
THE COMPETITION ACCOUNT OF ACHIEVEMENT-VALUE

BY

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Abstract: A great achievement makes one's life go better independently of its results, but what makes an achievement great? A simple answer is—its difficulty. I defend this view against recent, pressing objections by interpreting difficulty in terms of competitiveness. Difficulty is determined not by how hard the agent worked for the end but by how hard others would need to do in order to compete. Successfully reaching a goal is a valuable achievement because it is difficult, and it is difficult because it is competitive. Hence, both virtuosic performances and lucky successes can be valuable achievements.

Though men pride themselves on their great deeds, these are not often the result of great plans, but rather the result of chance. (La Rochefoucauld 2007[1678]: §57)

1. *Introduction*¹

Many value theorists agree that great achievements make your life go better²; to attain some properly significant goal through intentional, goal-directed activity promotes your welfare.³ Such achievement-value is independent of that borne by the fruit of your achievement. For example, creating a beautiful and original artwork makes your life go better even if you immediately lose the work to a studio-fire.

Not all successful goal-directed activities are valuable achievements of course. In my case, at least, when I set out to get the mail, and then do so, my performance does not amount to a valuable achievement. In order to isolate valuable achievements, most philosophical accounts begin with a version of the following:

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Difficulty View (DV): Achieving a goal is valuable for the agent if doing so involves difficulty, and it is more valuable the more difficulty it involves.

Several counterintuitive implications of DV lead most philosophers, however, to propose alternative conditions instead of or in addition to difficulty.⁴ Consider these three worrisome implications:

Needless difficulty: According to DV, injecting capsaicin under one's skin before writing an academic essay will increase the value the achievement of writing that essay bears for the writer *ceteris paribus*.⁵

Misguided but lucky effort: According to DV, stumbling upon a buried treasure by pure luck after following a dowsing rod through a desert counts as a highly valuable achievement for the treasure-hunter because of the effort spent with the dowsing rod.

Effortless virtuosity: According to DV, a highly skilled and practiced performer of a technical composition on the violin does not attain an achievement of any significant value for herself in performing the piece insofar as doing so is relatively easy for her to do.⁶

DV is indeed implausible if it entails that confronting such needless or misguided but lucky difficulties contributes greatly to one's welfare while virtuosic performance does not. This paper considers whether these are faults with DV itself or only the interpretation to which it is subjected.

I propose a new, unified interpretation of difficulty that avoids these implications. On my view, achievement-value is *solely* determined by the difficulty of the task, but the difficulty of the task is determined by how much effort competitors would exhibit in a comparable task rather than by how much effort the agent herself exhibits in the completion of the task.

My argument for this *competitive interpretation* of DV involves showing how it handles versions of the three objections just enumerated better than the most developed analysis of achievement-value currently on offer: what I call the *effortful interpretation* (Bradford 2015).⁷ In Section 2, I argue that DV is worth taking seriously, that difficulty is not bad for us the way it might seem at first. In Section 3, I lay out the competitive and effortful interpretations side by side. In Section 4, I introduce an important qualification on Bradford's acceptance of DV: She argues that difficulty is required for and that it contributes to, achievement-value but that there is another necessary and contributory condition, *competence*. I show that DV, on my interpretation, better handles cases of needless difficulty (Section 5), lucky achievements (Section 6), and effortless artistic creations (Section 7) than does Bradford's analysis of achievement-value. In Section 8, I consider an objection to the competitive interpretation of DV based on the role personal struggles play in our intuitions about achievement-value. I conclude that the competitive interpretation provides an adequate analysis of achievement-value, allowing us to reach a reflective equilibrium with respect to

our various intuitions and considered judgments regarding achievement and welfare.

2. *Isn't difficulty bad for us?*

Achievements contribute welfare value to the achiever independently of the value of the product of the achievement. The magnitude of the value of the achievement seems to track the difficulty of its accomplishment. This suggests that difficulty itself contributes to, or even constitutes, the value of the achievement. Hence, DV.

There is a common assumption that runs directly against DV. If true, taking DV as a starting point for an analysis of achievement-value would be foolhardy. I think it's false, unsurprisingly.

The assumption is that confronting difficulty in the pursuit of a goal is *prima facie* bad for us.⁸ Perhaps no philosopher has articulated this assumption with more clarity and vigor than Schopenhauer. He argues that humans are wired such that every impediment toward the immediate realization of the ends we pursue constitutes a painful state of want or striving and that all other aspects of our pursuits recede into the background against this painful striving:

Just as the brook makes no eddy as long as it encounters no obstacles, so too human as well as animal nature entail that we do not properly notice and realize everything that goes in accordance with our will. If we were to notice it, then it must not have immediately gone in accordance with our will, but must have met with some obstacle.—On the other hand, we sense directly, immediately, and very clearly everything that opposes, crosses and resists our will, therefore all that is unpleasant and painful. [...] On this rests the negativity of well-being and happiness, frequently emphasized by me, as opposed to the positivity of pain. (Schopenhauer 2015[1851]: 262)

Happiness and well-being have a negative character, for Schopenhauer, because what's good in life (including great achievements) withdraws from our attention in light of the constant struggle our activities require of us. Hence, life, for Schopenhauer, is constant suffering.

Nietzsche, too, plays on the intuitiveness of this assumption while articulating a directly opposed view, a view that agrees with DV:

Whether hedonism, [Schopenhauerian] pessimism, Utilitarianism, or eudaimonism: all these ways of thinking that measure the value of things according to *pleasure* and *pain*, that is according to concomitants and incidentals, are foreground-ways-of-thinking and naiveties, upon which anyone who appreciates the *formative* powers and an artist's conscience will look not without ridicule[...]. You want where possible—and there is no crazier 'where possible'—to *eliminate suffering*; and we?—it seems precisely that we would rather have it still higher and worse than it has been! Well-being as you understand it—this is really no aim [Ziel], this appears to us as an *end* [Ende]! ([1886] *Beyond Good and Evil* §225)⁹

Nietzsche *praises* the value of suffering. The suffering or striving characteristic of a difficult achievement is, he argues, itself valuable. Reflection on Nietzsche's example of artistic creation helps us see that things aren't as simple as Schopenhauer would have us think.

Oftentimes artistic creation does indeed *feel* hard; there is a first-personal strain associated in general with exerting ourselves in performing a difficult task. Call this *phenomenal effort*. Notice two things about phenomenal effort: First, it's not the same as other painful experiences; the feeling of effort or strain in writing is very unlike a headache. Accordingly, an artist might agree that the creation of an elaborate work of art was *difficult*, even *phenomenally effortful*, and yet balk at Schopenhauer's suggestion that it was a *pain*. So, if difficulty is presumed to be bad for us *because* it is presumed to entail a kind of pain, the badness of difficulty rests on a misunderstanding.

Second, whatever value we place on the phenomenal character of difficult tasks, there are *other* reasons to affirm the *positive* value of difficulty. This paper raises several. That there are such reasons is suggested already by the attitudes we take toward difficult, past accomplishments. For instance, we would not expect an artist to look back on an ambitious and successful project with regret simply because it was so difficult. Imagine we could present her with a choice between engaging another highly difficult project or taking up a much easier one which, we promise, will bear all the same instrumental value (in terms of aesthetic value, pay, accolades, etc.). Is it at all clear that she would choose the easier project? Is it clear that the easier would be the prudentially better choice? *Even if* it is desirable to avoid phenomenal effort when all else is equal, it simply does not follow that difficult tasks are less desirable for their difficulty.

I begin this paper by taking sides with Nietzsche, and against Schopenhauer, on this issue. I take it that confronting difficulty in the course of an accomplishment *enhances eo ipso* one's welfare. In my final view, it is not phenomenal effort that contributes value but other features of difficulty. For now, however, consider a thought experiment supporting Nietzsche's view against Schopenhauer's. Bradford (2015, pp. 94–96) asks us to imagine 'a Utopia, where everything we could possibly need is at arms' reach, or at the touch of a button'—or, she adds when considering the gray skies of boredom,¹⁰ with the pop of a pill. In such a place where no exertion is necessary, would we not find ways to introduce challenges into our easy lives? Since, by stipulation, such difficulties aren't necessary in order to obtain any valuable object or even to avoid boredom, 'there must be something about the [difficult] *processes themselves* that is choiceworthy for its own sake' (p. 96).

