

## IRREPLACEABLE VALUE

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ABSTRACT: If the *Mona Lisa*, the Sistine Chapel, the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun, or the Sword of Goujian were destroyed, nothing could replace them. New works of art that are even more impressive may be created, which may replenish the value in the world in *quantity*, but they would not fully replace the loss. Works of art and historical artifacts have *irreplaceable value*. But just what is irreplaceable value? This paper presents perhaps the first analysis. Irreplaceable value is a matter of intrinsic value in virtue of unreinstantiable good-making properties, which give rise to reasons to preserve and protect.

Keywords:

Irreplaceable value; irreplaceability; uniqueness; intrinsic value; reasons; art; historical artifacts.

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Imagine the headline:

Evil Demon Strikes the Vatican: Sistine Chapel  
Destroyed!

Luckily, no one was killed or injured. But the entire Sistine Chapel including, of course, its renowned ceiling with Michelangelo's frescos, not to mention wall frescos by Botticelli, Rosselli, and Perugino, and a great many other masterworks have been reduced to rubble. The world has suffered a great loss – an architectural treasure along with so many magnificent artworks.

Suppose it is then announced that a new chapel has been commissioned, to be designed by the greatest architectural geniuses of today, and it will be filled with new, even more impressive artworks by the very best artists. The sum total of intrinsic value in the world from art and architecture will be replenished to its former amount. Perhaps it will even be

surpassed! There is no reason at all to be sad about the lost Sistine Chapel.

Yet surely there is reason to be sad about it. While this new art might replenish the *amount* of value in the world, it could never replace it fully *in the same way*. The world, as it were, will never be the same. The value of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and all the other frescos it contained is *irreplaceable*.

The Sistine chapel, Stradivarius violins, the Terracotta Army in the mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huang, the cave paintings at Lascaux, the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun, Shakespeare folios, the Giant Sequoia Forest, the Sword of Goujian, and perhaps even you and me, are *irreplaceably valuable*. If any of these things were destroyed, their value could not be replaced even if the sum total value in the world could be replenished.

But just what is irreplaceable value? In spite of the seeming obviousness of irreplaceable value as a kind of value and its intriguing nature, it has gone virtually undiscussed in the philosophical literature.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I present an account of irreplaceable value.<sup>2</sup>

First I will clear some ground and take up some related discussions in the literature, and I will then present my account and defend and develop it by way of a series of objections and replies.

## INTRINSIC VALUE AND REASONS

Intrinsic value is the value that an object or state of affairs has “for its own sake” or “in itself.”<sup>3</sup> Objects or states of affairs bear intrinsic value in virtue of certain properties – good-making properties.<sup>4</sup> Which properties are good-making is defined by a

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant discussions appear in (Matthes 2013) and (Korsmeyer 2019) which I discuss later, along with others.

<sup>2</sup> This account develops the view that I sketch in (Bradford forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> There is debate about whether intrinsic value is value solely in virtue of intrinsic properties, or whether intrinsic value is better construed as “final” value which can be in virtue of extrinsic properties. I follow the dominant stance in the literature which is the latter (see e.g. Korsgaard 1983, Kagan 1998).

<sup>4</sup> There is another debate about whether value gives rise to reasons (e.g. Raz 1999, Maguire 2016), or whether giving rise to reasons simply is value (Scanlon 1998) or whether value is best analyzed in terms of

substantive axiology, i.e., a theory of the good. A very simple axiology, for example, is welfarist hedonism. According to welfarist hedonism, there is only one intrinsic good, which is welfare, and welfare is a matter of pleasure, and pain is the only intrinsic bad. On welfarist hedonism, intrinsic value is entirely fungible, one might say, or replaceable, in the sense that one unit is just as good as any other.<sup>5</sup> You can “make up for” the lost pleasure of forgoing dessert today by enjoying dessert tomorrow.

A more complex axiology includes intrinsic goods instead of or in addition to pleasure, and even in addition to welfare. Some plausible and popular candidates for intrinsic goods on a pluralist axiology include equality, justice, knowledge, virtue, beauty, works of art and historical artifacts, and the appreciation of these things, and perhaps also persons themselves as such. Some of the items listed on this pluralist axiology behave differently from goods such as pleasure. Goods such as works of art, historical artifacts, and perhaps some other things such as persons do not seem to bear value that is fungible in the way that intrinsic goods such as pleasure do. They have value that is irreplaceable, and that is what this paper is about.

In the broadest strokes, the relationship between intrinsic value and reasons is generally taken to be something like this: if X has intrinsic value, then there is a reason to favor X. According to a traditional and widely-held view, “favoring” is more specifically understood as *promoting*. There is a reason to promote value, especially for values that come in larger and smaller amounts that can be combined. If some state of affairs A would have more value than B, that fact *pro tanto* supports bringing about A rather than B if you can only bring about one. There may be, of course, other reasons that are relevant considerations for action, but what’s important is the minimal

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fittingness to respond in certain ways. “Good-making properties” is here used in a way that is neutral among these various views. On a buck-passing or “reasons-first” view, good-making properties are whatever properties give rise to reasons to favor, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> Some point out that goods such as pleasure may not be fungible interpersonally even though they are fungible intrapersonally. I believe irreplaceable value ultimately can partly explain why pleasure *inter alia* resists interpersonal fungibility, although I will not discuss that here.

claim that if X has value, then that is a *pro tanto* reason to promote X.<sup>6</sup>

That there is a reason to promote value is recognizable as the “compelling thought” that underlies consequentialism, the view that we are morally required to perform the action that brings about the most good. But it is not only consequentialists who accept that there is *pro tanto* reason to promote the good – it is accepted even by many deontologists, including W. D. Ross ([1930] 2002). The difference is simply that deontologists accept the existence of other moral reasons in addition to the reason to promote the good. So the claim that there is a *pro tanto* reason to promote value, understood in this straightforward way, is very widely held.

