

## Values, Objectivity, and Relationalism

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The twin diseases of value subjectivity and Humean instrumental rationality have infected moral theory and left in their wake a discipline that undermines its own importance. What remains is an ethical view that has opened up a seemingly unbridgeable divide between facts and values, reduces moral value to the status of mere desires or affections, and banishes rationality from playing anything but a peripheral role. Philippa Foot charges that the problem of deriving values from facts gained prominence because of a mistake that has infected moral theory over the past few decades. The mistake was subjectivism and non-cognitivism.

What all these theories tried to do, then, was to give the *conditions of use* of sentences such as “It is morally objectionable to break promises” in terms of something that must be true about the speaker. He must have certain feelings or attitudes. . . . *Meaning was thus to be explained in terms of a speaker’s attitude, intentions, or state of mind.* And this opened up a gap between moral judgments and assertions, with the idea that truth conditions give, and may exhaust, the meaning of the latter but not the former. Thus it seemed that *fact*, complementary to assertion, has been distinguished from *value*, complementary to the expression of feeling, attitude, or commitment to action.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, subjective accounts of value fall pray to the problems of arbitrariness, preference manipulation, and value elitism.<sup>2</sup> Non-relational accounts, in contrast, appear to slip into the absurdity of agent external value or end up sliding the other direction into relational accounts.

### 1. Objective Versus Subjective Value

People value a wide range of objects, activities, goals, careers, and pursuits. When asked what is valuable we include things like, a nice day on the golf course, hanging with friends, spicy Indian food, a fast car, lots of money, and good music. This list could be continued. But what thread runs through each of these items that make it count as good? One common answer is that they

are good because they are desired. On this view what is intrinsically good, or good in and of itself, is what satisfies an intrinsic desire. A person who desires, an object, state of affairs, or sensation, for itself and not just for something it can bring about, has an intrinsic desire for it. We desire such things and when they come to pass value has been brought into the world. Such views about value are commonly called subjective preference satisfaction theories or desire satisfaction accounts. Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, holds such a view:

But whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth Good: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, Evill. . . . Good and Evill, are names that signifie our Appetites, and Aversions; which in different tempers, coustomes, and doctrines of men, are different; And divers men, differ not onely in their Judgement, on the sense of what is pleasant, and unpleasant to the taste, smell, hearing, touch, and sight; but also of what is conformable, or disagreeable to Reason, in the actions of common life. Nay, the same man, in divers times, differs from himselfe; and one time praiseth, that, calleth Good, what another time he dispraiseth, and calleth Evill.<sup>3</sup>

This is an odd view of value. Why would anyone's mere arbitrary preferences count morally? Since preferences can be arbitrary, and according to this view value is intimately tied to preferences, this arbitrariness will contaminate value theory. Also of concern is preference or desire manipulation where the desires are not arbitrary they are contrived. We can imagine a situation where a child's preferences are manipulated so that the child prefers a particular kind of life or detests certain people. One attack leveled at many religious groups is that they manipulate the affections of children to ensure room for religious belief. A brief look at the history of religion and the diversity of religious belief would indicate that such manipulation is possible. It would seem that few people would come to desire bloodletting or ritual sacrifice to appease the gods if these views were not shoved down the throats of the young.

In part, such cases attempt to show the implausibility of maintaining the claim that the sole standard of value, in fact, that which creates value, is the satisfaction of desires and preferences. This point is echoed nicely by W.D. Ross. "It might be enough (to eliminate the theory as a plausible contender) to ask whether anyone finds it even possible to think that goodness could be brought into being by the feeling of some one or other, no matter how vicious or stupid or ignorant he might be."<sup>4</sup>

Defenders of subjective preference satisfaction accounts typically try to bolster their view at this point by claiming that only certain preferences or desires count. The desire to survive for a short time by consuming ourselves, when fulfilled, does not bring value into the world while the desire to spend time with our family does. Different criteria have been offered to mark the

boundary of preferences that count from preferences that do not. Standards of rational appraisal, universality, and perfect information have been offered as suitable candidates. Nevertheless, each of these fails to mark appropriate boundary.

