ORIGINAL ARTICLE

States of affairs and our connection with the good

Miles Tucker ⓘ

Department of Philosophy, Virginia
Commonwealth University, Richmond,
USA

Correspondence
Miles Tucker, Department of Philosophy,
Virginia Commonwealth University,
Richmond, USA.
Email: mtucker@vcu.edu

Abstract

Abstractionists claim that the only bearers of intrinsic value are abstract, necessarily existing states of affairs. I argue that abstractionism cannot succeed. Though we can model concrete goods such as lives, projects, and outcomes with abstract states, conflating models of goods with the goods themselves has surprising and unattractive consequences. I suggest that concrete states of affairs or *facts* are the only bearers of intrinsic value. I show how this proposal can overcome the concerns lodged against abstractionism and, in the process, reconnect us with the good.

KEYWORDS
axiology, intrinsic value, states of affairs, facts, truthmaking

Abstractionists say that only states of affairs can be intrinsically good.[1] They understand states of affairs as fine-grained, necessarily existing, proposition-like entities.

Abstractionism is often regarded as the default position in the ontology of value. The view is defended in the works of Roderick Chisholm, Fred Feldman, Noah Lemos, Ben Bradley, and Ralph

---

[1] I assume that the intrinsic value of a thing is the value it has *in itself* or *for its own sake*. Further, like Moore (1922/1960), I say that the intrinsic value of a thing depends only on its intrinsic features. This Moorean claim is controversial; I will indicate when I rely upon it and, where possible, will attempt to provide additional 'back-up' arguments that avoid it. I therefore hope that my general project may still be of interest to those like Korsgaard (1983), Hurka (1998), Kagan (1998), and Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000) who maintain that the intrinsic (or 'final') value of a thing can depend on its relational features.

Wedgwood, among many others.[2] Indeed, even its most influential critics, such as Anderson (1993, 26–30), Kagan (1998), and Zimmerman (2001, 46–65), develop their accounts as responses to abstractionism.

I argue that abstractionism does not deserve this privileged position: the view confuses representations of goods with the goods themselves. The problem can be traced to the mid-twentieth century effort to formulate a logic of intrinsic value. In developing this logic, philosophers assumed that intrinsic goods are simply the values of propositional variables. The identification seemed benign: whatever we might say of some (alleged) concrete intrinsic good, we can say instead of some abstract state or proposition which models that good.

Yet conflating abstract models of intrinsic goods with the goods themselves distorts our understanding of axiology. If abstractionism is true, then we cannot attribute intrinsic value to our lives, relationships, or projects—these things are contingent and concrete. As a result, we are radically disconnected from the good. Indeed, nothing we have seen, experienced, or chosen can be intrinsically valuable.

The abstractionist may reply that this is of little real consequence: we can simply attribute value to necessarily existing abstract states that *describe* these concrete entities. But this reply is inadequate. I advance two objections. First, abstract states of affairs are representational. But representations cannot be intrinsically good unless the entities they represent can be intrinsically good. Second, an abstract state of affairs must derive its value from the part of concrete reality that makes it obtain. But if abstractionism is true, concrete reality has no intrinsic value.

I defend an alternative ontology of value: only concrete states of affairs or *facts* can possess intrinsic value.[3] Like Armstrong (1997), I understand facts as complex, contingent entities composed of concrete particulars and universals. I show that this view has many of the advantages of abstractionism without its costs. After, I argue that factualism can avoid concerns raised by abstractionists such as Feldman (2000), Bradley (2002), and Lemos (2022).

1 | STATES OF AFFAIRS AS THE SOLE BEARERS OF VALUE

Abstractionists claim:

(i) only states of affairs can be intrinsically good.
(ii) states of affairs should be understood as abstract, proposition-like entities.

I say that only concrete states of affairs or facts can be intrinsically valuable. I therefore accept (i) but deny (ii). The paper is structured accordingly. I argue in this section that only states of affairs can be intrinsically good. In so doing, I highlight what I take to be attractive—and correct—about the abstractionist view.

---

[2] See Chisholm (1968) (1972) (1975) (1981) (1986), Feldman (1986) (1995) (1997) (1998) (2000) (2004), Bradley (2002) (2006), and Wedgwood (2009). Lemos (1994) (2022) (2023) says that only abstract states of affairs that obtain can be intrinsically good; the best interpretation of his position is controversial. See Zimmerman (2001, 49–50).

[3] This position may be traced to Ross (1930/2002, 114). My version of factualism also owes much to Zimmerman (2001). However, Zimmerman appeals to an ontology of structured, concrete events as advanced by Kim (1976). I take the ontology of facts suggested by Armstrong (1997) (2004) to be more attractive. Yet little will depend on this; the reader may substitute concrete facts for other entities, as long as these entities can play the same axiological role as the value bearers I prefer. See fn. 50.

The restriction of intrinsic value to states of affairs can be traced to the birth of analytic philosophy. In the *Principia*, G.E. Moore suggested that concrete particulars (i.e. objects, individuals, substances) cannot have intrinsic values; only "states of existence" involving particulars can be intrinsically good.[4] Ross (1930/2002, 112) argued for a similar restriction:

> Most of our adjectives, I suppose, refer to qualities that belong to substances; 'good' is the name of a quality which attaches, quite directly, only to 'objectives', and since an objective is an entity more complex than a substance, *standing as it does for a substance's having a certain quality or being in a certain relation*, 'good' may be called a quality of a different type from those that attach to substances.[5]

These claims fit neatly with philosophical practice.[6] The most familiar axiologies attribute value to things like pleasure, beauty, love, and understanding; Chisholm (1972) notes that these goods are best understood not as universals (i.e. properties, features, characteristics) but as *instantiations* of universals. But instantiations of universals are states of affairs. Thus the primary bearers of value should be understood as goods of the form <*a* is pleased>, <*b* is beautiful>, <*a* loves *b*>, and so on.

Particularists such as Anderson (1993) may demur; they suggest that the intrinsic values of states of affairs can be reduced to the intrinsic values of particular things, such as persons and artifacts. But we do not wish to reduce the value of <Lucy is pleased> to the value of Lucy. To do so would be to claim that *Lucy* is intrinsically good, insomuch as she is pleased. But the values of persons should not change with their moods.[7] Nor can we reduce the values of states of affairs to universals. It would be better for both Lucy and Linus to be pleased than for only Lucy to be pleased—but this is not because *pleasure* is getting better as more people experience it.

So claims about the intrinsic values of states of affairs cannot be reduced to claims about the intrinsic values of other things. Further, it seems that we need states of affairs as value bearers to make sense of familiar axiologies. Yet, with the abstractionist, I say that *only* states of affairs can be intrinsically good. How can this stronger claim be established?

Abstractionists appeal to considerations of *parsimony*.[8] If something that is not a state of affairs has intrinsic value, then it must be either a universal or a particular. But universals cannot have intrinsic value. The mere existence of a universal is not good in itself: we can take little comfort in absolute justice or perfect happiness if these qualities are never instantiated. When we say that universals are intrinsically good, we must instead mean that they are *good-making*. Ewing (1948, 116) remarks:

> 'Good'… is not properly applied to characteristics. When 'good' is applied to a characteristic of something it signifies not that the characteristic is intrinsically good itself, but that things which have the characteristic are in so far intrinsically good.

---

[4] (1903/1993, 171).

[5] My emphasis.

[6] Indeed, the restriction to states of affairs became sufficiently widespread that by the time of Harman (1967), it was uncontroversial that attributing intrinsic values to particular things involved a category mistake. Of course, this trend has reversed in the last thirty years.

[7] See also Bradley (2006).

[8] See e.g. Feldman (1986, 26).

