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An Examination of Intrinsic Value

by

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ABSTRACT

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Two conceptually distinct accounts of intrinsic value tend to dominate moral and value theory. One is the view, held prominently by J.S. Mill, in which intrinsic value is that which is valued as an end, rather than as a means to some further end. The other conception, advanced by G.E. Moore and W.D. Ross, holds intrinsic value to be the value something has in itself by virtue of its own intrinsic nature and independently of all other values and objects. In this essay, I present criticisms of each view and provide, in their place, an alternative conception of intrinsic value that avoids the failings of these prevailing accounts. This essay's account is independent of the particular valuations of persons, thus avoiding the criticism against the view represented by Mill, but remains relationally tied to persons, unlike the Moorean conception.
An Examination of Intrinsic Value

The study of value is a complex enterprise. Not only are there broad differences in theories of value, just what it is and what it isn’t, but there are importantly different types of things that one might consider to be bearers of value and various sorts of value judgments to make within these types. The particular focus in this essay is with the concept of intrinsic value. More specifically, I am concerned with the question of whether states of affairs, or outcomes, can have intrinsic value.

The discussion in this essay will begin, in section I, with comments on some of the terminology and conceptual distinctions that will lay the groundwork for subsequent sections. In section II, I will explore the two most prominent conceptions of intrinsic value. The first conception views intrinsic value as that which persons value as ends in themselves, rather than as means to further ends. The second view, most notably promulgated by G.E. Moore and W.D. Ross, conceives of intrinsic value as the non-relational value something has in itself by virtue of its own intrinsic nature or properties. I will argue that neither of these conceptions of value, nor a mixed theory combining the two, is acceptable. It will be shown, however, that the non-relational Moorean conception, although too impersonal and distinct from persons, is along the right track toward a plausible account of intrinsic value insofar as it posits value that is not dependent on the particular valuations of persons—the dependence on which will form the primary criticism against the valued as an end account.
Given the relative strength of the non-relational conception, in section III I extend my argument against this conception by defusing two putative features of non-relational intrinsic value that vastly contribute to its appeal. The object of this discussion is to clear the conceptual space for a theory of the intrinsic value of states of affairs that, as with the non-relational view, is independent of the particular valuations of persons, yet is relational—specifically, relational to persons—thereby avoiding the charge that intrinsic value is too impersonal.

This, then, sets the stage for section IV, in which I present and defend a relational conception of intrinsic value. Ideals that qualify as positing intrinsic value, I argue, must be non-person-affecting, in that the value of the ideal is not strictly determined by how persons fare (i.e., how they are affected), and the ideal’s value must be generated and determined by the willful behavior of persons. This account of intrinsic value is primarily structural, outlining the sort of relational connection intrinsic value must have to persons. This structure allows for various substantive articulations, in the form of varying ideals, of the precise manner in which persons’ willful behavior generates and determines intrinsic value.

I

The concept of intrinsic value is commonly appealed to in philosophical discourse. But just how we are to understand this concept—what intrinsic value is, where it originates and how it is justified, what its structure is, and what things have it and how—is quite controversial. As it stands, not only is there a diversity of contemporary conceptions of and approaches to intrinsic value, appeals to intrinsic value are often rather murky with regard to just what it is. Fred Feldman, for example, has recently identified eight
prominent and distinct conceptualizations of intrinsic value, in which intrinsic goodness can be understood as that which is unimprovably good, the final or ultimate end, unqualifiedly good, the object of correct love or desire, good in virtue of its intrinsic nature, good even if it existed in absolute isolation, incorruptibly good, or that which ought to exist.¹

Such a list is by no means exhaustive, although it does illuminate the importance of defining just what is meant by the notion of intrinsic value. Consequently, to get a foothold in the discussion of intrinsic value, I want in this section to consider a few important distinctions.

The first concerns a distinction between two broad conceptions of intrinsic value, which differ with respect to the proper bearer of this value—i.e., just what has the intrinsic value. The backdrop of this distinction applies more broadly to general value theory: it is based on the distinction between two types of theory of the good—what is good for persons and what is a good state of affairs or outcome.

To illustrate, consider the following claim: “Living a pleasurable life is good.” How might we understand the manner in which living a pleasurable life is good? We might say, for instance, that living a pleasurable life is good for the person experiencing the pleasurable life, that it is better for the person to live pleasurably than to live, say, miserably. There are different ways of characterizing just what is good for a person and the reasons for it being so. Some prevalent examples include the mental states account, which claims that what is good or bad for persons are certain of our conscious mental states (e.g., the experience of pleasure being good, the experience of pain being bad); preference-satisfaction theories, in which the satisfaction of our desires and preferences is what is good for us; and objective list accounts, which posit certain ideals or things that

are good for persons regardless of the persons' desires, preferences, experiences, etc.,
even if, in fact, they are inimical to what the person actually values or prefers.² There are,
of course, varying degrees of objectivity and importance of values both between and
within these accounts regarding what counts as good for a person and how much each
thing counts relative to other goods. But for each of these accounts, value judgments are
made regarding what is good or bad for specific persons; or, in Parfit's terminology, what
makes a person's life go best.

Alternatively, we might hold that it is a good state of affairs or outcome that a person
lives a pleasurable life. Claiming this could be in addition (perhaps) to it being good for a
person to live a pleasurable life; it is to say that it is good that a person lives a pleasurable
life, or that the world is a better place as a result. These sorts of valuations would allow
us to compare the goodness of different states of affairs, such that state of affairs \( x \) is
better or worse than state of affairs \( y \).³

Although both of these are views of general value theory, the concept of intrinsic
value has been specifically applied to each, such that something can be intrinsically good
for persons, or an intrinsically good state of affairs. Roughly speaking, intrinsic value is
traditionally thought of, within this context, as that value which something has in itself or
as an end in itself. For instance, in claiming that there are things that are intrinsically
good for persons, it is most commonly held that the experience of pleasure or happiness
is of intrinsic value for persons—it is something that is good as an end in itself for

² See Derek Parfit's discussion of these varying theories of the good in the appendix of his Reasons and
Persons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Regarding the objective list account, although it
posits value for persons that stands even if persons do not actually value it, such accounts typically make
some claim that persons would value it if they were suitably situated (e.g., adequately informed, fully
rational, etc.). More on this point below.
³ Such a comparison is likely not to be possible all of the time, and some would even argue that it rarely
would occur, if we accept a pluralism of values applicable to the assessment of states of affairs. With a
genuine value pluralism—i.e., when the set of values is not reducible to, or cannot be mapped onto, an
underlying monism—at least some incommensurability or incomparability of values is to be expected.
persons. Other sorts of intrinsic goods for persons include considering it intrinsically good for a person for his preferences or desires to be satisfied, or that certain goods on an objective list are intrinsically good for persons, such as self-perfection or vast knowledge.

States of affairs also are often articulated in terms of intrinsic value, in which certain states of affairs can be considered intrinsically good or bad. Common examples of the types of states of affairs that can be intrinsically valuable include those states of affairs in which a just distribution of goods obtains (or fails to obtain) among persons, or those in which important historical artifacts and achievements, such as architectural and anthropological evidence, remain well-preserved, and so forth.

Now although these two general theories of the good are distinct, they often are presented as interrelational. One example is that a theory about the value of states of affairs can be (at least partially) based on things that are good for persons. For instance, one might hold that it is a good (and perhaps intrinsically good) state of affairs for a person to live a good life rather than a miserable life because the former is better for the person. In this case, the position would roughly be that it is a good outcome—i.e., the world is a better place—that persons fare well, in addition, quite likely, to it being good for these persons to fare well. Thus, a person living a pleasurable life might be both good for the person and a good state of affairs.

Some theories explain what makes states of affairs better or worse strictly in terms of what is good or bad for persons. Classic utilitarianism, for instance, is an account concerned with states of affairs and which argues that what matters in the value judgments of states of affairs is how persons collectively fare (taking the sum or average of the well-being of these persons). Another prominent example (especially in economics
literature) is Pareto optimality: a state of affairs is considered Pareto optimal if no one can be made better off without making someone worse off.

But a state of affairs account needn’t be based solely, or at all, on what is good for persons. There are many values and ideals that a state of affairs account might incorporate, which are not a direct factor of how things are for persons. For instance, it might be considered a good state of affairs for beautiful things to exist, or for persons to live virtuously, or for history to be well recorded, and so forth. Moreover, we might argue that many of these various goods are irreducibly good, such that we are not able to reduce our system of goods to some singular underlying, and generally intrinsic, good. This allows for a thoroughgoing pluralism of ideals with regard to what can make a state of affairs good or bad.

This demonstrates a distinction (our second distinction) between two basic types of theories about good states of affairs: those that are based on what is good for persons and those that are not. Let’s refer to these as person-affecting goods and non-person-affecting goods, respectively. Given this distinction, the person-affecting view can be further divided into exclusionary and non-exclusionary versions. An exclusionary version of the person-affecting view maintains that states of affairs admit of value judgments only if persons are affected for the better or worse, such that things are better or worse for persons. An example of an exclusionary person-affecting view is presented by Larry Temkin under a position he terms “the Slogan”: “One situation cannot be worse (or better) than another in any respect if there is no one for whom it is worse (or better) in any respect.” Alternatively, a non-exclusionary person-affecting view, more along the lines presented by Parfit, merely holds that how persons are affected ipso facto bears on

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4 This terminology of “person-affecting” goods is borrowed from Parfit’s discussion of the person-affecting view in part four of Reasons and Persons.
the value judgments of states of affairs, but not to the exclusion of non-person-affecting ideals. A non-exclusionary person-affecting view is a claim about what does matter for value, and not a claim about what does not matter for value, which the exclusionary person-affecting view is as well. 

This distinction is similar to, although distinct from, what David Brink refers to as personal and impersonal theories of value. A theory of value is personal if what is valuable is such only insofar as it contributes to the value of persons' lives; while a theory of value is impersonal if it recognizes certain things as valuable independently from whether they contribute in any fashion to the value of persons' lives. Now this distinction is separate from that between person-affecting and non-person affecting goods, which are goods of states of affairs, since it seems legitimate to consider both goods for persons and person-affecting good states of affairs as personal theories of value. But it is important because it gets at quite clearly the essential difference between person-affecting and non-person affecting goods.

Now since both person-affecting and non-person-affecting goods are claims about states of affairs, the concept of intrinsic value is commonly applied: persons-affecting goods and/or non-person-affecting goods are often taken as intrinsic goods. Although this suggests we might think of both as types of intrinsically good states of affairs, it is nonetheless quite common to claim that only one posits genuine intrinsic value. A utilitarian, for example, might claim that only person-affecting good states of affairs can

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6 A non-exclusionary restatement of the person-affecting view can be something like this: An outcome is better or worse if persons are affected for better or worse. This is most similar to Parfit's initial statement of the person-affecting view: "It will be worse if people are affected for the worse" (Reasons and Persons, p. 370). (Parfit discusses exclusionary variants of this view most explicitly in his consideration of the Absurd Conclusion, ch. 18.) Stated as such, the person-affecting view can be just one among possible moral claims—including, as we will see below, the Principle of Person-Relevance—provided, of course, that these other principles in play do not exclude person-affecting views.
be considered *intrinsically* good because the only thing that has intrinsic value, for the utilitarian, is how persons fare (i.e., how persons are affected). But among those who disagree with the utilitarian, and who believe that non-person-affecting goods can be intrinsically valuable, it is often held that person-affecting goods cannot be intrinsic goods.

Indeed, we can note that each of the theories of value considered thus far—value for persons, valuable states of affairs, and person-affecting and non-person-affecting accounts of valuable states of affairs—stake claims to intrinsic value. And, as we have seen, it is often the case that such theories explicitly exclude the other accounts from having any legitimate claim on intrinsic value. This certainly illustrates some of the deep controversy regarding intrinsic value. But the significant difference in the types of value found in our first distinction (i.e., between value for persons and value of states of affairs) suggests an equally significant difference in the sort of intrinsic value being appealed to by each respective account. In fact, perhaps the common ground between these accounts is not much more than terminological, in that both speak of so-called intrinsic value despite the manner in which each conceives of intrinsic value as being fundamentally different. If this indeed is the case, then perhaps we ought not expect any sort of resolution in the form of the correct account of intrinsic value.

In any event, the complexity concerning intrinsic value suggests that a profitable discussion of intrinsic value ought, at least initially, to be focused with regard to the type of intrinsic value it is intended to be. In this essay, the specific focus is with the question of whether certain types of states of affairs can have intrinsic value. I will argue, in fact, for a particular account of the intrinsic value of states of affairs. And in presenting this

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view, I will for the most part not directly consider the question of whether anything can
be intrinsically good for persons (although many of my comments might be indirectly
relevant to this issue).

Even more pointedly, the primary concern with the presentation of this view of
intrinsic value will be its structure—how it is that states of affairs are valuable and how
this conception of value is related to persons. In focusing on the structure of the intrinsic
value of states of affairs I will ignore issues regarding how persons ought to think about
or react to intrinsically good or bad states of affairs. Thus, I will eschew discussion of
what many consider the more interesting questions for value theory: namely, for example,
questions of duty and obligation for persons, or whether persons are necessarily
motivated by the recognition of the intrinsic value of certain outcomes, or whether we
can say there are or are not “correct” emotions or attitudes toward intrinsic values.⁸
Moreover, I suppose that perhaps many would believe that what is intrinsically good for
persons is a more interesting and important question regarding intrinsic value than is the
possible intrinsic value of states of affairs, since what is intrinsically good for us might
provide more insight into the types of lives we should pursue. Nonetheless, this essay’s
more modest purview will be to focus on the possibility of intrinsically valuable states of
affairs.

As suggested in this section, a key issue in this discussion will be whether the
intrinsic value of states of affairs ought to be conceived of as person-affecting or non-
person-affecting value. I will argue that only non-person-affecting outcomes can

⁸ Important philosophers who have discussed these questions of value theory include Franz Brentano [in his
The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); and The
Foundation and Construction of Ethics (New York: Humanities Press, 1973)], Roderick Chisholm
[especially in Brentano and Intrinsic Value (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)], and Noah
Lemos [Intrinsic Value: Concept and Warrant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)].
plausibly involve intrinsic value, and that person-affecting value is based on the valuations of persons.

