Intrinsically Good, God Created Them

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ABSTRACT: Erik Wielenberg [2014] and Mark Murphy [2017], [2018] have defended a series of arguments for the conclusion that creatures are not good intrinsically. In response, I take two steps. First, I introduce a conception of intrinsic value that makes created intrinsic value unproblematic. Second, I respond to their arguments in turn. The first argument is from the sovereignty-aseity intuition and an analysis of intrinsicality that makes derivative good extrinsic. I challenge the analysis. The second comes from a conception of perfection where God exhausts all possibilities for goodness. I challenge this conception. The third comes from the contingency of creation and the internal logic of intrinsic value. I challenge the assumption that connects the two. I then present an argument from reference magnetism that the only conception of God, God's perfections, and religious language that makes it plausible that the sentence "God is intrinsically good and creatures are not" is true involves a strongly univocalist position. A view that is either unstatable or places strong demands on our conception of God, God's perfections and religious language thereby loses plausibility.

FORTHCOMING IN OXFORD STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

1 Introduction

Classical theists believe that God is unsurpassable. Classical theists also believe that God's creation is voluntary. Without defect, God might have chosen to create nothing. Classical theists further believe that God is omnifundamental - the only fundamental thing, with a hand in grounding all others. These beliefs form the basis for some arguments that creatures have no intrinsic value.[1] Mark Murphy and Erik Wielenberg make use of these doctrines to present three arguments to deny creaturely intrinsic value. The first comes from what Plantinga [1980] calls divine *sovereignty-aseity*. Part of God's supreme value comes from the fact that God is the source of all other value. But if creaturely value is derivative from divine value, then it is relational and therefore not intrinsic. The second starts with a conception of the absoluteness of divine goodness, which Murphy claims exhausts all possibilities for goodness, and therefore leaves no room for created intrinsic value. The third argument is from the contingency of creation. If created things are intrinsically valuable, God might have had compelling reason to create, contrary to Tradition.

In response, I develop a conception of intrinsic value drawing on Moore's approach to the concept as well as the contemporary literature on intrinsicality that makes creaturely intrinsic value unproblematic. I then address each of the Murphy-Wielenberg arguments in turn. In response to the first, I argue that the notion of intrinsic value I develop is better than the one the argument employs and so gives us reason to reject it. In response to the second, I argue that there is no way to make sense of the claim that God exhausts all possibilities for goodness that makes true all of the premises of the argument. In response to the third, I argue that the intrinsic value that would be created, were God to create, does not in fact give God a compelling reason to create, because God is immune to rational compulsion.

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1 Murphy [2017].

Finally, I confront the claim that creatures cannot have intrinsic value directly by arguing that, unless one adopts a strongly Univocalist theory of God, God's perfection, and human language, then the best theory about how words get their meanings pushes us to let 'intrinsically good' refer to an axiological property of created things, rather an axiological property of God. The intended conclusion that creatures have no intrinsic value is impossible to say on any robust understanding of divine transcendence.

2 A Direct Argument for Created Intrinsic Value

Our first task is to articulate a respectable notion of intrinsic value according to which creatures can bear value intrinsically. Our method will be fairly straightforward: we will regard 'intrinsic value' as a compound of the somewhat technical philosophical term 'intrinsic' and the ordinary term 'value.' Because the concept of value is not itself at issue in these debates, the main action will be in articulating an appropriate idea of intrinsicality. Our initial goal will be to articulate a notion of intrinsicality fit to task and then see if it rules the value of some created thing intrinsic.

We can trace the contemporary philosophical inquiry into intrinsicality itself to G.E. Moore.[2] Moore conceived of himself as making philosophically rigorous a folk concept. In a preface he wrote for a proposed but never completed second edition of *Principia Ethica*, Moore writes:

> I will only say, to being with, that I think I mean [when talking about intrinsic value] exactly what most people would mean, if they talked of properties which tell you something about the *intrinsic nature* of things which posses them. Some such expression as this of the *intrinsic nature* of things is, I think, used on occasion by almost everybody; and what I want to do is get as near as I can to explaining what it means. (Moore [1903/1999], p. 23, emphasis Moore's.)

This was written after lengthy reflection on his ethical project. But Moore says something similar in the 1903 text as well:

> Whenever [a reflective person thinking about what is good] thinks of 'intrinsic value' or 'intrinsic worth,' or that a thing 'ought to exist,' he has before his mind the unique object – the unique property of things – which I mean by 'good.' Everybody is constantly aware of this notion, although he may never become aware at all that it is different from other notions of which he is also aware. (Moore [1903/1999] p. 68).

and later

> [The difference between two species of ethical judgment] has, indeed, received expression in ordinary language by the contrast between the terms 'good as means,' and 'good in itself,' 'value as a means,' and 'intrinsic value.' (Moore [1903/1999] p. 73)

Moore's discussion of intrinsicality continues with a proposal by Jaegwon Kim [1982], that a thing's intrinsic properties are those which it has when it exists alone. There are echoes here of Moore's [1903/1999] Isolation Test for intrinsic value, and Kim cites Roderick Chisholm's [1976] notion of a property rooted outside of the time it is had. David Lewis [1983a] replied: 'being alone' is a property that everything has when it is alone, but it ought to be classified as extrinsic. In a later paper, Lewis along with Rae Langton [1998] proposed a new definition of intrinsicality which relied on two pieces

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2 Marshall and Weatherson [2018].

of machinery, the notion of naturalness and the idea of being independent of accompaniment.[3] Here is their precise definition of independence:

LL-INDEPENDENCE: Let X and Y be facts. X is independent of Y just in case each of the following cases is possible: (a) X & Y, (b) X & ¬Y, (c) ¬X &¬Y, (d) ¬X & Y.

