

## **Is Evaluativism (Political Polarization) a Consequence of a Substantialist World View?**

Chris Santos-Lang

To most people, “evaluativism” and “corporantia” are new concepts. The first part of the concept of evaluativism appears in Wiktionary with citations tracing the term back to Raymond Martin (1989) and the philosopher, Harty Field (2000). That part of the concept is the descriptive claim that some disagreements are impossible to resolve because they stem from differences in values. For example, a disagreement between a theist and an atheist may result from differences in epistemic practices which ultimately stem from differences in values. Thus, the theist and atheist might never be able to achieve agreement about whether God exists.

This descriptive part of the concept of evaluativism has been confirmed empirically. It turns out that certain biological differences among humans predispose us to different values which, in turn, shape our beliefs even before we realize it. For example, experiments reveal that 40% of variation in political ideology is explained by genetics (Hatemi et al., 2014), yet over 70% of us would reject the most qualified candidate for a scholarship if the candidate happened to affiliate with the political party that opposes our own (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). The injustice and inefficiency measured in the scholarship experiment is not conscious; participants do not realize that their judgements have anything to do with politics. We are not very self-aware and it is unlikely that we ever will be.

Like many other -isms, the concept of evaluativism has a second part, a prescriptive claim about how to respond to our differences. *Assuming that some disagreements result from our own evaluative diversity, what should we think and do?* At this point, the

evaluativist position seems to assume a position in the debate between field-being and substantialism, so it behooves the field-being philosopher to be aware of evaluativism. The evaluativist position is that one should apply a different standard to one's own beliefs and values than to the values and beliefs of others; it is the prescription that one *should* discriminate against people whose values differ from one's own.

*Are we individuals with the potential to separate our own beliefs and values from those of opponents, or are we all parts of something larger?* The substantialist insists that we are individuals, while the field-being philosopher insists that we are not. The evaluativist need not deny that every atom of our bodies is entangled with the entire universe, or that less than 2% of those atoms remain in our bodies longer than a year, or that the mechanisms of our cognition extend beyond individual brains to include scratchpads, musical instruments, calculators, and the Internet. The aspect of substantialism that produces evaluativism is merely the claim that, despite any such mixing of our identities at the fringes, we have knowledge *individually*—especially moral knowledge—and moral agency *individually*.

From the substantialist perspective, each of us is individually responsible to develop moral knowledge, so we need to be able to catch our individual moral errors. We can discover errors by watching for disagreement—disagreement is a red flag warning us that at least one of us is in error. Given that disagreements which stem from evaluative diversity cannot be resolved, this strategy for catching errors will work best if we surround ourselves with people who share our own values. Then, when we face a disagreement, it will be possible to sort out *which* of us is in error. If we do not segregate ourselves—at least by refusing to take seriously those who have different values—then the substantialists'

error-catching strategy will get hung-up on irreconcilable disputes. Thus, if we assume substantialism, then political polarization and other evaluativist discrimination appear to be of practical necessity.

One objection to this strategy is that disagreement indicates error even when it stems from evaluative diversity, so segregation merely allows such error to persist beyond our awareness. Here the substantialist can respond that the principle of ought-implies-can entails that it is OK to let such errors persist. This principle tells us that we have no moral obligation to catch errors that we cannot possibly catch. Since the substantialist locates moral responsibility at the level of the individual, and the dispute cannot be resolved at the level of individuals, it follows that there must be no moral responsibility to resolve the error.

Notice how this defense of the evaluativist prescription is premised on the substantialists assumption of individual moral agency. The field-being perspective allows that the moral responsibility to catch and correct an error may be had by a larger moral agent—perhaps by an entire society. When a brain processes tension between various neurons to reach a conclusion, we do not expect each neuron to understand that conclusion individually. Similarly, a society may process tension among its members to achieve moral knowledge, yet never educate its members to achieve that same knowledge individually. Thusly, a society could fulfill a responsibility to catch and correct errors, even while its individual members continue to disagree.

