good or bad, in the sense that we ought to do what is best, but there are deep disagreements as to how to interpret this intuitive idea, on the assumption that *is* has to be taken at face value. Indeed, one can understand the debates in normative ethics, which concern what agents ought to do, and which oppose consequentialists, deontologists, and virtue ethicists, as turning around this very question. Finally, let us mention another set of distinctions that is important within the normative domain. These are the broad categories of the moral, the prudential, the epistemic, and the aesthetic, to name but the most important ones.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, these broad distinctions cut across the deontic-evaluative distinction. Think for instance of the obligation not to harm an innocent person, on the deontic side, and of the shamefulness that is involved in cheating, on the evaluative side. Both this obligation and this evaluative property clearly fall within the moral.

With these distinctions in hand, let us turn to the main debates in the philosophy of values.

## 2) *The main debates*

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<sup>6</sup> That said, it must be noticed that the claim that evaluative concepts can be fully reduced to other kinds of normative concepts has its advocates. It is typically defended by those who adhere to a reductivist interpretation of the so-called fitting-attitude analysis of value (see, for instance, Danielsson, S. and Olson, J. (2007)).

<sup>7</sup> See Section B of this volume for discussions of different kinds of values.

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The most fundamental questions about the evaluative are divided into four fields, which importantly overlap with the distinctions within the evaluative domain sketched in the previous section. These are the *ontological questions*, which concern the nature of evaluative facts, the *semantic questions* regarding evaluative sentences, the *epistemological questions*, which focus on whether or not there can be knowledge in the evaluative domain, and finally what could be called, in analogy with the term ‘moral psychology’, the questions regarding *evaluative psychology*, such as that of the relation between evaluative judgements and motivation.<sup>8</sup> Hotly debated controversies mark each of these fields.

The central question concerning the ontology of the evaluative is whether evaluative facts and the properties that constitute them are objective, in the sense that they exist independently of what we think and feel. Put differently, objective facts are not constituted by our thoughts or by our feelings, unless of course what is evaluated is something psychological. There are three main answers to this question in the literature. According to the first one, which characterises what we will call *value realism*, evaluative properties, or ‘values’ for short, are objective, and so of course are evaluative facts. Values are part of the fabric of the world as much as shapes or protons are. Value realists split into different sub-groups, for they disagree among themselves concerning the relation between values and natural properties. According to some, values are reducible to natural properties (Railton 1986). Another possibility is to maintain that, while values are natural, since evaluative theories – or more generally normative theories – are on a par with natural sciences, values are nonetheless not reducible to any other natural properties. The claim is that the methods used in normative theorizing are not essentially different from the ones used in physics or biology, for instance, so that the entities postulated by both normative theories and natural sciences have to be considered to be of the same kind, though not reducible to one another (see Boyd 1988; Brink 1989; Sturgeon 1984). Even if they disagree about the reasons why values have to be considered natural, and about the way in which they are natural, both kinds of realist subscribe to *naturalism*. Naturalism is not accepted by all realists, however. Thus, non-naturalist realists argue that values are *sui generis* properties that are distinct from natural properties (Moore 1903; Shafer-Landau 2003; Oddie 2009). As we mentioned in the previous section, the question that non-naturalist realists have to address is whether one can make sense of the idea of properties that are non-natural. If one defines the natural as what is postulated by natural and social sciences, this question amounts to whether there can exist things in the world that are not postulated by natural and social sciences.

All these different versions of value realism can be contrasted with *value anti-realism*, a stance that is characterised by the rejection of the thesis that there are objective values. There is again a variety of options for anti-realists. A prominent anti-realist view, sometimes called *simple subjectivism*, is that values are relative to how people feel. Thomas Hobbes thus writes: ‘But whatsoever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire; that is it which he for his part calleth *good*: and the object of this hate, and aversion, *evil*; and of his contempt, *vile* and *inconsiderable*. For these words of good, evil, and contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves.’ (1651, Chapter VI; see also Westermack

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<sup>8</sup> These are the divisions which characterise metaethics. See for instance Shafer-Landau 2003.

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1906; Prinz 2007). According to simple subjectivism, being good is nothing but to be approved by someone, whether approbation is considered to be a specific emotion or a disposition to undergo a number of positive emotions. Such an account entails *relativism* about values, for what you approve might well be different for what someone else approves. Moreover, nothing would be good as such, for goodness would depend on whether or not people have the reaction of approbation or not. There are other ways to spell out anti-realist accounts, for instance by appealing to the reactions or conventions of specific social groups. Thus, one could claim that to be good depends on what a specific social group agrees upon. Again, this claim entails relativism about values, since different groups might agree on different conventions.