For Langton and Lewis, it is properties themselves that are classified as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Thus, they propose that a property is independent of accompaniment just in case four possibilities hold: it can be instantiated by a lonely thing (a thing that is the only existent), it can be instantiated by an accompanied thing, it can fail to be instantiated by a lonely thing, and it can fail to be instantiated by an accompanied thing. However, as they note, this alone is not enough; some properties, such as 'being cubical and lonely or non-cubical and accompanied' fit the definition but are not intrinsic. To patch the definition, they employ the notion of naturalness.

Following Korsgaard [1983], we should allow for one and the same property - value - to be in some instances intrinsic and in other instances extrinsic. There are sound reasons for a metaphysics of intrinsicality which attaches first to instances of properties and only derivatively to the properties themselves, defended by authors like Witmer, Butchard, and Trogdon [2005]. So an adequate test for intrinsicality will consider not properties as a whole but specific property instances: *a*'s being *F* is intrinsic just in case it is independent of accompaniment and *F* is fairly natural.

In Moore's [1903/1999] isolation test and in the Langton and Lewis definition, we are working primarily with intensional notions. Moore asks to consider whether it is possible for a thing to retain its value while existing alone; Langton and Lewis define 'independent of accompaniment' intensionally. A term's *ex*tension is the collection of things the term refers to. The extension of 'rabbit' is the rabbits. Some terms can have the same extension while still meaning different things. 'renate' and 'cordate' have (so far as we know) the same actual extension. Nothing with kidneys lacks a heart and *vice versa*. But 'renate' and 'cordate' have different meanings. There could be something with kidneys but no heart, or a heart but no kidneys. So the theory of meaning requires more than extensions. Enter intension. A term's intension tells us what it could possibly apply to. So 'renate' and 'cordate' have different intensions, and so different meanings. All well and good. But this problem recurs. 'Trilateral' and 'triangular' have the same intension. Every possible trilateral thing is a triangular thing. Yet, it seems to many, 'trilateral' and 'triangular' mean different things. One means 'three-sided' and the other means 'three-angled.' These are different. So the theory of meaning requires more than intensions. It requires *hyper*intensions. A term's hyperintension considers even its impossible applications, such as 'triangular' to the impossible shape that has four sides and three angles. Many concepts of interest in metaphysics have turned out to require hyperintensions for their proper characterizations.

Intrinsicality is one such concept. On this, many authors agree.[4] Eddon [2011] points out that properties things necessarily have break standard accounts of intrinsicality.[5] Bader [2013] also comes to

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3 Zimmerman [1997] discuses an analysis of intrinsicality that is in substance the same as that of Langton and Lewis (with both key elements of their definition, the dual independence tests and the use of naturalness, present), and anticipates some of the problems they discuss.

4 Eddon [2011], Bader [2013], Nolan [2014], Marshall [2016].

5 In Eddon's paper, she is working with a different strand of the intrinsicality literature than we have been. One common way of thinking about intrinsicality relies on the notion of duplication or exact likeness. This can be found in some of Moore's reflections (e.g. Moore [1903/1999] p. 23-24), but its modern incarnation is due to David Lewis [1983b], [1986]. In brief, Lewis said: a property is intrinsic iff duplicates, or exactly similar things, must both either have it or lack it. This account makes all necessary properties intrinsic. It is interesting to note that even a way of

the same conclusion, again partly motivated by considerations about necessary properties. As in theories of meaning, theories of intrinsicality require the granularity that only hyperintensional frameworks can provide. So we must define 'independent' hyperintensionally.

While intensionality has a well-understood and more-or-less concensus metaphysical and semantic home with possible worlds, both the metaphysics and semantics of hyperintensionality are hotly disputed. For continuity, it will be useful for us to work in a hyperintensional framework of impossible worlds.[6] The details of impossible worlds are also hotly disputed, but here are a few assumptions that will help us along our way. Just as possible worlds represent ways the world could be, impossible worlds represent ways that a world couldn't be. Just as we have possible worlds that are similar to reality, perhaps sharing its laws of nature, and possible worlds that are radically different, perhaps where Newton's theories accurately describe the world, we have impossible worlds that are relatively similar to reality, perhaps adding or omitting only a God and a few other supernatural entities, and impossible worlds that are radically different from reality, perhaps explosive ones where classical logic reigns and yet there are true contradictions. Just as we can carve out useful classes of possible worlds - say, the physically possible worlds for those which share our laws, or the historically possible worlds for those which share our history - we can carve out useful classes of impossible worlds, say worlds that share our logic but break our laws of metaphysics, or worlds that change some necessary truths while leaving others intact.

Next, we require a way of thinking about intrinsicality that allows one and the same property to be sometimes intrinsic and sometimes extrinsic. Both intrinsic value and extrinsic value are instances of the same property, value. Furthermore, reflection on "disjunctive" properties and ways of defining intrinsicality that deals with them without invoking additional primitives like naturalness has lead some metaphysicians to definitions of intrinsicality that attach first to property instances and then only derivatively to properties as a whole. One such useful account is that of Witmer et al [2005]. They define having a property in an intrinsic way as follows:

INTRINSIC WAY: something has a property in an intrinsic way just in case (i) that property is independent of accompaniment, and (ii) any other property in virtue of which it has that property is also independent of accompaniment.

They then define an intrinsic property as one that such that all possible instances of it are had in an intrinsic way.

This may be adequate for the project of identifying the purely intrinsic properties. But because we are working with a 'hybrid' property that has some intrinsic and some extrinsic instances, we want a full-blooded definition of a property instance being intrinsic. Rubio [2021] does this. Rubio begins by modifying Lewis and Langton's definition of independence of accompaniment. The first step in getting what we need is to say what it means for an object to instantiate a property independent of accompaniment. We can start by taking the Lewis and Langton definition and inserts relativizations:

INSTANCE INDEPENDENCE I: some object having a property is independent of accompaniment just in case: (i) the object has the property (ii) it can have that property while lonely, (iii) it can have that property while accompanied, (iv) it can lack that property while lonely, and (v) it can lack that property while accompanied.