If we are gripped by the *prima facie* plausibility that difficulty constitutes achievement-value—that DV or something like it is true—the next question is how to interpret DV.

3. *What does it mean for a task to be difficult?*

When is a task difficult and so (per DV) its completion a valuable achievement? If (again per DV) greater difficulty contributes greater value, then precisely how do we measure difficulty? The final aim of this paper is to defend a new interpretation of the measure of difficulty that resolves the apparent objections to DV from above. Here, I juxtapose this interpretation to Bradford's recent analysis of difficulty which is both probing and intuitive though, I argue, ultimately mistaken. At stake in the debate between her view and mine is whether difficulty requires that the agent find her performance effortful.

3.1. BRADFORD'S EFFORTFUL INTERPRETATION OF DIFFICULTY

Bradford's (2015, Ch. 2) interpretation seizes on the intuitive idea that a task is difficult in virtue of the phenomenal effort one exerts in carrying it out.¹¹ Accordingly, I call it the *effortful interpretation*. It has four principal components.

Here are the first three:

- E1. Difficulty consists in a degree of effort.
- E2. Effort is a primitive (but quantifiable) feature of first-personal experience.
- E3. An activity is difficult for an agent in virtue of the effort the agent exerts in carrying it out.

E1 and E3 are fairly self-explanatory. E2 is drawn from the notion of phenomenal effort introduced above.¹² I do not object to E2 in this paper; my objection focuses on E3 and E4 (below).

Since all activities require some degree of effort on the agent's part, difficulty proper involves effort above a double-threshold on the effortful interpretation. The first threshold marks off what Bradford (2015, pp. 50–51) calls 'intense effort' as opposed to a mere or background effort. What matters for measuring the difficulty of a task, she argues, is not the total phenomenal effort exerted by the agent in the performance of the task. If that were so, then the first-personally easiest task imaginable (watching mindless TV) could be more difficult than an incredibly effortful task simply through being extended over a long enough period of time (pp. 47–49). Instead, she counts only the effort above a threshold

of intensity such that exhibiting this intense effort constitutes what we ordinarily call an *effortful* rather than *effortless* endeavor. Bradford does not state how this intensity threshold is to be determined precisely. Perhaps she thinks of it as primitive, like the notion of effort itself. Or perhaps it is relative to the task, like the second threshold. My objection below focuses on Bradford's second threshold, and my alternative interpretation does without an intensity threshold altogether.

Bradford argues that the second threshold should be determined *absolutely* rather than agent-relatively. Specifically, she offers the following:

- E4. 'Difficult things require some sufficient degree of intense effort greater than the average intense effort' for the particular class of activity (2015, p. 55).

These four analyses of *difficulty* serve as the effortful interpretation of DV's claim that difficulty is required for and contributes to the value of an achievement.

Consider the achievement of composing a short story. On the effortful interpretation, the composition of a short story is difficult, and so a valuable achievement, to the extent that the writing process involves sufficiently more intense effort for the writer than the average composition involves for the average writer. Determining the precise threshold of E4 will require careful consideration of the relevant class of activity, but the basic picture is clear enough: The more effortful the task feels to the writer, the more difficult and so valuable it is *qua* achievement.

I now compare the effortful interpretation to my preferred alternative.

3.2. INTERPRETING DIFFICULTY AS COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE

I propose an interpretation of difficulty that departs from Bradford's in a couple key respects. In particular, instead of focusing on how effortful a task feels to an agent, my interpretation focuses on whether the agent's performance of the task is *competitive*, in the sense of being an effortful task *for competitors* to accomplish. On my interpretation, an activity is a valuable achievement for the agent insofar as it *outdoes* others, and it is a greater achievement the *more* it outdoes others.

This account is inspired by the thought that competition provides a special (perhaps unique) means for determining the magnitude and value of human endeavors *by comparison*. Nietzsche, again, gives voice to this thought when he writes that a person's strength

has a kind of *measure* in the opposition for which he has need; every growth gives itself away by seeking after a mightier opponent—or problem: because a philosopher who is warlike challenges even problems to duel. ([1888] *Ecce Homo*, 'Why I am So Wise' §7)

A person's strength is that feature explaining her capacity to achieve.¹³ Nietzsche's point is that without a literal or implicit competitor, one has no way to quantify one's own strength or the degree of difficulty one faces in striving after an achievement. My interpretation of DV runs with this insight.

The competitive interpretation of difficulty is a formal interpretation made up of these four components:

- C1. Difficulty consists in a degree of effort.
- C2. An activity is difficult for an agent in virtue of the effort an average member of the activity's reference class would exert in carrying out the activity.
- C3. The reference class of the activity the agent carries out consists in those agents who are or have been engaged in like activities regarded at the time of engaging in the activities.
- C4. Difficult activities require some sufficient degree of effort by the reference class greater than the average degree of effort of the reference class for an average like activity.

The competitive interpretation of difficulty is similar to the effortful interpretation in that both treat the sort of difficulty conditioning valuable achievement in terms of effort exerted above a determinate threshold (C1 = E1; cf. C4 to E4). Both interpretations, moreover, treat that threshold as relative to the class of activity to which the agent's achievement is being compared. In my case, the *reference class* is relative to the activity in the same way (C3). While I cannot consider here how best to specify such activity classes, I point the reader to Bradford's helpful discussion as a starting point (2015, pp. 55–62). My focus in this paper is on the relative merits of the effortful and competitive interpretations.

Where the competitive interpretation differs most from the effortful interpretation is in rejecting the agent-relativity of the difficulty of an achievement (contrast C2 to E3). On the competitive interpretation, the agent herself need not actually exert effort of the degree required by the threshold described in C4 in order to count as having done something difficult and so as having attained a valuable achievement. A task is difficult if the average competitors' completion of that task would involve more effort on *their* part than the average comparable activity.

This rejection of agent-relativity in favor of interpersonal comparison is the most distinctive feature of my competitive interpretation of difficulty. Von Kriegstein (2019), for instance, also criticizes the effortful interpretation for being too agent-relative, but his proposed alternative is a dualistic interpretation of difficulty. On the one hand, he embraces 'something like' the effortful interpretation as an interpretation of 'agent-relative' difficulty. And, on the other hand, he supplements it with an 'agent-neutral' account of difficulty measured not in terms of effort at all but in terms of probability of

success. Valuable achievements, then, are those that are difficult in one or both senses. I agree (partly for reasons discussed below) that neither the agent-*relative* effortful interpretation nor the agent-*neutral* probabilistic interpretation suffices on its own as an account of DV. But I worry about, among other things, how precisely these discrete axes of difficulty are supposed to interact in comparisons of achievement-value on such a dualistic model.¹⁴ My approach here is different. When it comes to interpreting DV, rather than conceiving of difficulty as an agent-relative notion (where the fact of an endeavor's difficulty varies based on who performs it) or an agent-neutral notion (where there is a constant, objective fact of its difficulty)—and rather than proposing to combine the two in some way—I conceive of difficulty in terms of *comparisons of actual persons* (living or historical). In other words, difficulty, on my view, is an *interpersonal* matter (i.e. relative to an implicit sphere of competition) rather than a wholly subjective (i.e. relative to the agent) or wholly objective one (i.e. relative at most to all agents or humans as such). I argue that this competitive interpretation of DV provides an adequate account of achievement-value all on its own.

Returning to the comparison to the effortful interpretation, a few more points of clarification are in order. The competitive, unlike the effortful interpretation, does not invoke an intensity threshold of effort. The competitive interpretation of DV yields fairly consistent results regardless of how finely we measure effort. This is because what matters on this interpretation is only how much effort the average competitor would exert in the performance in question as compared to the average performance of a like activity. Atypical differences across agents in total effort exhibited in the performance of a like activity will average out.

