

## Toward an Axiological Virtue Ethics

Rem B. Edwards<sup>1</sup>

**A**bstract: This article introduces Formal Axiology, first developed by Robert S. Hartman, and explains its essential features—a formal definition of “good” (the “Form of the Good”), three basic kinds of value and evaluation—systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic, and the hierarchy of value according to which good things having the richest quantity and quality of good-making properties are better than those having less. Formal Axiology is extended into moral philosophy by applying the Form of the Good to persons and showing how this culminates in an Axiological Virtue Ethics. This involves the systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic goodness of persons, the intrinsic-good-making properties of persons, and the moral virtues that respect the intrinsic worth of persons in thoughts, feelings, and actions. A few obstacles to being and becoming morally good persons are also identified and explained.

**K**ey words: Formal Axiology, Hierarchy of Values, Robert S. Hartman, Virtue Ethics.

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1. Lindsay Young Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus, The University of Tennessee, USA; remb1@att.net.

*Introduction*

First, please allow me to introduce myself to any new friends who might read this. I am now retired from a teaching career in Philosophy at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA, but I am still professionally active. I have published 21 books and over 85 articles and reviews in philosophy. My areas of specialization, research, and teaching are mainly in ethics, axiology (value theory, more broadly conceived), medical ethics, the philosophy of religion, and American philosophy. The following discussion outlines the best account of value theory and ethics or moral philosophy that I have been able to find, after almost a lifetime working on and thinking about ethical and broader axiological issues. I will keep technical jargon and historical references to a minimum, though inevitably there will be some.

*Formal Axiology in Seven Easy Steps*

The moral philosophy that I find most plausible is grounded in a broader theory of value known as Formal Axiology. This theory of value has been explained in many articles and books, but perhaps two of the best are Robert S. Hartman, *The Structure of Value*, 1967 and Rem B. Edwards, *The Essentials of Formal Axiology*, 2010. Hartman's book is very difficult, so most of my references will be to my own book. Much more relevant information is made available by the Robert S. Hartman Institute, on line at:

[www.hartmaninstitute.org](http://www.hartmaninstitute.org).

There are many kinds of goodness in addition to moral goodness, (e.g., good food, good workers, good products, good education, good theories, good societies, etc.), so axiology, the general theory of value, deals with non-moral as well as moral goodness. Formal Axiology differs from other

approaches in concentrating initially on the general patterns or forms involved in value judgments and inferences, and then applying these forms. Formal Axiology will be outlined in seven easy steps, and then applied to ethics or moral philosophy.

1. *The Meaning of "Good."* Before we can understand "moral goodness," we must first understand the more general meaning of "good" (or its equivalent in other languages). Robert S. Hartman, the creator of Formal Axiology, spent many years searching through innumerable definitions of "good" in order to discover a meaning common to its manifold uses (Hartman, 1994, pp.51-52). The British philosopher, G. E. Moore (1901), had more impact on ethical thinking in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century than almost anyone else. With Moore, Hartman agreed that "good" is not synonymous with any natural descriptive property such as pleasure, happiness, desire fulfillment, interest, preference, approval, knowledge, truth, conscientiousness, etc. Such definitions commit the "naturalistic fallacy," which confuses answers to, "What things are good?" with answers to, "What is the meaning of "good"?. Moore concluded from his own philosophical investigations that "good" cannot be defined at all, but Hartman disagreed and showed that this key value concept can be defined formally, though not materially or naturalistically. Thus, the naturalistic fallacy can be avoided, while recognizing an intimate relationship between the "Form of the Good" and descriptive "good-making properties."

Formal Axiology's "Form of the Good" is this: "Good" is "concept or standard fulfillment." This means that if you want to know whether ANYTHING is good, you must: A. have a standard or "concept" at your disposal, consisting of an indefinite number of ideal good-making descriptive or

conceptually constructed properties relevant to what is being evaluated; **B.** examine or otherwise learn about the value-object being evaluated to determine its actual properties; **C.** match its actual properties with the ones it is supposed to have according to your ideal standard; **D.** finally, judge or conclude that it is good if it has all the properties it is supposed to have, or judge it to be good by degrees (fair, average, poor, no good) if it has some but not all of them (Edwards, 2010, pp.2-7). Anyone can become a better judge of value by understanding that legitimate or justified judgments of “good” always involve these four steps.

Values are meanings in the sense that they always involve both the intensional connotations and the extensional denotations of concepts. Thus, the most valuable life is the most meaningful life, and the most meaningful life is the most valuable life.

Systemically valuable entities may fulfill only their definitional or conceptually constructed properties, but other kinds of goodness are richer in desirable properties. Consider this example of applying a relevant concept or standard to two complex value-objects. To determine if Mr. X or Mrs. Y are *extrinsically* good or useful college teachers, they must not only actually exemplify the defining properties of “college teacher,” but they must also exemplify additional ideal expositional “good-making” properties of the college teacher social role. They must:

*(Definitional properties)*

1. actually be teachers,
2. be employed to teach by a college,

*(Additional expositional extrinsic good-making properties)*

3. know well their subject matter,
4. engage in research and publication in their areas of teaching and specialization,
5. keep up with the latest developments in their areas of teaching and specialization,
6. be effective in communicating with students,
7. be fair and unprejudiced in grading students' papers and other course work,
8. make themselves readily available to students, e.g. by keeping regular office hours,
9. encourage their students who do well,
10. give extra help and attention to students who need it, etc.

*(Taking adequate account of the intrinsic goodness and the moral goodness of Mr. X and Mrs. Y (or anyone) requires additional good-making properties, as later explained.)*

This list of good-making properties could be extended almost indefinitely, as the "etc" indicates, but such criteria are widely used to determine if any given college teacher is a good one, a useful one. This is what a good college teacher is supposed to be like. Such norms (good-making properties) constitute our concept of "good college teacher." Norms are built into our concepts of social roles. Assuming that this list is sufficient, then if both Mr. X and Mrs. Y. exemplify all ten of these good-making properties, they are indeed good college teachers. To be classified as college teachers at all, they must fulfill the first two defining criteria. The remaining expositional good-making properties may be fulfilled by degrees, so Mr. X or Mrs. Y would be good teachers if they *completely* fulfill the 10 point standard, or they may *partly* fulfill the criteria by degrees and thus be fair, average, poor, or close to worthless as college teachers. Good is *complete* standard or concept fulfillment.