So turn to particulars. I argue that if we allow both states of affairs and particular things to be intrinsically good, we must also allow for a pernicious kind of double-counting.[9]

First, note that the existence of an intrinsically valuable particular entails the existence of an intrinsically valuable state. Let *a* be some particular object that is intrinsically valuable. Morality is not arbitrary; if something is intrinsically good, there must be some reason.[10] So let *F* be the feature that makes *a* good. But if *a* is intrinsically good in virtue of *F*, then the state of affairs <*a* is *F*> must be intrinsically good also.

Take an example: suppose that Linus is valuable because he is kind. This entails that it is also good that Linus is kind. Or, to put it another way, it cannot be that:

Linus is good *because he is kind*.

Even though:

It is not good *that Linus is kind*.

But to say that it is intrinsically good that Linus is kind is to attribute value to the state of affairs <Linus is kind>.[11]

Thus, if we allow that both particulars and states of affairs may have intrinsic value, then the existence of an intrinsically valuable particular will entail the existence of an intrinsically valuable state. The resulting ontology of value is extravagant: it implies that intrinsic goods come 'two for the price of one' and so doubles the number of goods (and evils) in the world. We should choose: either particulars like Linus can be good or states like <Linus is kind> can be good—not both.

Some may object that in depriving particulars, such as persons, of intrinsic value, we damage their moral significance. And it is more important to preserve the moral status of persons than to cling to an austere formal axiology.[12] Like the abstractionist, I am unmoved by this objection: the kind of moral significance we attribute to persons is importantly different from intrinsic value. Intrinsic value comes in amounts and is to be promoted.[13] But the importance of persons is generally *not* taken to come in amounts and is generally *not* understood to be something we are obligated to promote (see e.g. Anderson (1997)). Persons may be intrinsically morally important—but this is not because they have the same kind of value that attaches to instantiations of pleasure, love, or understanding. If we wish to preserve the moral significance of persons *per se*, we can instead claim that persons possess moral significance because they have *inherent*

---

[9] Feldman (1995) (2000) introduces double-counting arguments to motivate the need for a distinction between basic and non-basic intrinsic value states; see also Tucker (2019).

[10] See e.g. Ewing (1948, 53).

[11] This argument might be understood as a development of an argument Ross presents; see his (1930/2002, 111).

[12] This objection relies upon the claim that persons are not states of affairs. This claim is not obviously true. There is an important distinction between *thin* and *thick* particulars. (See e.g. Armstrong (1997, 124–126) (2004, 105); see also Sider (2006)). A thin particular is an object abstracted from its properties; it is the *a* in <*a* is *F*>. A thick particular is a particular considered *with* all of its properties. Thick particulars are therefore plausibly understood as conjunctions of states of affairs. If we accept the distinction between thin and thick particulars, then the claim that Linus (as a thick particular) is intrinsically good is, in fact, consistent with the claim that only states of affairs have intrinsic value. However, though this defense is consistent with the factualist view I prefer, it is unclear that it is also consistent with *abstractionism*—thick particulars do not seem to be abstract, proposition-like objects.

[13] See Bradley (2006) and Bradford (2023) for further discussion of the relation between value and promotion.

worth or *dignity*.[14] And the abstractionist does not—and should not—claim that the only bearers of worth or dignity are abstract states of affairs.

2 | THE NATURE OF ABSTRACT STATES

Only states of affairs can possess intrinsic value. But how should we understand these entities?

Contemporary axiology has important (if mostly forgotten) roots in the attempt to develop a *logic* of intrinsic value. The project reaches a kind of zenith in Chisholm and Sosa (1966) and von Wright (1963).[15] Like deontic logics, logics of intrinsic value were understood as extensions of extant systems. Many philosophers simply employed propositional variables along with a new two-place connective to be read '… is intrinsically better than…'. Other systems allowed further precision: they assume the existence of some function from propositions or states of affairs (goods) to real numbers (intrinsic values).[16]

Abstractionism is a natural result of this movement—and the ontology of value assumed in Chisholm and Sosa (1966) is still dominant.[17] The sole bearers of value are finely-grained states of affairs; they are abstract, propositional entities. A state of affairs P is identical with another Q if and only if P entails Q and Q entails P.[18] Though every state of affairs exists in every world, states like <Lucy is pleased> obtain only in some.[19] States of affairs can be generated by familiar logical operations: there are conjunctive, disjunctive, negative, conditional, and universally- and existentially-quantified states of affairs.[20]

Chisholm claims that though all states of affairs are *proposition-like* only some are *propositions*.[21] A proposition is an *eternal* abstract state, a state of affairs that either always or never obtains. Those states that always obtain are true and those that never obtain are false. Truth is thus defined in terms of the more fundamental property of *obtaining*.

Few of Chisholm's successors insist on this distinction between mere states and propositions, however. Some abstractionists, like Feldman (1986), do not comment on the relation between

---

[14] We might object that inherent dignity is (i) a kind of value (ii) a kind of value that is intrinsic and so (iii) a kind of intrinsic value. I am unconvinced by this reply. I believe that value necessarily comes in amounts and so think of dignity as a kind of deontic property. But if I am mistaken, then I propose that we split the concept of intrinsic value. Such a split will not be difficult: we have two conceptual roles and so two kinds of intrinsic value to fit these roles. First, there is the kind of intrinsic value that comes in amounts and is to be promoted. This is the Moorean kind of intrinsic value with which the abstractionist and I are concerned. Second, there is the kind of Kantian intrinsic value that attaches to rational creatures, does not come in amounts, and does not call for promotion. See Bradley (2006), Tucker (2019).

[15] See also Åqvist (1968), Halldén (1966), and Zimmerman (1983). Contemporary debates in population ethics, such as debates over the transitivity of *better than*, may be seen as important successors to this project.

[16] See e.g. Harman (1967), Quinn (1974), Oldfield (1977), Feldman (1986, 28–29).

[17] This formal axiology and its underlying ontology are developed further in Chisholm (1968) (1972) (1975) and (especially) (1976, 114–126).

[18] The relevant notion of entailment is hyperintensional: P entails Q if and only if (i) necessarily, if P obtains then Q obtains and (ii) necessarily, if someone entertains P, then they also entertain Q. See Chisholm (1976, 118), Lemos (1994, 33), Perrine (2018).

[19] See Chisholm and Sosa (1966, 244), Chisholm (1976, 118–119), Lemos (1994, 21), Perrine (2018), and Wedgwood (2009).

[20] See Chisholm (1976, 114–124) as well as Zimmerman (1983), Feldman (1986, 26–33) (2000), Lemos (1994, 20–26), Carlson (1997), and Perrine (2018).

[21] Chisholm (1976, 122–124).

states and propositions but allow non-eternal states of affairs to have truth-values. Others, like Carlson (1997) and Perrine (2018), explicitly identify states of affairs with propositions.

States of affairs are not only propositional; they are *abstract*. I assume an orthodox view: an entity is abstract if and only if (i) it exists necessarily (ii) it lacks a spacetime location and (iii) it is non-causal.[22] I take this account to fit neatly with the spirit of abstractionism.[23] Abstractionists are happy to explicitly accept (i)—and from the propositional nature of states of affairs, (ii) and (iii) follow.[24]

Begin with location. We do not think we can *find* propositions or abstract states—an expedition to discover the location of <if Linus is human, Linus is a mammal> would be ill-conceived.[25] Such things do not exist in any particular place or at any particular time. Indeed, locations are irrelevant to the existence of abstract states: every state of affairs exists necessarily, and so exists even in worlds with no concrete spacetime system.[26]

Similar reasoning shows that abstract states of affairs are non-causal. If states of affairs are not in our spacetime system, it is unclear how they could affect it.[27] <Lucy threw the ball at t> cannot cause <the window broke at t^*>: both may exist even though there are no persons, balls, or windows. These states of affairs are not concrete events but unlocated, necessarily existing propositions about such events. As a result, states of affairs are best understood as standing outside the causal order: we cannot affect them, and they cannot affect us.

