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Conservatisms about the Valuable

Jacob M. Nebel

University of Southern California

ABSTRACT
Sometimes it seems that an existing bearer of value should be preserved even though it could be destroyed and replaced with something of equal or greater value. How can this conservative intuition be explained and justified? This paper distinguishes three answers, which I call *existential*, *attitudinal*, and *object-affecting* conservatism. I raise some problems for existential and attitudinal conservatism, and suggest how they can be solved by object-affecting conservatism.

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1. Introduction

Classical utilitarians believe that we can be morally required to end a person's worthwhile life to create a new life that would be worth living. And ideal utilitarians (for instance, Moore [1903] and Rashdall [1907]) seem committed to the view that we can be morally required to destroy beautiful works of art or end loving relationships whenever doing so would make way for new artworks or relationships that are somewhat better.[1]

Many would reject these implications of utilitarianism, both classical and ideal. We have strong reason to preserve valuable lives, artworks, and friendships even when they can be replaced by substitutes of equal or greater value. These reasons might be grounded in a more general *conservatism* about value (see, for instance, Scanlon [1998: 95, 104], Raz [2001: 161], Scheffler [2007: 106, 2013, 2018], Cohen [2013: ch. 8], Nebel [2015], and Brennan and Hamlin [2016]). But there are many varieties of conservatism about value, and these varieties are seldom distinguished from each other.

This paper distinguishes between three kinds of conservatism about value. The varieties of conservatism that I explore differ in their scope—that is, in the range of things towards which they support a conservative disposition—and in their grounds—that is, in the reasons why we ought to preserve those kinds of things. The first kind of conservatism, proposed by G.A. Cohen, supports a conservative disposition towards

[1] This is complicated by the fact that ideal utilitarians can appeal to the value of virtue and say that destroying a beautiful work of art makes the world worse in terms of this value. Rashdall himself, however, understands virtue in terms of the value of our motives, and thinks that this value can never make a difference to first-personal deliberation [Hurka 2014: 174]. Even independently of this, though, it is hard to see why destroying and then replacing a beautiful object should always be considered vicious, rather than virtuous, if it brings about a greater balance of (nonmoral) good—especially if the act comes from the motive of promoting the good.

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existing things of intrinsic value: it is grounded in respect for intrinsically valuable things. The second kind, proposed by Samuel Scheffler, supports a conservative disposition towards things that we value: it is grounded in the nature of valuing attitudes. The third kind, proposed here, supports a conservative disposition towards valuable entities for whom things can be good or bad: it is grounded in our reasons for concern about their good.

2. Existential Conservatism

This section explores Cohen's conservatism. He argues that we have reason to preserve any existing thing with a certain kind of value. I call this *existential* conservatism.

Cohen [2013: 144] restricts his conservatism to bearers of 'intrinsic value', by which he means 'the value that something has in itself, independently of its consequences'. Many philosophers, though, distinguish between the value that something has in itself, in virtue of its intrinsic properties, and the value that something has independently of its consequences [Smith 1948; Korsgaard 1983]. Princess Diana's dress might be *noninstrumentally* valuable—that is, valuable independently of its consequences—in virtue of its relation to Princess Diana, and therefore extrinsically [Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2003]. It's worth framing Cohen's conservatism in a way that respects this distinction.

Which kind of value, intrinsic or noninstrumental, really matters for existential conservatism? Intuitively, we have reason to preserve Princess Diana's dress even if it could be replaced by something of equal or greater value. This suggests that noninstrumental value is what matters for existential conservatism.[2] I therefore state Cohen's conservatism as follows:

> **Existential Conservatism.** If an existing thing is noninstrumentally valuable, then we have reason to preserve it, even when it can be replaced by something of equal or greater value.[3]

Another reason to focus on noninstrumental value, rather than intrinsic value, has to do with the grounds for Cohen's conservatism. He argues [2013: 153] that, if we lack a conservative disposition towards existing things of noninstrumental value, we treat these things as having merely instrumental value:

> If an existing thing has intrinsic value, then we have reason to regret its destruction as such, a reason that we would not have if we cared only about the value that the thing carries or instantiates. … [I]t is rational and right to have such a bias in favor of existing value, that, for example, if you happily replace a fine statue by a merely somewhat better one, the production of which requires destruction of the original statue, then you mistreat the now destroyed work as (so to speak) having had the merely instrumental value of being a vessel of aesthetic value.

