

Basic Final Value and Zimmerman's *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*
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Abstract: This paper critically examines Michael Zimmerman's account of basic final value in *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*. Zimmerman's account has several positive features. Unfortunately, as I argue, given one plausible assumption about value his account derives a contradiction. I argue that rejecting that assumption has several implausible results and that we should instead reject Zimmerman's account. I then sketch an alternative account of basic final value, showing how it retains some of the positive features of Zimmerman's account while avoiding its pitfalls.

Michael Zimmerman's *The Nature of Intrinsic Value* is an ambitious work on intrinsic or final value. (I'll use the terms 'intrinsic value' and 'final value' interchangeably.) In it, Zimmerman defends the concept of final value, analyzes that concept, discusses the bearers of final value, addresses the computation of final value, and articulates a distinction between basic and non-basic final value, among other things. Zimmerman's book thus amounts to a systematic and substantive account of final value worth engaging.

This paper critically evaluates one part of Zimmerman's views, specifically, his view on basic final value. Its overall aim is to articulate a problem for Zimmerman's view of basic final value and offer a different view of basic final value that avoids that problem. In section II, I articulate the basic problem: given one assumption about value, Zimmerman's view actually derives a contradiction. In section III, I consider the plausibility of rejecting this assumption. I argue that rejecting it leads to several implausible consequences; further, there is a general reason for thinking it is true. This gives us reason for rejecting Zimmerman's account of basic final value. In section IV, I offer a solution to this problem by sketching an alternative account of basic final value. I show how my account does not derive the contradiction but does retain some of the benefits of Zimmerman's account.

But first I begin in section I with some assumptions and an explanation of why it is important to recognize a category of basic final value.

I. Stage Setting

I begin by laying out some assumptions and common ground between Zimmerman and myself. I will point out a few places of disagreement that will not matter for the subsequent discussion. I will also discuss why it is important to draw a distinction between basic final value and non-basic final value.

A. Some Common Ground

First, a terminological point. I'll be using the term 'final value' to refer to the kind of value that is "valuable for its own sake." Other authors use other terms to refer to this kind of value, including 'intrinsic value,' 'intrinsic goodness,' and 'final goodness.' I prefer to use the term 'final value' for reasons others have expressed (specifically Korsgaard (1983) though see Kagan (1998) for a response). I do not assume that final value *always* supervenes on a thing's intrinsic properties. Zimmerman prefers using the terms 'intrinsic value' and 'intrinsic goodness' and argues that final value does supervene on intrinsic properties (2001: 60f.). To avoid confusion, I'll enforce some terminological agreement between us, using brackets—e.g. [final value]—to

indicate where I've modified his text. Nothing in what follows will turn on this terminological issue or whether final value always supervenes on a thing's intrinsic properties.¹

Second, Zimmerman and I both accept that the primary bearers of final value and disvalue are states of affairs. In saying that states of affairs are the primary bearers of value, I am not necessarily denying that particular objects are of final value or disvalue. Perhaps they are. But insofar as they are, it is because of the value of states of affairs that are about them. (For the opposite approach, see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000, 2003).)

Since I take states of affairs to be the primary bearers of value, let me say a few more words about them. By states of affairs, I have in mind (put crudely) ways that the world could be or could be conceived of (cf. Plantinga (1972: 44), Chisholm (1976: 117f.)). For instance, on this usage, *LeBron James being a basketball player* is a state of affairs as is *two plus two equaling four*. Those states of affairs obtain, whereas others—like *LeBron James being President*, *two plus two equaling five*—do not. Following Chisholm (1976) and others (e.g., Feldman (1986)), I will identify states of affairs with propositions. Thus, obtaining states of affairs are true propositions; non-obtaining states of affairs are false propositions. Zimmerman identifies states of affairs with concrete states (2001: 46ff.). Nothing will hang on this difference here.

I will also be assuming that states of affairs have parts and that sometimes these parts are other states of affairs. The clearest example of this is conjunctive states of affairs: the state of affairs A&B has as a part A and as a part B. As a general account of parthood for states of affairs, I will follow Chisholm (1986: 73) and say that a state of affairs P is a part of a state of affairs Q if and only if necessarily, if Q obtains then P obtains and whoever conceives Q also conceives P. This account straightforwardly implies that A and B are parts of the complex state of affairs A&B. After all, necessarily A&B obtains only if A and B obtain as well; additionally, one cannot conceive of A&B without conceiving of both A and B. But it applies to other cases as well. For instance, suppose while thinking of a particular triangle one conceives of the state of affairs: that triangle is an isosceles triangle. Necessarily, if that triangle is an isosceles triangle, then it is a closed two-dimensional shape. Further, one cannot conceive of that state of affairs without conceiving of that triangle being a closed two-dimensional shape. Thus, on Chisholm's account, it follows that the state of affairs of that triangle being a closed two-dimensional shape is part of the state of affairs of that triangle being an isosceles triangle. To be sure, this definition fits most naturally with the idea that states of affairs are propositions, not concrete states. Thus, Zimmerman would reject it and offer an alternative account of parthood for states of affairs (see Zimmerman (2001: 58ff.)). However, the differences between Chisholm's and Zimmerman's account of parthood will not matter for my argumentation.

Some might be skeptical that the concept of part can be meaningfully applied to states of affairs, preferring only to apply mereological concepts to individuals. Though I think that is an overly skeptical stance, we can accommodate such opinions as follows. Instead of speaking of states of affairs as having parts, we can speak of when states of affairs are "included" in others. We can then define "included" in a way identical to Chisholm's definition of parthood: a state of affairs P is included in a state of affairs Q if and only if necessarily if Q obtains P obtains and

¹ One further wrinkle. I think there are different kinds of final value, specifically, that there is final ethical value, final epistemic value, and final aesthetic value. Thus, the term 'final value' might refer to either the genus or one of these species. As a matter of fact, Zimmerman uses the term 'intrinsic value' to refer to what I would call final ethical value (2001: 25). I will follow suit and use 'final value' to refer to 'final ethical value' omitting 'ethical' for brevity sake. However, almost nothing of substance in this discussion will turn on the fact that we are restricting our attention to the species final ethical value instead of the genus final value.

whoever conceives Q also conceives P. Everything I write could use such a definition of “included” instead of “parthood.”