Finally, while states of affairs may be *about* concrete entities, they are not composed of *concreta*. Chisholm (1976, 114) remarks:

> States of affairs, as they are being considered here, are in no way dependent for their being upon the being of concrete, individual things. Even if there were no concrete, individual things, there would be indefinitely many states of affairs.

This conclusion can be supported by considering the modal features of states of affairs. Abstractionists say that states of affairs exist necessarily. But concrete things are contingent.[28] And a necessary thing cannot have a contingent thing as a part.

---

[22] I assume further that an entity is concrete if and only if it is not abstract. See Cowling (2017, 69).

[23] Unfortunately, abstractionists never indicate exactly what they mean by 'abstract'. I have therefore chosen an account of the nature of abstract things that is both orthodox and consistent with the other claims made by abstractionists. I do not assume that because this view is orthodox it is correct or immune from criticism. The distinction between concrete and abstract entities is deeply controversial—and both Cowling (2017, 69–92) and Liggins (2024, 1–16) present important critiques of the traditional view I provide. If the reader prefers some other account of the nature of abstract entities, they may understand the account I offer as mere stipulation: in what follows, we can simply replace the term 'abstract' with 'non-located, non-contingent, and non-causal'. Indeed, my arguments in what follows do not require that abstract states of affairs are abstract *per se* but merely that (i) they are proposition-like, (ii) they exist necessarily, and (iii) they are neither located nor causal.

[24] See Chisholm and Sosa (1966, 244), Chisholm (1976, 118–119), Lemos (1994, 21), Wedgwood (2009), and Perrine (2018). Other abstractionists, such as Feldman (1986) (2000) (2004), and Bradley (2002) say little about the modal nature of states of affairs but clearly presume that they exist necessarily.

[25] See e.g. Heck (2016), Cowling (2017, 76–77), Liggins (2024, 5).

[26] Further, many abstractionists explicitly allow that there are impossible states of affairs, i.e. states of affairs that cannot obtain (see e.g. Chisholm (1976, 119), Lemos (1994, 21–22)). It seems there is no time or place that such states could be.

[27] See e.g. Heck (2016), Liggins (2024, 4–5).

[28] There may be some theological exceptions to this claim (see Zimmerman (2001, 33–34)). However, I do not think such exceptions will be relevant to my project here.

Abstractionists nevertheless allow that states of affairs may have parts. But the only parts of a state of affairs are the other states of affairs that it entails.[29] Thus <Lucy exists> is a part of <Lucy is pleased>—but Lucy is not.

3 | ROSS'S OBJECTION AND ALIENATION FROM THE GOOD

I accept that abstract states can model intrinsic goods such as lives, relationships, and outcomes. And I have no fundamental objection to the logics developed by Chisholm and Sosa or their successors.[30] But abstractionists see these systems not only as formalizations of the logical relations between propositions about goods but as guides to the nature of value. They therefore claim that no concrete entities have intrinsic value, that intrinsic goodness lies exclusively in necessarily existing representations of things, that there is no fundamental division between the bearers of truth and falsity and goodness and badness. I believe that these claims are false—and that they unnecessarily divide us from the good.[31]

Begin with the most familiar objection to abstractionism, suggested in Ross (1930/2002, 113–114).[32] The objection appeals to just two claims. First, abstract states of affairs exist necessarily and so exist regardless of whether they obtain. Second, *obtaining* is not an intrinsic feature and so cannot be relevant to the intrinsic value of a thing—at least according to the familiar Moorean conception of intrinsic value, which nearly all abstractionists accept.[33]

Now, consider the abstract state of affairs <everyone is happy>. This state exists necessarily and would be intrinsically good if it obtained. Thus <everyone is happy> must also be intrinsically good *even if it does not obtain*, since *obtaining* is an extrinsic feature. So <everyone is happy> is intrinsically good in every possible world, including our own. But <everyone is happy> is not actually intrinsically good. "It is good that everyone is happy" implies that everyone *is* happy—and, of course, this is not true. In this way, the abstractionist conflates actual and counterfactual

---

[29] Abstractionists do nonetheless take seriously questions about the relation between the value of a whole and the values of its parts; see especially Feldman (2000), Lemos (1994, 32–47) (2022), and Perrine (2018).

[30] I would, however, deny that every abstract state of affairs corresponds with some actual bearer of intrinsic value; I do not think that e.g. <Lucy is pleased or there are stones> models *any* good. (See Zimmerman (1983)). Nor do I think there are negative, conditional, or quantified goods. As a result, many of the principles codified in standard logics of value are vacuous—or, at a minimum, require reinterpretation or paraphrase. More generally, I would caution that our logic of value should be informed by first determining the nature of intrinsic goods and then developing our models and axioms, not vice-versa. Sayre-McCord (1986) makes a similar point regarding deontic logic and theories of obligation.

[31] Though I find some parts of the abstractionist's ontology problematic, I will not comment on the underlying metaphysics here. As most philosophers do when debating questions in formal axiology, I follow an ontologically permissive methodology. (See e.g. Lemos (1994, 20–31), Kagan (1998), Feldman (2000), Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000), Zimmerman (2001, 33–73)). In particular, I allow that any relatively well understood type of entity may exist and eschew purely ontological objections. I therefore focus on questions of the form *given that Xs exist, could Xs be the bearers of intrinsic value?*

[32] This argument is sharpened in Lemos (1994, 24) and Zimmerman (2001, 48).

[33] The only exception I am aware of is Perrine (2018), who does not reject the Moorean claim but merely withholds judgment. Still, we might object that Ross's argument does not reveal a problem with the abstractionist proposal *per se* but merely a problem for abstractionism *when combined with* the Moorean claim that only the intrinsic features of a thing can affect its intrinsic value. This may be a viable response to Ross's objection—though I think few abstractionists will find it attractive. Still, the remainder of the arguments I present will not rely upon this controversial claim about intrinsic value and intrinsic features. So I think that rejecting the Moorean claim will not be sufficient to preserve the abstractionist view.

truths about intrinsic value: the state of affairs <everyone is happy> would be good, if it obtained. But it does not obtain and so is not good.

The abstractionist may claim that this conflation is necessary to preserve the theoretical utility of abstractionism. Wedgwood (2009, 329) writes:

> [I]t seems to me of great importance to ethical theory to be able to *compare* states of affairs that do not actually obtain; for example, we need to be able to say that the state of affairs of Chris's living to the age of 85 (free from disease and pain and the like) is better than the state of affairs of his dying at the age of 55. For this comparison between two entities to be true, it seems that both entities must exist. So it seems that there is a positive theoretical advantage to focusing on the degrees of value that are instantiated by abstract states of affairs that do not actually obtain.

Wedgwood is correct, of course, that we need to be able to ask about the values of things that do not obtain. But we can reconstruct these questions without assuming that states of affairs that do not obtain can be intrinsically good. The project is uncomplicated: we speak not of the intrinsic value of Chris's living to 85 but the value that state would have, if it were to obtain.

Ross's objection therefore opens a modal gap between intrinsic goods and the abstractionist's models of these goods. The bearers of intrinsic value—whatever they may be—are good only if they actually exist or obtain; the abstractionist's goods exist necessarily and have their value even if they do not obtain. But though this modal difference has often been the focus of the debate between abstractionists and their opponents, I argue that it is merely an instance of a larger problem.