According to Cohen, the problem with anticonservative trade-offs, in which we replace an existing thing of value for an arbitrarily small gain in value, is that they

[2] Frick [2017] also interprets Cohen's conservatism as a claim about noninstrumental value. This seems to answer at least one of Matthes's [2013] objections to Cohen's conservatism—namely, that it cannot account for seemingly irreplaceable bearers of extrinsic value.

[3] I am using the mass noun *reason* in the 'pro tanto' sense, so that we can have reason to do something even if it's not the case that we ought to do it (and even if we ought not to do it). This doesn't necessarily imply that there is some fact that is *the* reason to do it (for discussion of the mass- and count-noun uses of *reason*, and of how they relate to each other, see Fogal [2016]). But I take it that, on Cohen's view, the features that make something noninstrumentally valuable explain why we have reason to preserve it, and might thus be said to be the reasons to preserve it.

instrumentalise valuable things. This is most clearly wrong when and because the value instantiated is noninstrumental.

Cohen's distinction between caring about value and caring about its bearer is important. Compare his idea to a view sometimes attributed to Plato (for example, by Vlastos [1999]). In the *Symposium*, Diotima argues that the beauty of one beautiful person is the same as the beauty of another, and that beauty itself—rather than beautiful people—is therefore the fitting object of love. This view would have us care primarily about an abstract universal rather than the individuals that instantiate it. On Cohen's view, that is a mistake: we shouldn't only, or even primarily, care about the beauty or value of an individual; we should instead care about the individual.

Why is it a mistake to care only about value rather than its bearer? If we care only about a thing's value, then (according to Cohen) we care about it merely as a means to the promotion of value, to keeping 'the value rating high' [2013: 153]. But if something is noninstrumentally valuable, then we shouldn't care about it merely as a means to anything else. More generally, we have reason to '[t]reat everything as having the profile of value it has' [Nozick 1981: 522]. Treating something as having the profile of value that it has means not only treating it as having the amount or degree of value that it has, but, more importantly, responding appropriately to the kind of value that it has. If something has noninstrumental value, then caring about it merely as a means to the promotion of value fails to treat it as having the profile of value that it has. As Nozick puts it, 'In responding to someone else's value, we act for his sake—not just the value's sake' [ibid.: 529]. This is because a person is valuable for his or her own sake.

I agree with Cohen that we shouldn't care about noninstrumentally valuable things merely for the sake of their value. But that's not enough to justify existential conservatism. If our proper object of concern *were* value itself, rather than its bearer, then anticonservative trade-offs would be justified. But it doesn't follow that, because our proper object of concern is not value itself but rather its bearer, anticonservative trade-offs are unjustified.

Consider a manifestly instrumental value: money. Suppose that you see a $10 bill on the footpath. When you pick it up, a $10 bill from your own pocket flies away and lands in the hands of the stranger who dropped the first bill. Neither you nor the stranger has any reason for regret. This is because a $10 bill is valuable merely as a means, not for its own sake. Anticonservative trade-offs with respect to money are justified because money has merely instrumental value [Chappell 2015].

Consider, next, Princess Diana's dress, which (we suppose) has noninstrumental value. Suppose that you value the dress noninstrumentally because of its relation to Princess Diana. Suppose that you lose this dress in the process of acquiring a new one that is noninstrumentally valuable in the same way, and to the same degree: it, too, was Princess Diana's. It is not obvious that you have stronger reason for regret than you would have if both dresses were of merely instrumental value. Accepting the replacement need not be driven by an inappropriate concern merely for the value of the object. I am therefore not convinced that existential conservatism can be justified merely by pointing out that we shouldn't care about noninstrumentally valuable things only for their value.

That's not to say that existential conservatism cannot be justified. But its justification would have to involve some reason why respect for noninstrumentally valuable things requires or supports a conservative disposition—that is, why a willingness to

make anticonservative trade-offs treats noninstrumentally valuable things as having merely instrumental value, and so fails to treat things as having the kind of value that they have.

Cohen's suggested connection between respect and preservation has to do with our reasons to regret the loss or destruction of valuable things. He suggests that we have reason to regret the loss of valuable things as such, not for the loss of their value. That's plausible enough. But we might have wanted an *explanation* for this. It is clear why we should regret the loss of value if we have reason to care about the promotion of value. But what are our reasons for regretting the loss of a valuable thing over and above the loss of its value?

Cohen might deny the need for an explanation by claiming that his existential conservatism is basic. But we sometimes lack any reason to prevent the loss of valuable things. Consider ephemeral objects like sandcastles and chalk drawings on city footpaths. We might have reason for regret when these things disappear. But we don't have reason to preserve them for as long as possible. This might be because it's in their nature to change and disappear. (Cohen says this about bonfires and shooting stars.) Even if we could somehow preserve these things forever, though, I don't think that we would have reason to do so.

