

Is It Fitting To Divide Value? A Review of the *Value Gap*  
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Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, *The Value Gap*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. 209 + xv. ISBN: 9780192848215. (hbk.). £55.00

Ordinary life seems brimming with goodness and value (and, sadly, their counterparts of badness and evil). It is good that you helped your friend move; and it is extremely bad that war has broken out in Europe. Enjoying the company of good friends is valuable for its own sake; and it is bad, in and of itself, when people don't get what they deserve. Normally, it is good for us to exercise and eat well, and bad for us to over indulge. It is good for our students to graduate and get jobs; and bad for our friends when their life-long projects come crumbling down. Etc.

Value theorists, since at least Sidgwick and Moore, have identified what seem to be two types of goodness and value. Some value or goodness seems to be value or goodness (period). Other value or goodness seems to be about goodness or value *for* something, normally though not always, a person. It is natural to wonder if there really are two types of value and, supposing there are, what relationships, if any, exist between them. Specifically, should we understand one in terms of the other and, if so, which one has priority?<sup>1</sup>

In his recent book *The Value Gap*, Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen explores these questions. The book is an overall defense of a “gap” between these two types of value so that neither can be fully understood in terms of the other. The book is composed of two parts, with a total of twelve chapters. The first part—chapters 1-5—defends this gap primarily by criticizing attempts to “close the gap” by understanding one type of value in terms of the other. The second part—chapters 6-12—further develops and defends this gap using a *Fitting Analysis* account of value. I will begin by summarizing the overall argument before turning to two critical comments.

Chapters 1 and 2 lay the conceptual foundation for the remainder of the book. The two central concepts of the book are ‘final goodness’ and ‘final goodness for.’ Crudely put, the former type of value concerns things that are valuable for their own sake; the latter type of value concerns things that are valuable for the sake of something, normally, a person. Rønnow-Rasmussen argues that the distinction between final goodness or value is not the same as the distinction between intrinsic value and extrinsic value (8-17). Many of the arguments are standard ones, which build some on previous work of his.

In chapter 2, he provides an official formulation of his position (see also 25-6):

*Value Dualism*: “‘final goodness for’ and ‘final goodness’ are both coherent value notions (whether or not we understand these as referring to non-derivative or derivative values) and they cannot be fully understood in terms of one another” (35).

*Value Dualism* is a conjunction, with the first conjunct asserting two “coherence” claims and the second conjunct asserting an “anti-reductionism” claim. One might object to either conjunct. The first conjunct is, itself, a conjunction. So once again, one might object to either conjunct, maintaining that either ‘final goodness for’ is not a coherent value concept or ‘final goodness’ is not a coherent value concept. However, those positions are extreme, and Rønnow-Rasmussen is right to spend less time on them.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout, for sake of brevity, I will be loose with the distinctions between concept, property types, and property instances. Context should make intention clear.

One might object to the second “anti-reductionism” conjunct of *Value Dualism*. Once again, one might object in one of two ways. First, one might object that “final goodness for” can be understood in terms of “final goodness.” Rønnow-Rasmussen labels such positions *Mooreanism* (34), given their clear antecedents in Moore’s *Principia Ethica*. Second, one might object that “final goodness” can be understood in terms of ‘final goodness for.’ Rønnow-Rasmussen labels such positions *Good-for Monism* (34), though perhaps “Geacheanism” might have also been an appropriate label.

Rønnow-Rasmussen objects to *Mooreanism* in chapter 3 and *Good-for Monism* in chapter 4. However, the kind of objection is the same in each case. Rønnow-Rasmussen argues that each position makes “incoherent” or “dismisses” value claims that seem coherent or “make perfectly good sense” (xiv, 37, 72). But, Rønnow-Rasmussen claims, *Mooreanism* and *Good-for Monism* are “formal” positions in value theory, not “substantive ones.” Though he doesn’t expound on this distinction, the idea should be clear enough: these positions tell us what value is like, not what things have value. But formal views should not restrict the range of coherent claims about value. Only substantive views should do that (26).