By contrast with what one might expect, realism and anti-realism are not the only options. There is a third main approach in evaluative ontology, *value constructivism*, which rejects both realism and anti-realism. Constructivists claim that both adversaries in this debate falsely assume that objectivity and subjectivity are incompatible. What constructivism holds is that evaluative facts, or at least evaluative truths, are constructs that are both objective, in the sense of being at least to a certain extent independent of human thought and feelings, and subjective, in the sense of being constituted by human activity. Again, there are different ways to spell out this idea. One possibility is to claim that being good is being approved by ideal observers, which are fully knowledgeable and impartial (Firth 1952; Brandt 1954). Another possibility is to argue that to be good is to be what would be approved after an idealized process of deliberation. Such a constructivist account, which many traces back to Immanuel Kant, has been mainly developed in the moral domain (Rawls 1980; Korsgaard 1996). Remarkably, David Hume, a philosopher whose approach could not be more opposed to that of Kant, has also been seen as an early advocate of a Humean kind of constructivism, which has been contrasted with Kantian constructivism (Street 2010). The main difference between the two kinds of constructivism concerns the relativity of normative claims, the Kantian constructivist advocating the universality of moral claims, while the Humean constructivist accepts that moral claims are relative to the specific standpoints of particular agents.

Value realism is commonly paired with specific stances in semantic, epistemology, and evaluative psychology. These are a) *cognitivism* about evaluative sentences, b) *rationalism* regarding evaluative knowledge, and c) *externalism* with respect to the relation between evaluative judgements and motivation. According to cognitivism, evaluative sentences have the same function as sentences about natural facts. Thus, when we say that cheating is shameful, for instance, we aim at saying something true, just as when we say that the cat is on the mat. Cognitivism thus holds that evaluative sentences aim at describing facts and are truth-assessable. Even though cognitivism fits well with how evaluative sentences appear to be used, *non-cognitivism* has had (and still has) a great many advocates. The main non-cognitivist account about evaluative sentences, *expressivism*, holds that the function of evaluative sentences is to express positive and negative emotions or, alternatively, attitudes such as desires and aversions (Ayer 1936; Stevenson 1937; Blackburn 1984; Gibbard 1990). In the former case, evaluative sentences would be of the same kind as ‘boo’ or ‘hurrah’, two interjections we use to express our positive and negative feelings, respectively. By contrast with a sentence that attributes feelings to persons, such as ‘you disapprove of cheating’, such

interjections and, more generally, expressions of feelings do not aim at describing states of affairs, and they fail to be truth-assessable. Another possibility is to opt for *prescriptivism*, a thesis that usually concerns moral sentences, and according to which the function of such sentences is to express imperatives or prescriptions (Hare 1952). On this suggestion, the sentence ‘cheating is bad’, for instance, would have the same function as the imperative ‘do not cheat!’, so that it could not be considered to have genuine truth-conditions. This is why both expressivism and prescriptivism are considered to be non-cognitive accounts of evaluative language.

It should be underlined here that the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism is often pitched at the psychological rather than the semantic level. Cognitivism about evaluative judgements is the claim that such judgements, like the corresponding sentences, are genuinely truth-assessable, a claim that is denied by non-cognitivism about evaluative judgements. This contrast is sometimes expressed in terms of cognitive states, such as, paradigmatically, beliefs. Accordingly, cognitivism about evaluative judgements amounts to the thesis that such judgements are on a par with beliefs, while non-cognitivism denies this and stresses the analogies with motivational states, such as, paradigmatically, desires.

Let us get back to value realism. In general, value realists tend to reject *skepticism*; they are in fact optimistic about the prospect of evaluative knowledge. Most often, realists have been and are still tempted to argue that knowledge about evaluative facts is obtained by the exercise of reason, thus subscribing to *rationalism* regarding the epistemology of values. According to an important strand of rationalism about evaluative knowledge, *intuitionism*, such knowledge is grounded on intuitions (Moore 1903; Audi 1997; Shafer-Landau 2003). Intuitions are often conceived as states that are immediately justified, in the sense that their justification is independent of other states. Thus, they are believed to constitute the foundation of justification and knowledge. Rationalists have other options, however. They can follow the move made by some moral realists, and argue that evaluative knowledge, or at least epistemic justification, depends not on the availability of foundational beliefs, but on the possibility of developing a coherent set of beliefs (Rawls 1971; Brink 1989; Daniels 1979). According to *coherentism* about evaluative beliefs, an evaluative belief would be justified on condition that it belongs to a fully coherent set of beliefs.

