The Conception of Literary Value: A Realist Challenge to Barbara Herrnstein Smith's Relativist Model.

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Abstract

In what follows I examine problems surrounding Barbara Herrnstein Smith's relativist conception of value in her book Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory I begin by showing how her conception of value is comprised of two distinct philosophical claims: the first axiological and the second epistemological. She first presents an anti-objectivist argument for axiological relativism which is quite tenable. She then tries to gain further support for this position by putting forth a version of epistemological relativism, a move which not only fails, but if true would undermine even her relativist axiology Once I have shown her constructivist position to be misleading, if not incoherent, I then reconsider what her axiological position would look like if it had the support of a more tenable epistemology. I therefore offer a conception of value, borrowed from Paul Grice's The Conception of Value and Allan Gibbard's Wise Choices, Apt Feelings, which argues from a realist epistemology yet accepts a significant degree of axiological relativism.

Abrégé

Dans cette étude on examine les problemes concernant la conception relativiste de valeur de Barbara Herrnstein Smith dans son ouvrage Contingencies of Value. Perspectives for Critical Theory. On montre, dans un premier temps, que sa conception de la valeur est composée de postulats philosophiques distincts: l'un "axiologique"; l'autre "épistémologique." Elle présente un argument anti-objectiviste en faveur du relativisme axiologique lequel est entièrement soutenable. Elle essaye ensuite de renforcer cette position en avancant un relativisme épistémologique, une approche qui échoue.

Après avoir illustré que sa position constructiviste était trompeuse, voir incohérente, on est amené a reconsidérer ce qu'aurait pu être sa position axiologique si elle avait eu le support d'une épistémologie soutenable Alors, on propose une conception de la valeur inspirée de The Conception of Value de Paul Grice et du Wise Choices, Apt Feelings de Allan Gibbard, lesquels adoptent une épistémologie réaliste tout en acceptant une part importante de relativisme axiologique.

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Introduction

Geoffrey Galt Harpham, in a lengthy review of Barbara Herrnstein Smith's The Contingencies of Value, sums up this book's influence in the postmodern literary world He notes that this book is:

> already being taken by many as marking a significant moment in the progress of contemporary self-understanding . . . especially in light of the book's extraordinarily vehement attack on such concepts as intrinsic value, objective truth, real standards, and its equally energetic promotion of circumstantial utility in their stead (134)

A particular example of this widespread acceptance is Smith's historical characterization of value and evaluation, included in Critical Terms for Literary Study, a guide to basic and current theoretical concepts published by the University of Chicago Press and edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas Mclaughlin

In an age when the value of a literary work is no longer considered to be universal or transcendent, when it is alleged in the journal Profession 91, a journal of the Modern Language Association of America, that "the concept of inherent relativity has been the guiding force in literary appreciation and creation from time immemorial," Smith appears to be leading the pack against such concepts as intrinsic value, objective truth, and real standards (Rampersad 10). What Smith offers is an axiological model where value, radically contingent, is the "product of the dynamics of a system, specifically an economic system" (Smith, 30). The book's message is being well received, mostly among literary theorists who have a larger stake in the literary canon than that of discovering artistic merit. Many feminist theorists and relativists in general hail the book as a long awaited boost, by a professional of Smith's academic standing, to their efforts

to re-construct the traditional western canon. Value is considered so radically contingent that the debate concerning literary value is seen by some as merely a "linguistic struggle of groups or regions for power or authority" and that one should not "mistake force for truth-value, for there can be no absolute value in such matters, *only* ideological positions that are relative to the interests of those who hold them" (Davey, 7, my emphasis). Indeed, theorists such as Charles Altieri absorb this critical historicism and derive its accompanying political lesson: "any desire to put literature to work as a social force would require us self-consciously to build canons that serve our concrete, political commitments" (23).

This wide incorporation of Smith's main ideas is understandable in an atmosphere where heretofore considered literary and cultural universals are being undermined in an attempt to promote extra-literary social and political concerns. However, in the end, Smith and others who accept her views have ignored many contemporary challenges to her epistemological and axiological arguments. Indeed, Smith has done little else but provide: (a) a holistic simplification of highly complex axiological issues; (b) an account which refuses to show causal links between this holistic model and individual evaluative decisions (many of which alter social conditions); and (c), an unsound and misleading attempt to ground her axiological relativism in an epistemological relativism which is itself untenable.

I begin by examining Smith's opening chapter and separating what I think are two distinguishable anti-objectivist philosophical claims, one axiological and the other epistemological. I examine her axiological position only briefly through her discussion of David Hume's "asymmetrical" model of human preferences. I accept its overall anti-objectivist argument as far as the possible fixity or absoluteness of moral and aesthetic standards are concerned. Although Smith needs to ground her axiological claims in a more rigorous philosophical fashion in order to convince the reader of the truth of her claims, she makes the illogical and unfortunate move toward an epistemological stance

that undermines her own relativist value system. Instead of maintaining a gap between a choice of values and a knowledge of value, and then supporting her claims with a sound epistemology, she argues that not only value but knowledge itself is relative and contingent. This leads her to confuse value choice with value itself.

In section two, I examine Smith's epistemological claims and show how they are problematic insofar as they are self-refuting and incoherent. I begin section two by examining Smith's claim that doubt concerning the fact-value distinction led to a reversal of opinion such that facts came to be viewed as fused with value and not facts at all. This is an epistemological claim that I then attempt to place in its contemporary philosophical context with the aid of philosopher Mario Bunge. Bunge convincingly argues that many constructivist claims are overdrawn at the value bank, and that the guidance of a theoretical tradition does not necessarily entail that the results of the research are overly tainted by bias.

I then draw on several critics of relativism from both the sciences and the social sciences, most prominently Harvey Siegel, for specific counter-arguments to Smith's relativist epistemology. In the end, I am forced by insufficient evidence to admit the inconclusiveness of the realist argument even with the abundance of positive evidence in scientific practice. I draw briefly on realists such as Richard Miller and Paul Horwich to exemplify this problem.

This second section is also concerned with exploring the "gap" between axiology and epistemology, and what is a fundamental demarcation between the two branches of philosophy. This "gap", the difference between a knowledge of value and an informed selection made from competing values, is the subject of the third section. Here I draw on two compatible conceptions of value, that of Paul Grice in his The Conception of Value, and Allan Gibbard in his Wise Choices, Apt Feelings, for a model of how a "realist" conception of knowledge is compatible with a striking degree of value relativism (choice) on the social level. I show how the determination of the value of an object (e.g., a literary

text) in its relation to something (e g., a particular social context) is a question of knowledge and not of choice. The important part of this model is that our understanding of how our values can be contingent to social systems is limited by our true grasp of the state of affairs in the social world, something which a relativist epistemology is incapable of comprehending.

Lastly, I summarily assess the effect of what a refutation of Smith's epistemological stance means to her position that all "value is radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things, but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables" (30) What I hope will become clear is that Smith's argument, if at all sound, applies only to the derivation of standards or normative systems in general, and says little about the evaluative process itself. It is in this sense that it is only partially accurate, and on the whole inferior to the model offered by both Gibbard and Grice.

Section 1. Defining the Problem: Smith's Conception of Value

In Contingencies of Value, there is no introduction; no formal preliminary statement or guide to the contents. There is no abstract to summarize the issues or highlight the argumentative structure for the reader, facilitating the digestion of the premises. And most puzzling of all, considering the theoretical claim made by the author of an entirely new conception of value and purported challenge to axiological stubbornness among the philosophical elite, is the complete absence of any philosophical context for the claims made in the first few chapters. Whereas Smith will point to the historical fact that traditional objectivism went virtually unchallenged for centuries, a main characteristic of her book as a whole is its systematic avoidance of possible challenges to Smith's own relativist conception of value. The philosophical background is shunted to the back of the book. The reader encounters the bridge before the blueprint, and the blueprint resembles a patchwork. What makes it a patchwork is not only the absence in her postscript metaphysics of any hint of the inconclusiveness of current arguments in both the social and natural sciences concerning truth, fact, and value, but the outrageous (pseudo)epistemological claim that her anti-objectivist position is not subject to justificatory warrant.

Whether intentional or not, the bigger philosophical picture and the limitations of her observations are never problematized by competing conceptions. Instead, her nonfoundationalist account is offered as the sole alternative to an obsolete objectivism. To hazard a political analogy, Smith offers a disillusioned populace an oligarchy as an alternative to monarchical rule. As it turns out, the objectivist position is as unfounded (no natural warrant) in reality as a monarchy. Both crumble easily under rational inquiry. But as one reviewer noted, "this is where the question begins, not where it ends" (Meili Steele, 107). With this in mind, I would like now to sift through Smith's first chapter and pry open a few of the doors she tries to close.

1 2 The first chapter of a treatise is most often of a general sort, picking its way across the field of issues concerned without actually stopping to pull any one issue completely loose from ' ' branches of possibility. This part of section 1 will begin by doing just that; following closely but cursorily the many paths taken by Smith's first chapter in the Contingencies of Value, "Fixed Marks and Variable Constancies." What should become clear in this discussion is that several philosophical or metaphysical claims are made, the bulk of which can be divided into two major branches· axiology and epistemology. What makes this combination interesting is the ontological status accorded both of them by Smith She offers a constructivist conception of value and evaluation that sees both as socially generated But this ontological conjunction of axiological and epistemological claims is, I will argue, not supported by the evidence. In order to understand why this is so, it is necessary to distinguish between these claims so that we might assess their viability separate from one another. What will become apparent is that while the axiological claim is quite tenable (a qualified relativism which I will later define), the epistemological position is not, and this poses problems for Smith's constructivist thesis. But first, I want to take a look at the thesis as is, and try to analyse it carefully enough to separate the claims.

The first chapter of the Contingencies of Value, an earlier version of which appeared nine years earlier in Poetics Today, examines the critical and personal history surrounding Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 The chapter title is apt: "Fixed Marks and Variable Constancies" is entirely consistent with the book's falsely assumed unique opposition between objectivism and Smith's version of nonfoundationalism. "Fixed marks" refers to conventional or classical axiological ideas such as intrinsic value, objective truth and real standards, ideas Smith attributes to such philosophers as David Hume and Immanuel Kant (among others). "Variable Constancies," on the other hand, refers to the constantly shifting foundation of perspective and taste which is said to undermine traditional axiological and epistemological views. According to Smith, value

and truth are no longer determinate or objectively derivable; they are completely contingent upon and created by the evaluator's social context, or standpoint.

Smith gets right to the conclusive point: the process of evaluation, unlike the traditional objectivist conception whereby worth is discoverable because intrinsic, is always tainted by the bias of the evaluator. In fact, so tainted is the act of evaluation that it not only shows the judge's bias in attending to certain preferred aspects, but any evaluation is less a factual discovery of latent worth, less a certain rationally derivable value relation between an art object and a particular social context, than it is the product of social construction. The focus moves from the evaluative process as means to an end to the process as an end in itself. Smith completely rejects the notion of a judge approximating validity or objectivity in his/her assessment of an object's worth, even in context. Though she denies that her conception is merely subjective, it smacks of what one might call a collective or social objectivity. In Smith's own words:

> [E]valuation is, I think, always mingled with regards that stand aloof from the entire point: always compromised, impure, contingent; altering when it alteration finds; bending with the remover to remove; always Time's fool. (1, my emphasis)

Value here is not something possessed by an object. It is the contingent result of a ensemble of factors in a system, dependent for its stability on the capriciousness of its collective audience's psyche and the attendant havoc that such a quantifiable value system engenders during the inevitable change in time and space. For Smith, the history of Sonnet 116's critical reception is not a matter of value recognition or selection by various critics at various times, but wholly a matter of these critical agents constructing that value themselves. There is no distinction made between the discovery or recognition of value and its selection for use. Instead, in true aphoristic zeal, Smith concludes that all "the

evaluatings have been contingent, and all of them will be--which is, I think, as it must and should be" (1). Note that this itself is a value claim.

Two things come to mind at this point which have to do with the weakness of Smith's presentation. First, the subtitle of this chapter, "A Parable of Value", claims to offer the truth. A parable, an allegorical or indirect rendering of a truth, is not an argument but rhetoric, and not a very convincing way to proceed when you consider the content of her rhetoric. Secondly, whenever an assertion is made, the qualifier "I think" is added on to the end to hedge the bet. This rhetorical strategy may be an attempt to release Smith from any claims to standard conceptions of truth. But, despite her explicit attempt to show how her version is but a version among many, she nevertheless makes truth claims which surpass this limit. The self-refuting and incoherent nature of these claims will be dealt with later in this essay.

