

Relationality, Relativism, and Realism About Moral Value

Among the many virtues of *Facts, Values and Norms*, is the articulation of an especially subtle and detailed form of naturalistic value realism. The theory aspires to vindicate the objective purport of value discourse while granting, indeed insisting, that value is subjective in important respects. Evaluative thought and inquiry are understood to be continuous with empirical inquiry in the human sciences, so that ethical and evaluative conclusions can ultimately be defended on a posteriori grounds. Railton argues that talk of what is good for a person, of what is morally right and morally valuable, and perhaps even of what is beautiful, may be shown to concern evaluative facts that are part of the natural world—a mind-independent world that is causally responsible for our experience. Yet each of these forms of value, he thinks, depends in essential ways on subjects who value them. They depend, that is, upon the existence of beings from whose subjective points of view things can matter; because a world without a locus of valuing or concern would be a world in which nothing mattered. One task Railton sets himself is to develop an understanding of the distinct respects in which value can be at once objective and subjective that could unseat the sort of skepticism about objective value that has seemed to many the inevitable upshot of a sober, naturalistic view of human life and thought: “a dark unease over what sort of thing value is and how it might find a place in the world” (86).

While I find much to agree with and still more to admire in these excellent essays, I confine my attention here to an area where I have some misgivings. I want to explore the puzzling category that Railton calls “moral value,” and try to understand how the balance between subjectivity and objectivity is supposed to be achieved in that particular case. For this reason, and because they have not yet received the widespread attention

that his earlier essays have, I will focus on the recent essays from Part I, and especially upon “Red, Bitter, Good.” But I begin by (re)acquainting the reader with some relevant claims of the well-known earlier essays.¹

1. In Railton’s early metaethical papers, the notion of moral value is not explicitly addressed. His program begins with realism about a category of value he calls intrinsic, nonmoral value: the notion of something being good for a person, or in his interests. What’s good for a person is, roughly, what he would want his prosaic self to want were he idealized in a certain way.² The second-order desires of an ideal agent, Railton says, will have a “reduction basis” in natural facts about the actual agent, the thing desired, and the context that explain why his ideal counterpart would want him to want just these things. Such facts constitute his “objective interests”—what is good for him. These facts are *relational*, in that they depend crucially on the nature of the agent whose good is in question. What is good for a person depends upon what that person is like, and people may turn out to differ quite a bit in this respect. But, Railton insists, the account is not *relativistic*: what is good for a person is not a matter of what accords with that person’s (or his community’s) beliefs about his own good. It is an empirical question to what extent any given person’s opinions about what’s good for him track his objective interests, and for most of us the fit is likely to be imperfect.³

¹ In deference to the division of labor for this symposium, I resist the temptation to speculate about whether and how ideas broached in some of the essays from other parts of this collection might be deployed in response to the questions I raise. I think there will be enough here to satisfy readers with an appetite for speculation. I will abbreviate the titles of cited papers as follows. “Moral Realism” (MR); “Facts and Values” (FV); “Aesthetic Value, Moral Value and the Ambitions of Naturalism” (AVMV); “Red Bitter, Good” (RBG); “How Thinking About Character and Utilitarianism Might Lead to Rethinking the Character of Utilitarianism” (HTC).

² The idealization places the subject in a standpoint “fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive errors or lapses of instrumental rationality.” (FV 54).

³ This is not to say that facts about our interests are only accidentally related to beliefs about our interests. Railton posits a “wants/interests mechanism” that tends to alter our desires into conformity with

Are there really facts about what is good for a person, so understood? If so, are these facts suited to play the commending role that is played by the notion of what is good for one? These are interesting questions that have received a good deal of discussion in the literature, and I do not propose to pursue them farther here.⁴ Let us suppose that they can be answered in the affirmative. If the results of idealizing agents in this way are sufficiently determinate, and if the evolution of desires in light of perfect information is the smooth culmination of the way that piecemeal improvements in information seem to justify the changes in desire they induce, then perhaps this assumption is warranted. At any rate, Railton's efforts to show this constitute, in my judgment, the most comprehensive and promising attempt in the philosophical literature to identify a natural property that is a promising candidate for playing the normative role of an important evaluative notion.