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Robert S. Hartman, the founder of Formal Axiology, thus “saw” the “Form of the Good” for the first time, though philosophers have sought it since the time of Plato. In the abstract, here is the form of the good:

GOOD-MAKING PROPERTIES	ACTUAL PROPERTIES
1. -----	1. -----
2. -----	2. -----
3. -----	3. -----
4. -----	4. -----
5. -----	5. -----
6. Extend as far as needed.	6. Extend as far as needed.

People can fail to reach agreement or make mistakes in positive value judgments if they:

- A. disagree about or misunderstand which good-making properties are included in the ideal standard,
- B. fail to examine, learn about, or understand adequately the value-object to which it is being applied,
- C. mis-match a thing’s actual properties with its ideal properties, or
- D. fail to draw logical conclusions.

This form can be applied to *anything* about which anyone makes positive value judgments, whether moral or non-moral. A corresponding form for “bad” or “evil” is composed of bad-making properties, though this negative form is not emphasized here (*Ibid*, pp.7-9). The forms of “good” and “bad” are definitive or absolute in structure or theory, but they are always somewhat subjective in application because disagreements or errors may occur anywhere between A. and D above (Hartman, 1967, pp.110-111). Then, to make further

progress, disagreements and errors must be discussed and resolved. Sometimes we just have to agree to disagree.

2. *Defining “Better,” “Best,” and “Ought.”* When comparing good things, if one has more good-making properties than *some* others in its class of comparison, it is *better* than those others. If it has more good-making properties than *all* others in its class of comparison, it is the *best* of the lot (Edwards, 2010, pp.20-22). Thus, Mrs. B is a better college teacher than Mr. A if she has nine of the good-making properties listed and he has only seven. She is the best of the lot if they are the only two teachers being compared. “X ought to be done” means “X is the best thing to do, so do it” (*Ibid*, pp.134-35).

3. *Three Kinds of Goodness.* There are at least three kinds of positive value or goodness—systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic; and all of them can be measured or compared rationally or conceptually with respect to their degree of goodness (*Ibid*, pp.27-39).

*Systemic goods are desirable mental or conceptual values.* Primary examples are: concepts, ideas, constructs, propositions, beliefs, laws, rules, mathematical and logical forms, ritual forms, and formalities of every description.

*Extrinsic goods are means to ends beyond themselves.* They include useful actions, objects, and processes located in public space-time and known through sensory perception. Examples are: beneficial human behaviors, natural resources, tools, flowing water, drinkable water, nutritious foods, shelters, clothing, etc. For short, we will call such aggregates “mere things” since in themselves they are inanimate and lack consciousness.

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*Intrinsic goods are ends in themselves, desirable for their own sakes. Primary examples are: unique individual persons, animals, and spiritual beings.*

Philosophers have debated for more than two millennia about answers to, “What entities are intrinsically good?” Obviously, these examples are controversial. Some say that only pleasure (or hedonic happiness) is intrinsically good, or desire-fulfillment, or truth, or knowledge, or moral conscientiousness, etc. The only available method ever discovered for determining which entities are intrinsically good is the “principle of isolation” described by G. E. Moore (1903, pp.91-96, pp.187-189). This method involves isolating the entity being considered from all else that it is normally associated with, then determining intuitively whether we desire it in itself or for its own sake when so isolated. We may discover that we value it only as a means to something else beyond itself, or only for its mental interests. After carefully applying Moore’s method of isolation, if we find intuitively that something all by itself is desirable in itself or for its own sake, we can reasonably proclaim it to be intrinsically good.

After reflecting for almost a lifetime on commonly advanced candidates for “intrinsically good” such as pleasure (hedonic happiness), desire-fulfillment, truth, knowledge, conscientiousness, etc., my own carefully considered and rationally refined judgment is that these are *not* intrinsically good. They have some other kind of goodness. They are *good for us*, but they are not *good in themselves*. Here is an easy way to see this. Carefully applying the principle of isolation to them means separating them from all else with which they are normally associated, *including individual conscious beings like ourselves*. Considered rigorously only “in themselves” or “in isolation,” such candidates for “intrinsically good” cannot even exist, much less have



positive value. They exist only “in us” or in other conscious individuals. They are thus good only *for us* but not *in themselves*. Only unique conscious beings are ends in themselves or *intrinsic goods*; these other desirable things are only *intrinsic value enrichers or enhancers*. Immanuel Kant (1969, pp.52-53) got the words right for this when he said that we should always treat persons as ends in themselves [intrinsic goods], and never merely as means [extrinsic goods]. Just what Kant meant by this is another story.

4. *The Hierarchy of Value*. Intrinsically good things have more good-making properties than extrinsically good things, which in turn have more good-making properties than systemically good things. This “more” can be qualitative as well as merely quantitative. Qualitative differences can also be counted. Thus, the three kinds of goodness fall into a hierarchy of goodness (Edwards.2010, pp.39-40). In application, since “better” means “more,” people (or other conscious individuals) are better or more valuable than mere things, and mere things are better or more valuable than mere ideas of things or of people (*Ibid*, pp.40-41).

Expressed abstractly, intrinsically valuable entities have more goodness than extrinsically valuable entities because they have more good-making properties, and extrinsically valuable entities have more goodness than systemically valuable entities because they have more good-making properties.

In application, this means that people (or other conscious beings) have more value than useful but inanimate sensory objects and processes, and useful sensory objects and processes have more value than mere ideas about them or about people.

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However implausible this hierarchy of goodness may seem at first, it can be defended. Let us begin with the least valuable of all, systemic values. Placing them at the bottom of our hierarchy of values does not mean that they have no value or very little value. Some good things can be very good, yet other good things can be even better. Systemic values—concepts, ideas, rules, beliefs, formal systems, etc., are only mental symbols that point toward or apply to even more valuable realities. Fictions may be created with them, but the primary purpose of mental symbols is to point or refer to realities beyond themselves. We have words for people and for mere things, but real people are more valuable than (have more good-making properties than) the verbal symbols that point to them. So it is also with desirable inanimate things—useful sensory or physical processes, activities, and objects. Both physical entities and human activities can be very useful as means to ends beyond themselves; so they are more valuable than our words for, thoughts about, or conceptual symbols for them. We can spend the coins in our pockets, but we cannot spend our thoughts about those coins. Money in the bank is worth more than money that exists merely in our minds or dreams, even if the two are numerically identical in face value. Real moral actions are more valuable than merely thinking about doing good.

