

Objective and Unconditioned Value*

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Preamble

A claim to *objectivity* about value is sometimes cast as a claim about the value something has *in itself*, independent of its relations to other things. Goodness is supposed to be “separate from” relations to such irrelevancies as “private and personal advantage”, or “the positive will or command of God”, as Samuel Clarke put it.¹ This thought about independence or separateness is also expressed in the idea of *intrinsic* value, so that it can be tempting to align a commitment to objectivity in ethics with a commitment to intrinsic value. G.E. Moore thought that a hankering after objectivity was really a hankering after intrinsic value, and he envisaged an entailment in one direction at any rate: “from the proposition that a particular kind of value is ‘intrinsic’ it does follow that it must be ‘objective’”.²

What does intrinsic value really have to do with objectivity, though? I shall be arguing that the relationship between them is more distant than you might think: first, because the extrinsically valuable can be objectively valuable (as Moore allowed); second, and more surprisingly, because the intrinsically valuable can be merely subjectively

*Ancestors of this paper have been presented over a number of years at a variety of colloquia, and I have been fortunate enough to have received helpful comments from very many people—so many, indeed, that it seems invidious to single some of them out. I am very grateful to them all, and especially to audiences at Monash University, the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, the University of Edinburgh, Stirling University, Yale University, Princeton University, Cornell University and MIT.

¹Samuel Clarke, “Discourse upon Natural Religion”, in *The British Moralists*, ed. L.A. Selby Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), 482.

²G.E. Moore, “The Conception of Intrinsic Value”, in Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922). The passage in more detail: “The truth is, I believe, that though, from the proposition that a particular kind of value is ‘intrinsic’ it does follow that it must be ‘objective,’ the converse implication by no means holds, but on the contrary it is perfectly easy to conceive theories of ‘goodness,’ according to which goodness would, in the strictest sense, be ‘objective,’ and yet would not be ‘intrinsic.’” Note that a rejection of objectivity is sometimes cast as a rejection of intrinsic value, for example in J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), Chapter 1.

valuable (as Moore denied). I shall also be wanting to consider how this question bears on Kant, since it seems far from incidental to his objectivist ethics that he holds there to be an *unconditioned* good—an *intrinsic* good, we can provisionally assume—whose goodness is “like a jewel” that shines “by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself”.³

Described like this, my enquiry looks rather abstract, and so it is, in part. But it has concrete importance, too. It matters, for example, to the plight of a young philosopher, Maria von Herbert, a student of Kant’s work, who wrote to Kant in 1791. Grief-stricken after the shipwreck of a love affair, she sought his advice.

I have found nothing, nothing at all that could replace the good I have lost, for I loved someone who, in my eyes, encompassed within himself all that is worthwhile, so that I lived only for him, everything else was in comparison just rubbish, cheap trinkets... that inner feeling that once, unbidden, led us to each other, is no more—oh my heart splinters into a thousand pieces! If I hadn’t read so much of your work I would certainly have put an end to my life.

Kant’s writings had given her reasons against taking her life, but, it seems, no reasons to make life worth living:

I’ve read the metaphysic of morals and the categorical imperative, and *it doesn’t help a bit*.⁴

Kant rose to the challenge of explaining why the categorical imperative should help after all, and he wrote a long letter whose topics, salient to her situation, included friendship and deception, though not suicide. Maria responded with a second letter describing the further “progress” of her “soul”:

³Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 394, 396.

⁴Both quotations are from her letter to Kant, August 1791, italics added to the second quotation. The Kant-von Herbert correspondence is in Vol. XI of the Academy edition of Kant’s works (Walter de Gruyter, 1922). My translation adapts and abridges that of Arnulf Zweig in *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-99* (Copyright 1967, University of Chicago. All rights reserved.) For more details of the story, and its philosophical significance, see Langton, “Duty and Desolation”, *Philosophy* 67 (1992), 481-505; reprinted as “Maria Herbert’s Challenge to Kant”, in *Ethics: Oxford Reader*, ed. P. Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). My work in that essay owes a great debt to Korsgaard; it is only more recently that I have come to think Maria presents a challenge not only to Kant (on a “severe” interpretation of him), but to Korsgaard’s version of Kant. For some recent criticism of my earlier argument about Maria, see James Mahon, “Kant and Maria von Herbert: Reticence vs. Deception”, *Philosophy* 81 (2006), 417-44.

My vision is clear now. I feel that a vast emptiness extends inside me, and all around me—so that I almost find myself to be superfluous, unnecessary. Nothing attracts me. I'm tormented by a boredom that makes life intolerable. Don't think me arrogant for saying this, but the demands of morality are too easy for me. I would eagerly do twice as much as they command. They only get their prestige from the attractiveness of sin, and it costs me almost no effort to resist that. [...] I don't study the natural sciences or the arts any more, since I don't feel that I'm genius enough to extend them; and for myself, there's no need to know them. I'm indifferent to everything that doesn't bear on the categorical imperative, and my transcendental consciousness—although I'm all done with those thoughts too.

You can see, perhaps, why I only want one thing, namely to shorten this pointless life, a life which I am convinced will get neither better nor worse. If you consider that I am still young and that each day interests me only to the extent that it brings me closer to death, you can judge what a great benefactor you would be if you were to examine this question closely. I ask you, because my conception of morality is silent here, whereas it speaks decisively on all other matters. And if you cannot give me the answer I seek, I beg you to give me something that will get this intolerable emptiness out of my soul.⁵

A more eloquent study of depression would be hard to find, and it is natural to wonder just why Maria is so very sad: whether her sorrow is due to the love affair gone wrong; due to the social straightjacket to which genteel Austrian society confined its women; or even due to that first failure she wrote about, the failure of philosophy (or Kant's philosophy) to supply point to one's existence. I shall set these questions aside, interesting as they are. Instead, I shall remark upon just two features of her situation, before we go on. Maria does not value other things; and she does not value herself. These absences find expression in that metaphor of a "vast emptiness" that extends "inside" her, and "all around" her. Nothing attracts her, she is "indifferent", and she finds her very self to be "superfluous, unnecessary". The emptiness all around, and the emptiness inside, are intolerable. That is why she wonders whether her life is worth living at all. How a question about intrinsic value matters to the plight of Maria might not be immediately apparent, and I must ask patience of my reader; but we'll see in the end that it does matter, and in particular it matters to the question of whether, and how, Maria (or someone like Maria) has value "in herself".

⁵Letter to Kant, January 1793..

Our first business, though, will be to gather our thoughts on intrinsic value, and an excellent starting point here is Christine Korsgaard's classic discussion.⁶

1. Two Distinctions in Goodness

Moral philosophy has got into a mess by failing to observe two distinctions in goodness, says Korsgaard, and she describes them thus:

One is the distinction between things valued for their sakes and things valued for the sake of something else—between ends and means, or final and instrumental goods. The other is the distinction between things which have their value in themselves and things which derive their value from some other source: intrinsically good things versus extrinsically good things. Intrinsic and instrumental good should not be treated as correlatives, because they belong to two different distinctions.⁷

What is her proposal, exactly? There is a distinction to do with “things *valued*” (in whatever way), and then a distinction to do with “things which *have their value*” (in whatever way): one distinction concerns the way we value things, the other concerns the ways things have value. So far so good.

