A PRACTICAL DISTINCTION IN VALUE THEORY: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ACCOUNTS

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ABSTRACT

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Contemporary moral philosophers have used practical experience as a tool for gleaning important facts about the metaphysical status of value. In particular, recent debate has been ongoing over the status of regret as an indicator that we live in a world filled with a plurality of different types of value. The thrust of many of the arguments in favor of this view is that if I choose one good thing over another and I am convinced that I made the right choice but nevertheless still feel regret at having to forego the other good, then the forgone good must be good thanks to a different type of value. In other words, common experiences like regretting our forgone rock careers indicates that there is a plurality of different types of value.

All of these arguments rest on an inferential claim about the practical effects of value, namely that under normal conditions if a value exists and we knowingly encounter it, then we will be affected in some way by our encounter with the value. Unfortunately, this inference inevitably causes these arguments to beg the question in favor of the conclusions about value that they set out to prove. This is particularly unfortunate since many of the intuitions that these arguments rest on are compelling.

This dissertation argues for a new approach to thinking about practical effects of value, such that the seeming practical effects of value tell us more about our evaluative beliefs than the metaphysics of value. On that point, this dissertation distinguishes quantitative and qualitative ways of thinking about our evaluations. After arguing for the particular practical experience of loss, this dissertation concludes that we should ultimately adopt qualitative theories of
evaluation. The ramification for value theory is that metaphysical claims about value that entail quantitative evaluative approaches should be abandoned.
To my family; all of it.
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CHAPTER 1. THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF VALUE AND EVALUATION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter serves two purposes. The primary task will be discussing the layout and content of this dissertation. In concert with this I will be placing this dissertation in the current literature. Since the layout and content of the dissertation make more sense with some background, I will begin with that. Overall, this dissertation argues for a new distinction in value theory that depends crucially on the practical effects of value. This new distinction is between quantitative and qualitative views of value, and ultimately, I will be arguing that qualitative accounts of value can give a better account for how we respond to missing out on what we believe are bearers of value. I call these experiences loss, and they are examples of a type of practical effect of value. If it is ultimately judged that these arguments for the acceptance of a qualitative account do not fully succeed, the effort will not be without its merit. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative theories of value has its place in the value theory literature, and loss has its place as a distinct sentiment that theories of value should account for.

Since much of this dissertation involves the relationship between value and its practical effects, section 1.1 introduces what I call the Practical Effects of Value Inference (PEVI) and the analogous Practical Effects of Evaluation Inference (PEEI). I argue that while PEVI is often used to make claims about the metaphysical nature of value, it also often overstates these conclusions. In section 1.2 and 1.3, I argue that in a dispute over the plurality of values Michael Stocker and Thomas Hurka’s implicit use of PEVI leads to an impasse. These sections demonstrate that a move away from PEVI makes sense for two reasons: (1) PEVI, which appears to be a useful tool for discovering more about the metaphysical nature of value, tends to conflate its discoveries about value with the very assumptions that are built into its formulation. In other
words, various formulations of PEVI have a strong tendency to beg the question in favor of their discoveries. And (2), these arguments by Stocker and Hurka have important merit even if we strip them of their claims about the metaphysical nature of value. At the heart of their views, both Stocker and Hurka agree on the idea that our presumed experiences with value show value to be far more complex than some theories of value would imply. We should not, after all, accept theories of value that cannot account for our experience with the world. However, in using PEVI they have both overreached their conclusions.

In this dissertation I use an alternative approach to questions and problems broached by Stocker and Hurka in their use of PEVI. With PEEI, I argue we can maintain the strong intuitions by Stocker and Hurka, but I conclude with a new type of distinction, a distinction in the way we evaluate. In short, I argue we should move away from the conclusions of arguments that rest on PEVI in favor of the more modest conclusions that come out of PEEI. The result is the quantitative/qualitative distinction, which is a distinction in how we think about our evaluations, not the metaphysics of value. Ultimately, I think there is a relationship between our evaluations and value, but what that relationship is represents a substantive question that has been overlooked in the use of PEVI.

Finally, section 1.4 of this chapter explains the arrangement of the remainder of the dissertation. After reading the sections preceding it, the arrangement will be more easily understood, and the overall impact of each chapter’s arguments can be seen from the perspective of current debate. Understanding the failures of PEVI is crucial to putting this dissertation into the larger context of value theory.

1.2 Responding to Value and Evaluation
One of the primary issues that this dissertation faces is the intersection of value, evaluation, and how people respond to the two. Oddly enough, in value theory it is contentious to claim that people respond to or are affected by value. This bizarre result is in part the byproduct of those who deny anything can properly be called “value,” since there can be no effects from something that doesn’t exist. It’s also in part due to views that take value to be an effect of our responses, such that it is not the presence of value that acts upon us, but rather our presence and responses that create value. But neither of these objections to the claim that people respond to or are affected by value really get to the underlying thought that makes this claim seem reasonable in the first place. This claim, which seems perfectly reasonable, is that if there are values, then people will be responding to them in various ways. After all, a value that never elicited any response from people would be an impotent sort of value.

Recent literature in value theory has used this connection between value and how people respond to it as a tool for gleaning further insights into the nature of value. I will call this inference from the practical effects of value to insights about the metaphysical nature of value the Practical Effects of Value Inference, or PEVI for short. The PEVI inference can be articulated as follows:

PEVI—If value V exists and person P knowingly encounters it, then value V will cause some practical effect on person P, assuming person P is normally disposed to respond to value V under normal circumstances, and person P isn’t presently in circumstances that make a response to value V normatively or justifiably inappropriate or psychologically unlikely.

Because PEVI is essentially a conditional, PEVI practitioners have two limitations to their ultimate conclusions: Either (1) the resulting insights are conditional on the assumption that there
is at least one value, or (2) they beg the question against views that hold that responses which seem to correlate with the presence of value are not caused by the value. The first limitation is a restriction on the scope of application for PEVI. Since value may not exist, PEVI may never be applicable. In other words, while PEVI may be a valid inference, it is an inference that applies to nothing. The second limitation to PEVI takes issue with the actual validity of the inference. Since PEVI articulates a particular causal relationship between a value and a person, the truth of PEVI depends on whether or not that causal relationship actually exists. Whenever this causal relationship is assumed without explicit articulation, it begs the question against views that don’t hold it.

Less contentious than PEVI is the claim that people respond to or are affected by the evaluations they make of things. The Practical Effects of Evaluation Inference, or PEEI, is an inference similar to PEVI, but rather than claiming to tell us anything about the metaphysics of value, the PEEI claims only to tell us something about the effects of our evaluative beliefs. Unlike the PEVI, PEEI is applicable to the world regardless of whether or not there are any values, and PEEI, as an inference, seems to have a better chance of being valid, since our evaluations of things do seem to directly impact how we respond to them. Of course, it’s still possible that our evaluations are dependent on our responses or that both our evaluations and our responses are dependent on some third thing, like the presence of an actual value. So in making the relational claim that evaluations have effects, PEEI is like PEVI in claiming that the evaluation is prior to and causes some practical effect. And if our evaluations do not affect us in any practical way, then this inference fails. It’s difficult, however, if not impossible to imagine making evaluations that didn’t affect us, since evaluating seems in all cases to serve some purpose.
Evaluations can occur in at least two ways. In the first way, and I believe most common way, people evaluate based upon their own preconceived notions of what it takes for something to be good. In evaluating this way, we internalize the ascription of value. We are ascribing value to something because we actually think it is valuable in those ways. There is, however, another sense in which we might say we are evaluating something. We might, for example, evaluate something based upon some standard that we do not endorse. We have not internalized this evaluation, and so while it is possible to evaluate in this external sense, it is unlikely to move us. In claiming that it is difficult if not impossible to imagine evaluations not having a practical effect on us, I mean evaluations of the internalized sort. Evaluations based on some standard that we have not adopted or do not endorse could certainly occur with no practical effect.

To make the distinction between PEVI and PEEI clear, it might help to think about what counts as a practical effect of value or evaluation. One commonly accepted affect of value is the pursuit of that value. In pursuing a value, we are trying to make it obtain, either for ourselves or others. Sometimes when the value is not something we can pursue, we instead honor that value in other ways. I may not be able to pursue a value like individual freedom at a certain point in my life, but I could certainly feel respect for or reverence for those who do, which might be a way to honor that value. Our pursuit and honoring of values are examples of their practical effects. In our pursuit of value, if two bearers of value come into conflict such that we can’t pursue them both, a practical effect of those values would be the mental conflict that we might have in deciding between them. Simply thinking about and choosing between bearers of value are examples of values possible practical effects.

Many of the practical effects of value are psychological or could be cashed out in terms of dispositions to act if one were in certain circumstances. For example, I might evaluate a
genocide occurring in a far away land, and the practical effects of that evaluation may only be slight. I might, for example, feel guilty that I’m doing nothing about it. I might also feel regret that the world is such that these sorts of things happen. If I’m particularly self reflective, I may go so far as to feel bad that I care more about my sick cat than I do about people dying in a far away land. Dispositional practical effects occur when the evaluation has been internalized such that the evaluation reflects certain dispositions to act, because of that evaluation. For example, if I truly think that the genocide is a terrible thing, then I should be disposed to pushing a button that would stop it, if I had access to that button.

In all these cases, the value is neither necessary nor sufficient for the practical effect. Instead of there actually being a value, we can substitute their being a belief about the presence of a value or what I’ll be calling an evaluation. So in all these cases of practical effects of value, it may simply be our evaluating things in the world that causes the practical effect, whether the values are real or not. I might, for example, pursue a career as a college professor because I truly believe that it is a valuable thing to do with my life. The effect of my believing that being a college professor is a valuable thing is my pursuit of that career, and that effect is completely explainable in these terms even if my belief is false. There actually being a value isn’t necessary for me to explain the practical effect. However, explaining the practical effect of my pursuing the career as a professor without my at least believing the career is valuable in some respect is more difficult.

It isn’t, of course, impossible to explain my pursuing a career as a college professor without referring to a belief I have that it is a valuable thing. It is difficult though, since my pursuit of the career implies that I have a reason to go after it. It might be the case that it is a good job for me to go after, because it will help me pursue other things I take to be valuable. For
example, I might think that supporting my family is truly valuable, and pursuing a career as a college professor is merely instrumentally valuable. In that same vein, I might suggest that any job would do, and there is nothing particular about a college professorship that makes it any better than any other job making about the same amount of money. My pursuit of the college professorship is not because I believe that career is particularly special, but it is a practical effect of my belief that my family is valuable. I think it takes examples of serious psychological impairment, like brainwashing, to show that we can pursue something without thinking that it is in some way valuable.

Using the word “pursuit,” however, may be the difficulty, since it seems to entail there being a goal, and goals are valuable. It is easier to show in other cases that there can be what seems to be a practical effect of evaluation, where there has been no evaluation. Choosing is something we often do after we compare two things, and comparisons sometimes depend on evaluations. It’s possible, though, to choose something without evaluating. You could make a policy, for example, that whenever there is a choice to be made, you always choose the option you heard about first. If that’s the method of choosing someone uses, then they’ll be choosing even though they are not evaluating. So it is possible to have what are often effects of our evaluations, not actually be caused by any sort of evaluation. And this is to be expected, since PEEI only claims that when we evaluate things, there will be a practical effect.

Two of the authors I deal with most in this dissertation, Michael Stocker and Thomas Hurka, accept a form of PEVI. I argue here in Chapter 1 that their acceptance of PEVI causes a semantic impasse in their debate. This result is unfortunate, since much of the thrust of Stocker’s argument seems to have merit. However, I think by dropping PEVI Stocker can maintain much of what gave his argument merit, but at the cost of his inference to metaphysical claims about
value. By moving away from PEVI, chapters of this dissertation show that important discoveries can be made about our evaluative thinking. Although I don’t take the issue up here, I think that our evaluative thinking and how we respond to that thinking is very important for understanding the metaphysics of value, but we should take up the task of understanding our evaluative thinking prior to understanding value. Otherwise we may find ourselves with a theory of value that doesn’t fit with our actions and behaviors, and if our theory of value can’t at least help us predict how we are going to respond to different situations, then there doesn’t seem to be much good in it.

1.3 PEVI Practitioners and Their Dilemma

In this section I want to discuss Michael Stocker and Thomas Hurka’s use of PEVI. I will be arguing that PEVI is a primary reason for their impasse in a dispute over rational regret and value. I’ll begin this section just by demonstrating how it is that we can recognize these philosophers as PEVI practitioners, while noting generally the problems it causes them. After broadly sketching how Stocker and Hurka adopt PEVI, I will show in section 1.4 how that adoption leads directly to their impasse.

A common mark of a PEVI practitioner is the taking as evidence a particular phenomenon as the effect of an interaction with value. So by observing that people act or behave in certain ways when they are presumably interacting with value, we can come to know something more about the value involved. Michael Stocker uses PEVI in this way in the eighth Chapter of his Plural and Conflicting Values. He says:

I can be conflicted over whether to betray my friend or my country, and I can be conflicted over whether to keep a death-bed promise to hold an expensive wake or whether to do something more useful with the money. The ground of the conflict is that
whichever option is chosen, even if it is the better one, it will lack something valuable had by the other option. And I can be conflicted by having to endure that lack. If, however, both options are valuable in the very same way, the better one will lack nothing of value that could be made good by the other. Here there is no lack to endure, nor therefore to be conflicted by. Thus, conflict requires plural values.¹

Without explicitly stating a form of the PEVI, Stocker clearly holds that a person’s being conflicted tells us that the options they have before them are not valuable in the very same ways. Being conflicted in Stocker’s case is a particular phenomenon that is the effect of a certain sort of interaction with value. Being unable to pursue two bearers of value—our interaction with the value—we can be conflicted about having to choose between them—the practical effect the value has on us. For this to follow, Stocker would have to be assuming that value has certain practical effects on people, and that by looking at these effects as evidence, we can learn something about the metaphysics of value.

There are some problems with Stocker’s argument as this simplified outline of his argument with PEVI explicitly articulated makes more clear:

   P1) If value V exists and person P knowingly encounters it, then value V will have some practical effect on person P. (PEVI)

   P2) One sort of practical effect value has on people is being conflicted, and this can occur when a person is confronted with choosing between two goods that are not good in the same ways.

   P3) Sometimes person P feels conflicted when choosing between two goods.

¹ Stocker, 1992. 171.
P4) If person P feels conflicts when choosing between two goods, then those goods must be good in different ways.

P5) For things to be good in different ways requires plural values.

C) There is a plurality of different types of value.

All of the premises are contentious, except perhaps P3—sometimes people feel conflicted. As for the rest—P1, P2, P4, and P5—each requires a substantial argument to come to its defense, which Stocker tries to provide. My interests here, however, are not in those other arguments so much as his use of PEVI.

Two obvious objections to the use of PEVI in Stocker’s argument begin with the fact that PEVI does not say anything about what sorts of effects to expect from value, and so it’s an open question as to whether or not being conflicted is really caused by an interaction with value. After all, our belief that there is value seems to be enough. Further, even if some effects were made clear and we granted a claim like P2, we can’t infer from the effect of being conflicted back to a claim about value, since it’s possible that things other than value could cause us to be conflicted. Not having enough information when we make a choice is one such counter example, but Stocker suggests yet another can be found in cases where we are simply conflicted over having to choose at all. These counter examples highlight the fact that PEVI is not a biconditional, and so in every case where we move from a practical effect back to a claim about the metaphysics of value we will be affirming the consequent.

That the PEVI alone says nothing about the sorts of effects we should expect from the presence of value is a problem that can be fixed by providing an explanation for the causal relationship between the presence of the value and its effect. Affirming the consequent is going to be fallacious here if we overreach in the conclusion of an argument that uses PEVI in the way
Stocker has. On the other hand, if PEVI is true, then the practical effects can be taken at least as evidence in favor of a claim about value. How good we take this evidence to be will depend on our explanation for the causal relationship between value and its effects. But it would be a mistake to take this evidence as conclusive.

Stocker’s use of the PEVI is clear, even if it’s not explicit. In the following passage, we will see Thomas Hurka’s articulation of PEVI. He writes:

Whenever a state of affairs is intrinsically good, it is appropriate, rational, and perhaps good to love that state for its own sake. By “loving” a state I mean being positively oriented toward it in desire, action, or feeling. This has three main forms: you can love a good state by desiring or wishing for it when it does not obtain, by actively pursuing it to make it obtain, or by taking pleasure in it when it obtains. Which specific form of love is appropriate to a particular good depends on facts about that good—does it obtain or not? and about yourself—can you effectively pursue the good or not? But for any intrinsic good, some positive orientation toward it, or some form of loving it, for its own sake is rational.²

According to this passage, Hurka thinks an attitude of love for a valuable thing is a practical effect of that thing’s value. Thus, Hurka’s own formulation of the PEVI can be articulated like this: HPEVI—If value V exists and person P knowingly encounters it, then value V will give P reason to love the state of affairs that instantiates V. Hurka’s formulation lacks an explanation for why it’s the case that V will give P reason to love the state of affairs, but since HPEVI is at least explicitly stated, it affords some explanation to further practical effects of value, like the pursuit of it or wishing for it. In this way, Hurka’s formulation can give at least a partial

² Hurka, 1996. 557.
explanation for why we feel conflicted when we forgo one good in favor of another. He says, “If you have chosen between two goods, one obtains while the other does not. Because of this, the forms of love appropriate to the goods are different: pleasure that it obtains for the one and regret or a wish that it obtained for the other.”

If we accept Hurka’s formulation of PEVI, we aren’t in a much better position than we were with Stocker. While Hurka fills in more of the dots between being conflicted and our interaction with value, his PEVI still doesn’t explain entirely why value causes these attitudes. This is because Hurka doesn’t seem to be particularly interested in the causal connection between value and its practical effects. Instead, he’s primarily concerned with what practical effects value should have on people. In his description of the practical effects value has on us, he uses language like appropriate and rational to explain why value has certain effects on us. In his articulation of the issue he asks, “The greater of the two goods now obtains, while the lesser does not. How should you feel about this fact?” This wrinkle in Hurka’s view parallels Stocker, but is worth digressing into for future clarity.

Formulations of the PEVI are most easily divided up by how they respond to questions about the appropriateness of responses to value. In other words, PEVI users aren’t always working with the exact same formula of PEVI, and one way their formulations might differ is in how they explain why a practical effect follows from an interaction with value. It’s important to digress on this point, because Stocker and Hurka may be using different formulations of PEVI. For example, if a response to value is appropriate because the observation of the correlation between the two is quite regular, then the PEVI is descriptive. A PEVI of this sort would explain the connection between a practical effect of a value and the value in terms of their constant and

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3 Hurka, 1996. 558.
4 Hurka, 1996. 556. [Italics mine]
regular correlation. The descriptive formulation holds that it is appropriate to experience a
certain effect of value, because that’s what normally happens. If the response to value is
appropriate because moral or practical beliefs, concerns, or judgments call for it, then the PEVI
is normative—moralistic if the appropriateness is determined entirely by moral beliefs. A PEVI
of this sort explains the connection between a practical effect of a value and the value in terms of
the reasons—moral and practical—for experiencing the effect when interacting with the value.
The normative formulations hold that it is appropriate to experience a particular effect from an
interaction with value, because you have normative reasons to do so. If the response to value is
appropriate because our understanding of what it means to be a value calls for us to respond in
certain ways regardless of moral or practical concerns, then the PEVI is fitting. A PEVI of this
sort explains the connection between a practical effect of a value and the value in terms of what
value is and how by its very nature we are affected by it in certain ways. On fitting formulations
of PEVI, our comprehending what value truly is entails our understanding certain effects that
value has on us. Hurka’s formulation of PEVI in “Monism, Pluralism, and Rational Regret” is
normative, but elsewhere he argues more specifically for a moralistic PEVI.

Hurka’s normative formulation of PEVI relies on conspicuously unexplained notions of
“appropriate” and “rational.” But I take it that what Hurka means, at least in “Monism,
Pluralism, and Rational Regret,” is that the attitudes we take toward intrinsic goods are
appropriate or rational depending on whether or not we have certain sorts of reasons to feel those
ways. Much of what he says about the appropriate degrees of feelings like regret depends on
having the right sort of reasons to feel those ways. Still, even while he falls on the side of some
powerful intuitions about appropriate or rational feelings, he doesn’t say explicitly why some

reasons to feel those ways are better than others, so at best we can say that in “Monism, Pluralism, and Rational Regret,” Hurka’s formulation of PEVI is normative.

Stocker also shares much of Hurka’s intuitions about regret. He says, “I do not think we need to argue that not regretting hurting one’s friend shows a defective moral character.”6 Hurka’s story about loving the good, wishing for it, taking pleasure when it obtains, and regretting having to forgo it implies that those who fail to feel these ways are in some way defective as well. Hurka and Stocker agree that it is appropriate to feel regret in cases where one may have done the best thing. There is, however, an important subtle difference in how Stocker tends to reserve the term “regret” for attitudes about evaluations of actions, using the expression “being conflicted” when it comes to attitudes had in situations where we are choosing between two goods. Hurka uses the term “regret” to describe the way we feel when we forgo a good. These differences may ultimately entirely overlap when it comes to cases, although I argue in chapter 4 that they do not, but I mention this so that there won’t be confusion over terminology. That they both accept some form of PEVI is the problem, and not that they use subtly different terms. I now argue how their acceptance of PEVI leads to their impasse.

1.4 The PEVI Impasse

The impasse between Stocker and Hurka is over whether or not rational regret can be accounted for by a form of value monism in cases where an individual chooses the better of two goods. The key to understanding their use of PEVI is through this simple description of their impasse. Rational regret in certain cases is assumed to be appropriate such that a theory of value must be able to account for it. The practical effect of value is the starting point, which means it is serving as evidence for or against metaphysical claims about value. This is true for both

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Stocker and Hurka, since they agree in every thought experiment that they use that regret is appropriate.

As evidence, rational regret in a particular case is only as good as the connection between value and its practical effects is tight. Neither Stocker nor Hurka provides us with what I have called a “fitting” account of PEVI. Their accounts have both been normative. What this means for their views about the connection between value and its practical effects is that a failure to experience a practical effect means there has been some sort of moral or practical failure in the individual. In reverse, having an experience of rational regret means that the individual responded appropriately to value. What an experience of rational regret does not tell us on a normative account is what about value necessitates a particular response in a person such that if we agree the response is appropriate that we will then agree on something about value. A fitting account of PEVI holds that the response to value is appropriate because our understanding of what it means to be valuable calls for us to respond in certain ways regardless of moral or practical concerns. The normative account of PEVI holds that certain responses to value are appropriate given moral and practical concerns, but this doesn’t mean there is anything specific about the way we understand value that necessitates this relationship.