## 2. David Gauthier's Subjectivist Account

Following Hume, David Gauthier affirms an account of instrumental rationality. Hume writes: "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" and ". . . tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching on my finger."<sup>5</sup> According to this view, rationality is a kind of means-to-end efficiency. When an agent takes efficient means to achieve a goal or desire she is said to be instrumentally rational. An individual's initial desires are neither rational nor irrational. Gauthier also affirms the subjectivity of value.

Value does not afford a single uniform measure of preference but a measure relative to each valuer. And although values are ascribed to states of affairs, the ascription is attitudinal, not observational, subjective, not objective. As a measure of preference value is and must be contingent on preferences for its very existence.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, value for Gauthier is a product of our affections. The order of explanation is from preference or desire to value not from value to preference. But what are we to say of the arbitrariness of value and the manipulation of preference problems? Gauthier attempts to provide an answer by introducing the notion of a considered preference. "Preferences are considered if and only if there is no conflict between their behavioural and attitudinal dimensions and they are stable under experience and reflection."<sup>7</sup> The behavioural dimension is expressed in choice. When we choose to eat an apple when offered both apples and pears we are revealing a preference. Expressing that we prefer apples to pears in conversation reveals an attitude. When these two domains conflict, when an individual claims to prefer apples to pears yet consistently chooses to eat pears when offered both, Gauthier claims that it is a matter confused values.<sup>8</sup>

Behavioral and attitudinal consistency or convergence will not alleviate concerns of arbitrary preference and manipulated desires. Consistent doers and sayers may still have had their desires brainwashed into them. Moreover, the charge of arbitrariness appears unanswered. The real work in terms of parsing out the preferences that count from the ones that do not is done by Gauthier's instance that "Preferences are considered if and only if . . . they are stable under experience and reflection."<sup>9</sup> Here Gauthier places several

rational requirements on desire sets. The condition of completeness “rules out preferentially non-comparable outcomes. . . . Thus for any two possible outcomes in a choice situation, the chooser must either prefer one to the other or be indifferent between them.”<sup>10</sup> The second requirement is known as transitivity. This requirement rules out the possibility of preferring apples to pears, pears to grapes, and grapes to apples. Both of these requirements seem eminently rational. The problem is to determine how they can apply to desire sets without also applying to particular desires. If an individual claims to prefer apples to pears, pears to grapes, and grapes to apples we may claim that her desire set fails the requirement of transitivity. It would seem that we are driven to say that the desire set is irrational because one of her preferences is irrational. It could be argued that desire sets, as opposed to individual desires, come under the purview of rational appraisal, but why? Such a reply appears ad hoc. Moreover a person may desire that desires be non-transitive or desire to have no desires? Such desires are irrational and if correct, we are abandoning the Humean conception of rationality.

Consider the goal of becoming a Chief Executive Officer that is held by an individual who also desires to survive by consuming himself. In light of the goal the desire may be dismissed as irrational. But what are we to say of the desire or goal to become a Chief Executive Officer? If it is a rational desire on the instrumental account, then there will be some further desire or goal that is sought. The desire to become a Chief Executive Officer would not be an intrinsic desire. Sooner or later we will come to an intrinsic desire and pose the question: Is it rational or not? Defenders of instrumentalist accounts of rationality may argue that such desires are outside the scope of rationality. We just have desires and they are neither rational nor irrational. If this is correct, then rational endorsement standards of subjective preferences will not work. In the end, rationality will not give us the means to determine which preferences or desires are rational.