Smith next examines the history of the Sonnets in academic circles. She begins by considering the evaluative process as employed by the poet himself. She focuses on the poet's first judgements as acts of in/exclusion, and tries to highlight the supposed capriciousness or subjectivism of the endeavour. The poem's own self-evaluations, inscribed within the poems, she sees simply as such, and not as elaborate rhetorical strategies aimed at the bias of the reader. When she speaks of a poem's being "good enough," she does not consider that the poet was observing and expanding upon an already centuries old marriage between language and human emotion, each constantly modifying the other over time. Instead, she somehow places the poet in a position whereby he approves or disapproves of his poetic creation wholly without guiding norms. And the poet's approval or disapproval does not in any way secure the poem's value with regard to any standards but his/her own. Is this how it really happens? Is the poet self-sufficient or self-creating? Or, is he a social creature who by virtue of his social status and public role (and public it is however private the sonnets were kept) is forced to assess the value of his poem rationally and with regard to a specific context or social

milieu? The accuracy of his judgement is not purely a priori, but depends on his experience of the language and its social usage. Does not this position of the poet's require that he judge even his own poetry with this in mind?

Smith next picks up a line which asks for biased readers, "readers who will value the poems . . . , 'for their love, not their style'," and she points to the variability in response the poems have received (2). Firstly, that readers might easily be able to separate the poem's content (love) from its expression is not a given, and even so, this in no way leads to the conclusion that bias toward the content overrides any distaste for its form. On the contrary, there is a tremendously amorphous frontier between taste and value judgement (as between form and content) How are we to separate our love for the poem's content from the way that content is expressed? Is the poem's plea not a rhetorical manoeuver? Form is not like the skin of an apple, to be peeled away revealing a delicious content. Form is the fabric of content. Words are but symbols, temporary representatives of human thought and feeling. To alter the form of the sonnet (in any way) is to alter the content.

Secondly, there is, admittedly, a variability in response, but this variability is due not to the change in value occasioned by different readers but to their particular attention to different aspects of the poem. For example, different readers will value the poem differently, but a lesser educated or absent minded reader's inability to notice the twist of irony in a final couplet does not erase the irony, it merely leaves it unnoticed That the poem is still valuable to someone who wishes to teach someone else the rhetorical possibilities of irony is testimony to the latent value of the poem, and also to the fact that value is recognized and not created.

From here Smith moves on to more implicit acts of evaluation such as the printing and publishing of the Sonnets. According to Smith:

> Each of these acts--publishing, printing, purchasing and preserving--is an

> implicit act of evaluation, though we may think it necessary to distinguish *them*, with their mixed motives, from real literary evaluation, the assessment of intrinsic worth. (3)

Smith wishes to mark a distinction between the mixed motives of mere speculators or hoarders and "real literary evaluation " Does this mean that "real literary evaluation" is possible? Is there or is there not intrinsic worth in literature? While she seems here to have relented somewhat on her claims of impure evaluation and value bias, she goes on to claim that the suppression of the Quarto edition was "another act of both valuing and devaluing the sonnets: an implicit witness to their having been found, though perhaps good for *something*, still *not* good for something else" (3). If we are speaking here of the value of the sonnets for the literature of which it is a part, how can this objective relation be affected by an economic process outside of this relation? Is that the distinction that she fails to make clear? The recognition, or mistaken assessment, or extraliterary assessment of the value of the Quarto edition is not the same as the value relation of the sonnets to the English language and to society in general. One is an economic relation dependent on the capriciousness of the consumer, while the other is a relation between a poem and a language and its users.

Smith gives a brief summary of several important critical responses the poem has received from the literary establishment as evidence that "[v]alue alters where it alteration finds" (4). She argues that the change in response to the poems over time, as evinced by these critic's varying and sometimes clashing remarks, proves that the value of a poem changes. But does it prove this? Or might it be the case that each of these critics had quite different literary and extraliterary goals in mind and that their assessment of the poems' worth in relation to these goals merely reflected this? The fact that one critic saw literature as serving different social or educational goals from those of another proves nothing but that they were both quite rational in selecting certain poems over others. Indeed, perfect

rationality would only highlight the contrast in judgement. A prude might reject Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita as morally unsuitable because of its lewd perambulations, but this does not prevent the book's being appreciated for its rhetorical style and its wit.

That the texts were the same over time but the poems were not is a trickier idea. In what way are they different? Now it is true that a particular sonnet, once inscribed into the canon (the literary measuring stick), alters the configuration of the canon and the status of the sonnet itself is reconfigured in turn. That is intrinsic to any dynamic language. Does not this point directly to the idea that value is relative in this way yet not contingent in Smith's sense? For example, the poem's meaning, which can only be understood by virtue of its relation to other meanings in the linguistic system to which it belongs, the sonnet as sonnet is contingent upon the canon and vice versa. And like meaning, this "means that there is no such thing as a single, unrelated meaningful element; and it means that changes in the other meanings in the field can involve changes in the given element" (Taylor, 22). But this incorporation, which forces the re-evaluation of the poem over time and across contexts does not in any way entail that the value of any poem is constructed by the evaluator. It merely requires a constant rediscovery of the poem's potential value much the same way we re-interpret a poem's meaning as our contextual knowledge changes. And despite Smith's separation of educated from vulgar valuations, the level of education a person brings to the evaluation of a poem reflects on the accuracy and coloring of the judgement and not on the value of the poem.

Smith reaches a peak of absurdity on page five of Contingencies of Value. In her anti-objectivist fervor and staunch opposition to anything resembling justification or truth, she mistakes the accuracy of a judgement for a declaration of universalism. In other words, she mistakes the descriptive assessment of a poem's worth as means to an end with the prescription of the ends themselves. She claims that her own experience with the sonnets "culminates" in a "solemn and sincere declaration" that she herself "cannot evaluate Shakespeare's sonnets" (5). This is because she knows them too well, and is

"too conscious of how radically variable and contingent their value has been" (5). In her haste to avoid any overdrawn pronouncement which might smack of a false universalism, she has gone to the opposite extreme and confused description with prescription to such an extent that the two words are not only inseparable but one of them (description) is disallowed

Can this be possible? Can someone so familiar with Shakespeare's sonnets actually claim to be unable to assess their worth? What Smith is forgetting is that when we ask her for an evaluation of a poem, we do not wish to be lectured on their intrinsic worth independent of any social or linguistic context, we only wish to understand how they might be valuable in a particular case, with particular ends in mind. General pronouncements of worth have their place and can obviously be overdrawn, but this is no reason to doubt their validity a priori. Authority may be abused but it does not preclude demonstration.

To digress for a moment, I would like to draw a simple analogy from ethology which might help clarify how the value of a particular poem might be understood in the literary world. Take the color of a rabbit's coat in moderate climes. The color will change with the seasons, becoming almost pure white in winter and more or less brown or gray in summer. This natural cycle has evolved over time and has been important in maintaining the rabbit's evolutionary equilibrium, serving as a natural camouflage that allows it to mask itself against predators. Rabbits which failed to adapt in this way perished long ago. What is important to our discussion is that the value of this genetic disposition is not contingent upon any ethologist's discovery of it. It is a valuable asset to the animal's survival regardless of our awareness of it and this parallels the corresponding relation a poem has to the language and social context of which it is a part. Members of a society with educational goals that stress the understanding of metaphors and their usage will <u>discover</u> the value of Shakespeare's elaborate metaphors, not <u>create</u> it. Either the poem possesses this ability or it does not.

Smith claims that the same sonnets have at different times given rise to extremely opposite literary experiences. While at one time they appeared to her subtle and profound, at another they appeared "awkward, strained, silly, inert, or dead" (6). She explains how time and certain related experiences have altered her perception of almost every poem in this way. But what is the independent variable here, the sonnets themselves or Smith's relation to them at different times? Obviously the poems will be viewed in a new light at every other reading, but this in no way entails that the present reading is the only valid one. Her changing perception of the poems is but a reflection of the poem's ability to be valuable in widely varied contexts. When she finds that previous perceptions are not there anymore, this is probably cause to wonder whether the old perceptions were accurate, not whether they existed.

Singling out Sonnet 116 for an exposition of the specifics of this type of changing attitude toward its worth, Smith explains how she first devalued this poem because of its popularity. In fact, she was embarrassed by it. And, in addition, a professor whose opinions Smith valued very highly (though she neglects to tell us directly why) "had once demonstrated in class, with great wit and dash, that the sentiments of 116 were as inane as its logic was feeble and its imagery vague" (7). Now, even with all the dash and wit of a rhetorical giant, it would take more than rhetorical flair to "demonstrate" or prove that the logic was indeed feeble, and that the imagery was vague or the sentiments inane. Whether the poem's sentiments are seen as inane one minute, or powerful another, even despite its frail arguments and vague imagery, is testimony not to the alteration of value but to the value this poem possesses to be different things to different people at different times, and to be open to several possible and plausible interpretations, of which many will be ambiguous. The very fact that the value can be demonstrated (proven) is a result of the poem's versatility and its latent value, not a reflection of the rhetorical abilities of the evaluator.

The second half of the first chapter concerns itself in a more general way with the

"literary" assessment process and, more directly, the concept of value itself. Indeed, value becomes a product of this evaluative process and in effect constructed by it. The focus moves away from the accuracy of the evaluation to the bias apparent in it. Smith is concerned with the ideological manoeuvering performed under the guise of objective criticism when she talks of the "nature of the assumptions presupposed by evaluative statements" (9). Her paradigmatic example of the anthology of "great works" and its hidden assumptions is a clear case of constructivist paranoia. Her claim is that the "repeated inclusion of a particular work in anthologies of 'great poetry' not only promotes but goes some distance towards *creating* the value of that work..." (10). She argues that by drawing the work to potential readers' attention, "value creates value" (10). She concludes that poetry that is "unknown, unseen, therefore unpraised, therefore without value--unless or until discovered, known, and praised by someone" (10).

The focal point of Smith's first chapter is the process of evaluation, and her key aim is to expose the variability of opinion and the narrowness of the traditional objectivist position. Near the end of chapter one, she describes her conception of value as directly opposed to any notion that evaluations might be "valid assessments or demonstrations of *the* value of literary works" (12) Out with the objectivist assumptions of universal purpose and fixed meanings or unique value. Here Smith confuses process with purpose, i.e , the discovery of value She states her position as follows (note the hedge):

> I would suggest, then, that what we may be doing--and, *I think*, often are doing--when we make an explicit value judgement of a literary work is (a) articulating an estimate of how well that work will serve certain implicitly defined functions (b) for a specific implicitly defined audience, (c) who are conceived of as experiencing the work under certain implicitly defined conditions. (13, my emphasis)

I have no quarrel with this position as stated. In fact, this is as I see it An evaluation is an appraisal of the value of something (means) in relation to another thing (end) Whether the ends or purposes remain implicit or not, they are understood as the standards or norms whereby the evaluator is guided. But it is the standards or norms which vary, not the value of the literature.

Smith comes close to saying this (and usually forces me reread many of her assertions), but instead puts forth her parable that "literary value is not the property of an object *or* of a subject but, rather, *the product of the dynamics of a system*" (15). Again, process wins over property. Smith places the evaluative burden squarely on the shoulders of perception only to emphasize the overwhelming effect of bias, a bias which creates value or "is value" (16). Indeed, our standpoint or "our particular experience of 'the value of the work' is equivalent to *our experience of the work in relation to the total economy of our existence*" (16). Notice how the emphasis is shifted away from the "relation" and toward the "experience" of the relation. The experience becomes the be all and end all of the value equation.

Smith confuses common goals with common experiences. That T.S. Eliot and Dr. Johnson may have shared an opinion of Shakespeare's genius does more than point to their sharing an experience of his drama, it points to their agenda. But for Smith, the variability in response is not only a reflection of competing perspectives which select among a poem's potential value according to specific ends, it becomes proof of the variability and creation of value. She understands the selection or recognition of specific values to be a creation of that value The process of recognition is for her a constructivist one as it involves the construction of a reality that is not independent of mind How this comes about in Smith's model has a great deal to do with her relativist views. In a nutshell, she tries to conjoin her axiological relativism to a relativist epistemology.

