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Facts and Values*

The fact/value distinction, in league with such equally grand and obscure distinctions as those between objectivity and subjectivity and between reason and emotion, has been vastly influential. Yet it appears on inspection to rest upon surprisingly insecure foundations. Thus I believe we should feel a certain unease about the weight it is asked to bear when we use it to support claims of the utmost importance about the nature of knowledge and the limits of inquiry. Perhaps it is time to consider what might happen were we to stop viewing these two realms as categorically distinct. A pair of alternatives immediately suggests itself: we might soften up facts, or harden up values. I propose to follow the latter course, but only after questioning an assumption about what the hardness of facts is supposed to consist in.

The sort of value I will be concerned with here is generic or non-moral goodness, often simply called intrinsic value. This is the sort of value that ordinarily is at issue when disputes occur about what an individual’s or group’s good consists in, about what kinds of lives are good to lead, or about what is desirable as an end in itself. Other species of value – such as moral or aesthetic value – I propose to leave aside for now.1

II

No doubt the fact/value distinction owes its prevalence to a great diversity of causes. However, it seems to me that among the arguments that have been most important to the philosophical defense of the fact/value distinction are these three: the argument from rational determinability,
the argument from internalism, and the argument from ontological "queerness." Let us take them up in turn.

Rational Determinability

Genuinely factual disputes, it has been thought, can be resolved by appeal to reason and experience. If two individuals differ over a question of fact, yet each is wholly rational in the formation and assessment of his beliefs, then it should always be possible in principle for experience and logical argument to bring them into accord. By contrast, it is claimed, two entirely rational individuals who differ in their values may be able to confront all possible experience and argumentation and still find their normative disagreement intact.

This defense of the fact/value distinction appears to presuppose that there are canons of induction so powerful that experience would, in the limit, produce convergence on matters of fact among all epistemic agents, no matter what their starting points. There is considerable room for doubt on this score. The history of efforts to discover a "logic of induction" has convinced many philosophers that no such canons exist: our beliefs about the world are underdetermined even by all possible evidence.2

However, suppose for the moment that there were an uncontroversial logic of induction that assigned a univocal degree of epistemic probability to any given proposition on the basis of any given bit of evidence. Surprisingly, this would not rescue the argument from rational determinability.

To see why, consider deductive logic. Does deductive logic tell us what it is rational to believe? No, it tells us only which propositions follow from other propositions (or, in the case of logical truths, from no propositions at all). The following inference, for example, is manifestly not logically valid:

(1) I believe that p.
(2) p implies q.
(3) I rationally ought to believe that q.

The conclusion would follow were we to add the premise:

We always rationally ought to believe the logical implications of one's current beliefs.

But (0) is not a principle of logic at all.3 Moreover, (0) is not a very plausible principle, for it would require that we believe infinitely many things, and, indeed, if there happened to be any contradictions among our
beliefs, it would require us to believe every proposition and its negation. Principles of deductive logic – and of inductive logic, should such things exist – are undoubtedly relevant to the question “What rationally ought one to believe?”, but only because obeying these principles, or knowing their import, sometimes serves the purposes of practical reason. The fact that deductive inferences are truth preserving makes deduction very handy, but, as the absurd consequences of (0) show, rational agents need not always go where the application of logic would lead them. So, if facts are supposed to be distinguished from values in virtue of what reason requires us to believe, then even the existence of an inductive logic would not secure the distinction. The question “What rationally ought one to believe?” will always belong to practical rather than theoretical reason.

Facts are hard, I believe, but not because reason and experience force them upon us. They are hard because they are part of a world that is causally responsible for our experience, a world most of whose features do not depend upon our conception of it or our aspirations in it. Reason, then, does not make facts hard; it finds them hard.

**Internalism**

Some proponents of the fact/value distinction have sought to draw the line between facts and values in a different way. Consider a claim on my part that I value something. This claim is undoubtedly a factual assertion. It may reflect a value judgment, but it is not itself such a judgment – others may accept my claim without sharing my value. But now consider a claim on my part that something is **valuable**. This remark does express a value judgment, and its normative character is revealed by the fact that a person who did not share my value would not in full knowledge and sincerity accept this statement. How are we to characterize the normative force of such a remark? One answer is that when I claim that something is valuable, I am claiming that it is in some sense an appropriate object of valuation or pursuit. It is this notion of appropriateness – and perhaps an associated commendatory force – that stands between my remark and its acceptance by someone with different values.

Now it has been held by contemporary Humeans and Kantians alike that in order for a normative judgment to apply to an individual, he must have some reason – not necessarily overriding – to comply with it. This thesis makes use of the notion of having a reason, and thus it takes various forms depending upon the conception of rationality presupposed.
A Kantian might require that the normative judgment be a maxim of the rational will of the individual. A Humean might require that the individual have some desire or end relative to which there is instrumental reason for complying with the judgment.

Suppose, for example, that I claim that the contemplation of beauty is intrinsically valuable. Certainly, I am not just preaching to the converted. The normative scope of my remark includes not only those who happen already to go for the contemplation of beauty, but also those who do not, saying that it would be a good thing if they did. One common, if rather dramatic, way of putting this is to say that the normative scope of my remark encompasses all rational beings as such.

If this were what value judgments involved, then, given the instrumental conception of rationality (and here contemporary Humeans and Kantians part company), it would follow at once that value judgments could not be factual. For according to instrumentalism, there are no substantive ends or activities - such as the contemplation of beauty - that all rational beings as such have a reason to pursue regardless of their contingent desires. But then, necessarily, my remark’s normative reach would exceed its grasp, so that the truth-conditions of ‘The contemplation of beauty is intrinsically valuable’ could never be satisfied. A common response to this conclusion has been to recommend abandonment of the idea that value judgments have truth-conditions, for it would be hard to explain their role in actual discourse on the assumption that they are factual assertions, but always - and necessarily - false ones.

By contrast, although values may be involved in deliberation about which factual statements to believe or assert, no normative commitments figure in the truth-conditions proper to them. For example, the statement that ‘People value the contemplation of beauty’ does not involve any ideas about the desirability of such contemplation, or even about the desirability of believing or asserting this statement. So the combination of internalism with the instrumental conception of rationality does not give rise to any difficulty about the truth-conditions of factual statements being met.

