

Realist axiology

Preamble

- Early stages of work, seeking feedback
- Overly ambitious abstract – too many questions to deal with in one presentation

Overview

- What is axiology and why does (or might) it matter for evaluation?
 - What is the importance for philosophy for evaluation?
 - What is the relationship between 'value' and 'values', and how should that be taken into account in axiology in evaluation?
- Is there is, or may there be, a philosophical position in relation to value/values and valuing that derives from, or is at least consistent with realist philosophy?
- What functions can value/values play in realist analysis – are they contexts, mechanisms, or outcomes?

Philosophy and (realist) evaluation

Philosophy is the systematic inquiry into the principles and presuppositions of any field of study

Ontology

The nature of reality.
“What is real?”

Epistemology

The nature of knowledge.
What can we know & how do
we know that we know it?

Axiology

The nature of value.
What is good, right or of value?

Realist ontology

- Mind-independent reality
- Social world is real, albeit not material
- Stratified reality
 - Levels of systems
 - Bhaskar – empirical, actual, real
- Emergence
- The realist understanding of causation

Realist epistemology

- Knowledge is socially and individually constructed
- No such thing as final truth or knowledge
- Reality constrains the interpretations that are reasonably made of it

Axiology

‘Axiology can be thought of as primarily concerned with classifying what things are good, and how good they are. For instance, a traditional question of axiology concerns whether the objects of value are subjective psychological states, or objective states of the world.’

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-theory/>

‘The fundamental project of axiology is the attempt to discover, properly formulate, and defend principles determining the intrinsic values of various things’

<http://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/Phil220/axiology.html>

...the study of value; the investigation of its nature, criteria, and metaphysical status.

<https://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/what.shtml>

..any particular axiology (a view about which states of affairs are the valuable ones).

https://www.reddit.com/r/askphilosophy/comments/xhewk/alternatives_to_utilitarianism/