So since Hurka and Stocker both articulate normative accounts of the PEVI, neither explains why our understanding of value itself calls for a particular sort of response. That Hurka and Stocker agree that these certain cases are appropriate for regret tells us nothing about what those cases mean for value. With a fitting formulation of PEVI, that relationship would be explicitly stated. For example, Stocker’s articulation of PEVI in terms of fittingness might be expressed like this: SPEVI—If value V exists and person P knowingly encounters it, then P will respond in some way to V because the metaphysical nature of value is such that we cannot
knowingly experience it and not be moved physically or psychologically toward it. While this fitting formulation of PEVI is still vague, since it doesn’t explain precisely why the metaphysical nature of value would have this effect on us, it does at least make the claim that our responses to value are causally influenced by the metaphysical nature of value. Taking Stocker’s regret argument further, we could articulate his position in terms of fittingness with respect to regret this way: If value V exists and person P knowingly encounters it, then P will experience regret at forgoing V if and only if in forgoing V, P did not get as much or more of V in the process, because the metaphysical nature of value is such that it does not cause us to experience regret unless we get less than what we could have had if we had chosen otherwise or the value that we got is of a different kind.

This fitting formulation of PEVI for Stocker is quite a mouthful, but it at least highlights the connection Stocker thinks value has with our responses, namely that because of the way value is and our relationship to it, we can only experience appropriate regret when we got less value or a different kind of value through our choice. While this move from a normative formulation to a fitting formulation may seem trivial or perhaps even implied, it is a relevant point nevertheless. Neither Stocker nor Hurka expressly states his position in these ways, and as a result, it’s not quite clear on what point they disagree. I’ve articulated what must be Stocker’s view to get his argument to go through, so I will do the same with Hurka. Once they are both on the table, it will be clear why they are at an impasse.

Like Stocker, Hurka’s articulation of PEVI lacks the tight connection between value and our response, which it needs to use an effect like regret as evidence for any metaphysical claims about value. In fact, it would seem that Hurka’s objections to Stocker actually tend to play on this problem. He says, “Issues about the division of appropriate attitudes and about the number
of good-making properties are logically independent.” Since Stocker didn’t articulate the tight connection, Hurka objects to his taking regret as evidence for a plurality of different types of value by simply giving examples of how we appropriately regret, in the normative sense, without there necessarily being a plurality of types of value present. The reason Hurka can make objections to Stocker using examples is essentially due to the fact that both Hurka and Stocker are using normative formulations of PEVI.

Having already transmogrified Stocker’s PEVI into a rough fitting form, doing the same with Hurka will show exactly the point at which their views differ. After doing this, we can look at the cases Hurka uses as counter examples to see why they aren’t convincing to Stocker. Hurka’s fitting PEVI would probably look something like this: If value V exists and person P knowingly encounters it, then P will experience regret at forgoing V if and only if V is weakly distinct from the value P actually got, because the metaphysical nature of value is such that it does not cause us to experience regret unless the good we get is weakly distinct from the good we forwent. According to Hurka, a weak distinction in value is, “…X must be distinct from Y in its intrinsic properties, that is, distinct apart from its relations, including its causal relations, to other states,”7 where X and Y are understood to be distinct goods. So according to Hurka, it’s fitting to regret a forgone good provided that the forgone good is weakly distinct from the good gotten. Notice, however, that this weak distinction says nothing about the value instantiated by X and Y being different. In terms of value supervenience, the weak distinction holds that X and Y are weakly distinct if their intrinsic properties are distinct, but the value that supervenes on these properties may be the same. So to fill out the explanation for the fitting relationship Hurka’s fitting formulation would more accurately say, “…because the metaphysical nature of

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7 Hurka, 1996. 566.
value is such that it does not cause us to experience regret unless the metaphysical properties upon which value supervenes are intrinsically different.”

Notice that the key to regret on Hurka’s fitting formulation is not a difference in value, like it was for Stocker. Hurka thinks regret can occur when the intrinsic properties upon which value supervenes are different. Stocker thinks that regret is caused when those values themselves are different. Having articulated their views in these ways, it’s easy to see that Stocker and Hurka disagree on a crucial point about the practical effects of value. On Stocker’s fitting formulation of PEVI, a difference in value causes regret. And so, where Stocker observes the regret, he takes it as evidence for a difference in value. Hurka, on the other hand, formulates a version of PEVI such that a difference in value is not what is needed for the effect of regret, but merely a difference in the properties upon which the value supervenes. Thus, were Hurka observes regret, he can only take it as evidence that the two goods have different intrinsic properties. Given these fitting formulations of PEVI, it’s pretty easy to see why Stocker and Hurka disagree over what different cases show.

Hurka’s argument against Stocker’s claim that rational regret indicates a plurality of values rests on three counter-examples that can be categorized descriptively in the following ways: (i) the distribution of goods to different people at the same time, (ii) the distribution of goods to oneself at different times, and (iii) the distribution of goods to oneself at the same time. In the first sort of scenario, Hurka suggests that we imagine being given the choice between giving five units of pleasure to one person or ten units to another person.\(^8\) Hurka urges that in this scenario the type of value that obtains in either option of the choice is the same, but there is still reason to regret if we give 10 units of pleasure to the one. In the second sort of scenario, we

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\(^8\) Hurka, 1996. 563.
are two imagine a choice between a greater pleasure today and a lesser pleasure tomorrow. According to Hurka, “...you can rationally regret the forgone lesser pleasure, because its different temporal location makes it distinct in the weaker sense.”\(^9\) And finally, in the third sort of scenario, Hurka argues that in cases like those suggested by de Sousa, Nussbaum, and Stocker where we are choosing between two similar goods for ourselves, we can also feel regret.\(^10\) He talks at length about Nussbaum’s example of choosing between two bagels on one plate and only one on the other, and suggests that we can certainly feel regret after choosing the better plate of two bagels, provided that the bagels are not qualitatively the same as the bagel forgone.

The introduction of a “qualitative” difference in bagels by Hurka at this point in his counter examples deserves a moment of digression, since one of the primary issues of this dissertation will be to get an understanding for what it means for a theory of value to be qualitative. When Hurka refers to goods being qualitatively distinct or the same, he refers at first specifically to goods like bagels. He says, “Given the revised definition of distinctness, a monistic theory that values only pleasure will agree that it is not rational to regret forgone pleasure from a qualitatively identical bagel.”\(^11\) What Hurka probably means here is that if the intrinsic properties of two bagels are the same, then our experience of those two bagels will be the same. So “qualitative” is likely being used to mean our subjective experience of the intrinsic properties. And we should expect identical subjective experiences from two bagels that have the same intrinsic properties. Importantly, Hurka doesn’t limit his use of the term “qualitative” to goods like Nussbaum’s bagels.

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\(^9\) Hurka, 1996. 565.  
Hurka goes on to apply the term qualitative to sensations of pleasure. According to Hurka, we might think of different experiences of pleasure as being qualitatively distinct. He suggests, “…that sensations with the property of pleasantness always have other introspectable properties that can differ from one such sensation to another…. [W]e never experience pleasantness on its own but always in conjunction with other introspectable properties.”¹² Hurka believes that these other introspectable properties that pleasure sensations always come with make pleasure sensations qualitatively different. He says, “…the two pleasures available to you are distinct in the weaker sense, and while enjoying the greater pleasure of eating bagels, you can rationally regret missing out on the qualitatively distinguishable lesser pleasure of discussing philosophy. You can appropriately regret a forgone pleasure at the same time, because its different origin gives it different internal properties.”¹³ If we assume that experiencing pleasure is the only value, then monism can allow for regret in cases where we’re deciding between two goods for ourselves. Of course, this is provided we grant what Hurka has said about pleasant experiences being qualitatively different, and furthermore, we must hold that qualitatively different experiences of pleasure aren’t actually giving rise to different values. This latter claim is one for which Hurka gives almost no defense.

Given these examples and Hurka’s use of qualitatively different experiences of pleasure, we should reformulate his fitting formulation of PEVI like this: If value V exists and person P knowingly encounters it, then P will experience regret at forgoing V if and only if V is weakly distinct from the value P actually got, because the metaphysical nature of value is such that it does not cause us to experience regret unless the metaphysical properties upon which value supervenes are intrinsically different, which in turn gives rise to qualitatively distinct experiences.

¹² Hurka, 1996. 568.
¹³ Hurka, 1996. 569.
of that value $V$. When we look at Hurka’s examples, we can see that he thinks they are cases where one may experience rational regret, but given his fitting formulation of PEVI, we can also see that the rational regret will indicate nothing more for Hurka than that we have had qualitatively different experiences of a value. And from qualitatively different experiences, we can infer only that the intrinsic properties are different among the supervening values. This is the crucial claim of Hurka’s fitting formulation of PEVI that Stocker doesn’t agree with.

The only trouble is that Hurka and Stocker don’t get around to discussing their PEVIs. Instead, they argue over the cases. Where Hurka sees monism and rational regret together, Stocker sees pluralism and rational regret together, each accusing the other of begging the question in their arguments. Clearly we have come to their impasse, but in light of what has been said about formulations of PEVI we can see exactly why Stocker and Hurka disagree, and the trouble they will have convincing each other further.

To recap, Stocker uses a formulation of PEVI to argue that rational regret—or being conflicted—indicates that there is a plurality of types of value. Hurka does not think that rational regret indicates a plurality of types of value, because Hurka’s formulation of PEVI implies that experiences of rational regret are at most indications of introspectably different properties of a value that give rise to a qualitatively different experience of it. Central to their dispute are their formulations of PEVI, because the move from a practical effect of value back to claims about the metaphysics of values goes relatively unexplained by either philosopher. The difficulty for both these authors is the same: they need to defend the reconstructed fitting versions of PEVI that we’ve discussed here. In these defenses, the point that they will not convince each other on is this: qualitatively different experiences of value imply different types of value. Stocker’s formulation of PEVI assumes this is true, while Hurka’s formulation denies it. The failure to
convince one another will fall out of a disagreement over what it is to be a different type of value. PEVI is weak as a tool for convincing, because the metaphysical claims about value haven’t been fully fleshed out.

This result, as I’ve said, is unfortunate, because Stocker’s original argument seems to me to have merit. And much of Hurka’s argument is clearly in agreement with Stocker. They both agree over cases where regret is appropriate, and they both agree that the regret tells us something about the metaphysical nature of value, in addition to something about a person’s moral character. In fact, Hurka’s brief discussion of qualitatively different experiences of value is exactly the sort of idea that Stocker wants to point to as the reason we should think there are plurality of values. Ultimately, I think we can reconcile these two views if we move away from PEVI to PEEI. If we refrain from making metaphysical claims about value and focus instead on claims about our evaluative beliefs, then the impasse between Stocker and Hurka is altogether avoided. We, of course, lose the argument for a plurality of different types of value that Stocker was hoping for, but we still maintain what I take to be the essential upshot of having a plurality of values, namely the explanation for our practical experiences with value, like regret. As I said from the start, we want an understanding of how we respond to our evaluative beliefs prior to making claims about value, because we want to avoid having a theory of value that doesn’t fit our experiences. If we use PEEI to get a better idea of our evaluative lives, then I think we’ll be one step closer to understanding what value really is. Using a fitting formulation of PEVI, assumes we know enough about the metaphysics of value to explain why it effects us in certain ways, but if we know that much about value, then we certainly don’t need PEVI to prove those metaphysics of value upon which PEVI stands. Those sorts of arguments would be circular.

1.5 Dissertation Arrangement
This chapter of the dissertation has argued that claims about the metaphysical aspects of value that rely on inferences from the practical effects of value have inherent difficulties that warrant setting these arguments aside. In particular, I have pursued a debate between Michael Stocker and Thomas Hurka over the relationship between rational regret and the number of values as a clear demonstration of these difficulties. I have concluded by suggesting the Stocker/Hurka debate should shift away from metaphysical claims about value to claims about the practical effects of our evaluations. In so doing we recast the Stocker/Hurka debate in ways I think articulate the thrust of their arguments better but without the same difficulties. I pursue the recasting of their dispute in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation argues for a new distinction in value and evaluation, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative theories. The quantitative/qualitative distinction doesn’t rely on metaphysical claims about value, and so understanding the quantitative/qualitative distinction doesn’t require preconceived metaphysical framework of values. Ultimately, this distinction is intended to better articulate a position that the monism/pluralism distinction is thought to capture. In particular, the practical effects that Stocker argues that pluralism has on our feelings, attitudes, or mental states can be completely accounted for by the quantitative/qualitative distinction. The upshot, of course, is that by using the quantitative/qualitative distinction we do not use PEVI, which tends to overreach in its metaphysical conclusions about value by begging the question in favor of those conclusions. The broader impact for value theory is bringing to light an intermediate step between metaphysical claims about value and their effects on us. The quantitative/qualitative distinction is that intermediate step. In other words, how we evaluate things and those evaluations practical effects on us—their PEEI relationship—are either quantitative or qualitative in nature. This
dissertation focuses primarily on that relationship. The relationship of the quantitative/qualitative distinction to the number of values is a question that has been (for the most part) set aside for another project, although I do discuss a related issue of the difference between the quantitative/qualitative distinction and incommensurability in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 is in many ways an extension of chapter 2. After describing what the quantitative/qualitative distinction is, I explore some popular formulations of hedonism to see, which, if any entail a quantitative or qualitative view of evaluation. Here I argue that holding some beliefs about the metaphysics of value do entail certain evaluative beliefs. This is not the core purpose for chapter 3, which is primarily to get clearer on the distinction between a quantitative and qualitative view. Secondary to this is to show what sorts of views about value actually hold quantitative and qualitative view. In the process, some of the intersection of value and evaluation is touched on.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation describes the feeling of loss, which I argue is a crucial practical effect of evaluation. Missing out on something good even when the good you got was best doesn’t always leave a person feeling completely satisfied. Loss is this feeling of discontent, which is often misattributed to regret. Besides refining our lexicon of sentiments, this chapter further describes our affective responses to evaluations as opposed to value. Here again, I will be refining and recasting the Stocker/Hurka dispute. Much of this chapter discusses early uses of the term “regret” by Bernard Williams, which sparked later disputes like that between Stocker and Hurka. Shifting away from a broad and ambiguous use of the term “regret” brings to the forefront questions about how we think about our evaluations.

Chapter 5 of this dissertation argues that some experiences of loss cannot be accounted for by a quantitative theory of value. Specifically, we may have justified experiences of loss that
quantitative evaluations cannot account for. Using a version of PEEI, I conclude that we should accept qualitative theories of value. The importance, of course, is that for arguments about the metaphysical nature of value, we should avoid theories that result in quantitative theories. Since I do not pursue the relationship between quantitative or qualitative theories of value and the metaphysics of value, I cannot make any claims about what loss ultimately tells us about the nature and number of value. Nevertheless, this chapter moves us one step closer to those sorts of claims.
CHAPTER 2. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE THEORIES OF EVALUATION

2.1 Introduction

The suggested shift away from arguments that employ the Practical Effects of Value Inference (PEVI) in Chapter 1 allows us to recast many of the good ideas had by users of PEVI. The particular argument I’m interested in recasting is the use of PEVI to show that there is a plurality of different types of value, suggested by Michael Stocker. I accept the intuitive thought that sometimes when we get something of the most value we have a reason to have a negative affective response that is grounded in our evaluation of the goods forgone. I also accept that our responses to things we take to be valuable tell us something important about our relationship with value. What I do not accept is the essential thought of PEVI, which is that we can move from what appears to be an effect of value back to a claim about the metaphysical status of value. To do this we would need to have a better understanding of how the metaphysics of value causes our responses, so that we could construct a fitting formulation of PEVI, which would assume we had knowledge of value that we were seeking to use PEVI to discover.

This chapter describes an essential distinction in value that is important to understanding where Stocker and I begin to depart ways due to PEVI’s weaknesses. In particular, it seems to me that value monism has been the inappropriate target of many PEVI arguments. The distinction in evaluation I suggest here is not about the number of different types of value, but instead, it’s about how our beliefs about values relate to one another in our evaluations. By distinguishing two ways of thinking about our evaluations, I will later argue in chapter 5 using PEEI instead of PEVI that one of these ways of thinking about evaluations better explains our responses to our evaluative beliefs. The result is that metaphysical views that entail certain ways of thinking about evaluation should also be abandoned.
This chapter is divided into five parts, which are focused on distinguishing quantitative understanding of evaluation from qualitative understandings. But in addition to making the distinction between quantitative and qualitative views, this chapter must also show that this distinction is unlike similar distinctions in value theory. Section 2.1 puts the distinction between a quantitative and qualitative view of value into perspective by explaining where in value theory the distinction arises. Here I argue that having a qualitative or quantitative view of value means you have a particular view about what evaluations tell you about valuable things. Section 2.2 introduces a distinction between evaluating a part of something or evaluating the whole thing, which I call “aspect evaluations” and “overall evaluations” respectively. This section also discusses the possible relationships between aspect evaluations and overall evaluations, which I later argue in the section on quantitative theories doesn’t necessarily depend on which side of the quantitative/qualitative distinction you come down on. Section 2.3 introduces the quantitative theory of evaluation, and describes what an adopter of such a theory thinks about their evaluations. This section also discusses a quantitative theory’s commitment to various scales of value. In section 2.4 I distinguish quantitative theories from nonquantitative theories, of which qualitative theories are only a part. I then distinguish between two types of qualitative theorist, the qualitative monist and qualitative pluralist, and I discuss how each understands various scales of value. Finally, in section 2.5 I conclude by distinguishing the quantitative/qualitative distinction from similar distinctions in value theory, like the monism/pluralism distinction and incommensurable values.

2.2 Ascriptions of Value and Substantive Value Theory

When a person makes a claim like, “This car is valuable,” they are ascribing value to that car. It is not, however, immediately clear what value they think the car has, and it is not entirely
clear what that ascription of value has to do practically for the lives of people who come into some contact with the car. It might be, for example, that the ascription of value is meant only to describe a certain monetary value that one should expect to get from the sale of the car. If the car is the first Model-T to roll off Henry Ford’s assembly line, then it might be that the ascription of value is meant to describe the car’s historic value to the people of the United States. In any case, general ascriptions of value like this initial claim that the car has value gloss over many ways in which a thing can be said to have value. This gloss of the car’s value does not tell us how valuable the car is relative to other valuable things. It also fails to tell us in what ways the car is valuable, and how those ways of being valuable relate to other ways the car might be valuable. This section distinguishes two fundamental ways in which we can understand ascriptions of value like, “This car is valuable,” and how we relate value ascriptions to one another.

To effectively distinguish between a quantitative theory and a qualitative theory, I must first start by explaining what sort of distinction in value theory this is. In short, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative theories of value is a distinction at the substantive level of value theory. The substantive level of value theory pertains to practical matters of value rather than metaphysical ones. Practical matters of value focus on how we use values and evaluations in our lives to assess things like choices, consequences, characters, etc. Metaphysical facts about value certainly effect practical matters, but as was discussed in Chapter 1, the relationship between the metaphysical and practical is very unclear. By making a distinction in value theory at the substantive level, many metaphysical questions are left open and unaddressed. This is why I have chosen to devote chapter 3 to relating the distinction to several versions of hedonism,
which will help show how this distinction is compatible with many different sorts of metaphysical views about value.

Essentially, the quantitative/qualitative distinction splits up two fundamentally different ways of thinking about and using ascriptions of value. Ascriptions of value are claims for a particular relationship between a set of nonevaluative properties and evaluative properties. In laymen’s terms, our evaluation of something is an ascription of value to that thing. For example, the claim, “The car is excellent,” relates the set of nonevaluative properties of the car to the evaluative property of being excellent. Or again, in less technical terms, “The car is excellent” is an evaluation of the car. Since this is a distinction at the substantive level of value theory rather than the metaphysical, the distinction won’t be interested in whether or not our ascriptions of value—our evaluations—bear truth value. It’s of enough interest for the substantive level that we make these ascriptions and use them to make decisions or promote certain affective responses.

There are two important ways we can divide up evaluative claims like this. Some ascriptions are positive, while some are negative. But this difference is not what you might think. A negative ascription does not mean that the thing being evaluated is bad. A negative ascription occurs when a set of nonevaluative properties lacks a particular relationship with an evaluative property. So a negative ascription of value occurs when we say that something does not have a particular evaluative property. All evaluations are either the positive or negative, and many overall evaluations—which I will discuss in more detail in a moment—involve relating both positive and negative ascriptions of value.

Of course, this difference between positive and negative ascriptions of value can obscure a different possible usage of the phrase “negative evaluation.” When we evaluate something,
sometimes we discover that the thing in questions isn’t valuable, or worse, that it takes away from valuable things. “Bad things” we might be inclined to say, have been negatively evaluated. Pain and suffering, for example, are bad, and this would be called a negative evaluation. I won’t be using the term “negative evaluation” in this way. While it may seem counter intuitive to some, I do this for clarity. Negative evaluations in the sense I have discussed here can be either negative or positive in the sense I’ve discussed above. Since I am most interested in distinguishing quantitative and qualitative theories of value, it is of more use to me to distinguish between claims that a relationship between properties holds or fails to hold. Whenever I need to discuss negative evaluations in the sense that something is bad, I will just say that a disvalue has been ascribed to the thing in question.

2.3 Overall Evaluations and Aspect Evaluations

Before going into the details of the distinction between a quantitative and qualitative theory of value, I need to say a bit more about ascriptions of value so that I can be very clear about what sort of distinction I’m trying to make. We ascribe value to things in several ways. Sometimes we talk about the overall value we think something has, while other times we ascribe value to only specific aspects of the thing we are evaluating. So while we might say that overall the car is excellent, when ascribing value to the interior we may say it is bogus. In some moral evaluations, we might talk about how overall the consequences of an action are very good. At the very same time, we may refer to a particular aspect of the consequences as bad. In terms of evaluating a good life, we might say that overall a person had a good life even though they went through several periods of rough times. This important difference in how we ascribe overall values to things as well as aspect values to those things’ parts can quickly confuse a discussion.

14 Just for added clarity, “Bogus” is an excellent example a positive ascription of a disvalue.
about a quantitative or qualitative theory of value, since these theories are distinguishing the ways we handle ascriptions of value. Things have what I call “aspect value” only insofar as the aspect value ascriptions are a part of the thing overall evaluation. Taken out of context of an overall evaluation of a car, we might say we have an overall evaluation of the car’s interior. Put back into context of the overall evaluation of the car, that overall evaluation of the interior would be called an “aspect value” of the car.

