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# The Western Search for Intrinsic Value

Y. S. Lo (勞若詩)

## I. Different Kinds of Reasons for Valuing Things

When we value something, we usually value it for some *reason*. If a person tells us “I value such-and-such,” it makes sense for us to ask “why?” and we expect them to tell us their reason for valuing the thing. Moreover, we expect their reason to indicate something particular about the thing being valued. Is it *explanatory* reason or *justificatory* reason that we expect? I think both. Very often, we want to know how people came to value the things that they now value. Is it their upbringing, survival needs, genes, or peer pressure? That is, we look for causal explanations for people’s evaluative attitudes. But perhaps just as often, we also want to know whether, and if so why, people ought to value the things that they in fact value. That is, we want to know whether and why it is right or wrong for them to value what they value, whether and why it will be better or worse if they stop valuing what they value. By asking these questions, we are looking for justifications for people’s evaluative attitudes (or for the abandonment of those attitudes).<sup>1</sup> In this paper, it is mainly justificatory reasons that we will be talking about when we talk about reasons for valuing, unless otherwise indicated.

There are two basic distinctions concerning reasons (i.e., justificatory reasons) for valuing things. The first is the distinction between valuing things for *instrumental* reasons and valuing things for *non-instrumental* reasons. To value something for instrumental reasons is to value it for its usefulness. For example, if a farmer values his poultry because it is useful as food or as a source of income, then he values it for instrumental reasons, he values it instrumentally. By contrast, to value something for non-instrumental reasons is to value it for

reasons independent of its usefulness. For example, if a dog owner values her dog for reasons independent of its usefulness, i.e., if she values the dog even if it is not useful to her, then she values it for non-instrumental reasons, she values it non-instrumentally.

The second distinction concerning reasons for valuing things is that between valuing things for *extrinsic* reasons and valuing things for *intrinsic* reasons. To value something for extrinsic reasons is to value it for its extrinsic<sup>2</sup> qualities. Qualities such as youth, beauty, wealth, various abilities and skills, and even moral virtues are all extrinsic, in that it is possible for people who have such qualities to lose them. For example: Young people will become old; beautiful people might turn plain or ugly by natural or unnatural courses; most of us will (if we live long enough) lose the abilities and skills that we are proud of having; even morally virtuous people might become corrupted or embittered, and lose their virtues.<sup>3</sup> Suppose someone values a friend for such extrinsic qualities. We say that his/her reason for valuing the friend is extrinsic reasons, or, in other words, that s/he values the friend extrinsically. By contrast, to value something for intrinsic reasons is to value it for its intrinsic<sup>4</sup> qualities, independent of its extrinsic qualities. Some philosophers argue that a thing's origin is an intrinsic quality. For example, X's attribute of being Y's biological child (i.e., being biologically originated from Y) is arguably an intrinsic quality of X. Suppose a mother values her son simply because he is intrinsically her son. That is, she values him simply because he has the intrinsic quality of being biologically originated from her. Then, we say that her reason for valuing the son is intrinsic, or, in other words, that she values the son intrinsically.

Given the two distinctions discussed above, there are altogether four basic kinds of reasons for which we might value an object:

- (1) We might value a thing for instrumental reasons (i.e., for its usefulness).
- (2) We might value a thing for non-instrumental reasons (i.e., for reasons independent of its usefulness).
- (3) We might value a thing for extrinsic reasons (i.e., for its extrinsic qualities).
- (4) We might value a thing for intrinsic reasons (i.e., for its intrinsic qualities).

Let us consider how the four basic kinds of reasons for valuing things can (or cannot) be combined. By definition, something is useful if and only if it is an effective means to deliver some desired or valued ends. Thus, whether something

is useful depends on (a) whether it is an effective means to some ends, and (b) whether the ends delivered by it is desired or valued. Since both (a) and (b) are contingent, usefulness is an extrinsic quality. So, when we value a thing for its usefulness, we value it for an extrinsic quality. Valuing instrumentally is necessarily valuing extrinsically. When we value a thing instrumentally, we are not valuing it for its intrinsic qualities. By contrast, if we value a thing non-instrumentally, we might either value it for its extrinsic qualities (e.g., beauty, rarity) or for its intrinsic qualities (e.g., their origins, assuming that this is an intrinsic quality). Both extrinsic qualities and intrinsic qualities can be our non-instrumental reasons for valuing things. Accordingly, for anything X, there are altogether three possible combined ways in which it can be valued:

- (1) X can be valued instrumentally (and thereby valued for an extrinsic quality).
- (2) X can be valued non-instrumentally for its extrinsic qualities.
- (3) X can be valued non-instrumentally for its intrinsic qualities.

