Intrinsic Value of Natural Organic Unities

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Abstract

In this paper, I reflect on the nature of the intrinsic value of natural organic unities. First, I defend the organic unities (OUP) principle and apply it to the bearer of intrinsic value. Second, I hold that the bearer of such value is natural kinds. Finally, I argue that we have reasons for both value theory and normative ethics to hold OUP and natural kinds as bearers of intrinsic value.

Keywords: Value theory; Natural kinds; Bearers of intrinsic value; Principle of organic unities

Introduction

Value theory reflects upon the concept of value and its nature: what things are valuable? What kind of value do they possess? Are all those values of the exact nature? Are there things more valuable than others? Which are the criteria for attributing them value?

Value inquiry is a metaethical task (p. 7) [1]. Metaethics is the philosophical reflection about the foundations of ethics. It engages with problems about the existence of moral facts, the knowledge of such facts, the logic, and the semantic of the moral language (see Miller 2003: 2). Philosophers reflecting on those issues take positions regarding nature, existence, and the possibility of knowledge about values. However, they usually talk about moral facts and properties. When metaethical writers talk about moral properties, we must understand those properties as values. Metaethical theories must be understood as theories about the nature of value [2].

However, being value theory a metaethical task, there are specific problems that general metaethics do not engage. Those problems are the following:
- What ontological categories bear values?
- Are those values commensurable or incommensurable?
- Are there values that are more important than others?

(or in other words: are there higher values than others?)
- What kinds of value are there?
- Does it depend the value of a whole on the sum of its parts?

Problem a. concerns value bearer (see [2] ch. 2; [4]: ch. 3; [5]: ch. 3). Problem b. concerns the commensurability/ incommensurability of value [6]. Problem c. is the problem of higher goods (see [3] ch. 4; [5] ch. 5-6). Problem d. is the problem of the different kinds of value (intrinsic, extrinsic, final, instrumental, personal, and so on. See [4] ch. 2; [7] ch. 9; [5,8] ch. 1). Finally, problem e. concerns OUP (see [3] ch. 3). I shall focus on problems a. (section 3) and e. (section 4) for this paper. In section 1, I shall present the concept of intrinsic value as used in this paper. Section 5 will discuss OUP and why we must hold OUP and natural kinds as bearers of intrinsic value.

The mainstream research on value theory has focused mainly on abstract problems, giving some solutions that are also very abstract. For example, consider the problem of the value bearer: is it some property, or a state of affairs, or a fact (i.e., an obtaining state of affairs)? I propose to consider this problem within the problem of the essentialism of natural kinds. The problem of value bearer cannot be solved by appealing only to abstract metaphysical categories but

to understanding that those categories reflect some very concrete kinds of reality, like persons, animals, plants, artificial objects, and the likes. Since this is a limited inquiry, I must focus on natural objects. This core idea will lead my reflection on what follows.

The problem of OUP, it seems, also can be related to the problem of the value bearer. If the bearer of intrinsic value is a natural kind, we need to postulate some unity between the particular parts that bear the value. The very notion of a natural kind requires a special kind of unity. This unity is, of course, not a mereological unity – in which case it would not be organic – but given in virtue of the specific nature of the kind in question. For example, if we consider that the human being has some intrinsic value, it is in virtue of the kind of thing the human is. Moreover, this kind of thing requires unity in the properties that constitute it. So, an account of the OUP, plus an account of natural kinds, can do the job that value bearer theorists give.

The Concept of Intrinsic Value

It is customary to distinguish between four kinds of value: intrinsic, extrinsic, final, and instrumental (see [3] ch. 1; [7] ch. 9; [4] ch. 2; [5] ch. 1; [8] 2 ff). They can be defined as follows:

(2.1) x is intrinsically valuable $=_{df.}$ x is valuable in virtue of its intrinsic properties.
(2.2) x is extrinsically valuable $=_{df.}$ x is valuable in virtue of some properties that are not intrinsic.
(2.3) x has final value (i.e. is valuable as an end) $=_{df.}$ x is sought for its own sake.
(2.4) x has instrumental value (i.e. is valuable as a means) $=_{df.}$ there is a y such that x is sought for the sake of y.