Third, I assume that when states of affairs are of final value they attribute properties to particular things. I do not assume that the properties are monadic. They might be relational properties. Though I assume that properties are attributed to particular things, I do not assume they are always attributed to just one thing. I leave open that a state of affairs is of final value and attributes a relational property between several things. When a state of affairs attributing a property is of final value, that property is a “value conferring property” since it sometimes “confers” value. Thus, on this usage, when a state of affairs S is of final value, S has the property of being of final value but S attributes a value conferring property. Of course, different axiologies fight over which properties are value conferring properties and thus, by extension, which states of affairs are of final value.

Fourth, both Zimmerman and I accept that there is an important connection between final value and pro-attitudes.² By ‘pro-attitudes,’ I have in mind attitudes like favoring, loving, valuing, caring about, respecting, etc. (For longer lists, see Adams (2007: 15-6) and Nozick (1981: 429ff.)) There are different ways of spelling out the exact connection. Zimmerman’s preferred approach is broadly deontic. Stripped of important qualifications and refinements, on his approach, something is of final value if and only if one is *required* to adopt a pro-attitude towards it when considering it (2001: chapter 4). My preferred approach is not deontic. Stripped of important qualification and refinements, on my approach, something is of final value if and only if it is *appropriate* for one to adopt a pro-attitude towards it. There are important differences between these accounts. But, again, for the most part the differences will not matter for what follows. I’ll periodically speak of what is “appropriate/required” as a way of signaling my intended neutrality.

B. Basic Final Value

The term ‘basic final value’ is not an ordinary one. But the distinction between basic final value and non-basic final value can be traced to some of our ordinary thinking about value. We ordinarily think certain things can be of final value—say, a visit with one’s extended family over the holidays. But insofar as that thing is of final value it is because of its relation to certain things—e.g. that one interacts with one’s extended family—and not necessarily others—e.g., that one traveled or slept in a hotel room. Thus, we might ordinarily explain the final value of one complex state of affairs by appealing to its relation to other states of affairs of final value. The distinction between basic and non-basic final value is a refinement of this idea. At first approximation, states of affairs are of non-basic final value when they are of final value, but an explanation of why they are of final value is in terms of their relation to other states of affairs of final value. By contrast, a state of affairs is of basic final value when it is of final value and there is no explanation of why it is of final value that appeals to the final value of other states of affairs.

The distinction between basic and non-basic final value is both similar and dissimilar to the distinction between instrumental and final value. (I discuss instrumental value more in my (2017).) When something is of instrumental value, an explanation of its value will appeal to its

² In fact, many authors of otherwise different views accept that there is *some* sort of important connection, though they frequently dispute the *exact* nature of the connection. See, e.g., Brentano (1902: 15f.), Ross (1939: 279, 282), Chisholm (1986: 47ff.), Anderson (1993: 2-3), Lemos (1994: 6ff.), Scanlon (1998: 78ff.), Zimmerman (2001), Audi (2004: 125). Of course, this kind of view is not new. Aquinas tell us “the essence of goodness consists in this, that it is some way desirable” (*ST*, I.5.1).

connection to something else of value, either something else of instrumental value or something of final value. In this way, instrumental value and non-basic final value are similar. But there are two important differences. First, when something is of instrumental value the “connection” between it and something else of value is having as a consequence (or likely to have as a consequence) that thing of value. That need not be the case for non-basic final value. In fact, I’ll suggest below that the relevant connection between non-basic final value and final basic value should be understood mereologically—in terms of parts—and not necessarily in terms of consequence. Second, when something is of non-basic final value it follows that it is of final value. Thus, when something is of non-basic final value, it follows that it would be appropriate/required to adopt certain pro-attitudes towards it. By contrast, when something is of instrumental value, it does not follow that it is of final value—it may be, it may not be.

One reason for marking the distinction between basic/non-basic final value is that it offers a refinement of a distinction in ordinary thinking. But there are also several other reasons for marking this distinction. I will briefly mention two. (These reasons are compiled from Harman (1967), Feldman (2000), and Zimmerman (2001), though the particular presentations are my own. For further discussion, see my (under review).)

First, philosophers who do *not* mark this distinction are more likely to either contradict themselves or produce an axiology that cannot be applied in the way that philosophers think it should. To illustrate, consider a philosopher who proposes the following view:

Simple Hedonism: The only states of affairs of final value are those that attribute pleasure (and nothing else) to particular things. The only states of affairs that are of final disvalue are those that attribute displeasure (and nothing else) to particular things.

A straightforward consequence of *Simple Hedonism* is if there is a state of affairs—including a complex one—that attributes something other than pleasure or displeasure to a thing, it cannot be of any final value or disvalue. But there are many complex states of affairs that attribute something other than pleasure or displeasure to things. Further, many of those complex states of affairs are ones that philosophers think an axiology should apply to. For instance, consider the complex state of affairs that consists of an entire possible world, or the outcomes of an action, or represents a human life. Those complex states of affairs can clearly attribute properties to things other than pleasure or displeasure. Thus, strictly speaking, given *Simple Hedonism*, those complex states of affairs are not of any final value or disvalue. To claim otherwise would be contradictory. So *Simple Hedonism* cannot always apply to complex states of affairs in the way that philosophers think a theory of value should.

The distinction between basic and non-basic final value is supposed to help avoid this problem. An axiology should identify which states of affairs are of “basic” final value. Other states of affairs might be of “non-basic” final value in virtue of their relationship to states of affairs of basic final value. Thus, anyone drawn to *Simple Hedonism* should really formulate their view as:

Modified Hedonism. The only states of affairs that are of basic final value are those that attribute pleasure (and nothing else) to particular things. The only states of affairs that are of basic final disvalue are those that attribute displeasure (and nothing else) to particular things.

