

CHAPTER 8

MONISM AND PLURALISM ABOUT VALUE

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At the start of Plato's *Philebus*, Socrates sums up the two views that he and Protarchus will be discussing:

Philebus says that the good for all animate beings consists in enjoyment, pleasure, delight, and whatever can be classed as consonant therewith, whereas our contention is that the good is not that, but . . . thought, intelligence, memory, and things akin to these, right opinion and true reasoning. (Plato 1958, 11b)

Philebus holds, in a word, that “pleasure is the good,” Socrates that “knowledge is the good.”¹ On each of these views, there is just *one* kind of good. Each is thus a form of *monism* about the good. A more ecumenical approach would allow that both pleasure and knowledge are good—and perhaps other things as well, such as love, beauty, and virtue. This is *pluralism* about the good.

This chapter explores some of the important facets of the contemporary debate between monism and pluralism in axiology. We will begin by explaining what value monism and pluralism are (section 8.1), and will then consider some important arguments bearing on the question (section 8.2).

Whether monism or pluralism is true may have implications for other areas of moral philosophy. For example, if pluralism is true, it may be more difficult to hold a reductionist metaethic about axiological properties. This is because goodness would then be “multiply realizable,” which stands in the way of identifying it with any particular nonevaluative property. Susan Wolf (1992) argues that one kind of pluralism makes possible an attractive, moderate relativist metaethic that doesn't devolve into a troublingly expressivist or subjectivist one. Others believe that value pluralism supports a liberal political system in which there are strong protections for individual freedom.² Some forms of pluralism are also thought to have perplexing practical

implications, for example, that in some situations none of our choices would be justified, or that in other situations, no matter what we do, there is reason to regret it. These we will discuss later.

8.1. WHAT ARE AXIOLOGICAL MONISM AND PLURALISM?

One familiar kind of pluralism in moral philosophy holds that there are a plurality of basic *moral obligations*, such as those codified in the Ten Commandments or in W. D. Ross's list of prima facie duties (Ross 1988 [1930]: 19–22). This kind of pluralism competes with the monistic theories of moral obligation of Mill (1863), whose single fundamental creed is the principle of utility, and Kant (1997 [1785]), for whom the supreme principle of morality is the categorical imperative. But our topic here is not monism and pluralism about moral obligation but rather *axiology*, which studies not right and wrong but *good* and *bad*.

8.1.1. Axiological Preliminaries

We will be concerned with two axiological notions. One is the kind involved in Socrates's remarks above: judgments as to something's being good or bad *for us*. These include judgments as to someone's being well or badly off, being benefited or harmed, or having a good or a bad life. We will call these *welfare* judgments.³

We also make judgments as to some state of affairs or outcome being simply a good or a bad state of affairs or outcome. Unlike welfare judgments, these kinds of judgment are not explicitly relational: we are not saying that the state of affairs is good or bad *for* someone (although that is often also true, and in fact is often what makes it a good or a bad state of affairs); we are saying that it is simply a good or a bad situation. We can call these judgments of value simpliciter. They appear in ordinary language in remarks such as, "The situation in the Philippines is quite bad," and "It's a good thing that the forest didn't burn down."

Some judgments contain both axiological notions, as when it is claimed that it's a bad thing when the wicked are well off. Henry Sidgwick intuited the grander thought that "the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other" (1907: 382). I'll stipulatively refer to welfare and value simpliciter as *axiological value*.

Axiological value should not be confused with moral value, a sort of value had paradigmatically by actions and agents, as when we speak of a "good deed" or a "bad man." Axiological judgments should also be distinguished from the following sorts of value judgment: "This is a good umbrella," "Thumbscrews are good for inflicting pain," "'Aubade' is a good poem," "Laticia is good at sudoku," and "Samuel Jackson was good in

Snakes on a Plane.”⁴ Our focus is on the two concepts of axiological value, or “‘the good’ as this is often understood in philosophical discussion, . . . a notion of how it would be best for the world to go, or of what would be best for particular people” (Scanlon 1998: 79).

Another distinction in axiological value cuts across the distinction between welfare value and value simpliciter. This is the familiar distinction between *intrinsic value*, the value something has in itself or as an end, and *instrumental value*, which something has, for example, when it is a means to something with intrinsic value.⁵ It’s good to have money, but having money is of course of no intrinsic benefit; if it couldn’t get you anything else, it would not be worth having. Money is good insofar as having it can get you things of intrinsic value, such as, say, enjoyment (on Philebus’s view) or intelligence (on Socrates’s view).

In order to understand monism and pluralism, we also need to distinguish between two different ways in which a thing can be intrinsically good. Axiologists are primarily interested in discovering which things have what we can call *basic* intrinsic value, in contrast to *derivative* intrinsic value. A state of affairs has its intrinsic value *derivatively* when it has it in virtue of the intrinsic value (or values) of some more basic state of affairs (or states of affairs) of which it is composed or constituted. Perhaps the most familiar kind of entity with derivative intrinsic welfare value is a *life*. A person’s life, if he is lucky, will be a good life for him. Its goodness for him will be intrinsic—it’s not as if his life is good for him because of something further that it brings about for him. But its intrinsic value will be derivative, at least in part: it will be explained, at least in part, in terms of the intrinsic value of some of the components of that life, or some of the events that take place within it. And some such events will, in turn, have their intrinsic value basically or fundamentally—that is, not in virtue of values had by the more basic states that might compose them.⁶

When we are wondering whether monism or pluralism in axiology is true, we are wondering about value at the most fundamental level, that is, *basic, intrinsic* value. We are not wondering, for example, whether instrumental value is unitary or diverse, for it is uncontroversial that it is diverse. Even if just one kind of thing is intrinsically, basically good, for us and for the world, a plurality of different kinds of thing will tend to bring about this one kind of thing, and thus be of instrumental value.