This definition works for some paradigm cases. When I am lying down, my shape is more-or-less

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thinking about intrinsicality that is very different from the one we are following nevertheless needs to go hyperintensional.

6 Nolan [1997], [2013] provides such a framework.

straight. If I were alone in the world, it would still be more-or-less straight. But I can sit up, and doing so would make my shape bent. If I were alone in the world, it would still be bent. So it looks like my instantiating my shape-properties fits instance independence i.

However, Rubio notes, this is not an adequate adaptation of the Lewis and Langton definition. It does not deal well with essential properties. As we saw, there might be essential intrinsic properties, and they will fail clauses (iv) and (v) of the definition on account of the object being unable to lack them. As an improvement, Rubio suggests simply dropping them:

INSTANCE INDEPENDENCE II: some object having a property is independent of accompaniment just in case: (i) the object has that property (ii) it can have that property while lonely, and (iii) it can have that property while accompanied.

This definition now does not exclude essential properties from being had intrinsically. But it errs in the opposite direction: it now counts every essential property as being had independent of accompaniment, since a thing must have its essential properties whether or not it is accompanied. The original definition avoided this problem by allowing all possible instances of a property to count when testing for Lewis and Langton's clauses (iii) and (iv). By borrowing this strategy, Rubio avoids the issue.

INSTANCE INDEPENDENCE III: some object having a property is independent of accompaniment just in case: (i) the object has that property (ii) it can have that property while lonely, (iii) it can have that property while accompanied, (iv) something can lack that property while lonely, and (v) something can lack that property while accompanied.

Rubio's final definition is up to the task. We can now use it to show how creatures might have intrinsic value. As our example, we will take as a paradigm case the value of a human being. I will assume here that 'value' is sufficiently natural so as not to run afoul of any naturalness requirement necessary to ward off disjunctive properties. We will go through the clauses of INSTANCE INDEPENDENCE III in turn for the case of human value.

Clause (i) asks: does our human being have value? By agreement of all relevant parties, yes. The issue is how humans and perhaps other creatures have value, not whether they do.

Clause (ii) asks: would our human being have value while lonely? This question is a little complicated. Most theists will regard the supposition that a human beings exists but nothing else does as impossible, because (at least) of divine necessity. So hyperintensional we go. But thinking of the human existing alone, it still seems true that they possess value. Various counterfactuals about them still seem true: it would be wrong to kill or torture them, it would be wrong to violate their autonomy, etc, and the best explanation for these intuitions is that they retain their value even when considered alone.

Clause (iii) asks: can the human have value while accompanied? The answer here as for clause (i) is an easy 'yes.' We all exist while accompanied and still have value.

Clause (iv) asks: can something lack value while lonely? There will be some controversy here. Davison [2012] argues for the universality of intrinsic value, but restricts his main arguments to the concrete. Davison's position is controversial; doubtless some readers will find examples such as a random photon moving through space forever, never to make contact with an eye or other seeing device, convincing. For those who find Davison's arguments persuasive, examples such as one of Lewis's

abundant properties so gerrymandered that it is beyond the ken of created cognition, or a random member of the set-theoretic hierarchy with no role in recognizable mathematics may do the trick.[7]

This brings us to clause (v), which asks if something can lack value while accompanied. The examples we have given in clause (iv) are all equally apt as examples for clause (v), since we have good reason to suppose that they all actually exist yet (at least one of them) without value.

This gives us a conception of intrinsic value that seems perfectly sound and is applicable to creatures. As a sort of 'proof by construction,' this gives us reason to believe that the arguments of Murphy and Wielenberg fail. But it will be useful to see exactly why/how they do, so to these we now turn.

3 The Argument from Sovereignty-Aseity

The first argument I will consider comes from the theistic commitment to divine *sovereignty-aseity*. Erik Wielenberg [2014] suggests a version of it against Robert Adams's [1999] framework for theistic ethics in *Finite and Infinite Goods*; Mark Murphy [2017], [2018] endorses and develops it further. We can understand *sovereignty-aseity* in terms of metaphysical fundamentality. An *a se* being is absolutely independent of anything distinct from itself for its core properties. Its mere existence is grounds sufficient for it to have the properties that make it the kind of thing that it is. Not only so, but an *a se* thing is an omni-fundamental thing. All other things have their existence and properties partially in virtue of its existence and the properties that it has (including its activity).[8]

Consequently, Murphy argues, if God is *a se*, then anything with value properties has those value properties at least partially in virtue of God, God's properties, or God's activity. But, he claims, a thing's intrinsic value is the value it has independent of relations to other things.[9] Thus, if a thing's value properties are partially derived from God, then they are not intrinsic and it has no intrinsic value. Thus, as long as it's not impossible for all value to be at least partially derived from God, God's properties, or God's activity, then divine *sovereignty-aseity* demands that it be so. A regimentation of Murphy's argument will allow us to draw attention to its key premises.

1. DEFINITION OF INTRINSICALITY PREMISE: A thing's intrinsic properties are those it has independent of the relations it stands in

2. ASEITY PREMISE: If it is possible, God would be greater if everything with value properties other than God had those value properties at least partially in virtue of some relation to God

3. POSSIBILITY PREMISE: It is possible for everything with value properties other than God to have its value properties at least partially in virtue of some relation to God

   Therefore

4. God would be greater if everything with value properties other than God necessarily had its value properties at least partially in virtue of some relation to God FROM 2 & 3

5. ANSELMIAN PREMISE: If God would be greater if P, and P is possible, then P

   Therefore

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7 Augustinians may insist that anything that exists has something of goodness about it, but nothing in the tradition requires that the good of existing be intrinsic.

