

Grounds of Goodness*

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Objects have value for human beings.¹ Knowledge and medicine are good for us, delusion and poison bad. What explains why? First, why are we subjects for whom objects can have value? What, that is, explains what I call our *axiological subjectivity*? After all, objects cannot have value for just anything. Nothing can be good or bad for the number 2. Second, what explains which objects have value for us? What, that is, explains what I call the *relational axiological properties* of objects for us? After all, not just anything has value for us. The number 2 does not. Among objects which do, some are good for us, others bad. So what explains the value of objects for us?

Many philosophers say that the *value of humanity* performs this task. Call them *axiologists*. They disagree about what our value need be like to do so. I present the going accounts in a bit. In a way, though, the details do not matter. I shall argue that our value, no matter what it is like, cannot perform this task.

The crux of my criticism is that human beings are animals among others. All animals are axiological subjects.² An explanation of the value of objects for us must fit into one of the value of objects for animals generally. Different objects have value for different animals, and some objects are good for one animal but bad for another. If the value of humanity is to explain the value of objects for us, the value of other forms of animality must explain the value of objects for them. The differences between the value of objects for different animals must depend on the differences in the value of their forms of animality. I shall argue, though, that those differences depend on differences in animal natures and that once we invoke animal natures, there is nothing left for the value of animality, including the value of humanity, to explain.

Although much of this essay is critical, my ultimate aim is constructive. I mean to contribute to the development and defense of *constitutivism*. Constitutivism is, at bottom, a view about the basis of normativity in nature. It says, roughly, that with respect to anything by nature

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1. Two notes on terminology. First, I use 'object' to cover anything, of any ontological category, which can be good or bad for a subject. Second, I use 'value' and cognates to cover goodness and badness, not just goodness. Many of my interlocutors use 'value' to only cover goodness. I will not alter quotations, but I only use 'value' in my own voice for the genus of which goodness and badness are species.

2. Objects can also be good or bad for plants, but I ignore them for the sake of space.

subject to standards, what it is determines how it should be.³ Although it is familiar, there remain fundamental doubts about constitutivism. One way to address them is to respond to objections. Another, which I take, is to develop and display its explanatory power.

I shall take up a version which focuses on capacities.⁴ On this account, a capacity sets a standard for its development and exercise given what it is a potentiality to do. I will argue that an object is good for an animal to the extent that and because it helps the development or exercise of at least one of their capacities. It is bad to the extent that and because it hinders such development or exercise. So objects can have value for animals because we possess capacities characteristic of our types of lives. Which are good or bad for a subject depends on their characteristic capacities. This is how animal natures explain the value of objects for animals in general and how ours explains their value for us in particular.

Two caveats before I begin. First, I assume the legitimacy of relational axiological properties of objects for subjects. Some philosophers regard them as at best derivative of substantial axiological properties and at worst degenerate. I think that they are as well attested as other relational properties of objects for subjects such as relational auditory properties and relational nutritional properties. I think that substantial axiological properties are as ill attested as the non-existent properties of what is food simpliciter or what is audible simpliciter. However, I cannot defend these claims in this essay.⁵

Second, in addition to claiming that our value explains the value of objects for us, many

3. See Phillipa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Michael Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), Christine M. Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Paul Katsafanas, *Agency and the Foundations of Ethics: Nietzschean Constitutivism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Jeremy David Fix, “Two Sorts of Constitutivism”, *Analytic Philosophy*, LXII, 1, (March 2021): 1-20.

4. Douglas Lavin, “Forms of Rational Agency” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, LXXX, (July 2017): 171-93, Karl Schafer “Transcendental Philosophy as Capacities-First Philosophy”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, CIII, 3, (July 2021): 661-86, Jeremy David Fix, “Intellectual Isolation”, *Mind*, CXXVII, 506, (April 2018): 491-520, Jeremy David Fix, “The Error Condition”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, L, 1, (January 2020): 34-48, Jeremy David Fix, “The Instrumental Rule”, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* VI, 4, (Winter 2020): 444-62, and Jeremy David Fix, “Practical Cognition as Volition”, *European Journal of Philosophy*, (forthcoming).

5. Switching from the material to the formal mode, the question is about the legitimacy of the concept GOOD FOR. In recent work, Christine Korsgaard defends relationism in the formal mode, Richard Kraut defends relationism in the formal and material modes, Donald Regan and Thomas Hurka defend substantialism, and Connie Rosati responds to Regan. See Donald Regan, “How to be a Moorean”, *Ethics*, CXIII, 3, (April 2003): 651-77, Donald Regan, “Why am I my Brother’s Keeper?”, in R. Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler, and Michael Smith, eds., *Reason and Value: Themes from the Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 202-30, Connie Rosati, “Personal Good”, in Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, eds., *Metaethics after Moore*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 107-132, Connie Rosati, “Objectivism and Relational Good”, *Social Philosophy and Policy* XXV, 1, (January 2008): 314-49, Richard Kraut [2012], *Against Absolute Goodness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Christine M. Korsgaard, “The Relational Nature of the Good”, in Russ Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics Volume 8*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1-26, Thomas Hurka, Thomas Hurka “Against ‘Good For’/‘Well-Being’, for ‘Simply Good’”, *The Philosophical Quarterly* LXI, 4, (October 2021): 803-22.

axiologists also say that it explains why we stand in relations of justice.⁶ Nothing in this essay turns on whether it can do so. I argue elsewhere that it cannot on the same grounds as I argue in this essay that it cannot explain the value of objects for us.⁷

1. Distinctions in value

What, according to axiologists, need our value be like to explain the value of objects for us? The going accounts are complicated. They concern many distinctions in value. Even formulating them is difficult. Different theorists distinguish different distinctions. Some label the same one differently. Some use the same label for different distinctions. Some use the same label for the same distinction but construe it differently. Stipulation and regimentation is needed.

Here is how I construe the relevant distinctions in value.

INTRINSIC/EXTRINSIC Is the value of μ based wholly in its intrinsic properties or partly in its extrinsic properties?

FINAL/DERIVATIVE Is μ valuable for its own sake or only for the sake of something else?

SUBSTANTIAL/RELATIONAL Is μ simply valuable or only valuable for certain animals?

OBJECTIVE/SUBJECTIVE Is the value of μ prior to the attitudes of certain animals toward it or are those attitudes prior to that property?