Defenders of *Mooreanism* try to understand final goodness for in terms of final goodness. The basic strategy will be that when something *x* is finally good for an individual *a*, then *x* is finally good and, in some sense, “involves” *a* (or *a*’s life) (cf. Moore (1903: §59), Regan (2004)). Rønnow-Rasmussen argues that this strategy struggles with claims like (my label):

*World*: “The world is overall good, but [the world] is overall bad for *a*” (40).

Rønnow-Rasmussen argues that the Moorean will see the world as the “value maker” for what is finally bad for that individual. But then on their proposal the world will have to be overall bad, since its overall bad for *a*. But according to *World*, the world is overall good. Thus, the Moorean proposal will render this claim incoherent or contradictory. But it seems perfectly coherent—and true, given a suitably chosen *a*.

A second kind of claim is what Rønnow-Rasmussen calls the “intuition of neutrality,” drawing on the work of John Broome. Crudely put, the intuition is this:

*Intuition of Neutrality*: “There are several levels of well-being such that adding a person with well-being within that range is ethically neutral: it makes the world neither better nor worse” (44)

The conflict with *Mooreanism* is clear here: the defender of *Mooreanism* would claim that if the individual has a certain degree of welfare—and thus things are finally good for that individual—then the world *is* a better place. But according to the *Intuition of Neutrality*, the world *isn’t* a better place were that individual to exist. (46-7). Since the *Intuition of Neutrality* seems like a coherent claim, *Mooreanism* once again runs afoul of the constraint.

Similar criticisms await *Good-for Monism*. Defenders of *Good-for Monism* may analyze claims about final goodness in terms of any of the following: what is good for everyone, what is good for a particular person, or what is good for some but bad for others (51). Rønnow-Rasmussen argues that *Good-for Monism* will struggle with cases of aggregation. Specifically, suppose I can save two people or just one of them. I might claim (cf. 52):

*Saving More*: It is better to save the two people instead of just the one.

However, it is hard for defenders of *Good-for Monism* to analyze *Saving More*. For, Rønnow-Rasmussen argues, there is no single value that aggregates according to *Good-for Monism*. There is the final goodness for the first individual; and there is the final goodness for the second individual; but no sense can be made of the two values *together* being better—as *Saving More* seems to claim.

A second, more wide-ranging criticism, is that *Good-for Monism* cannot accommodate certain concepts, like thick concepts or concepts of fairness (59-71). A representative worry is that claims about justice or fairness cannot be accommodated in terms of what is good for or bad for individuals (60-1). For instance, it is possible that a competition is unfair because it unnecessarily advantages some participants. But being unfair doesn't seem to be either necessary or sufficient for a competition being good for some participants and bad for others. Thus, it is not clear how proponents of *Good-for Monism* will analyze these claims about thick concepts.

So in the first part of the book, Rønnow-Rasmussen defends *Dualism* by criticizing positions like *Mooreanism* and *Good-for Monism* that try to either fully understand final goodness or final goodness for in terms of the other. Thus, he provides a negative case for the claim that there are two types or kinds of value. But one might wonder why both 'final goodness for' and 'final goodness' are both *value* concepts, if they are so distinct.

Rønnow-Rasmussen unifies them by appealing to a *Fitting Attitude* account of value. The specific account Rønnow-Rasmussen appeals to is more indebted to Scanlon (1998) than Brentano along two lines. First, Rønnow-Rasmussen eschews an account in terms of concepts of "fittingness," "appropriateness" or "correctness," instead appealing to an account using the concept of a "normative reason." Second, the account is reductive in nature, reducing being valuable to some fact involving normative reasons (compare Scanlon (1998: 97)). More specifically, Rønnow-Rasmussen proposes the following formulation (114):

FA1: For something  $x$  to be valuable is for  $x$  to be (or provide) a reason for an agent who is rightly placed to favour  $x$ .

What unifies both final goodness and final goodness for is that they are, or provide, reasons for rightly placed agents.

