

# Value

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The main problem is this: How does value, positive and negative, come to be? Is it a gift and burden from on high? Does it arise from below, out of physical reality, somehow? Or does it arise on the middle level, as it were: is it simply a matter of taste, or simply a matter of feelings that evolved as human beings evolved? That is to say, is it a matter of human nature or human choice? In a word, how is it that the reality we know shows this aspect that we call value?

Value is a slippery topic. It's difficult to talk sensibly about it. There are several reasons for this.

To begin with, the concept of value is abstract and hence difficult to grasp, like any other abstract concept. Moreover, it presupposes the concept of rationality, which itself is abstract and difficult to grasp.

More importantly, just as in the case of consciousness and for precisely the same reason, to deal with value, as people usually conceive of it, is to deal with a something-I-know-not-what with properties-I-know-not-what.

And just as in the case of consciousness, it's necessary to achieve a full understanding of the operations of the brain in order to understand value thoroughly, but of course a full understanding of the brain lies in the future.

Roughly, to say that something is valuable is to say that it makes sense to create it, to acquire it, to maintain it, to prolong it, to acquire

more of the same kind, to help others to do so, and so on.

This is a question of semantics, of the meaning of an expression, but sometimes it's important to get the semantics straight, though language is certainly not the key to the question of value. To expand a little on the definition just offered, to say that something is valuable, or good, is to say that it's desirable, that it's rational to go for it. Ice cream is good, so try it! That makes sense just as it stands. Ice cream is good, so stay away from it if you can! That doesn't make sense as it stands. It makes sense only if there's some reason to avoid what is good - if you'll be punished for indulging, or something else of the sort.

In many cases, it appears that an experience is good, or valuable, in that it's enjoyable. It feels good, like a walk through the woods by the lake on a sunny spring day. It involves considerable pleasure. It's enjoyable, and it's good for precisely that reason. In calling it good, then, do you go beyond calling it enjoyable?

Yes, you do, for "This experience is enjoyable" and "This experience is good" mean different things. You note that your experience is enjoyable, and then you decide that it's good. In deciding that it's good you take a further step. You decide that it's worthwhile to repeat the experience on another occasion, that it makes sense for others to take the trouble to get such experiences for themselves, and so on.

To say that it's enjoyable, then, is to say one thing, and to say that it's valuable is to say another. So it might appear that there's a gap of some sort between the natural order on the one hand and value on the other. But it isn't necessarily so. Maybe there is no gap here. Maybe value is simply part of the natural order.

From antiquity to the present, some philosophers have argued that only pleasure is good and only pain bad in the final analysis. It might be possible to combine this with the thesis that consciousness is quite simply

neural activity in the brain.

The question of value, of good and bad, is distinct from that of morality, of right and wrong. The latter has to do with choice and action: is it right, wrong, or merely permissible to do this or that? You can imagine a universe in which there is great good and also great evil, in the sense of horrendously bad situations, but in which there are no agents. Things just happen, good things and bad things, and there is simply no such thing as controlling it. In that universe there is such a thing as value, for there are both good and bad situations and it matters what happens, but there is no such thing as morality, because there's no possibility of doing anything about it. Ought implies can. You can't say that a person ought to do something if he just can't do it. And in that universe, by hypothesis, there is nobody and nothing that can, so there is no ought and no morality.

First for the question of value!

In this universe there is such a thing as positive value, and in addition, such a thing as negative value. However it is, whatever the details, health is of positive value and illness of negative value, for example.

Moreover, there is greater and lesser positive value, and greater and lesser negative value. A profound musical experience, for example, is of more value than a lick of candy, and constant, excruciating pain is worse than a slight, passing headache.

You can refer to this circumstance as the fact of value, if you wish, but it doesn't matter very much what you call it. It's a fact, and it remains a fact whether recognized or not, however labeled, and however conceived or misconceived.

Due to the fact of value, some situations are better than others. It's better to be well than to be ill, for example, and very much better to live in a just, prosperous, democratic society than in a police state in constant

fear and severely deprived, as so many do today.

Because one situation is better than another, it matters what happens. It's better to stay well than to fall ill, and so on.

In a word, in this universe, things *matter*, and they matter because there is greater and lesser positive and negative value.

Philosophers distinguish things that are of value just for what they are from things that are of value for other reasons.

Money is an obvious example of the latter. In itself, it's just "pieces of paper coated with chlorophyll," or numbers in a computer, but it can of course be exchanged for goods or services. Exercise is of value in that it makes you feel good and improves your strength and health - that is, in that it yields something else, pleasure, or leads to something else, strength and health. In view of these two states of affairs, money and exercise are said to be of extrinsic value. This accords with the common way of speaking: money and exercise are of value, even if they aren't of value just for what they are.

It stands to reason that if A is of value only in that it has something to do with B, in that it leads to B, for example, and B is of value only in that it has something to do with C, and so on to infinity, then nothing is of value. There must be something that is of value just for what it is. The value of that something is called intrinsic value.

