

# **CHALLENGING MORAL PARTICULARISM**

Mark Lance, Matjaž Potrč, Vojko Strahovnik (editors)

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Robert Audi** is the David E. Gallo chair in Ethics and Professor of Philosophy at University of Notre Dame. He is the author and editor of several books including *Belief, Justification, and Knowledge* (Wadsworth, 1988), *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge, 1993), *Action, Intention, and Reason* (Cornell, 1993), *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character* (Oxford, 1997), *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Routledge, 1998), *The Architecture of Reason: The Structure and Substance of Rationality*, (Oxford, 2001), *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value* (Princeton, 2004), *Practical reasoning and Ethical Decision* (Routledge, 2006) and *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.

**David Bakhurst** is Professor of Philosophy at Queen's University at Kingston (Ontario). He is the author of *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1991), editor of *The Social Self* (with C. Sydnovich, Sage, 1995) and of *Jerome Bruner: Language, Culture, Self* (with S. Shanker, Sage, 2001). He is also author of numerous articles on philosophical psychology, ethics and Russian thought.

**Jonathan Dancy** is Professor of Philosophy at University of Reading (UK) and at University of Texas (Austin). He is the author of *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Blackwell, 1985), *Berkeley: An Introduction* (Blackwell, 1987), *Moral Reasons* (Blackwell, 1993), *Practical Reality* (Clarendon, 2000), *Ethics Without Principles* (Clarendon, 2004), and numerous articles. He is also the editor of *Perceptual Knowledge*, *Reading Parfit*, *Berkeley's Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, and co-editor of *A Companion to Epistemology*.

**Brad Hooker** is Professor of Philosophy at University of Reading (UK). He is the author of *Ideal Code, Real World: A Rule-Consequentialist Theory of Morality* (Clarendon, 2000), and editor of *Rationality, Rules, and Utility* (Westview, 1993), and *Truth in Ethics* (Blackwell, 1996), *Well-Being and Morality* (with R. Crisp, Oxford, 2000), *Morality, Rules, and Consequences* (with E. Mason and D. E. Miller, Edinburgh, 2000; Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), and *Moral Particularism* (with M. Little, Clarendon, 2000). He has also published many articles, mostly in moral philosophy.

**Terry Horgan** is Professor of Philosophy at University of Arizona (Tucson). He is the author of *Connectionism and the Philosophy of Psychology* (with J. Tienson, MIT, 1996.), *Austere Realism* (with M. Potrč, MIT, forthcoming), and articles on many philosophical subjects including metaphysics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology, epistemology, philosophy of language, metaethics. He is also editor of numerous collections including *Metaethics after Moore* (with M. Timmons, Oxford, 2006).

**Mark Lance** is Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University. He is the author of *The Grammar of Meaning* (with J. O'Leary-Hawthorne, Cambridge,

1997) and of many articles in journals and books covering the topics of philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, epistemology, normativity, and philosophy of logic.

**Margaret Little** is Professor at Georgetown's Philosophy Department and a Senior Research Scholar at Georgetown's Kennedy Institute of Ethics. She is the editor of *Moral Particularism* (with B. Hooker, Clarendon, 2000) and author of *Intimate Duties: Re-Thinking Abortion, the Law, & Morality* (Clarendon, forthcoming). Her work covers areas of ethics, with particular interests in moral particularism, moral epistemology, motivation, and feminist bioethics.

**Sean McKeever** is Professor of Philosophy at Davidson College (North Carolina). He is the author of *Principled Ethics: Generalism as a Regulative Ideal*, (with M. Ridge, Oxford, 2006) and of several articles on moral theory, history of ethics, and political philosophy.

**David McNaughton** is Professor of Philosophy at Florida State University. He is the author of *Moral Vision: An Introduction to Ethics* (Blackwell, 1988), and articles on ethics, on 18th century British moral philosophy, history of philosophy, and on philosophy of religion. He is the founder of *British Society for Ethical Theory*. He is currently working with P. Rawling on a book on deontology.

**Nenad Mišćević** is Professor of Philosophy at Central European University and University of Maribor. He has written and edited several books – including *Rationality and Cognition* (Toronto, 2000), *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: Philosophical Perspectives* (ed., Carus, 2000), *Nationalism and Beyond* (CEU, 2001). He has written papers covering philosophy of mind and cognitive science, epistemology, political philosophy, nationalism, metaphysics, and moral philosophy.

**Matjaž Potrč** is Professor of Philosophy at University of Ljubljana. His books include *Language, Thought and Object* (DZS, 1988), *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* (Röll, 1993), *Origins: The Common Sources of the Analytic and Phenomenological Traditions* (ed., with T. Horgan and J. Tienson, Memphis 2002) *Vagueness* (ed., with T. Horgan, Röhl 2002), *Dynamical Philosophy* (ZIFF, 2004), *Practical Contexts* (with V. Strahovnik, Ontos, 2004) and *Austere Realism* (with T. Horgan, MIT, forthcoming). Articles cover metaphysics, moral philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of mind and cognitive science, vagueness, phenomenology, Slovene philosophical tradition.

**Anthony W. Price** is Professor of Philosophy at University of London (Birkbeck). His bibliography includes *Mental Conflict* (Routledge, 1995), *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1997), and articles 'Plato: Ethics and Politics', 'On Criticising Values', 'Plato, Zeno, and the Object of Love', and 'The So-Called Logic of Practical Inference'. He also pursues interests in contemporary ethics, with papers on the psychology and epistemology of value and in the area of practical reasoning, practical judgments, and reasons for action.

**Piers Rawling** is Professor of Philosophy at Florida State University. He is an editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality* (with A. Mele, Oxford, 2004) and author of articles covering ethics, decision and game theory, logic, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, rationality and reasons. Currently he works with D. McNaughton on a book on deontology.

**Michael Ridge** is Professor of Philosophy at University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *Principled Ethics: Generalism as a Regulative Ideal*, (with S. McKeever, Oxford, 2006) and of several articles on moral theory, social and political philosophy, and history of moral philosophy.

**Vojko Strahovnik** is an Assistant Philosophy Researcher at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ljubljana (Faculty of Arts). He is the author of *Practical Contexts* (with M. Potrč; Ontos, 2004) and the author of several articles on ethics, epistemology and Slovene philosophical tradition.

**Pekka Väyrynen** is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Davis. His publications and research interests fall mainly in the areas of ethics, rationality, and epistemology.