Perhaps this is because the eternal existence of such a thing does not preserve the valuable thing as it is, but instead destroys it or makes it less valuable. (Shiffrin [2013] suggests this about events like conversations and musical performances.) The value of a footpath drawing or sandcastle might consist partly in its mutability and eventual disappearance. But this doesn't seem to capture Cohen's concern for valuable things for their own sakes. If we allow an object to disappear because maintaining it would make it less valuable, then we seem to care primarily about the *value* of the object, not about the object itself. We treat it as 'having had the merely instrumental value of being a vessel of aesthetic value' [Cohen 2013: 153]. And even if maintaining an object of this kind made it no less valuable, but instead had no effect on its value, I don't think that we would have conservative reason to maintain it. Reducing the value of the object doesn't seem a complete explanation for why we lack reason to preserve it.

In other cases, we might have reason to preserve something of noninstrumental value, although not when its preservation crowds out a better replacement. Consider sensory pleasure. A pleasurable sensation is, plausibly, good independently of its consequences. It's not valuable merely as means to some other good. Suppose that you are undergoing some pleasurable sensation, so that it is an existing thing of value. Do you have any reason to preserve this sensation indefinitely even if it could be replaced by one that feels better? No. Even if the new sensation would feel only *slightly* better, you would have most reason to choose the better one. (That's not to say that all pleasures are intersubstitutable. We wouldn't welcome an abrupt end to our taking pleasure in our children's accomplishments in order to take even more pleasure in a nice meal. That would be an inappropriate response to the value of our children or of their accomplishments. We bracket these complications by considering purely sensory pleasures that are not responses to independently valuable objects.)

A final problem for existential conservatism involves valuable things that are lost or changed but can be restored. We would have reason to recover the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics* if we could. Existential conservatism gives us no such reason. Perhaps that, by itself, is no objection to existential conservatism. Maybe the reasons to recover the second book of the *Poetics* would have nothing to do with

conservatism of any kind (although I doubt that). Further problems, though, arise when existing things of value are replaced. Suppose that we discover a fake second book of the *Poetics*, written not by Aristotle but by Averröes. This book might have noninstrumental value, so that, according to existential conservatism, we have reason to preserve it. But if we could destroy it and replace it with the lost book written by Aristotle, I think that we would have reason to do so. Our loyalty should lie with the original, not the counterfeit.

Or consider one of Cohen's favourite examples of things worth preserving—All Souls College. Suppose that All Souls accepts external funding, admits undergraduates, hosts kindergarten birthday parties, becomes a Christian Rock record label, and changes radically in other ways. But suppose that, just after making these changes, we can reverse them. Surely Cohen would support the reversal. Existential conservatism, though, says that we have some reason to preserve the *existing* nature of All Souls (assuming that it retains some noninstrumental value). It says nothing in favour of restoring its original nature. That's not a conservative conclusion. There could be some independent principle that gives us reason to restore its original nature. But we might have wanted a plausible conservative principle to give us some reason to restore the original nature and no reason to preserve its new nature.

We have seen a few problems for existential conservatism. It seems not to explain why we should regret the loss of a valuable thing over and above the loss of its value. It wrongly predicts that we have reason to preserve fleeting phenomena and mere sensory pleasures. And it runs counter to conservative convictions about the restoration of valuable things. These problems are not decisive objections. But, other things being equal, we should prefer a view that can solve these problems.

3. Attitudinal Conservatism

The second kind of conservatism is due to Scheffler [2007, 2013, 2018]. He argues that we have reason to preserve valuable things *that we value*. Because this reason depends on our attitudes towards valuable things, I call it *attitudinal* conservatism.

Here is a simple way of understanding attitudinal conservatism. Valuing something involves seeing oneself as having reasons to respond to it in certain ways [Scheffler 2010: ch. 1]. These responses include conservative ones, like cherishing and preserving. If we value something *valuable*, then we don't just *see* ourselves as having reasons for conservative responses; we also *have* such reasons. So, if we value something that is valuable, then we have reason to preserve it.[4] Thus:

> **Attitudinal Conservatism.** If we value something worth valuing, then we have reason to preserve it, even when it can be replaced by something of equal or greater value.

On this view, our conservative reasons depend, at least in part, on our valuing attitudes. There might be things worth valuing that we don't value. On Scheffler's view, we ourselves lack reason to preserve these things. We would have reason to preserve them if we valued them. But, Scheffler believes, we are under no general obligation to care about every valuable thing.