Some examples can better explain the nature of those values. Consider money. First of all, money has value, however, not in the same way as, for example, friendship or knowledge. Money is usually considered an instrumental and extrinsic value. It is extrinsic because its value depends (or, more technically: *supervenes*) on extrinsic factors such as the value of other currencies, geopolitical affairs, the state of the economy, and so on. It is instrumental insofar we usually do not want money for itself, but for the things that money affords.

Let us consider another value, such as friendship. Friendship, we may say, is intrinsic and final. It is intrinsic insofar as its value supervenes on those features of each of the relata of the friendship relation, like personality, interests, psychological and moral dispositions. If we have money, friendship is one of those final values we want to spend. It is not an extrinsic value; insofar as it depends entirely on who

is the friend. Furthermore, if the relationship is convenient, it is not friendship. Therefore, friendship cannot be an instrumental good without changing the very nature of the relationship.

Of the above definitions, the intrinsic value has been that which most attention had received from philosophers, partly because the core concepts of ethical theories rely on a notion of what is intrinsically valuable. Thus, the core concepts of Aristotelian and Kantian (to give the most well-known examples) take happiness or the good will to be intrinsically valuable [9]. However, the concept of intrinsic value that I consider is more general. Since it is a metaethical task, value theory regarding intrinsic value engages with a concept used for any normative theory. That is why Noah Lemos talks about the intrinsic value *period* (ch. 4) [3].

However, those analysis problems lie in their high abstraction level, which analyzes little use for normative theory. When authors discuss the bearer of intrinsic value (if they are states of affairs, facts, or particulars), they are making assumptions on what there is. However, their assumptions are too general for thinking on a real application of those discussions for normative theory. If we want to know whether human beings and other natural beings have intrinsic value, it is no use to know if the bearer of intrinsic value is a particular, a state of affairs or a fact. We must further ask: what *kind* of thing is the human being? What kind of thing is a dog? And so on. Surely, we need metaphysics to answer those questions, and we need a sound theory of value. But we need both an ontology and a theory of value apt to answer *real* things and their specific natures. That is why my research will focus on what kind of metaphysical framework can be apt for an adequate explanation of the nature of the intrinsic value we are interested in. One way to do that is to consider natural kinds as bearers of intrinsic value.

The Bearer Of Intrinsic Value

I shall assume definition (2.1) of intrinsic value. Given that definition, then we must ask what ontological category bears intrinsic value. There are, roughly, the following alternatives [3-5]:
(1.1)   Universals
(1.2)   Abstract particulars
(1.3)   Concrete particulars
(1.4)   Abstract state of affairs
(1.5)   Concrete state of affairs or facts

Option (3.1) is defended by Panayot Butchvarov, who holds that
A person's life can be said to be good because it is happy only if happiness itself can be said to be good, and in general, a concrete entity can be said to be good only because it has

some other property or properties that themselves have the property of being good ([3] 14; also in Lemos 1994: 22) [10].

To my knowledge, option (3.2) is an alternative that has not been explored. However, it is reasonable to think that a trope theorist [11-13], holding that tropes constitute everything, should embrace (3.2). Options (3.1) and (3.2) are a minority position in the overall discussion.

The main positions in dispute are (3.3), (3.4), and (3.5). (3.3) is defended by Davison [5]. Lemos and Zimmerman have argued for (3.5), but, as Zimmerman has shown, Lemos's position can be taken as defending (3.4) (p: 49-52) [4].

There are good reasons to reject states of affairs as bearers of intrinsic value. The most important critique of states of affairs is that, ultimately, intrinsic value supervenes on the property or the particular; hence, the bearer is the property or the particular. If states of affairs can be considered bearers of intrinsic value, then the world must be irreducibly constituted by states of affairs. While it is true that, even so, the value of the states of affairs could supervene on the property or the particular, they cannot be isolated from each other.

David Armstrong [14] has argued for a world of states of affairs, namely, that atomic states of affairs ultimately constitute the world as the minimum ontological constitutive. A way to argue for states of affairs as a bearer of intrinsic value must address Armstrong's metaphysics.

However, this approach has its weaknesses, which I have described elsewhere [15]: if – by definition (2.1) – x has intrinsic value in virtue of its intrinsic properties, and if x is a state of affairs, then the value of x supervenes on its properties. Thus, properties are the bearers of intrinsic value.