## David McNaughton and Piers Rawling

### Holism about Value<sup>1</sup>

In *Principia Ethica* (1903; the page references below are to the 1966 paperback edition), G. E. Moore famously claims that there are ‘organic wholes’, the intrinsic values of which differ “from the sum[s] of the values of [their] parts.” (p. 36) This is his ‘principle of organic unities’ (p. 184), and is the form of holism about value with which we begin, but from which we will depart.

#### Moore on value

In chapter three of *Principia Ethica*, Moore argues against Hedonism – the view that pleasure is the sole good. He sees its prevalence as owing to commission of the ‘naturalistic fallacy’; but we set discussion of this aside here to focus on his direct arguments against the view. His first complaint is that if we consider pleasure in isolation from everything else – including consciousness of it – we see that “the pleasure would be comparatively valueless without the consciousness.” (p. 89) This is an application of Moore’s ‘method of absolute isolation’ (p. 188) – “the only method that can be safely used, when we wish to discover what degree of value a thing has in itself.” (p. 91) So the Hedonist would do better to claim, as Moore (pp. 90-96) sees Sidgwick as doing, that it is consciousness of pleasure that is the sole good.

On Moore's account, Sidgwick argues that all wholes of value have consciousness of pleasure as a component, and that the other components of these wholes have no value – as determined by applying the method of isolation. However, Sidgwick does not apply this method to the consciousness of pleasure – he “does not ask the question: If consciousness of pleasure existed absolutely by itself, would a sober judgment be able to attribute much value to it?” (p. 93) Rather, in each case, Sidgwick subtracts the value of the other components – which is zero – from the value of the whole, and concludes that all the value resides in the consciousness of pleasure.

Moore famously claims, by contrast, that: “The value of a whole must not be assumed to be the same as the sum of the values of its parts.” (p. 28) Hence Sidgwick’s subtraction is not guaranteed to give the correct result. Rather, Moore’s method is first to consider the parts in isolation (as if they were the only occupant of the universe), and determine their intrinsic values (the intrinsic value of an entity is the value it has ‘in itself’, as opposed to any value it may have as a means to achieving something of intrinsic value: p. 21). He then asks whether, in addition to the intrinsic values of the parts of the whole, there is a value to their combination. The intrinsic value of the whole is the sum of the intrinsic values of its parts plus the value of their combination.

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<sup>1</sup> We presented a version of this paper at the 2005 Bled, Slovenia conference on particularism. We benefited greatly from the feedback of the participants.

Moore's general method is laid out on p. 214 ff, where he considers, among other wholes, that of 'vindictive' or 'retributive' punishment. The wickedness of the crime is bad, but so is the pain of the punishment – so how are matters improved by the latter's imposition? In Moore's terminology, the improvement is due to the fact that the 'value as a whole' ('which arises solely *from the combination* of two or more things': sense (1) on p. 215) of crime followed by punishment is positive, where the value as a whole is to be distinguished from the value 'on the whole'. The latter is the sum of: the value of the crime plus the value of the punishment plus their value as a whole.

Moore's arithmetic is perhaps best explicated by numerical example. In the case of vindictive punishment (where  $V(x)$  is the intrinsic value of  $x$ ), suppose the intrinsic values of the parts are:

$$V(\text{crime}) = -8$$

$$V(\text{pain inflicted as punishment}) = -5$$

Moore's idea is that the value of the combination might be positive – say:

$$V(\text{combination}) = +6 = \text{value as a whole}$$

+6, then, is the value of the crime and punishment *as* a whole. Its value *on* the whole is given by the sum of the three values above:

$$V(\text{on the whole}) = -8 + -5 + 6 = -7$$

Note that  $-7 > -8$ , so the situation is better on the whole as a result of the addition of the negatively valued punishment.

Moore counts only the crime and the punishment as parts, hence the value of the whole is not equal to the sum of the values of its parts:  $-7 \neq -8 + -5$ .

If we take zero as the point of indifference, Moore preserves the intuition that although the addition of the punishment does improve matters (from  $-8$  to  $-7$ ), the overall situation is still bad ( $-7 < 0$ ). And he also preserves the intuition that the punishment must be *bad* in order for it to be *punishment*.

However, there is a strike against Moore's position here when we look to his isolation test to determine the intrinsic value of the punishment. Moore asks us to consider in isolation the associated pain or other evil. But in isolation from the crime, the 'punishment' would be the infliction of, say, incarceration, for no reason – it would not be punishment.<sup>2</sup> Presumably Moore assumes that the prisoner will have all the same beliefs in the isolated case as in the real one, such as the belief that she has been imprisoned after a trial, otherwise the subjectively experienced pain of the incarceration would be significantly different. However,

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Anthony Price at the Bled conference for this point.

these beliefs are, of course, all false in the isolated case. Yet in other places (e.g., p. 197) Moore takes true belief itself to be of value. Hence the false beliefs themselves detract from the value of the incarceration in the isolated case.

The difficulty that the punishment cannot be truly assessed in isolation (the incarceration in the absence of the crime, as we noted, not being punishment) is an instance of what we shall dub the ‘intentional problem’, by analogy with Brentano's use of the term ‘intentional’ (the crime here is analogous to the intentional object of a psychological state). As we shall shortly see, there are problem cases in which the use of the term is more than merely analogous – cases in which Moore actually does attempt to isolate psychological states from their intentional objects.

Lest there be doubt about our interpretation, we will now apply it to a few more of Moore's contentions. He claims, for example, that although the addition of pain as punishment for a crime makes for a state of the world that is “*always better, as a whole*, than if no pain had been there,” yet matters “may not be better *on the whole*’ if the pain of the punishment ‘be too intense, since that is a great evil.” (p. 214) This can be illustrated by modifying our numerical example thus:

$$\begin{aligned} V(\text{crime}) &= -8 \\ V(\text{pain inflicted as punishment}) &= -7 \text{ (cf -5 above: here the pain is too intense)} \\ V(\text{combination}) &= +6 \\ V(\text{on the whole}) &= 6 - 7 - 8 = -9 \end{aligned}$$

$-9 < -8$ , so the situation is *not* made better on the whole as a result of the infliction of such intense pain.

In our first illustration, matters are improved by the addition of negatively valued punishment but, since  $-7$  is not greater than  $-5$ , we have not illustrated how

(C) ‘the combined existence of two evils may yet constitute a less evil than would be constituted by the existence of either singly’ (p. 215).