A position like *Modified Hedonism* leaves open that some states of affairs—like possible worlds, people’s lives, outcomes of actions, etc.—are of final value just not basic final value. By utilizing this distinction, and updating particular axiologies, we can avoid this problem.

Second, if complex wholes like possible worlds, entire lives, etc. can be of final value, we might want to know how to compute their value or otherwise aggregate the value of their parts.³ Further, we will want a way of computing their value that does not, intuitively, *over count*. To illustrate one way we might over count, imagine a proposal on which the overall value of a complex whole is equal to the sum of the value of all of its proper parts. Let ‘W’ be a complex whole that is made up of three atomic states of affairs, A, B, and C, where A is of 10 “units” of final value and neither B nor C are of any final value or disvalue. This proposed view will naturally over count. For the proper parts of W include: A, B, C, A&B, A&C, B&C. Further, it is plausible that A, A&B, and A&C are each of 10 units of final value. Thus, on this proposal the overall value of W would be 30 units of final. But clearly we’ve counted the value of A too many times.

The distinction between basic and non-basic value is supposed to help us avoid this problem. When something is of basic final value, the final value it has is not explained by the final value of some other state of affairs. By contrast, when something is of non-basic final value, the final value it has is explained by the final value of some other state of affairs. Over counting can occur when we count both the basic final value of a state of affairs as well as the non-basic final value that occurs because of the final value of that state of affairs. Thus, using this distinction, we can identify the final value A has as basic but the final value that A&B has as non-basic. Clearly, counting the value of both A and A&B when determining the value of a complex whole is over counting. Thus, after distinguishing between basic and non-basic final, we can use only states of affairs of basic final value when determining the overall value of a complex whole.

This motivation for drawing the distinction between basic and non-basic final value does not necessarily assume that the overall value of a complex whole is the sum of the value of its proper parts (or subset of its proper parts). This problem of over counting is a problem of identifying which parts of a complex whole are to be used to determine the overall value of that whole. Even if we knew which parts of a complex whole are to be used to determine the overall value of that whole, there is still a question of how exactly to aggregate or compute the overall value. Thus, even someone like G. E. Moore, who strenuously objected to the idea that the value of a complex whole is the same as the sum of the value of its parts, can agree that it is important to determine which parts of a whole are of basic final value and which are not.

C. *A Mereological Approach*

I’ve introduced the distinction between basic/non-basic final value using explanatory concepts. When something is of non-basic final value, there is an explanation of the final value it has in terms of other states of affairs of value; that is not the case for things of basic final value. Thus, if a state of affairs S is of non-basic final value, it has an explanation of its final value at least in part of the value of other states of affairs. In and of itself, this characterization tells us nothing more about the nature of that explanation or what it would be like. An account of this distinction would go further by telling us more about how such explanations might go—what sorts of features or properties might figure in them. Such an account might not itself be couched in explicitly explanatory terms—it might not make direct appeal to relations like “in virtue of” or

³ To simplify discussion, I assume that the non-basic final value of complex wholes is determined entirely by their parts. This simplifying assumption is consistent with the final value of some states of affairs being extrinsic to them. Specifically, it is consistent with the *basic* final value of some states of affairs being extrinsic to them. Some might reject this simplifying assumption; fair enough—it *is* just a simplifying assumption. But notice that even those who reject this simplifying assumption should recognize that *sometimes* the parts of a complex whole play a role in determining the overall value of that whole and thus we need a way of identifying which parts play this role without over counting.

“because.” Rather, it might identify important relations between states of affairs that could then be used to provide the explanations that distinguish states of affairs of basic and non-basic final value.

An analogy could be helpful here. One might introduce the term ‘gene’ to stand for that stuff that explains which traits an organism inherits from its ancestors in contrast to those traits that it acquires on its own. An account of genes would go further and tell us more about what genes were such that they explained how an organism inherits traits from its ancestors. Accounts of genes might not explicitly include properties about inherited characteristics or ancestors. Rather, they might contain various other properties about (e.g.) information or structure or proteins that could then be used to explain facts about inherited traits from ancestors.⁴ Likewise, an account of the distinction between basic/non-basic final value would go further and tell us about what relations hold between states of affairs such that they could be used to explain when it was that some states of affairs were of non-basic final value.

A natural assumption—shared by Zimmerman and myself—is that a mereological approach is promising here. Specifically, it is promising to give an account of the distinction in terms of parthood relations that states of affairs bear to one another. This approach is promising because many of the considerations that push us to draw the distinction involve, in some way or another, issues about parthood. For instance, a solution to the problem of over counting would tell us which parts of a complex whole are the ones that should be used to help determine the value of the whole and which parts should not be. A solution to the problem of adequate formulation of an axiology would tell us how to formulate an axiology so that it can be applied to complex states of affairs that contain, as parts, states of affairs that, by light of some axiology, are not necessarily of value. Even our reasons for drawing this distinction that are drawn from ordinary life can be seen as involving mereological issues. Understanding the event of visiting one’s family as a complex state of affairs of a certain sort (cf. Chisholm (1976: 126ff.)), it is natural to value the event as a whole because of some of its parts (those that are about, e.g., specific interactions with family members) and not other parts (those that are about, e.g., the fact that one traveled). These considerations provide *prima facie* reason for seeking an account of the distinction in terms of the parthood of states of affairs.

Summing up, there are certain problems in stating an adequate theory of value. Distinguishing between basic and non-basic final value is the first step in certain solutions to those problems. Further, ordinary thinking draws *something* like this distinction. This gives us a reason to draw the distinction. But it does not tell us the exact content of the distinction. At this point, different theorists might posit different accounts of this distinction. To be sure, in giving an account of basic final value we cannot fall back on the ordinary usage of this term since it is not an ordinary term. But we do have some intuitions as to when the final value of certain states of affairs explains the final value of other states of affairs. And this distinction is meant to help resolve some of these problems. An adequate account of this distinction should confirm such intuitions as well as help us avoid these problems.

