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HYPERVENTILATING ABOUT INTRINSIC VALUE *

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ABSTRACT. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Brentano, Moore, and Chisholm have suggested “marks” or criteria of intrinsic goodness. I distinguish among eight of these. I focus in this paper on four: (a) unimprovability, (b) unqualifiedness, (c) dependence upon intrinsic natures, and (d) incorruptibility. I try to show that each of these is problematic in some way. I also try to show that they are not equivalent – they point toward distinct conceptions of intrinsic goodness. In the end it appears that none of them is fully satisfactory. Insofar as none of these succeeds, a fundamental problem remains for those who make use of the concept of intrinsic value. Precisely what do we have in mind when we say that some sort of value is “intrinsic”?

KEY WORDS: Aristotle, axiology, Brentano, Chisholm, intrinsic value, Kant, Moore, Plato, The Good, theory of value

1. HYPERBOLIC REMARKS ABOUT INTRINSIC GOODNESS

The friends of intrinsic value (and here I include myself) often lapse into poetry when they try to describe the object of their common interest. They speak in metaphor, analogy, and hyperbole. Plato, for example, gave analogies, saying that The Good is in some way like the sun.¹ He suggested that each is a source of immense value. And just as the sun is too blinding to observe directly with the naked eye, so the form of The Good is too dazzling to contemplate directly with the naked mind.

In a particularly high-flying passage, Plato compares a philosopher who has grasped the concept of goodness with a cave-dweller who has emerged from his subterranean cavern into the blinding light of the sun. He says:

In the world of knowledge, the last thing to be perceived and only with great difficulty is the essential Form of Goodness. Once it is perceived, the conclusion must follow that, for all things, this is the cause of whatever is right and good; in the visible world it gives birth to light and to the lord of light, while it is itself sovereign in the intelligible world and the

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¹ Plato, *The Republic*, translated and with an introduction and notes by Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 231.



parent of intelligence and truth. Without having had a vision of this Form no one can act with wisdom, either in his own life or in matters of state.²

Those who perceive this blinding form of goodness will return to their cavern dazed and confused. Their former compatriots will think them ridiculous, and may even try to kill them.

Immanuel Kant likewise drew comparisons. In describing a thing he took to be good in some outstandingly fundamental way, he tried to make clear that this thing does not have its value because of its capacity to produce good results. For even if “by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature” it were to have no extrinsic value at all:

... it would still sparkle like a jewel in its own right, as something that had its full worth in itself. ... Its usefulness would be only its setting, as it were, so as to enable us to handle it more conveniently in commerce or to attract the attention of those who are not yet connoisseurs, but not to recommend it to those who are experts or to determine its worth.³

G. E. Moore himself seemed to have trouble finding clear, literal words to describe this object. In one place, while struggling to express himself, he said this: “If I am asked ‘what is good?’ my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked ‘How is good to be defined?’ my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it.”⁴

It seems to me that we simply must do better than this. Metaphors and analogies and enforced silences will not help us to understand each other or the object of our common interest. I fear that by speaking in these confusing ways, we give aid and comfort to those who are no friends of intrinsic goodness. They are inclined to think that we don’t know what we are talking about (or maybe that we are talking about nothing at all).

It also seems to me that insofar as there is confusion about intrinsic goodness, there is even greater confusion about the other concepts of axiology and perhaps also those of normative ethics. For it is reasonable to suppose that other value concepts (extrinsic goodness, signatory goodness, etc.) are to be defined by appeal to the concept of intrinsic goodness. It is also at least somewhat reasonable to suppose that the concept of intrinsic goodness plays some role in the explanation of such things as moral rightness of actions, and virtuosity of character.

² Ibid.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated, with an Introduction, by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959), p. 10.

⁴ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, edited and with an introduction by Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 58.

Thus, there is reason for us to insist upon clarity and precision in our statements about the nature of intrinsic goodness.