But that is easily done. Let:

$$\begin{aligned} V(\text{crime}) &= -8 \\ V(\text{pain inflicted as punishment}) &= -5 \\ V(\text{combination}) &= +9 = \text{value as a whole} \\ V(\text{on the whole}) &= 9 - 5 - 8 = -4 \end{aligned}$$

In this case “there arises from the combination a positive good which is greater than the *difference* between the sum of the two evils and the demerit of either singly” (p. 215): the sum of the two evils is  $-13$  and the difference between  $-13$  and  $-8$  is  $5$ , that between  $-13$  and  $-5$  is  $8$ , and  $9$  is greater than both these differences. That is:  $9 > 13 - 8$  and  $9 > 13 - 5$ . Or, alternatively:  $9 - 13 > -8$  and  $9 - 13 > -5$ , which is our illustration of (C). Thus we can see how it is that



If it is true that the combined existence of two evils may yet constitute a less evil than would be constituted by the existence of either singly, it is plain that this can only be because there arises from the combination a positive good which is greater than the *difference* between the sum of the two evils and the demerit of either singly: this positive good would then be the value of the whole, *as a whole*. (p. 215)

Moore, it seems, must apply his method of absolute isolation to wholes as well as parts (the consciousness of pleasure is a case in point) – he could not determine the value of a combination as a whole by considering *it* in isolation from the parts of which it is a combination. Rather, it appears that one must consider the whole in isolation, and its parts in isolation, and then calculate the value of the whole minus the sum of the values of its parts to yield the value of the combination as a whole. (This procedure raises difficulties, which we discuss below.)

Applying this method to “personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments”, Moore concludes that these “include *all* the greatest, and *by far* the greatest, goods we can imagine.” (p. 189) Moore “regard[s] it as indubitable that Prof. Sidgwick was so far right ... that ... mere existence of what is beautiful has value, so small as to be negligible, in comparison with that which attaches to the *consciousness* of beauty.” (ibid.) But the main value does not reside in the mere consciousness. Moore (p. 197) “imagine[s] the case of a single person, enjoying throughout eternity the contemplation of scenery as beautiful, and intercourse with persons as admirable, as can be imagined; while yet the whole of the objects of his cognition are absolutely unreal.” He “think[s] we should definitely pronounce the existence of a universe, which consisted solely of such a person, to be *greatly* inferior in value to one in which the objects, in the existence of which he believes, did really exist just as he believes them to do.” Personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments, when valuable, comprise several constituents, and Moore sees three as particularly important in combination, though not singly (p. 199): the cognition of appropriate objects (beautiful objects, or worthy objects of affection such as admirable people (p. 198)), appropriate emotion toward these objects, and true belief in their existence. By themselves, these three have “little or no value,” (p.199) but “taken together [they] seem to form a whole of very great value.” (ibid.) (Here we have another instance of the intentional problem: true beliefs in the existence of the appropriate objects, for example, presuppose the existence of the latter. Thus these beliefs cannot be assessed in isolation.)

Moore then proceeds to draw out a pair of consequences of these thoughts that he sees as constituting their chief importance (p. 199): (1) we can see why mere knowledge can seem so valuable (consider the claims of Plato and Aristotle in this regard): it is a crucial part of wholes of great value, though of ‘little or no value by itself’ (p. 199 – as with true belief, another instance of the intentional problem); (2) beauty and emotion can be greatly enhanced by the presence of true belief (p. 200).

This completes our initial summary of Moore's views on value. We have only discussed one difficulty for Moore's position, namely the intentional problem that besets the isolation test. But many other questions can be raised; for example:

### **Does Moore divorce value from reasons?**

It is plausible to suppose that value is a mark of reasons: if some entity or state is of positive value, then there is reason to take a positive stance toward it – to admire it, approve of it, bring it about etc. And, correspondingly, if it is of negative value, then there is reason to take a negative stance toward it. Perhaps the link between value and reasons also runs in the reverse direction: if we have reason to take a positive stance toward something, then it is of positive value (*mutatis mutandis* for the negative case).

Jonathan Dancy (2004: 177; 2003b: 630-631) sees Moore as breaking this connection between value and reasons on the grounds that, on Moore's view, “a part can contribute to the whole more value than it has actually got *there*.” (2004: 177) Dancy considers Moore's discussion (1903: 35) of the value of the arm, in which Moore suggests that the intrinsic value of the arm is zero, yet “*as a part of the body, it has great value.*” He (Moore) goes on to say: ‘To have value merely as a part is equivalent to having no value at all, but merely being a part of that which has it.’ On Dancy's interpretation of Moore, the arm is contributing value to the whole (the body) that it has not got, yet “[s]urely we do have reason to protect the part *here*, if it is contributing value. So its presence is of value, it would seem, on pain of breaching the link between values and reasons.” (2004: 177)

Dancy is here relying on the thought that if we have reason to protect something, then it is of value: the presence of the arm is of value (*pace* Moore) because we have reason to protect it. He also “will allow no value that is not essentially linked to reasons.” (2004, p. 172) Even if the Moorean attempts to reject the former thought, unless she also rejects the latter she still faces the following sort of problem that Dancy raises. Consider Moore's account of punishment: the punishment is bad, according to Moore, but it ‘contributes’ a positive value to the whole of crime-followed-by-punishment (thus the addition of the punishment improves matters overall). Now if the punishment is bad, we have reason not to impose it, if we are not to sever the link from value to reasons. But, on the contrary, we surely *do* have reason to impose it.

How might Moore respond to Dancy's complaint? Dancy gives a ‘contributory’ interpretation of Moore on which each part of a whole has (potentially) two values associated with it: its intrinsic value (which it genuinely has), and its contributory value (which doesn't actually belong to it at all). We, on the other hand, favour an ‘emergence’ interpretation. Each part possesses only its intrinsic value. But when parts are combined into a whole, additional properties can ‘emerge’ that are properties of the whole but not of the parts individually. And these additional properties can confer value (either positive or negative) on the whole (Moore's ‘value as a whole’) beyond that of the parts. Thus, for example, a whole of positive value can be made up of parts each of which is valueless. Or in the case of the just punishment of a crime, it is not that the pain of the punishment has two

values associated with it: intrinsic badness but contributory goodness. Rather the pain is bad, but the whole of crime and punishment bears the property of being just; and this justice, we are supposing, is a good that outweighs the bad of the pain of the punishment.

Does this interpretation sever the connection between value and reasons? If one insists that one only has reason to protect a part if that part itself is of positive value, then yes. But why buy this principle? The Moorean might have it that: one has reason to protect (or produce) a part if and only if that part is itself valuable or its presence increases value. In the case of a valuable whole made up of valueless parts, we have reason to protect the parts because they are necessary to the whole or for the whole to have the value it has. In the case of punishment, the pain of the punishment is bad, hence we have some reason not to impose it; but its addition increases the good, giving us stronger reason to inflict it than not. And, on this account, the criminal also has stronger reason to suffer the punishment than to avoid it – although, of course, he might well *think* that he has stronger reason to avoid it. (We are assuming that the Moorean denies that agent-relative positional considerations can play a role in practical reasons, thus she cannot maintain that the prisoner's reasons to escape differ in strength from our reasons to abet him.)