8.1.2. Monism and Pluralism about Value Properties

We have drawn distinctions between several kinds of value: welfare, value simpliciter, moral value, and a number that we didn’t label. Drawing these distinctions makes possible the first thing we might be monists or pluralists about: *value properties themselves*. In his contribution to this volume, Ralf Bader characterizes Kant as endorsing “Value Dualism” on the grounds that Kant “recognizes two distinct types of value, namely (1) moral value, and (2) prudential value” (Bader, chapter 10 in this volume). On this sort of pluralism, it’s not that there is more than one morally good thing or more than

one prudentially good thing (though that might also be true), it is that there is more than one value *topic*. I'll call this *pluralism about value properties*, or *value property pluralism*.⁷ For value property pluralism to be true, it is not enough that we can draw distinctions in thought between the putative value properties of prudential value, value simpliciter, moral value, aesthetic value, and so on. The distinctions, or at least some of them, must be *irreducible*. That is, it must be that there is no single one of the value properties in terms of which all of the other value properties can be analyzed.

Taking into account all the evaluative categories, it would be surprising if value property monism were true. But *axiological value property monism* has a better chance of being true, since it attempts to reduce just two evaluative categories—our two axiological notions—down to one. G. E. Moore is attracted to this view (1903: § 59). Puzzled by the notion of welfare, Moore asks, “What, then, is meant by ‘my own good’? In what sense can a thing be good *for me*?” He suggests that this just means “that my possession of it is good *simply*” (Moore 1903: 98). Moore is thus suggesting that we analyze welfare in terms of value simpliciter. This is one form of axiological value property monism.⁸

It is also possible to be an axiological property monist “in the other direction.” That is, one might analyze intrinsic value simpliciter, a notion of which some are suspicious, in terms of welfare, about which skepticism is less common (this differential in perceived dubiousness is one motivation for such a reduction).⁹ On this theory, to say that a state of affairs is intrinsically good simpliciter is just to say that it contains a positive balance of welfare.¹⁰

It is also possible to be an axiological property monist not because one thinks that an analysis of one axiological property in terms of the other is possible, but because one denies the very intelligibility of one of the notions, or at least denies that it has any instances. Thomas Hobbes (1991 [1651]: ch. 6) evidently rejects the notion of value simpliciter, holding that all value is value *for*.¹¹ Judith Thomson (2008) and Richard Kraut (2011) hold similar views today.¹² And in fact G. E. Moore is sometimes interpreted as being an eliminativist rather than a reductionist about welfare.

There is also the less parsimonious option. Henry Sidgwick, for instance, believes in both welfare and value simpliciter but does not appear to think that one is definable in terms of the other. This is connected to his well-known doctrine of the dualism of practical reason, a doctrine that troubled Sidgwick, due to its possible implications for practical decision-making (1907: 496–509; see also Bader, chapter 10 in this volume). We will discuss the practical implications of value property pluralism in section 8.2. To be sure, being a pluralist about axiological properties does not imply pluralism about which kinds of thing have each kind of value. Indeed, Sidgwick himself was a monist (what I below call a “substantive monist”) about both welfare and value simpliciter (Sidgwick 1907: 3.14).

8.1.3. Substantive Monism and Pluralism

The core issue of monism versus pluralism in axiology is, for each axiological notion, whether to be a monist or a pluralist about it. To be a monist about it is to hold, to a first approximation, that there is just one kind of thing that has this kind of value, to be a

pluralist that there is more than one such kind of thing. We can call these views *substantive* axiological monism and pluralism.¹³

8.1.3.1. *Substantive Monism about Welfare*

Welfare monism is, to a first approximation, the view that just one thing makes our lives better and just one thing makes our lives worse. The oldest and simplest such view is *hedonism*, the Phileban view in Plato's dialogue, which holds that pleasure is the one thing of ultimate benefit to us and pain the one thing of ultimate harm. Though hedonism about welfare is thought to be less popular than it used to be, it very much continues to be discussed, clarified, refined, and defended today, and is in any case an important starting point for theorizing about welfare (see Feldman 2003; Crisp 2006; Mendola 2006; Tännsjö 2007; and Bradley 2009: ch. 1). A similar and possibly even equivalent monistic theory claims that welfare is constituted by *happiness* (Sumner 1996; Feldman 2010).

Another well-known version of monism about welfare, probably more popular today, is *desire satisfactionism*, which holds that our lives are made better just when we get what we want (see Carson 2000; Heathwood 2005; Oddie, chapter 4 in this volume). Such a theory is often assumed by welfare economists, perhaps because it is thought to make welfare easier to measure (Sumner 1996: 113–22). Related monistic theories claim that welfare is constituted by the realization of our *aims* (Rawls 1971: 92–93, 417), or, alternatively, our *values* (Raibley 2010). Many such theories appeal not to our actual desires or aims but to our rational or idealized desires or aims.¹⁴

A third prominent general kind of welfare monism is *perfectionism*, which holds that what ultimately makes our lives worth living is developing those traits that are essential to and/or distinctive of us, or are simply virtues or excellences in their own right.¹⁵ While many forms of welfare monism are *subjective* theories, in the rough sense that, according to them, our well-being consists not in what we get in life but in our attitudes about what we get, monism should not be confused with subjectivism. Perfectionism is an objective, or attitude-independent, welfare monism, as are some forms of hedonism.

8.1.3.2. *Substantive Pluralism about Welfare*

Substantive pluralism about welfare is, to a first approximation, the view that there are an irreducible plurality of basic goods (or bads) for us. The set is irreducible in the sense that nothing in the set is such that its value can be wholly explained by appeal to the value of other items in the set. In other words, each good must be put forth as both genuinely *intrinsic* and *basic*.

Although there is large overlap between the two views, pluralism about welfare should not be identified with “objective list theory” (Parfit 1984: 4). While subjective theories tend to be monist, we can imagine pluralist subjective theories, such as one that puts forth happiness, desire satisfaction, and aim achievement as its list of basic intrinsic goods. Also, if one-item lists are allowed, then objective list theories can be monistic. Hedonism is sometimes thought of as such a theory.