What about the particular? Davison's position relies on metaphysical nominalism (or at least it is suggested by his references to David Lewis). Since there are no abstract entities for nominalism, concrete particulars are the only bearers of intrinsic value.

However, nominalism is not a good way to characterize the metaphysics of value bearer. First of all, following Rodriguez-Pereyra's resemblance nominalism [16], the properties are understood as a resemblance relation of two particulars. For example, assuming that happiness is a property, if we say that x is happy means x resembles y, who is also happy. Since resemblance is a primitive relation, then, ultimately, intrinsic value is also primitive. Hence, if x has intrinsic value by P and x is P by a primitive relation (resemblance), then that x has intrinsic value is also primitive. Secondly, the

resemblance is an extrinsic relation. Since the properties of things supervene on extrinsic relations, they cannot explain the intrinsic properties, and thus, intrinsic value (recall the definition of intrinsic value).

In Arancibia-Collao [15], I argued that natural kinds are the best candidates for being bearers of intrinsic value. My arguments are the following. First, the question about value is a very humane and concrete experience. However, value theory addresses the problem of value in a rather abstract way. This reason does not intend to exclude the abstract reflection on value but to consider that it must reflect, if possible, this concreteness and humanness. The way to do this is to focus on the *kind* of things that we can say that bear intrinsic value. It makes sense to distinguish between the intrinsic value of, for example, a person from the intrinsic value of a fly. This very intuitive difference must be explained from a metaphysical point of view, and a reflection of natural kinds concerning intrinsic value can explain this difference.

Secondly, suppose the definition (2.1) on intrinsic value is true. In that case, it is necessary to explain why the intrinsic value of the kind *does not* supervene its intrinsic properties. The reason is that the intrinsic value of x supervenes on the kind of x as a whole. For example: if x bears intrinsic value, and if x is F, being F the natural kind of x, then the intrinsic value of x supervenes on F as a whole.

Natural kinds are properties (see Ellis 2001; Armstrong 1997: 65) [14,17]; *qua* properties can be composed of other properties (they can be seen as *structural* properties: see pp. 68-9) [18]. However, natural kinds are a special property insofar as they fulfill relevant explanatory requirements in science. The similarities we found, in reality, require a robust ontology for giving an account of it, and the best way to do this is to explain natural kinds as constituting hierarchies of generic universals (p. 67-8) [17]. Ellis gives the following example:

For describing a methane molecule, it is necessary to say how the atoms are arranged within the molecule. The molecular formula is not enough. This becomes obvious if we consider molecules such as butane and isobutane, or pentane, neo-pentane, and iso-pentane, which are distinguished from each other intrinsically only by their different molecular structures (p. 69) [17].

The later considerations point out that natural kinds give an account of the structure of things. Therefore, there are necessary explanations for reality as we found it (see [17] p. 68; [19] 15 ff). Therefore, we cannot reduce the kind to its constitutive properties.

Thirdly, if we cannot reduce natural kinds to their

constitutive properties, and if natural kinds are to be considered the bearer of intrinsic value, then the bearer of such value cannot be reduced to its constitutive properties, in which case the bearers would be properties and not natural kinds. Finally, it is important to note that, while natural kinds are properties, they are not properties *period*. Nevertheless, they fulfill important theoretical functions in science, and they are required to explain the complexity of reality.

Are natural kinds *qua* kinds (i.e., as substantive properties) the bearers of intrinsic value? While I submit that natural kinds, as properties, bear intrinsic value, my position is, more precisely, that *particulars* bear intrinsic value, *but only* as an exemplification of some natural kind.

Let me explain: if we believe in human dignity (for the sake of argument), we believe that human beings have intrinsic value. The particular (the human) possesses intrinsic value, but only insofar as it is a human. I mean that natural kinds are bearers of intrinsic value because particulars, being a certain kind of entity, have intrinsic value. This value supervenes on the kind of thing the particular is. This idea is not, to be clear, Davison's position. Natural kinds are an essential feature of the intrinsic value of things. Thus, the bearer of intrinsic value is not the particular period.