## II. Different Kinds of Values

What does the statement "such-and-such *has value*" mean?<sup>5</sup> We must not confuse it with another quite different statement: "People value such-and-such." We must bear in mind that the fact that people value a certain thing does not mean that the thing being valued by them has value. This is because it is possible for people to wrongly value something, which is actually valueless. So long as we leave open the possibility that people can make evaluative mistakes, we must distinguish the above two statements.

Let us go back to the question of what it means to say that something has value. I propose the following provisional<sup>6</sup> definition of the noun "value":

V. X has value if and only if we<sup>7</sup> *ought* to value X.<sup>8</sup>

If we accept V as a definition of "value," then corresponding to the various combined ways in which of a thing can be valued (see end of Section I above), we can distinguish the following kinds of value:

- V1. X has *instrumental value* if and only if we ought to value X for its usefulness.
- V2. X has *non-instrumental value* if and only if we ought to value X for reasons independent of its usefulness.

- V2.1. X has *extrinsically non-instrumental value* if and only if we ought to value X for its extrinsic qualities independent of its usefulness.
- V2.2. X has *intrinsically non-instrumental value* if and only if we ought to value X for its intrinsic qualities independent of its usefulness.<sup>9</sup>

A useful concept is that of “value-conferring quality.” This refers to qualities in virtue of which things have value. To put the definition explicitly: P is a value-conferring quality if and only if, for anything that has quality P, it has value because it has quality P.<sup>10</sup> Figuratively speaking, it is as if quality P “confers” value to the things that have quality P. But this is merely a metaphor. If the provisional definition V is correct, then something has value if and only if *we* (human beings) ought to value it. Thus, to say that P is a value-conferring quality is equivalent to saying that we ought to value things that have the quality simply because they have the quality. It seems that ultimately it is *we* (rather than the value-adding quality) who “confer” value to things.

Many alleged value-conferring qualities (e.g., beauty, youth, perseverance) are extrinsic, contingent and non-essential, in that a thing that has such qualities may one day lose them.<sup>11</sup> For example, someone may lose his beauty or youth but still remains himself. However, some value-conferring qualities might be intrinsic, necessary and essential instead, in that such qualities are part of the essence of the thing that has them. Thus, if the thing loses such qualities, it will not only lose its value, but it will no longer be itself. For example, some people might argue that they will no longer be themselves if they lose their minds.

### III. “Intrinsic Values” and Western Philosophy

The term “intrinsic value” (or, equivalently, “inherent worth”) is very widely used in Western philosophy, and in particular Western environmental ethics. But the term has been used by different philosophers in the West to mean slightly different things. When X is said to have “intrinsic value” (or be “intrinsically valuable”), that can mean any of the following:

- (1) X has a value, such that (a) the value is non-instrumental, or
- (2) X has a value, such that (a) the value is non-instrumental, and (b) X has the value because X has certain intrinsic qualities, or
- (3) X has a value, such that (a) the value is non-instrumental, and (b) X has

the value because X has certain intrinsic qualities, and also (c) the value is in itself an intrinsic quality of X.

Clearly, “intrinsic value” in sense (3) is a stronger and more demanding notion than “inherent worth” in sense (2), which, in turn, is a stronger and more demanding notion than “inherent worth” in sense (1).