Of course, an individual could as a contingent matter have a positive attitude toward the contemplation of beauty, and could recommend to all rational beings that they share this attitude. There would be nothing odd about his choosing the phrase ‘The contemplation of beauty is intrinsically valuable’ to make public his view. This phrase might even carry some descriptive content. But thus employed it would not be a mere statement of fact, for it would partake of the realm of expression or commendation, and so mere facts could not make it true.
The argument may be summarized: internalism plus instrumentalism yields the fact/value distinction.

Can this argument be stopped? One might join the Kantians in challenging the premise of instrumentalism, and attempt to argue that some substantive ends or actions are indeed mandated by rationality. Such challenges have a noble history, and even a noble representation in the present, but I find the ignoble instrumentalist view the clearest idea we have of what it is, at a minimum, to have a reason for acting.4

The remaining premise is internalism. Is it true that all normative judgments must find an internal resonance in those to whom they are applied? While I do not find this thesis convincing as a claim about all species of normative assessment, it does seem to me to capture an important feature of the concept of intrinsic value to say that what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone’s good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him. What I do not see, however, is a justification for the further claim that in order for something to be intrinsically valuable for a particular person, that something must induce a resonance in any arbitrarily different rational being. Let us call this further claim the thesis of value absolutism. The argument for the fact/value distinction under consideration can now be seen to have three premises rather than two: internalism plus instrumentalism plus value absolutism. Some form of the first two premises I am prepared to grant; the third premise I doubt.

I doubt it because I doubt that it is essential to the concept of intrinsic value that such value be absolute as well. Let me suggest a view of the nature of value that leads to a conception of intrinsic value, but not through any notion of absoluteness.

It seems to me that notions like good and bad have a place in the scheme of things only in virtue of facts about what matters, or could matter, to beings for whom it is possible that something matter. Good and bad would have no place within a universe consisting only of stones, for nothing matters to stones. Introduce some people, and you will have introduced the possibility of value as well. It will matter to people how things go in their rock-strewn world. Of course, what in particular will matter, or could matter, to these people will depend upon what they are like. Are they, for example, capable of the same range of beliefs and desires as we? Humans are persons, but they are much else besides: they are made up of carbon-based stuff rather than silicon-based stuff, they are the result
of a particular evolutionary history, they have various individual developmental histories, and so on. What matters to them, even when they are fully rational, need not matter to all rational beings. If certain sociobiologists are right, humans typically are capable of intrinsic motivation by beliefs about the well-being of those toward whom they have feelings of commonality, such as kinship. Had the mechanisms of genetic replication and natural selection been different, and had rational beings nonetheless emerged, they might have been virtually incapable of intrinsically desiring the well-being of others.

In a naturalistic spirit, we might think of goodness as akin to nutritiveness. All organisms require nutrition, but not the same nutrients. Which nutrients a given organism or type of organism requires will depend upon its nature. Cow’s milk nourishes calves and many humans, but it won’t nourish those organisms, including some humans, who cannot produce the enzymes needed to digest it; and some elements essential to human nutrition are toxic to other organisms. There is, then, no such thing as an absolute nutrient, that is, something that would be nutritious for all possible organisms. There is only relational nutritiveness: substance S is a nutrient for organisms of type T. Is there, therefore, no intrinsic nutritiveness, either? In a sense, yes: nothing is a nutrient in and of itself, irrespective of whom or what it might nourish. But in another sense, no: we may distinguish among the things that nourish an organism those that do so directly and those that do so mediatel y. Some substances are, for a given organism, in themselves nutritious — they are ultimate dietary requirements. Some substances (and not always different ones) are a source of nutrition in virtue of their contribution to the production or consumption of that which is an ultimate nutrient. Calcium is itself, intrinsically, a nutrient for humans — it is essential that we get it, but not essential how. Cakes and ale, on the other hand, are nutritious only insofar as they are vehicles for ultimate nutrients.

Similarly, we might say that although there is no such thing as absolute goodness — that which is good in and of itself, irrespective of what or whom it might be good for or the good of — there may be relational goodness. Moreover, among the relational goods for a given being, some may be intrinsic and others instrumental. To call a good intrinsic in this sense is to say something about why or how it matters to that being: Is it the sort of thing that matters — or would matter, under suitable circumstances — for its own sake, or merely as a means to other things? Here internalism comes naturally into play, directing us to look at the being’s motivational system: Is it capable of intrinsic motivation by a given consideration, and, if so, under what circumstances?
It is important to see that relationalism of this sort is distinct from relativism. Heaviness, for example, is a relational concept; nothing is absolutely heavy. But the two-place predicate ‘X is heavier than Y’ has an objectively determinate extension. Similarly, although a relational conception of value denies the existence of absolute good, it may yield an objectively determinate two-place predicate ‘X is part of Y’s good.’

Perhaps the simplest relational theory of goodness is that of Hobbes, who held that to call something good is always to speak of someone’s good, and that the only sense in which something can be good for someone is that he desires it. To call something part of someone’s intrinsic good, on this view, would presumably be to say that he desires it for its own sake. This theory has many virtues: it is uncomplicated, nonpaternalistic, and epistemically as straightforward as the idea of desire. Moreover, it easily meets at least one version of the internalist requirement, since according to the simpler forms of instrumentalism, the fact that one desires X is ipso facto a reason for pursuing it.

Yet this theory is deeply unsatisfactory, since it seems incapable of capturing important elements of the critical and self-critical character of value judgments. On this theory one can, of course, criticize any particular current desire on the grounds that it ill fits with other, more numerous or more powerful current desires on one’s part, or (if it is an instrumental desire) on the grounds that it is the result of a miscalculation with the information one has. But this hardly exhausts the range of assessment. Sometimes we wish to raise questions about the intrinsic desirability of the things that now are the main focus of our desires, even after any mistakes in calculation have been corrected. This appears to be a specific function of the vocabulary of goodness and badness, as distinct from the vocabulary of desire and aversion. But what could be the grounds for such potentially radical reassessment? Once one has accepted an instrumental conception of rationality, one cannot ask that reason by itself accomplish the criticism of ends. And once one has accepted internalism as well, one must find the grounds of criticism somewhere in the realm of things that actually or possibly find some internal resonance in the agent. Let us consider how such criticism might proceed.

Sheila is a journalist who has made something of a name for herself covering business and agriculture for a major newspaper in the Northwest. Word of her work spreads and, as a result, from the East comes a job offer from The Daily Planet, a great metropolitan newspaper. It would not have occurred to her to seek out such an offer, but immediately upon receiving it she feels a powerful urge to accept. Although it has made
significant contribution to her success, Sheila's small-town, Western background has always made her a bit apologetic. And she has never liked having to explain to people outside her profession that her paper "really is quite well regarded."

