

The Nature of Achievement : The Comparative Value Approach

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Abstract While investigating the value of achievements, Dunkle claims that lucky achievements are possible. For instance, if a person does great works, then it is possible that the works have the status of achievements, even if luck plays a crucial role in doing the great works. Rather than examining Dunkle's claim, this paper proceeds discussion under the assumption that lucky achievements are possible. In particular, based on this assumption, this paper suggests a new approach to the nature of achievement named the *Comparative Value Approach*. According to the comparative value approach, a product can have the status of an achievement if the product is valuable in an achievement-relevant domain, and in that domain the product is valuable more than most other items which either have been achieved or can be achieved by others. This paper shows that the comparative value approach successfully explains the cases of achievements, including the cases of lucky achievements. Besides this reason, this paper provides three more reasons to show that the comparative value approach is a feasible view of achievements. The comparative value approach can accommodate the fact that there are various kinds of achievements; the approach can explain the relation between the nature of achievement and the achievement-value of a product; and the approach can show why in determining the status of a product it matters that for average people achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult. Based on these four reasons, this paper concludes that the comparative value approach is a plausible understanding of achievements.

1 Introduction

What is the nature of achievement? What makes a product have the status of an achievement? In the literature of achievements, philosophers have provided various answers to this question. According to Bradford (2013), the fact that to achieve a product a person fully exercises her willpower makes the product have the status of an achievement. Similarly, Hirji contends that if a product has the status of an achievement, then the reason is that the product is the manifestation of high-level physical abilities or theoretical rationality (2018). These accounts successfully explain why a person's product is an achievement in the case where the person's willpower, physical abilities, or theoretical rationality have decisive roles in achieving the product. However, the accounts are not satisfactory in that they cannot accommodate the idea that lucky achievements are possible. Even if luck plays a crucial role in doing great works, and this is why the great works are not the manifestations of the person's high-level capacities, it seems plausible to say that the great works have the status of achievements. This paper aims to provide a new understanding of achievements named the *Comparative Value Approach*. According to the comparative value approach, a product can have the status of an achievement if the product is valuable in an achievement-relevant-axiological domain, and in that axiological domain the product is valuable more than most other items which either have been achieved or can be achieved by other people. This paper will argue that the comparative value approach is a feasible understanding of achievements because the approach can accommodate the idea that lucky achievements are possible. The approach implies that if a person's luckily achieved product is valuable more than most other items, then the product can have the status of an achievement not that of a mere goal attainment.

The structure of this paper is as follows: after introducing the idea that lucky achievements are possible, section 2 contends that perfectionist approaches and the difficulty approach encounter a problem in showing that luckily achieved products can have the status of achievements. Section 3 suggests the comparative value approach. In particular, section 3 shows that for four reasons the comparative value approach is a plausible understanding of achievements. The comparative value approach successfully explains the cases of achievements, including the cases of lucky achievements; the approach can accommodate the fact that there are various kinds of achievements, such as artistic achievements and historical achievements; the approach can show that what makes a product achievement-valuable has to do with the nature of achievement; and the approach can account for the significance of being-sufficiently-difficult-for-average-people. Section 4, after introducing a possible objection, argues that the objection fails in defeating the comparative value approach.

2 Lucky Achievement

Before proceeding discussion, terminological clarification is needed for better understanding of lucky achievements. While investigating the concept of achievement, Keller uses the terms ‘attain’ and ‘achieve’ for different meanings. Keller says that “[t]o achieve a goal is to have its attainment be due in part to your own efforts. If someone receives a large unexpected inheritance [...] he doesn’t *achieve* anything” (2004, 33). In other words, regardless of whether a person gets a product just by sheer luck or as a result of efforts, if the person gets the product, then the person is to attain the product. A person is to achieve a product just in case the person’s efforts have a role in getting

the product. This paper follows Keller's terminologies. In this paper, the fact that a person achieves a product stands for that the person's agency has a role in getting the product. Furthermore, the claim that lucky achievements are possible means that if a person achieves a product, then the product can have the status of an achievement, even if luck plays a crucial role in achieving the product.