[4] Just as something can be valuable either instrumentally or noninstrumentally, we can value a thing either instrumentally or noninstrumentally. I assume that Scheffler has in mind both noninstrumental value and noninstrumental valuing.

Attitudinal conservatism's focus on valuing seems to support a conservative bias towards *presently* existing things. Scheffler [2018] argues that valuing involves an attachment to what's valued, that attachment requires acquaintance, and that we can only be acquainted with things that exist. So, we cannot value a not-yet-existing substitute for an object that we value. This can explain why we have reason to preserve valued existing things even when they can be replaced by no-less-valuable things: even if we *would* value the replacement as much as we value the existing object, we cannot *now* value the replacement.

Attitudinal conservatism avoids the mistake that Cohen attributes to anticonservatives. We value the object, not its value. So, we correctly see ourselves as having reason to preserve the object. Our conservative responses, on this view, are responses to the valued object itself, not to the value that it instantiates.

Attitudinal conservatism can perhaps solve the problems that we saw for existential conservatism. First, existential conservatism seems to lack an informative account of why we should regret the loss of a valuable thing over and above the loss of its value. Attitudinal conservatism suggests a simple account of why we should regret the loss of a thing that we fittingly value, over and above the loss of its value. We should regret its loss because we are, or were, rightly attached to it, and we reasonably regret the loss of things to which we are attached.

Second, we lack reason to preserve fleeting phenomena, whose value partly consists in their ephemeral nature. Suppose that we value a beautiful footpath drawing. Because we are attached to the drawing, we might lament its disappearance. But we don't have reason to ensure that it exists forever. This might be grounded in facts about the distinctive way in which we value the object: we value it partly because of its mutability and eventual disappearance. Since the ways in which we see ourselves as having reason to respond to an object depend on the way in which we value the object, we needn't see ourselves as having reason to prevent its inevitable change and disappearance.

Third, we lack conservative dispositions towards mere sensory pleasures. Attitudinal conservatism might not apply to mere sensory pleasures: even though such pleasures are valuable, we don't *value* them in the robust way that we value projects, relationships, artwork, and even other people. We might *want* to experience such pleasures. But we are not attached or emotionally vulnerable to them, in the ways that we are to the things that we paradigmatically have reason to preserve.

Even if we do value mere sensory pleasures, the attitudinal conservative might claim that that we value them only *qua* sensations of a certain type, instead of valuing the token sensations themselves. This kind of valuing seems to be an appropriate response, because the value of a pleasurable experience seems to derive from the value of a type that it instantiates. And we *might* have conservative dispositions towards the type, if not its tokens. For example, if people lost the capacity to experience sexual pleasure but were better able to experience intellectual pleasure, this loss would be regrettable as such, not merely for its accompanying loss of value. However we individuate pleasures, it seems reasonable to hope that people will continue to feel good in the particular ways that we can feel good, even if the loss of those capacities allows people to feel even better overall.

If we do not value sensory pleasures, or if we value them *qua* type rather than *qua* token, then we can explain our willingness to upgrade our pleasurable sensations: we have attachment, not to *this particular experience*, but rather to the kind of experience

it is. So, attitudinal conservatism does not support an implausibly conservative disposition towards token pleasurable sensations.

The final problem that we saw for existential conservatism concerned the restoration of valuable things. If something valuable is lost and replaced, existential conservatism says that we have reason to preserve the replacement, and cannot explain why we have reason to recover the original. According to attitudinal conservatism, however, we might have no reason to preserve the replacement if we don't yet value it. It takes time and engagement to grow attached to something. And we might have reason to recover the original, because we might remain attached to it or (if we cannot be attached to things that no longer exist) to our memory of it. Of course, as we grow attached to the replacement and lose our attachment to the original, we might acquire reason to preserve the replacement and lose reason to restore the original. But that's to be expected: it is implausible that we should forever remain loyal to what we initially valued, no matter how much we, they, and other things have changed.

Although I find attitudinal conservatism more plausible than existential conservatism, it faces some important problems.

Attitudinal conservatism seems, in some ways, incomplete: it cannot capture all that we might have wanted from a conservative principle. It supports our conservative disposition only to things that *we* value. But, intuitively, we can have conservative reasons to preserve things that we ourselves don't value. For example, I don't value opera, Christianity, your children, or Slavic literature. But I have some reason to preserve these things. It would be wrong of me to allow their destruction, if I could easily prevent it, even if their destruction would make way for things that I do value.