Moving beyond Gauthier’s theory, we could adopt a non-instrumentalist account of rationality by endorsing a view that widens the scope of rational appraisal to include desires. This also appears to be a dead end. In response to the desire to survive for a short time by consuming ourselves we are tempted to say that such desires are irrational. One reason for saying this is that such desires are irrational because they are disvaluable. But this is dangerously circular. We need rationality to determine which preferences, when satisfied, bring value into the world, and we need value theory to determine which desires are rational or irrational. Such desires also seem fail the requirements of transitivity or coherence. An individual’s desire to survive by consuming himself would not cohere with his other desires. But this need not be so. A desire set could be coherent and transitive yet still include odd desires. Desire sets that exhibit coherence and transitivity, individually or combined, do not escape the charge of arbitrariness.

An alternative approach for rationally evaluating goals or desires is offered by David Schmitz in *Rational Choice and Moral Agency*.<sup>11</sup> Schmitz argues that there are some desires, like the desire to find something worth living for, that may change us while we pursue them. Simplifying Schmitz's account, we each begin with a desire to find something worth living for, pick a career, and during the pursuit come to value our pursuits for themselves. The goal of finding something to live for drops away as we change. Schmitz calls this growing into our choices. The career, becoming a doctor for instance, starts as an instrumental desire but becomes a final end that is valued in and of itself. Thus Schmitz could argue that final ends or desires may be rational.

Nevertheless, this account of rationality will not help a subjective preference satisfaction theorist mark off which desires count morally. The child who comes to value slave-like service to his parents may view his career as worthwhile and such desires may be rational given Schmitz's account, but all of this does not mean that value has been brought into the world when such desires are realized. Furthermore, coming up with a principled way of limiting the kinds of careers that would count as finding something to live for would be as difficult as our current worry of finding a principled way of deciding which desires count morally.

To more directly critique subjectivist accounts of value we may consider what might be called canonical examples of objective value, pleasure and pain. A subjectivist will agree that pleasure is good and pain bad but insist that this is so because of our attitudes and desires. An objectivist's attack is made nicely by Eric Mack.

But is pleasure good in virtue of the attitude of its subject? Do we perhaps each undergo various pleasures for a while, decide or otherwise come to form a preference for pleasure, and thereupon *make* pleasure a good thing and *give* ourselves reason to pursue it? The case for objectivism rests on the implausibility of affirmative answers to these questions.<sup>12</sup>

Objectivists about value claim that we desire pleasure because it is good independent of our affective states while subjectivists hold that it is our preference that confers value. Objectivists argue that we have reason to pursue pleasure because it is good while subjectivists hold that through our desires we give ourselves reasons to pursue pleasure. Let us consider a desire creation and satisfaction machine which creates in a subject countless easily satisfied desires and preferences. Upon satisfying such desires subjectivists appear driven to hold that value has been brought into the world. In fact the more desires are satisfied the more value is produced. A subjectivist may reply that we each have a second-order desire not to have our desires manipulated in this way. But such a second-order desire would be just as groundless as any other, and there is no reason to think that each of us has such a desire.

Moving from mere desires to lifelong goals and projects the subjectivist account becomes ever more strained.

One cannot take one's commitments to projects as merely psychological quirks for as such they could not command one's reflective loyalties. . . . [T]o value one's projects is to value that at which the projects aim. It is in this way that consideration of rational activity necessarily points beyond itself, to value in the world.<sup>13</sup>

Here Loren Lomasky drives home a deep failing in subjectivist accounts of value and Humean versions of rationality. The charge is a familiar one. Subjective theories of value end up making values arbitrary. This runs counter to the notion that to say something is valuable is to endorse it in some fashion. If value is arbitrary who cares? While subjective values may exist they are not morally relevant in any direct sense.

