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Perceiving Values

A Phenomenological Approach

Abstract

What is a value? Are values more than measures of our needs and desires, or internalized social and cultural rules of behaviour, originating in cultures and devoid of any universally accessible objectivity? Is there a place for values in a world of facts? Is axiological relativism the only viable view in a multicultural world? This paper argues for a perceptual model of value experience, by providing direct access to three different classes of value qualities of objects, in order to show, via a phenomenological exercise of emotionally qualified perception, that there actually is a place for values – including moral values – in a world of facts.

The word "values" - in its plural form – is not well received in politically correct conversations. We tend to associate it with conservative-authoritarian ideologies. We tend to assume that values are what is inherited from the past, so by essence "traditional." Many of us think of values in terms of fundamental, non-negotiable principles defining a cultural identity, a religious allegiance, a political faith. But even those that would vindicate a strong value-commitment for themselves tend to use the word in reference to a cultural heritage – albeit a "good" (!) one: e.g., "the values of the Founders", "the foundational values of our Republic"….

1. The State of the Art. Backgrounds

Strangely enough, this usage "values" is quite similar to that in the works of the only very popular philosopher who made a massive use of it in the plural form: Friedrich Nietzsche. As he writes in the Preface to *Daybreak* (1886)[1], "we are given heavy words and values with 'good' and 'evil', and this is our dowry. Only through it are we forgiven to be alive."

But of course, if there is a consistent Nietzschean view of values, its claim is that there are no values at all: what we call values are just habits of evaluation internalizing social and

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[1] "Fast in der Wiege giebt man uns schon schwere Worte und Werthe mit: "gut" und "böse" – so heisst sich diese Mitgift (dote). Um derentwillen vergiebt man uns, dass wir leben", Nietzsche (1999), Bd **, p. 242

cultural rules of behaviour. This is the standard view on values among cultivated lay people. Strangely enough, we no longer perceive anything particularly "nihilistic" about that. Dissolving values into internalized rules admittedly implies value-relativism, but relativism is thought to be just the price to pay for secularism and the modern, liberal foundations of an open society. The idea that, ultimately, the rules governing our daily lives are either biologically grounded programs or socially constituted, arbitrary conventions seems to be common sense.

Things are slightly different among professional philosophers: this standard view is still the dominant one, but is "embedded" in the language of meta-ethics.

As is often the case with meta-theories, meta-ethicists were initially supposed to investigate the logics and semantics of moral judgements. Later on the domain was extended to the metaphysic of values: what kind of entity is a value? Do values exist in some sense or are they only a measure of our needs and desires?

For the purpose of meta-ethical research, values can be identified with a subclass of properties – let's call them *normative or axiological properties.* A normative property is a property which makes a good thing good, or a bad thing bad, in one of the innumerable ways in which a thing can have a positive or negative quality. Societies can be more or less just, actions can be base, presentations messy and confused, conversations gloomy or cheerful, a landscape sublime, a dish delicious…. all these properties are "normative" in the following sense: they qualify a thing as more or less actualizing an ideal ought-to-be, or positively violating it.

Within this frame, the whole debate is about "oughtness". It is still shaped by the Fact/Value Dichotomy, as famously put forward by Hume. The best known version of the Dichotomy is logical and epistemological: one cannot possibly derive Ought-statements from Is-statements, so one cannot justify judgements of value on the basis of judgements of facts, or of logics[2].

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[2] "In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be

Hume himself provides an ontological version of his dichotomy. Take any moral property of acts and persons, e.g. a negative one, ingratitude. Hume claims that there is no descriptive content of all ungrateful acts and behaviours, which is to say that there are no value-features in reality, which could make a value judgment true or false[3].

A second intertwined claim defines the meta-ethical positions known even today under the labels of *expressivism* and *emotivism*. Value-judgments are just expressions of emotions, emotions being, as sensations, just *qualia*, or episodes of so-called phenomenal consciousness, bearing no *cognition* of actual reality. Like sense data, emotional data are not "primary qualities". They don't belong to "the furniture of the world." Hume (probably for the first time) states here the analogy between secondary qualities and value qualities which would become a topic in contemporary meta-ethics[4].

2. The Dilemma of Meta-Ethics

Let's adopt an informal wording of the value/fact dichotomy (D):

(D) There is no place for values in a world of facts.