8 For further discussion, see Menzel and Morris [1986], Craig [2016], Panchuk [2016], and Crisp [2019].

9 Murphy [2017], p. 69n3

6. Everything with value properties other than God necessarily has its value properties at least partially in virtue of some relation to God from FROM 3, 4, & 5

7. INDEPENDENCE PREMISE: If something necessarily has its value properties partially in virtue of some relation to God, it does not have them independent of the relations it stands in.

Therefore

8. Nothing other than God has its value properties intrinsically FROM 1, 6, & 7

I am willing to grant Murphy the POSSIBILITY, ASEITY, and ANSELMIAN premises. The trouble comes with the INTRINSICALITY PREMISE and INDEPENDENCE PREMISE in conjunction.

We begin by observing that the argument is much more powerful than Murphy hints at. By replacing 'value properties' with any other class of qualitative[10] properties, we have a new argument - roughly as potent as the old one - that that class of properties cannot occur intrinsically in creatures. This is because an *a se* God is an imperialistic grounder; for just about any qualitative instance of an *a* being *F*, God or some act of God's will be a required partial ground for the fact that *a* is *F*. Such is the life of the omni-fundamental. And while there might be specific reasons for a theist to deny created things intrinsic value, a theist should not deny everything all of its intrinsic properties; the fact that I have my shape partially in virtue of relations I stand in to God does not make my shape any less intrinsic. Indeed, the better part of our pretheoretic grasp of an intrinsic property is simply a property that a thing has because of what it is. A thing without intrinsic properties is, in effect, nothing.[11] God did not create nothing.

In fact, the argument may be powerful enough that not even God's intrinsic properties are spared. There are two potential routes to this conclusion. The first is to observe that none of God's essential properties are independent of accompaniment, a relation. Recall Langton and Lewis's definition of independence:

LL-INDEPENDENCE: Let X and Y be facts. X is independent of Y just in case each of the following cases is possible: (a) X & Y, (b) X & ¬Y, (c) ¬X &¬Y, (d) ¬X & Y.

We can use this to show that none of God's properties are independent of the relations God stands in. For X, let's substitute God's having of a (hopefully intrinsic) property - say, power, or goodness. For Y, let's substitute God's standing in a relation - say, accompaniment. Our facts are then Pg and $\exists xAxg$: God is powerful and Something accompanies God. Cases (a) and (b) check out, because God can be powerful while accompanied and powerful while not accompanied. But it fails (c) and (d), because God cannot fail to be powerful, and so cannot be powerful independent of the relations God stands in. This is the same kind of problem with necessary properties that motivated the move to a hyperintensional account of intrinsicality.

The second is a problem only for Trinitarians. Trinitarians hold that each member of the Godhead has all of the same essential *properties*, but stand in relational 'person-distinguishers.' The Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit is Spirated.[12] Consequently, a person of the Trinitarian

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10 For our purposes, we can think of qualitative properties as that which may be characterized without use of singular terms.

11 Thanks to Robert M. Adams for pointing out this consequence of denying things their intrinsic features.

12 By whom, we leave to medieval popes and patriarchs.

Godhead cannot hold properties independent of all of the relations that person stands in, even if the accompaniment problem is solved. The Son is necessarily begotten, and therefore cannot fit case (b) of LL-INDEPENDENCE for any property (e.g. being powerful), and likewise for the begetting Father and the spirated Spirit. But members of the Godhead no less than God Godself are supposed to have the key intrinsic features of divinity like power and goodness.

The hyperintensional approach to intrinsicality outlined in §2 gets around these problems. We have already seen how it allows creatures to have value intrinsically, and *mutatis mutandis* other intrinsic properties. Now we can see how it resolves the problem with God's intrinsic properties. Recall the analysis we concluded with:

INSTANCE INDEPENDENCE III: some object having a property is independent of accompaniment just in case: (i) the object has that property (ii) it can have that property while lonely, (iii) it can have that property while accompanied, (iv) something can lack that property while lonely, and (v) something can lack that property while accompanied.

The tough case will be a Trinitarian God. We will use 'powerful' as our example property, and the Father as our example person. Clause (i) then follows by hypothesis: the Father is powerful. Clause (ii) is where we need to rely on the fact that our definition is hyperintensional. From a Trinitarian perspective, the Father cannot be lonely. Fortunately, numerous variant theologies exist within Christianity and the other Abrahamic religions that are Unitarian, and show us how we should reason about a God who exists alone. This god remains powerful. Clause (iii), like clause (i), follows by hypothesis. Clause (iv) is relatively unproblematic; pick your favotire example of a thing that is not powerful - an apple, say - and you have something that fulfills it. The same object will work for clause (v). Thus, the conception of intrinsicality employed in §2 allows both humans and their creator to possess intrinsic properties. This renders it superior to the conception embodied in Murphy's intrinsicality and independence premises, and therefore a defeater for the sovereignty-aseity argument.

4 Making a Better World

Murphy offers a second argument for the conclusion that creatures have no intrinsic value, this one relying on two facts: the absolute goodness of God and the additive internal logic of intrinsic value. The rough argument is this. God is absolutely good. Thus God 'exhuasts the possibilities for goodness.' All goodness is realized in God, leaving none for the creatures except by something like participation. Thus, creating more good things (on Murphy's view creatures can still be good, even if not intrinsically) does not create more goodness. But the internal logic of intrinsic goodness is additive; creating an extra intrinsically good thing creates more goodness in a world.[13] So creatures cannot be intrinsically good. We may reconstruct the argument as follows:

1. ANSELMIAN PREMISE: God is intrinsically, absolutely good
2. AXIOLOGICAL PREMISE: if God is absolutely good, then God exhausts all possibilities for goodness
3. UNSURPASSABILITY PREMISE: if God exhausts all possibilities for goodness, then adding anything to a world with only God does not increase the amount of goodness in that world

13 For species of dissent here, which we shall set aside, see Oddie [2001], Climenhaga [2018], and Johnston [2019].

4. AGGREGATION PREMISE: A collection with two intrinsically good things is better than a collection with only one of those intrinsically good things.