This dual ontological thesis can be divided along these lines of value as standards and value as act or process. The axiological claim is that the values (standards) we choose

or select are dependent for their existence on our tastes or preferences. We construct our own ends. The epistemological claim is that we construct our own truth or reality as well, something which prevents us from evaluating objectively. It is essential that these two claims be kept separate as their independence from one another will be crucial to understanding how Smith succeeds in her axiological claims, while she misses the point in her attempt to refute objectivist epistemological views. What, then, is her axiological position and is it valid?

1.3 Contingencies of Value, pragmatically understood, is mostly a story about how the literary establishment, its critics, artists and schools, support and control a community's aesthetic and literary standards. As an ideological critique, it puts forward broad generalizations concerning this process together with select examples which go a long way toward showing just how institutionalized norms are maintained in the literary world. But Smith goes beyond a condemnation of western bourgeois aesthetics and objectivist philosophical foundations, and insists not only that our standards are a result of ideological bias, but that the evaluations performed by someone under the influence of those standards are inevitably tainted by this bias. Before we get into her epistemological views, it is important that we take a look at her axiological skepticism in isolation.

Smith's critique of traditional axiology is taken up in chapter four of Contingencies of Value. "Axiologic logic" is about the failure of traditional axiology to provide any proof of their guiding assumption, i.e., that there are natural moral and aesthetic standards to which we are necessarily drawn. Clearing the deck with a relativist hose, Smith asserts that:

> The project of axiology--that is, the justification of the claim of certain norms, standards, and judgements to objective validity, which is to say the demonstration of the noncontingency of the contingent--must, by the

definition of it just given, fail. (54)

Smith discusses both David Hume and Immanuel Kant I will take up her critique of David Hume as the paradigm for her anti-objectivist position with regard to axiology.

Smith begins by showing how Hume acknowledges the divergence of taste in and between communities, what she calls "the preferred gambit of axiological argumentation" (55). Hume then argues that it is only natural for us to seek some standard of taste because this will help us to coordinate our respective actions successfully Smith argues that it is not necessarily "natural," but that it is nonetheless necessary to survival for a community to develop standards or norms. But Smith is not concerned with norms as such in her discussion of Hume What concerns her about Hume's argument is his attempt to claim that there is a self-evident hierarchy of choice among variables in such fields as aesthetics and ethics, despite his admission that only empirical knowledge has this type of extra-mental reference point.

What bothers Smith is that Hume admits of the propriety of the axiological skeptic's argument, yet proceeds to claim that it is the case that there are objectively derivable human preferences, however difficult they are to discern. Or more precisely, as Geoffrey Galt Harpham puts it, what bothers Smith is that "believing that there may be a standard of taste, Hume is so tasteless as to try to identify and describe it" (138).

There may be standard of taste, but as Smith explains, the choice of Shakespeare over doggerel is not always self-evident. It is sometimes dependent on the literary standards to which both are subjected. What is claimed when Shakespeare is asserted to be objectively and absolutely better than doggerel is a limited "dependence, in other words, on the performance of a particular--*assumed*--, 'had in mind,' if not stated function" (58). There is a greater degree of skill involved in Shakespeare's poetry, but this matters little unless you desire the end result of all this finesse.

The social origin of accepted standards such as Shakespeare are forgotten in many

cases. Evaluative terms such as "genius" and "elegance" carry normative weight and create the illusion that they derive their meaning from some natural order of things. Is iambic pentameter the way we talk or the way we learn to talk?

Smith objects that Hume cashes in on this tendency to view the existing social structure as intrinsic to nature by attempting to "ground the standard of taste in . . . *nature*: specifically, the presumed psychophysiological nature of all human beings" (59). What he argues is that there are certain tastes and preferences we naturally prefer because of our psycho-physical makeup. This is itself a reasonable position, but because it is much too difficult a task to ascertain just what these natural relations between forms and sentiments are, Hume suggests instead we look to time and the existing social order for some evidence of a proper fit. What Hume does not admit is that despite the apparent appropriateness of the existing order, there is no justification for assuming that the existing order is at all naturally or ideally the best one, or even whether there is in fact a best fit, let alone a universal one.

Hume mistakenly sees Homer's poetry as absolutely "good" because it has withstood the test of time, and not because western attitudes toward it have been caught up in and are to a great degree derived from its example. Homer's work is a social product which has contributed to our socialization. Society creates Homer, and Homer contributes to society in turn. Homer is but a standard which provides some degree of normative governance and not an unquestionable part of our (purported) ideal nature. When Hume illogically moves from existing order to natural order, he is forced to view any deviations from this order as abnormal in more than a social sense. Things come to be seen as abnormal in an objective sense. As Smith points out, the:

> *asymmetrical explanation of preferences* . . . is one of the definitive marks of axiological logic: intrinsic qualities of objects plus universal, underlying principles of human nature are invoked to explain stability and

> convergence; historical accident and error and the defects and imperfections of individual subjects are invoked to explain their divergence and mutability--and also, thereby, to explain the failure of universal principles to operate universally. (61)

Hume treats those who do not favor Homer as naturally defective in sentiment. The blame is set on the person and not on the social model. But if the aesthetic models are understood as socially generated, there is no reason not to question the appropriateness of the model (leaving aside social stability for the moment). To blame the individual for not conforming to the model shows an unwarranted bias in favor of the model. One might just as easily blame the model. Hume has no justification for preferring one to the other, and in the end can be seen as relinquishing the task he set himself, i.e., to find a balance between form and sentiment such that most people might be reconciled to it. His mistake was in trying to reconstruct that balance instead of using existing evidence to construct a new balance.

This, in effect, is Smith's axiological position. She maintains that the inconclusiveness of traditional axiological arguments lend support to her skeptic's conception of value. And as far as standards of value are concerned, this is likely the case in reality. There is nothing to indicate that our social ends, our aesthetic or ethical standards, are to any great degree restricted by our natural world, e.g., one can conceive of viable human cultures where the sonnet form does not exist. But once those standards are chosen or installed, there is the question of whether we are able as rational beings to attend to them in an objective way. Are we capable of rationally deriving the best means to the ends that are in place as traditionally argued, or are we inevitably distracted by the contingencies that Smith discusses in her first chapter? This issue is the subject of the next section.

2.1 Beyond Traditional Objectivism, Relativism, and Constructivism.

If we are circumscribed in our normative choices only by our physical environment and our own physical and intellectual capacities, there is still tremendous room for variation. Without any intrinsic ends or goals, we are able to sculpt our selected purpose with whatever materials are available. But in that case, what about the means to those ends we do desire? While the best means to an end were or are traditionally viewed as determined (rationally) by the ends in question, Smith argues that this is not the case Or at least not the whole story This makes her argument more than a strict axiological matter. Smith raises epistemological concerns which she claims puts in doubt the traditional objectivist notions of truth, and this, I argue, is where the problem with her conception of value originates, namely with her attack on evaluation as an objective endeavour

The roots of this attack are planted in the second chapter of Contingencies of Value, "The Exile of Evaluation," a chapter concerned with the literary academy's ignorance of what Smith calls the "entire problematic of value and evaluation" (17). Smith traces the bulk of the blame for this exile to a conflict between two "mutually compromising intellectual traditions and ideologies, namely--or roughly namely--positivistic philological scholarship and humanistic pedagogy" (18) She sets up or accepts from others who were equally misled what becomes a false but paradigmatic opposition in her book, that between scholarship and criticism.

According to Smith, criticism is about analyzing and judging the quality of something, and is performed by someone with the proper skills. The goal of criticism is the assessment and description of worth in relation to certain ends (however those ends come to be), using scholarly tools as aids. Smith's historical model shows how this objective role had been usurped by critics who felt it was their duty to prescribe as well, and their evaluative behavior reflected this tendency. They enlarged their critical role to include grandiose recipes for human and cultural advancement. The problem was not in

the hypothesis, but in the way this hypothesis was put forward. The result was a series of critics who overextended themselves, claiming that their subjective assertions were in fact objective determinations, fixed, intrinsic and absolute. This tendency was fed by ethnocentric and ideological biases which found nothing wrong in claiming that the critic was a "special" person, capable of finding not only *the* "value" in a poem or aesthetic work but "by virtue of certain innate and acquired capacities (taste, sensibility, and so forth, which could be seen as counterparts to the scholar's industry and erudition), was someone specifically equipped" to find the literary value "that was a determinate property of texts" (19). The misconception lies with the notion that the critic was a counterpart to the scholar, and not a scholar him/herself. In point of fact the critic is a scholar trained to use scholarly tools in their role as judges.

Smith explains how the growth of axiological skepticism led many to question the objectivity of critical practice. She explains how the value judgements of certain critics, such as F.R. Leavis and Matthew Arnold, were more often "vacuous pseudostatements" about what values they espoused and not value judgments at all (19). Critics such as Yvor Winters accepted their role as humanists in charge of defining a tradition, as well as subjecting works to critical analysis. The role of the critic became that of setting the standards as well as selecting works which conformed to those standards. Once people began to question the standards, the result was an atmosphere of skepticism in which even the objectivity of the evaluation was put in doubt. While the original problem was that all critics saw their work as comprising both the selection of standards and the proper evaluation of works, maintaining a separation between these two roles became difficult. Sorting out objective or descriptive statements from prescriptive ones was not easy.

The answer for the constructivist lay in reversing the traditional overextension of objectivity, and considering all evaluations as prescriptive. The fact-value distinction was considered dissolved. Facts became an obsolete concept and were replaced by value designations because value was seen as created by the evaluative process, and therefore

not real or independent of that process. For someone to see a work as "good" made the work good to that critic, and to those who happened to agree with the judgement.

The link between Smith's two related claims, one axiological and the other epistemological, is wholly dependent on this fact- value distinction. If things are as Smith claims, then value can be seen to be produced in the manner she describes. On the other hand, if a distinction can be drawn and maintained between fact and value, some of her axiological claims may survive, but her epistemological arguments will fail. The viability of her epistemological arguments is the subject of this section.

2.2 Despite Smith's attempt in the last chapter of Contingencies of Value to head off a refutation of her epistemological position, the fact remains that her book is devoted to describing a reality that she claims does exist (though she may argue that it is a theory dependent or socially constructed reality; more on tha later). Therefore, she must be held accountable for her claims. What she calls the objectivist generation of truth is no more than a demand that statements made regarding reality and the real world be rationally justifiable.

But realists and constructivists disagree about what the concept "real world" actually means. Both of these contemporary alternatives in epistemology and in the philosophy of science talk past each other to such an extent that on the surface they seem plagued by a "semantic incommensurability". This refers to the idea that some scientists, such as those separated by a scientific revolution which forces a change in theoretical conception, "are not talking about the same theoretical entities even when they use the same terms" (Boyd, 13). As will be seen later, Smith uses this semantic concept to defend her relativist epistemology in chapter seven.

This debate goes to the heart of epistemological concerns. Reality for the realist is not the same as reality for the constructivist. A central realist claim is that the "reality which scientific theories describe is largely independent of our thoughts or theoretical

commitments" (Boyd, 195). Anti-realists disagree and consider reality as such to be a "social or intellectual construct" (195). The constructivist argument, succinctly restated by Boyd, runs like this:

> The actual methodology of science is profoundly theory-dependent. What scientists count as an acceptable theory, what they count as an observation, which experiments they take to be well designed, which measurement procedures they consider legitimate, what problems they seek to solve, what sorts of evidence they require before accepting a theory, . . . all of these features of scientific methodology are in practice determined by the theoretical tradition within which scientists work. (202)

The idea is that the world is somehow constructed by a theoretical tradition, and that discovery is pre-determined by that tradition to such an extent that facts are created and not found. How this comes about exactly (causally) is not explained. This is a difficult position to maintain in light of the fact that theories are modified from without as well as from within the institution. As far as realists are concerned, the development of a theory in practice is most often the product of inference both from the method and the material (a theory-independent world).