She says that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value is about the way things have value. Intrinsic value is the value a thing has in itself. Extrinsic value is the value a thing has from another source. The distinction between ends and means is about the way we value things. To value something as an end is to value it for its own sake; to value it instrumentally, as a means, is to value it for the sake of something else. So one should not, as is so commonly done, treat “intrinsic” and “instrumental” good as correlatives, since “intrinsic” comes from the distinction in ways things have value, whereas “instrumental” comes from the distinction in ways we value things. The true correlative of “intrinsic” is “extrinsic”; the true correlative of “instrument” is “end”. In short, we have—

Two distinctions

⁶Christine Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness”, in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 249-74, first published in *Philosophical Review* 92 (1983), 169-95; see also *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷“Two Distinctions”, 250.

- (1) Ways things have value: intrinsic value = value a thing has in itself
 extrinsic value = value a thing has from other source
- (2) Ways we value things: as an end = for the thing's own sake
 as an instrument = for the sake of something else, i.e. as a means

Korsgaard's proposal is an immensely helpful corrective to a traditional, and oversimplifying, distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value. But how exactly does it bear on the topic of objectivity?

A failure to observe these distinctions raises problems about objectivity, says Korsgaard; and the problems are different, depending on how we collapse the distinctions together. If we suppose that to have intrinsic value is no more than to be valued as an end, we make goodness subjective—too subjective, she thinks, since whatever we happen to have as an end turns out to be intrinsically valuable. If we go the other way, like Moore, and say that the things which have intrinsic value are or ought to be treated as ends, we make goodness objective—too objective, she thinks, since the possession of goodness turns out to be wholly independent of anyone's valuing it or taking an interest in it.⁸ This option she takes to be obscurely metaphysical and quite mysterious.

With the two distinctions observed, a more nuanced picture of value and objectivity becomes available, she argues. In particular, something might be extrinsically good, yet valued as an end; indeed its (extrinsic) goodness may have its source in the very fact that it is valued as an end. Such goodness would be objective, valued as an end, but not, as Moore thought, intrinsic. Korsgaard proposes Kant as the hero of this story: Kant is an objectivist who avoids the crude metaphysical-sounding claim of Moore. Kant is an objectivist who does not suppose that a thing's goodness is independent of whether anyone cares about it or not, an objectivist whose subtle view is sensitive to, indeed owes its great strength to, these two distinctions in goodness.

⁸G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); "The Concept of Intrinsic Value", *Philosophical Studies* (London: Kegan Paul, 1922).

Moore...came to the conclusion that the goodness of ends is intrinsic and must be independent of the interest that people take in them or the desires that people have for them. You might value something as an end because of its intrinsic goodness or in response to its intrinsic goodness, but a thing's possession of intrinsic goodness is quite independent of whether anyone cares about it or not. Kant's theory on the other hand, both allows for and depends upon the idea of extrinsically valuable ends whose value comes from the interest that people take in them.⁹

Notice that an assumption of Korsgaard's proposal is that we can equate "unconditioned" goodness with "intrinsic" goodness. That assumption seems plausible enough, on the face of things, and we shall be going along with it for the bulk of this paper; but I hereby forewarn the reader that we shall eventually have reason to doubt that intrinsic value is exactly what Kant had in mind.

Korsgaard's main proposal can be viewed as having two parts: an analytic part, making space for some distinctions that demand recognition; and a substantive part, exploiting those distinctions in an argument about objectivity. In response to the analytic part, I shall suggest a friendly amendment. In response to the substantive part, I shall express profound disagreement. There is more to objectivity than Korsgaard allows—more to the notion of objectivity itself, and more to objectivity in Kant. There is, in the end, a very basic question at stake, a question about how it is that human beings get their value.

The analytic part is straightforward enough, so I shall attend to it forthwith.

2. Amending Two Distinctions

An initial reaction to Korsgaard's proposed taxonomy is that it will not do as it stands. For a start, her description of instrumental good does not quite capture what "instrumental" means. To value something "as an instrument" is not to value it simply "for the sake of *something else*". Valuing "as an instrument" requires more than this. If Rudolph values his wedding ring for the sake of its association with his marriage, he values his wedding ring "for the sake of something else", but he does not value it as a means or instrument. To be sure, the ring may have effects, it may remind him of a loved one, it may provoke unease when glimpsed in mid-flirtation, but he does not value them for (or not *only* for) the sake of

⁹"Two Distinctions", 253.

these useful effects. An amendment on Korsgaard's behalf to the notion of instrumental valuing is readily made, though: we value something as an instrument when we value it for the sake of (not just any old "something else", but) its *effects*.

However, the example suggests a more important difficulty, which amounts to a *gap* in her conception of how one can value things. If Rudolph values his wedding ring for the sake of his marriage, he values it neither for the thing's own sake, nor (simply) for the sake of its effects—and there is no place for Rudolph's attitude in Korsgaard's taxonomy of valuing. When it comes to the ways we value things, she offers two options: we value them either as ends, or as means. But neither fits the case. So we can make a further amendment: there is room for extrinsic goodness not only in the ways things have value, but also in the ways we value things. Rudolph values his ring neither instrumentally, nor as an end; but he does value it extrinsically, for the sake of its association with his marriage.

We find a corresponding gap in Korsgaard's other distinction. She says that the notion of instrumental goodness does not concern the way things have value, but only the way we value things. But that seems wrong. Something might have instrumental value without anyone ever valuing it instrumentally: penicillin, in the millennia before the discovery of its powers; or in those possible worlds where it moulders forever unappreciated. There is room for instrumental goodness not only in the ways we value things, but also in the ways things have value.

With these considerations in mind, here are some amendments to Korsgaard's two distinctions. There is indeed a basic two-way distinction among the way things have value: intrinsic value is the value a thing has in itself; extrinsic value is the value a thing has from another source. But instrumental value should also appear as a way something can have value—and being the value a thing has from its effects, it should appear as a sub-species of extrinsic value. There is likewise a basic two-way distinction among the ways we value things: we can value a thing intrinsically, for its own sake; we can value it extrinsically, for the sake of something else. Instrumental valuing should also appear, but now as a sub-species of extrinsic valuing. In short, we have—

Two distinctions amended

- (1*) Ways things have value: intrinsic value = value a thing has in itself
 extrinsic value = value a thing has from another source
 instrumental value = value thing has from its effects
- (2*) Ways we value things: intrinsically = for the thing's own sake
 extrinsically = for the sake of something else
 instrumentally = for the sake of its effects

The upshot is that, while Korsgaard is right to make space for the oft-ignored notion of extrinsic goodness, we need space for more distinctions than her menu supplied.

Furthermore, the two distinctions now have a structural isomorphism absent in her initial proposal. How do they relate to each other, then? It will depend in part on what we take value and valuing to involve; and it will depend on what we take phrases like “for the sake of” to mean. Some possible interpretations would bring the distinctions into close alignment: for example, *valuing something intrinsically, for the thing's own sake* could be taken to mean *believing that it has intrinsic value*. Presumably that is not an interpretation Korsgaard would favor, but there are plenty of other possibilities. We can remain neutral, here, about what it is for a thing to have value (in whichever of these ways); and what it is to value something (in whichever of these ways). And we can remain neutral about what “for the sake of” amounts to. What we are doing at this point is simply opening up some conceptual space.¹⁰