The competitive interpretation is formal because, in addition to a notion of activity class, it requires a measure of effort in order to yield determinate results. In this paper, I take up Bradford's *phenomenal* conception of effort (E2) for convenience.¹⁵ However, the competitive interpretation is more adaptable than the effortful interpretation to alternative measures of effort.¹⁶

On the competitive interpretation, the difficulty of an achievement is a function of how effortful the task would be for the average comparable competitor. This should not, however, be taken to imply that achievements are only possible in the context of *actual* interpersonal competition.¹⁷

A philosopher who writes a groundbreaking book on a new area of inquiry is likely to count, on the competitive interpretation, as having done something difficult (and so achievement-valuable) despite the fact that she was not literally competing with anyone else in writing the book. The sense of competitiveness relevant to assessing the difficulty of her performance concerns simply whether this book would have been difficult for the average philosopher to complete. We can approximate this counterfactual state of affairs by identifying comparable philosophical works and assessing the average effort they required of their authors.¹⁸

Beyond *implicit* competitions, like that between one philosopher and another, we can also construe cases of *self-competition* as valuable achievements on my interpretation of DV. Consider Usain Bolt, the world-record holder for the 100-m dash. He first set the record in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Since then, he has broken his own world-record twice. Imagine an (admittedly preposterous) world where Bolt went on to break his own world-record so many times that all other athletes abandoned the 100-m race. As he continues setting new records, it would become increasingly irrelevant to compare Bolt's latest performance to those of other runners. Whether Bolt's performance is properly difficult and so a valuable achievement would eventually be determined solely by comparing how much effort it would have taken his prior self to match his latest performance.¹⁹ Interpreting DV competitively does not, in short, require there to be other human beings who are or have engaged in the same activity in order for there to be a fact of the matter regarding a performance's difficulty and achievement-value. Nietzsche seems to have something like this in mind when describing philosophers as 'challenging even problems to duel'; even a solitary task can be competitive.

Below I compare the merits of the effortful and competitive interpretations of difficulty, arguing that the latter is superior. Unfortunately, we cannot simply compare these two interpretations of difficulty by applying problem cases directly to them because the full force of Bradford's effortful analysis of achievement-value requires a further move, one that is not necessary for my competitive interpretation.²⁰ While this move ultimately opens her up to further objections, it is crucial for her response to the objections already raised above.

4. *Is difficulty enough for achievement?*

Bradford supplements difficulty with a further necessary and contributory condition on achievement-value, *competence*. Specifically, she argues for the following alternative to DV:

Difficulty-Competence View (DCV): Achieving a goal is valuable for the agent if the following two necessary conditions are met and to the extent that the two contributory conditions are met.

Difficulty: Achieving a goal is valuable for the agent *only if* doing so involves difficulty, and the more difficulty involved in achieving the goal, the more valuable it is for the agent.

Competence: Achieving a goal is valuable for the agent *only if* the process of reaching it is carried out with at least a minimum of competence, and the greater the competence with which the achievement is carried out, the more valuable it is for the agent.

DV and DCV both claim that difficulty is a necessary and contributory condition on achievement-value. But DCV does not take difficulty to be sufficient for achievement-value the way DV does; DCV also takes competence to be a necessary and a contributory condition.

Bradford argues that competence is necessary for, and contributes to, achievement-value on the basis of one of the objections to DV from above:

Misguided but lucky effort: According to DV, stumbling upon a buried treasure by pure luck after following a dowsing rod through a desert counts as a highly valuable achievement for the treasure-hunter because of the effort spent with the dowsing rod.

She argues that luckily discovering treasure through arduous but misguided means is not valuable in the way that diligently searching through records, excavations, etc. is. Furthermore, she argues, ‘If difficulty were the only source of value in achievements, then [the two] discoveries would have the same [achievement]-value’ (Bradford 2015, p. 100). One easily sees how the competence condition rules out misguided but lucky effort from being a valuable achievement, even without spelling out a theory of competence.²¹

I raise concerns for the competence requirement below.²² But in order to consider the full force of the effortful interpretation, and so present my argument against it in the most charitable light, we should bear in mind that Bradford offers it as an interpretation of DCV rather than of DV.

5. *The competitive interpretation better handles needless difficulties*

Regardless of whether we adopt DV or DCV, the competitive interpretation yields a better response than the effortful interpretation to every objection to the role of difficulty in defining achievement-value from above.

Recall the first objection:

Needless difficulty: According to DV/DCV, injecting capsaicin under one’s skin before writing an academic essay will increase the value the achievement of writing that essay bears for the writer *ceteris paribus*.

Does the effortful interpretation of DCV allow, problematically, for needlessly introduced difficulties to contribute to the value of achievements? In short, sometimes.

Bradford (2015, pp. 93–94) responds to this objection by observing that the *ceteris paribus* clause in the objection will not typically hold for a couple reasons. First, DCV (like DV) is an account of achievement-value, not an exhaustive account of welfare value much less of value generally. There will of course often be many other evaluative considerations to make when deciding how to write besides how to maximize effort. Second, making one’s

achievements needlessly difficult will tend to prevent one from competently carrying them out. So, assuming that competence is a necessary condition on achievement-value, introducing needless difficulty will not actually enhance achievement-value in those cases.

What about when the *ceteris paribus* clause does hold? In fact, many instances of needless difficulty will contribute achievement-value according to the effortful interpretation. We can, for instance, imagine a writer writing just as competently with capsaicin under his skin as without. In that case, the capsaicin would contribute achievement-value for the writer on the effortful interpretation of DCV. This is counterintuitive since his task of writing does not seem any more of an achievement in virtue of the additional, arbitrarily introduced effort.

Bradford's effortful interpretation of DCV implies that some, but not all cases of needless difficulty, contribute achievement-value. It limits the scope of the original objection, rather than addressing it completely.²³

How does the competitive interpretation compare? It rules out the contribution of needless difficulties to achievement-value much more fully and regardless of whether competence is invoked as a separate condition. The extra effort required of the pained writer, for instance, will not contribute one iota to the difficulty of his task on the competitive interpretation, provided that the average competitor does not similarly inject capsaicin under their skin. What matters on this interpretation is not how hard a task is felt to be for the agent but how effortful it would be for a competitor. So, an agent's introducing arbitrary sources of effort to her task does not make that task any more difficult or its completion any more valuable. This is a clear advantage over the effortful interpretation.

The competitive interpretation does imply, however, that if a large proportion of comparable authors made their task needlessly difficult by exerting irrelevant effort, this irrelevant effort would bear on questions of achievement-value. Such common though needless difficulty would raise the bar of difficulty required for a valuable achievement in that activity. While surprising, I think this is the correct conclusion. Many of what we intuitively think of as remarkable achievements derive their difficulty not from an essential relation between the final goal and the obstacles to reaching it but rather from the constraints conventionally placed on the pursuit of the goal. Achieving in games is a clear example of this. It is the arbitrary rules of baseball that make hitting a double a valuable achievement. Rules that made this needlessly harder, or that removed some of the needless difficulty, would have a direct effect on the value of that achievement.

Chalk one up to the competitive interpretation. This is, admittedly, an indecisive reason to favor it over the effortful interpretation. The next two advantages are weightier.

6. *The competitive interpretation better handles misguided, lucky effort*

Recall once more:

Misguided but lucky effort: According to DV, stumbling upon a buried treasure by pure luck after following a dowsing rod through a desert counts as a highly valuable achievement for the treasure-hunter because of the effort spent with the dowsing rod.

The lucky discoverer exerted a great deal of (misguided) effort. So this objection sticks to the effortful interpretation of DV. As we have already seen, however, Bradford responds to this objection by invoking competence as a further condition on achievement-value (per DCV). The lucky discoverer's lucky discovery does not count as a valuable achievement because it was pursued in an incompetent manner.