In the literature of achievements, Dunkle is one of the philosophers who claim that lucky achievements are possible. Dunkle says that, insofar as a person's agency has a crucial role in attaining a product, it is possible that the product is an achievement, even if luck plays a huge role in attaining it (2019, 1030-1032).¹ Though the concept of lucky achievement has not received substantial attention in the literature, the concept is important to understand the nature of achievement. This is because, just as Dunkle says, it seems possible that a luckily achieved product has the status of an achievement. The following is a case where luck plays a role in achieving a product:

Discovery Though a significant number of people have made huge efforts to discover books written by Diogenes of Sinope, no one could discover any of them. While engaging in research, Andrea misinterprets a word in an ancient document, and she keeps doing research based on that misinterpretation. Luckily, the misinterpreted word is one of typos, and Andrea's misinterpretation is what the author actually intended to mean by that word. This is why, though Andrea's research skills are just as good as average people's skills, and she makes efforts just as much as other average

¹ Bradford also says that a person's product is an achievement just in case the person's agency has a crucial role in attaining the product. Besides this condition, Bradford provides another condition of achievements. Bradford claims that when a person engages in activities to achieve a product, the person should have justified and true beliefs about why the activities are crucial in achieving it. See Bradford 2013, 205. Similarly, von Kriegstein says that a person's product is an achievement just in case the person's act increases the chance to achieve it, and this fact is the person's reason to perform that act. See von Kriegstein 2019a.

people do, Andrea succeeds in discovering one of the most important historical books: Diogenes's book.

In this case, it seems plausible to say that Andrea's discovery has the status of an achievement. Given that Andrea finds one of the most important books (i.e., Diogenes's book), and people have failed in finding the books, it seems feasible to contend that Andrea's discovery is not a mere goal attainment but an achievement even though luck has a crucial role in discovering one of Diogenes's books.

Perfectionist approaches, widely endorsed approaches to the nature of achievement, encounter a problem in accommodating the idea that lucky achievements are possible. According to perfectionist approaches, an activity has the status of an achievement if that activity is the full exercise of perfectionist capacities (Bradford 2013; 2015). Hirji expresses this idea that "an achievement is an activity that fully exercises or expresses any number of a range of perfectionist capacities" (2019, 525). For instance, conquering Mt. Everest has the status of an achievement because, to conquer the mountain, the climber should fully exercise her willpower. Even if a person arrives at the peak of the mountain, if the person arrives at the peak with a helicopter, then reaching the top of Mt. Everest does not have the status of an achievement because the person does not fully exercise her perfectionist capacity. Besides an activity, a product can have the status of an achievement if the product is the manifestation of high-level perfectionist capacities. For instance, Haring's *Radiant Baby*, *Montreux*, and *Barking Dogs* are achievements because these artworks are the manifestations of Haring's high-level perfectionist capacities, such as an in-depth understanding of contemporary art. If a child manifests her high-level capacities in her doodles, then the doodles have the status of achievements. However, in most cases, children's scribbles are

not achievements but mere scribbles because most children are not of great perfectionist capacities to manifest.

Considering that, in the case of *Discovery*, Andrea's research skills are as good as average people's research skills, it is difficult to believe that Andrea's research skills are at a high level. This is why advocates of perfectionist approaches cannot contend that, since Andrea's discovery is the manifestation of high-level capacities, the discovery has the status of an achievement. Furthermore, in the case of *Discovery*, Andrea puts forth effort just as much as average people do. The amount of effort, which average people make, is not big enough to make a product have the status of an achievement, thus proponents of perfectionist approaches cannot contend that Andrea's discovery is an achievement because to discover the book Andrea fully exercises her perfectionist capacity: willpower. According to perfectionist approaches, the manifestation of high-level capacities and the full exercise of perfectionist abilities are the factors that make a person's product an achievement. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that perfectionist approaches encounter a problem in showing that Andrea's luckily achieved product is an achievement.

Unlike perfectionist approaches, Dunkle's understanding of achievements can accommodate the idea that lucky achievements are possible. Dunkle contends that achievements are valuable because they are achievements. In particular, after claiming that the degree of difficulty decides a product's achievement-value, Dunkle provides a conception of difficulty as follows:

Difficulty consists in a degree of effort. [...] An activity is difficult for an agent in virtue of the effort an average member of the activity's reference class would exert in carrying out the activity (2019, 1024).