¹⁰Two issues here deserve further attention. First: perhaps something could have extrinsic value, *conditional* on something else, but without that “something else” being the *source* of the value. An example (from Jonathan Dancy): some jokes are funny only when the butt of the joke is present; yet one wouldn't say that the person who is the butt of the joke is the *source* of its funniness. See Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 9: “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value”; available at *Oxford Scholarship Online*. (Dancy also critically discusses Korsgaard's distinction and my proposed amendments). Second: some theorists, inspired by the considerations Korsgaard raises, have advocated a distinct notion of “final value”, which is the value something has “as an end” or “for the thing's own sake”. (Cf. Korsgaard's talk of “final goods” in the passage quoted above.) They argue that something may have *final* value that is at the same time *extrinsic* value: for example, the pen that Abraham Lincoln used to sign the Emancipation Proclamation; or Princess Diana's dress. The taxonomy I offer here is hospitable to this proposal only with the following translation: to talk of something having “final value” that is “extrinsic” is to talk of *valuing for the thing's own sake*, something that *has extrinsic value*. We keep the talk of finality and ends to a distinction, not in the way things have

With a little imagination, one can think of cases illustrating the possibilities made available by these distinctions. Money has instrumental value, but the miser is foolish enough to value it for its own sake. A person has intrinsic value, but the machiavel is wicked enough to value her as a mere means to his nefarious plans. The painting has extrinsic, non-instrumental value as the work of Picasso, but the philistine values it only instrumentally, as a means of impressing his friends. The yapping chihuahua has intrinsic value (perhaps), but Jane values it only extrinsically, for the sake of her misguided friend, who owns it. The tattered teddy bear has no value, but the child values it for its own sake. Then there are the multifarious overlapping possibilities, since (as far as I can see) there is nothing to rule out a thing's being valuable, and valued, in all kinds of ways, in any combination made available by the above distinctions.

3. Unconditioned Value: the Good Will, Humanity, Happiness

Kant, as already hinted, was sensitive to these distinctions in goodness, and his sensitivity is best illustrated in what he says about the good will, on the one hand, and happiness, on the other. The good will has “unconditioned” value. It is “like a jewel” that shines “by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself”; it “need not...be the sole and complete

value, but in the way we value things. For proposals about final value, see e.g. Shelley Kagan, “Rethinking Intrinsic Value”, *The Journal of Ethics* 2 (1998), 277-97; Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, “A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and For Its Own Sake”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (1999), 33-51. I don't in fact share their intuitions that e.g. Lincoln's pen and Diana's dress are “valued for their own sake”; they are valued for the sake of something else (though not just their effects), as in my example of the wedding ring. There is a further potential subtlety, though, which these authors perhaps have in mind. Just as we earlier noted a possible distinction between a “source” and a “condition” of value, so a comparable distinction might enable one to value something “for its own sake” *and* at the same time only “on condition” that it has certain extrinsic properties. Even with this subtlety, I don't find their examples compelling, but one could try adapting Dancy's example: we value the joke only on condition that the person who is the butt of the joke is present, but we perhaps don't value the joke for his sake. There is a large literature on intrinsic value, and I wish I could do it better justice; but see for example Noah Lemos, *Intrinsic Value: Concept and Warrant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Michael Zimmerman, *Intrinsic Value* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2001); and for a good overview and bibliography, Zimmerman, “Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value” (2004), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu>).

good, but it must still be the highest good and the condition of every other, even of all demands for happiness”. Kant is anxious to distinguish the value of the good will from its instrumental value — “usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add anything to this worth nor take anything away from it”—but he has more than just the contrast with instrumental value in mind.¹¹ Its goodness doesn’t depend on *anything* else, whether effects or other extraneous conditions. The good will has *unconditioned* value; and we are provisionally taking this to mean that it has *intrinsic* value.

In the course of the *Groundwork*, Kant’s insistence on the unconditioned value of the good will gives way to an insistence on the unconditioned value of humanity, or autonomy, or rational nature. Humanity is something “the existence of which in itself has an absolute worth”; autonomy “has an unconditioned and incomparable worth”; “rational nature exists as an end in itself”.¹² Now Kant evidently sees a connection between all these apparently different bearers of unconditioned value, a connection grounded somehow in the notion of autonomy. While that connection is not our topic here, it seems clear that if we are interested in Kant’s thinking about “unconditioned” good, we shall ultimately need to attend to the value of not only of the good will, but of humanity itself; but I shall postpone that transition for the moment.¹³

By contrast with the good will, happiness is not an unconditioned good. Happiness is a conditioned good, and it has value only when accompanied by the good will. We can provisionally take this to mean that the value of happiness is *extrinsic*. It is true that we always value happiness for its own sake, not as a means to something else. But philosophers were wrong to think that our valuing of happiness for its own sake was proof

¹¹Kant, *Groundwork*, 394, 396.

¹² Kant, *Groundwork*, 428-9, 436.

¹³ Commenting on this transition, Paul Guyer says, “all that is happening is that the intuitive conception of the good will is being replaced with the more abstract notion of rational being as an end in itself...the initial insight into absolute value is never superseded but is only refined by Kant’s own ‘philosophical’ theory”, in *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 147. Given that a villain lacks a good will but has humanity, I find it hard to see the latter as a “more abstract” version of the former, but I might be missing something, and in any case will have to leave this issue aside for the present.

that happiness has intrinsic value, that it is an unconditioned good. Our valuing it as an end is compatible with its having no intrinsic value, and indeed with its having no value—whether intrinsic or extrinsic—at all.

Whether happiness is valuable depends on its relation to a good will: but what sort of relation? Before looking at Korsgaard's answer, let us consider three possibilities.

One is that happiness *aids motivation*: warm feelings of sympathy (or hope of heavenly bliss) might help us to do our duty. To say this would be to say that happiness has instrumental value: it helps the good will do its job. Here we take happiness to be a conditioned, extrinsic, good because it is an instrumental good. It is a conditioned good whose condition is its usefulness.

A second possibility is that happiness is *deserved* by the good will. A world where the wicked prosper is worse than a world where the wicked languish; a world where virtue is rewarded is better than a world where it is not. Happiness unaccompanied by the good will, is abhorrent; happiness accompanied by the good will is the highest good. Here we take happiness to be a conditioned, extrinsic good, but not an instrumental good. It is a conditioned good whose condition is desert.

A third possibility is that happiness is *chosen as an end* by the good will, and being chosen is what makes it good. Here we take happiness to be a conditioned, extrinsic good, not because it is useful, or deserved, but basically because it is chosen: choosing happiness as an end confers value upon it. It is a conditioned good whose condition is its being chosen.

Now in principle happiness might conceivably have all three of these relations to the good will: it could be *useful* to the good will, it could be *deserved* by the good will, it could be *chosen* by the good will. Any of the three could in principle provide a reason for thinking that the value of happiness is conditioned, that its value depends on its being accompanied by a good will. But which of the three relations provides Kant's most basic or fundamental reason for thinking that happiness is a conditioned, extrinsic good?

Kant is notoriously lukewarm about the first relation, the usefulness of happiness to the good will. The good will should, ideally, manage without the vulgar incentive of

happiness. Perhaps happiness could have instrumental value for the good will, but it is not clear that Kant thinks so; and in any case it *is* clear that this isn't his reason for assigning conditioned value to happiness.¹⁴

Kant's heart evidently lies with the second relation, that of desert.

An impartial rational spectator can take no delight in seeing the uninterrupted prosperity of a being graced with no feature of a pure and good will, so that a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy.¹⁵

Happiness becomes good when accompanied by the good will, because it then becomes deserved. Kant often goes so far as to say that virtue *is* the worthiness to be happy:

Virtue (as the worthiness to be happy) [is] the supreme condition of whatever appears to us to be desirable, and thus of all our pursuit of happiness.¹⁶

The theme of desert becomes central to Kant's development, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, of the idea of the "complete" good, which consists of virtue rewarded with happiness. If we are looking for Kant's chief reason for assigning to happiness the status of a merely conditioned good, we will surely find it here, in the relation of desert.