Which items tend to appear on pluralists' lists? Derek Parfit (though he does not commit to pluralism) mentions "the development of one's abilities, knowledge, and the awareness of true beauty" (Parfit 1984: 3). James Griffin's list comprises, roughly, accomplishment, autonomy, understanding, enjoyment, and deep personal relations (Griffin 1986: 67–68). Martha Nussbaum's list is longer still, including life, health, bodily integrity, emotional attachment, practical reason, affiliation, play, and more (Nussbaum 2000: 77–80).¹⁶ Some forms of pluralism about welfare are pluralistic at least in part because they hold that holistic features of a person's life—such as whether the life generally improves over time, whether the life has variety, or whether tragedies early in life are redeemed by accomplishments later on—contribute directly to how good the life is (see Velleman 1991; Feldman 2004: ch. 6; Lemos 2010).

8.1.3.3. *Which Things Are Good versus What Makes Them Good*

A certain distinction in the theory of well-being is relevant to whether a theory is ultimately monistic or pluralistic. William Frankena suggests that a theory of welfare should answer not only the question of *which things* are good as ends for us but the question of *what makes* them good (Frankena 1973: ch. 5; see also Moore 2000: 78 and Crisp 2006: 622–23). In order to be truly monistic, a theory of welfare must have a monistic answer to the second question, the question of good-makers. The theory must claim that for all the things or states that are intrinsically good for us, they are all made good for us by the same single feature. A rational aim theorist might offer a list of what she takes the rational aims to be, or a perfectionist might offer a list of what he takes the human perfections to be. That these lists contain a plurality of items would not suffice to make their theories pluralistic. This is because, for each item, the fact that it is good would be explained in each case by the same one thing: its being a rational aim, or its being a human perfection. Truly pluralistic theories, by contrast, will typically hold that, for each good kind of thing on the list, it is, so to speak, its own good-maker. For example, the theory might say that not only are states of health intrinsically good states for us to be in, they are intrinsically good states for us to be in simply because they are states of health. To say that a good is its own good-maker is really just a way of saying that it is a *basic* intrinsic good.¹⁷

8.1.3.4. *Monism and Pluralism about Value Simpliciter*

Pluralism about value simpliciter is explicitly endorsed by G. E. Moore and W. D. Ross. Ross's list of goods is quadripartite: simplifying somewhat, it comprises virtuous disposition and action; deserved, innocent pleasure; the apportionment of pleasure and pain to the virtuous and vicious respectively; and knowledge (Ross 1988 [1930]: ch. 5). For Moore, the greatest goods are personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful (Moore 1903: § 113), but Moore also countenances the value of the mere existence of beautiful things (§ 50) and, with less conviction, of mere consciousness (§ 18). Ross explicitly denies that aesthetic enjoyment deserves its own place on the fundamental list. He regards it as a "a blend of pleasure with insight into the nature of the object that

inspires it,” and thus believes that its value is already fully accounted in his theory by the appearance of pleasure and knowledge on his list (Ross 1988 [1930]: 141).

Recent defenders of substantive pluralism about value simpliciter include Noah Lemos, whose list includes, among many of the items already receiving mention, “the flourishing of some forms of non-sentient life” (Lemos 1994: 99) and Robert Audi, who emphasizes, among other things, the intrinsic value of doing the right thing (Audi 2004). Substantive pluralism about value simpliciter is also a commitment of anyone who believes in the intrinsic, basic value of distributional goods, such as equality. Axiological egalitarians believe that although it matters how much total welfare an outcome contains, it also matters, in itself, how that welfare is distributed (see Holtug, chapter 14 in this volume).

8.1.4. Radical Pluralism: The Fragmentation of Axiological Value

We’ve yet to mention a third main kind of pluralism, one that is more radical—and consequently more philosophically interesting—than the views described thus far, but which is by no means a peripheral view among those who describe themselves as pluralists about value.¹⁸ To understand the view, it helps to appreciate some of its motivations, so our discussion here will encroach on section 8.2’s presentation of the arguments for the various theories. We’ll consider a welfare value version of this more radical pluralism.

We begin with the substantive pluralist idea that several distinct kinds of thing—such as those appearing on the lists above—help to make our lives better. And we are impressed by two phenomena: (1) apparent *incomparability*, or how value comparisons between instances of the different goods don’t always seem possible, even in principle; and (2) apparent *uncompensability*, or how losing out on an instance of one of the goods is sometimes not fully made up for by receiving a better instance of a different good. These thoughts may suggest that not even substantive pluralism is enough. For on substantive pluralism about welfare, the various good things all still have the same one kind of goodness, the one and only kind of welfare goodness that, on this view, there is. This common currency is thought to make substantive pluralism unable to accommodate the phenomena of incomparability and uncompensability. What is needed, it is thought, is the idea that each of the welfare goods is valuable *in its own way*. A loving relationship, for instance, has a loving-relationship-ish kind of welfare value, and a great achievement has a great-achievement-ish kind of welfare value. Aristotle may have had something like this in mind when he wrote, “the notions of honour and wisdom and pleasure, as being good, are different and distinct. Therefore, good is not a general term corresponding to a single Idea” (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.6, qtd. in Stocker 1990: 168).

This sort of pluralism combines the two earlier pluralisms. It is a substantive pluralism because it is not just a claim about what the value topics are; it advances substantive

claims about which things in fact have value, saying that a plurality of different kinds of thing do. But it is also a kind of value property pluralism, since it holds that there are a plurality of different welfare value properties. Indeed, for each different kind of good thing, there may be a unique welfare value property that only it can have. We will call this view *radical pluralism*.¹⁹

Two issues concerning radical pluralism are worth thinking about further, though I have space only to mention them here. First, we should be open to the possibility that we might combine welfare value property pluralism with substantive welfare *monism*. Some have wondered whether comparability fails even on the theories ostensibly most friendly to it, such as hedonism. Franz Brentano (1902: 27) writes,

how foolish would any one appear were he to assert that the pleasure he had in smoking a good cigar increased 127, or, let us say, 1077 times in intensity yielded a measure of the pleasure experienced by him in listening to a symphony of Beethoven or contemplating one of Raphael's madonnas!