Thesis (D) is, as it were, two-faceted. There is a negative side of it, which we may label the "Humean side", or the *reality side* of the Dichotomy:

(H) Value predicates do not refer to real or natural properties.

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given; for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it". D. Hume (1739), p. 335.

[3] "the crime of ingratitude is not any particular individual FACT; but arises from a complication of circumstances, which, being presented to the spectator, excites the SENTIMENT of blame, by the particular structure and fabric of his mind" D. Hume (1777), pp. 468-69.

[4] "Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind" (Hume 1978, 336).

But there is also a (possible) positive side of it: we may label it the "Moorean side" of it. In fact the whole meta-ethical debate originates in the last century at the crossroads of G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* and the early philosophy of language and logics. Here is a wording of the "Moorean" or the *ideality side* of the Dichotomy :

(M) Value predicates refer to non-natural properties

Claim (M) recalls the famous Naturalistic Fallacy argument by G.E. Moore, according to which it would be fallacious to explain that which is *good* in terms of natural properties, such as "pleasant" or "desired", let alone "constituting an evolutionary advantage." Let's call "Goodness" that which makes a good thing x good. Then any analysis of Goodness in terms of "natural" properties N gives rise to an open question: is such an N also good? For example: is the pleasure that x causes also good? Is the desire for x also a good desire? (Moore 1903).

The upshot of Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy argument is a claim of irreducibility of normative properties to natural properties, or of ideality to factual reality. The whole, still persisting debate constituting the bulk of meta-ethics turns this irreducibility thesis around, either questioning and rejecting it or developing it into some *pars construens*. We can accordingly identify four main positions concerning the status of value judgments:

(1) Non-Cognitivism (Emotivism, Expressivism): Value judgements have no truth conditions (since value predicates have no reference to reality)[5].

Metaphysical Cognitivism comes in two opposite versions:

(2) Naturalistic Realism[6] (axiological properties can be reduced to natural properties after all);

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[5] Contemporary representatives of a non cognitive option are Simon Blackburn (1993), Allan Gibbard (1990) and (2003), and Mark Schroeder (2008). A radical stance in non-cognitivism is taken by Error Theorist, arguing that we have compelling reasons to reject the presuppositions of moral thought. See J. L. Mackie (1977) and Richard Joyce (2001).

(3) Antinaturalistic Realism[7] (axiological properties are a special class of non-natural prperties).

These two views represent the two branches of the Dilemma of Meta-ethics (MD), that is:

(MD) Either normative properties are after all reducible to "natural" properties – but then they seem to loose their "normative" power;
or they are not reducible, but then they are "queer" properties. Where are they? In a "super-natural" world? In what sense do they exist?

A way to escape the dilemma is

(4) Constructivism, i.e. a form of cognitivism without realism, according to which there are no truth makers for value judgments, and yet value judgments are true or false in virtue of something else, for example intersubjective validating procedures (Constructivism is the modern meta-ethical heir of Kantianism)[8].

3. The phenomenological approach: back to the things themselves

From a phenomenological point of view, there are two annoying facts about the current meta-ethic discussion. The first is that philosophers tend to reduce values to moral values, instead of considering the whole variety of values, belonging to different spheres, which we are presented with in the life-world. We already had some examples of the variety of goodness.

The second one – much worse - is the lack of any intuitive presentation and analysis of some examples of axiological property. This is a major flaw for a phenomenologist, for it does

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[6] David Lewis (1989), Harman (1977)
[7] Schafer Landau (2003), Enoch (2011)
[8] Bagnoli 2013, pp. 153-182. John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas are among the most important modern constructivists.

away with the *source of evidence* for answering the questions addressed, *what* values are, and *whether* they do exist in some sense.

Lets label (Met) this methodological tenet distinguishing phenomenological research generally:

(Met): No theoretical problem about a type of thing S should be addressed but in the intuitive presence of some token or instance of S.

In a way, Method is just an application of Phenomenology's Main Warning, "Back to the things themselves", or the principle of priority of the datum on conceptual construction. In the rest of this paper, I shall apply (Met) to the question about the status of axiological properties of things, states of affairs, events, situations, behaviours, acts etc.