   Therefore

5. Adding an intrinsically good thing to a world with God in it would result in a better world than a world with only God in it FROM 1 & 4

   Therefore

6. Nothing intrinsically good can be added to a world with God in it FROM 1, 2, 3, & 5

I accept the ANSELMIAN PREMISE and the AGGREGATION PREMISE, although the second of these deserves some elaboration. But I will argue against accepting the AXIOLOGICAL PREMISE and the UNSURPASSABILITY PREMISE together.

The AGGREGATION PREMISE deserves comment. The first thing to note is that in considering it, we are interested primarily in *agent-neutral* goodness. Agent-neutral goodness is the type of goodness that any agent should appreciate. It contrasts with agent-relative goodness, goodness which only some agents should appreciate. The inherent dignity of humanity is an example of how agent-neutral is supposed to work. Part of the concept of inherent dignity is that any rational agent should recognize and respond to it appropriately. By contrast, the bonds between family members illustrate how agent-relative goodness works. The facts of family relationships provide a (defeasible) reason for me to act in ways that strangers would not have. On the assumption that nothing has disordered those relationships, I should care more about and work to promote the well-being of family members in ways that I need not for a stranger. Since our issue here is about intrinsic value, which is supposed to be a type of agent-neutral goodness, we will set aside agent-relative goodness hereafter.

Debate surrounds aggregation principles for goodness/utility. It's widely agreed that simply summing up the goodness of some things is a bad way to determine the goodness of those things. There are at least two reasons this might be so. One: the things might be in *organic unity*. Organic unity emerges when the parts of a thing contribute more or less than their intrinsic value to the value of a whole. For example, mixing pickle juice and vanilla ice cream produces a liquid that is worse than either of the ones that mix to make it, while in many great paintings there are individual patches of ugly color that nonetheless, due to their relations to the whole, add more to its value than a prettier color in their place would.[14] Two: when there are multiple dimensions of evaluation feeding into all-things-considered judgments of goodness, an on-balance good thing may diminish the whole along one dimension enough to offset whatever it might add along another. For example: adding more total welfare (without changing the people involved) to a population may nevertheless create a worse situation if it exacerbates inequality too badly.

The aggregation premise has been carefully worded to avoid these issues. It makes reference, not to the value of things directly, but to the value of collections of things. This is important. A thing and its parts, except in the case of mere fusions, will often exhibit some form of unity or interesting relatedness that a collection need not. Because collections presume only trivial (e.g. co-existence) relations between their members, the correct aggregation rule for collections is summative. The intrinsic value of a collection of things, considered merely as a collection, is the sum of the intrinsic values of the things in the collection.[15] For similar reasons, the AGGREGATION PREMISE avoids concerns about multiple dimensions of evaluation. The typical ways in which the addition of an on-balance

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14 See Hurka [1998], Lemos [2015] for further discussion.

15 More or less. Matters get more complicated when we reach the realm of the transfinite, but not in ways that will make a difference.

good thing to some other things can negatively affect the value of the whole is through the relations that it stands in to the others. But again, collections presume no non-trivial relations between their members, so the worry does not get off the ground. Of course, all of this means that the AGGREGATION PREMISE is far from the whole story about goodness aggregation. But it is enough of the story for purposes of the argument.[16]

With that said, we can turn our attention to the AXIOLOGICAL PREMISE and the UNSURPASSABILITY PREMISE. I will argue that we cannot accept these premises together. The key phrase in both premises is the phrase "God exhausts all possibilities for goodness." Considered alone, it is somewhat opaque. I don't understand what it means. In order for the argument to work, we require an interpretation of it that makes both premises plausible together. In bringing his argument, Murphy deploys it as follows:

> When God creates, God does not bring about further intrinsic goodness or even further agent-neutral goodness of the same sort that God has. Creatures are agent-neutrally good, but there is no further goodness brought about by creating. For God alone realizes all good. How could a being who is absolutely perfect not exhaust all the possibilities of goodness?[17]

Murphy treats it as equivalent to the phrase "God alone realizes all good." But what does this mean? It cannot mean that God is the only good thing. For he allows that creatures are good, albeit not intrinsically.

Perhaps it means that God is the only fundamentally good thing. This works and is plausible, if for no other reason than that on Anselmian theism God is the only fundamental thing and has a hand in grounding all of the facts about all of the other things. But read in such a way, the UNSURPASSABILITY PREMISE becomes implausible. The fact that something is a fundamental good thing, or the fact that it is good is a fundamental fact, tells us nothing about how its goodness stacks up against the goodness of derivative things, or things for whom the fact that they are good is a derivative fact. Think about the axiological situation if physicalism were true is instructive here. If physicalism is true, something like point particles or quantum fields or the wave-function itself is all that is fundamental. Yet none of these things will end up as valuable as persons, despite the fact that (a) the persons themselves are derivative things, and (b) the fact that the persons are good will be a derivative fact, grounded somehow in the physics.