Maybe there's some independent principle that gives us reason to preserve things valued by others. For example, if the loss of something that you value is bad for you, then I allow you to be harmed in allowing the destruction of something that you value. And I have independent reason not to allow you to be harmed.

There might, however, be things that *no one* values but whose destruction we have reason to prevent. We would have reason to prevent the destruction of great works of art or ecosystems even if their value were unrecognised and unappreciated. Perhaps that's because we *ought* to value such things. But if no one actually values them, then no one is harmed by their destruction—at least, as far as attitudinal conservatism is concerned.

Moreover, creating new things that we value can be good for us. Our lives can be enriched by forming new attachments. If the loss of something that you value would make way for something else that you would value even more, then the loss would be bad for you, but the replacement might ultimately be good for you. Suppose that this process would be just barely good for you overall. It seems to me that I should still prevent the destruction of what you value, if I can easily prevent it and if the replacement would be just barely good for you. I have the same reasons as you have to preserve things tha tyou value. But that can't be explained by the badness for you, since the loss and replacement would be better for you overall.

Further problems arise when we consider the relation between valuing and acquaintance. Valuing something is supposed to require acquaintance with that thing. This acquaintance requirement is supposed to explain why we cannot value the prospective replacement of something that we value: we are not acquainted with things that don't yet exist.

The requirement of acquaintance, however, might be too strong. Many of us value things in, or aspects of, the past. These might include things with which we are not or have never been acquainted—for example, distinctive and admirable features of one's heritage. If acquaintance with something at a time requires it to exist at that time, then we cannot currently be acquainted with things that no longer exist. Perhaps we remain attached, not to things in the past or to the past itself, but rather to our memories or thoughts of those things. But this makes it hard to see why we have reason to restore things that we used to value. If we cannot value the thing itself, but only some mental representation of it, then why do we have reason to restore the thing?

Whatever the answer to this question is, it runs the risk of undermining attitudinal conservatism's intuitive asymmetry between past and future. Just as we can value our thoughts of the past, we can value our thoughts of the future. But if our valuing mere thoughts of the past were enough to generate reasons to restore things, then our valuing mere thoughts of the future should be enough to generate reasons to bring those thoughts to fruition. It is therefore hard to see why we would have reason to restore something valued that we recently lost, rather than to create a new thing.

There might be relevant differences between our thoughts of the past and our thoughts of the future. We tend not to imagine the future in as much detail as that with which we remember the past. And it's harder to imagine the future correctly than it is to recall the past correctly. Perhaps such differences account for the distinct evaluative responses that we have towards the past and the future. But there are other problems for the requirement of acquaintance.

Consider things that presently exist but are spatially remote, like other planets, or patches of wilderness that have never been touched by humans. If valuing requires acquaintance, then we cannot value these things. But even if that's true, we nonetheless have reason to preserve these things, if we can, even if their destruction would make way for more beautiful planets or patches of wilderness. Attitudinal conservatism seems unable to account for such reasons.

I have focused on various ways in which attitudinal conservatism seems incomplete: it faces challenges in explaining why we have reason to preserve things that we ourselves don't value, things that no one values but ought to be valued, things that we used to value, and things that are too far away to value. More generally, there seem to be reasons to preserve valuable things that do not depend on our valuing them. We'll now consider a new kind of conservatism, one that avoids these difficulties.

4. Object-Affecting Conservatism

To introduce our third variety of conservatism, I want to return to Cohen's diagnosis of the anticonservative mistake. In section 1, I agreed with Cohen that it's a mistake to care about value rather than its bearer. I now want to explain why I think that's a mistake.

I think that it's a mistake about what value is. The mistake is made by *impersonal* conceptions of value, the paradigm example of which is due to Moore [1903]. On a Moorean view, goodness is a simple property that can be instantiated in people's lives, among other locations [Regan 2004]. What we call 'our own good' is just this property instantiated in our own lives. We have reason to care about each other's lives because we have reason to desire and promote the good wherever it is.

On a Moorean conception of value, goodness is, in some ways, relevantly like physical quantities—for instance, mass. Two objects with the same mass instantiate the very same determinate quantity. So, if we replace something of 3 grams with another object of 3 grams, there's no loss of mass. On Moore's view, two things of equal value instantiate the very same quantity of good. So, if we replace something with an equally valuable substitute, there's no loss of good.

If we were mere containers of impersonal good, then anticonservative trade-offs would be easily justified: they would be mere substitutions of some containers for others. Indeed, it would seem wrong *not* to replace one container for another, if the replacement would contain more good.