Now applying (Met) to this question opens up a philosophically widely neglected, yet pervasive feature of the life-world: the plurality, richness and variety of positive or negative value qualities "colouring" things, events, states of affairs, situations in the surrounding world. Indeed it is hard to find qualifying words in our languages, adjectives, which do not refer to some value quality. In fact, we are presented with an extremely rich variety of apparent value-qualities by means of *feeling*. I feel the unpleasantness of a sting, the bodily or psychological discomfort associated with a state of illness or weariness, the agreeable nature of an arrangement of colors, the delicacy of a delicious meal, the allegro character of a movement in a classical piece of music….But I also sense the nobility of a gesture, the vulgarity of an attitude, the wickedness of an act, the beauty of a masterpiece. Positive qualities somehow give joy, negative ones are depressing. The harmonious way a tool or a piece of furniture fits one's body, the pleasant form of a teapot, these qualities too are somehow "perceived:" but this perception is not affectively neutral. It has a more or less positive, or negative, affective valence. The German language has a synthetic way to denote this non-neutral kind of perceiving: a *Wertnehmen.* Value perception.

Now, what anybody would call the real world, the world of our acting and suffering, manipulating things and encountering people, making discoveries, being surprised or upset by

events, falling in love or feeling indignation and disgust, making decisions, promises, contracts, political choices and so on –is stuffed with value qualities, that is, with non-neutral facts.

Applying the ontological version of the fact-value dichotomy to this world would be embarrassing. Take a slaughter, a genocide, a rape for example. The Dichotomy Claim (D) would force us either to affirm that a genocide is not evil, or that it is not a fact, that there are no genocides. I don't know which claim is less plausible.

Our phenomenological method leads us to reject (D), embracing the opposite claim instead:

(K) Values do have a place in a world of facts

Wolfgang Köhler (K) is one of the founders of Gestalt psychology and a pupil of Carl Stumpf – mentor to him and the other founders of Gestalt Psychology (Kurt Koffka and Max Wertheimer) and to Husserl. Stumpf, who made pioneering discoveries in all fields of experimental psychology, and is still best known as the founder of modern psychology of music, was very also well known to many first-generation phenomenologists like Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Moritz Geiger, Roman Ingarden, Dietrich von Hildebrand and many others. (K) echoes the title of a book published by Köhler , in his American exile, in 1938, *The place of value in a world of facts*.

4. Classes of axiological qualities

Reference to this book brings us back to the common origins of Phenomenology and Gestalt Psychology. We shall draw on the vast repertory of Gestalt discoveries to display what Humeans deny that axiological properties possess: a *descriptive content*.

This is a only a preliminary step to address the core question: does the phenomenological approach offer a solution to the Dilemma of Meta-ethics? In this paper, we only address this preliminary step.

Yet this step involves a series of other, smaller, steps. Recall the first annoying fact about the current meta-ethic discussion. Philosophers tend to reduce values to moral values, instead of considering the whole variety of values, belonging to different spheres, which we encounter in the life-world.

Quite particularly in a Humean approach "moral" qualities are deemed to be analogous to sensory qualities: as colors are only sensory *qualia* or states of the mind, so values are "sentimental" or emotional *qualia*, confined to the mind or the eye of the beholder.

But what about sickness and fitness, comfort and discomfort, being more or less user-friendly, or liberty and servitude, gracefulness and sublimity, holiness, blasphemy, clarity, validity and soundness of argument? To sum up: do axiological properties of different spheres share any feature? Are there typical traits of their descriptive content, which would allow us to speak of *values*, as of *a* sort of contents, although divided into subclasses? Can we build an Axiology, including an explanation of what makes a value a *moral* one?

We shall examine three types of axiological qualities (§§ 4-6), starting from some examples of a type of qualities that the tradition recognizes to be "given to perception," *aisthesis* : aesthetic qualities.

4.1. The life of lines (*Linienzug*)

Just browsing through the pages of a famous text by Vassilj Kandiski (1926): *Point Line Surface,* we come across a lot of qualities affecting the drawings as if the lines, the spots of black, the surfaces were somehow animated, or expressing tensions, forces, movements or dynamic characters of sorts. We do perceive these qualities, even if we know that the lines or the points are motionless on the paper. Theodor Lipps (1908) and Ernst Cassirer (1920) describe this kind of qualities as presenting "the life of lines", as it were:

"a movement, such as stretching out, growing longer, self-restricting, abruptly starting and ending, or steady sliding, swinging up and down, bending, stooping, squeezing and

expanding. All these predicates do not refer to geometrical features of the form, but denote activities…" [9]

