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The Nature of Value
Axiological Investigations

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*To the memory of
Mamie Lou*

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Preface

During the past forty or fifty years a great deal has been published in moral and political philosophy. During most of this period, however, axiology or the general theory of value has been relatively neglected, and not as much work has been done in this area as was done during the last decades of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century by philosophers such as Brentano, Moore, and Ross. In recent years there has been something of a renewed interest in value theory. Much, however, if not indeed most, of the recent work in this area has not been in the non-naturalist, rationalist, intuitionist, realist tradition of the three thinkers just mentioned. The present work is in that tradition. It seeks to develop and vindicate a view of the irreducibility, rationality, and objectivity of value as an alternative to reductionist, skeptical, relativist, and subjectivist treatments of value. This it does in what may be referred to as a "positive" as opposed to a "negative" way by concentrating mainly on the development of my own views rather than on presenting detailed criticisms of the views of others, and there are few explicit references to and discussions of recent work. It will be an easy matter for those familiar with the recent literature to discover from the exposition of my own views the respects in which I agree and those in which I disagree with the views of recent writers on the topics I treat. For recent incisive criticisms, with which in the main I agree and to which I have little to add, of recent reductionist, skeptical, relativist, and subjectivist approaches to value theory I refer the reader to the criticisms presented by Professor Panayot Butchvarov in his excellent book *Skepticism in Ethics*.

It might be helpful if I present here a brief account of the course of the

book. One of the central theses of the book is that value is neither identical with nor reducible to psychological phenomena such as liking or disliking, preferring, evaluating, and valuing or devaluing, whether taken singly or in various combinations. In the first chapter, which is mainly phenomenological in character, I consider some of the differences between value and various of these psychological phenomena, some of the differences between such phenomena and some of the relations in which they stand to one another, and different levels of such phenomena.

In chapter 2, which is mainly ontological in nature, I discuss the ontological categories to which the bearers of intrinsic value belong. To use the language of Meinong, such categories are species of either of two genera objects and objectives. The categories of universals and particulars are species of objects. Objectives are sometimes, as by Ross, identified with facts. The term "fact," however, has different senses, to distinguish between which it is necessary to distinguish between states of affairs, the obtaining and the non-obtaining of states of affairs, and propositions, each of which I take to be species of objectives. Universals, taken completely in abstraction from their exemplification by particulars, and states of affairs, taken completely in abstraction from the question of whether they do or do not obtain, are abstracta. I argue that abstracta have no intrinsic value at all and that it is only concreta, such as existent particulars and the obtaining and non-obtaining of states of affairs, that have such value. Although, however, only concreta and never abstracta have such value, the intrinsic value of particulars depends upon the nature of the universals they exemplify and that of the obtaining and non-obtaining of states of affairs upon the nature of the states of affairs that do or do not obtain.

In chapter 3, I present a discussion of the species of value and their relationships to one another. There are two major species of value intrinsic and extrinsic and two major species of extrinsic value instrumental and contributory. These species yield the concept of total value, which is the conjunction of the intrinsic, instrumental, and contributory value a bearer of value has. The treatment of these species of value includes a discussion of wholes and parts and of the world, taken as a whole than which no more inclusive whole can be conceived. The chapter concludes with a discussion of C.I. Lewis' concept of inherent value and a rejection of this concept as useless for value theory.

In the fourth chapter I argue that the concepts of value, of positive,

negative, and neutral value, of intrinsic and extrinsic value, and of instrumental and contributory value cannot be understood unless the concepts of intrinsic goodness and badness are understood, so that the latter two concepts are the central concepts of value theory. Attempts to define these two concepts fall into either of two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive classes. One class consists of attempts to define them in terms of non-evaluative concepts, whether psychological or non-psychological, the other of attempts to define them in terms of evaluative concepts. I examine various attempts of both types, argue that they all fail, and conclude that the concepts in question are indefinable. I argue also that although the intrinsic goodness or badness of a given thing can sometimes be established by appealing to the intrinsic goodness or badness of something else, ultimately such proof rests on seeing without proof that something is intrinsically good or bad. All proof, however, whether in value theory or in any other area of inquiry, rests on seeing without proof that some given proposition is true and that certain propositions follow from certain others.

I argue in chapter 5 that although the concepts of intrinsic goodness and badness are the central concepts of value theory it does not follow that they are also the central concepts of moral philosophy. Instead, the central concepts of moral philosophy such as the concepts of duty or obligation, ought, rightness and wrongness, supererogation, rights, moral goodness and badness, and moral virtues and vices can be explicated without using the concepts of intrinsic goodness and badness, so that moral philosophy, rather than being simply a branch of value theory, is instead presupposed in certain respects by the latter. At the same time, however, what may be referred to as "moral objectives" are such that any moral objective has either intrinsic or extrinsic positive or negative value and therefore either positive or negative total value. The chapter ends with a brief treatment of theodicy.