What of Dancy's own view? As we have seen, he maintains that one has reason to protect a part if and only if that part itself is of positive value. He distinguishes between the grounds of value and its enabling conditions. In explaining the value of the whole, appeal is made to the value of its grounds, but only to the presence of its enabling conditions: enabling conditions are “required for the whole to exist ... [so] they are of value (because we have reason to protect them). But that value is not contributed to the value of the whole. So, we might say, every necessary part of a valuable whole will be of value, though not all such parts contribute their value (or all their value) to the value of the whole. ... Any part, then, that contributes value must have that value to contribute; but some valuable parts do not contribute their value to the whole, even though their presence is necessary for the whole to have the value it does.” (2004: 180-181) Dancy, as we have seen, complains that on Moore's view, “a part can contribute to the whole more value than it has actually got *there*.” (2004: 177) Dancy disallows this, but allows that parts can have ‘uncontributed value’.

Questions can be raised about this asymmetry, particularly around the issue of negative value. In the case of punishment, on Dancy's contributory interpretation of Moore, the pain of the punishment is bad, but it ‘contributes’ positive value to the whole of crime followed by punishment: recall that in the first numerical illustration above the value of the crime is -8, and value on the whole of crime followed by punishment is -7. On the one hand, the punishment is contributing more positive value than it has: it contributes +1, yet its value alone (as pain) is 6 fewer than this: i.e., -5. But alternatively described it is *not* contributing all of its *negative* value: it has 5 to contribute in a negative direction, but contributes 6 fewer than this in this direction: i.e., +1. Thus it has 6 negative units of ‘uncontributed value’. The content of Dancy's dictum that parts cannot contribute more value than they have but can contribute less seems, then, at best unclear.

Another troubling aspect of Dancy's appeal to uncontributed value concerns the issue of context-free value. Dancy's position seems to be that a part can have value in a context but not contribute all its value in that context: "It remains true that no feature contributes to the whole any value that it has not got in that context. But it is also true that some features that have value in that context do not contribute that value to the value of the whole." (2004: 181) The issue then arises as to whether a feature that possesses uncontributed value possesses that value outside the context in question. If the uncontributed value is not present outside the context where it fails to be contributed, then it would seem that it never could be contributed; but is value that could never make a contribution really value? We think not. So is Dancy committed to features that have context-free value (or, at least, 'trans-context' value)? He does discuss (2004: 181-182) the case of a dress that would be improved by the removal of diamonds. Of the diamonds, he says, "in a case where something of intrinsic value [the diamonds] makes matters worse by its presence, what we should do is preserve it, but remove it from the present context [the dress]." Here perhaps he implies that the diamonds have context-free intrinsic value. But then the question arises of how this is to be assessed.

To sum up: Dancy appeals to the notion of uncontributed value in order to combine (i) the claim that there can be parts of a valuable whole that, though necessary for its existence or for it to have the value it has, contribute no value to it, with (ii) the principle that one has reason to protect a part if and only if that part itself is of positive value. The appeal to the existence of uncontributed value at the least raises awkward questions, or so we have claimed. Better, in our view, to abandon it. One could still maintain that there are enabling conditions by hanging onto (i), but dropping (ii) and holding instead that (iii) one has reason to protect a part if and only if that part is itself valuable or is necessary for the presence or the value of a valuable whole. We see the Moorean as taking this option. On an emergence interpretation, Moore maintains that value beyond the sum of the intrinsic values of the parts may be conferred by new properties that emerge from their combination; thus there can certainly be parts of a valuable whole that, though necessary for its existence or its value, have zero intrinsic value themselves – indeed it is possible that a whole of positive value be made up entirely of parts with zero (or even negative) intrinsic value.

### **Varieties of value and the isolation test**

There are aspects of Moore's views on value with which we are in sympathy – for example, the idea that one cannot determine the value of a 'whole' by looking only at its 'parts' in isolation. Yet Moore does appeal to isolation in determining intrinsic values, which leads to what we called the 'intentional problem'. And this is not the only problem. For example, depending on one's perspective, the isolation test may give rise to difficulties when it comes to generalization.

According to the isolation test, the intrinsic value of an entity or state is its non-instrumental value in a world where it is the sole existent. This value cannot, of course, vary. In particular, it does not change when the entity appears in a whole – for example, "if it had no value by itself, it has none still, however great be that of

the whole of which it now forms a part.” (1903: 30) This entails that entities and states have their intrinsic values essentially or unconditionally – for instance, “a judgment which asserts that a thing is good in itself ... if true of one instance of the thing in question, is necessarily true of all.” (1903: 27) Moore's isolation test for intrinsic value, then, renders such value essential; and each instance of intrinsic value gives rise to a generalization: if X is intrinsically valuable here, then it is intrinsically valuable to the same degree wherever it appears.

What of those who find generalization implausible, such as extreme particularists? They reject Moore's isolationism on the grounds of their claim that no feature need have the same intrinsic value in every possible whole of which it is a part. But even those of a more moderate temperament (such as ourselves) might find Moore's degree of generalization excessive.

Moore's isolationism, then, results in over-generalization. But it also results in under-generalization. We find it plausible, for example, that justice can never be anything but intrinsically good (which is distinct from saying that being motivated by a sense of justice is always appropriate). But justice suffers the intentional problem: it cannot be isolated in Moore's sense – there could not be, we contend, a universe consisting solely of, say, a just act.<sup>3</sup> And given this it seems that Moore cannot assign it an intrinsic value.

Finally, even in cases that do not suffer the intentional problem, isolated evaluation seldom if ever makes much sense – how can one evaluate, say, the contemplation of a beautiful rose in a universe where it and its observer are the sole existents? To begin with, is the life of the observer short or long? Perhaps a longer life is better – but what about a long life spent only in the contemplation of a rose?

Given that the isolation test has (at the least) these problems, is it helpful? We doubt it. We claimed above that Moore must apply his method of absolute isolation to wholes as well as parts – in order to calculate the value of a combination as a whole, it seems one must consider the whole in isolation, and its parts in isolation, and then calculate the value of the whole minus the sum of the values of its parts. But why bother determining the values of the parts in isolation? Doing so does not help in working out the value of the whole ‘on the whole’, since this is the sum of the values of the parts *plus* the value of the whole ‘as a whole’ – and calculating the latter requires, as we have just seen, prior knowledge of the value of the whole ‘on the whole’. Moore's evaluative procedure is, then, at best unhelpful.

