On Existence and Value

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Abstract

It may be a deep, yet often ignored, human need for a human being to have value. In this paper, I firstly point out the problem of value, which is, roughly, how to find a way for a human being to have value. Then, I point out the problem of existence, which is a related problem, which is, roughly, how to affirm existence in an absolute manner. After that, I propose a solution to the problem of existence, which is a new way of thinking, which starts with a pure concept of existence, or in other words, a pure concept of "there be". This new way of thinking itself may be worthy of further philosophical research, especially metaphysical research. Finally, in this new way of thinking, I propose a solution to the problem of value, of which the main part is a metaphysical argument for that every entity has value. This paper may help to address the deep, yet often ignored, human need for a human being to have value.

1. The problem of value

It may be a deep, yet often ignored, human need for a human being to have value. In our current world, which is troubled by absurdism and nihilism, this need may be more urgent.

Perhaps the way that we firstly think that can make us have value is to contribute to the society. However, although contributing to the society should be appreciated and encouraged, seeing it as a way of making us have value seems to have some problems.

The main problem is: How can we deduce that a person has value from that he has contributed to the society? We can make this deduction into a more general form, which is that if A has helped B, then A has value. In our particular case, A is the person and B is the society. But is this deduction valid? It seems that if A has helped B, and B has value, then we can deduce that A has value. But it seems that without that B has value, we cannot deduce that A has value from that A has helped B. So, it seems that we need to affirm that B has value before we can deduce that A has value. But how can we affirm that B has value? Perhaps we need to deduce that B has value from

that B has helped C and C has value. But then again, how can we affirm that C has value? Here, we can see that, an argument taking this approach cannot even begin, let alone finish.

Another problem is, even if contributing to the society can make the contributor have value, if this is the only way for a person to have value, then we may have to affirm that some people do not have value. In our world, some people are unfortunately born with some serious illness or disability, and as a result they need much help from the society but cannot contribute to the society. So, if contributing to the society is the only way for a person to have value, then we may have to affirm that such people do not have value, but perhaps most of us do not want to affirm this.

Therefore, we need some other way for a human being to have value.

The main goal of this paper is to solve the problem of value, which is, roughly, how to find a way for a human being to have value. In fact, in this paper I will propose a metaphysical argument for that every human being, and also every thing, has value, simply by virtue of his, her or its existence.

2. The problem of existence

It is obvious that anyone or anything's having value is based on the existence of this person or this thing. (Note that in the broad sense of the word "thing", a person is also a thing.) If someone or something is not existent, then he, she or it cannot have value, just like he, she or it cannot have any attribute. So, not very strangely, when I was dealing with the problem of value, I was led into some investigation on existence. However, I have found that our ordinary view on existence sometimes seems to have some difficulty for philosophical thinking.

This difficulty comes from time, which we are all familiar with. Yet, time may be awkward for philosophical thinking.

Let us consider this case: Imagine that at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2040 ("UTC" refers to Universal Time Coordinated, which is a time standard independent of time zones.), there

will be at least one car in this world, but at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2080, there will not be any car in this world. If this is the case, then, at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2040, people will be able to say: "There is a car.", and at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2080, people will be able to say: "There is not any car.".

Now, let us consider the two propositions appearing above:

P1: There is a car.

P2: There is not any car.

It seems that these two propositions are contradictory to each other. But it seems that they are both true. How can we solve this problem?

Let us consider another case: Imagine that at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2002, a person had a red car, but later this person felt uncomfortable with the red color and asked someone else to paint the car to make it blue, and as a result, at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2003, this car was not red. If this is the case, then, at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2002, the owner of the car could say: "The car is red.", and at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2003, the owner of the car could say: "The car is not red.".

Now, let us consider the two propositions appearing above:

P3: The car is red.

P4: The car is not red.

In these two propositions, "The car" refers to the same car. Therefore, it seems that these two propositions are contradictory to each other. But it seems that they are both true. Again, how can we solve this problem?

The simple solution to them is, obviously, that these propositions are for different time, and consequently they do not have any contradiction. In other words, these propositions are not complete, and they are complete if they are changed to the following propositions, which do not have any contradiction:

P1': At the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2040, there is a car.

P2': At the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2080, there is not any car.

P3': At the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2002, the car is red.

P4': At the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2003, the car is not red.

This is how we think about things ordinarily. This ordinary way of thinking serves our daily lives well. However, in this way of thinking, nothing's existence or attributes can be affirmed in an absolute manner.

This is easy to understand. In this way of thinking, things' (including persons') existence and attributes can only be affirmed based on time, and therefore cannot be affirmed in an absolute manner. In fact, trying to affirm things' existence and attributes in an absolute manner by simply removing the time constraints can lead to contradictions, which has been shown in P1 and P2, and also in P3 and P4.