A final objection to desire-satisfaction accounts of value is the charge of speciesism. The term "speciesism" has been popularized by Peter Singer through his work on the moral status of animals.<sup>14</sup> If value is intimately tied to our affections and value is brought into the world only when a desire or preference is satisfied, then entities that do not have affective states are left out of the moral picture in terms of value. Subjectivist accounts of value would thus be elitist in the sense that only some living entities would be able to produce value by having intrinsic desires satisfied. The value of everything else in the universe, living or not, would be dependent on the desires or preferences of those beings who happen to have affections. Philippa Foot writes:

[These]. . . theories have the remarkable though seldom mentioned consequence of separating off the evaluation of human action not only from the evaluation of human sight, hearing, and bodily health but also from all evaluation of the characteristics and operations of animals. . . . To be sure, almost everything in the world can be said to be good or bad in a context that sufficiently relates it to some human concern. . . . But features of plants and animals have . . . natural goodness and defect that may have nothing to do with . . . wants.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, certain features of plants and animals may have goodness and defect independent of human affections, desires, preferences, or choices.

### 3. Considering an Objective Account of Value

On an objective account of value, value exists independently of human affective states. There are reasons for action, and we have to discover them instead

of deriving them from our preexisting desires or preferences.<sup>16</sup> Gauthier writes, “To conceive of value as objective is to conceive of it as existing independently of the affections of sentient beings, and as providing a norm or standard to govern their affections.”<sup>17</sup> But some philosophers have claimed that if value is not tied in an intimate way to our affections, then value is cut off from the world. Value is some unique property or quality that requires some special faculty to apprehend. J.L. Mackie argues:

If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were to be aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.<sup>18</sup>

Satisfying desires and preferences, however, is not odd and does not require some special faculty of apprehension. Thus subjectivists may have taken some ground here. But this argument, called the argument from queerness, is deeply flawed. While black holes, for example, are strange and different from anything else in the cosmos, we would hesitate to claim that their queerness should cause us to doubt their existence. Furthermore, no special faculty of apprehension is needed to become aware of black holes. These points hold for any entity, property, or relation. Lomasky echoes this view.

If value were, as the charge has it, in an esoteric province of its own, it is a chimera. We should give up all thought of devoting ourselves to the truly valuable, in the process constructing lives that are themselves valuable, and instead resign ourselves to the quotidian task of acting on the desires we do have. . . . The charge, however is false. It requires no special faculty to discern objective value, and if value in the world did not exist, we could not create it through our desires.<sup>19</sup>

We might consider the claim that nitrogen, in certain quantities, is objectively valuable for many varieties of plants. Such plants have a specific nature, and there are certain states of the world that will sustain or promote their continued existence. Nitrogen would be objectively valuable for such plants. No special faculty of moral perception or intuition is needed to understand this.

A second argument that Mackie offers against objective accounts of value is called the argument from relativity. Here the charge is that the variation of moral belief across times and cultures points toward subjectivity not objectivity.

Disagreement about moral codes seems to reflect people’s adherence to a participation in different ways of life. . . . [P]eople approve of monogamy

because they participate in a monogamous way of life rather than that they participate in a monogamous way of life because they approve of monogamy. . . . In short, the argument from relativity has some force simply because the actual variations in the moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values.<sup>20</sup>

Mackie notes that the well-known objection to this argument is to affirm that objective moral principles are situationally dependent and may yield different moral judgements in different cases. For example, the principle of utility may require that given a range of actions we ought to do what maximizes overall net value for everyone affected. In one case such a principle may require that we do one thing while in another we should do something else. Mackie claims that this objection to the argument from relativity will not work because while some moral judgments will be objectively true they will nonetheless be derivative.

As with the argument from queerness, the argument from relativity is problematic. First, even though moral principles like the principle of utility are situational, it does not follow that they are subjective, or based on subjectivity, or lead to subjectivity. A moral objectivist does not have to affirm moral principles, much less moral values, which hold across all times, places, and cultures. It may be the case that as a plant matures, it grows out of certain necessities that were required for its continued existence. If the plant mutated and began to have preferences or desires and did not need nitrogen, then at a certain time in the plant's development, nitrogen would be valuable, while at a later time it would not, independent of the plant's affections. Thus value could be relational yet not lead to subjectivity.

