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Exploring the Space of Value Comparisons

Andersson, Henrik

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

How It All Relates

Exploring the Space of Value Comparisons

HENRIK ANDERSSON | DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY | LUND UNIVERSITY

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Exploring the Space of Value Comparisons

Henrik Andersson

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Abstract

This thesis explores whether the three standard value relations, “better than”, “worse than” and “equally as good”, exhaust the possibilities in which things can relate with respect to their value. Or more precisely, whether there are examples in which one of these relations is not instantiated. There are cases in which it is not obvious that one of these relations does obtain; these are referred to as “hard cases of comparison”. These hard cases of comparison become interesting, since if it not the case that the standard three value relations obtains in these cases then the three standard relations do not exhaust the possibility of instantiated value relations. It is argued that for some of the hard cases of comparison, the standard relations determinately obtain. For some it is indeterminate, due to vagueness, which of the three relations obtains, but it is determinate that one of them obtains. Thereafter it is argued that the influential Collapsing Argument fails in ruling out other accounts of the hard cases of comparison. Since one cannot depend on the Collapsing Argument in order to conclude that all items are related by the standard three relations, the investigation continues. It is argued that none of the hard cases of comparison are cases of incomparability. Furthermore, none of them are cases of a fourth basic positive value relation such as “parity”. Consequently, for all the hard cases of comparison one of the standard value relations holds, although sometimes we do not know which one and sometimes it is indeterminate which one holds. This means that there is no reason to assume that one of the standard three value relations does not hold between items we are comparing. This is followed by a brief discussion about the normative consequences of this result. The thesis ends with four different appendices in which related topics are discussed.

Key words: Value relations, vagueness, parity, incomparability, incommensurability, indeterminacy, value comparisons, hard cases of comparison, transitivity, the collapsing principle

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How It All Relates

Exploring the Space of Value Comparisons

Henrik Andersson

LUND
UNIVERSITY

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Contents

Acknowledgements 10
1. Introduction 13
What It Is All About 13
Why Comparisons 13
Hard Cases of Comparison 16
The Different Views 19
An Overview 22
2. The Structure of Value Relations 25
Comparability and Incomparability 25
Incommensurability 28
Value or Value Bearers 30
The Structure of Comparisons 31
Non-Comparability 35
Meta-Ethical Assumptions 37
3. Properties of Value Relations 41
A Relation and its Properties 41
Logically Possible Value Relations 42
Non-Standard Relations 45
Non-Standard Equality 48
Conclusion 50
4. The Trichotomy View 51
The Trichotomy View and Hard Cases of Comparison 51
5. Vagueness 57
Its Features 57
Ontic or Semantic? 58
Theories of Vagueness 61

Supervaluationism 62
Second-Order Vagueness 64
6. The Vagueness View 67
An Argument for the Vagueness View 67
Vague Evaluative Predicates 70
Vagueness and Hard Cases 71
7. The Collapsing Argument for the Vagueness View 75
The Collapsing Principle 75
The Collapsing Argument 77
An Objection to the Collapsing Principle 80
Gustafsson's Objection to the Collapsing Principle 83
Elson's Objection 87
The Second-Order Vagueness Objection 93
8. The Incomparability View 97
Conceptual Space for Incomparability 98
The Small-Improvement Argument 99
Non-Comparability Revisited 101
Raz and Constitutive Incomparability 103
Evaluative Difference 108
Complex Comparisons 108
Rule-Given Incomparability 111
Incomparability and Probability 113
Conclusions 115
9. A Fourth Positive Value Relation 117
Rough Comparability and Imprecision 118
Parity 122
The Small-Improvement Argument Revisited 124
The Indeterminacy Objection 125
The Epistemic Objection 130
The Chaining Argument 133
An Objection 135
A Weaker Objection 139
Conclusions 142

10. The Best Views 145
Comparing the Competing Accounts 145
11. Rational Choice 149
Different Views of Rational Choice 149
Vagueness and Rational Choice 152
Ignorance and Rational Choices 156
Appendix A: Covering Concepts and Goodness Simpliciter 161
All Things Considered 161
Goodness *Simpliciter* 163
Is the Requirement for Specification an Expression of Conceptual Scepticism? 165
Thomson and Specifications 167
Analysable Goodness *Simpliciter* 169
The Vagueness View and Goodness *Simpliciter* 171
Conclusion 172
Appendix B: The Transitivity of Better Than 173
Superiority and Spectrums 178
Appendix C: The Fitting Attitudes Analysis of Value Relations 181
Potential Problems with the FA-Analysis 184
Fitting-Attitudes and Incomparability 186
Conclusion 188
Appendix D: Some Standard Configurations 189
Determinate and Indeterminate Comparability 190
Determinate and Indeterminate Incomparability 196
Second-Order Vagueness 200
Literature 205

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1. Introduction

What It Is All About

We make comparisons all the time. It starts out early in life as we wonder whether our siblings got more ice cream than we did. In school we wonder whether we are taller than our best friend, or more seriously, does that girl like my friend more than me? The same kinds of thoughts occur throughout our whole life: Does my colleague make more money than I do? Is my friend better looking than I am? And does she love my better-looking friend more than me? Comparisons are interesting this way; we already know that we have a lot of ice cream, that we make enough money, and that she loves me, but this is not enough. We want that extra piece of info: how does what I have relate to what they have? The same is true for less self-centred reasoning as well: It is good to know that the train takes me to my destination fast, but it may be even better to know that the plane takes me there faster; that cardboard is sturdy but timber even sturdier; and that fries are unhealthy but that deep-fried Mars bars even more so.

This thesis focuses on comparisons, value comparisons to be more precise. It will explore the space for value comparisons, i.e., can "better than", "worse than", and "equally as good" account for all value comparisons or is there room for more? After considering several different proposals it will be concluded that the three value relations can account for all comparisons but that sometimes we may not know which value relation holds, and in other cases it may be indeterminate, due to semantic vagueness, which value relation holds.

Why Comparisons

The focus of this thesis is on value comparisons and not the, by tradition, more familiar investigation of concepts such as "good", "bad", "right", and "wrong". It is understandable that much work within ethics has focused on these four concepts, but lately there seems to have been an increased interest in value comparisons. This is not surprising given the close connection between these different concepts. It might, however, be instructive to start off with a short justification of why the topic of value comparisons merits an in-depth exploration.

The obvious difference between concepts such as "good" and "bad" and concepts such as "better than" and "worse than" is of course that the latter express relations, i.e., they are concepts of value relations.[1] Even though these two different kinds of value concepts differ, they are also closely connected. In English dyadic predicates are *grammatically* closely connected to monadic predicates. Generally, comparative adjectives can easily be constructed by adding a suffix or a determiner to an adjective. For example, from the adjective "tall" one can construct the comparative "taller than" by adding the suffix "-er" and "than". From the adjective "kind" one can construct the comparative "equally as kind" by adding "equally" and "as". From the adjective "interesting" one can construct the comparative "more interesting than" by adding "more … than". So if one is to express a difference in degree in terms of a specific adjective, *F*, one either adds the suffix "-er" or adds the determiner "more": *A* is *Fer* than *B* or *A* is *more F* than *B*. Things are not as straightforward when it comes to "better than". This comparative has its origin in the Germanic "bat" and not in

[1] Here, in order to concretise the difference between these concepts, it would be apt to provide a definition of what I take to be a "value relation". Unfortunately it is difficult to come up with a short and satisfactory definition of "value relation". For example, one cannot expound what it means in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic properties, since goodness may partly be an extrinsic property. It could also be problematic to illustrate the difference in terms of "one-place or two-place predicates" since there could be two-place predicates that are used to refer to a specific conception of goodness. For example "*A* is good as a means to *B*" or "*A* is good for *p*" could perhaps be understood as a two-place predicative use of "good". These examples may even in fact be understood as expressions of relations, but this is not what I have in mind when referring to "value relations". When I use the term "value relation" I refer to a relation that expresses a value-comparative fact. Since I cannot provide a definition of "value relation" I can only hope that the reader has an intuitive grasp of the concept and the way value relations such as "better than" differ from monadic concepts such as "good".

"good".[2] Nevertheless, since "bat" means "good" it is clear that "better than" is the comparative of "good"; and "worse than" is its converse.

This is the grammatical connection, but it is reasonable to believe that the concepts are connected in a similar way. For example, many tend to believe that one ought to define the concept "good" in terms of the concept "better" while others believe that "better" ought to be defined in terms of "good".[3] If the former were true, then it would seem that "better" is one of the most central concepts within ethics. I do not wish to take a stand on which concept ought to be defined in terms of the other or whether it is possible at all. However, I take the mere fact that such proposals have been made to be evidence for the claim that there are close ties between the concepts, and this close connection is in itself a reason for why value relations are worthy of our attention.

Furthermore: It is obvious that we use comparatives very often. Many times we do so because the comparatives give us additional information to the monadic predicates that they are derived from. For example, it could be good to know that Alfred is tall, but it might also be good to know that he is taller than I am. This becomes even more obvious when we consider comparatives that belong to the evaluative realm: it could be good to know that both the cheesecake and the blueberry pie are tasty, but it is even better to have the extra piece of information that the blueberry pie is tastier than the cheesecake. Examples such as these should make it obvious why comparisons are important; in our everyday life it is helpful to know whether a thing is good, but it can also be important to have the additional information about how it relates to other options in terms of value.

The above example of everyday reasoning involving comparisons is also reflected in different philosophical views.[4] It cannot be denied that comparisons play a central part in some moral theories. This is perhaps most evident in

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[2] See for example Skeat (2005).

[3] For a good overview of suggested definitions see Gustafsson (2014).

[4] Consider for example the view that Ruth Chang has dubbed *comparativism*: "According to comparativism, comparative facts are what make a choice objectively correct; they are that in virtue of which a choice is objectively rational or what one has most or sufficient normative reason to do. So whether you are a consequentialist, deontologist, virtue theorist, perfectionist, contractualist, etc., about the grounds of rational choice, you should be, first and foremost, I suggest, a comparativist. Whatever substantive values, goods, or norms turn out to be those that make a choice or action objectively rational, the form of the fact that does the work must be comparative." Chang (2016, p. 213). One might find comparativism to be too radical—especially if one considers deontology. On the face of it, the deontologist's view would be that what one ought to do is determined by non-comparative requirements. It is true that there may be a need to compare requirements in terms of their strength if they come into conflict with each other, but of course they need not conflict in most situations

consequentialist theories of what is the right thing to do. According to some such theories, what is right to do is what brings about the best outcome. Thus, in order to act morally, one needs to know which of several outcomes is the best. Value relations may also be important for other moral theories. It would, however, be an exaggeration to claim that value relations play the same important role for all other moral theories; it may not be a value relation that explains what the right thing to do is, but at the same time it seems safe to say that they play *some* normative role in most moral theories.[5]

Furthermore, without downplaying the role of preferences, it seems safe to assume that value relations are also central in normative decision theory. In order to make a justified choice between two items we must often consider how the items relate to each other in terms of value. For some choice situations it would seem absurd to justify a choice between two items without making some form of value comparison. Consequently, comparisons are central to some notions of subjective rational choice.[6]

I think it is safe to conclude that value relations play an important normative role. One may have different views on what role this is, in which domains it is of most interest, and how important a role they play, but nevertheless they seem to merit our philosophical attention.

Hard Cases of Comparison

So comparisons seem to play an important role in many different theories. These theories often have a clear picture of what the normative implications of one thing being better than another is. The same is true if one thing is equally as good as another. Things may not be as straightforward, however, if none of the three value relations hold. There are in fact cases in which it is not obvious that one of the three relations obtains. For this reason it becomes important to determine what value relations may hold between two items. If it turns out that things can only relate by our three standard value relations, then this should be a relief for many, while if this is not the case then we should expect that many

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[5] For more on this see Chang (2016, pp. 227–229).

[6] This is the case for some theories about decisions under certainty and decisions under risk or ignorance. According to these, when we make decisions under certainty we should compare the value of the outcome of the acts, and when we make decisions under risk or ignorance we should compare the expected value of the alternatives.

normative theories require revisions.[7] And the latter would of course be unwanted.

It seems obvious that things can relate by being better than, worse than, and equally as good.[8] Those value comparisons that we make with ease should be a good indicator for this. We do not hesitate to conclude that peace and prosperity are better than war and famine; getting fired is worse than getting a promotion; and that two apples from the same tree may taste equally as good. In cases such as these, it is obvious to us which of the standard three value relations holds. If it were always easy to make comparisons in terms of the standard three value relations, then there would of course be little reason to believe that there could be other value relations than the standard three. However, not all comparisons are as straightforward as this. Many times we find it difficult to make comparisons. For example, assume that you are facing a choice between two different careers, one in philosophy and the other in law. You would be very pleased with a career within either of these fields but it is clear that the careers are very different. If you end up being a lawyer you will have a steady income and do good to other people. On the other hand, if you end up being a philosopher, then you might be able to quench your thirst for knowledge somewhat and you would be able to express your creativity. The comparison, and consequently the choice, is hard to make.[9]

Comparisons of the kind above are often colloquially referred to as cases of "incomparability". I, however, prefer to use the notion of "incomparability" in a more technical way and will refer to these cases as "hard cases of comparison" or "hard cases" for short. These hard cases become central in determining what value relations can hold between two different things. If we suspect that things can be related in some other way than by being better, worse, or equally as good, then it is to the hard cases of comparison we must look. Unfortunately it is difficult to give a uniform characterisation of these central cases. However, by providing examples, an intuitive grasp of what kind of class of cases is of interest

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7 The "standard" three relations are of course: "better than", "worse than", and "equally as good".

8 This claim might come out as too strong. Adherents of some specific meta-ethical positions might want to reject such a claim. In the next chapter I will, however, discuss meta-ethical positions that do not seem to be compatible with this claim.

9 Note that the focus of this thesis is the comparison and not the more common topic of hard choices. Of course, many hard choices may be explained in terms of hard comparisons. Furthermore, if options can carry value then perhaps all hard choices could be understood as cases in which we must make a hard comparison among the options that we choose from.

can hopefully be given. Let me, therefore, present some more examples of the kind of cases I have in mind.

When reflecting on hard cases one may tend to consider comparisons that ground life-changing decisions, such as comparisons of different careers. Other similar examples may for example be when pondering on where to live: would it be better to live in a big city or in the countryside? Some may have been comparing a future in which they have children to a life in which they do not have children. And perhaps some moral dilemmas could be understood to be examples of hard cases of comparison.[10] Hard cases of comparison, however, need not involve comparisons that have any bearing on such important decisions. They could also be found in more mundane situations. For example, you may be hesitant when judging what ice cream you find to be the tastiest: vanilla or chocolate? You may like the rich aroma of the chocolate and its bitter taste, but you may also like the milder and somewhat sweeter taste of vanilla, furthermore, you may not be willing to judge that they taste equally as good. Or to use a paradigmatic example, in terms of creativity, who is best: Mozart or Michelangelo? Mozart's creativity manifested itself in his progressive compositions that amount to over 600 different works. Michelangelo's creativity manifested itself perhaps most clearly in the diversity of his work; his paintings, sculptures, poetry, and engineering. It is clearly hard to judge who is the better of the two when it comes to creativity and we are not willing to say that they are equally as good.

I hope that these examples have been useful in characterising the cases I have in mind. Interestingly, they all seem to share the feature of being multidimensional, i.e., when we make the comparison there are different relevant respects that need to be taken into consideration. However, I do not believe that this feature is sufficient to provide a satisfactory characterisation, but it will play an important role in the discussions that will follow. Another feature that they all seem to have in common is that in all of the cases we struggle to determine which of the standard three value relations applies. It is for this reason

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[10] I shall, however, try to avoid using paradigmatic moral dilemmas as examples of hard comparisons. Some of the dilemmas may very well be cases of hard comparisons precisely because they share the features of the above examples. But this is most probably not true for all moral dilemmas. The discussion about moral dilemmas and how we are to understand them is complex and the writings are detailed and make up a field on their own. To group all of the moral dilemmas together with the cases above and argue that they are instances of the very same phenomenon would be a great oversimplification given everything that has been written on dilemmas: it would not take these different theories seriously. Even if some moral dilemmas may be cases of hard comparisons I shall, due to the complexity of the discussion on moral dilemmas, be cautious and try to not to refer to paradigmatic moral dilemmas when discussing value relations.

that they are interesting when we are to determine how things may relate in terms of value, since they put pressure on the view that the trichotomy of value relations can account for all value comparisons.

The Different Views

A successful account of the space of value relations should be able to encompass these hard cases of comparisons. Consequently, the main bulk of this thesis will discuss different possible accounts. There are four different views that claim to make sense of hard cases of comparisons.

According to one kind of view, which I will refer to as the *Trichotomy View*, some hard cases are cases in which one of the standard three value relations obtains but we do not know enough about the things we are to compare to determine which relation it is. The Trichotomy View claims that if we knew more about the items we would be able to tell which one of the standard three relations actually holds. To give an example, if I have never heard about Lex Luthor and Clark Kent, then I will find it hard to compare them in terms of moral character, but even if the comparison is hard to make, it is still the case that Clark is better than Lex. Thus, for the omniscient there would be no hard cases of this kind. For most of us, however, it is often impossible to gain all the relevant information. This could, for example, be due to the fact that the future is epistemologically open. So when you are to consider which of two careers will have the best outcome, the fact that you do not know what the outcome will be makes the comparison hard.

The Trichotomy View must be distinguished from the more radical and less reasonable claim that in *all* hard cases of comparison one of the standard three value relations determinately obtains. I take it that most acknowledge that some hard cases are of this kind, but they would reject the more radical claim that all hard cases are of this kind.[11] Ignorance and the standard three value relations alone cannot account for all hard cases of comparison, they would argue.

Another kind of view claims that some hard cases are cases in which it is indeterminate how the items relate. This indeterminacy is explained in terms of vagueness and hence I will refer to this position as the *Vagueness View*.[12]

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[11] Not many have argued for this position. However, in one text Donald Regan takes the self-proclaimed role of the "designated eccentric" and expresses a view that could be characterised as the more radical form of the Trichotomy View. Regan (1997).

[12] John Broome has perhaps most famously put forth this view. Broome (1997).

According to this view our language is vague; we cannot determinately point out the exact numbers of hairs that is the maximum for a person to be called bald. Just as there is no sharp border for the number of grains of sand that is needed for a collection of them to be called a heap. For this reason it will be difficult to determine whether a comparative applies or not. For example, Curly has very few hairs, but the few he has are evenly spread out on his head. Harry has more hairs than Curly, but they are placed so that he has more of a bald spot than Curly. Is Harry balder than Curly? It is very hard to come up with an answer and this is, according to the adherents of the Vagueness View, for the very same reason that it is hard to come up with an answer in some of the hard cases of comparison.[13]

There is also the position that argues that for some of the hard cases there is no positive basic value relation whatsoever between the items we are comparing—the items are incomparable. I will call this view the *Incomparability View*. This view gives a negative account of the hard cases. It tells us what is not the case; the things we are comparing are not related by any positive value relation.