Observations of actual scientific practice point to the dialectical nature of its progression, which strongly suggests that constructivism is not tenable. Constructivism is at a loss when it comes to explaining the instrumental reliability of scientific methodology. This is most clearly the case during periods coincident with what Thomas Kuhn calls scientific revolutions. What usually causes the revolution is an anomalous observation which points to the inadequacy of the existing theoretical paradigm According to Kuhn, "scientific revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense, . . . that an existing paradigm has ceased to function adequately in the exploration of an aspect of

nature to which that paradigm itself had previously led the way" (148). As Boyd points out, these anomalies are external to the constructed world and therefore "cannot be reflections of a fully paradigm dependent world: anomalies are defined as observations which are inexplicable within the relevant paradigm" (208) This last is most apparent in the case of technological advances, such as air travel or weather prediction, which depend for their success on a reliable reference to a mind or theory-independent reality.

Despite these problems, Smith borrows from constructivism to argue that value and evaluation are hopelessly tainted by the evaluation process and its incumbent bias. This epistemological thesis, that context determines content, is known in the sociology of science as the externalist thesis According to Mario Bunge, in a recent article published in the journal Philosophy of the Social Sciences on the new sociology of science, the externalist thesis argues that "the ideas, procedures and actions of an individual scientist are determined by his or her social environment or even that the latter 'constitutes' the former" (537). The degree of externalist influence is debatable, with some proponents claiming a moderate or weak externalism where the claim is only that knowledge is socially conditioned, while others (proponents of philosophical holism mostly) claim radical or strong externalism where knowledge is social. The weak and moderate versions stress only that the attainment of specific knowledge is to a certain extent guided by the research environment, either locally by the self-regulating scientific community or globally by society at large. This last position is not very difficult to understand as shared economic, ethical, social and political concerns arguably guide the pursuit of knowledge in certain areas in preference to others, and the scientific community is but an extension of this social system. Yet this is not to suggest that science is to any great degree compromised with regard to the facticity of its results. On the contrary, weak externalism merely argues that society, either locally or globally, influences the work, but not the results, of its members.

Strong or radical externalism, on the other hand, argues that scientific ideas are

not only influenced by the scientific community and society at large, but that they largely emanate from and are constructed by these sources. This is the strongest version of the "context determines content" thesis, and differs from moderate externalism only in its constructivist position. While moderate externalism stresses merely the influence of ideology in guiding the scientist's research, strong externalism argues that "all knowledge is social in content as well as in origin" (539)

The idea is that every "'scientific fact' is the product of a 'thought collective' or community of people united by a 'thought style'" (540). This collective thought process can apply either to the scientific community locally or to society at large. In effect, the thesis is that society "thinks" for the individual.

According to Bunge, the proponents of strong externalism have not provided any proof for their thesis. And those who have attempted to argue such a position have been systematically refuted, most notably by the emergence of widely divergent scientific patterns within the same highly circumscribed social setting. Bunge claims that this externalist attempt to fuse content and context is but:

> a convenient trick to avoid coming to grips with 'technical' matters, such as the construction and test of scientific theories; it allows the student to shift from the nuts and bolts of research to its instruments, externalities and *contingencies*. (543, my emphasis)

And this is just what I want to suggest that Smith's externalist thesis attempts to do for literary research. By focusing entirely on the social context and its influence on the direction of research in the literary community, she has neglected to take at all into consideration the accuracy of the content of detailed literary research. Indeed, her externalist position leaves no room for determining the accuracy, by testing, of statements concerning literature. What is wrong with her thesis is that it deals only partially with the

problem. Under Smith's constructivist/relativist framework, the accuracy of the judgement gives way to the judgement as process, and the nuts and bolts of the critical process are neglected

This failure to maintain a distinction between the evaluative process (the discovery of facts) and the selection of certain values or value systems (ideologies) over others is a direct result of Smith's constructivist leanings, again arguably an offshoot of a contemporary overfascination with science's social origins, the most likely cause of this failure being the abolition of the fact/theory distinction. But as Bunge convincingly argues:

> one may admit that the observational-theoretical distinction is not absolute, or that it is a matter of degree, and yet retain the fact-theory distinction because the former is an epistemological distinction (it only concerns knowledge), whereas the latter is ontological (it concerns reality as a whole). (550)

What this means with regard to Smith's thesis is that despite the fact that all concepts and statements contained within literary theories are theoretical, the facticity of these is an epistemological concern. Whether there really are things out there in reality to which these concepts accurately correspond is an ontological concern. And "while *epistemological* constructivism is in order up to a point, *ontological* constructivism is not, for it flies in the face of evidence" (550) So while society can be seen to influence the discovery of certain facts, the thesis that these facts are constituted or constructed by society is wrong.

The constructivist opposition to the objectivist thesis is but an extremist reaction and lacks evidentiary support, not the least of which is an explanation of just how society can "create or destroy facts" (552). Again as Bunge explains:

> Given their deliberate confusion between facts and propositions, how would they (constructivists) know when 'a statement splits into an entity and a statement about an entity' -- or when the converse process occurs, during which reality is 'deconstructed' --in ordinary parlance, a hypothesis is refuted? (552)

The failure of the constructivist to comprehend the scientific requirement that theories and their concepts actually refer to what is really the case is the source of much confusion in the philosophy of both the natural and social sciences. The belief that reality is but the "consequence" of scientific activity prevents the constructivist from understanding the need for justification with regard to a reality that is out there and independent of any social program. Reality, to the constructivist, is not independent of the "inquiring subject but a product of it" (553).

Statements such as this, which assert that the construction of facts has replaced their discovery, are familiar ones in the constructivist literature. Paul Feyerabend, cited by Smith as a contemporary philosopher of science, claims that scientific facts are hopelessly contingent upon the society that creates or "projects" them.

But as Bunge notes, the competition for theoretical predominance is determined in the end not by the rhetorical force of a particular view or perspective, but by the evidence which supports it. If Smith has any success with her relativist views, we can be quite sure that this success will be short-lived. And ideological influences notwithstanding, the truth of a "hypothesis, datum, or method" is dependent not on the motivation behind the research program, or that program's ideological origin, but on the accuracy with which it represents reality (Bunge, 48) Origin does not necessarily predetermine content, and the presence of multuple views is a reflection upon the perception process and not on the thing perceived.

This misguided attention to the process and consequent neglect of the thing

perceived characterizes Smith's conception of value and evaluation. Her constructivist philosophy denies the existence of a mind-independent reality, and claims that there is no intrinsic value which might be considered independent of that constructed by the evaluator But this failure to note a very real distinction between the politics of an evaluation and its real world accuracy is what leads Smith into many unfounded derivative statements concerning the possibility of accurate and objective literary criticism. Her confusion of ideology and science leads her to assume that science is hopelessly tainted by ideology and that the rational assessment of the means to a specific end is an a priori impossibility.

The evidence for this profusion of bias stems for the most part from philosophical relativism, which argues that this bias or ideological underpinning is mostly hidden, and that it is most apparent during periods of scientific controv /. But, as Bunge explains, the majority of scientific controversies are infiltrated to a degree by ideological biases yet they are terminated by "strictly scientific means" (62). And this is also the case with controversies in the social sciences. While it is admitted that cultural relativism is a real social phenomenon, debates over the nature of social facts should be resolved by scientific, logical and rational means. The phenomenological view of scientific behavior stressed by Thomas Kuhn et al. claims that science is only about the exchange of linguistic data, and that the "spotting of problems, the conception of hypotheses, the design of experiments, and the checks for truth do not occur" (57). Here means themselves are taken for ends, and the ends are misunderstood. And as Bunge notes regarding this process, "[w]hen the means are being systematically mistaken for the ends, something fundamentally wrong is happening, not only in morality but everywhere" (57-8)

2.3 As noted above, central to Smith's conception of value, and part and parcel of her constructivist stance is an epistemological position generally known as "relativism." I say generally because Smith herself denies the normal application of the term relativist by objectivist philosophers as it connotes what to her are unwarranted charges of "egalitarian tolerance," and an impractical moral and political "quietism." Indeed, Smith argues convincingly against these charges of quietism by noting that anti-foundationalism with regard to our choice of norms or standards does not necessarily entail that we cannot effectively avoid nihilism. The lack of some assumed universal or absolute justification for our actions does not mean the end of any goal directed behavior. In her own words:

> if the theoretical analysis is not transcendental, then it must be historical, and if the justification is not universal and unconditioned, then it must be restricted, partial, and local, which is *not* to say, it must be heavily emphasized, "subjective" in the usual limited objectivist senses of the latter, or "privatized" or "individualistic" in *their* current polemical senses. (175)

Despite the dramatized style in which it is presented, Smith's characterization and defense of relativism against the charge of quietism is for the most part convincing. If anything is left questionable with regard to the motive for action, it is the objectivist generation of an unjustified belief in some kind of universal ideal or undubitable foundation as a motive for "right" action. Smith merely shows how the motive for this unwarranted belief is no more meaningless than the motive to work toward any other set of goals or standards, however they come to be chosen, whatever contingent forces play a part. For example, vegetarianism has no more objective justification that does omnivorism The choice of one over the other is reduced to personal preference and goals, things like taste and longevity.

Smith's attention to the "quietist" debate only masks the issue glossed over rather peremptorily in her defense of relativism. And this is not the ethical or political relativism she effectively defends, but the epistemological relativism which if true would lend much needed support, and dare I say justification, to her conception of value She asserts, again with dramatic and rhetorical intuition, but minus the necessary rational or logical elaboration, that standard objections to relativism "hinge on inconsistencies of theory and practice" and not on the need for rational justification at all. She argues that her relativism does not have to defend itself against the usual charges of self-refutation and incoherence as it is:

> not a 'position,' not a 'conviction,' and not a set of 'claims' about how certain things--reality, truth, meaning, reason, value, and so forth--really are. It is, rather, a general conceptual style or taste, specifically played out here as (a) a conceptualization of the world as continuously changing, irreducibly various, and multiply configurable, (b) a corresponding tendency to find cognitively distasteful, unsatisfying, or counterintuitive any conception of the world as fixed and integral and/or as having objectively determinate properties, and (c) a corresponding disinclination or inability to use terms such as 'reality,' 'truth,' 'reason,' or 'value' as glossed by the latter objectivist conceptions. (151)

What is puzzling to even the willing but skeptical convert to epistemological relativism is the insistence that the conception involved be a conception of a world at all. How can a conception be arguably about the world if it pays no attention to the reality that is the world and to our relation as social beings to that reality? Constructivists will argue that all our worlds are constructed from a perspective, and that there is no way of getting at the "real world." Worlds, like value, are conceived. Yet, we interact with this world on

a daily basis and successfully enough to ensure not only our survival, but also a measure of prosperity, however prosperity might be viewed.

According to Harvey Siegel, in his book Relativism Refuted, the refutation of epistemological relativism is at least as old as the debate it engendered between Socrates and Protagoras in the Theaetetus. And the position taken by Smith in her defense of relativist truth is strikingly similar to that of Protagoras' extreme version of relativism where "knowledge and truth are relative to the person contemplating the proposition in question. P is true (for me) if it so seems; false (for me) if it so seems" (4)

Siegel claims that epistemological relativism is incoherent. He presents two basic arguments that show this The first is a very simple counter argument, and has to do with the logic of warrant of Protagoras' position. How can Protagoras' listeners assess the warrant of his claim if his and any other claim, including any claim counter to his, is of equal warrant? Relativism thereby undermines itself by making the "task of judging claims to knowledge . . . pointless" (4). How can we decide which claims are right?

This does not worry Smith. Her claim is that many or all institutions are right at one and the same time about the value of this or that poem. And she attempts to extricate herself from this charge, as does Protagoras, by arguing that objectivist notions of rightness and wrongness do not apply to her relativist conception of knowledge and truth. She says that part of what is at issue:

> is the viability of the terms in which the charges themselves are framed and of the entire system of conceptualizations and attendant syntax by which they are generated and through which they are articulated. (150)

What Smith is likely referring to is the idea that her relativist position does not carry the objectivist baggage normally thought of as an objective reality, a reality that plays the major role in the concept of rightness, an extra-mental reality that serves as a standard.

But even if we forget that right and wrong is a relation between our beliefs and an independent reality and merely stick to competing views, relativism still does not offer a viable philosophical platform. It only opens itself to the second charge of incoherence.

If according to the relativist, all beliefs are true, then those people who do not believe in relativism must be considered correct, even while those who do believe in relativism are also assumed to be correct. Smith, like Protagoras, must either admit the truth of her opponents' belief which argues that relativism is false or acknowledge her own beliefs to be false. Either way, the end result is that relativism is false.