2. SEARCHING FOR A CRITERION OF INTRINSIC GOODNESS

Here's one way to tackle the question. We can assume that there are several sorts of goodness. First and foremost, of course, there is intrinsic goodness – the “Chief good” (in Aristotle’s phrase).⁵ In addition, there are several lesser sorts of goodness. These include goodness as a means, goodness as a sign, goodness as a part, overall goodness, logical goodness (as in “that’s a good argument, but the conclusion is false”), monetary goodness, aesthetic goodness, functional goodness and perhaps others. We can then try to determine what’s distinctive about intrinsic goodness. We can, that is, seek a “criterion” or “mark” of intrinsic goodness – something that will enable us to distinguish this most important sort of goodness from all the others.

Several of the great moral philosophers of the past seem to have given some thought to this question, and some of them apparently have provided suggestions of answers. Each of the suggestions embodies a sort of “guiding intuition” about intrinsic goodness. Each suggests one way to distinguish this value concept from others.

I am aware of at least eight main guiding intuitions about intrinsic goodness (Perhaps it would be better to say that I am aware of some passages in writings of great moral philosophers; if in these passages the philosophers were talking about intrinsic goodness, then these passages seem to contain hints of at least eight distinct guiding intuitions about intrinsic goodness). I here briefly list the guiding intuitions, give some references, and suggest some sketchy interpretations:

1. The intrinsically good as the unimprovably good. Hints of this intuition can be found in Plato in the *Philebus*, and in Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* I,7. Aristotle indicates that he is searching for something that is so good that if you have it, your life cannot be improved by the addition of anything else. Happiness (which he takes to be this marvelous thing) is alleged to be “not a thing counted as one good thing among others – if it were so counted it would clearly be made more desirable by the addition of even the least of goods; . . .” On the contrary, happiness is unimprovably

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W. D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* edited and with an introduction by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 941 (Bk I, Ch 7. 1097a27).

good – it is “. . . that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing (*NE I,7*).”

2. The intrinsically good as the most final good. Again, this idea can be found in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. He says, “The chief good is something final. . . [it is] always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else.” (*NE I,7*)

3. The intrinsically good as the unqualifiedly good. Immanuel Kant suggests this idea in the *Groundwork*, where he discusses the good will, which according to him shines like a jewel (Section One, first sentence):

Nothing in the world – indeed nothing even beyond the world – can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a *good will*. . . .⁶ The good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes or because of its adequacy to achieve some proposed end; it is good only because of its willing, i.e., it is good of itself.⁷

(The first quoted sentence suggests that intrinsically good things are good without qualification; the second sentence assures us that he is talking about intrinsic goodness.)

4. The intrinsically good as the object of correct intrinsic love. This is Franz Brentano’s idea. In *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*,⁸ Brentano says: “We call a thing good when the love relating to it is correct. In the broadest sense of the term, the good is that which is worthy of love, that which can be loved with the love that is correct.”

5. The intrinsically good as that which is good in virtue of its intrinsic nature. This criterion is energetically defended by Moore in “The Conception of Intrinsic Value.”⁹ Moore says: “We can in fact set up the following definition: To say that a kind of value is intrinsic means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question.”

6. The intrinsically good as that which would still be good even if it existed in complete isolation. Moore defends this criterion in many places in *Principia Ethica*. In Chapter VI, for example, he says, “In order to arrive at a

⁶ Kant, op. cit., p. 9.

⁷ Kant, op. cit., p. 10.

⁸ Franz Brentano, *Origins of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, English edition edited by Roderick M. Chisholm; translated by Roderick M. Chisholm and Elizabeth Schneewind (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 18.