Another kind of account, the *Parity View*, claims that, for some hard cases, the items relate by a fourth kind of value relation.[14] This is a relation that we have previously overlooked; one item need not be better, worse, or equally as good as another; they could relate in some other way, they may for example be *on a par*.[15] It is important to note that the term "parity" is used here somewhat differently from how we ordinarily use it. Usually we refer to things that are

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[13] This paragraph merits two clarificatory points. First, the vagueness I discuss here is semantic. Vagueness need not only be semantic, it may also be ontic. I will discuss this possibility in the chapter about vagueness. Second, on one influential theory of vagueness proposed by Timothy Williamson the Vagueness View becomes similar to the Trichotomy View. Williamson claims that ignorance give rise to vagueness, thus, if this is correct, then the Vagueness View seems to collapse into a view similar to the Trichotomy View. See Williams (1994). Williamson's view will be discussed and rejected below in the chapter on vagueness.

[14] This merits some clarification. I here talk about a fourth value relation. If one believes that there could be more than three value relations it may not be clear why we should stop here. There may be five, six, seven, or how many have you, different ways in which items can relate. When discussing the Parity View I will, however, take it to be the view that there are just four value relations. I focus on this restricted view since this is the most thoroughly worked out view in favour of the possibility of a specific instantiated value relation beyond the standard three. If it turns out that this view is false then this makes the less restricted view less plausible. If this value relation is not instantiated then other value relations may very well be instantiated, but it is hard to see how one can argue for this possibility given that what I take to be the best argument in favour of a specific additional value relation failed.

[15] Derek Parfit and Ruth Chang have perhaps most famously argued for this view. Parfit (1984, 2014b) and Chang (2002a, 2002b).

equally as good, or almost equally as good, as being on a par, but this is not how the adherents of the Parity View use the term.[16]

As I have characterised these views none of them makes the strong claim of how *all* hard cases ought to be understood. They all make the more cautious claim that *some* of the hard cases ought to be understood in the way proposed. Of course one could reformulate the views as universal claims, but if the more reasonable and weaker claims are refuted then so must the stronger claims be as well.

I take it that these four views are the most reasonable views on how to understand hard cases of comparison. My strategy for evaluating these views will be a common one; in general, when trying to find out which theory we should accept, we should prefer the theory that has the most explanatory power and the lowest number of theoretical assumptions. This classical approach of favouring theoretical parsimony is a good starting point for the inquiry.

Before moving on it should be made clear that the aim of this thesis is to determine how things can relate with respect to their value. In order to investigate this I will focus on hard cases of comparison, since for these comparisons it is not obvious that one of the standard value relations obtains. But it is not the "hardness" of these cases that is of interest. The different views are not meant to explain why we find certain comparisons to be hard. The answer to such a question is probably epistemological: we find them hard because we do not know which relation holds or even if any value relation holds between the items. So, for example, if the parity relation obtains in a hard case then we might find the comparison to be hard since we were not aware of the mere possibility that two things could relate in this manner.[17] If we were told that they in fact are on a par we would of course cease to find the comparison hard. But even if we knew that things could relate in this manner, it could still be difficult to know whether an item is better than, worse than, equally as good, or on a par with another item, hence the "hardness". The notion of "*hard* comparisons" is consequently only meant to point us towards a certain group of comparisons that is extra of interest when we are to determine which value relations could possibly be instantiated.

It must also be stressed that, even though I consider the logical and conceptual possibilities of value relations, the central topic to be explored in this

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[16] How we are to understand parity will be addressed later on.

[17] This is not surprising. Just as an "at least as long" relation relates everything with a length or as an "at least as heavy" relation relates everything with a weight, we assume, in our everyday life, that everything will be related by an "at least as good" relation. Of course, it is hard to say which of the trichotomous relations applies when in fact none of them applies.

thesis is the actually instantiated value relations. Even though there might be conceptual space for certain possibilities I prefer to focus on whether these ever are instantiated, i.e., whether they actually ever obtain between two things. Determining whether a value relation that is conceptually possible is instantiated is a matter of determining whether there actually are two objects that relate to each other in a specific manner. In a sense this is an empirical question, but it is also a question that can be answered by using philosophical methods. To begin with, if we can show, through conceptual analysis, that there is no conceptual space for a certain value relation, then, clearly, it cannot be instantiated. Furthermore, if there is conceptual space for other value relations, then the search for these possible "new" value relations has been narrowed down to the hard cases of comparison. This is helpful since it allows us to consider whether the properties of these objects can be matched with the conceptual possibilities. This way we can, through philosophical methods, investigate which value relations may be instantiated.[18]

An Overview

Hopefully, it should by now be clear what the central topics of this thesis are. The disposition of the thesis will take the following form. In chapter 2 I will introduce some central terms that are used in the discussions that follow, I will discuss the structure of value comparisons, and I will have a discussion concerning the meta-ethical assumptions that are being made. This will be followed by chapter 3, in which there will be a discussion about the logical properties of value relations and what logical possibilities there are at hand. When this is done I will present the four views mentioned above, one at a time. The desideratum is to make as few assumptions as possible in order to account for all value comparisons. A theoretically parsimonious view with great explanatory power should be preferred to a view that is more theoretically burdensome or fails to be as explanatorily potent. For this reason I will, in chapter 4, be considering the Trichotomy View. This view requires little, if any,

[18] I will get back to the notion of "instantiated value relation" in the next chapter. If a justification for the focus on the instantiated rather than on the conceptually possible must be given, then the answer might be found in the difference of normative significance. Value relations that are conceptual possibilities but that we have no reason to believe to ever be instantiated seem to play little or no normative role in our everyday life, while, as we will see, instantiated value relations have normative significance.

revision to our standard conception of value comparisons and it invokes the familiar phenomenon of ignorance and our three standard value relations.

If this view alone can explain all the hard cases then there is no reason to consider other views that depend on more theoretically burdensome assumptions. It will, however, be claimed that the Trichotomy View cannot account for *all* hard cases. Of course it cannot be denied that some hard cases are of this kind, so the Trichotomy View gets it right. But setting these aside we must also be able to account for the remaining hard cases. In chapter 5 I discuss the phenomenon of vagueness, by describing its features and describing various theories of vagueness, especially the theory called supervaluationism. In chapter 6 I argue that the Vagueness View fares well in accounting for the remaining hard cases and it does so by only depending on the reasonable assumption that there is semantic vagueness. However, before accepting the Vagueness View in combination with the Trichotomy View, we must consider whether the other views can add something to our account. If there are some cases that cannot be accounted for in terms of the standard three value relations or in terms of vagueness, then perhaps they should be understood in terms of incomparability or parity.[19]

In chapter 7, I consider whether the so-called Collapsing Argument can rule out the remaining views. It is concluded that we cannot rely on the Collapsing Argument to reach such a conclusion. Next, in chapter 8, I consider the Incomparability View. It is argued that even though this view may *prima facie* seem to depend on very few theoretical assumptions, it has the drawback of not providing much explanatory power. As it turns out, in chapter 9, there are no reasons to add the Parity View either to our account of hard cases. The biggest drawback with the Parity View is that it fails to establish that purported cases of parity are not merely cases of vagueness, and therefore there is no reason to postulate this previously overlooked relation.

In chapter 10 I draw the conclusion that our standard three value relations—better than, worse than, and equally as good—can account for all value comparisons. However, when we are facing a hard case of comparison it might be the case that we do not know how the things relate or that it is indeterminate, due to vagueness, which value relation holds between them. This is, however,

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[19] It should be noted that the Vagueness View would take different forms depending on whether the Incomparability View or the Parity View is accepted, or both. According to the Vagueness View it is indeterminate what value relation holds between the compared items. If only the Vagueness View is accepted this means that it is indeterminate whether an item is better, worse, or equally as good as another, but if the other views are accepted as well, this would mean that it might be indeterminate whether one of the standard value relations holds or the items are on a par or incomparable. For more on some logical possibilities, see appendix D.

just a theoretical observation and as such it does not help to answer the practical problem of how we are to choose in hard cases. Fortunately, with a better understanding of these cases it will also become possible to arrive at a deeper understanding of the more practically relevant question of how we ought to choose. This is explored in chapter 11.

There are also related questions that are relevant to the central theme of this thesis. However, since the text unfortunately is, in some places, rather technical and dense, I have chosen to place some of the peripheral but relevant discussions in four separate appendices. Hopefully this will emphasise the central theme of this thesis and make the main text an easier read. This way one can read the main text without having to read the appendices, but there is also the option to read the appendices if one wishes to consider some topics further.

2. The Structure of Value Relations

In this chapter I will introduce and clarify certain concepts that will be used throughout this thesis. A theoretical framework for the discussions to take place within will be given. Terms such as "comparable", "incomparable", and "incommensurable" will be given a definition. I will make assumptions about the structure of value relations and finally I will discuss how my work and the assumptions I make relate to other concepts and views within value theory and meta-ethics.

Comparability and Incomparability

This work is meant to specify how two things can be comparable with respect to value. In order to answer such a question it must be clarified what "comparable" means. Traditionally, comparability in value has been defined as follows: two things are comparable if one is better than, worse than, or equally as good as the other. This definition has, however, been rightly questioned by Ruth Chang. As she points out, the "definition presupposes a substantive view about what relations exhaust the conceptual space of comparisons and is not properly part of the basic notion."[20] It is, however, very difficult to give another definition. According to Chang, we have an intuitive notion of evaluative comparability and thus we do not need to depend on a definition such as the one above. She backs this up by asking us to consider someone who believe that for two items to be comparable they must be either better than or worse than each other, and someone else who believes that for two items to be comparable they must either be better than, worse than, or equally as good as each other. These two persons define "comparable" differently, but their dispute seems to be more than a dispute about a definition; it seems to be a substantive disagreement. In fact, intuitively it seems that the first person is wrong in her definition; two items can

[20] Chang (2002a, p. 2).

be related by a third relation. Similarly the second person might also be making a substantive mistake—there could be four, five, six, or even more ways the items could relate. Thus it should be clear that the traditional definition depends too much on the substantive standpoint. So we must resort to our more basic intuitive notion of comparability, but then how are we to capture this intuition?

Let us begin by noting that the definition given above is partly true; if an item is better than another, then these items are comparable. The problem is that it is a substantive issue how many value relations there are. The definition goes wrong when it tries to state *all* the possible relations. It would do better if it only stated that if there obtains *any* value relation between the items, then the two items are comparable. There is, however, a problem with such a definition as well, since even for cases that we intuitively judge to be examples of when there is no comparability, nevertheless, several value relations hold between the items, such as "not worse than", "not better than", and "not equally as good". These relations clearly differ from those that hold when there is comparability in that they express that certain relations do *not* hold. These kinds of relations may be called "negative relations" and their opposite may be called "positive relations". A negative value relation tells us how items are *not* related, while a positive value relation tells us how the items *are* related. It is hard to expound this definition further, but nevertheless there seems to be an intuitive distinction to be made between positive relations and negative relations.[21] From this we can define comparability:[22]

> *Value Comparability:* Two items are comparable if and only if there holds a basic positive value relation between the two items.

It seems natural to define incomparability as the negation of comparability:

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[21] Perhaps something more can be said; when a positive value relation holds between two items, then there is something evaluative or normative to be said about the items. Someone might for example want to say that if one item is better than another then there are reasons for choosing that item over the other; thus there is something normative to be said. Conversely, if no positive value relation holds between two items, then there does not seem to be anything normative to be said. So the distinction between "comparable" and "incomparable" may be possible to spell out in terms of "normativity". But perhaps one may find that negative value relations such as "not better than" also have a normative pull. If so, an attempt of this kind will fail.

[22] Following Chang (2002b, p. 663).

Value Incomparability: Two items are incomparable if and only if there holds no basic positive value relation between the two items.[23]

These definitions also depend on the notion of "basic".[24] This notion is important since it gets the right result in cases such as the following: *x* and *y* are both better than *z*, i.e., there holds a positive value relation between them, nevertheless we judge them to be incomparable. The relation that holds between *x* and *y* is not basic. By this I mean that the value relation can be understood in terms of other value relations, in this case it can be understood in terms of "better than". Just as "much better than" is not a basic value relation since it can be understood in terms of "better than".[25] However, "*w* is much better than *u*" entails that "*w* is better than *u*" so *w* is comparable to *u*, while "*x* and *y* are both better than *z*" does not entail that there holds a basic positive value relation between *x* and *y*.[26]

"Equally as good", "better than", and "worse than" are basic positive value relations. To this it could be objected that "at least as good as" is more fundamental since from this relation and its negation one can define the other three. It is true that such a definition is possible and one can treat "at least as good as" as the basic value relation, but it is hard to see why it would be *more* basic than the other three value relations. For the ease of exposition I will treat "better than", "worse than", and "equally as good as" as basic value relations. It does not matter much, however, which of these camps is right. The issue that is more pressing is whether there are other value relations besides the standard three or, if you prefer, beside "at least as good", that are basic.

Even though these proposed definitions depend heavily on distinctions that are difficult to spell out and consequently may not be as illuminating as one could wish, they have the advantage of leaving open the possibility of positive

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[23] One may, of course, argue that a negative relation is not a relation in the first place. If that is true then the definitions become more straightforward. I owe thanks to Frits Gåvertsson for pressing me to consider this possibility.

[24] Chang does not use the notion of "basic"; according to her, "two items are evaluatively comparable if there is a positive value relation that holds between them and incomparable if there are only negative value relations that hold between them." Chang (2002b, p. 663).

[25] A definition of "much better than" in the terms of "better than" would probably take a form similar to the following. *A* is much better than *B* if and only if *A* is better than *B* and between *A* and *B* there is a long sequence of things ordered by their betterness.

[26] I owe this point of clarification to Wlodek Rabinowicz.

value relations other than the standard three.[27] Hopefully, despite this somewhat unclear definition, the reader is now in a position to grasp what I mean by "comparable" and "incomparable".[28]

It is important to note that the definition given above for incomparability is a technical definition that differs from how we colloquially use the term. In everyday English it might be common to say things such as: "Mozart and Michelangelo are incomparable in terms of creativity!" When we make such a claim we do not mean that there holds no positive value relation between Mozart and Michelangelo. A more reasonable interpretation is that we do not know what to say of their comparative value. This everyday use of the term is consequently closer to the phenomenon of what I refer to as hard cases of comparison. From here on I will only use the term "incomparability" in the technical way defined here.

Incommensurability

So far I have used and defined the term "incomparability". This term needs to be distinguished from the closely connected term "incommensurability".[29] The latter term is often used within philosophy but in many different ways. When the historical use of the concept of incommensurability is discussed in philosophical works, the Pythagoreans are often mentioned. The Pythagoreans held mathematics, and especially whole numbers, to be essential for our understanding of reality. According to them, all quantities and lengths could be expressed in terms of whole numbers and their ratios—these things were commensurable. The Pythagoreans took everything to be commensurable and

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[27] If it turns out that "better than", "worse than", and "equally as good" are the only positive value relations there are, then the proposed definition of "comparability" will have the same scope as the traditional definition. The only difference between the definitions will in such a case be that the new definition is substantively neutral.

[28] I have previously stated that by a value relation I mean a comparative value relation. As Johan Brännmark has kindly pointed out to me, this might make the definition of value comparability a bit thin since all it would say is that two items are comparable if and only if there holds a basic positive value comparative relation between the two items. I am not too worried about this. At least we have learnt that there must hold a basic positive value comparative relation. Furthermore, I do not believe that the definition becomes circular; "comparative" only tells us the form of the relation and is not synonymous to "comparable".

[29] There is also the notion of "incommensurate". This is however not as often applied within philosophical discussions but I take it to mean the same as incommensurable.

therefore it was a fatal blow to their worldview to discover that the diagonal of a square and its side were not. The ratio between these could not be expressed by the ratio of two whole numbers and thus they were incommensurable. The discovery of incommensurability was devastating to the Pythagorean worldview and had the alleged consequence that Hippasus of Metapontum, to whom this discovery is attributed, drowned at sea as a divine punishment.[30] The notion of incommensurability is thus not made to express the fact that no comparison can be made—the diagonal of a square is clearly longer than its side—rather it is used to express that there is no common measure for the comparison to be expressed in terms of.[31]

Thousands of years later, the notion of incommensurability once again came to play an important role within philosophy. This time it was in the field of philosophy of science. In that context, Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend used the notion of incommensurability when discussing the relation between rival scientific theories or, as Kuhn referred to them, paradigms.[32] Two scientific theories are incommensurable when statements in one conceptual scheme cannot be expressed in terms of the conceptual scheme of the other theory. Aristotelian physics, for example, cannot be evaluated or even understood within the conceptual scheme of Newtonian physics. Even if this may be true, the discussions that will follow will not consider this sort of incommensurability. They will assume that we are interested in comparisons within one conceptual scheme.

I will use the term incommensurability when referring to cases in which it could be possible to say that an item is better than another yet it is impossible to say *how much* better it is. This way incommensurability does not rule out the possibility of comparison.[33] A comparison can still be made but the comparison will at most be ordinal. If there is not even a chance of saying how two things relate ordinally, then I will say that the two items are incomparable.[34]

The reason I choose to discuss incomparability and not incommensurability is that I believe it to be a more interesting and serious problem for practical deliberation. The impossibility of determining exactly how much better one

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[30] Von Fritz (1945).

[31] As I will use the notion of incommensurability, the diagonal and the side are in fact commensurable since it can be expressed by an irrational number.

[32] Feyerabend (1962) and Kuhn (1962).

[33] Following the above definition, it even entails it.

[34] This is how I choose to use the terms incomparable and incommensurable, but in the literature one can find examples of philosophers who use them differently.

outcome is than another may lead to problems when we are to make a choice between the outcomes, but it will certainly be even more problematic if we do not know how they relate at all! I thus recognise that incommensurability may lead to problems for practical deliberation but I also believe that, if so, then incomparability will lead to even bigger problems.

Value or Value Bearers

Traditionally there has been a lot of focus on how different values can be related. One such discussion, which may be familiar, is how freedom relates to equality. Some may argue that freedom is better than equality while others may disagree. The disagreement in itself may show that it is hard to compare them. It seems hard to say exactly how freedom relates to equality, and this might be a sign that they are incomparable. Or at least it is doubtful that even more disparate values can be measured on the very same scale, i.e., they might be incommensurable.

Discussions about the incommensurability of values are also prominent in discussions about "trumping" and so-called "superior values". That is, it may seem reasonable that any amount of one value is better than any amount of another value. One explanation for this is that the superior value is infinitely better than the inferior, others might prefer another explanation, they may agree that equality always is be better than freedom, yet they cannot say *how* much better it is. Both values can be measured on separate scales but not on the very same scale, since no matter how much there is of freedom it will never reach the value of equality.[35]

Even though the issue of *values* being incommensurable or even incomparable is interesting, I will focus on comparisons of *bearers* of value rather than the values themselves. So instead of considering how we compare freedom with equality I will consider how we compare, e.g., one country with another with respect to freedom. It may, however, be possible to reduce the talk about comparisons of value to the comparison of value bearers. For example, if two values are incomparable, the bearers of these values will also be incomparable in some respect. Say that equality is incomparable to freedom; this seems to be reducible to the fact that the state of affairs in which there is equality but not freedom is incomparable to the state of affairs in which there is freedom but not

[35] See Griffin (1986) pp. 75–92 for a discussion about trumping in relation to incommensurability.

equality. If this is correct, then the incomparability of value is reducible to the incomparability of value bearers.