Some things are undoubtedly valuable just for what they are. A welcome hug from a loved one is an example. Who can doubt that you're right in judging that experience good? A fine walk by the lake is another. This is certainly a good experience, just for what it is. No amount of money can buy a better one.

And some things are undoubtedly evil just for what they are. Prolonged, extreme pain that serves no purpose is an example. To deny this argues want of imagination.

It appears, however, that most things have no value, positive or negative, just for what they are - a pen, for example. A pen can be used to write, and hence it has extrinsic value, but if it lacked all extrinsic value its existence would be a matter of indifference.

Perhaps it's better, however, to distinguish that which has value (aka what has intrinsic value) from that which produces it, can be exchanged for it, or so on (aka what has extrinsic value). In other words, on the one hand there are things of value, whatever they might be, and on the other, there is that which yields them, leads to them, can be used to bring them about or to acquire them, and so on.

Consider a parallel example. Villagers are in the woods collecting firewood. The work they do is one thing. The upshot, a pile of firewood, is quite another. The work yields a pile of firewood, but no one would run the two together. No one would call the work "extrinsic firewood," and the firewood itself, "intrinsic firewood."

In the same spirit, then, let's say that only intrinsic value counts as value. This goes against the common way of speaking, but it should bring clarity in the long run. As I use the term here, then, a pen, for example, is not of value at all. Rather, you can use it to write something, and the upshot, in the long or the short term, might be something that is of value.

In some possible universes, it doesn't matter what happens.

Imagine a universe devoid of life from beginning to end. It's expanding, like our universe, and stars and galaxies have formed, and rocky planets with rocky moons, but, for whatever reason you choose, no life has evolved anywhere in it. Clearly, in that universe, all is a matter of indifference. No particular situation is better or worse than another. Is it better for there to be stars that are massive, hot, and short-lived, like Rigel in our sky, or for there to be no such stars? It's neither better nor worse, of course. It just doesn't matter what types of stars there are and are not in

that universe. But since there's no situation that's better than another, it doesn't matter what happens. Is it better that this space rock and that one collide, or that they sail past each other without colliding? Clearly, it doesn't matter. If it happens it happens, if it doesn't it doesn't, and that's the end of the matter.

It's not a bad universe, really, because nothing bad happens in it, but clearly, it's not a good universe either. It just is.

Now imagine another universe. This one is not barren. On the contrary, it's full of life. On many planets and moons, there are forests, savannas, mountains, sparkling rivers, lakes, and oceans. These ecosystems are brimming with life of countless forms, some comparable to terrestrial flora, some comparable to terrestrial fauna, and some, by far most, very different from any form of life that we've encountered. If we were there, we would find all of this quite stunning. We would find the entire universe beautiful, even more splendid than ours, and many places in it very comfortable. For us, it would be paradise, if only we were there.

But we aren't there, and neither is anybody else. That is to say, there are no conscious entities at all. The animal-like entities, for example, are alive, but no more conscious than a child's teddy bear. Living, but no more conscious than a stone.

Let's say that the existence of that lush imaginary universe, lush to us, simply doesn't matter to any sentient being anywhere, not ever and not in any way. No sentient beings exist there, no humans, no sentient biological entities of any other species, no sentient robots with computer brains, and so on. Moreover, no sentient being has the slightest inkling of its existence, and none can get there. And so on. That entire universe goes unseen, unheard, and unfelt throughout its history, from beginning to end. Does it matter what happens there, then? No, again, it doesn't. By hypothesis it doesn't matter to any sentient being, and hence it just doesn't matter.

So long as the existence of that universe, lush and splendid as it would be to our eyes, has no effect on sentient beings, or more generally, on whatever consciousness does exist elsewhere, it's a matter of total indifference.

Some philosophers dispute this conclusion, but it makes a great deal of sense.

It appears that value is closely connected with consciousness, whatever the connection might be.

Why is a barren universe devoid of value, positive and negative? It stands to reason that it's devoid of value because it's devoid of consciousness. Why is it that even a universe teeming with life but devoid of conscious beings is devoid of value, too, for this appears to be the case? Presumably, it's precisely because it's devoid of conscious beings and hence of consciousness.

It appears that value is closely connected with pleasure and pain in particular.

In most contexts, however, it's better to speak of positive and negative consciousness, rather than pleasure and pain. There are many different levels of pleasure, from the simple sensation of a cool breeze on a hot day, for example, to the highest experiences of love, poetry, music, and the like, and perhaps beyond. In the case of the higher human pleasures, the word "joy" might be more appropriate. The pleasure of an alligator sunning itself is one thing, the joy of a human being in love is another, and the yet higher pleasure of a hypothetical alien far above the human level is yet another. Similarly for the negative side, pain.