Perhaps it means that any instance of the property 'goodness' is instantiated by God. If we understand property-instances as sharable, this might not preclude other things from also instantiating goodness. Having things share property-instances is weird, but we can make sense of it if we use a certain kind of bundle-theory of individuals. According to the bundle theory, individuals are constituted by bundles of properties. There are at least two major variants: trope bundle theories and universal bundle theory. According to both, to be an individual is to be a maximal coninstantiated collection of properties. To be a maximal coinstantiated collection of properties is to be a collection of properties all of which are coinstantiated with each other and such that there is no additional property that is coinstantiated with every property in the collection (although there may be some that are coninstantiated with some of the properties in the collection). According to trope theories, these properties are abstract particulars, individualized to each instance. Thus, while both the stop sign and the fire truck are red, each has its own trope of redness. According to universals theories, there is one and the same thing - the property of being red - that is coninstantiated with some properties to make the stop sign and some other properties to make the fire truck.

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16 Rubio [2020] works through some formal iterations of the aggregation premise, while Pruss [2016] gives a more detailed account of how multiple dimensions of goodness could create trouble for it, which we shall set aside for now.

17 Murphy [2017, p. 80-81.]

In a series of papers, L.A. Paul [2006], [2013], [2017] makes a persuasive case that bundle theorists should interpret the coninstantiation relation as composition, governed by a formal mereology. Thus, some property instances *x, y, z*... compose an individual just in case *x, y, z*... are all and only the parts of that individual. In a bundle theory where properties are univerals or some other kind of multiply locatable entity (Paul denies that the properties in her theory are universals, but they are multiply-locatable), it will be difficult to make sense of God instantiating every instance of the property 'goodness.' But in a trope theory, where each instance of the property goodness is an abstract particular, sense can be made. If, with Paul, we identify bundling with parthood, then what it is for a collection of tropes to form a bundle is for them to all be parts of the same bundle. We need take no stance here on how widespread this composition/bundling is among the tropes; on the ontologically extravagant end will be universalists who endorse a bundle for every collection. Paul herself adopts a brutalist view, in order to avoid bundles including tropes of squareness and roundness, and other such counterintuitive cases. We can then make sense of the claim that God instantiates every instance of the property goodness by including every goodness trope in God's bundle. This, however, would not preclude other things from also instantiating goodness. In a Paul-style mereological bundle theory, coincidence is overlap, and things can share properties. Paul motivates this with cases of material constitution, so that while the statue Goliath and its constituent lump of clay Lumpl are distinct things, they share their mass, charge, shape, and other categorical properties, avoiding double-counting.

On this interpretation of what it means for God alone to realize all good, we undermine the UNSURPASSABILITY PREMISE. By adding intrinsically good things to a world with God, we do not thereby add goodness to the world over and above God's goodness. God gets the additional goodness too. Of course, traditionalists will have all sorts of objections to the picture I have sketched, which runs roughshod over doctrines like simplicity and immutability. The goal here is a narrow one: to show that this interpretation of God realizing all goodness is not enough to ensure the argument's conclusion, that created things are not intrinsically good.

A somewhat different approach to interpreting what it means for God to exhaust all possibilities for goodness begins with Hurka's proportionality principle.[18] In giving his theory of virtue, Hurka proposes that the virtuous agent loves things in proportion to their goodness. He writes:

> Let me start with a minimal claim...given two goods, one greater than the other, it is best to love the greater more intensely than the lesser. If one person is enjoying a very intense pleasure and another only a mild one, it is best to be more pleased by the first person's pleasure than by the second's. This minimal claim is somewhat vague, since it does not specify by how much more one should love a greater good. But partly for this reason, it seems intuitively undeniable. Surely, if what is good is responding appropriately to values, one should respond more intensely to what has greater value.[19]

Tradition has it that God is deserving of thoroughgoing, all-consuming love. The fact that God creates an apple does not alter what God merits, and the collection {God, apple} does not merit greater love than God alone. But if this is so, then it indicates that by creating things, God does not thereby increase the goodness of reality. So the things must not be intrinsically good.

The main problem for this interpretation comes from Adams [2006]. Adams argues that Hurka's proportionality principle runs into problems when we consider how we normally think of how we ought to apportion our love. It is normal, healthy, and reasonable to value the health of a life partner over that of a stranger. It is a moral error to think that a life partner's health is more intrinsically

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18 In personal correspondence, Murphy has indicated that this is the kind of thing he had in mind when making his original claims.

19 Hurka [2001] p. 60.

valuable. Hurka introduces agent-relative values to try and resolve this kind of problem, but in order to avoid the problem, the proportionality principle must be formulated in a way that makes love responsive not only to intrinsic value but also to agent-relative values.[20] This shows that how we should apportion our love does not give us something like a definitive ranking of the intrinsic goodness of things. Indeed, it is far from clear that love has anything like the kind of additive property that the AGGREGATION PREMISE assigns to intrinsic goodness. At a minimum, further argumentation is necessary to make this interpretation viable.

Perhaps there is some other way to make sense of the claim that God alone realizes all goodness that is not simply an assertion of the argument's conclusion. If so, I leave it to others to find it and move on to another argument.

5 A Mandate to Create?

A third argument Murphy might advance relies on facts about the structure of intrinsic value and the doctrine of creaturely contingency. The Tradition demands that God's creative action was not rationally compelled. Thus we get another argument:

1. AGGREGATION PREMISE: A collection with κ-many intrinsically good items is worse than a collection of $\kappa+$-many things with intrinsic value

2. REASONS PREMISE: If collection 1 contains more intrinsic value than collection 2, all else equal, there is compelling reason to create collection 1

3. CETERIS PARIBUS PREMISE: In the case of not creating vs. creating at least one thing, all else is equal

   Therefore

4. HERETICAL SUBCONCLUSION: If a collection of created things has an intrinsically good thing in it, there is rationally compelling reason to create at least one thing FROM 1, 2, & 3

5. TRADITIONAL PREMISE: God did not have rationally compelling reason to create at least one thing

   Therefore

6. No collection of created things has any intrinsically good things in it FROM 4 & 5

The literature on the reasonability of divine creation offers us three viable ways out of this argument, which we need not choose between.

