From: R. Fabian (ed.), *Christian von Ehrenfels: Leben und Werk.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, (1986), 150-171

THE THEORY OF VALUE OF CHRISTIAN VON EHRENFELS

Barry SMITH

§1. Introduction

Ehrenfels' principal writings on value theory belong to the early period of his creative life, their publication following immediately upon that of his classic paper "Über 'Gestaltqualitäten'". They are:

— "Werttheorie und Ethik", a series of five articles published in 1893-94;

— "Von der Wertdefinition zum Motivationsgesetze", published in the *Archiv für systematische Philosophie* in 1896;

— "The Ethical Theory of Value", a review of Meinong's *Psychologisch-ethische Untersuchungen zur Werttheorie,* published in the *International Journal of Ethics* in 1896;

and:

— *System der Werttheorie*, vol. I: *Allgemeine Werttheorie, Psychologie des Begehrens* (1897) and vol. II: *Grundzüge einer Ethik* (1898).

All of these writings are now collected, with other, supplementary material, in vol. I of Reinhard Fabian's edition of Ehrenfels' *Philosophische Schriften*. I shall refer principally to the *System der Werttheorie*, citing page numbers according to the Fabian edition.

What follows is intended as no more than an outline of Ehrenfels' views, with some reference to the relations between his work and the subjectivist approach to economic values initiated by Carl Menger in his *Grundsätze der Volkswirtschaftslehre* in 1871. All criticism will be spared, as also will detailed considerations of influence.[1] I shall concentrate exclusively on value theory in the strict sense as Ehrenfels conceived it, avoiding conjectures as to the ways in which this theory might be supplemented by ideas from the theory of *Gestalten* to produce an account which would be more adequate to the dimension of aesthetic value.[2]

§2. Foundations of a General Theory of Values

Menger founded what has since come to be known as the "first" Austrian school of value theory. The first-generation members of this school included also Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk and Friedrich von Wieser, with both of whom Ehrenfels had significant exchanges.[3] The school is today represented by, among others, F.A. von Hayek, Ludwig Lachmann and I.M. Kirzner, and passing mention will be made in §10 below of possible lines of comparison between Ehrenfels' thought and that of Hayek, in particular.

Ehrenfels, on the other hand, together with Meinong and other pupils of Brentano, belonged to the "second" Austrian school of value theory.[4] In contradistinction to the economists, the members of this school were concerned to develop a *general* theory of values. They regarded economic value as only one special sort of human value, and urged that economic values could be properly understood only when their connection with the entire range of value-phenomena had been made clear.

1. For discussions of influences on Ehrenfels' value theory see Eaton, Grassl, 1982a, and Fabian-Simons.

2. The reader is however invited to compare the conception of value as organic unity set forth by Nozick in ch.5 of his 1981 with ideas sketched by Ehrenfels, e.g. in the fragment "Höhe und Reinheit der Gestalt" (1916).

3. Grassl, *op.cit.* is now the definitive survey of these exchanges.

4. See Eaton and, on the wider membership and influence of the school, Grassl, 1981 and (forthcoming).

The members of this second school did however look up to the economists as having achieved a theoretical depth and rigour in their analyses which was at that time lacking in work on values on the part of their fellow philosophers. Ethics, in particular, Ehrenfels conceived as having hardly advanced beyond its beginnings with the Greeks:

> it sets as its goal...an extraneous and often arbitrary listing and ranking of ethical and other value-objects, from which one might at best glean those lessons inherited from past ages which we call "worldly wisdom" — something which we normally learn to understand to appreciate only when we have acquired it for ourselves and at our own cost (p.214f.).

But how is the desired *theoretical* understanding of values to be achieved? Here Ehrenfels turned on the one hand to the task of *generalising* laws of valuation which had been discovered by the economists, above all the law of marginal utility. And on the other hand he turned to psychology. This he conceived, with some differences, in the way Brentano conceived it in the *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, i.e. as a descriptive psychology of different kinds of acts and of interrelations between acts.[5] These two strands in Ehrenfels' work and indeed in the work of Meinong, who must be credited with having taken the first steps in this direction, support each other mutually: the same laws hold for moral values as for economic values *because the two sorts of values have the same psychological foundations.*

§3. The Relation between Desire and Feeling

Ehrenfels' psychological foundation of value-theory conceives the value of things as dependent upon human valuing acts, which are in turn conceived as being dependent upon acts of desire. Thus, at least in first approximation,

5. The most important difference, from our present point of view, is the sharp distinction drawn by Ehrenfels between the two categories of *feeling* and *desire*. These were run together by Brentano into the single category of 'phenomena of love and hate'. Brentano is criticised on this point also by Anscombe in her 1978. It is the common indebtedness to a Brentanian act-psychology which, more than anything else, makes it appropriate to regard Ehrenfels, Meinong, Kraus, Kreibig and others as members of a single school.

> we do not desire things because we grasp in them some mystical, incomprehensible essence "value"; rather, we ascribe "value" to things because we desire them (p.219).