⁹ “The Conception of Intrinsic Value,” in G. E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 260.

correct decision on the question [what things have intrinsic value] it is necessary to consider what things are such that, if they existed by themselves, in absolute isolation, we should yet judge their existence to be good; . . .”¹⁰

7. The intrinsically good as the incorruptibly good. Roderick Chisholm in “Objectives and Intrinsic Value” says

And what do we mean when we say that a state of affairs is intrinsically good, or intrinsically bad – as distinguished from being merely instrumentally good or instrumentally bad? I suggest this: a state of affairs is intrinsically good if it is necessarily good – if it is good in every possible world in which it occurs.¹¹

Kant seems to have had a similar idea. In his argument about the Good Will, he seems to say that other things (cleverness, courage) are usually good, but can fail to be good under certain circumstances. The Good Will, on the other hand, is good no matter what. Its goodness is “incorruptible.”¹²

8. The intrinsically good as that which ought to exist [for its own sake]. Chisholm seems to endorse this idea in “On the Defeat of Good and Evil.” After giving a list of things often taken to be intrinsically good, he says, “The things on the good list are the sorts of things that ought to be.”¹³

You can almost hear some of these philosophers hyperventilating as they gush with superlatives about intrinsic goodness: “It’s a kind of goodness that’s unimprovable – if a thing has it, then it’s so good that there’s nothing you could add to it that would make it better.” “It’s a kind of goodness that’s incorruptible – if a thing has it, nothing can detract from its value.” “It’s a kind of goodness that needs no qualifications – anything that’s good in this way is just plain good!”

3. SOME QUESTIONS PROVOKED BY THE GUIDING INTUITIONS

Each of these apparent guiding intuitions about intrinsic goodness has a certain amount of intuitive plausibility, and each also has (to one degree or another) some historical pedigree. Yet each raises lots of questions; and all taken together raise even more questions.

¹⁰ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 187.

¹¹ Roderick M. Chisholm, “Objectives and Intrinsic Value,” in *Jenseits von Sein und Nichtsein*, ed. Rudolf Haller (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1972), pp. 261–270.

¹² Kant, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9.

¹³ Roderick M. Chisholm, “The Defeat of Good and Evil,” Presidential Address before the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 42 (1968), p. 22.

1. First is the question about what the doctrine means. Some of these gushing philosophers wrote long ago and in foreign languages. Some are notoriously obscure writers. Their remarks are sometimes brief and enigmatic. Thus, it is necessary to devote some attention to an initial clarification of meaning.

2. Once the guiding intuitions are clarified, we confront puzzles and paradoxes. Some of these ideas seem rather strange. We have to see if it is possible to refine (or perhaps recast) the ideas, and derive something coherent and useful from them.

3. Even if the intuitions can be recast so as to be somewhat plausible, we face some questions about relations among them. These guiding intuitions might be guiding us toward several different conceptions of goodness. It might turn out for example that Kant focussed on one of these (goodness without qualification) and Aristotle focussed on another (unimprovable goodness). Thus, it might be that the remarks that Kant made about the kind of goodness he had in mind are not equivalent to the remarks that Aristotle made about the kind of goodness he had in mind, and that this is not a mistake. Each of them might have said something true about what he had in mind, but something that might have been false if taken to be about what the other had in mind.

On the other hand, they might both have been talking about the same concept and each of them might have thought that he had found an interesting and distinctive fact about it. If the interesting facts turn out to be equivalent (e.g., a sort of value is unimprovable iff it is unqualified) then that would suggest that Aristotle and Kant were both onto the same sort of value. If the interesting facts turn out not to be equivalent, then several possibilities arise: perhaps one or both of the philosophers was mistaken about a feature of intrinsic goodness; perhaps one or both of them was talking about some other sort of value – a sort of value for which the principle holds true.

4. Suppose the guiding intuitions are not equivalent; suppose they point toward distinct conceptions of intrinsic goodness. Then we face a very deep question: which, if any, of these conceptions are of fundamental importance to moral philosophy?

I would like to answer all of these questions. Obviously, however, it is not possible to discuss them all in one short paper. I am going to focus on just four of these ideas, and just a few of the possible interpretations of each. The four in question are:

1. Unimprovability. (Plato and Aristotle). When a thing is intrinsically good, then it's good in such a way as to be "unimprovable" – it can't be made better by the addition of any other sort of goodness. But other sorts of goodness are not in this way unimprovable.