Johnston [2019] gives us a way out of the AGGREGATION PREMISE. According to Johnston, God is so unsurpassably valuable that God's inclusion in any collection of objects is sufficient to render the value of the collection unsurpassable, regardless of what other things are in the collection or how they are arranged. If Johnston is right, then the value resulting from creation provides God with no extra reason to create, because while creating may put more valuable things into the world, it cannot increase the value of the collection of things, because that collection must include God.

Pruss [2016] offers a different way out of the AGGREGATION PREMISE. According to Pruss, there are multiple, incommensurable dimensions of value. Each of these dimensions of value creates a chain of

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20 Adams [2006], p. 26-28.

worlds, with some world or worlds at the top. So long as a world is at the top of one of these value-chains, it remains reasonable for God to create it. If there are enough ways to generate incommensurability (and Pruss argues that there are), then this will provide God with a wide variety of options to create, including the world with God alone, none of which is better or worse than the others.

Rubio [2018] offers a third way out. Rubio argues that, minimally, two principles govern good moral and instrumental reasoning: one says "if you have more than one option available, do not choose your worst option." The other is the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives, which generalizes the following thought: if A is choice-worthy in the decision between A, B, and C, then A is choiceworthy in the decision between A and B. Losing options does not cause an option to switch from choiceworthy to non-choiceworthy. He then proves that, under the supposition that there is no best possible world, these imply that no world is choiceworthy. Under the further supposition that a world is possible only if God can reasonably create it, this implies that no world is possible. Rubio proposes to escape this conclusion by exempting God from the demands of morality and rationality. Thus, Rubio's way out does not deny any of the premises of the argument, but severs the connection between reasons in an abstract sense and God's reasons implied in the derivation of the final conclusion from the TRADITIONAL PREMISE and the HERETICAL SUBCONCLUSION.

6 The Reference Objection

Sometimes philosophers try to propose positions that cannot be proposed, even with infinite lexical resources. The classic example is of generality-relativism. Advocates wish to say: there is no such thing as a totally unrestricted quantifier. But Williamson [2003] shows that they cannot, no matter how they try. This is bad for the would-be proposers. It is difficult, though perhaps not impossible, to believe, accept, or know what cannot be communicated with words. It is harder still to successfully argue for such a view in a piece of analytical writing. I will now present an argument that Murphy is in this unfortunate situation with respect to the no-creaturely-value thesis, unless a strongly Univocalist view of God, God's perfections, and religious language is true. This makes a dilemma: accept the Univocalist position, which Murphy is on record as rejecting, or land in a position where you wish to propose a view that you cannot in-principle state. Both horns are unfortunate.

In order to give the argument, I will first take whirlwind tour through views about how God, God's perfections, and religious language relate. Then I will explain the best theory of reference, David Lewis's Reference Magnetism. Finally, I will show how a reference-magnetic criterion of meaning renders the content ≺God has intrinsic value but creatures do not≻ difficult to mean unless a strong univocalism holds.

6.1 Religious Language

There are a range of theories of how language applies to God and the divine attributes. The most optimistic pole holds that our predicates like 'goodness,' 'knowledge,' and 'power' when applied to God refer to the very same properties that they do when applied to more familiar entities. These univocity views do not typically hold that our language can capture all of the divine perfections, but that at least a few of the key ones can be adequately expressed by human language. Behind this view of language is a view of the perfections themselves. For univocity theorists, the property that we attribute to God with the sentence 'God is good' is one and the same property as the one we attribute to apples when we say 'apples are good' or that God attributes to creation when God says 'it is good.'

At the other pole are strongly apophatic views. According to these kinds of views, no positive predications of God are true. Thus, it is as true to say 'God is wise' as it is to say 'God is foolish,' and it is true to say 'God is mighty' as it is to say 'God is a wimp.' I dislike this standard characterization.

The standard characterization of 'positive predication' is syntactic. In the hands of a logician, this can be useful, e.g. in translation theorems that rely on form alone.[21] But any property-attribution can be regimented into a negation-free syntax, either by inventing words (so that claims like 'God is not an ocean' lose their negation when we define "rtfuyfgvb" as meaning 'not an ocean') or by creative use of the lambda calculus.[22] The heart of the apophatic view is again about the divine properties, not predicates in a language. According to the apophaticist, God's perfections are not at all like the properties we have. Whatever axiological perfection God has, it is so unlike the property involved in 'apples are good' that attempts to use the term 'good' to convey it are utter failures.

In between the poles are the ever-popular moderate views, the best-known of which invokes 'analogical' predication. According to moderate views, while it is strictly and literally false to say 'God is good,' 'God is wise,' or 'God is powerful,' it is nevertheless true in some extended sense (e.g. defenders of analogical views will say that these predicates apply to God in ways that are analogical to the way they apply to creatures, but not exact, because the true divine perfections are superior the creaturely ones). As before, this picture of the truth and application conditions of predicates is underwritten by a view of the relationship between divine and human properties. Thomas Aquinas, for example, thought that God alone had perfections essentially, while creatures have properties similar to the perfections because they stand in a relation, participation, to the divine perfections.

Key to any theory of religious language are the following questions: how similar are the divine perfections and human properties? How do the words of our language come to refer, specifically how do our predicates come to refer to properties? And what, if any, special features of the religious context change the answers to the previous questions?