UNCONDITIONAL/CONDITIONAL Is μ valuable as such or only if certain conditions are met?

As best I can tell, axiologists divide into three camps as concerns what our value is like.

	<i>Intrinsic or Extrinsic</i>	<i>Final or Derivative</i>	<i>Substantial or Relational</i>	<i>Objective or Subjective</i>	<i>Unconditional or Conditional</i>
<i>Kantian Relationism</i>	Intrinsic	Final	Relational	Subjective	Conditional

6. In addition to the axiologists I discuss later, see, among others, Sarah Buss “The Value of Humanity”, *Journal of Philosophy*, CIX, 5/6, (May/June 2012): 341-77 and Julia Markovits, *Moral Reason*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp-71-144.

7. Jeremy David Fix, “Humanity without Value”, (manuscript).

<i>Aristotelian Relationism</i>	Intrinsic	Final	Relational	Objective	Conditional
<i>Kantian Substantialism</i>	Intrinsic	Final	Substantial	Objective	Unconditional

Since no one discusses each distinction, let alone in my terms, I treat these accounts as inspired by various authors rather than as the positions of those authors.⁸

These accounts differ on whether our value is substantial or relational, objective or subjective, and unconditional or conditional. Beneath this disagreement, though, lies a consensus which matters more for the purposes of this essay. Each says that our value is intrinsic and final. Each also allows for objects with final value which our value is to explain. Knowledge, say, is a final good for me, delusion a final bad, and our value is to explain why. So each account says that what distinguishes our value from the properties which it is to explain is that it is intrinsic whereas they are extrinsic. Let me explain.

Kantian Relationists think that all value depends on the attitudes of a subject.⁹ However, whereas the value of an object for me, whether goodness or badness, depends on my attitudes towards it and on my value, my value depends on my attitudes towards myself. Aristotelian Relationists think that all value depends on relationships of benefit or detriment to subjects. However, whereas the value of an object for me, whether goodness or badness, depends on whether it is beneficial or detrimental to me and on my value, my value depends on whether I am beneficial or detrimental to myself. Kantian substantialists think that all value is objective but deny that there is a single account of its basis. Still, whereas the value of an object for me, whether goodness or badness, depends on its contribution to my life and on my value, my value depends on my properties. For each, the value of objects for us depends on their relationship to something else and so is extrinsic while our value does not and so is intrinsic.

This unity is no accident. Consider that axiologists often motivate the puzzle about the value of objects for us in terms of a need to halt a regress. A shovel, say, is good for digging,

8. For *Kantian Relationism*, see Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Christine M. Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For *Aristotelian Relationism*, see L. Nandi Theunissen, “Must We Be Just Plain Good? On Regress Arguments for the Value of Humanity”, *Ethics*, cxxviii, 2, (January 2018): 346-72, L. Nandi Theunissen, *The Value of Humanity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). For *Kantian Substantialism*, see Joseph Raz, “Respective People”, in his *Value, Respect, and Attachment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 124-75, Alison Hills, “Kantian Value Realism”, *Ratio* (new series), xxi, 2, (June 2008): 182-200, and J. David Velleman, “Beyond Price”, *Ethics* cxxviii, 2, (January 2008): 191-212.

9. Korsgaard first clearly articulates this account in Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, op. cit. Her earlier essays track closer to Kantian Substantialism. See Christine M. Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness”, *The Philosophical Review*, xcii, 2, (April 1983): 169-95 and Christine M. Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Humanity”, *Kantian Studien*, lxxvii, 1-4, (1986): 183-202.

which is good for burial, which is a good way to dispose of a body. Here the value of something is explained by its relationship to the value of something else which is likewise explained. This sequence can continue but must end to begin, or so the thought goes, because each object possesses a type of value which depends on and is explained by the value of something else. Without something whose value does not so depend and is not so explained, the explanation is incomplete. Our value is meant to be that terminus. It is meant to be a unique type of value which explains the value of objects for us but is not explained by the value of something else.

This regress is unnecessary and in a way distracting. The value of an object for a subject establishes the need for explanation since not everything is a subject for whom objects can have value and not everything has value for a specific subject. This need is present with respect to each relational axiological property, whether derivative or final, regardless of whether any are ever partially explained in terms of the value of something else. The puzzle is about the bases of certain relational properties of objects for subjects. While its solution must base those properties in part on the subject in question, it might not base them on the value of that subject. Motivating the puzzle in terms of a regress might obscure that possibility since there is no potential regress if our value is not to explain the value, whether goodness or badness, of objects for us.

Still, the potential regress emphasizes a condition of adequacy on accounts which aim to explain the value of objects for us in terms of our value. Our value must differ from those properties which it is to explain or else it on the same basis needs explanation. Differ how? In not being explained in terms of the value of something else. What type of value is that? Intrinsic. So despite their differences, all axiologists think that our value explains the value of objects for us because it is intrinsic. The distinctive value of the subject is thus to explain the value of objects for the subject, whether goodness or badness, whether derivative or final, and so on. As Christine Korsgaard puts it, “what is in a life matters because it matters to the subject of the life, and he matters”.¹⁰

2. What is good and what is food.

2.1 Although I formulate the task set for our value as about the value of objects for human beings, many axiologists write as if *all* relational axiological properties of objects depend on

10. Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

us. Korsgaard says that “humanity [is] the source of all reasons and values”.¹¹ Alison Hills says that “rational nature is supremely valuable because it is the source of all other values”.¹² Even certain sceptics of the explanatory significance of our value treat value as uniquely human. In the course of denying that our value explains the value of objects, Sharon Street says that “value is conferred upon the world by valuing creatures” and characterizes *valuing* such that only we among the known animals can do it.¹³ Donald Regan likewise rejects the explanatory significance of our value and yet says that “value is [n]ever realized except with the participation of rational nature” because “every intrinsically valuable state or event must include the appreciative awareness of an agent”.¹⁴ They all say that all value, all goodness or badness of anything for anything, depends on human beings.

Such axiological anthropocentrism is wrong. What is good or bad for other animals is a matter of how it is for them. It does not depend on us. We are irrelevant to most of what is valuable for them. Just think about those around before our evolution and after our extinction. Even when we are relevant, it is because we are good or bad for them, not because we in the relevant metaphysical sense make objects good or bad for them. Satiation is good for an animal, starvation bad, because of how it is for her regardless of whether we cause it.