Of course the immediate suspicion awakened by a view of this kind is that, in spite of the detour through desire, it must amount to some form of hedonism, i.e. to the view that the value of an object is ultimately a matter of the pleasure (feeling) it will bring. But Ehrenfels is not a hedonist: he does not hold that one's own feelings constitute the ultimate goal of all desiring. To see why not, it is necessary to mention briefly his account of the relationship between desire and presentation. Desire is directed towards some desired object (the word 'object', here, being understood in the widest possible sense, to include also properties, relations, processes, etc.). And this desired object, according to Ehrenfels, must be presented in some way by he who desires it. Some idea of it must be present as a constituent of the act of desire. The question of hedonism amounts, therefore, to the question whether, when we desire, we also necessarily present to ourselves our own pleasure or our own pain, or the removal of the same. And the answer to this question is that in many cases we do, but *not in all.*

This is the case first of all because:

> In the most common circumstances of our everyday life our desiring goes directly to certain routine external tasks such as eating, drinking, waiting, sitting, sleeping, etc., without there being presented thereby the state of feeling which corresponds to these tasks (p.236)

— a point which anticipates the important role played by habit in Ehrenfels' theory, to be discussed in §10 below.

And it is the case, secondly, because some desires relate to periods of time of which the subject will not or could not have experience, or to the feelings of individuals with whom he could have no conceivable contact. I might, for example, desire that my remote descendants should have the opportunity to acquire a taste for oysters; or I might wish that the Spanish Inquisition had never taken place; and a range of other cases can be brought forward to demonstrate that the concept of an act which is directed towards goals other than one's own feelings does not contain any sort of contradiction.[6]

6. Complementary arguments to the same effect are to be found in Duncker, 1941.

Whilst the desiring subject does not in every case desire his own happiness, there is of course *some* relation between desire and happiness or, more generally, between desire and feeling. But this relation is a complex one, involving both the *dispositions* of the given individual and the relative promotion of happiness which he experiences as being associated with given acts.

We can say, very roughly, that the disposition to desire on the part of a given individual is dependent upon the dispositions of that individual to have certain feelings. To say more than this, we have to recognise that acts of desire, according to Ehrenfels, are divided into three categories of wishing, striving, and willing. These three categories are ordered by the intensity of the experienced tendency in each to exert a causal influence on the surroundings of the subject in such a way as to bring about the desired object. They are related also in such a way that, just as every desire incorporates a presentation of the desired object, so every striving incorporates a wishing and every willing incorporates a striving (p.367f; see also Ehrenfels, 1887).[7] In relation to the latter pair, now, there holds what Ehrenfels calls the *law of the relative promotion of happiness* [*Gesetz der relativen Glücksförderung*]:

> Every act of striving or willing, at the time at which it takes place, furthers the state of happiness [of the desiring subject] in comparison with that state which would have obtained in the case of the absence of the given act (p.239).

Or more precisely:

> Every act of desiring is conditioned, both in its goal and in its intensity, by the relative promotion of happiness which it brings — in the light of the feeling-dispositions of the individual in question — at its time of entry into the consciousness of this individual and during the time it remains therein (p.245).

This (relative) increase in happiness is of course not itself something which is *aimed at*: this would bring us back to a form of hedonism. Rather, the law expresses one aspect of a complex relation of dependence involving dispositional properties of an individual, in something like the way in which the law of marginal utility, which

7. In Brentano's terminology, a presentation is an inseparable part of every desire, a wishing is an inseparable part of every striving, and so on. Cf. Mulligan/Smith, 1985.

asserts that there is a tendency for the utility derived from a good to decrease with an increase in its supply, expresses one aspect of a complex relation of dependence involving the dispositional properties of a good to yield utility.

Note, too, that it would be unreasonable to assert any law of *absolute* increase in happiness. One might, for example, do continuous battle against an evil (for example ill-health), which is nevertheless continually worsening, and still be always *relatively* happier than one would otherwise have been. It is necessary, for given acts of striving and willing to take place, only that, should one have been condemned to abstain from them, one would have been still more unhappy.

§4. The Objects of Desire

The proposition that we ascribe value to things because we desire them was, we said, a first approximation. For there are things to which we ascribe value without our being able to desire them. Thus for example I cannot desire the possession of a material good which I already possess, yet I can perfectly well ascribe value to this good. Similarly, I cannot desire that I be alive, and yet I place a value on my being in this state. Ehrenfels expresses this point in a way which is at first paradoxical. He says that it is only of things which do not exist that we can say that they have value at all. Of other things we have to say strictly speaking that they would have value if they did not exist (p.252). A better approximation to a 'law of value' is then:

> We ascribe value to those things which we either in fact desire, or which we would desire if we were not convinced of their existence. The value of a thing is its desirability...The stronger we desire or would desire an object, the higher value does that object possess for us (p.253).

Some of the air of paradox is removed from such formulations when Ehrenfels points out that, whilst there is, certainly, a way of speaking according to which we desire material things, processes, states (e.g. states of mind), and even relationships and possibilities, our desirings and valuings never relate directly to the object, but always to its *existence* or *non-existence* (or, more generally, to our owning or losing it, to our being in or lacking control of it, to our consuming or failing to consume it, and so on, i.e. to what, in the jargon, is called a *Sachverhalt* or *state of affairs*):

> To desire an object is to desire either the existence of the thing or its possession, and then in the latter case the desire also relates to an existence, not of the thing itself, but of our power of disposing over it, and at the same time it is directed to a non-existence: the absence of all disturbances which would inhibit this power of disposal. Similarly we desire the existence or non-existence, or more particularly the occurrence or non-occurrence, of certain changes of place, processes, or states,... (p.254).