Imagine a universe, then, in which there are animals, or animal-like beings, or plant-like beings for that matter, or living beings of some other sort, that see and hear, smell and taste, remember, think, and dream. They are conscious - just as fully conscious as we are. But in spite of that, they

have no good feelings and no bad feelings. They simply have no positive or negative feelings at all. They see, but their sense of vision gives them neither pleasure nor pain. Nothing strikes them as beautiful or ugly. And similarly for their other senses and their other mental operations. In sum, the conscious beings in that universe are indeed conscious, but there's not the slightest tinge of positive or negative feeling to their consciousness. With respect to feeling, positive and negative, their inner lives, to use a common expression, are entirely neutral. Their consciousness simply lacks those two aspects.

This might be very unlikely indeed from an evolutionary point of view, but that's neither here nor there. Just suppose that it's so. Then it makes sense to conclude that in that universe there's no such thing as value, even though there is such a thing as consciousness. What is there to care about in that universe? Nothing gives joy, and nothing hurts.

In sum, it appears that positive consciousness is a necessary condition of positive value: if there is no positive consciousness, then there is no such thing as positive value. And it appears that negative consciousness is a necessary condition of negative value.

But if consciousness must exist in order for value to exist, and even more so, if positive and negative consciousness, or at least one of them, must exist in order for value to exist, then this is a clue of the first importance. Unfortunately, it's difficult to say whether it is indeed so.

There's a further consideration. Why is it right to work for human happiness? Obviously, because to do so successfully is to bring positive value into the world. And why is it wrong to bring about unnecessary suffering? Because to do so is to bring negative value into the world for no reason. But this suggests that positive consciousness is of positive value, and negative consciousness of negative value.

It might even be that positive consciousness comes down to the same

thing as positive value, and negative consciousness to the same thing as negative value, once all the verbiage has been cleared away. But nothing I've said proves this. It's impossible to prove such things without bringing observation into play, just as it's impossible to prove things about elephants without bringing observation into play, without laying eyes on elephants.

Value is closely connected with motivation, the various things that move people and other animals to act as they do.

People make considerable efforts to acquire what they take to be of positive value, as for example an attractive mate, good health, and money, and avoid what they take to be of negative value, as for example illness. Even a crocodile pursues a good dining experience, as for example a young antelope, and avoids what hurts, as an attack by a hippopotamus. It doesn't verbalize any of this, of course, because it doesn't have language. But it's behavior nevertheless shows a primitive sense of values, one that is evident in the motives that figure in its behavior.

If something has positive value, moreover, it makes sense to act to preserve or maintain it, as for example a fine painting, to try to acquire it, as a fine house, or others like it, as a fine experience, to make more of it, as nutritious food, and so on. An approach response is in order. On the other hand, if something has negative value, it makes sense to get rid of it, as the institution of war, or to avoid it, as a disease. An avoidance response is in order. This, again, is built into the meaning of the expression "value."

Surely this connection between value and motivation is significant.

In the course of evolution, two remarkably effective mechanisms of motivation have evolved among many animal species, including humans: that of positive consciousness, or the pleasure mechanism, and that of negative consciousness, or the pain mechanism. This circumstance is

interesting in that it involves both motivation and positive and negative consciousness, and both appear to be connected with value.

Presumably, these two mechanisms have evolved precisely because they are effective. Roughly speaking, positive consciousness pulls. It brings about an approach response. And negative consciousness pushes. It brings about an avoidance response.

Why are the pleasure and pain mechanisms such effective motivators? Perhaps there are several reasons. To begin with, they don't involve deliberate calculation. The flame hurts, so you withdraw your hand. Or, if you withdraw it reflexively, even before it starts to hurt, still you've learned to keep your hand away from flame. You don't have to reason, "Flame will damage my hand, and if my hand is damaged I can't use it very well, so I'd better keep it out of the flame." You don't have to reason in this way or in any other. You've learned, and an animal like a squirrel can learn in the same way. Secondly, they are very powerful motivators. Strong pleasure or the promise of it is almost irresistible, and severe pain even more irresistible. There might be additional reasons.

Presumably, then, positive and negative consciousness appeared in the course of evolution because they can fulfill the functions they do in motivation. It's not surprising that the forces of evolution should have given rise to them, for a positive experience, a pleasurable one, is a neural event in the subject's brain, and a negative experience, a painful one, is a neural event of a different sort, and it's not surprising that evolution should have given rise to these physical phenomena.

All of this suggests a theory of the case. It runs as follows:

Pleasure and pain, or better, positive and negative consciousness, evolved as mechanisms of motivation. But now that they exist, and precisely in that they exist, there is such a thing as value. Positive consciousness is of positive value, negative consciousness is of negative

value, and, at bottom, nothing else is of value positive or negative. But consciousness is a natural, physical phenomenon, and hence so is value, even if our abstract, occult, indirect ways of speaking of value suggest otherwise.

If this is correct, then the entire phenomenon of value is a side effect, as it were, of the pleasure and pain mechanisms of motivation.