We can call those qualities *dynamic qualities.* The drama of the lines and the rising of the points in Kandinskj are a good contemporary example of what Lipps has in mind. We cannot doubt that all these qualities have a quite specific descriptive content. Do they also have a (more or less) positive or negative valence? They do. The movements and the lines themselves can "feel" more or less smooth, harmonious, unhampered, perspicuous – or maybe messy, entangled, broken, disharmonious…

4.2. Affective Qualities

The phenomenological literature about landscapes and their affective qualities is remarkable[10], and based on the key point that one should not confuse the emotional tonality of the landscape – both in nature and paintings – with the emotional state of the spectator. A gloomy landscape stays gloomy even if I am in a cheerful state of mind, Central Park at noon in a sunny day is gorgeous even if I'm meditating suicide.

How can we describe the affective tonality of a landscape? Well, the mouth of the Cecina River in Tuscany was bright and serene in its placid, quiet opening to the sea, before it was destroyed to make room to an artificial harbour for motor boats and cruisers. And the resulting agony of the confining pinewoods is as expressive as a Dante's inferno. And two of Italo Calvino's Six Values for the XXIth Century, Lightness and Quickness, are best exemplified by the ice-skating rink at Bryan Park on a winter dusk.

We shall complete this first step by a definition. We call "value" a quality of objects, given or presented by direct cognition of some kind (in our case, emotionally attuned perception), meeting these three conditions:

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[9] Lipps, *Estetica*, in Pinotti (1997) p. 184.

[10] Geiger (1911); Stein (1917); Pinotti (

(1) Having a descriptive content, a "thickness" of its own[11];

(2) Having a (more or less) positive or negative valence;

(3) *Not* having a conceptual criterion of application to objects.

A short comment on condition (3). Suppose a quality of a certain painted *Landscape* is anguish. Now there is no set of non-axiological properties that all objects expressing anguish must satisfy in order to do so, as it is the case with, e.g., the property of being human (namely, being an animal of such and such a species, and being rational). Remark that condition (3) is also met by colours: a red scarf, a red room, a red sunset need not have anything in common but redness. This is the rationale of a Humean equation of values to colors (subjective sensations or sentiments, qualia).

4.3.Generalization. Expressive Qualities

Some forty years ago, the Swedish philosopher and psychologist Gunnar Johansson took over a well known topic of experimental phenomenology and Gestalt theory: living or animal movement (as opposed to mechanical movement) and the way we perceive it.

"Our everyday experience also tells us that human vision not only detects motion and direction in man and animals, but also distinguishes different standard patterns of limb motion. We immediately see whether a person is walking, running or dancing, and also if he is moving forward with identical speed in these three cases. It is also a common experience that our visual apparatus is very sensitive to small deviations to such standard patterns. We immediately recognize, for instance, a slight limp in walking, we distinguish between a tired and an elastic gait, etc. Furthermore, we think we sometimes can recognize a person exclusively from his style of walking, his gestures, and so on"[12].

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[11] In current meta-ethical debate, "thick" and "thin" refer paradigmatically to moral values: "courageous" would be "thick", "good" or "right" would be "thin". In Max Scheler's (1016) terminology, "thickness" corresponds to "material" values, as in his title: *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, that is to "substantive" ones, provided with a virtually inexhaustible descriptive content, which makes our experience of corresponding goods or evils a mode of cognition, fallible and correctible, never completed.

[12] Johansson (1973), p. 201

Johansson introduced a method

"designed to separate *biological motion information* from other sources of information that are normally intermingled with motion information. Johansson attached small point lights to the main joints of a person's body and filmed the scene so that only the lights were visible in front of an otherwise homogeneously dark background. Using these displays, he demonstrated the compelling power of perceptual organization from biological motion of just a few light points"[13].

In the last decade, Niko Troje – a psychologist, biologist and computer scientist – used the same display, consisting of just fifteen light points attached to the main joints (shoulders, elbows, wrists, hips, knees, ankles) and to the vertical axis (head-breastbone-pelvis) of a human body. He observed about 40 male and 40 female walkers on a treadmill. The data was subsequently transformed into a representation which allows for linear morphing. The result is a pleasant animation which is now available online:

http://www.biomotionlab.ca/Demos/BMLwalker.html

This animation shows a human gait, a rather fluid, vigorous, and masculine one. There is already something very remarkable here: the emerging of a unitary dynamic gestalt from the synchronicity and regularity of the motions of just fifteen single points. You don't really see the moving points, you see and sense the walking body, its vigour, the robust but slender figure of the walking person, its size and weight, and even its calm, composure and decision.