Dunkle's claim is about the achievement-value of a product not about the nature of achievement. However, it is plausible to assume that what makes a product achievement-valuable has to do with what makes a product have the status of an achievement. Therefore, one can modify Dunkle's view of achievement-value to explain the nature of achievement. According to a modification, which this paper will name the *Difficulty Approach*, a person's product has the status of an achievement due to the fact that for average people achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult. Furthermore, the fact that for average people achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult means that average people should exercise a huge amount of effort to achieve similar products.

At a glance, the difficulty approach seems plausible in that the approach can explain why in the case of *Discovery* Andrea's discovery has the status of an achievement. According to the difficulty approach, Andrea's discovery is an achievement not a mere goal attainment because for average people discovering a similar kind of document is sufficiently difficult. However, this approach is not satisfactory because it is not sure whether difficulty is important in itself when determining the status of a product. The following case shows that difficulty is not important in itself:

Notebook Andrea's son has a couple of notebooks. These books are barely valuable because they are mere scribble books, and they are of bad quality. For average people, discovering the notebooks is sufficiently difficult because the son has told no one where he hid the books. However, Andrea discovers one of her son's notebooks because Andrea's normal research skills properly intersect with good luck.

Regarding this case, it is plausible to say that Andrea's discovery is not an achievement. Given that the son's notebooks are mere scribble books, it is reasonable to claim that the discovery is a

mere goal attainment. However, the difficulty approach encounters a problem in showing that Andrea's discovery is a mere goal attainment. According to the approach, the fact that for average people achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult makes the product an achievement. If a child does not tell where he hides his scribble books, then for average people discovering the books is sufficiently difficult, so the difficulty approach implies that in *Notebook* Andrea's discovery is an achievement. The difficulty approach has this problematic implication because the approach assumes that in determining the status of a product difficulty is important in itself.

The discussion above does not provide a decisive reason to reject perfectionist approaches and the difficulty approach. For instance, supporters of perfectionist approaches could contend that lucky achievements are not possible, thus the fact that perfectionist approaches cannot accommodate the cases of lucky achievements does not show any problems of perfectionist approaches. Furthermore, proponents of the difficulty approach could claim that difficulty is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a product to have the status of an achievement. In particular, the proponents could say that the finding in *Discovery* fulfills all the conditions to have the status of an achievement, but the discovery in *Notebook* does not fulfill all the conditions. This is why only the former has the status of an achievement. Although these replies deserve in-depth investigation, rather than examining the replies, this paper will explore a new way to understand the nature of achievement. In particular, under the assumption that luckily achieved products can have the status of achievements, and in determining the status of a product it is not important in itself whether, for average people, achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult, this paper will provide a new view of achievements: the comparative value approach to the nature of achievement.

3 The Comparative Value Approach and Its Plausibility

This section provides the comparative value approach. In particular, this section suggests four reasons to show that the comparative value approach is a feasible view of achievements. The first reason is that the approach successfully explains the cases of achievements, including the cases of lucky achievements; the second reason is that the approach can accommodate the fact that there are various types of achievements, such as artistic achievements and historical achievements; the third reason is that the approach can show that what makes a product achievement-valuable has to do with the nature of achievement; and the fourth reason is that the approach can explain why in determining the status of a product it matters that for average people achieving similar products is difficult.

3.1 The Comparative Value Approach

A motivating thought for the comparative value approach is that achievements are valuable more than most other achieved items. For instance, regarding the case of *Discovery*, it is plausible to contend that in terms of historical research Andrea's discovery is valuable more than most other discoveries. Based on this idea, the comparative value approach explains the nature of achievement as follows:

The Comparative Value Approach Products can have the status of achievements if the products are valuable in an achievement-relevant-axiological domain, and in that achievement-relevant-

axiological domain the products are valuable more than most other items which either have been achieved or can be achieved by others. In particular, the fact that in an achievement-relevant-axiological domain a product is valuable more than most other items makes the product an achievement.

This explanation assumes that the comparative value of a product determines whether the product is an achievement or a mere goal attainment. However, it does not imply that within the framework of the comparative value approach only a product's comparative value determines the product's status. A person should engage in various activities if she wants to achieve a product. Regarding this feature of a product, the comparative value approach can endorse the idea that the comparative value of an activity also determines whether the product, which the activity brings out, has the status of an achievement. According to this idea, even if a product has a small amount of value, the product can have the status of an achievement if the activities to achieve the product are valuable more than most other activities which either have been performed or can be performed by others.