A hedonist, the paradigm monist, might thus be tempted to say that the pleasures of cigar smoking make our lives better in a different way—in a cigar-smoking-pleasure kind of way—than do the pleasures of symphony-listening, which have symphony-listening-pleasure value. An instance of one of these goods might be thought to be incomparable to and uncompensable by an instance of the other. Such a theory, even if still in some sense a form of monism (since there is still just one overarching good-making property, *being pleasurable*), would also be a form of welfare value property pluralism.

The second issue concerning radical pluralism is that one might doubt the very coherence of the picture. As we have been discussing it, the goods that are each good in their own unique, sometimes incomparable, sometimes uncompensable, way all manage to make our lives better. That is, they are all welfare goods. Thus is there not still some general common currency of welfare value after all, standing in the way of incomparability and uncompensability? Or is the existence of the plurality of specific welfare value properties that the theory posits enough to deliver incomparability and uncompensability, despite the further existence of the generic welfare value property?

8.1.5. Further Problems in Understanding Substantive Monism and Pluralism

We have suggested that substantive monism is the view that there is just one intrinsically and basically good kind of thing and one intrinsically and basically bad kind of thing, while pluralism is the view that there is more than one of at least one of these kinds of thing. But there are problems with this characterization. One concerns how to individuate kinds. The problem works at both ends, by threatening to turn an intuitively

monistic theory into pluralistic one, and threatening to turn an intuitively pluralistic theory into a monistic one.

Hedonists hold that pleasure is the good. But there are many kinds of pleasure. There are intellectual pleasures, aesthetic pleasures, gustatory pleasures, and so on. These are different kinds of thing. Thus is hedonism, the paradigmatic monistic axiology, in fact a form of pluralism, since it admits that many different kinds of thing are intrinsically, basically good? Indeed, Socrates's own description of hedonism as the view "that the good for all animate beings consists in enjoyment, pleasure, delight, and whatever can be classed as consonant therewith" might have made us wonder earlier whether it is really a monistic doctrine.

To see the problem at the other end, consider a pluralism on which both pleasure and knowledge are intrinsically, basically good. Here (perhaps) is a kind of thing: the kind *being an instance of either pleasure or knowledge*. The pleasure I experienced when drinking coffee this morning and the knowledge I acquired while reading the paper were both instances of this single good. Can this theory thus be understood to be a form of monism, since it holds, or can be understood as holding, that there is just one intrinsically and basically good kind of thing: *being an instance of either pleasure or knowledge*?

Perhaps we can resolve this problem by focusing not on the question *Which things are good?*, but, once again, on the question *What makes them good?* Consider my state of gustatory pleasure in sipping my morning coffee as well as your state of intellectual pleasure in completing a logic proof. Each of these states is intrinsically, basically good, according to hedonism. We can ask the hedonist, of each state, *What makes it good?* Although they are different kinds of state—one is a gustatory pleasure, the other an intellectual pleasure—I should think that the hedonist would give the same answer in each case, namely, *that it is a state of pleasure*. That is the reason, for each of these different kinds of state, that it is intrinsically, basically good.

But what about the following alternative explanation as to why my state of gustatory pleasure is intrinsically good: *that it is a state of gustatory pleasure*? Arguably, this would not be the correct explanation (or at least not the deepest or most basic correct explanation). It would be like saying that this state of affairs is intrinsically good *because it is a pleasure that occurred on a Tuesday*. The extra fact of its gustatory-ness or its Tuesday-ness in fact plays no role in explaining why the state is good, and thus is not, strictly speaking, a part of the explanation (or at least not part of the deepest explanation). If this is right, then this provides an account of why hedonism is a form of monism: it is a form of monism because, for each basically, intrinsically good thing, the reason (or at least the most basic reason) that it is basically, intrinsically good is the same one reason in each case: its being a state of pleasure.

The focus on good-making may also help in explaining why intuitively pluralistic theories are pluralistic. Consider again the view that both pleasure and knowledge are intrinsically basically good. Why, on this theory, is the pleasure I received when drinking coffee this morning intrinsically basically good? The answer, it would seem—or at least the deepest answer—is simply *that it is a state of pleasure*. The correct explanation would intuitively *not* be that the state is intrinsically basically good because *it is either a state of pleasure or a state of knowledge*. *It's being a pleasure* is in fact the explanation (or,

again, at least the deepest explanation). Likewise for the knowledge I acquired while reading the paper: it is intrinsically basically good, on this theory, simply because it is an instance of knowledge. This axiological theory, then, is a form of pluralism because, according to it, for each basically, intrinsically good thing, there is more than one possible explanation of why it is basically intrinsically good: that it is a state of pleasure is one; that it is a state of knowledge is another.²⁰

There are further classificatory puzzles that we don't have space to investigate. One concerns theories on which distinctions among the sub-kinds of a good kind are evaluatively relevant. For example, unlike simpler hedonists, J. S. Mill holds that pleasures of the intellect are intrinsically more valuable than equally intense and long-lasting pleasures of mere sensation (Mill 1863: ch. 2). Should this make Mill a pluralist? I don't know what the intuitive answer is (if there is one), but the account sketched above would presumably classify him as a monist, since presumably, for either an intellectual or a sensory pleasure, what makes it good on Mill's theory is simply *that it is a pleasure*, that is, the same one thing in each case.

8.2. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST MONISM AND PLURALISM

Since monism and pluralism about the same axiological notion are logically incompatible, arguments for one are necessarily arguments against the other. It is thus often arbitrary whether to describe a certain argument as an argument for (or against) pluralism as opposed to an argument against (or for) monism. Thus, in what follows, we'll simply enumerate and describe a number of arguments that bear on the topic.

8.2.1. The Straightforward Argument for Substantive Pluralism

The most straightforward, and perhaps the most common, reason to be a substantive pluralist is that there is reason to think that a certain kind of thing is intrinsically, basically good and also reason to think that a certain other kind of thing is intrinsically, basically good. Such arguments tend to appeal to basic intuitions about intrinsic value.