In order to move from realism about nonmoral intrinsic value to moral realism, Railton initially relies on the idea that moral assessment is a matter of considering nonmoral value from a social point of view: one that is impartial and equally concerned with the interests of all those affected. Moral rightness is then identified as a matter of what is rational from the social point of view with respect to the realization of intrinsic, nonmoral goodness. Railton thinks that rationality is instrumental, and a matter of maximizing the values with which it is concerned. Thus his criterion of rightness is a direct consequentialism according to which the right act is the act that maximizes the nonmoral good of the affected parties.

our interests in various ways. Such changes need not proceed by an agent coming to believe that something is good for him, and will instead sometimes induce such beliefs. This is an important way in which evaluative beliefs can be subject to feedback from an independent evaluative reality, which is crucial to the externalist epistemology of value that Railton shares with other naturalistic realists. (MR)

⁴ See, for instance, David Sobel, "Full Information Accounts of Wellbeing" *Ethics* 104 (1994): 784-810; Connie Rosati, "Persons, Perspectives and Full Information Accounts of the Good" *Ethics* 105 (1995): 296-325; Don Loeb, "Full Information Theories of Individual Good," *Social Theory and Practice* 21 (1995).

Railton then argues that the relative degrees of rightness of various social arrangements can participate in explanations of behavior and in processes of moral learning whereby certain patterns in human social history can be explained. For instance, the fact that certain sorts of social arrangements depart from social rationality by significantly discounting the interests of particular groups explains why such arrangements exhibit a potential for widespread dissatisfaction and unrest. Such arrangements may sometimes generate discontent “because a society departs from social rationality, but not as a result of a belief that this is the case.” (MR, 23) So the facts in question are not relativized to the moral convictions of any group of people. Such discontent may or may not bring about social change, and it may or may not bring about a change in moral views whereby these come to better reflect the criterion of rightness. All that will depend upon other social factors in play, and Railton grants that some such factors work against moral progress. The claim is only that facts about relative degrees of rightness will play a role in a completed social theory that will help to explain the presence of some patterns among others—not that these will produce an overall social trend. On the other hand there may also be some such trends, which would constitute particularly impressive evidence of a pattern. Railton notes, for instance, a historical trend among moral norms toward increasing generality in whose interests they count as relevant, especially in societies where empirical inquiry in general is comparatively most advanced.

This argument from human social history “presupposes and purports to defend a particular substantive moral theory” (MR, 22), namely, the consequentialist moral theory above. I confess to some uncertainty about how the empirical considerations are supposed to defend the view of moral rightness. I don’t mean that the empirical account of moral history is too quick or vague to settle determinately on any particular property as the explanatorily relevant one in the social patterns cited. What I have provided here is a quick and sketchy summary of an account that is itself granted to be quick and sketchy.

Railton acknowledges that much more would have to be done to develop the sort of social historical theory that could serve his purposes well enough to differentiate among competing criteria of moral rightness. But let us suppose that a true, complete and detailed social theory were in hand, and that it took whatever shape Railton would regard as maximally supportive of his account of morality. I take it that, among other things, this theory would give some sort of explanatory pride of place specifically to facts about the degree to which social arrangements maximize the aggregate of individuals' interests, taken impartially. Still, how exactly would this social theory support the claim that moral rightness is a matter of doing this?⁵

The mere fact that some property plays a well-confirmed explanatory role is not itself a justification for thinking that the property is moral rightness, of course. Among other things, the property would have to recommend itself to us in something very like the way that we take moral rightness to do. It would have to play the proper sort of normative role, and any attempt to identify a property as rightness will be partly a matter of trying to show that it does so.⁶ But of course, just what that role is is itself a matter of controversy. Among other things, there are questions about whether moral rightness and wrongness must supply categorical or overriding reasons for action. Like most naturalists, Railton denies that they must. His account of rightness also seems to effect a sharp separation of rightness from questions about the appropriateness of blame.⁷ In these ways (especially the last of them, I think), accepting Railton's theory would mandate revision of some significant strands in ordinary conceptions of rightness' normative role.

⁵ David Copp raises similar questions in his "Explanation and Justification in Ethics" *Ethics* 100 (1990): 237-258.

⁶ In "Naturalism and Prescriptivity" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7 (1989): 151-174 Railton offers thoughts like these as a reply to the challenge posed by Copp op cit..

⁷ See, for instance, HTC and "Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality", also in *Facts, Values, and Norms*.