Yet when she thinks through the choice, she cannot escape noticing that a great many of the things that have made her life in recent years so enjoyable and productive — reportorial freedom, ready access to nature, and integration of family life with work — seem to count in favor of keeping her present job. Indeed, Sheila is a bit surprised at herself when these considerations seem to move her so little once she faces the lure of the big time. She wonders whether she has made an uncomfortable discovery about herself or whether she simply is so impressed by the thought of her byline on the front page of the Planet that she has lost sight of what fundamentally matters to her. She worries whether what she most desires really corresponds to what would be the best sort of life for her.

The connection between this normative concern and her desires — as required by internalism — is indirect. Her sense that she is being less attentive to the actual prospects of the options she faces than to their immediate impact upon her self-image does not by itself weaken her attraction to the Planet job that this desire no longer predominates. Like the rest of us, Sheila is concerned with her future well-being, but for her, like the rest of us, this concern is sometimes dim in comparison to more vivid goods. Still, a plausible version of internalism should allow the normative worry to stand, for it clearly has an internal grip on Sheila — it is a worry of hers.

There are other important classes of cases in which we question whether our good coincides with what we most desire. Consider Beth, a successful and happy accountant, who nonetheless wants above all to quit and devote herself full time to writing. Beth's desire, let us suppose, does not depend upon any failure to envisage vividly her best-warranted expectations about the future, nor does it involve any failure to calculate accurately with the information she has at hand. Unfortunately, however, although she has no convincing evidence to show it — after all, some of the short stories she wrote as an undergraduate were admired by her friends and teachers — Beth does not have the skill or temperament to be a writer. So, when the accumulation from her earnings enables her to give up ledgerbooks for copybooks, things go badly. She finds it enormously difficult to bring herself to write with any regularity, and what work she does produce fails to gain acceptance. Another sort of person might return more or less quickly to accounting, closing the episode, and
putting it down to experience. But Beth has never been one who knew when to cut her losses. She feels she must keep at it and make a success of it, so year in and year out she puts around her house while trying to spend time at the desk, tramps off to writers' workshops, takes part-time jobs, and sends off unsolicited manuscripts. Yet success does not arrive, and she becomes increasingly bitter, unproductive, and indebted. Looking back, she concludes that she paid too high a price in lost well-being and self-confidence for the information that she is not suited to writing. Knowing what she now knows, she thinks it would have been better had she fended off her desire to be a writer and remained an accountant with a few shelves of good current fiction.

This judgment distinguishes her good at a time from what she most desired at that time. Moreover, it distinguishes her good at a time from what was, given her beliefs and desires, instrumentally rational at that time. It may even so be said to assert a connection between her good and her all-things-considered desires, namely, between the all-things-considered desires of the sadder-but-wiser Beth and the good of her earlier self. Should internalism allow this sort of internal connection to support a judgment recommending against the writer's life for Beth at the time of her decision? There is an internal grip: Beth herself feels all too poignantly the evaluative force of her later, better-informed views.

Yet it is the later Beth who feels this force, for it is she who has the information. What force would the views of the later Beth have for the earlier Beth, were they somehow to become known to her? It might have the effect of quickly dulling the earlier Beth's desire to write. But we can also imagine that her earlier self's desire to become a writer would remain quite strong, perhaps stronger than any competing desire. Yet even in this latter case, it is natural to expect that her desire that this desire be effective will become more tentative, and that some contrary desires will emerge.

Why is this natural? Partly because it is natural to care about whether one is happy and whether one's desires are satisfied. The earlier Beth has every reason to believe that her later self takes these concerns to heart, since the later Beth is contemplating what she would want to pursue were she actually to relive the intervening years. Moreover, the earlier Beth also has reason to believe that her later self is better situated than she to know what would most satisfy Beth's desires during those years.

These observations tend in a certain direction. Presumably, the earlier Beth would find the views of the later Beth still more compelling had the later Beth knowledge not only of the outcome of attempting a career in writing, but of the outcome of alternative pursuits as well. What,
for example, would it really have been like for Beth to have remained in accounting? To have a desire is, among other things, to care whether or not it is satisfied. Although fuller information about how one’s actual desires will fare in the world may not always contribute to the satisfaction of those desires – one may know too much – the advice of someone who has this fuller information, and also has the deepest sort of identification with one’s fate, is bound to have some commending force.

To learn of a reassessment that would arise from full information (and vividness, rationality, and so on) may have force for another reason as well. The ground for this force is also – as it must be on the present account – in the contingent concerns of the actual individual. In this case, however, the concerns are immediately directed not at the satisfaction of desires, but at their defense.

Let us say that one embraces a desire, or accepts it as goal setting, when one desires that it be effective in regulating one’s life. This is not to say one desires that it be overriding; rather one desires that it influence the course of one’s life – insofar as this is within one’s power – in rough proportion to its strength. In the examples given, Sheila worries whether to embrace her desire to take the Planet job and the later Beth, reflecting upon the circumstances of her earlier self, no longer embraces the desire to be a writer. At least one of the features that distinguishes those among our desires that we call our goals is that we normally do not – at least, not without qualm – call a desire that we are not prepared upon reflection to embrace a goal. For an individual to deem something a goal or value of his own involves the idea on his part that it is an appropriate object of desire or pursuit.8 The notion of appropriateness at work is internal, but may concern the desires he would want to be effective in his actual life were he to contemplate that life with full awareness of the facts and full rationality in deliberation.

These counterfactual circumstances concern the defensibility of the desires themselves against certain sorts of criticism, although “criticism” here has a special meaning. There is no logical contradiction involved in embracing wholeheartedly a desire that one knows one would want not to be effective in one’s actual life were one fully informed and rational. The sort of conflict that is basic to the criticism of desires is psychological rather than logical. One might call this conflict “cognitive dissonance” were it merely cognitive. But what perhaps is most striking about it is that it involves a linkage between the cognitive and the conative. We should expect this sort of linkage in the psychology of value, since valuing is an attitude, and an attitude is neither merely a desire nor merely a belief:

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involves a collection of desires and an associated outlook or characteristic way of seeing things, an outlook that is partly constituted by characteristic beliefs about what one is seeing, and by a tendency to interpret or explain things in certain ways rather than others. That is why, when crucial beliefs are altered or challenged, the agent’s outlook itself shifts, with the result that the landscape he previously perceived changes and his desires, which had felt at home in that terrain, become unsettled.