A nice illustration of the straightforward argument with respect to value simpliciter involves W. D. Ross's "two states of the universe" arguments (Ross 1988 [1930]: ch. 5). In one, Ross begins by aiming to show that virtuous action and disposition, such as the desire to relieve others from suffering, is intrinsically good. In support of this, Ross writes:

It seems clear that we regard all such actions and dispositions as having value in themselves apart from any consequence. And if anyone is inclined to doubt this and

to think that, say, pleasure alone is intrinsically good, it seems to me enough to ask the question whether, of two states of the universe holding equal amounts of pleasure, we should really think no better of one in which the actions and dispositions of all the persons in it were thoroughly virtuous than of one in which they were highly vicious. (Ross 1988 [1930]: 134)

Next, Ross writes:

It seems at first sight equally clear that pleasure is good in itself. Some will perhaps be helped to realize this if they make the corresponding supposition to that we have just made; if they suppose two states of the universe including equal amounts of virtue but the one including also widespread and intense pleasure and the other widespread and intense pain. (Ross 1988 [1930]: 135)

If these are sound arguments—and they certainly have intuitive appeal—then pluralism about value simpliciter is true.²¹

The straightforward argument is also advanced for welfare as well. In a recent paper Christopher Rice writes:

Loving relationships . . . are judged to be good for people *because* they involve reciprocal love. Similarly, meaningful knowledge is judged to be good for people *because* it involves appropriately justified beliefs about meaningful truths. (Rice 2013: 202)

Rice adds that we intuitively do *not* judge that these things are good for people merely because people have positive attitudes toward these things.

The straightforward argument is arguably stronger in the case of value simpliciter than in the case of welfare. For there is a certain widespread intuition about welfare that cuts against pluralism about welfare (because it supports subjectivism about welfare), whereas there is no corresponding intuition about value simpliciter. Peter Railton states the intuition about welfare in the following well-known passage:

what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him. (Railton 1986: 9)

Another straightforward argument for pluralism about welfare appeals to Robert Nozick's famous "experience machine" thought experiment, in which we have the choice to live out the rest of our lives on a machine that feeds us convincing, pleasurable illusions (Nozick 1974: 42–45). Some people have the intuition that such a life, though more pleasant than a normal life, would be less good. This suggests that pleasure isn't the only good thing in life, and thus that pluralism about welfare is true.

However, there is an alternative, monist-friendly explanation of why the experience-machine life is less good: it contains less desire satisfaction. This explanation is

monist-friendly because it is available to a desire satisfactionist. Some have argued, however, that the package of explanations on the topic provided by the pluralist is superior (Lin, forthcoming).²²

If substantive pluralism does indeed do better justice to widely shared evaluative intuitions, as these arguments may suggest, then monists may reply by arguing that these intuitions should be rejected. One strategy is to argue for monism on other grounds (such as the arguments to be discussed below), and then to appeal to these premises to show that the anti-monistic intuitions must thus be mistaken. This would require that the premises in the pro-monistic arguments be more compelling than the anti-monistic intuitions. A more comprehensive case would include an error theory for these intuitions, or an explanation of why we would have them if they are false. Some monists have offered this. One kind of argument notes that it is a common mistake to attribute intrinsic value to highly reliable instrumental values (cf. Smart 1973). If we get pleasure or desire satisfaction whenever we gain new knowledge or appreciate great art, perhaps this causes us to judge, mistakenly, that knowledge and aesthetic appreciation are good in themselves. Another kind of error-theoretic argument claims that, for each of a number of putatively valuable things, it would be advantageous, evolutionarily or otherwise, to be disposed to believe that it has intrinsic value, even if it does not (Crisp 2006: 637–39). Such arguments must be approached by monists with caution, however, as they risk debunking all evaluative intuitions.

8.2.2. The Argument from the Explanatory Inadequacy of Substantive Pluralism

For much of what has been said so far in this chapter, we might wonder why we should even call attention to the categories of monism and pluralism in the first place. Shouldn't we just try to figure out which things are good in themselves and what makes them good? Of what philosophical significance is it whether the best theory turns out to be monistic or pluralistic? The answer is that a number of important arguments in axiology turn on precisely the issue of *how many* goods or good-makers there are, in relative abstraction from what the goods or good-makers happen to be. Thus we can be given reasons to be a monist or a pluralist relatively independently of the particular variety of monism or pluralism.

One such argument concerns the alleged explanatory inadequacy of substantive pluralism (Bradley 2009: 16; Schroeder 2012: § 2.2.1). Suppose that someone puts forth these as the basic goods: accomplishment, autonomy, understanding, enjoyment, and deep personal relations. The list seems random; a natural question is, Why these goods? If these five really are the basic, intrinsic goods, and no other candidate (virtue, self-respect, developing one's capacities, etc.) makes the list, shouldn't there be some explanation for this? If there isn't, then the theory fails to explain something that may intuitively need explaining. If there is an explanation for this, it would presumably come in the form of some criterion for inclusion on the list. Such a criterion would identify the feature that

the things on the list have in virtue of which they make the list. In other words, it would be telling us the one thing that makes these things good. But then the theory, appealing as it does to a single good-making feature, would have become a form monism!

What to make of this argument? Perhaps it's possible for the true theory of welfare to be less explanatorily adequate (cf. Rice 2013: 205). If there really are an irreducible plurality of basic goods, then ipso facto the explanatory demand cannot be met. Perhaps, then, the demand is question-begging against pluralism. It might be rejoined that, surely, all else equal, the theory that leaves less unexplained is more likely to be true. The pluralist might accept this principle, but claim that not all else is equal, since pluralism better accounts for the phenomena (as reflected, for example, in the straightforward arguments above). To say this, however, is essentially to concede that pluralism has a feature that makes it less likely to be true. If that's right, then the argument from explanatory inadequacy would be a successful philosophical argument, which is not to say a decisive one.