On a traditional view, weight or strength of reason to promote value is a function of *amount* of value (perhaps among other factors). What is interesting and important about irreplaceable value is that it has a different basic relationship with reasons than non-irreplaceable intrinsic value. There is a different character of the reasons vis-à-vis objects with irreplaceable value. This difference is illustrated with our reaction to the destruction of the Sistine Chapel. If the ceiling and other artworks in the Sistine Chapel were entirely a matter of ordinary non-irreplaceable intrinsic value, we would have no reason to mourn its destruction, so long as the sum total of value in the world were replenished. We would *certainly* have no reason to mourn it if its value were surpassed. In fact, we would have reason *to destroy it* if doing so would result in a higher sum total of value. But that is appalling. Quite the contrary: it seems that we might even have reason to preserve the Sistine Chapel even at the *cost* of a higher total value.

My point is that there is a different *character* of reasons vis-à-vis objects with irreplaceable value than there is toward objects or states of affairs with ordinary intrinsic value such as pleasure. We have reasons to *preserve, respect, honor, and cherish* objects that have irreplaceable value.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There is debate about what it is to “promote” value. I am simply taking “promote” as a matter of bringing about more rather than less, given the opportunity.

<sup>7</sup> Reasons to favor in ways that are alternative to promoting are often associated with buck-passing accounts of value, but it is important to note that it is not buck passing that commits an account to pluralism about attitudes beyond promoting. Anderson, for example, is a

The focus in this paper is irreplaceable value and its metaphysical, or metaethical, structure, rather than the substantive content of value. I am going to *assume* a pluralistic substantive axiology that includes works of art, antiques, historical artifacts, and so forth. I am not going to defend this or any other substantive claims about the content of a theory of the good. The view that I will describe and defend is a metaethical or what we might call a meta-axiological view. It concerns the metaphysics, or structure, of value, rather than its substantive content.<sup>8</sup> I'm also going to assume that irreplaceable value exists, and that the things that I am discussing have it. The goal of my paper is not to convince you that there is such a thing as irreplaceable value, rather, is to explain what irreplaceable value is.

### PERSONAL IRREPLACEABLE VALUE

Other philosophers have also discussed irreplaceability and value, albeit in slightly different ways. In particular, one sometimes sees discussion of irreplaceability in the context of discussions about love. Your beloved is irreplaceably valuable to you, which is why you would not accept a duplicate, or even an upgrade, of your beloved.<sup>9</sup> While there may be some similarities between the value that a beloved has to a lover and the irreplaceable value that I am discussing in this paper, there are important differences. The irreplaceable value of Shakespeare folios or the Sword of Goujian gives *everyone* a reason to preserve, respect, and admire these things. But the irreplaceable value of your beloved only gives *you* such special reasons. Your beloved has what we can call *personal* irreplaceable value – he

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pluralist about reasons and value, but not a buck-passer (Anderson 1993). In fact, one could hold a buck-passing analysis of value and *reject* pluralism about responses to value. On such a view, to have value would be to have properties that give rise to reasons to be promoted, rather than “favored” in the broader sense.

<sup>8</sup> I have noted that irreplaceable value involves reasons of a distinct character, and, while one might like to hear an explanation for why they have this character, I will touch on that only briefly. The focus of this paper is, as I have emphasized, the metaphysical structure of irreplaceable value. I look forward to having more to say about the character of reasons on another occasion.

<sup>9</sup> See for example (Gowans 1996, Raz 2001, Grau 2004, or Matthes 2013), to cite just a few.

is irreplaceably valuable *to you*, but not to all. In contrast, Shakespeare folios have *impersonal* irreplaceable value.

There is another way in which persons have irreplaceable value. You have special reasons regarding your loved one that no one else has, but *everyone* has reasons regarding every other person simply in virtue of their being a person. Moreover, the personal irreplaceable value that a beloved has to a lover is entirely contingent on the lover, whereas the irreplaceable value of all persons as such is, or seems to be, a necessary feature, borne by all persons simply in virtue of their being persons. I'll return to this aspect of the irreplaceable value of persons later.

Additionally, some objects seem to have personal irreplaceable value. A drawing by your four-year-old daughter that is displayed on your refrigerator door may have irreplaceable value to you, and give you reasons to preserve and admire it, it does not give *everyone* such reasons. It may, on some occasions, give reasons to others, but those reasons are not for the sake of the drawing itself, but for *your* sake, because it is something that is special to you.<sup>10</sup> The drawing has personal irreplaceable value.<sup>11</sup>

Personal irreplaceable value is undoubtedly of central importance, but it merits its own treatment. This paper is about impersonal irreplaceable value. This value gives *everyone* reasons to preserve and respect objects that bear it.<sup>12</sup>

## IRREPLACEABLE VALUE: THE VIEW

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<sup>10</sup> See (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011) for an analysis of personal value.

<sup>11</sup> Now, it may be the case that the (impersonal) irreplaceable value that I am discussing in this paper gives people reasons ultimately not for the sake of the object, but rather for the sake of other people who care about the object. I won't have space here to thoroughly consider this view, but it is, I believe, compatible with the account that I will develop. A longer discussion will come another time.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the difference is ultimately one of amount of value rather than kind. Later we will see that irreplaceable value has quantitative dimensions. Objects of personal irreplaceable value often have zero value apart from the value in virtue of the attachment of the relevant person, such as Jerry Cohen's favorite eraser (Cohen 2011). If *all* value is value in virtue of valuers, however, then perhaps the distinction between what I am calling impersonal irreplaceable value and personal irreplaceable value may be simply one of degree rather than kind. The objects that are at the center of my discussion have a very high amount of value in contrast to the objects at issue in many of the other discussions.