For Korsgaard, however, it is the third relation to the good will that matters most. The condition of the goodness of happiness is that it is *chosen*, by a person of good will. Happiness has extrinsic value, she says, *because* a person of good will values it as an end. Happiness has extrinsic value because it is chosen by persons: the value of happiness is *conferred* by the choice. Happiness has conditioned value because it has conferred value.

There is more. This conditioned, extrinsic value of happiness bears on the unconditioned, intrinsic value of the good will. The ability of choosers to confer value on their choices—the ability of agents to be value-conferrers—is, according to Korsgaard's Kant, the very source of the intrinsic value of the good will, and accordingly of persons.

¹⁴ Kant might not even allow that the incentive of happiness could be useful to the good will, since being motivated by happiness might be incompatible with being motivated by duty alone—witness his famously derogatory remarks about the sympathetic philanthropist in Book I of the *Groundwork*. There is a large literature on Kant and the motive of duty, but see e.g. Marcia Baron, "The Alleged Moral Repugnance of Acting from Duty", *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984), 197-220; Barbara Herman, "On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty", *The Philosophical Review* 90 (1981), 359-382.

¹⁵ *Groundwork*, 393.

¹⁶ *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Beck, 110 (NY, NY: Macmillan 1956).

We have intrinsic value because we value things as ends, conferring (extrinsic) value on them.

If we regard our actions as rational, we must regard our ends as good; if so, we accord to ourselves a power of conferring goodness on the objects of our choice, and we must accord the same power—and so the same intrinsic worth—to others.¹⁷

Here we have Korsgaard's version of Kant's basic argument for the intrinsic worth of autonomy. An unsympathetic reader may be tempted to view it as a chain of non-sequiturs; a sympathetic one will rightly ask to see more of the argument before coming to judgment. But it seems, on the face of it, that I could regard my actions as rational without regarding my ends as good. I could regard my ends as good without according to myself a power of conferring goodness on the objects of my choice. I could accord to myself a power of conferring goodness on the objects of my choice without according the same power to others. I could accord to others the power of conferring goodness on the objects of their choice without according intrinsic value to them. I could accord intrinsic value to them without their having, or acquiring, intrinsic value.

Since the merit of this chain of reasoning is not my topic, I shall leave these quibbles aside, only pausing to note the way Kant himself puts the argument:

But the law-making which determines all value must for this reason have a dignity—that is, an unconditioned and incomparable worth—for the appreciation of which, as necessarily given by a rational being, the word “reverence” is the only becoming expression. Autonomy is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature.¹⁸

We make law; we “determine” (Kant's word) or “confer” (Korsgaard's word) value. And that is what gives us unconditioned and incomparable worth. I have intrinsic value because I am a rational chooser of ends: in Korsgaard's terms, I am a value-conferrer, whose choice-making confers extrinsic value on the objects of my choice. My own intrinsic value lies in my extrinsic-value-conferring power. I do value; therefore I have value.

¹⁷“Two Distinctions”, 262. Cf. “Kant saw that we take things to be important because they are important to us—and he concluded that we must therefore take ourselves to be important”, *Sources of Normativity*, p. 122.

¹⁸*Groundwork*, 436.

4. Objectivity

The value of the good will, indeed of humanity itself, is unconditioned and intrinsic, but is it objective? And what of happiness: its value is conditioned and extrinsic, but is it objective? In thinking about this, we need to think more generally about objectivity.

So let us pause to recall an old question from Plato's *Euthyphro* about whether something is loved by the gods because it has value; or whether it has value because it is loved by the gods.¹⁹ We can move beyond the gods to some predicates closer to home: "is chosen by a rational will"; "interests us". The issue of dependence can be understood as a question about *direction of fit*. This is a notion that has had its chief philosophical use elsewhere, in the analysis of propositional attitudes, for example, distinguishing belief from desire, but it seems apt enough in the present context. Does the gods' love, or my rational choice, fit the value? Or does the value fit the gods' love, my rational choice? Does the valuing fit the value? Or does the value fit the valuing?

In other terms, borrowed from J.L. Austin, it can be viewed as a question about whether illocutions of valuing are *verdictive* or *exercitive*. Are they like "Guilty", said by the jury; or "Sentence: Twenty Years", said by the judge? Are they like "Out!" said by the umpire, watching the ball; or "Out!" said by the boss, when she fires me?²⁰ Verdictives track an independent truth; exercitives create a truth. For exercitives, saying so makes it so. For verdictives, saying so doesn't make it so—notwithstanding a baseball umpire's famous claim that "it ain't out till I call it!" An umpire's saying so might make it *count* as so, for the purposes of the game, but that doesn't make it so, as I suspect even that particular umpire acknowledged.²¹

¹⁹Plato, *Euthyphro* (trans. Lane Cooper), in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

²⁰J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), especially 152-56. The distinction between what we now think of as "directions of fit" was introduced by G.E.M. Anscombe in *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957). Searle applied it to speech acts, using direction of fit to illustrate the difference between e.g. assertions and imperatives (*Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also I.L. Humberstone, "Direction of Fit", *Mind* 101 (1992): 60-83.

²¹Umpires detect independent facts, but they also create social facts (about what counts as fact, for the purposes of the score); so the situation has its complications. The umpire was, I

One traditional way to claim that morality is objective is to give the first sort of answer to the Euthyphro question, or its secular surrogates. The gods do not confer value, though they may be particularly good at detecting it. The gods' saying so doesn't make it so, nor does the gods' loving so. Perhaps the gods value goodness as an end, but goodness is independent of their valuing it. The valuing do, or should, fit the values. That is what Plato thought, siding with Socrates against Euthyphro. That is what Samuel Clarke thought, when he claimed that moral norms are "separate" from "the positive will or command of God". And what goes for the gods' love goes for the other predicates: value should be independent of anyone's doings, divine or otherwise. So Korsgaard places Moore among these objectivists, since he thinks the possession of goodness is "independent of anyone's actually valuing it or taking an interest in it".

This conception of objectivity, despite its venerable history, may be thought to raise the stakes too high. *Truth*, for example, is hard enough to get; but truth is not nearly enough for objectivity, on this conception. Both answers to the Euthyphro question make moral judgements true; only one answer makes them objective.

Moreover, *inter-subjective agreement* is hard enough to get, either in practice or in principle, whether through shared forms of life, or through convergence.²² But inter-subjective agreement is not nearly enough for objectivity, on this conception. Either answer to the Euthyphro question can bring inter-subjective agreement; only one answer

gather, Bill Klem, who also said this, after being shown a photo of a "blown call": "Gentlemen, he was out because I said he was out". However, let me suggest (with some trepidation, as an outsider to the game and the nation that invented it) that there is more to the story. Klem surely saw his task as verdictive rather than exercitive. He also said that he "never missed one" (hardly something to be proud of if he couldn't have got it wrong), and then crucially qualified his claim— "I never missed one, *in here*", pointing to his heart— suggesting he just might have missed one *out there*. See <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/quotes/quoklem.shtml> (Thanks to an anonymous referee for the *Philosophical Review* for drawing my attention to Klem.) Some of these complications about verdictives are discussed in Langton, "Subordination, Silence and Pornography's Authority", *Censorship and Silencing*, ed. R. Post (Santa Monica, Ca: J. Paul Getty Trust and Oxford University Press, 1998), 261-83).

²²A salient alternative: see e.g. Korsgaard, "The Reasons We Can Share", in *Creating the Kingdom*; and *Sources of Normativity*.

makes morality objective. Inter-subjectivity, to be sure, gives us a more complicated, two-stage answer to the Euthyphro question. Q. Why do I love the good? A. Because it's good. Q. Why is it good? A. Because we all love it. The first sort of answer gives an appearance of objectivity; but the second destroys it. *My* valuing fits the value; but the value fits *our* valuing.