So FA1 might explain why both final goodness and final goodness for are both value concepts. But given a *FA* account, how might one provide a more specific account of each of these concepts? One approach is to appeal to a distinction between "agent-neutral" reasons and "agent-relative" reasons. Perhaps final goodness provides agent-neutral reasons, whereas final goodness for provides agent-relative reasons. However, Rønnow-Rasmussen rejects this approach due to skepticism about this distinction between those types of reasons (124-127). Instead, he opts for account in terms of "sakes." He proposes (my labels):

*Final Goodness*: For  $x$  to be finally good is for  $x$  to be, or provide, a reason for any agent who is rightly placed to favour  $x$  for its own sake (123)

*Final Goodness-For*: For  $x$  to be finally good for  $y$  is for  $x$  to be, or provide, a reason for any agent  $y$  who is rightly placed to favour  $x$  for its own sake for  $y$ 's sake (129, fn. 9)

Given FA1, both of these analyzes will imply that final goodness and final goodness for are values, since both provide reasons.

But a new problem emerges for *Dualism*. The problem involves the following claim (my label):

*Implication*. If  $x$  is finally good for  $a$ , then  $x$  is finally good.

*Implication* is, strictly speaking, logically consistent with *Dualism*. But it certainly threatens the spirit of *Dualism*. It is hard, though not impossible, to maintain a "gap" between two types of value if the extension of one is a subset of the other!

The problem is that *Implication* seems to follow from the principles *Final Goodness*, *Final Goodness-For*, and a further plausible principle. That principle is (122):

*LCP*: “If  $x$  provides a reason to  $\phi$  and  $\phi$ -ing logically entails  $\psi$ ing, then  $x$  provides a reason to  $\psi$  (where  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  refer to acts in a wide sense including favourings)”

The argument against *Dualism* then goes as follows (128-130). Suppose  $x$  is finally good for  $z$ . From *Final Goodness-For*, it follows that  $x$  is, or provides, a reason for any agent  $y$  who is rightly placed to favour  $x$  for its own sake for  $z$ 's sake. But from *LCP* it follows that if an agent  $y$  has a reason to favour  $x$  for its own sake for  $z$ 's sake, then agent  $y$  has a reason to favour  $x$  for its own sake. But from *Final Goodness*, it follows that  $x$  is finally good, since a rightly placed agent  $y$  has a reason to favour  $x$  for its own sake. Thus, from these three principles, and the claim that  $x$  is finally good for  $z$ , we get the conclusion that  $x$  is finally good. But obviously  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  are just random placeholders. The result thus generalizes to any case of something being finally good for, thereby establishing *Implication*.

In chapter 8, Rønnow-Rasmussen blocks the argument for *Implication* by modifying both *Final Goodness* and *Final Goodness-For*. Starting with the former, he proposes:

*Impersonal Final Goodness*: For  $x$  to be finally good is for  $x$  to be, or provide, a reason for any agent who is rightly placed to favour  $x$  for its own sake *where this favouring is not for the sake of someone or something other than  $x$*  (137)

He also proposes a modification for *Final Goodness-For* as follows (137, 144, 148):

For  $x$  to be finally good for  $a$  is for  $x$  to be, or provide, a rightly placed  $b$  with a reason to finally favour  $x$  for  $a$ 's sake (where  $a$  and  $b$  might, but need not, be identical)

Rønnow-Rasmussen claims these modifications will block the argument for *Implication* (137).

Rønnow-Rasmussen prefers to develop FA1 using the idea of a “sake” instead of the distinction between agent-neutral/agent-relative reasons. Thus, a natural question is how to understand the idea of valuing something for the “sake” of someone. The basic account is that to act, feel, etc., for someone’s sake, is to do it *for* them and not for any other person or purpose (146-7, 152). In chapter 9, he develops this account by drawing on cross-linguistic data. The appeal to cross-linguistic data is useful, since it shows that the concept of a “sake” is not idiosyncratic to English-users.