This hurts the case for identifying rightness with the maximization of wellbeing, but need not ruin it. I suppose that Railton's response would be that answering questions about the nature of rightness requires an attempt to reach a kind of wide reflective equilibrium, in which our views about the normative role of the predicate, and our intuitions about particular cases and general principles, have to be harmonized with our best empirical theories. What's important for present purposes is that he seems to imagine that relatively specific details of these best empirical theories could end up making a difference to fine-grained choices among rival moral theories; for instance whether morality requires *maximizing* nonmoral good or distributing it in some equitable way, and whether it is really people's *interests* that morality is concerned with, or something more restricted, such as their needs.⁸ It thus seems to be a feature of this naturalistic realism that the identification of a particular property as moral rightness, and the role that moral rightness will play in the deliberations of a morally conscientious person, can turn on quite subtle contingencies about the history of human social practices. One question in what follows will be how best to square these ideas with views about moral value that are defended in the more recent essays.

2. "Moral Realism" appears to embrace the idea, familiar from classical Utilitarianism, that moral considerations as such are not properly adduced in determining the value of outcomes.⁹ Instead, moral rightness, at least, is a matter of bringing about valuable states of affairs—the good of those involved—where that value is not itself a moral matter. The point is not just that considerations about the rightness of actions can't be appealed to in determining which possible outcomes of those very actions are better.

⁸ See, for instance, the discussion at MR 41, fn. 38.

⁹ Of course, in focusing on the nonmoral good of those affected, understood as Railton understands it, this theory is different from classical Utilitarianism.

That much is required for the theory to avoid circularity. But Railton's repeated characterization of the good that social rationality promotes as 'nonmoral' at least strongly suggests that even non-deontic moral considerations (if there are any such) would not affect it. In one respect this seems only reasonable. With respect to the question "What is good for Paul?" (or, "What is in Paul's interests?" or "What contributes to Paul's wellbeing, or his welfare?" all of which I take to be equivalent here), moral considerations about the attractiveness of Paul's concerns should have no purchase except insofar as they have purchase with Paul (or his epistemically, but not morally, idealized counterpart). As Railton puts it "People, or at least some people, might be put together in a way that makes some not-very-appetizing things essential to their flourishing, and we do not want to be guilty of wishful thinking on this score." (MR 38, fn. 20).

This seems to me just right as a claim about interests, but it raises the important question of whether a consequentialist should understand the moral point of view to be concerned with the efficient impartial pursuit of people's nonmoral good, or with some other category of value. Not all consequentialists are pure welfarists, of course. Some hold that not all enhancements in people's interests count morally in favor of the outcomes they are a part of—that satisfaction of some unpleasant person's interests might be genuinely good for him and yet not count in favor of an outcome in which it figured, or at least not count as much as, or in the same way as, its contribution to his wellbeing would otherwise indicate.¹⁰ Others hold that different things matter morally, instead of or in addition to people's interests as such.¹¹ Another familiar idea is that morality is concerned not only with everyone's wellbeing, but also with how it is distributed.

¹⁰ For a discussion of some of the relevant issues here, see Peter Vallentyne, "The Problem of Unauthorized Welfare" *Nous* 25 (1991): 295-321.

¹¹ David Braybrooke, for instance, has defended the idea that needs, not welfare, are the proper object of moral concern in his *Meeting Needs*, Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987). David

In “Moral Realism” Railton suggests that the question of whether moral *rightness* is maximizing or partly distributive is a question about instrumental rationality—whether (when adopting the social point of view) it would be instrumentally rational to maximize or to distribute nonmoral value. (41, fn. 38) I doubt, though, that the moral significance of distributions can properly be assigned to instrumental rationality. That theory’s principles should be neutral with respect to the kinds of value being promoted, but distributive requirements appear much more plausible in the case of moral action than in the case of prudential rationality, for instance.¹² So, if questions of distribution are granted to matter morally, this may be best understood as a feature of the moral point of view which influences its verdicts about which outcomes would be better.¹³ (Note that the claim that a more equal distribution, for instance, makes one state of affairs morally better than another, *ceteris paribus*, is distinct from a claim about the rightness of bringing it about, and seems to have some independent plausibility.) This, in turn, suggests that giving content to the idea of the moral point of view requires settling what that point of view is concerned with.