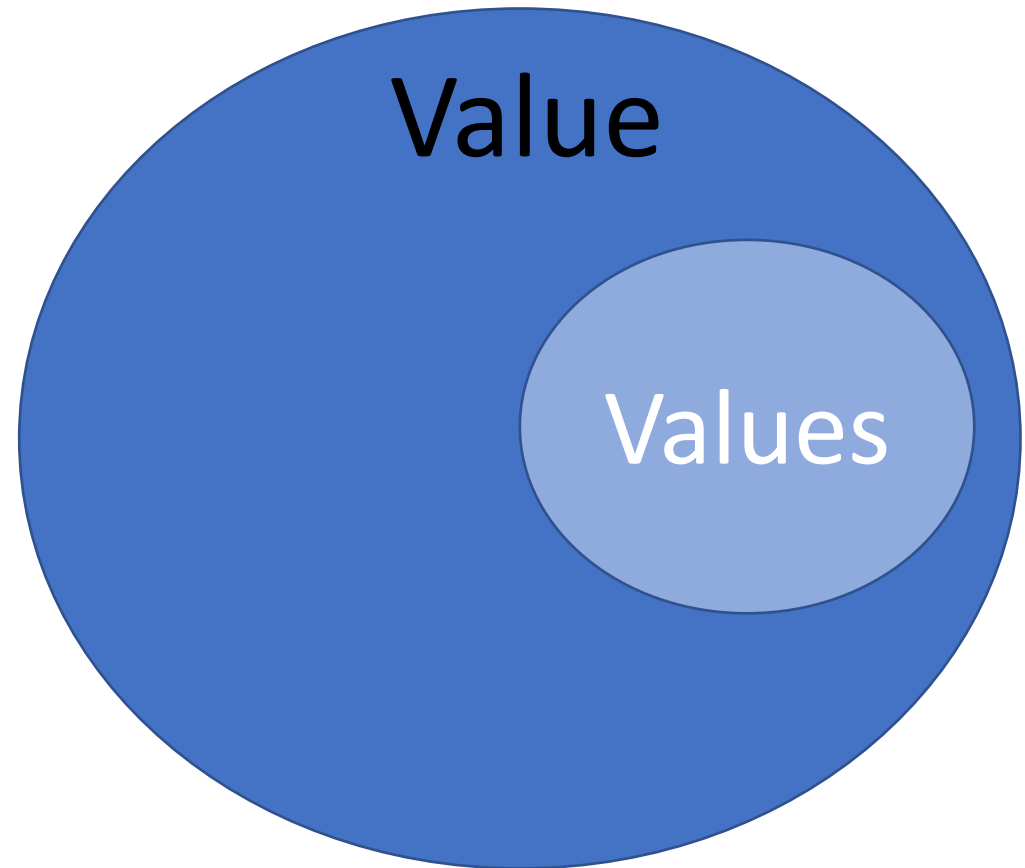
Axiology and e-valuation

- **Evaluation** is a process of assessing and making judgements of value
 - “Merit, worth, significance”
- **Philosophy** is the systematic inquiry into the principles and presuppositions of any field of study
- **Axiology in evaluation** should be systematic inquiry into the principles and presuppositions of valuing
- **Realist axiology** – Principles and presuppositions of valuing which are consistent with realist ontology and realist epistemology

Value and values

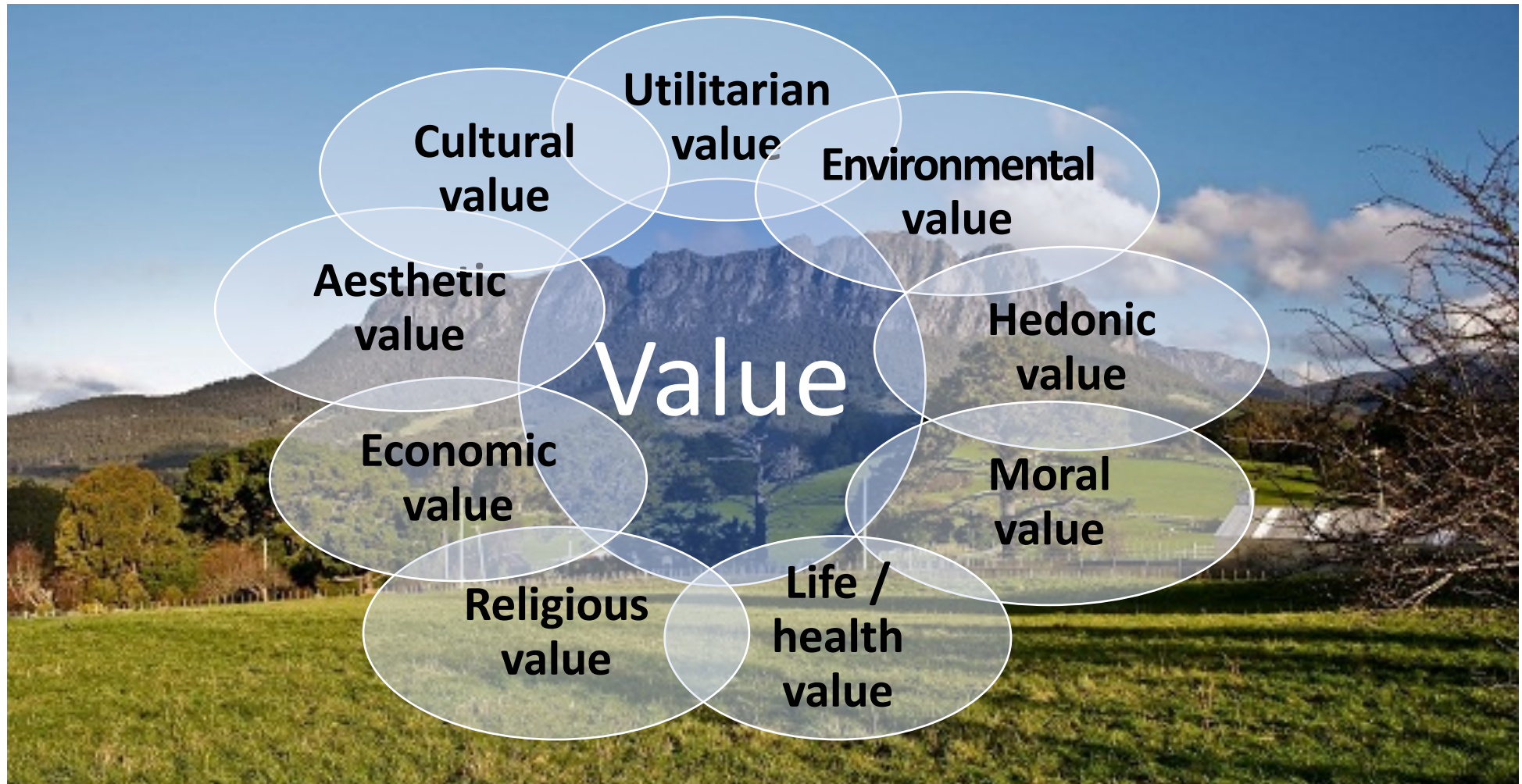
Values = moral
positions, principles

Values = multiple
kinds of value



Value in evaluation

“What things are good?”