A third more relevant, yet equally troubled, modern version of epistemological relativism argues that it is not the presence of alternate views themselves, but the manner of evaluating those views that is subject to alternative or competing standards. But this position itself succumbs to the incoherence argument as well because if true, its own truth will vary according to the sets of background principles and standards by which it itself is evaluated. In this way it forces conflicting positions and cancels out its own truth value. And as Siegel notes, even if epistemological relativism were rationally justifiable in this way, it would require a non-relativistic ground. This ground is denied from the beginning. Relativism vetoes the search for knowledge by preventing the serious treatment of epistemological concerns in the first place.

What Smith wants is a reconceptualization of the "normative" such that it avoids what she calls the "orthodox axiological machinery of 'justification, rational acceptability, warranted assertibility, right assertibility, and the like," and redescribes the normative in the constructivist sense as:

> either (a) the operations of sociocultural institutions of value marking, value maintaining, value transforming, and value transmitting, or in relation to 'true,' (b) the self-regulating mechanisms of verbal interaction. (153)

The full degree of Smith's relativist/constructivist position is here apparent. The evaluation process is the whole story. Value is produced or constructed by the social group, not found by it. And its "truth" is always internal or contained because it has no rational or logical way of convincing any nonbelievers of its worth as a position. The weakness of this position is most strongly felt in its inability to convince others of its own value as argument. Indeed, it undermines the very notion of argument and instead substitutes an emphasis on process and rhetoric. Smith trades in rationality and warrant for rhetoric.

As Meili Steele argues in her review of Contingencies of Value, Smith

> offers no justification for her vocabulary, no meta-theoretical argument against competing nonfoundationalist problematics. Such a gap would not be a serious problem if the book were not so contentiously aimed at exposing others' views. (107)

For Smith, justification is a matter of:

> setting forth, in greater or less detail, how she saw and evaluated the relevant conditions, what she believed the stakes were for all involved, what resources she thought were available to them as a group, her own interest in the outcome, and also--since nothing in her "position" would deprive her of access to such considerations--what she saw as the desirable consequences, now or at some time in the future, for those other people themselves and/or for some collectivity she shared with them (Smith, 165-6)

After sorting through Smith's contingency filled paragraphs, one can find her argument and see how it is incoherent. If "nothing in her 'position' would deprive her of access to such considerations," what is Smith talking about in the first place?

If we evaluate the evaluation assuming that it is tainted by an inevitable bias, who is going to evaluate our evaluation of the evaluation? Does the relativist have access to the "desirable consequences" or not? If yes, then relativism is false because self-refuting. If no, then it cannot possibly aid us to assess the value of anything accurately and is therefore of negligible value itself.

2.4 Smith may indeed argue that realists are question-begging when they assume the truth of certain beliefs, yet she cannot prove it. On the other hand, realists cannot conclusively prove the obverse But do they have to? Or is there enough evidence to warrant at least a tentative belief? According to Richard Miller, in his book Fact and Method: Explanation, Confirmation, and Reality in the Natural and Social Sciences:

> The strongest commitment that is reasonable in the sciences is tentative belief, with openness to revision in the face of further developments in science. But prudent scientists may avoid even this much commitment to a hypothesis that they regard as confirmed by present data. Thus, an astronomer may not believe (or disbelieve) the Big Bang hypothesis, because she takes present day cosmology to be too speculative, but may still speak of that hypothesis as confirmed by all data now available. As against belief in the basic falsehood of the hypothesis, belief in its approximate truth is more reasonable in light of present data. If one had to choose between the two appraisals, approximate truth would be the more reasonable choice. But noncommitment is at least as reasonable. (158)

Noncommitment is reasonable when faced with a realist/anti-realist debate that is for the

most part stalled along the border of unobservables. Even though realists argue that unbelief regarding some unobservables is itself unreasonable, they can offer no conclusive evidence.

Smith defends her ideas concerning the norms of justification in a recent issue of Critical Inquiry. This essay, entitled "Belief and Resistance: A Symmetrical Account," centers on current anti-realist reconceptualizations of belief which she says argue against static norms of justification. She argues that "profoundly divergent conceptual idioms" have hindered an understanding of how constructivists view belief. And though she acknowledges that new evidence alters belief, she points out that in the long running debate between constructivists and what she calls "traditional" rationalists or realists,

> the former stress the *participation* of prior belief in the perception of present evidence--that is, the hermeneutic circle. The latter insist on the possibility of the *correction* of prior belief by present evidence--that is, the possible rupture of the hermeneutic circle by what is posited as autonomous, observer-independent reality. (127)

Smith goes on to argue that norms of justification are irrelevant in a world where audiences are naturally and culturally gullible, a world where audiences are pre-disposed by their prior beliefs to interpret or assimilate new information in a subjective manner. This distorts any hope of achieving objectivity. She goes so far as to say that in order

> to understand why . . . some of us remain traditional epistemologists rather than becoming constructivists (or vice-versa), we would have to examine quite subtle details of our individual life-histories (educational, social, professional, and so on) as played out in relation to our more or less diverse cognitive temperaments. (136)

Unfortunately, Smith offers no concrete evidence which might explain how we come to prefer one philosophy over the other, or even a sense of how the causal sequence implied evolves. On the other hand, there are many examples in the history of science of how beliefs are restructured by new evidence. Richard Miller's book Fact and Method offers many examples of just how this happens, including a clear realist interpretation of the Copernican Revolution that shows how new evidence *corrects* prior beliefs.

In a section of her essay entitled "Macrodynamics of Belief," Smith offers a consumer oriented or pragmatic version of belief. Argument is out, taste is in. In this buffet epistemology, if reason has anything to do with our systems of belief, it is as the driving force in our selection of beliefs. Reason is equated not with our rational capacity for inference or for choosing the best means to an end, but with the choice of ends themselves. Smith claims that reason with a capital r is out, and that traditional or objectivist norms of argumentation are obsolete in this reconceptualization of belief. Her argument is that the truth of a belief is contingent upon the "particular conditions" to which it is being subjected. If a person likes a pie or a poem, or believes a theorem, it is because he/she benefits from such a belief under those conditions. Ironically, Smith uses one of the most secure of science's discoveries to argue her point by analogy:

> The distinctions here parallel those between naive and Darwinian understandings of biological "fitness," which is not the intrinsic superiority of certain traits as proved by the survival of the organisms that have them, but the very fact--seen post hoc--that the traits certain organisms happened to have permitted them to thrive under the conditions that happened to occur. (133)

The catch for Smith's proposed belief system is that in order for the organism to assess

even her version of "truth/value," there must be in place certain norms of argumentation which serve to reach the end (understanding) in question. Smith counters by arguing that these norms are not fixed. Indeed, she asserts that the norms change with the circumstances and according to needs. This pragmatism argues that beliefs should be reconceived as

> the *entire* organism's complexly linked--and continuously shifting, growing, weakening, and recombining--tendencies to perceive-and-act-in the world in certain ways. (135)

But it is not the conception of beliefs as constantly transforming that is troublesome here In fact, both constructivism and realism allow for this alteration of belief. The question is whether Smith's hermeneutic circle can be severed by new evidence in such a way that the bias inherent in this type of belief system is offset.

Paul Horwich, in an essay entitled "On the Nature and Norms of Theoretical Commitment," specifically addresses the belief issue raised by Smith in regard to the ongoing debate between realists and anti-realists. In the third section of his essay, Horwich attacks this retrenched constructivist position which argues that "theoretical belief would be tolerated but said to be justified on merely *pragmatic*, and not *epistemic*, grounds" (1). While instrumentalists may allow that "theoretical belief is desirable, they hold that the justification for it is purely pragmatic" (9). This means that the rules or norms which characterize the justification procedure might vary as Smith argues. According to Horwich, anti-realists (such as Smith) place the onus of proof on the realists. The realists themselves argue that the burden of proof falls on "reference to data, simplicity, and so on" (9). The realists are then "under an obligation to show that such considerations are adequate" (9) And as Horwich admits, finding the external support which might confirm or justify the use of specific or general norms for justification such

as those used by the realists is just not possible.

Another problem is the fact that "the usual canons of theory choice, which incorporate our preference for simplicity, constantly lead us to theories that turn out wrong" even while it has aided us in finding many more dependable ones such as natural selection (12) Add to this, underdetermination, the idea that more than one theory can be inferred from the same data.

Horwich accepts the instrumentalist notion that they may very well be alternatives out there which would just as well explain the data and undermine current conceptions. But Horwich argues, there is a distinction between "claiming that there *is* such an alternative, and claiming that there *might* be one" (12). With this manoeuvre, Horwich puts the onus of proof over onto the side of the instrumentalist:

> After all, finding *one* simple theory that fits all the observed facts, let alone two, is difficult . . . We perhaps cannot *prove* that there is no simple rival of our theory, but this does not justify skepticism since the probability that there actually *is* such an alternative is very small. (12)

Horwich adds further that there is also a strong possibility that the alternate theory (if one exists) may be found to be merely a translation of the concepts involved in the first one. Whether the instrumentalist/constructivist would take issue with Horwich's determination of probability is itself difficult to answer.

Smith, for her part, maintains that realist or objectivist ideas of reasonableness are the result of the particular standards of justification used in modern western culture. And Richard Miller concedes that:

> there is no general description of the scientific way of arriving at the truth which is effective, by itself, in assessing justifications, and there are no

> valid principles that describe what belief should be in light of the data, whatever the data are. (486)

There is no external (explicit) support.

What Horwich does at this point (and he parallels Miller) is insist that the demand for this external support is itself unreasonable considering our place as individuals attempting to cognitively understand the world. Faced with the logical impossibility of providing an indubitable foundation, we are forced as individuals to seek standards of justification which are flexible and allow for the altering of belief by the introduction of new evidence, standards which do not uncritically accumulate evidence to support an existing mindset.

2.5 Despite Smith's failure to argue successfully for an epistemological relativism, I cannot read many of her comments without feeling that she has come very close to the truth and somehow missed it. For example, take the quotation regarding the institutional control of value, extended here somewhat:

> If, however, "the normative" is taken in the *non-question-begging* sense of either (a) the operations of sociocultural institutions of value marking, value maintaining, value transforming, and value transmitting, or in relation to 'true,' (b) the self-regulating mechanisms of verbal interaction . (153)

What is interesting about this passage is its succinct conjunction of her thesis' two separate philosophical claims. Institutions not only develop, modify, and maintain norms or standards (an axiological claim), but they also have a monopoly on truth within their pale (an epistemological claim). But if the above counter-relativist arguments are right and

institutions do not hold a monopoly on truth, what truth is left in Smith's conception of value? What is left, I claim, is an elaborate description of how values as standards are set up and maintained in the literary academy, a process which needs to be distinguished from the possible accuracy of evaluations made according to those standards. But is it enough to show Smith's argument wrong and not provide some idea of what replaces both traditional objectivism and constructivism? I think not. In the next section, I will move toward a more positive argument and attempt to provide a brief yet coherent model of literary value and evaluation, one which conjoins axiological relativism (values) with scientific realism (evaluation).

3.1 Nonfoundationalist Axiology and Realism.

In this section, I will sketch a rival to Smith's nonfoundationalist conception of value, one which takes into account the wide range of normative systems (systems of aesthetic and ethical standards) possible within an axiological relativism. This absolutist value model, which I build from philosophical and socio-psychological materials supplied mostly by Paul Grice's The Conception of Value and Allan Gibbard's Wise Choices, Apt Feelings, provides a model of value recognition based on a realist epistemology. In light of this more tenable conception of value, one which avoids the traditional objectivist assumptions, Smith's philosophical shortcomings should become even more apparent that the second section was able to show.

We now have a clear idea of where Smith's thesis goes wrong. Her conception of value offers two categorically separate philosophical claims (one axiological, one epistemological), the latter of which we have shown is untenable. This forces us to re-examine her conception of value in light of what we have discovered of her knowledge claims.