The Principle of Organic Unities (OUP)

The OUP, originally formulated by Moore, holds, roughly, that the value of a whole need not be assumed to be the same as the sum of the values of its parts ([20] p. 28; [21] p. 79). The underlying intuition behind OUP lies in some paradigmatic examples. For example, Moore gives the case of the consciousness of a beautiful object claiming to have great intrinsic value, "even though neither consciousness nor the object itself holds much value" ([22] 2; [20]: 28). Alternatively, the most known example, the so-called "*Schadenfreude*" or malicious pleasure [22]: we can think of pleasure – by itself – as being intrinsically/finally good, but not if the pleasure is obtained by torture. So, John is pleased with Mary's pain is intrinsically/finally bad, and this value is not the mere sum of the two alleged parts of this fact, namely, the pleasure and the torture.

OUP has been contrasted to the principle of summation, which states that the value of a whole is a sum of the values of its parts (p: 33) [3]. Another principle related to organic unities is the principle of universality, which states that the part of a valuable whole retains its value when it is and when it is not a part of a whole (see [3] 33; [20] 30). The principle of universality contrasts with the principle of conditionality, which states that the intrinsic value of a part of a whole can be different depending on the whole that obtains (p. 33) [3].

Since OUP is usually understood with the principle of universality ([3] 32-3, 40; [23] 126; [1] ch. 5.3), I shall assume that organic unities entail universality. Nonetheless, I think conditionality can also be compatible with organic unities.

Zimmerman [22] has argued that a correct account of organic unities must address the following problems: (i) the concept of value that will be discussed; (ii) the kind of thing that has value and its concreteness and (iii) the concept of parthood that I will use and its relation to value bearers (see [22] 3-5). Regarding (i), he is thinking in final value (recall definition 2.3); regarding (ii), he affirms that concrete states of affairs are bearers of final value; regarding (iii), he makes a distinction between part and proper part: "*a* is a proper part of *b* just in case *a* is a part of *b*, but *b* is not a part of *a*" [22]. This conception of parthood (which needs to be related to the value bearer) leads him to account for the part-whole relation concerning states and events (he developed this idea in Zimmerman 2001: 58-60) [4].

While OUP was formulated considering states of affairs, it may be applied to natural kinds because its application to states of affairs depends on what kind of entity is the bearer of intrinsic value. Thus, if states of affairs are the bearers of intrinsic value, then OUP will apply to states of affairs; if properties are the bearers of intrinsic value, then OUP will apply to properties. Moreover, we can consider natural kinds as a special type of state of affairs. David Armstrong says that "a state of affairs exists if and only if a particular [...] has a property or, instead, a relation holds between two or more particulars" (Ch. 1) [14]. Taking Armstrong's definition of states of affairs, we can see that, if we consider the instantiation of natural kinds, there is a particular which instantiates a property, and hence, a state of affairs. As a natural kind, this state of affairs would have an inner structure (see [17] 26 ff.). This inner structure can account for the requirement of a part-whole conception that the principle must address.

Scott Davison (ch. 5) [5] has explored the relationship between natural kinds and intrinsic value. Concerning the problem of the degrees of intrinsic value, he has argued that the intrinsic value of a particular (the value bearer, for Davison) relates to the kind that thing is. He explicitly relates the question of degrees to the intrinsic nature of things and the principle of organic unities. He explains: "a human being, for instance, is more intrinsically valuable than the sum of the intrinsic values of his or her parts" (ch. 85) [5]. However, Davison has not developed this idea.

What can count for organic unity? Erik Carlson [24,25] has identified five criteria for organicity. The first state that the principles of commutativity and associativity are false. Letting $\geq$ denote for "at least as equal in value as" and $\sim$ to

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denote "equal in value as," the principle of commutativity holds, for any parts of a whole *a*, *b* and *c*

$$(Com) \ (a \wedge b) \sim (b \wedge a)$$

While the principle of commutativity states:
(Asoc) $[a \wedge (b \wedge c)] \sim [(a \wedge b) \wedge c]$

The second criterium of organicity states that the principle of monotonicity is false. Monotonicity holds states:
(Mon) $(a \geq b)$ iff $[(a \wedge c) \geq (b \wedge c)]$ iff $[(c \wedge a) \geq (c \wedge b)]$

On the third criterium, Carlson suggests understanding it as follows:

Let *S* be a set of value bearers that are atomic, in the sense of not being concatenations of other value bearers. Further, let *S•* be the superset of *S* containing the members of *S* and all their concatenations. Assume also that the value differences between the elements of *S* can be at least partially ordered, and let the "value status" of a value bearer denote whether it is good, bad, or neutral [24].