Now in presenting this argument for intrinsic value I will take the general possibility and coherence of valuable (though, critically, not intrinsically valuable) states of affairs or outcomes—i.e., states of affairs or outcomes as bearers of value—as a working assumption. Though this involves only assuming value in some fashion is relevant to states of affairs, it is nonetheless a controversial assumption in its own right since some are inclined to hold that only something that is good or bad for a person or persons can plausibly be considered valuable in any relevant sense. Many who take this line against valuable states of affairs, however, are skeptics about non-subjective value in general, and will reject any position claiming that value is or can be something that extends beyond what is valued by a person and is valuable for that and only that person (and, perhaps, those who agree with this person). Thus, by making the explicit assumption that states of affairs can be the bearers of value I avoid tackling the skeptical argument against it, which—although it is a deep and important issue for value theory—is simply not the focus of this essay.

As stated, one might be tempted to object that I assume too much in the way of my conclusion. But, again, I am not assuming that states of affairs can be intrinsically valuable, only valuable in some fashion. To keep this assumption as parsimonious as possible, its scope can be thought of as including only a general non-intrinsic person-affecting view, in which a states of affairs can be better or worse if it is better or worse for persons. Among those who accept states of affairs as possible bearers of value, exclusionary versions of person-affecting theories are the most common (including, e.g., somewhat derivative positions, such as classic utilitarianism and Pareto optimality). And
I believe this position is highly intuitively plausible and is the least controversial claim regarding the value of outcomes. Moreover, for anyone who accepts a person-affecting view, the skeptical line of criticism against the value of states of affairs cannot be taken: if outcomes can be good when good for persons, then this is to admit the coherence (of at least the possibility) of outcomes being good.

Hence, my argument will involve moving from this assumption to a conclusion that non-person-affecting ideals that posit a judgment concerning the intrinsic value of states of affairs can also be acceptable within a compelling value theory. In fact, the view that will be presented in this essay is that person-affecting ideals (under most conceptions of what can be good for persons) are not ideals of intrinsic value; only non-person-affecting ideals can be based upon intrinsic value. As we will see, this analysis stems from the claim that what is good for persons is based on what persons value, and basing a conception of value on what persons value contravenes any acceptable account of intrinsic value. But despite our account of intrinsic value excluding person-affecting ideals within its specific purview, we can still maintain person-affecting goods (and therefore the general acceptance of a non-exclusionary person-affecting view) to be part of general value theory.

Rather, what I'll attempt to do is to offer an account of intrinsic value that meets roughly some of the traditional desiderata for such value, as well as being in line with what I will suggest is a plausible conception of the general nature of value, while overcoming some of its greatest obstacles to acceptance. The first step in this argument, then, is to consider prevailing conceptions of intrinsic value and the primary obstacles they face in presenting an acceptable theory.
II

Interpretations of intrinsic value are, as we have mentioned, rather numerous—too numerous, in fact, to explore in great detail here. Nonetheless, there is a broad, albeit questionably coherent, traditional view of intrinsic value that tends to dominate the literature. This view is roughly that whatever has intrinsic value is valued as an end solely in virtue of its intrinsic nature or properties. It is important to note, however, that this view is constituted by two conceptually distinct features. The first is the claim that intrinsic value is the value something has as an end. This view, which we will term the "valued as an end" account (although we might also refer to this conception of value as that which is "valued as an end in itself," "valued for its own sake," or other similar locutions), is best understood by contrasting it with being valued as a means. If I value something as a means, I value it because it is a means to something else that I value, which might in turn be valued as a means to a further value, and so forth. But those things I value irrespective of any effect they might engender, I value as ends in themselves and therefore have intrinsic value.

The other conceptual feature of this traditional view is the notion that something has intrinsic value if it is "valuable in itself" independently of all other objects and values. On this conception, for something to be intrinsically good it must be good strictly in virtue of itself—or in virtue of its own intrinsic nature, as it is often put—without reference to anything beyond itself, such as further effects it may have or anyone's particular attitude toward it.

This familiar distinction is often presented as two discrete and competing, even antithetical, conceptions of intrinsic value. Indeed, many who explicitly acknowledge this

9 This qualification will be explained below, especially in footnote 27.
distinction reject the "valued as an end" interpretation as a legitimate account—or even a part of a legitimate account—of intrinsic value. Both G. E. Moore\textsuperscript{10} and W. D. Ross,\textsuperscript{11} and more recently Christine Korsgaard,\textsuperscript{12} for instance, are quite explicit that intrinsic value denotes a type of value that is in no way dependent on being valued by anyone as an end (or, furthermore, being valued by anyone in any fashion). On the other hand, though, many place the focus of intrinsic value on that which persons value as an end.

These positions notwithstanding, it remains quite common in discussions of value theory to think of intrinsic value as some combination of these two conceptions—that, for instance, what we value as an end is valuable in itself, or valuable as an end strictly in virtue of the value of its intrinsic nature.\textsuperscript{13}

Clearly, there is much disagreement regarding just what intrinsic value is and what it is not. But given the enormous influence of these two conceptions of intrinsic value—either as exclusive accounts or as features of a mixed theory—we should examine these positions to determine if an acceptable account of the intrinsic value of states of affairs lies among them, and, if not, to ascertain what sort of theory of intrinsic value we ought to pursue. Let's begin by considering each conception separately.

\textbf{Intrinsic value as "valued as an end"}

The "valued as an end" account of intrinsic value is generally explained in terms of the distinction between things valued as an end and things valued for the sake of something else. Simple observation demonstrates that many of the things we value are


\textsuperscript{12} Especially in her essay "Two Distinctions in Goodness" [\textit{The Philosophical Review} 42 (1983), pp. 169-95].
valued only insofar as they are instrumental in bringing about some other thing. But some things (perhaps, as some would believe, just one thing) are valued not for any further thing that they are instrumental in bringing about, but simply are valued non-instrumentally as ends in themselves. We can imagine that most of what we value is valued as a means to something else, and that most of the things these values are means to are themselves only valued as a means—e.g., I value gasoline as a means of enabling my car to run; but I value a running car only as a means of commuting (relatively conveniently) from place to place; but I value commuting from place to place only as a means of being in those various locations; and so forth. At the end, however, of any such chain of value would be something that is valued as an end, toward which all the instrumental values in the chain are ultimately directed.14

Conceptions of value roughly based on this distinction between value as an end and value as a means can prominently be found in Aristotle’s ethics and in Mill’s defense of utilitarianism.15 Both are monists about what is indeed valued as an end, claiming that all other values are means of it. Now although both consider this end to be, roughly speaking, happiness, there is I believe much substantive difference between their respective accounts. Aristotle speaks of the final end of man as being eudaimonia, a rich Greek term denoting not only happiness but a prosperous and flourishing life. Mill conceives of happiness more mundanely, in terms of pleasure: “By happiness is intended

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13 Shelly Kagan, for example, refers to this mixed position as the “dominant philosophical tradition” in his “Rethinking Intrinsic Value” (The Journal of Ethics 2 (1998), pp. 277-297).
14 Because of the tendency in the literature to think of intrinsic value as (at least in part) what is valued as an end, this distinction between value as an end and value as a means is often simply described as between intrinsic and instrumental value. This is, of course, to equate “intrinsic” with “non-instrumental” (and, on the other side, “extrinsic” with “instrumental”).
15 Although Aristotle did not explicitly speak of, and Mill rarely spoke of, value as an end as intrinsic value, their theories quite clearly were concerned with value as an end in just the same manner as those who talk of it in such terms. Thus we will refer to their conception of value as an end as intrinsic value.
pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure.\textsuperscript{16}

Nonetheless, both apply the general justificatory strategy of arguing that happiness is the sole intrinsic good because it is in fact what persons do value as an end. Mill offers the following argument for happiness as an intrinsic good:

The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as a means to that end....[T]he sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing could ever convince any persons that it was so. No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person...desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness is a good, that each person's happiness is a good to that person.\textsuperscript{17}

Mill goes on to argue that persons indeed value nothing but happiness as an end, rendering happiness the sole intrinsic good. But a monistic view is not required of the "valued as an end" account of intrinsic value—one might in fact argue that there is a plurality of things that persons do in fact value as an end.

In interpreting intrinsic value strictly as what is "valued as an end," this account holds that what persons value as an end determines what is intrinsically valuable (e.g., happiness has intrinsic value because persons value it as an end). In other words, the "valued as an end" account claims the justification for or source of intrinsic value is what persons value as an end, and something has intrinsic value only insofar as it is valued as an end.\textsuperscript{18} (The "valued as an end" conception of intrinsic value is thus based on what persons value, a basis we might broadly refer to as the "what persons value" conception

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 34. See also Aristotle's Ethics I.vii.
\textsuperscript{18} Again, we will discuss mixed views of intrinsic value below, in which the source of value is not clearly what persons value.
of value.) In this manner, intrinsic value is relational, with the relational basis being what persons value.\textsuperscript{19}

This argument for the source of intrinsic value may not be immediately transparent in the above passage. Indeed, Mill talks about what is "desirable," the only evidence for which is what persons actually desire. His claim, however, is that it is a psychological fact of the matter that persons in general seek happiness as an end. And whatever persons in general do in fact desire, so the reasoning goes, is on this basis desirable.

What is crucial for Mill in this passage is that valuing happiness as an end is a psychological fact for (nearly) all persons, rather than only for some. Other accounts of intrinsic value, however, might not employ this requirement; what is taken as the relevant number of persons for what is valued as an end to qualify as intrinsic value can vary.

Although Mill claims that something must be valued as an end by all or nearly all persons, others might allow the relevant group to be smaller.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, the purview of persons is not the only factor that can vary among theories. Another factor is the question of which values count: Does anything one happens to value count, or only those values that one has when, e.g., fully informed, completely rational, and suchlike? Additionally, do all these relevant values carry equal weight? Mill and Aristotle, for instance, took the position that some goods (i.e., certain types of happiness) are more valuable than others.

\textsuperscript{19} Of course, many philosophers hold a somewhat more complex picture of roughly the "what persons value" position. In particular, rather than holding that value ought to be defined as what persons actually value, it is often claimed that value is what persons would value in the right conditions—e.g., when a person is fully rational or has complete knowledge of all things relevant to the value in question. But even for such positions, what is valuable is what is valued by persons in the right circumstances. Thus, to keep this discussion as simple as possible, by speaking of value as "what persons value" I will refer to any sort of position that ultimately conceives of value in terms of what persons value, however this is qualified in terms of situational or psychological requirements.

\textsuperscript{20} Of course, it follows that the smaller the group the smaller the scope of the intrinsic value. Mill is going after a universal intrinsic value, and thus needs an account of what nearly all persons actually value as an end.
Despite such variations, the basic point nonetheless remains: intrinsic value is that which persons (however understood) value (or would value) as an end. Now, Korsgaard, in her argument against what is valued as an end being a conception of intrinsic value, argues that a proper view of intrinsic value makes a claim about "the location or source of goodness," but what persons happen to value as an end is relevant merely to "the way we value things."\(^{21}\) Granted, this point is likely correct with regard to many philosophers who speak of what persons value as an end in relation to what is solely valued as a means. But there is no reason to think that what persons value as an end must strictly be a way we value things; it is indeed often presented, as it is by Mill, as a claim about the source of intrinsic value. And for the sake of our discussion of the prevalent views of intrinsic value, we ought to consider it in this form.

Nevertheless, although many do in fact posit what is valued as an end as a claim about the source of intrinsic value, such a view lack plausibility. In particular, we must object to an account of intrinsic value being exclusively based on what persons happen to value. As the passage from Mill demonstrates, the "valued as an end" account of intrinsic value holds that what is desired (or, alternatively, what is valued) by the relevant group of persons is ipso facto desirable (or valuable). The criticism against this position, however, is that what persons value as an end is an account only of what is valued; in itself it fails to delineate what is valuable or worthy of being valued by persons. The error, then, lies in the equation of what is valued with what is valuable, a conflation perhaps motivated by a sense of the need to articulate intrinsic value in terms of what is valuable.

This general line of criticism is offered by Moore and Ross. In the following passage, Moore articulates this criticism against Mill's attempts to buttress the correspondence between intrinsic value and what persons value by analogy with what is

\(^{21}\) "Two Distinctions in Goodness," p. 170.
visible and what is seen. Mill believes this analogy to be illuminating because, similarly to intrinsic value, "[t]he only proof capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it." But against this Moore states that

[t]he fact is that ‘desirable’ does not mean ‘able to be desired’ as ‘visible’ means ‘able to be seen.’ The desirable means simply what ought to be desired or deserves to be desired; just as the detestable means not what can be but what ought to be detested....Mill has, then, smuggled in, under cover of the word ‘desirable,’ the very notion about which he ought to be quite clear. ‘Desirable’ does indeed mean ‘what it is good to desire’; but when this is understood, it is no longer plausible to say that our only test of that, is what is actually desired.

Moreover, in making just this point about a “what persons value” position (his specific target being R.B. Perry), Ross is a bit more explicit against “the theory...that ‘good’ and ‘object of interest’ [i.e., between ‘valuable’ and ‘what is valued’] are just different ways of expressing exactly the same notion.” Ross states that

[i]t is surely clear that when we call something good we are thinking of it as possessing in itself a certain attribute and are not thinking of it as necessarily having an interest taken in it. If when we attend to something we are impelled to describe it as good, it is surely not impossible to think that, though of course we can only discover its goodness by attending to it, it had its goodness before we attended to it and would have had it if we had not attended to it.

Now although both Moore and Ross present this criticism against the “valued as an end” view within the context of defending their own account of intrinsic value (which we will consider below), the backdrop of this criticism is the view that a plausible account of

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22 Utilitarianism, p. 34.
23 Principia Ethica, pp. 118-119. See also Moore’s lengthy criticism of the “what persons value” account in chapters III and IV of Ethics.
24 The work to which Ross responds is Perry’s A General Theory of Value (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1926).
25 The Right and the Good, pp. 81. For another, more recent, example of this sort of argument, see Michael Zimmerman’s essay “Virtual Intrinsic Value and the Principle of Organic Unities” [Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 59 (1999), pp. 653-66], especially p. 663.
intrinsic value must articulate its value as conceptually prior to whether persons come to value it and in what manner they do so. And against this backdrop, the strict “valued as an end” account simply does not offer an acceptable conception of intrinsic value. Defining intrinsic value strictly in terms of being relational to what persons value—that what persons value as an end is ipso facto of intrinsic value—gets things backward. We need an account of what is valuable that is prior to, and thus not entirely relational on, the particular valuations of persons.\footnote{Korsgaard highlights this point on pp. 187-188 of “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” in which she mentions Ross’ insight that we have interest in things because they are good.}

We should note that, as it stands, this objection to the “valued as an end” (or “what persons value”) account speaks against it only as a conception of intrinsic value, saying at best that what is valued as an end is not a very interesting sort of intrinsic value. The term “intrinsic value” is of course open to interpretation and certainly can be applied simply to value as an end. But it is rather interesting that the “what persons value” conception of value is often presented or understood as strictly opposing any view of intrinsic value—in fact, it is often presented as the skeptical alternative to intrinsic value, stating that value just is, and is nothing more than, that which persons value. Such a view grants the point made by Moore and Ross, that intrinsic value must be a claim about what is good or valuable prior to any person’s stance toward it, but then rejects intrinsic value on this ground by claiming that what persons value is the basis of all legitimate value.