This response, however, seems to me to confuse two different issues: One issue is whether highly difficult and highly valuable achievements (call them *great achievements*) can be *lucky*. It is another issue entirely whether *misguided effort contributes* to the greatness of the achievement. In what follows, I argue that great achievements can be lucky but that misguided effort does not contribute to their greatness. The competence requirement is not necessary, on the competitive interpretation, to prevent misguided effort from contributing to the greatness of achievements. Moreover, the competence requirement rules out too many cases of genuinely great though lucky achievements. For this reason, I prefer DV to DCV.

Take the issue of misguided effort first. The lucky treasure-hunter is supposed to have done something *difficult* that is only fortuitously connected to his discovery. This seems like an objection to DV because it seems clear that *this difficulty* does not *constitute* a valuable achievement, whereas according to DV, achievement-value simply consists in difficulty.

This is not a problem for DV on the competitive interpretation, however, since achievement-value never consists in the effort actually exerted by the agent, misguided or not. What matters, on the competitive interpretation, is how effortful the discovery would have been for the average treasure-hunter (compared to the effort of the average treasure-hunt). The average treasure-hunter would not have proceeded by using a dowsing rod, so the effort exerted doing this is not a factor on the difficulty of the discovery. Whether the discovery was an achievement, then, has nothing to do with the agent's misguided effort on the competitive interpretation of DV. This response is not available to the effortful interpretation, since what matters on that view is simply how effortful the task happens to be for the agent.

Now for the *separate* issue of whether luck is consistent with achievement-value. Consider, first, how DV evaluates the achievement-value of the lucky treasure-hunter on the competitive interpretation. Reaching a verdict here

requires comparing two average levels of effort: First, we need to determine how much effort the average treasure-hunter exerts in discovering the average treasure. Let us call that level of effort ${}_A E_A$. Next, we need to know not how much effort our lucky discoverer actually exerted (${}_L E_L$) but how much effort the average treasure-hunter would exert in discovering this lucky discoverer's lucky discovery (${}_A E_L$). According to the competitive interpretation of DV, the value of this lucky discoverer's achievement is determined by the extent to which ${}_A E_L > {}_A E_A$. If our lucky treasure-hunter stumbled upon a hard-to-find treasure, then his discovery was indeed difficult and so a valuable achievement for him. If his treasure was easy-to-find, then it wasn't a valuable achievement.

This is a different conclusion regarding the achievement-value of the treasure-hunter than we would get if we embraced DCV. But this seems to me precisely the right conclusion for an account of achievement-value to reach. For that reason, this seems to me an objection to the competence requirement.²⁴

Why is this the right conclusion? I offer three reasons.

On the competitive interpretation of DV, the lucky discovery of treasure may in fact be a *great* achievement for the discoverer even though it involved misguided effort. But to repeat, the achievement was *not great because of its misguided effort* on this view. That would be true if, as on the effortful interpretation, we took the misguided effort exerted to be relevant to the difficulty of the task. But on the competitive interpretation, such effort is irrelevant. It just so happens that the achievement was a competitive and, so, a difficult one despite the manner in which it was pursued. It is the fact of its competitiveness rather than the fact of the effort actually exerted that makes it a great achievement. My first reason to embrace lucky achievements is that doing so does not require us to value misguided effort. This wasn't obvious when first considering the lucky treasure-hunter.

Now consider a less bizarre example:

Lucky swing: Jack is a baseball player with a .250 batting average, which is fairly typical and not excellent. He takes to the plate at the bottom of the ninth in front a pitcher about to complete a no-hitter. The pitcher throws his infamous curveball. Jack reacts with the same instincts he has built up over years of playing, instincts that explain his batting average. He (mistakenly) swings lower than he (incorrectly) thinks the ball is heading, but luckily, his mistaken execution matches his inaccurate prediction perfectly; he makes contact at just the right point in his swing sending the ball out of the park and winning the game.

Here, unlike with the treasure-hunter, it's intuitive that Jack's home run is a highly valuable achievement. That *he* was lucky does not seem to detract from the *difficulty* or achievement-value of the task. My second reason to embrace lucky achievements is that, when we consider cases that do not

include grossly misguided effort, it is actually intuitive that luck is consistent with achievement-value.

A third and deeper reason to embrace lucky achievements is that luck is a nearly ubiquitous feature of the intuitively greatest achievements, even ones that are competently executed. Consider this case:

Competently beating the odds: Jesuina is a competent treasure-hunter searching (competently) for a submerged treasure somewhere in a vast region of the Pacific Ocean. This region is larger than any person—or, indeed, any moderate-sized team of persons—can scour in a lifetime. Using the best techniques and research, Jesuina forms a hunting plan, pursues it, and then discovers the treasure.

Jesuina's discovery was partially the product of good research and technique. Nevertheless, Jesuina's research and technique were not enough to guarantee success. As described, failure seemed much *more* likely than success. So, if beating the odds in a manner that cannot be attributed to one's agency alone counts as doing something with the aid of luck, then Jesuina was quite lucky indeed. But surely her lucky achievement is a paradigmatically great one.²⁵ And the very fact that she beats the odds is what here signifies the greatness of her achievement. Thus, far from signifying non-achievement, luck—once stripped of its connection to misguided effort—actually signifies great achievements.

One might try to weaken the connection between great achievements and luck by arguing that, while Jesuina achieved something great, it was no greater than a similar achievement pursued by the same means but *where the discovery required and obtained less luck*.²⁶ On such a view, luck would be consistent with achievement-value, but we would *discount* achievement-value in proportion to the luck involved. The problem with this response is that many of the features of Jesuina's task that mark out her achievement as intuitively great just are those features that made her success depend upon luck. These features are those properties of reality that determine the probability of success in a task pursued in a particular (competent) manner. For Jesuina, they are the features determining how large an area she can search and how narrowly she can determine the treasure's whereabouts. Thus, the proposed view would imply that discovering a buried treasure in the midst of huge region of the Pacific bears no more achievement-value than discovering a buried treasure in the midst of a much smaller region by the same means. This amounts to throwing out our impression of the greatness of achievements for the sake of blocking luck from correlating to their value for the agents. But once we have distinguished the issue of misguided effort from the issue of luck, I see no reason to block luck at such a cost.²⁷

Recall that the goal of analyzing achievement-value is to account for the contribution great achievements make to one's welfare. We can ask other evaluative questions about achievements, such as whether they exhibit

expertise.²⁸ That the success of the endeavor was lucky might count against its being an exhibition of expertise. Perhaps exhibiting, acquiring, or possessing expertise also contributes to one's welfare. But I see no reason to insist on the same constraints when analyzing achievement-value. That luck can affect welfare value in the way entailed by embracing lucky achievements is similar to the familiar ways in which it can affect moral worth. As with moral theory, trying to insulate value theory from all impacts of luck so evident in our daily lives threatens to disconnect our theory from lived experience.

If my argument for embracing lucky achievements is successful, we have reason to prefer DV to DCV since taking competence as a necessary condition on achievement-value rules out many cases of lucky achievements from being genuinely valuable ones. This, in turn, gives us reason to adopt the competitive interpretation of DV over the effortful interpretation, since the effortful interpretation without the competence requirement implies that misguided achievements are more valuable for the agent *because of their misguided effort*. We have, then, a second argument in favor of the competitive interpretation of DV. I have saved the strongest argument for last.

7. The effortful interpretation cannot handle noneffortful achievements

The most pressing objection to the effortful interpretation of DCV stems from the following:

Effortless virtuosity: According to DV/DCV, a highly skilled and practiced performer of a technical composition on the violin does not attain an achievement of any significant value for herself in performing the piece insofar as doing so is relatively easy for her to do.