3. Unqualifiedness. (Kant). When a thing is intrinsically good, then it is "unqualifiedly good" – you can say that it's good without putting any qualifiers in front of the word "good." But other sorts of goodness are not in this way unqualified. You have to be careful to qualify your remark with phrases such as "so long as it is not being used by a thief or villain."

5. Dependence upon Intrinsic Nature. (Moore). When a thing is intrinsically good, its goodness depends upon its intrinsic nature; anything with the same intrinsic nature would have exactly the same amount of goodness. Not so for other sorts of goodness.

7. Incorruptibility. (Moore, Chisholm, Kant and others). When a thing is intrinsically good, it is good in such a way that it is good of necessity. It continues to be good in all possible circumstances. Its goodness is incorruptible. Not so for other sorts of goodness.

4. THE APPEAL TO "GOODNESS"

Notice that every one of these alleged marks of intrinsic goodness seems to appeal, on its right-hand side, to some other conception of goodness. Thus, for example, the incorruptibility criterion (7) seems to say that if something is intrinsically good, then it is necessarily "good." The unqualifiedness criterion (3) seems to say that if something is intrinsically good, then the statement that it is "good" needs no qualification. Similar points hold with respect to the other criteria.

Let's start by assuming that when, on the right-hand side of each of these doctrines, we see the word "good," it means "overall good." William Frankena, Chisholm, and others have suggested that the overall value of a thing is the sum of its intrinsic value, its extrinsic value, and any other sort of value it might have.¹⁴ This of course might suggest a sort of circularity in the present context, since we would have to know a thing's intrinsic value in order to perform the addition. Thus, I cannot rely upon it as a definition. Let us assume that a thing is overall good if it's good "all things

¹⁴ William Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd Edition (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 83.

considered.” I hope that the rough idea is familiar enough for present purposes (It’s going to turn out that it does not matter). Then the doctrines come out meaning this:

1. Unimprovability: When a thing is intrinsically good, then it’s *overall good* in such a way as to be “unimprovable” – it can’t be made more *overall good* by the addition of any other sort of goodness. But other sorts of goodness are not in this way unimprovable.

3. Unqualifiedness: When a thing is intrinsically good, then it is “unqualifiedly *overall good*.” But other sorts of goodness are not in this way unqualified.

5. Dependence upon Intrinsic Nature: When a thing is intrinsically good, its *overall goodness* depends upon its intrinsic nature. Not so for other sorts of goodness.

7. Incorruptibility: When a thing is intrinsically good, it is *overall good* of necessity. It continues to be *overall good* in all possible worlds. Not so for other sorts of goodness.

Every one of these doctrines is obviously false. Consider (1). Surely an intrinsically good thing can be made *better overall* by the addition of other sorts of goodness. Imagine, for example, an episode of pleasure with an intrinsic value of +10 (assuming numerical hedonism for purposes of illustration). The overall value of this episode would be higher if the episode had a lot of good consequences or if it were the sign of good things to come. So it can be improved. That’s because the overall value of a thing is affected by its extrinsic value: if we increase the extrinsic value of a thing, then we increase its overall value, even though its intrinsic value remains unaffected.

Consider (5). On the present interpretation, it says that the overall value of an intrinsically good thing depends entirely upon that thing’s intrinsic nature. This is obviously wrong. Surely the overall goodness of an episode of pleasure does not depend entirely on the intrinsic nature of that episode. The overall value depends upon a lot of factors including its consequences, what it signifies in its actual context, etc. And just as clearly something else with the same intrinsic nature could differ in overall goodness, since it could differ in extrinsic value.

Consider (7). If (7) were true, then it would be impossible for an intrinsically good thing (e.g., an episode of pleasure) to be overall bad. But all parties agree that no matter how good pleasure is in itself, some episodes of pleasure lead to such bad results that those episodes are not overall good.

Consider (3). If we take “unqualifiedly overall good” to mean “good in such a way that the statement that it is overall good needs no qualifier, but is just fine as it stands,” then it is clearly wrong to say that intrinsically good things are unqualifiedly overall good. For an intrinsically good thing might utterly fail to be overall good, and hence it would be wrong to say that it is overall good – whether with a qualifier or not.