The fundamental task of the axiologist is to rank goods according to their intrinsic values.[34] Among those goods are complex entities such as lives, projects, achievements, and so on. Yet our lives, projects, and achievements are not necessarily existing abstract states *even if they can be modeled by them.*

My life is ontologically fragile. As Parfit (1984, 351–355) notes, if history were only slightly different, none of us would have lived. My life is therefore concrete: it is contingent; it is located in time and in space; it was caused to exist and may cause the existence of other things. Indeed, it is these very features that structure our understanding of our existence—and our fears about the ends of our lives.[35] Similarly my relationships, achievements, and projects are not abstract: they are not necessarily existing, non-causal things that stand outside of time and space.

---

[34] See Moore (1903/1993, 78), Feldman (1995), and Lemos (2022).

[35] We might object that the ontological status of our lives is less clear than I suppose. We can reasonably ask whether we would want to *live our lives again* (see e.g. Blumenfeld (2009)). This suggests that our lives are types, not tokens. Of course, for any *concrete token life*, it will belong to some *abstract type*. But which is of axiological significance: the token or the type? When I think about the value of my life, I am primarily concerned with the thing *that I live*. But I am contingent and might not have existed. And if I did not exist, then my life—the thing I live—would not exist. So my life is contingent and depends for its existence on me. Yet an abstract type presumably exists necessarily. Thus when I am concerned with the value of my life, I am not concerned with the value of an abstract type. Further, types can (presumably) exist without their tokens. But in the same way that perfect justice does not have value if it is not instantiated, a type does not have value if it has no tokens. I suggest instead that the axiological role of abstract types is like that of properties: they may be *good-making* but they cannot be good. Thus if I say that my life is intrinsically good and speak truly, then I must be referring to a token, not a type.

Further, recall that abstract states are in no sense *constructed* from concrete things. So I am not a part of any abstract state. But I am, of course, a part of my life and my relationships. Thus, again, we must conclude that these goods cannot be abstract states.

As a result, the divide between abstract states of affairs and the goods they are supposed to model is not merely modal but *categorical*. Indeed, the fundamental task of the axiologist—to evaluate goods such as lives, relationships, and so on—is impossible if abstractionism is true; none of these things is an abstract state and so none of these things may possess intrinsic value.

This is a surprising result. The abstractionist view is often presented as innocuous; Wedgwood (2009, 327) writes:

> At the very worst, focusing exclusively on [abstract] states of affairs would be a harmless "housekeeping" move with no theoretical consequences of any importance.[36]

This claim is not true. If only abstract states of affairs have intrinsic value, then we are deeply disconnected from the good: nothing we have ever seen, experienced, or chosen can be intrinsically valuable. Indeed, the entirety of concrete reality is no better than some neutral abstract state of affairs, such as <there are stones>.

The abstractionist may reply that my concern is exaggerated. Though no concrete thing can have intrinsic value, we can nonetheless preserve the truth of claims about the intrinsic values of lives and other *concreta* by employing paraphrases. When we say e.g. that our lives are intrinsically good we mean only that there are some valuable abstract states which represent our lives.[37] In this way, though we cannot attribute value to concrete entities, we can make do with abstract states *about* concrete entities.

I find this reply unpersuasive. The paraphrases supplied seem backwards: I am concerned with *my life*—the very thing that I live, that has begun and will end, that can make a difference to the values of other lives, that has me as a constituent or part, and so on. I am not concerned, except perhaps derivatively, about the values of abstract states about my life. It is the concrete entities that abstract states are about that are intrinsically valuable, not vice-versa.

In the following sections, I appeal to two arguments to support this intuitive verdict. The first focuses on representation, the second concerns truthmaking.

4 | THE REPRESENTATION ARGUMENT

Abstract states are proposition-like. If we accept Chisholm's view, we will say that a proposition is simply an abstract state that either always or never obtains.[38] But propositions are *representational*.[39] The proposition <Lucy is happy at *t*> represents Lucy as being a certain way and is true if it represents Lucy as she is. Similarly <Lucy is happy at *t*> is *about* Lucy—not because it has Lucy as a part or constituent but because it *describes* or *represents* her.

It is not only eternal states of affairs that are representational, however, even if Chisholm is correct that only eternal states can be identified with propositions. Imagine a traffic light; suppose

---

[36] See also Feldman (1986, 26).

[37] This kind of defense is suggested in Bradley (2002), Perrine (2018), and (especially) Wedgwood (2009).

[38] Chisholm (1976, 122–124). If we instead identify abstract states with propositions, the argument only becomes simpler.

[39] See especially Merricks (2015, 189).

it is now green. The abstract state <the traffic light is green> will obtain. And though *obtaining* is not quite the same as being true, it seems again that this state is *about* the light and its being green and so must represent it.[40] It is because this state is about the traffic light that, as the light changes to red, <the light is green> ceases to obtain.

Thus there is a connection between abstract states and concrete reality because there is a connection between which states obtain and what our concrete spacetime system is like. The abstract state of affairs <*a* is *F*> obtains if and only if *a* is *F*. And this biconditional holds because abstract states *represent* or *describe* situations; they are about particulars and the universals they instantiate. Or, to put it another way: just as a proposition has the truth conditions it does because of the way it represents the world, an abstract state of affairs has the 'obtaining' conditions it does because of the way *it* represents the world.

These claims may seem innocuous. Yet if only abstract states can possess intrinsic value, then (i) the only bearers of intrinsic value are representations of concrete things but (ii) the things these abstract states represent have no intrinsic value.[41] This is an unacceptable conclusion. Why would *representations* of our lives, achievements, and relationships have intrinsic value, though our lives, achievements, and relationships have none?

Of course, it is possible for a representation to have value though what it represents does not: a good painting may represent something with negligible value. But the painting is *adding something* to what it represents—whether it be style, context, emotion, or perspective. In contrast, abstract states do not seem to add anything of value to what they represent.

We can therefore argue:

1. If abstractionism is true, then only abstract representations of concrete things can have intrinsic value.
2. But abstract representations of concrete things cannot have intrinsic value unless concrete things can have intrinsic value.
3. So abstractionism is not true.

Call this the *representation argument*.

How might the abstractionist reply? Of the two premises, the first seems weaker. The abstractionist might appeal to some non-representational theory of propositions and revise their account of abstract states of affairs accordingly. They could then claim that premise one is false: abstract states are not representational and so are not representations of concrete things.

This reply may seem promising—but I believe that it cannot succeed. Consider first those non-representational views which understand propositions as *properties*. Speaks (2014) is paradigmatic; he argues that the proposition <Lucy is pleased> is simply the property of *being such that Lucy is pleased*. This is a universal property, a property that either everything or nothing has. The proposition is true when it is universally instantiated and false otherwise. <Lucy is pleased> thus does not *represent* Lucy—properties are not, Speaks claims, representational. But nonetheless <Lucy is pleased> is true if and only if Lucy is pleased.[42]

---

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] Of course, some abstract states will not represent concrete things but only other *abstracta*. However, to my knowledge, no axiology attributes intrinsic value to states that are only about abstract entities. So I will ignore this complication here.

[42] Some might claim that properties *are* (or can be) representational. However, if this is so, then this would simply be further reason to conclude that Speaks' theory cannot help the abstractionist.

Speaks' theory is simple and powerful. But it is not open to the abstractionist. Abstractionism is motivated by the idea that neither concrete particular things nor properties are the bearers of intrinsic value; value does not reside in properties but in their *instantiations*. But if properties cannot be the bearers of intrinsic value, then the abstractionist cannot identify abstract states with properties.

Other non-representational accounts of propositional entities look similarly unhelpful. According to *circmustantialist* theories, a proposition is just a *set of truth conditions*.[43] In its most familiar form, this view claims that a proposition is the set of possible worlds in which it is true.[44]

Yet if the only bearers of intrinsic value were whole possible worlds, we would have little knowledge of the good and so become disconnected from it. The problem is only amplified by the claim that goods are not individual worlds but vast sets of them. Further, for the same reason that states of affairs which do not obtain lack intrinsic value, merely possible entities lack intrinsic value. It therefore seems unwise to understand the claim "it is intrinsically good that Lucy is pleased" as a claim about a very large (or even infinite) set consisting almost entirely of merely possible worlds.