II. The Contradiction

With these preliminaries in place, we can now turn to Zimmerman’s view on basic final value and a problem facing it. In short, the problem is this: given one plausible assumption, Zimmerman’s view derives a contradiction. Seeing this derivation is difficult, partly because it

⁴ This is of course a crude approximation to the actual term; see Keller (2000) for a rich discussion of genes.

requires keeping track of several distinct definitions. In this section, I focus on the derivation of the contradiction; in the next section, I consider ways of blocking it.

The contradiction at issue is this:

The Contradiction: (A) No state of affairs that is of basic final value has a part that is of final value. (B). There is a state of affairs that is of basic final value and has a part that is of final value.

I'll show first how Zimmerman is committed to (A). I'll then show how, given one plausible assumption, (B) follows from his views as well.

Anytime a state of affairs is of final value it is either of basic final value or non-basic final value. To show that Zimmerman is committed to (A) I'll first argue that, on his view, no state of affairs that is of basic final value has a part that is of basic final value. I'll then argue that, on his view, no state of affairs that is of basic final value has a part that is of non-basic final value. The upshot is that, on his view, no state of affairs that is of basic final value has a part that is of final value—which is just (A).

Zimmerman refines his view on basic final value several times. His final refinement is this principle:

Basic [Final] Value 3: S has basic [final] value to a certain degree = df. (a) S is such that the contemplation of it as such directly morally requires that one either favor it to a precisely corresponding degree or disfavor it to a precisely corresponding degree or be indifferent toward it for its own sake and (b) no proper part of S is such that the contemplation of it as such directly morally requires such an attitude, unless that part is a purely temporal proper part of S. (2001: 161)

(In what follows, I'll ignore his comments about purely temporal parts as they don't matter for our discussion.) Let us assume there is a state of affairs, S, that is of basic final value to a certain degree. From *Basic Final Value 3*, there is no proper part of S such that contemplation of it as such directly morally requires *any* attitude of favoring or disfavoring. Now assume, for *reductio*, that S contains a part S* that is also of basic final value to some degree. From *Basic Final Value 3*, it follows that S* is such that contemplation of it as such directly morally requires that one favor it to a precisely corresponding degree. But this contradicts the claim that no part of S is like that. Thus, if a state of affairs S is of basic final value to a certain degree, then no part of S is of basic final value.

Zimmerman's definition applies only to states of affairs with basic final value *to a certain degree*. Perhaps states of affairs can be of basic final value but not to a particular degree. Presumably, for such states of affairs, Zimmerman would weaken (a) of his definition so that the contemplation of such states of affairs as such directly morally requires that one *favor* that state of affairs, but not necessarily favor it to a "precisely corresponding degree." However, notice that the argument of the previous paragraph did not really turn on the fact that when something is of basic final value it is appropriate/required to favor it to a *precise* degree. All that mattered was that it was appropriate/required to favor it *at all*. Thus, on Zimmerman's view, even if there are states of affairs of basic final value, but not to a precise degree, it will still turn out that no part of them are of basic final value.

Can a state of affairs of basic final value have a proper part that is of *non-basic* final value? Not on Zimmerman's view. After various refinements, Zimmerman states a general definition of final value, one that applies to states of affairs of both basic and non-basic final value. That definition is:

[*Final Value*] 5: S is [of final value] to a certain degree =df. Those states with basic [final] value that are contained in S are such that the contemplation of them jointly as such directly morally requires that one favor them jointly to a precisely corresponding degree for their own sake. (2001: 122)

Assume that there is a state of affairs S that is of basic final value. Now assume, for *reductio*, that S contains a part, S*, that is of non-basic final value to a certain degree. Given *Final Value* 5, it follows that S* has a part or collection of parts—S**—such that S** is of basic final value to the same degree that S* is. By the transitivity of parthood, it follows that S** is a part of S. Thus, one state of affairs, S, is of basic final value and has as a part another state of affairs, S**, that is of basic final value. But that contradicts *Basic Final Value* 3. So our *reductio* assumption is to be rejected: if S is of basic final value, then it does not contain a part that is of non-basic final value.

If something is of final value, then it is either of basic final value or non-basic final value. The last two paragraphs show that on Zimmerman's views when S is of basic final value, it does not contain any parts that are of basic final value or non-basic final value. Thus, on Zimmerman's view, when something is of basic final value, it does not contain any parts that are of final value, which is all the first conjunct, (A), of *The Contradiction* says.

(Though I've argued that Zimmerman's 2001 views imply (A) of *The Contradiction*, I'll note that Zimmerman himself is sympathetic to account of basic final value that implies (A). For instance, in a slightly earlier paper, he gives a definition of basic final value on which something is of basic final value if and only if it is of final value and no proper part of it is of final value (1999: 665).)

Deriving (B) of *The Contradiction* requires a little more setup. We'll need two technical terms, one provided by Zimmerman and one that I will stipulate. The first term is 'less determinate property of' and I define it as follows:

For any two properties P¹ and P², P¹ is "a less determinate property of" P² if and only if (i) necessarily, whatever has P² has P¹, (ii) possibly, something has P¹ without having P², and (iii) P² is a way of being P¹.

For example, the property of being a polygon is a less determinate property of being a triangle; likewise, the property of being red is a less determinate property of being crimson. Generally speaking, a determinable will be a less determinate property of its various determinates. But this definition extends beyond cases of determinable/determinates. For instance, the property of being a congressperson is a less determinate property of being a female congressperson, a conjunctive property. For being a female congressperson is a more particular way of being a congressperson. I will not offer an account of what it means for one property to be a way of being another property, leaving this idea at an intuitive level.

The second term is 'ontological ancestor' and is Zimmerman's. Roughly, S is an ontological ancestor of S* when S* exemplifies an indeterminate property and S exemplifies a more determinate property, and S* exemplifying the property it does is explained by S exemplifying the property it does (2001: 56). Zimmerman claims—plausibly—that if a state of affairs S is an ontological ancestor of S*, then S* is a part of S. Thus, to give an example, the state of affairs 'my copy of Rawl's *Theory of Justice* is shade of such-and-such green' might be an ontological ancestor to 'my copy of Rawl's *Theory of Justice* is colored' and the latter would then be a part of the former. More generally, it is plausible that if a property P* is a less determinate property of P, then a state of affairs S* that attributes P* to something is a part of the state of affairs S that is just like S* except that it attributes P instead of P*.

