

11.1

Incommensurable (Rough): Two items are incommensurable just in case they cannot be put on the same scale of units of value, that is, there is no cardinal unit of measure that can represent the value of both items.

Incomparable (Roughly): Two items are incomparable just in case they fail to stand in an evaluative comparative relation, such as being better than or worse than or equally as good as the other. (pg 205)

If two items are incomparable, then they are incommensurable. It is not the case, however, that if two items are incommensurable that they are also incomparable. It remains an issue for accounts of practical reason to explain how many / most of our choices are choices between *comparable* options. If we cannot even compare different options, then it seems like the reason is not guiding us (as there is no justification for one choice over another).

Incommensurability, on the contrary, is most intriguing in relation to different abstract values. If two values are incommensurable, then they lack a common unit of measurement. Though interesting, most plausible ethical theories claim that values are commensurable, and so the problem that incommensurability poses is limited.

11.2

Incomparability (def): Two items are incomparable if it is false that any positive, basic, binary value relation holds between them with respect to a covering consideration, "V."

There are positive value relations, and there are negative value relations. For example, *X is better than Y with respect to V*, and *X is worse than Y with respect to V*. There are also equivalent value relations such as *X is equally good as Y with respect to V*. Some philosophers think that those three relations are all the relations that two items can be assessed on.

Trichotomy thesis: There are only three basic relations of comparability: *better than*, *worse than*, and *equal good*.

11.3

Proponents of the trichotomy thesis think it is quite plausible that if two items are comparable, then one must be better than, worse than, or equally good as the other. For a trichotomist, if none of those relations holds, then the two items are incomparable. Chang challenges this by introducing his notion of parity. The clearest statement of parity (that I have found anyway) comes from a 2005 paper of Chang's where he states that there are 'certain hard cases of comparison - cases in which one item is better in some relevant respects, while the other is better in other relevant respects, but there is no obvious truth about how the items compare in all relevant respects'. (Chang 2005, 331) Such items of comparison are 'on par' with each other.

Another mistake that Chang seeks to remedy involves *vagueness*. Vagueness can be made concrete using a variety of examples. Chang uses the predicate *is bald*, but *is rich*, *is a heap*, and *is tall* are also classic examples.

Vagueness in comparability: when it is neither true nor false, or indeterminate, that a positive, basic, binary value relation holds between the items with respect to V.

The question now is whether or not cases of incomparability are in fact cases of vagueness. Chang discusses the argument of John Broome and what Broome calls the *collapsing principle*. “For any x and y, if it is more true that x is F-er than y than that y is F-er than x, then x is F-er than y” (Broome 1997: 77). Chang claims that this principle is plausible only if Fness can be measured (i.e. if x and y are commensurable). Since it is highly unlikely that *all* values can be so measured, the principle can be rejected. The next issue at hand is to establish what it takes to be not incomparable, but *noncomparable*.

Noncomparable: when the formal conditions required for comparability or incomparability to be possible fail to hold.

The idea here is that if you are attempting to compare x and y in relation to V, if either x or y are not within the domain of V, then the x and y are noncomparable with relation to that V. Though this distinction has little consequence in regards to practical reason (you would never think that you need to compare the number 7 with a smoked brisket in regards to tastiness), this distinction may matter in how we structure our axiology.

11.4

Comparativist views of practical justification attempt to place comparability as a necessary condition on a choice being objectively justified. When we decide between different actions to take, the values at play matter with regards how we decide. Perhaps the term *choose* should be isolated to when you decide to do x instead of y because x is more valuable. *Picking*, on the other hand, occurs when x and y are equally valuable (i.e. you do not have greater reason to choose one over the other). *Plumping*, on the other hand, is like picking but lacks practical reason. When you plump for one of the alternatives, it is because x and y are incomparable. The table below provides the comparativist view of value, reasons, and action.

Value	Reasons	Action
x is better than y	most reason to choose x	choose x
x is worse than y	most reason to choose y	choose y
x and y are equally good	sufficient reason to choose either x or y	pick x or pick y
x and y are on a par	??	??
x and y are incomparable	neither most reason to choose one nor sufficient reason to pick either-outside the scope of practical reason	plump for x or plump for y

Such a view is contrasted with *maximalism*. This view claims that ‘in order for a choice to be justified, it need only be not worse than the other alternatives.’ Interestingly, since *not being worse* is not a positive comparative relation, the definition of maximal and incomparable are compatible. Maximalism is quite popular because it is a less stringent view of practical reason. According to maximalism, to be justified an alternative need only be not worse than any other, while, according to comparativism, to be justified an alternative must be at least as good or comparable in some other way (e.g., on a par) with the other alternatives.

The core issue is whether or not we want to allow a choice to be justified even when x and y are incomparable. Maximalism allows this, but comparativism denies it. So, which should we accept? Chang argues that comparativism wins. Her argument centers around his diagnosing of why maximalism is so intuitive. In the law, things are justified for one of two reasons: either the law says that you can do x, or the law does not say you cannot do x. The law, however, does not have authority over all intentional actions. Practical reason, on the contrary, does have authority over all intentional actions. Hence, maximalism gets its plausibility by focusing on a subdomain of practical reason. Just because brushing one’s teeth 2 versus 3 times a day may be incomparable with respect to the law, and hence both have default legal justification, it does not follow that the same is true with respect to practical reason. Hence, you can neither pick nor choose to brush your teeth 2 versus 3 times a day - you must plump.