But the pluralist may have a different reply available, a *tu quoque* reply. For we can pose the same question to the monist; we can ask her, *Why this one good?* If her single good (or single good-maker) really exhausts the list of basic goods (or good-makers), and no other candidate makes the list, shouldn't there likewise be some explanation for *that*? It's not clear that the monist will be able to answer this question any more easily than the pluralist can answer his. If so, and if the explanatory demand is just as reasonable when the good is unitary as when plural, then the explanatory adequacy argument for monism fails.²³

8.2.3. The Argument from Uncompensability for Radical Pluralism

We caught a glimpse of the argument from uncompensability when we introduced radical pluralism above. The argument begins by calling our attention to a certain phenomenon: that in some choice situations, even when one knows that a certain option is the better option, something appealing or desirable remains about the worse option that isn't fully made up for, or compensated, by anything in the better option. As it is sometimes put, it is reasonable to regret your not getting the worse option, even though it is the worse option.

We can use a case of Michael Stocker's for illustration:

Suppose we are trying to choose between lying on a beach and discussing philosophy—or more particularly, between the pleasure of the former and the gain in understanding from the latter. (Stocker 1990: 172)

Let's suppose that it would be a modest gain in understanding but quite a pleasant rest on the beach so that your day would go better for you if you were to lie on the beach than if you were to discuss philosophy. Still, there is something attractive about philosophical insight that is wholly missing from lazy sunbathing, so that you feel that you are sacrificing something.

Contrast this with a case in which one is choosing between, say, a medium-sized chocolate milkshake and a large chocolate milkshake.²⁴ Suppose it would be better to get the large milkshake. In this case, there is nothing in the medium-sized milkshake that is not made up for in the large. It would be senseless to have the sense that, in forgoing the smaller shake for the larger, one has missed out on something that is lacking in the large. Regret would be clearly irrational here. But regret does not seem so irrational in the earlier case.

What does this show? Some believe that it is evidence that a radical pluralism is true (Stocker 1990: ch. 6). On radical pluralism, if you choose the better option of lying on the beach, then, while you'll get a better day, your day will lack a certain kind of value—philosophical-understanding-value—a value property totally missing in the other option. This may explain why the regret, or the sense of having missed out on something, is reasonable. For this to be a successful argument for radical pluralism as against competing theories, it must add the further premise that competing theories cannot adequately explain why such feelings would be reasonable.

Is that further premise true? A substantive pluralism that countenances the basic value of both pleasure and understanding can certainly say, fully and literally, that there is something valuable in the worse option that is wholly absent from the better option, namely, understanding. So the question is whether, on substantive pluralism, that loss of understanding is compensated for by the (ex hypothesi more valuable) pleasure in the better option. For the argument for radical pluralism to work, the radical pluralist needs the answer to be, "Yes, substantive pluralism does imply that the loss of understanding is fully compensated for." In support of a yes answer, the radical pluralist may say that, on substantive pluralism, the choice is ultimately between two quantities of the same stuff: welfare. So just as it would be silly to regret not getting the small milkshake, so too would regret be silly in this case, if substantive pluralism is true. In support of a no answer, the substantive pluralist might advance a certain thesis about rational regret, to the effect that regret can be justified simply on the basis of the nature of the good thing itself that was missed out on—in this case the understanding itself. It need not have its own special value property; that it is a good thing and is a *different kind* of good thing is enough to make the regret for not having gotten it reasonable (cf. Hurka 1996). After all, what is worth getting and worth wanting isn't the *value property* but the valuable *thing*. So can't the valuable thing itself, rather than the value property, justify a certain attitude? Against this suggestion, the radical pluralist may insist that the less good valuable thing can justify regret only if it is *valuable in a different way* from the better option—that is, only if radical pluralism is true.

Interestingly, the argument from uncompensability seems to pose no special challenges for substantive monism beyond those it poses for substantive pluralism (cf. Hurka 1996). That is, considerations of uncompensability do not seem to favor substantive pluralism over substantive monism. It might be said that hedonistic substantive monism goes wrong in the case above because it fails to recognize the intrinsic value of understanding. That might be true, but such an argument has nothing to do with uncompensability; it is simply a version of the straightforward argument for pluralism

(see section 8.2.1 above). To make the argument about substantive monism's ability to explain uncompensability, we can change the case, to one of comparing the pleasures of lying on the beach with the *pleasures* of discussing philosophy. But about such a case, it seems that whatever the substantive pluralist said above in attempting to justify the regret can be said by the substantive monist here. This is because the pleasures are so different: the pleasures of lazing on the beach are quite unlike the pleasures of discussing philosophy. Since both are good things, but are such different good things, the monist can attempt to explain the regret in just the way suggested above for the substantive pluralist.

Against the contention that considerations of uncompensability do not favor substantive pluralism over substantive monism, one might appeal to a case in which the pair of pleasures being compared are not so different in kind. But the more similar the pleasures become, the more the regret will seem irrational, as in the milkshake case. Notice, too, that if the traditional substantive monist feels that her explanation of the regret is not in the end successful, she can become a "radical monist"; that is, she can posit a plurality of value properties (lying-on-the-beach-pleasure-value, philosophical-discussion-pleasure-value, etc.), just as a substantive pluralist can (see section 8.1.4 above).

According to the reply to the uncompensability argument for radical pluralism that we have been considering, competing views can adequately explain the rationality of the regret. An alternative reply simply denies the rationality of the regret. If it really would give you a better day to lie on the beach, maybe regret would be childish or pathological. This reply can be bolstered by the observation that it is certainly rational to regret that one must choose between the two good things—that one can't have both. Perhaps when we have the thought that regret is rational in these cases, *that* is what we are thinking. But then these cases would provide no support for radical pluralism, since the competing views straightforwardly accommodate that thought (see Schaber 1999 and Klocksien 2011).