How overall evaluations relate to aspect evaluations will in some ways depend on whether or not we adopt a quantitative or qualitative view. However, neither the quantitative nor the qualitative view answers this question entirely, so we should not assume that one of these views has an easier time of assessing complex overall value. For example, one may adopt a version of Moore’s Theory of Organic Unities as a theory about how aspect evaluations relate to overall evaluations, and adopt either a quantitative or a qualitative view of value.\(^\text{15}\) This point about how the quantitative/qualitative distinction relates to overall evaluations and aspect evaluations will be clearer after I explain the differences in quantitative and qualitative theories of value.

2.4 Quantitative Theories

I’ll begin now discussing the specific aspects of a quantitative theory of value. This discussion will be longer than that of the qualitative view, because in many ways, this discussion will lay the groundwork for what a qualitative view can be. Very briefly put, a quantitative theory of value takes all ascriptions of value to have only one essential feature, the ascriptions bearing on the total amount of value of the object or state. The end substantive result of this view is that all practical matters in which evaluations come to bear are arbitrated entirely based

\(^\text{15}\) Moore, G. E., 1903.
on the amount of value. In other words, the practical effects of evaluation depend entirely on the amount of value ascribed to something. One way to think about quantitative theories is to remind ourselves of the excellent car. Having claimed that the car is excellent and in effect ascribed value to the car, we are still left to wonder what the car being excellent tells us about the overall value of the car. A quantitative theory of value responds that the evaluative claim of being excellent tells us only something about the overall amount of value being ascribed to the car. Another way to put this is that we use words like “excellent” to express a particular evaluation of something, but no matter what word you use, it all boils down to an amount.

The “boiling down” of ascriptions of value can happen in two ways. First, it may be that the car being excellent tells us everything about the amount of value being ascribed to the car. In which case, excellence is a value ascribed to the car which captures the overall amount of value we think the car has. In the second way, a quantitative theory of value can also combine more than one ascription of aspect value of something to make an overall evaluation of that thing. In this latter case, the evaluative claim of being excellent is an aspect value that tells us only some part of the overall amount of value had by the car. In this latter case, the overall value of the car would be determined by combining all the aspects of evaluation, like the bogus interior, to give us an overall evaluation of the car. As an aspect evaluation, excellence only matters in so far as it bears on the overall amount of value. Essentially, a quantitative theory of value takes the bogus interior and excellence of the car and boils these aspect values down to amounts for the overall evaluation. Some features that make a bogus interior distinct from general excellence are completely lost in this transition, but the quantitative view holds that all the evaluatively relevant features are in terms of total amount of value, and so distinct features that are lost are not evaluatively relevant.
An analogy to shapes may be helpful to make some of these points about quantitative ascriptions of value more clear. Suppose you cut out several polygons of different sizes and set them before you. In describing each polygon’s shape suppose we only pay attention to the number of sides. One shape has 4 sides, and so we say that the shape is a quadrilateral—four sides. Regarding shape, if our only concern is discerning the number of sides, then all we really need to do is count up the sides. In a similar way, regarding valuable things, if our only concern is the overall amount of value, then all we need to do is add up all the value. So suppose we take several polygons and arrange them together so that they combine to make another larger polygon, as we might when combining aspect values into an overall value. Assessing the overall shape of the combined polygons is, again, only a matter of adding up the sides. In our present view of shapes, the only relevant feature is the number of sides, and like combining several aspect evaluations into an overall evaluation, each shape that makes up a part of the larger polygon has an important relationship to the overall shape’s number of sides. Since we are only concerned with the number of sides a shape has, then we will only concern ourselves with how each individual shape bears on the total amount of sides the larger overall shape has.

As I mentioned earlier regarding value, it isn’t obvious how the number of sides an individual shape has will bear on the total number of sides the combined shape will have. But it is also undeniable that there is some relationship between the two. So for example, two squares of the exact same size can be place next to one another so that the new shape only has four sides. This means that the four sides of one square do not add to the four sides of the other square to get a new shape of eight sides. Instead we have two squares combining to get a shape with only four sides. The same is conceptually possible for the relationship between aspect evaluations and the overall evaluation. And again, the example from value theory where the relevance of this
relationship has been brought to light is in Moore’s Organic Unities. A quantitative theory of
type_value does not commit a person to holding a particular view regarding the relationship between
aspect evaluations and their overall evaluation. But it does commit the quantitative theorist to
holding that the aspect evaluation’s only real importance is how it affects the overall amount of
value we ascribe to the valuable thing.

This point about the relationship between aspect evaluations and overall evaluations is
key to understanding what a quantitative theorist is—or is not—claiming. When we find the
overall shape of a combination of shapes, we know that there are other features that bear on the
overall total number of sides. The size, for example, of each shape used will dramatically affect
the total number of sides. Taking two squares of different sizes and placing them end to end can
never result in another four sided shape like two squares of the same size would. Whether or not
one of our shapes has concave line segments can also have a big impact on the overall number of
sides. The analogy to overall evaluations holds here as well. There may be other features of an
aspect evaluation besides that aspect evaluation’s total amount of value, which bear importantly
on the overall evaluation. But again, a quantitative theory is only concerned with the overall
amount of value the thing being evaluated has and can admit that features of the aspect
evaluation, which do not bear on the evaluation of the aspect, do bear on the overall evaluation
that the aspect is a part of. The important point is that whatever is being evaluated has only one
important feature that all other features are subsumed by, and that is the amount of value had by
that thing. Returning to the shape analogy, this is analogous to recognizing that despite all the
features a shape may have, the number of sides is all that matters, and when combining shapes,
all the various features that may be ignored when figuring out that particular shape’s number of
sides are still very important to the number of sides had by the combined shape.
So from this analogy to shapes, several important points about a quantitative theory are made clear:

1) A quantitative theory of value is concerned solely with the amount of value a valuable thing has.

2) The amount of overall value a thing has isn’t necessarily simply a matter of adding up the amounts of value had by the aspect values.

3) Features of a valuable thing that bear on the total amount of value for an overall evaluation do not necessarily bear on the amount of value for an aspect evaluation.

The first point is shown in how our theory of shapes is concerned only with the number of sides a shape has, and this is analogous to our quantitative theory, which is only concerned with the amount of value a valuable thing has. Each individual shape has a total number of sides like each valuable thing has a total amount of value. The second point is shown in our discussion about how putting individual shapes together could make other shapes, and this was to be analogous with combining individually valuable things to create a new thing of value. This new thing of value will have an overall value that comes in some way from the individually valuable things, which we now call aspects of the overall value. The way in which the aspect values relate to the overall value is not clear, much like the way in which the number of sides of a shape put together from smaller shapes doesn’t have an obvious relationship to the number of sides of the smaller shapes. And finally, the third point is analogous to shapes in that the size of individual shapes may affect the overall number of sides for a combined shape, even though size has nothing to do with the number of sides for the individual shape.

2.5 Evaluative Scales and Relational Properties
Evaluations are important because we use them, and we use evaluations most often to make comparisons. Understanding what a quantitative theory of value means for making comparisons of valuable things is very helpful in understanding the view. With respect to the essential feature of all quantitative theories—they are concerned solely with the total amount of value—it’s important to note that the total amount of value ascribed to an object or state need not be thought of in terms of a single grand cardinal scale of value. It can be helpful to think about quantitative theories as holding that all valuable things fit somewhere on a scale of value with the only distinguishing features between evaluations being in terms of their relational properties on that scale. This point about the only distinguishing features being in terms of relational properties captures the thought that some features that go into figuring the total amount of value are in effect subsumed by that analysis and ignored once the valuable thing finds its place on the scale. This is analogous, again, to the relationship between the size of shapes that are combined to make another larger shape. The size matters for the number of sides that the larger shape has, but once we have the larger shape, we would rank order it according solely to the number of sides. Rank ordering according to the number of sides is fairly straightforward, and the relationships we could describe between two shapes according to their placement on the scale are solely in terms of the number of sides. On such a scale, their only distinguishing features are in terms of those relational properties that are relative to the scale. For example, the scale for shapes tells us what shapes have more, less, or the same number of sides. These are some of the relational properties that shapes have on that scale.

On an ordinal scale of value, the relational properties of valuable things are the ways in which we can describe the relationship between those things in terms of their placement on the ordinal scale. Some obvious relationships that occur are “greater than,” “less than,” and “equal
to” in amounts of value. Of course, “amount of value” is not understood in terms of a specific amount on an ordinal scale, but this scale does at least tell us that one thing has a greater amount of value than another. Other relationships that are possible on an ordinal scale include transitive relationships such that if X is valued more than Y and Y is valued more than Z, then X will be valued more than Z.

The sort of scale that a quantitative theory of value adopts will depend on the level of measurement ascriptions of value will have, and a quantitative theory is not committed by virtue of being quantitative to any particular claims about the accuracy or precision of measurement. Borrowing from Stanley Smith Stevens’s suggested distinction of levels of measurement in “On the Theory of Scales of Measurement” there are four levels of measurement: Nominal, Ordinal, Interval, and Ratio. Nominal levels of measurement classify things into distinct groups, and things are comparable in terms of whether or not they are equal to or not equal to one another. The nominal level of measurement couldn’t be used by a quantitative theory of value, because at very least a quantitative theory of value must rank order valuable things and a nominal scale is not a scale in this way.

Ordinal levels of measurement allow for the relationships I previously mentioned, as well as allowing for claims about median and mode about valuable things. So a quantitative theory that adopts an ordinal scale could tell us how many valuable things ranked about the same on their scale, and depending on what the highest and lowest ranked things were, they could also assess the median for valuable things. Notably, an ordinal scale would not allow for a typical average of value—the mean—because without actual values given to express the degree of difference between two things on an ordinal scale, there would be no way to figure the average

16 Stevens, 1946.
amount. *Prima facie*, being able to average the amount of value may seem like an important concern for the quantitative theorist. For example, we might want to know what the average value of well-being there is on this planet. As an ordinal ranking, we couldn’t find this out. At best, we could say who was right smack in the middle of a range from the best life to the worst, the median. We could also say what level on the scale the most number of people end up at, the mode. Ultimately, knowing the mean may not be a quantitative theorist’s concern at all, since you could tell from the transitive properties of the scale that a large number of people were worse off than something we already agree is pretty bad. So while it may at first seem that a quantitative theorist would be concerned with the mean, it’s perfectly consistent with and reasonable for a quantitative theory to not adopt a degree of measurement that allows for it.

If a quantitative theorist is concerned with averages and degrees of difference between valuable things, then an interval scale might suffice. An interval scale is able to do all the things that an ordinal scale can do and more. The primary difference between an interval scale and an ordinal scale is that the interval scale can tell the difference between two things on the scale. Fahrenheit and Celsius thermometers are both on interval scales. This allows us to describe the difference between the boiling and freezing point of liquids like water. On an ordinal scale of temperature we might understand differences only in terms of being hotter, and so we could easily describe the boiling point of water as hotter than the freezing point of water, but we couldn’t really say how much hotter, like we can with an interval scale. We know that on the Celsius scale the difference between freezing and boiling for water is 100 degrees. With respect to evaluations, adopting an interval scale is useful for knowing exactly how much better one thing is than another, but this comes with some epistemic drawbacks. Since value is often hard to assess with the precision necessary for an interval scale, it’s rare for people to adopt them in
actual practice. Of course, a quantitative theorist could account for this by adopting a sort of hybrid between the ordinal and interval scale such that valuable things do not have precise values, but exist as a range on the scale of value. We might actually think of the boiling and freezing points of water as existing as ranges too, since they depend on things like air pressure.

The only major feature of an interval scale that some quantitative theorists may be uncomfortable with—and the same problem holds for ordinal scales—is how zero is understood on these scales. The zero point on any interval scale can be chosen arbitrarily, such that zero may have no relation to whatever the scale is measuring. This is in pretty stark contrast with measurements of things like mass and length. When measuring something like length we know exactly what it means to have no length or a length of zero. This zero point on the length scale is not arbitrary in the way the zero on the Celsius scale is measured. Something with no length has a length measurement of zero, and it cannot be less than zero. On the Celsius scale for temperature, zero degrees is not having no temperature at all, and things can have a lower temperature than zero degrees Celsius. Fahrenheit is also an interval scale, but with a different zero degree than that of Celsius.

This feature—or lack of a feature—that interval scales have regarding their zero points makes adding things on the scale meaningless. For example, if you add 32 degrees Celsius to 52 degrees Celsius, then you do not get 84 degrees Celsius. The fact that zero has no relationship to an actual amount of something to be measured means you can’t take points on the scale and sum them to get a higher point on the scale that represents the combination of lower points. This may be exactly what a quantitative theorist wants for the grand scale of evaluation, since we have, after all, already noted that it is not completely clear how aspect evaluations will add up to

17 Joshua Gert (2004) has a theory like this that he challenges Ruth Chang’s “parity” with.
overall evaluations. But there may be quantitative theorists who do think that value comes in absolute amounts that are measurable and addable. These sorts of quantitative theorists hold to what is called a ratio scale of measurement for value. Ratio scales of measurement are just like interval scales, only the intervals between points on the scale represent an actual difference in the amount of something that can ultimately be summed up. So, for example, length and mass measurements are both measured on ratio scales such that their zero points mean no length and no mass. And we know that any point on one of these scales could be added to another point on that scale to get more length or mass. To make this difference more clear, we can compare the Celsius scale to the Kelvin scale for measurement. The Kelvin scale for temperature actually measures heat energy in something, and theoretically, it is possible for something to have no heat energy, but it is not possible for it to have negative heat energy. So zero degrees Kelvin is a complete lack of heat energy. Zero degrees on the Celsius scale does not mean a complete lack of heat energy. In fact, the Celsius scale was never intended to relate the temperature of a thing to a property like heat energy. It was intended only so that differences in temperature could be measured, but the word “temperature” was not defined in terms of heat energy. Ultimately, when absolute zero was postulated, the two scales where related such that the interval—the differences between degrees—on the Celsius scale was the same as that on the Kelvin scale, but still, the Kelvin scale was created to measure the presence or absence of heat energy, whereas the Celsius scale was only intended to measure differences.

This digression on the zero point of ratio scales as opposed to interval scales is very important for understanding the range of quantitative theories. A quantitative theory of value that employs a ratio scale for measurement is a theory of value that holds that things being measured and compared to one another relate in a very specific way. A quantitative theory of
value that employs a ratio scale for measurement holds that something with no value completely lacks the properties necessary for evaluation. This means that this sort of quantitative theory is ultimately making a metaphysical claim about the existence of evaluative properties and value.

Of course, a quantitative theorist of this sort could still be an error theorist about value, but they could not be non-cognitivist. Hedonistic versions of value that relate happiness to a specific physical property in the brain are likely to fall into the camp of quantitative theorists who adopt a ratio scale.

2.6 Qualitative Theories

Having talked at length about the specifics of a quantitative theory, I am now going to discuss qualitative theories of value. Qualitative theories belong to the set of substantive theories of value that are not quantitative. While all quantitative theories hold that the only essential evaluative feature of all valuable things is the amount of value that thing has, nonquantitative theories break into 3 distinct camps, each with its distinct practical implications.

In one camp, nonquantitative theorists deny that ascriptions of value have any essential features. As a substantive theory of value, these sorts of nonquantitative theorists will hold that there are no essential features of value that bear on practical matters, and so ascriptions of value are essentially impotent in terms of practical matters. Needless to say, this is not a very crowded camp of theories, and nonquantitative theories of this sort are not qualitative. Qualitative theories make up the remaining two camps of nonquantitative theories.

One of these camps agrees with the quantitative theorist that ascriptions of value have only one feature, but disagrees that the feature is the total amount of value. We’ll call this group the “qualitative monists.” Qualitative monists believe that all practical matters that depend on evaluation depend crucially on whether or not the thing being evaluated poses the single requisite
feature. The other camp disagrees with the quantitative theorist on both scores. These sorts of qualitative value theorists hold that there is more than one essential feature to all valuable things, and so amount cannot be the only relevant feature of a valuable thing. These “qualitative pluralists” think practical matters that depend on evaluations are—or are not—determinable by more than one evaluative feature. The important result is that qualitative value theorists do not take the amount of value to always be the only relevant factor in substantive matters like choices, consequences, feelings, characters, etc.

Qualitative monists hold that there is one essential feature to value ascriptions, but it isn’t amount. This sort of theory of value is categorical in the sense that members of the set of things valuable belong in virtue of some feature they all have, but at the same time, this theory is not concerned with the amount of that feature the valuable thing has. So, in essence, this sort of theory of value classifies everything simply in terms of whether or not the thing in question belongs to the set of valuable things or not. This sort of qualitative theory uses nominal scales for evaluation. If we return to the shape analogy from earlier, we might analogize a qualitative monist to a shape theorist who was only concerned with quadrilaterals. This shape theorist may admit that there are many shapes with more or less than 4 sides, but only those with 4 sides are quadrilaterals and only quadrilaterals matter practically. As for evaluation, a qualitative monist may hold that there are lots of things that are similar to things with value, but only certain things that have an essential quality will count as valuable. For example, suppose we flip the thought that the right course of action depends on the good, such that the goodness of something depends entirely on whether or not a right action was performed. The good things or valuable things are all good or valuable in virtue of the same feature, the rightness of the action performed. If in this
scenario we assume that rightness doesn’t come in degrees, then all valuable things will essentially be on a par with one another, which is why I say they use a nominal scale.

Qualitative pluralists are by far and away the more popular sort of qualitative theorist. The term “pluralist” is used to emphasize the plurality of important features an ascription of value has on practical matters, and it should not be confused with a metaphysical claim about the number of values. A value monist about the number of values can be a qualitative value pluralist, but I want to set that argument aside until the next section of this chapter. For now, it important to understand how a qualitative pluralist is different than a quantitative value theorist.

In my discussion of quantitative theories, I pointed out that it is sometimes easiest to think of that view as a view that takes all ascriptions of value and boils them down to an amount which fits neatly on a scale of value. Once this boiling down is complete, the only evaluatively relevant properties from one valuable thing to the next are relational properties on the scale of value. So valuable thing X and valuable thing Y can be related to one another on a quantitative theory only in terms of the relational properties they have on the scale of value. We could say things like, “X is great” and “Y is bogus,” but this would really all just boil down to an amount that would place X and Y on an evaluative scale, which would in turn give us relational properties like, “X is better than Y.”

As for qualitative pluralists, they can relate and compare valuable things on scales. What they will most assuredly deny is that the scale accounts for all of the evaluatively relevant features of the valuable thing. As a result, those relationships expressible in terms of the scale of value only tell part of the story. In other words, qualitative pluralists are resistant to boiling away evaluatively relevant features of a valuable thing, such that the only relational properties in terms of evaluation are those expressible by the placement on the scale of value.
What this means for a qualitative positions is that making comparisons of valuable things is more nuanced than a quantitative theory. Valuable X may be better than valuable Y, but the qualitative theorist would deny that’s all there is to say on the issue. Assuming the comparison between X and Y has been an overall evaluation, the qualitative theorist will most likely be tempted to point out how the aspect evaluations relate to one another. Specifically, a qualitative value theorist will want to point out things like the fact that one aspect evaluation is different than another. Supposing X and Y are cars, and we’ve agreed that X is a better car than Y, a qualitative theorist may be tempted to point out that the interior of X turns out to be worse than the interior of Y. These more specific differences that are subsumed by the overall evaluation still remain important to the qualitative theorist. And the differences the qualitative theorist points out needn’t themselves be put in terms of scaled relational properties. The qualitative theories may again agree that X is better than Y, but point out that Y has really nice leather, while X does not have leather at all. The simple fact that the evaluatively relevant features are different from one another remains an important evaluative point for the qualitative theorist even after an overall evaluation has placed the valuable goods on a scale of value.

Qualitative theories can even deny that overall evaluations are amenable to scalar relational properties like “better than.” A qualitative pluralist of this sort would essentially deny that we could boil down an overall evaluation that fits on a scale of value for comparison. This sort of qualitative theorist would be resistant to overall claims like, X is better than Y. Instead they’d want to list all the evaluative relevant ways in which X and Y were similar and different. It’s important to point out that doing this is no denial on the qualitative theorist’s part that comparisons can be made. The denial is that scalar comparisons can be made.

2.7 Monism/Pluralism and Incommensurability
Hopefully, from what has been said so far the difference between quantitative and qualitative theories is clear. It is, however, important to show how the distinction between qualitative and quantitative theories is different from distinctions already made in value theory. I want to start by arguing that value monism can be qualitative. It’s typically assumed that value monism entails a quantitative theory, so I won’t argue for that here. I do, however, want to point out that it is this assumption about monism and quantitative theories that Hurka seems to want to deny in his use of PEVI that I discuss in chapter 1. This is why I say at the beginning of this chapter that Stocker’s arguments are misdirected when he takes aim at value monism. Overall, Stocker’s arguments would be better had he targeted quantitative theories of value.

In Hurka’s defense of monism, he points out that a monism can allow for differences in introspectable properties that allow us to rationally regret. He takes this move from Shelly Kagan, who proposes a monistic theory of value in his “Limits of Well-Being” that is essentially hedonistic. But Kagan notes that pleasure is not a distinct component of our experiences, but rather a dimension of those experiences along which we can measure them.¹⁸ Understood this way, the single value of pleasure cannot be isolated from the rest of our experiences, and so every experience of pleasure will be qualitatively different in an important sense. In effect, these qualitative differences of our experiences of pleasure may matter for more than just assessing an overall amount of value, even though they do not make up distinct values. As to whether or not such a view is plausibly called a monism, I will not comment here, but if it is, then it is a monism that could easily be qualitatively pluralistic. Ultimately, our claims about the number of values in the world do not always entail claims about how values affect the world. Value monists can be either quantitative value theorists or qualitative ones. Value pluralists can do the same.

Incommensurability has been taken to mean several distinct things in value literature, but for the most part it has meant something close to “lacking a common measure.”\textsuperscript{19} “Common measure,” however, can be understood in several ways, as can its application to value. Nien-hê Hsieh, in his “Incommensurable Values” entry to the \textit{Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy}, outlines what he takes to be three distinct conceptions of value incommensurability. The practical application for a common measure, however, is undeniably the same across its uses, namely making comparisons.