With these terms in place, we need the following assumption to derive (B) of the *Contradiction*:

Assumption:(C) There is a state of affairs S that is of basic final value that attributes a property P to something; and (D) there is a state of affairs S* such that S* is of non-basic final value and S* differs from S only in that S* attributes P*, where P* is a less determinate property than P.

Zimmerman never formulates *Assumption*. It is a principle that is left-open given some of his informal remarks.⁵ In any case, I'll consider the plausibility of rejecting this assumption in the next section.

Given (C) of *Assumption*, there is a state of affairs S that attributes a property P where S is of basic final value. Given (D) of *Assumption*, there is a state of affairs S* such that S* is of non-basic final value and S* differs from S only in that S* attributes P*, where P* is a less determinate property than P. Now, plausibly, the instantiation of more determinate properties explains the instantiation of less determinate properties—a tennis ball is both shaped and spherical, but it's being spherical is what explains it's being shaped. Thus, plausibly, the instantiation of P is what explains the instantiation of P*. Given Zimmerman's account of ontological ancestor, it will follow that S is an ontological ancestor of S*. Further, on Zimmerman's account, if S is an ontological ancestor of S*, then S* is a part of S. So S* is part of S. But by (C) of *Assumption* S is of basic final value. But by (D) of *Assumption*, S* is of non-basic final value. So a state of affairs, S, is of basic final value and contains a part, S*, that is of final value, which is all that (B) of *The Contradiction* says.

There are various ways of trying to avoid the derivation of *The Contradiction*. For the most part, I will ignore all but the following one: rejecting *Assumption*. I focus on this way of blocking the contradiction because it is the main assumption that Zimmerman himself does not explicitly endorse.

III. Determinate Value and Basic Final Value

The Contradiction is a conjunction. To block its derivation one must block the derivation of one of its conjuncts. Zimmerman himself seems keen to retain (A); after all, at one point he formulated the distinction between basic and non-basic value in a way that is almost equivalent to (A). Further, given that in deriving (B) I used an assumption Zimmerman does not explicitly make, presumably Zimmerman will reject (B) and the assumption I used to derive it. In this section, I'll argue this is a mistake. It is (A) and Zimmerman's account of basic final value that we should reject.

A. Defending Assumption

Zimmerman is likely to reject:

Assumption:(C) There is a state of affairs S of basic final value that attributes a property P to something; and (D) there is a state of affairs S* such that S* is of non-basic final value and S* differs from S only in that S* attributes P* where P* is a less determinate property than P.

This assumption is a conjunction. Zimmerman clearly accepts (C). He must then reject (D). We can separate (D) into two claims: (i) there is a state of affairs S* that is just like S except it attributes P*, which is a less determinate property of P, and (ii) S* is of non-basic final value. It is clear that Zimmerman would accept the first claim. To deny it would be to maintain that

⁵ For instance, at various points (2001: 143, 179), Zimmerman considers the value a state of affairs has when its ontological ancestor is of a determinate amount of basic final value. At these points, Zimmerman does not simply insist that such a state of affairs could *never* have any final value.

whatever states of affairs are of basic final value, those states of affairs attribute a property so general and indeterminate that there is no other property that is a less determinate property than it. Such a position is pretty implausible, and I can think of no axiology that would maintain that. Thus, Zimmerman must instead maintain that, when a state of affairs S is of basic final value, any state of affairs that differs from S only in attributing a less determinate property than S does is a state of affairs that lacks any final value, basic or otherwise.

I think rejecting (D) is pretty implausible for several reasons. Specifically, when we start considering possible examples, this response has implausible results. For instance, consider an axiology that identifies the following two states of affairs as being of basic final value:

- (1) At *t*, George experienced great pleasure in his beer.
- (2) At *t*, Carla courageously defended an innocent person.

Now consider the following states of affairs:

- (3) At *t*, George experienced some pleasure in his beer.
- (4) At *t*, Carla performed a virtuous act.

It is plausible that both (3) and (4) are of some final value. But (1) and (3) are the same except the property that (3) attributes is a less determinate one of the property that (1) attributes. Likewise, (2) and (4) are the same except that the property that (4) attributes is a less determinate one of the property that (2) attributes. Thus, Zimmerman must maintain that neither (3) nor (4) are of any final value. That is implausible. (3) and (4) certainly seem to be the kinds of states of affairs that it would be appropriate/required to adopt pro-attitude towards.

A different problem is identified by Noah Lemos (2010: 38-9). Suppose the following state of affairs also obtains and is of basic final disvalue:

- (5) At *t*, Anita maliciously harmed Joseph by inflicting great pain on him.

Maliciously harming someone by inflicting pain on them is a way of acting viciously. Thus, when (5) obtains so does (6):

- (6) At *t*, Anita performed a vicious act.

Further, the only difference between (5) and (6) is that (6) attributes a less determinate property than the one in (5). Thus, on Zimmerman's view, (6) is not of any final disvalue. If neither (4) nor (6) is of any final value or disvalue, then it would seem it would not be appropriate/required to prefer one to the other. (After all, we are assuming that there is some sort of important connection between value and valuing.) But that is surely wrong. Surely it would be appropriate to prefer (4) to (6). For these reasons it is implausible to reject (D), and by extension, the *Assumption*.

B. Evaluative Inadequacy and the Invariability Thesis

One important response Zimmerman might offer is that states of affairs like (3), (4), and (6) are "evaluatively inadequate," not containing enough information to warrant a precise or particular amount of favoring (2001: 142ff.). However, this point by itself is insufficient to respond to my criticism. Perhaps he is correct that there is no precise amount of favoring that is appropriate/required for those states of affairs. At best, that would show that (3), (4), and (6) are not of any particular or precise amount of final value. They might nonetheless be of some amount of value, but to an indeterminate degree. (Here I'll follow Zimmerman (2001: 143, 179-80) in holding that when something is of an indeterminate amount of value, it has a value in a range or a numeric interval.) Thus, one might agree with Zimmerman that states of affairs like (3), (4), and (6) do not contain enough information to warrant a *precise* attitude while still maintaining that they contain *enough* information to warrant certain attitudes.