Moore defines an organic unity (1903: 36) as a whole the intrinsic value of which does not equal the sum of the intrinsic values of its parts. And he takes recourse to organic unities lest the intrinsic value of a whole be mistakenly calculated by looking only to the isolated intrinsic values of its parts. However, we reject the

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<sup>3</sup> The Moorean might respond by claiming (1) that only agents can exhibit justice; and (2) that there could be a universe consisting solely of a just agent. We are dubious of both claims. But even if they were substantiated, could the value of a just agent be realized if she were the only presence?

isolation test, and once it is abandoned the notion of an organic unity in Moore's sense becomes subject to challenge. Why be committed to the existence of Moorean organic unities unless one is committed to the claim that the parts of a whole can be evaluated independently of that whole? There may be other potential methods for such independent evaluation apart from the isolation test, but we see little prospect for their success.

Moore avoids the mistake of calculating the value of a whole by summing the values of its parts in isolation. But there is an alternative picture that also forestalls this error. We contend that there are indeed wholes that have more to them than is evident from their parts taken by themselves<sup>4</sup>. But we do not conclude from this that the value of such a whole cannot equal the sum of the values of its parts. Rather we reject both Moore's isolation test and his account of organic unities. We claim, rather, that parts can only be evaluated in a way relevant to the whole of which they are a part if they are evaluated *in situ* (thus one cannot evaluate a whole by looking to its parts in isolation; this is one reason why we consider ourselves holists); and the value of the whole does equal the sum of the values of its parts.

We reject, then, Moore's version of holism; but what of Dancy's? As we saw above, Dancy endorses uncontributed value, thus although “the value of the whole is identical to the sum of the values of the contributing parts,” yet given that some parts do not contribute their value, “the value of the whole is not identical to the sum of the values of all the parts.” (2004: 181) On our picture there is no uncontributed value, thus the value of the whole is simply the sum of the values of its parts.

Where do we stand, then, on (i), (ii) and (iii) at end of previous section? Before addressing this question directly, we need to lay out more of our view.

We are sympathetic to the idea that you have overall reason to perform some act if and only if this act of yours and its consequences would be valuable. However, this does not entail that the strength of your reasons to  $\Phi$  always varies only with the value of your  $\Phi$ -ing – we contend that value is not the *only* mark of the *strength* of reasons: agent-relative positional considerations also play a role in certain reasons, such as reasons of friendship or reasons to pursue certain benefits for oneself (see, e.g., McNaughton and Rawling 2006). This complication aside, however, the strength of your reason to  $\Phi$  varies with, and only with, the amount of value that your  $\Phi$ -ing will produce, where this includes the value of your act itself, and may depend on what has happened in the past. The type of value here is value as an end, which we discuss below; and the object of evaluation is the state of affairs that your act produces, which includes the act itself. (We address below Scanlon's objections to attributing the values of actions solely to states of affairs.)

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<sup>4</sup> These parts do not include their combination as an additional part – to do so would not only be misleading, but probably lead to regress: would we include the combination of [the basic parts and their combination] as itself a further part?

When it comes to practical reasons, then, the evaluative comparison of interest is that between states of affairs (we do not draw a distinction here between states of affairs and events) – these are the relevant wholes. And we shall take it that for purposes of evaluation their parts are also states of affairs. Consider, for instance, the state of affairs, S, of A committing a crime and subsequently being tried and imprisoned. S has as some of its parts: A committing the crime; A being tried; A being imprisoned; and A believing that he committed the crime, believing that he has been imprisoned because of this, and feeling remorse. There could have been a state of affairs, T, like S in that A is tried, imprisoned, has the same beliefs and feels the same remorse, but in which he did not actually commit the crime. T and S have some similar parts, then, but the values of these parts may be influenced by their surroundings. For example, A's feelings of remorse in S are of positive value but in T this is reversed. Or take the imprisonment of A. In S it is a case of punishment, and, let us suppose, justice, in which case it is of positive value. But in T it is not punishment (assuming that for the intentional infliction of pain to count as punishment it has to be in retribution for an offence), and is unjust, and thus of negative value (we are assuming that A's imprisonment in T does not have some unmentioned beneficial side-effect).

Every action, then, results in a state of affairs, which may be broken down into parts, each of which is another state of affairs. Care must be taken when evaluating these parts, since one and the same part can be picked out by differing descriptions<sup>5</sup> – and these descriptions can make reference (either implicit or explicit) to other parts of the same whole: A's imprisonment in the case above can be re-described as just punishment in state S but not in state T. Also, when summing the values of parts, the catalogue of parts must be mutually exclusive and exhaustive lest the whole be over- or under-valued (there will in general be more than one way to carve up the whole into such a catalogue).

The descriptions true of a state of affairs may, as it were, pull in different directions vis-à-vis its value. Consider again A's just imprisonment. On some views the pain of the imprisonment is a bad to be weighed against the good of the justice. But there aren't two different states of affairs here, one bad and one good. There is one state of affairs with two different descriptions (the intentional infliction of pain, the imposition of justice), and in determining whether it is better to imprison A rather than not, the good must be weighed against the bad. We are supposing that the good outweighs the bad here, so we have more reason to impose the punishment than not. (The prisoner, on our view, may have more reason to escape rather than not, but this is because of agent-relative considerations that we are leaving aside here.)

Vis-à-vis (i), (ii) and (iii) at end of previous section, we are inclined to adopt (i): there can be parts of a valuable whole that, though necessary for its existence or for it to have the value it has<sup>6</sup>, are not themselves valuable as ends – indeed, we see it as possible that there can be such parts of a valuable whole that have

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<sup>5</sup> Cf Davidson (e.g., 1980: 59) on the redescription of actions.

<sup>6</sup> See Dancy 2004: 172 for discussion of such necessary conditions.

negative value. But we adopt neither (ii) nor (iii). These both make reference to the idea of having reason to protect a part, but we reject this possibility. When you act you produce a state of affairs. You cannot simply replace or protect a part of a whole without creating a new whole. And all we are committed to is the claim that you have reason to produce such a whole if and only if that whole is valuable. Parts of wholes have values; the value of a whole is the sum of the values of its parts; you have reason to produce a whole if and only if it's valuable.

