

Philosophy 152A
Topics in Value Theory: Achievement and Games
Lecture Notes

Roy Zhao

UCLA, Spring 2022

Intro Value Theory: w/ Hurka

Hedonism: Pleasure is good and is all that matters

Gedanken Experiment: Experience Machine against hedonism

Imagine a machine that generates pleasure to an agent, such that the agent cannot tell apart the difference of pleasure created by the machine or real life.

If hedonism is true, then we have no reason not to be plugged into the experience machine. However, we do have reason not to be plugged into the machine, so hedonism is not the whole picture.

Bradford: Achievement, wellbeing, and value

Purpose: discusses the nature and significance of achievements.

To begin, we can recognize that achievements have a certain structure – a process that culminates in a product

What is achievement: Credit Condition

Achievements belong to agents, and the process needs to be connected to the product in a certain way – the process culminates in the product, and the product is properly attributable or credited to the agent and their activities.

But how do we form a credition condition for achievements?

A natural thought is that the product must be caused by the exercise of the agent's abilities. Ability or competence seems to make all the difference in connecting an achiever to the outcome of the activity.

From there we can do two ways:

- 1) ability is a disposition to bring about the relevant result in a sufficient number of relevantly similar nearby possible worlds
- 2) the product must be brought about “in a competent way,”

Moreover, an interesting thought is that there is a basic metaphysical relation between an exercise of ability and its culmination: manifestation. Taking the aspirin caused the pain to be relieved, but its power was not manifested in this outcome.

Similarly, in achievements, we might hold that the product is a manifestation of the competence exercised in the process. The relation between the product and process is a basic metaphysical relation of manifestation that holds more generally between powers and their products

Difficulty

what characterizes great achievements and distinguishes them from the mundane? One important observation is that they are difficult.

Peeling banana and for a violin virtuoso to play an easy piece? Not so much of an achievement.

Valuable Products

A natural thought is that great achievements are also characterized by great products, telephones, penicillin, etc.

But many achievements have no independent value: running marathon, climb Everest, etc. So having a product of independent positive value is not a necessary condition of a great achievement.

Negative value? (ex. murder) kinda an achievement?

Value of achievements: well-being

According to hedonism or desire satisfaction theory, achievement is relevant for wellbeing insofar as it contributes to pleasure or satisfies desires, respectively.

However, we ignore the views above and attempt to incorporate achievement as part of well-being.

Value of achievements: Achievementism

Achievementism: Achievement, or something like it, is all there is to well-being.

Value of achievements: Pluralism

Achievement is only valuable to some degree, for some achievements.

Bradford: The Value of Achievement

Thesis: achievements are valuable in virtue of their **difficulty**. I propose a new perfectionist theory of value that acknowledges the will as a characteristic human capacity, where perfectionism is the view that the exercise of our characteristic human capacities is of intrinsic value. A further ambition of this article: to introduce a new development for perfectionism that acknowledges a characteristic human capacity that is overlooked by previous accounts.

Account of Achievement

- 1) characterized by a process-product structure: all achievements have a process, which culminates in a product.
- 2) the process of an achievement is difficult
- 3) The product must come about in a sufficiently non- lucky way

Overall, achievements are characterized by a difficult process which culminates competently in a product.

Simple Product View (SP)

SP holds that the intrinsic value of the product is entirely independent from its being difficultly produced and competently caused. So, the value of an achievement is entirely a matter of the intrinsic value of the product. Difficulty, engagement, etc are not of value. Ex. Picasso's painting is an achievement because it's an excellent painting.

However, SP there appears to be no good account of the value of achievements with zero-value products. Ex. Climbing Everest.

Counterargument from SP: the goal of climbing Mt. Everest isn't simply to be on the top of the mountain. It's to get to the top of the mountain in a particular way – by climbing. The climbing is the product. The process by which the product is attained is itself part of the product.

Difficulties

Most clearly, achievements that have inherently valueless products gain value in virtue of their difficulty, and the value of achievements increases as difficulty increases.