It's only by analysing the apparent gait you see into its constituent parts, as you would analyse the syntax of a proposition after grasping it as a meaningful whole, that you will realize how the dynamic gestalt depends on the regular pattern of the synchronic motions. The synchronic pendular movements of the light points, combined with their rhythm of swing, make up the visible gait.

The dynamic gestalt, the *walking style,* emerges from the synchronicity and regularity of the motions of the single points. It's one of the phenomena testifying to the most general

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[13] Troje (2002), p. 371.

Principle of Gestalt, according to which wholes are not just sums of their parts, but new entities, with identity and persistency conditions of their own.

Now a walking style is a global quality of an activity and an agent: it would seem a pretty abstract global quality, and it is amazing that it emerges with such pregnancy, before any conceptualization, as a rich and well structured perceptual *datum*. Nothing could better falsify the sort of atomistic theory of perception positing unstructured pluralities of sense data or atomic sensations in causal correlation with proximal stimuli, e.g. points of the retinal image, explaining structure, and organization of data as illusory constructions of our "brains," or cognitive systems (Dennett (1991), Metzinger (2011)). It is a reassessment of the First Principle of Gestalt: no datum without structure or organized richness of content. Structure and organization are built into the perceptual data. They are not a construction or conception or interpretation by a subject.

What sorts of qualities do we actually *see*? No doubt, qualities we would call *expressive*, as a gesture, a posture, a look can be expressive. Expressing what? The answer is on the four axes of the walking space displayed by the animation. They present us with a lot of information about human agents, concerning gender (on the male/female axis), bodily states such as freshness or tiredness, or even attitudes and/or traits of physical personality (on the axis heavy/light), moods or even character traits (on the axis nervous/relaxed), and finally emotions or emotional dispositions (on the axis happy/sad). Here the language knows more: "exultance," for example, literally means jumping (out of joy), "alegria" (Spanish) comes from "alegrar" (to lighten, to relieve)…

Like gradually varying nuances of a colour in the colour space, the qualities of walking styles both have a recognizable, discernible content or "matter" and one coming by degrees (like the nuances of violet between red and blue); differently from colours, they also have a *negative* or *positive* polarity, qualifying gaits not only by style features (*Sosein*) but also as good or bad in some sense: an *axiological* polarity. This polarity, though, spans the whole walking space and the style features: there are different ways a gait can express masculinity or femininity, some of them are a paradigm of vigour or of grace, other are exaggerating in those

directions, soon becoming ridiculous. We see a bold man, then a sheriff, than a boaster or a caricature of a real macho. The female gait becomes seductive, then coquettish, and finally comic. Firmness, resoluteness expressed by a marked pace turn to the leaden gait of a man weighed down. The speeding up or the slowing down of the rhythm of swing change smoothness and ease respectively into ridiculous restlessness and discouraging inertia, a further touch of lightness or of heaviness add up to hectic euphoria or depressive lethargy…

Yet there is something somehow shared by all these different qualifications of a gait, a matter of their axiological polarity. I would call it (dynamic) harmony - and its opposite.

Harmony is a value. All expressive qualities are value qualities, having both axiological polarity and descriptive content. They would fill a specific chapter in a treatise on material axiology. They make up a special class of normative properties: if we laugh at overstressed masculinity, or at complete lack of grace and lightness, we feel that some ideal aesthetic norm or *requirement* is somehow violated.

Actually, expressive qualities of this kind display the presence of a living subject, in this particular case of *another self* as directly experienced. Perceptual experience confronts us with *socially and interpersonally relevant value qualities* of activities and agents, emerging from relatively simple patterns of motion, whose range of possible variations define the variety and degree of realization of such qualities between the extremes of their polarity. Perceptual experience, in other words, works in these cases as *a perceptual basis for empathy*, or direct experience of other persons and animals as such – as embodied and sexed subjects of experience and intentional motion.