As for the thesis that only positive consciousness is of positive value and only negative consciousness of negative value:

On the present account, it's not terribly mysterious that this is so. It's so due to the way in which value came to be. To be sure, there's a great deal to the universe that lies beyond our present knowledge and it's impossible to say what a full knowledge would entail, but as far as our present knowledge goes, only positive and negative consciousness are of value, positive and negative, at bottom.

In order to make a good case for other candidates, besides positive and negative consciousness, it's necessary to formulate an alternative account of the origin and nature of value.

The many philosophers, then, including Epicurus, who maintain that positive consciousness is the only thing of value (or the only thing of value at bottom, or the only thing that is of value just for what it is, or so on), and negative consciousness the only thing of negative value, are correct.

But what about the virtues, such as honesty? Isn't it the case that it's best to be honest though the heavens fall? What about knowledge and wisdom? Isn't it better to be wise and unhappy than foolish and happy? What about an area of wild, untamed nature? Isn't that of value just for what it is, even if nobody benefits from it, even if nobody knows about it? What about life itself? Isn't that of value even if it's full of sadness? Aren't all these things of intrinsic value? All have advocates, and it's just common sense that many highly diverse things are of value, most of them not

because they bring joy, but just because they are what they are.

But none of these other candidates is convincing. No, it isn't best to be honest though the heavens fall. If honesty will make the heavens fall, then surely it's best, not just prudent, but best, to be dishonest. And this is evident in small ways in everyday life. Sometimes you must be dishonest to avoid hurting people's feelings. As for knowledge, in a world in which knowledge brings nothing but misery, clearly it's best not to know. In such a world, there's no such thing as wisdom. There's only such a thing as knowing too much. In the real world in which we live, it's best to be wise and unhappy only in that wisdom brings greater happiness in the long run. Wild, untamed nature is of value, positive or negative, depending solely on the consciousness that flourishes there, unless it affects conscious beings, or more generally consciousness, elsewhere. The human race, after all, has spent several hundred thousand years escaping from wild, untamed nature. Life itself is relevant to value only insofar as it supports consciousness.

In sum, it's plausible to suggest that the entire phenomenon of value is a side effect of the pleasure and pain mechanisms of motivation, and that only pleasure is of positive intrinsic value and only pain of negative intrinsic value.

As for the thesis that value is a purely natural, physical phenomenon:

Let's say you judge correctly that an experience you have is valuable: positive, worth prolonging, worth repeating, and so on. Then the neuroscientist is in a position to make just the same judgment in different terms, purely physical ones.

You judge that your experience is good, then. Is that judgment on the intuitive and emotional side, or on the logical and intellectual side? The former, surely. It's an intuitive, emotional judgment because you don't perceive that which you judge. You have an experience and you judge it

to be good, but you don't see that experience with the eyes in your head. Hence you're in no position to make an intellectual judgment. You lack the requisite information.

Does that mean that your judgment is irrational? No, it doesn't. It's intuitive and emotional, not irrational. You reflect, "This is a splendid fragrance." Obviously, that judgment doesn't violate reason in any way. By way of contrast, if you argue, "This fragrance is splendid, therefore God exists," you do violate reason, because the conclusion, that God exists, doesn't follow, whether God exists or not.

To summarize to this point, you judge quite reasonably that since your experience has a certain property, that of being enjoyable, it is good, that is, worth prolonging, repeating, and so on. So, what is all this "worth prolonging or repeating" business?

As you know very well, as any normal human being knows, there is something about an enjoyable experience that prompts approach. You as an organism try to prolong it, or to bring about a repetition of it. That something about the experience, however, whatever it is, must be a physical property of it, since all the properties of any experience are physical. Hence it is something that the neuroscientist can see on the screen of the brain monitor. The same goes for a pain. As any normal human being knows in that he or she has experienced countless pains, there is something about a pain that prompts avoidance as opposed to approach. You cut the pain short if you can, and try to avoid a repetition, unless some thought process, rational or irrational, or some other extraneous factor dictates otherwise. Again, that something must be a physical property of the pain, and hence in principle it lies open to observation by the neuroscientist. The neuroscientist can see what's happening.

The neuroscientist, then, is in a position to see with the eyes in her head just why you, as an organism, show an approach response to the one

neural event, the one you conceive of as enjoyable, and an avoidance response to the other, the one you conceive of as painful. But the fact that the one neural event and the other are that way, the way she observes them to be, and the fact that the enjoyable experience is desirable or intrinsically good and the pain undesirable or intrinsically bad, are one and the same fact conceived of in two different ways, the neuroscientist's way and yours respectively. So if you judge correctly that your experience is intrinsically good, the neuroscientist can make a parallel judgment, which is to say, exactly the same judgment, but in her own purely physical terms.