The effortful interpretation of the difficulty requirement implies that *effortless* (i.e. non-intensely effortful) performances of otherwise difficult tasks do not count as valuable achievements for the performer. The competitive interpretation does not. This is a significant advantage of the competitive interpretation since playing a difficult violin piece flawlessly seems like a genuine and valuable achievement *for the virtuosic violinist*.²⁹

In this section, I consider, first, how the competitive interpretation handles this case and, then, Bradford's response to this objection. I argue that her effortful interpretation is unable to account for the full range of paradigmatic achievements that aren't effortful for the agent. I conclude that this provides us with the strongest argument in favor of the competitive interpretation of DV.

7.1. COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF VIRTUOSITY

The competitive interpretation better handles the objection of effortless virtuosity than the effortful interpretation. Because the difficulty of the task, on the competitive interpretation, is measured by how much effort the average competitor would exert in order to accomplish the same end, the effortlessness of the agent's actual performance in no way diminishes the difficulty of the task or the value of the achievement for the virtuoso.

In order to determine whether a virtuosic performance is a valuable achievement on the competitive interpretation of DV, however, we need to specify the relevant reference class (C3). Who are the relevant competitors to our virtuosic violinist: other (professional) violinists or other virtuosos? I am inclined to think there are multiple (potential) achievements here, but I needn't insist on this point. The competitive interpretation issues the following conditional verdicts: If the reference class is taken to be any (professional) violinist, then our virtuoso's performance is a valuable achievement for her; if virtuosos, then it depends on further facts about the effort this particular performance would require of *other* virtuosos compared to the average effort of a virtuosic performance. If our virtuoso performed a piece so challenging that most virtuosos would exert more effort performing it than they would in the average virtuosic performance, then the competitive interpretation yields the verdict that this performance bears achievement-value for the virtuoso. If this was a run-of-the-mill virtuosic performance, then it might not bear achievement-value for the virtuoso.

These conditional conclusions seem to me entirely appropriate and certainly far preferable to the conclusion that virtuosic performances never bear any achievement-value for the virtuoso. That latter conclusion is what follows from the effortful interpretation since the difficulty requirement on that interpretation demands that a task involve much intense effort on the agent's part in order for it to bear any achievement-value. Bradford embraces this conclusion, though she introduces a distinct sense in which the virtuoso *does* achieve something (something, however, of no achievement-value for her).

Difficulty is an agent-relative notion on the effortful interpretation (E3). Bradford points out that we can coin a derivative notion of difficulty by making recourse to an *ad hoc* reference class (such as the class of average persons in relevantly similar circumstances). Such a derivative notion allows us to say that some activities are difficult relative to a reference class without being difficult *for the agent*. But, to be clear, such derivative difficulty does not contribute achievement-value on Bradford's effortful interpretation. On her view, a virtuosic performance can be difficult and so an achievement (*vis-à-vis* some reference class) even though it is neither difficult nor a *valuable* achievement *for the virtuoso* (2015, p. 62).

It seems wrong to me, and others,³⁰ to say that the effortlessness of the performance prevents it from being a valuable achievement for the

virtuoso. I grant, however, that musical performances require a great deal of practice doing approximately the same activity as the performance. So perhaps a polished (because patiently practiced) performance is not the remarkable achievement the virtuoso reaches; perhaps the real achievement here is *acquiring* virtuosity. While this observation helps with the case of the virtuoso, there is a much larger class of noneffortful artistry, which Bradford does not consider, and which increases the strain on the effortful interpretation.

7.2. MORE DIFFICULT CASES THAN VIRTUOSITY

First, consider

Patient creation: Helga³¹ is an established, successful painter. She follows a humble, daily routine, which she often finds enjoyable. Her most recent project proceeds more easily than usual. Its completion involved *far below the average level of intense effort* she has come to expect from such a project and even farther below the intense effort required of a comparable work of art by the average artist. When she finishes, she believes it to be her best artistic creation to date, one so highly innovative that it will mark a new movement in the medium. Others agree. Years later, her belief is confirmed.

Helga clearly has achieved something valuable. Such a patient creation is a real achievement, it seems to me, and is genuinely valuable if any achievements are. But Helga's case fails to meet the difficulty requirement on Bradford's effortful interpretation of DCV. Because the amount of intense effort involved in the creation was minimal, far less than average, Helga's creation fails to clear the threshold of difficulty necessary for being a valuable achievement (E4). A different result follows from the competitive interpretation. Helga's artistic contribution certainly would have been effortful *for the average painter*. So the competitive interpretation implies that Helga's creation is a valuable achievement for her.

Consider, second,

Creation in the zone: Sofia is a novelist who has recently relocated to rural New England where the present winter is especially harsh. With scenic but uninviting views of the world from her desk, she finds it easy to plug away on her latest book. In her daily writing, she quickly enters into the zone, effortlessly putting words on the page, designing, and then carrying out her vision. She completes her first draft in two short months which seem to breeze by. This draft becomes her most critically acclaimed novel.

The average drafting of a novel is not, I suppose, spent almost entirely *in the zone* the way Sofia's was. If we also assume that writing while in the zone is not *intensely* effortful, then Sofia's achievement involves less intense effort than the average comparable novel. So Sofia's composition of her novel fails to count as difficult or, for that reason, as a valuable

achievement on the effortful interpretation. Again, her achievement is a valuable one on the competitive interpretation since the average writer would presumably have to work harder than on the average novel in order to write such an acclaimed book. Here, too, the competitive interpretation seems to reach the right conclusion, whereas the effortful interpretation does not: Sofia's composition was a valuable achievement for her.

Finally, consider a third case³²:

Spontaneous creation: Irmin³³ was a West-German composer who, in the 1960s, traveled to New York City and spent time at the Chelsea Hotel. He experimented there with improvisational rock music on the piano opposite a bass player. He described the experience this way, 'I would play a simple melody, and then he would play a few notes on the bass that completely changed the harmonic context. Then I would offer a new variation within that context, and he would re-interpret again.' This improvisational session led Irmin to a whole new approach to popular music within the rock milieu. He returned to West Germany and formed an experimental rock band, which became one of the most influential bands in Europe in the middle of the century. When asked, he did not exactly describe his musical co-creations as *easy*, but he repeatedly called them *effortless*, much less strenuous than his traditional compositions.

Irmin's spontaneous creations are genuine achievements, but they fail to involve as much intense effort for Irmin as his traditional compositions did. Indeed, it is unclear whether Irmin's effort was *intense* at all. For reasons analogous to those above, Irmin seems not to have done anything difficult on the effortful interpretation even though he has on the competitive interpretation. So, again, this case points in favor of the latter.

Our sense that Helga, Sofia, and Irmin each attained a genuinely valuable achievement undermines the intuitive connection between exerted effort and great achievement that Bradford's view builds on. A lot of artistic creations fail to count as genuinely valuable achievements for the artists on the effortful interpretation. It's possible that Bradford, in dismissing the counterexample of virtuosic performance, did not appreciate how expansive the range of noneffortful creations is. This expanse alone increases the pressure on us to adopt the competitive interpretation rather than the effortful interpretation. Moreover, I show that the proposed response to the case of the virtuoso considered above is of no use in these other cases.

7.3. WHY THESE CASES ARE MORE DECISIVE

The cases of noneffortful creations I described above share an important feature that may not necessarily belong to effortless virtuosity but which is intuitively connected to achievement-value. These cases are stipulated to result in what we might call *artistic contributions*—the creation of genuinely original and influential works of art. What counts as an achievement in art more than such contribution? Indeed, Huddleston (2012) plausibly suggests

that artistic value (as opposed to the aesthetic or other value of an artwork) consists precisely in the achievement-value of the creation of art.³⁴

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the value of the achievement *consists in* the value of the artwork that results. I endorse DV according to which the value of the achievement consists in its difficulty. What I am suggesting, however, is that artistic contribution is a paradigm case of a valuable achievement. So we have a reasonable (though defeasible) expectation that an account of achievement-value would count such contributions as valuable.

This expectation is why the effortful interpretation of DCV disappoints so much when it fails to classify such contributions as valuable achievements. Given the competitive interpretation as an alternative that meets this expectation, we can ask whether it is more desirable to preserve the intuition that intense effort is necessary for an achievement than that artistic contributions are valuable achievements. And since I have already raised separate reasons to refine the intuition that effort contributes achievement-value, this intuition seems to provide even less reason to defy our expectation of the achievement-value of artistic contributions.