There are a couple of issues to discuss for better understanding of the comparative value approach. The first issue is which axiological domains are achievement-relevant, and why those domains are achievement-relevant-axiological domains; the second issue is what exactly 'being valuable more than most other items' means; the third issue is why in determining the status of a product what other people can achieve matters as well as what other people have actually achieved; and the fourth issue is why the comparative value approach considers a product's comparative value, not absolute value, important in determining whether the product has the status of an achievement. The comparative value approach can provide a full-fledged understanding of achievements just in case the approach settles all these four issues. However, it is out of this paper's

scope to provide a full-fledged understanding of achievements. This paper just aims to show that, besides perfectionist approaches and the difficulty approach, there is another feasible understanding of achievements: the comparative value approach. Therefore, rather than settling all these four issues, in the discussion below this paper will briefly mention possible accounts of the issues.

The first issue is which domains are achievement-relevant, and why those domains are relevant. In the literature of achievements, the creation of great artworks (Bradford 2013, 206; Dunkle 2019, 1018; Hirji 2019, 543) and the discovery of historical treasures (Bradford 2015, 14; Dunkle 2019, 1018) are typical examples of achievements. Considering that these products or the activities to achieve the products are valuable in the domains of art or historical research, it is reasonable to assume that art and historical research are achievement-relevant domains. According to the comparative value approach, though Haring's *Radiant Baby*, *Montreux*, and *Barking Dogs* look similar to a child's scribbles, Haring's artworks but not a child's scribbles have the status of achievements because in the domain of art Haring's activities to create the artworks are valuable more than most other activities, and art is an achievement-relevant domain. Furthermore, Schliemann's discovery of ancient Troy remains is an achievement because the discovery is valuable in the domain of historical research, and historical research is an achievement-relevant domain.

Unlike artworks and historical discoveries, it is controversial whether or not evil acts can have the status of achievements. For instance, it is plausible to contend that Hitler's massacre does not have the status of an achievement. In particular, one could contend that Hitler's massacre is valuable in the domain of evil, but the domain of evil is not an achievement-relevant-axiological domain. This is why his massacre is not an achievement though in terms of evil the act has a huge

amount of value. However, it is also feasible to contend that Hitler's massacre has the status of an achievement. One could contend that the domain of evil is an achievement-relevant-axiological domain, and in that axiological domain Hitler's massacre is valuable more than most other acts. Therefore, even though Hitler's act is not morally permissible, the act has the status of an achievement (Bradford 2015, 162). Given that these two positions of Hitler's massacre are plausible, depending on how proponents of the comparative value approach understand the nature of achievement, the proponents can either add the domain of evil to the list of achievement-relevant-axiological domains or exclude the domain of evil from the list of achievement-relevant domains.

Various explanations are possible regarding the issue of what makes an axiological domain achievement-relevant. A first possible explanation is that every domain is achievement-relevant. According to this explanation, Haring's artworks, Schliemann's discovery, and even Hitler's massacre have the status of achievements. This is because Haring's activities to make the works are artistically valuable, Schliemann's discovery is historically valuable, and Hitler's massacre is valuable in terms of evil. A second possible explanation is the modification of Hurka's suggestion. While discussing the value of game-playing, Hurka introduces a thesis of gaming, according to which evil games are not valuable because their aims are neither morally valuable nor morally neutral (2006, 225, fn.7). Based on this suggestion, one could provide a second explanation regarding the issue of what makes a domain achievement-relevant. According to this explanation, if a domain is achievement-relevant, then the reason is that valuable items in the domain are also morally valuable or at least neutral. This explanation implies that Haring's paintings and Schliemann's discovery are achievements, for the creative activities and the historical finding are

morally neutral. In contrast, Hitler's massacre is not an achievement because the act is morally disvaluable.

The second issue is what exactly 'being valuable more than most other items' means. Depending on the understandings of achievements, advocates of the comparative value approach can provide different interpretations of this qualification. For instance, if an advocate believes that only exceptional people's products can have the status of achievements, then the advocate might contend that a product is an achievement just in case the product is top 1 percent by value among every item. On the contrary, if a proponent thinks that even normal people's products can have the status of achievements, then the proponent could contend that a product has that status in the case where the product is top 10 percent by value. A methodology to examine the interpretations of 'being valuable more than most other items' is to check what kinds of reactions are appropriate toward products. According to Bradford, awe, admiration, and being impressed are appropriate reactions toward achievements (2015, 4). Based on this idea, one could examine the interpretations by checking whether the top 1 percent or the top 10 percent of products are proper objects of awe or admiration.

