

Constructed Values or Constricted Values?

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Objectivity is of course unobjectionable and naturalism is, as we say, a natural. So broadly speaking I am in sympathy with the aims of the Gricean project. My problem is that I want to be a realist too. For I believe that values are not up to us to construct.

This is not to say that I might not come to accept the sort of framework or metaphor embedded in a 'construction story' like the Gricean story, say in the way that one might accept a contractarian story and yet deny that anything was contracted by anyone. At this stage though I am still too much in the dark to have anything like a considered view about this, Grice's Carus Lectures (being still unpublished).^{So} Granting that I could accept such a framework I would, other things being equal, want to interpret it less literally and draw different conclusions from it. For starters I would not interpret the Gricean routine as one of construction--'the making up from scratch' as it were--of values, but rather as ^{some sort of} structural decomposition, a 'taking apart to see how the pieces fit together'. This latter stance allows for the possibility that some of the pieces might be unconstructed values and leaves realism about values open.

One of my heroes of moral philosophy is the late Peter Glassen. His paper 'Are There Unresolvable Moral Disputes?' in the inaugural issue of Dialogue was also, (I am told), the highpoint of one of the first meetings of the CPA. Glassen, fighting emotivism, the enemy of objectivity of his day, likewise

made attitudes the core of his account of value judgements. These attitudes, construed as dispositions to approve or disapprove, and constrained by a psychological set that included both affective and cognitive components, were what conferred the moral (or aesthetic or whatever) point of view on the judgement-maker and objectivity on the value judgement. What Glassen saw, but did not emphasize enough and perhaps did not foresee the implications of, is that ^{these} dispositions are a two-way street. Any ^{such} dispositions of an agent vis-à-vis features of the world would involve correlative dispositions of the world vis-à-vis the agent. The world must be such that it disposes agents to certain sorts of judgements under certain conditions. It is something about the world that engenders a value judgement of a certain sort in a judgement-maker of a certain sort. Glassen's account could fit well what Baker terms Humean Projection under specified conditions. But notice that this attitudinal-dispositional analysis is counterfactual. The world could be such that any agent of a certain sort would do such-and-such, even if no agent actually filled the bill; or even if no agents existed for that matter. No one would then find anything valuable of course, but that's not the same as saying that there's nothing to find. Humans only construct valuations, not value itself.

Glassen's view thus segues into that of Peter Miller, potentially another hero of mine. In his recent article 'Descartes' Legacy and Deep Ecology' (Dialogue 1989) Miller, campaigning against the larger enemy of anthropocentrism, explicitly draws ^{and defends} the conclusion that value is intrinsic to various nonconscious natural entities and therefore does not stand in need of human (or other) consciousness.

If I understand Baker's portrayal of Grice aright it seems that he wants objectivity based on projection relations involving attitudes (as we get in Glassen's account) but eschews the nonanthropocentric implications, to the point of plumping for an antirealism in which even truth conditions go by the board.

I must confess I don't see how this is possible on any story of how, in Baker's words, attitudes legitimately project onto the world under specified conditions--at least if this resembles the attitudinal-dispositional position I have sketched. Moreover I don't see why the constructional aspect of the Gricean story is not compromised from the outset. The whole idea of humans as value-constructors is made to depend on the notion of 'finality features' or functions. But such functions cannot be attributed without smuggling in value. To attribute such a function is to attribute a proper role, and propriety is a value notion.

The problem with the Gricean construction story as I see it is that an idealized natural history of the pragmatics and epistemology of value is being passed off as metaphysics. But an account of how and why we came to seek and conceptualize value is not an account of value itself. Here I think Miller hits the nail right on the head when he says

It would be surprising, indeed, if values bore no relation to the admittedly subject-dependent experiences and activities of valuing and evaluation, just as it would be surprising if physical objects bore no relation to our subject-dependent perceiving and scientific theorizing. Perceptual and value experiences, while not absolute and incorrigible in their deliverances, are supposed to have some

sort of epistemic primacy in our access to objects and values in the world. We should not, however, confuse epistemic primacy with ontological primacy and assume that physical objects could not exist without a perceiver nor values without a valuer. In both cases, we draw inferences from what is seen or valued to what is unseen or unvalued due to remoteness, interference, other preoccupations, the limitations of our faculties, the transcendence and difference of the real world from the world of appearances, and the like. (199)

But perhaps I am failing to read between Baker's lines and inadvertently strawmanning Grice. Or perhaps Grice has arguments that deflect my reasoning and diagnosis. If that's so, I am eager to be set straight.