In the final chapter 12, Rønnow-Rasmussen assumes *Dualism* has been successfully defended, and explores how to “mind the value gap.” Rønnow-Rasmussen rejects the idea that while there are two types of value, they never conflict (184-5). He rejects, as psychologically implausible, that we are disposed to only respond to one of the values (184-7). He considers several more exotic options for navigating the value gap, arguing they are not fully satisfactory either (187-197). On the final two pages (197-8), he sketches a reason for thinking the conflict between the values permeates our lives. It seems likely we will frequently be in positions where we have reasons to finally favour something and finally favour something for someone’s sake. But it seems plausible both that we can only have one (occurrent) favouring attitude at a time, *and* that we can favour things for only one reason at a time. If all of three claims are right, then we will frequently be in positions where we are forced to choose which type of favouring attitude to have, and thus, which type of value to respond to.

Up to this point, I’ve focused mostly on *Dualism* and Rønnow-Rasmussen’s defense of it. But there are a number of related topics he discusses I haven’t touched on. Chapter 5 discusses the idea that goodness for is exhausted by well-being, and considers whether  $x$  might be good for  $y$ , even if  $x$  does not constitute part of  $y$ 's well-being. Chapters 10 and 11 discuss favourings and motivational reasons. Given a preferred understanding of motivational reasons, Rønnow-Rasmussen argues that not all favourings involve motivational reasons (164, 166-73). He further

argues that even if certain things cannot be motivational reasons for us to favour things, it may still be the case that they provide rightly placed agents with reasons (177-8). And there are a number of shorter discussions on well-known topics, such as the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values (6ff.) and the wrong reason problem for *FA* accounts (100ff.).

The book is written in a first-person exploratory mode. Rønnow-Rasmussen frequently provides an honest opinion about the relative strengths and weakness of various ideas without necessarily conclusively ruling for or against them. And many ideas—like the *FA* Account—are treated as hypotheses in need of development or refinement in various ways. This style of writing has advantages and disadvantages. The book is more engaging, as it reads like an honest wrestling with complex ideas. However, it can be more challenging to identify the exact theses being proposed or defended, since ideas and theses are modified and developed over time, sometimes across chapters. Thus, newcomers to value theory might find the book challenging, though perhaps rewarding to carefully work through to learn about the major debates and distinctions in value theory. Veterans of these disputes are likely to find a lot to sink their teeth into, from new arguments to updated versions of old arguments.

Additionally, the book is not overly long, with the 12 chapters being two pages' shy of two-hundred pages. Some of the chapters—specifically, chapters 5, 10, 11 and to a lesser degree 1—are more self-contained and could perhaps be effectively excerpted for a course. But the book is an overall argument developing and defending *Dualism*. So it is best engaged as a whole.

In what remains, I want to raise a few critical comments in the spirit of pushing discussion forward. I will focus on two issues: Rønnow-Rasmussen's criticism of *Mooreanism* and his proposed analyzes of final goodness for and final goodness. I focus on these issues, as both are relevant to the tenability of *Dualism*.

As I am sympathetic to *Mooreanism*, I will consider Rønnow-Rasmussen's argument against it. He argues that *Mooreanism* will not be able to make sense of certain claim such as:

*World*: "The world is overall good, but [the world] is overall bad for *a*" (40).

*Intuition of Neutrality*: "There are several levels of well-being such that adding a person with well-being within that range is ethically neutral: it makes the world neither better nor worse" (44)

Since a formal theory should not rule out substantive claims, we have reason for rejecting *Mooreanism*.

However, the *Intuition of Neutrality* seems very close to just the denial of *Mooreanism*. In fact, the *Intuition of Neutrality* looks close to being just a formal claim in value theory. I am doubtful that it is substantive problem for *Mooreanism* if it is at odds with a formal claim that is close to its denial. To be sure, defenders of *Mooreanism* might have to undermine this intuition. But the problem with the *Intuition of Neutrality* for *Mooreanism* is formal in nature.