Let us make a terminological point here. Rationalism is not merely a claim regarding evaluative knowledge. Quite generally, moral (as well as evaluative) rationalism contrasts with sentimentalism. Rationalism about the evaluative can be characterised, very roughly, as the claim that evaluative judgements are grounded in reason. Kant is without doubt the foremost advocate of moral rationalism in the history of philosophy (Kant 1785, 1788). By contrast, sentimentalism about evaluative judgements not only denies that evaluative judgements are grounded in reason, but also claims that the ground of the evaluative lies in the sentiments. Thus, Hume, the most prominent moral sentimentalist, famously states that ‘morality [...] is more properly felt than judg’d of’ (*Treatise*, book III, Part I, Section III) and argues that moral distinctions are not derived by reason. Because they take sentiments and emotions to be non-cognitive states that are opposed to reason, sentimentalists most often reject value realism and doubt that there can be knowledge in the relevant domain (Nichols 2004; Prinz 2007). As we shall

argue below, however, this association between anti-realism and sentimentalism can and needs to be resisted.

What about the relation between evaluative judgements and motivation? Value realists tend to argue against *internalism*, i.e. the claim that there is an internal or necessary connection between evaluative judgements and motivation. Internalism is particularly attractive in the case of first person moral judgements of the deontic kind (Hare 1952; Smith 1994). It appears plausible that if an agent judges that she ought to perform some action, she will be motivated to do so, or at least that, if she fails to be motivated accordingly, she can be accused of some kind of rationality failure. What is often claimed is that if an agent is not motivated in accordance with her moral judgements, she manifests practical irrationality, such as weakness of will. If this were indeed true of moral judgements, such judgements would be importantly different from judgements about natural facts, which have no particular connection to motivation. This is why many moral realists have been tempted by externalism (Railton 1986; Brink 1989). Transposed to the case of evaluative judgements, the question is whether a judgement like the judgement that this action is the best, say, is one that a fully rational agent could make without having any motivation to perform the action. As we shall argue below, externalism may be more plausible in the case of evaluative judgements than in the case of judgements regarding what I ought to do.

What we have, then, are standard options that characterise realists and anti-realists. The standard realist package comprises cognitivism, rationalism and externalism, while the standard anti-realist package is constituted by non-cognitivism, sentimentalism and internalism.<sup>9</sup> There are clear affinities between these different claims, and indeed, there are also a number of logical inferences between specific claims. For instance, if there are no evaluative facts, it follows that there will be nothing we can know, so that evaluative knowledge is excluded. Nevertheless, it has to be underlined that there are many more combinations than there might seem to be at first sight. Some moral realists have for instance argued that their account is compatible with internalism (Shafer-Landau 2003). Moreover, as John Mackie (1977) has made clear in the moral case, one can well defend both anti-realism and cognitivism. According to the so-called *error theory* that Mackie advocated, moral judgements are fully cognitive, but since there are no objective moral facts, they fail to correspond to any reality (Joyce 2001; Olson 2014). Similarly, it could be argued that even if evaluative judgements have the sole function of expressing positive and negative feelings, this does not entail that there are no evaluative facts. Sadly enough, we would simply not be able to refer to such facts. Further possibilities will emerge when we discuss the arguments for and against the objectivity of evaluative facts. In particular, we shall argue that it is possible to develop an account of the evaluative that is both sentimentalist and fully realist.

### **3) *Anti-realism vs. Realism: the arguments***

There are at least three ways to defend a realist stance about values (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003). The first consists in offering some positive argument in support of value realism. The second consists in arguing that all anti-realist positions face problems so big as to be

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, moral realism and anti-realism are often defined in conjunctive terms (see, for instance, Sturgeon 1984; Sayre-McCord 1988; and Railton 1996).

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ultimately unappealing. The third consists in rejecting the objections against value realism raised by its opponents. Obviously, these strategies are far from incompatible; indeed, it is to be expected that a full defense of value realism will combine elements from the three of them. In what follows, we shall consider the main arguments pertaining to each of these strategies.