As was mentioned earlier, I take discussions about hard cases to have a bearing on questions on how we are to act. When we face choices we often compare the options and not the values, and thus discussion about comparing value bearers is perhaps more important for practical reasoning than the discussion regarding the comparison of values.[36] This is a further reason why I focus on value bearers rather than on the value. It should also be clear that the notion of a value bearer is here very broadly construed since it can refer to options, persons, outcomes, things, and so on.

The Structure of Comparisons

Say that you are to compare a steak with a vegetarian organic dish. These two options can be compared in a number of ways: The price of the steak and the price of the vegetarian option may be such that, in this respect, they are equally good. The steak may taste better than the vegetarian dish. The vegetarian dish may, however, be better when it comes to health considerations. Just as they may be incomparable in some respect, in some other they may be on a par, and in some it may be indeterminate how they relate. So is the steak better, worse, equally good, incomparable, on a par with the vegetarian dish or is it indeterminate how they relate?

When the question is posed liked this, without specifying exactly which of the multitude of possible comparisons is meant, it is hard to give an answer. I would even go as far as to say that the question cannot be made intelligible without specifying whether it is promotion of health, the price, or the taste of the two options that we are to compare, or if it is a combination of all of these respects.[37] Call this the *Requirement for Specification*. One way to satisfy this requirement is to express value relations in the following way "… is better than … with respect to … ". So for example the following comparison satisfies this requirement: "the steak is better than the vegetarian option in terms of taste." Of course the specification need not be made in such an explicit manner. Very often the context in which we make the judgement determines whether we are

[36] By focusing on incomparability rather than incommensurability, and value bearers rather than value I follow the path of research that was commenced by Ruth Chang (1997).

[37] In discussions about value comparisons one often comes across the notion of "all-things-considered". For more on this notion see appendix A.

concerned with the price, the taste, or health and so on, and in those cases there is no need to specify further. Nevertheless, a specification has to be made, either explicitly or implicitly.[38]

It is also important to note that by making such a specification the logical features of our comparatives stay intact. For example, the better-than relation is assumed to be asymmetric, which means that if *A* is better than *B* then *B* is not better than *A*. It is however possible that the steak is better than the vegetarian option in terms of taste and the vegetarian option is better than the steak in terms of health considerations. If we do not specify these aspects, then the "better than" relation will not seem to be asymmetric.

In the discourse of value relations Ruth Chang was the first to argue for the idea that all comparisons must proceed in some specific respect.[39] She introduced the idea of a "covering concept", or as she sometimes calls it, a "covering consideration" or a "covering value".

> I will be assuming that all evaluative comparisons must proceed in some or other evaluative respect(s), what I call a "covering consideration." So, for example, Mozart cannot be better than Michelangelo simpliciter but can only be better in some or other respect(s). Just as all nonevaluative comparisons of more, less, or equal must proceed relative to some covering consideration like length, all evaluative comparisons must be relativized to a covering consideration like beauty, self-interest, or philosophical talent. Without a covering consideration in terms of which a comparison proceeds, a comparison is incomplete; saying that Mozart is better than Michelangelo simpliciter does not tell us whether he is better with respect to chess, spelling, or creativity. Put another way, all (binary) value relations are strictly three-place: X is better than Y with respect to V. Since explicit reference to a covering consideration in every instance is cumbersome, we omit such reference, but an appropriate covering consideration is always implied.[40]

Since Chang's writings about value relations sparked a general interest in the topic of value relations, many followed her in claiming that value comparisons

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[38] Sometimes we may use other terms to express the specification. When saying "the steak is tastier than the vegetarian option" this may, in some contexts, be equivalent to the statement: "the steak is better than the vegetarian option with respect to its tastiness."

[39] See appendix A for a discussion about a possible, and more general, understanding of the requirement.

[40] Chang (2002b, p. 666).

must proceed in some respect. In fact, most people who write on the topic of value relations assume that there is a requirement for specification. Unfortunately, not much work has been done on how we are to understand this requirement. I admit that, as the requirement is characterised, it is rather unclear what sort of requirement it is. It is uncertain what strength it has and what meta-ethical commitments are entailed by it. This topic is not well explored; mostly it is just taken for granted that the comparisons must be specified. I will also make this assumption, but I do investigate some meta-ethical commitments that come with the assumption in appendix A.

However, before moving on I shall try to expound the requirement some more. I believe it is important to consider what it takes to satisfy the requirement, i.e., what can count as a covering concept. Following Chang, the covering concept is meant to specify the evaluative respect in terms of which the comparison should proceed. It is unfortunately unclear what is meant by an "evaluative respect" here. In early writings Chang suggests that the covering consideration must be a value:

> Every comparison must proceed in terms of a value. A "value" is any consideration with respect to which a meaningful evaluative comparison can be made. Call such a consideration the *covering value* of that comparison.[41]

It is important to note that this is not a claim that there is a form of value that Chang calls "covering value". Rather it is a claim that comparisons must specify the relevant value. For example, a covering value could be things such as "tastiness", "beauty", or "conduciveness to happiness".

Some may also find the suggestion that the covering concept must be a value to be problematic; perhaps they doubt whether things such as tastiness and beauty actually are values. There are, however, other reasonable suggestions at hand. It may seem more cautious to claim that the third variable need not be a value but an aspect.[42] By aspects I mean a kind of feature or a kind of property of the things we are comparing. Beauty is one aspect that could be compared; moral considerations, taste, and price are other aspects.[43]

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[41] Chang (2002a, p. 3).

[42] It seems that Chang may have changed her own view. In early writings she stated that the comparison must proceed in terms of a covering value. In later writings she states that they must proceed in terms of some evaluative respect. This view may be the same as the one I am presenting here.

[43] A specific value would of course also be an aspect of the things we are comparing.

A possible worry with this suggestion is that the relation is no longer explicitly a normative relation since the value comparisons could be made with any kind of aspect whatsoever. For example a judgement such as the following will come out as a value judgement: "*A* is better than *B* in terms of length" and some may find this questionable. However, given the right circumstances, I cannot see why this could not be construed as a value relation. When constructing something, a certain plank may be evaluated to be better than another with respect to its length. It is true that when the third variable has to be a covering value the comparison has a clear normative part and, on this other suggestion, this part is lost, but the relation still seems to be normative.

In the above paragraph I mentioned "the right circumstances". This raises another interesting question regarding the requirement. In some circumstances one plank may be better than another with respect to its length, but in another circumstance the opposite may be true. Does this mean that the context should be specified in the covering concept as well? Or are there other requirements above the Requirement for Specification such as a requirement to specify the context? If the first is true, then in order to specify the Requirement for Specification the covering concept needs to be of the following kind: "length when building houses". If the latter is true then "A is better than *B* with respect to length" might satisfy the Requirement for Specification but not the further requirement that requires that we specify the context.

Both of these suggestions seem reasonable, but in the philosophical discussions about value relations most seem to neglect the possible role of the context. They accept something similar to the Requirement for Specification, but do not acknowledge the role of the context. As noted, this disregards the possibility that in one context *A* may be better than *B* with respect to length and in another *B* may be better than *A* with respect to length. At least this troublesome result does not seem to arise for comparisons where the context does not influence the value of the items we are comparing, i.e., it does not arise when we compare the intrinsic value of the items.[44]

The discussion above raises some questions regarding the Requirement for Specification, and it should be clear by now that the topic of covering concepts is very much an uncharted territory. This is unfortunate since it would of course be of tremendous philosophical value to have a greater understanding of the requirement. For this thesis it also means that there is no orthodox view to fall back on. I will not explore this topic further, however, since it would be too vast a task that would shift the focus from hard cases of comparison to the more

[44] I wish to thank Anders Herlitz for pressing me to discuss the role of the context.

abstract matter of the structure of value. Consequently, I will join most philosophers in the field when I choose to disregard the role of the context.

I will, however, take a stand on whether the covering concept should be construed as a value or an aspect. Personally, I believe that the concept must be a value or at least an evaluative concept. That is, value should here be construed as generously as possible; moral values, pragmatic values, aesthetic values, and so on, must all pass as values. The length of the plank is included here since, in the right circumstance, it has a prudential value to us. I will not argue for the claim that the covering concept must be an evaluative concept, since I am not sure how to go about doing so. This is consequently not more than a somewhat qualified guess on my part. I do, however, believe that not much hinges on this assumption.[45]

It should also be made clear that in what follows all comparisons will proceed with respect to a value. In most cases I will specify what covering concept I have in mind, but sometimes I will use the variable *V* as a placeholder for the covering concept. Occasionally, for stylistic reasons, I will omit the covering concept, but nevertheless it should be assumed that the comparison is made with respect to some *V*, unless I make explicit that it is not the case.

Non-Comparability

With the discussion about the Requirement for Specification in mind it is time to return to the issue of incomparability and comparability. First, it may be noted that there probably holds a positive value relation between most things, and therefore most things are comparable in one way or another. So even if Mozart might not be comparable to Michelangelo with respect to creativity, he is certainly better than Michelangelo with respect to composing music. It seems that for any two items it will be possible to come up with a covering concept for which a positive value relation holds between the items in question. If that is the case any two items will be comparable! This means that the definition of comparability and incomparability I have given is of little interest. It is more useful to specify whether two items are comparable with respect to a specific covering concept.

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[45] This assumption becomes most salient when I later on describe the vagueness interpretation of hard comparisons. However, some slight adjustments to the argument in favour of the Vagueness View can be made so that the covering concept might just as well be spelled out as an aspect rather than a value.

Relativised Value Comparability: Two items are comparable with respect to covering concept *V* if and only if there holds a basic positive value relation with respect to *V* between the items.

Relativised Value Incomparability: Two items are incomparable with respect to covering concept *V* if and only if there holds no basic positive value relation with respect to *V* between the items.

Since most of the ensuing comparisons will be with respect to a covering concept, the terms "comparability" and "incomparability" will refer to their relativised forms, i.e., the comparability and incomparability will also be with respect to a covering concept.

It now becomes possible to distinguish a phenomenon similar to incomparability. There seem to be numerous ways in which Mozart may be better than, worse than, or equally as good as Michelangelo, but for other items there might not be that many possible ways in which they can be related. Take for example the colour blue and the number four. There might be some comparisons that can be made between them, but it is hard to come up with such a comparison. To be more specific; it is hard to come up with such a comparison that is meaningful. Some comparisons between them are clearly not meaningful at all. For example how do the number four and the colour blue compare in terms of tastiness? It seems that they are incomparable, but it also seems that they are incomparable in a way that differs from how some would claim that Mozart and Michelangelo are incomparable when we compare their creativity. The reason is that the covering concept in terms of which we are making the comparison is not applicable to both items in the case of blue and four. If both items fail to fall within the domain of the covering concept the items are *strongly non-comparable*.[46]

Strong Non-Comparability: Two items are strongly non-comparable with respect to covering concept *V* if and only if neither of the two items falls under the domain of *V*.

In the definition above, two items are non-comparable if none of the items fall under the domain of the covering concept. It might, however, be enough that one of the two items does not fall under domain for them to be non-

[46] Ruth Chang dubbed this phenomenon "noncomparability". Raz seems to have something similar in mind when he discusses "radical incomparability". Chang (1997, p. 28) and Raz (1986, p. 329).

comparable. For example, the colour blue and a cheesecake might be non-comparable with respect to their taste. Call this *weak non-comparability.*

> *Weak Non-Comparability:* Two items are weakly non-comparable with respect to covering concept *V* if and only if one of the two items does not fall under the domain of *V*.

Since neither number four nor the colour blue falls under the domain of being tasty it does not make much sense to attribute "tasty" to them and thus it is false that blue is better, worse than, or equally as good as number four in terms of tastiness. Things might be different when it comes to weak non-comparability. Some might want to argue that, since the cheesecake is edible, one might be willing to judge that the cheesecake is better than the colour blue with respect to its taste. If this judgement is correct then weak non-comparability is not a form of incomparability. I am, however, hesitant about the claim that the cheesecake tastes better than the colour blue.[47]

Whether non-comparability should be understood as a form of incomparability or not and what role it may play in accounting for hard cases of comparison will be discussed in more detail in the chapter about the Incomparability View.

Meta-Ethical Assumptions

Now when the general framework has been presented it could be a good idea to consider which meta-ethical assumptions the discussions that will follow depend upon. This thesis could probably be said to belong to the field of formal axiology.[48] The field of formal axiology is often assumed to be orthogonal to—and thereby neutral regarding—many of the other disciplines within philosophy that take value as their object of research. I do not, however, believe that my work will be neutral regarding all other questions within value theory. Take for example a consequentialist who states that the right thing to do is that which

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[47] I can see how the fact that the cheesecake has taste tempts us to conclude that it tastes better than blue. But what if the cheesecake tastes awful? In such a case it seems odd to say that it tastes better than blue. I suppose one thus claims that it is worse than the colour blue. Does this mean that something with a neutral taste, such as e.g., water, would taste equally as good as blue? To me this seems absurd.

[48] For more on this label see for example Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen (2003, foreword).

brings about the best consequences and is confused about how to choose in hard cases. Giving the consequentialist the tools for understanding how things may relate will most probably affect the outcome of the choice situation. Thus, the formal axiological issue of which value relations are instantiated has some bearing on a normative issue.

It also seems that some of the views that I will express will not be compatible with certain meta-ethical views. As the field of meta-ethics is vast I shall not, and cannot, consider each possible formulation of each possible view and thus I can only present an overview of what at first glance seems to be compatible or not compatible with the arguments I will present in the continuation of this work.

Meta-ethics is often divided into four subfields: a semantic part, which is concerned with questions regarding the meaning of our normative judgements; a metaphysical part which is concerned with questions concerning the nature of the normative; an epistemological part which deals with how these judgements may be justified; and a psychological part in which the psychological aspects of the normative judgements are considered. In this work I will discuss many of these topics as well. For example, I try to settle which value relations are instantiated. This I take to be a question for which the metaphysical issues within meta-ethics are relevant. I try to answer this question by considering how we use our value terms and in doing so I clearly deal with semantic questions. And, of course, the claim that our value comparatives are vague is a claim about the semantics.

Consequently, many discussions within meta-ethics are relevant to the discussions I will be conducting, but are all meta-ethical positions compatible with the claims I will be making? This is a question that would require too much work to answer. I will only present a conclusion regarding which value relations are instantiated and how we are to understand hard cases, and I leave it to those who are attracted by my position to consider how well my arguments and conclusions fit with their own favourite meta-ethical position.

Personally, I have an inclination towards a realist conception of value and this will probably show in how I formulate myself. This becomes clear when one considers that I wish to explore which value relations are *instantiated* in the world. Such talk seems to fit well with a claim that values are part of the furniture of the world. But that does not necessarily mean that one cannot reformulate my claims and arguments so that the conclusions will be available for other positions as well. For example, "instantiated value relations" could be read as "value relations that we tend to believe to be instantiated" or "value relations that we, through our language, express as being instantiated" or "we behave as if the value relation was instantiated".

Let me give some more examples. I tend to believe that (i) moral claims are attempts to report mind-independent facts and (ii) that these claims can be true if we successfully report the facts.[49] Those who disagree with (i) and/or (ii) might find my methods puzzling, but even if they find the way I express my arguments to be misleading they could still agree with my conclusions. For example, take those who reject (ii). In this thesis, claims such as the following will be reoccurring: "it is neither true nor false that *A* is better than *B*". For some non-cognitivists, who believe that moral sentences are not truth-apt, such a claim will not be very informative. But a non-cognitivist could nonetheless accept my claim that some hard choices are to be understood as cases of vagueness. When faced with the question as to whether *A* is better than *B* with respect to *V*, the emotivist may hesitate. If "better than with respect to *V*" is vague then the emotivist would on some precisifications express her approval of *A* over *B*, and on others she might express her approval of *B* over *A*.[50]

There are of course also positions that reject (i), but endorse something similar to (ii). These will claim that there are moral properties, but that these are not mind-independent. For example, a subjectivist could make a claim such as "it is true that *A* is better than *B* with respect to *V*". But it does not mean that the subjectivist will endorse (i). However, even if (i) is rejected, my conclusions can be accepted. A subjectivist, for example, may, due to vagueness, be indecisive as to which item is the better with respect to *V*. On one precisification of "better with respect to *V*" the subjectivist may prefer one item over another while on a second precisification the opposite may be the case and under a third precisification the subjectivist may be indifferent.

It is hard to pinpoint exactly which meta-ethical assumptions the discussions that will follow depend on. It is of course possible to do so, but since there is such a vast amount of different competing meta-ethical theories it would be too space-consuming to do so. I hope at least that my very brief outline of how the discussion could be understood in some anti-realistic frameworks has compensated for the realism that might shine through in some of my writing. The fact that these discussions often use formulations typical for realists does not entail that this is where we ought to place the discussion.

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[49] What is meant by "mind-independent" is of course not obvious. I shall not try to provide a definition. There are plenty of suggestions within meta-ethics on how claims such as these should be understood.

[50] A non-cognitivist may also accept my claim that the Trichotomy View gives a correct account of some hard cases, i.e., that one of the standard value relations holds but we do not know which one. I take it that such a claim would be interpreted by the non-cognitivist in terms of uncertainty concerning what to feel about, or what to with, the items we are comparing.

Hopefully, the brevity of this discussion is somewhat excused by the fact that my forthcoming arguments do not, as far as I am aware, rely on some meta-ethical position that my opponents would reject. In general, the philosophical discourse on this topic is conducted in terms similar to mine. This is also true for the positions I set out to reject, so no matter what meta-ethical positions are entailed by my use of terms, the opponents of my view use a similar set of terms and consequently their claims entail the same meta-ethical position.

3. Properties of Value Relations

Before considering which value relations are instantiated it could be illuminating to consider the logical features of value relations. In this chapter I will present what I take to be the logical properties of the standard trichotomy of value relations. I will also consider other logically possible value relations. By considering logical properties of value relations one can construct a taxonomy of logical possibilities, which will help us to determine the logical space for different value relations and thereby delineate the various possible relations to consider when determining which value relations are instantiated.

A Relation and its Properties

Relations can have several different properties. I shall focus on six properties: *reflexivity, irreflexivity, symmetry, asymmetry, transitivity,* and *non-transitivity.* I take these to be the most discernible properties for relations.[51] These properties are defined in the following way:

A relation R is:

Reflexive: if and only if, for any item x, x is related to itself by R.
Irreflexive: if and only if, for any item x, x is not related to itself by R.
Symmetric: if and only if, for any two items x and y, if x is related by R to y, then y is related by R to x.
Asymmetric: if and only if, for any two items x and y, if x is related to y by R then y is not related to x by R.
Transitive: if and only if, for any items x, y and z, if x is related to y by R, and y is related to z by R then x is related to z by R.