Note that 'existence', here, is not an abstract notion, as it is, for example, in the ontology of Meinong. (Ehrenfels' problems are not abstract, but perhaps the most concrete that there are.) For he insists that the presentation of existence or non-existence which is involved in an act of desire always relates in some way to existence within the causal order to which the subject experiences himself also as belonging.

> There is no special psychic basic-element "desiring" (wishing, striving, willing). What we call desiring is always nothing other than the presentation, founding a relative promotion of happiness, of the inclusion or exclusion of an object in or from the causal network around the centre of the present concrete I-presentation (p.386).

We can now see that the remark that wishing, striving and willing represent different orders of experienced causal involvement of the desiring subject applies, more precisely, to the ways in which the subject's own actions are presented by him as associated with this presentation of an inclusion or exclusion of the object of desire within this causal network. This association is most attenuated in the case of the wish, yet even here there is some residual causal involvement: however highly we might value the replication of events of a given sort, we do not wish that such events should take place in parallel universes with which we could have no possible causal contact.[8]

That the object of desire is always presented as set causally in relation to the surrounding reality of the subject is clear where the object of desire is a future state of the self (an effect of what he himself will *do*). But Ehrenfels insists that even in regard to far distant past or future times, for example if I desire that Socrates had been acquitted, or that Beethoven had heard his 9th Symphony, then I

8. It is considerations such as this, perhaps, which would explain the peculiar air of unreality which surrounds the dream-machine experiments spoken of by Robert Nozick in his 1974.

present these processes as brought into causal connection with things, processes and events which I regard as real. I consider the given processes always

> either as co-determining causes of present realities in which I, too, am involved (as in the two given cases) or as effects of shared causes, or as possible shared causes of future effects, all understood as related to my present surrounding reality [*in bezug auf die gegenwärtige subjektive Wirklichkeit*] (p.266).

This moment of causal involvement is reflected in the way in which desire has a real 'muscular' effect on one's body, the way in which objects of desire, as soon as we desire them, 'cease to float around as an insubstantial play of light and shadow in the region of phantasy — and win, as it were, embodiedness and weight' (p.366).

§5. On the Nature of Values

Ehrenfels dismisses out of hand attempts, such as the Marxian labour theory, to answer the question as to the nature of value by appeal to notions like cost or sacrifice. Certainly I may decide practically which of two objects is more valuable to me by asking myself for which object I would be prepared to make the greater sacrifice (pay the higher price). But this, as Ehrenfels points out, is nothing more than a useful practical expedient. It has no theoretical consequences:

> it could never help to throw light on the content of the concept of value, since of course it consists just in measuring one value against another, more specifically in measuring a positive against a negative value (p.267).

The tradition of Austrian philosophy to which Ehrenfels belonged sought not to *reduce* one sort of object to another, but rather to describe as faithfully as possible our experiences of given objects and to describe the interconnections between them in such a way as to allow these descriptions to throw light on questions as to their nature and mode of existence. In regard to values, Ehrenfels points out that they cannot be properties, dispositions or capacities of objects, for then their existence would be bound up with the existence of the objects involved. Such a conception would imply, for instance, that the value of the victory of the Normans in 1066, for example for present-day Frenchmen, ceased to exist in 1066. Value is, rather,

according to Ehrenfels, a certain sort of *intentional relation* between a subject and an object. It is an intentional relation because its obtaining does not depend upon the simultaneous existence of the two relata. In this respect it is comparable to the relation between presentation and presented object, or between judgment and object judged about, but it is comparable also to relations such as similarity and difference.[9] And all of these relations, Ehrenfels argues, can be awarded a kind of 'supertemporal existence' (p.261).[10]

The relation of value consists in the fact that 'the subject either actually desires the object or would desire it were he not convinced of its existence' (loc.cit.). This relation exists

> wherever the most intuitive, vivid and complete presentation of the existence of the given object conditions in the subject a state which lies higher on the feeling-scale pleasure-displeasure than the corresponding presentation of matters given the non-existence of the object. The magnitude of the value is proportional to the intensity of the desire, as also to the distance between the two feeling-states so characterised (loc.cit.).

Thus value is 'subjective' in the two-fold sense that it depends for its existence on a specific valuing subject and for its internal constitution (intensity and directedness) upon the dispositions of that subject. It is, however, 'erroneously objectified by language' (p.31). Value is not, be it noted, hereby *reduced* to dispositions to feeling. For value is not an automatic reflection of feeling-dispositions, as if we could read off the value a thing would have for each given subject from a knowledge of the way that subject is disposed to feel. Value relates to feeling always through the mediation of *desire*, and this introduces an element of voluntarism into the account. The presence of this element reflects the fact that, at least in certain circumstances, desire must come in advance of associated feeling, and this in turn has great significance for Ehrenfels' conception of the motor of human evolution, which he seems to conceive as a species of excess energy of desire.