Although I believe this conclusion is misguided, I agree with the distinction that value based strictly on what persons value is antipodal to a plausible conception of intrinsic value. But in the least, the fact that the “valued as an end” view has been employed both as an account of intrinsic value and as a view antagonistic to intrinsic
value exemplifies the deep controversy and diversity surrounding the question of intrinsic value.

We might add that since the “valued as an end” account can be understood in terms of the broader view equating value with what persons value, it is perhaps at best seen as an explanation of what is good for persons. From this one might establish a person-affecting view, in which outcomes can be better or worse if persons are affected for the better or worse. But this, then, merely demonstrates that the person-affecting view, given its basis on what is good for persons (which in turn is based on what persons value; see footnote 27), also runs into the criticism we’ve presented against the “valued as an end” position. Thus, the person-affecting view (under most interpretations) cannot ground a theory of intrinsic value.²⁷

**Intrinsic value as “valuables in itself”**

We have seen that Moore and Ross concur with the essential criticism of the “valued as an end” conception of intrinsic value, that intrinsic value must provide some account of what is good or valuable prior to persons taking an interest in such things. In its place,

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²⁷ The point here is that the person-affecting view is the application of what is good for persons to the value of outcomes, and what is good for persons depends on what persons value or would value given the right conditions. This latter claim can be seen by noting that for something to make my life better for me, it must be a change that I value or would value in the right conditions. Typically, for instance, we hold that being happy and content is good for a person. But we hold this because being happy and content is what a person values being, or would value being under the right conditions. If being happy and content is not something a person values under any conditions then it is difficult to maintain that being happy and content is nonetheless good for that person.

Although this is generally the case, there is some room for an opposing view based on an objective list account of what is good for persons. In this case, one need not maintain that what is good for a person is or would be valued by that person; something may just objectively be good for that person irrespective of what that person does or would value. Nonetheless, I think that despite the conceptual space for such a view, it is not very plausible. A more plausible rendering of the objective list account is to say that such-and-such is good for persons even if they don’t actually value it, but they would value it if only, say, they came to recognize it as objectively good for them. In other words, it seems that the plausibility of even an objective list theory requires that at some point what is good for persons would be valued as such. Consequently, we can state that although there is some conceptual space for an alternative view, the person-affecting view is for the most part going to be thought of as based on what persons value or would value. In light of this, we will hereafter not consider this unlikely possibility.
Moore and, following him, Ross provide the most influential alternative to viewing value as strictly relational to persons’ interest and desires.

The classic statement of this view, which we will term the “valuable in itself” conception of intrinsic value, is offered by Moore. Now although his general target are those who view value as based on what persons desire or value, Moore is more specifically concerned, in his *Principia Ethica*, with arguing against a widespread mistake in ethics, which he terms the “naturalistic fallacy.” This fallacy involves defining ‘goodness’ in terms of some natural property; for instance, claiming that good is pleasure or good is the satisfaction of desires. To say that goodness is some such property, according to Moore, is to deprive the notion of goodness of any unique meaning, for saying “goodness is pleasure” would be to say “pleasure is pleasure” if goodness simply is equated with pleasure.\(^{28}\) Moore argues that to avoid the naturalistic fallacy is to recognize that goodness is in fact a simple indefinable and unanalyzable concept. He says that

> 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.\(^{29}\)

Essential to this thesis that goodness is an unanalyzable concept is Moore’s conception of intrinsic value. Moore discusses two sorts of judgments about good. The first is the good effects something might produce. Goodness of this type is understood strictly in terms of the goodness of its product: it is good (as a means) only because its effect is good. The other sort of judgment, then, is about things that are themselves

\(^{28}\) See Moore’s example of the concept of yellow, in which yellow cannot simply be equated with its physical occurrence (*Principia Ethica*, section 10), as well as his open question argument against viewing goodness as being some property.
good—i.e., intrinsically good. Something that is intrinsically good is good in itself, apart from any accompaniments or additional effects it may happen to have. Since intrinsic goodness is the goodness something has in itself, it is in effect, for Moore, just what goodness is. Certain things have the non-natural property of goodness and are therefore good in themselves, or intrinsically good. Thus, intrinsic value is a simple and unanalyzable concept.

In light of intrinsic value being an unanalyzable concept, we might wonder how something could be said to have it. Indeed, a good thing is good just in case it is, as Moore would say, a good thing; and we might take this as the best answer that can be offered to why a thing is good. (What is right, for Moore, is bit more illuminating.) But regarding how a thing can be good, Moore states that “it depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question”\(^{30}\)—i.e., a good thing’s goodness is derived from features about itself, its intrinsic nature.

Because intrinsic value, for Moore, is unanalyzable and depends entirely on a thing’s intrinsic nature, such value is non-relational. That is, intrinsic value is not in any way dependent on or relational to anything extrinsic to itself; intrinsic value is a feature something has non-relationally, strictly in virtue of itself. In contrast, something that has its value relationally would depend in at least some way on something other than itself for the source of its value. Now, the manner in which one might think value to be relational can be rather variant. But what any example will have in common is that the value of the thing in question is in some fashion relational to something other than itself.

Of course, the most significant view of relational value with which Moore is concerned is the relational value we considered above (in terms of the distinction

\(^{29}\) Principia Ethica, section 6.

between value as an end and value as a means), that value is relational to the actual desires or interests of persons, such that the source of this value is persons’ particular desires and valuations. In Ethics, Moore argues in length against this notion of relational value, whether the value is thought to be what one person values, what most persons value, what all rational beings value, etc. Value that is non-relational must exist independently of what persons happen to value. This argument is specifically motivated by the naturalistic fallacy, and is articulated in terms of his famous “open question argument.” But the point is a general one: the concept of intrinsic goodness must be freestanding if it is to have a unique and substantive meaning, and this, according to Moore, entails that intrinsic goodness must be non-relational. Moore’s non-relational view of intrinsic value, then, meets the requirement we suggested above that intrinsic value must exist prior to the valuations of persons (and thus is not relational on what persons value). According to Moore, we might value what is, prior to our valuations, already intrinsically valuable; but valuing something does not, by means of this valuation, determine it to be intrinsically valuable.

But if intrinsic value is non-relational in this sense, we may wonder how it is that we can ever know what is intrinsically good or bad. Moore attempts to elucidate this conception of non-relational intrinsic value by means of what he terms the “method of absolute isolation.” This involves regarding the thing in question by itself and in “absolute isolation,” as if it were the only thing that exists in the universe.31 If it is found to have value in complete isolation, to have value even if nothing else existed, it is intrinsically valuable.

This method strikes many, for various reasons, as somewhat odd. An immediate question one might have is what practical role this method actually plays. Moore’s
argument here—as well as, following Moore, the position of Ross—depends on our ability to intuit what is intrinsically good. If this is the case, and we can know (at least some of) the good by intuition, then why employ the strange method of imagining something as the only existing thing in an otherwise ontologically empty universe?

The reason, it seems, lies in Moore’s concern about the fallibility of our intuitions: “I hold…that in every way in which it is possible to cognise a true proposition [i.e., intuition], it is also possible to cognise a false one.” In light of this, Moore argues that the method of isolation serves the practical task of precluding errors of intuition. Specifically, this method is intended to ensure that we consider the thing in question non-relationally, for imagining something as the only thing in existence is intended to eliminate any possibility of relational value. If something has value merely insofar as, say, persons value it, then it would be valueless if it existed alone since there would be no one in the imagined universe to value it.

Moore’s isolation test is most straightforward and coherent when we consider the value of particular objects and their simple properties. If we wish to determine whether a beautiful painting or a highly complex organism is intrinsically valuable, we can imagine a universe in which only that painting or organism exists. Of course, many will object that a value assessment of an object in complete isolation simply cannot tell us anything about the actual value, if any, of the object, or be at all reliable in determining just what does have actual intrinsic value. But such objections are primarily metaphysical and

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31 Cf. Principia Ethica, section 112 and Ethics, pp. 57-8.
32 Principia Ethica, p. 36; preface to the first edition.
33 Ibid., section 112.
34 Note also that this method allows comparisons of intrinsic goods: “In order to discover whether any one thing is intrinsically better than another, we have always thus to consider whether it would be better that the one should exist quite alone than that the other should exist quite alone” (Ethics, p. 58).
epistemological—they question either the very possibility of anything being intrinsically valuable in Moore's sense or the efficacy of our intuitions regarding value.

A deeper problem for Moore's isolation test, however, concerns its own (possible) incoherence when applied to states of affairs. Consider a comparatively simple state of affairs in which a person has detailed knowledge of x. Knowledge (especially knowledge of particular things such as philosophy, the sciences, history, and the like) is often held to be intrinsically good—good not just for the person who has such knowledge but a good state of affairs that a person has such knowledge. In applying the isolation test, however, just what are we to imagine exists alone in the universe? Since it is the knowledge that is being tested we clearly must include it. But since knowledge is impossible without a knower, i.e., the person who has the knowledge, the existence of this knowledge requires a knower to exist as well. And, moreover, given the common understanding of knowledge as true belief, for knowledge rather than mere belief to exist the grounds for the belief's truth must exist. Thus, the facts that correspond truthfully with the beliefs to make knowledge must exist as well. If the knowledge is relatively simple then we needn't add much to our ontology. But if the knowledge is of something more complex, say, that such and such has the highest city income per capita in the world, then our imagined universe begins to get quite crowded: we would need this universe to contain, for example, all the world's cities, all the people in these cities, their respective incomes, etc. If such things do not exist, then the "facts" upon which the knowledge is based are hardly facts at all; they seem to be at best beliefs. And with at least all of this required in our imagined universe, it is difficult to make much sense out of considering a person's knowledge of something rather complex in "absolute isolation."35

Aside from the particular difficulties with Moore’s method of isolation, a more fundamental line of objection focuses on the non-relationality of his conception of intrinsic value. That this view of intrinsic value is non-relational is in many respects its essential feature: what it is to be intrinsically valuable is to be valuable irrespective of any relations the valuable thing might have; something is intrinsically valuable solely in virtue of its intrinsic nature. As we have noted, this non-relational goodness is, for Moore, unanalyzable: as Moore says, “good is good, and that is the end of the matter.” But such an account of the good is often objected to precisely on the grounds of its non-relationality.

For instance, Philippa Foot\textsuperscript{36} argues that this conception of goodness has no meaning because it does not stand in relation to any particular moral virtue. Foot’s specific target is the consequentialist assumption that there are good and bad, better and worse states of affairs, which ground the moral judgments of our actions in accordance with the insight that a better state of affairs is always preferable to one that is worse. This is, for the most part, Moore’s consequentialist position. But the rub, for Foot, is not with the consequentialist claim that we ought to produce the best outcome; rather, it is that “we go wrong in accepting the idea that there are [good and bad,] better and worse states of affairs in the sense that consequentialism requires,” i.e., intrinsically, as good or bad in themselves. The problem with a non-relational account of value is that it lacks meaning; it is an empty assertion to claim that a state of affairs is intrinsically good in this manner.

\footnotetext[36]{\textsuperscript{36}In her “Utilitarianism and the Virtues” [Mind 94 (1985), pp. 196-209].}
Foot argues that a claim about a good state of affairs, if it is to be meaningful and coherent, must be relational in the sense of being a good state of affairs relative to some moral virtue.\(^{37}\)

Similarly, Judith Thomson suggests that intrinsic goodness understood as non-relational, unanalyzable, and nonderivative (i.e., something that does not “inherit its goodness” from something else) is “deprive[d] of content” and “therefore is not a way of being good.”\(^{38}\) Thomson understands a “way of being good” as particular normative standards by which to judge something. This is best elucidated by examples of ways of being good. For instance, a good dancer is good at dancing (In what way is a dancer good? In the activity of dancing according to our standards of judgment); a good hammer is good for use in striking nails; a good film is good according to judgments of aesthetic and narrative standards. Also, quite notably, something that is “good for persons” is a way of being good—my happiness is good in the way of being good \textit{for me}. But a Moorean account of intrinsic goodness cannot in like manner be considered good in a way: Moore says, of course, that “good is good, and that is the end of the matter.” Therefore, given Thomson’s assumption that “it seems right to think that everything is good only insofar as it is good in one or more ways,”\(^{39}\) she concludes that Moore’s “valuable in itself” conception of intrinsic value cannot be a meaningful view of goodness.

Both of these criticisms (as well as similar remarks from other philosophers critical of Moore’s conception of intrinsic value) are framed within specific conceptions of what it is to be good in a meaningful sense. The respective diagnoses, then, of such criticisms

\(^{37}\) Foot focuses on virtue, but we needn’t do so; we could rely, more abstractly, on value ideals to serve the same purpose.

vary somewhat with regard to why Moore’s conception of intrinsic value is unacceptable. Nonetheless, both can be understood as substantive articulations of a basic underlying complaint: that a non-relational conception of value is too distinct from a plausible conception of what value actually is. By its non-relationality, and as the method of isolation demonstrates, Moore’s view of intrinsic value holds that value exists not only prior to any person’s particular interests but entirely independently of persons altogether. It is because of this non-relationality and independence from persons and our normative standards—with regard to virtues (for Foot) and different types of good things (for Thomson)—that Thomson and Foot, among others, charge that this account of value amounts to nothing substantive.

Another way, then, to think of a non-relational explication of intrinsic value is as an account of what we might call cosmic value. We can understand cosmic value as value that is objectively part of the cosmos itself, in the nature of things, we might say, and conceptually distinct from the existence of persons or anything else. Such an account, however, comes in sharp conflict with a conception of the nature of value as somehow dependent or supervenient on persons—e.g., that value comes into the world with persons constituted the way we are. This is not to make a substantive claim regarding how value is related to persons, but simply, as Korsgaard puts it, “that goodness must lie in some relation to human beings, [which is] at odds with the theory that goodness must be entirely nonrelational.”\(^\text{40}\) Thus, according to this rough conception of the nature of value, Moore’s depiction of intrinsic (cosmic) value is too severely impersonal for a plausible

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 96.
\(^{40}\) “Two Distinctions in Goodness,” p. 187.
theory of intrinsic value. There must be some manner in which any plausible account of intrinsic value is connected with persons.