To put it simply, if the brain monitor renders a clear, detailed, complete picture of your enjoyable experience, the neuroscientist is in a position to say: "Given the nature of this neural event, it's clear that the organism will strive to prolong this state of affairs and to bring about a repetition of it." And similarly, if the brain monitor renders a comparable picture of a pain, the neuroscientist is in a position to say: "Given the nature of this neural event, it's clear that the organism will strive to bring an end to this state of affairs and to avoid it in the future."

This makes a great deal of sense. You judge that your experience is desirable on the grounds that it's enjoyable - in other words, on the grounds that it has a certain property, that of being enjoyable. But that property is a physical property. Let's call it property P. So you judge that your experience is desirable on the grounds that it has physical property P. You conceive of property P very inadequately for the purposes of theoretical understanding, as the property of being enjoyable, but that's neither here nor there. What makes the experience desirable is in fact the physical property in question, P. It's just that the neuroscientist conceives of desirability in her own terms, not as an inexplicable something, but in terms of the behavior to be expected of the organism in view of the

physical properties of the neural event.

In contrast to your judgment, the neuroscientist's judgment is of course more logical and intellectual than intuitive and emotional. But like your judgment, it is of course perfectly rational. This is not to say that you make one judgment and the neuroscientist another, for again, the two judgments are one and the same judgment expressed in two different ways. You say, "This experience is enjoyable and hence good." She says, "This neural event shows property P, and hence it's to be expected that the organism will act to prolong or repeat it, unless some extraneous factor enters the equation." But this comes down to the same thing.

In judging that your experience is good, you go beyond saying that it's enjoyable. Just so, in judging that the neural event is such that the organism naturally shows an approach response, the neuroscientist goes beyond saying that it has property P. On your side, the experience is good in that it's enjoyable. Just so, on the neuroscientist's side, the neural event is such that the organism naturally shows an approach response in that it has property P. The neural event is such that you as an organism naturally show an approach response as a matter of fact, the experience is good just for what it is as a matter of fact, and these facts are one and the same fact conceived of in two different ways.

Now let's tie these two ideas together:

Let's say that your enjoyable experience is simply a whiff of mint, for example. You judge that it's a good experience, and of course you're right. It is indeed a good experience. But why is it good? It's good because it's enjoyable, of course: enjoyable, therefore good. We're talking about intrinsic good now, so any bad effects that might ensue are beside the point. Your whiff of mint might cause you to lose sight of the traffic situation around you and thus land you in the hospital or the morgue, but that's neither here nor there.

But that means, your experience is good in that it has a certain characteristic, a certain property, that of being enjoyable, or in other words, pleasant. All the properties it has, however, are physical. You conceive of one of those physical properties, a complex one, perhaps, in your nonphysical terms, as the property of being enjoyable. But that's irrelevant, too. Your judgment that the experience is good is based on the fact that it has a certain physical property, for all that you conceive of that property inadequately, in nonphysical terms.

So if an experience is good in that it's enjoyable, then it's good in that it has a certain physical property.

People seek pleasure, then, because it has a physical property visible to the neuroscientist on the screen of a brain monitor, and avoid pain because it has a contrasting property, likewise visible. Nothing but a neural event or a comparable physical event with property P causes the approach response in question, and nothing but a neural or comparable physical event with property Q causes the avoidance response in question. Hence nothing but such an event is to be regarded as desirable or undesirable just for what it is. A barbell doesn't have property P or property Q, nor does a roofing tile, nor does a star in the sky, nor does wisdom, nor does good character. A barbell might well be of value, to follow the common way of speaking, or a roofing tile, or wisdom, or good character, but not intrinsically, to make the philosopher's distinction.

Many philosophers agree, stating the thesis in the subject's terms, not in neurological ones.

This is a theory, and the purpose of a theory is to explain things. What does this theory explain, then?

1) It explains how it is that there's a connection between consciousness and value. Positive consciousness is of positive value, precisely in that it has the physical properties it does, and similarly for negative

consciousness, and nothing else is of value positive or negative.

2) It explains how it is that there's a connection between value and motivation. The very phenomenon of value is a side effect of the pain and pleasure mechanisms of motivation.

3) It explains value as a natural phenomenon. Positive and negative consciousness arose naturally in the course of evolution, and the very fact of their existence is the fact of value. This is of the first importance, for you cannot be said to understand value until you understand it in natural terms.

In order to count as scientific, a theory must make predictions that it's possible to confirm or disconfirm in observation. This theory predicts that value disappears entirely when positive and negative consciousness are removed from the picture, and reappears when they are reinserted.

It's impossible, however, to eliminate positive and negative consciousness from the universe to see what happens. Instead, you must consider highly limited examples.

Let's consider one such example, then, that of music. People value music very highly, and they find it pleasurable. The theory predicts that if they don't find it pleasurable, they won't value it. But is this so? It might be difficult to perform the experiment, to eliminate experimental subjects' pleasure in music, but fortunately that's not really necessary, for the answer is obvious. If people don't find music pleasurable, then they won't value it. It won't be music to them at all. And if, following that, music is made considerably more pleasurable to them than it was in the first place, then they will value it all the more. But this confirms the theory.