In the sixth chapter an account is presented of the ground of the value of particulars, which are either persons or things that are not persons. The goodness or badness of particulars of both types is determined by the nature of the universals they exemplify, taken in conjunction with the nature of the kinds of which they are instances. The exemplification of a given universal by an instance of one kind might make it a good instance of its kind, whereas the exemplification of the same universal by an instance of another kind might make it a bad instance of that kind. It is argued that in at least some cases being a normal instance of

a given kind is sufficient to make an instance of the kind a good instance and that an instance of a kind can be a good instance without being an excellent one. This is followed by a discussion of virtues and vices, which are treated as good-making and bad-making properties of persons, and of loving and hating, the first of which is treated as a central virtue of persons, the second a central vice. It is then argued that the complete good of a person consists of two components: one a non-moral component consisting of having non-moral goods of various sorts, the other a moral component consisting of being morally good, which consists of having various of the moral virtues in a degree sufficient to make one a good person.

The seventh and eighth chapters are devoted to a discussion of the nature and value of practical rationality. In chapter 7 it is argued that such rationality takes precedence over theoretical rationality, given that the object of theoretical rationality—the acquisition of theoretical knowledge or understanding—is only one value among others. The argument includes a discussion of the difference between silence and deception and of the possibility of self-deception and an assessment of the relative value of silence, deception, and knowledge. In the eighth chapter the relationship of practical rationality to morality is discussed. Two views of practical rationality and morality are discussed, one of which is egoistic, the other non-egoistic. It is argued that there is no antecedent impartial concept of practical rationality that is neither egoistic nor non-egoistic and that we can determine whether an egoistic or a non-egoistic view of practical rationality is preferable only by determining whether an egoistic or a non-egoistic view of morality is preferable. This means that, rather than tailoring our view of morality to fit some antecedent view of rationality, we ought instead to tailor our view of practical rationality to fit an acceptable view of morality. Since, I argue, a non-egoistic view of morality is preferable to an egoistic view, we ought to adopt a non-egoistic rather than an egoistic view of practical rationality.

In chapter 9 the value of different attitudes that can be taken toward intrinsically indifferent things is discussed. Different possible extreme views and different possible moderate views of the value of various attitudes toward the indifferent are distinguished, and I argue that it is good that people like various indifferent things of which they have experience or knowledge, if for no other reason than that such likings are manifestations of magnanimity, instances of which are intrinsically

good, and that a pervasive dislike of indifferent things is intrinsically bad, given that such disliking is a manifestation of mean-spiritedness, instances of which are intrinsically bad.

In the tenth chapter, which perhaps could be regarded as an appendix rather than a concluding chapter, I discuss some of the implications for higher education of the view of the complete human good presented in chapter 6. By distinguishing between (1) civilization and morality, (2) having goods and being good, and (3) moral and non-moral education, I argue that a non-moral education that seeks only to assist students in acquiring only one aspect of their complete good, by endeavoring only to increase their understanding of the various arts and sciences and to prepare them for various careers, is one-sided and inadequate and that the task of higher education is also to assist students in acquiring their complete good by helping them to become good persons.

Chapter 2 is a slightly revised version of a paper, "Bearers of Value," that appeared in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991). I am grateful to the editor for permission to use that material here. I thank also Oya Kolatu and Lissette Castillo for the excellent work they did in typing the manuscript. Douglas Browning of the University of Texas read an earlier version of the manuscript with the exception of chapters 4, 5, and 10. I am deeply grateful to him for his many insightful and detailed comments and suggestions. I have followed some but not all of his suggestions. On certain philosophical issues we disagree. My respect for him as a philosopher, however, is so great that usually when we disagree I come away feeling that he sees things I fail to see. For the many flaws that doubtless remain I alone am responsible, especially in view of the fact that I have not unflinchingly followed the suggestions he made. As always, my profoundest debt of gratitude is to my wife, to whose memory this book is dedicated, for her unflinching cheerfulness and encouragement over many years and for constantly providing throughout these years absolutely ideal conditions under which to work. One of my deepest regrets is that she did not live to see its completion.

Chapter 1

Value and Psychological Phenomena

One of the central theses of this work is that value is not identical with or reducible to psychological phenomena such as valuing, evaluating, preferring, liking or disliking, taken either singly or in various combinations. In this chapter we shall consider (1) some of the differences between value and certain of these phenomena, (2) some of the differences between such phenomena and some of the relations in which they stand to one another, and (3) different levels of such phenomena.