What of the case above of the diamonds on the dress? The three states of affairs to compare are (a) that of the dress being decorated with the diamonds; (b) that of the dress being devoid of the diamonds, the latter being held ready for a more appropriate use; and (c) that of the dress being devoid of diamonds, the latter being destroyed. We are supposing that the middle state of affairs is the most valuable. The diamonds themselves are not a state of affairs, and although we have no objection to speaking of their value as objects (in some context), that value is not relevant here. But we do have reason to preserve them: since the middle state is the most valuable, we have most reason to remove the diamonds from the dress and hold onto them.

The value of a state of affairs with which we have been concerned is its value as an end. How does this relate to intrinsic value? We reject Moore's isolation test, and with that rejection goes, of course, rejection of Moore's account of intrinsic value. Moore restricts value to only two varieties: intrinsic and instrumental (value as means<sup>7</sup>). And intrinsic value is, for Moore, identical to all of the following: value in itself (see, e.g., 1903: 21), value as an end (see, e.g., 1903: 24), and (as far as we can tell) value for its own sake (see, e.g., 1903: 87). Also, as we have seen, intrinsic value is, on Moore's account, held essentially.

Is there an alternative account of intrinsic value that does not appeal to the isolation test? Part of the intuitive appeal of the isolation test rests on the thought that intrinsic value should not depend on extrinsic features. For example, suppose that a state in which a beautiful object exists is increased in value by the arrival of an appreciative observer. Is the *intrinsic* value of the former state increased by this arrival? It seems not. Or to take another example, a red helleborine may be made more valuable by its rarity, but its rarity (since this is dependent upon the number of *others*) is not relevant to its *intrinsic* value. On this approach, the intrinsic value of an entity is dependent upon that entity's intrinsic features – but work would need to be done to spell out both the nature of an intrinsic feature and the nature of the dependence (see, e.g., Dancy 2004: chap. 10).

We do not propose to do this work. Rather, the important category for our purposes here is that of value as an end. And, *pace* Moore, two states of affairs might differ in their value as ends even though they have the same intrinsic value (because intrinsically similar). For example, suppose that in one state of affairs red helleborines are rare, but in another they are not. Each of these states of affairs

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<sup>7</sup> Note that one and the same feature may be both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable: health, for example, might be intrinsically valuable and valuable as part of the means to, say, some achievement.



has as a part the existence of some red helleborine. The intrinsic values of these two parts are identical, but their values as ends differ: the value as an end of the existence of the plant is greater in the state in which it is rare.

Value as an end is, of course, to be contrasted with value as means. But in addition to this distinction, there is also a fundamental/derivative distinction (and there may be more – see, e.g., Dancy 2004: chap. 10). Instrumental value is clearly derivative: the value of a means derives from the value of the end at which it aims. But there also seem to be cases of derivative value as an end, such as certain cases of constitutive value. For example, innocent enjoyment is valuable as an end, and watching cricket constitutes such a form of innocent enjoyment for David. It is not that watching cricket is a means to enjoyment in the way that driving to the cricket match is such a means, or in the way that surgery is a means to health: David's watching cricket *is* a form of innocent enjoyment. Watching cricket in this case is valuable as an end. But it is not fundamentally valuable: its value, on this account, derives from the fact that it is a form of innocent enjoyment. One way in which to distinguish the fundamental from the derivative is to consider the question "Why is that valuable?" In the case of David's watching cricket, one answer is: "because he enjoys it." But if we ask, "And why is enjoyment valuable?" we seem to hit bedrock – although enjoyment may not be valuable (if it is sadistic, for example), when it is valuable, there seems to be no further feature that confers its value. Thus, in this sense, watching cricket is derivatively valuable; it is the enjoyment that is fundamentally valuable, although both are valuable as ends.<sup>8</sup>

So much for our discussion of value as an end *per se*. But we have assigned it, in the case of actions, to states of affairs. We now turn to Scanlon's complaints against this approach.

### Scanlon and the teleological account of value

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<sup>8</sup> Setting aside the isolation test, this distinction between fundamental and derivative value, if adopted by a Moorean, might help in her defence against certain complaints. For example Scanlon (1998: 88-89) claims that because Moore adopts a purely 'teleological' account of value (see below), he (Moore) cannot give a satisfactory account of his own claim that friendship is a good. Scanlon implies that Moore's teleological account of value commits him to the view that "the primary reason to be loyal to one's friends is ... that this is necessary in order for the friendship to continue to exist." (1998: 89) We take Scanlon to be attributing to Moore the following line of reasoning: loyalty is not fundamentally valuable, hence it must be instrumentally valuable – valuable as a means to continuing friendships. But a modified Moorean position has available the following possibility: loyalty is not a means to continued friendship; rather it is partly constitutive of friendship. On this account, loyalty is both valuable as an end and derivatively valuable – its value derives from the value of the friendship. We do not think that this will save the Moorean account of friendship, but we do not share Scanlon's account of why it should be rejected. Scanlon rejects a teleological account of value; we accept it (at least as far as acts are concerned). We reject the Moorean account of friendship not because of objections to its account of value, but because we take it that a Moorean account of reasons would entail that the strength of your reasons to act always varies only with the value of your so acting. And we deny this: we claim that positional facts can also play an ineliminable value-independent role in certain reasons, such as reasons of friendship (see, e.g., McNaughton and Rawling 2006).

Scanlon (2000, chap. 2) criticizes what he calls the ‘teleological’ account of value, according to which (as we read Scanlon) intrinsic value is assigned to, and only to, states of affairs (which he sees as entailing the claim that “To be (intrinsically) valuable ... is to be ‘to be promoted’.” (2000: 80)) We take it that Scanlon would see his criticisms as applying not only to this approach in the case of intrinsic value, but also in that of value as an end. The value (as an end) of an action is the value (as end) of the whole that it produces (which has its performance as a part). But what kind of entity is this whole? It is hard to see that it can be anything but a state of affairs (or, perhaps, an event – we do not see the distinction as important in the current context). Thus although the teleological view may not be generally true, when it comes to action it seems unavoidable – at least if that is read as claiming that the value of an action is the value of the state of affairs that arises as a result of its performance.

Two questions immediately arise:

- (1) Does this entail, in line with Scanlon's claim above, that valuable actions are ‘to be promoted’?
- (2) What of Scanlon's arguments against a teleological account of value – do they weigh against our account?