Notice Bradford's view does imply that difficulty is of positive value. It only appears less valuable when in contrast to urgent claims that are made on us.

Utopia analogy: Since all activities are entirely unnecessary in Utopia, that is, unnecessary for acquiring the products in which they culminate, there must be something about the processes that is choiceworthy for its own sake. It proves that if something has intrinsic value, then it has intrinsic value – meaning that if something ever has intrinsic value, then it always has intrinsic value.

Bradford's claim is rather that difficulty accounts for at least some of the value of all achieve-

ments.

Perfectionalism

explains the value of the items on the traditional ‘objective list’ by appealing to their relationship with certain special human features. Ex. Knowledge, pleasure, achievement, loving relationships, and so on are valuable according to perfectionism because they are manifestations of special human features. Having these special features, and manifesting them, according to perfectionism, is having a good life.

Delineating exactly what these characteristics are and what makes them perfectionist capacities, and doing so successfully without being circular, are the most difficult tasks for any perfectionist. The question of what constitutes being a perfectionist capacity – we could call this the metaphysical question. – could be answered by holding that the perfectionist capacities are those that are unique to us as human beings, or those that are essential to human nature. Another approach is to say that the special capacities are those that are fundamental, meaning that their exercise is ‘near-inevitable’ for almost all human beings.

Bradford’s rough epistemic guide for perfectionist capacities:

- (I) characteristic of human beings and
- (II) plausibly worth developing. If a capacity meets both criteria, this is sufficient for its inclusion in the presumptive account of perfectionist capacities.

classic accounts of perfectionism: the most basic and general capacities in perfectionism include our rationality

Difficulty is understood best as straightforwardly a matter of requiring effort.

Will is the final reaching point of the paper.

Bradford: Evil Achievements and the Principle of Recursion

Thesis: I conclude that Recursion is best construed as an instance of genuine organic unity

Thomas Hurka’s Principle of Recursion: the pursuit of a good is itself good, and the pursuit of a bad is bad.

Or more formally:

- 1) For some base intrinsic good, G, the loving of G is itself of positive intrinsic value; the hating of G is of negative intrinsic value.
- 2) For some base intrinsic evil, B, the hating of B is of positive intrinsic value; the loving of B is of negative intrinsic value

Process Thesis: the process if a source of intrinsic value of an achievement.

Here we assume the process thesis is true, as well as a zero-valued product. The principle of

recursion then entails that something happens to the value of the process, in virtue of it being in pursuit of something good or bad. If the product of the achievement is of positive value, Recursion entails that the pursuit of this product is good. If the product of the achievement is of negative value, Recursion entails that the pursuit of this product is bad.

G.E.Moore, however, claims that that the value accrued in situations involving a pro-attitude toward a good is accrued by the whole comprised of the attitude and base good. He explicitly says that the mere existence of a beautiful object on its own is of very little value, and the pro-attitude, on its own, would have hardly any value. This is called Bona fide organic unity; while a different view is conditional organic unities that the values of the parts change when they are considered as a whole. Spoiler: bona fide organic unity is better.

HOWEVER, according to the Process Thesis, the positive value of achievements is grounded in the process. If the product of the achievement is of positive value, Recursion entails that the pursuit of this product is good. If the product of the achievement is of negative value, Recursion entails that the pursuit of this product is bad. But if the product is of negative value, and if Recursion is true, then what happens to this positive value?

We consider three possible ways of understanding how Recursion works, and the implications of these construals for the value of achievements – evil achievements in particular:

Three construals:

1. the value of the process is polarized by the value of the product.

When the product is of positive value, the process of an achievement is unaltered in value by Recursion. When the product has a negative value, such as an elaborately planned murder, the value of the process is negative. "Anything that touches the negative product becomes negative."

However, two ways it fails:

- 1) a pursuit that is otherwise valuable should accrue more value in virtue of it being the pursuit of some good. But the polarization construal of Recursion doesn't have the resources to account for such a bonus
- 2) small evil products?