If taking an attitude or embracing a desire involves certain beliefs, it also involves an assumption that these beliefs are not merely false, that one’s outlook is not largely a matter of, or psychologically dependent upon, error or ignorance. What is it about the possibility of error or ignorance that creates a potential threat to one’s outlook itself? The beginning of an answer may be this. We call upon our basic goals, as distinct from our mere (though perhaps insistent) desires, to explain to ourselves and to others the worthwhileness and point of our choices – indeed, of our lives. The price we pay for using our values in this way is a commitment to their defensibility. If our values are to support us, we must support them. And we defend our attitudes by appeal to facts psychologically congenial to them. Hence, if someone raises convincing doubts about our understanding of the facts, he causes us unease in our values. We could, of course, always in such circumstances insist that the absence of a logical connection between beliefs and desires permits us to keep our values intact, no matter how wrong or uninformed we discover ourselves to have been on the facts. It is interesting that we so seldom do this. One reason might be that such a response seems to be a shrinking from the task of explaining the worthwhileness and point of what we do. That is, it seems to involve something akin to an admission of defeat – an admission to others and to ourselves that there is less to our lives than had seemed to be the case.

Unless the idea that we must support those values that support us is to involve a mere conjuring trick, we must find somewhere outside our ends, seen as personal desires, to gain a toehold. Historically, this has been done by appeal to such things as gods, ancestors, and the order of nature. The existentialists were quite right in saying that if, as moderns, we reject these props, and if we further conclude that valuation and choice are a mere matter of fixing on something by fiat, then values cannot confer meaning and life becomes absurd. But there are fixed points beyond the self. When we defend our values by appeal to facts, facts whose truth-values do not fluctuate with our particular desires or decisions, we are seeking such a toehold. Importantly, too, these truth-values do not fluctuate with the
decisions or desires of others, so that this toehold can support us even when we find ourselves in a world with people whose beliefs or ends differ from our own. If we discover that our values are psychologically dependent upon ignorance or error, we lose this source of support.

Of course, our first-order desires may press upon us willy-nilly, and may be remarkably insensitive to discovery that we were wrong on the facts. But for this very reason it does not do much to explain to myself or others the worthwhileness or point of what I have done with my life to say that I have simply acted upon whatever desire happened to be most urgent at the moment. Higher-order desires of the sort that are involved in embracing a desire are more responsive to changes in belief, and so not only do they become more closely tied to our identity, they become the basis of the idea of value.

The proposal I would make, then, is the following: an individual’s good consists in what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality. The wants in question, then, are wants regarding what he would seek were he to assume the place of his actual, incompletely informed and imperfectly rational self, taking into account the changes that self is capable of, the costs of those changes, and so on. A fully informed and rational individual would, for example, have no use or desire for psychological strategies suited to circumstances of limited knowledge and rationality; but he no doubt would want his incompletely informed and imperfectly rational actual self to develop and deploy such strategies.

My claim is that this notion of someone’s good affords an explanation of the normative force of judgments of one’s good, for it gives expression to an idea of appropriateness or fitness of an end for an agent. Fitness consists in a certain match between an agent’s motivational system, on the one hand, and his capacities and circumstances, on the other, when all are accurately represented and adequately appreciated. Moreover, this notion of someone’s good also satisfies an appropriate internalist constraint: we can see in the psychology of value, as discussed previously, the ways in which the views we would have were we to become free of present defects in knowledge or rationality would induce an internal resonance in us as we now are.

Let us then say that an individual’s intrinsic good consists in attainment of what he would in idealized circumstances want to want for its own sake – or, more accurately, to pursue for its own sake (for wanting is
only one way of pursuing) — were he to assume the place of his actual self. This account leaves open the possibility that the intrinsic good of different persons may differ, and thus splits internalism from value absolutism. It therefore removes an essential premise from the argument from instrumentalism and internalism to the fact/value distinction. If the intrinsic good of a rational being can depend upon its contingent features, in particular, upon those features that determine the being’s idealized hypothetical wants, then the fact that no substantive ends would necessarily exist for all instrumentally rational beings does not stand in the way of the facticity of value judgments.

It now is possible to deal with the remaining defense of the fact/value distinction — the argument from “queerness” — rather more rapidly.

Queerness

The usual sort of objection to the facticity of values on grounds of ontological queerness is parasitic upon the two arguments already considered. It would be peculiar, to say the least, if there were features of the world that evoked in all rational beings, no matter what their contingent nature, a sense of “to-be-pursuedness” (to use Mackie’s phrase). But we need not believe in the reality of such things in order to believe that there are facts about values. We need only believe in those properties of the world, most conspicuously, of human motivational systems and the situations in which they find themselves, that support the counterfactuals concerning idealized desires used previously to characterize intrinsic goodness.

The argument from queerness concerns the nature of reality, and so some Hegelian reflections may not be out of place. The aboriginal objectivist view of value is perhaps the idea of an end that commands our allegiance, no matter what we are severally like. The commanding in question might be done by a deity, or, in the more sophisticated versions, by rationality itself. A good of this kind would be absolute, and of it one could say that it is not valuable because we desire it, but rather, we desire it (at least, when we know what we’re about) because it is valuable. But the idea of an end that commands our allegiance from without drops altogether from view once the world is seen from a secular, nonteleological, instrumentalist standpoint. This may tempt us to negate the objectivity of value and assert instead its subjectivity. We carry out the same sort of inversion of the concept of objective value that Hume accomplished in the case of causal necessity or Feuerbach in the case of the Holy
Family – the concept of objective good is held to be a projection, a reification of a subjective human response as if it were a self-substistent reality. The slogan becomes: we do not desire things because they are valuable, we deem them valuable because we desire them.

But now for the Hegelian point: the negation of this negation is not far off in dialectical space, and when we reach it, we are able to transcend the antithesis of objectivity and subjectivity that both the aboriginal objectivist conception of value and the subsequent subjectivist negation of it presuppose.