It does not help the effortful interpretation, moreover, to propose that the real achievement reached by Helga, Sofia, and Irmin is that of *becoming an artist* who creates artistic contributions with little effort. Helga certainly achieves something valuable by becoming a methodical and patient creator; so, too, do Sofia and Irmin. But there are at least three reasons to reject the proposal that this is the only source of achievement-value for the noneffortful creator.

First, if Huddleston (2012) is right that artistic value just is achievement-value, then reducing the apparent achievement-value of Helga's creation to the achievement of becoming the artist she is would imply that her beautiful, innovative, and influential creations also bear no artistic value!

Second, the proposal implies that, by becoming especially competent in creating art effortlessly, one *thereby* achieves less of value for oneself in so creating. But it seems odd to say that becoming good at achieving something can render future achievement less valuable for one. It's no doubt true that when a child gets the hang of riding her bike, riding around the block ceases to be a valuable achievement for her. But if a professional cyclist were to become so good at cycling that she completed the *Tour of Flanders* as easily as the child rides around the block, would it thereby cease to be a valuable achievement for the professional? Many of the world's greatest achievers are also among the most competent in what they achieve. This is why I am able to generate several examples of noneffortful artistic creation where both the effortlessness and the greatness of the achievements are intuitive. But if we reduce this achievement-value to that of acquiring competence, then the *value* of the achievements of these great achievers would, according to

the effortful interpretation, tend to be far less for them than the value for an ambitious dabbler of a one-off success. This is because the expert exerts far less effort in creating original artwork, winning competitions, etc. than the ambitious dabbler whose tremendous effort just happens to be successful this once.

On DCV, of course, the more *competent* the achievement, the more valuable it is all else being equal and provided it meets the necessary condition of difficulty. So the effortful interpretation of DCV does *not* imply that competence detracts from achievement-value in all cases. *But* it does imply that (1) competence sufficient for reducing the level of intense effort an agent exhibits in the achievement *does* render the achievement less valuable and that (2) in cases like the ones I described where that reduction leads to below-average intense effort, competence undermines any achievement-value in the task whatsoever. Competence, in short, sometimes contributes to achievement-value, sometimes diminishes it, and sometimes negates it entirely. This is a highly revisionist account of achievement-value. In this way, as in others, the competitive interpretation conserves more of what I think are our ordinary judgments about achievement-value.

The third reason to reject the proposal that the achievement-value of noneffortful creations be reduced to the achievement-value of becoming an artist who creates effortlessly is that the proposal fails to account for all our relevant intuitions about noneffortful creations. Consider the following comparison: Imagine Liam who, just like Helga, has become a patient creator, and imagine that for several years they lead identical artistic careers. This last year, however, Helga created a genuine artistic contribution while Liam did not despite his working on a project just as methodically as Helga. Does Helga not acquire more achievement-value in total than Liam? But if the only source of Helga's achievement-value is becoming a patient creator, then Liam would seem to have acquired just as much, according to the effortful interpretation.

It might be mistakenly thought that Helga acquired more achievement-value than Liam in becoming who she is because becoming who she is was a greater achievement *in virtue of the fact* that Helga achieves more in the end. But it does not follow, on the effortful interpretation, that because Helga goes on to achieve more becoming Helga was a greater achievement. It may have been that prior to becoming a patient artist, Liam had many bad artistic habits (such as waiting for inspiration to strike and drinking or using drugs to hasten it). Overcoming these habits may well have involved much more intense effort (thus, difficulty) than Helga's self-creation. In that case, Liam's achievement of becoming who he is was actually a *more valuable* achievement than Helga's on the effortful interpretation, quite in contrast to the difference in their creative output.

My point is that we cannot explain away our intuitions about noneffortful creations by appeal to the distinction between achievement-value for an agent of creating something and achievement-value for the agent of having become the person who creates something. The value of the latter achievement does not track, on Bradford's account, the value of one's creative endeavors. Nor, I suppose, *should* it.

We have, then, one more—and I think the strongest—reason to endorse the competitive interpretation over and against the effortful interpretation. The former, unlike the latter, can account for the achievement-value noneffortful artistic contributions bear for the artist. The competitive interpretation, we have seen, also provides a better explanation for why needless or misguided effort does not contribute to the value of an achievement, and it offers a more compelling account of how valuable achievements can be lucky.

My arguments depend on a variety of evaluative intuitions, which are not always the surest guides in analysis. I certainly do not mean to insist that we heed all of our intuitions no matter what. But as with the entire literature on achievement-value, I have striven to show that there is a kind of reflective equilibrium available to the competitive interpretation that is unavailable to the effortful interpretation given that, on the latter interpretation, needless difficulties can often still contribute to achievement-value, while a lucky or noneffortful task can never be a valuable achievement for the agent.

8. *The objection of personal struggle*

Before closing, I consider an objection to my competitive interpretation of DV that might be thought to upset the reflective equilibrium I have endeavored to establish.³⁵

Consider this case:

Personal struggle: Django³⁶ was a guitarist who, through injury, lost the ability to play on the fretboard with his third and fourth fingers. And yet he went on to become one of the most virtuosic and accomplished jazz guitar players of all time. His innovations in composition and performance have had a lasting effect on jazz music and guitar-playing generally.

The competitive interpretation of DV rightly concludes that Django's artistic contributions are great achievements. It implies, too, that Django's acquisition of virtuosity on the guitar is a great achievement. So far, so good. But the competitive interpretation *also* seems to imply that Django's accomplishments bear no more achievement-value for him than identical contributions on the guitar would for a guitarist able to use four fretboard fingers. Surely, one might object, Django's innovative performances were

more difficult because of his injured hand. But since, on the competitive model, what matters is how effortful the performances would be for an average competitor rather than how much effort the agent herself exhibits in the performance, the number of digits Django deployed would seem to be irrelevant to the value of his achievements.

Django is relevantly similar to a large number of cases where personal struggles seem to bear on the difficulty and value of achievements. One might conclude that the competitive interpretation is misaligned with an important set of our intuitions and that, perhaps, it needs to be supplemented by an agent-relative notion of difficulty in the manner of von Kriegstein's dualistic interpretation.

These conclusions would be too hasty. Whether Django represents a compelling counterexample to the competitive interpretation depends on which of Django's achievements we take his injury to be relevant to assessing. Let us distinguish two broad achievements: his artistic contributions and his acquisition of virtuosity on the fretboard. They were certainly both great, but was one or the other greater *in virtue of* Django's physiological limitations? I argue that, while his injury plausibly did impact the value of his acquisition of virtuosity, it did not impact the achievement-value of his musical contributions—that is, his performances and compositions (which were intertwined).

To begin with the latter point, I encourage those unfamiliar with the real Django Reinhardt to consult videos of his playing. He was a master on the guitar. His first and second fingers on his left hand moved so fluidly along the fretboard as to defy any perception of effort or strain. He played fast, always smoking, and never stumbling. Having become virtuosic, his performances, at least, were decidedly *not* specially effortful in his case. While I agree that we want to say Django did something especially difficult in his life in virtue of his injury, and that our interpretation of DV should allow for that special difficulty to contribute to the value of his achievements, I argue that it's a mistake to attribute this special difficulty to his performances and compositions. His artistic contributions were greater achievements *not because* they involved more effort for him than for other influential guitarists (they *did not* anyway) but *because and to the extent that they were more competitive*.

Django's acquisition of virtuosity, however, probably was more difficult due to his injury. (He was already a skilled guitarist before the injury, and so he had to adapt to a new style of playing). We do seem to have reason to regard this acquisition as a greater achievement in his case. I do not regard this as a problem for the competitive interpretation of DV, however, because I think Django's achievement of acquiring virtuosity is not directly comparable to the acquisition of virtuosity with four fretboard fingers. Django's virtuosity-acquisition required different processes, had different and fewer if any models to follow, and crucially *resulted in different performative*

techniques than his acquisition of virtuosity before the injury. All these differences are surely relevant to determining the class of activity in terms of which we specify the reference class of competitors when assessing the difficulty and so value of Django's achievement of virtuosity on my competitive interpretation.