If we make this restriction absolute, that is, we think that not only in this way of thinking, but absolutely, nothing's existence or attributes can be affirmed in an absolute manner, then we will witness a thought source of nihilism: If nothing's existence can be affirmed in an absolute manner, or in other words, nothing can be affirmed to be existent in an absolute manner, then, it follows that ultimately there is nothing, because if ultimately there is something, then this "something" can be affirmed to be existent in an absolute manner, which contradicts the premise. In fact, this idea is not new. It exists, explicitly or implicitly, in several different idea systems that are nihilistic or are inclined to nihilism.

But why is this related to our seeking of value? Well, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, it is obvious that anyone or anything's having value is based on the existence of this person or this thing. Now, if the existence of someone or something is shaken, as we can see above, then surely the corresponding value is shaken. In other words, the existence of someone or something is the foundation and background of the corresponding value, if there is the corresponding value.

Therefore, in order to solve the problem of value, we need to firstly solve the problem of existence, which is, roughly, how to affirm existence in an absolute manner. Actually, in this paper I will propose a solution to the problem of existence, which will enable us to affirm not only existence, but also attributes, in an absolute manner.

3. The solution to the problem of existence

As shown above, the problem of existence comes from time. Indeed, among the nature of time, there have been some debates.

It may be difficult for us to determine what the nature of time is. However, regardless of what the nature of time is, we can have another way of thinking, which can be a solution to the problem of existence. This way of thinking does not deny time, but does make time minor to existence, which we can see in this paper later.

This way of thinking begins with a pure concept of existence, or in other words, a pure concept of "there be".

This concept denotes that there is something, in an absolute manner, without reference to time. In the sense of this concept, we may have this proposition: There is an entity. (Here, the word "entity" has no real difference from the word "thing". But in this paper, I use the word "entity" to explicitly mean that I may be referring to a person.)

What does it mean to say, in the sense of the pure concept of existence, that there is an entity? It just means that there is an entity. When we think of this proposition, we should not imagine that there is a physical entity occupying some space and some time. Instead, we should only think that there is an entity. This may seem strange, but let us try to follow this way of thinking.

In the sense of the pure concept of existence, we can also have this proposition: There is something. How does "something" differ from "an entity"? Well, they differ "in idea", but they are

the same "in reference". "In idea", an entity is one entity, with the idea of "one", while something is just something, without the idea of "one". However, it is obvious that every "something" is an entity, and every entity is something. Therefore, "something" and "an entity" differ "in idea", but are the same "in reference".

It should be noted that this pure concept of existence is only a concept. It does not imply that there is any entity or any "something" in the sense of this concept. In the following, the existence, in the sense of this concept, of some entities are argued for or discussed.

3.1. The existence of the self

Let us firstly consider the existence of the self. Here, what the "self" refers to depends on the context. For me, the self is myself. For you, the self is yourself. For anyone else, the self is himself or herself.

Using a method that is similar to, but still different from René Descartes' "I think, therefore I am", we can prove that there is the self (that is, "I") and the self is an entity by the following steps:

(1) I go to see some color (for example, to see a blue thing).

(2) It can be affirmed that I have some vision experience.

(3) From that I have some vision experience, it follows that there am I, because otherwise it cannot be the case that I have some vision experience.

(4) From that there am I, it follows that I am something.

(5) As mentioned earlier, it is obvious that every "something" is an entity. Therefore, it follows that I am an entity.

(6) From that there am I and that I am an entity, it follows that there am I and I am an entity.

Here, it should be noted that, although the proposition "I have some vision experience" itself is unrelated to time, it does not mean that I am having some vision experience all the time, from perhaps millions of years ago to the present time. This is not what this proposition means. Instead,

this proposition means that I have some vision experience, which is at a specific time. In other words, I have some vision experience, and this vision experience is at a specific time. But still, the proposition "I have some vision experience" itself is unrelated to time. It is only the vision experience mentioned in this proposition that is at a specific time. That the vision experience is at a specific time is somewhat similar to that in our ordinary way of thinking a physical object is at some specific space.

From here, we can see that in the new way of thinking, not only the concept of existence (or "there be") is somewhat different from that in our ordinary way of thinking, but also the meanings of some propositions are somewhat different from the ordinary meanings.

3.2. The existence of entities that we have perception about

There are (or may be) many entities besides the self, such as physical objects and other human beings. How can we deduce that indeed there are these entities?

