

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Notes

Intrinsic Value

The concept of intrinsic value has been characterized above in terms of the value that something has “in itself,” or “for its own sake,” or “as such,” or “in its own right.”

This means that something is valuable for its own sake as opposed to being valuable for the sake of something else to which it is related in some way.

Suppose that someone were to ask you whether it is good to help others in time of need. Unless you suspected some sort of trick, you would answer, “Yes, of course.” If this person were to go on to ask you why acting in this way is good, you might say that it is good to help others in time of need simply because it is good that their needs be satisfied. If you were then asked why it is good that people’s needs be satisfied, you might be puzzled.

You might be inclined to say, “It just is.” Or you might accept the legitimacy of the question and say that it is good that people’s needs be satisfied because this brings them pleasure. But then, of course, your interlocutor could ask once again, “What’s good about that?” Perhaps at this point you would answer, “It just is good that people be pleased,” and thus put an end to this line of questioning. Or perhaps you would again seek to explain the fact that it is good that people be pleased in terms of something else that you take to be good.

At some point, though, you would have to put an end to the questions, not because you would have grown tired of them (though that is a distinct possibility), but because you would be forced to recognize that, if one thing derives its goodness from some other thing, which derives its goodness from yet a third thing, and so on,

There must come a point at which you reach something whose goodness is not derivative in this way, something that “just is” good in its own right, something whose goodness is the source of, and thus explains, the goodness to be found in all the other things that precede it on the list. It is at this point that you will have arrived at intrinsic goodness.

That which is intrinsically good is non-derivatively good; it is good for its *own* sake. That which is not intrinsically good but extrinsically good is derivatively good; it is good, not (insofar as its extrinsic value is concerned) for its own sake, but for the sake of something else that is good and to which it is related in some way. Intrinsic value thus has a certain priority over extrinsic value. The latter is derivative from or reflective of the former and is to be explained in terms of the former. It is for this reason that philosophers have tended to focus on intrinsic value in particular.

When we say that something is intrinsically valuable, this means that something is valuable in itself. These are things that are pursued for their own sake, not to acquire something else. Things like happiness, truth, and goodness are all intrinsically valuable. You do not, or at least should not, pursue these things to get you something else, but they should be pursued because they are good in themselves. You don't need a reason to pursue truth; the fact that truth is good in itself is enough.

Various Understandings of Intrinsic Value

Korsgaard defined intrinsic value as something that is valued for its own sake or simply it is the end result in itself rather than a means to an end. In contrast, the instrumental value is used to achieve some kind of end. It refers to something like the origin or actual source of goodness. The contrast between instrumental and intrinsic value is therefore misleading or a false contrast. The natural contrast to intrinsic goodness is the extrinsic goodness and implies the value a thing gets from some other source.

Therefore, there are two comparisons in goodness. The first one is the difference between things that are valued for their own sake and those that are valued for the sake of something else. There is another difference between things which have their value in themselves like feelings and love, and those which have taken their value from some other source: intrinsically good versus extrinsically good things. Korsgaard (1983) argued that, both intrinsic and instrumental values are actually not correlatives, because they belong to two different categories.

On the other hand, Kant and Gregor (1785) argued that 'good will' has the highest status due to its intrinsic value. They defined intrinsic and extrinsic with the terms 'conditioned' and 'unconditioned.' Kant and Gregor further argued that things that are conditioned or meet the principles of good conditionality are objectively good and those that are good without being conditioned are good for their own worth.

The theory of intrinsic values elucidates that there are certain beliefs or values that are abstract in nature like happiness, which is a kind of emotion that many people attribute to having intrinsic value because it is hard to control what makes people happy and almost everyone can agree on the fact that happiness is a positive natural emotion. Thus, intrinsic values are the means and end in themselves. Those values are actually the core beliefs that lead an individual to make judgments on situations.

The nature of intrinsic value is not an easy one to fathom. Moore (1903) used a notable straight forward question to argue that when the value is intrinsic, it is simple and indefinable. He offered the 'isolation test' as a criterion for determining whether something has an intrinsic value to it or not. The test can be applied to investigate if something can exist entirely by itself or not. In order to apply the isolation test, one has to ponder upon something

existing entirely by itself; if it fulfills the criteria of the isolation test, then under such circumstances, the value is intrinsic; otherwise it is extrinsic in nature.

Listing Intrinsic Values

One of the most comprehensive lists of intrinsic goods that anyone has suggested is that given by William Frankena:

- life,
- consciousness, and activity;
- health and strength;
- pleasures and satisfactions of all or certain kinds;
- happiness, beatitude, contentment, etc.;
- truth; knowledge and true opinions of various kinds, understanding, wisdom;
- beauty, harmony, proportion in objects contemplated; aesthetic experience;
- morally good dispositions or virtues;
- mutual affection, love, friendship, cooperation;
- just distribution of goods and evils;
- harmony and proportion in one's own life; power and experiences of achievement; self-expression; freedom; peace, security; adventure and novelty; and good reputation, honor, esteem, etc.

The Concept of Extrinsic Value

That which is extrinsically good, is good not for its own sake, but for the sake of something else to which it is related in some way. For example, some would say that helping others is good not because it leads to the betterment of the people but because it makes you feel better.

The Concept of Instrumental Value

Instrumental value is considered by many philosophers as a type of extrinsic value because its value comes from outside itself. Something that is instrumentally valuable is valuable as a means to an end. You value most things instrumentally.

Instrumental Value is also defined as the value that a thing gets because it is useful. For example, a knife has the instrumental value to cut something.

For instance, you value a washing machine that works purely for its useful function, or instrumental value. If there were a very cheap cleaning service next door that picked up and dropped off your laundry, you might use it and sell your washing machine because it no longer has any instrumental value to you.

On the other hand, many philosophers write as if instrumental value is the only type of extrinsic value, but that is a mistake. Suppose, for instance, that the results of a certain medical test indicate that the patient is in good health, and suppose that this patient's having

good health is intrinsically good. Then we may well want to say that the results are themselves (extrinsically) good.

But notice that the results are of course not a means to good health; they are simply indicative of it. Or suppose that making your home available to a struggling artist while you spend a year abroad provides him with an opportunity he would otherwise not have to create some masterpieces, and suppose that either the process or the product of this creation would be intrinsically good. Then we may well want to say that your making your home available to him is (extrinsically) good because of the opportunity it provides him, even if he goes on to squander the opportunity and nothing good comes of it.

Conclusion

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- That which is extrinsically good, is good not for its own sake, but for the sake of something else to which it is related in some way. For example, some would say that helping others is good not because it leads to the betterment of the people but because it makes you feel better.
- Instrumental value is considered by many philosophers as a type of extrinsic value because its value comes from outside itself. Something that is instrumentally valuable is valuable as a means to an end. You value most things instrumentally.

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