In his later essays, Railton discusses a category called “moral value” that allows us to ask whether what counts in favor of a given outcome, morally speaking, is simply a matter of how much wellbeing it contains, or something else. In the course of an examination of parallels between aesthetic and moral value, he offers a general

Sobel offers another alternative: in effect that it should be up to each individual what is considered when taking that individual into account morally. See his "Wellbeing as the Object of Moral Consideration," *Economics and Philosophy* 14 (1998): 249-82.

¹² Imagine a gifted young woman with real talent and genuine interests in philosophy, in musical performance, and in competitive chess, for instance. A distributive principle that was well suited to morality, if applied instead to her prudential deliberations about how to allocate energies between her interests, might discourage her too much from sacrificing one or two of these interests in order to focus on a third. Yet it seems there could be circumstances where this is what prudential rationality ought to commend.

¹³ Railton may agree with this, despite the remark in Moral Realism that seems to suggest otherwise. See HTC, 248 fn. 20.

characterization of the latter. Moral value is a matter of “those features of acts, motives outcomes, etc. which count favorably from a moral point of view.”¹⁴ To avoid numerous complications, let us direct our attention to the moral value specifically of outcomes. Now we can ask, what outcomes are morally valuable? That is, what are the features of outcomes that count favorably from a moral point of view? My question, though, is what settles the answer to that question? I think that Railton’s considered view is that the moral value of outcomes is in fact exhausted by the wellbeing they contain, and hence that the sorts of alternative views I mentioned above (that would include considerations of distribution and/or exclude some considerations of wellbeing from counting independently toward an appraisal of the moral value of outcomes) are mistaken. But he may be better taken as leaving that question open in his later work. In any case, my interest here is not so much in settling that question as in understanding what would settle it. How (if at all) might a perfected social theory of the sort I imagined in section 1 be of help in establishing wellbeing’s status as the sole source of moral value in outcomes?

3. Questions about the determination of moral value come most sharply into view in “Red, Bitter, Good.” There Railton addresses the idea, influential in contemporary ethical theory, that value might helpfully be understood by analogy with secondary qualities such as color. Simon Blackburn has argued that such views are damaged by a disanalogy between the cases, as follows. “[I]f we were to change so that everything in the world which had appeared blue came to appear red to us, this is what it is for the world to cease to contain blue things, and come to contain only red things.” Whereas “...if everyone comes to think of it as permissible to maltreat animals, this does nothing at all to make it

¹⁴ AVMV, 117. Railton allows that this is only one conception of moral value among others, but this is the one that he is concerned with, and that we will be pursuing here.

permissible: it just means that everybody has deteriorated.”¹⁵ Thus Blackburn thinks that color is relativistic in a way that morality is not. Some of the philosophical literature on color runs against Blackburn’s view on this point, however. It is more plausible to understand the dependency of color on human sensibilities in a way that fixes colors rigidly to a tendency of objects to look a certain way given our *actual* propensities to respond. On this view, if spectral inversion were brought about by a change in those propensities, that would indicate not that the colors of objects had altered, but merely that (say) blue things had come to look the way red things used to look.¹⁶

Railton proceeds to consider an analogous approach to moral value, which would make moral value non-relativistic by fixing it to the propensities of actual observers, as follows:

(M) x is morally good = x is such as to elicit in normal observers as they *actually* are (and in *actual* normal circumstances) a sentiment of moral approbation.
(RBG, 133)

(Note that Blackburn’s claim was about moral permissibility, whereas M is a thesis about moral value.) Railton asks whether accepting something like M would be a good way of accommodating Blackburn’s plausible non-relativistic intuition about the maltreatment of animals, and argues that it would not.¹⁷ The argument against M proceeds by appeal to a philosophical science fiction.

¹⁵ Simon Blackburn, “Errors and the Phenomenology of Value” in Ted Honderich, ed. *Morality and Objectivity: A Tribute to J.L. Mackie* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 14. Quoted in Railton, p. 132.

¹⁶ On this point, Railton cites Sydney Shoemaker, “Self-Knowledge and ‘Inner Sense’,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54 (1994: 249-314).