What I call “intrinsically non-instrumental value” (see V2.2 in Section II above) is the same as “intrinsic value” in sense (2). That is, it refers to a value which is at least (a) non-instrumental and (b) conferred by certain intrinsic qualities of the thing having that value, but might (or might not) be (c) in itself an intrinsic quality. In short, the concept “intrinsically non-instrumental value,” as I use it, leaves open the question whether a non-instrumental value conferred to a thing by its intrinsic qualities is also in itself an intrinsic quality of the object. However, if we assume an extreme form of rational realism (the claim that ought-statements, like logical and mathematical statements, are non-contingent), and if we assume V (the proposition that X has value if and only if X ought to be valued), then “intrinsic value” in sense (2) does entail “intrinsic value” in sense (3). Here is the argument:

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| V.   | X has value if and only if X ought to be valued. (assumption)   |
| ERR. | If an ought-statement is true, then it is necessarily true. (assumption of Extreme Rational Realism)  |
| P1.  | X has intrinsic value in sense (2).   |
| P2.  | X has a value, such that (a) the value is non-instrumental, and (b) X has the value because X has certain intrinsic qualities. (= P1)   |
| P3.  | X ought to be valued non-instrumentally, because it has certain intrinsic qualities. (from P2 and V)  |
| P4.  | X <i>necessarily</i> ought to be valued non-instrumentally, because it has certain intrinsic qualities. (from P3 and EER)   |
| P5.  | X <i>necessarily</i> has a non-instrumental value, because X has certain intrinsic qualities. (from P4 and V)   |
| P6.  | X has a value, such that (a) the value is non-instrumental, and (b) X has the value because X has certain intrinsic qualities, and also (c) X <i>necessarily</i> has the value, meaning that the value itself is a necessary (i.e., intrinsic) quality of X. (= P5) |
| C.   | X has intrinsic value in sense (3). (= P6)  |

#### IV. "Intrinsic Values" and Traditional Western Religion

From the perspective of traditional Western religion (which is largely Judaeo-Christian), all human beings have equal "intrinsic value" in the *strongest* sense (i.e., in sense (3) described above). As explained above, this kind of value is not only non-instrumental and conferred to a thing by its intrinsic qualities, but it is also in itself an intrinsic quality of the thing. This means that if a thing has such a value, then it *necessarily* has such a value. It can never lose it, just as it can never lose its other intrinsic qualities.

We know that people often lose their merits, abilities and even their virtues. We also know that not all people are equal in their abilities and virtues. Some are more capable than others; some are more virtuous than others. Given these facts of the human life, what reasons do we have for thinking that all human beings have equal intrinsic value, a value which is not only equal for everyone, but is necessarily guaranteed for every human being forever? If there is a foundation for such an absolute and enduring value, it seems that the foundation itself must also be absolute and enduring. The following is a summary of the traditional Western religious argument for the view that all human beings have equal intrinsic value in the strongest sense. The argument seeks to provide exactly this kind of foundation for the (supposedly) absolute and enduring value of a human being.

- G1. God is all-knowing and all-good. (from definition of "God")  
 G2. God believes such-and-such if and only if such-and-such is true. (from G1 and definition of "all knowing")  
 G3. God loves (i.e., approves of, or values) X if and only if God believes that X has value. (from G1 and definition of "all-good"<sup>12</sup>)  
 G4. X has value if and only if God loves X. (from G2 and G3)<sup>13</sup>  
 G5. God *unconditionally loves* all human beings, in the sense that:  
 (a) God loves all human beings independently of whether they are useful or not, and  
 (b) God loves all human beings for their intrinsic qualities,<sup>14</sup> and  
 (c) God necessarily loves all human beings.<sup>15</sup>  
 G6. God's unconditional love for all human beings is *equal*.  
 G7. All human beings have *equal unconditional value*, in the sense that:

- (a) all human beings have equal non-instrumental value, and  
 (b) all human beings have the equal value because they have certain intrinsic qualities, and  
 (c) the value in itself a necessary (i.e., intrinsic) quality of human being. (from G4, G5, and G6)<sup>16</sup>

In short, the above argument from G1 to G7 shows that from the traditional Western religious perspective, all values are generated by God's love, and that since God's love for human beings is equal and unconditional, all human beings have equal and unconditional value—that is, what Western philosophers call "intrinsic value" in the *strongest* sense of the term.