Let me make the implication behind this analogy explicit: We are talking about the hypothesis—inconceivable to the substantialist, but conceivable from a field-being perspective—that people will never be intelligent enough individually to have moral

agency individually. This hypothesis can be tested empirically by manipulating the evaluative diversity of social groups and measuring the impact of such manipulation on their intelligence. If depriving societies of certain kinds of evaluative diversity turns-out to morally handicap those societies, then we have evidence that people are not sufficiently intelligent individually.

Perhaps the closest we have come to running such experiments is the teamology work pioneered by Douglass Wilde at Stanford (2008). Wilde controlled the composition of student teams in design classes, and showed that teams engineered for greater evaluative diversity significantly outperform self-selected teams. Variations on his experiment were replicated at Carnegie-Mellon, Loyola University of Los Angeles, Oregon State, Shanghai Jiao-Tong, Sungkyunkwan University, U.C. Berkley, U.C. San Diego, the University of Florida, and U.T. Austin. Left to their own devices, modern students fall into evaluativism as a form of discrimination and this significantly decreases their intelligence. Yet substantialism remains society's default assumption; we put individuals on trial for crimes—rather than blame the larger field—and we administer educational tests to individuals. And evaluativism is currently as much a default as racism was two hundred years ago. Liberals and conservatives (and other value groups) gather in different social circles, move to different communities, and attend to different information channels.

Harty Field described the prescriptive part of the concept of evaluativism this way: "...in dealing with a follower of the Reverend Moon, we may find that too little is shared for a neutral evaluation of anything to be possible, and we may have no interest in the evaluations that the Moonie gives. The fact that he gives them then provides no impetus whatever to revise our own evaluations." Politics, religion and philosophy may be

important to us, but we expect these topics to produce fruitless frustration at family reunions, so we talk about something else.

The word “corporantia” names those of us who see an alternative to such discrimination. It is the ancient Latin word for entities which form into a body. In this case, it refers to people who form into social bodies as in the concept “Corpus Christi” which proposes that we are gifted to play different roles in our families or teams. Instead of seeking to avoid disagreement, the corporantia respond to evaluative diversity by distinguishing interdependent value systems from potentially obsolete value systems and dividing work into roles corresponding to the interdependent value systems. Liberalism and conservatism are interdependent value systems, for example, so the corporantia would accept both liberals and conservatives but would assign them different duties and authorities. Liberals are good for out-of-the-box thinking, while conservatives are good for retaining refined knowledge.

In other words, the corporantia do what we hope the parts of our physical bodies would do if they had so much awareness: They figure-out how the various parts of the body are designed to function, they fulfill their own roles, and they delegate all other authority to the other parts of the body. When they encounter someone with different values, such as a Moonie, the corporantia are filled with the excitement of a scientist who may have discovered a new kind of cell: *Is this a previously undiscovered part of the body? Something that can be found in all healthy bodies? they wonder. If so, what is its function? What authority should we relinquish to this kind of person?* The corporantia can answer these questions empirically, much as doctors discover the functions of cells.

In asking myself, *Why is evaluativism so popular?* I am drawn to ask, *Why is substantialism so popular?* Evaluativism could decrease in popularity, as racism did, if the general population became wary of it. However, not all philosophers are equally ready to condemn evaluativism. The assumption of substantialism provides a defense of evaluativism, so it is doubtful that evaluativism can be condemned effectively without also condemning substantialism. A social movement, parallel to the civil rights movement, would tip the substantialism/field-being debate.

To put this another way, the resolution of certain social problems—including political polarization—may require popularization of field-being philosophy. It may be accurate to say to the average person, *Do you see that relationship in your family which strains over a difference of values, such as political ideology or spirituality? That strain is one of the costs of substantialist philosophy. That philosophy is a disease. For the sake of our own social health, we need to advance alternative philosophies.*

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