So the value of objects, whether good or bad, for the other animals does not depend on us. We are no more at the center of the axiological universe than we are at the center of the physical universe. A world without us is not without value. The other animals are independent axiological subjects. Axiological anthropocentrism is false.

2.2 I doubt that these authors actually accept axiological anthropocentrism. Anyway, it does not matter here.¹⁵ What matters is the independent axiological subjectivity of the other animals. If they are independent axiological subjects, the value of humanity cannot explain the value of

11. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, *op. cit.*, 122.

12. Hills, “Kantian Value Realism”, *op. cit.*, 186.

13. Sharon Street, “Coming to Terms with Contingency: Humean Constructivism about Practical Reason”, in James Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer, eds., *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 40-59, at p. 40 and pp. 43-4.

14. Donald Regan, “The Value of Rational Nature”, *Ethics*, cxii, 2, (January 2002): 267-91, at p. 289.

15. I think that these authors slip into axiological anthropocentrism because many of them think that our value explains the value of objects for us and the relation of justice between us. The former task is about our axiological subjectivity. The latter is about our moral agency and patiency. Whereas we are not the only axiological subjects, we are, as far as we know, the only moral agents. All moral patients are moral patients only in relation to us. So whereas we are not at the center of the axiological universe, we are at the center of the moral universe. I think that these authors slip into axiological anthropocentrism because they run together these tasks and confuse our centrality to the moral universe for centrality to the axiological universe. However, since for this essay I only need to establish the independent axiological subjectivity of the other animals, I will not pursue this argument here.

objects for them. If the value of objects for us needs explanation, so does the value of objects for them. If our value is to explain the value of objects for us, theirs must explain the value of objects for them. So axiologists must say that our value explains the value of objects for us as part of an explanation of the value of objects for a subject in terms of the value of that subject.

Here is a way into that view. The value of an object for a subject depends on its contribution to the life of that animal.¹⁶ Shovels, say, can be good for human beings because we can use them. Not so for dolphins. No arms. Not every contribution, though, makes for goodness. Poison and delusion contribute as much to a life as medicine and knowledge. The former are bad for me, though, poison derivatively and delusion finally so, while the latter are good for me, medicine derivatively and knowledge finally so. What distinguishes which contributions make for goodness, which badness? Axiologists think that the value of humanity is the measure in our case, the value of delphinity in the case of dolphins, and so on.

That argument says that without the value of an animal, we cannot distinguish the good for that animal from the bad. I disagree. Axiologists are right that the value of objects for a subject depends on that subject. It depends on the nature of the subject, though, not on their value. The basis of my argument is the independent axiological subjectivity of animals. In particular, different objects can have value for different animals, and an object can be good for one animal but bad for another. Whatever explains the value of objects for a subject must explain this variability between subjects. Although the nature of a subject is up to that task, the value of a subject is not. So I shall argue.

Here is a way to get the gist of my argument. Rae Langton challenges an inference that she finds suggested but not endorsed by Korsgaard which moves from the claim that *objects are good for us because we value them* to the claim that *our capacity to value is good*. Langton points out that absent explanation, this inference is unsound because we “have no more antecedent reason to expect the creators of goodness to be good than to expect painters of the blue to be blue In general we don’t think the source of something valuable must itself be valuable”.¹⁷ Even more generally, something can explain why something else has a property without itself having that property, as my flattering you can explain why you blush even if I am not blushing.

Langton only challenges an inference and so only a modal link, but there is a deeper point about explanation. Consider that except in self-portraits, my pigment is irrelevant to the

16. I use ‘contribution’ and cognates to cover what is finally or derivatively good or bad for an animal.

17. Rae Langton, “Objective and Unconditional Value”, *The Philosophical Review*, cxvi, 2, (April 2007): 157-85, at pp. 175-6.

explanation of the color of what I paint even if they are the same. If I am painting a still-life of a bunch of pale yellow apples which are the same color as my jaundiced skin, what explains the color of the painting is the color of the apples (and, if you insist, my perception of them). So not only can something explain why something else has a property without itself having that property, but it can have that property and explain why something else has that property and yet its having that property might not contribute to that explanation.

I shall in this section argue for such a claim about the explanation of the value of objects for subjects. I take no stand on the value of subjects, human beings included. I will instead argue that our nature can explain the value of objects for us regardless of whether we have value. Likewise for the other animals.

2.3 A first problem is that the value of a subject is insufficient to explain the value of objects for that subject because it cannot explain which objects are good or bad for that subject. The source of the problem is that each animal must possess the same type of value if it is to explain the possibility of the value of objects for that subject. Yet then the value of a subject cannot explain why different objects have value for different animals. Let me explain.

Recall the regress used by axiologists. The value of an object is explained by its relationship to something else of value whose value is likewise explained until, according to them, the explanation ends with our value. Our value is meant to terminate this explanation because unlike the value of those objects, it is intrinsic.

Such a regress is possible with respect to the value of objects for other animals. The tall grass is good for a lion because it provides cover. Cover is good for her because it increases her chances of catching and eating her prey. Catching and eating her prey is good for her because it nourishes her. Nourishment is good for her because of the value of leoninity. Similarly, a clear prairie is good for the antelope because it increases her chances of spotting a predator. Identifying predators is good for her because it increases her chances of evading and escaping. Evading and escaping is good for her because of the value of antholopia. In each case, the value of the subject terminates the explanation only if it differs from the value of objects for that subject. Differs how? In not being explained in terms of something else. What type of value is that? Intrinsic.

All axiological subjects thus possess the same type of value if that value terminates such a regress. However, different objects are good or bad for different subjects, and the same object

can be good for one subject and bad for another. If all subjects possess the same type of value, it cannot explain these differences. The value of a subject is thus insufficient to explain the value of objects for that subject.

Perhaps insufficiency is okay. Axiologists say that the value of objects for us depends on our value, not that it depends *solely* on our value. Maybe they can appeal to something which augments the explanatory contribution of our value. What might? It would need to distinguish one axiological subject from another and explain the variability of the value of objects for subjects without obviating the explanatory contribution of the value of a subject.

The only option is animal natures. Differences between them distinguish one animal from another and explain why different objects are good or bad for them. Differences between the human and cunicular digestive capacities, say, explain why eating belladonna is bad for us but good for rabbits. Similarly, bicycles are good for us but not for snakes because we are bipedal but they are not. Animal natures are thus needed to explain the variability of the value of objects for different subjects.