1. Value, Valuing, and Evaluating

The term "value" is used in different ways. Some of these uses will be of no interest to us here. We shall not, for example, be interested in its use to refer to the truth-value of propositions. Nor shall we be concerned with its use to refer to the value of a variable, as when it is said that the value of the variable "x" in " $1 + x = 3$ " is 2. There are, however, at least three uses of the term and its cognates in which we shall be interested. In one of these uses it is used as a verb, as in "I value *a*," "you value *b*," and "he values *c*". In a second it is used as an adjective, as in "*x* is valuable". In a third it is used as a noun, as in "Some of John's values are *a*, *b*, and *c*," in which the values of the variables "*a*," "*b*," and "*c*" are some of the things John values. In this third sense of the term it is the things themselves valued by a person that constitute the values of that person. Such things are valuable or have value, at least for the person who values them, but they themselves, as values of the person, are distinct from the value they have for him. They are his values in the sense that he values them.

In addition to valuing various things, a person can also evaluate

things. Evaluating a thing is different from valuing it. In evaluating something a person is not valuing it but instead is endeavoring to determine its value or at least to ascertain whether he, and perhaps also others, ought to value it and, if he concludes that he, and again perhaps also others, ought to value it, to determine the degree to which he, and perhaps also they, ought to do so. Evaluating some object of evaluation presupposes that the value, if any, it has and the degree of its value are independent of whether one already values it. Thus one can value an object without evaluating it, and one can evaluate an object without already valuing it. The evaluation of things by human beings has been a persistent and widespread practice throughout the course of human history, and unless things have value independently of their being evaluated this practice would rest on a persistent and widespread illusion and would have little or no point.

As used in any of the three ways indicated above, the term "value" usually, if not indeed always, connotes what is sometimes referred to as "positive" value, as opposed to "negative" or "neutral" value. In the broadest sense of the term, to say that someone values something, x , is to say either that he likes it or that he regards it as good, and to say that x has value or is valuable is to say that it is good. Similarly, to say that some of John's values are a , b , and c is to say that he likes them or that he regards them as good. In evaluating something, however, a person is endeavoring to determine whether it has value and, if it does, whether its value is positive or negative and perhaps also to determine the degree to which it has either positive or negative value. The term "value" thus has both a narrow and a broad use. In the narrow sense it connotes only positive value. In the broad sense it connotes not only positive but also negative and perhaps also neutral value.

To say that something has neutral value is to say that it has neither positive nor negative value. If the term "value" is used in the broadest possible sense, neutral value, like positive and negative value, will be a form of value, and everything will have value, since everything has either positive, negative, or neutral value. In a narrower sense of "value," however, to say of something that it has neutral value or that it is neutral in value is to say that it has no value at all. In this sense of "value," some things might have value and others not. Those things that have either positive or negative value have value, but those things, if any, that have neither positive nor negative value have no value at all. Since to say of something that it has neutral value is to say that it has

neither positive nor negative value, it seems better to use the term "value" only in the narrower sense according to which the only forms of value are positive and negative value. Thus instead of saying that everything has value, since everything has either positive, negative, or neutral value, I shall say that those things, if any, that have neither positive nor negative value have no value at all or that they are indifferent in value.

If we restrict our use of "value" in the way suggested, we may say that "value" names a genus or determinable of which the most general species or determinations are positive and negative value. The terms "positive value" and "negative value" are technical or at least quasi-technical terms. The meaning of "positive value" is more or less the same as that of "good," in a wide sense of "good"; and the meaning of "negative value" is more or less the same as that of "bad," in a wide sense of "bad". We may therefore say that "value" names a genus or determinable of which the most general species or determinations are good and bad. This, indeed, might even serve as a definition of "value," taken as an adjective or a noun. It is unlikely in this context to be taken as a verb, since, as we have seen, to say that some person values something, *x*, is to say that he likes *x* or regards it as good. Taken as a verb, the genus named by "value" would be more appropriately named "valuing". If so, then it is valuing, not value, that is named by "valuing".

Valuings might themselves have value and be valued and evaluated by someone. Just as a person can like or regard as good certain things and dislike or regard as bad certain other things, so also one can like or regard as good some valuings and evaluations and dislike or regard as bad certain others. One might, for example, like or regard as good evaluations that are careful, conscientious, and judicious and dislike or regard as bad those that are careless, unconscientious, and injudicious. And one might like or regard as good and thus value valuings of others that agree with one's own and dislike or regard as bad valuings of others that disagree with one's own. Indeed, one might also evaluate one's own valuings and evaluations and come to value, i.e., to like or to regard as good, some of them and to dislike or regard as bad others. A person's initial valuings are likely to be strengthened if, upon evaluating them, he comes to value them, i.e., to like them or to regard them as good. If, however, he comes to dislike them or to regard them as bad, he might modify or abandon them. This, however, does not always happen, since