CHAPTER 15

Evaluation and Choice

A shirt your father once wore feels different from an identical shirt bought yesterday. Both are cloth. Both do the same job. The difference is in you, in the web of associations around the first.

Chapter 14 argued that emotion constitutes evaluative difference: your responses make value and do not find it lying about. How are several responses of different strength resolved, and why do people rank the same things so differently?

This chapter supplies the mechanics. Total value is a composite of the pull of a thing itself and the pull of everything associated with it. And where two accurate feelings conflict, there is no hidden exchange rate waiting to be found.

The pull of a thing and the pull of its web

Evaluation has parts, however fast it runs. Your senses pick up a stimulus. Your thinking identifies the object and links it to what you have stored. Then your capacity to be drawn or repelled responds to the whole package. That response constitutes the value.

So the pull divides by where it comes from. Primary value is the response to the object on its own, stripped of its web. Added value is the response to its secondary objects, which means everything associated with it. It comes in two kinds, sorted by direction. Derived value runs backward from the source: your father gave you the shirt. Consequential value runs forward to the effects: the shirt protects sunburnt skin.

A painting is reattributed to Vermeer, and a collector feels a surge. Is that added value on the painting, or the primary value of a new object, the-painting-as-a-Vermeer? If any added value can be relabelled that way, the distinction does no work.

The severing test answers by an intervention. Cut the association and hold the object’s own features fixed. Whatever dies with the cut was never the object’s own.

One refinement follows. An association can retrain the primary response instead of adding to it. So the test is dated: a component is added at a time if severing at that time kills it. Three conditions are set on such claims: a record of the exposure, a cut that kills less of the pull as exposure accumulates, and no reversal on its own. So primary is a status at a stage, never a mark of innocence.

Why must value divide this way? The chapter derives the division from earlier results. Every component of total value is an oriented response to the object

(Chapter 14), and a pull is always the pull of some content (Chapter 13). So ask what content a response rides. Either it keeps to what the encounter with the thing delivers, or it brings in items the encounter does not deliver, such as source, price or owner. There is no third condition to be in. The first route constitutes primary value, the second added value. What the encounter delivers includes relations it presents, such as the shirt's fit on this body. So the line divides the delivered from the imported, and it cuts across the line between a thing's own features and its relations.

What a choice is

A choice acknowledges a preference, and it needs two responses of differing strength. Between two shirts you take the one that pulls harder. Standard rational choice theory treats preferences as given inputs. Here they are outputs.

Two claims here are marked as bets on evidence. The first is that choice follows the strongest total value, which has content because the parts can be measured apart from the choice. Its content is modest, since the parts carry no fixed weights. The claim predicts only that choice tracks their sum in sign and rough size. The second is that compelled choice reveals a ranking already in place. One limit is granted. Where two responses match in strength, the choice makes a resolution and discloses none. Three conditions are stated: repeated choice, relevant information present, situational pressure controlled. Research finds rankings that flip with the way a question is asked. Those studies sat outside the conditions, and the account predicts the flips fade as they are approached. One confound is admitted. Once you have chosen, the option gains value by being yours, which can counterfeit an order that was never there. So one forced choice cannot tell disclosing an order from making one. Only repetition insulated from that gain can.

Across a life these responses build a hierarchy, a ranking by the strength and direction of pull. Picture five faulty devices, each about to destroy its contents: a plant, a snake, a dog, a child and a precious shirt. You must set the order of rescue, and people differ. The scenario is offered as an intuition pump, and the conditions above do the real work.

When two accurate feelings conflict

Set five patients' suffering against one patient's death. Accurate empathy on both sides delivers opposed pulls of similar force. So the demand arrives for the correct exchange rate, fixed independently of anyone's weighing. The chapter answers that no such rate exists. A ranking that no possible evaluative system produces is composed of nothing. That is Chapter 14's vacancy result in practical dress. Within one person the parts of a composite resolve, since they are orientations of one register. Across people nothing resolves them, because a pull belongs to whoever undergoes it.

A deadlock is a field in equilibrium, with opposed responses balanced. Fields leave equilibrium by enrichment. New secondary objects enter: what the choice does to the surviving families, to trust in the institution. Each carries added value, until the composite tips and motion resumes.

Enrichment needs a discipline, or the manipulator qualifies, since his whisper also tips fields. The standard comes from Chapter 14: an added value is legitimate insofar as it bottoms out in real registrations. The demagogue is the harder case, as the chapter concedes, since his whisper usually does bottom out in real fear. Its fault is a misreading: the association is keyed to a false or incomplete picture of the people affected. So the standard must be read as Chapter 21 reads it: the added value must fit the registrations it invokes.

Between people, enrichment takes a form of its own. Picture the two pulls as two screens in one hall. There is no third screen on which they appear weighed against each other. “The weighing is in the viewers.” A field is mutually informed when each party accurately takes in what the other undergoes.

Three outcomes are possible. The fields may converge on what to do, and then the convergence is the fact. They may converge one level up, on how to decide, by a triage rule or a lottery or a vote. Or neither level converges, and the residue begins: no further fact, only a choice among tragedies. Whether a field converges at either level is itself contingent. Triage boards and courts have rejected the lottery as often as adopted it.

The objections the chapter answers

The strongest form of the demand is an argument about consistency. Take Derek Parfit’s mere addition argument and the spectrum arguments after it. Each option in a chain is no worse than its neighbour. So the endpoints come out ordered, and refusing that order looks incoherent. The reply separates the rules from the job. Transitivity and dominance are constraints on a scale already in place, and the chapter keeps them in force. They cannot install the scale, since each step assumes that its neighbouring cases are comparable, which is the disputed point. Where registrations give out, the chain has no links.

Martha Nussbaum asks how a real preference is told from an adaptive one, shaped by oppression to endorse it. The woman who prefers subordination is held there by added value: punishment and ostracism on one side, approval on the other. Where the primary response is intact and merely outweighed, a test works. Withdraw the imposed threats, and such a preference collapses. The hard case is conceded. A person socialised from birth may have no intact primary response waiting, so the test misfires there. What is left is the clash with her wider commitments, and the near-universal run of human responses against her conditioning. Neither appeals to a fact holding apart from all responses. There is also no vantage outside every evaluative formation from which her settled responses can be declared not truly hers.

What the chapter claims

All four results are graded *constructed*, the third rung of the book's ladder. Constructed means the best available positive account: coherent and well motivated, and not forced, with live rivals still standing. Everything here rests on two earlier chapters: the account on which responses constitute value, and the division of a mental state into its content and its pull.

The first result is the division of total value, held in place by the severing test and derived as exhaustive by its logical form. The second is the structure of choice, with preferences as outputs. The third is the hierarchy itself, layered over a base you do not control. The fourth is weighing as the widening of a field, which between people becomes mutual registration.

Three commitments are staked on evidence, and two have appeared already. The third is that mutually informed fields converge more often than they diverge, which the chapter calls its thinnest empirical bet.

One limit is stated openly. Where a fully informed field stays level on the outcome and on the procedure alike, there is no further fact to find, and every later chapter carries that limit.

Chapter 16 asks whether the ethical traditions have confused the tool of evaluation with the thing they take it to measure.