Given that, the third criterium states that "the value ordering of *S•* is not a function only of the value ordering of *S*, the ordering of the value differences in *S*, and the respective value status of the members of *S*" (p. 293) [24]. The fourth criterium states that a whole can be good (or bad) although it has no good (or bad) proper part (see p. 293) [24]. Finally, the fifth and last criterium states that "the value of a part may depend on its relations to other parts of the whole" (p. 294) [24].

Discussion

In what follows, I shall argue that we have reasons to accept OUP. I want to sketch two paths: (i) from the consideration of natural kinds as value bearers and (ii) the acceptance of basic normative (ethical) commitments.

OUP and Natural Kinds as Value Bearers

I have explained the main requirements of organicity that the authors hold. One critical requirement is a conception of intrinsic value bearer. From that conception follows many of the problems and many of the solutions that OUP bears. My idea is that natural kinds (or, more precisely: natural kinds exemplifications) can account for the requirements mentioned above and criteria. First of all, the negation of (Com), (Asoc), and (Mon) follows from considering natural kinds as the bearer of intrinsic value because the ordering of the parts of a natural kind, as a whole, cannot be commutated. This is because of the constitutive properties of a natural kind that structure in a certain order. The parts of a natural kind, as a whole, also cannot be associated as (Asoc) requires, for the same reason noted above: the structure of a natural

kind does not allow for this. Alternatively, more precisely, it depends on the structure of the natural kind, but only insofar as it does not affect the inner structure or, in other words, the whole. The same for (Mon): its true would imply that intrinsic value "would be measurable on a ratio scale" and "would then be meaningful to compare the value of a whole to the sum of the value of their parts. However, this would also imply that the value of the whole is identical to this sum, and hence that there are no organic unities" (p. 289) [24]. The natural kinds also accomplish the third, fourth, and fifth criteria as intrinsic value bearers since natural kinds explain the order of the whole parts in question.

OUP and Normative Ethics

Given natural kinds as bearers of intrinsic value, the value of the whole *must* supervene on the value of the natural kind of which the particular in question is an instantiation. For example: if *x* is a human being, then the value of *x* supervenes on the kind of thing *x* is, namely, human. Given the principle, the value of *x* is given for being human and not for summing up the properties of *x*. This idea is critical for any ethic that considers the idea of human dignity seriously, insofar as the value of a human could be given by some skills or development. Thus, we could have two humans: *x* is an eminent scientist, and *y* is some vulnerable teen from a very vulnerable country. If the principle is false, we could sum up the value of the parts of them to get a value for each of them. This would lead that *x* values more than *y*. Recall that we are talking about intrinsic/final value. Thus, *x* has more intrinsic/final value than *y*. Put more crudely: the eminent scientist is more intrinsically/finally valuable than the vulnerable teen.

This is an undesirable conclusion. I hold that a way to avoid this conclusion, from the point of view of value theory, is to give a strong metaphysical ground, a ground that could be compatible with the foundations of science. As I have argued, natural kinds accomplish relevant explanatory functions in science. Using natural kinds for ground intrinsic value is grounding value theory in scientific realism. Also, it can help to clarify value attribution. For example, if we believe that humans are more intrinsically valuable than flies, then there is a fact of the world that grounds this belief. While I assume that relating the value attribution to facts of the world does not determine, by itself, the value of an entity, it helps us to identify it more clearly. In the latter example, humans' higher intrinsic value regarding flies is grounded in the different natural kind that those things instantiate. A defender of other approaches would have to argue, additionally, that the properties of each thing instantiate ground the differences of value attribution (for example, rationality regarding humans and its absence regarding flies). However, if we take natural kinds as value bearers, this explanation is supposed. Then, natural kinds are also a simpler explanation of the grounds of value.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that the value bearer is natural kinds. Taking natural kinds as value bearers is a better account for making sense of our moral judgments and grounds value theory in scientific realism. Thus, we have theoretical reasons for accepting natural kinds as value bearers. The OUP is consistent with our intuitive judgments about the value of things. Also, denying the OUP concerning value bearers would lead us to undesirable conclusions. Therefore, we have practical reasons to accept the OUP. We have reasons for favoring both the OUP and natural kinds as value bearers. Both approaches complement each other to provide a more intuitive and plausible account of the grounds of value.

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