

## Comments on Rick Freeman's Paper

Douglas MacLean

What follows are roughly drafted comments on Rick Freeman's clear and thoughtful paper on valuation. I will focus on his section 2, the valuation paradigms. I will begin by suggesting a different approach to the subject, which I believe to be more intuitively compelling than the paradigm suggested by Rick. I will briefly describe this different approach in three statements. Then I will offer some comments on specific points as a way of illustrating the difference in our approaches.

### A Different Approach

1. I suggest that we not think of value primarily as a property of objects or states of affairs; rather, we should think of valuing as a feature of our rational behavior. Valuing is something that rational agents do. *To value something is to take oneself to have reasons for holding certain positive attitudes toward that thing and for acting in certain ways in regard to it.* Exactly what these reasons are, and what actions and attitudes they support, will differ with different cases. We value many different kinds of things, and we value them in different ways. Valuing involves acting or responding in ways that are appropriate, and these ways will be determined by the nature of the thing, its role in our individual or collective lives, and our own interests and desires. To value something is to recognize reasons to care for, admire, respect, desire, preserve, protect, etc., that thing. To value some things may require being true to them or being guided by goals or standards implicit in them (as when we value marriage, loyalty, or the Constitution).<sup>1</sup>
2. We value some things that we do not regard as valuable. We can value things for sentimental or personal or quixotic reasons (as when someone values her collection of "snow globes" that she has collected from various cities and sites that she has visited). To claim that something is *valuable* is to claim that others should share your reasons for valuing it.
3. Certain general distinctions of kind among values may be useful, but they can also lead to confusion. For example, the concept of *instrumental* value is ambiguous. Sometimes it is used to refer to things that we value as means, in contrast to those things that we value as ends (or for their own sake). At other times instrumental value is used to refer to a kind of value something may have, and the contrast is usually with *intrinsic* value.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), ch. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See Christine Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions in Goodness," in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 249-264.

We value some things as means and some things as ends. And as Aristotle pointed out, we value some things both as ends and as means to some further end. We sometimes say that what we value merely as a means has instrumental value. We also say that some things are instrumentally valuable if we have reason to value them as a means to something else we value. Thus, a fungus might be valuable in this sense because it has properties that can be used to cure some horrible disease. The fungus has this value, moreover, even if nobody currently values it, perhaps because its curative powers are yet to be discovered. What we mean is that we have reason to value the fungus.

Instrumental value is also sometimes used to refer not to a way that we value something (or have reason to value that thing), but to a kind of value that a thing has. Here the contrast is with intrinsic value. Intrinsic value is then taken to be something that is valuable in its own right. Now, I find this way of talking confusing, because it leads people to identify valuing something as an end with having intrinsic value. But these two meanings are not identical. As I noted above, we value some things as ends that we do not regard as having intrinsic value. The concept of intrinsic value is mysterious. I prefer, therefore, to talk about reasons for valuing and to distinguish reasons we have for valuing things as means (or instrumentally) and reasons for valuing them as ends or in their own right. The distinction will be cashed out in the different kinds of reasons and the different kinds of appropriate behavior and attitudes involved.

### **Responses to Freeman**

1. Freeman talks about “rights-based” intrinsic values. To treat something as having a right to exist is a way of valuing it, but we should not take rights to be constitutive of valuing something as an end or of intrinsic value. There are at least two reasons for this. First, rights are often used to constrain or limit appropriate ways of treating something. They do not, in this sense, refer to a kind or an amount of value a thing has. If we say a person has a right to life, it means that certain ways of treating persons are ruled out. It does not mean that persons have a certain value (which may then be compared and traded off against other values). Secondly, we may grant rights to things that we do not value as ends (or regard as intrinsically valuable). Thus, in the law, entities like corporations can have rights.
2. Freeman says three things about utilitarian values which, taken together, are confusing. He says: (a) Utilitarian values are based on preferences; (b) Economic measures of value are utilitarian; and (c) The economic value of something is a measure of its contribution to human well-being. First, the *summum bonum* of classical utilitarianism is happiness or well-being, which may or may not be based on preference satisfaction. Preference utilitarianism is one kind of utilitarianism (and is, moreover, a kind of utilitarianism that many philosophers have not found to be a plausible moral theory). Secondly, to the extent that economic value is a measure of contribution to well-being, it conforms to the goals of classical utilitarianism, which are different from preference-satisfaction. Finally, I believe that happiness and well-

being are things that most people seek as ends. Well-being should not be regarded as a species of instrumental value.

3. The difference between the approach I have outlined above and Freeman's approach comes out most clearly in the following passage:

Values that are independent of people's present use of the service have been variously termed 'existence,' 'nonuse,' and more recently, 'passive use' values. These values are said to arise from a variety of motives, including a desire to bequeath certain environmental resources to one's heirs or future generations, a sense of stewardship or responsibility for preserving certain features of natural resources, and a desire to preserve options for future use.

First, it is worth noting that Freeman categorizes existence value as a kind of instrumental value, which is the way I understand economists usually to use this concept. Freeman also notes that these values arise from a variety of motives. I would say that they are supported by a variety of reasons, which justify different appropriate responses to the things whose existence alone we find valuable. Finally, however, to say that people value some thing from a sense of stewardship or responsibility to future generations is to cite some reasons why people value these things as ends or in their own right. Reasons of stewardship or responsibility to future generations are not, in the first instance, reasons that appeal to happiness or well-being. Rather, they are reasons to value things as ends.

4. According to the characterization of values I am describing, there is not compelling reason to make a fundamental distinction between individual and community-based values. To value something is to take oneself as having a reason to hold certain attitudes toward that thing, and these reasons and the appropriate attitudes can vary in many ways. Reasons for valuing that appeal to our membership in a group or a community, therefore, are just some of the many different kinds of reasons we have for valuing things. They do not single out a separate class of values. Freeman refers to deliberation as an appropriate method for identifying (and measuring?) community-based values, but I am suggesting that deliberation is an appropriate method for determining and assessing all values.

I have not discussed issues of measurement in these comments. In his introduction, Freeman writes:

What is needed is measures of the values associated with *changes* in the degree of protection offered to ecological systems and *changes* in the quantities of various services provided by ecological systems rather than estimates of the *total value* of ecological systems.

I agree that we should not seek estimates of the "total value" of ecological systems, because I don't think the idea of "total value" has any clear meaning. But in addition to wanting measures of the values associated with changes in the degree of protection of ecological systems, we should seek ways of assessing the reasons for protection, the

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reasons more generally for valuing ecological systems, and a way of understanding and measuring the costs of various ways of responding to these reasons.