Against this point, recall the milkshake case. Suppose that it is regrettable that we can't have *both* the medium and the large milkshake. The point above would seem to predict that we would have a tendency to confuse this regretability with regretability over not having chosen the smaller milkshake. That is, it predicts that we should have the intuition that after one has correctly chosen the large shake, it is rational to regret not having chosen the smaller one. But, as noted above, we don't have this intuition.

8.2.4. Comparability Arguments

Considerations related to value comparability have been appealed to both in support of and against pluralism. Both kinds of argument make use of the idea that there will be incomparability if, and only if, goods are plural. Incomparability occurs when there are two things that are both intrinsically, basically good, but (1) neither is better than the

other and (2) nor are they equally good. They simply stand in no comparative evaluative relation at all.

Monists might use this against pluralists. They might claim that the incomparability implied by pluralism itself implies that justified choice between such goods is impossible. Because justified choice is always possible—it can never be that whatever you do, you do wrong—pluralism must be false. Pluralists, for their part, may use the idea against monists, claiming that incomparability is required to do justice to the complexity of our practical lives.

Why think that pluralism begets incomparability? First consider the following. Suppose yesterday you received both some enjoyment and some understanding. Suppose I ask, Which did you get more of, enjoyment or understanding? Plausibly, that question has no answer. It simply makes no sense to suppose that there might be more or less enjoyment in some situation than there is understanding (provided at least that there is some of each). That is like supposing that the speed of the earth might be greater than its size.

Next, notice that the analogous claim concerning things of the same kind seems to fail: it *does* make sense to think that there might be more or less enjoyment in some situation than there is enjoyment in some other situation. That two states of enjoyment are comparable in terms of quantity, while a state of enjoyment and a state of understanding are not, may suggest that the *values* of two states of enjoyment are comparable, while the *value* of a state of enjoyment and the *value* of a state of understanding are not. This is the main line of reasoning from pluralism to incomparability (Stocker 1990: 166–67).

But is this even true for every pair of enjoyments? What about Brentano's idea that it is absurd to suppose that the amount of enjoyment some person receives in listening to Beethoven might be greater, by some precise amount, than the enjoyment he receives in smoking a cigar? The failure of such relationships, which is sometimes called "incommensurability," does not in fact establish incomparability. Even if pleasures don't stand in these mathematical relations, it still might be that, for any two pleasures, either one is stronger than the other or they are equally strong. Furthermore, it is not even clear that Brentano's claims of incommensurability are true.²⁵

There is another case to consider that's relevant to whether monistic theories are like pluralistic theories as regards comparability: comparing the good with the bad. Suppose yesterday you received some pleasure and some pain. Suppose I ask, Which did you get more of, pleasure or pain? Can that question be answered? There cannot be more or less pleasure than there is understanding in some situation, but can there be more or less pleasure than there is pain in some situation? For my part, I'm inclined to say yes; at the very least, I balk much less at a pleasure/pain comparison than at a pleasure/understanding comparison. Some theories of the nature of pleasure can even shed light on why. According to one such theory, pleasure is explained in terms of desire (see Spencer 1871: § 125; Brandt 1979: 38; Heathwood 2007). Roughly, pleasurable experiences are those we want to be occurring while they are occurring, and painful experiences are those we want not to be occurring while they are occurring. The comparability

of pleasure and pain is then explained in terms of the comparability of the wanting involved in pleasure and the wanting involved in pain.

We have just been considering whether monism, too, might lead to value incomparability. Let's return to the argument that pluralism does. One way to resist this argument begins with the observation that if some state of enjoyment is good, there is intuitively a fact as to *how* good it is. The state of enjoyment won't just have value, it will have some specific quantity of value. And likewise for understanding: if some state of understanding has value, there will be some quantity of value that it, too, has. But then we have on our hands two quantities of the same one thing: value. And whenever one has two quantities of the same thing, it must be either that one quantity is greater or that they are equal.

This line of argument shows at most that *substantive* pluralism does not deliver incomparability, and so it points to why—repeating now a point from earlier—those pluralists who believe in incomparability are moved to be radical pluralists. If they are merely substantive pluralists, they hold that the various good things each participate in the same one kind of value, and thus open themselves to the argument of the previous paragraph. To obtain incomparability, they can become radical pluralists. They can hold that enjoyment has its own enjoyment-value, while understanding has understanding-value. Now, multiplying kinds of value in this way still may not guarantee incomparability, for there could still be some more generic value property—or “supervalue”—that subsumes the plurality of specific value properties. To secure incomparability, radical pluralism evidently needs to take an even more radical form, and hold that there is no such generic value property (if this is indeed a coherent view; see section 8.1.4 above).

A challenge for this form of radical pluralism—and more generally for the idea that pluralism implies incomparability—is “nominal-notable comparisons” (Chang 1997: 14). If understanding and pleasure are both basic goods, then surely it's better to understand Einstein's theory of relativity than it is to enjoy one lick of a lollipop. If that's right, then some instances of understanding and pleasure are comparable. If that's true, it may be difficult to sustain the thesis that not all are (which is not to deny that the answer to some questions of value comparison will be unknowable or vague).

Pluralists' attempts to secure incomparability may fail for yet another reason. It is commonly held that there is a connection between value and rational or fitting attitudes.²⁶ On one plausible-sounding view, if some state of affairs would be good, we have reason to want it to occur, and, moreover, to want it to occur to the degree that it is good. Chris Kelly argues from this to the impossibility of value incomparability—even granting the assumption that each good thing is good in its own way, that is, even on radical pluralism. If the plausible-sounding view above is true, then, claims Kelly, “Whether it is autonomy-value, pleasure-value, or beauty-value, if it is really value, the ideal desirer would, absent defeaters, want it” (Kelly 2008: 374). And the strength of her desire would indicate its degree of value. Since any two desires are comparable

with respect to strength of desire, so too will the plurality of goods be comparable with respect to value.²⁷

I will conclude by returning to the more radical pluralism. I suggested that it is the surest way to secure incomparability. But it is also then the surest way for pluralists to expose themselves to the monist charge that pluralism is incompatible with justified choice in some situations. Some radical pluralists want to resist this. They want to avoid any failures of justified choice while simultaneously avoiding positing a supervalue that would threaten incomparability. In this connection, Griffin speaks of “super-scales” (1986: 90), and Stocker of “higher-level synthesizing categories” (1990: 172). It is hard to tell whether they are doing anything other than introducing a value property under another name.

