**Intrinsic Value OFF**

Moral theories categorize value in the world as either intrinsic or extrinsic—what has value for its own sake, and what has value only for the sake of something else. When intrinsic value conflicts with instrumental value, intrinsic value ought to be prioritized. Moral judgments about intrinsic value are categorically binding; their value does not depend on anything external to themselves. But judgments of instrumental value are merely contingent on empirical circumstance—on whether A really is a means to Z. When a duty relating to intrinsic value conflicts with a duty relating to instrumental value, the categorical duty always trumps the contingent duty, since categorical duties by nature are absolutely necessary—they hold irrespective of circumstance.

The environment is not an intrinsically valuable good. Only agents are intrinsically valuable; facts about the world only have value relative to agents. Hill[[1]](#footnote-1):

The second argument is roughly this: **Most valuable things[']** have value only because valued [sic] by human beings. Their **value is derivative from the fact that they serve our interests** and desires**. Even pleasure, which we value for its own sake, has** only derivative value, that is, **value dependent on the contingent fact that human beings want it**. Now if valuers confer derivative value on things by their preferences and choices, those **valuers must themselves have value**. In fact, they must have value **independent of**, and superior to, **the derivative values which they create**. The guiding analogy is how we treat *ends*. We value certain means because they serve intermediate ends, which in turn we value because they contribute to our ultimate ends, that is, what we value for its own sake. The value of the means and the intermediate means is derivative from the value of the ultimate ends; unless we value the ultimate end, the means and intermediate ends would be worthless to us. So, it seems, the source of derivative value must be valuable for its own sake. Since **the ultimate source of the value of our contingent ends,** such as health, wealth, and even pleasure, **is their being valued by human beings**, human beings, as valuers, must be valued for their own sakes**.**

To say that an object could have value that is non-derivative from humans valuing them is just to say that that object has some objective, non-relational value-making property. These properties are only perceptible through intuition, but our intuitions about the environment are unclear. Hill 2:

Early in this century, due largely to the influence of G. E. Moore, another point of view developed which some may find promising.4 Moore introduced, or at least made popular, the idea that certain states of affairs are intrinsically valuable—not just valued, but valuable, and not necessarily because of their effects on sentient beings. Admittedly Moore came to believe that in fact the only intrinsically valuable things were conscious experiences of various sorts,5 but this restriction was not inherent in the idea of intrinsic value. The **intrinsic goodness** of something, he thought, was **[is] an objective, nonrelational property of the thing,** like *its* texture or color, **but not a property perceivable by sense perception** or *detectable by* scientific instruments. In theory at least, a single tree thriving alone in a universe without sentient beings, and even without God, could be intrinsically valuable. Since, according to Moore, our duty is to maximize intrinsic value, his theory could obviously be used to argue that we have reason not to destroy natural environments independently of how they affect human beings and animals. The survival of a forest might have worth beyond its worth to sentient beings. This approach, like the religious one, may appeal to some but is infested with problems. There are, first, the familiar objections to intuitionism, on which the theory depends. Metaphysical and epistemological doubts about **nonnatural, intuited properties are** hard to suppress, and many have argued that the theory rests on a misunderstanding of the words good, valuable, and the like.6 Second, even if we try to set aside these objections and think in Moore’s terms, it is far from obvious that everyone would agree *that* the existence of forests, *etc.,* is intrinsically valuable. The test, says Moore, is **[determined by] what we would say when we imagine a universe with just the thing *in question,* without any effects or accompaniments, and then *we* ask, “Would its existence be better than its nonexistence?”** Be careful, Moore would remind us, not to construe this ques- tion as, “Would you prefer the existence of that universe to its nonexistence?” **The question is, “Would its existence have the objective, nonrelational prop- erty, intrinsic goodness?”** Now even among those who have no worries about whether this really makes sense, **[With the environment,] we** might **well get a diversity of answers. Those prone to destroy** natural **environments will** doubtless **give one answer,** and **nature lovers** will likely give **another.** When an issue is as controversial as the one at hand, intuition is a poor arbiter.

Thus, the environment is not intrinsically valuable.

1. Thomas Hill, Jr. “Self-regarding suicide: A modified Kantian view,” in *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 102-103. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)