Well, this is a difficult question. We have perception that insinuates that there is some entity. For example, I have vision perception that insinuates that there is an entity that can be called "a table". I have another vision perception that insinuates that there is an entity that can be called "a lamp". If we assume that, what our perception insinuates is true, then we can deduce knowledge of the existence and also attributes of many entities from the combination of our perception and this assumption. However, whether this assumption is true, and, if it is true, how can we prove or defend that it is true, are two difficult questions. Anyone who understands the Cartesian scepticism can easily know why these two questions are difficult.

However, for the main goal of this paper, which is to solve the problem of value, it is to a large extent acceptable not to answer these two questions. This is because the main goal of this paper can to a large extent be reduced to proving that the self has value. If this can be proven in the context of the self, then this may be applied to every or nearly every human being in the context of

every or nearly every respective human being. To prove that the self has value strictly, a proof of the existence of the self is needed, but a proof of the existence of other entities are not needed. Therefore, since it is difficult to answer these two questions, and for the main goal of this paper, it is to a large extent acceptable not to answer these two questions, this paper does not seek to answer these two questions. Nevertheless, these two questions may be worthy of further philosophical research.

Now, I am going to show how this new way of thinking can be applied in the practice. In a manner that is more specific but can also be generalized, I am going to show how this new way of thinking can be applied to the four propositions P1, P2, P3, and P4, which are mentioned in the previous section. In fact, this part of this paper is not necessary to solving the problem of value. But it may help us to understand this new way of thinking better.

Let us firstly consider the first two propositions, that is, P1 and P2. In this way of thinking, what should they be transformed to? The answer is that, P1 and P2 should be transformed to the following two propositions respectively ("N" in the names of the propositions stands for "New"):

N1: There is an entity that can be called "a car" and occupies the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2040.

N2: There is not any entity that can be called "a car" and occupies the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2080.

Here, an entity can "occupy" some time. This is, to some extent, similar to that in our ordinary way of thinking, a physical object can occupy some space.

It should be noted that, in N1, the existence of an entity is affirmed in an absolute manner. In fact, from N1 it follows this proposition: There is an entity that can be called "a car". This proposition is not contradictory to N2.

Now, let us consider the two other propositions, which are P3 and P4. In our new way of thinking, they can be transformed into the following two propositions respectively:

N3: The entity, which can be called "a car", has the attribute "being red at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2002".

N4: The entity, which can be called "a car", does not have the attribute "being red at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2003".

It should be noted that, in N3, an attribute of an entity is affirmed in an absolute manner. Although this attribute itself involves time, the proposition N3 itself is not based on time. The proposition N3 merely denotes that, the entity, which can be called "a car", has a specific attribute. Clearly, this is not based on time. It is that specific attribute that involves time.

N3 and N4 are respectively equivalent to the following two propositions, which may be simpler:

N3': The entity, which can be called "a car", is (red at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2002).

N4': The entity, which can be called "a car", is not (red at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2003).

Here, I use parentheses to indicate that the words inside the parentheses are at first combined to form a meaning. Without the parentheses, the propositions N3' and N4' may be interpreted as propositions in the ordinary way of thinking. For example, without parentheses, N3' will be written as the following:

The entity, which can be called "a car", is red at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2002.

This can be interpreted as the following proposition (in this proposition I also use parentheses to indicate that the words inside the parentheses are at first combined to form a meaning), which is a proposition in the ordinary way of thinking:

(The entity, which can be called "a car", is red) at the time UTC 14:00:00, January 1st, 2002.

We can see that, this new way of thinking does not deny time, but does make time minor to existence. By contrast, in our ordinary way of thinking, existence is minor to time, since in our ordinary way of thinking, existence can only be affirmed based on time.

I want to point out that, this new way of thinking does not intend to cancel our ordinary way of thinking. Both of them may be feasible ways of thinking. If ultimately, our ordinary way of thinking is incorrect (here I do not intend to determine or suggest whether this is the case), it can still be a convenient way of expressing and communicating. This is like that, if some people think that the sun is static and the earth is orbiting around the sun, they can still say that the sun rises and goes down. In fact, our ordinary way of thinking seems to serve our daily lives better, while the new way of thinking seems to serve some philosophical, and especially metaphysical, thinking better.

This new way of thinking itself may be worthy of further philosophical research, especially metaphysical research. There may be some related topics and questions that are worth probing. For example, in this new way of thinking, it is possible to consider an entity that is "out of time" and does not occupy any time, but this is impossible in our ordinary way of thinking. But for the goal of solving the problem of value, it is sufficient for us to stop here.

4. The solution to the problem of value

Now, after (if I am correct) solving the problem of existence, we may start to solve the problem of value, in the new way of thinking.

