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VALUES, VALUING AND EVALUATION

by

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INTRODUCTION

Professor von Wright has stated that those concepts relevant to ethics may be divided approximately into three groups. The three groups he suggests are value concepts, which include the concepts of good, bad and evil, normative concepts, which include obligation, right, prohibition and permission, and finally, concepts which belong to "the notion of a human act" and "notions which are relevant to action" such as desire, end, need, want, intention, motive, reason and will. Von Wright suggests that the study of this third group of concepts could be called a "Philosophical Theory of Man" or "Philosophical Anthropology", for such a study is often embarked upon if the view is held that "one can look for the foundation of morals ... in the needs and wants of man and in the specific nature of man as agent".

This rather sweeping categorization does draw attention to an approach to ethics that has been neglected of late - the use of "Philosophical Anthropology" to clarify our

2. Ibid, pp.7-8.
understanding of value-concepts and of evaluation. In the following study, this approach will be adopted in order to discuss the capacity of men to value things, and also, to have values. The relation of evaluation to both these capacities will be discussed\(^1\), for it will be seen that men only value and have as values, things which they believe to be good in some way or other. It will be suggested that the notion of what it is to value something will remain obscure until our understanding of evaluation is broadened to encompass particular interests, wants and purposes of individual human beings.

In a sense, this could be called a meta-ethical study, for the primary interest of the thesis is to offer a partial answer to the question, "What does it mean to say that someone 'values' something?" In answering this question, it is hoped that some light will also be thrown on the nature of values, and on the types of evaluation associated with valuing. It is thus a conceptual study of valuing, evaluation and values, and some relations that hold between them. One could say that it is an attempt to clarify and broaden our understanding of the meaning of these three words. However, it should not be thought that

\(^1\) In Chapter I the substantival and verbal uses of the word "value" are discussed. To have values and to value something are both distinguished from what it is to evaluate something.
such a study presupposes that the meanings of these words, that the concepts involved, are fixed and need only to be explicated. Although we know well enough how and when to use phrases like, "He evaluated X", "He values X", or "X is one of his values", the grounds on which we make such statements remain unclear, the relations between such concepts obscure. It is in the clarification of issues such as these that we may come to a better understanding of what the words mean. It is at this point that our reference to "Philosophical Anthropology" becomes relevant, for it will be tacitly assumed that attention to particular wants, interests and purposes of men, help to clarify the concepts mentioned, and certain relations between them.

Thus, this study should be seen not only as one of conceptual analysis, but also as one of concept construction, for concepts of what it is to value something and what it is to have values are in particular confused. (The extreme ambiguity of the word "value" contributes to this confusion.) A lucid account of this type of procedure has been offered by von Wright.

Reflection on the grounds for calling things by words is a type of conceptual investigation. ... The aim of the type of investigation of which I am speaking, is not to 'uncover' the existing meaning ... of some word or expression, veiled as it were behind the bewildering complexities of common usage. The idea of
the philosopher as a searcher of meanings should not be coupled with an idea or postulate that the searched entities actually are there - awaiting the vision of the philosopher. If this picture of the philosopher's pursuit were accurate, then conceptual investigation would, for all I can see, be an empirical inquiry into the actual use of language or the meaning of expressions.

Philosophic reflexion on the grounds for calling a thing 'x' is challenged in situations, when the grounds have not been fixed, when there is no settled opinion as to what the grounds are. The concept still remains to be moulded and therewith its logical connexions with other concepts to be established. The words and expressions, the use of which bewilder the philosopher, are so to speak in search of a meaning.¹

This being the case, I do not apologise for the fact that certain distinctions I shall draw concerning the use of the word "value" are not reflected clearly in common usage.

Although not often recognised as such, considerations that could be termed "Philosophical Anthropology" have emerged in meta-ethical studies. A very brief study of this type is attempted by Professor Hare in his book *The Language of Morals*, to be found in chapter eight which is called "Commending and Choosing". However, the neglect of this type of study has tended to produce very restricted and misleading views of the nature of evaluation in

particular¹. I wish to discuss Professor Hare's attempted explanation of the logical nature of value-words, in order to show how his concept of what it is to evaluate something may be broadened to encompass varieties of evaluation other than those he describes. As it will be seen that evaluation of an object in a manner to be specified is a precondition of it being valued, this discussion is a necessary preliminary to our analysis of what it is to value something.

¹. An example of such a limited view of evaluation may be found in J.O. Urmson's "On Grading", in A.G.N. Flew (Ed.), Logic and Language, Second Series (Oxford, 1961), pp.159-186.