One straightforward argument in favour of value realism is based on the *phenomenology* of evaluative judgements (Brink 1989). First, when making an evaluative judgement, we seem to express some sort of cognitive state that does not appear to differ, in nature, from ordinary beliefs, such as the belief that the cat is on the mat. Second, our evaluative judgements seem to be about an objective evaluative reality, which exists independently of our own attitudes. This is evidenced by the fact that disagreement about value presents itself as genuine disagreement, one that can be positively resolved by figuring out how things really are. This contrasts with the implications of most anti-realist theories, for instance non-cognitivism, which depicts evaluative disagreement as some kind of spurious disagreement. According to the value realist, these features of our experience should be taken at face value. This means that, unless we have overwhelming reason to think otherwise, we should admit that there really are objective evaluative facts and properties, which our evaluative judgements attempt to capture. Anyone wishing to defend an anti-realist position must either provide an account that accommodates the appearances or explain such appearances away.

Another important consideration that favours value realism comes from linguistic evidence. As is widely acknowledged, evaluative predicates, such as ‘is good’ or ‘is admirable’, behave like ordinary predicates. Thus, the structure of ‘Sarah is admirable’ appears in no way different from that of ‘The ball is round’. Both types of sentences can be evaluated in terms of truth, for we can ask ‘Is it true that Sarah is admirable?’ just as we can wonder whether the ball is round. Thus, the two types of sentences appear to have cognitive contents that are genuinely truth-assessable. Since this is just what is to be expected if value realism holds, it provides us with a reason to embrace the claim that there are objective evaluative facts. Whether this consideration is conclusive depends on whether the anti-realist can satisfactorily account for these features of evaluative discourse.

The second strategy to defend value realism consists in casting doubt on rival accounts. Consider the most prominent non-cognitivist account, *expressivism*. Expressivism offers a clear account of the meaning of evaluative expressions when they appear in assertoric contexts. According to this view, the sentence ‘The cat is amusing’ expresses an attitude of amusement towards the cat. However, this cannot be the full story. In fact, the same evaluative expressions are often embedded in more complex sentences, such as conditionals, negations, and so on, where no attitude seems to be positively expressed. If so, non-cognitivism owes us an explanation of the meaning of evaluative expressions when they occur in such non-assertoric contexts. More specifically, non-cognitivism must explain how the meaning of complex evaluative sentences derives from the meaning of their parts and do this in a way that preserves and explains the semantic properties of such sentences. This task has proven to be quite difficult. Indeed, one often-rehearsed objection against non-cognitivism, the so-called *Frege-Geach problem*, is that the view is incapable of successfully explaining how arguments featuring evaluative statements can be logically valid (Geach 1960, 1965).

Consider for example the following train of thought: the cat is wet; if the cat is wet, it is funny; hence, the cat is funny. There is little doubt that this is a valid inference, in the sense that the conclusion is bound to be true if the premises are.<sup>10</sup> The problem is that it is difficult to see how this can be so if we assume, with expressivism, that the conclusion merely expresses the attitude of amusement. No attitude appears to be expressed when we utter ‘If the cat is wet, it is funny’, for in this context, ‘The cat is funny’ is not asserted. So, strictly speaking the conclusion cannot follow from the premises. Insofar as value realism is committed to cognitivism, it is immune from this problem and, consequently, appears to be a more plausible position.<sup>11</sup>

Value realists have, however, to deal with a battery of objections from the anti-realist camp. Drawing partly on Hume (1739-1741), John Mackie (1977) has provided a classic statement of several of these objections, so it may be useful to start our presentation from there. Mackie’s first argument, which is known as *the argument from disagreement*, targets value realism’s capacity to account for the phenomenon of radical and persistent evaluative disagreement. It seems evident to many that the evaluative judgements made by different individuals or groups present a large degree of variation, both historically and inter-culturally. By itself, this is no reason to conclude that value realism is false. After all, there has been, and there still is, disagreement about scientific theories. This is generally not regarded as a reason to think that there is no fact of the matter capable of adjudicating between such theories. However, the alleged disagreement about values is supposed to present a more significant problem for value realism when it is combined with the view that the evaluative and the scientific domains are relevantly disanalogous. In order to characterise this disanalogy more precisely, some point out that there exists no method for deciding cases of evaluative disagreement comparable to the method used in science to resolve cases of scientific disagreement (Ayer 1946; Sturgeon 1984, 2006). Others claim that, supposedly unlike scientific disagreement, evaluative disagreement may persist under idealised conditions. According to this line of thought, it is a genuine possibility that different, perfectly rational and well-informed agents may fail to converge on the same evaluative judgements, through no fault of their own (Blackburn 1981; Shafer-Landau 2003). The next step of the argument consists in claiming that the best explanation of the disagreement in the evaluative domain is that there is no objective evaluative fact to be discovered. Rather, the observed disagreement seems to reflect the fact that values are inherently subjective, in that they depend on the perspective, culture or ways of life in which the individuals are immersed.