Claims of incommensurability are claims about the metaphysical properties of types of value. Arguments for incommensurability move from claims about the incomparability of bearers of value, back to claims about the incommensurability of the value born by the bearers. This means that arguments for incommensurability rely on PEVI. I’ve argued for an important troublesome feature of arguments that rely on PEVI in the first chapter, namely that the phenomenon that is intended to prove the metaphysical property tends to assume that the metaphysical property is true. However, it is particularly hasty in the case of value incommensurability. For one thing, our inability to compare two good things could be caused by epistemic difficulties in evaluation. To take a famous example used by Joseph Raz, my inability to compare the life of a clarinetist to a legal career seems to say more about my inability to evaluate than it does about the incommensurability of value.\textsuperscript{20} Another troublesome feature of these arguments is that incommensurability already assumes a plurality of different types of value. I don’t think a single value can be incommensurable with itself, so when an argument for incommensurability is presented, the conclusion is not only that values are incommensurable, but also that there is more than one type of value.

\textsuperscript{19} Hsieh, 2007.  
\textsuperscript{20} Raz, 1986.
It seems perfectly plausible that a person could have difficulty or be completely unable to compare two bearers of value even though there is only one type of commensurable value. Evaluating bearers of value is not always easy, even if you assume commensurable values, and evaluation is a necessary part of comparison. Failing to compare tells us more about evaluation than the metaphysics of value. Using PEVI to make claims about incommensurability begs the question against value commensuration and value monism.

More important than the failures of these arguments is that the quantitative/qualitative distinction fits nicely into this debate. If comparative difficulties more clearly entail something about people’s evaluative beliefs and the quantitative/qualitative distinction tells us something about people’s evaluative beliefs, then we should check to see if comparative difficulties tell us something about the quantitative/qualitative distinction. There seems already to be some evidence of this in the Stocker/Hurka debate, since Stocker’s arguments would do better against a quantitative theory because his arguments are based primarily on feeling conflicted when bearers of value are compared. To see how well the quantitative/qualitative distinction fits the role that incommensurability is meant to play when we compare two valuable things, we need to look at several formulations of incommensurability.

The three types of incommensurability covered by Hsieh have PEVI built into them, such that types of incommensurability have incomparability built into their definitions. For example, in the first sense, which Hsieh attributes to James Griffin, two values are incommensurable if and only if the further realization of any one value never outranks a certain amount of another realized value. In other words, two values are incommensurate if one of the two values can trump any amount of the alternative. We will call this “trumping incommensurability.” As you
can see from this definition of incommensurability, what makes them incommensurable is the way they are sometimes compared.\textsuperscript{21}

This is useful for our purposes, because it supplies us several important ways in which we think comparisons are difficult. Rather than draw the same conclusions about incommensurability, as other philosophers have, we will use these difficulties in comparison to help delineate the quantitative/qualitative distinction. The result will not only make the distinction more clear, but it will also show how quantitative/qualitative theories relate to current theories of incommensurability, even if the arguments for the truth of those positions are unstable.

If one were to adopt the trumping conception of incommensurability, then comparisons would still be possible and often easy to make. But this theory’s defining feature in allowing any amount of a value to be trumped by some amount of another value means that this view cannot be adopted by a quantitative theory of value, since a quantitative view of value holds that the defining feature of an evaluation is the amount of value. By claiming that in some cases no amount of a particular value is sufficient to overcome another, this sort of incommensurability is definitively not quantitative. It could, on the other hand, be adopted by either the qualitative monist or pluralist. In other words, if we think that on occasion there is some trumping going on in our comparisons, then we are not quantitative value theorists. And in turn, if incommensurability is defined as allowing for trumping, then quantitative value theorists do not think that there is this sort of incommensurability.

Qualitative value theorists can allow for trumping in comparisons. Since both the qualitative monist and pluralist allow for something other than amount to matter for practical

\textsuperscript{21} This is, again, clear evidence that PEVI begs the question. Incommensurability is defined in terms of the practical effect that is often cited to prove that values are incommensurable.
purposes like comparisons, either could allow that one evaluation trump another in a comparison irrespective of amount. In the case of the qualitative monist, this trumping would have to be the only thing that mattered for comparison, but this just means that the theory of trumping could depend in no way on the amount of the value. Valuable good A trumps valuable good B, because valuable good A meets certain criteria.

In the second sense, “values are incommensurable if and only if there is no true general overall ranking of the realization of one value against the realization of the other value.”22 This sense of incommensurability is simply denying that there is a single overall ranking between any two values that holds true for all comparisons involving these values, so we’ll call it “universal scale incommensurability.” This view explicitly assumes value pluralism, which goes, again, to show that these are claims about the metaphysics of value. In terms of comparability, we can make a similar claim to this, without assuming a plurality of values, which will be more useful for saying things about the evaluative implications. Two evaluated things are hard to compare in this sense, because the ranking on a scale of value of the one good thing to the other is not always the same. In other words, valuable A may be better than valuable B on some occasions and not on others.

This view of incommensurability is consistent with there being a particular ranking of the values in any given comparison, but there is no single ranking of the values that holds across all comparisons. In other words, we may be able to rank value A to value B in any given situation, but never be able to say, “For all situations, value A ranks Φ to value B.” Incommensurability in this sense is still consistent with our being able to make comparisons in all situations, but Φ may change from one situation to the next. In terms of comparability, our evaluation of valuable A

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may rank $\Phi$ to valuable B in some cases and rank $\theta$ in others, but our evaluation of valuable A will not rank $\Phi$ to valuable B in all cases.

Universal scale incomparability is consistent with quantitative theories of value. Quantitative theories hold that the only essential feature of an ascription of value for all practical purposes, like comparisons, is that ascriptions total amount of value. My ranking of valuable A and valuable B will change if the amounts of value I ascribe to valuable A and valuable B change. Nothing about the quantitative view of value maintains that these amounts can’t change in various circumstances. For example, I’d rank diamonds better than gold by weight purely in terms of an amount they are good, but that ranking could change if how good these things were changed. And it could change if diamonds were more suddenly more abundant and gold harder to come by. So our evaluations, in terms solely of amount, can change, which can change our comparisons.

It should be no surprise that qualitative theories can also account for this sort of incomparability/incommensurability. The fact that our comparisons will differ depending on the circumstances is a particular claim about the relative nature of our evaluations. In fact, universal scale comparability seems to be primarily a denial of the relative nature of evaluations. While this claim might be true, quantitative and qualitative theories of value are consistent with either objective or relative understandings of our evaluations. The key to understanding these views is their clear stances on what matters for practical purposes. The quantitative theory holds that the only thing that matters for practical purposes is the amount of value we ascribe to a good, while the qualitative theorists do not hold this. Neither of these views is invested in a claim about the universal objectivity of our evaluations.
The third form of incommensurability discussed by Hsieh denies that it is possible to rank values in every case. This means that in some cases value A will not rank to value B, and vice versa. In terms of comparability, this would be equivalent to a denial of what Ruth Chang calls the “trichotomy thesis.” The trichotomy thesis holds that the comparison of any two valuable things can always be expressed in terms of one of the following: “better than,” “worse than,” or “equal to.” So if I were to evaluate valuable A and valuable B, I could not then compare them in terms of one being better, worse, or equal to the other.

Quantitative theories of value could not allow for this sort of incomparability. According to a quantitative theory of value, for any evaluation I have of valuable A and valuable B, that evaluation is in terms of an amount. Those amounts are always comparable in terms of the trichotomy thesis. Qualitative theories could, again, allow for this sort of incomparability. Evaluations of valuable A and valuable B on a qualitative account may not be in terms easily expressible in the trichotomy thesis. It might be true that valuable A is better that valuable B in some respects and not in others. If our evaluations allow of various qualities, our comparisons may not be able to say much more than the ways in which the two things are similar and different, evaluatively.

In the next chapter, I focus on giving examples of quantitative and qualitative theories of value based on the distinctions I make here. As it turns out, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative theories of value is consistent with many other theories about value, and so it will be of some help to further clarifying the distinction to examine several theories of value to see how the distinction relates to them. Since the total number of theories about value probably increases by day, I couldn’t hope to come close to including them all in this dissertation. Instead,
I’ve decided to focus on several interpretations of hedonism. By focusing on how various interpretations of hedonism may be further parsed up according to the quantitative/qualitative distinction, I am aiming to show the relevance and subtlety of the distinction.
CHAPTER 3. HEDONISM AND THE DISTINCTION

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will explain what it is to have a quantitative view or a qualitative view in the context of a hedonistic view of value. I take it that one of the best illustrations of this distinction occurs when we compare Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. I will discuss Bentham in 3.1 and argue that he is quantitative in the sense I’ve been using here. This will be a fruitful discussion because Bentham is often taken to be the epitome of a value monist and so I will be able to contrast the qualities that make Bentham a quantitative theorist with those that make him a value monist. Following Bentham, I will discuss desire satisfaction theories and how they are, for the most part, quantitative as well in 3.2. In 3.2 I also suggest how a desire satisfaction account could be qualitative, which raises an important objection to the qualitative account that I handle in 3.3. In the Mill section I will discuss his higher/lower pleasures distinction, and how in his efforts to defend utilitarianism from caricature, he took on some of the spirit of a qualitative account.

3.2 Benthamite Hedonism: A Quantitative Theory

Benthamite hedonism is an archetypical quantitative theory of value. Even with all the intricacies in the felicitous calculus, attributions of value vary only by degree on a single scale. This boiling down of ascriptions of value to just their amounts the typical dead giveaway for quantitative theories, and so pursuing Bentham’s thoughts here will help clearly demonstrate what it is to be a quantitative theory of value. Whether or not Bentham himself or Bentham scholars would agree with my interpretation of Benthamite hedonism will not take away from the elucidating feature for value theory this pursuit will have.
Jeremy Bentham is taken usually to have a fairly simplistic view of pleasure and value. For example, Martha Nussbaum wrote:

Plato, Aristotle, and a whole line of subsequent philosophers discussed such questions [about the nature of pleasure] with great subtlety. Bentham simply ignores them. As Mill writes, "Bentham failed in deriving light from other minds." For him, pleasure is a single homogeneous sensation containing no qualitative differences. The only variations in pleasure are quantitative: it can vary in intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, propinquity or remoteness, and, finally, in causal properties (tendency to produce more pleasure, etc.). Perhaps Bentham's deep concern with pain--which can somewhat plausibly be considered as a unitary sensation varying only in intensity and duration--is the source of his feeling that various pleasures do not meaningfully differ in quality. But this conclusion, Mill says, is the result of "the empiricism of one who has had little experience"--either external, he adds, or internal, through the imagination.\(^{24}\)

Besides being quite stinging in their tenor, these remarks on Bentham capture the general view of his hedonism. I won’t take up the aptness of such beliefs too much here, but I do want to enlighten them some. The primary reason is not to understand Bentham better, although this may be a result, but to more accurately describe how he is a quantitative value theorist. In what follows I will cover the basics of Bentham’s theory of value. From that I will give an argument for why his view should be understood as a quantitative theory.

Bentham’s hedonism is both motivational and normative. In an oft cited passage from the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham says, “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone

\(^{24}\) Nussbaum, 2004.
to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne.” So to Bentham, pleasure and pain are not only our sole sources of motivation, but also the sole arbiters of how we ought to act.25

It’s seems apparent from these claims that pleasure is being equated with value. However, the exact relationship between value, pleasures, and pains is not entirely obvious. In the fourth chapter, “Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, how to be Measured,” Bentham says this about their relationship:

Pleasures then, and the avoidance of pains, are the ends that the legislator has in view; it behoves him therefore to understand their value. Pleasures and pains are the instruments he has to work with: it behoves him therefore to understand their force, which is again, in other words, their value.

Bentham takes it that value, instrumental or final, supervenes on pleasures and pains. But the supervenience relationship isn’t an identity claim. Pleasures and pains are not exactly the same as value and disvalue, even though, according to Bentham, all an only pleasure is the supervenience base for value.26

The reason Bentham should be understood as not simply equating pleasure to value is that he distinguishes them from an understanding of their value. To know the value of pleasures and pains is different, for Bentham, from simply knowing what the pains and pleasures are. While this point is subtle, it was the reason for Bentham’s felicitous calculus. To find out how much value an option had required an equation involving all the pleasures and pains involved.

26 I think it’s most natural to read Bentham as a Buck passer. Value comes from reasons; all of which come from pleasure and pains.
Such an equation defined the supervenience relationship between value and its base of pleasure and pain. And without the proper equation, Bentham’s legislatures couldn’t move from claims about pleasures and pains to claims about their value.

In determining the value of a particular pleasure or pain experienced by an individual, Bentham cited four variables that determine the pain or pleasure’s overall value: (1) intensity, (2) duration, (3) certainty or uncertainty, and (4) propinquity or remoteness. Intensity is how strongly the pain or pleasure is felt. The pain from sunburn is less intense than that of a grease fire burn. Duration is a measure of how long the pain or pleasure is felt. Sunburns are felt for longer periods than the small burns one might experience cooking. Certainty or uncertainty is the likelihood that an individual will even experience a pain or pleasure given a certain state of affairs obtains. So while we have assumed that sunburns are painful, it’s possible that the likelihood of the pain occurring given a sunburn varies depending on the severity of the sunburn or a person’s natural sensitivity to a sunburn. Propinquity or remoteness is how far away in time the pain and pleasure is. An investment may be certain to bring a person great rewards, but those rewards may not be fully reaped for many years, which would make them remote.

From this it seems clear that even while Bentham was certain that pain and pleasure determined value, he made room for certain states of affairs to bear on the total amount of value. After all, a particular pain would feel the same regardless of its propinquity, and Bentham is clear that propinquity still affects the amount of value. Ultimately, Bentham isn’t entirely clear on what he means exactly by pleasure and pain, so the relationship between the sensation of pain or pleasure and the state of affairs that give rise to features like certainty and propinquity isn’t fully developed. I think there is reason to believe that what I’ve said here is consistent with Bentham given what he says in Chapter V, “Pleasures and Pains, Their Kinds.” There he notes
that pleasures and pains are “interesting perceptions” that are either simple or complex. The complex interesting perceptions are composed of simple interesting perceptions, which can be mixtures of pains and pleasures. This bit by Bentham is analogous to my discussion in chapter 2 of putting shapes together to understand the relationship between “aspect evaluations” and “overall evaluations.” The primary difference here is that Bentham is putting together simple pleasures to make complex pleasures, and only once we’ve understood the relationship of those pleasures can we derive their value. Those relational properties, then, bear on the total amount of value, even though they themselves are not pleasures or pains.

To further drive this point home about the distinction between pleasure, pain, and value for Bentham, I will briefly examine how he analyzes a complex pleasure, which he calls a “complex perception.” What determines whether or not a concatenation of simple pains and pleasures is in fact a single complex perception depends on the existing cause. Bentham says, “Whatever pleasures are excited all at once by the action of the same cause, are apt to be looked upon as constituting all together but one pleasure.” In footnote 13, Bentham gives a sample analysis of a complex pleasure, which he describes as “the pleasures of a country scene.” Given his analysis, it would appear that to Bentham, states of affairs give rise to many simple pleasures and pains, which then give rise to the complex pleasure or pain. In this particular example by Bentham, he cites the simple pleasures of sight, sounds, smells, innocence, gratitude and more as making up the overall complex pleasure. So the complex pleasure seems to just be all of the simple pleasures that come from the same cause, being in a country scene. Here’s how we might understand certainty and propinquity in the midst of these complications. If an investment with a certain high return can be thought of as a complex pleasure, composed of many simple pleasures, then the fact that all of these simple pleasures will come together in time is its degree of
certainty. And the time it takes for all those simple pleasures to come together is its propinquity. Ultimately, then, propinquity and certainty are facts about the states of affairs which comprise complex pleasures, and so they are not actual features of the sensation of pleasure.

The tricky part is understanding certainty and propinquity in all cases, since they don’t seem to have a place in Bentham’s simple pleasures like those of sight, sound, and smell. We might just suppose that Bentham didn’t intend to apply such features in figuring the value of simple pleasures, but Bentham does refer to certainty and propinquity as features belonging “to all sorts of pleasures and pains alike.” As a result, it’s probably worth working those features into simple pleasures too. This will show that even in the case of simple pleasures and pains, value isn’t merely identified with them.

When estimating the value of a simple pleasure of a beautiful view, we can understand Bentham’s use of propinquity and certainty as extrinsic properties of that state, be it a state of mind or state of affairs. When the state obtains—like when we’re actually looking at a beautiful scene—certainty and propinquity have reached their limit. An interesting point on which Bentham is silent is whether or not the moments before viewing the beautiful scene have more value than the moments actually spent viewing the scene. The moments before would lack the intensity and duration but have lots of propinquity and certainty. Bentham doesn’t actually say which of the four variables contributes most to overall value.

Given all this, we can sum up a general theory of value for Bentham like this. Bentham thought all value came from pleasure, either complex or simple. Understanding how much value some pleasure, P, was responsible for depended on several facts about that pleasure, namely its intensity, duration, certainty, and propinquity. Bentham is commonly understood to have accepted that pleasure was a sensation, but this should not be confused with his theory of value.
Bentham did not equate a sensation of pleasure with value, since certain facts about the sensation which were extrinsic to the sensation could vary the amount of value, namely certainty and propinquity. Pleasure and the facts about a particular pleasure determined an amount of value. Further inspection of this relationship between pleasure and value will show us that Bentham was a quantitative value theorist.

For Bentham, value supervenes on pleasures, pains, and the relational properties those pleasures and pains have in virtue of the state of affairs in which they obtain. A quantitative theory of value is, again, a claim about practical matters of value, and its primary concern is with ascriptions of value. Practical matters of value focus on how we use values and evaluations in our lives to assess things like choices, consequences, characters, etc. Bentham clearly has before him a use for ascriptions of pleasure, namely their defining characteristic in determining the rightness or wrongness of an action. Acting in accordance with the principle of utility requires that one maximize happiness, and in order to do that, Bentham’s primary focus is on conglomerating ascriptions of pleasure into a single scale of value. All evaluations, then, belong somewhere on that single scale of value.

When an evaluation is made, according to Bentham, the only relevant feature of that evaluation is it bearing on the total amount of value. So when we say that the car is an excellent car, the only important feature of that evaluation is how much value was ascribed to the car. Given what Bentham has said, a car can only be excellent if that car has value, and value supervenes on pleasures, pains, and their extrinsic relationships. The pleasures and pains that are assumed to come from the car are put into the felicitous calculus—duration, intensity, certainty, and propinquity—to give us a total amount of value. Once a total amount of value has been figured, there is nothing more to say in favor of or against the car’s excellence that is not entirely
represented in the amount of value. This process of boiling down all the features of the car’s
goodness into amounts makes Bentham a quantitative value theorist, because a quantitative value
theory takes all ascriptions of value to have only one essential feature, the ascriptions bearing on
the total amount of value of the object or state. Once we have the total amount of value, for
Bentham, then that’s all that can be said for practical matters when comparing good things,
which highlights the quantitative aspect of putting everything on a scale of value, which blurs all
but the relational properties allowed by that scale.

One important point to highlight from this is that Bentham makes a metaphysical claim
about value, and whether or not this claim turns out to be true doesn’t matter for whether or not
Bentham is a quantitative or qualitative value theorist. This follows, again, from the fact that the
quantitative/qualitative distinction is a distinction at the substantive level of value theory.
However, we can see that Bentham’s metaphysical claims—whether they are true or not—do
bear on how he thinks evaluations ought to be made. This is important because Bentham can
rightfully call himself a hedonist, and his understanding of hedonism leads him to being a
quantitative value theorist. But when Bentham is compared to other hedonists, we will see that
their versions of hedonism lead them to different substantive positions. This result supports
further the claim that the quantitative/qualitative distinction is quite different than other
metaphysical distinctions like the monism/pluralism distinction.

In finishing with Bentham, I would like to sum up by reiterating what claims can be made
clearly of Bentham, and what claims cannot. I have argued here that Bentham is best understood
as having a quantitative theory of value. I came to this conclusion without first assuming he was
a value monist, which he is often assumed to be. I think that by understanding Bentham in terms
of a quantitative theorist, we leave open the possibility that he be interpreted as a value pluralist,
holding a more complex understanding of pleasure and pain than the simple sensation view that’s often attributed to him. Given that pluralism and monism are claims about the number of values and not claims about how we treat ascriptions of value, it’s perfectly consistent with a quantitative theory of value to interpret Bentham in either way, especially since Bentham seems to be primarily concerned with our summing up of value, and not with whether or not those values are distinguishable by type. Ultimately, I think that it is because Bentham is such an adamant quantitative theorist that we take him to be a value monist.

A quantitative theory of value is easily confused with monism and simple sensation views of pleasure. This is because it is often assumed that an implication of monism or a simple sensation view of pleasure is a quantitative theory of value. What’s more, a clearly quantitative theory of value is often taken to be only explainable in terms of a system of value easily aggregated, like monism and particularly a simple sensation view of pleasure. But neither of these implications holds necessarily. So while Bentham has put it that “Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry,”27 we shouldn’t infer beyond a quantitative theory of value. Whether or not my thoughts here on Bentham are correct, it remains true that if he had a quantitative theory of value, then he could have been a monist or pluralist.

3.3 Desire Satisfaction Accounts: Quantitative and Qualitative

While few claim to be Benthamite in their understanding of value today, there are many other views that could easily be understood quantitatively. Desire satisfaction accounts of well-being or pleasure, for example, can be interpreted as quantitative theories of value. I will briefly give a schematic for how desire satisfaction accounts have quantitative or qualitative

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implications. I will be following Derek Parfit’s distinctions between desire satisfaction accounts.²⁸

Before discussing desire satisfaction accounts specifically, Parfit covers a variation on hedonism that is similar to desire satisfaction accounts, which is worth covering here. On one fairly popular interpretation of Bentham, all sensations of pleasure and pain are essentially the same sensation in various degrees and durations. Parfit calls this narrow hedonism, and he dismisses it. Instead of a single common experience of sensation to all pleasures or pains, Parfit suggests that a hedonist may instead claim that the commonality between all pleasurable events is that they are wanted. The more we want them, the better those experiences are deemed to be. Parfit calls this type of hedonism, preference hedonism.²⁹

In many ways preference hedonism may be thought of as just another variation of a desire satisfaction account, but Parfit takes steps to distinguish it from what he calls a success theory of desire satisfaction accounts. Broadly speaking, desire satisfaction accounts hold that what is valuable for a person is what best fulfills that person’s desires. But one’s desires are not only numerous, their fulfillment can vary in ways that make for different types of desire satisfaction accounts. In what Parfit calls an unrestricted theory we could have our desires satisfied and this be valuable for us even though we are completely unaware of it. In Parfit’s example of this we meet a stranger who is dying from a disease. Being sympathetic to this stranger’s situation we want him to be cured. According to the unrestricted theory, if this stranger goes on to be cured and we never know about it, then our desire has been satisfied and that is good for us. Parfit finds this implausible, and he dismisses the view. For our purposes, we can distinguish this sort of unrestricted theory from preference hedonism by noting that

²⁹ Other authors sometimes call this functional hedonism, since pleasure is defined in terms of a functional state.
preference hedonism would not accept such a case as involving pleasure, since there never was an experience of having the preference fulfilled. The lack of knowledge about the stranger overcoming his disease prevents us from experiencing the pleasure that a preference hedonist is accounting for.