Here is my proposal: irreplaceable value is value that is in virtue of *unreinstaniable properties*.

Properties, on the standard view, are multiply instantiable – many things can bear the properties *red*, *pleasant*, or *fuzzy*. Some properties, however, are such that they can't be newly instantiated. The properties *painted by Michelangelo*, *created during the Qin dynasty*, or *made by Antonio Stradivari* are all properties that, as a straightforward matter of historical fact, can't be instantiated in any object that doesn't currently instantiate them. The objects that instantiate them now, or have in the past, are the only objects that ever will instantiate them. The properties *painted by Michelangelo*, *created during the Qin dynasty*, or *made by Antonio Stradivari* are nevertheless multiply instantiated – each of these properties is instantiated by more than one object. But the objects that now instantiate these properties are the *only* objects that ever will because these properties cannot be reinstanitated.

Virtually every object has some property or other that is, as a matter of historical fact, unreinstaniable. Virtually every object in the entire universe, simply in virtue of its path through time and space, has some property that couldn't possibly be instantiated again. A coin in your pocket has dings and scratches and bits of dirt that are unique to its history over time – no other penny replicates this combination of properties. But a dirty penny in your pocket, of course, doesn't have irreplaceable value.

Irreplaceable value is not a matter of any old unreinstaniable properties. Rather, the proposal is this: when the properties in virtue of which an object has value are unreinstaniable, the object's value is irreplaceable. The ceiling of the Sistine chapel bears the unreinstaniable property *painted by Michelangelo*, a Stradivarius violin bears the property *made by Antonio Stradivari*, and the Terracotta Army bears the property *created during the Qin dynasty*. These unreinstaniable properties ground value, and would do so even if they weren't unreinstaniable. Since they are unreinstaniable, the objects that bear these properties have irreplaceable value.

#### OBJECTION: RAMPANT PLURALISM

Given how I have just described this view, one might reasonably worry that this requires an extremely messy substantive theory of the good. Consider the amazing array of things that have

irreplaceable value: the Sistine Chapel, Fred Astaire's tap shoes, a fragment of the Titanic, a button from a WWI soldier's uniform, the Sword of Goujian, a nineteenth century thimble, the Brasher doubloon, and the list goes on. To explain this dazzling assortment of valuable things, it seems as if there must be an equally dazzling assortment of good-making properties. An axiology that includes *painted by Michelangelo, created during the Qin dynasty, or made by Antonio Stradivari* among its GMPs is already a wildly pluralistic axiology, not to mention that it will also include *owned by Fred Astaire, being an artifact from the Titanic, painted by Picasso*, among many others. What substantive theory of the good could possibly manage to give a unified and elegant explanation of all these good-making properties? Pluralism is one thing, but a rampant pluralism that involves a list of millions upon millions of non-derivative basic goods is wildly contrary to even the mildest principle of parsimony.

One might simply embrace rampant pluralism. But one need not. I propose a nested grounding structure: irreplaceable value is value that is in virtue of good-making properties that are in virtue of unreinstantiable properties. The good-making properties that ground irreplaceable value are not themselves unreinstantiable; rather, the properties that ground the good-making properties are unreinstantiable.

In general, on the traditional view of intrinsic value, good-making properties supervene on, and, more specifically, are at least partly grounded in, an object's descriptive or non-normative properties. For example, the good-making property *being pleasant* is instantiated in virtue of some assortment of descriptive, non-normative properties – e.g., *sweetness, fuzziness, being relaxing*. *Being pleasant* is, of course, an ordinary, reinstantiable good-making property. *Sweetness, fuzziness, being relaxing*, are all also reinstantiable properties, which ground the good-making property, *being pleasant*.

The same structure is true of irreplaceable value. The property *made in the 17<sup>th</sup> century* grounds the good-making property *antique*. In other cases, the good-making property *antique* is grounded in the property *made during the Qin dynasty, or made in 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas, or made during the reign of Louis XIV*. *Antique* is reinstantiable (wait enough time and everything will become antique), but *made in the 17<sup>th</sup> century* or *made during the Qin dynasty* are unreinstantiable. *Antique*, is,



we can suppose, a good-making property. The properties *made during the Qin dynasty*, *made in 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas* are not themselves good-making properties. Rather, they ground a good-making property, to wit, *antique*. Since there are a great many objects that bear the good-making property *antique*, the account of irreplaceable value supports a far tidier and therefore more defensible substantive axiology than it would if irreplaceable value were directly grounded in the unreinstantiable properties.

What makes *antique* a good-making property? And what makes this refined version of the account of irreplaceable value less rampantly pluralistic? As I have said, I am simply assuming a certain substantive axiology.<sup>13</sup> I have taken as an assumption that objects such as the terracotta soldiers, the Sistine Chapel and Fred Astaire's tap shoes are all indeed valuable, and therefore that there is some substantive theory of value that explains them. I don't have a defense of this or any particular substantive theory of value. My task, rather, is to give a meta-axiological account of the *structure* of the value that these things have, assuming that they have it. Although I do not have a theory that explains why *antique* is a good-making property, or why *being a manifestation of great talent*, or *having great artistic value* one either, I take it that it is plausible enough that these or something similar are good-making properties that explain the value of many objects that we do indeed rightly consider to be valuable.