Historically, Western morality has a religious basis. As we have just seen, God's love, approval and command are traditionally the source and foundation of values and morality. That explains why even nowadays in the West "moral value" is still often taken to be unconditional (i.e., not only non-instrumental and conferred by intrinsic qualities, but also *necessary*). The idea that you are not really loved or valued unless you are loved or valued unconditionally is quite common and tempting. In short, when similar moral notions such as "moral value," "intrinsic value," "inherent worth," "human dignity" and "universal human rights" are used in the strongest sense to mean "unconditional value," they are the *ethical parallels* of the religious notion "God's unconditional love." The idea that all human beings have equal moral value, I believe, originated from the traditional Western religious doctrine that God loves all human beings equally. Likewise, the idea of all human beings having an unconditional, necessary and guaranteed value evolved from the traditional Western religious doctrine that God loves all human beings unconditionally.

When secular philosophers from the West argue that a thing has no *genuine* value unless it has value in the strongest, unconditional sense, a reasonable suspicion is that they are trying to save keep the full ethical implications and contents of "God's unconditional love" even though they have long given up their belief in God's existence; that they want to hold on to the ethics of their traditional religion even though they have given up its theology. However, that will not do. As we have seen, "God" is the whole source and foundation of the necessity imbedded in the notion "moral value" in its strongest, unconditional sense. Without a necessarily existing God who necessarily loves us, we cannot have necessary value.<sup>17</sup>

So far, we have discussed different concepts of “value” in traditional Western religion and philosophy, and also how they relate to each other. To summarize, we have differentiated three kinds of value (one of which can be further divided into two):

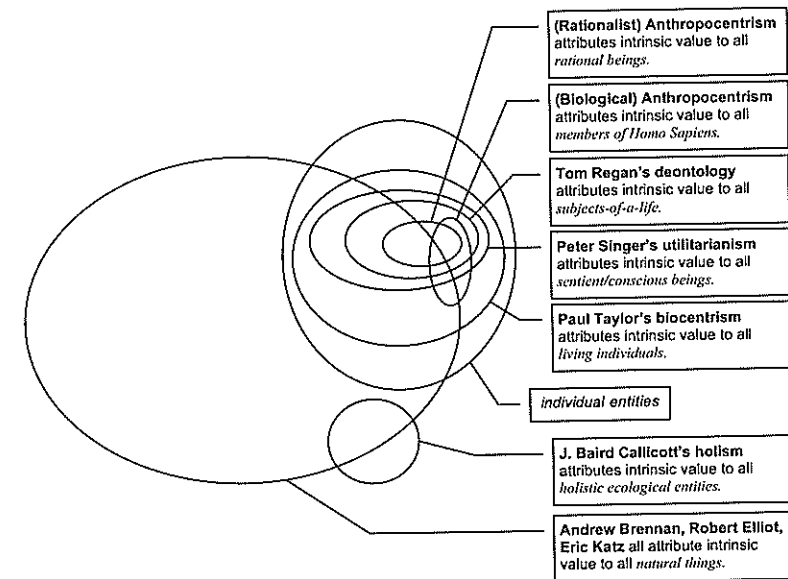
- V1. X has *instrumental value* if and only if X ought to be valued for its usefulness.
- V2. X has *non-instrumental value* if and only if X ought to be valued for reasons independent of its usefulness.
- V2.1. X has *extrinsically non-instrumental value* (i.e., “intrinsic value” in sense (1)) if and only if X ought to be valued for its extrinsic qualities, independent of its usefulness.
- V2.2. X has *intrinsically non-instrumental value* (i.e., “intrinsic value” in sense (2)) if and only if X ought to be valued for its intrinsic qualities, independent of its usefulness.
- V3. X has *unconditional value* (i.e., “intrinsic value” in sense (3)) if and only if X ought to be valued unconditionally meaning that X necessarily ought to be valued for its intrinsic qualities, independent of its usefulness.

## V. “Intrinsic Values” and Environmental Ethics

The term “intrinsic value” has considerable importance in Western moral philosophy, particularly in environmental ethics. However, as we have seen, the term (or its equivalence, such as “inherent worth,” “moral value”) is ambiguous. Sometimes the term is used to mean (V2) “non-instrumental value,” without being made clear whether the non-instrumental value is conferred by extrinsic qualities (as in the case of V2.1) or by intrinsic qualities (as in the case of V2.2). But sometime the term “intrinsic value” is used to mean (V3) “unconditional value” as well. So, it is very important that when we discuss or argue about whether a certain thing has intrinsic value, we must first make clear in what sense we are using the term.