Instead of an unrestricted theory, Parfit suggests a *Success Theory*. This sort of desire satisfaction account, “appeals only to our desires about our own lives.”30 As a result, our desire for the stranger to be cured is not a desire about our own life, and so it is not a desire that matters for determining what is valuable. And apparently to avoid any further discussion on the subject, Parfit claims that even a desire to have all of one’s desires fulfilled should not be counted as a desire about our own lives, analogizing that sort of desire to a *Cambridge-change* in properties. Whether or not Parfit is correct on this is not the issue here, since I’m only interested ultimately in showing that a success theory is quantitative.

The difference between success theory and preference hedonism, according to Parfit, is that preference hedonism is only interested in preferences about our lives that are introspectively discernable. The point here is that a preference not to be deceived and a preference to never believe we are being deceived, when satisfied, are not introspectively discernable. In other words, we cannot introspect after one of these preferences has been satisfied and distinguish which it was. A success theory is interested in all our desires about ourselves, even the ones that are not introspectively discernable. And so, it makes a difference for a success theory whether or not the desire not to be deceived is actually being satisfied. Our lives go better when our desires about ourselves are fulfilled. I think that the difference between the success theory and

preference hedonism is substantial enough to continue with Parfit in claiming that these are distinct views. I will discuss them each with respect to a quantitative theory of value.

Parfit’s discussion of Preference Hedonism and Success Theory couches these theories in terms of what would make a person’s life go best. This means that at the substantive level these theories are making evaluations in terms of whether or not the thing in question will make the person’s life go best. In both theories, the thing in question to be evaluated is the satisfaction of some desire or preference. As to whether or not these theories are quantitative, the crucial point is how these theories handle the evaluation of the satisfaction of the respective desires/preferences. If it’s the case that these evaluations boil down essentially to an amount for practical purposes, then they are quantitative.

As Parfit describes these theories, it appears that evaluations are purely quantitative. Taken in isolation, something is better for our lives if it fulfills the stronger desire. Strength of satisfied desire determines the amount of value something has for our lives. In a discussion of hypothetical and actual desires Parfit says, “One of these alternatives would be best for me if it is the one in which I would have the strongest desires and preferences fulfilled.”31 Evaluations are tied primarily to strength of desire, and this makes these views quantitative. Ultimately, evaluation of the satisfaction of particular desires is nothing more than an amount based on the strength of the particular desire. In terms of practical matters, we should only concern ourselves with how much—an amount—the satisfaction of this desire will bear on our lives.

How much a satisfied desire bears on our whole lives can be thought of either in terms of a sum of all the satisfied desires we have in our life, or instead, in terms of desires we have about some part of our life take as a whole, including desires about our whole life. Parfit calls these

31 Parfit, 1987. 496.
ways of weighting desires in terms of one’s whole life, “summative” and “global” respectively.\footnote{Parfit, 1987. 496-98.} Whether one adopts a summative or global approach to evaluating particular desires, the result is still a quantitative view. On a summative approach, all our desires figure into what’s best for our lives, so one desire varies from the next for practical purposes in only one respect, amount, which is determinable by the strength of the desire. On a global approach, many of our desires are dismissed for determining what’s best for our lives, since they are not desires about part of our life taken as a whole. This only limits the number of desires that can be evaluated. It does not add some new feature to those desires that are evaluated that would make the view qualitative. Of the desires evaluated on a global approach, the only thing that matters is the strength of the desire for determining the worth of satisfying that desire.

Given this analysis of a Preference Hedonism and Success Theory, it appears as though both are quantitative. But this is as Derek Parfit has described them, so let me briefly suggest an alternative approach to desire satisfaction accounts that could be qualitative. The trick to making a theory qualitative is to describe it in such a way that evaluations don’t simply boil down to amounts of value. Parfit’s theories rest on the assumption that the only evaluatively significant feature for practical purposes is the strength of the desire. Variation, then, between evaluations couldn’t amount to anything other than amount. If it were the case that desires differed significantly from one another such that we could type differentiate between them, then a desire satisfaction account may have the ground work for a qualitative theory.

In the purely abstract, the possibility of this is easy to demonstrate. Suppose that there are desires of type A and desires of type B. The satisfaction of a desire of type A is different from the satisfaction of a desire of type B. The difference, here, is really the crux of the matter.
It cannot be a difference solely in strength, and it must be a difference that matters for practical purposes. Let me suggest that a dispositional theory of value could accomplish this, particularly when it is mixed with thoughts from Frankfurt in “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person.”

Suppose desire of type A differs from desire of type B in that desire of type A is what Frankfurt calls a second order volition or a volition of the second order and desire of type B is a first order desire. Second order volitions, which I will just call “volitions,” are desires that other desires be effective. The object of desire for most volitions are first order desires, so typically, desires of type A are only satisfied when desires of type B are satisfied. However, desires of type B are satisfied regularly without it being the case that a desire of type A is also being satisfied, since desires of type B are not dependant on a corresponding desire of type A. The interesting difference that comes from this for substantive evaluative purposes is that we as persons identify more closely with desires of type A than our desires of type B. In fact, we can have conflicting desires of type B, but have a desire of type A that only one of those type B desires be effective. A case like this would be a junky who does not wish to be a junky anymore.

When it comes to practical matters and evaluations, the strength of type A and type B desires is not the issue. Type of desire takes precedence. A junky who has two type B desires, one to take heroin and the other not to take heroin, may also have a single type A desire that his type B desire not to take heroin be effective. On a desire satisfaction account, where strength of desire satisfied is all that matters for evaluation, the type B desire to continue taking the drug will probably win out. The type B desire to not take heroin is probably helplessly weak. So weak, in fact, that even when it is combined with the type A desire that it be effective, the strength of

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those two desires still does not outweigh the strength of the single desire of type B to take the
drug. But since it seems that desires of type A are the things that make us persons, even if they
are weaker, this fact about type A desires seems to be an important evaluative feature that could
trump the strength of a type B desire no matter how strong. In extreme cases, type B desires
could be quite foreign to who we are as people, and their satisfaction does not seem to be
particularly good for us. Especially when “us” is understood as the person who has type A
desires contrary to those type B desires. Satisfying those very strong type B desires may indeed
bring some relief to a person, but when it is at the cost of a type A desire, we will have sacrificed
something evaluatively important in a different way than the mere satisfaction of a type B desire.

This sketch of a desire satisfaction account that grants two different types of desires will
have problems, and I am not promoting or defending it here. I’m only suggesting it as a way that
desire satisfaction accounts could be qualitative. I will address one concern, however, since I
need to be sure this view is distinct from the desire satisfaction accounts suggested by Parfit. In
particular, it needs to be distinct from a global account, since this distinction between desires of
type A and type B appears to be effectively the same as Parfit’s summative and global distinction
about desires.

Distinguishing desire types the way I have suggested as a possible qualitative account
could is different than Parfit’s global account. The reason Parfit abandons summative
approaches to well-being in regard to satisfied desires is that a person could have a strong desire
to take a drug every day that would give them no pleasure, but having satisfied this desire day
after day for an entire life would make for more satisfied desires, which would mean that that
sort of life as an addict would be better than not being addicted. As a solution to this, Parfit
offers the global account, which basically dismisses as evaluatively irrelevant desires that are not
The strong desire to take the drug everyday is not a relevant sort of desire for evaluating a person’s well being, but the desire to not be an addict is. The global account simply dismisses a whole slew of desires as evaluatively relevant to our well-being, where as the distinction between types grants that the satisfaction of desires of type A and type B are both evaluatively relevant, but that in some cases the satisfaction of a type A desire trumps the very strong desire of type B.

The desire satisfaction theory I’ve offered here is qualitatively pluralistic. By way of reminder, qualitative pluralists think practical matters that depend on evaluations are—or are not—determinable by more than one evaluative feature. A desire satisfaction account that grants two types of desire as I’ve described it here grants that strength of desire is important for determining an amount of value when that desire is satisfied, but what makes it qualitatively pluralistic is that it also grants that in practical matters this is not always the only evaluatively relevant feature. Sometimes the type of desire involved makes for an important evaluative feature that may have nothing to do with the amount of value.

I want to conclude this section by addressing an important objection to the qualitative pluralist. Now that I’ve given an example of a theory that is qualitatively pluralistic, this seems to be a good place to address those objections, since I can refer to the example to help ground theoretical claims.

3.4 Objection to the Qualitative Theory

Perhaps the most immediate objection to a qualitatively pluralistic account can be summed up in several related questions. First, how can it be that our evaluations of things are really anything more than determining an amount of value? Granting for the sake of argument that something can have many evaluatively relevant features, like being a type A desire rather
than a type B desire, why should we think that those features actually give rise to evaluations that differ in any other way than amount? After all, doesn’t the fact that a type A desire sometimes trumps a strong type B desire just go to show that these two desires are on the same scale of evaluation where on most occasions a type A desire is more valuable?

With respect to the first question, there is clearly a strong assumption built into it that our evaluations are nothing more than denotations of amounts. I am not sure we are entitled to this strong assumption, and so I think it merely begs the question against a qualitative theory of value. One of the reasons I do not think we are entitled to this assumption is that an evaluation taken in isolation from other evaluations of similar things doesn’t seem to plausibly take the form of an amount. For example, take the common experience of buying a new computer, when you know little to nothing about what makes a computer good. In such a position, we can be shown a computer and told exactly what that computer can do. For the sake of argument, when we are told what the computer can do, we are not told what it can do in comparison to other computers. So, when we ask whether or not we will be able to construct databases and write papers on it, we are told that we can. We are even told that we will essentially have more computer than is necessary for our needs, which is common for most people. From that information, we can certainly evaluate it. We can say whether or not the computer will be good for us. We can even give reasons as to why the computer is good. We cannot, however, say how good that computer is in comparison to other computers. We would have trouble, for example, putting a price tag on this computer, since that would require us to compare it to other computers on the market. Our temptation, I want to suggest, to say how good the computer is in terms of amount diminishes the moment we take it out of context of comparison with other computers.
Of course, that doesn’t mean we won’t be comparing the computer to other things that are
good and possibly perform similar functions, like a decent pen and paper set, a calculator, or a
typewriter. I think we are going to quickly attempt to put the computer into an evaluative
context. This does not, however, make the strong assumption for a quantitative view any more
true, but it does explain why it is so difficult to give up.

In many cases, we simply aren’t satisfied saying that something is good in a different way, when it seems the thing being evaluated is similar to many things we do know about.
Perhaps a prominent instance of this comes when we try to evaluate new forms of art.
Evaluating early conceptual art like Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) wasn’t impossible at the
time. Taking the urinal out of context, we could have certainly evaluated it along the same lines as any sculpture. If we didn’t know that it was a urinal and we thought perhaps that Duchamp had actually molded it himself, then we might say nice things about its overall form, symmetry, and balance of space. But when it comes to art, it seems we cannot help but make comparisons. Determining how good Duchamp’s *Fountain* was with respect to other art would have probably placed it very low on a scale. Despite the nice things that could be said for it, it was no *David* (1504). But comparing it to Michelangelo’s *David* at the time would have been to misunderstand the work. Again, that doesn’t mean the comparison wasn’t made between Duchamp’s *Fountain* and other works, because it certainly was. As I said, there is a strong tendency to place an evaluation with respect to other things of a similar type. But this strong tendency to transform an evaluation into an amount is the product of a strong tendency to want to compare things and put them in perspective. It is not a necessary component of an evaluation. Therefore, I conclude that the question, “How can it be that our evaluations of things are really anything more than
determining an amount of value?" rests on a strong assumption that is false, though perhaps psychologically difficult to avoid.

The second line of questioning is related to the first, and is based on similar assumptions about amounts for comparison. If we grant for the sake of argument that something can have many evaluatively relevant features, like being a type A desire rather than a type B desire, why should we think that those features actually give rise to evaluations that differ in any other way than amount? This question quite clearly asks how the evaluations of two different things can be any different from one another besides the difference in how good those things are. This question is assuming that the evaluations of two different things cannot be different except in ways that come from their relative amounts. Again, I think that this assumption is false.

Inherent in this question is a comparison, and I agree that comparisons drive us toward assessing an amount of good. But let me suggest another way in which a comparison could go. Rather than try to make an assessment of how good the satisfaction of a type A desire is in relation to a type B desire, we might list all the ways in which they are similar and different. If we grant that the satisfaction of a type A desire is valuable and that the satisfaction of a type B desire is also valuable, then this approach to comparison will allow us to compare two valuable things without automatically reverting to an amount of value. There may be some concern that this sort of comparison will be useless in determining a course of action, but that’s assuming, again, that what’s best is automatically cashed out in term of amount of value. The sort of comparison I’ve suggested could lead us to a course of action we judge to be the best by relying on the similarities and differences. If we could, for example, decide to act to satisfy the type A desire, because when we evaluated it, we determined that it had evaluative qualities not had by the type B desire.
Again, the quantitative value theorist will claim that these qualities are really just valued more than the qualities had by the type B desire, but I’ve already argued that we don’t necessarily have to view all evaluations this way. If it’s the case, as I think it is, that we can make evaluations of things in relative isolation from the evaluation of things of a similar type, then we can take those evaluations—without corresponding amounts—and compare them to other valuable things. The resulting comparison that may lead to action need not be based solely on a purely quantitative evaluation.

3.5 Mill in the Qualitative Spirit

This section examines Mill’s approach to value in chapter 2 of his *Utilitarianism*. I think Mill has some interesting insights into a qualitative theory of value, which he makes there. I try to build on common understandings of Mill, and so I make no serious claims in advance about the interpretive accuracy here. I am not saying, “This is how Mill should be understood.” And for my purposes, this is sufficient, since my primary aim is to draw further attention to the distinction between a quantitative and qualitative theory of value, not to get Mill exactly right. Ultimately, I will be arguing that Mill’s insights into qualities of pleasure are analogous to similar claims about qualities of evaluations.

Chapter 2 of *Utilitarianism* is an attempt at clarifying the utilitarian position. Mill believes that Utilitarianism has come under disrepute primarily by way of caricatures of the view. Arguments against Utilitarianism have been founded on what are essentially straw-man characterizations. Mill’s work in chapter 2, then, is to clearly explain the position in a way that addresses those caricatures, which come almost entirely from the utilitarian claim that “life has no higher end than pleasure.” This makes Mill’s focus a discussion of the sorts of hedonism
consistent with The Greatest Happiness Principle while being sensitive to the straw-man objections.

The argument against the hedonistic aspect of utilitarianism that Mill works against assumes that if life has no higher end than pleasure, then pleasure in any form makes for a good life. Once that assumption has been made, Mill’s antagonists can move easily to the *reductio ad absurdum* that a life of the simplest of pleasures, which we share with many animals, is just as good as a life of complex pleasures, which we do not share with animals. Concluding once and for all from this that Utilitarianism is “…a doctrine worthy only of swine.”

Mill handles this argument in two different ways. First, he points out an obvious empirical problem with the initial assumption. It’s true that there is no higher end in life than pleasure, but it doesn’t follow that any sort of pleasure is sufficient for our lives. What is pleasurable to a pig is not usually pleasurable to a person, and what is more, people take greater pleasure in intellectual activities and the moral sentiments than the mere sensations available to animals. As a matter of empirical fact, people engage primarily in pleasures that pigs do not engage in, and people will experience more pleasure if they do not focus entirely on swinish pleasures. The absurd nature of the reductio is undermined, since it is highly unlikely that people will get as much pleasure living like swine than they would experiencing the pleasures of other faculties.

This first rejoinder provided by Mill works by pointing out that indulging in swinish pleasures will not get us as much pleasure as those that come from exercising the intellect or moral sentiment. It basically relies on an empirical claim about the quantity of pleasure we can expect when we take seriously the fact that we are not like animals in what pleases us the most. So Mill’s first point of clarification about the hedonism in utilitarianism is consistent with a
quantitative theory of value. However, Mill isn’t satisfied to defend utilitarianism solely on those grounds.

Because Mill’s first argument depends crucially on the contingent nature of what brings people the most pleasure, Mill’s second argument attempts to find a more secure footing by claiming that some forms of pleasure are intrinsically superior to others. His argument is basically that pleasures differ in quality, and these qualitative differences make some pleasures intrinsically more valuable than others. At this point, Mill tries to make it very clear that he does not mean that these pleasures are more valuable in the sense that they will have a greater amount of pleasure. What Mill does mean by this is less clear, but if his argument succeeds, then utilitarianism can be hedonistic and not swinish by emphasizing these qualitatively distinct pleasures.

This second argument by Mill is crucial to taking a traditional view of Mill and showing that it has the inner workings of a qualitative theory of value. It also helps show how Mill wrestled with some of the same issues we have wrestled with in making the distinction between a quantitative and qualitative theory of value. In particular, Mill struggles with expressing how pleasures can differ qualitatively without this simply amounting to a difference in amount.

The remainder of this discussion of Mill will center on his comments about the distinction between quantity and quality with respect to pleasure. From this I think we can draw out how this proposal by Mill can be read as an early articulation of a qualitative theory of value. And if this language is too strong for Millian scholars, verging too close to their realm of interpretive work, then let me say that we can at least read this part of Mill as an early expression of the qualitative spirit. The following passage is Mill’s account of qualitatively different pleasures.
If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.34

In this passage Mill is not explicitly articulating a qualitative view of value, but he is articulating a qualitative view of pleasure. I think, however, that the two are analogous in important ways. For example, the first difficulty that Mill is attempting to account for is the same sort of objection faced by qualitative value theorists when they are asked, “How can it be that our evaluations of things are really anything more than determining an amount of value?” Mill’s handling of this question with respect to pleasure is to point out that we prefer and desire some pleasures over others regardless of the amount of pleasure that attends the instance. For Mill’s case, this means that there is something about those preferred pleasures that sets them apart from other pleasures, and it isn’t just an amount of pleasure that is doing this. It is the quality of pleasure.

When a qualitative value theorist is approached with the same question, I think it is crucial to ask, “Can we prefer or desire some qualitatively distinct sorts of values, such that it

renders the quantity of those values of small account?” In answering this question, we do not have the linguistic luxury that Mill had in being able to appeal to a higher order of evaluation, which makes, for him, arbitrating between qualitatively distinct pleasures a matter of being more valuable. Remember, he gets to say, “…what makes one pleasure more valuable than another…” since he’s making a claim about the value of qualitatively distinct pleasures. For us, we are trying to see if qualitatively distinct evaluations are, in a sense, more or less valuable than one another. In other words, Mill shows that pleasures can be qualitatively different aside from the quantities of pleasure, but it should be noted that he does this by relying on how much more valuable those qualitatively distinct pleasures ultimately are, which means he appears to rely on a quantity of evaluation. In showing that evaluations can be qualitatively distinct, our proof cannot be expressed in terms of how much more valuable they are, because then we will appear to have ultimately slipped back to the quantitative perspective.

So, can we prefer or desire some qualitatively distinct sorts of values, such that it renders the quantity of those values of small account? I think that when answering this question we should pay close attention to Mill’s analogous response. Mill used our preferences or desires for types of pleasure to explain why they were good irrespective of the intensity and duration of those pleasures. This move, I’d like to suggest, allows Mill the chance to recast the comparison of pleasures in terms that are more easily expressed apart from amounts. Imagine comparing pleasure X to pleasure Y, where it is agreed that pleasures X and Y are equal in amount. If this is all we are told, then there doesn’t seem to be much to evaluate and compare. Put in purely abstract terms like this, we can only go on the little information we are given, and the pleasures don’t differ with respect to that. However, suppose we were told that we needed to choose between the two, and we were given the additional information that the vast majority of people
familiar with both pleasures regularly prefer X to Y. This new fact seems to change things and provides us with a new footing for evaluation.

But what does the fact that people prefer or desire pleasure X do for us the evaluators such that we can count it in favor of pleasure X above and beyond what we already know, which is that pleasure X and pleasure Y are equal in amount? I think that what it does is indicate that there is something different about pleasure X from pleasure Y that is relevant evaluatively, but is not fully taken into account by the amount of pleasure. Of course, the quantitative theorist will argue that the fact that people desire pleasure X either does not matter for its evaluation and we are making a mistake when we think it does or that if their desires do matter for the pleasure’s evaluation, then it has already been figured in to the amount. Let me briefly argue why the quantitative theorist is making a mistake.

The first claim by the quantitative theorist seems to be false. If we know nothing else about two pleasures except their amount and that almost everyone prefers one, then the fact that everyone prefers one will most certainly figure into our evaluative comparison of the two. I think this is shown by our reaction to the initial example that is purely abstract. Even knowing that the pleasures are same in amount, the additional information that virtually everyone prefers X to Y seems to count for it. If the quantitative theorist still objects that we are wrong to do so, then their argument appears to rest on an assumption about evaluations that begs the question against the qualitative theorist, namely that there can be no other relevant evaluative factors. The second claim by the quantitative theorist accounts for people’s desires and preferences, but holds that in this particular case the fact that almost everyone prefers pleasure X to pleasure Y is not sufficient to make pleasure X the clear evaluative winner. This is a very bizarre result for the quantitative theorist. It means that almost everyone will choose pleasure X over pleasure Y
based on preferences which are not at all evidence that pleasure X is the more choice worthy pleasure with respect to our evaluations, even though it is that very fact that makes it equally as good. In other words, that everyone prefers pleasure X to pleasure Y only makes pleasure X as good as pleasure Y.

I suppose to bring this point home it will help to return to the problem of Haydn and the Oyster, which is arguably the thrust behind Mill’s view. The way this problem is laid out, we are given a choice between living the life of Haydn the composer and living the life of an oyster. Haydn’s life is filled with many successes and pleasures. He was no Beethoven, but he was still pretty remarkable. The oyster, on the other hand, is pretty unremarkable, except that it will live longer than Haydn. Its life will be filled with the pleasures of having all its very simple needs met all of the time, and it will have all these needs met for a long enough period that eventually it will live a more pleasurable life than Haydn. Since it’s the case that most everyone will chose the life of Haydn to that of the oyster, despite the fact that the oyster will have more pleasure overall, this is evidence that the quality of the pleasure matters.35

I don’t want to pursue the quantitative arguments much further except to point out how quickly the quantitative theory might begin to accept tenants of a qualitative theory. The quantitative theorist could respond that this is all true, but that there are some really important evaluative features of pleasure Y that are often ignored by our desires and preferences, which make it equally as good as the pleasure we most desire, pleasure X. In the case of Haydn and the Oyster, perhaps they will point out how being completely satisfied for a really long time isn’t really something we prefer but it is something that matters for the quantity of pleasure. This line of argument, however, begins to admit that there are a multitude of important evaluative features,

which is one step closer to being a qualitative theorist. All the quantitative theorist needs to drop now is the claim that these multitude of important evaluative features matter only insofar as they contribute to amount. Ultimately, that it is theoretically possible for the quantitative theorist to run into a situation where everyone prefers pleasure X to pleasure Y which only makes X equally as good as Y is enough to rethink its initial assumptions.

