

24.02: Moral Problems and the Good Life  
Prof. Sally Haslanger  
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## Value and the Environment

### I. Recap

So far we've been considering what makes a human life a *good life*. The thought is that there are some things that are intrinsically good, not just instrumentally good, and that lives can be wasted if they aren't sufficiently oriented towards what is intrinsically good. In considering what is intrinsically good, we've considered kinds of experience (e.g., pleasure), desire-satisfaction, the realization of human capabilities, and the possibility of a list of objective states or conditions that are good or valuable in themselves.

### II. Framing the Question

The question: What makes a human life a *good life*? is related to a broader question: What is valuable, in general? Are there things, other than human lives, that can be good or bad? And if so, what makes them good or bad? What is the source of their value?

Recall the distinction between instrumental goods and intrinsic goods: something is instrumentally good if it is good *as a means* to some other good. Intrinsic goods are good *in themselves*. We can now begin to clarify this further. Whether or not something is an instrumental good is a matter of *how we value it*: do we value it as a means to something else, or do we value it for its own sake? A heuristic to determine whether you value something instrumentally is to consider: would you still value it even if it didn't have the same effects?

Intrinsic goods are better contrasted not with instrumental goods, but extrinsic goods. An extrinsic good is valuable because of its relation to something else as opposed to some fact about *it*. A heuristic to bring out the contrast is the "isolation test": X is intrinsically valuable just in case it would be valuable even in a world where there was nothing else. Examples (some controversial, but the point is to get the idea, not to agree):

*Valued instrumentally*: vaccinations

*Valued for its own sake*: pleasure

*Extrinsically good*: photo of Gandhi, Einstein's letters

*Intrinsically good*: knowledge

We now need another distinction between conferred and unconferred goods. Something has *conferred* value just in case it is valuable because someone values it. Something has *unconferred* value just in case it has value regardless of whether or not it is valued. Note that if things have conferred value, they are extrinsically valuable. (Can things be extrinsically valuable without that value being conferred?)

*Value conferred*: money

*Value unconferred*: honesty, courage (moral virtue, generally)

Questions:

- i) Is anything intrinsically good that is not good *for* humans?
- ii) Is all value conferred?

### III. Methods

Ethical theory and reflective equilibrium.

#### **IV. Two Thought Experiments (Wenz)**

Case I: bomber pilot

Case II: last human

*Intrinsic value principle:* Things with intrinsic value should be valued for their own sake and not merely instrumentally.

*Prima facie obligation* ("at first sight" obligation): an obligation that may be overridden by other moral considerations.

*Wenz's principle:* Because of their intrinsic value, we have a prima facie obligation to avoid destroying healthy ecosystems (of a certain degree of complexity), "apart from any human advantage that might be gained by their continued existence." (MM, pp. 596-7)

#### **V. Counter-arguments (Baxter)**

- a) People do not, as a matter of fact, value the environment/ecosystems for their own sake.
- b) It is not clear what the preferences of animals/ecosystems are, or whether they even have preferences.
- c) Animals and ecosystems cannot represent themselves in moral dialogue, and we cannot trust other (self-appointed) humans to represent them.
- d) There is no good or bad, right or wrong, in nature. All value is conferred.

*Conferred value principle:* if the value of X is conferred, then x should not be valued for its own sake, but only instrumentally.

Is the value of ecosystems/animals intrinsic? Is it conferred?