But this conception of value strikes me as deeply unattractive. Value isn't like mass: people (and other valuable things) are not merely locations where some quantity—good—is instantiated. Our reasons to care about our and each other's lives are not explained by the fact that this quantity just happens to be instantiated in our and each other's lives. As Cohen [2013: 164] puts it, we are not mere 'vessels of value'.[5]

If, however, value is not some impersonal quantity, then what is it? I think that there are many kinds of value. Two are relevant for my purposes here.

The first species of value with which I am concerned is a kind of status, and so I call it *status-value*. This kind of value most plausibly applies to people—for instance, when Kantians say that people have dignity, rather than price [Parfit 2011: sec. 70]. Status-value is not a kind of goodness or desirability. It is not an object of desire, or a quantity to be promoted. People are status-valuable, in the sense that they are worth caring about for their own sakes.[6] People are worth caring about *for their own sakes*, in the sense that they themselves (as opposed to their causal contributions to valuable states of affairs) are the sources of reasons to care about them, and this is to be reflected in the way in which we care about them.

Which things have status-value? There is room for reasonable disagreement here.

On one view, only people and perhaps other sentient beings are status-valuable. On a broader view, many other things—for example, works of art, relationships, and other living things—might also be status-valuable. That would be true if they are worth caring about for their own sakes, not merely for the sake of the people who enjoy, create, participate in, or otherwise benefit from these things. I am inclined to think that these and many other things have status-value. But I don't insist on this; we'll soon see how the choice between these different views is relevant to the scope of my proposed conservatism.

The second species of value with which I am concerned is a kind of goodness. It is a property of states of affairs, but it's not impersonal. It is the good of a person or other entity. Things can go more, or less, well for a person. This kind of value might be a quantity, in some sense: it is a determinable property that might, on certain views about well-being, have a quantitative structure. And a person's good is worth promoting, in that we have reason to make people better off. But each person's good is a

[5] Although, as I suggest elsewhere [2019b], some of our deepest moral convictions might reveal that we *do* regard people in this way.

[6] On caring, see Jaworska [2007] and Seidman [2009]. On for-someone's-sake attitudes, see Rønnow-Rasmussen [2011: ch. 5].

distinct quantity; different people's good cannot be 'fused' together to form the good of a single person or other whole [Rawls 1999: 24].[7]

Which things have a good, other than people? Again, there is room for reasonable disagreement here. On one view, only people and other sentient beings have a good. This view seems too restrictive. It seems good for a plant for it to have water and sunlight. On a broader view (due to Kraut [2007]), things can be good for nonsentient living things (for instance, by being conducive to their health) as well as artifacts and purposeful activities (for instance, by enhancing their ability to achieve their purpose).[8] We might also judge things to be good for natural kinds more generally, by making them better specimens of their kinds.[9] On an even broader view (due to Thomson [1997]), things can be good for arbitrary inanimate objects: the good of an inanimate object that is not an artifact is, for Thomson, determined by the wants of human beings. (This does not entail that such an object can only be *valuable*, or worth caring about, because of its contribution to the wants of human beings.) I prefer these broader views, but again I don't insist on them.

These two species of value relate in the following way: if something is status-valuable—that is, worth caring about for its own sake—then we have reason to want things to go better rather than worse for it.[10] This doesn't mean that our emotions must always be sensitive to fluctuations in its good, or that we must always do whatever we can to make it better off. But we have some reason to prefer, in some dispositional way, that things go well rather than badly for it. We should not be indifferent to the good of things that are worth caring about for their own sakes.

The distinction between status-value and the good of a person or other entity is probably too simple to capture all varieties of value. But it might help to justify a kind of conservatism:

> **Object-Affecting Conservatism**. If a thing has status-value, then we have reason to preserve it when and because its preservation is good for it—even when it can be replaced by something that is no less worth caring about for its own sake.

This kind of conservatism is object-affecting in the sense that it grounds our reasons to preserve an object in what is good *for* that object.

Object-affecting conservatism supports a conservative disposition only towards things that have status-value. Some entities for whom things can go well or badly lack status-value. Things can go well or badly for the Nazi Party, but we don't have reason to want things to go better for the Nazi Party. The Nazi Party is not worth caring about for its own sake. So, object-affecting conservatism does not support the preservation of the Nazi Party, even if the party's preservation would be good for it.

Object-affecting conservatism supports the preservation of a thing only when the thing would be better off being preserved. This is most plausible in the case of people. But it also seems plausible for other kinds of things that are worth caring about for their own sake. Just as it is bad for an ecosystem to dump radioactive

[7] This doesn't entail incomparability between different people's good, any more than the distinctness of a person's height and width entail the incomparability of those dimensions.