So in the case of Mill, the fact that people prefer or desire pleasure X indicates that there is something different about pleasure X from pleasure Y that is relevant evaluatively, but is not fully taken into account by the amount of pleasure. Can this also be said of an evaluation? Suppose we are told that one evaluation R is rank ordered the same as another evaluation S. Evaluations R and S are evaluations of different things, and we are asked to choose between them based on what we’ve been told. Like in the case of pleasures, we aren’t really left with much for comparison. And clearly, on a quantitative view, it doesn’t really matter which we choose. But suppose again that we discover that one of the two things evaluated is routinely preferred to the other, despite the fact that they are evaluated the same. Doesn’t the fact that people desire or prefer one of these evaluated things indicate that the amount is leaving essential evaluative information out?

I think the answer here is that it does indicate this. The fact that people sometimes desire or prefer more one thing to another that they themselves agree is evaluatively the same, indicates that there are evaluative features that amount simply does not fully account for. It should be noted that these evaluative features do not necessarily make the prefer thing better than the alternative. After all, it has been granted that they are just as good as one another, but our preference shows that they are good in different ways. The thing less preferred may be very good, but we just don’t prefer it. As I said in the first chapter, our responses to evaluations
indicate something important about evaluations. I don’t want to argue any further in this chapter why a qualitative theory fits our world better than a quantitative view, since I’ll take that up later.

Mill’s argument about the qualities of pleasures is analogous to qualitatively distinct evaluations. It would require more work to show that Mill himself was a qualitative value theorist, since, as I’ve already pointed out, his argument in the second chapter of *Utilitarianism* is consistent with what I’ve called a quantitative view. His use of preferences and desires to draw attention evaluatively relevant features of pleasures apart from their amount is crucial to understanding the difficulties we have in articulating a distinctly qualitative view. In light of our natural tendency to compare things quantitatively, I think Mill’s use of our preferences and desires throws a helpful wrench into these natural tendencies of our comparisons. Ultimately, I’d like to say his arguments are in the spirit of a qualitative value theorist, even if he himself was not.
CHAPTER 4. LOSS, REGRET, AND EVALUATION

4.1 Introduction

Regret and remorse are popular philosophical fare in the dialectic of sentiment and normative theory. In this chapter, I aim to add to this list the sentiment of loss. Loss can be loosely described as the feeling of having missed out on something. It’s commonly felt every day when we make choices between what appear to be two good things, like at the grocery store or on a menu. And while these occasions are fairly trivial in our lives, loss in these cases is not different in kind from the more substantial choices we make about what sorts of lives to live. So, for example, we may experience loss when we decide between a career as an academic and a career as an auto mechanic.

This chapter will proceed with a discussion of what loss is, and how it is different from the other normative sentiments that I mentioned. The goal here is to lay the framework for the claim that loss is a normative sentiment that must be accounted for by an adequate theory of value. Once this claim has been made plausible here, then I will argue in chapter 5 that loss is not adequately handled by a quantitative theory of value. The result, then, is that we should adopt qualitative theories of value. The first step in making this claim is to distinguish loss from other sentiments that have been forced to play its role in the past. I will begin making this distinction in section 4.1 of this chapter simply by elaborating on a definition for loss and describing its cognitive components, one modal and one evaluative. This will bring to light a possible problem with loss, namely that it proliferates beyond a reasonable limit if it isn’t reigned in conceptually. This problem parallels a problem had by Thomas Hurka in his discussion of rational regret in “Monism, Pluralism, and Rational Regret,” so this discussion will give me the

36 Hurka, 1996.
opportunity to explain the similarities and differences between his regret and my loss. For the most part, I think Hurka should have used a term other than “regret,” since his notion of the term is more like my concept of loss. I will conclude section 4.2 with an explanation of why Hurka should have done this.

I conclude this chapter in section 4.3 with a discussion of regret from Bernard Williams’s “Ethical Consistency.” There Williams introduces a conception of regret that he then uses to argue for a claim about normative theory. For my purposes, Williams’s argument in “Ethical Consistency”37 introduced much of the discussion about rational regret in contemporary literature, so it is important for me to distinguish loss from his description of regret. Williams articulates other formulations of the concept of regret, which I will mention, but they are so broad that he ends up refining them in “Moral Luck.”38 Furthermore, since it is my overall task in this dissertation to argue that loss tells us something important about value theory, which is a style of argument similar to Williams’s approach to regret and normative theory, I will conclude this chapter by arguing that by adopting a concept of loss as distinct from regret, Williams and other supporters of regret can avoid some possible objections.

4.2 Loss

Loss is what we feel when we think we haven’t gotten some possible good available to us. We needn’t be making a choice in order to experience it. We can experience loss when a close friend dies or when we’re given a smaller than expected slice of pie. In either of these cases, there is some expected good that we did not get, and we are in the position of believing that we have not gotten some possible good available to us. Regardless of whether the distribution of good was by chance, our own choosing, or another’s, we may experience loss.

38 Williams, 1981.
The feeling of loss experienced when we think we haven’t gotten some of the possible good available to us is *permissible* under these conditions. Just because a person thinks that they haven’t gotten some of the possible good available to them, does not mean that they always will or should feel loss. Loss is more or less appropriate depending on certain features of the situation. Much of this chapter is devoted to explaining when loss is and when loss is not appropriate, so I will begin this discussion by distinguishing several different senses in which we use the term “appropriate.” After that, I will discuss two cognitive components to our sense of loss that help limit the occasions in which loss is appropriate. After I have explained what these cognitive components are, then I can use them to address some immediate concerns about a sentiment that has been so far defined as permissible anytime we think we haven’t gotten some possible good available to us.

Two important senses in which a sentiment can be appropriate are its being *justified* or *fitting*. Loss is a sentiment that is *justified* when we reasonably believe that we haven’t gotten all the possible good available to us. In other words, we reasonably believe that we are missing out on some possible good. Loss is not justified when we reasonably believe that we have gotten all the possible good available to us, or when our belief is not reasonable. And loss is understood to be *fitting* when we have, in fact, not gotten all of the possible good available to us, or, in other words, there is in fact some good available to us that we did not get.

These notions of justified and fitting can come apart. I may reasonably believe that my life would have gone better as a mechanic, but base this belief in part on a misunderstanding of what it is to be a mechanic. My belief may be justified, but it is not fitting. Of course, in reverse, loss could be fitting although it is not justified. I could easily be oblivious to features of
being a mechanic that make loss warranted, even though there is no way of me knowing of these features without having experienced that life for myself.

Sometimes we might want to say that loss is neither fitting nor justified, but all the same one should feel it. And, we may also want to say that loss is fitting or justified, but all the same one should not feel it. For example, under an oppressive regime I may reasonably believe that I have all the possible good available to me, and be quite correct in my assessment. But given that my situation has been imposed on me by outside forces, I should not be completely satisfied with the good I have gotten. It would be good for me to feel loss to encourage a restless spirit that may promote change in the political system. Or suppose we find ourselves overwhelmed with a sense of loss that is both justified and fitting. We have lost, for example, a spouse or a child. If the loss felt is so debilitating that it endangers our welfare, then there is a sense in which we should not feel it. These sorts of claims about the appropriateness of loss do not follow from either the fittingness or justification for loss. In these sorts of situations, “appropriate” has moral and practical implications built in, so we’ll call these normative senses of the word “appropriate.” Normatively appropriate claims about sentiments tell us more about what we think is practical and moral than about a sentiment itself, so I will stick primarily to claims about when loss is justified and fitting.

Loss is only fitting when the good missed out on is a good for the person who has missed out on it. I can feel loss when someone close to me dies, because I am missing out on the good that person brings to my life. Loss is greater in proportion to how close that person is to me. Closeness is a metaphorical way of expressing the way my emotional life is bound up in the general well-being of that person and how that person’s life actually makes my life better. If they are doing well, then that is good for me. If they die, then that is not good for me. Of
course, I wouldn’t say that I’m close to my boss, but if I’m about to be promoted and he dies, then I can certainly feel loss. This is because loss isn’t really tied to a certain closeness or relationship we have with a person, unless all we mean by that is that their life brings us good. Being close and having a relationship with someone is a major way we fill our lives with valuable things, but loss is sensitive to the missing out on good whether it come from these genuine relationships or when we’re just using someone.39

I cannot fittingly feel loss when someone who brings no good to my life dies. If a friend of mine has a parent die whom I do not know, then I cannot fittingly feel loss at the death of that parent. I could, however, fittingly feel loss over the grief of my friend. If, for example, I attended the funeral of my friend’s parent, it would be bizarre of me to weep uncontrollably since I did not know the person who died. It is not bizarre of me to go, however, since it would a gesture of support for my friend. In such a situation, it would be fitting for me to feel loss because I am missing out on the good I get from my friend when he is in a better mood. Loss is, in this way, a very self centered response, which is why we will sometimes think it is not appropriate even though it is both justified and fitting.40 And in such cases we may have moral reasons to quell our loss or its expression.

The sense of having missed out on something good is undeniably common. For the moment, I want to discuss just this feature of loss. It’s something that everyone has experienced. For example, it’s not uncommon for us to feel like we’ve missed out on something good when

39 It might be argued that this isn’t the typical sense in which we use the word “loss,” but we use “loss” in so many ways it’s hard to believe that any one of them is typical. If the point of such an objection is that this use trivializes the loss we feel when a spouse or child dies by associating it with many other ways we can experience loss, then I admit that I think these sentiments are similar in type, though not by degree. I would also caution those objectors that their use of the term “loss” may have certain normative senses of appropriateness built in that I am trying to avoid.

40 Loss gives expression to what we have missed out on, and we may not want to be expressing our loss when our friend is truly grieving over his.
we’ve had to take care of some work or chore instead of doing something we’d really like to do. The justification for these common experiences has two cognitive components. First is a belief that there was a missed opportunity; call this the “modal component.” The second part is the belief that the opportunity was good; call this the “evaluative component.” Whether or not loss is fitting depends in part on the facts of the matter involved in the modal component and the evaluative component of the belief that we have missed out on something good.

The modal component distinguishes between what could have happened in a given situation and what could not have happened. If there are two options before us, either of which we can choose, but both of which we cannot, then either of those two options is possible, while getting both is not. If these are the facts of the matter, then it is fitting to feel loss after choosing one of the two options—assuming we’re missing out on some good of the alternative—but it is not, in a sense, fitting to feel loss that we could not have both. To have both goods is not actually an option. This does not bar us from being justified in our feeling of loss at not being able to get both goods, provided that the feeling is based on a reasonable belief that we could have had both. There is, however, another sense in which it is fitting for us to feel loss at missing out on both the goods, which I will discuss next.

The modal component must also mesh with the claim that we can experience loss even when we do not have a choice. Having a choice is different from there being various possible outcomes. In the prior scenario of incompossible goods, we have a choice between two possible outcomes. It was argued that the third possible outcome of having both was not a choice, and so we could not really miss out on it. It may seem from this that the modal component in a deterministic world would prevent all cases of fitting loss, since we could never choose other than the way we chose. However, we can experience loss even when we miss out on some good
that we are not responsible for. In other words, we can feel loss when we miss out on a good, even when we had no choice in the matter, like when a friend or family member dies. The question, then, is not whether or not we can miss out on something when we lack the opportunity to choose, since we can experience loss at that. The question is whether we can experience loss when we missed out on something that wasn’t a possible way for things to go, like in a deterministic world.

Suppose the world we live in is completely deterministic in the sense that every event is the necessary result of a prior causal event. Any goods that we don’t get are goods that we could not have gotten. They aren’t truly available to us. To say that we could have gotten them had things been different is true only if by “different” you mean either (a) determinism is not true, or (b) determinism is still true but the prior causal chain of events had gone another way. The first response doesn’t help to show how determinism is compatible with loss, but the second does. In the second case, we can fittingly experience loss in a deterministic world, since it isn’t a necessary truth about determinism that the deterministic world we got was the only possible deterministic world. In other possible deterministic worlds, things could have turned out differently, and when we feel loss in a deterministic world we’re expressing our sense of having missed out on those possibilities. Fitting loss is compatible with determinism, because the deterministic world we live in is not itself necessary. After all, we could have lived in a different deterministic world.

This result is contrary to the earlier claim that we cannot fittingly feel loss when we miss out on getting to choose both good things. Had the world gone differently, even in a purely deterministic world, it is possible that both goods could have been an option. This is the sense in which it is fitting to feel loss at missing out on the third option of getting both goods. I want to
note now, and deal with in more detail later, that the ability to miss out on these more remote possibilities dramatically proliferates the occasions in which loss is fitting. But it is important, also, to remember that this may be a different sort of missing out on a good than just choosing one available option over another, since there is a sense in which having both was not possible for me given the way the world was. Of course, these senses of missing out on possible ways things could have been are the same if the world is entirely deterministic, since choosing otherwise would have required the world to be as different as a world that allowed for all three possibilities. In either case, loss is proliferated, and I will deal with this problem later in the chapter.

The evaluative component of loss ensures that the thing we think we are missing out on is of value to us. For justification purposes we need only reasonably believe that thing we missed out on is good. Our evaluation of that thing is sufficient. For our loss to be fitting, we must have actually missed out on some good. I may, for example, reasonably think that the tacos on the menu will be good, but actually be wrong about it. If I opt for enchiladas, then I may justifiably experience loss because I am missing out on the good of the taco, but this experience may not be fitting, if the taco is not in fact good.

Having gotten a sense of the two cognitive components of a sense of missing out on some good, it’s important to rein in the occasions that loss is fitting or justified. For starters, loss can’t be appropriate in either sense if the good we got is the same as the good we forwent. If it were, then we could experience loss when we turned down one cup of coffee for another that is all but numerically the same. Loss is what we feel when we think we have not gotten some good available to us, and if we got some good that was the same as a good forwent, then we have gotten all the good available to us. In the case of the two cups of coffee, it would be hard to deny
that we haven’t gotten all of the good available to us when we choose either of the two coffees. And if we were to have a sense of missing out on some good at the thought that we could have had both cups, the loss would only be appropriate if we could have had both and that having both would have been good. Again, the possible ways in which the world can go will be an issue here, but the fact that the coffees are the same and assuming having both would not be good, then we can’t appropriately feel loss for forgoing one.

Now that loss has been explained, I want to deal with the problem of proliferating loss. This problem is related to an issue raised in Thomas Hurka’s “Monism, Pluralism, and Rational Regret.”\(^{41}\) In that piece, Hurka’s notion of regret is similar to that of loss, but they are different enough that they do not share all the same problems. For the most part, Hurka’s concept of regret is born out of a feeling of love for good states of affairs, and when good states of affairs are forgone, this love for them gives rise to a wish that they had obtained. It’s the wish that they had obtained that Hurka refers to as regret. In this sense, Hurka’s regret is similar to loss in that both are sensitive primarily to missing out on value. Ultimately, I think Hurka used the language of regret instead of using a new term, because it fit naturally in the contemporary discourse. The debates had already been forged by the time Hurka jumped in, and regret was the term of choice. It must also have been the case that Hurka didn’t see how these debates were actually working with different concepts of the same word, “regret.” For now, I will borrow the thrust of Hurka’s puzzle for regret and apply it to my notion of loss. This will help show that while Hurka’s concept of regret is very close to my concept of loss, in that they are sensitive to missing out on value, there are important differences.

\(^{41}\) Hurka, 1996.
Hurka argues that our responses to value differ depending on the ontological status of the value. So if the value does not yet obtain, then we desire or wish for it. If the value does obtain, then we take pleasure in its obtaining. And if the value is forgone, then we regret that it did not obtain. In a case where more than one valuable thing is at issue, we have responses to each valuable thing individually. When we are given a choice between two good things, before either obtains we can desire both. Should both obtain, we would take pleasure in both, and if we have to forgo either, then we will feel regret. The point, here, is that our feelings toward the valuable things are divided up between them. We are not wholly invested in the better good. A view that says we should feel only for the greater good, Hurka calls the concentration view. But a view that holds that we should feel regret at the forgone alternative is Hurka’s proportionality view.42 And Hurka notes, “…it is intuitively plausible that you should feel some love for both goods and should divide this love in proportion to their degrees of goodness.”43

The problem this view has, which my view of loss needs to avoid, is that the more available options there are that we forgo the more regret that is justified and fitting. Trips to the supermarket would be dreadful if it were justified and fitting for us to feel regret or loss every time we chose one item over another brand of the same sort of item. Unlike the coffee case I mentioned earlier, these cases of choosing do not represent goods that are all but numerically the same. Tastes between cereals can be very different, for example, and that isle is typically full of good choices.

The trick, then, is for my loss and Hurka’s proportional regret to avoid so much justified and fitting experiences of these sentiments. Hurka argues:

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43 Hurka, 1996. 558.
The proportionality view builds an answer to this second question into its answer to the first. If the reason regret is rational is that it involves a proportional division of love, then it is rational only when its intensity is proportioned to the value of its object. In particular, it is not rational to regret a forgone lesser good more intensely than one is pleased by a greater good one did produce.44

But while this may be an answer to the question of limiting regret between two goods, it isn’t much help in the grocery store. A box of cereal may be valuable, and the pleasure one would get from choosing one good cereal over another may outweigh the regret of the forgone good cereal, but what about the 6 other good cereals? Does the pleasure we get from choosing that single box outweigh all that regret? It would seem unlikely, since the pleasure we get from choosing one good cereal isn’t likely to be very high, and we can always add more forgone good cereals to the mix to add to our regret.

Hurka’s response to this is that we shouldn’t feel all this regret for two reasons. Instrumentally, all that regret will take away from the pleasure of having gotten something good. So we shouldn’t regret, because it ruins all the fun of grocery shopping. But while this may be true, the regret is no less fitting or justified. Besides, what about more serious cases where the goods forgone are people’s lives and in such a situation we actually think there is something wrong with a person who holds this instrumental view. If I can only save one person, then it really is the case that I should feel bad at forgoing five other lives even if there is some instrumental reason for it? After all, wouldn’t an instrumental reason like this really just be aiming at our feeling good, when maybe we really shouldn’t? Of course, Hurka could argue that in the latter case of saving lives the instrumental reason is outweighed by some moral reason to

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44 Hurka, 1996. 559.
feel bad. But even this doesn’t seem to get to the heart of the matter, which is that according to Hurka’s view regret is fitting and justified in the grocery store and this position is at odds with a typical grocery store experience, which involves very little regret. So even while Hurka may have a way to weaken the requirement for regret, actual experience seems to imply that we have very little reason to regret in the first place.

Hurka’s second argument is that regret involves pain, and we should minimize painful experiences. He explains that we have “noninstrumental reason for limiting the kind of regret that involves pain at the absence of a good.” Hurka’s point is that while regret is the “rational” response, we have additional reasons to avoid experiencing it. But all these added reasons about when to feel what apart from our claims about what is fitting and justified seem only to cover up a serious problem with Hurka’s theoretical view, which makes fitting and justifiable regret constant and intense.

This problem would seem to apply equally to loss, since there will be cases where we will not get all the possible goods available to us. However, loss is not sensitive to goods the way Hurka’s regret is sensitive to token goods. Hurka’s proliferation of regret comes as a result of the proportionality view’s requirement that we feel love toward instances and possible instances of the good. The grocery store presents a problem because there are so many instances of the good. Even among boxes of the same kind of cereal, each represents a possible good that we should desire individually and regret when it’s forgone.

As I already mentioned, loss is not fittingly experienced when the good you got is not different than the good you forwent, since you got all the possible good available to you. This is

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45 Hurka uses rational to mean fitting or justified. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, what’s fitting and justified can come apart from what we ought to do, particularly since these responses can be outranked by moral reasons like how they affect other people’s feelings.

46 I have been assuming that these are final values and not just instrumental.
true for loss when the goods are numerically distinct. Between two boxes of Cheerios, what reason could we have to say that we didn’t get all the possible good available to us when we pick one over the other? Assuming the boxes are the same size and price, we have not missed out on any good. And since it is no part of loss that one should feel a certain way toward instances of value simply as instances, loss avoids some of the proliferation problem encountered by Hurka’s regret.47

But this doesn’t completely vindicate loss, because there are two other situations that could arise that would still proliferate the loss. Even while we’re choosing between two boxes of Cheerios, we’re forgoing many other cereals that are not Cheerios. These other boxes could be sources of loss, and given the variation of cereals, this could be a lot of loss. The way loss avoids this is through our evaluative beliefs. For us to feel loss justifiably, we must think that we did not get all the possible good available to us. Our reasonable belief that the forgone alternatives are not good in ways different than the good we got is sufficient for us to not feel loss at forgoing them. Furthermore, supposing when we buy Cheerios we do so because it is healthy, but we recognize that many other cereals taste better even though they aren’t as healthy. We can feel loss at forgoing Chocolate Frosted Sugar Bombs, because their taste is better than that of the Cheerios. But do we feel additional loss at each type of cereal that tastes better than the Cheerios? We certainly wouldn’t want for this to be a result of our theory.

We do not feel loss for every type of cereal that tastes better than Cheerios, because loss is a result of not getting some possible good available to us, where possible good is not understood as an instance of good. It would be an odd result of a view that recognized that

47 Hurka’s discussion of inclusion cases doesn’t seem to recognize this point and how it undermines his own view. Given the examples he uses for inclusion cases, it doesn’t seem that two different boxes of the same kind of cereal count as an inclusion case. In fact, he says as much in a ft. nt. about bagels. So while he seems to recognize this, he doesn’t put it all together as a major flaw in his view.
Cheerios was the best option, but in lieu of the fact that so much loss would be experienced at forgoing the good tasting cereals that we should opt for a good tasting cereal and only experience the loss of a healthy cereal. Since once we get a good tasting cereal, all other good tasting cereals no longer represent a source of loss, then it would seem that they shouldn’t individually count as sources of loss in the first place. The source of loss is the good of tasting good, and not specific to any box or brand. We feel loss because we missed out on some type of good, not because we missed out on a particular good.