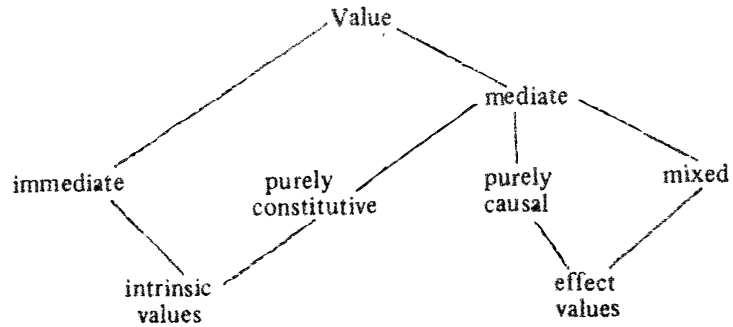
9. The confusion, or at least the terminological running together of intentional and formal relations is characteristic of early Brentanians, including Husserl.

10. On relational theories of value in general see Ingarden, 1984.

§6. Types of Values

I may desire something either for its own sake, or because of the effects which I conceive it as having in bringing about something which I desire for its own sake. This yields for Ehrenfels a division into *intrinsic values* [*Eigenwerte*] and *effect values* [*Wirkungswerte*].[11]

On the other hand, an object may have intrinsic value for me only in virtue of the value of some part or moment. Ehrenfels gives the example of the intrinsic value of a man in virtue of his good character. The value of the good character Ehrenfels calls an *immediate* value.[12] The value of the man he calls a *constitutive* value (compare the value typology represented below). An example of a *mixed* constitutive and effect value would be the value of a piece of ore in virtue of that part of it which is iron, which is in turn valued because of the effects of its use in particular applications. But note that the piece of ore may also — for example in reflection of its beauty — have value for its own sake. This shows that even the position of objects in the value typology is in part context- and subject-dependent. One and the same object can in one context have an intrinsic value, in another merely an effect value, and in another it may have no value at all.



(from p. 269 of *System der Werttheorie.*)

11. Menger's theory of capital divides effect values in turn into effect values of first order, which yield intrinsic value directly, effect values of second order, which yield effect values of first order, and so on.

12. It attaches to its object 'immediately' in the sense of Husserl (Logical Investigation III, §18).

The constitutive value of a whole is simply the sum of the immediate values of the parts. The effect value of a whole, in contrast, is normally not simply the sum of the values of the parts. (Consider the respective effect values of two pairs of shoes, one a normal pair, the other a pair consisting of two — independently perhaps more valuable — left shoes.) This non-summative character of effect values reflects what the Austrian economists called 'complementarity' amongst material and other resources, and ch. VII of Part I of *System der Werttheorie*, "On the Calculation of Effect Values", is in essence an exposition of the main outlines of the Austrian economic theory of complementarity and of the associated notions of imputation and substitution. With regard to these last, both Menger and Ehrenfels share the view that we assign effect values to objects to the extent that we believe intrinsic values to be dependent upon their existence (p.31). (The proposition that the value of goods of higher order is derived solely from the value of the consumer goods in whose manufacture they serve has indeed come to be called 'Menger's law' by present-day proponents of Austrian economics.) The problem of 'imputation' is just the problem of calculating effect values given this dependence on intrinsic values. (How, in a complex process of production of some consumer good, is the value of the factors used in this process to be imputed from the value for consumers of the expected end-product?) Central to the economists' solution to this problem, and also to Ehrenfels' account, is the notion of substitutability, the idea that the magnitude of an effect value is the cost of substituting some other means of bringing about the same effect. The value of the water on board a ship is the cost of a detour to replenish stocks, and this changes, from day to day, with the distance from the nearest port.

Effect values, for Ehrenfels, divide into material goods on the one hand and human beings (or more particularly 'human actions and qualities') on the other. The former he conceives as the subject-matter of economics, the latter fall within the domain of ethics, though of course human beings, too, can be treated as material goods, for example when they are used as slaves (p.399). But this implies a rejection of the more usual classifications of the sciences of values: for now economics and ethics, conceived as sciences of effect values, stand over against, for example, aesthetics, logic, medicine, hygiene, and other disciplines dealing with intrinsic values:

> Art, science, health — when these words are understood in a particular way — all belong to that great complex of intrinsic values which lend existence to effect values not only in the economic but also in the ethical sphere (p.400).

§7. What Doth Charity Avail Me?

To solve the imputation problem, for example in order to decide whether to spend one's fortune on religious or on political purposes, or on some mixture of both, or on wine, women, or song, it is necessary that the individual valuing subject have some implicit notion of a *common measure* of the intrinsic values which might be yielded by resources at his disposal. Classically, the term 'utility' has been employed for this concept, but Ehrenfels finds this term too narrow. For something is normally said to be of utility for a subject only to the extent that it leads to a result which is of intrinsic value *for him*, i.e. of intrinsic value in the narrow, egoistic sense:

> Thus, according to common conceptions, the money which I give out for my own pleasure is of utility; not, however, that which I give to the beggar — which gives *him* utility (p.271).