6.2 Reference

Words refer to things. 'Sun' refers to a massive round glowing object that appears in the sky. 'Bach' refers to the composer of much sacred music. 'Wise' refers to an elevated cognitive-emotional status. How do they do that? A tempting answer: through the activity of speakers. The people who decided to use the word 'sun' said something like: "let 'sun' mean the massive round glowing object in the sky," and so it was. Likewise for other words. According to this story, words mean what they do because objects out in the world satisfy certain descriptions associated with those words (perhaps in their original use, modulo semantic drift), a family of theories roughly known as *descriptivist*. Tempting as they seem, descriptivist theories cannot be all there is to say about how words come to mean things. Putnam's Paradox proves global descriptivism inadequate.[23] Here's why. When we speak, we mean to speak truly. The principle of charity demands that if there are two legitimate interpretations of my words, one that makes them true and one that makes them false, we advert to the true one. But, as long as it has enough objects, just about any world can satisfy just about any theory with the clever assignment of objects to the relevant extensions of predicates. So there needs to be a constraint on eligible interpretations that prevents charity from making all of our utterances true.

David Lewis offered two replies to Putnam. One relied on the causal connection between the thing referred to and the word referring, which is not of much interest in this context. The other offered a constraint to prevent charity from running amok: objective similarity. Some classes of objects are more objectively similar to each other than others are; compare: the electrons vs. the objects on your desk. These classes form joints in nature, they are more natural than others. Lewis's constraint then says: the best interpretation of a theory is the one that balances the goal of charity with the goal of assigning more natural classes of objects as the extensions of the predicates. This gives us the theory of

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21 for example, Sahlqvist [1975].

22 Barendregt [1985].

23 Lewis [1984].

reference magnetism, and explains both how words get their meanings and how even a charitable interpretation can yield falsehoods.

6.3 the Objection

We are now in a position to launch our objection. According to Murphy, God has a property, which he calls 'intrinsic goodness,' that creatures lack. Creatures have a distinct but related property, goodness by participation, which God lacks. In order not to prejudice the description of the objection, we will call God's property axiological property 1 and the creaturely property axiological property 2. We may then ask: how should we assign the extension of our predicate 'intrinsically good'? Should it be the things that have axiological property 1, should it be the things that have axiological property 2, or should it be both??

Reference magnetism advises us to choose the extension that best balances eligibility and charity. Choosing axiological property 1 would be massively revisionary, since claims about the intrinsic value of created things, in particular persons, are a commonplace. Thus, charity pushes us strongly toward axiological property 2 or the disjunction. But as we have seen, charity does not reign supreme. We can get things wrong. Thus the question arises, in what direction does eligibility push?

What we say about eligibility depends a bit on how we think about divine transcendance. If our picture of God, God's perfections, and human language is somewhat like the Univocalist's vision, then God and God's perfections are fairly easy to refer to. The Univocalist thinks that God is highly eligible to go into the extensions of predicates, and therefore eligibility considerations may push us toward axiological property 1. How much more eligible is God's axiological property then ours, and how does this eligibility trade off against charity? These seem like difficult questions, but I am willing to grant that if the Univocalist is roughly correct we have a stalemate. There is no particular reason to think that one property or the other is a better referent (or: the predicate 'intrinsically good' has no determinate extension) and we can grant Murphy a win on points, assuming the objections of §2-3 fail.

On the other hand, if our picture of God, God's perfections, and human language is more like the Apophaticist's vision, Murphy is in trouble. According to the Apophaticist, God is a highly elusive referent, shying away from the extension even of very general predicates. It would be almost impossibly bizarre for a predicate like 'intrinsic goodness' to refer to a feature of God alone. If this is the right picture, both eligibility and charity push toward axiological property 2.

This leaves the moderate views, which Murphy endorses.[24] If the moderate picture of God, God's perfections, and human language is true, then God is a moderately elusive referent. The concepts we have are inadequate to the fullness of the divine perfections, but sentences applying them to God are occasionally in some extended or analogical sense true or appropriate to assert. Some moderates allow that some predicates may apply to God strictly and literally (e.g. those expressing Rea's [2019] revealed concepts), but generally on the moderate picture God is rarely an eligible referent, and so it is unlikely that eligibility will pull us toward axiological property 1, let alone enough to overcome charity's push the other way.

In fact, on a moderate view, if Murphy is right, 'intrinsic goodness' is a very odd concept indeed. It applies to nothing familiar, although it is when considering created things that we came to develop it (it is not a creature of religion). Instead it applies to God, but only analogously. It applies strictly and literally to nothing, although there remain two axiological properties, one of God's and one of ours. This is unlike other perfections, like 'power' or 'wisdom' which do apply strictly and literally to some creatures and analogously to God, who has superior dynamic and sage properties that we lack the

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24 Murphy [2017] p. 5

predicates to refer to. Oddness is not an insurmountable problem, but overcoming it requires more powerful arguments than the ones we have seen so far.

7 Conclusion

We have seen how to conceive of intrinsic value in a way that makes created intrinsic value unproblematic. Then we have considered arguments for the claim that created things have no intrinsic goodness advanced by Mark Murphy and Eric Wielenberg. The first started with divine *aseity*, arguing that because the value-properties of created things are derivative they cannot be intrinsic. In response, we showed how the argument's internal logic generalizes to show that no created things have intrinsic properties, then showed how to give a criterion for intrinsicality that avoids the general result, but also avoids Murphy's result. The second argument began with a characterization of God's goodness as exhausting all possibilities for goodness. That formulation is opaque and requires elaboration, but none of the natural candidate-elaborations make plausible all of the premises of the argument together. The third argument began with the idea that creaturely intrinsic value would provide God with a compelling reason to create. We agreed that, in general, it does in fact do that, but that God is beyond the norms of rationality and therefore free to create or not. Finally, we objected that the picture of God, God's perfections, and human language required if Murphy's claim is true is either strongly univocalist or very odd. I conclude that we have not been given adequate reason to deny created things their intrinsic value.[25]

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