It is simple cases like this that count as valid tests. Here is another:

If an animal is given food but doesn't find it tasty, will it value that food? Of course not. In this case, too, there is no real need to perform the

experiment, and the theory is confirmed. Where there is no enjoyment, there is no positive value, and hence there is no behavior that indicates that the item in question is valued.

It won't do to say that an animal doesn't value anything. Human beings are animals, after all, and our experience and behavior, even if more complex than that of other terrestrial animals, is continuous with that of the more highly evolved mammals at the least. To say that an animal doesn't value its food is absurd.

As for more intricate cases, they cannot be used to construct a valid test. Consider money, for example. People value money. But do they value it even if it cannot be used to create positive consciousness for anybody or to avoid negative consciousness? In order to perform the experiment, it's necessary to eliminate all positive and negative consciousness, all pleasure and pain, and then determine whether money is still valued, but that's not practical.

In general, it's impossible to determine the root facts of value, assuming that there are such facts, by canvassing people's values, because as a rule people's thinking on questions of value is more or less confused, usually more. People value what is not valuable, fail to value what is valuable, routinely confuse extrinsic and intrinsic value, make huge mistakes in calculating what will lead to what, put far too much weight on lessons they learned from their parents as children, and so on. The result is a spaghetti plate of confusion that tells us very little if anything about the facts of value, although it might tell us a great deal about human psychology and capacities.

There is nothing to work with, then, but simple, clear-cut cases like that of music, and they obviously confirm the theory presented here.

As usually conceived, value, like consciousness, is a blind concept.

Consciousness is a blind concept in the sense that for you, any

experience you have is absolutely a something-I-know-not-what with properties-I-know-not-what. As far as human life goes, however, nothing but a positive experience is valuable at bottom, and that which makes it valuable lies in those properties-I-know-not-what. Thus value is a blind concept, too, in the same sense.

The point is that when you sit there and mull over your life and what's good and bad in it, that which is good and bad at bottom simply doesn't appear to you in any way at all. You simply do not perceive it, just as and precisely in that your own experience doesn't appear to you.

As in the case of consciousness, there is no gap in the neuroscientist's knowledge of the value of your experience.

The value of your experience lies in its physical properties. But in principle those physical properties lie fully open to the view of the neuroscientist. Hence there is nothing to the value of your experience that lies beyond her ken. It's all right there on the screen of the brain monitor.

Value can be observed in sense perception.

This follows, of course. Value comes down to positive consciousness, and it's possible to observe that in sense perception, though it requires special instruments and specialist understanding to do so. Our instruments are not yet good enough and the requisite specialist understanding has not yet been achieved, but that is beside the point.

In order to think clearly about value, it's necessary to think about it in physical terms.

We are used to thinking of good, bad, and even worse, evil, in the subject's introspective, emotional terms. But the subject's information is severely limited, because he doesn't perceive his own experience. In order to think clearly about consciousness, it's necessary to think about it in physical terms, and this holds, of course, for pleasure and pain in particular. It stands to reason, then, that in order to answer any difficult question

about intrinsic value, it's necessary to bring sense perception into play, to look and see, and to think in objective, intellectual terms. In effect, desirability, basic goodness or value, is a fact of nature, a physical fact that can be observed in sense perception. Similarly for basic evil.

Usually the subject expresses his pleasure and pain and his values outwardly. A normal observer or listener understands. This understanding is of the utmost importance for practical purposes and in human relations, but it isn't theoretical, and it's no substitute for the neuroscientist's perception of the subject's experiences. The normal observer or listener doesn't perceive the situation any more than the subject does.

Value is a natural phenomenon. It's a fact of nature, like the make-up of the moon, the evolution of a star, love among humans, or any other natural phenomenon you might care to name.

Let's engage in a momentary flight of fancy. Imagine that birds and only birds are of positive value just for what they are precisely in that they're constituted as they are. This isn't so, of course, but let's say that it is. Imagine further that snakes and only snakes are of negative value just for what they are in that they're constituted as they are. Then, other things being equal, the existence of birds makes the world a better place, and the existence of snakes makes it a worse place. When you consider the interactions among birds, snakes, and other things in the unfolding history of the universe, the picture becomes more complicated. There might be a particularly valuable species of bird that lives on snakes, for example, and cannot live without them. Then, in that regard, the existence of snakes works out for the better. But this is neither here nor there. Leaving this sort of thing out of account, more birds, better world, more snakes, worse world.

The point is that in this case it's easy to see that value is a natural phenomenon. Birds have evolved naturally, and they're good just for what

they are in that they are as they are. There's nothing to them but their natural characteristics, and it's their natural characteristics that make them good. There's no element of value in this picture that hovers mysteriously above the natural world. There are birds with their natural characteristics, and snakes with their quite different natural characteristics, and, let's say, our ways of talking about birds, snakes, and value. But our ways of talking are irrelevant. In the final analysis, when we talk about value, it's just birds and their natural characteristics and snakes and theirs that we're talking about. Value comes down to that and nothing more, in this imaginary world.