The upshot of this descriptive analysis is one more piece of evidence for our main thesis (K). Though all of our aesthetic and empathic experiences we vividly, immediately perceive different values *in* the events themselves qualified by those values. We somehow really *see* the place that values have in the world of facts.

5. Enlarging our axiological horizon. Affordances

Our next step is to assess claim (K) even beyond the class of expressive qualities. We shall enlarge our perspective by considering one more class of values: affordances. A quick way to do so is by analyzing an example I exploited somewhere else (De Monticelli 2013). Koppenplatz is a small park at the heart of Mitte, Berlin. There you might undergo the same illusion I suffered when trying to set aright an upside down chair – one of two, surrounding an ordinary green painted table, which you might have misunderstood for a piece of furniture kindly furnished by Mitte's municipality, offering a comfortable seat to any tourist inclined to meditating or recording memories in her journal. The chair would have by no means been redressed – it turned out to be a monument, table and other chair included, or rather a memorial of past tragedies, as you often come across in Berlin. As a memorial, the monument quite simply evokes the main violation of human dignity perpetrated by the Nazis through racial discrimination. It does so by representing a violated home.

The first, naïve reading presents us with a perfect instance of what is called an affordance, i.e. a (dis)value quality conferring a peculiar *motivating power* to the object or situation it qualifies, such as the handiness of a handle, the comfort offered by an armchair, inviting you to lean down and rest, or the seductiveness of a gait, inviting you to admire and court the walker. "Affordance", as it is well known, is a neologism introduced by Köhler's disciple James J. Gibson, echoing the German words *Forderung, Aufforderung*, the sort of *claim* (Spiegelberg 1986) things of the surrounding world us seem to address us all the time, "inviting" us to or "suggesting" all sort of actions: rooms waiting to be tidied up, beds asking to be made, musical dissonances craving to be resolved, high mountains inviting silence…

Our upside down chair, as all affordances, exemplifies the *oughtness* of a normative property of another kind than the purely aesthetic one. What we have here is a *real* "ill" - a very modest "ill" – we would rather call it an inconvenience. A disorder in ordinary urban or domestic furniture. An upside down chair loses its functional role, its *use value*. What sort of action does it require? One of the kinds that a normal housewife affords everyday….

Oughtness or requiredness (Köhler's preferred term) permeates not only affordances of these kinds, but also expressive qualities as the ones exhibited by our walking styles. Let me

evoke a memory exemplifying this point. It happened to me as a freshly appointed professor in Geneva. One of my mentors commented on my opening lecture with these fatal words: "Mais vous bougez trop!" The frantic excitement and anxiety I had experienced must have been even too visible in my way of gesturing at my conclusions, jumping in all directions, running around my points…

6. Moral values

On a second reading, that upside-down chair "reveals" a negative axiological fact which is much more serious, and much worse, than a breach of domestic order: a blatant violation of human *dignity*, a *violated home*, a real "evil," a moral evil. *Requiring* the appropriate emotional and volitional response: no more racial discrimination. Requiring it in a much more peremptory way than affordances do: with the force of a categorical imperative. Requiredness is *moral obligation* when it is the normativity of a *moral value*. *Right* and *Wrong* in the moral sense refer to a completely new mode of requiredness: an unconditional oughtness characterizing moral obligation. Can we give an account of this peculiar unconditionality?

If requiredness, valence and absence of a criterion of applicability are the common features of all values, the modal character of moral oughtness (necessity) must be explained by a feature of moral values.

Now what is a moral value? Curiously enough, most authors in the meta-ethical debate do not have a definition of *moral* values, as distinguished from non-moral ones. So we have to provide for one.

A moral value does not qualify states of affairs, unless they are somehow related to deeds, actions, behaviours, decisions. So let's consider a couple of other examples, whose analysis will suggest a definition and constitute the third and final step in our verification of (K).

The fact evoked by the Berlin's memorial, Crystal Night 1938 is a pogrom, a series of actions which have been perceptible and recorded in many images. A pogrom is something of which it would be hard to affirm that is no moral evil (exemplifying the negative value *anti-Semitism* or *racial discrimination*), and even harder to argue that is not a fact.

Or, let's consider recent assaults on cultural world heritage, as the ones perpetrated by ISIS, and resulting in destruction of invaluable artistic and cultural goods.