One of the central ambitions of environmental ethics in the first two decades of its development has been to provide rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and/or its various inhabitants—which, if successful, imply a direct moral responsibility on the part of human moral agents towards those objects. The following is a diagram showing the many

different ways in which Western environmental philosophers have tried to attribute intrinsic value to things other than human beings.<sup>18</sup>



Compared with the anthropocentric (i.e., human-centred) justification for environmental conservation (briefly, the idea that even though only human beings have intrinsic value, moral agents should still protect the non-human natural environment because it is instrumentally valuable for human beings), the idea that non-human nature is intrinsically valuable is seen by many environmental philosophers as a more resolute moral ground for the environmental movement.

Just as some people believe that God loves *all his creations*, some environmental philosophers (e.g., Holmes Rolston III) argue that *all natural things* (whether they are human or not, rational or not, sentient or not, living or not, individuals or holistic) have intrinsic value. The claim that all natural things have intrinsic value, I believe, is best understood as coming from the religious idea that God loves everything created by him, and therefore that it is best defended by the following argument (which is very similar to the traditional argument for attributing intrinsic value to all human beings):

- G1. God is all-knowing and all-good.  
 G2. God believes such-and-such if and only if such-and-such is true. (from G1)  
 G3. God loves X if and only if God believes that X has value. (from G1)  
 G4. X has value if and only if God loves X. (from G2 and G3)  
 G5\*. God *unconditionally loves* all his creations, in the sense that:  
 (a) God loves all his creations independently of whether they are useful or not, and  
 (b) God loves all his creations for their intrinsic qualities,<sup>19</sup> and  
 (c) God necessarily loves all his creations.<sup>20</sup>  
 G6\*. God's unconditional love for all his creations is *equal*.  
 G7\*. All of God's creations have *equal unconditional value*, in the sense that:  
 (a) all of God's creations have equal non-instrumental value, and  
 (b) all of God's creations have the equal value because they have certain intrinsic qualities, and  
 (c) the value in itself a necessary (i.e., intrinsic) quality of human being. (from G4, G5\*, and G6\*)<sup>21</sup>  
 G8. All natural things are God's creations.  
 G9. All natural things have equal unconditional value, i.e. "intrinsic value" in sense (3). (from G7\* and G8)  
 Furthermore,  
 G10. God instrumentally loves *all* his creations.<sup>22</sup>  
 G11. All natural things have instrumental value (from G4, G8, and G10).

What else other than God (who is supposedly all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, and necessarily existing) can generate value for *all* natural things? Human agents discriminate when they value. They seldom value everyone and everything—whether instrumentally or non-instrumentally. But God is different. God is supposed to love *all* his creations! Just as the idea of *universal human rights* is best understood as originated from the idea of God's universal love for all human beings, universal moral value for all natural things is best understood as coming from the idea that God loves all his creations.

If the challenge of secular moral philosophy has been to provide non-

religious reasons for taking human beings as intrinsically valuable and for human beings to act morally towards each other, then the challenge of secular non-anthropocentric environmental ethics is to provide non-religious reasons for taking (at least some if not all) non-human things in nature as intrinsically valuable, and for human beings to act charitably towards them. I end the paper by posing two relevant and interesting questions:

- (1) Can environmental ethics in China (which does not traditionally subscribe to Western Judaeo-Christian religion) make sense of the rather radical environmentalist view that all natural things have intrinsic value?
- (2) Does environmental ethics in China need to make sense of that view?