**Mixed theory of intrinsic value**

Each of the two prominent theories of intrinsic value considered thus far lack plausibility, at least insofar as they stand alone. Interestingly, our criticism of each pulls us in the theoretical direction of the other. The “valued as an end” theory gets it wrong by suggesting that intrinsic value is determined by whatever persons value and not allowing for value to be prior to these interests. In other words, it is too dependent on the valuations of persons. The “valuable in itself” view, however, is too impersonal and detached from persons.

In light of these criticisms, one might believe a more promising direction to take would be to propose a mixed theory, in which there is a conceptual connection between what is valuable in itself and what is or would be valued as an end. On such a position, something that is intrinsically valuable has this value independently of it actually being valued by anyone, but that, as part of our moral psychology, we in fact value (or would value) intrinsically valuable things as ends in themselves. What is intrinsically valuable, then, necessarily motivates or requires us (perhaps qua rational beings) to value it. Typically, it is held that persons value what is intrinsically valuable because of its intrinsic value—in recognizing something’s intrinsic value persons are moved to value it for its own sake. On this mixed view, part of what it means to be intrinsically valuable is to be something that prompts persons to value it as an end.

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41 In fact, in *Principia Ethica* it is entirely impersonal. In *Ethics*, though, Moore does move toward a more personal account of value by requiring states of mind to be present in a (significantly) valuable whole. We will discuss this position directly in section IV. But to foreshadow the problem: Moore’s (and, following Moore, Ross’) move toward a more personal account threatens to enfeeble their notion of non-relationality.
A mixed theory of intrinsic value, in which persons value as an end what is valuable in itself, appears to be more prevalent than either of the conceptions of value we have discussed as discrete theories. Indeed, the traditional view that we mentioned at the onset of the section constitutes a mixed theory. Moreover, one might believe a mixed theory avoids the criticisms made in this section insofar as, first, this intrinsic value is not entirely relational on what persons value because some things require or prompt being valued while others do not, and, second, this intrinsic value is not too detached from persons because there is some psychological or motivational connection between what is intrinsically valuable and what persons value.

Despite this, however, a mixed theory requires that the position regarding why and how intrinsically valuable things are intrinsically valuable must be etiologically distinct from what persons value as ends. Even if we are necessarily motivated or required to value certain things as an end, these things must be of the sort to engender this necessity—i.e., they must be intrinsically valuable. This leaves the burden for proponents of a mixed theory to determine the source of intrinsic value apart from what persons value.

A common position to take on this issue is to claim that the value something has as an end for persons depends on the value it has in itself. Because of the value something has in itself, apart from, say, its further effects or relations, persons value it as an end in itself.

Viewing a mixed theory in this fashion certainly avoids the primary criticism of the strict “valued as an end” account, but it does so only at the cost of collapsing into an

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42 This is in fact the very feature of the “dominant philosophical tradition” that Kagan is keen to refute in “Rethinking Intrinsic Value.”
The conception of intrinsic value remains the value that something has in itself in virtue of its intrinsic nature. This mixed account only adds the connection between what has this status of intrinsic value in the world and our emotional, conative, or moral psychology.

To be sure, this connection can provide an advantage if working within a roughly Moorean framework of non-relational value because, with this connection, analyzing what persons value, or what emotions or desires are correct and suitable toward things that are intrinsically valuable, offers a way of characterizing or articulating intrinsic value. That is, it might help to elucidate just what is intrinsically valuable and what it is to be intrinsically valuable, which, if the conception of intrinsic value is non-relational, might be the best way of doing so. Nonetheless, the objections mentioned above to a non-relational view of intrinsic value would apply, leaving us again with doubts as to its plausibility.

Certainly, a mixed theory could be based on some other notion of intrinsic value that offers a conception of what is valuable prior to the valuations of persons without rendering this value non-relational. But this brings us to this section’s general conclusion. Our discussion has suggested that the familiar distinction in conceptions of intrinsic value—between the Moorean “valuable in itself” and the “valued as an end” accounts—fails to provide a plausible account of intrinsic value. Each of these views considered independently is unsatisfactory, and mixed theories of intrinsic value tend to collapse into some account of what is intrinsically valuable, which for the traditional conception is roughly a Moorean account (given the focus on the value something has solely in virtue of its intrinsic nature).

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43 Thomson mentions this criticism on p. 108 of “On Some Ways in Which a Thing Can Be Good.”
Now, this section’s criticisms are not so much conclusive arguments against either the “valued as an end” or “valuable in itself” accounts (after all, the question of intrinsic value is not merely theoretical, it is also one simply of terminology); rather, they are a recognition of each account’s prominent drawbacks with respect to a general notion of what we might think of as an acceptable conception of intrinsic value. Such an account needs to proffer a view of what is intrinsically valuable that is non-instrumental and conceptually prior to the interests and desires of persons—i.e., a theory of what is intrinsically valuable, rather than merely valued by persons. In this respect, the Moorean view of intrinsic value is at least along the right lines. At the same time, however, an acceptable account must avoid our primary criticism of Moore’s argument, that since a strict non-relational view of intrinsic value is entirely distinct from persons, it is at odds with the highly plausible conception of the nature of value that value comes into the world, and is importantly entwined, with persons (or rational beings) constituted the way we are.

The relevant question, then, becomes whether our basic view of intrinsic value, that value must not be entirely relational on what persons value, necessarily implies a non-relational theory. In other words, is there an available theory of intrinsic value that posits value that is prior to persons’ valuations but, at the same time, not non-relational? Presenting an alternative theory of intrinsic value is the task for the remainder of this essay.

III

Thus far we have argued that a plausible account of intrinsic value must posit value that is prior to any person’s desires or interests—that is, it must be an account of what is
intrinsically valuable. As a result, we rejected outright any view of intrinsic value based on what persons value (as an end). And since the person-affecting view (under most interpretations of what is good for persons) is an extension to outcomes of what persons value, the person-affecting view also cannot offer an account of intrinsic value.\footnote{See footnote 27. Again, the point here is that the person-affecting view is the application of what is good for persons to the value of outcomes, and according to the most plausible interpretations what is good for persons depends on what persons value or would value given the right conditions. And because of this dependence on what persons value, person-affecting value cannot be intrinsic.} However, we also noted that although the prevailing alternative to the “valued as an end” view of intrinsic value—i.e., Moore’s non-relational view—is along the right track, non-relational intrinsic value ought to be rejected because as a view of cosmic value it is too impersonal and thus contrary to the view that value is somehow dependent or supervenient upon persons. In other words, non-relational value is simply too distinct from persons since it fails to meet a plausible conception of the nature of value, that value must have some connection to persons.

As an alternative to these prevailing conceptions of intrinsic value, I will propose a relational account of intrinsic value that ties value—indeed, what is intrinsically valuable—to persons in a particular way that is nonetheless not dependent on what persons value. This argument follows the lead of the non-relational view by positing value that is independent of persons’ desires and interests, but in relationally tying value to persons it meets, unlike the non-relational view, the desiderata that value is importantly connected to persons.

Of course, this objection to the non-relational account, that it is implausibly impersonal, is certainly broad and depends in large part on the intuitive plausibility of the view that value is indeed necessarily connected in some manner to persons. Someone who disagrees about the basic nature of value would be inclined to reject this as a reason
to resist the non-relational view, thus undermining part of the motivation for proffering a relational view of intrinsic value. Beyond this, many proponents of non-relational value would claim that rejecting this account on the basis of it being too impersonal is in effect to reject the very possibility of intrinsic value, because, many believe, intrinsic value just is value that is non-relational—i.e., what it means for something to be intrinsically valuable is for its value to depend only on its own intrinsic nature.

Not surprisingly, I believe that if this were indeed the case, then the prospects for a plausible theory of intrinsic value look dim. It is my position that understanding intrinsic value to be non-relational is a substantive position, and one that is less plausible than a relational account of intrinsic value that is not strictly dependent on what persons value.

But before presenting such an account, I want in this section to expand my argument against the non-relational view. I will demonstrate that viewing intrinsic value non-relationally not only is not required but is unappealing at best, even though it posits value that is not strictly dependent on the desires and interests of persons. Specifically, I will consider two features of the non-relational view that typically contribute to its vast appeal, and indeed are often taken as reasons for countenancing the non-relational view. These two features are (1) that non-relational intrinsic value is value something has strictly in itself such that the value is independent of varying circumstances; and (2) that the insight mentioned above that intrinsic value is prior to persons’ desires and interests ought to be understood as requiring a non-relational view of intrinsic value, which thus stands as the alternative to the (relational) view that value is based in what persons value.

I will suggest that both of these features in fact fail to provide the support of the non-relational view that they are believed to offer. These comments will do two things: first, they will, as an addition to section II’s criticisms, call into further doubt the plausibility
of the non-relational view; and second, they will help to clear the conceptual space for a relational account of intrinsic value that better meets our general desiderata.

Let’s first consider (1), the claim that for something to be non-relationally intrinsically valuable it must be valuable in itself and independent of situational circumstances. Many proponents of intrinsic value believe that allowing things to be valuable in themselves is an argument specifically for the non-relational view. Indeed, what is believed to be an essential claim of the non-relational view is that intrinsic value is in no respect relational to external circumstances: if \( x \) is intrinsically good, then \( x \) is good absolutely irrespective of the circumstances in which it exists. (In fact, of course, Moore and Ross would say that \( x \) is good even if it is the only thing in the universe; but since we found such a claim arguably incoherent we won’t let the circumstances go to this metaphysical extreme.) This facet of the non-relational view is often referred to as the “thesis of universality.”

Although value that is not circumstantially relational is (at least ostensibly) a fundamental desiderata of intrinsic value within the Moorean tradition, it is not as straightforward as it might initially appear. Consider pleasure, a classic example of an intrinsic value. According to the universality thesis, if pleasure is a (non-relational) intrinsic good then it is good whenever it exists. But if this is so, then the pleasure experienced by an evil person committing an evil act is good in the same manner as the pleasure, of equal amount, a good person experiences while performing a good act. Moore and Ross avoid the untenable conclusion that it is better that an evil person feels pleasure in acting evilly than for that person not to experience anything by their appeal to

\[45\] See, for instance, Principia Ethica, p. 81: “The part of a valuable whole retains exactly the same value when it is, as when it is not, a part of that whole.”
the doctrine of organic unities.\textsuperscript{46} This doctrine is described by Moore as the position that the “value of a whole must not be assumed to be the same as the sum of the values of its parts.”\textsuperscript{47} This view holds that the relevant bearers of value are wholes, constituted by their respective parts. For instance, a whole may comprise parts A, B, and C (and only these parts). The doctrine of organic unities allows the value of this whole to differ from the sum of the value of each respective part. The “extra” value comes from the whole considered as such, and belongs not to any of the parts but to the whole itself. In Moore’s terminology, the value of a whole considered “on the whole”—i.e., the overall value of the whole—is roughly the value of its parts plus the value of the whole considered “as a whole”—i.e., the unique value that exists from the combination of the parts within the whole.\textsuperscript{48}

So, if we consider an evil person experiencing pleasure while performing some evil act, the appeal to organic unities allows us to consider the pleasure not just qua pleasure, but as pleasure experienced by an evil person committing an evil act. In such a case, although the pleasure itself is, in accord with the thesis of universality, considered good, the relevant whole can be intrinsically bad on the whole since the good is experienced by the person taking pleasure in an evil act.

One might reject this theory of organic unities by arguing against the thesis of universality. One might claim, for instance, that although pleasure is indeed customarily good, the pleasure experienced by an evil person in performing an evil act is not good—that is, the pleasure itself is not good when an evil person experiences it in performing an

\textsuperscript{46} Recent prominent examples of the endorsement of a roughly Moorean theory of organic unities include Lemos in *Intrinsic Value* and Chisholm in *Brentano and Intrinsic Value*.

\textsuperscript{47} *Principia Ethica*, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., pp. 251f.
evil act.\textsuperscript{49} The point is that the value of the pleasure changes according to the situation, e.g., who is experiencing it and why.\textsuperscript{50}

Such a position can be given within the framework of organic unities, as what has been called the “conditionality” interpretation of organic unities.\textsuperscript{51} Unlike the Moorean interpretation, which assigns value to the whole as a whole in order for the value of the whole not to equal the sum of its parts, the conditionality view can hold that although the value of a whole need not equal the sum of the value its parts considered outside of this whole (i.e., each part considered alone), it can claim that the value of the whole does equal the sum of its parts considered as parts of the whole. The reason is that the value of each part can change upon entering the relevant whole due to its relational interactions with the other parts of the whole—e.g., although pleasure might be good when considered alone, if an evil person experiences pleasure in performing an evil act, then the relation between the pleasure and the evil act which brought about the pleasure might render the pleasure bad. And because the conditionality view explicitly allows various relations to affect and change the value of things, entailing that the value of a thing does not depend on its intrinsic properties alone, it stands as a rejection of and alternative position to the non-relation view of organic unities.

\textsuperscript{49} This pleasure might be considered in no way good, or, at least, not as good as when it is experienced by a good person performing a good act. Or this pleasure might even be considered bad. Each of these views are legitimate and each would serve the purpose of contravening the thesis of universality.

\textsuperscript{50} A noteworthy recent rejection of the thesis of universality that is somewhat different is offered by Zimmerman in “Virtual Intrinsic Value and the Principle of Organic Unities.”

\textsuperscript{51} Roughly this approach is taken by Korsgaard, who argues specifically for a Kantian theory of conditional value. This distinction between the Moorean theory of organic unities and the conditionality theory of organic unities is thoroughly discussed by Thomas Hurka in “Two Kinds of Organic Unity” [The Journal of Ethics 2 (1998), pp. 299-320].

Interestingly, Lemos (Intrinsic Value, p. 43) argues that Ross in fact proffers a conditionality rather than a universality theory of organic unities. Now since Ross explicitly endorses Moore’s view that intrinsic value is non-relational, the question of whether Lemos’ claim is correct—as I do not think it is—depends on whether Ross’ view of prima facie goods is compatible with or contradicts his acceptance of the non-relational view.
Now, I am not endorsing the conditionality theory in lieu of the universality thesis, although the point I wish to make is suggested by it. When we consider the difference between pleasure experienced in doing something good versus pleasure in doing something evil, most of us, including Moore, wish to claim that the latter is intrinsically worse than the former. I believe, in fact, that it is an important insight to recognize that circumstances are deeply and inextricably part of value. Quite obviously, this is to admit that the circumstances of the experience of pleasure do matter. There are, indeed, relations among the experience of pleasure, the person who experiences the pleasure, the activity that gives rise to the pleasure, and so forth. The conditionality thesis gives us a fairly straightforward way to talk about these relations, stating that the relations among these circumstantial features affect their respective values. It is in this manner that the conditionality thesis of organic unities is a relational account of value.\textsuperscript{52}

The Moorean view, however, in order to preserve its non-relationality, maintains that something's intrinsic value can depend only on its intrinsic nature. But at the same time it recognizes the importance of allowing circumstances to bear on value as well. It does so by encomposing the circumstantial relations as parts within a whole, which allows the circumstances to affect the holistic value of the whole as a whole while not affecting the value of any of the parts. And this is intended to allow the view to maintain that the value of the whole on the whole remains non-relational.