Why are people more valuable than merely inanimate things? In only a few words, people are animate and conscious, but cars, houses, cash, coins, etc. are not. Careful attention will be given soon to the profusion of intrinsic-good-making properties of people. For now, let's grant that people have many good-making properties that inanimate but useful objects do not have. Real people are worth more than all the thoughts we can think about them. Real friends and loved ones are worth more than all of our ideas of or beliefs about them; and in relation to non-conscious extrinsic goods, they are priceless.

5. *Value Combinations and Confusions.* Value objects belonging to our three kinds or dimensions of goodness may be combined with one another in positive or negative, helpful or hurtful, value-increasing or value-decreasing ways. These combinations may form organic wholes that are more valuable than the mere sum of the values of their components or parts. For example, we can use ideas to create useful products, and we can give useful or physically beautiful things to our friends and loved ones. People can unite with people in marriage, family, and friendship. Homes can be bought or built for people. Good ideas can help us to become more thoughtful of an affectionate toward those we love, or more useful to our employers or employees. Examples of such value combinations are practically inexhaustible. Things that are otherwise good taken singly may also be combined with other good things in hurtful or destructive ways, e.g., when two good cars crash to make good junkers. Good ideas, useful things, and active people can be used to hurt people, destroy property, and degrade beliefs.

Value combinations must be distinguished from instances of the three dimensions taken singly. Great confusion may result when they are mistakenly identified, especially so when considering the value of systemically good things. Intellectuals are partial to systemic goods without always understanding why. We may confuse the value of ideas or other systemic goods as such with their relations to other good things that are complex value combinations. We might wonder if ideas aren't more valuable than mere things *because* we can do so much more with them. Well, which ideas, and which things? More importantly, good ideas plus their desirable consequences are rich combinations of value-objects in two or more value dimensions, and that combination (ideas *plus* what we can do with them) should

not be confused or identified with the value of ideas alone. To avoid such confusion when assessing the relative worth of ideas, follow this rule: *The value of conceptual symbols must always be correlated only with the good things that they symbolize (Ibid, p.48)*. Thus, we should not ask if ideas in general are more valuable than cars, houses, lands, and property. We should ask instead if a real car is not more valuable than the mere idea of a car, if a real house is not better than the mere idea of a house, if real land and property are not worth more than the mere thoughts of such, etc. Finally, we should ask if the value combination—the reality of a good idea and what we can do with it—is not more valuable than the mere thought of “a good idea and what we can do with it.” The obvious answer to such questions is, “Yes.”

6. *How We Value*. Good things, value-objects, exist within the three value dimension—systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic. They are *what we value*; but *how we value* is equally important, though often neglected (*Ibid*, Ch. 3). *How we value* involves both thoughts and feelings. Some philosophers suggest that valuing involves thoughts alone (e.g., Kant, Moore); others say that valuing involves feelings alone (e.g., the Emotivists and Logical Positivists). Both capture only half the truth. The whole truth, says Formal Axiology, is that valuing properly involves both thoughts and feelings. Evaluation is both a rational and an affective process.

*Mentally or rationally*, evaluating all three kinds of value-objects (and their combinations) involves forming relevant standards composed of ideal sets of good-making properties, then gaining knowledge of the actual properties of these value-objects, then matching the two sets of ideal and actual properties to determine if they correlate, i.e., if the objects really exemplify their ideal properties, and to what degree, then drawing logical conclusions.

*Affectively or emotively*, value-objects are evaluated through different kinds and degrees of feeling. Different feelings belong most naturally and appropriately with value-objects in different value dimensions. Most appropriately, we are involved dispassionately, objectively, or disinterestedly (but not uninterestedly) with ideas and beliefs (systemic evaluation.) We are involved with mere things through ordinary practical desires and feelings (extrinsic evaluation). And we are involved with persons or conscious beings through intense feelings of love, compassion, enjoyment, and self-identification (intrinsic evaluation). Degrees of feeling-involvement shade off gradually into one another, but hard core instances of each are identifiable. Systemic evaluation is the least intense kind of affective involvement, but it is not mere indifference or uninterestedness. Intrinsic evaluation is the most intense kind of affective involvement, and extrinsic evaluation falls somewhere in between. What philosophers call “approval” comes in many shades.

7. *Valuing Good Things in Different Dimensions.* A value-object in any dimension can be evaluated as if it belongs to some other value dimension. The distinction between value-objects (values) and evaluations (how we value) is highly relevant and important.

As value-objects, mere things like knives, tables, newspapers, and art objects that have no consciousness or awareness of their own *never* have any intrinsic value. They are always merely extrinsic value-objects. However, we can value them in three different ways, systemically, extrinsically, and intrinsically. We can value any value-object as if it belongs inherently to some other value dimension. Evaluation in each dimension has two components, a conceptual or rational component (concept fulfillment) and an affective component (our emotional or affective involvement with it). Let’s

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consider a pocket knife as an example. In itself, a pocket knife is simply an extrinsically valuable (useful) perceptual object or tool, but we may relate to it evaluatively in three distinctive ways

Evaluating this or any extrinsic value object *systemically* involves both reason and affections. (1) Rationally, we do this by applying only a very few abstract Form of the Good properties to it. Does it actually fulfill its purely formal properties? Does it exemplify the definitional properties of “knife”? (It might be only a rubber or plastic toy that will not cut anything.) Does it have the mathematical and geometrical properties of a good pocket knife? (A poorly manufactured one may not.) (2) Affectively, we can relate to these formal properties only objectively or disinterestedly. We can also evaluate pocket knives extrinsically or intrinsically.

Evaluating a knife or any extrinsic value object *extrinsically* also involves both reason and affections. (1) Rationally, we can apply a more complex Form of the Good to it. For example, a good pocket knife can be used for cutting, chopping, and defending. How well do the properties of this particular knife fulfill the expectations of usefulness that we have for it? Does it actually have the good-making expositional properties that it ought to have? We may go further and ask if this knife is worth its weight in gold, but even gold is merely an extrinsic value object, highly prized for its immense utility. (2) Affectively, we can relate to the usefulness of knives and gold through our normal everyday practical desires, feelings, attitudes, and interests.