Mackie’s second argument is the so-called *argument from queerness* (Mackie 1977). As Mackie points out, this argument has two parts: one metaphysical (or ontological) and one epistemological. He claims that ‘[i]f there were objective values, they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else’ (Mackie 1977, p. 38). According to Mackie, objective evaluative facts provide ‘the knower with both a direction and an overriding

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<sup>10</sup> As shown by Tappolet (1997), such inferences thus make for a problem for those who claim that moral truth is distinct from ordinary truth.

<sup>11</sup> See Schroeder (2007) for a recent extensive discussion of the Frege-Geach problem and the attempts made by expressivists to overcome it.

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motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it' (Mackie 1977, p. 40). Since ordinary facts appear to lack the same action-guidingness and motivational force, objective values look 'queer'.

Let us elaborate on Mackie's argument, starting with its epistemological part. Mackie specifically targets moral intuitionism. His idea is that our knowledge of evaluative facts could not come from any of our ordinary perceptual or rational faculties, but only from some mysterious faculty of intuition or evaluative perception. However, the appeal to such a faculty seems suspect. Indeed, if our commitment to value realism forces us to adopt such an account, we would do better to revise our commitment. Mackie's worry is sometimes spelt out in terms of epistemic access. Accordingly, if values exist independently of us and if they are different from ordinary facts in the way that Mackie assumes, then it is unclear by what means we could acquire knowledge of, or justified beliefs about, them. Alternatively, the challenge for value realists is to offer an account of how we can form justifiable evaluative judgements about a supposedly independent evaluative reality, in a way that does not look like a miraculous coincidence and that is consistent with what we know about ourselves and about how our evolutionary history from other scientific disciplines (Street 2006).

Consider now the second part of Mackie's argument. For reasons of space, we shall simply focus on the relation between values and motivation. That there is such an intimate relation between the two is often considered a platitude in the philosophical literature, a claim already made by Hume (1739-1741, p. III, i, 1). As we have seen above, many think that values and motivation are linked by an internal or necessary relation. More precisely, the claim is that, by conceptual necessity, if someone judges that an item is characterised by some positive value, then she will somehow be motivated to pursue it. For instance, R. M. Hare argues that if someone assents to a moral judgement and is sincere, then she will act accordingly, unless she is not free to do that (Hare 1952). Hare's formulation has the defect of rendering cases of weakness of will (or *akrasia*) seemingly impossible. Indeed, if Hare is right, it is simply impossible for an agent to freely act against her moral judgements. Similarly, if judging that an action is the best necessarily entails performing that action, then it is impossible for the agent to freely act against that evaluative judgement. This strong form of internalism is often taken to contrast too drastically with our ordinary experience. In order to make room for cases of weakness of will, some authors have thus proposed to weaken Hare's formulation. What we should say, according to them, is simply that if an agent sincerely judges that an item is characterised by some positive value, then she will be motivated to pursue it, *unless* she is practically irrational (Smith 1994). Put differently, the agent who is not motivated to follow her evaluative judgement suffers from weakness of will or other kinds of practical rationality failure. Be that as it may, Mackie's worry is that if our value judgements reliably track an objective evaluative reality, then they reveal to us that such an objective evaluative reality has the power of directly motivating those who have access to it (or at least those who have access to it and are rational). This appears quite extraordinary. How could some objective facts, which exist independently of our attitudes, engage our will in such a direct way? This feature seems to demarcate evaluative facts from all other ordinary facts with which we are acquainted.

This argument can actually be transformed into a positive argument in favour of non-cognitivism, when it is combined with the so-called *humean theory of motivation*

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(see Smith 1994 for this argument). The central idea of the humean theory of motivation is that, conceived of as purely cognitive states, beliefs alone cannot motivate one to act. Some non-cognitive attitudes – typically, desires – must always be present in order for one to be motivated to act. However, if we accept this account, together with the idea that evaluative judgements are necessarily motivating, it immediately follows that evaluative judgements cannot express beliefs. If they did, they would not motivate a rational agent necessarily, but only contingently, that is, in combination with some external motivational state. Thus, if we want to preserve an internalist conception of evaluative judgements, it appears that we have no choice but to abandon the cognitivist understanding of evaluative judgements and, with it, value realism.