Some may worry that the Euthyphro standard raises the stakes too high for objectivity in ethics, and I allow there might be reasons for favoring a weaker standard. Suppose, for example, that goodness really did depend on the gods' love, or that moral laws were divine commands. That at any rate would make goodness *independent of us*—independent of human feelings, desires, conventions, tastes, choices. That would not be enough for objectivity on the Euthyphro standard: but many might count it as objectivity enough nonetheless.²³ For present purposes, however, I propose to run with the Euthyphro standard. I shall not have a great deal more to say in its defense; but it surely captures an important intuition about objectivity, which is doubtless why it has such a sturdy philosophical pedigree, beginning with Plato, persisting through the history of ethics in the work of theorists like Clarke, Moore and Ross, and continuing, in revived form, in much work on objectivity today.²⁴

²³For an instance of this thinking, see James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (McGraw Hill, 2002), 41 (thanks to an anonymous reader for the *Philosophical Review* for drawing my attention to this).

²⁴ For example, in efforts by Mark Johnston and Crispin Wright to differentiate more and less objective accounts of various discourses (about e.g. colour, shape, value), in developing the influential idea that certain such discourses are “response-dependent”. See Johnston, “Objectivity Refigured: Pragmatism Without Verificationism”, in *Reality, Representation and Projection*, eds. John Haldane and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 85-130; especially “Appendix 1: the Euthyphro Argument”, 108-9; Wright, “The Euthyphro Contrast: Order of Determination and Response Dependence”, in *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 108-39). One important complexity of the Euthyphro standard is the difficulty of spelling out the direction of dependence. Both Socrates and Euthyphro could agree that something is pious if and only if it is loved by the gods, as Wright says. If we give priority to the left-hand side of the biconditional, we have “detectivism” about piety; if we give priority to the right-hand side we have “projectivism” (Wright, 108, drawing on Johnston). But what does the difference in “priority” amount to? Wright advocates spelling it out in terms of the *a priori* status of the relevant biconditionals. Both theorists favour (or sympathetically explore) a “projectivist” reading of the biconditional for statements about value. It seems to me that in their terms, Korsgaard too is a “projectivist” about value, and her account a response-

On this traditional conception of objectivity, it is quite right to think that a good may be an extrinsic, conditioned good and also be an objective good. Something might have conditioned, instrumental value independently of whether the gods love it. Or something might have a non-instrumental variety of conditioned, extrinsic value independently of whether the gods love it. Perhaps happiness, for example, is extrinsically good in the second of the three ways we just considered: it is good just in case it is deserved. That in turn may be an objective matter, independent of the gods' love, and independent (in principle) of whether happiness is chosen as an end.

If that is so, then we have it that *something which is extrinsically valuable may be objectively valuable*. Recall the question with which we began, about the relation between objective and intrinsic value. Well, here we have part of an answer, for here is one easy way for the notions of objective value and intrinsic value to come apart.

Korsgaard of course would agree that something extrinsically valuable may be objectively valuable. That was indeed her stated reason for wanting to draw attention to the "two distinctions in goodness". But note that while Korsgaard would agree with the form of the conclusion we have just drawn, she gives it a quite different content: she means something else by "extrinsically" valuable, and something else by "objectively" valuable.

By "extrinsically" valuable, she doesn't mean the conditionally valuable as such, but a proper subset of the conditionally valuable: she has in mind conditioned values that are, in her sense, *conferred* values. And while we might all agree that some conditioned values may be objective, it is far from obvious that conferred values are objective: we shall see that on the Euthyphro test for objectivity, they are not.

This brings us to the second difference. Korsgaard means something else by "objectively" valuable. Her understanding of objectivity in "Two Distinctions" is not captured by the Euthyphro test. According to Korsgaard, one may answer the Euthyphro

dependent account: she apparently endorses the biconditional "something is good just in case it is an object of rational choice", giving "priority" (however we spell that out) to the right-hand side of the biconditional.

question either way, and still hold morality to be objective; or so I take to be the implication of the following:

We can say that a thing is good objectively (this is my terminology) either if it is unconditionally good or if it is a thing of conditional value and the conditions of its goodness are met.²⁵

On this usage, if good is independent of the gods' love, it is unconditionally good, and therefore objectively good; if it is dependent on the gods love, it is conditionally good, and therefore—given that the gods do love it—objectively good.

Now it isn't quite clear how this terminological proposal is intended, but if it is meant for general application, the result will be rather odd. On this usage, all value, on pretty much any account of value, will turn out to be objective. Suppose truth-telling is good on condition that the gods love it, and suppose the gods do love it: truth telling is objectively good. Suppose lying is good on condition that the gods love it, and suppose the gods do love it: lying is objectively good. Goodness that is subjective by the Euthyphro test is objective on Korsgaard's proposal.

Now I take Korsgaard's usage to be idiosyncratic, and I anticipate agreement even from readers who favour a weaker test for objectivity than the Euthyphro test. Whatever conception of objectivity you endorse, I invite you to consider, with that in mind, any textbook subjectivist, who holds, for example, that truth-telling is good on condition that *I like* truth-telling. Suppose I do like truth-telling: then truth telling, on Korsgaard's usage, is objectively good. Or consider a more restricted domain for which one might think subjectivism appropriate, for instance, tastes in food. Suppose strawberry ice-cream is good on condition that I like it, and I do like it: strawberry ice-cream is then objectively good. Any paradigm subjectivist will, it seems, turn objectivist if Korsgaard's usage here is taken seriously. So it seems unlikely that Korsgaard's objectivity, as described here, is really objectivity. I suspect that any reasonable test for objectivity will block the kind of anthropocentrism permitted by Korsgaard's usage.

²⁵“Two Distinctions”, 258.

For present purposes, we shall, as advertised, be running with the Euthyphro standard for objectivity; and it is time now to apply it to Korsgaard's account of happiness and the good will: the extrinsic value of happiness, as a conditioned good; and the intrinsic value of the good will, as an unconditioned good.

5. Objective Value: Happiness, the Good Will, and Humanity

For happiness, the Euthyphro question will be this. Does happiness have value because it is valued as an end, chosen by a good will? Or does the good will choose happiness, value happiness as an end, because it is good (given that it is deserved)? Korsgaard gives the first answer. She rejects the idea that happiness might have value, as Moore thought, "independently of whether anyone cares about it or not". It has value, extrinsic value, precisely because it is cared about, and chosen as end. Kant's theory is supposed to allow for, indeed rests upon, "the idea of extrinsically valuable ends whose value comes from the interest that people take in them".²⁶ She says that, given that its condition is met, the value of happiness is objective; but she does acknowledge that this is not what one expects from an objectivist theory.

To some, it may seem paradoxical to claim that things are good because we desire or choose them, rather than to say that we desire or choose them because they are good.²⁷

Well, it does not seem paradoxical exactly, but it does not seem objective either. If Korsgaard takes this horn of the Euthyphro dilemma for happiness, she surely makes the value of happiness subjective, whatever she may wish to say to the contrary.

Here again, readers who find the Euthyphro test too stringent should consider how happiness fares on whatever conception of objectivity they find reasonable. Is happiness objectively good? If you think it is, you will probably think it is good even if someone does not desire it, or value it, or choose it.

To bring that home more vividly, think now of Maria von Herbert, sunk in her private slough of despond, lost in apathy and depression. Nothing attracts her. There is

²⁶"Two Distinctions", 253.