In order to leave 'utility' with its customary meaning we therefore introduce as a technical term the word 'avail' (a translation of Ehrenfels' somewhat archaic '*Frommen*'). By 'avail' is meant, quite generally, the magnitudes of intrinsic values underlying effect values, so that utility then appears as a sub-class of avail. Courage in battle, duteous service in one's parish, honour, charity, loyalty, marriage, honesty, may all be lacking in utility for given individuals in given circumstances; but this does not mean that they are *without avail*. Ehrenfels even goes so far as to formulate a 'law of diminishing marginal avail' (p.274), and in this he is, with Böhm-Bawerk, one of the first to recognise the possibility of generalising the point of view of economic theory — in a way which has now become almost commonplace — to areas where it has hitherto been held to be entirely alien.[13]

13. Cf. Böhm-Bawerk, 1881, Becker, McKenzie and, for a general introduction, McKenzie-Tullock.

§8. Interpersonal Value-Comparisons

A further problem for the general theory of values is that of comparing or relating the valuations of different individuals. One might, for example, reason that to affirm that M places more value on object A than N, is to affirm that M is ready to relinquish more than N for the realisation of A. But then of course we have no means of comparing their respective valuations of what it is that each is prepared to sacrifice in order to attain the desired goal. In certain circumstances we can appeal to some common standard. M might, for example, be prepared to sacrifice his life and entire fortune for some given end, where N is prepared to offer no more than, say, an old raincoat. And because, in the case of values such as life, liberty, health, the life of one's family and the like, we can assume a fair amount of uniformity across a normal population, we can reasonably conclude in such circumstances that, other things being equal, M's valuation is the higher. But a clear-cut conclusion of this sort will be available only in relatively rare circumstances.

Ehrenfels therefore considers also the possibility of effecting an independent comparison of different subjects' valuations by appeal to the intensities of their respective acts of feeling and desire, that the two types of comparison may serve as some sort of check on each other. Intensities of feeling and desire are, after all, correlated, at least to some extent, with physiological phenomena which can be measured. He notes, however, that the comparison of such absolute intensities does not yield a valid measure for value-comparison:

> For suppose the two subjects M and N are of a completely identical psychical disposition, with the single exception that all feeling reactions in M are one and a half times more intensive than in N. In this case M and N would behave identically in all identical situations; indeed one would have no means at all, and no clue, as to how to identify the difference in their feeling-reactions or even to presume that there is such a difference... If two subjects behave identically in all conceivable cases of conflict, then they also value identically (p.282f.).

In the comparison of the valuations of different subjects what matters is, therefore, the *direction* and the *relative* intensities of the decisions of their will and of their impulses to action, not the absolute intensities of their feeling states.

§9. The Struggle for Existence among Values

Values are, as we have seen, in every case relative to valuing subjects, and since there is competition amongst those subjects for valued objects of various types, so, derivatively, there arises a competition amongst values themselves. It is as if the material of value were itself a scarce resource, and subject to all of the characteristics of scarce resources, including the liability to degenerate through overuse or to be used up, and to be affected e.g. by climatic or technological change or by growth in knowledge.

Ehrenfels is aware that his account of the mechanisms governing value-change may suggest certain parallels with the materialist interpretation of history. But the latter goes too far, he claims, in seeing the superstructural dimension of value as being determined exhaustively by underlying material developments. His account, in contrast, sees a complex system of dependence relations between dispositions and tendencies on the two levels in such a way as to leave room for even large-scale consequences of individual acts, including sometimes gratuitous acts of desire.

Crucial to Ehrenfels' account — which suggests also a comparison with Nietzsche — is his belief that intrinsic values, too, may change. Indeed, Ehrenfels criticises economics for concerning itself with effect values exclusively under conditions of stable intrinsic values (p.333). Change in intrinsic values is brought about above all in response to changes in effect values, and then the new intrinsic values,

> in calling forth new strivings on the part of human beings, transform the relations of man to man, and therefore also transform for the valuing individual the circumstances of his surrounding world, thereby setting in train once more new motion in the effect values (loc.cit.).

Thus the intrinsic value which we, in Western countries, have lately learned to award to 'self-development' on the part of women, reflects changes for example in the effect values of home services (brought about by technological developments in the fields of cooking and cleaning). It almost certainly reflects also changes in the effect values used up in generating 'self-development' (as education, for example, has become cheaper, relative to other goods).

It is clear from all of this that there is no trace, in Ehrenfels' thinking, of value-absolutism or value-objectivism such as we find in, say, Plato, Meinong, Scheler, or N. Hartmann (or indeed, though

these are perhaps to be taken less seriously, in certain protagonists of so-called 'human rights').[14]

Nor, either, is there a trace of ethical formalism such as we find in the 'metaphysical-mystical dogmatism' of Kant (p.215): the principle of universalisability Ehrenfels would reject as the result of an insensitivity to the ways in which even intrinsic values may differ from individual to individual according to age, sex, or personal disposition, e.g. because of the different repertoire of effect values which each will have at his disposal.