[51] For an in-depth logical analysis of value relations see Halldén (1957). For an interesting discussion on the role of such an analysis see pp. 19–21 in Halldén (1957).

Non-transitive: if and only if, for some items x, y, and z, x is related to y by R, y is related to z by R, and x is not related to z by R.

From these six properties it might seem as if we can construct the following taxonomy of possible properties of value relations:

(i) transitive, reflexive, and symmetric
(ii) transitive, irreflexive, and asymmetric
(iii) non-transitive, irreflexive, and asymmetric
(iv) non-transitive, reflexive, and symmetric
(v) non-transitive, irreflexive, and symmetric
(vi) non-transitive, reflexive, and asymmetric
(vii) transitive, reflexive, and asymmetric
(viii) transitive, irreflexive, and symmetric

However, we can rule out (vi), (vii), and (viii) from our taxonomy since these are not logical possibilities. In order for something to be asymmetric it must be irreflexive, and therefore there cannot be any relation that has the properties described by (vi) and (vii). Similarly, since no relation can be transitive and symmetric, while being irreflexive, no value relation can have properties such as those described by (viii). This leaves us with (i)–(v).

It must be stressed that these are logically possible properties for relations. This means that (i)–(v) are not value relations in themselves; they are merely properties of logically possible relations and as such they are not normative. What is interesting is whether there are value relations that correspond to each of these logical possibilities. In the remainder of this chapter I will investigate whether there are such basic positive value relations.

Logically Possible Value Relations

One kind of well-known relation that has the properties of (i) is the "equally as good" relation, i.e., this relation is transitive, reflexive, and symmetric. This seems self-evident. If someone, for example, argued that it is not symmetric we would probably say that this person is confused about the application of the term "equally as good" since it seems to lie at the core of the concept that it is symmetric. It is, after all, clearly not intelligible to say "that *A* is equally as good as *B* in terms of *V* and *B* is not equally as good as A in terms of *V*". If one makes

such a claim one must have misunderstood some central part of what it is for two things to be equally as good.[52] So there seems to be at least one basic value relation with the properties of (i). It is hard to conceive of other value relations with these properties, but one such relation may be the relation that holds between two items *x* and *y* if and only if there is a third item that is better than both of them.[53] In a domain in which, for any *x* and *y,* there is something better than both of them, this relation obtains between any *x* and *y* and therefore the relation is reflexive, symmetric, and transitive. However, even if this relation has the properties of (i) it is not a basic positive value relation. We could also of course try to construct a value comparative of this kind. For example, a comparative such as "very much equally as good" could be understood to have these properties, but to say of two things that they are "very much equally as good" seems, at best, to be the very same as saying that the two things are equally as good, or worse, just blatantly confused. Consequently, I believe it is safe to say that it is only "equally as good" that is a basic value relation that has the properties of (i).

Next we can consider which value relations may have the properties of (ii). The basic value relations "better than" and "worse than" seem to be instantiated value relations with these properties. That is, I take these relations to be transitive, irreflexive, and asymmetric. It is hard to deny that they are irreflexive, since something can hardly be better than itself. Similarly, it is hard to deny that they are asymmetric since if they were, then it would be possible for *A* to be better than *B* with respect to *V* and yet *B* could be better than *A* with respect to *V*; but such a claim seems clearly to be confused.[54]

Whether "better than" and "worse than" are transitive or not is, however, more debated. It has been thought for a long time that "better than" is necessarily transitive. As John Broome has pointed out, all comparatives of a genuine predicate are necessarily transitive.[55] Remember how I mentioned that we can form dyadic predicates from monadic predicates. From the monadic predicate "F" we can form the dyadic predicate "more F than". "Better than", I

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[52] Some may want to argue that the relation is not transitive. This possibility will be considered when I discuss (iv).

[53] I owe this example to Wlodek Rabinowicz.

[54] Irreflexivity of course follows from asymmetry.

[55] Broome (2004, p. 61).

claimed, is equivalent to "more good than".[56] All comparatives formed from genuine predicates have this structure and it clearly follows that if *A* is more good than *B*, and *B* is more good than *C*, then *A* is more good than *C*. So "better than" and "worse than" are transitive relations. This has, however, been questioned by Larry Temkin. He claims that, due to the fact that assessments of relative goodness sometimes are "essentially comparative", "better than" need not be a transitive relation.[57] This means that depending on what I compare an object with; different considerations of that object will be more or less weighty. I argue in appendix B that Temkin's argument is not convincing and thus we cannot conclude that these relations are not transitive.[58] I will however return to this issue later on in this chapter.

So "better than" and "worse than" have the properties described by (ii). There are of course more relations with these properties. For example "much better than" just as "very much better than" seem to have such properties. I believe that the list of value relations with these properties is endless. However, these relations can all be understood in terms of more basic value relations such as "better than". This seems for example to be the case with "much better than"; if *A* is much better than *B*, then this entails that *A* is better than *B*. Thus I conclude that there are only two basic value relations with these properties: "better than" and "worse than".

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[56] It should also be noticed that there might be other ways to construct comparatives from monadic adjectives. For example, if we compare two bad objects, one may be better than the other even though it is not obvious that it has more "goodness".

[57] For a full characterisation of "essentially comparative" see Temkin (2012, p. 371). It should also be noted that the relation Temkin discusses is qualified as "all things consider better than in a wide reason implying sense". According to Temkin: "Roughly, on this use, outcome *A* is better than outcome *B*, all things considered, if one would have more reason to prefer *A* to be realized than *B*, from an impartial perspective." Temkin (2012, p. 13).

[58] There is one interesting point to consider. Arguments in favour of a non-transitive betterness relation often have the feature that the context changes from one comparison to another. In one context certain features become more important than others and this can give rise to non-transitivity since the context is not fixed. If value comparisons were always relativised to a specific context then the move from one context to another would not make the betterness relation non-transitive, since transitivity is only assumed to hold if the context to which the relation is relativised remains unchanged. This, once again, raises the question of the role of the Requirement for Specification. If the covering concept includes a specification of the context, then many arguments in favour of a non-transitive betterness relation are blocked.

Non-Standard Relations

Let us now consider the logical properties that are being described by (iii). One relation that has these properties is for example the slightly-better-than relation. The following shows that the relation is not transitive: If *A* is slightly better than *B*, and *B* is slightly better than *C*, then this is compatible with the possibility that *A* is not slightly better than *C*; *A* might be much better. So "slightly better than" is non-transitive. It is also an asymmetric relation since if *A* is slightly better than *B* then *B* cannot be slightly better than *A*. And of course it is an irreflexive relation, since it does not make sense to say that *A* is slightly better than *A*.

"Slightly better than" is probably not the only value relation with these properties. However, even if there are several relations of this kind, they are not basic. We can make sense of them in terms of relations such as "better than" and "worse than". This is at least the case when it comes to "slightly better than" since it can be defined in terms of "better than".[59] I shall therefore move on to consider whether there could be a basic value relation with the properties described by (iii). In doing so Larry Temkin's claims once again become interesting.

Temkin claims that "better than" is not transitive. I believe that it is, but there is of course still a possibility that there is a value concept very much like "better than" which happens to be non-transitive. Let us call this a *non-standard betterness relation*. There is clearly a logical space for both a transitive "better than" relation and a non-transitive relation that is similar to "better than". But this is not enough for us to accept that such a relation is instantiated. It is, however, an interesting position to consider since it is a mediating position between Broome and Temkin; it allows for a transitive betterness relation and relation similar to "better than" that is not transitive. Broome himself has repeatedly argued that "better than" is transitive, it is an analytical feature of "better than" he claims. He does, however, hint at something similar to my suggestion when he admits that one is free to use the term in a way in which it is non-transitive:

> Some authors write as though the transitivity of betterness is an issue in ethics. It is not; it is an issue in semantics. But then, if it is only

[59] In order to show how it is not a basic relation, the following draft of a definition might hopefully suffice: "*A* is slightly better than *B* iff *A* is better than *B* and a small improvement to *B* would make *B* equally as good or better than *A*."

> semantics, how can it matter for ethics? The answer is that we can only understand each other using the meanings we have. True, you could decide to use "better than" with a nonstandard meaning that does not require it to be transitive. But then your "better than" would not mean better than, and it would not be the comparative of any predicate "good". You would say some things are better than others when actually they are not. Consequently, it would be hard for us to understand your ethical conclusions.[60]

What Broome seems to say is that Temkin is free to use the words "better than" to refer to a non-transitive concept, but that Temkin's claims within ethics would be hard to understand since he would be using these words in a non-standard way. The debate between Temkin and Broome is consequently conceived of as a debate about what properties the relation in fact has—is it transitive or not? However, it is interesting to consider the somewhat overlooked third possibility, i.e., that there are two different concepts: the non-standard betterness and the standard betterness relation.

I take it that the major problem with this possibility is, as Broome mentions, that it is hard to know how we should understand the non-standard betterness relation. One finds the claim that "standard" betterness is not transitive to be hard to grasp but at least we are still familiar with the concept of betterness; we know what it means for pairwise comparisons. This non-standard betterness, however, is not the same as the betterness relation, and therefore we are in the dark in understanding what this relation actually means. Of course, we can at least separate them by referring to their logical properties, but let us consider how their normative properties may differ. The following is a rough sketch of how one may go about determining this.

It could be that the two relations are incompatible. Just as "betterness" is incompatible with "equally as good". When one of them holds between two items the other cannot hold. So if one item is non-standardly better than another there cannot hold a standard betterness relation between them. On this interpretation the whole idea of accepting that there are two kinds of betterness becomes rather uninteresting. If they are not compatible, then sometimes items will be related by a standard betterness relation and sometimes items will be related by a non-standard betterness relation, but this seems to amount to the same thing as the claim that there is only a non-standard betterness relation. That is, if there is only the non-standard betterness relation then most of the times this relation does not give rise to circularity, i.e., it behaves just like the

[60] Broome (2004, p. 50).

standard betterness, but other times it gives rise to circularities. If this is the case then there is no need to assume that there are two relations since the non-standard betterness can account for all cases. In other words, this position does not seem to differ much from the position advanced by Temkin.

The more interesting position is that the two relations are compatible. If that is the case an item, *A*, can be standardly better than another item, *B*, and *A* might also be non-standardly better than *B*. However, sometimes the relations may come apart. An item, *C*, may be non-standardly better than another item, *D*, and *D* may be standardly better than *C*. It is interesting to consider the normative implications of these possibilities.

Let us begin by considering what happens in the pairwise comparisons when they do not come apart. So for example: *A* is standardly better and non-standardly better than *B*. What normative significance does this have? I cannot see how such a case would be different from a case in which *A* is only standardly better than *B* and the non-standard betterness relation does not apply at all. It seems odd to claim that the first case has an even stronger normative pull on us than the second case. This could mean that the non-standard betterness relation is silent when the standard betterness relation applies. So the standard betterness relation seems to have a priority over the non-standard betterness relation in these cases.

It is more interesting to consider the cases in which the relations come apart, i.e., when *C* is non-standardly better than *D*, but *D* is standardly better than *C*. Above it was suggested that the standard betterness relation has priority over the non-standard betterness relation. Perhaps this generalises. If it the non-standard relation has no normative pull on us in cases such as the above then it might be normatively silent in the cases when the relations come apart as well. If that is the case, then it is unclear what is gained from assuming that there are two betterness concepts rather than just one. It is, however, doubtful that this is the right way to describe the normative character of these cases. In fact it is rather difficult to understand the normative character of a case in which the two relations come apart. Just as it could be argued that it is difficult to understand "betterness" in the way Temkin proposes it should be understood, it is at least as difficult to understand the claim that "*C* is non-standardly better than *D*, but *D* is standardly better than *C*". In this respect, there is nothing to gain from assuming that there are two different betterness concepts, since this may be just as confusing as claiming that there is only one betterness relation, but the relation is non-transitive.

It seems that the possible position of accepting that there could be two betterness concepts is at least as hard to decipher as the claim made by Temkin.

Without a more in-depth investigation of the possibility that there are two different concepts, no insights are gained from this assumption.[61] I shall therefore assume that there is only one such concept. Furthermore, I shall assume that the relation is transitive.[62] That is, I shall assume that our betterness relation has the properties described by (ii) and not the properties described by (iii), and that there is no reason to believe that there exists a basic value relation with the properties described by (iii).

Non-Standard Equality

Now consider the properties described by (iv). That is, a relation that is non-transitive, reflexive, and symmetric. It seems that a relation with such properties would be similar to "equally as good". There are two possibilities to consider. It could be that "equally as good" actually has these properties and not the properties described by (i) or that there are two "equally as good" relations, one that is transitive and one that is not. The latter possibility is similar to the position discussed above and it seems that it should be rejected on the very same grounds. This leaves us with the possibility that "equally as good" is actually non-transitive.

As has already been noted, I take it that if two items, *A* and *B*, are equally as good with respect to *V*, then they have equally as much of the features that contribute to making the objects good with respect to *V*. This explains why "equally as good" is a transitive relation. If a third item, *C*, is equally as good as *B* with respect to *V*, then they must have equally as much of the properties that contribute to making the objects good with respect to *V*. If "equally as good" is non-transitive then it seems reasonable to conclude that *A*, *B*, and *C* need not have equally as much of the good-making features. It is perhaps enough that they fall within the same range. So *A* and *B* may not have equally as much good-making features but have sufficiently enough, just as *B* and *C* do not have equally as much but sufficiently enough, and thus *A* and *C* need not have sufficiently enough.

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[61] Wlodek Rabinowicz has suggested that his account of value relations could allow for these two concepts of betterness. Perhaps this more developed account has some advantages as compared to just accepting the non-standard betterness relation and rejecting the standard betterness relation as possible instantiated relations. See Rabinowicz (2012, p. 163).

[62] For more on this see appendix B.

Something must be said about what it is for things to be within the same range. To be more specific: it needs to be established what determines whether two items fall within the same range. The idea of ranges is not unfamiliar when it comes to discussions about value relations. Nien-hê Hsieh, for example, has some interesting discussions on this topic.[63] According to him comparisons can be clumpy and this can account for the ranges. He explains the clumpiness in terms of clumpy covering considerations. "A clumpy covering consideration sorts items into classes, or clumps, based upon the degree to which the items possess each of the relevant respects that comprise the covering consideration."[64]

On this account the ranges are determined by the covering consideration. "The clumps into which items are sorted, or belong, might be said to reflect the smallest unit of measurement for purposes of comparison in terms of the covering consideration."[65]

Hsieh discusses the parity relation but the idea of clumpy covering concepts can perhaps be useful when discussing non-transitive equality as well. The covering consideration may sort items into different clumps and these clumps can be ordered so that all items within one clump will be better than items within another and so on. Of course items within a clump will be equally as good with respect to the clumpy covering value. Each clump here thus makes up a range. But since this range is fixed by the covering consideration it cannot explain the non-transitivity of equally as good. The range must be different for each comparison and if that is the case it is hard to see how the concepts of clumps can help us understand the non-transitivity.

I believe that we should reject the claim that "equally as good" is non-transitive. However, it should also be acknowledged that we sometimes treat it as a tolerant predicate, i.e., as if its applicability is not affected by a small change. This could give rise to non-transitivity. If "equally as good" were tolerant and *A* is equally as good as *B* then a small improvement to *A* would leave the relation unaffected. This could give rise to non-transitivity. I believe, however, that the predicate is not tolerant. It is just that we sometimes, somewhat carelessly, apply it as if it were tolerant. If *A* is equally as good as *B* and a small improvement is made to *A*, then *A will* be better than *B*. Of course, sometimes, in certain situations, it does not matter that *A* is better than *B*. The difference between them is negligible and we may therefore state that the improved *A* is equally as good as *B*. However, when pressed on the matter we would be willing to admit

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[63] Hsieh (2005).

[64] Hsieh (2005, p. 184).

[65] Hsieh (2005, p. 184).

that one item in fact is better than the other but that the situation did not demand such a precise comparison.

This leaves us with (v), that is, a relation that is non-transitive, irreflexive, and symmetric. These properties are interesting since those who claim that hard cases of comparison should be understood in terms of a fourth basic positive value relation claim that this relation has the properties described by (v). Perhaps the fact that this relation is symmetric, just like the standard equally as good relation, has made people to refer to it in ways that relate it to the standard equally as good relation. The relation is, for example, sometimes referred to as "roughly equally as good" and "on a par".

Let us assume that there is such a parity relation. Consider the comparison of Mozart and Michelangelo with respect to their creativity. It could be argued that the relation that holds between Mozart and Michelangelo also seems to hold between Michelangelo and Mozart, and therefore it is symmetric. This relation is not reflexive since Mozart is equally as good as himself. Furthermore, the relation seems to be non-transitive. Assume that there is a composer called Mozart^{+}, who is just like Mozart but slightly improved. Even if Mozart is on a par with Michelangelo, and Michelangelo is on a par with a Mozart^{+}, Mozart^{+} is not on a par with Mozart; he is better than Mozart.

Whether there is an instantiated relation with properties such as these will be discussed in the chapter on the Parity View.

Conclusion

By looking at the formal properties of relations, I found several logically possible value relations that differ from the standard three. However, when considering whether there could be some non-standard positive basic value relations that have these properties it was argued that—with the exception of (v)—there is not much that speaks in favour of it. For this reason, if there is a fourth positive basic value relation, beyond the standard three, then this relation most probably has the properties described by (v). It has not been determined, however, that there is such a value relation that is instantiated.

It seems that if we are to look for instantiated value relations, beyond the standard ones that actually are instantiated, we must focus on hard cases of comparison. It is now time to consider the different views available, when it comes to cases of this kind.

4. The Trichotomy View

In this chapter I will consider the possibility that hard cases of comparison are cases in which one of the standard three value relations obtains. I will claim that it is reasonable that some hard cases are of this kind, but—even though it would be of theoretical advantage—this cannot account for all hard cases of comparison.

The Trichotomy View and Hard Cases of Comparison

According to the Trichotomy View some hard cases are cases in which the items are determinately related by one of the standard three value relations, but we fail to know which one of them. To give an example: if I have never heard about Lex Luthor and Clark Kent, then I will find it hard to compare them in terms of moral character, but even if the comparison is hard to make, it is still the case that Clark is better than Lex. Consequently, educating yourself about the things you are to compare can dissolve the hardness in cases such as these. The same explanation might also be applied to the comparison of Mozart and Michelangelo. If we knew more about them and their work, it is possible that we would find it easy to say how they relate with respect to creativity; one would be better than the other or they would be equally as good. The Trichotomy View thus depends on our well-known three value relations in order to account for some of the hard cases of comparison.

The difficulty of comparing items can, however, only be dissolved in some cases. Sometimes it might be impossible to know everything relevant for the comparison and because of this it is hard to make the comparison or perhaps it is even impossible. This could be because the information is *practically* impossible to gain. Let us for example imagine that Max Brod actually did burn all of Franz Kafka's novels and that you are to determine which of the novels he burned is the best one. There does not seem to be any way to determine this and thus it will clearly remain a hard comparison.