Animal natures might also seem to complement the values of animality without obviating their explanatory contributions. With respect to all going accounts, the nature of an axiological subject explains the value of that subject. For Kantian Relationists, the nature of an axiological subject is the object of the attitude which grounds the value of that subject. Although all animals possess the same type of value, the objects of the attitudes are different in each case because we value ourselves. For Aristotelian Relationists, the nature of an axiological subject is part of the relation which grounds the value of that subject. Although all animals possess the same type of value, the subject of the benefit or detriment is different in each case because we are beneficial or detrimental to ourselves. For Kantian Substantialists, the nature of an axiological subject grounds the value of the subject. Although all animals possess the same type of value because all of us have the same generic properties, we have different specific determinations of those properties and thus the basis of the value is different.

So maybe the value and nature of an axiological subject jointly explain the value of objects for that subject, and the variability of the value of objects for different subjects depends on differences in our natures.¹⁸ This appearance, though, is misleading. The nature of an

18. This explanation might go in two ways. First, perhaps the value of an object for a subject is immediately jointly grounded in the nature and value of that subject. Second, maybe the value of an object for a subject is immediately grounded only in the value of the subject, and the value of the subject is immediately grounded in the nature of the subject in a way which distinguishes the value of one type of animality from another. These differences do not matter for my purposes.

axiological subject is sufficient to explain the value of objects for that subject without help from the value of the subject. I will first argue that relational axiological properties share their relevant features with other relational properties such as *being edible for an animal* and *being audible for an animal*. Yet the *nutritiousness of humanity* is irrelevant to the explanation of the nutritiousness of objects for us as the *audibility of humanity* is irrelevant to the explanation of the audibility of objects for us. Just so, the *value of humanity* is irrelevant to the explanation of the value of objects for us. In each case, our nature does all the work.

2.4 Let me establish the parallel. First, the nutritiousness of objects for subjects needs explanation on the same basis as does the value of objects for subjects. Objects can be nutritious for subjects.¹⁹ Lettuce is edible for us, hemlock inedible. What explains why? First, what explains why something is a subject for whom objects can be nutritious? What, that is, explains our nutritional subjectivity? After all, objects cannot be nutritional for just anything. Nothing can be edible or inedible for the number 2. Second, what explains which objects are nutritious for a subject? What, that is, explains the relational nutritional properties of objects for a subject? After all, not just anything is nutritious for a subject. The number 2 is neither edible nor inedible for us. Among objects which are nutritious for us, some are edible, others inedible. So what explains the nutritiousness of objects for us?

Second, as all animals are independent axiological subjects, so all are independent nutritional subjects. The nutritiousness of an object for other animals is a matter of how it is for them. It does not depend on human beings. We are irrelevant to most of what is nutritious for them. Just think about those around before our evolution and after our extinction. Even when we are relevant, it is because we are edible or inedible for them, not because we in the relevant metaphysical sense make stuff edible or inedible for them. The nutritiousness of objects for other animals does not depend on us. We are not at the center of the nutritional universe. A world without us is not without nutrition. The other animals are independent nutritional subjects.

Third, the nutritiousness of objects varies for different subjects as does the value of objects. Different objects are nutritious for different animals, and an object can be edible for one

19. As I use 'value' and cognates to cover goodness and badness, so I use 'nutritiousness' and cognates to cover edibility and inedibility, not as a synonym for 'edible'. My use of 'edible' and 'inedible' deviates from ordinary use since on mine 'edible poison' is a contradiction, but I hope that my meaning is clear enough and close enough to ordinary usage to not confuse.

animal but inedible for another. A watermelon, say, can be nutritious for human beings but not for starfish, and belladonna is edible for rabbits but inedible for human beings. This variability of the nutritiousness of objects depends on the natures of the animals in question as does the variability of the value of objects. A watermelon can have relational nutritional properties for human beings but not starfish because we can consume it given our digestive capacity but they cannot given theirs. Belladonna is edible for rabbits but inedible for human beings because their digestive capacity can break it down, distribute nutrients from it, and dispose of waste while ours cannot without poisoning us. So differences in the natures of animals explain the differences in the nutritiousness of objects for them.

What explains the nutritiousness of objects for subjects? Were axiologists right about our value and were the parallel between value and nutrition to hold, the answer would be the nature and nutritiousness of the subject. That is false. It is not that I lack nutritional properties. I am edible for all sorts of animals. Nor is it that I lack intrinsic nutritional properties. I can eat parts of myself. Yet my nutritiousness, even for myself, is a matter of my nutritional objectivity, not my nutritional subjectivity. It is a matter of whether I can be eaten, not of whether I can eat. The nutritiousness of humanity, whether for myself or others, is thus irrelevant to the nutritiousness of objects for me. My nutritional subjectivity instead depends on only my possession of a digestive capacity. Which objects are edible or inedible for me depends on only the natures of those objects and my digestive capacity. Likewise for all other animals.

So the nature of animals, not their nutritiousness, explains the nutritiousness of objects for those subjects. It thereby explains the variability of those properties between subjects. Holding the object stable, variability in the nutritiousness of an object depends on the differences in the digestive capacities of different animals. Belladonna is edible for rabbits but not human beings given the differences in our digestive capacities. Hold instead the subject stable and whether an object is edible or inedible for that animal depends on its properties. Lettuce and asparagus are edible for human beings while rocks and hemlock are not because of how their properties contribute to the explanation of whether our digestive capacity can break down those objects, distribute their nutrients for biological self-maintenance, and expel waste without poisonous reactions.

Consider now the audibility of objects for subjects. A similar puzzle is possible. First, not everything is an auditory subject, and not everything is audible or inaudible for a specific subject. Second, all auditory subjects are independent. Third, the audibility of objects varies for

different subjects. And as the puzzle is the same, so is the solution. The audibility of humanity does not explain the audibility of objects for us. My audibility, whether for others or myself, is a matter of my auditory objectivity, not my auditory subjectivity. It is a matter of whether I can be heard, not of whether I can hear. My auditory subjectivity instead depends only on my possession of an auditory capacity. Which objects are audible or inaudible for me depends on only the natures of those objects and my auditory capacity. Likewise for other animals. So the nature of an animal explains its auditory subjectivity as it explains its nutritional subjectivity.