[8] For critique, see Rosati [2009] and Behrends [2011].

[9] Even Sumner [1992: 8] is 'prepared to think that mountains and stars can fare better or worse on some objective scale of perfection'; he just doubts that we have any reasons to want them to fare better, since they lack a point of view.

[10] Frick [2020] makes a related claim about his 'bearer-regarding' and 'state-regarding' senses of 'mattering'.

waste in it, it is even worse for that ecosystem to bulldoze it in order to build some new facility. Just as it is bad for a sculpture to chip at its parts, it is even worse for that sculpture if its material is ground up and reappropriated. Just as it is bad for a friendship to break a promise to one's friend, it is even worse for that friendship if it is ended altogether. These claims might be derived from one of the views, mentioned earlier, about what is good for things of these kinds. But we might also find these claims plausible independently of any such theory: bulldozing an ecosystem seems bad for that ecosystem, destroying a sculpture seems bad for that sculpture, and ending a friendship seems bad for that friendship.

It might, however, be unclear why we have reason to preserve such things when they could be replaced by things that have no less status-value. But this can be explained by a principle that many philosophers independently accept—namely, that it cannot be better for a person to be brought into existence than never to exist at all [Broome 1993; Blackorby, Bossert, and Donaldson 2005; McMahan 2013]. On some views, that is because, if she never existed, then there would have been no *her* for whom her existence would have been worse.[11] This kind of reasoning is not specific to persons. It applies to anything that can be affected for better or for worse. This means that promoting the good of status-valuable things—that is, of things whose good is worth caring about for its own sake—gives us no reason to bring more of such things into existence.

Some might object that if existence cannot be better than nonexistence for a thing, then we would never have reason, according to object-affecting conservatism, to preserve things. But consider the life of a person. An existing person can be better off if she continues to live than if she dies, because her life as a whole will be better if she continues to live. We have reason to prefer, for her sake, that she lives a better life. The badness of death does not, on many views, rely on comparing the badness of nonexistence at some time with the goodness of existence at that same time [Nagel 1970; Feldman 1991; McMahan 1988; Broome 1993]. Instead, it involves (at least in part) a comparison between different possible lives extended through time. Similarly, a friendship can be better off if continued rather than ended—not because the friendship is badly off at times when it doesn't exist, but rather because the temporally extended friendship is better if longer.

I hope that I have said enough to motivate the basic idea of object-affecting conservatism. I now want to see whether it avoids the problems for existential and attitudinal conservatism.

Let's begin with the problems for existential conservatism. The first problem was the lack of an informative explanation for why we should regret the loss of a valuable thing over and above the loss of its value. Object-affecting conservatism can explain this: we should regret the loss of a status-valuable thing when and because its continued existence is better for it than its loss. There might be some sense in which we regret the loss of its value: we regret a loss of value *for* the thing. But that is not the kind of lost value to which anticonservatives appeal. We do not gain it back by replacing the original object.

The second problem concerned the preservation of fleeting phenomena, like footpath drawings. If we can make sense of things being better or worse for a drawing or

[11] That is the reasoning of the authors cited in the previous sentence. For critique, see Arrhenius and Rabinowicz [2015] and Nebel [2019b]. Elsewhere [2019a], I offer a different view, on which it still cannot be better for someone to exist.

another inanimate object, then object-affecting conservatism can avoid this problem. And I think that we can make sense of such things. For example, it might be bad for a footpath drawing if it is erased prematurely, before the artist intends it to fade. It might be good for it if it lasts a long time. But it might not be good for it for it to be preserved indefinitely. These claims might be true if the good of a work of art depends on the artist's intentions about that work, or on the properties that make it aesthetically valuable (which, for footpath drawings, might include their eventual disappearance).

Similar claims might hold for musical performances, conversations, bonfires, supernovae, and—on some views—even lives. Let's suppose that all of these things have status-value: their value does not consist merely in their value for the people who witness or participate in them. On this view, we have reason to care about *this very performance* or *this very conversation* for its own sake. Now, it might be bad for these things to be cut short prematurely—that is, before the intended end of the song, or before the aim of the conversation was achieved. And we might have reason to prevent their premature ending even if being cut short is necessary for starting some new performance or conversation. But we might have no reason to prolong a performance or conversation beyond its proper end, because doing so is not good for (and indeed might be bad for) the performance or conversation.[12]

If you prefer a narrower view of which things have a good, then you might doubt that many of these ephemeral objects or events have a good at all. In that case, you might still accept object-affecting conservatism. After all, the problem for existential conservatism was that it supported a disposition to preserve these things that should *not* be preserved. So, it would be no objection to object-affecting conservatism if it could not ground a special reason to preserve these things.