This move might seem odd, or in Korsgaard's term "perverse,"\textsuperscript{53} since it incorporates circumstantial relations into a theory intended, of course, to avoid relations

\textsuperscript{52} We should note that Korsgaard does not conceive of conditional value as being intrinsic; she in fact thinks of it as extrinsic. But Korsgaard, we must recall, is explicitly under the influence of viewing intrinsic value as by definition non-relational, and in light of conditional value being relational she views the conditionality theory as non-intrinsic. However, once we disencumber ourselves from this definition of intrinsic value, it becomes possible to consider the conditionality theory of organic unities as an articulation of intrinsic value.

\textsuperscript{53} "Two Distinctions in Goodness," pp. 192-3.
altogether. The Moorean view recognizes that circumstances are in fact crucial to value assessment, but proceeds to define its way out of admitting a relational view of value by enveloping essential circumstantial relations in a larger whole and then denying that these relations are valuationally relevant.

A likely response to this complaint, I would imagine, would be to remind us that the Moorean view of organic unities does not contradict the essential claim of non-relationality, that non-relational value depends on nothing beyond a thing's intrinsic nature—i.e., that only a thing's intrinsic nature matters, and any external relations are not relevant. The important point of this response is that the interrelations of the parts of a thing's intrinsic nature are themselves part of its intrinsic nature. For instance, consider the French flag. Considered as a whole, the intrinsic nature of the French flag includes not only the colors red, white, and blue, but the relations among these colors—to wit, the spatial ordering of the colors. If the colors were ordered in any manner other than, from left to right, blue then white then red, then it would fail to be the French flag. Hence, understanding wholes in this way allows us to say, so the response goes, that the parts and the relations between the parts are merely part of the whole's intrinsic nature. In other words, any relations between parts within a whole are themselves part of the whole's intrinsic nature. Thus, applied to value, the value of a whole remains non-relational, even if there are relational interactions within its intrinsic nature, as long as relations between the whole and anything external to the whole are not in any fashion relevant.

The problem, however, is that although this view retains the non-relationality of intrinsic value, it does so only at the cost of rendering it trivial. Notice again the move that supposedly preserves non-relationality despite the recognition of circumstantial
interactions: the relational effects of particular circumstances are subsumed within a whole as parts of its intrinsic nature. Thus, the whole consisting of an evil person garnering pleasure from evil behavior is intrinsically and non-relationally bad, despite the goodness of the pleasure qua pleasure, because these features—the pleasure, the bad person, and the evil behavior—and their relations are parts of the intrinsic nature of the relevant whole. But what if a second person experiences pleasure in knowing that the bad person experiences pleasure by acting evilly? What of this second person’s pleasure? If we claim, as would be consistent with our remarks regarding the bad person’s pleasure, that the second person experiencing such pleasure is bad, then we acknowledge the relational interaction of the second person with the whole involving the first. But the Moorean theory avoids relationality here by simply combining the second person and his pleasure with the first whole to fashion a single, larger whole. This allows the claim that the larger whole is indeed non-relational, since now the interaction is no longer external, but part of this whole’s intrinsic nature.

We see, then, this is the basic move that the non-relational view of the principle of organic unities makes in order to retain its non-relationality while “acknowledging” circumstantial relations. But given this solution, the non-relationality of the Moorean theory of organic unities is in peril of being rendered trivial. As long as we envelope ostensibly relational interactions within organic wholes, non-relationality can be maintained. In doing so, however, we see that any value assessment can be determined non-relational merely by enveloping all relational elements in a single whole. It is simply a matter of turning any external relation that affects a value assessment into an internal interaction of parts of a larger whole’s intrinsic nature. In fact, Moore offers no theoretical means by which to avoid even radical interpretations of relational
interactions—intrinsic nature can be quite complex, with a multitude of internal interactions, while nonetheless being the intrinsic nature of a singular whole. In a sense, the Moorean conception of organic unities, in its desire to retain non-relationality, rigs the game in its favor, such that there is no relational interaction that could not be subsumed within a whole and deemed non-relational.\textsuperscript{54} That is, Moore and Ross define their way into non-relationality despite incorporating circumstantial relations into relevant states of affairs by including any relational attribute within a larger whole.

In the least, this calls into doubt the feature of the non-relational view in which intrinsic value is that value something has in itself strictly in virtue of its intrinsic nature and independently of whatever circumstances obtain. Indeed, the Moorean view can retain its non-relationality while allowing, as any plausible account of value must, circumstantial relations to bear on value, but only at the cost of robbing non-relationality of its bite. And if this is the case, then the value something has strictly in itself would seem not to have the appeal for the non-relational view that it is typically thought to provide, and it would certainly seem less of a reason to favor this view.

Furthermore, if these comments are plausible, those who accept a non-relational conception of intrinsic value might be left wondering whether intrinsic value is at all compatible with the relevance of circumstantial relations. And given the plausibility of value being affected by circumstantial relations, some would likely find the prospects for intrinsic value bleak. The reason for this concern is the likening of non-relational value with intrinsic value. If the acceptance of circumstantial relations threatens non-relationality then the push is toward a relational account, which, if we equate intrinsic value with non-relational value, would move us away from intrinsic value.

\textsuperscript{54} We can imagine a whole comprising everything in the universe. We then could assign a single non-relational value to all that exists.
But this leads us to the second feature of the non-relational view that typically contributes to this view’s appeal, that non-relational intrinsic value is the articulation of the insight that goodness is prior to any person’s desires or interests. This commonly involves viewing the non-relational account as the alternative to theories of value based solely on the desires or interests persons take in things. This has, I believe, led to something of a conflation of a distinction between views of intrinsic value that generally is not recognized or appreciated (in the least, it is for the most part ignored). The distinction is this: We might think of or characterize intrinsic value either 1) in the Moorean sense, i.e., as non-relational value; or 2) as something valuable independent both of its instrumental value and of the desires and interests of persons.\textsuperscript{55}

I believe that the failure to appreciate this distinction is in large part due to a mischaracterization of the conceptual scope of a non-relational theory of intrinsic value. A non-relational theory is commonly articulated in terms of value that is non-instrumental and independent of persons’ interests and desires. This is in large part due to the familiarity of the distinction between “valuable in itself” and “valued as an end” conceptions of intrinsic value. As we noted above, these are often thought of as competing and exclusionary views, and philosophers who reject the valued as an end conception—and who generally relegate this conception to the broader view, discussed above, that value only is what persons value—typically resort to defining intrinsic value non-relationally. The reason for this interpretation, I believe, is the general belief that a relational view of value just is an account that is predicated, in some sense, on what

\textsuperscript{55} Of course, one can interpret instrumental value in terms of what persons value—e.g., Mill argues that most value is instrumental toward what is intrinsically valuable, but what is intrinsically valuable is understood in terms of what we all do value as an end; therefore instrumental value is merely part of a relational view in which value is what persons value. This notwithstanding, I will henceforth talk of characterization (2) only as being independent of what persons value, assuming, of course, that any such view would also not merely be an account of instrumental value. In other words, any view in line with (2)
persons value. Consequently, this belief leads proponents of a non-relational theory of intrinsic value to find that a "valued as an end" account of value goes wrong precisely insofar as it is a relational view of value. That is, any value worthy of being considered intrinsic must not be relational, because intrinsic value must be good for its own sake, and therefore not good merely as a means nor dependent on any particular valuations of persons. 56

Viewing the non-relational account in this manner is rather pervasive, owing perhaps in large measure to the defense of non-relational intrinsic value presented by Moore and Ross. As we noted in section II, both work from the basic insight that something that is intrinsically good is such that we find it to be good because it is good, rather than because we hold it to be good. Moreover, it is this conception of intrinsic value that leads Moore and Ross to interpret it as requiring or implying a non-relational conception of goodness. But it is important to note that this insight, and the subsequent non-relational view of intrinsic value, is central in the response to the prevalent view of the early part of the twentieth century that value is simply that which persons happen to value or desire. Moore, for instance, is at great pains (especially in chapters 3 and 4 of Ethics) to argue against the view that "goodness" and "badness" are defined merely as what persons hold to be good or bad. Moore's central objection to any such view is, of course, that they run aground of the naturalistic fallacy; and Moore repeatedly employs the "open question argument" against these views—e.g.,

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56 And similarly, those who find a Moorean view of intrinsic value implausible because of its non-relationality—that it is, e.g., too detached from persons—and who believe that value must therefore be relational, typically themselves hold some view based on what persons value.
it is quite certain that a man may think an action to be right, even when he does not think that others have in general the required feeling (or absence of feeling) towards it; and that similarly he may doubt whether an action is right, even when he does not doubt that some man or other has the required feeling towards it. [This shows that] whatever a man is thinking when he thinks an action to be right, he is certainly not merely thinking that others have a particular feeling towards it; and similarly that, when he is in doubt as to whether an action is right, the question about which he is in doubt is not merely as to whether any man at all has the required feeling towards it.\(^{57}\)

Ross states this more succinctly: “to say that S thinks X good leaves it an open question whether X is good.”\(^{58}\)

Moreover, Ross, in his explication of the nature of intrinsic goodness, primarily considers as the opposing, relational theory the view that value is based on that in which persons take an interest. And from the claim that something is good because it is good, Ross objects that “[i]f a thing derives value from its relation to an interest taken in it, it would seem impossible that anything whatsoever should possess value in itself [and that] value would seem always to be borrowed, and never owned; value would shine by a reflected glory having no original source.”\(^{59}\) And, more explicitly acknowledging relationality to be the problem, Ross states that “[w]hat the relational theory must maintain, if it is to be plausible, must be...that whereas most people think that certain things have a characteristic, goodness, distinct from that of being objects of interest, nothing has any such characteristic.”\(^{60}\) Otherwise put, the relational account of value must reject any value supposedly independent of the interests or desires persons have in things.

Other, more recent, examples of philosophers talking of relational value in terms of persons’ values or interests include Thomas Nagel, who describes “the intrinsic value of

\(^{57}\) Ethics, p. 111; see also pp. 152f.
\(^{58}\) The Right and the Good, p. 85.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 75.
certain achievements or creations, apart from their value to individuals who experience or use them,” and Lemos, who claims that “[w]hen one says that something is intrinsically good, in the [non-relational] sense, he means just that, that it is good period. He does not mean that it is intrinsically good for me, for himself, for human beings, or for rational beings.” Interestingly, Korsgaard also seems inclined to think of the valuations of persons as the important alternative to a non-relational view. She agrees with Moore and Ross that intrinsic value must be conceived non-relationally. And, as we noted above, Korsgaard agrees with our objection to the non-relational view that value cannot be entirely non-relational; it must be connected in some important sense to persons, i.e., value must be, at least to a large extent, relational. But the theory of value that Korsgaard presents as the alternative to the non-relational view is indeed a view in which value is importantly a product of what persons value. To be sure, Korsgaard does not present this theory as intrinsic; she recognizes it to be a theory of extrinsic good. And, moreover, non-relational intrinsic value does lie at the very heart of Korsgaard’s Kantian theory, in which the one “unconditionally” and intrinsically good thing is the rational nature of persons, i.e., the ability of persons to set rational ends. But for Korsgaard, what is legitimately extrinsically good, and the preferred alternative to the Moorean view, must be that which is rationally taken to be worth valuing by persons, or that which rational persons value.

Now it is not my claim here that conflating the distinction between non-relational value and value that is independent of what persons value is definitional—that is, that

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60 Ibid., p. 82.
62 Intrinsic Value, p. 4.
63 Korsgaard’s theory moves in a direction away from the Moorean conception of value similar to my view. The major difference between our views is that while I will present an account of intrinsic value in line
theorists tend to define non-relationality as (not instrumental and) not dependent on what persons value. Of course the definition of non-relational value is value that is not relational to something other than itself, which merely encompasses within its scope value being (non-instrumental and) independent of what persons value. Rather, the point is that there has been a preoccupation with articulating relational value as value relational on what persons value; and, moreover, much of the argument for the non-relational theory has focused on arguing against relational value conceived as such. Indeed, I suspect many find a great deal of the intuitive plausibility of a Moorean theory of value to be due to it standing as the alternative to value based on what persons desire and the articulation of the claim that goodness is prior to such valuations.

But this section's distinction gives conceptual space to a view of intrinsic value that meets these two desired features while not being non-relational. And it is, I believe, largely because of the conflation of this distinction that relational theories of intrinsic value that are independent of what persons value have not been given adequate consideration in the literature.

To sum up this section, we have considered two features of the non-relational view of intrinsic value that are typically thought to be essential to this view, as well as to offer this view intuitive support. The first is the claim that the non-relational view offers an account of intrinsic value in which things are intrinsically valuable strictly in themselves and independently of external circumstances. Our criticism of this claim is that the non-trivial compatibility of non-relational value and circumstantial relations (as between a person's pleasure and that in which the person takes pleasure) is rather suspect. But the relevance to value of circumstantial relations seems obvious—indeed, all of the

with characterization (2), Korsgaard clings to tying value to what persons (in the right circumstances) value.
philosophers we have considered in this essay who endorse the non-relational conception of intrinsic value accept the relevance of circumstances. Thus, if we wish to maintain the application of intrinsic value to non-simple states of affairs (i.e., including multiple parts in a larger whole), then we seem drawn to a relational conception of such value.

The second feature we discussed was the claim that non-relational intrinsic value is the articulation of the position that goodness is prior to any person’s desires or interests, and thus stands as the alternative to the relational view that value is based on what persons value. But, it was argued, this claim actually combines two distinct positions: intrinsic value is non-relational; and intrinsic value is independent of what persons value. This second position offers a way of presenting an account of intrinsic value that is relational, yet independent of the valuations of persons.

Together, these arguments suggest that not only are we not necessarily drawn to the non-relational view when we accept the claim that intrinsic value must be prior to persons’ interests and values, but these arguments also demonstrate that a relational account of intrinsic value is, if indeed available, preferable to the non-relational view. And in light of our criticisms of the non-relational view in this section, as well as, and most importantly, the criticism in section II, we are now in a position to offer a relational account of intrinsic value.