A second problem is that there may be much less disagreement about moral principles and moral values than is commonly suggested. When Inuit Eskimos are asked why they treat their elderly in a certain fashion they will generally appeal to the very same principles that other cultures recognize. Moral anthropologists do not find cases where needless suffering or torture for fun is unconditionally valued. The apparent disparity of moral beliefs may be better explained by different, perhaps culturally based, applications of the same moral principles.

Finally, Mackie is right to note that participation in a way of life does color a person's view of the world. What an objectivist denies is that desires, preferences and their satisfaction have anything to do with the correct account of value. Given the beings that we are it is no wonder that participation in different ways of living will produce different desires, goals, and dreams for each of us. In the most extreme case we are beings that can be brainwashed to desire practically anything. It would not follow that such disparate preferences



must lead us to subjectivism. Moreover, it would seem that the implied moral suspiciousness of created desires points toward objectivity not subjectivity. If we are to affirm that value exists it must be objective value. Preferences and desires can be significant but they do not lie at the foundation of value theory.

#### 4. Relational and Non-Relational Accounts of Value

Aside from the distinction between subjective and objective values there is also the relational and non-relational distinction.<sup>21</sup> Relationalists about value claim that value is always related to objects, persons, groups, or times. Following Mack's definition:

A state of affairs is valuable relative to an agent if and only if its existence is a basis for a ranking of the world by the agent, where the state of affairs obtains, over the world where it does not obtain. Moreover, the presence the state of affairs does not always give other agents reasons for ranking the world where it obtains over the world where it does not obtain.

Another state of affairs has non-relational value if and only if its presence is a basis for each agent to rank the world where it obtains over the world where it does not obtain.<sup>22</sup>

Understanding the distinction between relational and non-relational value is difficult. In one sense, it would seem that all value is relational because it must be linked to a living entity. On this view living entities capable of experiencing different states of the world would be a necessary condition for the very existence of value. If there were no living entities, then no values would exist. Externalists deny this claim holding that value could exist absent the existence of living entities.<sup>23</sup> But if to value is to endorse in some fashion, such endorsement would necessitate the prior existence of an endorser. We call a state of the world morally valuable because it promotes, furthers, or sustains and we call a state of the world disvaluable because it imperils, stagnates, or destroys. On this account, the existence of life is what makes the notions of good, bad, better, and worse possible.

While most philosophers would not deny that affirming agent external value would be curious, this does not automatically leave us with a relational account. G.E. Moore gives two objections to relational accounts of value:

What, then is meant by "my own good"? In what sense can a thing be good *for me*? It is obvious, if we reflect that the only thing which can belong to me, which can be mine, is something which is good. . . . [I]t is only the

thing or the possession of it which is *mine*, and not the *goodness* of that thing or possession.<sup>24</sup>

If this is correct, then relationalist accounts of value may signify possession of value but nothing more. According to Moore, the goodness in question exists independently of the relation to an agent. This sounds especially agent external, as if value could exist independently of life. As well, philosophers who defend relational accounts of value need not make value relative to individual agents. For example, value could be related to groups of living entities or species. Moreover advocates of relationalism do not have to deny the objectivity of value. Nitrogen is objectively valuable for plants but relational as well. If there were no plants and no other entities dependent on nitrogen, then nitrogen would not be valuable. A similar case could be constructed for subjectivist accounts of value as well. Relationalism does not require objectivity or subjectivity.

Moore's second argument against relational accounts of value trades on the notion of value conflict or competition.