In summary, the competitive interpretation of DV entails that

- 1a. Django's musical contributions were highly difficult and valuable achievements.
- 1b. The difficulty and achievement-value of his contributions are directly comparable to those of guitarists able to play with four fretboard fingers.
- 2a. Django's (re)acquisition of virtuosity was a highly difficult and valuable achievement.
- 2b. The difficulty and achievement-value of his acquisition of virtuosity are not directly comparable to those of guitarists who play with four fretboard fingers.

I believe that all four of these implications are correct, and it would be an objection to an account of achievement-value if it did not cohere with all four. It is a mark against the effortful interpretation, for instance, that it contradicts 1a. Less obvious, perhaps, is that to deny 1b would be condescending to Django as it would be for analogous cases; it would be tantamount to distinguishing Django's artistic contributions from other contributions on the sole basis of Django's physiological limitations. The music he left behind is beautiful, innovative, and has been influential. What makes this music an achievement for him is not the difficulty *for someone like him* of making such music but its difficulty *full stop*. This gives us reason to conclude, not only that the competitive interpretation stands in need of no supplementation by an agent-relative account of difficulty, but that in fact the agent-relative account leads us astray here. When we transition from considering Django's contributions to considering his virtuosity, we see that to deny 2b would be to identify mistakenly the activity of acquiring skills and habits constitutive of musical virtuosity with the performance they make possible. Django's musical compositions/performances are one thing, the constitutive elements of his virtuosity are another.

While these implications are specific to Django, they represent how to apply the competitive model to other cases where personal struggle seems to bear on the value of an achievement. In the final analysis, the answer on the competitive interpretation depends, as it should, on whether the struggles in question are relevant to marking off a distinct activity and so reference class for the achievement in question. Often, as in Django's case, there are discrete but overlapping achievements which require careful analysis and imply discrete reference classes. A systematic account of these cases would

require a fuller account of how to determine activity classes, which will have to wait for a subsequent paper.

9. Conclusion

To capture the competitive interpretation of DV with a slogan, the value of an achievement is measured not by how hard the agent worked for it but by how hard others would need to do in order to measure up. We are *more*, not less, impressed by the deftness of a practiced competitor who easily dispenses with her opponent. To treat such a performance as less of an achievement for the victor is to lose sight of some of the most paradigmatic instances of valuable achievements—including artistic creation. I have proposed an interpretation of DV that allows us to preserve this impression, by defining difficulty not in terms of effort actually expended (by the agent) but in terms of effort required (by a competitor).

This paper offers several reasons to favor the competitive interpretation over the effortful interpretation of DV. First, the competitive interpretation captures our sense that original and influential artistic creations can be genuinely valuable achievements for the artists even when their creation involves little or no intense effort. Noneffortful creations are common forms of achievement. So it is a strength of the competitive interpretation that it preserves our sense of their achievement-value.

Second, the competitive interpretation is more flexible regarding how effort is measured than the effortful interpretation. Third, on the competitive interpretation, an agent's arbitrary or misguided effort will not contribute to the value of the achievement. This is because the effort actually exerted by the agent is not, on this view, what determines the difficulty and so value of the achievement. While the effortful interpretation can partially rule out such cases, the competitive interpretation does so much more fully.

Fourth, the competitive interpretation allows us to preserve the thought that difficulty itself *constitutes*—rather than merely contributing to—the value of an achievement. It allows us, that is, to dispense with the competence requirement of DCV. Besides being more parsimonious, maintaining DV on its own allows a lucky achievement to be a valuable achievement for the agent *provided* the achievement itself would be difficult for the average competitor. As I argued above, there is a partial correlation between the greatness of an achievement and the luck involved in bringing it about, so embracing lucky achievements is a desirable feature of an account of achievement-value.

I close with one final argument in favor of the competitive interpretation of DV. Recall the thought experiment of a utopia where everything we want and need (including relief from boredom) is available through no effort on our part. Bradford rightly observes that we would, in such a utopia, seek

ways to introduce difficulty into our lives. It seems to me, however, that rather than looking for ways of expending effort for its own sake, we would instead seek ways to compete with ourselves and others. We would set ends the success of which is uncertain, and if we succeed, we would modify these ends to be more ambitious. We are more disappointed, I suggest, by failing to measure up to our literal, implicit, or self-competition than we are when our endeavors involve less phenomenal effort than we expect.

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NOTES

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² Hurka (1996), Keller (2004), Portmore (2007), Bradford (2013, 2015), von Kriegstein (2017, 2019), and Hirji (2019). Bradford (2013, p. 204) even opens her essay with the claim, ‘Achievements are, if any thing is, on the “objective list” of the things that can make a life a good one.’

³ While I do not explore the issue here, it should be noted that there is no reason to limit the domain of possible achievements to those intentional, goal-directed activities that succeed in attaining the specific goal one set out to accomplish. We often do not have a fully accurate picture of the goal we are pursuing until we have achieved it.

⁴ Portmore (2007), Bradford (2015), and Hirji (2019). Cf. von Kriegstein (2019).

⁵ Keller (2004, pp. 32–34), Portmore (2007, pp. 11–12), and von Kriegstein (2017, pp. 47–51).

⁶ I borrow these last two examples from Bradford (2015, pp. 100–103, 31) who intends to defend her view against them.

⁷ Von Kriegstein (2019) and Hirji (2019) have both quite recently proposed new accounts aiming to address some of the criticisms raised to Bradford’s. While these accounts are interesting, they are (1) quite a bit less developed than Bradford’s as well as (2) more recent and perhaps less well known. More importantly, they (3) do not defend DV as I propose to do and (4) depart where I follow Bradford while following where I depart. For these reasons, I find it useful to contrast my view primarily to Bradford’s. I note several advantages I take my proposal to have over these others throughout what follows.

⁸ It seems to be this assumption that leads Portmore (2007) to replace DV with what he calls ‘the Investment Condition (IC)’ in analyzing achievement-value. According to IC, achievements are more valuable the more we have invested in them. Difficulty would be a sign of investment. Bradley (2011) shows that Portmore’s specific explanation of achievement-value rests on an untenable evaluative principle. I argue, moreover, that Portmore’s approach of substituting IC for DV is itself misguided: The difficulty we confront in carrying out a task is not a welfare-cost invested in an achievement and in need of redemption.

⁹ Translations of Nietzsche are mine based on Nietzsche (2009).

¹⁰ This addition is necessary to shut down Schopenhauer's (2015 [1851], p. 263) own response to a similar thought experiment, namely, that boredom is an even more painful state than striving.

¹¹ Bradford proposes the following as a general analysis of the concept of *difficulty* and not only of the difficulty condition on achievement-value. My criticism and alternative, however, are limited to the question of how to interpret DV, so I do not pursue the question of whether either interpretation suffices as an analysis of the general concept. It is my considered view (contra Bradford, von Kriegstein, 2019, and others) that *difficulty* is polysemic and does not afford a fully general analysis.

¹² Bradford does not explicitly state that effort is to be understood first-personally, but this seems to be what she has in mind: She considers it conceptually primitive; she uses thought experiments that draw on introspection; she compares effort to pleasure (2015, p.42); and throughout the chapter (2015, Ch. 2), she proposes to measure effort through tools developed for hedonic metrics. See von Kriegstein (2017) for a detailed discussion of her notion of effort.

¹³ In context, it's clear that Nietzsche is also discussing a person's *ambition* and not just her *capacity* to achieve. But his point remains that both are to be measured by the 'might' of the competitor *sought* and *overcome*.

¹⁴ Von Kriegstein (2019, p. 61) is explicit that this account of achievement-value is only a 'sketch' in need of further development.