Of course there are other non-representational theories; perhaps they could overcome these concerns. Still, I believe there is a *general* problem with any version of abstractionism which allows that states of affairs are non-representational.

Recall that abstractionists say that we can understand sentences such as "my life is intrinsically good" to mean "abstract states of affairs *about* my life are intrinsically good." In so doing, they assume that abstract states of affairs about my life are a viable substitute for it. But if abstract states are not representational and so about nothing, then *a fortiori* there are no abstract states about concrete things. Thus the non-representational abstractionist has no way to explain how sentences such as "my life is intrinsically good" might be true.

The abstractionist may reply that they can develop new substitutes for concrete goods. Those who prefer an ontology of non-representational propositions often suggest that representation emerges from propositional attitudes, not their objects.[45] Thus the proposition that Lucy is pleased does not represent Lucy. But when we *believe* this proposition, *we* represent Lucy as being pleased.

By appealing to these claims, the non-representational abstractionist may hope to preserve the paraphrases proposed. They attribute value not to propositions which represent *concreta* but to propositions such that we represent *concreta* when we believe these propositions.

It is important to be clear about what this proposal comes to, however. The abstractionist now claims that the substitute for my life will be some abstract entity (say, a proposition) that *is not my life*, does not *contain me or my life*, exists *independently of my life*, and is not *about my life*. But this proposition is nevertheless valuable in itself and a reasonable substitute for my life. And it is a reasonable substitute simply because when we believe this proposition, we correctly represent my life.

I find this claim implausible. I think my life, the contingent thing I live, is intrinsically good. I think the same is true of my relationships with those I love. I am therefore skeptical of any

---

[43] I borrow this terminology from Georgi (2019), who also provides a helpful summary of the metaphysics of propositions and representation. For criticism of non-representational approaches more generally, see especially Merricks (2003) (2015, 82–120).

[44] See e.g. Stalnaker (1984). Quinn (1974) explicitly claims that the bearers of intrinsic value are propositions and that propositions are sets of possible worlds. It is unclear, however, if Quinn's account is suggested merely as a model of goods or as a genuine claim about their nature.

[45] See e.g. Speaks (2014, 216).

attempt to replace lives, relationships, and other concrete goods with abstract states of affairs. But if such a substitution is to succeed, it must be founded on a close and significant relation between concrete goods and their substitutes. Yet the relation between concrete goods and their non-representational substitutes is neither close nor significant.

5 | THE TRUTHMAKER ARGUMENT

I argue that only concrete *facts* can possess intrinsic value. We can begin to see the appeal of this view—and develop an additional objection to abstractionism—by focusing on truthmaking.

What is true depends on what exists: truths require *truthmakers*. In his important (2004, 5), Armstrong writes:

> The idea of a truthmaker for a particular truth, then, is just some existent, some portion of reality, in virtue of which that truth is true. The relation is, I think, a cross-categorical one, one term being an entity or entities in the world, the other being a truth…The 'making' here is, of course, not the causal sense of 'making'. The best formulation of what this making is seems to be given by the phrase 'in virtue of'. It is in virtue of that independent reality that the proposition is true.

Many endorse *maximalism* about truthmaking: every truth must be made true by something. However, like Asay (2020, 79–91) (2023, 23–25), I am skeptical that *every* truth needs a truthmaker. Some claims, such as negative existentials, are *not about* what exists and so we should not expect that such claims are made true by what exists. I appeal only to a weaker claim: *truths about things that exist must be made true by what exists*. Truths about Lucy must be made true by Lucy and her environs; they cannot float free of how things are. However, since all plausible examples of intrinsic goods are about things that exist, we can ignore this complication for now.

With ideology in place, I turn to argument. Propositions are a kind of states of affairs.[46] In particular, a proposition is a state of affairs that either always or never obtains. Thus some states of affairs are truths. And truths require truthmakers.

Further, when a state of affairs that is *not* a proposition obtains, there must be something that makes it obtain. The state of affairs <Lucy is pleased> cannot obtain without assistance from Lucy. If this state of affairs holds, it holds because of Lucy and the universals she instantiates. So every valuable abstract state that obtains will have something that makes it true (or makes it obtain)—a *concrete correlate*.

What are these concrete correlates? The most common answer is that truthmakers are *concrete states of affairs* or *facts*. Armstrong (1997, 116) writes:

> We are asking what in the world will ensure, make true, underlie, serve as the ontological ground for, the truth that *a* is F. The obvious candidate seems to be the state of affairs of *a's being F*. In this state of affairs (fact, circumstance) *a* and F are brought together.

---

[46] Again if we reject Chisholm's view and simply identify propositions with abstract states, then the argument only becomes simpler.

Like Armstrong, I understand facts as concrete: they are contingent, they have locations in time and space, and they possess causal powers. (Simply consider facts such as [Lucy hitting Linus in the back of the car on Tuesday]).[47] Indeed, facts may be understood as the *relata* of the causation relation.[48] An atomic fact consists of an *n*-place universal instantiated by *n*-many concrete particulars. Molecular facts may be formed by mereological sum (conjunction). There are no disjunctive, negative, or quantified facts.[49] And there are no facts that do not obtain. Facts are not propositional; they cannot be true or false. Rather, they make up part of the 'furniture of reality'.

Is it the truth or the truthmaker that has intrinsic value? The concrete fact [Lucy is pleased] makes the state of affairs <Lucy is pleased> obtain—and thus the obtaining of this abstract state of affairs seems to *ontologically depend* upon the fact. Similarly, if the state of affairs <Lucy is pleased> is intrinsically valuable, its value seems to depend on the value of the fact [Lucy is pleased]. What is fundamental is not the thing that *describes* Lucy but Lucy's concrete circumstance.

We can reinforce this point by returning to the concerns that Ross raised. Consider again the universally quantified abstract state <everyone is happy>. If we grant this abstract state intrinsic value, then we must admit that its value seems to depend not only on *whether* it obtains but *what makes it obtain*. The state of affairs <everyone is happy> is *better* when it is true because there are countless contented souls, rather than just one. Indeed, for any 'indeterminate' abstract state—i.e. a state that might obtain in many different ways—its value seems to depend on the value of the determinate, concrete situation that makes it obtain. But if indeterminate states derive their value from the concrete situations that make them obtain, then it would be *ad hoc* to claim that perfectly determinate states do not also derive their value from the concrete situations that make them obtain.

Thus we may argue:

1. If abstractionism is true, then abstract states are the sole bearers of intrinsic value.
2. But abstract states derive their values from the values of the concrete facts that make them obtain.
3. So abstractionism is not true.

Call this *the truthmaker argument*.

I believe we should attribute intrinsic value to truth*makers*, not truth*bearers*, and I suggest with Armstrong that we understand truthmakers as concrete facts.[50] This proposal maintains the abstractionist insight that the bearers of intrinsic value are not particulars or universals but

---

[47] More generally, I assume that concrete facts are located wherever the concrete particulars that make them up are located (though this view becomes more complicated when we consider facts that have spacetime relations as constituents; see Armstrong (1997, 135–138)). And I assume that our concrete spacetime system is simply the mereological sum of all concrete facts.

[48] See Armstrong (1997, 204–205).

[49] See e.g. Armstrong (1997, 134).