Evaluating a knife or any extrinsic value object *intrinsically* also involves both reason and affections. (1) Rationally, we can conceptually consider a pocket knife in its uniqueness and completeness. How does it differ from all other knives in

the universe? What are its individuating properties? Does it have any psychological properties? Why do we find it especially appealing? (2) Affectively, we can relate to it with profound sensitivity, love, affection, delight, and personal identification, as if it were person-like. When affectively evaluating them intrinsically, we typically associate extrinsic value objects, mere things, with persons. Intrinsic evaluations of extrinsic objects are value compositions, not evaluations of merely inanimate objects considered in isolation. For example, we may intensely value this particular pocket knife because it belonged to our father or grandfather, who we recall with great affection. Perhaps we recall using it ourselves on a glorious camping trip with our own children. Thereby, we personally identify intensely with this particular knife/grandfather, or with that knife/camping-trip/with-our-children. There is a real difference between the value of *a mere pocket knife* and *my grandfather's pocket knife*. Of course, a miser might intensely and directly value the gold or money that the knife is worth "for its own sake" and create his own personal identity around it, without further associations. However, most of us value money in any form only extrinsically, for what we can do with it, i.e. for its usefulness in getting other things that we want. We easily recognize that misers overvalue gold or cash.

No matter *how* we value it, a pocket knife as such is just a pocket knife, a physical object with no mind, awareness, consciousness, thoughts, sensitivity, feelings, or values of its own, and no amount of value-association or reflection can ever get around that brute fact. This must also be said of tables, chairs, newspapers, physical works of art, etc. A newspaper is inherently a value compound or composition, being both a physical object and a locus of systemic thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and information. We can separate these two elements and consider a newspaper merely as useful kitty

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litter, or we can ignore its physicality and consider only the thoughts it brings to mind.

Even professional axiologists may ignore the distinction or confuse values (what we value) and evaluations (how we value), so don't be discouraged if you share this confusion. Robert S. Hartman sometimes called art-objects like beautiful paintings and sculptures "intrinsic values," though surely he meant only that we can evaluate them intrinsically. Many of us think that way about them. Strictly speaking, however, they are only extrinsic value-objects being evaluated intrinsically in their full concreteness and uniqueness and with profound feelings. A beautiful statue by Michelangelo has no mind, awareness, consciousness, thoughts, sensitivity, feelings, or values of its own. Thus, it is not intrinsically good, not an end in, to, and for itself, even if we aesthetically identify with it profoundly and speak metaphorically of its "intrinsic value."

Often, evaluating value-objects in some other dimension is a very good thing that enhances overall value; but sometimes it is not, most obviously when done to diminish the value of something even better. Overvaluation or undervaluation involve valuing things as if they were something else, and ranking them wrongly in relation to other better or less valuable value-objects. For example, people can be evaluated as if they were mere things or property (slavery), or as if they were mere tokens in a system (ideology and dogmatism). Things and beliefs can be valued passionately as if they were persons, and persons may be evaluated as mere things or mere systemic tokens (*Ibid*). Most of the moral evils of human existence involve either undervaluing people or outright devaluing them.

Nothing is inherently wrong with positively evaluating everything in any value dimension passionately and intensely (intrinsically) as long as the hierarchy of value is sustained,



that is, as long as value-objects are *loved in proportion to their actual degree of goodness*. This is the way that the saints value in every culture, but most of us fall far short of this (*Ibid*, pp.125-130). This leads us to axiological ethics.

### **AXIOLOGICAL ETHICS OR MORAL PHILOSOPHY**

Ethics is understood by most philosophers to pertain to our relations with human beings, ourselves included. In recent decades, ethics has been profoundly extended to include our relations with non-human animals and our wider natural environment, but, due to limitations of space, our present focus will be on our ethical relations with people. Axiological ethics 1. applies the Form of the Good to human beings to discern our good-making properties, and in doing so 2. it applies three kinds of goodness to human beings—systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic. Our moral duties, practices, motives, and virtues can be identified within these contexts.

1. *Systemic formal ethics* is expressed conceptually or rationally in moral beliefs, rules, regulations, rights, commandments, etc. It is expressed affectively in approving, adopting, or affirming such conceptual formalities dispassionately or objectively, and in being mentally attuned to the still small voice of conscience within us. There is no definitive list of carefully considered conscience-sanctioned ethical rules, but they include such things as: We ought to help the poor and those in need. We ought to keep our promises. We ought not to kill. We ought not to steal, etc. Often, appropriate qualifications are required, such as allowing killing in self-defense or to protect friends or loved ones against aggression when there is no other way to do it. Conceptual ethical guidelines are desirable, indeed practically indispensable, but other aspects of morality (the extrinsic and the intrinsic) are even more desirable, so moral rules exist for the sake of practice, property, and people, not the other way around.

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Systemic ethics can also be expressed in thinking positive or beneficial rather than negative, hurtful, degrading, or prejudicial thoughts about people. Harmful thoughts often lead to harmful deeds and to real harm to persons. I have elsewhere summarized the most basic systemic moral rules of Formal Axiology in these words:

- 1) We ought to value people more than things, and things more than ideas.
  - 2) We ought to develop ourselves, and to help others develop themselves, systemically, extrinsically, and intrinsically.
  - 3) We ought to value all persons and conscious beings, including ourselves, intrinsically, and never *merely* extrinsically or *merely* systemically.
  - 4) In all possible value dimensions, we ought to choose courses of action that sustain or increase value, and avoid actions that decrease value for ourselves and others who are affected by what we do.
  - 5) Thus, *we ought always to identify-with, prefer, choose, and do what is best, that is, what is likely to be richest in good-making properties (Ibid, p.170).*
2. *Extrinsic practical ethics* consists in *acting* rightly and avoiding wrongful actions. Extrinsic ethics includes systemic ethics. *Rationally*, it involves acting in accord with socially beneficial moral rules, while recognizing that good moral judgment often transcends rule-rigidity. It considers both actions and consequences. It involves understanding what is likely to help or hurt people, thinking helpful rather than hurtful thoughts, and putting our systemic value insights into practice. Extrinsic ethics presupposes systemic ethics. *Affectively*, extrinsic moral goodness involves very ordinary human feelings, emotions, pleasures, attitudes, preferences, approvals, attitudes, likings, desires, and interests. *Practically*, extrinsic ethics involves *acting* rightly, which