Whether an object is audible or inaudible, edible or inedible, for a subject depends on the natures of the subject and object in question. The differences between animal natures explain the variability of the audibility and nutritiousness of objects for different subjects. The nutritiousness and audibility of the subjects are besides the point. Our auditory capacity is thus the non-audible basis of the auditory properties of objects for us as our digestive capacity is the non-nutritious basis of the nutritional properties of objects for us.

2.5 As the nutritiousness and audibility of humanity are irrelevant to the explanation of the nutritiousness and audibility of objects for us, so the value of humanity is irrelevant to the explanation of the value of objects for us. It is a matter of our axiological objectivity, not our axiological subjectivity. It is a matter of whether we can be good or bad for a subject, not of whether an object can be good or bad for us.

In fact, that irrelevance follows from the irrelevance of our nutritiousness. What is edible or inedible for us is what is good or bad for us to eat. Relational nutritional properties of objects for subjects are a subset of the relational axiological properties of objects for subjects. Since our value is unnecessary to explain the nutritiousness of objects for us, it is unnecessary to explain the value of objects for us.

Think again about the lion and the antelope. Catching and eating the antelope is good for the lion not because of the value of leoninity but because she has capacities exercised and developed in that action. At the limit, she can develop and exercise her capacities only if alive, and she needs sustenance to live. Since lions are obligate carnivores, she needs meat. Given their digestive capacity, antelope meat will do. Given her capacities, catching the antelope is a way to get some. Similarly, escaping the lion is good for the antelope not because of the value of antholopia but because she has capacities exercised and developed in that action. At the limit, she can develop and exercise her capacities only if alive, and she must escape to live. So catching

and eating the antelope is good for the lion but bad for the antelope and escaping the lion is good for the antelope but bad for the lion because of their natures, not because of their value.

Nothing changes with regards to human beings. We are animals among others, objects can have value for us as they can for other animals, and which are good or bad for us depends on our nature and, in particular, on our characteristic capacities. Differences between our nature and those of other animals explain differences in which objects are good and bad for us and them. That is why life on land is good for us but bad for sharks. It is why belladonna is bad for us to eat but good for rabbits.²⁰

An object which is edible and thus in that way good for me is so because it would help the development or exercise of my digestive capacity. An object which is inedible and thus in that way bad for me is so because it cannot help the development or exercise of my digestive capacity and perhaps because it would hinder such development or exercise. Just so, generally, an object is good for us in some way to the extent that and because it helps the development and exercise of at least one of our capacities and bad for us in some way to the extent that and because it hinders the development or exercise of at least one of our capacities. Differences between which objects have value for which subjects and in which ways depend on differences in the capacities characteristic of those animals. So the nature of the subject and object in question explain the value of that object for that subject. The capacities of animals are the non-axiological foundation of the value of objects for subjects.²¹

2.6 Why do the characteristic capacities of animals explain the value of objects for them? Axiologists might claim that the only response is that developing and exercising those capacities are good for the animal in question and that this response undermines my criticism in

20. Colleagues sometimes object that even if these claims are true, the properties in question are not normative. While I cannot here present an account of normative properties, here is a way to understand the error in this objection. Consider standard puzzles for normative properties. Metaphysical puzzles challenge their reality on the grounds that we need not use them in a physical account of the world. Epistemological puzzles challenge whether we can know them when they are causally inert. Explanatory puzzles challenge whether we must avert to them to account for our apparent experience of them. While these puzzles are usually put as a challenge to specifically moral properties, relational axiological properties need not appear in a complete physical description of the world, seem as causally inert as any normative property, and are as liable to elimination through factoring of our apparent experiences of them as moral properties. They are normative properties if such puzzles are a guide. For the canonical expression of the metaphysical and epistemological puzzles, see J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, (London: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 36-40. For the canonical expression of the explanatory puzzle, see Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 4-7.

21. An axiologist might try to bust the analogy by denying that nature can ground axiological properties as it can auditory or nutritional properties, but that argument is no good. Animals are axiological subjects but rocks and numbers are not. Since axiologists think that what makes something an axiological subject is its intrinsic value, they think that animal natures can be the basis of axiological properties.

one of two ways. First, they might claim that the value of developing and exercising my capacities needs explanation by the value of humanity. It is another object whose value for a subject needs explanation by the value of that subject. Second, they might claim that the value of developing and exercising my capacities is part of the value of humanity. It is part of the value of the subject which explains the value of objects for that subject.

Neither challenge works because both leave axiologists with nothing to explain the variability of the value of objects across subjects. Take the first challenge. If the value for a subject of developing and exercising certain capacities depends on the value of their animality, what is to distinguish the values of different types of animality? What explains why it is good for one animal to develop and exercise certain capacities and good for another to develop and exercise others? Axiologists cannot appeal to the nature of the animals in question since they mean to deny the explanatory significance of the capacities which characterize different animal natures. Yet what else might it be?

Take now the second challenge. What explains why developing and exercising certain capacities is part of the value of humanity but not the value of lupinity? Axiologists again cannot appeal to the nature of the animals in question since they mean to deny the explanatory significance of the capacities which characterize different animal natures. Yet what else might it be?

Better to recognize how the value of objects for subjects fits into a pattern of explanation common to many relational properties of objects for subjects. As our nutritiousness is irrelevant to the explanation of the nutritiousness of objects for us, so our value is irrelevant to the explanation of the value of objects for us. That is not to deny our value for all sorts of animals, including ourselves, anymore than it is to deny our nutritiousness for all sorts of animals, including ourselves. It is instead to say that 'the value of humanity' labels the output of explanations of whether we are good or bad for certain animals, including ourselves, as 'the nutritiousness of humanity' labels the output of explanations about whether certain animals, including ourselves, can eat us. What is good for us, like what is food for us, depends on our nature. Axiologism is wrong.

3. Constitutive capacities

3.1 I will conclude with a brief account of how that explanation of the value of objects for subjects fits into a type of constitutivism. I shall argue that it captures the basic insight of

axiologism and can respond to two common arguments against relationism.

Axiologists recognize that the value of objects for subjects not only *has* an explanation but *needs* one because it is value *for* subjects and depends on them. A world without organisms is without value as it is without nutritiousness and audibility. Put organisms on the scene and objects can be good or bad for us as they can be edible or inedible for us and audible or inaudible for us. As we might put it, value is vital in that it is tied to the living. Axiologists, though, think that animals can be the foundation of value only if our value is that foundation. They take the vitality of value to depend on the value of vitality. That is their mistake.