Harvey Siegel shares Smith's distaste for the fixed and immutable foundationalism so characteristic of traditional Western philosophy, science, and even art. The last chapter of his book, Relativism Refuted, deals exclusively with this issue, if only briefly. Like most contemporary philosophers, he understands the problems that positivism raised for science, and likewise, the dogmatism that the unique and self-privileging framework so-called objectivists cultivated in the arts and social sciences. In fact, what usually passed for normal and natural was but the ethnocentrism and biased judgement of the scientist or critic. But Siegel, who has just finished showing how even contemporary epistemological relativism is as self-contradictory as ever, must now consider his options. For him, as for me, the answer lies in an epistemology which avoids familiar objectivist traits such as "absolute certainty," a predetermined and "necessary privileged framework," or the "unrevisability of some class of statements"

(160). The answer lies in a more flexible form of absolutism somewhat distant from what Siegel calls the "vulgar" absolutism of old. According to Siegel, the rejection of relativism does not necessarily entail that we revert to the "vulgar" absolutism we have already rejected. Contrary to much thought on this issue, we might instead embrace an absolutism where:

> fallibility and revisability reign, with respect both to putative knowledge-claims and to the evaluative criteria by which such claims are assessed. Knowledge claims can be objectively assessed in accordance with presently accepted criteria (e.g. of evidential warrant, explanatory power, perceptual reliability, etc.), which can in turn be critically assessed. (161)

All that this absolutism requires as a presupposition is a willingness to pursue objective and non-question-begging judgements with regard to a mind-independent reality. Siegel takes this absolutist position to be a precondition to any epistemological inquiry claiming to seek knowledge of the world. And interestingly, he admits that a moral or aesthetic relativism may co-exist with this epistemological thesis. What this means to axiology is that even if standards are constructed, the non-biased evaluation of aesthetic worth can still proceed in an efficient and rational manner.

Paul Grice, in his book The Conception of Value, reaches this same conclusion in a critique of J.L. Mackie's axiological relativism. Grice does not reject Mackie's relativism, but he does show some hesitation in accepting it outright. This appears to be due to his "realist/objectivist" reluctance to accept anything beyond the notion that values are "out there" in reality. Whether socially constructed or not, these values possess a "causal efficacy" which renders them objectively real, even if only transiently. These values, or "target notions" as Grice calls them, may be inventions or myths as the anti-objectivist sees them but they are nevertheless notions,

> backed by practical motivation, perhaps derived from the utility of such inventions towards the organization of some body of material; in the case of values (perhaps) the body of material might be rules or principles of conduct. (36)

In this way, the standards (values held) involved are not "absolute" or "natural" in the traditional objectivist sense yet they are nonetheless part of a social and natural reality as far as causation is concerned.

What Grice goes on to show is that whatever the origin of the normative system in place, be it objective or relativistic, this is nevertheless categorically different from the subsequent value attributions which are made with reference to those norms.

> It is a mistake, . . ., to think of practical reasoning as recognizing the transmission of an original non-relativized value down a chain of inheritors: what we start with is a relativized value (relativized to some person or potential agent), and it is this value which is (sometimes) transmitted. So the question of justifying ends, otherwise than by showing them to be actually desired, does not arise. (60)

Value is present because ends exist in society. We must accept the "absolute" value of certain things even while we recognize the probable arbitrariness of certain of our ends. As Grice notes, the suitability of certain ends is only circumscribed by its place in a system of ends. As we will see later with Allan Gibbard, our ends are part of a system of norms we adhere to and which are for the most part hierarchical, higher order norms govern the selection of lower order norms. All our actions are intermediate ends, subordinated to our greater goals. This does not render them arbitrary or relativistic. It

makes them all the more real, objective and rationally derivable as means (intermediate ends)

3.2 What are we and how do we exist? According to Paul Grice, we are thinking social beings and we exist as such with the aid of our minds. Our rational selves, that is our thinking-reasoning selves, help us to coordinate our actions and feelings with our natural and social environments. Rationality for Grice is a naturally evolved adaptation selected for its benefit to our survival (physical and cognitive). Its selection as a survival tool arises from the accuracy of correspondence it provides between our thoughts or thought patterns and the extra-mental world we live in. This allows us to coordinate our actions effectively and efficiently enough to survive (grow old, pass on our genes), and also to reach our own "constructed" goals. If there were no way for us to reach that extra-mental world, our ability to survive would be severely compromised.

Grice bases much of his conception of value on this evolutionary view. He begins by examining the biological organism called human being before it has matured rationally and become philosophical about its own destiny as an organism. To do this, he must consider its biological "purpose."

In describing an organism's purpose, Grice concedes that an organism as such has no specific pre-ordained purpose for which it is designed, yet as a "living thing" it does have finality by definition. It naturally possesses a capacity to perform functions which maintain its existence and role in the environment to which it is wed. It may not be part of an organism's consciousness, but every organism fulfills one or many roles. This does not mean that these roles are pre-determined by some higher organism, only that most organisms are suitable for adaptability to a particular context. Grice moves metonymically to the organism's internal organs to explain this concept:

> [E]ach of these organs or parts will have, so to speak, its job to do, and

> indeed its status as a part (a working functional part, that is to say, and not merely a spatial piece) is determined by its being something which has such-and-such a job or function (eyes are things to see with, feet to walk on, and so forth); (73)

But this recognized function, which is taken as that organ's purpose, is only understood in this way in relation to its place within the organism. The adaptability of an organ to a temporary slot as a walking tool such as a foot need not be seen as its existential purpose. That a foot is used for walking is merely recognizing that one purpose to the neglect of any other purpose it might serve. Feet may be used to play guitar or squash grapes, but neither of these are understood as essential to the foot. And further, many of our organs, e.g., our appendix and our tonsil glands, no longer serve any recognizable function or purpose for us. By analogy, this example argues that we humans, like our organs within us, serve no one fixed or final purpose that is separate from our genetic and nurturing history. That we recognize or select a purpose out of the infinite possibilities does not sanction its universal applicability, it merely notices it

Purposes are much like causes. The cause of some event is never singular; it is always the result of a combination of elements, all of which contribute to the event in question. The cause is found by asking a specific "why" question. For example, if the road is slippery and the driver of one car strikes another, we might blame the wet or icy road for the accident. But we might ask why the driver of the offending car (assuming we can distinguish which is the offender) was not more attentive to the road conditions. Both are equally valid causes, and depend on which viewpoint is taken. How the accident happened is a combination of causes, and this is always the case, but asking why the accident happened forces the recognition of one of many contributing causes.

The context and standpoint of the observer will determine to a large extent what purpose is thought to be served. The question of why something is as it is can only be

achieved by assuming a standpoint. The Oxford English Dictionary offers three variations of the word standpoint; a word which is a combination of an action (the verb stand) and a place in space (the noun point) The first refers to "a fixed point of standing; the position at which a person stands to view an object, scene or the like": the second of a "mental point of view, the position (with respect to degree of information, direction of sympathies or prejudices, assumed fundamental principles, or the like) which a person occupies in relation to any object of mental contemplation": while the third refers succinctly to a "position in life or in the world" What these three variations possess in common is the notion of a standpoint being above all a place in space, whether that space be abstract or concrete The second thing of importance here is that a standpoint affords a point of view, something which is both had and obtained by your position in space. It can be both an active or a passive condition. A third implication I wish to draw out is the notion that your visual field (physical and mental) is limited by your standpoint. And lastly that your standpoint can be both a conscious position or an unconscious one. Like a theoretical framework, standpoint delimits the area of inquiry. And like a framework, "it does not give us at once all the variables which will be relevant and the laws which will be true, but it tells us what needs to be explained, and roughly by what kinds of factors" (Taylor, 63). What a standpoint does is create a position from which to depart toward some goal.

Grice's desire to understand how or why human beings possess an ability to reason leads him to the idea of purpose. He understands reason as a faculty which distinguishes us as persons and serves us in our working toward some "purpose" in our lives. What he suggests is that though we evolved using our reason to serve a "detached finality, that is, to purposes which are detached from any purposer, purposes which can exist without there being any conscious being who has, as *his* purpose, whatever the content of those purposes may be," we gradually begin to develop our own goals or ends (79). All signs point to the idea that our reasoning ability helps us to maintain ourselves as human qua human; rational beings that use their minds to cope with reality. The

interesting development comes when humans become intelligent enough that they use their ability to think not merely to keep themselves alive and pass on genetic material, but to question those very biological ends. So while the evolutionary purpose is a consequence of adaptation and natural selection and comes to be retroactively, rational beings are free to not only question those biological ends but to develop their own ends in a prospective and predictive manner. Grice concludes that this rational creature:

> will not merely be capable of raising and answering a range of questions about how certain ends are to be achieved, ., but will also have both the ability and the requisite concern to raise questions about the desirability or propriety of the ends or results which his rationality enables him to realize. (86)

While our rational self has developed in order to be able to correspond accurately and in a relatively sophisticated way with reality through its senses, it has also enabled us to be existentialists about our purpose.

Grice's model is ontologically relative with regard to ends, i e , they are the products of an encounter between rational beings and their environment, and the suitability of any fixed norms in relation to whatever ultimate end is a reflection of the specific circumstances. This axiological relativism allows that there may be many models which suit any one social setting. In addition, the model remains devoted to the idea that the means to those ends are an epistemological concern and not relative at all What Grice argues is that a moral and aesthetic relativism is probably what we live by when we talk of standards, but that any system of norms we develop survives only with the aid of a rational mind dependent on an approximately accurate sense of reality. The traditional objectivist notion of intrinsic or absolute value associated with philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant Grice (like Mackie) sees as nothing more than the

> notion of valuing, or of (hyphenatedly, so to speak) thinking-of-as-valuable some item x, and, subject to the presence of certain qualifying conditions, we should end up with the simple thought, or belief, that the item x is valuable, and in thinking of it as valuable, we should now be thinking, correctly or incorrectly, that the item x has the attribute of being valuable. (88)

Grice does suggest that we inevitably (as humans) tend toward fixing certain things as valuable, but I find his evidence (he himself considers it fragmentary and ill-defended) for this hypothesis lacking in substance.

What we get from Grice is more than a story and less than specifics. While he presents a simple and plausible model of the evolution of rationality, he insists on putting forward a conception of value that not only considers the means to certain ends as absolute, but that goes beyond this and argues for the absoluteness of certain human *ends* as well. Still, this hypothesis is strikingly different from theories of absolute value put forward by other more traditional philosophers. It is not the result of the abstract and prescriptive idealism that characterized traditional objectivism and which finds its beginnings in Plato. On the contrary, Grice's hypothesis is derived from empirical circumstance and distances itself from any prescriptive role. As a metaphysical stance, it refrains from singing the praises of any one ideological position except that of which it considers foremost in defining us as human beings, that of rationality.

Grice arrives at this conclusion through a series of steps. In the first, he denies absolute value as put forward by Hume et al., and accepts a conception of value as relativized towards some end or result. The next step follows directly from this one, and requires merely that there need be some recognizable end for which some thing or act may be valuable. The third step requires that people act rationally on a regular basis as if

objects and actions possessed absolute value. (As noted above, the necessity of such a tendency to view value as absolute is questionable but empirically probable) The fourth step argues that it is part of the nature of persons qua persons to act rationally. The last two steps go further than this and propose that as "members-of-a-kind," persons qua persons will come to view certain things as possessing an "unqualified absolute value" as these things contribute to both defining and maintaining them as members of that kind (119).

There is one problem with the last step. It may be only relative to the existence of persons qua persons, but it is nevertheless relative to this *end* as far as value goes. This aside, what Grice has managed to highlight is that human beings are rational persons who are naturally prone to develop tendencies toward viewing certain ends as absolute, but also that these ends should therefore be considered absolute in turn because they contribute to the substantive person. If true, this hypothesis asks that we consider to what degree, if at all, we are circumscribed in our choice of ends by our place in the world as (rational) biological organisms. This suggests to me that though Grice initially (and hesitantly) accepted J.L. Mackie's axiological relativism, he nevertheless would like to maintain a more restricted relativistic position with regard to our axiological choices.

We have the freedom to choose how we maintain ourselves as rational beings qua rational beings, but this end itself circumscribes what is less than a completely relativistic axiology. The next part of this section will explore Allan Gibbard's attempt to show in more detail to what degree we are limited or free to choose among the many possible moral and aesthetic normative systems such that we might still maintain ourselves as persons.