Ehrenfels' approach to values always manifests a total respect for the kaleidic shifts in the totality of values, the motor of which he sees as an extraordinarily subtle and complex system of the most manifold effects and counter-effects, where 'one step disturbs a thousand leaves' (p.333). Ehrenfels' views here are not, however, merely a form of social organicism (a fascination with the biomorphology of society). They are, rather, the result of a theoretical recognition of the importance of the marginal principle — of the principle that you can have too much of a good thing — in governing the movements of value in a society. Classical utilitarianism ignores this principle in affirming, flatly, that the general utility of given feeling-dispositions will guarantee their high ethical value. For it thereby fails to account for the cases where, precisely as a result of such high valuation, a given feeling-disposition is replicated to the extent where it begins to have negative consequences for the common good. For Ehrenfels, in contrast:

> Only those dispositions are valued highly for which an *increase* in the factually existing stock would be such as to promote the general good (p.438).

Only those feeling-dispositions are valued highly for which the

14. Values, for Ehrenfels, either exist or do not exist: they cannot be true or false. He does however recognise certain sorts of *error of valuation*. The value of quack remedies, for example, comes into being only through the mediation of a false judgment about an object. He recognises also the possibility of making a false judgment about a value, e.g., when someone assumes, incorrectly, that he knows what is best for another. Cf. *System der Werttheorie*, Part I, Ch.IX and Part II, Ch. VII. A full treatment of these matters would require a detailed comparison of Ehrenfels' views with those of Brentano (1889), for whom the role of (correct and incorrect) *judgment* in the theory of values is much more prominent.

demand is greater than the supply, and a large part of Ehrenfels' ethics is concerned with the social 'regulators' which stimulate individuals to optimal levels of production of feelings such as guilt, regret, compassion, caution, enthusiasm, and the like.

§10. Value and Habit

Ehrenfels' account of the evolution of values rests on a distinction between 1. *cultural* development, i.e. the accumulation of products of material and intellectual labour, or of capital in the widest sense, including acquired human capital, art, language, religion, law, traditions of child-rearing, etc., and 2. constitutive development, i.e. the evolution of inborn physical and psychical characteristics of the organism.[15] It is one principal theme of Ehrenfels' later writings that cultural evolution may have a negative effect on constitutive evolution (cf. Graßl, 1982a, pp.13ff.). It is not this aspect of Ehrenfels' thought which is of interest to us here, however, but rather the details of the ways in which, on his account, cultural and constitutive factors interact with each other *in the individual subject*. We shall seek specifically to answer the question as to how the individual can acquire or learn to perceive cultural values as values at all.

Before we can answer this question, however, another detour is necessary, in order that we may set forth the outlines of a strain of Herbartianism in Ehrenfels' thinking. Herbart conceived the mind as consisting, in effect, of two levels: a strictly confined level of *consciousness*, and a deeper, sub-conscious level, within which it is as if there is unlimited space and freedom of movement.[16] Elements are exchanged continuously between the two levels, their passage governed by quasi-mechanical laws of attraction and repulsion ('laws of

15. As will become clear, there is much in Ehrenfels' writings to suggest the further distinction, emphasised by Hayek (1979), between 1(a). cultural values which are the product of deliberate human creation or design, for example the value of an electro-turbine, and 1(b). cultural values which exist as a result of human action but as its *unintended consequences*. Not everything that is not natural is therefore also 'artificial' in the normal sense of this word.

16. It may be worth pointing out here that Herbart had a no less powerful influence on the thinking of Freud.

association') and subject to different sorts of forces and pressures ('inhibition', 'suppression', etc.).

The details of Herbart's view need not, fortunately, concern us here. The version which Ehrenfels accepted was, in any case, toned down by elements of the rather more sophisticated act-psychology of Brentano. The following passage from the *System der Werttheorie* will, however, give a flavour of the view in question:

> Immediately after we receive a vivid impression, the image of the latter floats before us with great clarity, and even if it is for a time suppressed from our consciousness through subsequent experiences, still, it reasserts itself without any exertion on our part as soon as there is, so to speak, a free space — somewhat as a submerged piece of wood will rise to the surface of water as soon as one leaves it to itself (p.341f.)[17]

Let us assume, if only for the sake of argument, that there is at least some grain of truth in what Herbart, Ehrenfels (and Freud) have to say in this and similar passages about the 'narrowness of consciousness' [*Enge des Bewußtseins*]. What is the relevance of this notion to our present concerns? Actions normally take place only to the extent that there are associated desires (acts of striving and willing). But such desires, together with the presentations which they involve and the feelings with which they may be associated, *take up space*, to the extent that the execution of even a relatively unsophisticated system of actions would be impossible if the presentations and desires associated with each of its various component parts would have to remain in consciousness simultaneously. The narrowness of consciousness would seem to imply that it would be possible for man to form desires relating only to relatively simple tasks, ordered at best in a linear fashion, leaving no scope for the nesting of ends and means, for practice and rehearsal, for planning or preparation in advance. How, then, can the sometimes massively complicated systems of higher order actions characteristic of life in developed societies come about at all?