The third issue is why in determining the status of a product what other people can achieve matters as well as what other people have actually achieved. Imagine that, except person A, every person is suffering from poverty and hunger. This is why person A is the only one who could pursue and achieve a goal. Person A's achieved goal is valuable in an achievement-relevant-axiological domain, but if the other people did not suffer from poverty and hunger, then all of them could have achieved goals which are valuable much more than person A's achieved goal. In this case, if all that matters is what people have actually achieved, then the comparative value approach implies that person A's achieved goal has the status of an achievement. This is because,

considering that no one except person A has achieved a goal, person A's achieved goal is the most valuable one among every achieved item. On the contrary, if what other people can achieve also matters in determining the status of a person's achieved goal, then person A's achieved goal is not an achievement but a mere goal attainment. This is because if the others do not suffer from poverty and hunger, then they can achieve goals which are much more valuable than person A's achieved goal.

Regarding the case above, it seems reasonable to say that person A's achieved goal does not have the status of an achievement. Considering that the other people can achieve much more valuable goals in the case where they are free from poverty and hunger, it seems implausible to say that person A's achieved goal has the status of an achievement. This is why, in evaluating the status of a product, the comparative value approach assumes that what other people can achieve matters as well as what other people have actually achieved. If a significant number of people have achieved similarly valuable products, then the product does not have the status of an achievement. Even if only a few people have achieved similarly valuable products, if a significant number of people can achieve a similar kind of product, then the product does not also have the status of an achievement. A remaining task regarding the third issue is, then, to elaborate the meaning of 'what other people can achieve'. 'What other people can achieve' is what the other people achieve when they are under a certain circumstance. In this circumstance, people do not suffer from poverty and hunger, so they are motivated to pursue their goals. Depending on the understandings of achievements, advocates of the comparative value approach can add more conditions to this circumstance.

The fourth issue is why the comparative value approach considers a product's comparative value, not absolute value, important in determining the status of the product. In particular, one

could claim that it is enough for a product to have a huge amount of value in an achievement-relevant domain. This claim, which this paper will name the *Absolute Value Approach*, is similar to the comparative value approach in that the claim also explains the nature of achievement based on the concept of value. Furthermore, both of these two approaches can successfully explain the cases of *Discovery* and *Notebook*. According to the comparative value approach, Andrea's finding in *Discovery* has the status of an achievement, but her discovery in *Notebook* has the status of a mere goal attainment. This is because whereas Andrea's finding in *Discovery* has a larger amount of historical value than most other discoveries, the finding in *Notebook* is not valuable more than most other discoveries. Similarly, the absolute value approach can also explain the cases of *Discovery* and *Notebook*. Andrea's finding in *Discovery* has a huge amount of historical value, but the discovery in *Notebook* has a small amount of historical value. According to the absolute value approach, a product can have the status of an achievement if the product has a huge amount of value. This is why proponents of the absolute value approach can contend that the discovery in the case of *Discovery* has the status of an achievement, but the discovery in the case of *Notebook* does not have it.

The comparative value approach and the absolute value approach successfully explain the cases of *Discovery* and *Notebook*. However, the comparative value approach is a more correct view of achievements because the comparative value approach but not the absolute value approach can accommodate a phenomenon of achievements: the more people achieve a similar kind of product the less that kind of product has achievement-value. Imagine that a person successfully performs Paganini's 24 caprices, which are famous for their musicality, after many people fail in performing the pieces. In this case, regarding this first-ever performance, it is reasonable to say that this first-ever performance is not a mere goal attainment but an achievement. Furthermore,

assume that after the first-ever performance a huge number of people successfully perform the 24 pieces. In this case, if another new person performs the same pieces, then it seems that this new performance is not as great as the first-ever performance. In particular, if every other person successfully performs the pieces, then the last performance might not have the status of an achievement.