As suggested previously, the notions of good or bad have a place in the scheme of things only in virtue of facts about what matters or could matter to beings for whom it is possible that something matter. A being for whom something can matter is a being with a point of view, a subjectivity. In a universe without subjectivity, there is no value either. But all actual subjective beings are at the same time objective beings. They have determinate properties that are not merely constituted by their conception of themselves, and these properties determine what sorts of things do, or can, matter to them. Their self-conception may be more or less objective, that is, may more or less accurately reflect what they really are like, how they actually are situated, and so on. According to the sketch of the psychology of value and of the nature of intrinsic good given previously, that which is genuinely valuable is constituted by what matters to subjective beings whose conception of themselves and their world is in this sense objective. Value, then, is not a merely objective or merely subjective matter. It is in virtue of our subjectivity that valence can exist, but it is in virtue of our objective nature that we possess a subjectivity, and moreover a subjectivity of a kind that valences some things rather than others and that finds a special valence, called ‘value,’ in those things that would be subjectively compelling were our consciousness objectified. The notion of subjectivity objectified affords a convenient way of expressing a point made previously, that in our attempts to defend our values we look beyond mere subjective identification with them, seeking to show that this identification can withstand full rational appropriation, and appreciation, of the real.

III

We are hardly through with objections, however. Even if one were to succeed in turning back familiar arguments for the fact/value distinction, few would likely be convinced that value judgments can be factual in the
absence of a plausible factualist theory of value. I have tried to sketch what I take to be such an account, yet it in turn faces a number of serious difficulties that now must be addressed. Within the confines of this paper, I can consider only two such difficulties, both of which have figured in recent criticisms of naturalistic theories of value. One difficulty concerns the determinateness of value, as characterized here; the other concerns its naturalness. Let us now turn to the first of these.

**Determinateness**

It might be questioned whether what has been said thus far suffices to show that judgments of non-moral value might be factual, since there are grounds for skepticism about whether there is such a thing as “what one would, if fully and vividly informed and fully instrumentally rational, want oneself to seek were one to assume one’s actual place.” Surely, the idealization involved is severe. As finite beings, we may be incapable of being fully informed about ourselves and our world, or of assessing in an appropriate way the relevance of so many considerations. How, then, are we to evaluate counterfactuals about what one would desire if one were fully informed and rational?

It seems to me that the only answer possible is that the notion of idealized desires is an unabashedly theoretical one. While we have no direct epistemic access to such desires, a theory-assisted extrapolation may nonetheless be available from the present state of an individual’s cognitive and conative systems. For part of any comprehensive psychological theory will be an account of the factors that influence which desires we form and how these desires evolve in response to various sorts of changes, including changes in belief. We saw an instance of such a process in the case of Beth. As her beliefs about her aptitude and prospects changed, so did her desire to be a writer. Although she might continue to wish that she could become a writer, she no longer wants this wish to be effective for her as she is. The changes in her desires precipitated by her realizations are, we noted, of an entirely familiar kind.

More generally, it is a familiar fact about people that their desires – especially, their values – and their beliefs show a certain coherence. For example, we typically do not find two individuals who agree about the likely effects upon an individual of participation in contact sports or homosexual relations, one of whom thinks that such activities are part of individual flourishing while the other thinks they could not be. Of course, not all differences in desire are caused by differences in belief – sometimes
it is the other way around, as in wishful thinking. Thus what we should say is simply that differences in desire are generally associated with differences in belief of characteristic kinds, so that individuals who differ in their beliefs tend to differ predictably in their desires, and individuals who are in close agreement in their beliefs tend to resemble one another in their desires as well. So the idealization I have described, which in the limit fixes the full content of an individual’s beliefs, may leave rather restricted scope for variation in desires. This claim is all the more plausible in light of the fact that, insofar as possible, the idealization holds fixed the individual’s non-belief properties, so that the contribution of these features to desire-formation would remain largely the same.

We are not ourselves fully informed, and thus do not know the answer to the question where an extrapolation of our desires would lead. We may, however, gain greater confidence that there is a relatively determinate answer to this question by considering a series of much smaller and more manageable questions. Begin with an individual who believes, wrongly, that $p$. Then ask how his desires would change were he to believe instead that not-$p$, but to remain the same in every other property (except those that could not coexist with believing that not-$p$). Given nothing more powerful than commonsense psychological theory, we may feel reasonably confident that there is an answer. We then imagine this process repeated until all of the individual’s erroneous beliefs have been set right, and his system of beliefs has been enlarged to accommodate as much of the truth as possible. No doubt the extrapolation becomes more tenuous the further it is carried, and the larger the interactive effects of accumulated changes in belief, but thus far the idea of extrapolation does not seem to have become ungrounded.

However, the possible effects upon the individual of the order and mode of presentation of the information he receives create serious difficulties for this picture of determinate, piecemeal change.

The way an individual’s desires evolve upon receipt of information may depend in part upon which illusions he is disabused of first. To specify that full information be supplied but make no reference to order of presentation may thus be too indefinite. Yet it would seem arbitrary to fix upon one order of presentation, for this would build any effects peculiar to that ordering into the idealization itself. What is needed, then, is some way to avoid both indefiniteness and arbitrary definiteness.

Now some of the effects of order of presentation can be expected to become very dilute as the total volume of information grows. Moreover, with greater information second-order mechanisms of neutralization will
come into play. For the information an individual receives will include knowledge of psychological theory in general, and of its application to his psychology in particular. He therefore will become aware of the differential effects upon him of various orderings of the same information, and it is well known that awareness of such effects tends to reduce their impact. In the limit, we can imagine that full awareness of effects of sheer order will leave them without significant net impact.

An experiment in cognitive psychology reveals that when subjects observe two individuals taking a test, one of whom answers a high percentage of the early questions correctly but then falters, while the other does poorly initially but then answers a high percentage of the later questions correctly, the first is usually viewed as more able, even though in the end each answers the same number of questions correctly in all.14 If the subjects had been asked which test-taker they would prefer as a math tutor, they likely would have answered “The first,” and perhaps they would also have been willing to pay a premium to secure his services. But if they were to become convinced of the influence of sheer order on their evaluations of relative ability, they presumably would no longer want their initial preference for the first test-taker to influence their choices—or willingness to pay—in this way.15

A similar response may be made to the worry about mode of presentation. Part of the idealization described is that the information an individual receives be vivid as well as complete. But it is not hard to imagine that two modes of presentation of a given body of information might be equally vivid, but different in effect. A story vividly recounted by Dickens might evoke a different response in us than the same story vividly told by Mailer. Of course, it is difficult in such cases to say when we have the same story twice rather than two stories about the same subject: information may be conveyed by mode of representation. Moreover, the information conveyed by a story is a function of both message and receiver. A certain word and its dictionary equivalent may awaken in some hearers, but not others, quite different trains of images. In a related way, vividness, too, depends upon receptivity—purple prose may be vivid to some, deadening to others.16

It is difficult or impossible, then, to characterize mode of presentation in a way entirely unrelated to content. But that merely allows us to put the worry about mode of presentation in another way. For if there are an infinite number of ways of representing a given state of affairs, and if some of these might have evocations that others do not—even when vividness is equal—then it becomes doubtful whether full information could have a
determinate effect. In response it can be said that as one's information becomes more complete, one learns more about the possible range of modes of presentation and their specific effects upon one. Moreover, although language and other forms of representation may be infinitely expressive, our conative systems are not infinitely fine-grained: for any given individual, vast classes of modes of presentation would have essentially the same effect. Effects peculiar to a given class of presentations may be dampened precisely by exposing oneself to an array of effect-producing presentations and to the facts about how these various sorts of presentation differentially affect one. We may not be able to remove such effects, but we may be able self-consciously to play them against one another to weaken the hold of any specific sort of presentation upon our choices, thereby achieving greater independence from mode of presentation.