¹⁷ Blackburn himself certainly does not embrace M, but David Wiggins may accept something like it. Wiggins considers Bertrand Russell’s famous observation that, while he can’t see how to refute the arguments for the subjectivity of value, “I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don’t like it.” Wiggins replies “What is wrong with cruelty is not, even for Bertrand Russell, just that Bertrand Russell doesn’t like it, but that it is not such as to call forth liking given our

Actual humans, Railton supposes, take an intrinsic interest in kin relations. That is, we think it better, other things equal, if a benefit conferred on one individual by another is conferred between kin rather than non-relatives. Let us follow Railton in supposing this to be an intrinsic preference of actual people, and one that would survive full information. We suppose that it does not depend on whether greater happiness is produced by letting benefits flow along bloodlines, nor even on whether the participants are aware that the kin relation obtains. But now suppose that, as a result of changes in reproductive and developmental practices, human beings change in such a way that they no longer take any intrinsic interest in kin relations. New humans reproduce through a new process of automated replication. Replicas go through a brief period of maturation, during which they are cared for by a host family that may or may not be biologically related to them. Strong bonds of affection commonly form between hosts and “children” but these are not the product of any intrinsic interest in biological relatedness per se. They are “more like the special gratitude and affection old humans would feel toward those who acted as one’s parents during a challenging year as a foreign exchange student.” (135) Biological relatedness does not matter to new humans, and would not matter even were they fully informed.

Three new humans are riding together in an airport limousine. Ed, Ethan (a replica of Ed, unbeknownst to them) and some other guy. Ethan is in the middle, and he might turn to talk to Ed, in which case they would engage in a brief discussion that they would mildly enjoy, or toward the other guy. If he turns to the other guy, the conversation will be enjoyed a little more, but an opportunity for a kin interaction to occur will be lost forever. Railton says

An actual human contemplating these two possible scenarios among new humans might find an intrinsic preference that Ethan turn and talk to Ed, his “parent,”

rather than the man on the right. It is better and more fitting, we might think, that his own flesh and blood make this acquaintance and hear something of the story of his life...But would this response on our part really make sense? (137)

A bit later,

It would not advance anyone's good for kin connections to be made after intrinsic motivation in favor of such relations had disappeared from the planet. And it is perhaps equally difficult to see any moral purpose advanced thereby. (138)

Still later,

Before we project norms garnering the approbation of actual humans onto relations among non-actual humans we must ask whether the sorts of lives from which they derive meaning and intrinsic value are the same. In posing this question we need not appeal to a utilitarian principle as such. Rather, a much more general principle is at stake, on which (for example) Rawls has used to criticize utilitarianism: "the correct regulative principle for anything depends upon the nature of that thing."
(141)

Obviously, if morality is a matter of impartially promoting people's interests, then in deciding how to treat people we must attend to what is in their interests, and the ways in which these might be different from ours. (*Facts, Values and Norms* will make a fine birthday gift for some of your friends, less so for others.) So I assume that this was not the whole lesson to be drawn from future humans. In the passages just quoted, two issues are raised, though the difference between them is not highlighted. One question is whether the realization of kin interactions contributes to future human wellbeing. Let's agree that it doesn't. The second question is whether there would be any moral value realized by future human kin interactions. Railton invites us to grant that there wouldn't be, and concludes from this that we cannot rigidly project our own sense of what is of moral value with respect to the treatment of creatures who are different from us.

It is not obvious to me that we need to correct our own actual propensities toward moral approbation when we conclude that there would be no moral value in Ethan talking

to Ed. We may simply be assuming that any moral value in the realization of kin relations would have to arise from the contribution of such realization to the affected parties wellbeing. Because we suppose there to be no benefits to their wellbeing from realizations of kin relations, our own propensities to moral approbation see no moral value in such realizations either. If that is what's going on, it is not clear that we are taking the right regulative principle for them to be different from the right regulative principle for us. The relevant principle in both cases might just be "Promote wellbeing, impartially considered" and the differences between them and us are of no further theoretical interest than any differences among us old humans in what makes our lives go well. Perhaps I am wrong about this, and actual humans accord moral import to kin relations independently of their contribution to wellbeing. But if so, the psychology of this commitment is a subtle matter, not easily kept in focus.