There is also a further and more familiar kind of way in which it can be impossible to gain all the relevant information. The impossibility in these cases is due to the fact that the future is epistemologically open. So for example when you are to consider which of two careers will bring the best outcome, the fact that you do not know what the outcome will be, makes the comparison hard.

It is hard to deny that sometimes one of the three standard value relations holds between two items but we do not know which one of them holds. It thus seems clear that we must accept the Trichotomy View; this theoretically parsimonious view can account for some of the hard cases. The somewhat more interesting question is, however, how many hard cases it is applicable to.

What makes the Trichotomy View stand out among the other views is that it claims that for the cases discussed one of the standard three value relations determinately holds, i.e., one of the things that we are comparing is actually better than the other, or they are equally as good. If this were the case for *all* hard cases of comparison, then we would not be forced to make much revision to our conception of value relations and our theories of value in general. Furthermore, we are familiar with the trichotomous relations and thus the account does not need to assume new or somewhat obscure concepts in order to account for the hard cases.

It is therefore interesting to consider whether the Trichotomy View can account for *all* hard cases of comparison. The most well-known proponent of the idea that one of the trichotomous value relations always obtains is probably Donald Regan.[66] Many of his claims are similar to those mentioned above, but he also notices that it is hard to come up with an explanation as to why things cannot be related by one of the standard three value relations. According to Regan, "[c]omparisons between goods of the same kind are relatively unproblematic."[67] Just as Regan claims, it seems true that having an extensive knowledge of some interesting topic is more valuable than an insignificant knowledge of the same topic. More interesting are comparisons between different things. It may seem that comparing extensive knowledge of an interesting topic with friendship could be an example when none of the standard value relations obtains. However, as Regan rightly points, out the mere fact that we are comparing different things should not cause a worry.

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[66] This is not the claim that everything is related in value by *some* covering concept. But rather the stronger claim that the hard cases of comparison are not to be understood in terms of the Incomparability View, the Parity View or the Vagueness View.

[67] Regan (1997, p. 134).

> Imagine that what we are comparing is a deep and passionately committed knowledge of beetles, such as might result from a life's study, and a modestly rewarding but not especially intimate friendship, such as any fortunate person can expect to have a goodly number of. Whatever our worries about how comparisons of value are possible between such different things, do we really doubt that the knowledge of the beetles is more valuable?[68]

It seems very reasonable that the *mere* difference cannot explain why the standard value relations might not obtain. A good exemplar of its kind will for most cases be better than a bad exemplar of another kind even though the things may be very different.[69] It may, however, be thought that for less extreme comparisons the difference can have this effect. For example, it might be thought that two modestly successful lives in two different careers could be such an example, but according to Regan there is no explanation as to why that would be the case:

> Why should it not be so, that a particular middling-successful life as a clarinettist must be either better than, equal in value to, or worse than a particular middling-successful life as a corporate lawyer? The failure of comparison cannot be attributed to the *general* impossibility of intertype comparisons; that has already been abandoned. Nor does it seem that the failure of comparison can result from an insufficient fine-grainedness in the value scales. If we are comparing various lives-as-a-clarinettist with each other, it seems we can imagine gradations in value as small as we like (including gradations much smaller than it would normally be worth worrying about in practice, but that is a quite different point). The same is true of lives-as-a-corporate-lawyer. So if *some* comparisons are possible between particular lives-as-a-clarinettist and particular lives-as-a-corporate-lawyer, and if the scales of value within each type of value are indefinitely fine-grained, why should it not be possible in principle, however difficult in practice, to make indefinitely fine-grained

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[68] Regan (1997, p 134). A more convincing example might be a comparison between an important friendship and shallow knowledge of some trivial topic.

[69] Granted that there is a covering concept that applies to them both.

> comparisons between the two types of lives, so that any life-as-a-clarinettist and any life-as-a-corporate-lawyer are comparable? [70]

It seems reasonable to accept that the Trichotomy View can account for *some* of the hard cases of comparison. It can, however, *pace* Regan, be questioned whether it can explain *all* hard cases. The most straightforward way to object to the claim that the Trichotomy View can account for all hard cases would be to present a case in which we have full knowledge and yet we would not affirm that one of the standard three relations holds. In such a case, the view cannot account for all comparisons and an explanation must be sought elsewhere. But of course this line of objection depends on coming up with a case in which we have full knowledge and yet we find that none of the standard value relations obtains. This is not an easy task, but I will get back to such an objection when discussing the Parity View. Instead, let me present what I take to be the biggest problem with the claim that the Trichotomy View can account for all hard cases.

What I take to be the most serious drawback with the account is that it does not seem to fit well with how we experience all hard cases. We do not always identify the hardness with lack of information. In fact we do not always acknowledge that one item is at least as good as the other, but we just do not know which. Rather, we often seem to believe that it is not true that one of the items is at least as good as the other. It thus seems that this account of hard cases must also explain how it can be that we systematically make this mistake (since it is a mistake given the Trichotomy View).[71] This is of course possible, but such an explanation might make the claim that the Trichotomy View can account for all hard cases less attractive, since it might make the view more theoretically burdensome. For reasons such as these I think it is safe to conclude that the idea that the Trichotomy View can account for all value comparisons is overly naïve.

Setting aside the implausible claim that one of the standard value relations determinately obtains in *all* hard cases of comparison, I take the more reasonable claim that it can account for *some* comparisons to be a good benchmark for the other accounts of hard cases: in order for them to be taken seriously, they should not do worse than the Trichotomy View. That is, they must be able to account for hard cases for which we doubt that an account in terms of ignorance about which standard relation determinately applies suffices. Furthermore, I take it that it is not enough to say, for example, that these are cases of incomparable;

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[70] Regan (1997, p. 135). This is just one of several considerations that Regan mentions as to why we should believe that there is always full comparability.

[71] This objection is mentioned by Chang (2002b, p. 671).

one must also explain this incomparability. Preferably the explanation should be made in terms of some well-known phenomenon, just as the Trichotomy View employs the phenomenon of ignorance and our standard value relations. Additionally, a desirable feature of the other views is that they should require little revision of philosophical theories.

I take this to be a good point of departure. As has already been discussed, the narrative of this thesis will focus on parsimony and explanatory power. I have now started with the view that assumes as little as possible, the most theoretically parsimonious view, and we must now see how much deviation we need in order to account for all cases of comparison. With these guidelines in mind I will commence by considering the Vagueness View, but first the phenomenon of vagueness must be thoroughly expounded.

5. Vagueness

Imagine that, by counting each hair on people's heads, we could order them by how bald they are, starting with someone who is very hairy and ending with someone who has no hair whatsoever. This way we have a spectrum of people such that those at the top of the spectrum will not be bald, and those at the bottom will be bald. But what are we to say about Harry who is situated somewhere in the middle of the spectrum? Is it true or false that Harry is bald? The fact that "bald" is vague makes it hard to answer that question. As our language is vague, difficulties of this kind are to be expected. It is my conviction that it is the same kind of difficulty that we face in many hard cases of comparison. That is, for those hard cases of comparison that cannot be explained in terms of ignorance, I believe that vagueness plays the central explanatory role. I will argue for this claim throughout the remainder of this thesis. It is not obvious, however, how we are to understand vagueness. Therefore, before moving on to arguing for the Vagueness View, I shall in this chapter briefly state what I take vagueness to be.

Its Features

When discussing vagueness it is common to highlight the fact that vague predicates have three interrelated features: They admit borderline cases, they lack sharp boundaries, and they are susceptible to sorites. Consider the classic example of "is bald". This predicate seems to have all these features. Harry is a borderline case of "is bald" since it is not obvious whether he is bald or not bald—he is not determinately bald and not determinately not bald. Even if we know exactly how many hairs Harry has on his scalp it is still not obvious whether he is bald or not; so this is not an epistemic phenomenon.[72] It is also the

[72] As I will mention later on, some actually do believe that vagueness in fact is an epistemic phenomenon, but at least it is not a clear case of standard ignorance.

case that "is bald" lacks sharp boundaries. That is, its extension is not well defined. We cannot draw a sharp boundary between those who are bald and those who are not.

These two features are more than interrelated. If the possibility of borderline cases did not exist it is hard to see how there could be vague boundaries; i.e., if things are either determinately *F* or determinately not-*F*, *F*'s extension seems to be well defined.

"Is bald" is, like all vague predicates, susceptible to sorites arguments. Sorites arguments are a class of arguments in which one, through a certain pattern of reasoning, arrives at a paradoxical conclusion. In the paradigmatic example one starts out with two premises; according to the first, R1, one grain of sand is not a heap, according to the second, R2, the addition of one grain of sand cannot turn something that is not a heap into a heap. From R1 and R2 it is concluded that two grains of sand are not a heap. If we apply R2 once again we can conclude that three grains of sand are not a heap. Similarly, if we apply R2 n times we can conclude that $n+1$ grains of sand are not a heap. This is the paradoxical result, since, for some number n, $n+1$ grains of sand clearly are a heap. Our example with bald is susceptible to this kind of reasoning as well: Adding one hair to the scalp of someone who is bald can hardly make that person not bald. But if this line of reasoning is repeated, then we will eventually arrive at some person who is clearly not bald.

Hopefully, being aware of these three features of vague predicates can be helpful in distinguishing vague predicates from other predicates and understanding what it is for a predicate to be vague.

Ontic or Semantic?

I will mostly discuss indeterminacy due to semantic vagueness. Semantical vagueness must be distinguished from ontic vagueness; that is vagueness that is not to be found in our language but in our world. In other words, if we could precisify our language, then it could still be the case that a sentence can be indeterminate in the way that it is susceptible to sorites and the reason for this is that the sentence is ontically vague.[73]

Paradigmatic examples of vagueness in the world include objects such as clouds, mountains, but also persons, and lately examples from microphysics have

[73] This characterisation is in line with Barnes (2010).

emerged. These examples all seem to have the existence of fuzzy borders in common. For example, the border of the cloud seems fuzzy; there is no sharpness to it. The problem, however, with many of these paradigmatic examples of ontic vagueness is that it is hard to separate them from semantic vagueness. The following example from Elizabeth Barnes may however make the difference more clear:

> [S]uppose that the proposition "Daniel is bald" is vague. As things stand now, "Daniel is bald" is indeterminate. But now suppose that we were able to fully precisify the truth conditions of the predicate "is bald" – bald, under an admissible precisification, comes to mean "has less than 846 hairs". Further suppose, however, that Daniel has 845 hairs very firmly attached to his scalp, and one hair which is teetering on the brink, about to be dropped – that is, imagine a scenario in which it's indeterminate exactly how many hairs Daniel has. We now have a fact of the matter about what "bald" means, and we know that Daniel will fall under its extensions if and only if he has less than 846 hairs. The trouble is: there seems to be no fact of the matter about how many hairs Daniel has.[74]

Examples such as the one above might not convince everyone. Indeed, the very idea of ontic vagueness is controversial. Bertrand Russell had, for example, the following to say on the topic of ontic vagueness:

> There is a certain tendency in those who have realized that words are vague to infer that things also are vague. We hear a great deal about the flux and the continuum and the unanalysability of the Universe, and it is often suggested that as our language becomes more precise, it becomes less adapted to represent the primitive chaos out of which man is supposed to have evolved the cosmos. This seems to me precisely a case of the fallacy of verbalism—the fallacy that consists in mistaking the properties of words for the properties of things. Vagueness and precision alike are characteristics which can only belong to a representation, of which language is an example. They have to do with the relation between a representation and that which it represents. Apart from representation, whether cognitive or mechanical, there can be no such thing as vagueness or precision; things are what they are, and there is an end of it. Nothing is

[74] See Barnes (2010, p. 605). The notion of "admissible precisification" will soon be made clear.

> more or less what it is, or to a certain extent possessed of the properties which it possesses.[75]

Many seem to share Russell's view on ontic vagueness. Sceptics of ontic vagueness often back up their views by referring to Gareth Evans's article *Can There Be Vague Objects?,* in which he gives a technical argument for the conclusion that vagueness must be due to language and not the world.[76] Personally I am sceptical as regards the phenomenon of ontic vagueness for the simple reason that I find it hard to fully grasp it. I am inclined to agree with David Lewis when he writes:

> The only intelligible account of vagueness locates it in our thought or language. The reason it's vague where the outback begins is not that there's this thing, the outback, with imprecise borders; rather, there are many things, with different borders, and nobody has been fool enough to try to enforce a choice of one of them as the official referent of the word 'outback'. Vagueness is semantic indecision.[77]

Lately, however, philosophers seem to have become more accepting of the idea of ontic vagueness. Evans's argument has been questioned and accounts of ontic vagueness have been given so that it becomes less opaque. Given this development we should perhaps not reject outright the existence of ontic vagueness. I will not take a stand on this issue. However, I will reject the radical idea that *all* vagueness is due to the world. Such a position seems overly radical and is probably rejected by most. I believe that the existence of semantic vagueness is all that needs to be assumed in order to account for those hard cases of comparison that are not due to ignorance. So even if ontic vagueness exists, this fact should not affect my conclusion. And if it turns out that ontic vagueness plays a more central role than I tend to think, then much of my arguments can probably incorporate ontic vagueness as well.[78] Consequently, in the continuing discussion I will focus on semantic vagueness.

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[75] Russell (1923, p. 84).

[76] Evans (1978).

[77] Lewis (1986, p. 212).

[78] Of course, this all depends on what theory of ontic vagueness one adopts. To begin with one must embrace a theory that preserves classical logic. For such an account see Barnes (2011) and Barnes & Williams (2010).

Theories of Vagueness

Now, when the features of vagueness have been presented, one can move on to consider different theories of vagueness. This will be necessary in order to make more discerning claims about hard cases as cases of vagueness. There are several theories of vagueness, i.e., theories that give a logic and semantics of vague language. Most notably there is the many-valued logic approach to vagueness, the epistemicism, and supervaluationism.

There are several kinds of many-valued logic. On some accounts there are three truth-values: true, false, and neutral. This means that the laws of classical logic have to be abandoned. Most noteworthy the law of excluded middle is no longer a tautology.

Then there are many-valued logic accounts in which those statements that are fully true can be represented by the number 1 and those that are fully false can be represented by 0. The truth-value of a vague statement can then be represented by a real number in-between 0 and 1. Besides rejecting classical logic, there are further problems with truth-functionality. Assume that the negation of a statement reverses the truth-value so that if the truth-value of p is n then the truth-value of "not-p" is $1-n$. Now, if "X is tall" has a truth-value of 0.5 then it follows that "X is not tall" has a truth-value of 0.5. Let us also assume that "Y is tall" has a truth-value of 0.4. Then "X is tall and Y is tall" has the same truth-value as "X is not tall and Y is tall". However, the latter clearly seems false: How can Y be tall if X is not tall? Thus the truth-value of the latter should not be the same as the former.[79] Similarly, "X is tall or tall" will have the same truth-value as "X is tall or not tall".

Epistemicism on the other hand does better in that it does not conflict with classical logic. According to epistemicism, vagueness is ignorance about where the extension of the predicate falls. That is, for some x, we do not know whether x is F or not-F, but it is clearly F or not-F. So, for example, we do not know whether Harry is hairy or not, but he is clearly hairy or not hairy. Epistemicism has the advantage that it leaves classical logic intact and can explain the concept of vagueness in the familiar terms of ignorance. Many, however, find it to be too counterintuitive, since it supposes that there in fact are sharp borders for predicate extensions. It may seem absurd that there is an exact number of hairs such that someone is bald with this number of hairs but if they had one more hair they would not be bald. In his *Vagueness* Timothy Williamson does a good

[79] Keefe (2000, p. 96).

job in trying to explain this peculiarity.[80] Nevertheless, I shall not rely on epistemicism in order to account for vagueness since I believe that there are better theories at hand. That said, it should also be acknowledged that if epistemicism is the correct theory then my claims regarding the space for value relations still seem to hold. The Vagueness View combined with epistemicism seems to reduce to the Trichotomy View, since for those hard cases of comparison that are due to vagueness it is nevertheless the case that one of the standard three value relations determinately obtains, we just do not know which one.

Supervaluationism

Even though vague predicates do not have precise extensions we still have some idea of when they determinately apply and when they do not. Some people are clearly tall and others are clearly not tall. For example, under all reasonable interpretations of "tall" Michael Jordan will clearly be tall. On the other hand, for a borderline tall person, Mr Average, there are some admissible interpretations or, as I will refer to it from now on, admissible *precisifications* or admissible *sharpenings,* of "is tall", for which Mr Average will be tall and some for which he will not be tall. These are the key parts in the supervaluationist account of vagueness advanced by Kit Fine.[81]

According to supervaluationism, a sentence is "supertrue" if it is true on all its admissible sharpenings, it is "superfalse" if it is false on all its admissible sharpenings. When a vague predicate, *p*, is applied to a borderline case it will not come out as supertrue or superfalse but as neither true nor false, i.e. supervaluationism allows for truth-value gaps. Or to phrase it somewhat differently: for the borderline case it will not be determinately true that *p* nor will it be determinately false that *p* but it will be indeterminate whether *p* or not *p*.

I have said that the sharpenings must be *admissible*. This means that they must be consistent with ordinary language use. A part of this is to respect *penumbral connections.* Even though it may be indeterminate whether a statement is true or false, some logical relationships between statements may nevertheless be determinately true. For example, it may be indeterminate

[80] Williamson (1994).

[81] Fine (1975).

whether Mr Average is tall or not, just as it is indeterminate whether Mr Average$^+$ is tall or not, but it is determinately true that Mr Average$^+$ is taller than Mr Average. Consequently, a sharpening in which Mr Average comes out as tall but Mr Average$^+$ is not tall is not an admissible sharpening.

Since supervaluationism allows for truth-value gaps, the principle of bivalence, i.e., the logical principle that each statement is either true or false, has to be rejected. However, I take this to be a good feature of supervaluationism, since our intuitions about borderline cases seem to support this. The law of the excluded middle is, however, maintained, since it is true that "*p* or not-*p*" even if it is neither true nor false that "*p*", on sharpenings on which *p* is true "not-*p*" will be false and vice versa. So on all sharpenings it will be true that "*p* or not-*p*" and this essential law of classic logic is preserved.[82]

This is not to say that supervaluationism does not also come with some problems. For example some rules of inference such as contraposition and *reductio ad absurdum* are not always valid. The reason for this is that, according to supervaluationism, just because a statement is not true it does not follow that it is false.[83]

A perhaps even more troublesome worry concerns truth-value shifts. According to some, supervaluationism gives an unreasonable interpretation of "or" and "there is". It is absurd, they claim, that "*x* is *F* or *G*" is true when *x* is a borderline case of *F* and *G*. How could that be considering that *x* is not clearly *F* nor clearly *G*, they ask.