If, therefore, it is true of any single man's "interest" or "happiness" that it ought to be his sole ultimate end, this can only mean that man's "interest" or "happiness" is *the sole good*, the Universal Good, and the only thing that anybody ought to aim at. What Egoism holds, therefore, is that *each* man's happiness is the sole good – that a number of different things are *each* of them the only good thing there is – an absolute contradiction!<sup>25</sup>

While Moore has ethical egoism in his sights, his argument may also find purchase in the current debate. If relational accounts of value lead to conflicting value claims, then there may be a problem. Relational accounts of value need not fall prey to this charge even when we make value relative to individuals. Mack reminds us of this:

But, clearly, no inference of the sort Moore expresses is justified. What egoism holds is that each man's happiness (or whatever) is *his* sole good – that there are as many distinct ultimate goods as there are persons, each being the ultimate good for the person whose happiness (or whatever) it is.<sup>26</sup>

Alternatively we might make value relative to groups. The fact nitrogen is valuable for plants and protein for animals does not yield a contradiction. Similarly if maintaining strong family ties is valuable for some group of people given certain conditions and not for other groups in different conditions there is no obvious conflict or contradiction of value. Moreover, no oughts have entered the picture, since it does not follow that if something is good that we ought to pursue it.

A final objection to relational accounts of value “turns on the demand for the compossibility of all the actions that agents ought, all values considered, to perform.”<sup>27</sup> Ethical systems must not require the impossible. But theories of value in general, do not require particular obligations. What we ought to do morally is covered by a theory of obligation.

It is difficult for non-relationalists to keep from sliding into an agent neutral account of value or distance themselves from the problems of agent external value. Following Mack we could have non-relationalists adopt “a someone, sometime, somewhere condition” where non-relational value would only exist if this condition were met.<sup>28</sup> But as Mack notes, “such a stipulation leaves open the question of whether that value would exist – would exist as an external value – even were the condition for its being labeled a neutral (non-relational) value not satisfied.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the condition appears to make value relative in just the way a relationalist would advocate. Let us suppose that in a few years we are visited by a race of benevolent and rational beings who have freewill and an advanced culture. They arrive from Alpha Centauri and we notice that they are biologically different from humans and other life forms found here on earth. The Centaurians have acid for blood and consume rocks for sustenance. Let us further suppose that after they learn our language, we realize that they are moral beings who act on reflectively endorsed and rationally appraised principle. It seems that non-relationalists must insist that the domain of value for the Centaurians is the same domain as what is valuable for us. Relationalists, in contrast, can affirm that they may have different values because of their different natures. Pleasure may not be good for the Centaurians, while ingesting rocks is not good for us. There is a kind of elitism that pervades non-relational accounts of value, as if human beings and their way of perceiving the world is all that matters morally. On a non-relationalist view, evolved dolphins, Centaurians, and even birds, fish, plants, and bacteria are all indirectly related to value. They are only related to value through human perceptions and preferences for certain states of the world. When we expand our scope and ask what is directly valuable for dogs, cats, birds, and fish we are driven away from subjective non-relational accounts of value. They may not have desires or preferences and yet still have moral values related to them.

One problem for an objective and relational account of value is that such views may leave human life as such outside of moral value. Protein is valuable in relation to human life but it is not clear what makes human life valuable. If all value is relational, there cannot be any fixed and absolute values. Similar points may be made about plant life or non-human animal life. If human beings, plants, or other living entities have value, it is in relation to something. Human life, considered in and of itself, has no value. In reply, it may be said that the life of an entity, considered apart from any relations it may have, has no moral value. A solitary human being, who has no relations

to other entities, has no moral value. Likewise, a cup of water existing in a universe with no life and no possibility of life has no value. The position may be softened when we consider the nature of human beings and what is required for our continued existence, beyond mere basic necessities. As social creatures, there are a host of relations that, we must create and maintain. Adopting lifelong goals, projects, and commitments may give our lives meaning and value.