Yet, even when purified, extended, and compensated as far as possible for effects of order and mode of presentation, an actual individual's beliefs will always fall well short of embodying full information. We must then begin to ask: Of the things we cannot cram into his head, are there any that are of a kind that our psychological theory indicates would change the desires of someone like him, and, if so, how would they change them? We may for example be unable to get a given individual to absorb the whole truth about the behavior of subatomic particles. Yet we may be able to attain reasonable confidence that none of the facts in this subject inaccessible to him would alter his present desires in any significant way. By contrast, we may also be unable to get him to absorb the whole truth about social psychology, but may be reasonably confident that these further facts would quite undermine some of his present attitudes toward his co-workers.

Slowly, we move away from the picture of trying to cram information into a person's head, and instead look at a given individual as something like a personality, a collection of properties that ground dispositions to react in various ways to exposure to certain facts. Just as there is a reduction basis for an individual's current desires — those features of his psychology, physiology, and circumstances in virtue of which he now has these desires — there is a reduction basis for his idealized hypothetical desires. When we ask how his desires would change upon the impact of further information, we appeal to this basis. We, in effect, hold this basis as nearly constant as possible when asking what someone like him would come to desire — or, more precisely, would come to want that he pursue were he to assume the place of his original self.

It is an open matter how determinate our answers to such questions can be. There are, however, two sorts of indeterminateness, only one of
which would be genuinely troubling for the present account. It might turn out that, given what a particular individual is like, more than one set of hypothetical desires is compatible with full information. This sort of “tie for first place” need not be upsetting. Why should we suppose that there could not be several possible lives that would be equally valuable for an individual to lead? Beth was ill suited to be a writer, but a life as an accountant with a strong avocational interest in wildlife preservation might be as good for her as a life as a wildlife foundation administrator with a strong avocational interest in contracts bridge. Either would suit. Indeed, the same might be true of basic values. A life for a given individual in which the value of autonomy plays an important organizing role might tie with a life characterized by less autonomy and more accomplishment. Of course, once certain choices have been made and acted upon, some options may cease to be equal-best. But new equal-best options are bound to emerge.

A second sort of indeterminacy would be more troubling. Suppose that we cannot formulate a psychological theory powerful enough to yield anything like the general principles previously appealed to regarding the interrelation of beliefs and desires. Then we might have no grounds for confidence in any extrapolation beyond what we can actually accomplish by way of fixing an individual’s desires through fixing his beliefs. There are two cases to consider. In the first, the facts about what an individual’s desires would be might be determinate, but we would be unable to extrapolate to them because no general theory of an appropriate kind capable of subsuming these changes is available. Presumably, those who recently have argued against the possibility of a general theory of human action that would establish a system of psychological and psychophysical laws, but who believe that our behavior is law governed under other descriptions, might hold such a view. This would permit us to think that there are facts that determine how an individual’s desires would evolve under even more ideal information, and thus not undermine the present account of intrinsic value, but it would deny us access to these desires—and thus to facts about intrinsic value—through psychological theory.

In the second case, even the idea that there is determinacy about what someone would desire under ideal conditions would be dropped. One might, for example, hold that there are no facts or principles at any level of description that fix the way an individual’s desires would evolve under full information. For example, one might say that since it is nomologically impossible for individuals to become fully informed, one cannot treat the acquisition of full information as a limit process within psychological theory.
In general, it is not an objection to a counterfactual that it involves hypothesizing circumstances that are, in the actual course of things, nomologically impossible. It would be excessively skeptical to insist that there is no fact of the matter about how our lives would be changed were our natural life span to be increased two-fold, or our unassisted memory ten-fold, yet such hypothetical circumstances would involve violation of laws of physiology. Indeed, if we suppose the world to be deterministic, then no contrary-to-fact circumstance could obtain except as the result of the violation of a law.

The objection must be that the case at hand is really quite extreme: the rupture effected in psychological theory by the supposition of equipping otherwise normal people with full information would leave too little of the fabric of that theory intact to support the relevant counterfactuals. But this, too, seems excessively skeptical. It is for theoretically deep reasons that matter cannot achieve frictionlessness or perfect elasticity or absolute zero, yet we may—with the aid of physical theory—see matter as possessing properties in virtue of which it would be disposed to behave in a certain way in such idealized conditions, and different kinds of matter, to behave differently. Similarly, it might be said that owing to the psychological properties of actual people, it is impossible to bring them to a state of full and vivid information, yet we may see them as possessing properties in virtue of which they would be disposed to respond in certain ways to ever more complete and vivid information (supposing a capacity to absorb it), and different kinds of people, to respond differently.¹⁸

Naturalness

One consequence of this discussion is to suggest that, if a psychological theory of the sort I have in mind is possible, then appeal to the hypothetical desires of an idealized individual has an essentially heuristic function. The work is being done by the lawful regularities linking desires, beliefs, and other features of individuals, and by the relevant “initial conditions,” that is, the facts about a given individual’s psychology, physiology, and circumstances that are the reduction basis of his dispositions to desire.

Indeed, I propose to say that what makes some or other end or activity be part of an individual’s good is not the fact that he would, were he ideally informed (and so on), desire that his actual self pursue it, but rather the existence of the reduction basis for that counterfactual, namely, the particular constellation of law-governed features of the actual individual and his circumstances in virtue of which these claims about idealized hypothetical
desires hold. Thus, the truth-condition of the claim that such-and-such is good for a given individual is directly given by the existence of this constellation of features, without detour through idealized desires. We may then take an individual's desires, as they approach idealization in the limit, to be indicators of his good, of the presence of the sort of fit discussed previously between an individual and an end or activity.