Constitutivism avoids that mistake. It is at bottom an account of the basis of normativity in nature which says that with respect to anything by nature subject to standards, what it is determines how it should be. In particular, the basic idea is that organisms are by nature subject to standards because they are active in the world and can succeed or fail in their activities. That is a fundamental difference between the organic, with respect to which distinctions between what something does and what happens to it are possible, and the inorganic, with respect to which no such distinction is possible.

Different constitutivists develop this basic idea in different ways. I prefer a version based on the notion of the capacities of an organism. A capacity, in this sense, is a potentiality of an organism to do something in a suitably broad sense as opposed to a liability of an organism to undergo something. Human capacities include our potentialities to speak, digest, hear, walk, circulate blood, and regulate our body temperature. Our liabilities include our potentialities to be set on fire, blown to bits by the bomb, or toppled by a tidal wave.

On a constitutivist account of the capacities of organisms, the nature of a capacity establishes standards for its development and exercise. To develop a capacity is to become more able to do what it is a capacity to do. For it to degrade is to become less able to do what it is a capacity to do. To exercise it correctly is to do what it is a capacity to do. To exercise it incorrectly is to fail in doing what it is a capacity to do. For example, as a human being, I am born with a capacity to speak. To develop it is to become by degrees able to communicate with others through language. For it to degrade is to become less able to communicate. To exercise it correctly is to communicate through speech. To exercise it incorrectly is to fail in communicating through speech in one way or another.

At the bottom of this explanation are the capacities which characterize the nature of the animal in question. Animal kinds differ from each other in virtue of their characteristic

capacities. Human beings differ from sharks, say, because we have a capacity to extract oxygen from air whereas they have a capacity to extract it from water, because we have a capacity for bipedal motion whereas they have a capacity for fluid propulsion, and so on. So different animals are subject to distinct standards because of their diverse characteristic capacities. Hence, those diverse characteristic capacities explain the variability of the value of objects for different subjects. Although the human and lionine capacities to digest are specific determinations of a generic nutritional capacity, these determinations establish different standards for the exercises of those capacities which make different objects good or bad for each of us to eat. Lions are obligate carnivores because an exercise of the lionine digestive capacity meets the standard set for it by the nature of that capacity only when the lion eats meat. Cabbage and lettuce are thereby bad for the lion to eat. Not so for human beings, as an exercise of our digestive capacity can meet the standard set for it by the nature of that capacity when we eat vegetables.²²

So with different types of animal natures comes the variability of the value of objects for different animals. To understand which objects are good or bad for which animals, we must understand their natures. Still, generically, an object is good in some way for an animal to the extent that and because it helps the development and exercise of at least one of the characteristic capacities of that animal. An object is bad in some way for an animal to the extent that and because it hinders the development or exercise of at least one of the characteristic capacities of that animal. The overall value of the object for the subject is a matter of its overall contribution to their life, which depends on the full set of capacities whose development or exercise it helps or hinders. So it is good or bad overall for the subject given the extent to which it helps or hinders the development or exercise of the animal's capacities overall. The value of objects for subjects thus depends on the natures of the object and subject in question.²³

As for an object to be good in some way for a subject does not imply that it is good overall for the subject, so for an object to be good overall for a subject does not imply that the subject must go for it. There is more that would be good for me to eat than I can or should eat,

22. Questions about nutritiousness, value, and so on can mix concern for general or particular objects with concern for animal species or for particular members of those species. We can ask, say, about (a) the edibility of apples in general for human beings in general, (b) the edibility of apples in general for a particular human being, (c) the edibility of a particular apple for human beings in general, or (d) the edibility of a particular apple for a particular human being. There are interesting questions about explanatory priority here. All I can say is that I follow the common view of those inspired by Kant and Aristotle that the standards set by the kind come first and individuals are understood in relation to their kind. For versions of this view, see, among others, those cited in footnote 3.

23. This is the more general, and basic, truth behind the claim that relational goodness is “*person- or agent-directed*” because the objects which are good for an organism are “‘called for’ by her nature”. Connie Rosati, “Objectivism and Relational Good”, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

as there are more careers that would be good for me to pursue than I can or should pursue, as there are more books that would be good for me to read than I can or should read. In general, the overall goodness of an object for a subject, whether final or derivative, is necessary but not sufficient for the subject to correctly go for it. We have freedom within these constraints. In contrast, the overall badness of an object for a subject, whether final or derivative, is enough for the subject to correctly avoid it.

That might seem like a problem for the constitutivist claim that the characteristic capacities of a subject explain the value of objects for that subject, whether goodness or badness. If those capacities can explain the goodness of the object but that is not enough to explain whether going for it is correct for the subject, need not the constitutivist introduce something else into the explanation?

No. Goodness usually permits without requiring because usually no single object is necessary for the subject to successfully develop or exercise a capacity, let alone for the development and exercise of the set of characteristic capacities of the subject. Badness prohibits because a single object can interfere or undermine the development or exercise of a capacity and so the development or exercise of the set of characteristic capacities of the subject. For example, to develop and exercise my capacity to digest, I must eat. Although certain objects are prohibited because I cannot successfully digest them, many objects are good for me to eat, at least if we only think about them in relation to that capacity. Of course, I have other capacities, and various edible objects are overall bad for me to eat because doing so would hinder the development or exercise of some of my other capacities. For example, if I maintain a vegetarian diet, to eat the veal is overall bad for me because it hinders that exercise of my will even though veal is edible for me. Many other edible objects, and so objects which help me exercise my capacity to digest well, are still open for me to eat. They are overall good for me to eat so long as they do not hinder the proper exercise of my other capacities and indeed help to develop and exercise them, as I cannot read, write, run, and all that jazz without energy gained through consumption.

Constitutivists thus need not appeal to anything beyond capacities, including the ongoing development and proper exercise of our capacities, to explain why the overall goodness of an object for a subject usually permits but does not require but overall badness prohibits. They just need to emphasize not just the capacities themselves but also the development and exercise of those capacities.