**IV**

In broad terms, a relational situation that occurs between any two terms might be symbolized as \( x \mathrel{R} y \), such that \( x \) stands to \( y \) in relation \( R \). This allows a formal description of relational value as the value of some \( x \) only in relation to some \( y \). Such value is both dependent on this relational structure, in that \( x \) is valuable *only* in its relation to \( y \), and
generated or brought about by this relation, such that \( y \)'s relation to \( x \) is the source of \( x \)'s value. For instance, a car battery is good only in its instrumental relation to cars, and it is this relation, that the car battery enables the car to operate, that is indeed the source of the car battery's value. A non-instrumental example: an object can be considered good for a person insofar as the person values it, in which the value of this object is generated by and has its value only in virtue of this valuing of the object.

Given that our concern in this essay is with the value of states of affairs, to present a relational account of intrinsic value we must first determine its relational basis. There are of course many possibilities on which to base the relational value of states of affairs. Throughout this essay, however, we have been working within the confines of a general view of the nature of value in which value is somehow dependent or supervenient on persons. This has prompted the fundamental criticism of the non-relational theory of intrinsic value that it simply is too impersonal. Given this, it is obvious that the direction we ought to pursue in presenting a relational theory of intrinsic value is to take, most broadly, persons as the relational basis of this value. Let us, then, consider persons being the relational basis of intrinsic value as a requirement for a plausible relational theory of the intrinsic value of states of affairs.

In light of this requirement of a relational theory of intrinsic value, it is quite interesting to note that Ross and the later Moore (in *Ethics* and "The Conception of Intrinsic Value") make a move in the general direction of basing the value of states of affairs on persons. More specifically, they hold that for any organic unity to be intrinsically valuable it must have consciousness, or a "state of mind," as a part.\(^6^4\) By

\(^6^4\) Moore and Ross' specific positions are not identical. Moore claims that a state of affairs that would be quite valuable given some state of mind as part of the whole might retain some value without a state of mind present, although this value may be so small as to be negligible. Ross, on the other hand, flat out denies that any state of affairs could have any value if no state of mind is present. In terms of the method of
positing this requirement, they insist that a person—insofar as a person has consciousness or "state of mind"—must be part of any intrinsically valuable state of affairs. This might, then, be taken as a reason Moore and Ross can eschew the objection to the non-relational conception of intrinsic value that it is unacceptably impersonal and hence at odds with a plausible view of the nature of value. After all, how could the non-relational account be too impersonal if persons are required as part of any valuable state of affairs?

But suggesting that value is importantly dependent on persons seems exceedingly close to claiming that value is relational on persons. In the least, their position here implies that Moore and Ross indeed recognize the need for tying value to persons, despite denying this relation's fundamentality by insisting that such value remains non-relational. Therefore, this coincides with our criticism in section III that they maintain the non-relationality of their position despite the inclusion of circumstantial relations (and here the circumstantial relational is very specific and consistently applied) only by rendering their account trivially non-relational.

This, I believe, illustrates an important point. Both Moore and Ross recognize the need for a plausible theory of value, even intrinsic value, to be intimately entwined with persons. This of course is roughly to agree with the conception of the nature of value that we have employed in this essay, both in general in our pursuit of a tenable account of intrinsic value and, more pointedly, in our criticism of the non-relational view. But if Moore and Ross indeed share with this essay a similar conception of the nature of value and the importance of persons to value, then this would seemingly strengthen our criticisms of the non-relational view (since, after all, they would agree with the very assumption this essay has employed to ground its criticisms). Of course, one might

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absolute isolation, Ross states: "Contemplate any imaginary universe from which you suppose mind entirely absent, and you will fail to find anything in it that you can call good in itself" (The Right and the
believe that Moore and Ross' inclusion of states of mind in any (significantly) valuable whole avoids, or in the least allays, the objection that the non-relational view is too impersonal. But it is precisely their inclusion of states of mind that threatens to undermine the non-relational view that this rebuttal is intended to absolve: requiring persons to be part of any value-bearing state of affairs trivializes non-relationality and is indeed a clear move toward a relational view.

In light of this, our task in this section is to incorporate the relational basis of persons explicitly into our theory of intrinsic value. To do so, we need first to determine the structure of this relation. The question to pursue is this: In what manner is the intrinsic value of state of affairs relational on persons? What is it about persons that gives rise to claims about intrinsic value? This inquiry sparks further questions concerning how and why this relational theory of value is plausible, and just what defense can be offered.

Section III has directed us toward a relational theory of intrinsic value that is explicit in allowing situational circumstances to bear on value. We found that despite the common desire (at least among those who endorse the non-relational theory) for an account of intrinsic value to be independent of situational circumstances, it appears that circumstances must be relevant in any plausible account of intrinsic value.65 Hence, I think a good approach to determine the structure of relational intrinsic value is to focus on circumstantial factors that affect the value of states of affairs. In particular, we need to examine just what sorts of circumstances are relevant. This should help to reveal whatever cohesive structure, if one exists, that underlies circumstantial effects on value.

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65 Good, p.140). (There are further differences between the two accounts, although this is the most germane.)
65 In fact, not only can circumstances bear on intrinsic value, circumstances seem always to bear on intrinsic value: if $x$ is intrinsically good only if $y$ occurs, then whether or not $y$ occurs is always relevant to the (possible) value of $x$. 
One significant sort of circumstance that we have discussed throughout this essay is the value attributed to states of affairs in which persons are affected for the better or worse. We have referred to the position that attributes such value to states of affairs as the person-affecting view. We also noted that this view is the application of what is considered good or bad for persons to the value assessment of outcomes, and that what is good or bad for persons (most plausibly) turns ultimately on what persons desire or value. Now this view of the value of states of affairs is relational—indeed, it is relationally tied to persons—since the value of a state of affairs is generated and determined by a normative judgment regarding what the relevant persons desire or value (i.e., an outcome is good only if persons are affected for the better, in which ‘affected for the better’ is understood in terms of what these persons value). This normative judgment is simply that what persons of a given state of affairs desire, and therefore what is good for these persons, determines, along with how these persons are affected, the value of this state of affairs.

This account of relational value, however, is obviously not one of intrinsic value, since intrinsic value must be independent of and prior to persons’ desires and interests. Therefore, those circumstances that involve persons being affected for the better or worse cannot, solely on the basis of being such circumstances, determine intrinsic value. This demonstrates that a theory of the intrinsic value of states of affairs must allow only for non-person-affecting ideals (again, under most conceptions of what can be good for persons). A non-person-affecting ideal is any ideal that posits value that is not determined strictly by how persons are affected, in which if persons are affected for the better then

66 In other words, we’re claiming that an intrinsic value cannot base its value solely on whether persons are affected for the better or worse. As we will see below, how persons fare can indeed play into intrinsic value assessments, as long as the central value claim does not merely assert that the better persons fare the better the outcome is. See footnote 73 below.
the situation is *ipso facto* better. (Recall that a non-person-affecting ideal can hold that situation A is better than situation B even if no one is better off in A and some are worse off in A if A is better according to the value posited by this ideal.) A non-person-affecting ideal will hold value to be dependent on some position other than "it is better that a person is affected for the better." And because only non-person-affecting ideals are not based on what persons value and what is good for persons, any ideal that posits intrinsic value must be non-person-affecting.⁶⁷

Despite this, however, I believe the person-affecting conception of relational value is suggestive of the direction we ought to take in pursuing intrinsic value: although the circumstances relevant to intrinsic value cannot be based on how persons are affected or in what persons value, an account of intrinsic value might be structurally similar. Just as the person-affecting view involves a normative judgment of a certain feature of persons (i.e., what persons value), the structure of intrinsic value might also focus on certain features of persons, provided that the relevant features are not what persons value or what is good for persons. In other words, if the intrinsic value of outcomes is indeed structurally similar to the non-intrinsic value of outcomes, then there is likely some feature or characteristic of persons that can be considered to be relevant to, and involve a normative judgment regarding, the value of states of affairs. We might, then, tentatively consider this to be the second requirement for a relational account of intrinsic value, that

⁶⁷ Of course, non-person-affecting ideals would include, if any exist, non-relational goods (in fact, any ideal that is non-relational clearly cannot be person-affecting, and thus is non-person-affecting). Indeed, given the prevalence of the non-relational view of intrinsic value, many tend to think of non-person-affecting ideals as roughly synonymous with non-relational ideals—that any good that is non-person-affecting must be a claim about a non-relational intrinsic good. This is not surprising considering our argument in section III that many tend to conflate the conception of intrinsic value, that it is prior to the desires and interests of persons, with non-relationality. Conflating non-person-affecting value with non-relational value is a mere extension of this. It is our task in this section to demonstrate that a non-person-affecting intrinsic ideal can nonetheless be relational.
value has as its relational basis some (as of yet unspecified) feature(s) or characteristic(s) of persons.

But is there such a relational basis for intrinsic value? Since we have managed to narrow the scope of intrinsic value to non-person-affecting ideals, perhaps the best way of determining what, if any, relational basis can be established among certain features of persons is to examine some plausible non-person-affecting ideals that would be intuitive candidates for ideals positing intrinsic value. An appealing conception of intrinsic value would allow us to defend on its basis certain non-person-affecting ideals; it might also provide us with a position that provides scope to non-person-affecting intrinsic value, such that it explicitly rejects certain non-person-affecting ideals. We are looking, then, for a position that can ground a compelling account of intrinsic value and provide a substantive defense of various plausible non-person-affecting ideals (and the greater number of plausible non-person-affecting ideals that this position can bolster, the higher its credibility is).

Examples of non-person-affecting ideals are those that allow, on the basis of its particular normative claim, one situation to be better than another even if no one is better off in the former and, perhaps, some are worse off. One example that I find particularly instructive is the widely-accepted ideal of proportional justice.

We need first to demonstrate that proportional justice is indeed a non-person-affecting ideal. To do so, let's consider two possible situations involving the respective afterlives of a group of saints and a group of sinners. In the first situation, call this situation A, the saints have afterlives much better than the afterlives of the sinners. In the

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68 I borrow this example from Temkin because it is a fairly clean and precise demonstration of the value of proportional justice. See his Inequality, pp. 260-62, and, more recently, his essay "Equality, Priority, and the Levelling-Down Objection," in The Ideal of Equality, ed. M. Clayton and A. Williams (London: St. Martin's Press, 2000).
second situation, situation B, the afterlives of the saints are identical to their afterlives in A, but the sinners' afterlives are much better than in A so that now the sinners enjoy afterlives far better than the afterlives of the saints.

To ensure this example focuses exclusively on proportional justice, let's suppose (as Temkin does) that both the saints and the sinners are completely ignorant of the afterlives—and even the very existence—of the other group. Moreover, since we intend this example to turn only on the ideal of proportional justice, which is strictly comparative, we need not take any position regarding how well off either group is in any absolute sense; we know only, for both situations, how well off each is relative to the other.

According to proportional justice, saints undoubtedly ought to fare better than sinners. Thus, situation A is better than B although no one is better off in A, and, in fact, the sinners are better off in B. But it is precisely for this reason that the person-affecting view would judge B to be better than A, since the sinners are affected for the better in B while the saints are not affected either way. Proportional justice, therefore, is a non-person-affecting ideal: it is not strictly a factor of how persons are affected since it is possible for an outcome to be better (relative to this ideal) even if no one is better off and some are worse off.

The value claims of proportional justice are articulated in terms of fairness—specifically, proportional justice dictates which outcomes are fair and which are unfair, or, alternatively, just and unjust. These assessments of value relative to the ideal of proportional justice are formed on the basis of what persons deserve relative to each other. A fair and proportionately just outcome obtains when how persons deserve to fare
relative to each other is in line with how these persons actually fare. But to make sense of this position we need to identify the source of these desert-claims.

In basic terms, a person’s desert according to proportional justice is based on certain features or characteristics indicative of that person as an individual. Specifically, these features or characteristics generate the desert-claims and determine what a person deserves relative to others in accord with the comparative normative standards of our conception of justice—that is, those standards by which a person’s features or characteristics are taken to be, in rough terms, better or worse than another’s.69

This specific focus on individuals is also demonstrated by (the most plausible interpretations of) the person-affecting view. As we noted, for a situation to be better than another according to the person-affecting view, at least one person would need to be better off in the former. Thus, the structure of the person-affecting view has individuals as its relational basis such that value is generated and determined by the manner in which persons qua individuals are affected (as based on what these individuals value). This focus on persons as individuals is to be distinguished from, say, groups in general or society at large. On this view, then, we cannot claim that a situation is better because some group or society is better despite no individual actually being better off.70

We have seen that the feature of persons on which the person-affecting view is based is what persons value; but since this is not a basis available to the non-person-affecting ideal of proportional justice, what features or characteristics of individuals can be said to

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69 What counts as better or worse is not important here; I am only concerned with the structure of how proportional justice links value to persons within situations, not our particular normative judgments stemming from this structure.

70 Now, although one might want to claim that the person-affecting view can be applied more holistically, such that groups of individuals can be affected for the better or worse even if none of its constitutive persons is affected for the better or worse, I think such a proposal simply would fail to be a version of the person-affecting view. It seems clearly to be the case that a so-called “holistic person-affecting view” would in fact be claiming that a situation can be better or worse even if no one (read: no individual) is affected for the better or worse; but this is precisely how we defined a non-person-affecting ideal.
generate and determine desert-claims? There are, of course, varying views on what about individuals give rise to desert-claims. Some propose a conception of rights or moral claims persons have regarding what sort of outcome one deserves relative to others. It is quite often, however, that the source of such rights or claims are mysterious, and it is not uncommon for them simply to be insisted upon. This notwithstanding, the more relevant concern with this position is that it does not focus on individuals in the way seemingly implied by proportional justice (or, similarly, the person-affecting view). Rights typically are attributed to persons wholesale: every person has the same basic rights. But proportional justice is not something that applies to persons in this fashion. The point of proportional justice is that persons can deserve better or worse than others persons, just as saints deserve better than sinners. Even if one wishes to maintain that we all have a right to proportional justice, there seems no coherent way, based on this right alone, to say that any persons deserves better or worse than any other person. To do this, we must focus on some other feature or characteristic of persons, one which allows for the differences that affect what persons comparatively deserve.

A substantive articulation of this abstract connection between the value of proportional justice and individuals can be offered in terms of persons’ willful behavior: persons’ comparative willful behavior determines their comparative desert. Willful behavior, here, is construed quite broadly to refer to any of a person’s intentional actions, attitudes, thoughts, character, preferences, and so forth. This interpretation is broad in order to allow the moral relevance of any intentional expression of one’s agency, even those expressions (as in one’s thoughts) that do not result in externally manifest actions.