The claim *World* is more bothersome. But defenders of *Mooreanism* have a uniform and principled response here. To see it, start with the claim that the world is overall good. Though there are some differences, and I'm simplifying some, the standard *Mooreanism* analysis goes as follows (compare Feldman (2000), Zimmerman (2001), Perrine (2018), and, for a variation, Oliveira (2016)). Some states of affairs are of final value/disvalue, and they don't have that value/disvalue in virtue of their relation to other states of affairs of value. These states of affairs are of "basic final value." The overall value of the world is a function of these states of affairs of basic final value/disvalue. Thus, if the world is overall good, it is because there are certain states of affairs of basic final value/disvalue and the sum or aggregate of *all* of them is overall good.

Turn next to the second half of *World*, that the world is overall bad for *a*. A defender of *Mooreanism* might analyze that statement as follows. Some states of affairs are of basic final value/disvalue for *a*. These states of affairs are (i) of final value/disvalue, (ii) “involve” *a* in some way, and (iii) lack an explanation of their final value/disvalue in terms of other states of affairs that “involve” *a*. This analysis is consistent with *Mooreanism*, since basic final value/disvalue for *a* is being analyzed in terms of final value/disvalue (period). Then if the world is overall bad for *a*, it is because there are states of affairs of basic final value/disvalue for *a* and their sum or aggregate is overall bad.

The basic strategy for both cases is uniform. The overall value of the world, *and* the overall value of world for *a*, are both derivative. Whatever value they have can be traced to more specific states of affairs. The main difference is *which* states of affairs their value is traced to. Because their derivative value is explained by different states of affairs, the defender of *Mooreanism* can coherently claim that some states of affairs are both good or valuable, but bad or disvaluable for *a*. So contrary to what Rønnow-Rasmussen claims (42), a defender of *Mooreanism* can coherently maintain that the very same thing—in this case, the world—is overall good yet overall bad for *a*. To be sure, this strategy will need to be developed in various ways. But it may indicate that the superior criticisms of *Mooreanism* are substantive in nature—involving specific proposals of what is good and bad for—as opposed to formal.

A second worry involves how Rønnow-Rasmussen intends to block the argument for *Implication*. He does so by offering a modified analysis of final goodness for (137, 144, 148):

For *x* to be finally good for *a* is for *x* to be, or provide, a rightly placed *b* with a reason to favour *x* for its own sake for *a*'s sake (where *a* and *b* might, but need not, be identical)

This analysis uses what I will call a “double sake” locution: there is a reason to favour *x* for its own sake for *a*'s sake. An important issue is how to clarify this locution to better understand the attitude it is supposed to refer to.

One reason for clarifying this locution is that, on some understandings, it is incoherent. Specifically, on some understandings of what it means to favour something for its own sake, it is incoherent. For instance, consider the *intentional on-its-own* understanding of favouring something for its own sake. To favour something for its own sake is to favour it on its own. And to favour it on its own is when, were one to consider it on its own, isolated from other things, one favours it in various ways (e.g. desires it, admires, intends to bring it about, etc.). The intentional on-its-own understanding strikes me as a natural way of understanding the locution ‘favouring *x* for its own sake.’ But this understanding seems to make the double sake locution incoherent. To favour *x* for its own sake for *a*'s sake would seem to amount to favoring *x* both on its own, isolated from *a*, and *not* on its own, but in its relationship to *a*. And that seems incoherent.

An alternative understanding is the *factoring* understanding on which the locution merely identifies two distinct attitudes. On this understanding, to favour *x* for its own sake for *a*'s sake is just to both favour *x* for its own sake *and* to favour *x* for *a*'s sake. On the factoring understanding, the double sake locution is coherent. But on this factoring understanding, the modified account of final goodness for won't block the argument for *Implication*. So an alternative understanding is needed for defending *Dualism*.