Zimmerman might argue that if states of affairs like (3), (4), and (6) lack sufficient information to warrant a precise attitude then they are not even of indeterminate value. Since they are not of precise value either, it would follow that they are not of any final value. That would undermine my defense of (D), and by extension, the *Assumption*.

Zimmerman's argument at this point takes as a premise what he calls the "Invariability Thesis." It states that "it is necessarily the case that any two states that have exactly the same constituent property have exactly the same [final] value" (2001: 63). Now (4) has as a constituent property the property of *performing a virtuous act*. The following state of affairs also has that property:

(7) At t^* , Carla performed a virtuous act.

But let us suppose that (7) obtains only because (8) obtains:

(8) At t^* , Carla prudently paid her electric bill immediately.

Now (4) and (7) have the same constituent property. By the Invariability Thesis, it follows that they have the same amount of final value (whatever that amount might be). Plausibly, (7) obtains because (8) obtains and (4) obtains because (2) obtains. Using Zimmerman's terminology, (2) is an ontological ancestor of (4) and (8) is an ontological ancestor of (7). However, it is plausible that (2) and (8), even if of a precise amount of basic final value, are of differing amounts. (Courageously defending an innocent person seems more valuable than prudently paying bills immediately.) At this point, the argument proceeds by considering three cases (cf. Zimmerman (2001: 143-4)).

First case: (2) and (8) have determinate amounts of final value, but different amounts. (4) and (7) have the same value as their ontological ancestors—(2) and (8) respectively. But this would violate the Invariability Thesis, since it would follow that (4) and (7) are of differing amounts of final value despite having the same constituent property. Second case: (2) and (8) have indeterminate amounts of final value, but different amounts. (4) and (7) have the same value as their ontological ancestors—(2) and (8) respectively. This case violates the Invariability Thesis for essentially the same reason as case one. Finally, while (2) and (8) have a determinate amount of basic final value, (4) and (7) lack any final value—determinate or otherwise. But this case is inconsistent with what I claim and is actually Zimmerman's view! Thus, the argument goes, (4) and (7) are not even of indeterminate value. In this way, Zimmerman might use the Invariability Thesis to argue that (4) and (7) are not even of any indeterminate value.

This argument from cases neglects one possibility: that a state of affairs (e.g., 7) can occur in virtue of another (e.g., 8) and have more indeterminate final value than the final value of the state of affairs it occurs in virtue of. To be sure, Zimmerman does consider this kind of possibility, but he sets it aside. He writes, "I cannot see any reason to think that, if a state [is such that] it can only occur in virtue of some ontological ancestor that itself has a determinate [final] value, then it may nonetheless have [final] value to an indeterminate degree. Why think, on such occasions, *anything* happens whose [final] value is not determinate?" (2001: 143).⁶

⁶ At (2001: 144) he considers the possibility again and rejects it. But his rejection in that case is routed in the particular example he uses. That example requires saying that a state of affairs is of indeterminate final value where the range of values for that state of affairs includes both positive and negative numbers. He is surely right that would be absurd. But the examples I am working with would not require assigning a range that included both positive and negative numbers. I'll also briefly note a possible tension here. Zimmerman accepts an intentional isolation method for determining what is of final value (cf., *inter alia*, (2001: 132ff.)), where one considers a state of affairs *as such*. But given the isolation test, it should not matter whether a state of affairs obtains only because of another. So it is a little odd that Zimmerman asks this rhetorical question given his acceptance of the intentional isolation method.

However, it is a mistake to set this possibility aside. It is plausible that sometimes a state of affairs can obtain in virtue of another and have more indeterminate value than the final value of the state of affairs it obtains in virtue of. Further, the most plausible way of thinking about this kind of case turns out to be consistent with the Invariability Thesis. Or so I will briefly argue.

First, it is plausible that whatever is of basic final value, it comes in “families” of value conferring properties (cf. Feldman (2000: 335ff.)). For instance, on a view that ascribes basic final value to particular virtuous actions, the family might include various kinds of properties like: courageously defending a person, prudently paying one’s bills immediately, kindly helping a stranger, etc. Of course, instances of these properties will not necessarily be of the same final value—like we’ve said, presumably courageously defending a person is of more final value than prudently paying one’s bills on time.⁷

Second, for some assumed family, there will be some property that “unifies” it in the following sense. First, any particular value conferring property in this family will be a more determinate property of this unifying property. Second, anything that has this property will also have some more determinate value conferring property from this family. I will call such a property a “unifying property.” Sticking with our current example, the property of *being a virtuous action* will unify the family of properties that includes (e.g.) courageously defending a person, kindly helping a stranger, etc. After all, the property *being a courageous defense of a person*, for instance, is a more determinate property of the property *being a virtuous act*. And anytime a person performs a virtuous act there is some more determinate virtuous act that the person performs.

It is plausible that if a property is a unifying property for some family of value conferring properties, it is itself a value conferring property. After all, not only do instances of it guarantee that something is of basic final value, it is a more general way for things to be of value. To use our example, if any particular kind of virtuous action is of basic final value, then surely it is appropriate to value that a virtuous action has been done, since any particular way that action could have been done results in something of final value.

But if a unifying property is of final value, it is natural to wonder how much final value its instances have. The most natural answer here is that it is of indeterminate value and the range of indeterminate value corresponds to the lowest value of the properties it unifies, on one hand, and the highest value of the properties it unifies, on the other hand. It is not natural to say that the unifying property has an unchanging *determinate* amount of value because its instances can be explained by the instances of more determinate properties of it and those properties can have different amounts of value. So it is more plausible to say that unifying properties have an indeterminate amount of value. As for the range of indeterminate value, it is most plausible to say that its lowest value is the highest lowest bound of the properties it unifies and its highest value is the lowest highest bound of the properties it unifies. After all, while instances of a unifying property guarantee that some more determinate value conferring property is instantiated they leave open which one exactly it is. To choose a narrower range would be to exclude some of the value conferring properties that it leaves open, while choosing a wider range would be to include value conferring properties it does not guarantee.⁸

⁷ Of course, what exactly belongs to some family of basic final value will turn on substantive axiologies. For instance, various forms of hedonism will allow that there are families of value conferring properties, but those properties will just be exclusively about different kinds of pleasure.