[50] Bradley (2004) rightly stresses that any formal axiology that appeals to a contested ontology is in danger of being rejected outright by those who do not accept that ontology. I am unconvinced that this objection can be avoided: bundle theorists reject the existence of particulars, nominalists reject the existence of abstract objects, and so on. I think the concrete facts I appeal to are no more objectionable than the abstract states that abstractionists employ; indeed, concrete facts are widely accepted in approaches to ontology which focus on either grounding or truthmaking. However, if the reader objects to concrete facts, then there may be other entities that can play a similar axiological role, such as tropes, structured events, and so on—as long as such entities are contingent, causal, capable of making propositions true, and can be conjoined in

instantiations of universals. But it denies that these instantiations are abstract or proposition-like. My life is a contingent, concrete thing which consists of my instantiating various properties and standing in various relations—i.e. my life is a *mereological sum of contingent, concrete facts* that have me as a constituent. And much the same can be said for our relationships, achievements, and so on. Further, by our actions, we can make certain valuable facts exist.

The factualist proposal therefore reconnects us with the good. Value does not reside only in abstract things: it can be a part of our lives, experiences, relationships, and actions.[51] We do not need to search for substitutes for these goods. Rather, we can attribute value to the very facts that make up our existence. Factualism therefore embodies the rejection of a widespread, but deeply alienating, Platonism about value.

6 | THE EXPRESSIVE POWER OF FACTUALISM

We can better understand the factualist proposal by considering objections to it. Abstractionists warn that if we restrict ourselves to concrete goods, we will limit our expressive power. Lemos (2022) argues that sentences such as:

> *It would be intrinsically better for someone to be pleased than for a billion people to suffer.*

are clearly true but are literally false on views like mine; indeed there can be no concrete fact of the form <someone is pleased>.

This concern can be answered. Whenever it is true that someone is pleased, there will be some concrete state that makes it true. Call the 'smallest' state that makes this proposition true its *minimal truthmaker*. We can say that A is a minimal truthmaker for B when A makes B true, but no proper part or constituent of A makes B true.[52] Many propositions will have more than one minimal truthmaker; e.g. the truth that someone is pleased will be made true by every fact of the form [x is pleased].

With these definitions in place, we may say that the claim:

> *It would be intrinsically better for someone to be pleased than for a billion people to suffer.*

May be understood as:

> *Any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that someone is pleased would be intrinsically better than any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that a billion people are suffering.*

---

such a way that we may plausibly believe that complex goods like lives are made up of these entities. Dropping any of these conditions would allow the same arguments I have advanced against the abstractionist to reappear.

[51] Of course, we may also wish to speak of the value of merely possible entities, such as possible worlds; here the factualist proposal does less well. If I am correct that only things that actually exist or obtain may have intrinsic value, then no (merely) possible world can be intrinsically good. This does not eliminate axiological questions about worlds; it only requires that we reimagine them. We ask not what the value of a possible world *is* but what facts *would exist* if that world were actual—and what the intrinsic values of these facts would be.

[52] See Armstrong (2004, 19–20). For refinement and defense of the notion of minimal truthmakers, see O'Conaill and Tahko (2016).

This paraphrase strategy may seem to fail when applied to comparisons involving negative existentials.[53] Consider:

> *It would be intrinsically better for someone to be pleased than for no one to be pleased.*

If we follow the paraphrase strategy outlined, we obtain:

> *Any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that someone is pleased would be intrinsically better than any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that no one is pleased.*

But what can make *no one is pleased* true? Some propose the existence of negative facts or absences; others say that the *whole world* makes negative existentials true.[54] I find these replies unattractive. As I have mentioned, I believe that negative existentials are not about what exists and so are not made true by something's existence. Thus there can be no minimal truthmakers for the claim *no one is pleased*. So:

> *Any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that someone is pleased would be intrinsically better than any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that no one is pleased.*

May be replaced by:

> *Any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that someone is pleased would be better than nothing.*[55]

What is the intrinsic value of nothing? This is a vexing question, familiar from the literature on the harm of death and the non-identity problem. I hope we can avoid this question here: I say only that *A is intrinsically better than nothing* is functionally equivalent with *A has positive intrinsic value*. (And *mutatis mutandis* for *A is intrinsically worse than nothing*.) If this is correct, we may arrive at our final paraphrase:

> *Any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that someone is pleased would have positive intrinsic value.*

---

[53] I am thankful to Noah Lemos for raising this concern.

[54] See e.g. Cameron (2008).

[55] Thus, for any good, this strategy provides the same paraphrase for every comparison between that good and a negative existential. For example: (i) "it would be intrinsically better for someone to be pleased than for no one to be pleased" and (ii) "it would be intrinsically better for someone to be pleased than for no one to suffer" will both be paraphrased as (iii) "any minimal truthmaker for the proposition that someone is pleased would be better than nothing." This may seem objectionable—(i) and (ii) are not synonymous with each other and thus cannot be synonymous with (iii). However, I do not believe that an acceptable paraphrase must be synonymous with the sentence it replaces. Following Quine (1960, 160) and Keller (2015) (2017), I take a successful paraphrase to be a replacement that can do the same work as the sentence it replaces. This does not require synonymy, though it does require that the entities we paraphrase away are given reasonable substitutes. "The cheese has three holes" may differ in meaning from "there are three non-overlapping spacetime regions entirely surrounded by cheese". But the latter is nonetheless an acceptable paraphrase for the former, as non-overlapping spacetime regions surrounded by cheese are reasonable substitutes for holes in cheese. Thus in paraphrasing (i) and (ii) as (iii), I do not claim that these sentences are equivalent in meaning. But I do claim that *nothing* is a reasonable axiological substitute for abstract states which take the form of negative existentials.

I take this to be a plausible interpretation of the claim that it would be better for someone to be pleased than for no one to be pleased.

The abstractionist may reply that my defense is hypocritical. In considering the ways in which abstractionism divides us from the good, I argued against a paraphrase strategy: we cannot reasonably reinterpret claims about the intrinsic values of concrete goods as claims about abstract states of affairs. But why think that paraphrases are permissible in defense of factualism but not abstractionism?

In reply, I stress that my concern about the abstractionist's paraphrases is not about paraphrase *per se* but paraphrases that invoke unacceptable substitutes for goods. It seems to me plain that my life, projects, relationships, and so on may be intrinsically valuable—and, as I have argued, these things cannot be replaced by abstract states of affairs, especially if abstract states are non-representational.

Of course, it is plain also that it would be bad for a billion people to suffer. But it is, I think, far less clear *which thing or things* we are evaluating when we hold that it would be bad for a billion people to suffer. The abstractionist says we are evaluating a *single, actually existing thing*: the indeterminate, abstract state <a billion people are suffering>. The factualist says instead that our evaluation is counterfactual: we are concerned with the concrete situations that would make this indeterminate abstract state obtain, if they existed.

Even putting the representation and truthmaking arguments aside, I find the factualist interpretation of "it is bad for a billion people to suffer" at least as plausible as the abstractionist's. And so I deny that there is any hypocrisy in my defense: the paraphrases I suggest do not invoke implausible substitutes for goods—and so are unlike the paraphrases that the abstractionist proposes.

7 | FACTS AND CONCRETE EVENTS

I close by considering how factualism can avoid two objections lodged against a similar (and perhaps more familiar) position in formal axiology. This position claims that the sole bearers of intrinsic value are concrete, coarse-grained *events*. The nature of these events is familiar from Davidson (1970) (1985); their axiological significance is forcefully defended in Tännsjö (1999). Coarse-grained events are unstructured entities; they are not made up of particulars and universals. Further, unlike facts, coarse-grained events are individuated by their spacetime locations. If they occur at the same time and place, then *my writing*, *my writing slowly*, *my writing while it is Tuesday*, and *my writing while the sun is out* will be merely different accounts of the same event.

Views like Tännsjö's have many of the virtues of factualism. In particular, they avoid Ross's objection (there are no coarse-grained events that do not obtain); they allow us to speak plainly about the values of lives, relationships, outcomes, and the like (as long as we understand such goods as unstructured concrete events); and they do not disconnect us from the good. Further, since coarse-grained events are not propositional, Tännsjö's view is not vulnerable to the representation or truthmaker arguments.