What I will offer for substantive axiology, however, is this: it makes for a *far more plausible* substantive axiology that these general, multiply instantiated properties, such as *antique*, *manifestation of great talent*, and so on, are good-making properties, rather than the rampantly pluralistic properties considered above, such as *made by Antonio Stradivari*, *being a part of the Titanic*, *belonging to Abraham Lincoln*.

With this nesting of properties, we avoid the concern that irreplaceable value involves a messy axiology. Irreplaceable value is value in virtue of good-making properties that in turn are in virtue of unreinstantiable properties. The good-making properties are relatively few in number compared to the very large (perhaps infinite) amount of unreinstantiable properties on which they supervene.

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<sup>13</sup> For discussion that may shed light on how such an axiology might be developed, see (Korsmeyer 2019, Matthes 2013).

## OBJECTION: THE PROBLEM OF UBIQUITY

One might complain, however, that all value – every good-making property (or GMP for short) – appears to be grounded in at least some unreinstantiable properties. Unreinstantiable properties are ubiquitous, and, as a result, one might think, so is irreplaceable value. If it's ubiquitous, this undermines the distinction from non-irreplaceable value and therefore its significance. Call this *the problem of ubiquity*.

Consider the valuable state of affairs in which Nathan enjoys a beautiful sunset. Let's suppose a straightforward axiology according to which this state of affairs involves the intrinsic goods of beauty and pleasure. The GMPs include, therefore, Nathan's pleasure and the beauty of the sunset. Nathan's pleasure obtains in virtue of some combination of properties of his mental states, biology, and so on. The beauty of the sunset supervenes on a combination of its descriptive properties – the texture of the clouds, the colors, the quality of the light, the surrounding hills and trees, and so on. It is easy enough to imagine that no sunset will ever be *quite* like this sunset – the colors will never be exactly these shades of tangerine and cerise, the clouds will never be exactly this attenuated shape and soft mauve. All these properties, one might claim, are unreinstantiable. The beauty of the sunset, one then might think, is irreplaceably valuable.

But colors, shapes, and so on, are the very model of ordinary *reinstantiable* properties. As delightful and surprising as they may be, colors are not unreinstantiable properties.

However, one might be moved to say that that the *combination* of properties upon which the GMPs of the sunset experience supervenes could never come together in quite this way – this exact shade of tangerine can be reinstantiated, but it just might never be reinstantiated *right next to* this shade of cerise. The texture of the clouds might be a reinstantiable property, but may never appear again in conjunction with *that* particular texture of clouds.

Now, it is somewhat implausible that such a combination of properties would indeed be unreinstantiable. Presumably the laws of nature do not foreclose the possibility that two sunsets could be exactly alike. But let us suppose for the moment that they do. Suppose that there is some quirk about the light and the clouds and so on that make it the case that the combination

of properties of this particular sunset could never be reinstated. Suppose further that this is true for every sunset: it's virtually impossible for all the details to come together in the very same way again. Does that make the sunset irreplaceably valuable? Is *every* sunset irreplaceably valuable? The same could be said, presumably, about virtually anything – it may very well be the case that the GMPs of all objects and states of affairs supervene on utterly idiosyncratic combinations of properties that could not be reinstated in that very way ever again. If it's true that no combination of properties that ground GMPs can ever be reinstated, then one might conclude that all value is irreplaceable value.

Strange as it may seem, I think that there may be some truth to this, which I will return to later. Nevertheless there is a distinction between Nathan's sunset and the irreplaceable value of the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun and other such things. Nathan's sunset involves (at most) an unreinstatable *combination* of properties, but not properties that are themselves unreinstatable. In order for value to be irreplaceable, it is the *properties* that are unreinstatable, not their combinations.<sup>14</sup>

Even still, one might imagine that the GMPs of the beautiful sunset are determined by all the various properties of the clouds, including even the tiniest dirt particles that are suspended in the cloud itself. These dirt particles presumably have drifted all over the planet, and have been swept up into the atmosphere to finally find themselves suspended in this cloud, comprising its texture, opacity, color, and so on, all of which are part of what you are enjoying about this beautiful sunset. So among the properties on which the beauty of this sunset supervenes are the properties of these very dirt particles.

In fact, one might point out that GMPs are instantiated in virtue of the properties of bits of dirt to some extent in every possible instance, simply given how messy and dirty the world is – bits of stuff floating around everywhere! – so one might say that *all* GMPs are determined by unreinstatable properties,

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<sup>14</sup> But isn't "having such and such combination of properties" itself a property? It may indeed be so, assuming an ontology that includes metaproperties. Even still, what we have learned is that this type of property cannot determine irreplaceable value. To be cheeky about it, in any case, the property of "having an unreinstatable combination of properties" is not itself an unreinstatable property.

and therefore all value is irreplaceable after all. The problem of ubiquity returns.

## CENTRALITY

As I have said, there may be some truth to that. Nevertheless, we can draw a distinction about the role that properties play in determining other properties. Suppose some property  $a$  is instantiated in an object in virtue of the object having some set,  $B$ , of other properties, including among others  $c$ ,  $d$ ,  $e$ , and so on. The properties of  $B$  fully ground  $a$ . But each of the various  $B$  properties, which are partial grounds of  $a$ , may play a more or less *central* role.