(1) This question needs clarification. Some acts are more valuable than others, so even on a naïve consequentialist view, not all valuable acts are to be promoted if this means promoting them all equally. Presumably, on any sensible view, at most only the most valuable acts at a particular juncture are to be promoted at that time. Suppose one holds, as on certain consequentialist views, that (roughly) each of us should, on every occasion, maximize the good. Then each of us should so act on every occasion. If we should do what we have most reason to do (we actually deny this – see McNaughton and Rawling 2004 – but that discussion is not relevant here), then on some consequentialist views you always have most reason to perform the most valuable action within your power. We deny this – we claim above that the strength of your reasons to A may not vary only with the value of your A-ing. Perhaps this means that we do not see valuable actions as always ‘to be promoted’. We're not sure. But in any case, we do not see that our view is inconsistent with assigning value to states of affairs when it comes to evaluating actions.

(2) Scanlon (2000: chap. 2) argues against a purely teleological account of value. As we have said, we have no quarrel with assigning value to entities other than states of affairs, except in the case of action. But in the case of action, we claim, they are its sole repository. Do Scanlon's arguments tell against this?

As far as we can tell, Scanlon offers three arguments against the purely teleological account of value. First, he attempts to undercut what he sees as one of the sources of the teleological notion of value: a purportedly mistaken teleological account of reasons (2000: 83-84). Second, he offers cases of value that, he claims, do not fit the teleological mould (e.g., 2000: 89, 100). And third, he seems to

argue that the teleological account of value commits one to explaining practical reasons by reference to value in cases where the reverse direction of explanation is more plausible (e.g., 2000: 93). We address these arguments seriatim.

According to “the purely teleological conception of reasons, ... since any rational action must aim at some result, reasons that bear on whether to perform an action must appeal to the desirability or undesirability of having that result occur, taking into account also the intrinsic value of the action itself.” (2000: 84) But, Scanlon argues, “many of the reasons bearing on an action concern not the desirability of outcomes, but rather the eligibility or ineligibility of various other reasons.” (ibid.) Thus Scanlon distinguishes (pp. 50-51) between *pro tanto* reasons, which “can be outweighed without losing their force or status as reasons” (2000: 50) and *prima facie* reasons, which may lack force altogether under certain conditions (2000: 51). We are not convinced, however, that Scanlon's analysis of the phenomenon he is pointing to is the correct one. And, more importantly for our current discussion, we do not see how his complaints against a teleological account of reasons have any bearing on a teleological account of value.

First, then, Scanlon's examples of ‘non-teleological’ reasons. There is the case of ‘playing to win’ (2000: 51-52). Suppose that playing to win a particular game is what you would most enjoy, and that no other relevant considerations weigh as heavily as this one. So you decide to play to win. Then, claims Scanlon, this decision renders irrelevant the fact that executing certain strategies will leave your opponent feeling ‘crushed and disappointed’ – you simply need not weigh this fact when determining which strategy to execute. However, while we might agree that when the time comes to decide upon a strategy you need not consider your opponent's feelings, this is not because they are irrelevant, but because you should already have taken them into account when deciding to play to win in the first place. The effects on your opponent's feelings were a relevant consideration at the time you decided on this, and remain so – but it is built into the case that they did not, and do not, weigh heavily enough to override your decision.

The other examples concern “various formal and informal roles” (2000: 52) and deontological constraints (2000: 84-86). Concerning the former, Scanlon claims that being “a good member of [say] a search committee ... involve[s] bracketing the reason-giving force of some of your own interests which might otherwise be quite relevant and legitimate reasons for acting in one way rather than another.” (2000: 52) On one reading, Scanlon's idea seems to be that reasons that arise from various interests of mine are silenced by my role as a search committee member. But this makes it appear that these reasons are still somehow present, but rendered inoperative. On the account we find more plausible, by contrast, if I am on the search committee then the fact that, say, Eve is a close friend of mine is simply no reason to vote for her – as opposed to being an ‘ineligible’ reason to do so. We have here an instance of the more general particularist point that a consideration that is a reason in one situation may lack that status in another: that Eve is in my friend may be a reason to favor her in another context, but not here.

Alternatively, perhaps Scanlon has in mind a counterfactual account of the non-teleological reason-giving force of my committee membership – something like the following: if I weren't on the search committee then the fact that Eve is my friend would be a reason to vote for her (even though, given that I am on the search committee, that fact is no reason to do so). The problem here, of course, is that if I weren't on the search committee I wouldn't have a vote. The fact that I'm on the search committee is not a non-teleological reason that “bear[s] on whether to [vote for Eve]” (2000: 84 – cited above); rather it is a necessary condition for having a vote.

Do deontological constraints fare any better as an example of non-teleological reasons? Scanlon says the following:

Consider, for example, the principle that one may not kill one person in order to save several others. Accepting this principle involves accepting a certain view of the reasons one has: that the positive value of saving these others does not justify killing a person. If this principle is correct, then one does not need to balance the value of abiding by it against the good to be achieved through its violation. Doing this would be flatly inconsistent with the principle itself, which holds that the good is not sufficient to justify the action in question. Someone who accepts this principle therefore does not need to appeal to the ‘negative intrinsic value’ of killing in order to explain why she does not do what is necessary to save the greater number. (2000: 84)

The relevant claim here is that a constraint against killing is not to be weighed against the disvalue of more deaths; rather it is built into the constraint that the weighing ‘does not need’ to be done. As Scanlon goes on to say, however:

Of course there is also the question of whether one should accept such a principle to begin with. This is the question to which the claim that deontological prohibitions are ‘paradoxical’ is most plausibly addressed, and it obviously needs an answer. (2000: 85)

We side with the consequentialist here, and deny that there are constraints. That is something we argue elsewhere, however (see, e.g., McNaughton and Rawling 2006). For present purposes, our complaint is that, on this account of constraints, it is not so much that the constraint against killing renders ‘ineligible’ the reasons that favor minimizing the loss of life (in the way that being on a search committee purportedly renders reasons of friendship ineligible); rather, on Scanlon's account of it, the constraint simply has built into it the claim that the reasons that favor minimizing the loss of life are ineligible. Scanlon seeks to avoid the thought that the constraint against killing is appealing to killing's undesirability. But, first, the constraint itself makes reference to the desirability of minimizing killing – as quoted above (2000: 84): “the [constraint] holds that the good [of minimizing killing] is not sufficient to justify” one's own act of killing. And second, constraints, on Scanlon's account of them, dictate what is to count as a sufficient reason, so of course they are not to be weighed in the way that

killing's undesirability is to be: just as the rules of evidence in a trial are not themselves evidence but dictate how it is to be weighed, so Scanlon's constraints are not, as he seems to claim, reasons, but, rather, dictate how they [the reasons] are to be weighed.