Yet, as abstractionists have made clear, we have good reason to reject coarse-grained events as the bearers of intrinsic value. Bradley (2002) (2006) notes that axiologists must be able to distinguish between goods such as *Lucy is pleased* and *Lucy is pleased that Linus is in pain*. The abstractionist can accommodate such distinctions with ease: these goods have different entailments and so are not identical. But suppose that *Lucy is pleased* and *Lucy is pleased that Linus is*

in pain occur at the same time and in the same place. They will then be identical on views like Tännsjö's.

This has significant axiological implications. If we accept Tännsjö's view, we must accept either (i) *Lucy is pleased* and *Lucy is pleased that Linus is in pain* necessarily have the same intrinsic value or (ii) identical events may have differing intrinsic values depending on how they are described. The first option eliminates an entire class of axiologies by ontological fiat. And the second option implies that the value a thing has *in itself* can vary with the way we describe it. Neither option is acceptable.

We may worry, however, that this objection generalizes to the factualist position I prefer. Facts need not be as fine-grained as abstract states; indeed, some metaphysicians argue that the only facts are those that involve fundamental properties and relations. So why assume we will have all the concrete facts we need? Why assume e.g. that there will be facts of the form [Lucy is pleased] *and* [Lucy is pleased that Linus is in pain]?

I believe this concern can be answered. The problem is ultimately about the individuation of *universals*, not the individuation of *facts*. Any instantiation of an *n*-place universal by *n*-many concrete particulars is a fact; thus the number of possible facts is determined by the number of universals and particulars. So the question is: will we have enough *universals* to say all that we need?

The answer is surely *yes* if we accept an *abundant* account of properties, according to which there is a universal for every meaningful predicate. But even if properties are *sparse*, we may remain optimistic.

According to a popular account, the set of sparse or fundamental properties is the minimal set of universals such that the truth of everything can be secured by the distribution of these universals.[56] I believe that there are truths about intrinsic value and so insist that these truths must be guaranteed as well. I therefore say that if it is true that there is a distinction in value between Linus being pleased and Linus being pleased that Lucy is suffering, then we may help ourselves to the relevant universals we need to explain this difference. Thus *if there is a truth to express about axiology*, we will have the ontology to express it.

A second objection to views like Tännsjö's appeals to the necessity of intrinsic value. Like Moore (1922/1960, 260) (1942/1968, 588), nearly all abstractionists insist that the intrinsic value of a thing does not depend upon its context; if something is intrinsically good, then it is necessarily intrinsically good. Call this the *necessity principle*. The necessity principle is often thought to play an important axiological role: it ensures that the intrinsic value of a thing *persists in isolation*; it allows that the intrinsic value of a thing might be known *a priori*; it supports the claim that the intrinsic value of a whole need not be equal to the sum of the values of its parts.

Yet it is unclear that concrete events could have their values necessarily. Feldman (2000, 326–327) writes:

> [W]e may want to make a number of claims about the modal features of intrinsic value. For example, we may want to say that each thing has its intrinsic value of necessity. But, there is no consensus about the modal features of concrete events. Consider the concrete event that consists in Bob's being happy to degree +10 at 9:00PM. Could it have happened a bit earlier in the evening? Could it have involved a slightly smaller amount of happiness? Could it have happened to Babe instead of to

---

[56] See Schaffer (2004).

> Bob? *If the item in question is truly "concrete", I see no way to assure negative answers to these questions.*[57]

I agree with Feldman that if we wish to uphold the necessity principle, we should be skeptical that coarse-grained concrete events are the sole bearers of value. But I believe this is not because such entities are concrete, but because they are individuated by their spacetime locations. The factualist proposal I have advanced individuates facts by their constituents and claims that facts have their constituents necessarily. As a result, I argue that factualism can also support the necessity principle.

I proceed by cases. Goods can be divided into two classes: atomic goods and complex wholes. A good is *atomic* when its intrinsic value does not depend on the intrinsic values of its parts. We often restrict our attention to these atoms: the view that e.g. pleasure is the only good is, I believe, best understood as the view that the only atoms of intrinsic goodness are pleasures.[58] *Complex wholes* include goods such as lives and outcomes. Some are mere sums. The values of these goods are entirely determined by the values of their atoms. Other complex goods are organic unities.[59] The value of an organic unity depends not only on the values of its atoms, but on the relations that hold between them.

Begin with the atoms of value. Here I follow Zimmerman (2001, 63). To uphold the necessity principle, we claim that the intrinsic value of an atom depends only on its *constituents*. Thus imagine that [Lucy is pleased] and [Lucy loves Linus] are atoms of value. We say the first is intrinsically good because it has *pleasure* as a constituent; the second is good because it has *love* as a constituent. But it is impossible for a concrete state to gain or lose a constituent. So these facts have their value of necessity.

Further, for any atom of value A that appears to have its intrinsic value in virtue of some feature F which is not a constituent of A, there will be some wider state that includes this feature as a constituent; this will (in general) be a state of the form $[A \text{ is } F]$. If we are attracted to the claim that intrinsic value is a necessary kind of value, we should insist that this wider state is the true atom of value. Indeed, it is only the wider state that can play the explanatory role that is often given to intrinsic goods: such goods must contain, within them, everything necessary to explain their value and the value of everything that derives from them.

Now consider complex goods. Mere sums are handled easily. A mere sum is an intrinsic good that is a conjunction of facts, and the value of a mere sum is entirely determined by the values of the atoms it has as conjuncts. But (i) a conjunction has its conjuncts necessarily and (ii) the value of an atom depends only on its constituents, which are essential to it, so it follows that (iii) the value of a mere sum is also necessary.

Finally, let us consider organic unities. The intrinsic value of an organic unity is not entirely determined by the values of its atoms. Imagine that O is an organic unity with two atoms, A and B. Since O is an organic unity, its value depends both on the values of its atoms and the relations between them. Let R be the relevant axiological relation between A and B. Now either O contains the state of affairs $[A \text{ stands in } R \text{ to } B]$ as a part or it does not. If it does,

---

[57] My emphasis. Lemos (2021) explicitly suggests that this concern might generalize to views which allow that the only bearers of intrinsic value are concrete states of affairs.

[58] See Feldman (2000).

[59] See Moore (1903/1993, 79).

then, again, the value of the whole will depend only on it having the parts it does.[60] If *O* does not have [*A* stands in *R* to *B*] as a part, we should insist that it is the state of affairs [*O* & [*A* stands in *R* to *B*]] that is the true bearer of value. Again, only the wider state contains within it everything needed to explain its value. So the intrinsic value of an organic unity is necessary also.

8 | CONCLUSION

The abstractionist proposal is closely tied to contemporary axiology. But though the abstractionist view has been fruitful—and has served as the basis for some of the most important work in axiology over the last century—it must be rejected. In identifying abstract models of intrinsic goods with the goods themselves, we are forced to sever our connection with the value in concrete, contingent reality. The problem is serious but avoidable. Factualism stands as a powerful alternative.[61]

ORCID

Miles Tucker https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3444-5863

REFERENCES

Anderson, E. (1993). *Value in Ethics and Economics*. Harvard University Press.

_____ (1997). "Practical Reason and Incommensurable Goods." In R. Chang (Ed.) *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason* (pp. 90–109). Harvard University Press.

Åqvist, L. (1968). Chisholm-Sosa Logics of Intrinsic Betterness. *Noûs*, 2, 253–270. https://doi.org/10.2307/2214721

Armstrong, D. (1997). *A World of States of Affairs*. Cambridge University Press.

_____ (2004). *Truth and Truthmakers*. Cambridge University Press.

Asay, J. (2020). *A Theory of Truthmaking*. Cambridge University Press.