What is the peculiarity of violence which makes it a moral disvalue? A violent action can have a good purpose, as with the case of a boy who was rescued from drowning by having his foot amputated so as to disentangle him from the rocks where it got trapped. Violence in that case was the only means to realize a value, survival or avoiding death. So, what makes violence a moral disvalue is that *it realizes disvalues instead of values, or realizes a lesser value than that which it would have been possible to realize in the given circumstances*, as in the case in which the boy could have been rescued without loosing his foot.

This example shows us that the peculiarity of a moral value we were looking for depends on its *being a second order axiological quality*: the value quality of an action realizing values, or disvalues. Moreover, it depends on an overall feature of values of any kind: hierarchy, or degree of value.

We cannot further clarify this second condition of morality within the limits of this paper: yet hierarchy is a crucial feature of the axiological realm. It is to the axiological datum what structure or gestalt is to any datum whatsoever: it us the specific inner organization of any *good*. (For example, integral health and functionality of a living body is more valuable than partial health and functionality, and a polity recognizing equality of rights is less unjust than one discriminating people).

But what we can see now is that actions have a (positive or negative) moral value if and only if they realize goods or ills, that is, states of affairs charged with positive or negative, ultimately non-moral, values. Murder would not be morally vicious if human life had no value. Smashing useless bricks has no "destructive" character. *Ethics presuppose general axiology.*

A very tentative definition, drawing on the classic phenomenological tradition, will conclude our analysis.

(MV) Moral value is the value inhering to actions, intentions, habits – and, ultimately, persons - aiming, in the given circumstances, as much as it is in the agent's knowledge and

power, to realize positive instead than negative values, and higher (or the highest possible) instead than lower values.

Assuming that the predicates "right" and "wrong" – in their "thinness", or lack of descriptive content – refer to the second order character of moral value, (MV) opens up a path for a meta-ethical theory (in a proper sense) – which is of course no possible undertaking for the present paper.

Let's then conclude the third and final step of our analysis: what about (K) in case of moral values? Do moral values as well "have a place in the world of facts"?

Consider the emotional shock we live when looking at smashed ancient sculptures. How can we describe it? Here are some tentative descriptions:

Horror in the face of *an act of deliberate destruction* of the *invaluable remains of past civilizations*: a destruction of *significant portions of beauty, knowledge, memory, meaning of our lives.*

Indignation for depriving humanity of a part of its *common cultural heritage.*

Contempt and deep blame for the *ignorance and brutality* of those criminals.

More subtly: Disconcertment face to a *blasphemous arrogance* using the name of God to destroy what is sacred – namely what has the highest possible value, a *Sinnegebung,* an offer of sense to any human life, not only ours.

These moral sentiments – horror, indignation, contempt, blame, disconcert – constitute the moral experience we make of the actions we are presented with. They are to the corresponding moral judgements what the visual, tactile, kinaesthetic experience are to ordinary factual judgements about the surrounding world. They are the source of evidence for their truth.

7.   Concluding remarks

While considering different classes of qualities given to direct cognition, i.e. perceptual and emotional experience of the real world – aesthetic, functional and even moral qualities – we

were able to ascertain that they all share a feature actually making them all *axiological* qualities, or values: requiredness.

Requiredness (or oughtness) comes in different types. Aesthetic requiredness does not seem to address us as *agents*. It's more of what a German would call a *Seinsollen*, an ideal oughtness. It does not carry a motivational power for action – although it does require "contemplation". Functional requiredness does carry a motivational power for agents, as whatever is related to the axiological sphere of Usefulness: it just *invites* us to make things with things, as affordances typically do. Moral oughtness exhibits a radically different type of motivational power – a *moral reason* for acting, a *practical obligation* – what a German would call a *Tunsollen*.

Seen in this axiological perspective, reality (of the life world) exhibits requiredness all over: qualified reality is the source of all normativity. But there does not seem to be anything "queer" or super-natural in that. Nothing remote from ordinary experience.

I hope to have shown that values are given to direct experience, in the mode of affective perception, and have a lot of descriptive content, although of a purely axiological kind. In this sense *value experience is a mode of cognition* : it is an inexhaustible source of information.

This is only a part of a conclusive proof of our claim (K), that values do have a place in a world of facts. Solving the dilemma of meta-ethics requires showing *exactly how, as normative properties, values* "are in", or inhere to, facts - without loosing their normativity. This requires a further piece of axiological theory, and is a job for another paper.

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