⁸ These ideas could be put more formally like this. A property P is a unifying property for a family of value conferring property F only if (i) if *a* is P then *a* is also Q, where Q is some element of F, (ii) for any element Q of F,

Notice too that we have a promising answer to Zimmerman’s rhetorical question: “why think, on such occasions, *anything* happens whose [final] value is not determinate?” The final value of a unifying property is not determinate because there are many more specific ways of that property being realized and those particular ways are of different amounts of value. (E.g., there are many ways of being virtuous that are of different amounts of value.)

However, notice that if P is a unifying property, then any two instances of P have the same value. For the value of P is set by the value of the range of the properties it unifies. So every instance of P has the same amount of indeterminate value. Thus, even though (4) and (7) could not be about the same virtuous act, those states of affairs are of the same value. Thus, the Invariability Thesis is not violated.

Summing up, I’ve argued that it is plausible that sometimes a state of affairs (e.g., (7)) can obtain in virtue of another (e.g. (8)) and be of indeterminate value even though the state which it obtains in virtue of is of more determinate value. Further, this can occur in such a way that the Invariability Thesis is not violated. If this is correct, then one could concede to Zimmerman the Invariability Thesis while still maintaining that states of affairs like (3), (4) and (6) are of final value

C. *Generalizing the Criticism*

In defending *Assumption*, I used particular examples from possible axiologies. My criticism does not essentially depend on those axiologies being true or even plausible. Rather, those examples illustrate some general claims about value that are plausible and in tension with Zimmerman’s view.

First, it is plausible that whatever states of affairs are of basic final value, those states of affairs will be ones attributing fairly determinate properties to things—states of affairs like:

- (1) At *t*, George experienced great pleasure in his beer.
- (2) At *t*, Carla courageously defended an innocent person.

Of course, this is vague, and I haven’t said *how* determinate the properties are likely to be. (For instance, they may be even more determinate than the ones in (1) and (2).) But it is implausible that the value conferring properties in states of affairs of basic final value will be ones like “the property of performing some action” or the “property of having some mental state” or otherwise generic or general properties.

Second, it is plausible that if it is appropriate/required of us to bear pro-attitudes towards a state of affairs attributing a fairly determinate property, then it will likewise be appropriate/required for us to bear pro-attitudes towards a state of affairs that differs from that one only in that it attributes a less determinate property. Thus, if (1) and (2) are of basic final value, it is plausible that the following would also be of final value:

- (3) At *t*, George experienced some pleasure in his beer.
- (4) At *t*, Carla performed a virtuous act.

To be clear, I don’t claim that *every* less determinate property of the property in a state of affairs of basic final value is also a value conferring property; the claim is, more weakly, that *one* of the less determinate properties of the property in a state of affairs of basic final value is also a value conferring property.

But these two plausible general claims, which are illustrated by (1)-(4), have an implication that is inconsistent with Zimmerman’s account of basic final value. They imply that when a state

if *a* is Q, then *a* is P, and (iii) for any Q of F, Q is a more determinate property of P and P is a less determinate property of Q. The value of P is then the highest lowest bound of properties in Q to the lowest highest bound of properties in Q.

of affairs, S, is of basic final value, then there is a state of affairs S* such that S* differs from S only in that it attributes a less determinate property than S does and is of final value—which is just what *Assumption* says. Thus, we should not reject *Assumption*. Rather, we should reject Zimmerman’s account of basic final value. Rejecting that account will then allow us to block the derivation of (A) of *The Contradiction*.

IV. Basic Final Value—An Alternative Account

In the remainder, I sketch an alternative account of basic final value. I’ll show how it avoids the pitfall of Zimmerman’s account while also helping resolve some of the problems that motivated drawing the distinction to begin with.

Among value conferring properties, I will distinguish between core value conferring properties and non-core value conferring properties. Core value conferring properties contain the “right” amount of information, whereas non-core value conferring properties do not. More specifically, a non-core value conferring property may contain too much information—that is, it contains some irrelevant information—or it contains too little information—that is, it lacks some relevant information. A core value conferring property is neither a value conferring property that contains irrelevant information nor a value conferring property that lacks relevant information.

In speaking of “relevant” information, I have in mind information that is relevant to the appropriateness of adopting pro-attitudes.⁹ If a non-core value conferring property contains “irrelevant” information, then it contains information that plays no role in fixing what attitudes are appropriate to bear towards instances of that property. To give an example, consider these states of affairs:

(2) At *t*, Carla courageously defended an innocent person.

(9) At *t*, Carla courageously defended an innocent person, where *t* occurred on a Tuesday.

(9) contains irrelevant information, specifically that Carla’s act occurred on a Tuesday. Because that information is irrelevant, the range of pro-attitudes that are appropriate to bear towards (9) and (2) will be the same—the addition of when Carla’s act occurs plays no role in fixing what attitudes are appropriate.

But some value conferring properties might lack relevant information. Such a property contains sufficient information for it to be appropriate to adopt some sort of pro-attitude but fails to include information that more specifically delineates a set of appropriate pro-attitudes. For instance, consider again:

(4) At *t*, Carla performed a virtuous act.

Perhaps (4) contains sufficient information for it to be appropriate to adopt some pro-attitude towards it. But there may be more specific information about what Carla did that would determine more specific pro-attitudes as appropriate. (For instance, the amount of appropriate pleasure to take in Carla courageously defending an innocent person is greater than the amount that would be appropriate if she has just prudently payed her bills immediately.)