_____ (2023). *Truthmaking*. Cambridge University Press.

Blumenfeld, D. (2009). Living Life Over Again. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 79, 357–386. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2009.00282.x

Bradley, B. (2002). Is Intrinsic Value Conditional? *Philosophical Studies*, 107, 23–44. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1013165112545

_____ (2004). *The Nature of Intrinsic Value* by Michael Zimmerman. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 69, 492–494.

_____ (2006). Two Concepts of Intrinsic Value. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 9, 111–130. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-006-9009-7

Bradford, G. (2023). Uniqueness, Intrinsic Value, and Reasons. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 120, 421–440. https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil2023120825

Cameron, R. (2008). How to be a Truthmaker Maximalist. *Noûs*, 42, 410–421. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2008.00687.x

---

[60] Note that if *O* does contain [*A* stands in *R* to *B*] this does not imply that *O* is not truly an organic unity. The thesis of organic unities requires that the value of the whole is not equal to the sum of the values of the atoms it as parts. Thus *O* will fail to be an organic unity only if (i) [*A* stands in *R* to *B*] is a value atom and (ii) the value of *O* is equal to the sum of the intrinsic values of *A*, *B*, and [*A* stands in *R* to *B*]. I see no reason to think that either (i) or (ii) must be true.

Chisholm, R. M., & Sosa, E. (1966). On the Logic of 'Intrinsically Better'. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 3, 244–249.

Chisholm, R. M. (1968). The Defeat of Good and Evil. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 42, 21–38. https://doi.org/10.2307/3130021

———— (1972). "Objectives and Intrinsic Value." In R. Haller (Ed.) *Jenseits von Sein und Nichtsein* (pp. 261–269) Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt.

———— (1975). The Intrinsic Value in Disjunctive States of Affairs. *Noûs*, 9, 295–308. https://doi.org/10.2307/2214633

———— (1976). *Person and Object*. Open Court Press.

———— (1981). Defining Intrinsic Value. *Analysis*, 41, 99–100. https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/41.2.99

———— (1986). *Brentano and Intrinsic Value*. Cambridge University Press.

Cowling, S. (2017). *Abstract Entities*. Routledge.

Davidson, D. (1970). Events as Particulars. In *Essays on Actions and Events* (pp. 181–188). Oxford University Press.

———— (1985). Reply to Quine on Events. In *Essays on Actions and Events* (pp. 305–312). Oxford University Press.

Ewing, A. C. (1948). *The Definition of Good*. Routledge.

Feldman, F. (1986). *Doing the Best We Can*. D. Reidel Publishing Company.

———— (1995). Mill, Moore, and the Consistency of Qualified Hedonism. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 20, 318–331. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.1995.tb00319.x

———— (1997). On the Intrinsic Value of Pleasures. *Ethics*, 107, 448–466. https://doi.org/10.1086/233744

———— (1998). Hyperventilating about Intrinsic Value. *The Journal of Ethics*, 2, 339–354. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1009751305610

———— (2000). Basic Intrinsic Value. *Philosophical Studies*, 99, 319–346. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1018614917379

———— (2004). *Pleasure and the Good Life*. Oxford University Press.

Georgi, G. (2019). Propositions, Representation, and Truth. *Synthese*, 196, 1019–1043. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-017-1492-y

Halldén, S. (1966). Preference Logic and Theory Choice. *Synthese*, 6, 307–320. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00485085

Harman, G. H. (1967). Toward a Theory of Intrinsic Value. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 64, 23: 792–804. https://doi.org/10.2307/2024086

Heck, R. G. (2016). The Existence (and Non-existence) of Abstract Objects. In P.A. Ebert & M. Rossberg (Eds.), *Abstractionism: Essays in Philosophy of Mathematics* (pp. 50–78). Oxford University Press.

Hurka, T. (1998). Two Kinds of Organic Unity. *The Journal of Ethics*, 2, 299–320. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1009795120631

Kagan, S. (1998). Rethinking Intrinsic Value. *The Journal of Ethics*, 2, 277–97. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1009782403793

Keller, J. A. (2015). Paraphrase, Semantics, and Ontology. *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, 9, 89–128.

———— (2017). Paraphrase and the Symmetry Objection. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 95, 365–378. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2016.1168457

Kim, J. (1976). Events as Property Exemplifications. In M. Brand & D. Walton (Eds.), *Action Theory* (pp. 159–177). D. Reidel Publishing Company.

Korsgaard, C. (1983). Two Distinctions in Goodness. *The Philosophical Review*, 92, 169–195. https://doi.org/10.2307/2184924

Liggins, D. (2024). *Abstract Objects*. Cambridge University Press.

Lemos, N. (1994). *Intrinsic Value: Concept and Warrant*. Cambridge University Press.

———— (2021). What is Basic Intrinsic Value? *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 24, 33–43. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-021-10167-7

———— (2022). Defeat, Pluralism, and Indispensable Goods. *Philosophical Studies*, 179, 3039–3053. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-022-01818-1

———— (2023). Conditionalism, Intrinsicalism, and Pleasure in the Bad. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 107, 692–705. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12941

Merricks, T. (2003). The End of Counterpart Theory. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 100, 521–549. https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil2003100101

———— (2015). *Propositions*. Oxford University Press.

Moore, G. E. (1903/1993). *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge University Press.

_____ (1922/1960). The Conception of Intrinsic Value. In *Philosophical Studies* (pp. 253–275). Routledge & Kegan Paul.

_____ (1942/1968). A Reply to my Critics. In P.A. Schlipp (Ed.), *Philosophy of G.E.Moore* (pp. 533–677). Open Court.

O'Conaill, D., & Tahko, T. (2016). Minimal Truthmakers. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 97, 228–244. https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12064

Oldfield, E. (1977). An Approach to a Theory of Intrinsic Value. *Philosophical Studies*, 32, 233–249. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00354136

Parfit, D. (1984). *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press.

Perrine, T. (2018). Basic Final Value and Zimmerman's The Nature of Intrinsic Value. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 21, 979–996. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-018-9938-y

Quine, W. V. O. (1960). *Word and Object*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

Quinn, W. S. (1974). Theories of Intrinsic Value. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 11, 123–132.

Rabinowicz, W., & Rønnow-Rasmussen, T. (2000). A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for its Own Sake. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 100, 33–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0066-7372.2003.00002.x

Ross, W. D. (1930/2002). *The Right and the Good*. Oxford University Press.

Sayre-McCord, G. (1986). Deontic Logic and the Priority of Moral Theory. *Noûs*, 20, 179–197. https://doi.org/10.2307/2215390

Schaffer, J. (2004). Two Conceptions of Sparse Properties. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 85, 92–102. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0114.2004.00189.x

Sider, T. (2006). 'Bare Particulars'. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 20, 387–397. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2006.00112.x

Speaks, J. (2014). "Representation and Structure in the Theory of Propositions." In *New Thinking About Propositions*. Eds. King, J. C., Soames, S. and Speaks, J., (pp. 215–225) Oxford University Press.

Stalnaker, R. (1984). *Inquiry*. MIT Press.

_____ (1999). A Concrete View of Intrinsic Value. *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 33, 531–536. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1004619330737

Tucker, M. (2019). From an Axiological Standpoint. *Ratio*, 32, 131–138. https://doi.org/10.1111/rati.12219

Von Wright, G. H. (1963). *The Logic of Preference*. Edinburgh University Press.

Wedgwood, R. (2009). Intrinsic Values and Reasons for Action. *Philosophical Issues*, 19, 321–342. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-6077.2009.00172.x

Zimmerman, M. (1983). Evaluatively Incomplete States of Affairs. *Philosophical Studies*, 43, 211–224. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00372384

_____ (2001). *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.