These reflections are intended to reveal one central point about the proposed criteria: on the first set of interpretations, every one of them appeals, on its right-hand side, to some concept of goodness. That concept cannot be overall goodness. In order for these criteria to stand a chance of being right, either (a) we must find some other concept of goodness for the righthand sides, or else (b) we have to reformulate them entirely, so as to eliminate the need for a distinct concept of goodness on the right-hand side.

5. A DIFFERENT SET OF INTERPRETATIONS

Let’s try another set of interpretations of the doctrines. On the right-hand sides of the doctrines I will no longer make any reference to overall goodness. That was a mistake. Consider the following reformulations:

1. Unimprovability: When a thing is intrinsically good, then it has a sort of goodness that is “unimprovable” – in general, and for anything, it can’t be made to have more of *that sort of goodness* by the addition of any other sort of goodness. But other sorts of goodness are not in this way unimprovable.

3. Unqualifiedness: When a thing is intrinsically good, then it has a sort of goodness that is “unqualified.” In general, and for anything, when you say that it has this sort of goodness you don’t have to add any qualifier. Your remark will be complete and unambiguous as it stands. But other sorts of goodness are not in this way unqualified.

5. Dependence upon Intrinsic Nature. When a thing is intrinsically good, it has a sort of goodness that depends upon the intrinsic nature of anything that has it. In general, and for anything, if it has *that sort of goodness*, it has it because of its intrinsic nature. Corresponding claims do not hold for other sorts of goodness.

7. Incorruptibility: When a thing is intrinsically good, it has a sort of goodness with respect to which things cannot change. In general, and for

anything, if it has *that sort of goodness*, it will continue to have it in all possible worlds. This is not so for other sorts of goodness.

The guiding intuitions are all false on these interpretations, too. In three cases, the doctrine is false because it fails to say something *distinctive* about intrinsic goodness. In one case (unqualifiedness) it goes wrong for another reason.

Consider the first guiding intuition:

1. Unimprovability. When a thing is intrinsically good, then it has a sort of goodness that is “unimprovable” – in general, and for anything, it can’t be made to have more of that sort of goodness by the addition of any other sort of goodness. But other sorts of goodness are not in this way self-sufficient.

What’s said here about intrinsic goodness is true of many sorts of goodness. Consider signatory goodness for example. Suppose a certain x-ray picture is signatorily good because it indicates good health. Suppose its signatory value is +12. Now add some monetary value, or some instrumental value to the x-ray. You will find that if it still signifies good health, its signatory value is still +12. Increases in other sorts of value do not serve to increase signatory value.

Similar experiments will show that monetary value, instrumental value, etc., all have the same feature: they are unimprovable in the specified sense. (Overall value is improvable. If you increase the intrinsic value or the extrinsic value of a thing, its overall value will rise.)

3. Unqualifiedness. When a thing is intrinsically good, then it has a sort of goodness that is “unqualified.” In general, and for anything, when you say that it has this sort of goodness you don’t have to add any sort of qualifier. Your remark will be complete and unambiguous as it stands. But other sorts of goodness are not in this way unqualified.

This guiding intuition seems just plain false. The problem is that “intrinsic” is already a qualifier – it serves to make clear just what sort of goodness is in question. And surely there are plenty of cases in which the failure to include the qualifier would lead to misunderstanding. For example, suppose a certain episode of pleasure causes a dear friend to have a fatal heart attack. The episode of pleasure is extrinsically bad; overall bad; bad as a sign; bad as a part; etc. If you (a hedonist) were to say “that episode of pleasure was good, a ‘good thing,’ just dandy” you might be misunderstood. It would be better for you to make clear that you mean that it was *intrinsically good* – thus you had better add the qualifier. This shows that the failure to include the qualifier can be just as misleading in the case

of intrinsic goodness. Intrinsic goodness cannot be identified as the sort of goodness that needs no qualification.