3.3 Allan Gibbard, in his book Wise Choices, Apt Feelings, offers a more elaborate and practical extension of Paul Grice's hypothetical and abstract model. His inquiry is axiologically centered, and focuses on how our moral selves are dependent on our ability to reason accurately and appropriately As he summarizes it himself, "[n]arrowly moral judgements are not feelings but judgements of what moral feelings it is rational to have. Feelings, we think, can be apt or not, and moral judgements are judgements of when guilt and resentment are apt" (6) It is part of Gibbard's thesis that feelings of guilt or resentment, and the whole of our moral sentiments, are feelings we learn by either accepting outright or internalizing them as norms which then govern our normative behavior In the same vein, aesthetic norms are but semi-fixed control systems which govern our aesthetic behavior, be it creative or critical.

Gibbard presents evidence which suggests that our capacity to accept norms is part of our biological heritage and adaptively advantageous. He argues that we are "designed for social life" (26). Design here should be understood in the Darwinian sense: i.e., genetic variation and natural selection has allowed us to evolve in such a way that we have become quite successfully adapted to a social type of existence which secures the passing on of our genes. The "function" of our rational and normative selves is a very important element in Gibbard's model because like Grice, Gibbard is suggesting that we have an adaptive social tendency toward accepting and being guided by norms. These norms serve as heuristic devices which enable us to coordinate our beliefs and activities.

Natural selection mimics intentional design in such a way that organisms appear to have purpose and finality. But nature is inherently neutral and provides no prescriptive purpose. The appearance of purpose that we grasp results from observing an organisms' functioning and deducing a circumstantial finality, but in reality this is only a description of that organisms' phenotypic role. Reproduction is the only "design function" in nature, and this purpose is itself retroactively observed, the perception of the "accumulation of mutations and genetic recombinations that have favored reproduction" (62).

The function of an organism does not presuppose finality, only purpose in a Darwinian sense. An organism's function in one environment may differ from that organism's function in another because the phenotype is a result of a genotype-environment interaction. Organisms develop in such a way that selection pressures in the environment force adaptations which allow it to survive. If the organism is unable to adapt, its genotype disappears. Rabbits who were unable to change their coat with the seasons in moderate climes perished and those who survived passed on their genes.

The scenario is no different in the case of human beings. Rationality and systems of normative control allow humanity to prosper in social settings of varying degrees of complexity and circumstance: "systems of normative control in human beings, . . ., are adapted to achieve interpersonal coordination" (64). Our predispositions, part of our phenotype, help us to achieve certain goals in the social world as in the natural world. Our propensities to develop goals in concert with others were selected as they contributed most to our survival. In this sense, our tendency toward forming goals and trying to achieve them developed naturally and is a phenotypical characteristic.
Gibbard suggests that we naturally tend toward normative control.

> Propensities well coordinated with the propensities of others would have been fitness-enhancing, and so we may view a vast array of human propensities as coordinating devices. Our emotional propensities, . . ., are largely the results of these selection pressures, and so are our normative capacities. (67)

The key to understanding our moral natures lies hidden somewhere in our ability to coordinate our social lives successfully. It becomes necessary for us as social beings that we reach a certain standardization according to which we can all (or a sufficient number of any group) gravitate. This standardization in turn allows us to coordinate our

actions in a social as opposed to an anti-social manner. It contributes to our survival much the same as our physical abilities by allowing us to maintain order or equilibrium in our lives. And in order for us to live according to these accepted or internalized norms, we must be able to reason according to them in turn, otherwise our accepting them would not prove adaptable.

Is it the case that our reason has been subject to normalization? Gibbard argues that that is exactly the case. Survival is a matter of matching up our beliefs with our natural and social reality. What we know of these realities are the beliefs we have that match up accurately with that reality. The accuracy of our beliefs, to be truly adaptive, must by definition correspond to an extra-mental reality.

This somewhat preliminary and crude look at the development of normative systems specifically avoids any notion that there is any particular kind of system that is the best one. Indeed, while our social and evolutionary goals may mesh, our evolutionary purpose does not prefigure or restrict our normative systems in any direct sense. As well, our physical and psychic capacities allow for a wide range of possible scenarios. A significantly large number of moral systems may contribute effectively to passing on our genes or sustaining our rational abilities, a fact which points to the relativity inherent in the construction of standards for behavior. The goals are survival and social coordination; the rest (our surrogate goals as Gibbard labels them) is dependent on the particular environmental circumstances and the suitability of certain behaviors with regards to those goals. The complexity of the system is only restricted by our genetic potential. Gibbard only suggests that we possess "broad propensities to accept norms, engage in normative discussion, and to act, believe, and feel in ways that are somewhat guided by the norms one has accepted," not that these norms are fixed in advance in the traditional objectivist sense (27).

3.4 It is one thing to argue that we tend to follow or are governed by systems of

norms and another to prove that we are capable of following those norms in an effective and efficient manner; i.e. that we are able to determine objectively what is the best means (among those we have access to) to achieving the ends in question. Indeed, that is the central issue in the constructivist/realist debate. The second half of Gibbard's thesis concerns just how an objective rationalization (which is supposed to proceed according to our adopted normative system) comes about. There is nothing positive, sure or final about Gibbard's notions, only an imperative demand that if we are in fact governed by normative systems, we must obviously possess a certain degree of internal coherence and consistency in our methods. In other words, we are able to be rational. But it is one thing to claim that this is possible and another to provide direct evidence. Is there such a thing as an impartial observer or a disengaged perspective? Gibbard offers an introductory epistemic story of what it means to share norms or standards and to proceed to adjudicate according to those norms, one which understands the influence of perspective yet argues that the conception of value is not overwhelmingly contingent.

The constructivist (in this case, Smith's version of constructivism) is unable at bottom to understand the distinction between judgement and taste as he/she feels that the judgement will be fundamentally influenced by the taste of the observer, hence the notion of radical contingency. For Allan Gibbard, the rationality of a judgement is independent of the observer. It cannot therefore be a matter of taste. To express your critical opinion of something is to express your acceptance of certain norms. As Gibbard explains, the analysis he offers:

> says not that the speaker *states that he accepts* a system of norms that permits x, but that the speaker *expresses his acceptance* of a system of norms that permits x. To express a state of mind is not to say that one is in it. (153-4)

The speaker or judge is not making claims of absolute rationality the way a traditional objectivist might, but making claims of "what it is for someone to *judge* that something is rational We explain the term by saying what state of mind it expresses" (8). To call something rational is not to equate it with being factual, it is merely making the claim that it is logically derivable from certain norms. For example, the claim that Shakespeare is a great poet is nothing more than the claim that he has shown his ability to work within a normative system, or according to accepted norms, whether he played a part in creating those norms or not. If we accept those norms, we must rationally accept the claim that he is a great poet.

If we do not share norms for behavior, we may find people's actions unintelligible. But the concern here is whether we can determine if judgements are objective or not *within* a culture or system of norms, not across cultures. And within a system of norms, there are rules which determine whether an act or belief is appropriate or not To say that Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 is an example of great poetry is to express your acceptance of norms which decree such a statement. And in order to understand and follow (or perhaps modify) these normative rules, we depend on our rational abilities, our reason.

Reasons are the specific rational rules which apply to particular normative systems. Each person is equipped with norms which guide the acceptance of some reasons over others Different systems put weight on different elements, and this leads to the widely ranging preferences of different individuals, not to mention some degree of internal conflict. We weigh all known considerations, then choose according to which ones sway us to a greater degree. Our norms help us decide, and a "person who thinks an act, belief, or emotion rational thinks that it would be so even if he thought not" (164). That is, it is not just a matter of taste. The literary romantic (Gibbard uses the twisted logic of the anorexic as an example) may appear irrational to a classicist, but in the end it is the norms that we do not share which makes the romantic appear irrational. Only if the

romantic accepts our norms and continues to act as a romantic might (perhaps writing idealistic pastoral prose) can we consider he/she irrational The lesson here is that we derive our notion of rational from separate norms which weigh considerations differently

These norms that we do not share are sometimes "higher order norms" which govern many lower order norms. For example, personal ideals, such as a strong aversion to cruelty, may influence the acceptance of different norms But it is important to remember that the rationality of any particular judgement according to those norms remains distinct from the choice of the norms in the first place. This distinction is crucial to understanding how a judgement can be objective and ideological at the same time. All judgments are ideological, but it is the norms they relate to which are ideological, not the judgement proper. It is in this sense that we may grasp the rationality behind exotic or unfamiliar cultural practices. All we need do is learn the rules of the system which governs a particular rationale. We can bridge the gap between perspective or framework by understanding the concepts involved

But even once we accept the notion of objective warrant in cases such as cultural relativism or aesthetic codes, there remains the question of when it is rational to accept a judgement. It is one thing to say that judges be considered rationally objective if they are coherent, consistent and intelligible and another to show how they can be. Gibbard suggests that we develop epistemological norms for the acceptance of judgements. This is the pin which holds up the pants of Gibbard's argument. If it is possible to show how this is possible in practice, then value is not a relative or a contingent concept Gibbard argues that "[t]o treat judgements as objective is to treat them as knowledge--as objective knowledge. That means supposing their contents can be known, and can be known by anyone--in principle at least" (181). A judge is only considered to a judge qua judge so long as he/she makes epistemological claims regarding a particular normative system

In everyday conversation, we may browbeat, coerce, and be rhetorical, but the skeptic will not be convinced until proof is offered. The audience must decide when it is

acceptable to believe the speaker One instance is when we as audience feel that the speaker is an authority who happens to share norms that we do This is contextual acceptance (174) Another is when the speaker's reasoning is one we accept. Fundamental authority is something the traditional objectivist was interested in discovering, and more often than not he/she assumed its presence in normative matters, but this is too risky a proposition for your average discussion But, Gibbard does argue that we have to grant some mutual influence in these matters as:

> [m]utual influence . . . is part of what accounts for the very existence of normative discussion. What then, are we doing when we try to decide whether it *makes sense* to be so influenced? We are, I suggest, trying to decide what norms to accept as governing our thought. We are trying to decide what norms to accept for letting one's judgements depend on what others think. (177)

In the end, we judge the claims of others by the same epistemological norms that we judge ourselves. Contextual authority is rooted in self-trust, and if we make logical demands on our own judgments, we can apply them to others. We necessarily offer a "partial and discriminate" authority to others. This is the essence and beginnings of objective validity in a social context Our acceptance of their claims is not without the same discrimination we apply to our own beliefs.

Any disagreements between speaker and audience when they both accept the same norms is either an epistemological matter, or the result of different normative systems. If it is the result of different normative systems, then it is an axiological matter and not open to a strictly shared rationality. But the point of all this is to show how barring this type of axiological draw in which further discussion is usually pointless (without compromise), once the norms are agreed to, the subsequent demands upon action, thought, and even

feeling become an epistemological concern and may be assessed from within as from without the system, neutrally and objectively.

In an axiological sense, we can agree to disagree at the level of norms, or we may compromise and come to a consensus in these matters. This type of relativism is acceptable. But within the normative system itself, relativism is disallowed because epistemologically unsound. Assertions within the system are subject to justificatory warrant. A clear and contemporary example of this type of distinction is the abortion debate. We have two sides who follow separate normative rules, each of which can be seen as acting rationally within their own system. The situation is such that the pro-lifers consider abortion to be murder. The pro-choice groups do not view abortion as murder The term murder for pro-choice only applies after birth The problem is not with an inability to understand the definition of murder. The problem arises because both groups have put forward a different definition, one which they do not share. Murder then becomes a matter of law (normative), and which type of law is adopted will determine whether the people are acting rationally according to the law or not. And it is important to note that the separate frameworks are not incommensurable as both sides can understand the others' rationale. It is the norms themselves which occasion disagreement, not the trivial epistemic uncertainties which might arise.

Once this distinction is made between the acceptance of norms and the evaluation according to those norms, our sense of objectivity depends on our willingness to believe that we can accept claims as true independent of the speaker. Gibbard recognizes this:

> Pragmatically grounded rules of thought and discussion will give a special status to a core, systematic way that beliefs can promote success Call the beliefs that work best in this way *systematically apt*, . . , prescriptions for success in action will support systematically apt beliefs. Finally and chiefly, the pragmatically best norms for discussion will require factual

> claims to be systematically apt, and will allow challenges only to their systematic aptness. (221-2)

This means that if claims are made, they must be epistemologically sound in order to offer pragmatic support to any coordinating social effort. Faced with making decisions in the real world, we had better choose the best means to arriving at the most effective and efficient decisions and actions.

What directs this whole enterprise is the wish to make effective decisions in our social and normative lives If we accept this goal, then it becomes imperative that we find some epistemic story which serves our pragmatic goals. Relativism fails at this. Realism succeeds because it happens to be the best way to deal with reality as we know it.