The other way loss can be proliferated was mentioned earlier in the discussion of the modal cognitive component to loss. Simply imagine all the possible good things that could happen on a trip to the grocery store that didn’t. We may only feel a slight loss at missing out on a good tasting cereal, but what about the million dollars we didn’t get from a passing stranger while we’re deliberating over cereals? That’s certainly a good we didn’t get when we picked out our Cheerios but was nevertheless a possible good. So in addition to feeling loss at forgoing good tasting cereals, we are justified in feeling loss at missing out on that million dollars. Of course, getting a million dollars isn’t the only thing we missed out on. We can imagine all sorts of things that were possible on that trip that didn’t occur. We didn’t bump in to the love of our lives, or the movie producer that thinks we have just what it takes to make it big. Or perhaps we missed out on our chance to do something nice for someone, since no one was in the aisle while we were there.

The large number of possible ways things could have gone can represent a lot of cases for loss. Many of these cases will be lumped together like all the good tasting cereals, but this won’t take care of all the possible cases. Since I have argued that loss is compatible with determinism, we can’t escape this problem by simply saying those things weren’t possible. After all,
determinism isn’t necessarily true and even if it were, it’s possible that things could have gone different in a different possible world. One way to avoid this is suggested by Hurka:

…when a good does not obtain, the degree of love appropriate to it depends on the degree to which its obtaining is a close possibility. If a good could exist now given only small changes in the world, then as much or almost as much love is appropriate to it as to an existing good of the same magnitude. As the possibility of its obtaining becomes more remote, however, the intensity of love appropriate to it diminishes. Beyond a threshold of remoteness perhaps no love is rational, even for a very great good.48

This condition suggested by Hurka is built into loss’s modal cognitive component, and does much to accurately describe our experiences of different amounts of loss in various situations.

Suppose we have a choice between two incompossible goods. We have essentially four imaginable states of affairs that come immediately to mind. On the one hand we could choose not to have either of the goods, call this (C1), and we could then feel loss at missing out on all the available good. This is an easily imaginable possibility that we will think we are avoiding when we choose one good over the other. So two other immediate possibilities are (C2) choosing A over B or (C3) choosing B over A, where A and B are the goods. In all of these cases, if A and B are not good in the same way, then some loss is inevitable. (C4) would be to get both A and B, and we can often imagine this as a possibility too, since incompossibility in many cases tends to be due to a contingent feature of the world. However, since A and B are incompossible, even while it’s a contingent feature of the world that makes it this case, our loss at not getting both A and B cannot be as close in possibility as (C1), (C2), or (C3), and so the loss felt will be proportionally less. Again, this is what I suggested earlier when I said that there

48 Hurka, 1996. 559-60.
is a sense in which the loss is appropriate for the incompossible goods, but that this may be importantly different the appropriate loss felt at forgoing one of the alternatives. However, getting both A and B can be such a great good that (C4)’s being proportionally less may not make it altogether something to feel less loss at. But compared to the loss experienced in either (C2) or (C3), it’s hard to imagine how it could be much more than both those cases.\footnote{It’s possible that the loss of (C4) could be more than one of them, depending on the difference in value of A and B. But it can’t be more than each of them, unless A and B together made for some greater value that didn’t come with them apart.} If (C4) is distant enough modally to lessen the loss that results, then it’s easy to see how more distant cases of being offered a million dollars are remote enough not to warrant much, if any, loss at all.

The two cognitive components of loss help it to avoid rapid proliferation, which is not only instrumentally bad, but bad because it doesn’t map onto actual experience. The evaluative component maintains that loss is only fitting when the good missed out on is different in kind, while the modal component keeps the almost infinite possibilities from overburdening us with loss. My concept of loss differs from Hurka’s regret in that while both are sensitive to missing out on value, my notion is sensitive to missing out on types of value rather than instances of different value. This helps limit the proliferation of loss that burdens Hurka’s concept of regret. Hurka cannot simply escape with his modal component, because regret is sensitive to possible instances of the good, which there are far more of in relatively close possible worlds than possible types of good.

Before moving into a discussion of Williams’s concept of regret, I want to suggest again that Hurka used “regret” for two related reasons. The first is that it was the term of choice for the debate he jumped into. But this dissertation is arguing that that debate was flawed on two scores: (1) claims about the metaphysical number of values do not necessarily entail practical
effects in people, and (2) the concept of regret has been used so much and in so many ways, it is not clear that it maintains enough of a consistent definition throughout the debates to be of use here. And it is this second flaw that I have taken up in distinguishing loss from Hurka’s regret and in the next section Williams’s regret. The second reason I think Hurka accepted the term regret is that it is similar to Williams’s claim that regret is the thought, “how much better if it had been otherwise.”50 Hurka describes regret as, “…a wish that it obtained….”51 It seems to me that these two understandings of regret overlap quite a bit, but Hurka’s focus on wishing good states of affairs had obtained is slightly different from the more broad notion expressed in Williams’s wish that things had been otherwise. I might wish, for example, that things had been otherwise, even though I grant that good states of affairs obtained. Williams’s broad definition can have bad means to some end as the reason for wishing things had been otherwise, while Hurka’s insistence on the wish being about intrinsically good states of affairs doesn’t allow for this.

Ultimately, wishing things had been otherwise wasn’t Williams’s only articulation of regret, and I find that he uses it quite consistently in “Ethical Consistency” to refer to a wish that we had done otherwise or could have done otherwise. The final section of this chapter distinguishes my concept of loss from Williams’s concept of regret in “Ethical Consistency.” The useful result is that loss can come to the rescue of Williams’s regret when it is faced with certain objections. I argue that this is yet another reason that loss stands as an independent sentiment.

4.3 Regret and Loss

50 Williams, 1981. 27.
51 Hurka, 1996. 558.
Regret and remorse are all commonly cited phenomena in normative theory, but their relation to value is unclear. Loss is essentially tied to missing out on value, whereas regret and remorse are typically tied to right and wrong action. In particular, these phenomena are most often cited as evidence in favor of conflicts of duty and moral remainders. I will begin this discussion with a brief explanation of Bernard Williams’s account of regret, agent regret, and conflicts of duty to mark how his account is distinct from loss. I will then proceed to examine some arguments for conflicts of duties to demonstrate how an understanding of loss better captures our understanding of what is going on in these cases. The result, I think, is that loss is vindicated as a distinct sentiment, but also, the methodology of using sentiments to make some inferences about normative and evaluative theory is also defended to some degree.

Williams introduces the notion of regret in “Ethical Consistency.”52 In a discussion of what happens to a rejected desire in the case of conflicting desires, Williams points out that the rejected desire often reemerges on the other side of a choice in the form of regret. He says, “[…] the opportunity for satisfying that desire having irrevocably gone, it may reappear in the form of a regret for what was missed.”53 But this only tells us when we might experience regret, and doesn’t tell us much about the constitutive grounds of that regret. In other words, this gives us the “when” instead of the “why” of regret. After all, the experienced regret may simply be due to having forgone something we think is good, like the satisfaction of a desire, or it could be a function of our thinking that the forgoing of something good conflicts with obligations we have to ourselves. Williams goes on to say, “That a man regrets not having been able to satisfy a desire, is sufficiently explained by the fact that he had that desire.”54 But again, this claim does

52 Williams, 1973.
53 Ibid. 170.
54 Ibid. 170.
not make clear why we are regretting in the first place. Is it that unsatisfied desires are bad, like on a desire satisfaction account of value, or is it that desires direct us in what to do and so forgoing a desire is like forgoing a sort of prescription for action?

In his analogy of desire conflicts to moral conflicts, Williams indicates that regret is grounded in the forgone prescription for action. Williams says:

If I eventually choose for one side of the conflict rather than the other, this is a possible ground of regret… As with desires, if the occasion is irreparably past, there may be room for nothing but regret… These states of mind do not depend, it seems to me, on whether I am convinced that in the choice I made I acted for the best; I can be convinced of this, yet have these regrets, ineffectual or possibly effective, for what I did not do.\(^5^5\)

Given this passage, it seems clear that regret attaches to an action, such that it is by forgoing an action or choice that we think we have reason to regret. This idea is essentially different from loss in that regret seems not to be justifiable when a friend dies, unless that regret is for all the things we did not do before the friend died or worse it is a regret that we did something that lead to our friend’s death. The regret is felt because we have failed to do something or we made some sort of mistake, but loss isn’t tied to our actions or inactions. Loss is tied to missing out on some good. There will be many cases where these sentiments overlap, since our regret at failing to do something is usually something that would have been good for us, which we have now missed out on. It is, however, more important to note that they can come apart.

The two ways in which these sentiments can occur distinct from one another are occasions when we do not regret what we did, but we feel as though we have missed out on some good, and occasions when we feel as though we have not missed out on some good for us, but

\(^5^5\) Williams, 1973. 172.
regret what we did. I would not regret saving my son or daughter from drowning, even if it meant I had to throw my ice cream cone in the sand. After rescuing them from a large wave, I may come back to find my unsalvageable ice cream, and wish that I could finish eating it. I can easily recognize that I am presently missing out on some possible good, but in no way regret what I did. After all, I am fully convinced that I did the right thing, even if the right thing caused me to miss out on some possible good. In reverse, I might not feel any loss at all in winning a court battle, but regret the means by which those goods were obtained.

Given, now, that loss is different from the regret that Williams discusses, in that loss is sensitive to missing out on some value and regret is sensitive to judgment about what we have done, I want to highlight a similarity between Williams’s project and my own. In particular, Williams is using a sentiment to tell us something important about normative theory, while I am using a similar sentiment to tell us something about evaluative theory. There is a common objection to what Williams has done that might be raised as an objection to me. However, I think by distinguishing regret and what it says about normative theory from loss and what it tells us about value theory, both these views are made stronger.

In “Ethical Consistency,” Williams argues that regret is evidence that moral obligations actually conflict, but not in the same way beliefs conflict. The difference between these types of conflict is that belief conflicts do not involve any regret when they are resolved. An essential part of overcoming belief conflicts is “to be disembarrassed of the false belief.” But this is not analogous in the case of conflicting obligations, where the aim is to act for the best, which Williams claims “[…] is a frame of mind that acknowledges the presence of both the two

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56 The only exception to this is when we have a desire for the belief to be true. It’s possible that one might also think that a having particular belief is morally obligatory, and so a conflicting belief that turns out to be true would cause one to regret forgoing a morally obligatory belief.

57 Williams, 1973. 172.
ought’s.” So it isn’t as though in cases of moral or practical conflict that once we acknowledge
the best course of action from two obligations that the forgone obligation has now been shown to
be no obligation at all. According to Williams, it was still an obligation which we will now
regret forgoing. This regret may turn into a need on behalf of the forgoer to make up for the
forgone obligation.

What makes Williams’s view plausible is the fact that we often think there is something
wrong with the individual who does not feel this way after forgoing an obligation, even while the
thing done was for the best. What it means for these feelings to be “wrong” can be a tricky
point, particularly because “wrong” is often understood as irrational when it’s levied against
positions like Williams’s. Williams tries to argue that what it can’t mean is that the feeling, even
if it’s irrational, is something a proper moral agent would avoid. In a passage explaining
Agamemnon’s regret for sacrificing his daughter, Williams calls those who would claim this
regret irrational “glib moralists” because it seems there is a very good reason for him to feel this
way, namely that he had to kill his daughter. He also points out that decent human beings are
going to feel these ways, and we should not understand admirable moral agents as ones who are
very different from decent human beings.

It’s not clear what mileage Williams gets from these claims. It’s uncontroversial that we
will sometimes feel bad, even horrible, when we do the best thing. But that bad feeling isn’t
necessarily a result of a forgone obligation that was conflicting with the best thing. Williams’s
arguments do seem to show that we should feel bad in these cases, but more needs to be said as
to whether or not this bad feeling is constituted of the belief that a real obligation was forgone.
Furthermore, even if people think they’ve forgone an obligation, this won’t prove that they are

correct in that assessment. After all, they could be irrationally feeling regret. So at most, Williams’s examples show that we will and perhaps ought in some sense feel bad, but they fail to show that we ought to feel regret, since to regret is to think one forwent an obligation. What is more, it won’t work for Williams to point to cases of moral conflict to demonstrate regret. Since regret is supposed to show moral conflicts, moving from moral conflicts to regret would be begging the question.59

Ultimately, it seems that Williams’s arguments in “Ethical Consistency” don’t hinge crucially on these claims, since he need only show that moral conflicts, whatever they amount to, are more like desire conflicts than belief conflicts. Whether or not the regret it rational or irrational, it doesn’t exist in the belief cases. Therefore, moral conflicts do seem to be more like desire conflicts on that score. If the thought is that making moral conflicts irrational undermines this similarity to desire conflicts, then one might wonder if objectors aren’t begging a question of their own. After all, what evidence is there that we should assume that the best thing doesn’t forgo an obligation we have? I suspect that it is assumptions that stem from definitions of moral obligations and right action that have lead people to such conclusions, but Williams is calling into question those very definitions with his arguments. Assuming those definitions are true when objecting to Williams, begs the question against him. And at the end of the day, if holding to our definitions dogmatically dismisses as irrational a very common and real phenomenon, then those definitions are having their status as inferences to the best explanation greatly undermined. If we take the explanatory strength of our definitions seriously, then this is a reason to dismiss those definitions.

59 Terrance C. McConnell makes this begging the question point clear in his “Moral Residue and Dilemmas” paper, although he doesn’t refer specifically to Williams as having this problem.
This discussion of regret and moral conflict may seem to have taken us far afield from the notion of loss, but it highlights a very important issue when suggesting a relationship between a sentiment like regret and what it tells you about normative theory. For the constitutive content of a sentiment to be at all useful for explaining a phenomenon like moral conflict, that content will need to be specific enough so as to be discernable from other sentiments—in this case bad feelings. But the problem will always arise that making the content specific enough will beg the question in favor of the phenomenon that the sentiment is evidence for, like regret and conflicting moral obligations. If as Williams points out, “That man regrets not having been able to satisfy a desire, is sufficiently explained by the fact that he had that desire,” then we can’t really think about forgoing desires or obligations without thinking about regret. And if regret is specific enough in its constitutive scope, so as to make it different from any bad feeling, then thinking about regret will be thinking aboutforgone desires or obligations. But this intimate connection is no objection to such a view, as levying begging the question would make it seem, since there is explanatory value in the sense that this intimate connection explains a lot of what we feel in cases where it at least seems we have two obligations but can only do one. Dismissing the feeling as purely irrationally is equally question begging, but without the additional good feature of explaining why we feel what we feel. In an effort to maintain theoretical neatness, normative theory sacrifices its usefulness.

Loss is susceptible to a similar charge, but as I have argued here, loss is a common phenomenon, and we need only show that its intimate connection to the constitutive cognitive content that goes into feelings of loss has explanatory value. I will do this now by showing how

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60 Williams, 1973. 170.
loss accounts for the bad feelings we have in some cases that regret or remorse cannot. The first case of loss has already been mentioned. It occurs when we’ve done what we ought to have done, and only forgone something that was impermissible. The second case occurs when we don’t adopt a deontic view of obligations. The last case of loss can be felt even while we regret, but it explains why that regret is not intense or extreme. This final case defends views like Williams’s against objections that note that there are often times when we feel no regret at all, and do not think any regret is called for.

It isn’t hard to imagine a case where we do what we ought and forgo what we ought not, but it is a case that we rarely dwell on in normative theory. For example, there isn’t any dispute over how one should feel about this variation of the trolley problem. Suppose that a trolley is careening out of control toward five people, but we can change the trolley’s route to either a set of tracks that hits no one or a set of tracks that runs through the crowded streets of a local chili cook off, which would kill dozens of people. In this situation, we ought to try to save those five people who are in the way of the trolley, but there seems to be no obligation for us to run the trolley through the chili cook off. Quite the contrary, it seems that running the trolley through the chili cook off is impermissible. Changing the trolley’s course to a street with no one on it is obviously what we ought to do. If we’re maintaining Williams’s framework for regret, then we don’t seem to have any grounds for it in this scenario. After all, what obligation was forgone or what mistake was made? The obviousness of the right course of action syncs nicely with the lack of regret one feels afterward.

The tricky part is imagining a situation like this where one still feels bad afterward, even though what was done is so clearly the right thing to do. If we can imagine a case where we

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61 “Remorse” is what Williams calls regret felt by the agent who voluntarily did something they wish had been otherwise. “Agent-regret” is the same as remorse, only the act wasn’t necessarily voluntary. Williams, 1981. 30.
clearly have an obligation to do one thing, but in the process we will be forgoing something of value that doesn’t present us with another obligation, then we will have the sort of case where one can fittingly experience loss even though one cannot fittingly regret. I think these cases happen often enough when we make certain life decisions, like settling on a stable job to support one’s family instead of pursuing the exciting but risky career of a stunt man. If we assume we have certain obligations to our families, particularly to our young children, then we will need to forgo many things of value in order to meet those obligations. In such cases, we may feel bad after forgoing those good things, even though what we did was clearly the right thing to do. This sort of feeling bad is loss and not regret.

Scholars of Williams may be apt to point out that these sorts of scenarios can be accounted for in one of a number of ways, all of which rely on the broadness of Williams’s definitions for regret. For example, Williams mentions in “Ethical Consistency” how desires may conflict with moral obligation, and in those cases, he calls this a type of regret—in which case, forgoing the life of a stunt man would be forgoing a particular desire. This may, of course, be true. Especially if we grant that under some accounts of value, desire is a necessary condition. But as an objection to loss, I do not think this point does much to undermine it as a distinct sentiment. True, in these cases, loss and Williams’s regret may be two words for the same thing, but this overlap is to be expected when a theory has such a broad notion of regret, as Williams’s does. After all, in “Moral Luck,” Williams defines regret broadly at first as the thought, “how much better if it had been otherwise.” While this becomes more focused when he discusses agent-regret, the regret felt by the agent responsible (voluntarily or not) for whatever state of affairs that would have been better had they been otherwise.

62 Williams, 1981. 27.
Of course, there are other ways to handle this quibble. We might suppose that we do not miss out on any of the available value when we forgo the life of a stunt man, even though we really desired the life of a stunt man. In which case, we would have Williams’s regret but not fitting loss. Alternatively, value might be understood as not having any necessary connection to our desires, or we may just fail to desire something of value that we forgo. In either case, we will have forgone a value, without the desire, and so we will have fitting loss without Williams’s regret.

The second key case for loss is how it can work with nondeontic normative theories, like consequentialism. A deontological normative theory holds that the rightness or wrongness of an action is fundamentally determinable in terms of the action, regardless of its consequences. “Obligations” or “duties” are the terms often used to describe the sorts of actions that are right. Since Williams uses the term “obligation” to describe moral conflicts that result in regret, it’s an open question whether or not a teleological theory like consequentialism can have moral conflicts and regret. A teleological theory holds, as it was defined by C. D. Broad, “[…] that the rightness or wrongness of an action is always determined by its tendency to produce certain consequences which are intrinsically good or bad.”63 In other words, there is always only one obligation in any given situation, which will be to produce intrinsically good states of affairs. The only exception is if two or more available courses of action will produce the same amount of good consequences, provided that those are still producing the most value. Obligations, then, will only conflict in cases where there are two options producing the same amount of value. In those cases, either course of action is right and either way a person decides, they will be in a

63 Broad, 1965. 206-207.
position to regret. To this extent, Williams’s regret could account for conflicting obligations on a teleological account.

However, these rare cases are not the only time we feel bad after making a choice on a teleological account. There are cases where we clearly fulfill our obligation by producing the most value, but forgo other value in the process. In these cases, our bad feeling can be explained as a fitting experience of loss. Returning to a previous example of providing for one’s children or pursuing the life of a stuntman, we might imagine that providing for one’s children is the right thing to do because it will produce the most value—in which case, pursuing the life of a stuntman is no obligation. Regret is such a case could not stem from conflicting obligations. It could be explained by an obligation and desire conflict, but as I’ve argued, these conflicts don’t amount to anything different than loss, provided that the forgone course of action would have produced a value not had by the pursued course of action.

Much of what has been said about regret over conflicting obligations is contentious for another reason. There are many cases where we do what we think is best, feel nothing for the forgone alternative, and do not think we should feel anything for the forgone alternative. These sorts of cases are similar to the ones discussed earlier in reference to proliferating regret and loss in Hurka’s model. In cases of moral obligations, I think this failure to regret occurs primarily when we do not think we have forgone a real obligation. However, it does seem possible that we can clearly recognize a forgone obligation and fail to regret forgoing it. This happens particularly in cases where the chosen obligation seems to be more clearly the best thing to do.

On Williams’s model, even while the course of action taken was clearly the best thing to do, it’s no less the case that the action forgone was still something you were obligated to do. Regret, in his sense, is sufficiently explained by this fact. But supposing I forgo a promise to
meet a friend for coffee, so that I can rush my wife to the hospital. In such a case, I might regret forgoing my obligation to my friend, but more importantly, I might not. If I truly had an obligation to my friend, then there is a sense in which my regret would be fitting. But it’s unlikely that I would feel any regret at all. The overwhelming sense of obligation to my wife’s health would simply silence any feelings for a forgone obligation to keep a promise.

The tension seems to be that obligations have various weights, but all are no less obligations. Regret in these cases is fitting because they are obligations, but this regret may be mitigated if we allow for a way to weigh obligations. W.D. Ross, for example, avoided this weighing by assuming that all obligations were merely \textit{prima facie} except for the all things considered obligation.\textsuperscript{64} While this would explain why in many cases we don’t regret, it wouldn’t explain the cases that we do regret. Therefore, this move doesn’t work for Williams, since a mere \textit{prima facie} obligation wouldn’t be a real obligation for us to regret.

The trick, then, for Williams is to give various weights to obligations, while still maintaining their obligatory nature. The weight of an obligation could be understood to only come into play when obligations conflict, such that all obligations are equally obligatory in the sense that they override all other practical considerations. However, once two or more obligations conflict, then the weight of the obligation can be taken into account. One way to give obligations weight is to discuss the value of the obligation. C. D. Broad suggests of deontological theories, “The concepts of obligation are fundamental, and the concepts of value are definable in terms of them. Thus it might be held that the notion of \textit{fittingness} is fundamental, and that “X is intrinsically good” means that it is fitting for every rational being to

\textsuperscript{64} Ross, 1930.
desire X.” This connection between obligations and value needn’t be exactly as Broad suggested in this passage, but it does provide a useful framework for understanding the weight of obligations. If we suggest that X is the fulfillment of some obligation, then the fulfillment of obligation A is intrinsically good means (on one possible view) that it is fitting for every rational being to desire the fulfillment of obligation A. Presumably, this will be true of all obligations, but in some cases the desire for the fulfillment of the obligation will be stronger than in others, like the obligation to the health of our spouses over the obligation to fulfill a promise. What this suggests, I think, is that while both obligations are intrinsically good, they are intrinsically good in different ways, such that one is better than the other. This difference in value explains why the obligations have different weight.