5. Dependence upon Intrinsic Nature. When a thing is intrinsically good, it has a sort of goodness that depends upon intrinsic natures. In general, and for anything, if it has that sort of goodness, it has it because of its intrinsic nature. But this is not so for other sorts of goodness.

This criterion suffers from a sort of structural problem. On a fairly standard view, the intrinsic nature of a thing is the set of its intrinsic properties. A thing's intrinsic properties are the ones it would have to share with a duplicate. But since duplicates could not differ in intrinsic value, it follows that each thing's intrinsic value is one of its intrinsic properties. As a result, intrinsic values do not "supervene" upon intrinsic natures; they are included within those natures.

Let us bypass this possible difficulty. Let us understand the supervenience criterion broadly, so as to include the possibility that intrinsic goodness is distinctive because it alone of sorts of goodness is either supervenient upon or included within intrinsic natures.

I think it is correct to say that intrinsic goodness supervenes in this way upon intrinsic natures. However, in fact several other sorts of goodness depend in this way upon intrinsic natures, too. Some examples: "logical goodness" as when we say that something is "a good argument"; aesthetic goodness, as when we say that my nose is beautiful; epistemic goodness as when we say that this is good evidence for that.

Surprisingly, Moore seems to have recognized at least two sorts of intrinsic goodness. In *Principia Ethica*, he clearly assumes that there is just one thing – a "unique property of things" that can be called "[positive] intrinsic value" or "intrinsic goodness."¹⁵ But in "The Conception of Intrinsic Value" he just as clearly indicates that he thinks that there are at least two different sorts of intrinsic goodness. In addition to the former "intrinsic [moral?] goodness" there is beauty, which takes to be another intrinsic sort of goodness. He casts his "definition" in such a way as to insure that beauty comes out intrinsic. Although Moore did not say so, logical goodness (validity) comes out intrinsic, as does epistemic goodness (or the goodness of a good reason to believe something).

7. Incorruptibility. When a thing is intrinsically good, it has a sort of goodness that is necessary. In general, and for anything, if it has that sort of goodness then it has it of necessity. That sort of goodness is in this sense incorruptible.

¹⁵ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 68.

But this feature is not distinctive: several sorts of goodness seem in this way to be necessary (logical, epistemic) and some sorts of goodness that some take to be intrinsic turn out to be not necessary – e.g., beauty.

6. MY INTERPRETATIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF THE INTUITIONS

Here are some rough sketches of what I take to be the most plausible interpretations of the four guiding intuitions:

1. Unimprovability: I think that when Plato and Aristotle spoke of the unimprovability of The Good, they must have been thinking of a possible feature of certain *properties* (e.g., happiness, pleasure, wisdom). They were trying to locate a property they could call “The Good.” A person’s life would be made better in a distinctive way by the possession of that property. If a person had that property to a sufficiently high degree, then there would be no other property that could improve that person’s life. The only thing that could make it better would be getting the first property to a higher degree. When they spoke of a property’s being unimprovably good, perhaps that’s what they meant.

It seems to me that the quest for an unimprovably good property presupposes a tremendously controversial axiological thesis: that there’s *just one* property that’s good in the distinctive way. For if there were two, then neither would be unimprovable in this sense. For no matter how much e.g., wisdom you have, your life could be made better by the addition of some pleasure. Thus it seems to me that the assumption that The Good is unimprovable automatically rules out any interesting form of axiological pluralism.

3. Unqualifiedness: When a thing is intrinsically good, then it is “unqualifiedly good” – you can say that it’s good without putting any qualifiers in front of the word “good.” But other sorts of goodness are not in this way unqualified.

Kant might have been trying to state the incorruptibility criterion. If so, the idea would have been that there is no need to add the qualifier because if a thing is intrinsically good, it will continue to be intrinsically good no matter what. So the point is really not that qualifiers are not needed; rather, it is that the object will continue to be intrinsically good no matter what. If this was really Kant’s point, he didn’t do a very good job of expressing it. On the other hand, if we take him at his word, and understand him to mean that when used to express intrinsic goodness “good” needs no qualifier, his criterion is simply mistaken. Indeed, it would be mistaken no matter what

sort of goodness he had in mind. There is no sort of goodness that satisfies it.