It will not suffice to seek a solution to this problem by pointing to what might be called a *division of the labour of desire* in society (though such certainly exists), for there are many higher-order actions which involve one individual only, and even in cases of collective action the problem would remain of giving an account — other than by an appeal to some kind of pre-established harmony — of how the

17. The passage occurs in the context of a discussion of Herbart's theory.

respective desires of the participating subjects should reticulate with each other in just the ways which are necessary to yield the appropriate results.

Ehrenfels' solution to this problem consists in the idea that even complex systems of higher order actions, as they manifest themselves in the life of the individual, are broken down into constituent, relatively routine tasks, in such a way that the desires necessary to call forth each particular task in the appropriate context enter into consciousness automatically. This comes about in virtue of the fact that the objects whose realisation is the goal of the given constituent micro-actions have become, in different ways, stamped with value in their own right. Or more precisely, since for Ehrenfels value is itself just the relation of desirability of an object for a subject, the subject himself becomes affected in such a way that desire for the realisation of the given object arises automatically within him, without his having to recall or work out rationally in each successive instance why it is that he finds the given object valuable.

The mechanisms by which the subject is affected in the relevant ways are certain highly specific feeling-dispositions 'which enable us to carry through a system of actions once started with relatively little expense of presentational activity in our desiring' (p.372). These are portmanteau feeling-dispositions, effective, in principle, in relation to all spheres of life, dispositions which we have just because we are normally developed acting, desiring subjects. Thus, at least within certain limits, we possess a disposition to feel more comfortable in *doing what we have done before* (the mechanism of ***habituation***). We possess a disposition to feel uneasiness at an interruption of a system of actions once initiated, or at the giving up of a decision once made.[18] It is as a result of these and related dispositions that objects which we have once conceived as means towards some desired goal thereby quickly acquire the characteristic of goods in their own right. Thus we are spared the constant regard to the end-result or ultimate goal of our actions, *or indeed to any goal at all.* In the course of the

18. The parallel suggests itself between these phenomena and the phenomena of time-preference and risk-aversion discussed by economists (and in particular by the members of the Austrian school). All the given dispositions occur to different degrees in different individuals, and in different types and classes of individual. All can be affected by (and have an effect on the success of) education and training.

execution of the overwhelming majority of our actions we proceed *mechanically*.

> The student, for example, does not need to recall, as he buys his train ticket at the station, that he is doing this because it is necessary to reach the mountains; he has already qualified the ticket — or the possession of it — as a 'good' in the considerations which preceded his decision. And he desires this good, now, for as long as the given considerations are not put out of action — not as means, but as end, just as he desires the view from the mountains (p.373).

Where we imagine that a given system of actions is running its course in a way which implies that it is coordinated by a determined ego or self, characterised by resolution and single-mindedness, there is in fact a continuous and somewhat haphazard switching of desire from end-result to mediate goal, from present action to subsequent action, interspersed, for the far greater part of the time (or indeed, in cases of total routinisation, usurped entirely), by periods without any sort of desire at all. And we can hereby perhaps begin to understand how it is possible that the specific material dispositions appropriate to given higher order actions should become inscribed on the individual, and how the associated systems of cultural values should come into being and should thereafter be preserved and respected. Consider, for example, the complex networks of values which are involved in the respect we have for good manners, or for good grammar, or for legal or political or religious institutions, or in our concern to go about our daily tasks in an honest and diligent fashion. The dispositions to feeling which these values reflect are not, except in a vanishingly small degree, innate; and nor are they acquired as a result of rational insight on the part of individuals into the truth or falsity of given laws or maxims. Rather, they are the cumulative effects of the workings of mechanisms of habituation, etc., of the kind referred to above.[19]

Of course, in the vast majority of cases, these mechanisms are brought into play and the relevant dispositions thereby become

19. Many of the ideas in this section will be found, in different forms, in Hayek, 1962, which rests in turn on Hayek, 1952. They can be detected also in the thinking of Hume, for whom of course the notion of *habit* played a central role, not least in his conception of the workings of political and religious institutions. (See Ehrenfels, 1887, pp.554, 576.)

inscribed on the subject as a result of the fact that an individual is in the first place constrained by another to execute a given higher order action *against his will*. Individuals acquire culture above all through training and education. But to describe the complex interplay of value and feeling which is at work in this, necessarily collective or collaborative process, would lead us far too far afield.

§11. Conclusion

This brief outline has, I hope, brought out three central features of Ehrenfels' work on value theory:

1. its naturalism and descriptive depth: Ehrenfels makes no assumption that need be regarded as implausible by any human science;
2. its appeal to *structure*, to dependence relations and causal relations, above all involving acts and dispositions to act;[20]
3. its sensitivity to the relational character of values, which is manifested in a way which leaves room for a power on the part of individuals to determine values — without however collapsing into mere relativism or scepticism.

20. Dependence relations or relations of inseparability holding across time are inadmissible within the framework of Brentano's own descriptive psychology, which is in this respect inferior to that of Ehrenfels: see the critical remarks appended to Mulligan/Smith, 1985.

Bibliography

Anscombe, G.E.M. 1978 "Will and Emotion", in R.M.Chisholm and R. Haller, eds., *Die Philosophie Franz Brentanos*, Amsterdam: Rodopi (*Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 5), 139-48.