On a different account of constraints, that (say) by pulling the trigger I would be the killer of an innocent myself is to be weighed against the fact that by not doing so several innocents will be murdered by others. And the latter reason to pull the trigger is argued to be weaker than the former reason not to pull it. We disagree that such arguments work generally: although we acknowledge that there may be circumstances in which I shouldn't pull the trigger even to prevent the murders, we disagree that constraints are so weighty that they trump any consideration that might favor their violation – we disagree, for example, that you are generally forbidden to violate a constraint even to prevent more egregious violations by others.<sup>9</sup> But at least this account of constraints brings positional reasons into play – that the killing would come about by *my* hand is seen as crucial.

On our view positional considerations are relevant to practical reasons, and they do not “appeal to the desirability or undesirability of having [a particular] result occur” (2000: 84) – to this extent, then, they might be referred to as at least non-teleological components of reasons. For example, that something would bring *me* pleasure, or console *my* friend, gives me a reason to pursue it beyond its desirability. That I have certain pleasures is desirable; but no more or less desirable than, say, that you have those same pleasures. Similarly, it is desirable that my friend be consoled by me; but no more so than that your friend be consoled by you. However, on our view, I typically have more reason to pursue my pleasure or console my friend than to facilitate your pursuit of your pleasure or your consolation of your friend – and not merely because it is a more efficient use of my time.

To conclude, we agree with Scanlon to the extent that there are at least non-teleological components of reasons. But we disagree that his examples exemplify these; and, more crucially, we do not see how these non-teleological aspects of reasons for action tell against a teleological account of the *value* of actions. These non-teleological aspects count, as it were, alongside value, not as non-teleological components *of* value.

What, then, of Scanlon's cases that, he claims, do not fit the teleological mould? On p. 88 (2000) he considers the case of friendship. He makes various points, but his direct argument here against the purely teleological account of valuable action seems to run as follows. Friendship is valuable, but there are reasons of friendship that are not reasons “to promote friendship (for ourselves or others).” (2000: 89) We agree. But we disagree with Scanlon's conclusion that therefore there are non-teleological values involved in reasons for action vis-à-vis one's friends. Rather, according to us, what this shows is that there are reasons of friendship that are not

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<sup>9</sup> More globally, we reject models of reasons and morality on which, roughly speaking, all reasons favour oneself or those close to one but are, as it were, held in check by various moral proscriptions and prescriptions (cf. Hobbes' Sovereign).

concerned with value. What I have reason to do for my friends involves producing valuable states of affairs, but there will be instances where, say, what I have most reason to do is help *my* friend (to produce the valuable state of affairs in which I aid her), even though I could produce even more value by doing something else. The positional consideration that she's my friend is a reason here – a reason that doesn't rest entirely on value. (Notice that we don't deny that states in which friends help friends are valuable; but if that value were the entire story then I would have no special reason to help my friends – the state in which I help my friends is no more valuable than the state in which you help yours, so I would have, *ceteris paribus*, as much reason to bring about the latter as the former. And such parity, we have argued elsewhere (in McNaughton and Rawling 2006, for instance), would undercut the very possibility of friendship.)

On p. 99 (2000) Scanlon offers the case of the value of music and art. Consider, say, Beethoven's late quartets. Scanlon wants to distinguish between the following questions: (1) how valuable is the experience of listening to them? (2) how should we value them? And he claims that the purely teleological view of value cannot handle (2). Again, we disagree. Question (2) is directed at the issue of “what one should expect from [this music], and in what way it is worth attending to.” (2000: 100) But we don't see why the teleological account of value can't handle this: there are states of affairs in which people attend to this music appropriately, and states of affairs in which they don't (when it is “played in the elevators, hallways, and restrooms of an office building, for example.” (p. 100)) The former are more valuable than the latter.

Scanlon wants to draw the same distinction regarding friendship (2000: 88 ff). We are more sympathetic here to the idea that teleological value misses the mark when it comes to the issue of how to value friends. But, as we argued above, this is not because there's anything amiss with the teleological account of value in the case, but rather that not all the relevant reasons are rooted in value. (The same point might also apply in the case of valuing music: it might be that each of us has special reason to attend to Beethoven's late quartets appropriately *ourselves* – a reason that does not stem from the general value of all of us attending appropriately.)

Finally, we come to Scanlon's claim that the purely teleological account of value commits one to explaining practical reasons by reference to value in cases where the reverse direction of explanation is more plausible (e.g., 2000: 93). Scanlon claims, for instance, that “we have good reason to be curious about the natural world and to try to understand how it works,” (2000: 93) and that this explains the value of scientific knowledge, rather than the other way around. And he sees this as an argument against the purely teleological account of value.

It is unclear to us, however, how this argument is supposed to proceed. Suppose we agree that scientific knowledge is valuable because we have reason to be curious about the world (as opposed to claiming that we have reason to be curious because knowledge is valuable). Is this inconsistent with attributing value to states of affairs here? We think not. For instance, Scanlon himself adopts what he calls a

‘buck-passing’<sup>10</sup> account of value according to which “to call something valuable is to say that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it.” (2000: 96) So, on this account, to call the state of affairs in which I possess knowledge valuable is to say that this state “has other properties [apart from its value] that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it.” One of these properties is that it is a state in which my curiosity is satisfied – and on the view we are considering in this paragraph this state is valuable because I have reason to satisfy my curiosity. We see nothing inconsistent in such a view.

### **Concluding remarks**

We see no problem, then, in claiming that the objects of value, when it comes to actions, are states of affairs (where the value here is value as an end). There will in general be more than one way to break a state into a mutually exclusive and exhaustive set of component states, but the sum of the values of the members of any of these sets will equal the sum of the values of the members of any of the others. And this sum is the value of the original state. This account of matters is not holist in Moore's sense, then, because the value of a whole is equal to the sum of the values of its parts. But it is holist in another sense: the value of a part is dependent upon the whole in which it appears.

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<sup>10</sup> We remain neutral on the issue of buck-passing about value: the buck-passer maintains that value is not itself a reason, but that to say something is valuable is to say that there are reasons to, say, promote it. On occasion people do express matters by saying that there is reason to do something because it's good – and this locution might be taken as implying that value is a reason. We have no objection to this provided that double-counting is avoided, unless done uniformly. When something is valuable, there are reasons for its value, and these might also be reasons for action (or perhaps some attitude). The danger is that if one then contends that the value is an additional reason, the reasons for that value get counted twice, as it were. There is, perhaps, a way of keeping things kosher here: one can uniformly double-count and thereby give all objects of evaluation equal advantage.

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