The comparative value approach can explain the above phenomenon of achievements. According to the comparative value approach, a product can have the status of an achievement if the product is valuable more than most other items. In terms of musical value, the last performance is not valuable more than most other performances because every other person has already performed the same caprices. This is why the last performance does not have the status of an achievement though it might have a significant amount of musical value. Unlike the comparative value approach, the absolute value approach assumes that a product can have the status of an achievement, even if the product is not valuable more than most other items. In particular, according to the absolute value approach, what matters is the absolute amount of value. Considering that in terms of musical value the last performance is similar to the first performance, the absolute value approach implies that the last performance has the status of an achievement not that of a mere goal attainment. The comparative value approach successfully explains a phenomenon of achievements, but the absolute value approach fails to do so. This is why, in developing a view of achievements, it is reasonable to consider a product's comparative value significant.

3.2 Plausibility

The comparative value approach is plausible for four reasons. The first reason is that the comparative value approach successfully explains the cases of achievements, including the cases

of lucky achievements. Perfectionist approaches and the difficulty approach encounter a problem in explaining *Discovery* and *Notebook*. On the contrary, the comparative value approach can successfully explain these cases of luckily achieved products. The comparative value approach implies that Andrea's finding in *Discovery* is an achievement because the discovery is historically valuable more than most other discoveries. In the same vein, according to the comparative value approach, the finding in *Notebook* does not have the status because the finding is not historically valuable more than most other findings. Besides *Discovery* and *Notebook*, the comparative value approach can explain various other cases. For instance, as mentioned above, Haring's artworks are achievements because in the domain of art Haring's activities to make the artworks are valuable more than most other activities. Similarly, performing Paganini's caprices has the status of an achievement because in terms of musical value the performance is valuable more than most other performances.

The second reason for the comparative value approach is that the approach can accommodate the fact that there are various types of achievements. While Haring's paintings are artistic achievements, Andrea's finding is a historical achievement. If a view of achievements can explain these features of Haring's achievements and Andrea's achievement, then the view is a more correct understanding of achievements than if the view cannot do so. Perfectionist approaches can accommodate the features. Advocates of perfectionist approaches might contend that Haring's achievements are artistic because the achievements are the manifestations of high-level artistic capacities. Similarly, the advocates might claim that Andrea's achievement is historical since Andrea achieves the product as a result of exercising her skills in historical research. Proponents of the difficulty approach can also explain the above features of Haring's achievements and Andrea's achievement. The proponents might contend that Haring's achievements are artistic

achievements in that Haring could draw the paintings because he had high-level artistic skills, and for average people acquiring that level of artistic skills is sufficiently difficult. Similarly, the proponents might contend that if luck did not have the supportive role in finding Diogenes's book, then Andrea could have discovered the book only in the case where she had high-level skills in historical research, and for average people having that level of research skills is sufficiently difficult. This is why, according to the difficulty approach, the discovery is a historical achievement.

Just as perfectionist approaches and the difficulty approach do, the comparative value approach also successfully accommodates the fact that while Haring's achievements are artistic, Andrea's achievement is historical. For instance, a supporter of the comparative value approach might contend that Haring's paintings have the status of artistic achievements because Haring's activities to draw the paintings are valuable in the domain of art, and in that achievement-relevant domain the activities are valuable more than most other activities. Similarly, the supporter might claim that Andrea's discovery has the status of a historical achievement because in the domain of historical research Andrea's discovery is valuable, and in that achievement-relevant domain the discovery is valuable more than most other discoveries. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that regarding the task to explain why, for instance, Haring's achievements are artistic rather than historical, the comparative value approach can suggest a feasible explanation just as the other approaches can.

The third reason for the comparative value approach is that the approach can show that what makes a product achievement-valuable has to do with the nature of achievement. According to perfectionist approaches, a person's product is an achievement if the product is the manifestation of the person's high-level capacities. Based on this assumption, advocates of perfectionist

approaches can contend that if product A has a larger amount of achievement-value than product B, then the reason is that the capacities to achieve product A are at a higher level than the capacities to achieve product B. The difficulty approach assumes that the fact that for average people achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult makes the product an achievement. Based on this claim, proponents of the difficulty approach can say that product A has a larger amount of achievement-value than product B if for average people achieving product A is difficult more than achieving product B. As these accounts show, perfectionist approaches and the difficulty approach can explain how the achievement-value of a product is related to the nature of achievement.