At one point, Rønnow-Rasmussen does more fully characterize the double-sake locution. He writes (152):

The best way to understand the first ‘sake’ in ‘favouring  $x$  for its own sake for  $a$ ’s sake’ is to regard it as specifying that  $x$  is conceived of in a non-instrumental way—that is,  $x$  is not favoured because it is conducive to something else that is valuable... the second ‘sake’ ...tells us that the favouring attitude is final. The idea conveyed is that the favouring is not dependent on some other favour, nor does its intentional content contain anything (self-reflexive) about the attitude being depending on some other favouring

One natural regimentation of this passage is as follows:

*Negative Analysis:* An agent  $b$  favours  $x$  for its own sake for  $a$ ’s sake if and only if (i)  $b$  favours  $x$ , (ii) it is not the case that  $b$  favours  $x$  because  $b$  believes  $x$  is conducive to something else that is valuable, and (iii) it is not the case that  $b$ ’s favouring  $x$  either (a) depends upon some other favouring attitude of  $b$ ’s or (b) itself refers to some other attitude.

I call this regimentation the *Negative Analysis* because the two clauses (ii) and (iii) are negative in nature. They tell us what the attitude is *not* like.

I will briefly raise three issues. First, the *Negative Analysis* does not refer to  $a$  on the right hand of the bi-conditional. Thus, it is doubtful it explains what it means for  $b$  to favour  $x$  for  $a$ ’s sake. Second, conditions (ii) and (iii) are purely negative—they merely require the agent *not* be a certain way. But agents *not* being a certain way is a very weak condition. To see this, consider a cognitively unsophisticated agent like my cat Mala. Mala favours things—like his food and head scratches. So Mala could satisfy condition (i). But in virtue of being cognitively unsophisticated, Mala will also *not* have the further attitudes described by conditions (ii) and (iii). Thus, in virtue of being cognitively unsophisticated, and favouring things, Mala will meet the conditions of *Negative Analysis*. I’m not sure this result is unwelcomed, but it is surprising.

One might deal with both of these problems by enriching the intentional content of the attitude on both sides. The content might not be simply favouring  $x$  but rather favouring  $x$ -*in-relation-to- $a$* . Enriching the content of the attitude would more clearly relate  $b$ ’s favouring to  $a$ . Additionally, it is unlikely that cognitively unsophisticated agents, like Mala the cat, can have attitudes with such enriched contents. Enriching the content of the favouring attitudes might produce new theoretical problems, which I can’t explore here. But there’s a third issue that enriching the content will not help with.

The third issue is that condition (iii)(a) excludes seemingly paradigm cases of double sake attitudes. Specifically, condition (iii)(a) excludes cases where  $b$  favours  $x$  but only because  $b$  antecedently favours  $a$ . Suppose I care about my mother’s piano; for instance, I try to respect it, not damage it, store it appropriately, etc. But suppose I only care about my mother’s piano because I care about her. (Any other piano I would sell or give away.) This case seems to be a case of a double sake attitude—I favour my mother’s piano for its own sake for her sake. But condition (iii)(a) implies that it is *not* a case of such an attitude, since my favouring of the piano depends upon an antecedent favouring. (Worse yet, if my attitude is not a double sake attitude, then *Final Goodness For* will not imply that my mother’s piano is finally good for me.) But presumably many double sake attitudes are supposed to be like my attitudes here—I favour  $x$  for its own sake because I antecedently care about  $a$ . But condition (iii)(a) will exclude such attitudes as double-sake attitudes.

I have focused on double-sake attitudes because they play two important roles in Rønnow-Rasmussen’s book. First, they are part of his FA account of one of the central concepts, final goodness for. Second, they are supposed to allow him to block the argument for *Implication* that

threatens *Dualism*. So clarity about what exactly these attitudes are, and how they work, is of great importance. While it may be that an understanding of the locution can do both of these things, we've not yet identified a clear understand that in fact does both.

Summing up, Rønnow-Rasmussen's *Value Gap* is a sustained argument for *Dualism*, the idea that there are two coherent value notions—final goodness, final goodness for—that cannot be understood in terms of each other. Along the way, Rønnow-Rasmussen touches on many of the central issues of contemporary value theory. The book is full of ideas, arguments, and distinctions, and rewards careful study. It is lively and interesting, and recommended to those working in these fields.<sup>2</sup>

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