We can think of it this way. One of the things that grounds can do is explain. The full explanation of  $a$  includes all the  $B$  properties. Of the  $B$  properties, however, some play a more important role in the explanation of  $a$ , while others play a less important role. The central grounding properties play a big role in the explanation of  $a$ . They make a big difference in whether or not  $a$  obtains, or how it obtains. Peripheral properties play a very minor, peripheral role in the explanation of  $a$ . We might even say that the peripheral properties, although part of the ground of  $a$ , make only a weak difference in  $a$ .<sup>15</sup>

The properties of the bits of dirt suspended in the cloud particles play a peripheral role determining the beauty of the sunset. The sunset could very well be beautiful if the bits of dirt were slightly different. These properties play a very peripheral explanation in the beauty of the sunset.

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<sup>15</sup> Although much of the discussion of grounding concerns the binary issue of what it takes for something to ground something or not, the notion of centrality illustrates that at least in some cases, the roles that some partial grounds play have a scalar dimension. There is more to explore here. Perhaps it is the case that irreplaceability itself is scalar. To my mind, however, centrality seems more naturally understood as a threshold condition. (There's more to explore here, which is a project for another time.) Similarly, while difference-making in explanation too is generally discussed binarily, central properties make a strong difference in the properties they ground, whereas peripheral properties make a weak difference. Differences can be bigger or smaller, of course, so here too is another area for further consideration. Alternatively, one might see peripheral grounds as non-difference-making partial grounds. See (Krämer and Roski 2017) for a discussion of non-difference-making grounds. They too consider the idea that difference-making may be weaker and stronger.

In contrast, in other cases, properties of bits of dirt are indeed central to other GMPs. Patina, for example. Consider an early 19<sup>th</sup> century Shaker chair. Part of its significance comes from the beautiful color of the wood, and, beyond just its appearance, the fact that the wood bears an elegant patina, reflecting its history as an ordinary household object, part of the quotidian life of many previous generations. If the bits of dirt had different properties – say, they were accumulated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, rather than over the last 200 years – then the chair would not have an elegant patina. It would be fake! The properties of the bits of dirt on the Shaker chair are central to its GMPs. They make a big difference in the explanation of its value.

Patina isn't simply a matter of bits of dirt, but is rather a matter of the historical properties of the bits of dirt – where it has been over time. The properties of the bits of dirt and therefore of the patina are central to the GMPs, and are unreinstantiable. The properties of the bits of dirt in the cloud are not central to its GMPs.<sup>16</sup>

Properties that are unreinstantiable but are merely peripheral in their role determining GMPs do *not* give rise to irreplaceable value. Only when unreinstantiable properties are *central* to GMPs is value irreplaceable.

Centrality and peripherality are, of course, gradable. So there is work to be done discerning what degree of centrality is necessary, how many unreinstantiable properties must be central for value to be irreplaceable, and so on. Those details will have to wait for another time. But for now, by and large, let us say that the properties of the bits of dirt in the clouds do not play a central role in explaining their beauty. These particular bits of

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<sup>16</sup> But, then again, are not the bits of dirt in the cloud particles, in fact, millions upon millions of years old? Like all the atoms that comprise our planet and its atmosphere, they are the result of a process so poorly understood it strikes many, even physicists, as miraculous as could be. However, as wondrous as these mysterious facts may be, they undermine the specialness of the properties of the particles of the cloud – *all* the atoms in universe are billions of years old. In contrast, where patina is concerned, it is the particular causal path in time of the dirt particles comprising patina that matters – these particles have spent several centuries clinging to this same object, and have been joined by other particles, over the course of a century or two. The cloud particles have not been clinging together *in the same cloud* for centuries. (And if they had been, then perhaps it would be a very special cloud. But I assume an ordinary cloud here.)

dirt are not crucial to the beauty of the clouds. Similar bits of dirt with different properties could just as well be swapped out with the current ones for an effect that is so similar it would not alter the GMPs of the sunset. In contrast, we cannot change the bits of dirt comprising the patina without thereby sacrificing some of the GMPs of the chair.

Considering Nathan's sunset, however, suppose that there *are* properties that are unreinstantiable and are central to the good-making properties. Suppose that Nathan enjoys the sunset with the company of very good friends, with whom he has been reunited for a very brief time in a tragic twist. One of the dear friends has a terminal illness, and this is the last time that they will be together. As Nathan watches the sunset, he reflects on the joys of their time together and camaraderie, the fragility and tenuousness of life, all of which shape the way in which he enjoys the tangerine and cerise sunset with the textured mauve clouds. The company of Nathan's dying friend, one can easily imagine, is central to the GMPs of his overall experience of the sunset.

Once we entertain this possibility, it isn't hard to imagine that something like this might be true in other instances. Perhaps some properties that ground good-making properties in other cases may be unreinstantiable. The view that I have described supports the conclusion that states of affairs such as these do indeed have irreplaceable value.

I am inclined to think that this is correct. As I hinted earlier, irreplaceable value may be more prevalent than we might have originally thought, and examples like this can help us see why that is plausible. Recall that irreplaceable value correlates with reasons to *preserve*, *respect*, or *promote continued existence*, in contrast to the reasons that we have regarding objects and states of affairs with non-irreplaceable value – reasons to promote in the sense of *bring about more of*.

It's natural to think that the reasons that Nathan has toward the enjoyment of the sunset fit the profile of the reasons that we have regarding *irreplaceable* value, rather than non-irreplaceable intrinsic value. Nathan has reason to *savor the moment* of the beautiful sunset, reflecting on the precious time with his friend, and so on. This seems to be precisely correct when we reflect on the kinds of attitudes that we have reason to take up toward the sunset. We do indeed have reason to savor

the moment, to commit it to memory, and to make it last as long as we can.