2. the value of the process is augmented or diminished summatively.

Summative method: The summative construal of Recursion holds that Recursion generates a value, V_R , that is summed with the value of the process. V_R is positive when product V_{prod} is positive, and negative when V_{prod} is negative. We can further construct proportionality based on the products' values.

3. there is an augment or diminishment of value, but not strictly summative, rather an instance of genuine organic unity.

For process to retain all its value.

On this construal, Recursion is such that the value that is accrued or lost is not gained or lost by the process – that is, the value located in the process is not what is affected by Recursion. Instead, Recursion governs the value of the whole – process and product together, as a unit. In addition to the process, and the product, there is an entity that is composed of the process

and product – the achievement itself.

Hurka: Games and the Good Apr 20

Thesis: The paper concludes by arguing that game-playing is the paradigm modern (Marx, Nietzsche) as against classical (Aristotle) value: since its goal is intrinsically trivial, its value is entirely one of process rather than product, journey rather than destination.

Some preassumptions: Hurka takes this admiration to rest on the judgement that excellence in games is good in itself.

Define games

A unified explanation of why excellence in games is good requires a unified account of what games are, and many doubt that this is possible. Wittgenstein: game is hard to define only with loose family resemblances.

However, we have a perfect explanation from Bernard Suits' *The Grasshopper*, that games are 'the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.'

From this definition Hurka does the following:

- (a) argue that the different elements of Suits's analysis give game-playing two distinct but related grounds of value, so it instantiates two related intrinsic goods.
- (b) game-playing is an important intrinsic good, which gives the clearest possible expression of what can be called a modern as against a classical, or more specifically, Aristotelian, view of value.

Suits' analysis that there are three main parts of a game

- (a) prelusory goal
 - a goal that can be described independently of the game, putting a ball in the hole in golf, etc. 'Prelusory' because it can be achieved apart from the game. Every game has such a goal; moreover, the goals in games (getting a par) is a derivative of the prelusory goals.
- (b) the constitutive rules
 - the function of these rules is to forbid the most efficient means to the prelusory goal

HOWEVER, these first two elements involve pursuing a goal by less than the most efficient means, but they are not sufficient for playing a game. This is because someone can be forced to use these means by circumstances he regrets and wishes were different - Ex. a farmer having to harvest crops by hand, etc. That's why we need the third element.

- (c) the lusory attitude
 - willingly accepting the constitutive rules, or accepting them because they make the game possible.

Furthermore, Hurka wants to see if it allows a persuasive explanation of the value of excellence in games, then it would be philosophically interesting.

Suits: playing games is the supreme good because that's what people would do in Utopia. Hurka find many other activities to be equally valuable.

Difficulty: If the prelusory goal and rules of a good game make succeeding at it reasonably difficult, they will also give it one ground of value if difficult activities are as such intrinsically good. Difficult activities are such good.

Relating Games to Achievements

If we ask what explains these differences—between achievements and non-achievements, and between greater and lesser achievements—the answer is surely in large part their difficulty: how complex or physically challenging they are, or how much skill and ingenuity they require.

Meanwhile, we also need to have "an important good is what we can call 'rational connection to reality' suggested by Nozick's experience machine. This rational connection to reality contains two parts: knowledge (theoretical: justified true belief) and achievement (reality)

Hurka then introduces his hierarchy diagram, more complex knowledge/achievements are more closer to the top.

these are precisely the aspects of difficulty found in good games.

Lusory Attitude

prelusory goal and constitutive rules make playing a good game difficult, but the lusory attitude?

the prelusory goal and constitutive rules together give it a feature, namely difficulty, and the lusory attitude chooses it because of this feature

AND with the principle of recursion: The prelusory goal and constitutive rules together give playing in games one ground of value, namely difficulty; the lusory attitude in its amateur form adds a related but distinct ground of value, namely loving something good for the property that makes it so