3.2 Why think that capacities can serve as the non-axiological foundation of the axiological properties of objects for subjects? Why not think that capacities must possess axiological properties if they are to explain the axiological properties of objects? For example, maybe the exercise of a characteristic capacity of a subject is finally valuable, derivatively valuable, or not valuable. If it lacks value, why would objects be good or bad for the subject to the extent that and because they help or hinder the exercise? If it has derivative value for the subject, it must derive that value from something with final value for the subject and so presupposes a further explanatory basis. Yet if it is finally valuable, does that not imply that it is something of value for the subject at the bottom of the explanation rather than their characteristic capacities? Each option of this trilemma seems bad for a constitutivist.

However, a constitutivist can accept that the *development and exercise* of the characteristic capacities of animals have final value for them. Indeed, constitutivists insist on it. After all, the puzzle about the value of objects for subjects, whether goodness or badness, is *not* solely about the *derivative* axiological properties of objects for subjects. It is about all the axiological properties of objects for subjects, whether derivative or final. Knowledge and satiation are finally good for human beings, delusion and starvation are finally bad for us, well-researched books and medicine are derivatively good for us, and conspiracy theories and poison are derivatively bad for us. All these objects and more contribute, whether positively or negatively, whether finally or derivatively, to whether the life of the human being in question goes well. All the axiological properties of those objects for us need explanation, and on the same basis, as no such properties of objects are possible with respect to anything which is not an axiological subject such as numbers or concepts.

Just so, the value of developing and exercising the characteristic capacities of a subject needs explanation, and on the same basis. To develop these capacities is good for the subject, both finally and derivatively according to the constitutivist. For the capacities to deteriorate or for their development to otherwise halt or retard is bad for the subject, again along both dimensions. To exercise these capacities successfully is good for the subject, usually both finally and derivatively. To do so unsuccessfully is bad for the subject, again usually both finally and derivatively.

Such properties need explanation because in general, the value of objects for subjects, whether good or bad, needs explanation and because the value of objects varies across subjects.

Developing and exercising different capacities is good for different animals. Why? The answer must be based on the nature of the subject as the explanation generally of the value of objects, whether goodness or badness, for a subject must be so explained. After all, without a subject, nothing has such a relational property, whether the value is final or derivative and whether it is goodness or badness, and different objects have value for different subjects, again covering both final and derivative value and both goodness and badness.

According to constitutivism, a capacity sets the standard for its development and exercise. Hence, while the development and deterioration of a characteristic capacity can be good or bad for the subject and while its exercise can be good or bad for the subject depending on whether it is successful, the capacity is neither good nor bad for the subject. It is instead part of the nature of subject, and that nature is the non-axiological foundation of the axiological properties of objects, including of the development and exercise of those capacities, for subjects. Since different animals by nature possess different characteristic capacities, developing and exercising certain capacities will be good for one animal and developing and exercising others will be good for another because of the differences in their nature. Animal natures thus explain the variance of the value of objects across subjects.

So the constitutivist avoids the trilemma because although the development and exercise of the capacity have value for the subject and although that value in part explains the derivative value, whether goodness or badness, of other objects for the subject, the value of such development and exercise is explained by the capacity which itself is neither good or bad for the subject. Nature is the basis of normativity and our nature just is what it is, neither good nor bad for us, because it defines us. Likewise for the other animals.

3.3 Why, though, focus on the capacities of animals? Even if axiologism is wrong, why not think some other aspect of our nature explains the value of objects for us, perhaps in part by explaining the value of developing and exercising various of our capacities? In particular, why not think that the *needs* of an animal explain the value for that animal of developing and exercising various capacities? Perhaps developing or exercising a capacity is good for an animal to the extent that and because it helps them meet their needs and bad for them to the extent that and because it hinders them in meeting their needs. Maybe an object is good for them to the extent that and because it helps them develop or exercise their capacities in ways that contribute to meeting their needs and bad for them to the extent that and because it hinders them in

developing or exercising their capacities in ways which contribute to meeting their needs.

Although needs might seem fit to play this explanatory role, I do not think that they can. At least, a constitutivist must deny it and instead claim that the capacities of organisms explain their needs. Let me explain why.

Consider first that to say that an animal needs an object is to say that it contributes to the life of an animal as either a final or derivative good. Indeed, we can restate the puzzle about the value of objects for us in terms of needs. After all, although organisms have needs, numbers and concepts do not. Organisms need certain objects but not others, and needs vary across subjects. So what an animal needs just is what is good for them, and the task of explaining the value of objects for us includes the task to explain our needs. If so, needs are axiological properties.²⁴

Since needs are axiological properties and since the axiological properties of objects for subjects vary across subjects, the needs of animals depend on their natures and so on their characteristic capacities. I need food because I have a nutritional capacity. Which objects I *need* or *may* eat depend on the nature of my nutritional capacity and those other capacities whose proper functioning depends on my getting specific nutrients from what I consume. Similarly, I need to live on land whereas a shark needs to live in water in part because I have the capacity to extract oxygen from air whereas she has the capacity to extract it from water. So needs vary across animals because they are axiological properties and what is finally or derivatively good or bad for one animal need not be finally or derivatively good for another. These differences must be explained, and differences in the characteristic capacities of animals explain them. Needs thus cannot be the non-axiological foundation of the axiological properties of objects for subjects. Animal natures, and thus their characteristic capacities, can.²⁵

3.4 Let me conclude this presentation of constitutivism by explaining how this version of the

24. That argument might seem to trade on an ambiguity. Perhaps there is a difference between the objects which an animal needs and the needs of the animal. Maybe the objects an animal needs depend mediately on the needs of the animal by depending on the capacities of the animal. So it is the needs of the animal which play the foundational explanatory role. However, as far as I understand this distinction, it just is the distinction between what is derivatively good and finally good for an animal, both of which fall under the explanatory task under discussion in this essay.