²⁷"Two Distinctions", 266.

nothing she desires, or values, or chooses—not even happiness. If you think happiness is objectively good, you will surely think this: *it would be good for Maria to be happy*. Happiness has value whether or not Maria values it. Korsgaard, however, must say that if Maria genuinely does not value happiness, it really has no value for her. The value of happiness disappears if happiness isn't valued; that is the price of making the value of happiness subjective.

We turn now to the Euthyphro question for the good will, which seems to be this. Does the good will have value because it is valued as an end? Or is it valued as an end because it has value? Korsgaard's initial answer is is neither of these: the good will has value not because it is valued, but because it *confers* value. Recall that elegant, if suspicious, chain of inference: if we regard our actions as rational, we must regard our ends as good; if so, we accord to ourselves a power of conferring goodness on the objects of our choice, and we must accord the same power—and so the same intrinsic worth—to others.

This answer should prompt at least the raising of an eyebrow. It is as if the gods were to congratulate themselves: we are *ourselves* good, because our saying so, our loving so, is what makes things good. How plausible would that sort of self-congratulation be? Not very. We have no more antecedent reason to expect the creators of goodness to be good, than to expect painters of the blue to be blue, or the creators of babies to be babies.²⁸ In general we don't think the source of something valuable must itself be valuable. War can produce good poets, chicken manure can produce good roses, and in general the sources of good things can be bad.

These eyebrow-raising would, I acknowledge, be over-hasty,²⁹ but, more to the point, they are irrelevant to our present concerns. What we are after is a direct answer to the

²⁸ For the painting analogy, I am indebted to an anonymous reader of the *Philosophical Review*.

²⁹But for criticism in a similar spirit, see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, "A Distinction in Value", 48 n. 27. For a suggestion that it would be overhasty: Allen Wood has warned against confusing two ideas, one that rational nature is a source of the *existence* of good things, and another that rational nature is a source of the *value* of good things. He draws a parallel with the notion of authority: if we take certain recommendations as authoritative, it must be because we respect the (independent) authority of their source. Note that Wood's defense of Kant's argument seems less readily available to Korsgaard:

Euthyphro question, and this isn't it. From the point of view of the Euthyphro test there are just two options when it comes to the goodness of the gods. Either they love themselves, and are made good that way; or they are good independent of whether they love themselves. If the former, they are conditionally good; if the latter, they are unconditionally good.³⁰ We want to know the answer to the corresponding question about the good will: whether the good will has value because it is valued, or whether it has value independent of whether it is valued.

Korsgaard is aware of the need to resolve an answer to this question. In a postscript to her collection of essays, she remarks on some "tensions" within her stated views on the value of humanity; and she raises them again in an essay responding to criticism from J.B. Schneewind. She asks:

Does Kant think, or should a Kantian think, that human beings simply have unconditional or intrinsic value, or is there a sense in which we must confer value even upon ourselves?³¹

The "tensions" she remarks upon amount to different, and conflicting, answers to this Euthyphro question at different moments in the evolution of her thinking.

Before we look at her considered answer, we should note that Korsgaard is writing here of the value of human beings, rather than the good will, but her remarks are relevant, given the noted (though here unexplored) connection between these bearers of unconditioned value. We could take her remarks to extend to the good will, since the good

while he accepts the idea that we "confer" value on our ends, his understanding of what it is to "confer" value is a realist one, and very different from Korsgaard's. See Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 130; for the alternative take on "conferring" value, see his review of Korsgaard's *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, *Philosophical Review* 107 (1998), 607-11.

³⁰The "independence" in question would need more careful spelling out than I give it here. Insofar as Euthyphro and Socrates could agree that something is good if and only if the gods love it, they both in a certain sense deny the independence of goodness from the gods' love. However, something like independence is preserved in the thought that for the objectivist, the goodness has priority, however that priority is to be unpacked (cf. the "detectivist" reading of the relevant biconditional, footnote 24 above). Thanks to Patrick Kain for encouraging me to think further about this.

³¹The quotation is from *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 407; the reply to Schneewind is in "Motivation, Metaphysics and the Value of the Self: A Reply to Ginsborg, Guyer and Schneewind", *Ethics* 109 (1998), 49-66.

will and humanity are both described, at different points in the *Groundwork*, as having unconditioned value. Rather than wrench them away from their natural focus, however, we would do better to adapt the present discussion to hers, and redirect our attention from the good will to humanity.

How then does Korsgaard answer her own question about the value of human beings? She says that in earlier essays (including “Two Distinctions”) she leaned to the view that human beings simply have unconditional or intrinsic value; but that more recently she has—

come to think of the value we place even on ourselves as also conferred... [T]here is a continuity between the value of humanity and the value of other things: they are all the result of our own acts of conferring value.³²

Korsgaard here explicitly addresses the Euthyphro question for the value of human beings, and she answers it Euthyphro’s way. Her considered answer to the Euthyphro question is in the end that human beings *have* value because they *are* valued, just like the gods who are good because they love themselves. Human beings get their value in the way that happiness is said to get its value, according to Korsgaard’s Kant: namely, by being valued, or chosen, as end. How are we to spell this out? It looks as though we shall be driven to something like this. (Watch carefully.)

It is because we value human beings as ends in themselves that they are ends in themselves. It is because human beings have conditioned, i.e. conferred, value that they have unconditioned value. It is because human beings have extrinsic value that they have intrinsic value.

Now this really *is* beginning to sound paradoxical. How can it be because I have extrinsic value, that I have intrinsic value? How could I have value that *doesn’t* depend on something else, by having value that *does* depend on something else?

My diagnosis of the difficulty here is that it lies in our hitherto unexamined equation of the Kantian labels “conditioned/unconditioned” with the distinctions that were our starting point: conditioned value, we provisionally assumed, was extrinsic value;

³²Korsgaard, “Motivation, Metaphysics”, 63. This view emerges in other writings, including *Sources of Normativity*.

unconditioned value was intrinsic value. There is much to be said for that equation. It is taken for granted by Korsgaard (in “Two Distinctions”) and many others. But it creates a tangle when we confront the prospect of something that might *confer value on itself*. The value in this case doesn’t, after all, depend on something *else*. Unpicking this conceptual tangle will help us in two ways. First, it will help us avoid the paradox that Korsgaard’s formulation confronts. And second, it will help us answer the question with which we began: the question of what intrinsic value has to do with objectivity.

Korsgaard’s implication, in the passage just quoted, is that if human beings confer value on themselves, that value is conditioned and therefore *not intrinsic*: that having “unconditional or intrinsic value,” is incompatible with the thought that “we must confer value even upon ourselves”. This manifests the natural, but (as we are about to see) ultimately mistaken, terminological assumption that conditioned value is extrinsic, and unconditioned value is intrinsic.

How can we tell whether value is intrinsic? The only method Korsgaard mentions is Moore’s isolation test (a test which, for for other reasons, probably needs improving, though I can’t go into that here).³³ By this test, though, Korsgaard is wrong: value conferred by oneself on oneself will turn out to be *intrinsic* value, since I could have that value and exist all alone. To be sure, the value depends on a relation: the relation of conferring, or perhaps choosing as an end. But since the relation is borne *by the self to the self*, it is not extrinsic to the self: and the resulting value can therefore be an intrinsic value. This value, it seems, is *conditioned but intrinsic*.