¹⁵ Again, see von Kriegstein (2017) for a detailed discussion of Bradford's notion of effort and some critical arguments regarding how best to elaborate it. Some of his concerns with Bradford's notion of effort are rendered moot in the context of the competitive interpretation (see Section 5). A full consideration of how to measure effort within the competitive interpretation will have to wait for another paper.

¹⁶ Consider a measure of effort suggested to me by an anonymous reviewer: effort as the energy expended in the performance of the task's mechanical and computational components. One immediate concern for this proposal is that some energy expended by a machine or organism during such tasks is lost to mechanical inefficiencies and unrelated organic processes, and these inefficiencies do not seem to contribute to the difficulty of the task proper. For example, the energy spent digesting breakfast does not seem relevant to measuring the difficulty of shovelling snow. We might partially address this by focusing on energy *output* rather than energy *input* similarly to how we measure the output of an automobile engine ($[weight \times distance]/time$).—Replacing phenomenal effort with something like horsepower in Bradford's effortful interpretation leads to untenable results, whereas applying this model of effort to the competitive model would not radically alter its verdicts. Imagine two competitive runners who finish the same race in the same time: H is 160 pounds and L is 140 pounds. On the horsepower-effortful interpretation, H did something more difficult than L. And so, H would attain more achievement-value than L all else being equal. On the horsepower-competitive interpretation, however, what matters would not be the level of horsepower H generates but the horsepower required of the average runner to match H's performance compared to the horsepower required of the average runner for the average comparable race. This comparison is not affected by the relative weights of H and L. So the values of the achievement for H and for L respectively have nothing to do with their respective weights.

¹⁷ I appreciate two anonymous reviewers' calls for a thorough discussion of this point.

¹⁸ There is no special conceptual hurdle to determining comparableness of works, even if there are epistemic hurdles. We might, for instance, consider a work comparable if it bears a similar number of difficult-making features to similar extents as do other works, where which features are difficult-making is determined by polling professional philosophers. This approach assumes a phenomenal measure of effort (as in E2) and that self-report tracks phenomenal effort. We would employ a different approach if we thought a different model of effort was more salient. Again, my focus is a level above the analysis of effort.

¹⁹ My preposterous example of Bolt is meant to avoid complications regarding how to demarcate the relevant class of activity for self-competitions since I cannot explore the matter in sufficient detail here. On *both* the effortful and the competitive interpretations, the threshold of difficulty marking off an instance of competing with oneself as a valuable achievement will depend upon how the activity is construed and how one's performance compares to the average performance in that activity. For the effortful interpretation, what matters is how your level of *effort* compares to the average competitor's. For mine, it's how much effort your performance would require of your competitor. If the activity class of *your* morning jog is one in which you can reach a valuable achievement, the effortful interpretation would imply that how *hard* the jog was for you—the extent to which you were out of breath, etc.—compared to your average level of effort would determine the difficulty and value of that achievement. On my competitive interpretation, however, it's roughly how fast you ran a particular course compared to how fast you have run it that would determine its difficulty and so achievement-value. On this as on other issues, the competitive interpretation of difficulty seems to draw our attention to the more salient considerations; we take doing a personal best to be a valuable achievement whereas having to exert ourselves extra hard is a sign of non-achievement.

²⁰ Both von Kriegstein (2019) and Hirji (2019) also take up this further move. My objections to it, below, thus serve as objections to their views.

²¹ Bradford (2015, p. 65) defends the following view: 'The extent to which somebody causes something competently is a matter of the extent to which they have justified and true beliefs (JTBs) about what they are doing. Whether or not somebody is causing something at all competently is a matter of having some requisite measure of JTBs. So to cause something competently, you need to have enough JTBs, and the more JTBs you have, the more competently you cause it.' I have reservations about describing competence in terms of countable JTBs. (For one alternative, see Sosa, 2010.) But since the competitive interpretation of DV does not require competence to be a necessary or contributory condition on achievement-value, I do not pursue the matter here.

²² My objections focus on the claim that competence is a necessary condition on achievement-value. I leave consideration of whether competence should be retained as a contributory condition for another time. My view does, though, handle all the objections raised in this paper without any reliance on competence.

²³ Bradford could respond by adopting von Kriegstein's (2017, pp. 49–51) proposal to further restrict what effort exerted by the agent is relevant to determining its difficulty. He proposes a requirement that the agent *not believe* the effort *fails* to contribute to her success. This might indeed further restrict the problem cases for the effortful interpretation (e.g. by ruling out the effort exerted during obsessive-compulsive rituals), but it would not obviate them entirely. The writer we are imagining, for example, may have no occurrent beliefs about the contribution his pain will make to his success in writing, or he may even falsely believe that the pain makes his success more likely. It still seems wrong, in either case, to say that the pain contributes to the value of his achievement.

²⁴ For the same reason, this seems to be an objection to the accounts proposed by Hirji (2019) and von Kriegstein (2019).

²⁵ It should be noted that, with Jesuina's case, I am *not* pumping our intuitions against DCV. Jesuina's achievement is likely to be *difficult* on either interpretation and *competent* on Bradford's interpretation. My present point is that Jesuina's case helps us to appreciate that *luck* does not discount achievement-value.

²⁶ The implications of this response would as best as I can tell converge on what Bradford's account would imply regarding such cases. If so, my objection to this response *is* an objection to Bradford's view.

²⁷ Hirji (2019), too, argues that luck is at least compatible with achievement-value in many cases. And von Kriegstein (2019) argues that the points I was just making get straight to one of

the constitutive features of achievement-value: *viz.*, the probability of success. (N.b. I have only claimed, in contrast to von Kriegstein, that luck or beating the odds *signifies* achievement-value; achievement-value remains on my view constituted by its *difficulty* interpreted in terms of its competitiveness.) There seems, then, to be a shared sense that Bradford's rejection of luck at least goes too far. Hirji and von Kriegstein, however, still embrace a version of DCV.

²⁸ See Lopes (2018, Ch. 5) for an account of *aesthetic* expertise that affords competence pride of place.

²⁹ Cf. von Kriegstein (2017, 2019) and Hirji (2019).

³⁰ Again, see Hirji (2019) and von Kriegstein (2017, 2019).

³¹ Think here of what is sometimes called the emergence of the muse as it occurs in highly methodical artists. Cf. the self-descriptions of Ernest Hemingway and Stephen King, and Corinna Belz's depiction of Gerhard Richter's methodical routines in the film *Gerhard Richter Painting* (2017).

³² I note a fourth, more controversial case: the delegated manner of artistic creation for which Andy Warhol was famous and which, in a different way, one sees in the work of Ai Weiwei. Whether these are a clear counterexample to the effortful interpretation depends on how we classify their activities and on how much intense effort is involved in such art managements. It seems at least imaginable that some delegated creations are genuinely valuable achievements for the delegators and that they involve below-average intense effort on the delegators' parts.

³³ Irmin is based on the composer and musician Irmin Schmidt who cofounded the band, Can, in Cologne in 1968. The quotation is a rough paraphrase of his interview in the 1999 documentary, *Can—The Documentary*.

³⁴ To avoid confusion, there is another sense of artistic achievement in the aesthetics literature the value of which is distinct from the achievement-value I am here attributing to noneffortful creation. The value I am after is the welfare value for the artist of having accomplished a great achievement in her artistic contribution. On the one hand, I believe that this is the sense of achievement-value Huddleston (2012) proposes to equate with *artistic value*. On the other hand, Lopes (2018) has a distinct sense of *aesthetic achievement* in view when proposing to account for the normativity of *aesthetic value* in terms of *aesthetic achievement*. Lopes' sense of achievement is roughly that of a successful performance of an action caused by the agent's competence. It is meant to capture the conditions and value of expert agency, and Lopes (p. 98) is explicit that it is not meant to capture the conditions of achievement-value in my sense.

³⁵ I thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing for a fuller discussion of this objection.

³⁶ Django is, of course, based on the famous case of Django Reinhardt (1910–1953).

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