In the real world it's not birds, but positive consciousness, and not snakes, but negative consciousness, but the same conclusion holds: value is simply a natural phenomenon.

Value is a physical fact.

Given that it's a natural phenomenon, this is what you would expect.

Your sensation is desirable just for what it is in that it's enjoyable, the neural event that appears on the screen of the brain monitor, the so-called neural correlate, is such that you as an organism can be expected to prolong or repeat it in that it has a certain physical property, P, and these two facts are one and the same fact. But this in turn means that basic desirability, or in other words value, is a physical fact. In principle, once we know exactly what to look for, we can find basic value, desirability, or goodness in the way we find birds. It's just a matter of looking, though with the help of instruments. At first hearing, this might strike you as frightening. But more knowledge and deeper understanding, especially in the area of values and that of morality, should have desirable consequences.

You can of course establish conditioned responses. You can train a dog or a human being to come at the sound of a bell and flee at the sound

of a whistle, but that's irrelevant, because the requisite training relies on pleasure and pain in the first place.

All that holds for the positive value of a good experience holds also for the negative value of a bad one, of course, *mutatis mutandis*.

Value is an objective fact.

This follows from the thesis that value is a natural, physical fact.

Positive consciousness is of value because it is what it is. But it consists of neural activity in the brain in the case of a human being. That neural activity, however, just like anything else physical, is what it is as a matter of objective fact. Positive consciousness, then, is of value as a matter of objective fact.

By the same token, your judgment that your experience is good is objective, not subjective.

People value widely different things. Sometimes their sense of value is well-placed, as when they value the well-being of a child. And sometimes it's mistaken, as when they are taken in by a personality cult and value the rule of a cruel, psychopathic dictator. But the very fact that people are sometimes mistaken in their values indicates that value is an objective matter.

One way to refer to the fact of value is to say that it matters what happens. It does indeed matter what happens, and if a nihilist asserts that it doesn't, then he is just plain wrong, just as ancient astronomers were just plain wrong to say that the stars are background light showing through pinpricks in an obscuring membrane. Since it is an objective fact, the fact of value is independent of opinion, just as it is independent of ways of talking.

Value is absolute, not relative.

Many thinkers of a naturalistic bent conclude that value is relative. That is, it's up to the individual, or to society, to decide what has value and

what doesn't, and that decision determines the question. It determines what is good, what is bad, and what is neither. But if the present account is correct, then value is simply a fact of nature. This is of positive value, that of negative value, and the other of no value, positive or negative, as a matter of objective fact. But this entails that value is absolute, not relative, just as the physical characteristics of celestial bodies, stars and planets and so on, are absolute, and not for us to set by fiat.

When all is said and done, the fact that there is such a thing as value in this universe comes down to the fact that there is such a thing as positive and negative consciousness, as far as we have reason to believe at present. But the latter fact is objective, and hence so is the former.

It is nature, then, not God, that renders value absolute. It's not that God makes this or that valuable by declaring it so. Rather, positive consciousness is valuable simply in that it is what it is, and that has nothing to do with any declaration on the part of a supreme being.

The language of value is largely beside the point.

In technical discussions of intrinsic value, philosophers tend to concentrate on the language of value. But this is largely beside the point.

Since it is objective, the fact of value remains just what it is no matter what you call it or how you refer to it, just as a rose is a rose by any other name.

To say that an experience is positive, or pleasant or joyful, is to say one thing, and to say that it is valuable is indeed to say another. But this fact of semantics is irrelevant to the point under discussion. There is such a thing as value quite simply in virtue of the existence of positive and negative consciousness, no matter how you choose to talk about that state of affairs.

To deal with the fact of value, people have devised various ways of talking, just as they've devised ways of talking about mountains, rivers,

birds, snakes, the weather, and so on. They say, “This is valuable,” “This is more valuable than that,” “This is worthwhile but that isn’t,” “This matters more than that does,” “This is important and that is less so,” and so on. Just like talk about mountains, rivers, and so on, this talk is practical for the most part. To point out that such and such is valuable is to point out that it makes sense to protect, preserve, or pursue it, or to produce more of it, or so on, as it does, absolutely, if it is indeed valuable. The point is that all the verbiage is just a way of dealing with the fact of value, and does not affect that fact in any way. It affects the fact of value no more than talk of the sun affects the sun.

To say that positive consciousness is valuable is to say that it makes sense, that it’s rational, to show an approach response to it simply in that it is what it is. The root fact, then, is that it is valuable simply in that it is what it is.

At bottom, value is not at all a matter of taste.