3.5 The importance to this study of Gibbard's thesis is this idea that though we are biologically prone to function by internalizing and accepting systems of normative governance, it does not necessarily restrict to any great degree what norms or normative systems we adopt. All that Gibbard's hypothesis entails is that we possess this genetic capacity to live (within certain vaguely defined limits) according to whatever survival worthy normative system we happen upon. In nature we find self-supporting ecosystems which have developed by constant mutation and selection over thousands of years and which achieve periods of moderate stability during which there is little change. Gibbard's thesis is that in social life, the very same thing happens; we achieve stability by adhering to social principles and rules of conduct that develop in and out of social life. That we have evolved to the extent that we have is testimony to our normative adaptiveness and our normative reasoning abilities in disparate circumstances.

So, while moral and aesthetic standards (as well as many other normative systems) are required for our survival, which standards are adopted is not determined beforehand. And though our choice of normative systems is restricted by our natural as

well as our social environment, the choice of a particular system is most likely a relatively taste-ridden matter to be decided only tangentially by its relation to the rather loosely defined notion of survival (of our physical or rational selves), if indeed that be the end we have in mind. But no matter what ends are chosen, or how they are chosen, our ability to conform to those ends is dependent on our reasoning powers, or our powers of normative judgement. We must be able to know and act upon the means to those chosen ends. Only some (not necessarily unique) behaviors or actions will bring about the desired end.

Gibbard's analysis is:

> not directly a hypothesis about what it *is* for something to be rational at all. It is a hypothesis about what it is to *think* or *believe* something rational, to *regard* it as rational, to *consider* it rational. An observer *believes* an action, belief, or attitude *A* of mine to be rational if and only if he accepts norms that permit *A* for my circumstances. (46-7)

In the end, this analysis is about what epistemological norms we must accept in order to function efficiently and effectively as normative beings. Epistemological norms are set by our desire to know things of the world around us, be it of our natural or social reality. These epistemological norms govern our normative behavior. Whatever we know of the world figures in our deliberations when we are confronted with a decision. Acting rationally is always talk of acting with regard to a certain end, whether that end be apparent to others or not, unconscious or conscious, and:

> [W]hat it is rational to believe settles what to believe, and what it is rational to feel about something settles how to feel about it. Not that a person will always do what he thinks it rational to do, but settling what it

is rational to do at least ends discussion. The person who agrees and then acts otherwise has not been effectively governed by what he himself has conceded. (49)

Section 4. Conclusion: Smith's Conception of Value Reconsidered.

Where does Smith go wrong? Despite her tendency to overplay the dynamic interactions between people and their environments, her functionalist/economic model is surprisingly apt at explaining how changes in personal economies (ends, standards, needs) require changes in the configuration of the means to those ends as well. I have no problem with this, her axiological claim. The problem comes from Smith's rendering of it *as* a knowledge claim.

The initial puzzle that her model presents is a result of trying to sort out and hold on to Smith's self-refuting argument long enough to separate the converging elements such that each can be studied separately. Two central claims are made which cross each other at odd angles. The first is that the evaluation of the means to an end is overly tainted by the evaluation process itself (an epistemological claim). The second is that because we (our needs and desires) and our environment (physical, technological, etc.) change over time, we must constantly reassess our position in relation to our environment and the value relation of those things around us.

But these separable claims immediately contradict each other. If the first claim truly expressed the way things were in reality, it would preclude the possibility of our adapting to even a transiently fixed and stable world, let alone a dynamic one. Smith gets it backwards. Instead of arguing that we must constantly reassess the value of this or that literary text in relation to our changing goals and standards, she argues that we must do this without any hope of success. The assertion is troubling in the extreme. But because she sticks to both these claims, Smith consistently overextends her axiological model, melting the value of an object in its absolute relation to an end into a "market value" that is relativistic.

The contradiction arises because of Smith's constant confusing of value as act or process and value as object (norm or standard). I have no quarrel with her claim that "there is a continuous process of mutual modification between our desires and our

universe" which may require a constant revamping of our normative system (32). What I do find problematic is her claim that value itself is something that changes. The faultiness of this kind of idea is apparent in her attempt to explain how process is everything.

In her third chapter, "Contingencies of Value," Smith argues that the dynamics involved in maintaining standards translates into a kind of "value market" fueled by the economy of human taste. Specifically, what she claims is that:

> All value is radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables or, to put this another way, the product of the dynamics of a system, specifically an *economic* system. (30)

Value is not found, it is created.

This constructivist position leads Smith into absurdity. What is typically understood as the perceived or selected function of a work for the nonce, Smith understands as the whole of its functions. She argues that any value that is selected by a critic is constructed for his/her own purpose. What Smith claims of attributions of value is that:

> In perceiving an object or artifact in terms of some category--as, for example, "a clock," "a dictionary," "a doorstop," "a curio"--we implicitly isolate and foreground certain of its functions and typically refer its value to the extent to which it performs those functions more or less effectively. (32)

In addition, she claims that it is only under certain conditions that these functions will be

"foregrounded" and that the value of this or that artifact will vary according to what functions are called upon. She puts the weight of this characterization onto commonly used terms used to describe the value relation such as the idea that "one will 'realize' the value of a dictionary *as* a doorstop or 'appreciate' the value of the clock *as* a clock" (32).

Smith places a clock in the same category as a curio. Many of her examples are not so easy to decipher, but there is a clear distinction to be made between a curio and a clock. A clock qua clock, whether it be recognised or not, indicates the passage of time And whether that clock is an astronomical clock or an atomic clock, its existence as a clock is a consequence of its ability to indicate sufficiently accurately either the relative motion of the earth and sun or "the natural vibrations of the cesium atom" (Falk, D8) If at the equator the clock indicates midnight, and the sun is directly overhead, this is sufficient grounds to question the accuracy of the clock but not the fact that it is a clock Its status as an artifact meant to perform this indicatory function is independent of anyone perceiving it. The curio, on the other hand, can only be considered such by human intervention, and is not a curio without someone perceiving it in that way The clock may be considered a curio, but it remains a clock regardless

Smith then combines the languages of aesthetics and economics (something she claims is inevitable) to come up with a spurious dynamics of literary appreciation. What she argues is that:

> The recurrent impulse and effort to define aesthetic value by contradistinction to all forms of utility or as the negation of all other nameable sources of interest or forms of value--hedonic, practical, sentimental, ornamental, historical, ideological, and so forth--is, in effect, to define it out of existence; for when all such utilities, interests, and other particular sources of value have been subtracted, nothing remains (33)

I concur. In essence, aesthetic value is use value. It is a calculation of how certain aesthetic works contribute as means toward certain aesthetic ends. And these aesthetic ends themselves are in turn subordinated to systems of normative governance. It is an estimation of a work's potential value to a society's standards, which themselves are a result of the various *natural*, hedonic, practical, ornamental, etc., considerations she mentions.

It is a matter of taste and not judgement, and the bulk of her third chapter is taken up with a tendency in formal axiology toward explaining:

> the constancies of value and convergences of taste by the inherent qualities of certain objects and/or some set of presumed human universals, and to explain the variabilities of value and divergences of taste by historical accident, cultural distortion, and the defects and deficiencies of individual subjects. (36)

Smith argues that there are no such universals, and that there is a need for the levelling of any hierarchy of tastes as all tastes are the products of these same dynamics. The asymmetrical argument put forward by traditional axiological philosophers like David Hume having been shown invalid, Smith offers a symmetrical explanation whereby "our selection among higher goods, like our selection among any array of goods, will always be contingent" (42). There is no way of making an objective choice in matters of taste.

Once we understand the dynamics of taste, the model can be applied to all our normative activities, including aesthetics. The stability of the standards depends upon the:

> normative activities of various institutions: most significantly, the literary and aesthetic academy which, among other things, develops pedagogic and other acculturative mechanisms directed at maintaining at least (and,

> commonly, at most) a *sub*population of the community whose members "appreciate the value" of works of art and literature "as such." (43)

The same applies to the person acting in conjunction with or within the institution, such as the writer who can at best hope to modify the standards slightly and that only with great effort. Each "literary" piece will have to be the result of numerous evaluative calculations which take as their standard the already existing norms. Any great deviation will run the risk of obscurity while no deviation at all we be left unnoticed

Where Smith begins to trip herself up is when she moves from the writer as creator to the critic as creator. What she says is that all forms of evaluation, from reviews by scholars to awards by committees,

> whether overt or covert, verbal or inarticulate, and whether performed by the common reader, professional reviewer, big-time bookseller, or small-town librarian, have functions and effects that are significant in the production and maintenance or destruction of literary value (46)

But the small-town librarian does not create a book's literary value. The book possesses a capacity to perform certain literary functions independently of any recognition it might receive from the librarian or the scholar. The critic's job is to assess this potential, and not to lavish empty praise upon a book in an attempt to create a type of market value unrelated to the book's literary potential This may certainly happen, and it no doubt often does, but this does not entail that we must view the purchase of many copies or a dogmatic review as a direct indication of its literary worth.

If we follow Smith's argument a little further, we are forced into an incoherent position as her claim that value is created works against observed practice. When we

claim that Homer's poetry is a positive tool for our young children (let us say that he teaches them moral lessons we approve of), we are making a statement about its value in relation to our ends. Whether Homer does in fact contribute in a positive way toward our goals is an objective matter. No matter where the endorsements roll in from, their objectivity is debatable and their attestations do not create the value in a book. they describe it. Their accuracy is an evaluatory aspect, to be distinguished from the creation of standards. Institutions do not create literary value, they create standards by which this value is assessed.

This last point is where Smith's discussion of the dynamics of literary appreciation fails. While she acknowledges the functional nature of literary texts, she persists in claiming that the "value" of a work is not latent. In other words, she takes the obvious truth that people may either not recognize or ignore the "value" of a literary work to mean that the value itself is nonexistent if not recognized. When she discusses people's ignorance of Homer, she argues that Homer therefore has no value for them. But Homer's work does still possess a certain latent value, whether it be recognized, used, or ignored.

Smith's description of how standards are maintained in literary circles is fairly accurate and insightful. The problem is with her claim that value is created, that the "value of a literary work is continuously produced and re-produced by the very acts of implicit and explicit evaluation that are frequently invoked as 'reflecting' its value and therefore as being evidence of it" (52). This constructivist/relativist type assertion is not borne out by the evidence she presents. Indeed, it is contrary to the evidence she presents. The dividing line comes when she moves from a statement about the ontological origin of norms or standards to an epistemological statement concerning the presence or absence of value. The former is supported by her axiological arguments while the latter is not. She herself realizes this and seeks support for this position by advancing a relativist epistemological position, one whose tenability we have already assessed and dismissed in

section two.

What becomes clear once Smith's two major claims are separated is that Smith is concerned with the standards by which different works are evaluated and not with the evaluation at all. It is in this sense that her conception of value is not only partial, but is also inferior to the objectivist conception of value. The model that Gibbard and Grice offer makes allowances for the many possible normative systems which might occur yet argues for the possibility of maintaining those standards. Smith's model offers only an explanation of the dynamics of value choice. Her comments reflect accurately upon the recognition and selection of certain values (as standards) over others, but only insofar as these values are considered as ends in themselves and not as means to some desired ends. This is most apparent in her discussion of "art" as a label that is confined to the creation of artistic standards, a process which is both somewhat arbitrary and consensual. But once the standards have been set, the value of the next work of art put up against those standards shows itself by rational means. The subsequent labeling of something as art is but the application of these standards or norms to specific examples. Whether these examples contribute to, modify, or reject those standards is all a reflection of their value toward those standards. To call something art is merely to include it into an already defined normative system which reproduces itself each time someone evaluates a work accordingly. The constant inclusion and exclusion of works within any normative system only strengthens the system. The evaluation need not necessarily be biased. That it is ideologically governed to cater to a specific system of norms does not render the assessment accurate or inaccurate. But then Smith's book is no longer about the evaluation itself, it is about the ideology which prompts the evaluation. Smith does not realize it, but the evaluation process is usually irrelevant to her argument. What she is overly concerned with is the standards used by the judge. This is readily apparent in her explanation of how the Western academic canon reproduces itself by choosing works according to its own standards. What else does she suggest? Nothing.

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