To distinguish clearly between rigidly projecting our own moral attitudes and allowing distinctively moral value to vary with the nature of the beings affected, consider a rather more ham-fisted example. First, suppose that actual human moral approbation is prompted (or would be, when fully informed) by outcomes that maximize wellbeing, impartially considered. This fact, we can suppose, helps to explain why moral rightness as Railton understands it might turn out to play the sort of explanatory role in human social history canvassed above. But now imagine a future human population where informed moral approbation is no longer tied to the impartial maximization of wellbeing. These humans value their own wellbeing, of course, and to varying degrees they may value each others' wellbeing as well. But they do not think the morally best outcomes are the ones that involve as much of it as possible for all of them. Morality, they think, is concerned with whether everyone has their basic needs satisfied. Once this is taken care of, further enhancements in wellbeing are nice, but not morally significant per se. As a result, by these people's lights, outcomes that leave some folks with needs unsatisfied in order to bring about great gains in wellbeing for many more people have nothing to

recommend them, morally speaking, and a good deal to condemn.¹⁸ Call such outcomes “needful.”

Do needful outcomes have moral value in this future human world? Would it be morally right to bring such outcomes about there? I’m not sure how Railton would have us answer these questions. To say “no” is to take rather more seriously Rawls’ dictum that the correct regulative principle for anything depends upon the nature of that thing. What is of moral value with respect to the treatment of these people would be allowed to depend in a particularly strong way upon them and the character of their moral concerns. This conclusion might also seem most consonant with Railton’s subjectivism about the sources of value—recall his suggestion that the existence of value depends upon the existence of beings to whom things matter. With respect to moral value, on the present proposal its existence and nature would be allowed to depend upon the existence of beings to whom things matter morally, and upon what things matter morally to them. Moreover, if we are instead to attribute moral value to needful outcomes on future earth, then I am quite unsure what the lesson of Railton’s new humans is supposed to be.

On the other hand, if we follow these leads and say that needful outcomes are not morally valuable on future earth, one might well wonder about the extent to which the view we will have arrived at is helpfully described as non-relativistic moral realism. For it now seems that verdicts about the moral value of outcomes, and hence about the rightness of actions promoting them, are governed to a substantial extent by features of the moral sensibilities of the affected parties. And while this does not exactly render morality relative to moral opinion, it would appear to make it more radically relational than was evident in “Moral Realism.”

¹⁸ I am simply stipulating whatever has to be case empirically in order to bring about a world that would make the above descriptions of future humans true. No doubt there are various ways this might possibly happen, and it might be instructive to try to tell the story about how these changes could most plausibly come about. That story might affect our verdicts about the questions I raise in what follows. But I won’t try to pursue this here.

Railton says in a footnote

“Plainly I do appeal to some principles of ours in asking how we’d assess the new human example: that morality is impartial and concerned with (perhaps among other things) the goodness of lives, ...or that the proper regulative principle for a thing regulates in accord with the nature of that thing. These principles are, however, (something like) necessary or constitutive truths of the moral or evaluative domain rather than substantive moral or evaluative judgments.” (RBG 147, fn. 23)

If this remark is intended to foreclose the possibility of a view like the one I attributed to my future humans counting as a moral view, then I hope Railton can be persuaded to expand upon it. One set of questions will concern where (something like) necessary or constitutive truths of the moral domain fit within the broadly naturalistic picture he has sketched, and on what grounds something’s status as such a truth is defended.¹⁹ What is needed, more specifically, is a way of distinguishing between those features of distinctively moral value a concern with which is necessary to the moral point of view as such, and those which will be permitted to vary with the nature of the beings with whom that point of view concerns itself on a given occasion.²⁰ Articulating such a distinction would be another important step in determining how to balance the objective, non-

¹⁹ I suspect that these will be said to be necessary truths in something like the way that “Water is H₂O” is sometimes said to be a necessary truth. So my example moves us beyond the relationality that “Red, Bitter, Good” is intended to defend for moral value. But then I wonder what that relationality comes to, beyond the thought that different things are in different people’s interests. In what ways *does* the right regulative principle for a thing depend upon the nature of that thing?

²⁰ The question here is general, not restricted to the particular respect in which I imagined future humans diverging from present ones. They might instead have shared our concern with wellbeing, but found greater moral value in equal distributions of wellbeing than in outcomes with more of it, unequally distributed. Or they might have thought that some enhancements of wellbeing are disqualified from counting toward moral value for other reasons. The puzzle is whether and how the correctness or incorrectness of such views about moral value turns on fine-grained differences between the way people are now and other ways we might have been or might become. This puzzle is made more pressing by the frequency with which philosophers have defended these and other views of value on grounds that appear internal to the moral point of view.

relativistic purport of moral claims with a subjectivist and relational conception of the source and character of value.²¹

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