This has the advantage of demystifying claims about one's good, and also of suggesting a possible response to an important objection to naturalism about value. According to a view that has wide currency among epistemic naturalists, purportedly factual claims earn their place in our going theory of the world by making some contribution to explanation. But claims about what is valuable have no obvious explanatory role. It would seem always to be possible to explain people's behavior in terms of their actual beliefs and desires without making any reference to whether what they desire really is good. Of course, we might have to make reference to their beliefs about what is good, but that would be just one more piece of descriptive sociology.

How, then, is the naturalist about value to satisfy the demands of epistemic naturalism? Or more generally, can it be said there are natural facts about value if these alleged facts -- unlike other natural facts with which we are familiar -- can make no contribution to explanation?

Consider again Beth, the erstwhile accountant. She desired to become a writer, and that desire forms part of the core of the explanation of her decision to leave accounting to try her hand at other sorts of fiction. Recall that, although she could not have known it at the time, she lacked the talent or personality to be a writer. We may suppose that this lack derives from some underlying facts about her psychology, which in turn derive from some deeper underlying facts about her physiology, circumstances, and so on. These facts help to explain why she fails as a writer, and moreover why her experience as a writer eventually undermines her commitment to writing. Yet on the present account, it is these self-same facts that constitute the fact that a life of writing is not part of her good. Thus, facts about what is or is not part of Beth's good can play a role in explaining her decision to give up writing.

Note that this role is prior to any change in Beth's beliefs about whether the writer's life is a good one for her. For though her loss of the desire to be a writer may explain most immediately why she ultimately abandoned that career, the further and prior fact that writing is not a good career for her explains why she came to lose this desire. Thus, the features of her in virtue of which she lacked the ability to write compelling prose help to
explan why her writing did not win the approval of editors or readers; the features of her in virtue of which she lacked the patience and discipline necessary for long periods of unstructured and unrewarded work help to explain why she became so frustrated and unproductive; and so on. During the entire initial portion of the saga of her editorial rejection, personal frustration, and professional unproductivity, Beth wanted to be a writer, and firmly believed that being a writer was part of her good. This belief and associated desires only came to change as her experience, in which facts about what was or was not good for her played a causal role, grew. This fits a general schema for learning that eventuates in naturalistically justified belief: the fact that p helps to explain why one comes to believe that p.

Note, too, that one’s good can play a role in the evolution of one’s behavior even though one never comes to form an accurate idea of it. Consider Henry, another successful and happy accountant (this is, after all, the 80s) who also desires above all to be a writer, and who also lacks the ability or personality for it. But Henry, alas, has an additional property: he is not very perceptive, especially when it comes to noticing anything at odds with his rather generous view of himself. So when he quits accounting and takes up writing, he attributes his subsequent misery and failure to the idiocy of editors, the torment of true genius, and the decline of the West. There never comes a time when, in retrospect, Henry questions his decision. Let us suppose, however, that were Henry to have surveyed his options with full information and rationality at the time of his choice, he would have wanted that he stay on in accounting rather than attempt writing. Although there are some interesting problems here about whether someone can be gotten to believe unpleasant truths, it may be supposed that were Henry to see vividly the tortuousness, lack of accomplishment, and clumsy self-deception of the life he would lead as a writer, and set this against the pleasant, productive, and sociable existence available to him as an accountant, he would form a firm desire that his passion for writing not be effective. The reduction basis for this desire—which would include Henry’s ability, personality, and circumstances—constitutes the fact that a life as a writer would not be a good life for him. Idiomatically, we would say that “He was not cut out to be a writer.” We may point to this fact to explain why Henry’s life, which as an accountant had been reasonably happy and successful, became such a mess.

Now let us amend the story somewhat. Suppose that, to ease the financial strain of writing, Henry took a part-time job doing accounts for the business of one of his few remaining friends. As he took the job,
he promised himself that he would continue to write, and would return to full-time writing as soon as possible. He believed as strongly as ever that working as an accountant was not part of a life in which he could flourish. However, after several weeks at the new job, during which the necessity of learning the ropes meant that he was quite fully engaged in accounting and was prevented from doing any serious writing, he found his mood improving, and others found his company more bearable. This he took to be evidence that he was all the more ready to write as soon as the accounting work was behind him. He decided to work full time at accounting in order to speed his return to writing. He found he had greater energy and concentration than before, and that the pleasure he had taken in many of the small things in life, which had left him, was beginning to come back. From this he inferred that he was ready at last to begin his novel. But he decided that he needed to stay on a bit longer at accounting, and to take on a few more accounts, in order to earn enough to tide him over the long span of time such an ambitious work would take. And so on. Slowly the papers on Henry’s writing desk yellowed, and his urge to sit down at that desk, or to chastise himself for not doing so, departed. He spent the next thirty years in accounting, always ready to tell you over a drink of his plans to return to writing in his retirement. He in fact spent his retirement in a lucrative second career in real estate. One fall he sold his suburban house and bought a condominium in Florida, and, feeling strangely unmoved, he left for the housecleaners the dusty folders containing his unfinished writing projects to discard, stacked alongside a pile of back issues of The New Yorker and some bundled-up newspapers he had meant to recycle. We cannot explain Henry’s trajectory in terms of his belief that he is fit for a career in accounting, but not writing. He did not believe this. Yet we may be able to explain his trajectory in terms of the suitability for him of the accountant’s life, but not the writer’s. Here, then, is another important kind of learning, in which the fact that p helps to explain why someone acts “in accord with” p, even though he does not come to believe that p.

We can be pictured as beings who form many and varied desires, and in effect try them out by acting upon them, for we tend to keep acting upon those that bring with them some reinforcement. In this process, the sorts of facts about us that constitute our good—in the naturalistic sense in which that notion is understood here—may have considerable opportunity to influence our behavior. Of course, many other processes affect behavior, and as individuals our experimentation, flexibility, and sensitivity are limited. So we cannot expect to have very full knowledge of our good,
or to act as we would if we did. Especially, we cannot expect this once we notice how much information would be necessary to arrive at reliable views about what is good for complex and interactive organisms like us.

