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Response to Sagoff

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The main contention in Sagoff's thoughtful letter is the meaning of 'intrinsic value.' As the adjective indicates, something has intrinsic value if it possesses certain properties that are independent of valuers, 'inherent qualities' in Sagoff's phrasing. That something *possesses* these properties determines whether it is intrinsically valuable, not whether it *is valued*. That something is loved, revered, etc. is irrelevant to its *intrinsic* value. It is clearly relevant, however, to its *instrumental* value. Sagoff's distinction between 'attributes of nature we value as objects of our love, reverence, appreciation, and respect' and 'attributes of nature we value for the contribution they make to our wellbeing' distinguishes between types of instrumental value, not between instrumental and intrinsic value.

Sagoff proposes that something is intrinsically valuable if valued 'because of [its] inherent qualities rather than because of any benefit' provided to valuers, and suggests that objects of love, reverence, etc. can be valued without increasing the valuer's wellbeing. This account is flawed. Besides its implausibly narrow conception of wellbeing, humans are often considered intrinsically valuable *because* they possess intrinsically valuable properties (rationality, virtue, etc.), regardless of their instrumental value. This provides a strong rationale against harming humans and conservation proponents want a similar status for non-human entities. But in Sagoff's account something is intrinsically valuable only by being valued in the right way. Under this account the 'intrinsic' value of humans and non-human entities would problematically vanish if they were not appropriately valued, thereby undermining the secure foundation of value proponents of intrinsic value seek. Unsurprisingly, this account is rarely found among conservation biologists. Sagoff quotes Rolston to support his account's purported currency amongst conservationists, but out of context the quotation is ambiguous. Sagoff believes it says natural beauty is intrinsically valuable because it *is valued* 'for what it is in itself.' But two sentences

later Rolston [1] evinces the valuer-independent intrinsic value concept found throughout the conservation literature we were criticizing: '[t]hese things [natural entities] count, whether or not there is anybody to do the counting.'

Sagoff asserts without argument that we are mistaken in claiming that aesthetic value is instrumental, and that our account entails that pornography is the most valuable form of art because it produces the most pleasure. This is mistaken. That pornography is art, as Sagoff suggests, or that the pleasure it facilitates outweighs the harm of its production, is highly contentious. More importantly, plausible accounts of instrumental value do not hold that pornography is more valuable than great art. There is thus no argument here against our view, nor do we agree that pleasure should be narrowly equated with sexual gratification. Since art derives its value from experiences it produces in humans, calling aesthetic value 'intrinsic' rather than 'instrumental' is perplexing.

Finally, Sagoff incorrectly presumes we believe willingness-to-pay (WTP) is the sole method for assessing instrumental value. Problems with WTP are well-known, especially in environmental valuation [2]. We agree that WTP poorly measures aspects of the environment that are difficult to quantify. But this and other difficulties do not undermine the general cogency of instrumental approaches to value. As we originally emphasized, WTP is but one of many methods for assessing instrumental value. Criticizing instrumental value for deficiencies of WTP commits precisely the misrepresentation of instrumental value we reject.

References

- 1 Rolston, H. (1989) *Philosophy Gone Wild*, Prometheus Books
- 2 Norton, B. (1987) *Why Preserve Natural Variety?* Oxford University Press

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