Consider, next, the third problem for existential conservatism, concerning pleasure. We lack reason to preserve a pleasurable sensation when it could be replaced by an even more pleasurable one. Object-affecting conservatism can avoid this problem because pleasure, quite plausibly, lacks status-value. It is worth caring about, not for its own sake, but rather for the sake of the person who experiences it. It is good for people, but it does not have a good that is itself worth caring about. Pleasure is, therefore, unlike people and other things towards which we have a conservative disposition.

The case of pleasure highlights the importance of distinguishing between our different varieties of value. Although pleasure is not worth caring about for *its* (pleasure's) sake, it is good for its own sake, rather than for the sake of something else that it causally promotes. It is good for its own sake in the sense that it is worth wanting as an end to be brought about, not merely as a means to something else. But this doesn't mean that it has either status-value or impersonal value. It lacks status-value because, as we saw in section 2, pleasure is not something that we value in the robust way that we value projects, relationships, artwork, and even other people. And, arguably, it is not impersonally valuable because pleasure is good for its own sake—that is, noninstrumentally—only *for the sake of* whoever experiences it.[13] We want there to be pleasure, not because pleasure makes the world better, but rather because it is good *for* people: people are not mere containers of valuable

[12] This point is in some ways similar to Shiffrin's [2013] suggestion about the reduced value of the item. But my point is about the reduction of value *for* the item, not the reduction in value *of* the item.

[13] The case for this double *for-the-sake-of* qualification regarding noninstrumental personal value (although not specifically regarding pleasure) is made by Rønnow-Rasmussen [2011: ch. 5].

experiences. This does not, however, mean that the goodness of pleasure is merely instrumental: some things, like pleasure, are noninstrumentally good for people.

The final problem for existential conservatism had to do with restoration. When something of value is lost and replaced, our conservative allegiance does not immediately shift towards the replacement. We have reason to restore the original thing. The implications of object-affecting conservatism for this issue are complicated, like the issue itself. It might imply that we have reason to restore the original object, if its resumed existence would serve it well. But if the replacement is also worth caring about for its own sake, then we might also have some reason not to destroy it in order to restore the original. What we have most reason to do probably depends on the case. Averröes's counterfeit might be less worth caring about for its own sake than Aristotle's original. The cheesy dystopian future of All Souls is less worth caring about for its own sake than its original nature is. So, in these cases, we plausibly ought to restore the original. But there might be other cases in which we have sufficient reason not to restore the original, or even decisive reason to preserve the successor. (Perhaps some things are better off dead or forgotten.)

Those are the four problems that we saw for existential conservatism. Object-affecting conservatism, I think, can avoid these problems.

Object-affecting conservatism also avoids the problems for attitudinal conservatism. Those problems had to do with our conservative responses towards things that we ourselves don't value, things that no one values but that ought to be valued, things we used to value, and things that are too far away to value. Object-affecting conservatism can support these responses because it doesn't require any sort of valuing connection or acquaintance between us and what we have reason to preserve.

Again, if you have a narrower view of which things have a good, or which things are worth caring about for their own sakes, then object-affecting conservatism might have (on your view) more limited scope. If you also believe that things beyond that scope ought to be preserved even when they could be replaced by similar things of equal or greater value, then you might regard object-affecting conservatism as insufficient to explain our conservative convictions. Since object-affecting conservatism states only a sufficient condition for our reasons to preserve valuable things, this would not, by itself, give us reason to reject object-affecting conservatism. One possibility is that, in addition to object-affecting conservatism, some additional conservative principle is also true, such as attitudinal conservatism. (After all, our problems for attitudinal conservatism were ways in which it seemed incomplete or too weak: we can have reason to preserve things that we don't value.) Another possibility is that our conservative dispositions with respect to objects beyond this limited scope cannot be justified. This would remove some of the motivation for preferring object-affecting conservatism to existential conservatism, since some of our objections to the latter focused on things beyond that limited scope. But not all of our objections did: we saw existential conservatism to be, in other ways, too strong (for example, in supporting a conservative disposition towards mere sensory pleasures). A third possibility is that object-affecting conservatism is false. I do not insist that it is true. But it seems to me a view worthy of consideration, even if its plausibility and explanatory power depend on the answers to these other big open questions: which things are worth valuing for their own sakes, and which things have a good?[14]

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