Becker, G.S. 1976 *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Böhm-Bawerk, E. von 1881 *Rechte und Verhältnisse vom Standpunkt der volkswirtschaftlichen Güterlehre*, Vienna: Wagner'schen Universitätsbuchhandlung; Eng. trans. as: "Whether Legal Rights and Relationships are Economic Goods", in *Shorter Classics of Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk*, South Holland: Libertarian Press, vol.I, 30-138, 1962.

Brentano, F. 1874 *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, vol.I, 1st ed., Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot; Eng. trans. of 2nd ed., *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, London: Routledge, 1973.

— 1889 *Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis*, Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot; Eng. trans., *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, London: Routledge, 1969.
Duncker, K. 1941 "On Pleasure, Emotion and Striving", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1, 391-430.
Eaton, H. O. 1930 *The Austrian Philosophy of Value*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
Ehrenfels, C. von 1887 "Über Fühlen und Wollen. Eine psychologische Studie", *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften (phil.-hist. Klasse)*, 114, 523-636.
— 1890 "Über 'Gestaltqualitäten'", *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie*, 14, 242-92; Eng. trans. in Smith, ed., (in preparation).
— 1893/94 "Werttheorie und Ethik", *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie*, 17, 76-110, 200-266, 321-63, 413-75; 18, 77-97; repr. in Ehrenfels, 1982.
— 1897 *System der Werttheorie*, vol. I, *Allgemeine Werttheorie. Psychologie des Begehrens*, Leipzig: Reisland.
— 1898 *System der Werttheorie*, vol. II, *Grundzüge einer Ethik*, Leipzig: Reisland; both vols. repr. in Ehrenfels, 1982.
— 1916 "Höhe und Reinheit der Gestalt", from *Kosmogonie*, Jena: Diederichs, pp.93-96, repr. in F. Weinhandl, ed., *Gestalthaftes Sehen*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 4-46; Eng. trans. in Smith, ed., (in preparation).
— 1982 *Philosophische Schriften*, vol. I, *Werttheorie*, ed. R. Fabian, Munich: Philosophia.
Fabian, R. and Simons, P.M. 1985 "The Second Austrian School of Value Theory", in Smith and Grassl, eds.
Grassl, W. 1981 "Grenznutzenlehre und Ethik", in E. Morscher and R. Stranzinger, eds., *Ethik. Grundlagen, Probleme und Anwendungen*, Proceedings of the 5th International Wittgenstein Symposium, Kirchberg am Wechsel, 1980, Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 219-22.
— 1982 "La morale come mercato: utilitarismo e marginalismo nella filosofia morale di Mario Calderoni", in R. Faucci, ed., *Gli italiani e Bentham. Dalla "felicità pubblica" all'economia del benessere*, Roma: Franco Angeli, vol. II, 29-41.
— 1982a "Christian von Ehrenfels als Werttheoretiker", in Ehrenfels, 1982, 1-22.
— 1985 "Markets and Moarlity. Austrian Perspektives on the Economic Approach to Human Behaviour", in Smith and Grassl, eds.
— (forthcoming) "Etica ed economia. La matrice austriaca del pensiero di Mario Calderoni", *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*.
Hayek, F.A. 1952 *The Sensory Order. An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology*, London: Routledge.

— 1962 "Rules, Perception and Intelligibility", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48, repr. in *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*, London: Routledge, 1967, pp.43-65.
— 1979 "The Three Sources of Human Values", in *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. 3, London: Routledge, 153-176.
Ingarden, R. 1984 *Man and Value*, Munich: Philosophia.
Kirzner, I.M. 1973 *Competition and Entrepreneurship*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
— 1979 *Perception, Opportunity and Profit: Studies in the Theory of Entrepreneurship*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Kraus, O. 1901 *Zur Theorie des Wertes. Eine Bentham-Studie*, Halle: Niemeyer.
— 1937 *Die Werttheorien. Geschichte und Kritik*, Brünn: Rohrer.
Kreibig, J.C. 1902 *Psychologische Grundlegung eines Systems der Wert-Theorie*, Wien: Hölder.
McKenzie, R.B. 1977 "The Economic Dimensions of Ethical Behavior", *Ethics*, 87, 208-21.
— and Tullock, G. 1978 *The New World of Economics*, Homewood: Irwin.
Meinong, A. von 1894 *Psychologisch-ethische Untersuchungen zur Werth-theorie*, Graz: Leuschner and Lubensky.
Menger, C. 1871 *Grundsätze der Volkswirtschaftslehre*, Vienna: Braumüller; Eng. trans. as *Principles of Economics*, Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950.
Mulligan, K. and Smith, B. 1985 "Franz Brentano's Ontology of Mind. A Critical Study of the *Deskriptive Psychologie*", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 45.
Nozick, R. 1974 *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books.
— 1981 *Philosophical Explanations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Smith, B. 1985 "Austrian Economics and Austrian Philosophy", in Smith and Grassl, eds.
Smith, B., ed. 1985 *Foundations of Gestalt Theory*, Munich: Philosophia.
Smith, B. and Grassl, W., eds. 1986 *Austrian Economics. Historical and Philosophical Background*, Beckenham: Croom Helm.