Once we have a way to talk about obligations in terms of types and amounts of value, then we can use loss to explain why forgoing some obligations doesn’t result in very much regret. This move will grey the distinction between regret and loss in cases where both are appropriate. This move will also increase the number of cases where both are appropriate, since every conflict of obligations can now be understood as a possible instance of forgoing value. Of course, the distinction will still remain in cases where regret might be appropriate and not loss or where loss is appropriate and not regret.

This section has argued that loss is not the same as regret or agent-regret as they are often used in describing moral conflicts. It’s also the case that loss is distinct from remorse, which Williams describes as agent-regret where the thing done that you wish was otherwise was

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65 Broad, 1965. 278.
66 Strength of desire is not how this move has to work, but that we desire two distinct fulfillments of obligations may be enough to explain that they are different. The difference in intrinsic value is enough for loss, and for varying degrees of it.
67 Of course, this isn’t guaranteed. At most it might show that different obligations give us different values, but that the values are equally weighty. The problem is that we want to say that they are not equally weighty.
voluntary. All the ways loss is not like agent regret, it is also not like remorse with the addition that loss also doesn’t require voluntary actions. I have also argued here that loss’s differences from regret, agent-regret, and remorse have explanatory value in that they fill some holes in the arguments over moral conflicts. I have not argued that loss proves that moral conflicts exist, but instead supplied an additional sentiment that can explain what we feel when the forgone obligation was teleological or cases that we simply do not regret forgoing what would appear to have been an obligation. Since these latter examples are often explained away as not have conflicting obligations, there remains a sentiment that needs to be explained that can’t be filled by regret.\textsuperscript{68} Loss fits this position. Another way in which loss has explanatory value occurs when the forgone option was impermissible but we still feel bad about it anyway. While I’ve noted that these cases are not the most common cases of loss, they represent some of the clearest examples of how regret and loss are not the same.

\textsuperscript{68} McConnell, T. (McConnell argues that the bad feeling need not be regret and so we need not think obligations were forgone. On that point, loss fits nicely, since it can be the bad feeling without needed conflicting obligations. In this way, loss fills holes in the dispute over moral conflicts, but not in a way that supports the arguments for conflicting obligations.)
CHAPTER 5. LOSS AND THE QUANTITATIVE/QUALITATIVE DISTINCTION

5.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have covered quantitative/qualitative theories of value and the phenomenon of loss. This chapter works to answer the question, “What is the relationship between loss and a theory of value?” Specifically, this chapter examines what loss can tell us about value.

In making this connection between loss and the distinction I’ve made about our evaluative thinking, it will be important to remind ourselves about the practical effects of value inference (PEVI) as well as the practical effects of evaluation inference (PEEI). The claims I make here are based on PEEI, which means they aren’t claims about the metaphysics of value. The relationship between loss and the quantitative/qualitative distinction helps us to better understand our evaluative lives, which should in turn have some impact on a theory of value. Ultimately, however, I will be focusing more on the impact the relationship has on our evaluative lives and less on what that means for the metaphysics of value.

Section 5.1 of this chapter will review the sentiment of loss and the distinction between a quantitative and qualitative theory of value. Section 5.2 argues in favor of a very specific relationship between loss and a quantitative theory of value, such that a quantitative theory of value fails to account for loss in some important cases. The result of this failure, I think, is that we ought to abandon quantitative theories of value.

5.2 Review

From chapter 4 we learned that loss is what we feel when we think we haven’t gotten some possible good available to us. It is appropriate to experience loss, in the sense that it is fitting, when it is in fact true that we did not get some possible good available to us, and it is
appropriate to experience loss, in the sense that it is justifiable, when we reasonably believe that we did not get some possible good available to us. This distinction between fitting and justifiable accounts of loss is essential for understanding loss’s implications for our evaluative lives. In brief, the fact that loss is *justifiable* on some occasions is sufficient to tell us that we have reasonable beliefs about our missing out on things we take to be good. I will return to this fully in 5.2.

Loss is importantly different from regret in that loss is about value, while regret is about our judgment of actions. However, it is important to remember that part of making judgments about actions can involve value, and so loss and regret can often occur together. In such cases, it isn’t assumed that the emotional or physical experience will be such that one can actually tell that they are experiencing both distinctly. However, while one might not be able to pry apart the experience of both these sentiments when they occur together, we can often tell the experiences are different in the way we describe the reasons for our bad feelings.

For example, regret may come because we judge that the action was some sort of mistake. But what makes an action a mistake may or may not involve particular evaluations. So, for example, when we judge an action wrong because the action belongs to a particular set of impermissible actions, we may feel as though we made a mistake without giving voice to any reason for our bad feeling based on value. We might say that we regret not fulfilling a promise to a friend simply because it was a promise, and promises are not supposed to be broken. This judgment of our action doesn’t need to be based on any value at all. In fact, if we described the same situation with our reasons for our bad feeling being focused on the value we missed out on, then the very self centered nature of loss would surface. For example, we might say that we regret breaking our promise to our friend, because now our friend won’t talk to us and that makes
our life less enjoyable. In such a case, we’d be experiencing loss at the good we were missing out on, and we would be judging what we had done as a mistake because of these results. We would, in effect, be feeling both loss and regret.

While we certainly could explain our regret at breaking a promise this way, most people would judge that the mistake was not our missing out on good for ourselves but failing to keep a promise to our friend. Focusing so much on our loss that we judge our action as a mistake for that reason instead of because we broke a promise to our friend reflects, I’d suggest, an important character flaw. But rather than argue further for that claim, I think it is a good illustration of how loss and regret are distinct sentiments that can be combined to get a variety of results. If we’re regretting because of our loss, then we wish things had been otherwise because we didn’t get some good, but we can certainly regret what we’ve done without thinking we missed out on some good. In more common examples, we might just regret doing something because it was a silly mistake, like responding harshly to an email we have simply misread. Our reasons for our bad feelings in these cases are very telling of the variety of sentiments we are experiencing.

Perhaps the most telling examples of regret and loss are those that clearly show how these sentiments may come apart. For example, when we think we have done the right thing, but still feel as though we missed out on something. A case like this might happen when I’ve chosen to save someone’s life instead of drinking my delicious milkshake. In such a case, we can imagine how I could judge my action as clearly the right thing to do, but also wish that I could have had my milkshake (even though pursuing the milkshake instead of saving the life would have been impermissible). I may feel a tinge of loss at forgoing my milkshake, since doing the right thing in this case didn’t involve getting the good that was my delicious milkshake. Or perhaps I’m a father who makes it a point to attend as many of my children’s’ activities as
possible at the cost of working overtime and showing my boss how seriously I take my job. I can feel without a tinge of regret that what I’ve done is right, but feel loss for the job opportunities I may be forgoing in the process.

That loss is different from regret in its sensitivity to evaluative claims can explain many cases where we feel bad even though we’ve done the right thing. Loss is an expression of our having missed out on something good or our reasonable belief that we missed out on something good. Whether or not that good we missed out on bears on our judgment of an action is an independent issue. Importantly, we don’t feel loss every time we miss out on something good, because our sense of loss depends on two cognitive components, one modal and the other evaluative. The modal component depends on what could have happened in a given situation. Some possible ways things could have gone are more remote than others, in the sense that the world would have to have been significantly different for those possibilities to occur. For example, my sense of loss at missing out on an anonymous million dollar gift every day I get the mail is relying on a modal belief about a very remote possibility. If I were to be overwhelmed with a sense of loss at this, then this loss would not be fitting, since the possibility of it happening is very remote. It may be justified, though, if I have a good reason to expect an anonymous million dollar gift every day. Some possibilities are far closer in proximity, and the fittingness of our loss will be proportionally greater given this proximity. The candy bar I forgo at the supermarket may cause me to feel some loss when I initially decide against it, but this loss will subside as that possibility becomes more remote. If I’m still feeling loss at forgoing that candy bar in a month, then my loss is not fitting.

The evaluative component also helps curtail excessive loss. If the thing forgone is not very good, then it wouldn’t be fitting for me to be overwhelmed by loss. In the case where I
forgo one candy bar in favor of another candy bar, the very small value I take candy bars to have makes it the case that my forgoing either or both won’t cause me much loss. My belief about the value of a candy bar makes my slight loss justifiable, but supposing I’m wrong in my evaluation and at least one of the candy bars happens to contain Willy Wonka’s Golden Ticket. Loss to a great degree would be fitting if I forwent that piece of candy, even though I didn’t know it. In such a case, loss is fitting but not justified.\textsuperscript{69} In fact, a more powerful experience of loss is fitting.

The evaluative component also helps to curtail the amount of loss we experience in that it is not sensitive to particular instances of value that are all but numerically the same. In other words, we do not feel loss at forgoing a good that is good in the same way as the good we got. If we believe the good we got is different than the good we forwent, then we may justifiably experience loss at this. If the good we got was in fact evaluatively different than the good we forwent, then the loss will be fitting as well.

These two cognitive components work together to explain the amount of loss one might justifiably experience when we forgo a good. With all the facts before us, these two cognitive components can also tell us what loss is fitting. The only difference being that in the judgment of fitting, it only matters whether or not some facts are true or false and not what we reasonably believe to be true or false.

Our experience of loss is explained by a particular experience we’ve had with what we believe are valuable things. I’m suggesting in this chapter that a particular understanding of our evaluations is insufficient for having that experience, and so cannot be relied on to explain loss. The particular understanding of evaluation that I find deficient is the quantitative theory of value.

\textsuperscript{69} After all, I have no reason to suspect that chocolate bars contain fictional golden tickets that will provide me with a magical adventure through Wonka’s factory and a lifetime supply of candy.
This theory of value holds that ascriptions of value have essentially one feature, their overall bearing on the total amount of value. If we understand valuable things as having aspect evaluations and overall evaluations, then the quantitative theory is best understood as assimilating any aspect evaluations into a single overall amount for the overall evaluation.

For clarity, aspect evaluations are the evaluations we make of things that do not try to take into account every evaluatively relevant feature of something valuable. When we’re evaluating a car, our evaluation of the car’s interior is an aspect evaluation of the car. On a quantitative theory of value, when we are making our overall evaluation of the car, any relevant aspect evaluations are only relevant insofar as they contribute to the overall amount of value we take the car to have. Since a car’s interior contributes to the overall evaluation of the car, the evaluation of the car’s interior is an aspect evaluation. On a quantitative view, details like a car’s interior being leather are ultimately boiled down to an amount, and the leather interior contributes ultimately to the overall evaluation of the car in terms of amount.

Perhaps most telling of a quantitative view is that when we make a comparison between two valuable things the only evaluative differences are differences in terms of the amount of value those things have. We can, in effect, base all comparisons of valuable things on a scale of value, where the relational properties the valuable things have on the scale of value is all that can be said of how they are evaluatively different. On a quantitative account, one valuable thing has more, less, or the same amount of value as something else, and as far as comparisons based on purely quantitative evaluations are concerned, this is pretty much all that can be said about how the two valuable things differ.\footnote{Depending on the degree of measurement, the theory could say how much of a difference there was between goods too.} This is due to the fact that all the evaluatively relevant features of the valuable good have been boiled down to an amount, which makes comparison easier. But
in making the comparison easier, it also causes the comparison to be less nuanced. To borrow from an example in chapter 2 of this dissertation, one car may be clearly more valuable than another car, but the fact that the two cars have very different interiors is completely irrelevant on the quantitative account. This is true even when the overall better car has the worse interior.

The opposite of a quantitative theory does not hold that ascriptions of value have only one essential feature, the overall bearing on the total amount of value. These theories of value—nonquantitative theories—break into three distinct camps. There are those theories of value that hold that ascriptions of value have no essential features to speak of. There are also those that hold that there is one essential feature to ascriptions of value, but that it is not the overall bearing on the total amount of value. And finally, there are those that hold that ascriptions of value have more than one essential feature, and whether they include the total amount of value is an open question. Qualitative theories of value belong to either of the last two groups of theories about ascriptions of value, which I have called “qualitative monists” and “qualitative pluralists” respectively.

The qualitative monist compares all evaluative claims on a nominal scale. This means something either is valuable or it is not valuable, but there are no amounts to value. These sorts of theories are rare, since we tend to think that something is or is not valuable for more than one reason. But these theories do highlight an important feature of our evaluative lives that goes unaccounted for on a quantitative account. When we evaluate two things so that we can compare them, our comparisons are not always solely in terms of how much more value we think one of the things has. Often times, our comparisons are simply an attempt to see the ways in which the valuable things are similar and different, without reference to an amount. We might say, car X has a leather interior, while car Y has fabric. These aspects of the cars interiors are often
important evaluative features, but neither needs to be considered more valuable than the other. By drawing attention to them as simply different, we have elucidated important evaluative information that should not, according to a qualitative theory, be subsumed by an amount of value.

The qualitative monist, as I said, is a rare bread. They make evaluative comparisons solely on whether a valuable thing has a certain evaluative property or not, and everything that has it is the same, evaluatively. The qualitative pluralist, on the other hand, shares the intuition that similarities and differences in terms of evaluatively relevant features of something shouldn’t be boiled out of a comparison. The nice thing about the qualitative pluralist is that they can accept this, and also accept the fact that overall evaluation can be made in terms of amount—provided, of course, that we understand that even though car X may be more valuable than car Y, car X and car Y have important evaluative differences.

5.3 Loss and Its Relation to Evaluation

If we can agree that loss is a sentiment sensitive to value that is sometimes justifiably felt, what can loss tell us about our evaluations? Our evaluations should be understood in such a way that loss can be accounted for. After all, loss has an important evaluative component and is a common experience that seems to have some explanatory value in cases where regret doesn’t seem appropriate. If I have to forgo something I think is valuable in order to do something I think I should, then we can understand my slight dismay isn’t because I think I’m making some sort of mistake. I certainly have a good reason for being upset when I forwent something I think is valuable, because I need to do what I ought.

Our evaluations, then, need to be understood in such a way that these occasions for loss are accounted for. Not getting some of the good available to us—which is the central thought to
loss—has an important evaluative component, namely the good we didn’t get. So our evaluations should be understood in such a way that we can talk about not getting all the good in every case we think loss is justified. If our understanding of our evaluations is such that it doesn’t allow for justified loss in some cases that loss is in fact justified, then our understanding of our evaluative lives is inaccurate.

So the question before us is whether or not loss tells us anything important about the distinction between quantitative and qualitative theories of value. Using examples of how a quantitative theory of value handles comparisons of value, I will argue that the quantitative theories cannot explain loss in certain sorts of cases that are fairly common experiences of loss. But before going into those arguments, we need to be reminded of the error that comes from using the practical effects of value inference, PEVI, which was a problem for the Stocker/Hurka debate.

Chapter 1 argued that PEVI has difficulties in arguing for claims about the metaphysics of value. The inference from the practical effects of value back to the cause assumes a very tight relationship between what it is for something to truly have value and that value’s effects on us. The problem is that we don’t know the tight relationship between what it is to truly have value and that value’s effects on us. The arguments that rely on PEVI are intended to teach us about what it means to truly have value, while at the same time assuming we already know. This essentially begs the question. If I proceeded to use loss as an indicator of qualitative aspects of value, then I would also use PEVI in a question begging way. Instead, I will use the practical effects of evaluation inference (PEEI) to make related claims about the qualitative aspects of our evaluations. Using occasions where loss is justifiable instead of fitting, I can tie our evaluative beliefs directly to our justifiable experiences of loss. Since the quantitative/qualitative
distinction is a distinction about our evaluative beliefs, and not a distinction about the
metaphysics of value, then our adopting a quantitative or qualitative view will directly impact
whether or not we can justifiably experience loss. Ultimately, while I don’t get to conclude
something absolute about value, I get to at least say something about how we should evaluate
things. If it turns out that some theories—like those suggested in chapter 3—of value don’t
allow for these sorts of evaluations, then we should abandon them.

Let me begin this argument by making a PEEI claim plausible, since I take it that our
evaluative beliefs affect our practical lives. For example, I feel some loss—be it ever so slight—
when I buy bananas instead of salt and vinegar chips. While each will provide me with a snack,
I’m convinced that both will do so in different ways. I take it that bananas and salt and vinegar
chips are just different, and their differences are important to my evaluation of them. When I
buy bananas I miss out on something I really like and think is valuable, which is the vinegary
flavor of the salt and vinegar chips. Tasting good is part of what makes salt and vinegar chips
good to me, and my overall evaluation of the salt and vinegar chips depends on this aspect
evaluation of the chips. Bananas taste good too, just not in the same way, so with respect to the
aspect evaluation of tasting good, these two snack foods have evaluatively relevant differences.

Whether or not my ascription of value to the salt and vinegar chips is apt, my belief that it
has value means that salt and vinegar chips are going to affect me in certain ways. Things that
we evaluate have a practical impact in how we make comparisons, choices, and perform actions.
Evaluation comes with certain practical effects, and depending on the evaluation various effects
may occur. The important point is that evaluations do not need to be true for them to give rise to
the effects. So it need not be the case that a particular good have value for me to think it has
value and to evaluate it. These are the main claims of PEEI.
Evaluations and their effects go together, much like loss and forgone evaluated goods go together. For me to believe that something is very good but be in no way affected by that belief would reflect a certain misconception of what it is to think something is valuable. In much the same way, for me to feel loss at a forgone thing that I take to be in no way good implies some sort of dysfunction on my part. Our justified feelings of loss cannot stray far from our evaluations. If we experience justified loss at forgoing something we take to be good, then that loss will tell us something about our evaluation of the good. When I feel loss at forgoing a bag of salt and vinegar chips, then I thought those chips were valuable. So at very least we can say that occasions of justified loss tell us that we thought the thing forgone was good.

However, our simply believing something is good, as we’ve seen in chapter 4, is not enough to justify loss completely, since this would leave open too many occasions for one to feel loss. Loss isn’t sensitive simply to our thinking something is valuable, because we think all sorts of things are valuable all of the time. And we even think two things that are all but numerically the same are both valuable, but we don’t experience justifiable loss when we forgo one. I’ve suggested in an earlier chapter that loss can only be justified if we think that the good forgone is good in a different way than the good gotten. One bag of salt and vinegar chips is as valuable to me as the next—of the same brand—and should not give rise to justifiable loss. Justified loss, then, tells us that we think the forgone good is valuable in a different way.

I take it to be undeniably true that when I eat bananas over salt and vinegar chips, I did not just eat a better version of what was essentially the same thing. Making an overall evaluation of these snack foods for the sake of comparison solely in terms of amount takes this fact about the differences between bananas and salt and vinegar chips to be mostly evaluatively irrelevant. It isn’t that overall evaluations completely ignore the aspect evaluations that make these two
snack foods different. Instead, the problem is that once the overall evaluation has taken into account the amount the aspect evaluations contribute to the overall evaluation, not much is left to be said. But my feeling of loss when I forgo the salt and vinegar chips isn’t just about missing out on overall value. It’s about my missing out on something I take to be valuable in a different way than the good I got. Justifiable loss is a sentiment that is entirely sensitive to this sort of reaction.

When I make an evaluation of bananas and chips, they have very different sorts of aspect values. When I feel loss it is at very least because I am missing out on the differences that can be seen when we compare the aspect evaluations. Loss occurs when we haven’t gotten some of the good available to us, and the differences in aspect evaluations can be a way to describe the evaluatively relevant parts of the overall evaluation that we did not get. If the bananas were good in the very same way the chips were good, then I wouldn’t be experiencing loss when I chose them over the chips. Therefore, since I feel loss and the only apparent evaluative difference between the goods is in the aspect evaluations that gave rise to an overall evaluation, it must be that the differences in the aspect evaluations are not being completely boiled out when I make an overall evaluation for comparison.

Given the quantitative account of value, in what way can the salt and vinegar chips be evaluatively different? They are different in amount, but in choosing what I take to be the more valuable bananas I can’t believe that I missed out on any of the amount of value. I missed out on the properties that gave rise to that amount, but the properties I missed out on only matter insofar as they tell me how much value the salt and vinegar chips have, according to the quantitative view. The only way for the loss to be justified is for me to think that my evaluation of the salt
and vinegar chips has evaluatively relevant features not accounted for simply in the amount. But for this to be true, the quantitative theory of value would need to be false.

Qualitative theories of value, on the other hand, hold that amount is not the only feature in an evaluation. A qualitative account may grant that amount is an evaluatively relevant feature, but also hold that there are other evaluatively relevant features that are ignored when we only take amount into account. A qualitative theorist is going to resist boiling all evaluations down to amount, because the aspect evaluations that go into making an overall evaluation may show important differences between the evaluated goods that go ignored in a purely quantitative account. It’s often assumed that evaluation leads naturally to a means for comparison, and comparisons tend to be in terms of better than, worse than, or equal to, but some comparisons are simply in terms of how things are similar or dissimilar. Evaluations may point out differences or similarities that don’t amount to variations in amount of value, and these variations are exactly what a qualitative theorist will want to account for.

5.4 Conclusion

The argument so far has been that a quantitative account of value cannot account for loss when we get the thing we judge to be the most valuable. The basis for this argument was that the quantitative account only allows evaluations to have the single aspect of determining how good something is, which only allows for evaluative differences in terms of the amount of good something has. Since loss is sensitive to evaluative differences between two good things, holding a quantitative account doesn’t allow for loss when the thing we got was comparatively better than the thing forgone. The reason being that under a quantitative theory the thing gotten doesn’t differ from the thingforgone in any evaluative way save for amount, and on that score the better thing has all the value the thingforgone had and more.
Ultimately, despite my insistence on using PEEI, I think that there is some implication for the metaphysics of value. If a theory of value entails a quantitative evaluative account, then we should abandon that theory of value. We can’t, however, assume that because someone maintains a quantitative evaluative account that their theory of value is bad, because it could be that their theory of value simply doesn’t entail either a quantitative or qualitative account.

Many of the recent disputes over the metaphysics of value have used PEVI, which have led them to overreach in their conclusions. Since PEVI has a strong tendency to beg the question in favor of the conclusions these authors have been striving for, we need an alternative approach for using practical effects in the world to glean interesting information about the metaphysics of value. I think that by exploring our evaluative lives more, we will come to discover that many of our theories of value are simply inadequate. We should, however, hesitate to move too quickly from claims about our evaluative lives to claims about the metaphysics of value.
Bibliography