## Notes

1. Whether it is explanatory or justificatory reasons that are being discussed, there seems to be times when reasons "run out," that is, times when it is reasonable to be satisfied with the answer "I value such-and-such simply because it is such-and-such."
2. Extrinsic qualities are contingent and non-essential.
3. See, for example, Shakespeare's *Othello*.
4. Intrinsic qualities are necessary and essential.
5. The two phrases "has value" and "is valuable" are often used interchangeably by philosophers. I shall follow this convention.
6. V is a "provisional" definition because it defines "value" in terms of "ought," without telling us what the term "ought" means. So, V will remain a provisional definition of "value" until we can supplement a definition of "ought." But this goes out of the scope of this paper. For a discussion of the meaning of "ought," see my article "Making and Finding Values in Nature: From a Humean Point of View," *Inquiry* 49 (2006): 123–147.
7. Who does this "we" refer to? If "we" refers to all typical human beings, then V is a definition of "universal value." If "we" refers to some (but not all) typical human beings, then V is a definition of "relative value."
8. The parallel definition of "disvalue" is that X has disvalue if and only if we ought to disvalue it. Any two things that have exactly the same set of value-conferring qualities and disvaluing-conferring qualities also have exactly the same (amount and kinds of) value and disvalue conferred to them. In other words, the value and disvalue of things *supervenes* on their value-conferring and their disvalue-conferring qualities, respectively.

9. If no individuals (but only types) have intrinsic qualities, then no individuals (but only types) can have value in the sense (2) (i.e., intrinsically non-instrumental value). Those who deny individuals essence but want to attribute moral value (or its equivalents) to individuals should adopt a less demanding notion of moral value. They might construe the moral value of individuals as what we have called “extrinsically non-instrumental value” (i.e., non-instrumental value conferred by extrinsic qualities). This might also explain why some philosophers think that particulars are not as valuable as universals.
10. Similarly, we can define “disvalue-conferring qualities” in the following way: P is a disvalue-conferring quality if and only if for anything that has quality P, the thing has a disvalue because it has quality P.
11. I mean that a thing which has those qualities might lose them but without losing its identity. That is, the thing may lose those qualities but still remains itself.
12. The idea here is Aristotelian: The virtuous person not only knows the good but loves the good. It follows that a good person at least loves what she believes to be good.
13. G4 is the traditional religious metaethical analysis of “value.”
14. For example, their origin, that is, their intrinsic quality of being created by God.
15. Why necessarily? Because God’s love for human beings is so unconditional, such that it is independent of all contingent features in the universe, which means that God’s love for human beings is necessary.
16. A hidden assumption here is the religious doctrine that God necessarily exists. Without this assumption, there will be some possible worlds in which God does not exist, and therefore possible worlds in which human beings are not loved by God, and therefore possible worlds in which human beings have no value. Thus, there will be *no* guarantee that human beings have *necessary* value.
17. Some secular Western philosophers have tried to replace “God” with various versions of “ideal agents” (e.g., fully rational agents). But unless such ideal agents necessarily exist, they cannot deliver the same kind of necessary moral value that has been traditionally delivered by “God.” Such ideal agents cannot guarantee that human beings have moral value in every possible world where they exist.
18. For further details, see Andrew Brennan and Y. S. Lo, “Environmental Ethics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 edition)*, ed. E. N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/ethics-environmental/>>
19. See n. 14 above.
20. See n. 15 above.
21. See n. 16 above.
22. This is because God has assigned some purpose for every one of his creations.

## 人與自然的關係

蒂利希對科技的一種文化神學的反思\*

陳家富

### 一、前言

本文會以蒂利希 (Paul Tillich, 1886–1965) 思想中的「個體化與參與」的兩極觀念為貫通人與自然的關係，並以科技作為這種兩極性的一個中心概念來闡述當前生態問題的前景。筆者會就學界對蒂利希思想中的生態論述作一個概覽，並指出他們的限制；及後就「個體化與參與」這觀念在人與自然的關係中的含義作出表述；隨後將這種兩極性的扭曲所做成的自然物化和人的非人化來凸顯雙方關係的錯置；最後會就科技的含混性格及其救贖來總結蒂利希生態思想中的一些重要理念。

### 二、過去的研究成果及限制

雖然在蒂利希的思想中對自然有豐富的洞見和認識，但學界對蒂利希這方面的研究一直是鳳毛麟角。據哥士文 (Richard C. Crossman) 的資

\* 本文以〈田立克的生態遠象：人與自然的關係〉為題刊於賴品超編：《基督宗教及儒家對談生命與倫理》(香港：崇基宗教與中國社會研究中心，2002)，經修訂後收錄於拙著：《田立克：邊緣上的神學》(香港：基道出版社，2008)，頁83–108。