More generally, if a non-core value conferring property P contains irrelevant information, then there is a value conferring property P* such that P* lacks that information and the range of pro-attitudes that are appropriate to adopt towards instances of P and P* are the same. If a non-core value conferring property Q lacks relevant information, then there is a value conferring property Q* such that Q* has more information than Q and the range of attitudes that are

⁹ Feldman (1986: 30) suggests that states of affairs of basic final value are ones that contain no “extraneous” information while giving all the “essential” information. He briefly repeats this idea in his (2000: 328-9). But Feldman does not say what exactly makes information “extraneous” or “essential.” My account improves on this suggestion.

appropriate to adopt towards instances of Q^* are more determinate or specific ones than those that are appropriate to adopt towards instances of Q .

It is natural to see value conferring properties that are more or less determinate of core value conferring properties as non-core value conferring properties. A value conferring property that is more determinate than a core value conferring property contains excess information—information the core value conferring property lacks. Likewise, a value conferring property that is less determinate than a core value conferring property lacks relevant information—information the core value conferring property has.

This account of core value properties leaves several things open. First, while instances of a core value property contain the right amount of information for it to be appropriate to adopt a range of pro-attitudes, it leaves open exactly what the range might be. Perhaps it is a single, precise attitude of favoring/disfavoring, or a range of precise attitudes, or something less determinate than that. Second, this account leaves open how many core value conferring properties there are. This is as it should be; different axiologies will identify different properties as being core value conferring properties.

We can now turn to my account of basic final value. My proposal is this:

A state of affairs is of basic final value if and only if (a) it attributes, to some particular thing or things, a core value conferring property (and no other properties), and (b) there is no proper part of it that attributes, to some particular thing or things, a core value conferring property (and no other properties).

Let me now compare this account to Zimmerman's, indicating ways in which it retains the benefits of his account while avoiding its problem.

First, like Zimmerman, my account of basic final value appeals to the connection between basic final value and pro-attitudes. However, we do this in different ways. First, Zimmerman's (2001) account does this directly so that basic value final is understood in terms of valuing attitudes. My account is more indirect. I understand basic final value in terms of core value conferring properties and understand core value conferring properties in terms of information relevant to valuing attitudes. Second, as mentioned earlier, Zimmerman connects value to what pro-attitudes are required, whereas I speak of what is appropriate. Finally, on Zimmerman's view, when something is of basic final value there is a *precise* amount of valuing that is required/appropriate for an agent. I leave open that there may not be a precise amount.

Second, Zimmerman's account is broadly mereological, implying that something is of basic final value only if it has a certain property and none of its proper parts have that property. A mereological account of basic final value is promising. For instance, some of the reasons that motivated drawing a distinction between basic and non-basic final value turned on our reflection about the relations between complex wholes and their parts. Further, when we learn that some complex states of affairs—e.g. visiting one's family—has value in virtue of its parts, it is natural to think that state of affairs is not of basic final value. Thus, if there is a property that distinguishes between basic final value and non-basic final value, presumably it is a feature that basic states of affairs have but their parts do not. My account is also broadly mereological. On it, something is of basic final value only if it has a certain property and none of its proper parts have that property. The main difference between us are the particular properties we use.

Third, and relatedly, my account of the distinction confirms some of our intuitions about basic final value. For instance, recall the following intuitive idea from earlier: if neither B nor C is of any final value or disvalue but A is of "10 units" of final value, then insofar as A&B and A&C have any final value it is because of the value of A. In this way, A&B and A&C should be

of non-basic final value while A is of basic final value. My account confirms this result. For if A is of basic final value, then neither A&B nor A&C can be of basic final value. For both A&B and A&C contain a part—namely A—that attributes a core value conferring property, and thus my account prohibits them from being of basic final value.

Fourth, according to Zimmerman, the guiding idea of basic final value is this:

...states that are evaluatively inadequate do not of course have basic [final] value, for they have no [final] value at all. But, also, states that are evaluatively superfluous likewise do not have basic [final] value, for although they do have actual value, their constituent properties contain more “information” than is necessary to identify what’s really “doing the work” with respect to what it is that the [final] value in question supervenes on. Thus basic [final] value is to be found in those states that are evaluatively neither inadequate nor superfluous. (2001: 155-6)

I’m in broad agreement with Zimmerman here. On my view, when something is of basic final value, it attributes a core value conferring property. Core value conferring properties, by definition, are properties that confer value; thus on my view states of affairs attributing them have value and are not “evaluatively inadequate.” Additionally, core value conferring properties are value conferring properties that, by definition, do not contain any irrelevant information. Thus, on my view, states of affairs of basic final value are not evaluatively superfluous either.

One caveat, though. This quotation suggests that on Zimmerman’s view a necessary *and sufficient* condition for a state of affairs to be of basic final value is for it to be neither evaluatively inadequate nor evaluatively superfluous. Without settling the exegetical question of whether that is what Zimmerman intends, I reject the suggestion that this would be sufficient. For key to my criticism of Zimmerman was that *Assumption* was true. And *Assumption* implies that there are states of affairs that are not of basic final value, are of final value, but do not contain irrelevant information. Rather, such states of affairs contain enough information for us to see that they are of some final value, but lack some relevant information. Thus, I would reject the suggestion that a sufficient condition for a state of affairs to be of basic final value is that it is neither evaluatively inadequate nor evaluatively superfluous.

Finally, even given *Assumption* this account does not imply the *Contradiction*. Like Zimmerman’s account, if *Assumption* is true, this account will imply (B) of the *Contradiction*. However, unlike Zimmerman’s account, this account does not imply (A) of the *Contradiction*. Specifically, this account permits that a state of affairs can be of basic final value and contain a part that is of final value, so long as that part is not of basic final value. Thus, this account avoids the main problem I articulated for Zimmerman’s account.

V. Conclusion

Summing up, in *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*, Michael Zimmerman offers a complex account of final value including a discussion of basic final value. Here I’ve argued that Zimmerman’s account faces a problem. Given *Assumption*, Zimmerman’s view derives a contradiction. After defending *Assumption*, I’ve offered my own account of basic final value. While more could be said about this account—and I do say more in my (Under Review)—I’ve hope to have shown that the account of basic final value here is a plausible one that retains some of the benefits of Zimmerman’s while avoiding some of its problems.¹⁰

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