### 5. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value

Typically the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value is put the following way. An object or state of affairs has intrinsic value if it has value in itself. An object or state of affairs has extrinsic value if it gets its value from some other source. Christine Korsgaard writes:

Since intrinsically good things . . . are thought to have their value in themselves, they are thought to have their goodness in any and all circumstances – to carry it with them, so to speak. If you find that a certain kind of thing is not good in any and all circumstances, that it is good in some cases and not in others, its goodness is extrinsic – it is derived from or dependent upon the circumstances.<sup>30</sup>

Korsgaard equates notions of unconditional and conditional value with intrinsic and extrinsic value. An object or state of affairs is unconditionally good when it is good in every situation while it is conditionally good if certain conditions need to be met.<sup>31</sup> To be careful we need to distinguish between two distinctions that are often run together, intrinsic and extrinsic goods, and instrumental and final goods. Instrumental value is sought for the sake of something else, while a final good is sought for its own sake. Thus the distinction between instrumental and final goods highlights certain chains of motivation but does not indicate whether the value in question is intrinsic, relational, or subjective. Korsgaard puts the point nicely:

There are . . . two distinctions in goodness. One is the distinction between things valued for their own sakes and things valued for the sake of something else – between ends and means, or final and instrumental goods. The other is the distinction between things which have their value in themselves and things which derive their value from some other source: intrinsically good things versus extrinsically good things.<sup>32</sup>

It is absurd, however, to hold that some object or state of affairs is good unconditionally, independent of life, consciousness, or other matter. This opens

the door to Mackie's charge of queerness. We must first determine what already has to exist for any claim of intrinsic value to make sense. A typical candidate of intrinsic value is pleasure. Pleasure is said to be valuable in every circumstance. It has value in itself, and it is unconditionally good. But to have a state of the world where pleasure exists, we must also have bodies, neural nets, and consciousness. Physiological states of pleasure do not exist independently of such things. Thus while pleasure may be intrinsically good it is still relational.

Following Kant, Korsgaard argues that the only thing with intrinsic goodness is a good will. Glossing over the intricacies of Kantian moral theory, a good will is a will that does the right thing for the right reason every time. Here again, a good will if it exists, is related to a host of conditions that must obtain for willing to obtain. Korsgaard admits as much when considering the individual who destroys plant life wantonly. "Such a person shows a lack of the reverence of life which is the basis of all value."<sup>33</sup> The set of conditions that must obtain for value to obtain makes all value, in a sense, conditional and relational. It appears, however, that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value is unimportant. If value is objective and relational, little is gained by adding this further distinction. In certain quantities, nitrogen would be objectively valuable for certain varieties of plants. Nothing interesting would be gained by noting that the state of affairs in which a specific plant has processed a life-sustaining amount of nitrogen is valuable in itself.

One objection is that without a fixed foundation for value a regress problem will appear. Robert Nozick echoes this, saying: "something must be valuable in itself; otherwise value could not get started, value would be without foundation."<sup>34</sup> But what could ground value more solidly than objectivity or for that matter subjectivity? Again, nitrogen would be valuable for a plant and would ground value chains. Nothing important seems to be lost in omitting reference to being valuable in itself or unconditionally valuable after determining whether the value in question is objective, subjective, relational, or non-relational. Indicating that a certain value is intrinsic does not clarify the relational or objective aspects in question.

## 6. Facts and Values

Claiming that moral value cannot be derived from descriptive claims about the way the world is, may seem peculiar. It is not obvious how else we know what is good, aside from looking at the word as it is and how it might be. If ethical propositions are not deducible or definable from non-ethical propositions, then it would appear that morality is cut off from the world. The way the world is has no connection with what we ought or ought not do. It is actually worse though, because this problem affects both domains of moral theory.

The gap between descriptive claims and moral oughts infects theories of right and wrong action while the divide between facts and values infects theories of what is valuable. Thus, even if the gap between facts and values could be filled, oughts would not follow. Similarly, if the divide between descriptive claims and moral obligations could be traversed it would not follow that facts and values will have been linked. It is no wonder that many moral theorists become skeptics, nihilists, or amoralists. The concern is to provide a solution to the fact and value problem that leaves room for values that attach to this world. Rarified or free floating conceptions of value, values that are indefinable or intuited, or conceptions that are radically subjective or socially constructed, lead down a slippery slope. We can determine a particular plant's nature and then ascertain what states of the world benefit its continued existence. We can learn what would have to occur for it to flourish. Value, then, leaves no gap to be traversed and is clearly not an indefinable, intuited, or unknowable quality or relation. For life to continue, certain states of the world must obtain. The states are objectively valuable in relation to specific groups of living entities. Value is not cut off from the world. It is intimately tied to life. This view is nicely captured by Philippa Foot's account of natural goodness.

