INTRINSICALISM AND CONDITIONALISM ABOUT FINAL VALUE

ABSTRACT. The paper distinguishes between two rival views about the nature of final value (i.e. the value something has for its own sake) – intrinsicalism and conditionalism. The former view (which is the one adopted by G.E. Moore and several later writers) holds that the final value of any F supervenes solely on features intrinsic to F, while the latter view allows that the final value of F may supervene on features non-intrinsic to F. Conditionalism thus allows the final value of F to vary according to the context in which F appears. Given the plausible assumption that there is an intimate tie between final values and appropriate attitudinal responses, it appears that conditionalism is the better approach for mainly the following three reasons: First, intrinsicalism is too indiscriminate, which makes it subject to what I call ‘location problems’ of final value. I illustrate this problem by discussing alleged examples of Moorean organic unities. Second, intrinsicalism evokes symptoms of ‘evaluative schizophrenia’. Third, considerations of theoretical economy tell in favour of conditionalism. Thereafter I respond to some recent challenges to conditionalism. An appendix surveys some meritorious implications that conditionalism offers for various substantial versions of such structurally different views about value as monism, pluralism, and particularism.

KEY WORDS: conditionalism, final value, intrinsicalism, G. E. Moore, organic unities, pain, pleasure, supervenience

1. INTRODUCTION

In the opening chapter of Principia Ethica G. E. Moore made the following claim:

The part of a valuable whole retains exactly the same value when it is, as when it is not, a part of that whole.\footnote{Moore (1993 [1903], p. 81).}

Moore was here thinking of intrinsic value. He based this claim on his belief in a thesis that he didn’t state explicitly in Principia Ethica but which he later referred to as “...perhaps the most important thing I want to say about [intrinsic value]”\footnote{Moore (1993 [1922b], p. 22, see also pp. 6, 16).}, viz.
Intrinsic value is a property which depends only on the intrinsic nature of the things which possess it.\(^3\)

The close connection between these two theses is quite obvious; if the intrinsic value of some \(F\)\(^4\) depends exclusively on the intrinsic nature of \(F\), then \(F\) has the same intrinsic value in whatever context it appears (provided of course that the intrinsic nature of \(F\) is kept intact). To use a more contemporary jargon, Moore’s view was that intrinsic value \textit{supervenes}\(^5\) exclusively on properties intrinsic\(^6\) to that which has it. This view has been accepted by many philosophers writing in the theory of value.\(^7\)

Recently however, some authors have questioned the influential devices of Moore’s\(^8\), and argued that the value something, \(F\), has \textit{for its own sake}, or as an \textit{end} may well supervene on properties non-intrinsic to \(F\). To demarcate the deviation from Moore, some writers refer to the value something, \(F\), has for its own sake, or as an end, as \textit{final} value and treats intrinsic value as a subcategory of the wider category of final value.\(^9\) In this paper I will follow their lead and use the term ‘final’, rather than ‘intrinsic’, value. This terminological shift is not a substantive deviation from Moore. For

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 22 [italicised in original]. In his influential 1922-essay “The Conception of Intrinsic Value”, Moore similarly wrote: “To say that a kind of value is ‘intrinsic’ means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question.” (Moore (1993 [1922]a, p. 286) [italicised in original]

\(^4\)In this paper I intend to be non-committal as to the ontological status of \(F\). That is, I abstain from taking a stand in the debate on which kind(s) of ontological entities that can properly be ascribed final value. Suggestions in the literature include e.g. properties (Butchvarov, 1989); facts (Ross, 1930); states of affairs that obtain (Lemos, 1994); concrete states of individuals (Zimmerman, 2001a); physical things and persons (Anderson, 1993; Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 1999, 2003). I defend my own view that particularised properties or tropes are the bearers of final value in Olson (2003). The debate on the ontology of value bearers is not crucially connected to the debate over intrinsicalism and conditionalism, or to the arguments in this paper.

\(^5\)Moore did not use the term ‘supervenience’, but it is clear, especially from his (1993 [1922]a) that he had the concept in mind.

\(^6\)I won’t dwell upon what it is for a property to be intrinsic. Suffice it to say here that a property \(P\) of an object, \(x\), is intrinsic to \(x\) if \(x\)’s having \(P\) is not dependent on the existence, or non-existence, of a distinct object \(y\), otherwise \(P\) is non-intrinsic to \(x\). See Langton and Lewis (1998) for a commendable discussion on this topic.

\(^7\)For instance Chisholm (1986); Lemos (1994, 1998); Zimmerman (1999, 2001a); Feldman (2000); Bradley (2002). It deserves to be mentioned that Chisholm in his (1968) suggested a view closer to conditionalism than to intrinsicalism.