Axiological realism ≠ Realist axiology

- Axiological realism:

- – a value position in the philosophy of science: ‘that science pursues theories that are true’; regardless of whether we can know that a theory is in fact true.
- “...value claims (such as, nurturing a baby is good and abusing a baby is bad) can be literally true or false; that some such claims are indeed true; that their truth can be known or substantially approximated by humans objectively...

<http://damienmarieathope.com/2015/10/axiology-naturalism-realism-and-moral-theory-ideas/>

- What especially distinguishes the quasi-realist project is an emphasis on explaining why we are entitled to act as if moral judgments are genuinely truth-apt even while strictly speaking they are neither true nor false in any robust sense.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-cognitivism/#DetGenDes>

- Realist axiology – an approach to valuing in realist evaluation (and research) which seeks to be consistent with realist ontology and epistemology

Tasks for realist axiology

- Addressing issues of value, values and valuing in ways that are consistent with realist ontology and epistemology.
- Identifying the implications of realist ontology and epistemology for 'valuing' in e-valuation
- Identifying the implications of realist ontology and epistemology for issues with ethical / values implications (e.g. the implications of multiple causality for responsibility in programs and policies)
- Informing the development of realist research ethics

Founding papers

- Gary Henry and George Julnes, Values and realist evaluation, in Henry, Julnes and Mark (1998) Realist Evaluation: An Emerging Theory in Support of Practice
- Working towards 'a realist theory of values'
- ≠ a realist theory of value and valuing

A realist view on the nature (ontology) of value

- There is a real world, independent of our interpretations of it.
 - Things in themselves exist, independent of whether and how we value them
- The social world is real
- “That which has real effects is real, whether or not it is material”
(Bhaskar)
- Value has real effects in the world
- Value is real

A realist view on the nature (ontology) of value

- An axiological question: “subjective psychological states, or objective states of the world?”

Tentative realist proposition:

- Value is attributed by humans: “Humans have a natural capacity for valuing aspects of everyday life as well as issues of policy” (Henry & Julnes, 1998, p 54)
- Real things (material or not) have characteristics and attributes. Value is attributed in response to particular characteristics of the ‘valued object’ and their relationship to the values of the valuer
- That is: value is concurrently inherent to the ‘valued object’ and an attribution – *it lies in the interaction between the two*: value is an emergent property of that interaction

Value is contextual

- Value is context specific
 - Valuing is undertaken in light of the context of the valuer
 - The context of the valuer is always complex and multi-faceted – attributed value may be different for the same person in different situations or at different times
 - Attributed value can be different for different people in the same situation
 - Valuing is culturally and individually determined
- To say that value is real is therefore not to say that value is 'the same' across contexts

Stratified systems

- Value is different at different levels of a system
- Value of a university degree program:
 - to individual participants
 - to university
 - to local employers
 - to regional economy

Value in realist analysis

- Realist analysis developed to explain variations in outcome patterns
- Context – mechanism - outcome
- Is value context, mechanism or outcome?

Value as context

- “Elements of context affects whether, and which, mechanisms fire”
 - What is it about context that affects whether and which mechanisms fire?”
- What is valued which affects how this program will work?
- Where X has high value, Y mechanism fires generating Z outcome.

Value as context (2)

- All contexts incorporate multiple types of value (and values)
- Value of different types in any context interact and affect each other
- Value and values can be mutually supportive and/or competing
- Patterns of value and valuing form contexts within which intended program mechanisms can or can't fire; and/or whether unintended mechanisms fire.

Value as mechanism

- How does 'value' cause its effects?
- Attributed value and moral values shapes human choices, decisions and actions
- In program terms – 'reasoning and resources':
- Programs provide resources, opportunities or constraints. The value placed on the resource (in comparison to other valued things, and/or in relation to valued goals) shapes the reasoning in response and thereby helps determine the outcome.