goes deeper than mere rational objectivity. Pro-social desires, if often practiced and reinforced, can become moral habits, dispositions, and virtues. Though it is only long-range egoism, what philosophers call “reciprocal altruism” is a good expression of extrinsic moral goodness. Most of us, for very practical reasons, find the “social contract” that codifies reciprocal altruism very desirable: “I won’t hurt you if you won’t hurt me; I will help you if you will help me.” Thereby we get along and muddle through. Since we are by nature social beings, most of us desire at times to help a few others in unselfish ways. Here the line between extrinsic and intrinsic morality grows fuzzy, depending on the depth and scope of such imperatives, desires, and affections. Most ordinary people are systemically or extrinsically ethical and get along well enough with others without being moral saints and heroes.

3. *Intrinsic virtue ethics* rationally involves applying the Form of the Good to all persons, self and others, as explored in the next section. Virtuous people also consider and are guided by ethical rules (rational or systemic ethics), but they understand that rules are incomplete, general, often conflicting, and never displace good judgment by good people in concrete circumstances. Virtuous people are also morally active people, so virtue ethics also includes extrinsic ethics. Affectively, intrinsic virtue ethics involves the most profound manifestations of morally good motives and enduring moral affections and virtues. As I explained elsewhere,

Intrinsic morality is the highest level of morality, but it is not the sum total of ethics. [There is also systemic and extrinsic moral goodness.] It is based upon and manifests genuine and profound love, empathy, compassion, and self-identification with others. Its requirements go far beyond those of systemic and extrinsic ethics. With increasing degrees of intensity and

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specification, all three levels of morality orient us toward and are governed by the basic principle of morality: *We ought always to identify, prefer, choose, and do what is best, that is, what is likely to be richest in good-making properties.* The systemic level gives more specific action-guiding moral rules for optimizing moral goodness; the extrinsic level largely lives it but without great passion; the intrinsic level does it best, most thoroughly, and with the most intense, profound, and saintly moral motives and virtues. (*Ibid*, p.156)

Intrinsic moral goodness includes systemic and extrinsic moral goodness, but it goes beyond them by degrees if not in absolute kind. To understand this, we must reflect on how the Form of the Good applies to individual persons.

### *The Intrinsic-Good-Making Properties of Persons*

People may be good or valuable in several different ways. We will now consider the intrinsic goodness of persons, which includes their uniqueness and their moral goodness or virtues. Morally good people take the intrinsic goodness of all persons fully into account conceptually, behaviorally, and affectively. We must now consider some of the good-making properties of intrinsically valuable persons.

What intrinsic-good-making properties do people have that extrinsic and systemic goods lack? Persons are intrinsically good, ends in themselves, valuable in themselves or for their own sakes, *because* they exemplify many intrinsic-good-making qualities not exemplified by mere things or by mere ideas, formalities, and beliefs. Among these are: minds, awareness, consciousness, thoughts, sensitivity, feelings, actions, and values of their own. Explaining this involves applying the Form of the Good to persons.

Modern sociobiology has made it fashionable once more to think seriously about human nature, about properties shared in common by all human beings. Having distant common ancestors and a common genetic heritage makes us more alike than different the world over. Sociobiology as well as axiology invites us to consider what we are like essentially as human beings. Having common good-making properties does not necessarily mean that these properties are only or distinctively human, that no other living creatures have them. Axiology invites us to assess the value significance of our essential properties, whatever they are, and no matter who or what else shares them. Again, there is no definitive list, but we will consider some obvious possibilities.

To decide whether anything is good, we must create or identify a conceptual standard composed of relevant good-making properties, then apply this standard to it. Deciding whether anything is intrinsically good requires more specific *ideal criteria for intrinsic goodness* that distinguish it from extrinsic and systemic goodness. So, what intrinsic-good-making properties do people (and other conscious beings) have by virtue of which they are valuable for their own sakes, ends to, in, and for themselves? These can be divided into three groups, generically human properties, unique individual properties, and moral properties. People are ends in themselves because they exemplify the following intrinsic-good-making properties.

1. *Generically Human Intrinsic-Good-Making properties.*  
Some intrinsic-good-making properties are common to all human beings everywhere. Consider these examples.

*Consciousness.* We know from experience what consciousness is. We experience it every time we wake up from a good night's sleep. We know that through it we are aware of many things and take account of our environment; but we have many unanswered

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questions about it. We know that consciousness is embodied, that it is intimately related to the functioning of our brains, but we really do not know how (though there are many theories about this). Yet, we do know that it is very real and causally effective. Consciousness partly accounts for our intrinsic goodness.

*Self-consciousness and self-concern.* Not only are we aware, when awake, of what is present and going on in our environment, but we are also aware of ourselves, of what is present and going on within ourselves. We are immediately aware of our own thoughts, feelings, choices, and actions, and of their temporality. Further, we are concerned about ourselves and about our own thoughts, feelings, choices, and actions. Such things matter greatly to us. By nature, we are self-concerned, self-interested. We anticipate and care about our own future, what we will think, feel, experience, choose, and do tomorrow and later. We plan ahead, though some do this better and further than others. Some have long-range plans of life, though their specificity varies from person to person and from time to time within each person. We are valuable to, for, and in ourselves partly because we are directly aware of and care about ourselves.

*Intelligence* is a very broad concept that includes our systemic capacities to remember or image past events, create concepts, make judgments, generalize, draw logical inferences (reasoning), and imagine things not immediately experienced, including future possibilities for actualization. Because we are intelligent beings by nature, we are curious. We wonder, we seek and find knowledge and truth, and we value such things. Although we are intelligent or rational beings, we should not think that our intrinsic goodness depends on reason or intelligence alone. Nor should we vainly boast or assume that only human beings are intelligent. Still, intelligence is one of our intrinsic-good-making properties.