Bertil Rolf even claims that supervaluationism changes the meaning of the existential quantifier. He asks us to consider the following sentence: "There is a number, *n,* such that Tom was bald when he had *n* hairs but not when he had *n*+1 hairs." As Rolf notes, this sentence is true according to supervaluationism, yet we would normally reject such a claim since it is odd to say that there is such a number.[84] It seems that supervaluationism treats "there is"-statements differently from how we usually treat such statements; supervaluationism gives "there is" different truth-conditions than we normally say it has; it changes the meaning of the existential quantifier and this is not something that we want from a theory of vagueness.[85]

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[82] By respecting the penumbral connections supervaluationism presupposes that the sharpening of "*p*" and "not-*p*" are not independent.

[83] For a discussion of how these problems could be solved see Keefe (2000, p. 179).

[84] Rolf (1981, p. 129).

[85] On the standard interpretation of the existential quantifier, a sentence such as "there is some *x* such that *x* is *F*" is true iff predicate *F* is true of some *x*. This is not the case according to supervaluationism since "there is some *n* such that n is the largest number of hairs compatible

Unfortunately, I cannot provide a reply to this objection against supervaluationism.[86] All that can be said is that the cost of accepting supervaluationism seems to be much smaller than accepting any of its rival theories. The focus in this thesis will not be on theories of vagueness, but on vagueness itself. Since it does better than other proposed theories I shall stick to supervaluationism and try to make sense of the hard cases of comparison using it.

When discussing different theories of vagueness one further possibility presents itself. One may want to argue that if *x* is a borderline case of *F*, then it is false that *x* is *F* and false that *x* is not-*F*. It may after all seem natural to claim that it is false that Mr Average is tall and false that he is not tall. This theory of vagueness is interesting since it gives us an opportunity to reinterpret claims made by the adherents of the Parity View. As I will argue later on, a fourth possible positive value relation such as parity is very hard to distinguish from vagueness. The most obvious difference seems to be that when there is parity, it is false that any of the trichotomous relations holds, and when there is vagueness it is indeterminate which of the trichotomous relations holds. But as just noted, this could be compatible with parity being a form of vagueness if we accept the theory of vagueness just presented. However, adherents of the Parity View will also claim that not only is it false that the standard three relations hold in hard cases of comparison, but it is also true that they are on a par. The latter part of this claim might be difficult to incorporate into a theory of vagueness and consequently it might be difficult to reinterpret the Parity View so that it is construed as a theory of vagueness.

Second-Order Vagueness

Something also needs to be said about the phenomenon of *second-order* vagueness. If there is vagueness, then there are borderline cases of predicates such as *F*. There are things that are clearly *F*, other things are clearly not-*F*, and others that are not clearly *F* nor clearly not-*F*. But there can also be borderline

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with one being bald" can be true even though there is no *n* for which the predicate "is the largest number of hairs compatible with one being bald" is true.

[86] The objection is similar to the problem I posed for epistemicism. There is, however, one very important difference. Epistemicism entails that there is such a sharp border. Supervaluationism on the other hand entails that the sentence expressing such a belief is true. That is, supervaluationism seems to get the wrong truth-value in these cases.

borderline cases; for one item it is not obvious whether it falls within the zone of clearly *F* or in the zone of borderline *F*. For some patches of colour it is not obvious whether it is clearly red or if it is borderline red. So it can be indeterminate whether something is clearly *F* or not clearly *F* nor clearly not-F. That is, it can be indeterminate where the indeterminacy begins. These borderline borderline cases could be understood in terms of vagueness, i.e., there is a second-order zone of vagueness. In fact the above reasoning could be iterated, there could be borderline borderline borderline cases, and so on, and this leaves open the possibility of even higher orders of vagueness.

It may seem that supervaluationism fails to encompass the phenomenon of second-order vagueness. That is, it may seem that it is either the case that a sentence is true on all admissible precisifications or it is not true on all admissible precisifications. So the sentence is either vague or precise and thus there is no room for higher-order vagueness. But this is only the case if we assume that there is a determinate set of admissible precisifications. There could be precisifications for which it is indeterminate whether they are admissible or not and thereby it could be vague whether a sentence is vague or precise. In other words, if "admissible precisification" is vague, then there will also be room for second-order vagueness.[87] And as Rosanna Keefe points out there are good reasons to expect "admissible precisification" to be vague:

> [T]he notion [admissible precisification] corresponds to "acceptable way of making all expressions precise", and it is natural to expect vagueness over what counts as acceptable here. For example, it is acceptable to make "tall" precise by drawing a boundary at 6 feet 0 inches but not by drawing one at 5 feet 0 inches, and there is no point between these two heights which determinately marks a point of sudden change from being an acceptable boundary to an unacceptable one.[88]

The phenomenon of vagueness has now been introduced and I have presented what I take to be the best theory of vagueness. I can move on to discuss why I believe that those hard cases of comparison that are not due to ignorance are to be understood in terms of vagueness.

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[87] Similarly epistemicism about vagueness claims that second-order vagueness is ignorance about when we are ignorant.

[88] Keefe (2000, p. 203).

6. The Vagueness View

In this chapter I will present an argument in favour of the Vagueness View. It will be argued that the Vagueness View can account for some hard cases of comparison without making excessive assumptions and revisions within value theory.

An Argument for the Vagueness View

The best argument for the Vagueness View is straightforwardly simple. The Vagueness View can explain hard cases of comparison by referring to a well-known phenomenon, namely vagueness. Furthermore, the features of vagueness seem to be similar to the features of hard cases of comparison—there seems to be a good fit. These are the two main claims that the argument for the Vagueness View is dependent on.[89]

The argument starts out with the observation that our language sometimes is vague. This is an observation that seems impossible to refute. As already noted, vague predicates admit borderline cases, they lack sharp boundaries and they are susceptible to the sorites paradox. It is hard to deny that there are predicates that have these features. Predicates such as "is bald", "is tall", "is rich", and "is a heap" are clearly vague.[90] It is easily shown that they have the three features mentioned. As already mentioned, this is the case with the predicate "is bald": There is no exact number of hairs that is the maximum for someone to be correctly called bald. So the predicate lacks a sharp border. And some persons are borderline cases of being bald, if they had a few more hairs we would not call them bald and if they had a few less we would be willing to call them bald.

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[89] For another explanation and defence of the Vagueness View that takes a similar form to what I am about to present see Elson (2014c).

[90] Bertrand Russell gave the following humorous explanation as to why there is vagueness: "whatever vagueness is to be found in my words must be attributed to our ancestors for not having been predominantly interested in logic." Russell (1923).

Furthermore, with vague predicates we can construct sorites. It seems true that if a man with *n* hairs is bald then so is a man with *n*+1 hairs. If we start out with a bald man, then adding one hair to his scalp will not make it the case that he ceases to be bald. But if we repeatedly add one hair to his scalp we will arrive at the result that a very hairy man is bald.

From this it seems hard to deny that there are vague predicates. And where there is vagueness there can be indeterminacy. Let us return to the borderline bald person. For this person the predicate does not seem to determinately apply nor does it seem to determinately not apply. For this reason we say that it is indeterminate whether the person is bald or not. It is neither true nor false that he is bald, just as it is neither true nor false that he is not bald. Similarly, according to the Vagueness View, some hard cases of comparison are cases in which it is indeterminate which value relation that applies; it is neither true nor false that Mozart is better than Michelangelo, just as it is neither true nor false that Mozart is worse than Michelangelo and neither true nor false that they are equally as good.

However, the step from monadic predicates to comparatives must be made clearer. Perhaps comparatives cannot be vague. This is something Derek Parfit seems to suggest when he claims that the concept "good" is vague but the concept "better than" is not, just as "tall" is vague but the concept "taller than" is not.[91] It may be true that one cannot just assume that if the monadic predicate is vague then so must the comparative be; a vague monadic predicate may not always guarantee that its corresponding comparative is vague. Just because "is tall" is vague it does not follow that "taller than" is vague.[92] But even if it is true, it is not enough to cast doubt on the claim that comparatives can be vague. A simple example should be enough to establish that comparatives can be vague.

Consider the comparative "is balder than". When comparing the baldness of two persons it is not just the number of hairs that is important. It is true that this plays a part, but so does the distribution of the hairs, their thickness, and so on. Just as there is no exact border for how many hairs one needs to have in order to not be bald, there might not be an exact function of how these different dimensions of "balder" are to be weighed. Say that Harry is bald. There can be persons that have more hairs, thicker hair, and more evenly distributed hairs

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[91] Parfit (2014b).

[92] The example may be poorly chosen since "taller than" may very well be vague, due to the fact that it may be indeterminate exactly what we should compare. If Alf shaved his head, he and Beth may be equally as long. However, Alf has bigger hair than Beth, so if we are to include the hair then Alf is taller than Beth. On the other hand, Beth wears high heels, and if she kept them on she would be taller than Alf. This illustrates how "taller than" can be vague.

than Harry. Harry will clearly be balder than this person. Similarly, there could be persons that are balder than Harry. But then there could also be borderline hairy persons, persons that are not clearly balder than Harry and who Harry is not clearly balder than, nor clearly equally as bald as. That is, the comparative admits borderline cases and there are no sharp boundaries as to when someone is balder than Harry. The comparative is also susceptible to sorites: If a person is balder than Harry, then adding a hair, replacing a hair so that his hairs become more evenly distributed, or making the hairs minimally thicker, will not change the fact that this person is balder. Nevertheless, by repeatedly adding a hair, replacing a hair so that the hairs become more evenly distributed, and making hairs minimally thicker, we will end up with a person that is not balder than Harry.

This shows that comparatives can have the three distinguishable features of vagueness. The case above has one further interesting feature in common with many vague comparatives; it is multidimensional. This means that there are several different dimensions that are important when attributing the comparative. In the case of "is balder than", there is for example the number of hairs, their distribution, and their thickness. Just as, e.g., "is larger than" is multidimensional in that one might have to consider length, height, and width when determining whether an object is larger than another.

This multidimensionality can explain why it may be indeterminate whether the comparative applies or not. Consider for example a person who is borderline balder than Harry. Let us call him Baldwin. For each dimension of "balder" there might be a determinate answer to how Baldwin relates to Harry. Baldwin may have more hair than Harry. Harry on the other hand has better distributed hairs. Their hairs are, however, equally as thick. If "balder" was a one-dimensional comparative that only depended on one of these factors, there would have been a determinate answer to how Baldwin and Harry relate. But "balder" is a multidimensional comparative that takes all of these factors into account, and if it is indeterminate how these different dimensions are to be weighed then it will be indeterminate how Harry and Baldwin relate with respect to "balder". Note that this fits well with supervaluationism. On some sharpenings of "balder than" one dimension is more important and therefore given more weight than the others. So for example, on one admissible sharpening of "balder than" Harry may be balder than Harry because he has fewer hairs than Baldwin. On another sharpening, Harry may not be balder than Baldwin, due to the way his hairs are distributed. Because of this it is not supertrue nor superfalse that Harry is balder than Baldwin.

As a side note: even though I believe that multidimensionality is central in understanding many cases of vague comparatives it need not be the only explanation of the vagueness of some comparatives. As Luke Elson highlights, some comparative vagueness may be derivative of vague monadic predicates:

> Say that a is "heap-richer" than b if a owns more heaps than b. Sarah has twenty clear heaps, and no other piles of sand. Sally has fifteen clear heaps, ten borderline-heaps, and no other piles of sand. It is vague how many heaps Sally has, and so it is vague which of them is heap-richer: if Sally has less than twenty heaps, then Sarah is heap-richer than Sally; if Sally has twenty heaps, then Sarah and Sally are equally heap-rich; if Sally has more than twenty heaps, then Sally is heap-richer than Sarah.[93]

Vague Evaluative Predicates

It is now established that our language is vague and that even comparatives can be vague. Furthermore, when studying our language we realise that there are plenty of predicates that behave as "is bald" and "is balder". Thus it cannot be denied that vague predicates are common in our everyday language. This is the first step of the argument. It could, of course, be denied that there is vagueness in the evaluative realm. It is, however, hard to see why that would be the case. Take an evaluative predicate such as "is well-functioning". This predicate is clearly vague since it lacks sharp boundaries, allows for borderline cases and is susceptible to Sorites. Some coffee makers are clearly well-functioning; they produce hot and tasty coffee quickly, others are not well-functioning; they take forever and produce cold and hideous coffee. Then there are some coffee makers that are borderline cases. These produce warm but not, as you prefer it, hot coffee and the taste is all right but not as sharp as you would prefer.

This should be enough to establish that there is vagueness in the evaluative realm, but it is also interesting in that it illustrates how vagueness can be transmitted. "Is hot" is clearly a vague predicate and if the correctness of ascribing "is well-functioning" to a coffee-maker depends on whether we would say that the coffee it makes is hot or not, then it seems that the vagueness can be transmitted from the non-evaluative to the evaluative. So if we accept that

[93] Elson (2014c).

purely non-evaluative predicates can be vague, then we should accept that evaluative predicates can be vague.

Vagueness and Hard Cases

Monadic evaluative predicates can be vague and so can evaluative comparatives. When arguing for the latter claim it will be made clear what role the Requirement for Specification plays for the adherents of the Vagueness View. We should not just simply say that Mozart is better than Michelangelo; we have to specify in which respect we are to compare them. Say that we are to compare them with respect to their creativity. This covering concept is clearly multidimensional. There are numerous ways in which one can be creative, and as the above reasoning has shown us this opens up for vagueness, as it may be indeterminate how these different dimensions should be weighed. Consequently, it is indeterminate whether Mozart is better, worse, or equally as good as Michelangelo with respect to creativity; it is not true that one is better than the other nor that they are equally as good, and because of this we find the comparison to be hard. So the requirement for specifying a covering concept is helpful for the proponents of the Vagueness View since it allows them to explain neatly where the vagueness in located. That is, it is not enough to say that "A is better than *B*"; we must say with respect to what it is better. If this covering concept is vague then it can be indeterminate how two things relate.[94] This is a theoretical explanation as to how we are to understand hard cases of comparison. It was shown that it could explain why we find it hard to compare Mozart to Michelangelo with respect to their creativity and the same explanation seems to be available to most hard cases.

It is important to note that just because the covering concept is multidimensional there need not be vagueness; even though there are many different aspects that need to be weighed, there could for example be a determined procedure for such a weighing and thus no vagueness. But we should not expect these cases to be hard cases of comparison (unless the hardness can be accounted for by the Trichotomy thesis in terms of ignorance).

This is in fact a further advantage of the Vagueness View. It can explain why it is hard to compare Mozart to Michelangelo with respect to creativity and easy

[94] Of course, the Vagueness View is not dependent on the Requirement for Specification. It is enough for the adherents of the Vagueness View to claim that e.g., "better" is vague.

to compare Michelangelo with a composer that is clearly bad with respect to creativity, call him Talentlessi. Often, when the covering concept is multidimensional, it will not be true on each admissible sharpening that one item is better than another, and this will give rise to indeterminacy. A case in point is the comparison of Mozart and Michelangelo. But sometimes, even when the comparison is multidimensional, it can be true on all admissible sharpenings that one item is better than another. This is the case with Michelangelo and Talentlessi. In these cases there is no indeterminacy but we should not expect these cases to give rise to hard cases of comparison either. So sometimes the vagueness of the covering concept gives rise to indeterminacy and sometimes it does not.

It seems that the Vagueness View has a good explanation as why hard cases of comparison are due to vagueness in the evaluative domain. It could, however, be that things are more complicated when it comes to hard cases of comparison within the moral domain. Even though I take the moral domain to be a subdomain of the evaluative, it could be that the Vagueness View cannot account for hard cases within this subdomain. It is, however, hard to see why that would be the case. There is no reason to assume that comparatives in the moral domain differ much from other comparatives. Just as we locate the vagueness in the covering concept when we are dealing with non-moral evaluative hard cases of comparison, the same is true for hard cases in the moral domain.

This concludes the argument in favour of the Vagueness View. The appealing force of the argument is the plausibility of the assumptions made; how it can account for hard cases of comparison by an appeal to a well-known phenomenon and thereby avoid major revisions in our value-theoretical framework.[95]

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[95] The most pressing objection to the Vagueness View should be mentioned. Vagueness, it is argued, can easily be dissolved by arbitrary stipulation but it does not seem to be the case that we can deal with the hard cases in such a light-hearted way. This kind of objection will be discussed in the chapter on parity. Briefly, however, this objection has two flaws. First, remember that the reason we experience the comparison as hard is probably epistemic. For example, we might not know whether one item is better than the other, equally as good, or whether it is indeterminate how they relate. If it turns out that it is indeterminate, then it might be that we can arbitrarily choose one item. The reason that we do not want to deal with these cases in such a light-hearted way is ignorance of whether this is a case of indeterminacy or determinacy. Second, it is not obvious that the cases can be easily dealt with just because they are cases of indeterminacy. That is, it is not apparent that in cases of indeterminacy we can arbitrarily just act in accordance with one admissible precisification. I will, however, discuss this more in the chapter on parity.

It has thus been established that some hard cases of comparison are due to ignorance and others due to vagueness. What remains to be investigated is whether this can account for all hard cases of comparison or whether there could be other explanations as well. More specifically: could it be that sometimes none of the trichotomous value relations obtains between two items? According to an influential argument, one can rule out this possibility on formal grounds. This argument, the Collapsing Argument, claims that if there is vagueness then it cannot be the case that none of the standard three value relations holds.

7. The Collapsing Argument for the Vagueness View

The most famous proponent of the Vagueness View is probably John Broome. Broome presented the Collapsing Argument in order to argue that vagueness cannot coexist with what he calls "hard indeterminacy", i.e., the possibility that sometimes none of the standard value relations holds. And since vagueness clearly exists, hard indeterminacy cannot exist.[96] If Broome's argument is correct then there is no reason to believe that the Incomparability View or the Parity View is correct, and it should be concluded that ignorance and vagueness can account for all hard cases of comparison. In this chapter I shall explore his argument in detail. It will be concluded that, even though most objections that have been presented against the argument can be questioned, the argument fails to establish convincingly that there is no such thing as incomparability or parity in the domain of value.

The Collapsing Principle

At the core of John Broome's influential argument in favour of the Vagueness View lies the *Collapsing Principle*, according to which:

> *The collapsing principle, special version.* For any *x* and *y*, if it is false that *y* is *F*er than *x* and not false that *x* is *F*er than *y,* then it is true that *x* is *F*er than *y*.[97]

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[96] Broome (1997).

[97] Broome (1997, p. 74). The following discussion is applicable to most comparatives, but since I am mostly interested in evaluative and moral comparatives I will treat, "*F*er than" as shorthand for "better than with respect to some fixed covering concept". It should also be noted that, for

Some find this principle intuitively appealing, and it should be granted that for some comparisons the principle seems to be self-evidently true. For example, consider Adam who is 170 cm and Bo who is 190 cm. It is false that Adam is taller than Bo and not false that Bo is taller than Adam and it is true that Bo is taller than Adam. Of course, just because the Collapsing Principle holds for some comparisons it cannot be concluded that it holds for all value comparatives. Broome has, however, argued that it does. As Broome states: "It takes only the slightest asymmetry to make it the case that one thing is *F*er than another. One object is heavier than another if the scales tip ever so slightly toward it."[98]

In the very same way: When it is false that *y* is better than *x* and not false that *x* is better than *y*, then there is a certain asymmetry in respect of their betterness and since there is this asymmetry, the scales tip. Thus *x* must be better than *y*.