The comparative value approach can also explain the relation between the achievement-value of a product and what makes the product have the status of an achievement. The comparative value approach assumes that a product can have the status of an achievement if the product is, for example, top 10 percent by value among every item. Based on this assumption, proponents of the comparative value approach can contend that an achievement has achievement-value because in an axiological domain the achievement is valuable more than most other items. Furthermore, if product A has a larger amount of achievement-value than product B, then the reason is that product A is, for instance, top 1 percent by value in an achievement-relevant-axiological domain, but product B is just top 10 percent by value in the same achievement-relevant domain. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the comparative value approach is a plausible understanding of achievements because it can explain how a product's achievement-value is related to the nature of achievement.

The fourth reason for the comparative value approach is that the comparative value approach can explain why, in determining the status of a product, the fact that for average people

it is sufficiently difficult to achieve a similar kind of product has importance. The difficulty approach is a correct view of achievements in that when determining the status of a product it actually matters whether achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult for average people. For instance, performing Paganini's 24 caprices does not have the status of an achievement if everyone can easily perform the pieces. However, the difficulty approach is not satisfactory because the approach assumes that the fact that achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult for average people is important in itself. Just as *Notebook* shows, this fact does not seem to have importance in itself. Therefore, an approach to the nature of achievement has two tasks regarding the significance of being-sufficiently-difficult-for-others. An approach must be able explain why being-sufficiently-difficult-for-others is important in evaluating a product, and this explanation should not appeal to the idea that being-sufficiently-difficult-for-others is important in itself.

The comparative value approach can complete the two tasks above pointing out an indicative role of being-sufficiently-difficult-for-average-people. While discussing the nature of difficulty, von Kriegstein claims that "when we say that something is difficult we often simply mean that the chances of success are low" (2019b, 57). Based on this claim, proponents of the comparative value approach can explain the significance of being-sufficiently-difficult-for-average-people. According to the comparative value approach, a product can have the status of an achievement if in an achievement-relevant domain the product is valuable more than most other items which either have been achieved or can be achieved by other people. This is why if a significant number of people have achieved or can achieve items which are as valuable as a product, then the product cannot have the status of an achievement. The fact that two products are similar to one another means that in an axiological domain they have a similar amount of value.

Furthermore, if achieving a product is not sufficiently difficult for average people, then a significant number of people might have achieved or at least can achieve that product. Therefore, if achieving a similar kind of product is not sufficiently difficult for average people, then the product does not have the status of an achievement. This is because it indicates that the product is not valuable more than most other items which either have been achieved or can be achieved by others.

Critics might point out that the account above relies on von Kriegstein's conception of difficulty. In particular, critics might claim that according to another conception of difficulty it is possible that a person's probability to achieve a product is not so low, even if achieving that product is sufficiently difficult for the person. For instance, Bradford claims that an activity is difficult for the person herself just in case the person should make a huge amount of effort for the activity (2013, 219). In this conception of difficulty, even if achieving a product is sufficiently difficult for average people, it is possible that average people's chance to achieve the product is high enough. This is because most average people could achieve a product even in the case where they should exercise a huge amount of effort for the product. Therefore, critics might conclude, the comparative value approach cannot successfully explain the significance of being-sufficiently-difficult-for-average-people. This paper will not examine which conception of being-sufficiently-difficult is correct. The point is that the comparative value approach has a theoretical machinery to explain why in evaluating the status of a product the fact that for average people achieving a similar kind of product is sufficiently difficult is important. According to the comparative value approach, achieving a product is not sufficiently difficult for average people if average people's chance to achieve the product is not so low. Based on this understanding, advocates of the approach

can explain why being-sufficiently-difficult-for-average-people matters in the discussion of achievements.

4 Objection

Critics could claim that the comparative value approach is a problematic understanding of achievements because a product can have the status of an achievement even in the case where a significant number of people have achieved or can achieve a similar kind of product. The performance of Paganini's 24 caprices might not have the status of an achievement if every other person has successfully performed the pieces. However, critics might say, it does not mean that no product can have the status of an achievement if a significant number of people have achieved or can achieve a similar kind of product. In particular, earning a high school diploma has the status of an achievement although most people have earned and can earn that diploma. Considering that most people have earned or can earn a high school diploma, earning that diploma is not valuable more than most other items. This is why the comparative value approach cannot accommodate the fact that high school graduation is not a mere goal attainment but an achievement. Therefore, critics might conclude, the comparative value approach is a problematic understanding of achievements. Hereinafter this paper will name this objection to the comparative value approach the *Diploma Objection*.