In my view . . . a moral evaluation does not stand over against the statement of a matter of fact, but rather has to do with facts about a particular subject matter, as do evaluations of such things as sight and hearing in animals, and other aspect of their behavior. Nobody would . . . take it as other than a plain matter of fact that there is something wrong with the hearing of a gull that cannot distinguish the cry of its own chick, as with the sight of an owl that cannot see in the dark. Similarly, it is obvious that there are objective, factual evaluations of such things as human sight. . . . Why does it seem so monstrous a suggestion that the evaluation of the human will should be determined by facts about the nature of human beings and the life of our own species.<sup>35</sup>

Goodness and defect would thus depend on matters of fact. From this vantage point it would seem that there could be no divide between facts and values. Here, as elsewhere in *Natural Goodness*, Foot is largely correct.<sup>36</sup>

Value is objective and relational. Subjective accounts that ground value in human affections cannot adequately answer the problems of arbitrariness, preference manipulation, and value elitism. Non-relational accounts of value slip into the absurdity of agent-external value or slide in the other direction into relational accounts. Finally, if we view practical rationality as a kind of master virtue, then we should abandon Humean instrumentalist accounts. Echoing Warren Quinn, practical rationality would have little importance if it were nothing more than the slave of the passions.<sup>37</sup>

## Notes

1. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 8.
2. See *Ibid.*, pp. 1–24. See also James Griffin, *Well Being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), W. Quinn, *Morality and Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Bernard Gert, “Rationality, Human Nature, and Lists,” *Ethics* 100 (January 1990), Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), Don Hubin “The Groundless Normativity of Instrumental Rationality,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 98(9), (2001), and “Converging on Values,” *Analysis* 59 (1999), and Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 85–88.
3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, C.B. Macpherson ed. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books 1968), pp. 120 & 216.
4. W.D. Ross, “The Nature of Goodness,” *Readings in Ethical Theory*, Wilfried Sellars and John Hospers eds. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. 1970), p. 22.
5. David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, P.H. Nidditch ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 415–416.
6. David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 25.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
11. David Schmidtz, *Rational Choice and Moral Agency* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).
12. Eric Mack, “Moral Individualism: Agent-Relativity and Deontic Restraints,” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 7 (1989), p. 95.
13. Loren Lomasky, *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 232.
14. See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
15. Foot, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–26.
16. See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 139.
17. Gauthier, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
18. J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 38. See also David Brink, “Moral Realism and the Skeptical Arguments from Disagreement and Queerness,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62 (1984), pp. 111–125.
19. Lomasky, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
20. Mackie, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
21. See Mack *op. cit.*, pp. 83–93. See also Christine Korsgaard, “The Reasons We can Share: An Attack on the Distinction Between Agent-Relative and Agent-Neural Values,” *Altruism*, Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred Miller Jr., Jeffrey Paul eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 24–51.
22. Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
23. See Nagel, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
24. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 98.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
26. Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
29. *Ibid.*

30. Christine Korsgaard “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” *The Philosophical Review* 92 (1983), p. 171.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–179.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
33. Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 156.
34. Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 414.
35. Foot, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
36. See also W.K. Frankena, “The Naturalistic Fallacy,” *Mind* 48 (1939), pp. 464–477.
37. See Quinn, *op. cit.* I am indebted to Fred D. Miller Jr., Travis Cook, Edward Feser, Richard Timberlake, George Selgin, Kimberly Moore, Don Hubin, and the editor of the *Journal of Value Inquiry*, Thomas Magnell, for their suggestions and comments.



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