*Feelings or affections*, broadly understood to include all desires, appetites, emotions, affections, purposes, interests, approvals, moods, enjoyments, attitudes, etc., are among our intrinsic-good-making properties. Without feelings we would have no values at all; we would not care about anything. Non-human animals (rational by degrees) as well as human animals (also rational by degrees) have feelings, so intrinsic-good-making properties are not distinctively human. Shared intrinsic-good-making properties indicate that some non-human living things also have intrinsic worth. Animals have feelings, but mere things and mere thoughts do not. Some of our feelings (e.g., of hatred and revenge) are among our moral bad-making properties. Having feelings partly accounts for our intrinsic goodness. Feelings are also integral to intrinsic moral goodness, particularly those feelings involved in profound love, empathy, compassion, delight, and concentration.

*Creativity, choosing, and acting* are universal human properties that contribute to our overall intrinsic goodness. All human beings are creative, make choices, and act upon them. Some people are much more creative, make more momentous decisions with more consequential effects, than others. We constantly make creative choices in dealing with the ordinary affairs of life and in relating to others, even if we are not immensely creative artists, musicians, writers, thinkers, philosophers, inventors, social engineers, or moral activists. All of us are partly self-creative, and our initiatives influence human, animal, and environmental others by degrees. All of us are responsible for the choices we make, i.e., for the voluntary control we exercise over what we think, how we feel, and what we do, and for our immediate and long-range effects. Many of us are immensely creative and concentrate intensely on what we are creating (e.g., works of art, or systems of thought, or inventions, or better social

conditions and relations), and we intensely identify ourselves with our products during our most creative moments.

*Values and evaluations* are common human intrinsic-good-making properties. We recognize value-objects and evaluate them in three dimensions. Mere things and mere thoughts do not. Living is valuing. All of our waking moments involve evaluating value-objects. One of our intrinsic-good-making properties is that we both recognize and identify ourselves with intrinsic goodness. We also recognize and attach ourselves by degrees to other kinds of goodness.

Perhaps other common human properties should be added to this list of intrinsic-good-making properties, but we have enough before us to show how the Form of the Good applies to our own intrinsic goodness. We are intrinsically valuable because we actually exemplify these ideal good-making properties. We fulfill this concept. Yet, at least one more property is absolutely essential for intrinsic goodness, and here it is.

*Uniqueness or individuality* contributes significantly to our being final ends, valuable in, to, and for ourselves. Here “individuality” does not mean “individualism” in the pejorative sense — eccentric selfishness, excessive self-centeredness, or exclusive self-interestedness. No, “uniqueness” or “individuality” just means “having properties that nothing else has” (*Ibid*, pp.56-61). Not having some important things in common with others is one of the most important things that we all have in common! No human being is only generically human, having only abstract general capacities for consciousness, self-consciousness, intelligence, feelings and affections, creative choice-making, etc. Concretely, all of us have properties that no one else has. All of us are distinct individuals, unrepeated and unrepeatable under the sun, and our uniqueness is one of our most important intrinsic-good-making properties. Keep in mind that uniqueness alone does not account



for our intrinsic worth because, in a sense, all mindless thoughts and things are also unique, that is, all have at least one property that nothing else has; and they may be so regarded and valued. Intrinsic worth requires all the other common human properties already discussed plus uniqueness. So what are some of our individuating or unshared properties?

1. All universally human properties are concretely combined or configured in each person in absolutely unique ways (as are our fingerprints, iris eye patterns, genes, etc).
2. Every person occupies an absolutely unique position in space and time. No one else was ever born exactly where and when I was born, and no one else sits exactly where I sit as I now type these words. Such spatiotemporal uniqueness extends throughout life. Human spatiotemporality involves embodiment; no one else has my body; no one else has yours.
3. Every person constantly enjoys an absolutely unique and distinctive perspective on the universe. No one else sees or otherwise experiences anything from exactly my point of view.
4. All persons make their own choices. No one else makes them for us, or makes them at all. Each new choice is an additional good-making property (as is every other new positive experience). Time constantly enriches our axiological goodness.
5. What was just said of choice is also true of all previously discussed universally human intrinsic-good-making properties in the concrete. Each person is consciously and self-consciously unique with respect to all the *details* of consciousness and self-consciousness, all the particulars of functioning intelligence, affections, and actions. In the abstract, we have many desirable general capacities in common; in particular, mine are only mine, and yours are only yours.

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6. Considered concretely rather than in the abstract, all of us have our own distinctive personal projects, stations in life, and responsibilities to ourselves and others.
7. All of us have our own unique self-concepts, self-knowledge, self-ideals, and self-expectations.
8. Each of us can only die once in, to, and for ourselves. Nobody else can do it for me. No one else can do it for you.

This list might be extended indefinitely, but enough has been said to make the essential point about uniqueness. We are not intrinsically good simply because we are generically human. In addition, we are individual or individuated persons, and we are valuable in, to, for, and because of our absolute uniqueness. We can and should value all persons in their uniqueness and not just as generically human. Values that are not unique, e.g., our generic human properties, and our social properties or roles, are replaceable without loss of goodness by any other individual who exemplifies those properties (to the same degree). Unless we have formed intimate personal relations with them, most people in our lives are replaceable with little or no sense of loss. This is because in practice we value most people only extrinsically or systemically, and all extrinsic and systemic values are replaceable without loss by something or someone else just as good. We can value others through extrinsic or systemic ethics without valuing them through intrinsic ethics, but this still leaves something to be desired.

We do not normally grieve when our students, colleagues, customers, employers, employees, etc. move on or away and are no longer in our lives. We can always get another one if anyone's goodness to us is merely extrinsic or systemic. We do grieve, however, when those who are very close to us, those we value intimately and intrinsically, move away or out of our lives, especially if separated by death. If we did not

cherish uniqueness, we would feel no great loss when a dear friend or loved one dies, just as a shopkeeper feels no great loss when a customer walks away. Yet, this is not so; we do grieve when intimates are lost. But can't dear friends and loved ones also be replaced without loss by other friends and loved ones, just like passing customers or most of the students in last year's classes? Not so. Grief focuses primarily on uniqueness, not just on common humanity, or on repeatable social roles (usefulness to others), or on systemic conformity. Friends and loved ones may have beneficial successors, but they cannot be replaced intrinsically. If we comprehend that, we have understood the value of unique and intrinsically valuable persons.