5. Dependence upon Intrinsic Nature. When a thing is intrinsically good, it has a kind of goodness that depends upon its intrinsic nature; anything with the same intrinsic nature would have exactly the same amount of that sort of goodness. Not so for other sorts of goodness.

I think it is relatively easy to understand this supervenience criterion. I take it to mean that a sort of goodness is intrinsic iff it either supervenes upon or is included in the intrinsic natures of the things that have it.

This criterion implies that several sorts of goodness are intrinsic – moral, epistemic, logical, aesthetic. It also seems to imply that some things can have their intrinsic values contingently (because some components of intrinsic natures are contingent). My nose formerly had quite a lot of beauty – an intrinsic form of goodness. But now it has slightly less. That’s because my nose has changed with respect to some of its intrinsic properties such as shape and size.

If I am right about this, then this guiding intuition fails as a criterion of “that unique property of things” that allegedly stands at the very center of moral philosophy – the one by which ethics can be defined.¹⁶ For if I am right about this, then there are several sorts of intrinsic goodness (aesthetic, epistemic, logical, moral), and some of them have little to do with ethics. A Moorean would then have to say more: what is distinctive about the distinctively *ethical* sort of intrinsic goodness?

7. Necessity; incorruptibility: When a thing is intrinsically good, it has a sort of goodness that things have of necessity. It continues to have just as much of this goodness in all possible worlds and in all possible circumstances. Its goodness is incorruptible. Not so for other sorts of goodness.

This criterion remains problematic. We might take it to mean (a) that intrinsic value is distinctive because if a thing has a certain intrinsic value, it must have that same intrinsic value in all possible circumstances *no matter how different it may be in other respects*. In this case, beauty is not a form of intrinsic goodness, since a thing that is beautiful would fail to be beautiful if were different in its appearance (which it could be). My nose is slightly less beautiful than it formerly was.

On the other hand, we might take it to mean (b) that intrinsic value is distinctive because if a thing has a certain intrinsic value, it must always have that intrinsic value *provided that it retains its intrinsic nature*. The

¹⁶ Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 2.

second interpretation has different implications. Beauty (I think) becomes a sort of intrinsic value. Indeed, several sorts of goodness (logical, epistemic, aesthetic, moral) satisfy the criterion, when stated in this way. Hence, it fails if it is intended as a criterion of the special sort of goodness by reference to which ethics is to be defined.

7. CONCLUSIONS

I have to acknowledge that I have not succeeded entirely in clarifying the four guiding intuitions that I have discussed. Nevertheless, I want to draw some conclusions, making use of rough-and-ready understandings of these things where necessary.

I think Plato and Aristotle's unimprovability criterion is a red herring. They were seeking a mark of The Good; not a mark of intrinsic goodness. If we recast the unimprovability criterion as criterion of intrinsic goodness as I have suggested, it implies that there can be at most one intrinsically good property. No other criterion has this implication, and it begs too many important questions of axiology. It should be eliminated (I also think that it does a poor job as criterion of The Good. My reason for this is the same: it begs too many controversial questions).

I think the unqualifiedness criterion is simply confused. It implies that there is no such property as intrinsic goodness. It should be eliminated.

I think Moore's supervenience criterion is interesting and fairly plausible, but not as a criterion of that special sort of intrinsic value that interests us as moral philosophers. It allows that there might be several sorts of intrinsic goodness. It also allows that there might be a sort of intrinsic goodness that things have contingently. It rules out the possibility of a sort of intrinsic goodness that things have in virtue of their non-intrinsic properties. As it stands, it is seriously incomplete, since it does not serve to distinguish the relevant sort of intrinsic goodness (moral?) from all the others (aesthetic, epistemic, logical). So, before we appeal to it for crucial projects in moral philosophy (e.g., formulating a principle about right action), we had better complete the project.

I think Kant and Chisholm's incorruptibility criterion allows there to be several sorts of intrinsic goodness. Thus, however plausible we find this as a necessary condition of that central concept of moral philosophy, it is not sufficient. Again, more work has to be done on this problem.