But won't this lead to absurd consequences? Irreplaceable value gives reasons to promote its continued existence, and so if it were possible to prolong Nathan's sunset for an infinite amount of time, we would then have reason to do so. One might think that this is absurd. But looking more closely, it is not in fact so absurd. We *do* think that this is the correct response to have to such things. In a moment such as Nathan's sunset, undoubtedly we find ourselves saying, "I wish this could last forever!" – and that is precisely what irreplaceable value elicits. It may very well be that there are similar moments in life whose value is irreplaceable.<sup>17</sup>

#### OBJECTION: QUALITATIVE SUPERIORITY

One might think, however, that this leads to yet another objection. I have said that irreplaceable value is qualitatively distinct from nonirreplaceable intrinsic value. In fact, the view that I have put forward claims that each instance of irreplaceable value is qualitatively distinct, and that we have reason to preserve irreplaceable value even at a cost of overall amount of intrinsic value. One might then call to mind that there is a famous theory of value that also makes a qualitative distinction, which similarly claims that one has stronger reason to choose the qualitatively distinct value over a larger quantity of the other kind of value, and that claim gets that theory into a lot of trouble. This is John Stuart Mill's qualitative hedonism. Mill distinguishes between two kinds of pleasure that are qualitatively distinct, in the sense that one unit of one kind of pleasure is not worth the same amount of value as one unit of the other kind. It is well known that Mill claims that anyone offered some higher pleasure "would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure" (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch II, p. 9).

An important objection to Mill's view is delightfully illustrated by Roger Crisp: "Given the choice... between reading Jane Austen right through on the one hand, and a combination

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<sup>17</sup> One might then wonder: if it were possible to make such a moment last forever, or to in fact spend an eternity savoring a single moment, would we have reason to do so? Perhaps, but there may be weightier reason against doing so. The explanation for why will become evident in the next section of the paper.

of reading all of Jane Austen except *Northanger Abbey* along with a huge and varied amount of lower pleasure, it seems quite rational to prefer the combination” (Crisp 1997, p. 41). Surely it’s ridiculous to insist that higher pleasures have lexical priority over lower.

A similar concern might be raised about irreplaceable value. Consider this:

A demon is forcing the following choice on you. He will destroy the original *Make a Wish Cottage*, a schlocky but irreplaceably valuable painting by Thomas Kinkade, unless you forgo any food other than a thin gruel and live a strictly ascetic lifestyle that reduces your well-being by at least 100 units per day for the rest of your life.

If *Make a Wish Cottage* has irreplaceable value that is qualitatively superior to welfare value, and we therefore always have stronger reason to preserve irreplaceable value than to promote fungible intrinsic value, then not only should you do what the demon asks, but you should also be willing to do much more. *No amount* of well-being can outweigh even the slightest bit of irreplaceable value.

But this is not the view that I have described. There is no reason to think that irreplaceable value has *lexical* superiority over non-irreplaceable value. Mill’s qualitative hedonism is susceptible to this objection not because he makes a qualitative distinction, but because he further insists on the lexical superiority of one kind of pleasure over the other, regardless of quantity.

I have made no such suggestion about irreplaceable value. To be sure, I have suggested that we can have stronger reasons to preserve and sustain instances of irreplaceable value that are *not* strictly proportionate to their *amount* of value. But that is a far cry from the view that *any amount* of irreplaceable value is superior to any amount of fungible intrinsic value. Even though there is a qualitative distinction between irreplaceable and non-irreplaceable value, it is not one of lexical superiority.

Irreplaceable value, in fact, admits of quantitative amount that can indeed be compared both to other instances of irreplaceable value and non-irreplaceable value.



## QUANTITATIVE IRREPLACEABLE VALUE

Perhaps you noticed that in the earlier examples, we have no problem at all comparing irreplaceable value *in amount*. Even if newly created art would not replenish the value in virtue of *painted by Michelangelo*, it *could* replenish the *amount* of value in the world that is in virtue of the good-making property *being a great work of art* (or *manifests great artistic value*, and so on). So irreplaceable value comes in *amounts*. Irreplaceable value has a quantitative dimension.

Consider again Kinkade's *Make a Wish Cottage* and this time compare it to another work that is characterized by luminousness, Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* triptych, to which an entire room at the MoMA in New York is devoted. The Monet has a greater amount of value, or so I'll assume, than the Kinkade. Yet the value of both paintings is irreplaceable.

What underlies this quantitative dimension of irreplaceable value is something along the following lines. *Monet-painted* is an unreinstantiable property that, among others, determine (in part) the painting's good-making properties, which include *painted by a famous artist*, *having great artistic value*, *beautiful*, *manifests great talent*. At least some of the painting's good-making properties admit of degrees: at least some of the painting's good-making properties can be instantiated to greater and lesser degrees in different objects. Something can be more or less beautiful, a more or less great work of art, or manifest greater or lesser talent. These properties all admit of degrees, or so it seems very plausible to hold.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> To be more precise, some properties are such that they can be instantiated *to a greater or lesser degree* – that is, some object O can instantiate *p* to a greater or lesser degree than some other object O'. (Or: O stands in the *more p than* relation to O' just in case O instantiates *p* to a greater degree than O'.) Beyond that, one still might want to know what is it for *p* to be instantiated in greater or lesser degrees? That, it turns out, is a substantive matter regarding each property. For X to be *very fuzzy*, or for X to be *fuzzier than Y* is a matter pertaining to what it is to be fuzzy, which is quite a different matter from what it is for S to be *very introverted*, or for S to be *more introverted than Y*. These are matters that are solved only with accounts of what it is to be fuzzy or to be introverted. And of course not all properties admit of degrees – J can't be *more of a bachelor* than K, and T can't instantiate *deciduousness* to any greater or lesser degree. And again, these are substantive matters, resolved by the nature of bachelorhood and deciduousness. The details do not impact the view of irreplaceable value.