Another anti-realist argument challenges the value realist's capacity to explain how evaluative facts depend on natural facts. Speaking in terms of normative facts, Mackie presents the challenge thus: 'What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty – say, causing pain just for fun – and the moral fact that it is wrong? It cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic necessity. Yet it is not merely that the two features occur together. The wrongness must somehow be "consequential" or "supervenient": it is wrong because it is a piece of deliberate cruelty. But just what in the world is signified by this "because"?' (Mackie 1977, p. 44). Value realists are, indeed, typically committed to the *supervenience thesis*, according to which it is impossible for two items to have the same natural properties but not the same evaluative properties. The idea is that evaluative properties are fixed by natural properties, in such a way that if two items have the same natural properties, they have also the same evaluative properties. The supervenience thesis is generally held to be a conceptual truth. Thus, one cannot possibly judge, of two qualitatively identical things, that one is e.g. admirable, while the other is not, without manifesting some sort of conceptual confusion.

According to its opponents, however, value realism has a hard time in explaining why the supervenience relation holds. The source of the problem lies in the value realists' commitment to an additional thesis, namely, the *lack of entailment thesis*. According to it, no set of natural truths entails a corresponding set of evaluative truths. In other words, evaluative statements cannot be logically derived from natural statements. The motivation for adopting the lack of entailment thesis comes primarily from Moore's rejection of naturalism or, more precisely, from the rejection of *analytic naturalism*. Moore's argument, which has become known as *the open question argument*, is that it is always possible for one to doubt whether some item possessing some natural property, say the property of promoting biological fitness, also possesses an evaluative property, say the property of being good, without manifesting any conceptual confusion. Moore takes this to be evidence that evaluative concepts cannot be reduced to natural concepts. Put differently, evaluative concepts resist analysis in terms of natural concepts. In the absence of conceptual entailment based on such an analysis, however, it is difficult to explain why the supervenience relation holds. Indeed, there should be no reason to think that a 'mixed world', in which two items have the same grounding (or subvenient) properties, but not the same evaluative properties, is conceptually impossible.

By contrast, anti-realist theories seem to have less trouble in explaining the supervenience of the evaluative on the natural. In fact, some have thought that the argument from supervenience especially favours non-cognitivism. Blackburn, for one,

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has argued that the purpose of evaluative discourse is not to describe an evaluative reality, but ‘to guide desires and choices among the natural features of the world’ (Blackburn 1993, p. 137). Now, according to Blackburn, if it were possible to judge that two items possess the same natural properties, but not the same evaluative properties, then evaluative discourse would completely lose its point, that is, it would be incapable of fulfilling its action-guiding function. Thus, supervenience holds no mystery. One can explain it simply by pointing out the role of evaluative concepts in guiding behaviour.

Like some of the previous anti-realist arguments, Blackburn’s argument from supervenience is an instance of a more general strategy against value realism, which has been powerfully defended by Gilbert Harman (1977). The idea is simple. According to Harman, we have reason to believe in the existence of some property only if that property figures in one of our best explanations of some phenomena in the world. However, evaluative properties do not seem to play any role in our best explanations. Therefore, we have no reason to believe in their existence.

Harman emphasises the difference between ethics and science. He considers the following example. When seeing a vapour cloud in a cloud chamber, a physicist immediately utters: ‘There goes a proton!’. The physicist’s underlying judgement can be partly explained by the fact that she endorses a specific physical theory, which causes her to form the immediate belief that there is a proton. However, Harman thinks that our explanation can proceed even further. More specifically, Harman believes that the fact that there *really* was a proton is part of a more complete and powerful explanation of why the physicist made that judgement. In other words, according to Harman, the truth of the theory is part of the best explanation of the physicist’s observation in the cloud chamber.