Broome tries to explain why the principle should be accepted by presenting cases similar to the following: Say that you face the choice of helping your elderly mother with the groceries or driving your child to ballet lessons. You wish to do the best thing and you can only do one of the things. When considering the different options you conclude that it is false that driving your child to the ballet is better than helping your mother but you also conclude that it is not false that helping your mother is better than driving your child to the ballet. There is an asymmetry here and this asymmetry gives you a reason to help your mother. But you could only have such a reason if helping your mother was the best thing to do. Or say that you are to award a prize for the best philosopher. You have two candidates, Cleo and David. After thoughtful consideration you conclude that Cleo is not better than David but you cannot conclude that David is not better than Cleo. You cannot toss a coin to determine whom the prize should be awarded to since the prize is to be given to the best philosopher and Cleo clearly is not the best philosopher. You ought therefore to give the prize to David. And since the prize should go to the best philosopher David is the best philosopher. Or even more generally, if it is fitting to respond more favourably towards one item than to the other, or if it is more fitting to respond favourably towards one item than to the other, it follows that this item is the better item.

This is all that can be said in favour of the principle. Opponents will point out the weaknesses in the above reasoning: For example, it may not be fitting to give the prize to David; perhaps no one should get the prize. And the asymmetry

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brevity, I will refer to this principle as the "Collapsing Principle" and later on as the "Dyadic Collapsing Principle".

[98] Broome (1997, p. 74).

may not give you a reason to help your mother; all we might know is that helping your mother is either better than or *neither better nor worse* than driving your child. Unfortunately I know of no novel way to establish the Collapsing Principle, but some do find it to be intuitively appealing and this should count for something.[99] I will, however, return to the issue of whether the Collapsing Principle is true or not later on. Let us for now focus on Broome's argument.

The Collapsing Argument

Broome asks us to envisage what he calls a *Standard Configuration*. Since "better than" is a transitive and asymmetric relation, we can linearly order some items by how good they are. These items will then constitute a chain; at one end of which we have items that are not very good at all and at the other far end we have items that are very good. The chain may for example consist of musicians ordered by how good they are in terms of creativity. At one end we have a very poor musician and at the other end we have some very talented musician. We now have a chain of musicians fully ordered by how good they are in terms of creativity. Broome—who gives an example of churches ordered by how impressive they are—calls such sequences within a Standard Configuration a continuum. As Broome points out, such a "continuum of points may not exist in fact; we may simply imagine it. For instance, actual churches do not form a continuum, but we can imagine a continuum of churches. Also, I have not defined what I mean by a 'continuum': I hope I may leave that to intuition."[100]

Things in the chain may be compared to something that is not part of the chain. Broome calls this a "standard". The standard may in this example be some painter.

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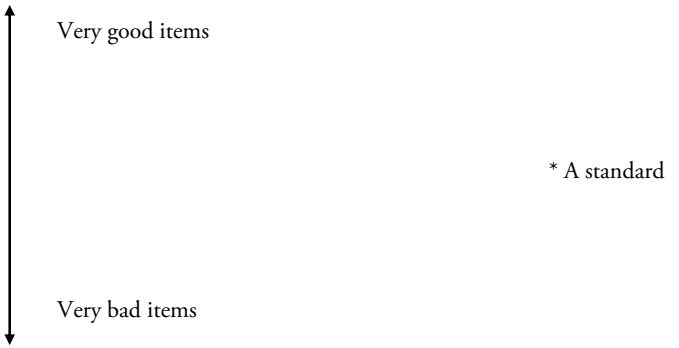
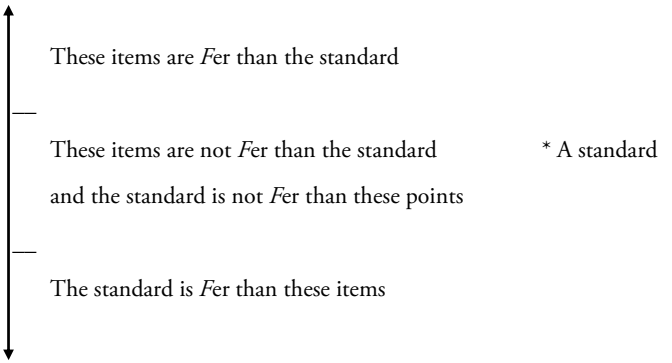
[99] Anders Herlitz kindly pointed out to me that some may find the following principle to be more intuitively appealing: "For any *x* and *y*, if it is false that *y* is *F*er than *x* and not false that *x* is *F*er than *y,* then it is true that *x* is *F*er than or *equally as F* as *y*." For value relations the conclusion will read: "then it is true that *x* is at least as good as *y*." This weaker formulation of the Collapsing Principle may very well seem more intuitive and as far as I can see it will suffice in order for Broome reach the wanted conclusion. As we soon will see, all we need from the principle is that it is not indeterminate how *x* and *y* relate. However, since Broome uses the more exact formulation of the Collapsing Principle, I shall also use the exact formulation.

[100] Broome (1997, p. 70). It is true that, ideally, this chain of items should be dense but we cannot always construct a chain of actual things that is dense. However, as Broome points out, we can imagine a chain that it will not have too big gaps. For more on Standard Configurations see appendix D.

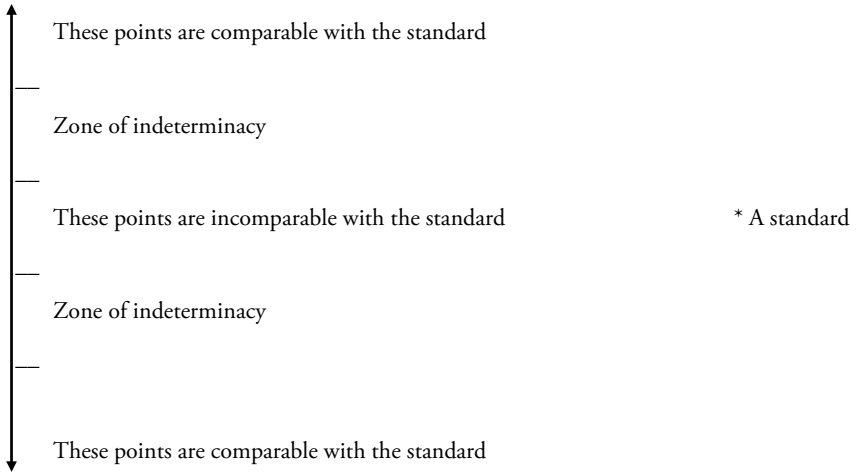


By comparing musicians with the painter in terms of being creative, we can tell which value relation holds between them. It is assumed that musicians at the top of the chain will be better than the painter, while musicians at the bottom of the chain will be worse. More generally: items at the top of the chain will be *F*er than the standard and the standard will be *F*er than items at the bottom of the chain. If there is incomparability or parity, then there is a zone in the chain such that it contains more than one point and the points in this zone are not *F*er than the standard and the standard is not *F*er than these points.



As the middle zone has been characterised so far, it could be a zone of parity or a zone of incomparability. Let us assume that it is a zone of incomparability. According to Broome, it seems implausible that there is a sharp boundary between the points that are *F*er than the standard and those that are not—there must be an area of vagueness between these points, i.e., a zone of indeterminacy.

Consequently, between the zone of points that are comparable to the standard and the zone of points that are incomparable to the standard there must be a zone of indeterminacy.



This is impossible according to Broome.

Here is why: For any point in the zone of incomparability and above: (i) it is false that the standard is *F*er than it. For the point to be clearly in the zone of incomparability it must also be the case that it is false that the point is *F*er than the standard. If it is the case that the point is *F*er than the standard, then the point is within the top zone. We may now conclude that for the points within the upper zone of indeterminacy it is: (ii) neither true nor false that they are *F*er than the standard. It is here the Collapsing Principle comes in. According to it, given (i) and (ii), it is true that the points in the upper zone of vagueness are *F*er than the standard. This would mean that there is no zone of vagueness, but since it is unintelligible that there is a sharp border between those points that are *F*er than the standard and those that are not, we should instead conclude that there is no determinate incomparability.[101]

When Broome presented the argument, not much had been written on the concept of parity. It seems, however, that the argument works just as well for parity. If the chain contains a zone of parity, then it is likely that there is a zone

[101] As Wlodek Rabinowicz notes, this only proves that determinate incomparability is impossible (2009, p. 80, n. 16). For those points for which it is indeterminate whether they are incomparable with the standard or not, it is not false that the standard is *F*er than they are, and thus the Collapsing Principle does not kick in. Thereby, indeterminate incomparability may be compatible with indeterminacy.

of vagueness between the points that are *F*er than the standard and those that are on a par, i.e., between points that are *F*er than the standard and those that are not. This is all it takes for the Collapsing Argument to apply.

The Collapsing Argument is an interesting objection against the idea that there could be incomparability or parity. If the argument holds, there is no reason to consider the Incomparability View and the Parity View; vagueness and ignorance suffice to account for the hard cases of comparison.

However, there are several objections that have been raised against the Collapsing Argument. One common objection focuses on the Collapsing Principle. The objection, or rather the counterexample to the principle, has been embraced by many and has been developed in several steps. The structure of the counterexample was first presented by Ruth Chang, and then argued for more forcefully by Erik Carlson.[102] Wlodek Rabinowicz then highlighted this objection.[103] Johan E. Gustafsson developed it further and Luke Elson presented it in an even more remarkable form.[104] I shall now investigate the objection in detail to see if it is possible to save the Collapsing Argument from it. Since I find the principle reasonable I will do my best to defend it against objections. I will try to provide as good a defence as possible and in the process I will be making some strong assumptions, perhaps even overly strong assumptions, but even with this tenacious defence of the principle it will be concluded that we cannot rely on the Collapsing Argument.

An Objection to the Collapsing Principle

When Ruth Chang presented the counterexample, she stated that if it is neither true nor false that *A* is better than *B* and false that *B* is better than *A*, then the Collapsing Principle will tell us that *A* is better than *B*.[105] This means that we have two conflicting judgements; it is true that *A* is better than *B* and it is not true that *A* is better than *B*. Consequently, either the Collapsing Principle is false or our initial judgement is mistaken. The adherents of the Collapsing Principle will of course claim that our initial judgement is mistaken: It cannot be the case that it is neither true nor false that *A* is better than *B* and yet false

[102] Chang (2002a, p. 161) and Carlson (2004, 2012).

[103] Rabinowicz (2009).

[104] Gustafsson (2011) and Elson (2014a).

[105] Chang (2002a, p. 161).

that *B* is better than *A*. According to Chang the adherents of the Collapsing Principle will thus reject the claim that it is not true that *A* is better than *B* and proclaim that *A* is better than *B*. But this is a mistake according to Chang, since there is no reason to reject one proposition rather than the other. I believe that the adherents of the Collapsing Principle will partly agree with Chang; our initial judgement is mistaken, but they will not conclude that *A* is better than *B*; rather they will reject the mere possibility of the combination of it being neither true nor false that *A* is better than *B* and false that *B* is better than *A*.

However, there is something worrying with the structure of these value judgements and it is the very same structure that Erik Carlson employs in a similar objection:

Imagine two philosophers: Alf and Beth. They have the same relevant properties as regards their goodness as philosophers, except that Alf has greater rhetorical skills. Assume that it is indeterminate whether rhetorical skills make you a better philosopher. Carlson writes:

> If so it is neither true nor false that Alf is a better philosopher than Beth. But it is clear, I presume, that rhetorical skill does not contribute *negatively* to goodness as a philosopher. Hence, it is false that Beth is a better philosopher than Alf. These two judgments, that it is neither true nor false that Alf is a better philosopher than Beth, and false that Beth is a better philosopher than Alf, together contradict the collapsing principle.
>
> The general point illustrated by this example is that there appear to be properties such that it is indeterminate whether they are positively relevant for an item's goodness, but false that they are negatively relevant, or vice versa. Since the collapsing principle excludes the possibility of such indeterminately relevant properties, there is good reason to reject it.[106]

This, indeed, seems to constitute a counterexample to the Collapsing Principle. There are two different proposed ways of dealing with this counterexample. One strategy has been proposed and developed by Cristian Constantinescu.[107] In brief, he argues that the counterexample can be avoided by restricting the scope of the Collapsing Principle. This is a strategy that I believe will be unsuccessful.[108] The other strategy has been proposed by John Broome.[109] This

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[106] Carlson (2012, p. 6).

[107] Constantinescu (2012).

[108] As Carlson argues: If we are to accept a restricted version, we need arguments in favour of it. Such arguments might not be easy to come by. A second problem is that a restricted principle

strategy, which I will refer to as the "denial strategy", is simply to deny that there exist properties of the kind described by Carlson. Since there are no arguments that support the existence of these properties, which I will refer to as indeterminately relevant properties, it is tempting to deny that they exist. If there are no such properties, then one cannot construct counterexamples of the kind Carlson describes.

In fact, as it turns out, it is natural for the adherent of the Collapsing Principle to deny the existence of such properties. Here is why: Let "*F*er than" be the comparative "contributes more to making you a better philosopher". *N* is a property that does not make you a better philosopher nor worse; its effect on your philosophical skills is neutral. Rhetorical skills, *R,* is a property for which it is indeterminate whether it contributes to your goodness as a philosopher while it is determinate that it does not contribute negatively to your goodness as a philosopher. It is false that *N* is *F*er than *R* and it is not false that *R* is *F*er than *N*. Thus, according to the Collapsing Principle, it is true that *R* is *F*er than *N*. It is true that rhetorical skills contribute more to making you a better philosopher than the neutral property of *N* does. But then it can hardly be indeterminate whether *R* makes you a better philosopher. In this way, the argument against the Collapsing Principle seems to fail since it presupposes the existence of a property that the adherents of the Collapsing Principle would deny exists.

For those who have a strong intuition that these sorts of properties do exist, this response may not be convincing. In their eyes I only, once again, state that the Collapsing Principle is not compatible with such properties. Thus, there seem to be two ways to understand the structure of the argument. According to some: the Collapsing Principle is not intuitively plausible. However, the idea that there exist indeterminately relevant properties is intuitively appealing. Carlson's argument shows us that, since it is reasonable to assume that such properties exist, the Collapsing Principle must be rejected. It is then concluded that my response begs the question since it depends on the Collapsing Principle.

Those who find the Collapsing Principle intuitively appealing may have another way to look at it. To them there is nothing, apart from an ungrounded intuition, to support the idea that there exist indeterminately relevant properties. Carlson's objection shows us that if such properties exist, then we must reject the Collapsing Principle. My response shows that the Collapsing Principle rules out the existence of such properties and, thus, if one finds the Collapsing

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has a less general application and therefore it will fail to rule out incomparability in the domains where it does not apply. Carlson (2012, p. 13). For more on this see Andersson (2014).

[109] Broome (2009, p. 417).

Principle to be intuitively appealing, one should not reject the Collapsing Principle, but rather reject the existence of indeterminately relevant properties. In short: one man's modus ponens is another man's modus tollens.

I admit that it is rash to conclude that there cannot exist indeterminately relevant properties, but at least one should be willing to submit that Carlson's argument is not conclusive. In order to reject the Collapsing Principle we need arguments in favour of the existence of such properties. Such arguments have not been presented and those who find the Collapsing Principle intuitively appealing should consequently not find Carlson's counterexample to be devastating to their position. But at the same time it should be acknowledged that, since many do not find the Collapsing Principle intuitive, Carlson's argument shows that we cannot depend upon the Collapsing Principle in order to conclusively rule out the Parity View and the Incomparability View. The status of the Collapsing Argument is consequently somewhat unclear. Perhaps we can get a clearer picture of its status by considering some other objections that have been advanced.

Gustafsson's Objection to the Collapsing Principle

Even if it is true that indeterminately relevant properties do not exist, there is a similar objection that does not depend on such properties. Johan E. Gustafsson has presented this objection. In his version, it is determinate that certain properties make the object worse (or determinate that they make the object better), but it is indeterminate whether the object has these properties. So for example:

Alf and Beth are identical in every relevant aspect except that it is indeterminate whether Beth is narrow-minded ("narrow-minded" is a vague predicate) and determinate that Alf is not narrow-minded. Let us stipulate that narrow-mindedness makes you a less good philosopher. This implies that Beth is not a better philosopher than Alf. Since it is indeterminate whether Beth is narrow-minded, it should also be indeterminate whether Alf is a better philosopher than Beth. However, according to the Collapsing Principle, Alf is better than Beth.[110] That is, without presupposing the existence of

[110] Gustafsson's example has a structure similar to the example I have presented, but his example uses bald cavaliers instead of narrow-minded philosophers. Gustafsson (2011, p. 26). I have, however, chosen to use another example since I believe it will make the presentation of the difference between the objections more transparent.

indeterminately relevant properties, Gustafsson's argument shows that it must be indeterminate whether Alf is better than Beth, while the Collapsing Principle says that Alf is better than Beth.

Gustafsson might, however, be wrong in assuming that there are no determinate relevant differences in cases such as these. Carlson seems to acknowledge this and admits that this counterexample to the Collapsing Principle can be avoided if we formulate the principle in monadic terms. The *Monadic Collapsing Principle* states that:

> For any *x* and *y*, if it is false that *y* is *F*, and not false that *x* is *F*, then it is true that *x* is *F*er than *y*.[111]

This version follows from the Collapsing Principle, or as it perhaps should be called: the "Dyadic Collapsing Principle". That it follows can easily be shown: If it is false that *y* is *F* and not false that *x* is *F,* then it follows that it is false that *y* is *F*er than *x* and it also follows that it is not false that *x* is *F*er than *y*. According to the Dyadic Collapsing Principle this means that it is true that *x* is *F*er than *y*. So, if we accept the Dyadic Collapsing Principle we should also accept the monadic formulation of it.[112] Let us also assume the following principle:

> *P*: "If *F*ness contributes negatively to a certain kind of goodness, and *x* and *y* are identical in all value-relevant aspects, except that *y* is *F*er than *x*, then *x* is better than *y*."[113]

The Monadic Collapsing Principle and principle *P* seem to get the job done without leading to any contradiction. Here is why: Since it is indeterminate whether Beth is narrow-minded, it is not false that she is narrow-minded. It is also determinate that Alf is not narrow-minded, so it is false that Alf is narrow-minded. Then, according to the Monadic Collapsing Principle, it is true that Beth is more narrow-minded than Alf. Here we have a determinate relevant

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[111] Carlson (2012, p. 6).

