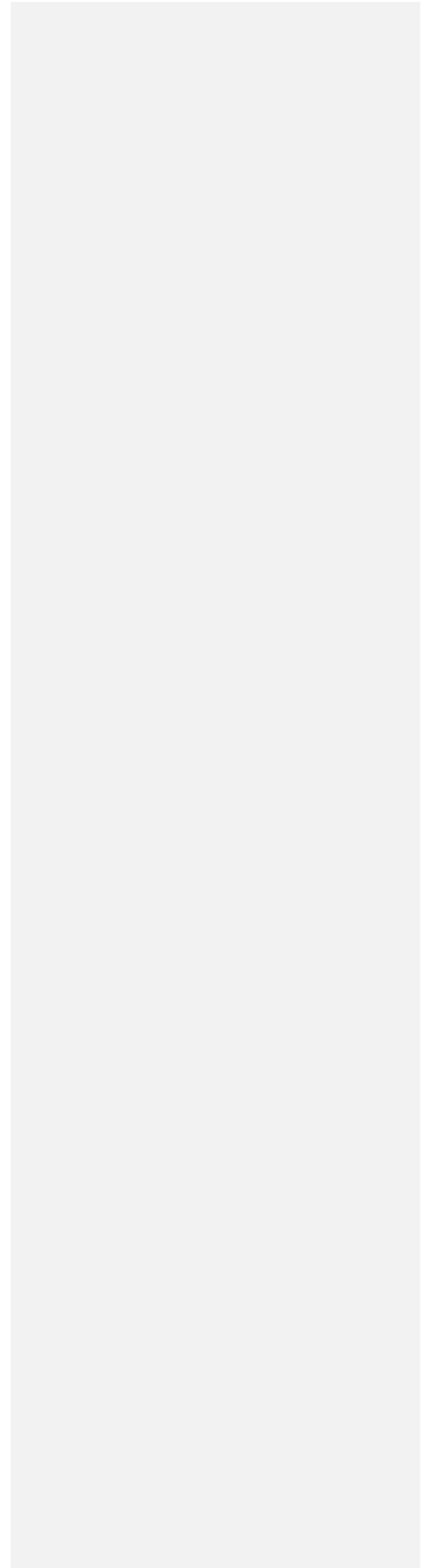


The Value Debate

PHIL 138
July 28, 2012



A/A-

Your discussion is focused, well-written, and well-organized. You do a nice job explaining extremely tricky parts of their arguments in a succinct manner and using your own voice. There are a couple of spots that are unclear, but, overall, great work.

This paper explores Bryan Norton and Gary Varner's views on intrinsic value to posit that while the writers differ over which entities have intrinsic value their views converge at the level of policy. I start by examining the dissimilarities of their positions and move on to investigate the similarities and implications of their arguments.

Norton and Varner have different positions on intrinsic value. For Varner, intrinsic value is the value an entity has regardless of how others value it.¹ And **if satisfying the needs or desires of the entity creates intrinsic value**, then it has interests.² For instance, a flower satisfying its interest of growing has intrinsic value and makes the world better independent of how others value it. Different interests, however, are morally relevant to different degrees. Long-term desires giving meaning to an individual's existence form his ground project and are most morally relevant.³ Relatively temporary noncategorical desires such as feelings of joy matter less than ground projects but more than biological interests such as growth. So when a human ground project involves building a mansion that harms the biological or noncategorical interests of a plant or animal, satisfying the human ground project is better.

Comment [A1]: This could be clearer.

¹ Varner, p. 110

² Varner, p.110

³ Varner, p. 115

In Norton's weak anthropocentric view, humans are the loci and source of value.

⁴As the loci of value, they have value within or for themselves; and as the source of value humans can be used to determine whether a nonhuman entity, such as a tree, ought to be valued for its own sake or for a purpose it serves for humans.⁵ In essence, the value of human existence and human consciousness establishes the value of everything else.⁶ Many nonanthropocentrists also agree that humans are the source of value. The disagreement arises over how they value nonhuman nature.⁷ For Norton, an environmental ethic should not confer intrinsic value to nonhuman nature.⁸ Rather, the value of nonhuman entities should be derived from rational worldviews.⁹ For instance, if humans consider it rational to maintain harmony with nature, they should value their relationship with nature and what nature teaches them to act in ways that preserve the harmony.

Comment [A2]: Nice explanation of Norton in a nutshell

Norton and Varner, however, are not in complete disagreement. Both writers establish hierarchies of desires and preferences used to determine moral behavior. For Varner, only humans have ground projects and such projects are weighed over the non-comparable interests of other entities. He acknowledges that by prioritizing human interests his view appears anthropocentric when the allocation of value is considered.¹⁰ Norton establishes a similar weakly anthropocentric hierarchy of morally relevant human

⁴ Norton, p. 327

⁵ Norton, p. 327; 335-336

⁶ Norton, p. 331; p. 335

⁷ Norton, p.331-32

⁸ Norton, p. 327; p.336

⁹ Norton, p. 331

¹⁰ Varner, p. 118-119

desires. In Norton's view, preferences that are adopted after an individual rationally accepts a particular worldview are valued over preferences that are less rational and can be temporarily satisfied.¹¹

Comment [A3]: This last point needs to be developed a little bit more. You need to explain what makes a worldview rational for Norton for this similarity between Norton and Varner to make sense.

There are many implications of the divergence and convergence of Norton and Varner's views. On the question of biodiversity, for instance, both would agree that there is a need to maintain biodiversity, but they would do so for different reasons. Varner would argue that since satisfying ground projects requires each individual to survive and biodiversity is important for survival, individuals must preserve biodiversity to survive.¹² Norton, who looks at collectives instead of individuals, would contend that since biodiversity is important for maintaining ongoing human consciousness, humans must allocate and distribute resources fairly to preserve their kind.¹³

Comment [A4]: Excellent

Thus, we can see that although Norton and Varner disagree over what has value, their views converge at the level of policy. They disagree over whether a tree has intrinsic value, but they would agree that if felling the tree satisfies rational and existence-defining human desires, then the tree must be felled.

Bibliography

Norton, Bryan G. 1984. Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism. *Environmental Ethics* 6 (2): 326-338.

¹¹ Norton, p. 338

¹² Varner, p. 118-9

¹³ Norton, p.333

Varner, Gary E., ed. 2002. *Biocentric Individualism*. Edited by E. W. D. Schmitz, *Environmental Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.