25. A similar response applies to an objection which says that the significance for animals of developing and exercising capacities depends on the fact that we 'strive for life', which I take to mean that we aim to keep ourselves alive, active, and in health. Different animals live different types of lives, and those differences depend on the natures of the characteristic capacities in question. To strive for life is to develop and exercise these capacities, and to do it well just is to do so in a way which contributes to the continuation of their development and exercise.

view can put the lie to two prominent objections to certain forms of relationism. The first is to Kantian relationism in particular. It says that if our attitudes are the basis for what is good or bad for us, I cannot choose correctly or incorrectly. I can instead will arbitrarily and make absolutely anything good or bad for me. If I am sufficiently reflective, I recognize this liberty of indifference and choose arbitrarily. That account of choice, though, is false factually and phenomenologically. Not only can I choose correctly or incorrectly, but to choose is not to arbitrarily plump between objects which are not subject to any measure. It instead characteristically involves attempts to determine the value of those objects by considering their properties.²⁶

Critics of Kantian relationism sympathetic to this objection tend to conclude not only that the normative properties of objects are objective rather than subjective but that they are substantial and intrinsic rather than relational and extrinsic. Regardless of whether this objection is sound with respect to its intended target, it is unsound with respect to my version of constitutivism. Consider the comparison between relational axiological properties and relational nutritional properties. Whether an object is edible or inedible for me is not up to me. Thinking it or, for that matter, swallowing it cannot make it so. And I know it. It is an objective rather than subjective property of the object. That is why when considering whether to eat an object, I focus on those of its properties relevant to its edibility or inedibility for me. Still, the edibility of an object for me is a relational extrinsic property of the object which depends in part on its nature and in part on mine.

Similarly, whether an object is good or bad for me is not (always) up to me. Thinking it cannot (always) make it so. And I know it. That is why when considering an object, I focus on those of its properties relevant to its value. Such objectivity and phenomenological focus, though, no more implies that the goodness or badness of an object is substantial and intrinsic than it implies that the edibility or inedibility of an object is substantial and intrinsic. It does not imply that the property is not a relational property which depends in part on relevant aspects of my nature. It just implies that when we consider relational properties of objects for us, our focus is not always or even often on *all* their bases. We need not think about the relevant aspects of

26. For versions of these objections to Kantian relationism, see Berys Gaut “The Structure of Practical Reason”, in Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 161–88, at pp. 182-3, Rachel Cohon, “The Roots of Reason”, *The Philosophical Review*, cix, 1, (January 2000): 63-85, at 77-8, Donald Regan, “The Value of Rational Nature”, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-5, and David Enoch, “An Outline of an Argument for Robust Metanormative Realism”, in Russ Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics Volume 2*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 21–50, at 35-41. For discussion and defense, if qualified, see David Sussman [2003], “The Authority of Humanity”, *Ethics* cxiii, 2, (January 2003): 350-66 and Michael Bukoski, “Korsgaard’s Argument for the Value of Humanity”, *The Philosophical Review*, cxxvii, 2, (April 2018), 197-224, at pp. 204-8 and 215-7.

ourselves, but that no more shows that they are not part of the basis of the value of objects for us than does the fact that I need not think about my ears when listening to music shows that our auditory capacity is not part of the basis of the audibility of objects for us.

Understanding this response to this objection also shows that a certain familiar argument against relationism generally is unsound. This argument takes inspiration from G.E. Moore's isolation test which asks us to consider an object as if it were on its own in the universe as far as possible and to ask about its value. Is knowledge good? Is ignorance bad? Is the Grand Canyon good? Would its destruction be bad? Is life good? Is death bad? And so on. The fact that we say 'Yes' to many of these questions is often taken to show that the value of objects is not fundamentally relational, and it is meant to support an explanation of the value of objects for subjects in terms of the more basic substantial value of objects.

Whatever the merits of substantialism generally about the value of objects, this argument cannot support it. Imagine a universe with only a head of cabbage in it. Is the cabbage edible? There are at least two possible answers here. We might answer 'No' on the grounds that an object is edible only if there is a subject who can eat it, and in this world there are none. We might instead answer 'Yes' on the grounds that although there are no such subjects in that world, such subjects are possible. We can eat cabbage, and that makes cabbage edible for us even in worlds without us. The answer just depends on how we understand the modal profile of the question. The possibility of the affirmative answer does not support the obviously false claim that nutritiousness is a substantial and intrinsic rather than relational and extrinsic property of the object.

Consider now a cave on its lonesome. Is it good? We might answer 'No' on the grounds that an object is good only if there is a subject for whom it is good, and in this world, there are none. We might instead answer 'Yes' on the grounds that although there are no such subjects in that world, such subjects are possible. Various animals, human beings among them, can use caves for shelter, and shelter is often needed for survival and so for us to develop and exercise our capacities. The answer again just depends on how we understand the modal profile of the question. The possibility of the affirmative answer does not support the claim that value is a substantial and intrinsic rather than relational and extrinsic property of the object.

Yet there is nothing unique about human beings here. We tend to focus on ourselves when we ask these questions because in much of our lives, questions about nutrition or value are about what is edible or inedible for us or good or bad for us. Yet the cabbage is as edible for

the rabbit as it is for us, and it is as inedible for the lion as holly berries are for us. Similarly, the cave is good for us but not for dolphins, at least assuming that it is on land, as chasing and catching me might be good for the lion who needs a meal but bad for me who would rather not be one. The ability to isolate these objects in thought reveals nothing about the nature of the value of objects incompatible with relationism about axiological properties as it reveals nothing about the nature of the edibility of objects incompatible with relationism about nutritional properties.

So the constitutivist explanation of the value of objects for subjects explains the value of objects for us within a general account of the value of objects for any animal in a way which explains the variability of the value of objects for different subjects. It likewise reveals what goes wrong in two prominent arguments against relationism about the value of objects for us.

4. Subjects and objects.

A task often set for the value of humanity is to explain the value of objects for us. While axiologists are right that the value of objects for us depends on us, they are wrong that it depends on our value. It depends on our nature, as we understand when we recognize the independent axiological subjectivity of the other animals and the variability of the value of objects across subjects. Different animal natures explain that variability, and there is nothing left for the value of those animals to explain. It is thus the nature, not the value, of the subject which in part explains the value of an object for that subject as according to whether the object helps or hinders the animal in the development or exercise of their characteristic capacities. In this respect, we are, at least with respect to our role in explaining the value of objects for us, not an end but a beginning.²⁷ We are the partial foundation of everything of value for us, as are the other animals with respect to everything of value for them, not because we and they are valuable but because we and they are alive. What is in a life matters because it matters to the subject of a life, not because the subject of the life matters.

27. For the significance of the role of a human being neither as means nor as end but as beginning in the explanation of the value of objects for us, see Marie Guillot and Lucy O'Brien, "The Authority of Humanity", *Ergo*, (forthcoming): 14. They tie this thought to Kantian substantialism in a way which I think is detachable from their central argument.