71 Certainly, many will hold them to be granted within a political system to its members. But my concern here is with moral desert, not political desert. A recent example of such “insisted upon” moral claims is suggested by Dennis McKerlie in “Equality” [Ethics 106 (1996), pp. 274-296], esp. 292f, regarding the moral claim to equality.
On this account of proportional justice, the relative willful behavior of persons generates desert-claims and determines what these persons comparatively deserve, such that the better one’s willful behavior (in accord with the ideal’s normative standards) the better one deserves to fare relative to others. That is, between any two persons, if the willful behavior of one is better morally than the willful behavior of the other, the former deserves to fare better.\textsuperscript{72} And consequently, this proportional desert, in comparison to how persons actually fare, permits value assessments of situations in terms of proportionately just and unjust (or, alternatively, fair and unfair) outcomes.\textsuperscript{73}

Basing desert (and therefore the link between persons and value) on willful behavior is supported by our analysis of the saints and sinners example. Essential to what we would consider a saintly or sinful life is the willful behavior a person exhibits. It is plausible to think of the saints as having been, for instance, beneficent, respectful, and honest, and the sinners as having been evil mass murderers or thieves. And it is this dissimilarity of willful behavior that determines their respective desert—that is, the saints deserve to fare better than the sinners because their willful behavior was better. Consequently, situation A is the deserved outcome, leaving B objectionably unfair.

We should emphasize here that this view of proportional justice affords value assessments regarding undeserved and unfair outcomes based on what persons in fact deserve. For an outcome to be unfair according to this conception of proportional justice, this outcome must be undeserved insofar as some alternative outcome is deserved. And,

\textsuperscript{72} Of course, we are not committed to including all sorts of intentional behaviors—one could, for instance, claim that merely one’s actions count toward desert, thereby excluding one’s thoughts, attitudes, etc. But the point is that desert is generated and determined by at least some feature of persons’ willful behavior.\textsuperscript{73} This point picks up on what was stated in footnote 66 above. There we noted that while both the intrinsic value of non-person-affecting ideals and the non-intrinsic value of person-affecting ideals might be concerned with how persons fare, it is only the latter that are strictly based on this concern. Here, we see that the particular judgments of proportional justice are in part determined by how persons fare, but only insofar as how persons fare should match how persons deserve to fare. And how persons deserve to fare, being non-person-affecting though person-relevant, is the essential value claim of this ideal.
as we have seen, what generates and determines a deserved outcome for proportional justice is the comparative willful behavior of persons. Notice that the substantive claim being appealed to here is that it is only by willfully behaving in some manner that a person can be said to deserve some particular outcome. A consequence of this position is that outcomes cannot be considered objectionably unfair if there are no desert-claims (as based on persons’ willful behavior) to determine some alternative outcome to be fair. Thus, on this view of proportional justice the natural and social contingencies of the positions and circumstances into which we are born are not considered objectionable. This is a notable divergence from the commonly-held position that because these natural and social inequalities are arbitrary and undeserved, they are objectionable and ought to be corrected.\textsuperscript{74} The account of proportional justice we are proposing requires claims of fairness to be grounded in desert-claims that are connected to the willful behavior of individuals. And for any outcome to be proportionately unjust, the relevant persons must deserve some alternative outcome.

This point harks back to the conception of cosmic value that we discussed in section II (pp. 27-8). Cosmic value, recall, is a value claim that is independent from persons; although it can be applied to persons or situations involving persons, there is nothing substantively about the persons that bears on it. Thus, to claim an outcome is cosmically unfair is to hold that an outcome can be unfair irrespective of anything about persons considered as individuals to generate a claim about what would be fair.

\textsuperscript{74} Rawls offers one of the more prominent recent examples of this position. Rawls’ claim that undeserved social and natural inequalities are unfair does not in any way depend on anything about the relevant persons as individuals; there is nothing specific about any individual to generate the claim (see John Rawls, \textit{A Theory of Justice} [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971], esp. section 12). An important related position that holds undeserved natural and social contingencies (among other, similar, “merely undeserved” situations) to be objectionably undeserved is teleological egalitarianism. We will discuss this position below.
The claim that underlies this conception of proportional justice is that the fairness with which it is concerned is dependent on—or, we might say, relevantly connected with—persons’ willful behavior. The basic structure of this view consists in a connection between value and persons based on willful behavior. Let’s call this connection person-relevance. This account of proportional justice, consequently, postulates an account of person-relevant fairness.

But does this claim of person-relevance offer a general position detailing the sort of structural link between persons and value that any acceptable non-person-affecting ideal must express, rather than being merely a position regarding desert-claims and proportional justice? Furthermore, even if person-relevance can be interpreted as such a position, is it at all plausible and compelling as the basis on which we can ground an account of intrinsically valuable states of affairs (more specifically, an account of acceptable ideals regarding intrinsically valuable states of affairs)?

I want to argue that this has in fact revealed an important general position regarding intrinsic value and acceptable non-person-affecting ideals, which I term the Principle of Person-Relevance.

The Principle of Person-Relevance: A non-person-affecting ideal pertains to the value of a situation only if the ideal in question is relevantly tied to the persons involved in the situation, such that the persons’ willful behavior generates and determines (in accord with the ideal’s normative standards) the situation’s value (relative to the ideal).

This principle delineates a distinction among non-person-affecting ideals: it provides a basis for accepting certain non-person-affecting ideals while rejecting others. Specifically, the Principle of Person-Relevance distinguishes between those non-person-affecting ideals that are person-relevant and those that are strictly impersonal (i.e., non-
person-relevant). Person-relevant ideals not only are the sorts of non-person-affecting ideals that are acceptable, they are also relational to persons—specifically, relational to some feature or characteristic, namely willful behavior, of persons as individuals. Person-relevance, then, provides a conception of relationality of the sort for which we are looking. Consequently, if plausible, this principle would provide the necessary grounding for a relational theory of the intrinsic value of states of affairs.

An important step in elucidating and defending this principle is to demonstrate that it underlies and supports the intrinsic value claims of a wide variety of plausible non-person-affecting ideals.\textsuperscript{75} Doing so will help make precise the claim made by the Principle of Person-Relevance, as well as lend support to it as a general principle within value theory. Now, we have already explained how the ideal of proportional justice is to be understood as person-relevant: it ties value to persons’ willful behavior by claiming that willful behavior generates and determines comparative desert-claims, which establish what a fair and positively valuable outcome is.\textsuperscript{76} But let’s now examine some additional examples of how this principle can support non-person-affecting ideals.

Let’s first consider the ideal of virtue, which, unlike proportional justice, does not in any respect involve desert-claims.\textsuperscript{77} Nonetheless, we can take the ideal of virtue to be person-relevant since it is directly tied to persons’ willful behavior in the following

\textsuperscript{75} Note, of course, that the Principle of Person-Relevance designates which non-person-affecting ideals can be germane to the value assessment of outcomes; in its present form it does not characterize which ideals can tell us what is good or bad for persons. Accordingly, the ideals we consider below are taken as regarding the value of outcomes. How these ideals, and any other person-relevant non-person-affecting ideal, bear on what is good or bad for persons is therefore not addressed.

\textsuperscript{76} Of course, some might object to this view of desert and posit a theory in which what persons deserve is based on something other than willful behavior. Such an account might then claim that undeserved outcomes are objectionable because they are not in line with what is deserved. But even if we grant an account of this sort we should note that the conception of person-relevance rejects not only claims regarding merely undeserved outcomes, but any view that proffers desert-claims not generated and determined by persons’ willful behavior.

\textsuperscript{77} Although we may also believe that virtuous persons deserve to fare better than those lacking virtue, the value associated with virtue is not one of desert. Insofar as virtuous persons fare worse than non-virtuous
manner: It is only by willfully behaving virtuously that a person can properly be considered virtuous; a person is not virtuous if the person’s behavior is only in line with virtue, but done, for instance, entirely accidentally (i.e., non-intentionally) or with non-virtuous ends in mind. It is the person’s willfulness that must be virtuous. This general claim applies to varying theories of virtue that may disagree upon the exact seat of virtue—whether it be in a person’s actions, character, thoughts or what have you—as long as this seat of virtue is at least some aspect of persons’ willful behavior. Moreover, we need not claim that the value of virtue is person-affecting—a proponent of the ideal of virtue typically holds virtue to be intrinsically valuable, such that it is good that a person is virtuous even if this person, by circumstance, is not well-off. In other words, the value of a situation vis-à-vis virtue is determined by the virtuous or non-virtuous willful behavior of persons, irrespective of their levels of well-being.

Note that the similarity between proportional justice and virtue is structural, not substantive. Both are person-relevant ideals, and therefore relational non-person-affecting ideals, because persons’ willful behavior is the relational and generative basis of each ideal’s respective value. This similarity is not substantive because each employs a different normative judgment regarding the manner in which willful behavior determines value—i.e., each claims that persons’ willful behavior is important for reasons different from those of the other: proportional justice is concerned with willful behavior insofar as it determines persons’ comparative desert; virtue focuses on the non-comparative quality of willful behavior and assigns value accordingly and independently of how persons fare (or deserve to fare). In other words, for virtue it is the willful behavior corresponding
with the virtuous criteria (whatever they happen to be) that is valuable, while for proportional justice it is the comparative willful behavior coupled with the normative claim that persons ought or deserve to fare proportionate to our judgment of persons' respective willful behavior. This demonstrates that the particular connection of desert is not what does the work in the Principle of Person-Relevance. This principle is a claim strictly about the structure of the relational link between non-person-affecting value and persons, stating that any acceptable non-person-affecting ideal must consist of some particular normative link between value and persons based on the persons’ willful behavior. And despite the substantive difference between the ideals of virtue and proportional justice, both are relevant to the value of outcomes, according to the Principle of Person-Relevance, because both are relevantly tied to persons’ willful behavior.

Now, other person-relevant ideals might be quite similar to proportional justice. For instance, general merit-based theories can also involve desert-claims generated and determined by persons’ willful behavior. A merit-based theory might be absolute rather than proportional, in which persons deserve some particular outcome in accord with what they merit, regardless of the relative merit of other persons. A simple example of an absolute deserved outcome: the winner of an Olympic marathon deserves the gold medal, and not just something comparatively better than the runner who finishes second.  

Another ideal that we can take as person-relevant and non-person-affecting is a person’s degree of autonomy. Although a full conception of what constitutes autonomous action is controversial, the basic understanding is that such action involves some degree

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behavior thus determines whether the value is positive or negative (and, we can presume, to what degree this value is positive or negative).

79 It might be somewhat uncommon for an absolute deserved outcome to exist entirely irrespective of considerations of proportionality. Typically, we would have a mixed theory of justice; for instance, we might believe that the saints not only deserve better than the sinners, but that the saints deserve to have wonderful afterlives.
of self-directed choice on the part of the agent. A minimal requirement would need to be that the action is willful, rather than involuntary or unintentional by means of coercion, lack of freedom or recognized alternatives, or some such thing. To act autonomously, it would seem, just is to act willfully under the right conditions as determined by the conception of autonomy one endorses. Therefore, it is not a particular type or quality of a person’s willful behavior that generates and determines the value, as is the case for virtue, nor is it comparative differences in the quality of desert-producing willful behavior, as with proportional justice; rather, it is more broadly willful behavior as such that does so.\textsuperscript{80} Otherwise put, what is intrinsically valuable for the outcome is simply the occurrence of persons behaving willfully. This demonstrates that the structure of value-assessment for autonomy is person-relevant, for to value autonomy is to value persons willfully behaving. And, moreover, autonomy is not a person-affecting value, since persons can act autonomously while being affected for the worse—imagine, e.g., a society in which persons are punished for each autonomous action.

An ideal that is somewhat similar to the ideals of autonomy and virtue is the ideal of self-perfection. Applied to outcomes, the ideal of self-perfection holds that it is good that persons strive toward bettering or perfecting themselves in certain ways (again, normative considerations come into play here regarding what counts as a good way to try to perfect oneself).\textsuperscript{81} But what is important for value is that this striving toward self-

\textsuperscript{80} Of course, one may not consider all willful behavior, in our broad understanding, to count as autonomous action; for instance, one might not consider it autonomous to hold certain ideas or thoughts willfully. But, in any event, that which one does count as autonomous ought to be some subset of persons’ willful behavior.

\textsuperscript{81} Just as with autonomy, self-perfection is most often expressed in terms of what is good for a person, that it is good for a person to be autonomous or to fulfill one’s capacities and talents. Applied to outcomes, the judgment is that it is a good state of affairs that persons act autonomously or work toward self-perfection. Understanding this ideal as non-person-affecting perhaps might seem, at first glance, misguided, since one might believe that striving to perfect oneself just is person-affecting (after all, isn’t a person affecting his own situation by striving toward self-perfection?). But striving toward self-perfection needn’t necessarily involve producing change in oneself—a person may try and fail.
perfection is willful. That is, it is valuable that persons willfully engage themselves in pursuing to perfect their capacities and talents rather than in willfully opting, e.g., to wallow in base pleasures and simple activities. In this fashion, self-perfection is substantively, as well as structurally, similar to the ideal of virtue, since it is a certain type of willful behavior that generates positive value for outcomes.

Another interesting and instructive—and quite plausible—example to mention is the ideal of promise keeping. Promise keeping is often understood to be relevant to the value of outcomes (at least among those who accept the possibility that outcomes and states of affairs can have value, beyond any questions of what is valuable for persons), that it is good that a promise is kept, and bad that a promise is broken.\(^{82}\) Moreover, it is generally held that a promise ought to be fulfilled even if its fulfillment is not known. For instance, a husband’s promise to his wife to remain faithful ought to be fulfilled even if his wife would not find out that he broke it; it is a bad state of affairs if the husband cheats unbeknownst to the wife. This demonstrates that promise keeping is non-person-affecting. Suppose that the husband does cheat and feels great about it, while the wife never finds out and always feels great that her husband (as far as she knows) has never cheated. In this case, everyone might be affected for the best while the outcome is worse because the promise was broken.\(^{83}\) Promise keeping is not only non-person-affecting, it is also person-relevant: to make a promise is a willful act, and it is the willful act of promising that creates an obligation and a moral claim to fulfill that promise. Moreover,

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\(^{82}\) Now, even if we do hold that promise keeping is a good state of affairs, this is not to say that promise keeping is good, bad, or neutral for either the promise-maker or the promisee. Some might want to maintain that promise keeping is relevant only for the persons involved, and that promises have no bearing on states of affairs beyond how persons are actually affected. Here the position I’m considering is that promise keeping is relevant to the value of states of affairs independently of how persons are affected, or even if they are affected at all.