Modifying Harman’s own example so as to fit the present discussion, consider now the case of an evaluative observation. Suppose that an individual watching the antics of a wet cat exclaims: ‘How amusing!’. We can certainly explain the individual’s judgement by reference to the standards of amusement that she more or less consciously endorses, and that cause her to judge that the cat is amusing. Can we go beyond that? Can we infer that the cat really possesses the objective property of being amusing? Harman is sceptical. According to him, the existence of mind-independent evaluative properties does not play any role in the best explanation of the individual’s judgement. In fact, postulating an objective property of amusement is completely irrelevant. This is so because there is a better explanation of the individual’s judgement, which appeals to her psychological make-up, her social and cultural upbringing, and so on, rather than to the existence of an objective evaluative reality.

#### **4) Perspectives**

Given these different arguments, defending value realism might seem to be a tall order. A promising line, however, is to explore possibilities that fall outside of the standard realist package we presented above (section 2). As we explained, value realism is commonly paired with rationalism regarding evaluative knowledge. In this last section, we will consider a defence of value realism, which combines value realism and sentimentalism, and which we shall call ‘sentimental realism’.

The central claim of sentimental realism concerns evaluative concepts. As we mentioned, concepts such as *admirable*, *shameful* or *disgusting* have obviously a tight

connection to emotions. Such value concepts appear essentially related to specific responses. A plausible way to spell out the *response-dependence* of such concepts is by formulating equivalences like the following:

- (1)  $x$  is admirable if and only if feeling admiration is appropriate in response to  $x$ .

It is of course easy to formulate similar equivalences regarding the amusing, the disgusting, the shameful, and so forth. Let us make clear that according to the most plausible interpretation of such equivalences, they are not to be taken as proposing conceptual or ontological reductions.<sup>12</sup> The best way to interpret such equivalences is to read them as proposing conceptual elucidations. The equivalence would express the thought that the concept *admirable* is conceptually connected to the concept *admiration*, but none of the concepts should be considered to be more fundamental. On such a no-priority view, the grasp of the two concepts would be interdependent. A second important issue is that, on the most plausible understanding of such equivalences, appropriateness has to be taken to be a matter of correct representation. Put differently, an appropriate emotion would be one that is correct from the epistemic point of view, in the sense that it represents things as they are, evaluatively speaking.<sup>13</sup> According to such an account, something is admirable if and only if it is such that feeling admiration is correct in response to it, and this is so only if it is admirable.<sup>14</sup>

Now, what has to be underlined is that this account of evaluative concepts is entirely compatible with value realism. It is perfectly possible to claim that evaluative concepts are response-dependent in the sense that the envisaged equivalences are true of such concepts while also maintaining there are objective evaluative properties, which we try to pick out when making evaluative judgements. Indeed, while the proposed interpretation of the equivalences is compatible with anti-realism, it goes best with a realist account of values, according to which our evaluative judgements can correctly represent evaluative facts.

In addition to these claims regarding evaluative concepts and properties, sentimental realism subscribes to a specific epistemology of values. Indeed, the main virtue of the proposed account is that it is grounded on what is arguably a plausible account of emotions, the so-called *perceptual theory of emotions*, according to which emotions are perceptual experiences of a particular kind.<sup>15</sup> What is specific about emotions, on this account, is that they represent things as having evaluative properties. Thus, an emotion of admiration with respect to a friend will be correct just in case the

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<sup>12</sup> In this, sentimental realism differs from the so-called fitting attitude analysis. See Deonna & Teroni (this volume).

<sup>13</sup> See Tappolet 2011.

<sup>14</sup> One might worry that such an account would not be illuminating enough to be of interest. It appears that what is proposed is simply that something is admirable just in case it is admirable. However, there is reason to think that in spite of its circularity, the resulting equivalence is of interest. As will become apparent, what it underlines is the crucial epistemic role that emotions play in our grasp of affective concepts. As David Wiggins (1987) suggested, the important point to keep in mind is that there is nothing more fundamental to appeal to than admiration when we try to find out whether or not something is admirable, and the same can be said about other evaluative concepts of the same kind.

<sup>15</sup> See Meinong 1917; de Sousa 1987 and 2002; Tappolet 1995, 2000, 2012; Johnston 2001; and Prinz 2004, 2006; Deonna 2006; Döring 2007; Goldie 2009; and Tye 2008. For critical discussions, see Deonna and Teroni 2012; and Brady 2013.

friend is really admirable. An important point here is that on this account, emotions have representational, albeit not conceptually articulated, content.<sup>16</sup> Emotions represent their object as having specific evaluative properties, that is, as being fearsome or disgusting, and so on, even though the agent who undergoes the emotion need not possess the relevant evaluative concepts (the concepts *fearsome*, *disgusting*, etc.).