³³Moore’s test for intrinsic value is comparable to Jaegwon Kim’s test for intrinsic properties, as compatibility with loneliness (i.e. unaccompaniment by any other distinct contingent object). David Lewis showed the mistake: loneliness is compatible with itself, but extrinsic (“Extrinsic Properties”, *Phil Studies* 44 (1983), 197-200, drawing on Kim, “Psychophysical Supervenience”, *Phil Studies* 41 (1982), 51-70. Analogous difficulties arise for value: rarity passes the isolation test, but is not, I think, *intrinsically* valuable. Lewis and I propose an alternative account of intrinsicness in terms of independence of loneliness and accompaniment, in “Defining ‘Intrinsic’”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1998), 333-45. Dancy looks at its application to value in *Ethics Without Principles*, Chapter 9.

If we abandon the equation of unconditioned and intrinsic value, Korsgaard's answer escapes paradox. We must, it is true, avoid saying that it is because persons have conditioned value that they have unconditioned value, and we must avoid saying that it is because they have extrinsic value that they have intrinsic value. But there is no harm in saying the following: it is because they have conditioned, i.e. conferred, value that they have intrinsic value.

It is a familiar thought to those working in the metaphysics of properties that a property may be relational in certain ways without being extrinsic: for example, the properties of being "three-legged" (like Jake the Peg), or "self-deceived" (like George Bush).³⁴ Such properties are relational, because they cannot be defined without mentioning a relation; but they are intrinsic, because (involving relations *interior* to the thing) they are compatible with isolation. Here we have that thought coming up in the context of value. Just as a property can be at once relational and intrinsic, so value can be at once conditioned and intrinsic. So Korsgaard's stated answer to the Euthyphro question can make good sense, if she is understood to be affirming the conferred value of humanity, which, being conferred, is conditioned; but being self-conferred, is intrinsic.

Sorting out this conceptual tangle helps us escape that paradox; and now let us see what it tells us about objectivity. We concluded earlier on that something whose value is conferred is merely subjectively valuable. We have just concluded that something whose value is conferred can be intrinsically valuable. So we have the possibility before us that *something intrinsically valuable can be merely subjectively valuable*.

³⁴See Rolf Harris, "Jake the Peg" (1966, Black Swan Music); and for the president, see e.g. Ron Susskind, "Without a Doubt", *New York Times Magazine*, 17 October 2004. Sometimes the relationality associated with an intrinsic property is merely conceptual, as when the intrinsic property is picked out by a relational concept, e.g. Eiffel-Tower-shaped. Sometimes the relationality associated with an intrinsic property is not merely conceptual, but involves relations interior to the thing that has the intrinsic property, e.g. relations borne by the thing to itself, or among its parts. For an excellent analysis of different notions of intrinsicness, see I.L. Humberstone, "Intrinsic/Extrinsic", *Synthese* 108 (1996), 205-67. It is sometimes thought that dispositional and response-dependent concepts may pick out intrinsic properties. Humberstone advocates using the "relational/non-relational" terminology for a conceptual notion of property, and "intrinsic/extrinsic" for a more metaphysically robust conception of property.

This puts yet more distance between the concepts of objective and intrinsic value. We earlier noted a less surprising aspect of their distinctness: something extrinsically valuable may be objectively valuable, as when the value of happiness is extrinsic through its dependence on desert. Here we have the other, and more surprising, side of that coin: something intrinsically valuable may be merely subjectively valuable, as when the value of a human being is intrinsic through being self-conferred. So Moore was mistaken in thinking that “from the proposition that a particular kind of value is “intrinsic” it does follow that it must be “objective””. Korsgaard’s own proposal provides a counter-example. And it seems to me that an objectivist like Moore should not be satisfied with value that is intrinsic through being self-conferred. Contrary to Moore, intrinsic value is probably not, in fact, what the objectivist was hankering after all along.

Summing up then, we have seen that, contrary to Korsgaard, value can be intrinsic and at the same time conditioned. We have seen that, contrary to Moore, value can be intrinsic and at the same time subjective. Moore’s claim that “intrinsically valuable” implies “objectively valuable” is mistaken. (There is hope, though, for an analogous thought that objectivity is implied, not by intrinsic, but by unconditioned value.) We have seen how Korsgaard’s own idea of conferred value supplies an illustration of value that is at once intrinsic, conditioned, and subjective, when we consider the value human beings are supposed to confer on themselves. And we have resolved the apparent paradoxicality of her claim about our supposedly conferred but unconditioned value: while such value cannot be conferred and unconditioned, it can be conferred and intrinsic.

6. Kant

So, Korsgaard’s considered answer to the Euthyphro question can be shown to escape paradox. Does this, then, remove the obstacles to her account of Kant? Sadly, no. One inescapable obstacle remains, and it is simply this. Korsgaard has abandoned the unconditioned value at the heart of Kant’s philosophy. For Kant, a human being, or a good will, is good unconditionally: not because of its valuing of itself, and not because of its valuing of other, lesser, things such as happiness. Korsgaard admits that conferred value is

conditioned value. It is value whose condition is the act of conferring. When Korsgaard says Kant thinks, or that a Kantian should think, that human beings “must confer value even upon ourselves”—that, by implication, they do *not* after all “simply have unconditional or intrinsic value”—she has travelled a very long way indeed.

To bring that home, think again about Maria von Herbert, lost in an emptiness that extends inside her and all around her, lost in a misery of apathy and self-loathing that finds nothing to be of value, whether outside her or within. She does not value other things; and she does not value herself. We must assume that, in Korsgaard’s terms, she does not confer value on other things, and does not confer value on herself. But think: if we only have value because we *do value* ourselves, then our conclusion is a bleak one. Maria von Herbert *does not have value*. Maria von Herbert, acute philosopher, spurned lover, eloquent correspondent, is nothing. Sunk in apathy and self-loathing, she has lost what made her valuable. She thinks she does not matter—and *she is right*. Her conclusion that she should put an end to her life is, in these terms, justified. That is what we should say, and we should not shed tears when we learn that she put her conclusion into practice a few years later.³⁵

Korsgaard appears to accept this consequence of her view. She allows that, in a certain sense, norms disappear when one fails to value other things, and fails to value oneself. She goes so far as to suggest that suicide is then justified, or at any rate not unjustified. She describes a ‘a kind of suicide’ which in many respects resembles Maria’s—a kind of suicide

which people commit because they feel that they themselves are worthless and, as a result, that life has no meaning and nothing is of value...It is hard to say of one who commits such suicide that he has done wrong, for he has violated no value in which

³⁵In 1803. See Arnulf Zweig, Introduction to *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence 1759-99* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1967). My use of the example of Maria assumes it is possible not to value other things, and not to value oneself, an assumption which I think needs little defense. However, it could conceivably be denied by (who else?) a philosopher; and probably was denied by Kant, who seems to have thought it impossible (as a matter of natural necessity) for us not to value our own happiness, and likewise impossible for us not to value ourselves. How to spell out my argument in a context of a conditioned good whose condition is (supposedly) *necessarily* fulfilled? The objection would remain that the value of human beings is supposed to be unconditioned *tout court*; not dependent on a condition that is (luckily enough) necessarily fulfilled.

he still believes...There is no way to put the point which is not paradoxical: value only exists if life is worth living, and that depends on what we do.³⁶

Well. In a moment we shall be thinking about how Kant's own philosophical response to the situation of someone like Maria might differ from Korsgaard's. But there is a more basic question to look at first, the question about objectivity with which we began this section. How would Kant himself respond to the Euthyphro question? If Korsgaard's reading is correct, indeed if the prevailing constructivist reading of his philosophy is correct, Kant ought to offer some version of Korsgaard's answer: the gods are authors of the good, or rather we ourselves, as rational lawmakers, are authors of the moral law. Now it must be admitted that Kant sometimes seems to talk in these terms.³⁷ But look at what he says in response to the Euthyphro question, put to him in something close to its original form:

Whilst it is true that the moral laws are commands, and whilst they may be commandments of the divine will, they do not originate in the commandment. God has commanded this or that because it is a moral law, and because his will coincides with the moral law. . . No-one, not even God, can be the author of the laws of morality, since they have no origin in will, but instead a practical necessity. If they were not necessary, it is conceivable that lying might be a virtue. [God is] the lawgiver, though not the author of the laws.³⁸

It is hard, I think, to marry this with constructive interpretations of Kant, since what goes for God presumably goes for ourselves too.³⁹ Our reason commands this or that

³⁶*Sources*, 162-3. She also says that 'the rest of us cannot hear of such a case without feeling betrayed'.