\(^{83}\) Of course, as with all obligations the fulfillment of a promise needn’t always be good. Situations arise in which it will be a far better outcome to break a promise then to keep it. But this doesn’t change the basic point that promise keeping can be good even if no one is better off.
it is essential that the promise is willful—if the promise is forcibly procured or inadvertently offered then it lacks moral force. Understood as such, the willful act of promising is the (relational) basis of the value of promise keeping. Hence, the value of promise keeping to outcomes is supported (and, as we will see below, explained) by the Principle of Person-Relevance.

Now, although this is likely not a complete listing of plausible person-relevant ideals, this discussion has proved useful in clarifying the claim made by the Principle of Person-Relevance, as well as lending support to its plausibility. And since this principle satisfies our criteria for an account of intrinsic value, these ideals considered thus far, being non-person-affecting yet person-relevant, are examples of relational intrinsic values. Moreover, this principle not only undergirds many plausible non-person-affecting ideals, it also provides scope to our account of intrinsic value by rejecting any non-person-affecting ideal that is not relevantly tied to persons’ willful behavior. A notable and instructive example is the ideal of teleological egalitarianism.

This view of egalitarianism (which we will refer to simply as ‘egalitarianism’) maintains that any undeserved outcome is unfair and therefore intrinsically bad; or as Temkin, a recent defender of this brand of egalitarianism, puts it: “un undeserved inequality is always objectionable.”84 Now there is clearly a parallel here to the ideal of proportional justice (and, to a lesser degree, merit-based desert), since that position also claims that undeserved outcomes are unfair. But the essential difference between the two positions lies in how desert is understood.

Proportional justice, recall, bases its conception of an undeserved outcome on the prior desert-claims that are generated and determined by persons’ willful behavior. In this respect, for proportional justice an outcome is objectionably undeserved only if the
outcome is not in line with what is proportionately deserved, as based on the comparison of persons’ willful behavior. The egalitarian’s claim of objectionably undeserved outcomes is more (and, I believe, unacceptably) broad: an unequal outcome is considered undeserved, on the egalitarian view, whenever one group is worse off than another through no fault of their own, understood as the outcome not being the result of some voluntary choice(s) or action(s) for which the worse-off group is responsible. We see, however, that this view claims that an outcome is undeserved merely if it is not deserved. But this would then hold even if the alternative outcome(s) are also not deserved. In other words, the egalitarian objects to outcomes that are “merely undeserved” even if there is no alternative outcome that is deserved. Or more specifically, the egalitarian objects to undeserved inequalities even if there is no basis for claiming the relevant persons deserve an equal outcome. And if this is the case, then there is nothing about persons as individuals aside from how they fare relative to each other that need bear on value.\footnote{To be sure, egalitarianism does, in some sense, care about a particular feature of persons—namely, their possession of the relevant good. But this concern is only indirect, for egalitarianism attaches no weight to whether, to what extent, or even to why a given individual has this good. Rather, it focuses only on the comparative differences in its distribution.} In this respect, we might even say that the position espoused by egalitarianism is a claim about what we above referred to as cosmic unfairness.\footnote{The egalitarian might be tempted to object to this charge of cosmic unfairness by claiming that egalitarianism does indeed care about the willful behavior of persons to the extent that such behavior can render an equal situation unfair, and an unequal situation fair. It is perfectly consistent, for instance, for the egalitarian to agree that the unequal distribution in situation A of the saints and sinners example is fair because of the respective willful behavior of the saints and sinners. But, of course, this is just the position, and on the same grounds (to wit, that the saints deserve to fare better than the sinners), held by the ideal of proportional justice. The point here, however, concerns the essential egalitarian claim (i.e., that claim which differentiates it from the ideal of proportional justice) that an unequal outcome can be unfair even considered entirely without regard for the persons’ willful behavior, how they are affected, or anything else regarding these persons as individuals except the comparative distribution of the relevant good, which can be strictly arbitrary and entirely distinct from individual agency. And it is only against the backdrop of this fundamental concern that the egalitarian is concerned with whether persons’ willful behavior supports the positive value of equality or justifies a particular inequality. In this respect, egalitarianism treats persons, to put the point metaphorically, as mere placeholders of goods. Thus, perhaps there is on occasion some reason for the egalitarian to treat persons as individuals and to focus on the significance of how given individuals affect the world and are affected by it, but this by no}
In any event, the important point for our discussion is that because egalitarianism is based on the claim that merely undeserved outcomes are unfair, it is not a person-relevant ideal and would therefore be rejected by the Principle of Person-Relevance. Egalitarianism, much like Moore’s non-relational account of intrinsic value, is not acceptable because it is too distinct from persons as individuals. Moreover, not only does the Principle of Person-Relevance reject non-person-relevant ideals like egalitarianism (which is not in and of itself very interesting, since many ideals—even highly implausible ones—can be said to reject egalitarianism), but it stands as a possible grounding for the leveling-down objection, which is one of the more commonly articulated objections to egalitarianism.\(^7\) Thus, the Principle of Person-Relevance lends theoretical support to a well-established criticism of egalitarianism, which in turn adds to this principle’s plausibility.

Our discussion of the variety of plausible non-person-affecting ideals that are endorsed by the Principle of Person-Relevance, and the example of the delimiting scope it offers among non-person-affecting ideals, suggests that this principle is indeed a general position that cuts across all non-person-affecting ideals, grounding those ideals that connect value to persons’ willful behavior while rejecting those that do not. An additional feature of the Principle of Person-Relevance that follows from this, and which further solidifies its plausibility, is that it provides much in the way of an explanation of the value of specific person-relevant intrinsic values. This principle’s structural dependence on the willful behavior of individuals as the relational basis and unifying

\(^7\) For much more on this criticism of egalitarianism, see my essay “Reconsidering the Levelling-Down Objection Against Egalitarianism,” *Utilitas*, forthcoming. In this essay, I respond to arguments against the leveling-down objection by arguing that this objection ought to be based on the Principle of Person-Relevance.
element of person-relevant value suggests that willful behavior is indeed the explanation of such value. And indeed, this explanation sounds right for the intrinsic values we have considered in this section.

For instance, what is morally important about virtue is that virtuous behavior is a willful endeavor, that the virtuous person actively and consciously willfully behaves in a virtuous manner. The fact that the person willfully chooses to act in a way that is virtuous (perhaps irrespective of the ease or difficulty of acting as such due to social circumstances, etc.) is precisely why virtue is positively valuable, while entirely accidentally performing an act that outwardly only resembles a virtuous act is not of value—it’s just mere good fortune. And these comments apply, mutatis mutandis, to the other person-relevant ideals: the value of each ideal is explained by its basis in persons’ willful behavior.

In light of these considerations, we see that this principle provides us with a reasoned position with which to defend a relational theory of the intrinsic value of outcomes, rather than a mere appeal to intuitions regarding each ideal. As such, this principle provides a theory of intrinsic value in line with the description of intrinsic value we have settled on in this essay: namely, that a plausible theory of the intrinsic value of states of affairs 1) must not be determined strictly by what persons value or how persons are affected; and 2) must be relational, with persons as its relational basis. Such an account not only must meet these criteria, it must also provide a reasoned and compelling position with regard to how it is relational on persons. The Principle of Person-Relevance is an attempt to do just that, by tying intrinsic value to persons’ willful behavior.

By demonstrating that this principle is sufficiently broad to ground many appealing intrinsic values while nonetheless restricting the scope of value, and that it provides a
compelling explanation of the value of these ideals, we have run through one mode of
defense. Depending on the role given to intuitive plausibility and explanatory power, this
may indeed represent the best available argument in defense of the Principle of Person-
Relevance.

But another line of defense of this principle is to consider the plausibility of the
structure itself, and whether tying relational intrinsic value to persons as this principle
does is itself compelling.

This principle states that certain non-person-affecting ideals are acceptable provided
they are relevantly connected to persons' willful behavior. As we mentioned above, this
connection between value and persons' willful behavior is, for the Principle of Person-
Relevance, structural rather than substantive. This structural connection is simply that the
persons' willful behavior generates and determines the value of a situation. Now while all
person-relevant ideals will share this structural requirement, they of course differ with
respect to the connection's substantive articulation—indeed, this variation is precisely the
measure on which person-relevant ideals are distinct from each other.88

An interesting argument to make regarding the structure of the Principle of Person-
Relevance is to pick up on the point which introduced the presentation of person-
relevance above. There we noted that a relational account of intrinsic value might be
structurally similar to the relational person-affecting view. If this were the case, then,
granting the plausibility of the person-affecting view, this structural similarity would lend
plausibility to intrinsic value.

Of course, for the structural similarity to provide support for a relational account of
intrinsic value, such a view of intrinsic value must not exclude person-affecting value,
nor be excluded by it. The position suggested by this structural analogy to the person-affecting view, the Principle of Person-Relevance, indeed does not force us to reject the moral importance of how persons are affected: it is merely a distinction to make among non-person-affecting ideals, only excluding from value those non-persons-affecting ideals that are not directly tied to persons’ willful behavior. We are free to accept a non-exclusionary version of the person-affecting view, in which although all outcomes that affect persons can ipso facto be better or worse, non-person-affecting outcomes are not excluded from moral worth. Therefore, the Principle of Person-Relevance is theoretically compatible with the person-affecting view.\textsuperscript{99}

The structural similarity that drove the argument above is that both accounts tie value to certain features or characteristics of persons as individuals. While this similarity has proved instructive, it is not as such terribly interesting. But what is interesting is that both this principle and the person-affecting view connect value to persons in much the same fashion. For the person-affecting view, what generates and determines value is how persons are affected. The Principle of Person-Relevance claims that it is how persons willfully behave, and thereby affect the world,\textsuperscript{90} that generates value. The similarity, then, is that both involve what we might call a direct affecting link with persons, in which value stems directly from either how, for the person-affecting view, persons are affected or how, for the Principle of Person-Relevance, persons affect the world through their willful behavior. On this understanding the direct affecting link with persons works in

\textsuperscript{99} The particular normative judgments of each ideal is something that lies beyond the scope of this essay. For now I’m relying on their general intuitive plausibility and whether each particular ideal is supported by the structural requirement of the Principle of Person-Relevance.

\textsuperscript{90} See the relevant discussion in section I regarding this distinction in the person-affecting view.

\textsuperscript{90} This involves a somewhat broad understanding of affecting the world: a person willfully affects the world either in the obvious way as manifest in the external world or by affecting one’s “inner world,” so to speak, through intentionally held thoughts, preferences, and so forth.
both directions, how persons affect the world and how they are affected by it (which includes, of course, being affected by other persons).

This link stands as part of the structural expression of the belief that value, even if plural and diverse, is importantly connected to persons as individual agents. Specifically, the direct affecting link provides a substantive claim regarding just what constitutes an acceptable link between value and persons for a relational theory of value. Therefore, it further characterizes our general conception of relational value by suggesting a structural commonality, which might function as a requirement, between (and within) intrinsic and non-intrinsic accounts of relational value.

This commonality is significant because it ties, in at least one respect, the plausibility of intrinsic relational value to the person-affecting view. In section I, we took as our starting-off point the assumption that the person-affecting view is a legitimate theory of the value of states of affairs. What grounds this as a relatively benign assumption is the widespread acceptance of the person-affecting view; and among those who reject this view it is often the case that states of affairs as bearers of value are rejected altogether. The drive of this essay has been to argue from the assumption of the relatively conservative person-affecting view to an acceptable account of the intrinsic value of states of affairs. By demonstrating a structural similarity between the non-intrinsic person-affecting view and the relational intrinsic value of the Principle of Person-Relevance, the move from the assumption of a non-exclusionary version of the former to the conclusion of the latter seems less of a leap and more of a theoretical progression. In the least, this similarity might be taken to offer a reason for those who accept the person-affecting view to accept the Principle of Person-Relevance view as well, without opening the floodgate to just any ideal regarding the value of states of affairs—the Principle of
Person-Relevance provides a principled basis to accept certain such ideals while rejecting others.

Granted, this structural similarity is not likely adequately compelling to conclude, on this basis alone, that the Principle of Person-Relevance follows from the person-affecting view. There are, of course, important differences between the two that might be thought morally significant. For instance, one might reject the importance of the direct-affecting link by claiming that it is much more plausible that how persons fare is relevant to value than it is that how persons willfully affect the world is relevant to value. But our defense of the Principle of Person-Relevance also adduces its compatibility with and demonstrates it to be the explanatory basis of intuitively plausible non-person-affecting ideals. Indeed, as we have mentioned, this is perhaps the strongest case available for our account of intrinsic value. But the direct-affecting link illustrates that there is also an underlying structural and normative confluence between this principle and the person-affecting view. In this regard, both views can be taken as substantive articulations of the general view of the nature of value that has run throughout this essay—that value is somehow dependent or supervenient on persons and comes into the world with persons constituted the way we are.

V

In sections II and III, we presented an argument for what a plausible theory of intrinsic value must be. Such an account must not be strictly dependent on what persons value or what is good for persons. From this we determined that an acceptable theory of the intrinsic value of states of affairs must be articulated in terms of non-person-affecting value since person-affecting value, being the application of what is good for persons to
outcomes, is generally (and most plausibly) based on what persons value. But we have also determined that an acceptable theory must be relational, with persons as the relational basis.

In section IV, we explored an account we termed the Principle of Person-Relevance, which turns on a claim about the manner in which value is connected to persons—specifically, that value is generated and determined by persons’ willful behavior, yet is not dependent on the valuations of persons. The Principle of Person-Relevance, therefore, meets both criteria for a plausible theory of the intrinsic value of states of affairs.

We can thus conclude that this principle captures much of what we want in a plausible account of the intrinsic value of states of affairs. It is, first of all, in line with our conception of the nature of value, in which value is importantly connected to persons. Failing in this respect, as sections II and III point out, is indeed a crucial objection to the non-relational account of intrinsic value. Beyond meeting this requirement, the Principle of Person-Relevance also provides a reasoned grounding and explanation of a wide variety of non-person-affecting ideals, while offering scope to our range of acceptable values.

We have also argued that the very structure of the Principle of Person-Relevance is a source of defense on its behalf. The direct-affecting link expressed by this principle ties it to the person-affecting view, offering a reason for those who accept the latter to accept the former as well. Moreover, this similarity helps to conclude the overarching argument of this essay: from the relatively uncontroversial assumption (at least uncontroversial among those who believe states of affairs can be bearers of value) that a state of affairs can be better if the persons within the state of affairs are better off, to the conclusion that
a state of affairs can have intrinsic value, such that its value is not strictly dependent on how persons fare, if the value is generated and determined by persons' willful behavior.
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