For our interests here, GMPs supervene on unreinstantiable properties and at least some can be instantiated in greater or lesser degrees. As a result, in at least some cases, an object can have more or less irreplaceable value than some other object. The Monet has a greater *amount* of irreplaceable value than the Kinkade, in virtue of the Monet instantiating various good-making properties *to greater degrees* than the Kinkade.

The *overall amount* of value that an object bears is a matter of the value in virtue of *all* of its good-making properties – both those that supervene on unreinstantiable properties and those that supervene on ordinary reinstantiable ones. The *amount of irreplaceable value* is a matter of the amount of value that is borne by the object in virtue of its good-making properties that supervene on unreinstantiable properties, or on combinations of properties that include unreinstantiable properties among the central determining properties.

Irreplaceable value, as we saw above, can be determined by combinations of properties. Some of these properties may be unreinstantiable and some may be reinstantiable. Consider, for example, the difference between a 17<sup>th</sup> century X that is in very good condition and a 17<sup>th</sup> century X that is not in good condition. The property *being in good condition* is reinstantiable, but it is relevant for the *irreplaceable value* of the X. The X that's in good condition, it is very natural to think, has a greater amount of irreplaceable value in part in virtue of its being in such good condition. So some GMPs of the object supervene on combinations of reinstantiable and unreinstantible properties – so long as at least some central determining properties are unreinstantiable, the value is irreplaceable.

So GMPs that are determined by at least some central unreinstantiable properties can come in degrees, and so irreplaceable value can come in degrees.

Similarly, the painting by Monet has a greater amount of value than the painting by Kinkade, and the value of both paintings is irreplaceable. The Monet, we assume, instantiates GMPs to greater degrees than the Kinkade – the Monet has greater artistic value, manifests greater talent, and so on, all of which are (among its) GMPs. The Kinkade, to be sure, has artistic value and manifests talent, but to a lesser degree than

the Monet. In each case, the properties of artistic value and manifesting talent supervene on (at least some central) unreinstantiable properties. So the value is irreplaceable, and *also* admits of quantitative measure. We can compare irreplaceable value in amount.

Assuming, then, that strengths of reasons is in part a function of amount of value, we have an explanation for why reasons to preserve the painting by Monet are stronger than the reasons to preserve the Kinkade. The strength of reasons to protect some valuable object or state of affairs is at least *in part* a function of the *amount* of value it has. The Monet has a greater amount of value. And so we can see why we should not deprive ourselves of solid food for the rest of our lives even if it means sacrificing one mediocre yet irreplaceable painting. The well-being that we would forgo has a greater amount of value (or so I'm supposing) than the amount of value of the Kinkade, even taking into consideration the augmented strength of reasons to preserve it in virtue of its irreplaceability.

Now, there might be something with a larger amount of irreplaceable value that would be worth such a sacrifice or even greater. One might even think that if the evil demon demanded a lifetime of nothing but thin gruel for food as ransom for the splendidly serene *Water Lilies*, it would be worth it. I imagine many people will think that the *Water Lilies* is *obviously* worth a diminishment in their well-being, and that some people might even go so far as to lay down their life for it. In any case, the reasons to protect the *Water Lilies* are very strong. So irreplaceable value can generate very strong reasons that are not solely a matter of amount of value.

There is far more to be said about this – what would the trade-off schedule look like, to the extent that such a thing is possible? As tempted as I am to explore, since my goal in this paper is simply to sketch the proposal for the view, I will leave that for another time and turn instead to another quantitative dimension of irreplaceable value.

## A SECOND QUANTITATIVE DIMENSION

There is also a second way in which irreplaceable value is quantitative. It has to do with the number of objects that instantiate a particular unreinstantiable property. As we have seen, more than one object can bear an unreinstantiable

property. There are many objects whose irreplaceable value is in virtue of the property *Monet-painted*, for example. Each of those objects has irreplaceable value. That value, as we just saw in the last section can vary in amount – some of those paintings may be more or less valuable than others, in virtue of various other of their good-making properties, such as condition, artistic value, and so on.

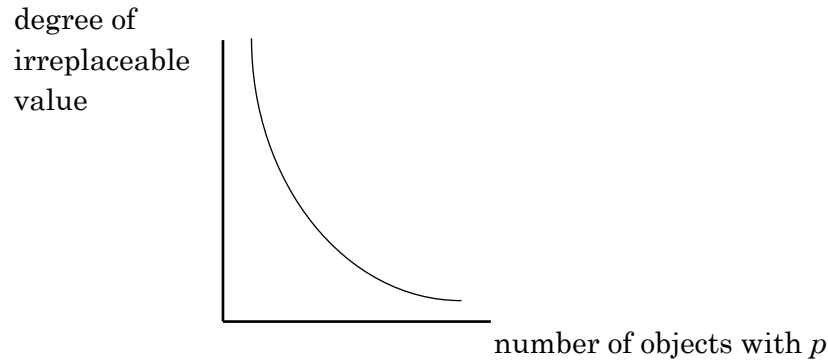
But notice also that there is a change in the *reasons* vis-à-vis objects with irreplaceable in virtue of *how many* objects instantiate any particular unreinstantiable property. As it happens, there are roughly 650 Stradivarius violins in existence. That number is presumably smaller than it was in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and, one might suppose eventually it will become even smaller. Suppose that we reach that point where there is only *one* Stradivarius violin remaining. Consider the strength of the reasons that we would have to protect it, and compare them to the strength of the reasons that we have to protect any of the currently existing 650 or so violins. The last remaining Stradivarius would be incredibly precious – I might even be willing to take a bullet for it. But would I be willing to lay down my life for any of several? As passionate about violins as anyone may be, that seems excessive.