A philosophical consideration about "Who am I?" may help to show how the common property of "having properties that no one else has" (uniqueness) is essential to our having intrinsic worth. This question can be asked and answered by everyone, so the "I" used here is everyone's "I." According to Formal Axiology's understanding of "self," *I am the integrated unity and totality of all of my properties*, whether good or bad (*Ibid*, pp.58-61). But none of us are finished or completed integrated totalities. We exist in time. We are becomings, not mere beings; and every moment adds new and interesting good-making (or bad-making) properties to our integrated totality—new sensory and introspective experiences, new thoughts and beliefs, new feelings, desires, appetites, emotions, purposes, interests, moods, attitudes, approvals, enjoyments, etc., and new choices and creative practical endeavors. Time constantly adds to the richness of who "I" am, to the richness of my concrete intrinsic-good-making properties. So it is with all of us. The *number* of good-making properties in abstract "humanity" can be counted easily; the *number* of good-making properties in unique individuals is so vast that it is practically impossible to count them.

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More could be said about the intrinsic goodness of human beings, but this is enough for now. Note that morally wicked people exemplify all of the preceding intrinsic-good-making properties that morally good people exemplify. They are conscious, self-conscious, self-concerned, and intelligent. They have feelings, make creative choices, have values, and are unique individuals. They are intrinsically good even when they are morally bad. Our capacities for morality, degrees of it, or the lack of it, are also integral aspects of our uniqueness. Thus, another universal intrinsic-good-making properties is that *we can be either morally good or morally bad*, or fall somewhere in between by degrees. So how does Formal Axiology deal with moral or ethical goodness and badness?

2. *Morally Desirable Good-Making Properties or Virtues.*  
“Intrinsically good” and “morally good” are distinctive concepts that can be independently fulfilled, even if the notions overlap in content. They have different good-making properties, and they apply to different people to the degree that they exemplify such good-making properties. No one can fail to be intrinsically good; anyone can fail to be morally good.

Morally good-making properties are commonly called “virtues.” Moral virtues are enduring dispositions to behave morally. Aristotle suggested that morally right or correct actions are those that morally virtuous persons would do. What is now called “virtue ethics” springs from this insight. Identifying morally correct actions in this manner requires an understanding of the moral virtues of morally good persons. Many moral virtues have been identified, such as wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, humility, truthfulness, and honesty; but we will concentrate on a few that have special significance within the framework of Axiological Virtue Ethics, those involving the intrinsic evaluation of others.

Intrinsic virtue ethics involves and presupposes systemic and extrinsic ethics. Intrinsic ethics is both informed and active. Applying the Form of the Good to the concept of “morally good person,” here are some relevant good-making properties or *moral virtues*.

*Conscience.* All people, by nature, and not just by culture, have an internal systemic moral compass, commonly called “conscience.” Its clarity and strength varies from person to person. It may be colored or distorted by culture and upbringing, but we all have it (except maybe sociopaths). Carefully considered, it approves of certain ways of relating to people and disapproves of others. Morally good people are attuned to and do not suppress conscience. They have an easy conscience because they actually do what conscience requires, and they refrain from what conscience prohibits.

*Empathy.* No one can be a morally good person systemically or extrinsically without conscience, a sense of and beliefs about right and wrong, and actions flowing from them; but intrinsic empathy goes further and is equally essential. Conscience could not function effectively without some degree of it. Empathy is the ability to imagine oneself in someone else’s place, in “someone else’s shoes,” as we often say. Empathy positively values the goodness in someone else’s life, whether it be systemic (mental), extrinsic (physical, social, active, or practical), or intrinsic (inner personal). Empathy requires imagination. It functions when we imagine the goodness in someone’s else’s life, especially when our own thoughts, feelings, words, and actions affect them. Imagining how we might affect others for better or for worse, and how they would respond to that, motivates the highest morally good or ethical behavior. One of the most important and universally accepted formal aids to empathy is commonly called the “Golden Rule.” Exactly what it says may

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be expressed in many different ways: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you. Do not hurt others if you would not have them hurt you. Desire for others what you would desire for yourself. Love for others what you would love for yourself. Love others as you love yourself. All versions of the Golden Rule require imagining how others would be affected by what we do, *assuming that we have their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires, habits, and interests*, not that they have ours. Virtuous persons are empathetic and act accordingly. Empathy is a fundamental good-making-property of morally good persons.

*Compassion.* Empathy focuses on the *goodness* in the lives of others, and on acting to enhance that goodness. Compassion attends to *the undesirable things or harms* in the lives of others, and on how to act to alleviate or avoid inflicting them. Empathy rejoices with those who rejoice; compassion suffers with those who suffer. Evils in the lives of others may be systemic (undesirable thoughts and beliefs, e.g. falsehoods, confusions), extrinsic (undesirable physical or social conditions or behaviors), or intrinsic (undesirable inner or personal conditions, experiences, or passivities). Existing evils in the lives of others are not necessarily inflicted by us. They may be already there. Compassionate people identify with the sufferings and losses of others. They do what they can to console those who suffer and to alleviate their suffering and losses. Compassion imagines the harms that we might inflict on others, and it is merciful. Compassion does not inflict harms on others that we would not wish to have inflicted on ourselves, and it acts to alleviate already existing harms that we would want relieved if we were in their place.

*Identification with others.* Empathy and compassion manifest an underlying intense axiological/psychological

moral identification of self with others. Artistic, practical, and intellectual creativity, concentration, and consumption involve intense personal identification with and evaluation of works of art, physical things, social conditions in the world, and intellectual products. We may robustly identify ourselves with systemic goods, with extrinsic goods, and with intrinsic goods.

When we identify ourselves profoundly with intrinsically good things, with other people, something very strange and interesting happens to us. We are transformed. We are no longer narrowly and exclusively self-interested or self-centered selves. The “self” is changed into something much more inclusive and expansive. Psychologically and axiologically, we somehow become one with others. Ontologically, we are still unique and distinct individuals, but our internal self-identity now includes their self-identity. The metaphysical differences between us no longer matter and often are no longer even noticed. Their systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic goodness become our systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic goodness. The systemic, extrinsic, and intrinsic harms that befall them now befall us. When we identify intensely with others, our lives are enriched immensely but not selfishly, for their good-making properties in every value dimension now become our own good-making properties. We are no longer the narrowly self-absorbed persons we were before. With respect to their ills, here too our lives are enriched as we suffer compassionately with those who suffer and strive to help them.