Value as mechanism

Construct of mechanism

Value construct of mechanism

Natural powers and liabilities of things

Humans have a natural capacity to value
Things have characteristics to be valued

Forces: push, pull or otherwise exert pressure

Perceived value or values motivate or pressure

Interactions: transfer between elements → changed states

Interactions affect value which changes states of affairs

Feedback or feedforward processes

Changed value from earlier process affects new value/values

Reasoning and resources

Program resources are valued / contribute to valued goals, affect reasoning

Value as mechanism – MOUNT ROLAND EXAMPLES

Realist constructs of mechanism	Value construct of mechanism
<i>Natural powers and liabilities</i> of things	Mt R: natural capacity to support genetic diversity; Humans: natural capacity to value life
<i>Forces</i> : push, pull or otherwise exert pressure	Economic value of Mt R as tourist destination motivates conservation OR development
<i>Interactions</i> : transfer between elements → changed states	Interaction between valued human uses of Mt R and flora/fauna affects biodiversity
Feedback or feedforward processes	Biodiversity outcomes affect conservation/ environmental value of Mt R
Reasoning and resources	Education about Mt R's environmental value triggers new reasoning about

Value as outcome

- Intended value is inherent to most outcomes
 - Programs to improve health, employment, decrease violence ... the outcome is assumed to be 'good in itself'
- Changes to value or values are the intended outcome of some interventions
- In so far as outcomes vary, value varies.
- Most programs have multiple types of outcomes that affect different stakeholder groups in different ways - multiple types of value, differentially distributed
- 'Negative value' (diminishment in value)

Realist axiology and values

Realist axiology and values stance

- “Realism as a broad school”
- Critical realism and Pawson and Tilley’s realism start from different axiological positions
 - Critical realism – a pre-existing analysis of power relations informs analysis
 - Realism as philosophy of science (‘as objective as possible given that objectivity is a value, not a state’)
- Realist understanding within evaluation approaches taking other value positions (e.g. democratic evaluation, empowerment evaluation)

Analysing values from a realist perspective

- Value – “Responsibility for behaviour”

IF:

- There are always many causes of any outcome, AND
- Those causes lie at multiple levels of systems, AND
- Causes interact with each other (amplifying/constraining), AND
- Causes operate differently in different contexts
- How should we address issues of ‘responsibility’ for behaviour?
 - Same logic train can be applied to attribution of outcomes for programs

Realist approaches in evaluation/research ethics

- Emma Williams - CARES workshop 2016
- Integrating ethical considerations throughout the evaluation process
- For whom, in what respects is this research/evaluation behaviour ethical?
- How do ethical risks vary at different stages of evaluation, in different contexts?

Summary

Using axiological principles in realist research and evaluation

- Explicitly identify value and values propositions in program theory
 - Differentiated – for whom, in what contexts, at what levels of systems, what value and what values?
 - Functioning as C, M and O
- Use methods and construct instruments to test value and values propositions
 - E.G. Most Significant Change; Beneficiary Assessment; Rubrics that specify acceptable effects on various types of value affected by intervention

The realist question - With an axiological twist

For whom	Of value to whom? Using whose judgement of value / values?
In what contexts	How does context affect value / valuing? How does value/do values affects mechanisms?
In what respects	Which valued outcomes or states of affairs are affected, in what ways
To what extent	How greatly affected (positively or negatively)
And how	What mechanisms generate effects for which 'things that are valued'?
At what costs...	Which valued things are diminished? What values are negatively affected?
... borne by whom	Which groups 'lose' or 'pay' 'things valued by them'?

Some issues in 'measurement' for evaluation

- Individual good, collective good?
- If collective good: does 'good for more people' = better?
 - A logical conclusion: good for the welfare of people in China is better than good for welfare of people in Australia (China population estimate 2018 = 1,416,153,810; Australia = 24,833,198); good for both is even better
- Present or future good?
- "...a ...benefit for the present people at the expense of future people's misery."

Population axiology

Towards a realist axiology

- Value is / values are real, because they have real effects in the world
- Value is an emergent property of the interaction between characteristics of the 'valuand' and the values of the person / group / culture
- Value exists at different levels of systems. The same thing has different value at different levels of systems.
- Value is contingent on context
- Different types of value interact and affect each other, within any context
- Value can be, or operate as, context, mechanism or outcome

Realist axiology and realist evaluation

- Values stances inherent in different schools of realism
- Ethics issues can, and perhaps should, be disaggregated