

3.1

Moore's shadow continues to loom large. Olson's purpose in this paper is to survey various objections to Moore's claims regarding *intrinsic goodness*. Moore, it will be remembered, claimed that intrinsic goodness was both unanalyzable and the sole unanalyzable concept in ethics. Olson calls the former *Unanalyzability* and the latter *Uniqueness*.¹

3.2

Most of section 3.2 highlights various issues which, though interesting, are not the focus of this paper. One thing of note, however, was Olson's explanation of Moore's reliance on the *synonymy criterion of property identity*. According to this criterion, two terms pick out the same property if and only if they are synonymous. For Moore, the concept of intrinsic goodness picks out the property of intrinsic goodness. Since the property is simple, the concept must also be simple. For Moore, the concept (and, hence, the property) of intrinsic goodness must be non-natural because of the open question argument (see the handout on Moore for a refresher).

The criterion, however, is false. Again, we are reminded that 'water' and 'H₂O' pick out the same thing, but are not synonymous with one another. If they were synonyms, then Lavoisier taught us nothing.

3.3

Eventually, Moore would come to reject Uniqueness, though he would maintain that intrinsic value was still central to ethics. Moore, in his 1961 work *Ethics* (reprinted in 1963), would argue that intrinsically good outcomes are, in some sense, equivalent (but not synonymous) with what is right, what our duty is, or what we are obligated to do. By abandoning Uniqueness, Moore was also able to claim that right, duty, and obligation were also unanalyzable. The idea is that 'it is necessarily true that if an action, A, would bring about a total outcome that is intrinsically better than the total outcome of any alternative action, then A is uniquely right; there is a duty or obligation to perform A (Moore 1963 [1912]: 39).' Hence, intrinsic goodness, rightness, duty, and obligation are related but *not* because of what they mean.

Some who followed Moore in claiming that intrinsic value was non-natural, would also reject Unanalyzability. Ewing, for example, would adopt the *fitting attitude analysis* for intrinsic value. On this view, for an object to be intrinsically good is for that object to be a fitting object of a pro-attitude. FA analysis has, however, a standard problem known as the *wrong kind of reasons problem*. Should we, for example, favor a demon for his own sake in order to stop them from wreaking havoc? If yes, then our fitting attitude toward the demon is not because the demon is

¹ Uniqueness entails Unanalyzability, but not the other way around. Hence, if Uniqueness were dropped, intrinsic goodness may still be unanalyzable.

intrinsically valuable. However we wish to settle this debate, Olson's basic claim is that one can reject Unanalyzability and Uniqueness and still defend intrinsic value.

3.4

A different kind of doubt about intrinsic value stems from a concern about whether or not it is normatively redundant.

To see what the apparent normative redundancy of the property of intrinsic value amounts to, consider two examples: First, suppose that you suffer a painful toothache and that the pain is intrinsically bad. Plausibly, the fact that the toothache is painful is a reason for you to visit a dentist. But is it equally plausible that the fact that the pain is intrinsically bad is a further reason for you to visit a dentist? Second, suppose that some resort is pleasant and that the pleasantness of a visit is intrinsically good. Plausibly, the fact that the resort is pleasant is a reason to visit it. But is it equally plausible that the fact that the pleasantness of a visit is intrinsically good is a further reason to visit? The intuitive answer to both questions is no, and this suggests the general conclusion that "[intrinsic] value adds no reason to those generated by the ground for that value" (Dancy 2000: 164). It is in this sense that many think intrinsic value is normatively redundant.

Such redundancy is taken by many to show that intrinsic value reduces to reasons for attitudes and actions. What conclusions one draws from this redundancy, however, vary. Kraut, for example, concludes that there is no property of intrinsic value. The rejection of the property does not, however, entail the rejection of the concept of intrinsic value. The lesson Kraut takes from this is that philosophers 'should hold that nothing in the actual world, and perhaps nothing in any possible world, falls under it, that is, that the property of being intrinsically valuable is not instantiated in the actual world, and perhaps instantiated in no possible world.'²

Olson then highlights a possible problem with Kraut's pessimistic conclusion. 'Kraut's interpretation of Moore seems to be based on a conflation of the question of what it is for there to be a reason (i.e., the question of how the concept of a reason is to be analyzed) with the question of what the reasons are. Moore's Principia view answers the former question in terms of intrinsic value, and the latter in terms of the natural features on which intrinsic value supervenes.' Post-Principia Moore, though he denied Uniqueness, accepted what Olson calls a *two-way necessary* connection between an action being morally required and that action also being maximally conducive to intrinsic goodness. Olson claims that since Moore is not committed to the view that intrinsic value is a reason-giving property, normative redundancy

² This quote, by the way, is an excellent example of how *not* to write philosophy. If you're using more than three commas, then you need more than one sentence.

should not be used to reject the existence of the property of intrinsic value. Unlike the proponents of phlogiston, Moore did not claim that intrinsic value is a / the reason giving property.

3.5

If there is a property of intrinsic goodness, then some things are just good [full stop]. To be intrinsically valuable just means that a thing is good for its own sake. This predicative use of good, however, is a source of much controversy. Peter Geach and Judith Jarvis Thomson, for example, deny that the predicative use makes sense. Something is only good relative to some kind. If Moore is to be understood as saying that nothing illuminating can be said about intrinsic value (beyond that goodness supervenes on it), then the Geach and Thomson deny that Moore's view makes sense. Olson thinks that this is at least *something* illuminating about intrinsic value was offered by Moore: If a thing has intrinsic value, then it survives the isolation test. Whether or not this is enough is left an open question (ha!).

Olson closes the paper by surveying a 2003 paper by Thomson where she criticizes those who understand intrinsic goodness in terms of whether something ought to be sought. Her idea is that when philosophers claim that something is predicatively good, then two things follow: we both ought to pursue it and also have an explanation of why we should pursue it. The question, though wrong headed, is aiming after something important.

Olson reminds us that on Ewings view, that is not what is meant. On Ewings view, the fact that something is intrinsically good tells us that we ought to seek it. We ought to seek it because when something is intrinsically good, then we ought to have a fitting attitude towards it. The justifying explanation of why we ought to seek something intrinsically good is, however, not that it is intrinsically good, but that the nature of the intrinsically good thing makes it the case that the fitting response to it is a pro-attitude. Hence, the predicative use of good can be made sense of in a way that captures something important.