Still, we can expect that people may do a reasonable job over a certain range of goods. This would help to explain two widely held views. First, on a number of matters where technical expertise is not required, individuals are held to be the best judges of their own good. We ordinarily think that their choices are more likely in the long run to reflect their good than the choices a third party, however well-meaning, would make for them. That would make sense on the present view, for it is the individual himself who has the most intimate and sustained exposure to experience of a kind to promote learning about his good using the mechanisms just described. And a second truism would make sense as well: we in general think that an individual’s judgment of his own good—or the likelihood that his choices will reflect his good—improves with greater, and especially broader, experience.

I won’t pretend to argue here that these value-involving explanations are well warranted. I can at best put them forward as potential counterexamples to the complaint often voiced against naturalism about value that we cannot even begin to imagine how facts about what is good for us might enter into a scheme explaining what we do, and why.

NOTES

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* I would like to thank Richard Brandt, Michael Bratman, Stephen Darwall, William Frankena, Allan Gibbard, Donald Regan, Michael Smith, and David Velleman for helpful discussion of some of the material contained in this paper.
1. It is controversial whether one can discuss intrinsic value without also discussing moral value. For an account of moral evaluation that dovetails with the account to be offered in the text of non-moral goodness, and that is not prior to it, see my "Moral Realism," The Philosophical Review 95 (April 1986), 163–207. Reprinted here as Chapter 1.
2. The chief difficulties encountered were the imposibility of associating individual hypotheses with particular experiences, owing to the holistic character of theory testing, and the impossibility of motivating a unique choice or weighting among various criteria of theory assessment: empirical adequacy, conservativeness, simplicity, generality, falsifiability, and explanatory unity are only some of the possible candidates, and each admits of diverse formulations.
3. One can, to be sure, incorporate logical principles into principles about what one rationally ought to believe, as in the principle ‘One ought not to believe both p and not-p,’ or in principle (0). Informally, we may say that these are “principles concerning what we logically ought to believe,” although this is elliptical for
“principles concerning what we ought to believe, on the assumption that we seek to bring our beliefs (construed as a system of propositions) and inferences into conformity with logical standards.”

4. I therefore will assume in what follows a version of the doctrine of internalism according to which normative judgments must be linked to the promotion of the ends of those to whom the judgments are applied, in particular, to the satisfaction of their actual or idealized desires.


6. It may be worth saying again that my concern in this essay is with non-moral value. We, of course, also sometimes wish to raise questions about the moral worth of our ends, or, for that matter, about their aesthetic merit. While I believe that these other dimensions of assessment exhibit important relations to intrinsic value, I also believe that clarity is served by recognizing the differences as well as the similarities in their evaluative bases and normative roles.

7. In Brandt’s account of “rational desire,” that which is good for someone is tied to the best available information at the time. On such a view, it might turn out that writing was good for Beth at the time she chose it, since the best information at that time may not have presaged what Beth later, to her regret, discovered. I find it much more natural to say that writing merely appeared good at the time. See Richard C. Brandt, A Theory of the Good and the Right (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 111f.

8. Hypocrisy arises when an individual who says he values X nevertheless does not really want this value to be effective (whether or not he admits this to himself). (Sheila may be in the midst of asking herself whether her earlier – and not infrequent – pronouncements on the value of freedom of action, nature, and family were to a degree hypocritical.) Weakness of the will arises when the desire for X to be effective is present, but some other desire, a desire that one does not upon reflection want to be effective in proportion to its strength, prevails. (Sheila may in the end come to want that her desire to stay put be effective, but then discover that the allure of Metropolis is stronger.) Obviously, these descriptions are very gross. Cf. Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” The Journal of Philosophy 68 (January 1971), 5–20.

9. This notion is not the same as that of an individual’s welfare, for it may turn out that an ideally informed and rational individual would want to seek as an end in itself (were he to step into the place of his present self) the well-being of others as well as himself.

10. Remaining, that is, from among the three mentioned at the opening of the present section.


13. In what follows, I will focus on the problems of full information rather than full rationality. I am assuming that we tend to think ourselves in a better position
to judge how our wants would differ were we fully rational (but had the same 
information we now have) than were we fully informed (but were about as rational 
as we now are). Perhaps we think – not altogether without cause – that the gap 
between our actual condition (at least, in our saner moments) and full instrumental 
reasoning is smaller than the gap between our current beliefs and full information. 
Of course, it is one thing to be fully rational relative to existing information, and 
another to be fully rational relative to complete information. What will be said 
is partly addressed to worries about assessing the instrumental relevance of bits of 
information when one has such an abundance of them.

14. The experiment is reported in Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, Human Inference: 
and Ross emphasize both the difficulty of overcoming some primacy effects and 
the effectiveness of information in offsetting others.

15. The example might be thought an unfair one, since, intuitively, it is uncontroversial 
that order of correct response is simply irrelevant to mathematical ability, and 
since the judgments in the example seem to direct us precisely to the question of 
assessing mathematical ability. However, I have been unable to find a convincing example 
in which both (i) sheer order of receipt of information would have an effect 
upon the net impact of a given body of information and (ii) there are some intuitive 
grounds for thinking that this effect might be relevant to the judgment at hand.

16. Receptivity, in turn, will depend upon an individual's personal history. This gives 
rise to the observation that it may make a great difference to the motivational 
effect of a bit of information whether the individual has had some experience 
that would serve to give it life. The later Beth's hard-won realization that writing 
did not suit her can be expected to have greater force for her than the earlier 
Beth's mere receipt of the news about the preferences of her later self. When, in 
the present idealization, it is required that information be fully vivid, it is in effect 
required that the individual have undergone whatever experience or education 
would be necessary for this. Fortunately, as fiction and drama show, not every 
fact need be directly experienced in order to make a profound impression upon 
us. A well-told or well-acted or well-filmed tale, perhaps one that connects with 
whatever kind of experience one already has had, may do the job.

17. There is evidence in the psychological literature that we develop strategies of 
image-balancing even as children. See W. Mischel and E. Moore, “The Role 
of Ideation in Voluntary Delay for Symbolically-Presented Rewards,” Cognitive 

18. It would have quite drastic effects upon psychological theory to suppose that 
humans had come onto the evolutionary scene without cognitive limitations. Much 
of what we are now like reflects the fact that our cognitive means have been in 
various ways limited. But in assessing counterfactuals about how full information 
would affect us as we now are, we should not let our imagination wander off into 
rewriting history. Ordinary usage shows that counterfactuals do not “backtrack” 
in this way. See the discussion in David Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and 

19. For a parallel criticism of naturalism about moral value, see Mackie, Ethics, and 
especially Gilbert Harman, The Nature of Morality (New York: Oxford University 