Perhaps one way to retain justified choice alongside incomparability is to hold that when one faces a choice between two incomparable outcomes, either choice is permissible. This corresponds to one interpretation of Sidgwick’s dualism of practical reason. One might object to this thought on the grounds that to say that each option is justified is just to say that the options are equally good after all, and so to abandon incomparability. But that doesn’t seem right, at least in our restricted context. Recall that we have restricted our discussion to axiological value. Even if, in a wider sense of “good”—such as one on which “good” just means choiceworthy—each option is equally good, this does not mean that they are equally good in terms of either value simpliciter or welfare (or in terms of, say, understanding-value and pleasure-value).

Other radical pluralists accept failures of justified choice.²⁸ This view corresponds to the other interpretation of Sidgwick’s dualism of practical reason, on which, in Sidgwick’s words,

the Cosmos of Duty is thus really reduced to a Chaos: and the prolonged effort of the human intellect to frame a perfect ideal of rational conduct is seen to have been foredoomed to inevitable failure. (1874: 473)

Socrates and Protarchus, for their part, end the *Philebus* in agreement that a pluralistic view is best—that neither a life devoted solely to pleasure nor a life devoted solely to knowledge is “self-sufficient” (60d)—though they express no worries about comparing the goods. Indeed, they conclude that the best life will contain just the right mixture of these and other goods.

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NOTES

1. Or at least these are common ways of encapsulating the two views. In Frede's translation, for example, she titles this section of the dialogue, "The Introductory Challenge: Pleasure vs. Knowledge" (Plato 1993: 1). I have cheated a little here in that, as Socrates summarizes his view in the full passage, he leaves it open that pleasure might be somewhat good.
2. See Berlin 1966 and Galston 2002; Arneson 2009 disagrees.
3. See Tiberius, chapter 9 in this volume, for a discussion of the main theories of welfare.
4. For more on such judgments, see Olson, chapter 3 in this volume, section 3.5.
5. Some prefer the term "final value" over "intrinsic value" (see Rønnow-Rasmussen, chapter 2 in this volume; Kagan 1998; and Korsgaard 1983). I use "instrumental value" broadly, to include also the case in which something prevents something bad rather than causes something good.
6. See Harman 1967; Quinn 1974; and Feldman 2000 for more on basic intrinsic value.
7. Mason (2011: § 1.1) calls this "foundational pluralism," Rønnow-Rasmussen (2013) "goodness pluralism."
8. Contemporary sympathizers with the Moorean view include Donald Regan (2004); Guy Fletcher (2012); Kris McDaniel (2014). See also Rønnow-Rasmussen, chapter 2 in this volume.
9. See Olson, chapter 3 in this volume, for some discussion about skepticism about intrinsic value simpliciter.
10. Cf. Harsanyi's Theorem, which Broome (chapter 13 in this volume) summarizes as the view that "general utility can be treated as the total of personal utilities." See also Schroeder 2012: § 1.1.1.
11. See also Rand 1964: 16 and Rønnow-Rasmussen, chapter 2 in this volume.
12. See Olson, chapter 3 in this volume for further discussion of their views.
13. Mason (2011: § 1.1) calls them "normative" monism and pluralism.
14. E.g., Brandt 1972: 682 and Railton 1986: 16; Heathwood 2005 defends actual desires.
15. See Aristotle 1968; Hurka 1993; and Kraut 2007, though Hurka might deny that his theory is a theory of welfare as I have characterized the notion.
16. Even more recent lists can be found in Hurka 2011 (pleasure, knowledge, achievement, virtue, and friendship), Fletcher 2013 (achievement, friendship, happiness, pleasure, self-respect, and virtue) and Rice 2013 (loving relationships, meaningful knowledge, autonomy, achievement, and pleasure).
17. Hurka (1996: 560–61) assumes a similar understanding of the monism/pluralism distinction, and describes it as "standard" (564). See also Lin (forthcoming).
18. Proponents include Stocker (1990), Kekes (1993), and Anderson (1995).
19. Ben Bradley used this term for this sort of view in his comments on Elinor Mason's paper "The High Price of Pluralism," at the Fifth Annual Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference, Western Washington University, August 2004.
20. Philosophers have not devoted much attention to the question of just what makes an axiology monistic or pluralistic. One exception is Fred Feldman (2004, ch. 8). Feldman's account of the monism/pluralism distinction is superficially different from the account sketched here, but it may share some deeper similarities. For accounts with considerable overlap to the one outlined here, see Tucker (n.d.) and Lin (forthcoming).
21. Ross's argument is a "bare-difference argument." On bare-difference arguments and on their connection to the additivity and separability of value, see Oddie 2001. On additivity

- and separability, see also Broome, chapter 13 in this volume, and Carlson, chapter 15 in this volume.
22. In another interesting argument for welfare pluralism, Alex Sarch (2012) contends that the best way to incorporate an objective element into a theory of welfare is to make it pluralistic.
 23. For further discussion, see Bradley 2014: 205–6.
 24. This case is similar to the “inclusion cases” in Hurka 1996.
 25. For more on incommensurability and its relation to incomparability, see Chang, chapter 11 in this volume.
 26. See Brentano 1902; Broad 1930: 238; Ewing 1947: ch. 5. The argument in the text doesn’t require the strong thesis that value is reducible to fitting attitudes, just that there is a necessary connection between them (as in, e.g., Zimmerman 2001: ch. 4).
 27. For criticism of this argument, see Klocksien 2011: 340–43 and Mason 2011: § 4.
 28. See Mason 2011: § 4.4 for a list of such philosophers. See Chang, chapter 11 in this volume, for further discussion.

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