³⁷Cf. J.B. Schneewind's account of Kant's adaptation of divine command theory to human agents, in *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Chapter 23.

³⁸Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, tr. Louis Infield (NY, NY: Harper and Row, 1963) 40, 51-2.

³⁹In developing this argument I find myself in sympathy with a number of writers who reject constructivist interpretations of Kant, and see his moral philosophy as grounded in something of fundamental value, whether rational nature, or the good will, or humanity, or freedom. Paul Guyer says Kant's philosophy rests on "an unabashed assertion of the intrinsic value of freedom", in "Morality of Law and Morality of Freedom", *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129-71, 155. Allen Wood says Kant is "a moral *realist* in the most agreed-upon sense that term has in contemporary metaphysics and meta-ethics"; and "if a "deontological" ethical theory is one that precludes grounding a moral principle on substantive values or ends, then the aim of Kant's argument...is to show that no deontological theory is possible", *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 157, 114. Barbara Herman says, "Whatever it is that makes Kantian ethics distinctive, it is not to be found in the

because it is a moral law, and because the virtuous will coincides with the moral law; and whilst moral laws may be commandments of the rational will, they do not originate in the commandment of that will, any more than they originate in God's commandment. Recalling now the passage we considered earlier, that lawmaking which "determines all value" is not, after all, a lawmaking which "confers" value.⁴⁰ "Determine" is a notoriously slippery verb, one which can be pushed either way on the Euthphro question. Do the gods "determine" what is good? Two questions really: Do they decide it? Do they discover it? Korsgaard's Kant says they decide it; Kant seems to say they discover it.⁴¹

Korsgaard hopes for a morality that "depends upon the idea of extrinsically valuable ends whose value comes from the *interest* that people take in them",⁴² and she thinks she

subordination of all considerations of value to principles of right or duty. In this sense, Kantian ethics is not a deontology", in "Leaving Deontology Behind", *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 208-240, 210. Nagel criticizes Korsgaard for anti-realism in his response to her, in *Sources of Normativity*, 200-209, especially 205. Karl Ameriks defends a "substantive realist" interpretation of Kant, see "On Two Non-Realist Interpretations of Kant's Ethics", *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). John Hare goes so far as to defend a form of divine command theory on Kant's behalf, in *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), Chapter 3. Robert Johnson argues that these anti-constructivist interpretations of Kant are incompatible with Kant's account of autonomy, see "Value and Autonomy in Kantian Ethics", forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Meta-Ethics*. However Patrick Kain argues that Kant's notion of self-legislation does not admit a constructivist reading: to be a "law-giver" of a law that is binding *a priori* and unconditionally is to declare that our wills correspond to the law, not to create the law. See Kain, "Self-Legislation in Kant's Moral Philosophy", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 86 (2004), 257-306; Hare and Ameriks agree (Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, 277 n. 29; Hare, *God's Call*, 94, n. 14). Kain draws on various texts, including the following, from *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6: 227): "A (morally practical) law is a proposition that contains a categorical imperative (a command). One who commands (*imperans*) through a law is the lawgiver (*legislator*). He is the author (*autor*) of the obligation in accordance with the law, but not always the author of the law. In the latter case the law would be a positive (contingent) and chosen/discretionary [*willkürlich*] law. A law that binds us *a priori* and unconditionally by our own reason can also be expressed as proceeding from the will of a supreme lawgiver, that is, one who has only rights and no duties (hence from the divine will); but this signifies only the idea of a moral being whose will is a law for everyone, without his being thought of as the author of the law."

⁴⁰*Groundwork*, 436.

⁴¹The picky reader will note that "decide" may be vulnerable to the same slipperiness.

⁴²"Two Distinctions", 253, emphasis added.

finds it in Kant. I find it hard to share her hope, and harder to share her picture of Kant. It is easier to find a Kant who says this instead:

For us men it is wholly impossible to explain how and why the universality of a maxim as a law—and therefore morality—should interest us. This much only is certain: the law is not valid for us because it interests us...the law interests us because it is valid for us.⁴³

This is a Kant who appears to share more ground with Plato and Moore than with Aristotle, or Hume, or Korsgaard.

What then if Korsgaard were to give the other answer, the old objectivist answer, to the Euthyphro question? This would admittedly be to concede what she wished to avoid: it would be to attribute to Kant the very view she found absurdly metaphysical in Moore. Kant would be like Moore in saying that, when it comes to our valuing of persons as ends in themselves, our choice ought to be a response to an attribute in things, an attribute of intrinsic—or (as we should now say) unconditioned—goodness. It is because human beings have intrinsic—or (as we should now say) unconditioned—value that we do or should value them as ends in themselves. Kant would endorse a version of the Moorean view Korsgaard says he opposes—the view that “you might value something as an end because of its intrinsic goodness or in response to its intrinsic goodness, but a thing’s possession of intrinsic goodness is quite independent of whether anyone cares about it or not”—and while Kant might substitute “unconditioned” for “intrinsic”, he would not be offering some subtle and nuanced alternative.⁴⁴ If Korsgaard were to give that old answer, though, I suspect she would have Kant on her side.

Rational beings. . . are called persons because *their nature already marks them out as an end in itself*—that is, as something which ought not to be used merely as a means.⁴⁵

Let us return, now, to Maria. It is worth observing that while Kant did not, in fact, reply to Maria’s second letter, we can guess how he might have replied. Even in despair, Maria has a duty to “humanity in her own person”, of which he says, “by virtue of this

⁴³ *Groundwork*, 461.

⁴⁴“Two Distinctions”, 253.

⁴⁵*Groundwork*, 428, emphasis added.

worth....we possess an inalienable dignity”.⁴⁶ Maria’s dignity is not alienable by anyone’s doings or valuing— not even her own. The emptiness in her valuing is not an emptiness in her value. In the terms Korsgaard ascribed to Moore, but should surely ascribe to Kant, Maria possesses an intrinsic —or (as we should now say) unconditioned— goodness that is “quite independent of whether anyone cares about it or not”, and that in turn is something that demands from her an appropriate response. That is surely part of the reason why Kant’s famous injunction against suicide is a categorical imperative. Nothing Maria can do, or fail to do, can make that norm disappear.

There is much more to be thought about here; but for now let us simply stop with the reflection that beings whose *nature* “already marks them out” as ends in themselves have no need of extra acts of value-making, whether by the gods, or by themselves. You have value whether or not you do value: you have value whether or not you happen to value such things as happiness; or happen to value yourself. Your value is not conditioned, not conferred, but shines, “like a jewel”, having its “full worth in itself”.

⁴⁶ *Metaphysics of Morals*, 436. Here I use the translation by Mary Gregor in *The Doctrine of Virtue* (New York, Evanston and London: Harper and Row, 1964).