With these claims in hand, it is easy to see how one can defend sentimental realism against some of the abovementioned objections to realism. There is no need to elaborate on the point that if emotions are perceptual experiences of values, then we have a ready answer to the epistemological worries raised by Mackie. Moreover, given that emotions normally come with related motivations, sentimentalism is also in a position to handle the challenges related to internalism. Even though making an evaluative judgement does not necessarily involve a motivation to act, it will normally be accompanied by such a motivation, given that such judgements are grounded in the corresponding emotional reactions. If so, it is not necessary to postulate objective entities possessing magical motivational properties, in order to account for the motivational force of evaluative judgements.

While these points make the proposed account promising, a note of caution is in order. As spelt out, this account concerns only evaluative concepts that are explicitly related to emotions. So, the question arises as to how sentimental realism can be extended to the more general concepts of good and bad, as well as to thick evaluative concepts, such as *courageous*, or *generous*, which might be thought to be more independent from emotions. Moreover, while sentimental realism brings in new resources in defence of value realism, it does not have a specific answer to all of the objections discussed in the previous section. This is not to say that it has no answer, but only that, with respect to some objections, sentimental realism will share its responses with alternative value realist accounts.

Consider the objection from supervenience. The sentimental realist may choose between several available options. One possibility is to argue that evaluative properties are identical to natural properties. To give just one example, a sentimental realist may claim that the property of being admirable is identical to a complex natural property, which can be correctly represented by the reaction of admiration. If this account is adopted, the puzzle of supervenience immediately disappears. Indeed, if two items possess the same natural properties, then they will necessarily have the same evaluative properties, simply because the latter are identical to (a subset of) the former. Given the variety of the natural features on which the value property supervenes, the question is whether these natural features really constitute a genuine natural property.<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, the sentimental realist may deny that the supervenience relation is a conceptual truth (see Harrison 2013). For instance, one may retreat to the idea that the supervenience relation holds only by metaphysical necessity, i.e. it is true in all possible worlds, but not in virtue of the very meaning of evaluative concepts. If this is the case, there is indeed no conceptual ban on ‘mixed worlds’ in which two items have the same natural properties, but not the same evaluative properties, even though such worlds are metaphysically impossible. This is because metaphysical necessity is weaker than

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<sup>16</sup> For non-conceptual contents, see *inter alia*, Evans 1982 and Peacocke 1992. For critical discussion, see Deonna and Teroni 2012; Brady 2013; Dokic and Lemaire 2013, and Deonna & Teroni (this volume).

<sup>17</sup> See Deonna and Teroni (this volume).

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conceptual necessity, i.e. it is possible for one to conceive of things that are false in all possible worlds.

What about the issue of the explanatory role of evaluative properties? To begin with, the sentimental realist may notice that Harman's challenge can be understood in different ways. According to one reading, the reason why evaluative facts do not play any role in our best explanations is that they are causally inefficacious. In response, the sentimental realist may argue, on the one hand, that evaluative facts, such as the fact that someone is admirable, are typically cited as causes of some events, such as the response of admiration of a person in normal conditions; and, on the other hand, that the causal requirement is too strong, since it excludes too many necessary entities or properties (e.g. numbers, scientific laws, etc.) from our best explanations. According to a second reading, the gist of Harman's argument is that the positing of evaluative facts violates a methodological principle of explanatory parsimony, according to which one should avoid postulating further entities or properties unless they are explanatory useful. In response, the sentimental realist may either argue that evaluative facts are needed in order to explain at least some phenomena in the world or maintain that evaluative facts, though explanatorily redundant, are nevertheless deliberately indispensable. The idea is that we cannot but postulate such facts when we reason about what to do (Enoch 2011). The existence of evaluative facts would thus be justified through an inference to the best justification, rather than through an inference to the best explanation (Sayre-McCord 1988).

These are only some examples of how sentimental realism can deal with the remaining anti-realist objections. By way of conclusion, what needs to be kept in mind is that, while sentimental realism is on a par with other realist accounts of value in the way it addresses the latter objections, it appears at the same time to offer a more intuitive account of evaluative concepts and a naturalistically more attractive response to the arguments from epistemology and motivation. Of course, more needs to be said in order to provide a full defence of sentimental realism. What we hope to have shown here, however, is that sentimental realism must be taken very seriously in future debates about values.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> We wish to thank Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni for their helpful comments.

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