In this section, I propose a metaphysical argument for the proposition that every entity (including, but not limited to every human being) has value. More specifically, for any entity M, this argument argues for the proposition that M has value.

This argument starts by arguing for the proposition that M is good. Now, to avoid immediate confusion, I want to make some clarification on this proposition. By the word "good", this

proposition does not mean "morally good", which is about morality, or "overall good", which is roughly about whether the goodness of M outweighs the badness of M. It may be the case that it is not the case that these two attributes apply to every entity. Instead, the word "good" in this proposition means "good in some way". So, what this proposition really expresses is that M has some goodness.

Actually, the idea that every entity has some goodness is not a new idea. It can be found in the works of several philosophers. For example, Saint Thomas Aquinas, in Article 1 ("Whether goodness differs really from being?") of Question 5 ("Goodness in general") of Part 1 of Summa Theologiae, proposes a metaphysical argument for this idea [1]. Besides, in the book "Being and Goodness: the concept of the good in metaphysics and philosophical theology", Scott MacDonald and others discuss some metaphysical arguments for this idea [2].

However, it seems that these arguments are not very satisfactory. In this paper, I am not going to talk about why I think so, because this is irrelevant. What I am going to do here is to propose my own argument for the proposition that M is good, which seems to be more satisfactory.

This argument for the proposition that M is good is the following:

(1) It is obvious that M is M.

(2) From that M is M, it follows that M is-M. Here, I use the expression "is-M" to express a single concept of "is M". Therefore, "is-M" is a single predicate.

(3) From that M is-M, it follows that M is positive. Here, like the case of "good", I use the word "positive" to mean "positive in some way". Ultimately, the validity of this step is regarded as self-evident. The idea behind this step is this: Being-M (here, I choose "being-M" as the gerund of "is-M", just like "going" is the gerund of "go") is an affirmation, and an affirmation implies some positiveness.

(4) From that M is positive, it follows that M is good. The validity of this step is regarded as self-evident.

Now, the argument for the proposition that M is good has finished. This argument is the first part of the argument for the proposition that M has value. After it, the value argument continues. So, I give successive numbers to the succeeding steps of the value argument, which are the following.

(5) If M does not have value, then M is absurd, and therefore M is not good. This is because being absurd is so awful that it renders it impossible for M to be good.

(6) However, M is good. Therefore, M has value.

Now, the whole argument for the proposition that M has value has finished. We can see that the proposition that M has value is derived from the proposition that M is good. It may be the case that, the idea that that an entity has value can be derived from that this entity is good is not a completely new idea. John F. Wippel seems to have this idea in a paper [3]. However, it seems that in that paper he does not provide an argument for this idea. It seems that this idea is not obvious enough to be self-evident and therefore it needs an argument.

We have got an argument, which is essentially a metaphysical argument, for the proposition that M has value. But we may feel that this argument is strange. We may feel that the value appears strangely. We may ask: How can this argument be true? Is there any easy way for us to understand the appearance of the value?

To address such confusion, I propose a guess here. It should be easy for us to understand that M is-M. It may be the case that the affirmation being-M implies some positiveness, and M has this positiveness, and this positiveness is some goodness, and this goodness is some value. This is only a guess, but it does show us how the argument may be true.

It should be noted that, the main part of the value argument is to argue for the proposition that M is good. From the proposition that M is good, it is easy to reach the conclusion that M has value. Therefore, if there is any other argument for the proposition that M is good, we can easily have another argument for the proposition that M has value.

Now, let us combine the previous section and the value argument in this section to obtain a solution to the problem of value. The previous section has proved, in the context of the self, that there is the self and the self is an entity. Now, the value argument in this section, which applies to every entity, can be used to prove that the self has value. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is the self and the self is an entity, which has value. The whole reasoning may be done in the context of every or nearly every human being. This is a solution, which I propose, to the problem of value.

5. Summary

In this paper, I firstly point out the problem of value, which is, roughly, how to find a way for a human being to have value. Then, I point out a related problem, that is, the problem of existence, which is, roughly, how to affirm existence in an absolute manner. After that, I propose a solution to the problem of existence, which is a new way of thinking, which starts with a pure concept of existence, or in other words, a pure concept of "there be". This new way of thinking itself may be worthy of further philosophical research, especially metaphysical research. Finally, in this new way of thinking, I propose a solution to the problem of value, of which the main part is a metaphysical argument for that every entity has value. This paper may help to address the deep, yet often ignored, human need for a human being to have value.

Acknowledgements

I sincerely acknowledge Parmenides of Elea, Saint Thomas Aquinas and René Descartes.

The ideas of the three philosophers have given me important inspirations in my journey of thinking

towards the ideas expressed in this paper.

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