It is controversial whether high school graduation is an achievement. For instance, it seems reasonable to say that earning a high school diploma does not have the status of an achievement because most people have earned or can earn that diploma. However, this paper will not argue that

earning a high school diploma is a mere goal attainment. Even if high school graduation has the status of an achievement, the comparative value approach can avoid this counterexample. If the comparative value approach assumes that regardless of its type a product has the status of an achievement just in case the product is valuable more than most other items, then the diploma objection successfully defeats the comparative value approach. This is because the objection shows that there are cases where products are achievements though they are not valuable more than most other items. On the contrary, if the comparative value approach assumes that depending on a type of product a different factor decides whether the product is an achievement, and the comparative value approach does not aim to explain every type of product, then the diploma objection fails in defeating the approach. This is because a proponent of the comparative value approach can contend that earning a high school diploma is not the type of product which the comparative value approach purports to explain, so earning a high school diploma is not a counterexample of the approach. This strategy to avoid the diploma objection is available for the comparative value approach. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the diploma objection fails in defeating the comparative value approach.

Regarding the reply above, a critic could contend that the reply is arbitrary. In particular, a critic could claim that there is no reason to assume that depending on a type of product a different factor decides whether the product is an achievement. Just as this critic claims, if a type of product does not matter in determining the status of a product, then the reply above does not successfully dismiss the diploma objection. However, the reply is not arbitrary because a phenomenon of achievements endorses the idea that a type of product matters in determining the status of a product. If a high schooler does not miss any classes through the semesters, then regardless of how many other students have attended all the classes the schooler receives an award for perfect attendance.

In particular, even if every other student attends all the classes, it is proper that a student receives an award if the student attends all the classes. On the contrary, a high schooler is *summa cum laude* just in case the schooler shows better academic performances than most other schoolers. In other words, a schooler is *summa cum laude* only when her grade point average is, for instance, top 10 percent.

A way to explain the cases above is to assume that if a product has a huge amount of value in the domain of human perfection, then the product is an achievement regardless of whether in that domain the product is valuable more than most other items. In contrast, if a product is valuable in other achievement-relevant domains, then the product has the status of an achievement just in case the product is valuable more than most other items. Perfect attendance has a huge amount of perfectionist value because to attend all the classes the person should fully exercise her perfectionist capacity: willpower. Therefore, perfect attendance has the status of an achievement regardless of how many other students have attended all the classes. This is why a student receives an award for perfect attendance even in the case where every other student does not miss any classes. A student's grade point average indicates that the student has, for instance, certain levels of reading and analysis skills. These skills are valuable in various non-perfectionist domains, such as the domain of historical research, so the skills are achievements in the case where they are valuable more than most other items. This is why a high schooler is *summa cum laude* only when the student's grade point average is, for instance, top 10 percent. The fact that a student's grade point average is top 10 percent indicates that the student's skills are valuable more than most other skills.

As the account above shows, it is not arbitrary to claim that depending on a type of product a different factor decides the product's status. This claim is plausible because it can explain the

cases of perfect attendance and *summa cum laude*. In the case of a perfectionist product (e.g., perfect attendance), the absolute amount of perfectionist value matters in deciding whether the product has the status of an achievement. On the contrary, in the case of a non-perfectionist product (e.g., reading and analysis skills), the comparative amount of non-perfectionist value is important in evaluating the status of the product. Therefore, based on this idea, advocates can claim that the comparative value approach explains what makes a non-perfectionist product an achievement. This approach does not aim to explain what makes a perfectionist product have the status of an achievement. Earning a high school diploma is a perfectionist product, so the fact that the comparative value approach cannot explain the case of high school graduation does not defeat the approach.

5 Conclusion

This paper provided a new approach to the nature of achievement: the comparative value approach. According to the comparative value approach, what makes products achievements is the fact that the products are valuable in achievement-relevant-axiological domains, and in those domains the products are valuable more than most other items which either have been achieved or can be achieved by other people. This paper argued that the comparative value approach is a plausible understanding of achievements because the approach successfully explains the cases of achievements; the approach can accommodate the fact that there are various kinds of achievements; the approach can show that what makes a product achievement-valuable has to do with the nature of achievement; and the approach can explain why being-sufficiently-difficult-for-average-people

matters. Moreover, this paper introduced an objection and dismissed it. Therefore, this paper concludes that a product can have the status of an achievement if the product is valuable in an achievement-relevant domain, and in that domain the product is valuable more than most other items.

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