*Integrity.* Being consistently or constantly true to ourselves, to the goodness that is in us, to the best that is in us, to our highest intuitions and ideals, is integrity. Morally good persons have systemic integrity, extrinsic integrity, and intrinsic integrity. They are honest, truthful, responsible, reliable, and conscientious. They have high standards. They are dependably helpful and actually live up to their highest

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ideals of goodness. They are open to finding and becoming something even better. They assume personal responsibility for who and what they are and do. They have profound self-esteem and value themselves as well as others intrinsically.

Many other moral virtues could be identified and discussed, e.g., *a sense of justice* that issues in treating people fairly and with due respect, but perhaps enough has been said about the intrinsic moral virtues emphasized by Axiological Virtue Ethics. *Morally right actions* are those that would be done by people who are conscientious, empathetic, and compassionate, who identify themselves with others, who are consistently true or faithful in thoughts, words, and deeds to the best of the goodness within themselves, and who are fair and just in their dealings with others. Moral rules are never sufficiently precise or inclusive so as to eliminate the necessity for the individual judgments and decisions of virtuous people.

Many hard questions about how to apply axiological ethics remain to be answered. For example, what does all of this imply for highly controversial current issues in medical ethics, ethics and animals, ethics and the environment, inevitable conflicts between intrinsically valuable lives, degrees of intrinsic goodness, etc.? These remain beyond the scope of this essay, though I have discussed some of them elsewhere (Edwards, 1991, pp.81-104).

Instead of now dealing with the very large topic of moral vices and negative thoughts, deeds, and feelings, this discussion will conclude with some brief comments on just a few common but serious obstacles to becoming and being morally virtuous persons.

3. *Major Obstacles to Virtuous Living.* Not everyone is morally good. Bad people exist in the world, and most people exist in a fuzzy realm somewhere between the best



and the worst that they could be. Why is it so hard for us to be or become morally good people? Here are a few of the many obstacles.

*Undervaluing other people.* Even when we attach some positive value to people, as most of us usually do, we may regard them as having less value than they actually have, and we may act accordingly. We may view them only or primarily extrinsically, and thus exploit them and treat them as mere means to our own ends, without acknowledging their intrinsic worth, without taking adequate account of their own beliefs, plans, projects, physical well being, or inner feelings, desires, habits, and interests, and without treating them as ends in themselves. It is morally permissible to use people; we do it appropriately and with proper respect much of the time; but we may not *merely* use people and disregard or devalue their intrinsic reality and worth, just as Kant suggested. We often disregard or thwart what is best for others for the sake of our own material or social gains, thus undervaluing their intrinsic goodness for the sake of our own extrinsic well being. We may undervalue others who disagree with us, or who do not fit neatly into our own belief systems and ways of thinking, thus ranking their intrinsic personal worth lower than our own systemic conceptual values. Ideologists and fanatics of every description constantly do this.

Not valuing others intrinsically actually diminishes us, though we may not realize it. We hurt ourselves when we do not identify ourselves with others, when we do not take their goodness into ourselves and make it our own. As often noted, people can be very moral in some ways, e.g., systemically and extrinsically, without being profoundly or intrinsically moral. People who know what is right and act accordingly may be extrinsically moral—because it pays, or systemically moral—

duty only for the sake of duty (see Kant, 1969, pp.6-7, pp.18-20), but not for the sake of people. Yet, such people are missing out on something very important. To some degree, egoists and reciprocal altruists may resent the fact that innumerable good-making properties belong to and within others, and that all the goodness in the universe is not exclusively their own. Yet anyone really can make all the goodness in the universe their own by not caring that it is not exclusively their own, by delighting in its presence with and in others, and by identifying as fully as possible with all in all. Such intrinsically moral (and saintly) people live lives as meaningful and rich in goodness as it is possible for any human life to be.

*Disvaluing other people* takes the practical axiological errors of undervaluation to extremes. We may regard people as having little or no value, but we may go even further and regard them as so inherently evil that we are allowed if not obligated to inflict evils of any or every description upon them by any means available to us. We may regard others, our “enemies,” as inherently evil because they now threaten or in the past have damaged our way of thinking, our social or material prosperity, or our inner feelings and reality. Moral vices like hatred and revenge disvalue people as such. Greed and envy disvalue their property—as long as they have it, while positively coveting it for ourselves. Dogmatism and ideology disvalue their beliefs and life-forms if different from our own. Such vices are major obstacles to moral goodness. Better means richer in goodness. Love is better than hatred. Forgiveness and mercy are better than revenge. Delight in the prosperity of others is better than greed and envy. Equality is better than snobbery or domineering. Inclusion is better than exclusion. Forbearance is better than dogmatism. Helping is better than hurting. Building is better than destroying. Peace is better than war. These are difficult moral lessons for

anyone anywhere to learn and practice, but the world would be a much better place for all if we did.

*The insider/outsider distinction.* One of the most natural but morally pernicious distinctions made by almost everyone (except for moral saints) is that between insiders and outsiders. Insiders are people who have moral standing with us; they belong to our moral community; outsiders don't. We feel that we have moral duties to help and not hurt insiders, but not outsiders. Insiders are "our kind of people;" outsiders are "those kind of people," "strangers," "aliens," "enemies." We care about what happens to insiders, but not to outsiders, strangers, aliens, enemies. Using the insider/outsider distinction, we inordinately limit the scope of our moral concerns, duties, and frames of reference. We regularly use it to ignore, underestimate, or even devalue the intrinsic worth of others.

Modern sociobiologists tell us that when morality first originated, it was applied only to members of one's own tribe or clan, but not to outsiders, not to those who do not belong. Thus, by nature we seem to care morally only for persons of kin and kind. Even within our own social groups and cultures, we distinguish between superiors and inferiors, to whom we have more or less stringent moral obligations. Many philosophers and serious thinkers insist that we must somehow expand the scope of our moral concerns beyond kin, kind, and social class. Philosophers insist that morality is necessarily universal in scope and application, and many other people say that as human beings we are all brothers and sisters of one another and should act accordingly, but are they fighting a losing battle with human nature? Let us hope not.

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