

At the end of Chapter Five, Nick makes much of the power of Daisy's voice over Gatsby: "I think that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be over-dreamed—that voice was a deathless song" (p.96). Later on, Gatsby observes that "Her voice is full of money," and Nick develops the point: "That was it, I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals song of it." Is it possible for characters in Gatsby's world to disentangle different kinds of value: In particular, do the social conventions and self-understandings of the main characters allow them to disentangle the material value associated with economic wealth, the value attributed to a human object of desire, the aesthetic value of a beautiful object, and the moral values by which one assesses a person's character? Why, if it all, does this matter?

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When pioneers discovered American shores, they arrived on the fringe of earth's last fresh wilderness, a place of hope and wonder. In one of *The Great Gatsby's* most memorable lines, Fitzgerald imagines "man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation... face to face for the last time...with something to commensurate his capacity for wonder" (180). Fitzgerald depicts an America that has forever lost its forefathers' wonder for intrinsic beauty. The characters in *The Great Gatsby* entangle aesthetic beauty with economic worth, and equate one's morality with one's financial and social status. Thus their individual personalities are lost to social ambition, and this corruption of passion is Fitzgerald's hopeless, fatal vision of America.

The dominance of material wealth in Fitzgerald's story is first apparent upon Nick's initial visit to the Buchanan house, wherein he describes a lawn that "started at the beach and ran towards the door for a quarter of a mile... finally when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines" (6). Nick depicts a mansion woven into the natural landscape--an aesthetically beautiful sight. However, the home's aesthetic value escapes its owner, as Tom says to Nick, "I've got a nice place here...It belonged to Demaine, the oil man" (7). Tom infers that his home is beautiful because a wealthy oil man once owned it. A sweeping lawn is valued for its social history rather than its owner's aesthetic affection for it.

Just as Tom replaces aesthetic value with financial worth, Myrtle Wilson entangles love and morality with economic value, resulting in the loss of her individuality. Unhappy with her impoverished lifestyle, she wrongly believes Tom's high social status is the cure, and begins a secret affair. With Tom, she can buy whatever she wants, including a puppy for sale on the street. She wants the dog not for a companion, but because "they're nice to have" (27), and when Tom buys it for her, he tells the vendor "it's a bitch, ... here's your money, go buy ten more dogs with it" (28). Myrtle objectifies the puppy in the same way she objectifies herself by submitting to Tom. Just like the puppy, there are ten more Myrtles for Tom, as indicated when he carelessly "broke her nose with his open hand" (37). She's a dime-a-dozen, for her character is defined by a monetary value rather than personal preference.

Tom's wife, Daisy, who expresses a bitter awareness when she observes "the best thing a girl can be in this world [is] a beautiful little fool" (17), is nevertheless governed by her high status and social conventions. Although she truly loved Gatsby in her youth, she refused to wait for him. Daisy, confusing the values that identify one's existence, "wanted her life shaped now... and the decision must be made by some force--of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality" (151). Tom bought her easily, as "he gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty

thousand dollars” (76). Daisy can't escape the quantitative value of money as the supreme authority in her identity, making her no more than a “beautiful little fool.” Such confusion is visible when she begins to cry at the sight of Gatsby's expensive clothing: “she sobbed... 'it makes me sad because I've never seen such... beautiful shirts” (92).

Gatsby confuses economic value with aesthetic, emotional, and moral values more than any other character, and his confusion crystallizes in Daisy. Nick says “she was the first 'nice' girl he'd ever known.” (148). However, he seems to use nice the same way Tom does in reference to his house, as Nick continues, “Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of Daisy... gleaming like silver.” (150). Gatsby is initially attracted to Daisy for her aesthetic beauty, but quickly confuses it with the appeal of her immense financial wealth. Hence Gatsby “sprang from his Platonic conception of himself” (98)—Gatsby's fabricated identity was a financial means to obtain something unquantifiable. Disregarding the law to achieve financial success, he sacrifices his moral reputation, becoming a man of “unaffected scorn” (2) and “corruption” (154) in the eyes of society. Gatsby buys an “imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy” (5), attempting to assimilate into Daisy's aristocratic world, but remains like his awkwardly large mansion, a caricatured imitation with his pink suit and yellow car.

However in the end, it's Gatsby, the liar and bootlegger, who ironically remains loyal and sincere, as he takes the blame for Myrtle's murder and protectively watches over Daisy from the bushes outside her house. Here is where the ultimate entanglement of different types of value exists in Fitzgerald's story. Although Gatsby remains a fraud and a criminal in the eyes of high society, it's the Buchanans' moral values that are truly skewed. Nick confesses in the end: “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money” (179). In Fitzgerald's story, society equates morality with social status. After the death of Myrtle, Tom and Daisy continue to live their lives behind their wealth, as if their status precludes a cause for shame, while Gatsby tragically dies alone for his loyalty. Fitzgerald's ending indicates that his diagnosis of America's immoral materialism is incurable. To him, Tom and Daisy's avarice is the American reality, and Gatsby's misdirected sincerity is no more than the American Dream.