Furthermore, this criterion does not permit a sort of intrinsic goodness that things have contingently. It implies that a thing's intrinsic value must be essential to that thing. Some philosophers have thought, however, that the fundamental bearers of intrinsic value are things that happen to

be intrinsically good, but might fail under different circumstances to be intrinsically good.

In light of this, it seems to me that we had better be cautious about gushing in this way: “Intrinsic goodness is so wonderful! Things that are intrinsically good have a sort of goodness that is unimprovable! And they have a sort of goodness that is incorruptible!” The problem is that it’s not clear that there could be any sort of goodness that’s suitably “unimprovable,” while there are too many sorts of goodness that are incorruptible. If we are going to gush, we should at least gush consistently.

In the end, then, it seems to me that of these four guiding intuitions, two are irrelevant and two are incomplete. The incomplete ones do not point in the same direction. Clearly, if we are to answer the complaints of those who are not sympathetic to intrinsic value, we will have to do a much better job of identifying that dazzlingly important object that we think stands at the core of moral philosophy.

APPENDIX

Although I mentioned eight guiding intuitions about intrinsic value, I discussed only four of these in the body of the paper. I here briefly indicate some thoughts about three of the remaining four.

2. Aristotle says that the chief good is “most final,” and by this he seems to mean that it is always good as an end, but never good as a means. If taken at face value as a criterion of intrinsic goodness, this remark seems a bit silly. Suppose there are several goods, but happiness is the chief good, as Aristotle seems to say. Surely it still might be the case that happiness is sometimes good as a means. For example, in addition to being outstandingly good in itself, happiness might also be good in virtue of the fact that it lowers stress and thereby leads to good health. It also might be good as a sign, and also good insofar as it serves as a good example to others.

Is it conceivable that Aristotle thought that the chief good would somehow be sullied if it happened to have some good results? Could he have imagined that it would be unfitting for such an august good also to be useful? If so, it appears that Aristotle had a strange conception of the chief good.

6. Moore’s isolation test for intrinsic value has been subjected to quite a bit of careful scrutiny.¹⁷ Provided that we take the bearers of intrinsic value to be states of affairs, it turns out to be difficult even to state the test in a coherent way. Aside from whole possible worlds, most states of affairs simply cannot occur without many others occurring alongside. If isolation requires such lonely occurrence, then no such state of affairs can occur in isolation. In this case, the test yields the unfortunate result that everything is intrinsically good.

¹⁷ See, for example, Eva Bodanszky and Earl Conee, “Isolating Intrinsic Value,” *Analysis* 41 (1981), pp. 51–53.

But as I indicated, the literature on the isolation test is large. A number of intriguing isolationist proposals have been formulated. Many of them have been subjected to critical scrutiny. I cannot review them here.

7. Chisholm suggested in one place that the intrinsically good is that which ought to exist for its own sake. The suggestion is somewhat obscure, since we don't have any agreed conception of what it means to say that something ought to exist for its own sake.

I assume that the intent of the principle is really that the intrinsically good is that which ought to *occur* (rather than *exist*) for its own sake (I say this because I assume that the candidates for intrinsic goodness are states of affairs. I interpret Chisholm's point as being the claim that good states of affairs are ones that ought to "happen" or occur or be true).

Consider the state of affairs that consists in my experiencing ten units of pleasure here and now. Call it "F+10." If we assume a simple sort of numerical hedonism, we will want to say that F+10 is intrinsically good. I simply don't know what to say about the question whether F+10 ought to occur for its own sake. Perhaps it ought to occur; but I am inclined to say that if it ought to occur, it ought to occur for *my sake* – because it would make my life go better. I cannot tell whether this runs counter to Chisholm's intent or not.

Suppose I am already experiencing 11 units of pleasure; thus F+11 is occurring. Since the occurrence of F+10 would be slightly worse than what's already happening, it is not entirely clear to me that we should say that F+10 ought to occur for its own sake.

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