We have, it seems, stronger, weightier reasons – reasons to go to greater lengths to preserve the last remaining Stradivarius than we do for any of several. We haven't done anything to increase the *amount* of value of the last remaining Stradivarius, so the source of the augmented strength of reasons must come from elsewhere. I suggest that it comes from the *second* quantitative dimension of irreplaceable value, which I will call *degree* of irreplaceable value.

While *amount* of irreplaceable value is a quantitative dimension that can be directly compared to amount of nonirreplaceable value, *degree* is unique to irreplaceable value, and is independent from amount.

Degree of irreplaceable value is a matter of the number of objects that bear some unreinstantiable property. As we see in our case of the last remaining Stradivarius, as the number of objects instantiating the property *decrease*, degree of irreplaceable value *increases*.

The relationship between degree of irreplaceable value and number of objects instantiating some unreinstantiable property *p* can be illustrated like this:



The number of objects bearing unreinstantiable property  $p$  is on the x axis, and the degree of irreplaceable value is on the y axis. As the number of objects instantiating  $p$  decreases, the degree of irreplaceable value increases. The graph resembles  $y=1/x$ . (Presumably, however, for many objects it holds only for  $X \geq 1$  since half a Stradivarius is presumably less valuable than a whole one.)

We can see that degree is a distinct dimension from amount. Holding *amount* of value constant, as the number of objects with the same kind of irreplaceable value decreases, their degree increases – case in point the Stradivarius violins.

#### CODA: PERSONS

The view, then, is that irreplaceable value is in virtue of good-making properties that are in virtue of unreinstantiable properties.

Earlier I promised to return to the irreplaceable value of persons. One might think if anything has irreplaceable value, it's persons. But while many people have irreplaceable value of the sort that I have described, it does not exhaust the irreplaceable value of persons. Far from an objection, I take this as evidence that there is yet another, distinctive and perhaps even more important kind of irreplaceable value.

Here is what I mean. Consider first the nature of what we are inclined to grant the irreplaceable value persons. First, it

is extraordinarily weighty, i.e., it is either extraordinarily high in amount or perhaps defies quantitative measure, and it is the same in weightiness from person to person. Second, it is not contingent, but is a necessary feature of persons as such. But neither of these features are true of irreplaceable value of the kind that I have described. It does not defy quantitative measure, and in fact comes in degrees that can vary widely. More significantly, it is grounded in *contingently* unreinstantiable properties.

Candidates for the ground of the irreplaceable value of persons are typically, say, subjectivity or phenomenal consciousness, on the one hand, or rational autonomy on the other. Neither of these candidates are contingent features of persons (arguably), nor are they unreinstantiable, nor do they appear to be grounded in unreinstantiable properties. So the irreplaceable value of persons may be distinct from the irreplaceable value of art objects and historical artifacts.

But, to be sure, this is a feature, not a bug, as the expression goes. The irreplaceable value of persons is of superlative significance, and one should expect that the structure of value and reasons regarding persons is distinctive from the structure of value and reasons surrounding antiques and art objects. Needless to say, there is far more to be said than can reasonably be done here, so this will have to wait for another time. Truly, there is more to be said about virtually every aspect of irreplaceable value. My goal in this paper has been simply to articulate the view and highlight some of its merits.

Before I close, let me briefly address some objections that perhaps has been niggling in the background. First, one might complain that, while I have pointed to the distinctive character of reasons vis-à-vis objects of irreplaceable value, I have not yet explained why they have this character. Why does irreplaceable value yield reasons to preserve, cherish, and so forth, rather than reasons to promote, in the sense of create more? Indeed, this is a good question. The aim of this paper was not to answer it, but, as I stated at the outset, to give an account of the structure of the metaphysics of irreplaceable value, which I have done. Developing the explanation of the distinctive character of its normativity is another paper's worth of issues, which will have to wait for another day. In the meantime, we are in a position to see why we have reason to promote the continued existence of some object of irreplaceable value as opposed to

promote it in the sense of creating more because, significantly, we cannot create more.<sup>19</sup>

Second, one might think to suggested that many of the intuitions about, say, resisting the destruction of original works of art, or having reasons to preserve things that are not directly proportionate to their quantitative amount of intrinsic value can simply be explain by *non-consequentialist* principles, that is, deontological moral principles that are not value-based that govern how we ought to treat art and historical artifacts. Might not it be possible to give an account explaining our intuitions in terms of other principles?

There's not much I can say to the question of whether it *might not be possible* to give such an account. As to whether such an account would be preferable to the account I have given is something that we could only see if there were indeed such an alternative proposal. The fact that it might be possible to give one is no real objection to the view I have proposed. What I am in fact doing here is giving an explanation that would vindicate intuitions about such constraints, so it is not an objection of concern to point out that there *may* be some other explanation. To be sure, there may be! But without such an explanation, I can't say much more other than to point to the merits of the one I have given.

In all, then, this comprises the beginning of an account of irreplaceable value.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See also my discussion in (Bradford forthcoming).

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful for the discussion from many audiences including those at MadMeta, Uppsala University, the University of Toronto, Queen's University, Southern Methodist University, Bowling Green State University, University of Texas at Austin, Tilburg University, King's College London, Oberlin College, Boston University, and the British Society for Aesthetics, as well as discussion with and comments from Selim Berker, Chris Howard, Olle Risberg, two anonymous readers for this volume, and many others.

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