The Value of Unity
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Abstract

This is a new theory of intrinsic value, of what is good and bad in itself.

Physical pain and acts of cruelty are bad in themselves, we believe, even if they lead to a greater balance of good. Similarly, physical pleasure and acts of kindness are good in themselves, even when they somehow lead to what is bad.

The first and most important challenge for any theory of intrinsic value is to explain our many confident judgments such as these, concerning what is good and bad in itself. A second challenge for such a theory is to explain the nature and limits of value pluralism: to explain how different cultural practices can be equally valuable, for instance, while oppression or racist domination cannot be good at all. Third, the theory should describe plausible relations between morality and value—that is, between ‘the right’ and ‘the good’. This new theory aims to meet these challenges, by offering a new analysis of how we reason about value.

This is a formal theory. Instead of postulating a substantive list of goods and bads, the theory is built up by analyzing our judgments of value and disvalue and finding distinctive logical forms within those judgments. There is a logic that structures human judgments about what is good and bad; isolating this logic explains why both thin and thick evaluative concepts tend to be continuous across human reasoners.

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