Here’s an example of taste: You like okra and your mother despises it. Your response to okra is different from hers, and that’s a matter of taste. Neither response is incorrect. You say that okra is delicious, and you’re not mistaken. Your mother says that it’s disgusting, and she’s not mistaken, either. It’s delicious for you and disgusting for her.

Presumably, you judge okra to be delicious, or good as we say in English, because for you it gives rise to a pleasurable experience. It tastes good. And your mother can’t stand it because for her it gives rise to a most unpleasant experience. And presumably, if it gave you a bad experience and your mother a good one, you would hate it and she would love it. If this is true, however, then both you and your mother judge a pleasant dining experience to be good. It’s just that okra gives you a good one and her a bad one.

But this suggests that when it comes to judging experiences good or

bad, people agree for the most part, and this in turn suggests that it's not a matter of taste at bottom. Probably, most people would say that a pleasant experience is good and a painful one bad, leaving the consequences out of account. This qualification is important: leaving the consequences out of account. A pleasant alcohol high, for example, is good as far as it goes, but the whole drinking incident is extremely regrettable if it leads to a traffic accident or contributes to cirrhosis of the liver. On the other hand, the dentist's drill might impart an experience that's very bad as far as it goes, but the trip to the dentist is probably wise and might well turn out to be very fortunate.

Perhaps some are tempted to argue as follows, with a scowl: People are evil, and they deserve to suffer. To recognize this and take on suffering is to show a proper humility before God. So pleasure is bad and pain, good. As for okra, if it disgusts you and makes you feel bad, it's good, and you should have it for breakfast every day to remind yourself of your miserable state, and if it pleases you, it's bad.

There is no end of opinions, and no end of weird, perverted ones. This way of thinking certainly appears to be weird. It counts as rational only if someone can give convincing evidence that people are evil, whatever that means, can prove in addition that since they are evil they ought to suffer, can argue convincingly that God exists, whoever or whatever that is supposed to be, for different people mean very different things by "God," can prove that people ought to show humility before God on account of the evil in their souls, and can show that they achieve this purpose by causing themselves pain and discomfort. Similarly for all similar views. A tall order!

If you make a run down the slopes on your skis, then, and judge that your experience was good, it appears that your judgment is not one of taste.

But this is more than a tentative conclusion. To say that your experience was good is to say that it's rational to pursue further experiences like it, and if it is indeed rational to do so, then that, clearly, is a matter of fact, not one of taste.

On the present account, the clincher is this: The neuroscientist's observation that the neural event is such that the organism naturally shows an approach response is not a matter of taste, of course, but rather one of fact. But your judgment that your sensation is desirable is one and the same as her observation, though put in very different terms. That is to say, at bottom, her observation and your judgment say the same thing about the same thing. Hence your judgment is one of fact, not one of taste.

The neuroscientist's stance and yours are very different, of course, in that she has the advantage of sense perception and you don't. This makes it natural to refer to her observation of a matter of fact versus your judgment of fact, but this is neither here nor there. It doesn't affect the conclusion.

In sum, a physical property is an objective property, and your judgment that your experience is good is based on a physical property, for all that you don't recognize it for what it is. Hence it's based on an objective state of affairs. When you say "good," moreover, you mean what the rest of us mean. We know what you mean. We understand what you say. Therefore your judgment isn't subjective, but objective, and hence not one of taste. This conclusion, of course, accords with the fact that people who understand the question agree that a delightful experience, of bathing, for example, is good, not bad, unless their thinking has gone haywire.

The fact of value extends beyond the human realm. To begin with, certain other terrestrial species, besides ours, are clearly capable of pleasure and pain, if not of joy and suffering on a human level. It's plausible to speculate, moreover, that life, consciousness, and various

forms of positive and negative consciousness, including forms far more elevated than human joy and suffering, occur elsewhere, beyond this planet. But if this is so, then value is not merely a terrestrial phenomenon. Quite possibly, it matters what happens not just here on Earth but throughout the universe, and, if there are other universes, throughout some of them, too.

Value arises out of the fundamental fabric and principles of the physical universe, not from the highest or divine level, and not from the middle or human level, but rather from the lowest or physical level.

On the present account, value doesn't arise from the highest level. That is to say, it's not a gift from on high. It's not that a supreme being has granted us the chance to make our lives worthwhile by giving us something to work for, and the chance to make our lives miserable by creating the possibility of suffering.

It doesn't arise from the middle level, either. That is to say, the individual doesn't impart value to something simply by deciding to value it, and neither does society. Rather, value lies there to be discovered, and any individual, and any society, can be entirely mistaken as to what is valuable.

Rather, value arises from below, as it were, out of the laws of physics. Those laws guide organic evolution, which has given us positive and negative consciousness as motivators, and in turn pleasure and pain, happiness and suffering, have left us with a state of affairs in which things matter, in which it makes a difference whether the future develops in this way or that, an important difference. We did not create this state of affairs. Rather, it was handed to us - by physical nature, not by a supreme being. And we have invented ways to talk about it in order to deal with it.