[112] The sceptic will claim that what follows from the fact that "it is not false that *x* is *F*" and "it is false that *y* is *F*" is only that it is *not false* that *x* is *F*er than *y*. That is, we need an argument in favour of the Monadic Collapsing Principle. To this it could be replied that since the Dyadic Collapsing Principle entails the Monadic Collapsing Principle, there is no need for a separate argument in favour of the Monadic Collapsing Principle. The sceptic can then reply that this is to beg the question. This objection is the very same kind of objection that was discussed when my argument against the existence of indeterminately relevant properties was first introduced. So this is not a new objection, but admittedly, it might still be question-begging.

[113] Carlson (2012, p. 6).

difference between Alf and Beth. Moreover, since narrow-mindedness makes you a less good philosopher and Alf and Beth are identical in all value-relevant aspects, except that Beth is more narrow-minded than Alf, then Alf is a better philosopher than Beth. We have now reached this conclusion without any contradictions.

Carlson expresses doubts about principle *P*: "Suppose that it is bad for a cavalier to be short. This surely does not imply that a taller cavalier is always better than a shorter one, all else being equal."[114] It might be possible to reply to this objection. The objection seems to take advantage of the fact that the meaning of "short" depends on the context. When it comes to "short" in the sense in which Carlson uses it, a reasonable interpretation would be "shorter than the average person", but then his argument seems to fail: Being shorter than average contributes negatively to the goodness of a cavalier; x and y are identical in all value-relevant aspects, except that y is even shorter than the average person than x, then x is better than y. If the two cavaliers are not shorter than average there seems to be no problem. This does not rule out that in some contexts it may be that a 190 cm cavalier is better than a 220 cm cavalier, but in such a context the reasonable interpretation of "shorter" will no longer be "even shorter than the average person."[115]

However, there are other problems with this view. Carlson presents an example that is structurally similar to the following: Once again Alf and Beth are identical in all relevant aspects except that this time Beth is narrow-minded and it is indeterminate whether Alf is narrow-minded. Given the other properties Alf and Beth possess, not being narrow-minded is for them a necessary and sufficient condition to qualify as a good philosopher. This means that it is false that Beth is a good philosopher and indeterminate whether Alf is. According to the Monadic Collapsing Principle, Alf is a better philosopher than Beth. However, this seems to be rushing things, since it is indeterminate whether Alf is narrow-minded and this seems to be the only difference between Alf and Beth.

So in short: according to Carlson it seems unintuitive that Alf is better than Beth when the only difference between them is that it is indeterminate whether

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[114] Carlson (2012, p. 6).

[115] A counterexample similar to Carlson's, has been suggested to me by Wlodek Rabinowicz: Suppose that having holes in its bottom contributes negatively to the goodness of a pitcher; it makes it totally unusable. If pitcher y has more holes in its bottom than pitcher x, x need not be better than y: if both have holes in their bottoms, both are totally unusable. A reply to this counterexample would look similar to the reply I gave to Carlson's. That "holes contribute negatively to the goodness of a pitcher" is not completely true, but only true in the context of pitchers that are not unusable due to holes. For a pitcher with a big hole an additional hole will not contribute negatively since it is already unusable.

Alf is narrow-minded while it is determinate that Beth is narrow-minded. Even though it is not necessarily a sign of inconsistency, it does seem odd. However, Carlson is mistaken in that the only relevant difference between Alf and Beth is that it is indeterminate whether Alf is narrow-minded while it is determinate that Beth is not. Since it is indeterminate whether Alf is narrow-minded it is also *not false that Alf is not narrow-minded*. And since it is *false that Beth is not narrow-minded* it must, in accordance with the Monadic Collapsing Principle, be *true that Alf is more not narrow-minded than Beth*, or expressing it in a more natural way: *Beth is more narrow-minded than Alf*. This seems to be a relevant difference between Alf and Beth and this difference can explain why Alf is better than Beth: since Alf and Beth are identical in all value-relevant aspects, except that Beth is more narrow-minded than Alf, Alf is better than Beth, all in accordance with the principle introduced above. This way one can express doubt as to whether Carlson's objection holds or not.

There is one further objection that needs to be considered: It could be held that it is odd that it can be indeterminate as to whether x is F while it is determinate that x is Fer than y. Even if this may seem odd it is not of necessity contradictory. For example, if x and y can be placed on a linear scale, then there seems to be nothing contradictory in it being indeterminate whether x is F and determinate that x is Fer than y. An example would be that it might be indeterminate whether Alf is tall yet it is determinate that Alf is taller than Beth.

This leads us to a similar potential problem with the Monadic Collapsing Principle. If F is a property that can only be represented by a nominal scale, then the notion "Fer than" seems unintelligible. One object can hardly be "Fer than" since Fness does not allow for degrees. Yet according to the Monadic Collapsing Principle these properties can be expressed as "Fer than". Here is an example: it is indeterminate whether Alf is dead and it is determinate that Beth is not dead. Then, according to the Monadic Collapsing, Principle Alf is more dead than Beth. But this does not make sense, since there is no such thing as "more dead than"—being dead does not come in degrees.

Just because the Monadic Collapsing Principle is unintelligible when it comes to these sorts of properties does not prove it wrong. However, it strengthens the doubts about its validity. If one wishes to avoid this doubt then one must argue that the Monadic Collapsing Principle does not kick in for these properties. This might be possible. I find it hard to grasp how these sorts of nominal properties that do not come in degrees can be vague. For example how can it be vague whether Beth is pregnant? Or how can it be vague whether Alf is biologically a male? It may be that we do not *know* the answer to these questions. For example: Beth may not have taken a pregnancy test and Alf may not have tested

to see whether he has XY chromosomes. Nevertheless, the questions have a determinate answer so there is no vagueness involved.

One could object to this. It could be argued that there is vagueness because the criteria of being *F* are not fully clear. For example, the reason it is indeterminate whether Alf is dead or not is that "is dead" is a vague predicate. Is one dead when one stops breathing? Or must one's heart stop beating? Or must one be "brain dead"? Or must all of one's electrical activity have ceased? Say that Alf satisfies the first three criteria. In such a scenario it might be correct that due to the vagueness of "dead" it is indeterminate whether or not Alf is dead. However, in such a case it seems equally intelligible that Alf is more dead than Beth who only satisfies the first two criteria.

If there is no vagueness that yields indeterminate truth-values then the Collapsing Principle does not kick in and thereby it does not yield unintelligible comparatives such as "Alf is more dead than Beth". In other words: it might be a successful reply to Gustafsson's objection. I take this to be the most promising line of respeonse to Carlson's and Gustafsson's objections.

Elson's Objection

Luke Elson has presented a counterexample that is very similar to Gustafsson's but Elson's counterexample has an extra twist. Elson first defines a comparative:

> *X* is *settaller* than *Y* iff set *X* contains more tall men than set *Y*.

then he asks us to consider the following three sets of men:

> Set *A* that contains ten tall men and nothing else
> Set *B* that contains ten tall men, one borderline tall man and nothing else
> Set *C* that contains eleven tall men and nothing else

It is obviously false that *A* is settaller than *B*. Since it is indeterminate whether the eleventh man in *B* is tall it should also be indeterminate whether *B* is settaller than *A*. This means, according to the Collapsing Principle, that *B* is settaller than *A*. The definition of "settaller than" together with the description of *A*, entail that set *B* contains at least eleven tall men. This contradicts the original claim that *B* only contains ten determinately tall men. However, Elson's argument does not end here. He applies the same sort of argument to sets *B* and

C in order to reach the conclusion that set *C* is settaller than *B*. From this he can show the striking contradiction that set *B* contains at least eleven tall men and no more than ten tall men.[116]

Elson's counterexample is very similar to Gustafsson's, even though they come in very different clothing. This becomes clear when one considers their structure. Both counterexamples assume that it is determinate that a certain property contributes positively (in Gustafsson's case; determinate that it contributes negatively) but it is indeterminate whether a certain item (a certain set in Elson's case) actually has this property.

Since Elson's example is structurally similar to Gustafsson's, it might be thought that the same reply is available to this counterexample as well. This is partly correct. However, things become somewhat more problematic with Elson's example. Let us compare the arguments step by step.

Remember that in Gustafsson's case it is determinate that a certain property contributes negatively to the goodness of an object, but it is indeterminate whether the object has this property. The same argument can, of course, be made by considering a property that determinately contributes *positively* to the goodness of an object, yet it is indeterminate whether the object has this property. For example, it may be indeterminate whether someone has analytical skills, but it is determinate that analytical skills contribute to being a good philosopher.[117] By considering such an example the similarities between Gustafsson's argument and Elson's argument will become clearer. I take it that in Elson's example the corresponding property would be something along the lines of "having an additional tall man". It is determinate that having an additional tall man contributes to "settallness", but it is indeterminate whether set *B* has an additional tall man.[118]

So far the cases seem structurally identical, but let us move on.

In the next part, Gustafsson would argue that since Alf and Beth are identical in all relevant respects except that it is determinate that Alf does not have

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[116] This contradiction would not arise if we accept the weaker formulation of the Collapsing Principle that was mentioned in footnote 99. According to this formulation set *B* is settaller than or equally as settall as set *A*. Similarly set *C* is settaller than or equally as settall as set *B*. From this we cannot reach the conclusion that set *B* contains at least eleven tall men and no more than ten tall men. It might as well be that set *A* contains 10 tall men, set *B* contains 10 tall men, and set *C* contains 11 tall men.

[117] Gustafsson's original example discussed bald cavaliers. As already mentioned, I have chosen to use this example since I believe that it helps us to see the structural similarities between Elson's and Gustafsson's counterexamples.

[118] Exactly how we are to understand Elson's definition of settallness will be discussed in detail later on.

analytical skills and it is indeterminate whether Beth has analytical skills it should also be indeterminate whether Beth is a better philosopher than Alf.

Similarly, since set *A* and set *B* are identical in all relevant respects except that it is determinate that set *A* does not have an eleventh tall man but it is indeterminate whether set *B* has an eleventh tall man, it should also be indeterminate whether *B* is settaller than *A*.

This is a counterexample to the Collapsing Principle, Gustafsson argues, since the Collapsing Principle tells us that Beth is a better philosopher than Alf. Elson could make a similar claim, but he chooses not to highlight this problem. Instead, he exploits this fact to reach the remarkable conclusion that set *B* has at least 11 and no more than 10 tall men. I will return to that conclusion later on. Now I shall instead focus on the contradiction that the Collapsing Principle tells us that *B* is settaller than *A* and yet it seems reasonable that it should be indeterminate whether *B* is settaller than *A*.

Remember that the strategy in dealing with Gustafsson's counterexample was to show that in fact it is not indeterminate that Beth is better than Alf, and that the asymmetry between them tells us that Beth is determinately better than Alf. This was argued for by appealing to the Monadic Collapsing Principle and principle P. A similar line of reasoning is available with respect to Elson's counterexample. This time, however, instead of principle P, we must appeal to principle P*:

> P*: If *F*ness contributes positively to a certain kind of goodness, and *x* and *y* are identical in all value-relevant aspects, except that *x* is *F*er than *y*, then *x* is better than *y*.[119]

The reply will then take the following form: Set *A* and set *B* are identical in that they have 10 tall men. The only difference between the two sets is that set *B* has an additional borderline tall man (with everything above 10 tall men being an additional man). This fact makes it indeterminate whether *B* has an additional tall man. It is, however, false that *A* has an additional tall man. According to the Monadic Collapsing Principle, if it is false that *A* has an additional tall man and not false that *x* has an additional tall man then it is true that *B* has more of an additional tall man.[120]

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[119] If one accepts principle P one must surely also accept principle P*. However, as already hinted at, it is not obvious that we should accept principle P. I will, however, return to this later on.

[120] I take "*F*er than" to be synonymous to "has more *F* than". Consequently the Monadic Collapsing Principle can be formulated as such: For any *x* and *y*, if it is false that *y* is *F*, and not false that *x* is *F*, then it is true that *x* is more *F* than *y*.

Next one applies the principle P^*. In Gustafsson's case that meant that one could conclude that since Alf has more analytical skills than Beth, Alf is a better philosopher than Beth. And thus it is not indeterminate whether Alf is better than Beth. In Elson's case it seems reasonable to conclude that since set *B* has more of an additional tall man than A, it is not indeterminate whether *B* is settaller than *A*.

In this way one can respond to the part of Elson's example that is analogous to Gustafsson's. However, a contradiction lingers even after my response since, if it must be determinate that *B* is settaller than *A*, then *B* must have more tall men than *A*. Thus *B* must have eleven tall men, but we know that *B* only has ten tall men and one borderline tall man.

In Gustafsson's example, this contradiction is avoided since it is only argued that Beth has more analytical skills than Alf and is therefore a better philosopher. It does not follow that she determinately has analytical skills. One may try to apply the same reasoning to Elson's example. Thus it is not that set *B* has more determinately tall men that makes it settaller than set *A*, it is enough that it has more additional tall men than *A*. It is, however, unclear whether it is enough that a set has more additional tall men than another for it to be settaller. Elson gives us a definition of settaller, but the definition leaves us with some questions: Must a set contain more *definitely* tall men than another in order to be settaller? Or is it enough that there are more *borderline* tall men? That is, which reading of the definition is correct?

(i) *X* is settaller than *Y* if and only if it contains more determinately tall men.

(i) seems like the most natural understanding of the comparative but on this interpretation it will not be indeterminate whether *B* is settaller than *A*, it will be determinate that *B* is not settaller than *A*. Similarly, it will be determinate that *C* is settaller than *B*. It seems that we need a definition that takes the borderline tall men into consideration:

(ii) *X* is settaller than *Y* if and only if it contains at least as many determinately tall men and more borderline tall men.

This definition will not do since it entails that a set that contains 100 tall men and no borderline tall man will not be settaller than a set with only one borderline tall man. Furthermore, even if one accepts this oddity Elson's counterexample cannot be established. Since according to (ii) it will be

determinately the case that *B* is settaller than *A* and thus it is not indeterminate whether *B* is settaller than *A*. *C* contains at least as many determinately tall men as *B* but it does not contain more borderline tall men and thus it is determinate that *C* is not settaller than *B*. The following may do better:

(iii) *X* is settaller than *Y* if and only if it contains at least as many determinately tall men and more men that are determinately tall or borderline tall.

On this definition it will still be the case that *B* is determinately settaller than *A* and it is determinately not the case that *C* is settaller than *B*, but *C* is settaller than *A*. So Elson's counterexample will fail for this definition as well. It seems hard to come up with an interpretation of the definition for which the counterexample works. One final possibility to consider is that it might be indeterminate which definition is correct. This is somewhat strange considering that it is Elson himself who has defined the comparative, but by taking this route, the artificial comparative mimics the vagueness of natural comparatives. Assuming a supervaluationist approach to vagueness this would mean that one item is only determinately settaller than another if it satisfies both (i) and (iii). The result would be that it is determinately false that *A* is settaller than *B* and indeterminate that *B* is settaller than *A.* Consequently, the counterexample seems to work for *A* and *B*, but it does not work for sets *B* and *C* since it is determinately false that *B* is settaller than *C* and determinately false that *C* is settaller than *B*. So it seems that we still lack a good interpretation of the definition. Perhaps (iii) should be rejected since it not only entails that it is determinately not the case that *B* is settaller than *C*, but also it is determinately not the case that *B* is settaller than *C*. This is odd since we are not willing to say that they are equally as settall. Does this mean that set *B* and set *C* are incomparable according to (iii)?

Nevertheless, perhaps a definition like the one proposed is close to the mark. If so it is interesting that the comparative "settaller" seems to be vague. It raises the question of whether Elson's example is more similar to Carlson's example than to Gustafsson's. In Carlson's example the comparative "better philosopher" is vague and therefore it is indeterminate whether rhetorical skills contribute positively but it is determinate that they do not make you a worse philosopher. Elson's example could be construed in the same manner: "settaller" is vague, so therefore it is indeterminate whether the property of "having a borderline tall man" contributes positively or not. It is however clear that it does not make a set less "settall".

Does this mean that we should accept that there could be indeterminately relevant properties? I do not believe so. The fact that one can construct a comparative for which only two sharpenings such as (i) and (iii) are permissible, which in turn means that "having a borderline tall man" is an indeterminately relevant property, does not support the claim that our naturally vague properties ever are of this kind.

In fact the use of the artificial comparative "settaller than" should make us hesitant to accept Elson's counterexample in any form. Elson is aware of this objection and presents a less artificial comparative: Assume that you like to go on holiday to large countries. Now, this is not your only preference when it comes to choosing your holiday destination, but nevertheless you like to visit large countries. Let us also assume that China, France, and Ireland are all equally as good except when it comes to their size. If you compare China to Ireland you will naturally prefer China, due to the fact that China is a large country. However, if you compare a borderline large country, France, with China, it is indeterminate which country is the best holiday destination, since it is indeterminate whether France is a large country. Similarly, it is indeterminate whether France is a better holiday destination than Ireland for the very same reason. Now, the Collapsing Principle tells us that China is better than France and France is better than Ireland. Since they are all equally as good except when it comes to their size and since you prefer large countries to small it must be the case that France is both large and not large!

This example that is less artificial than the "settaller" example is, I believe, identical to Gustafsson's example. Consequently, the same response is available. According to P*, if being a large country contributes positively to being a good holiday destination, and two countries are identical in all value-relevant aspects except that country *y* is larger than country *x*, then country *x* is better than country *y*. China is clearly larger than France and France is clearly larger than Ireland. For this reason China is better than France which is better than Ireland, and this could be the case even if France is borderline large.

This, I believe, should raise some suspicion to the artificiality of "settaller than". Some may find it odd that the Collapsing Principle is restricted in such a way that it does not apply to some artificial comparatives. There might be something to this worry, but at the same time it should be noted that the comparisons that we are interested in are mostly not artificial. It is the everyday comparisons that are of interest for discussions of practical deliberation and for these the Collapsing Principle yields no contradiction.

Of course this result depends on principle P*. This principle can be criticised on the same grounds as principle P. That is: certain gradable features might only

contribute positively or negatively to the goodness of their bearers between certain thresholds. Beyond and below these thresholds it might not matter how much of this feature the object has. For example, for two very small countries whose only relevant difference is their size, the fact that one is larger than the other may not make it a better holiday destination; it is still not a large country. I made suggestions as to how to reply to these kinds of objections by trying to make the context count. In this example, one could argue that being large means being larger than the average-sized country. Neither of the two small countries is larger than the average-sized country and consequently the principle is not applicable to them. But I admit that this kind of reply might not have been too convincing. It seems hard to explain such cases when we have two very large countries; being large may contribute positively to being a good holiday destination, but from this it does not follow that being larger makes a country better as a holiday destination. It might well be that upon reaching a certain size further size increases do not make any positive value contribution.[121]

Before summing up where all of this leaves us, I shall discuss one more objection to the Collapsing Principle.

The Second-Order Vagueness Objection

There is one further objection that has been posed to the Collapsing Principle. The objection states that the Collapsing Principle excludes second-order vagueness. As already mentioned, by second-order vagueness one refers to the idea that there is no sharp boundary between vague and determinate comparability. I.e., in the continuum there are no two adjacent points, x and y, such that it is clearly indeterminate whether x is *F*er than the standard and clearly determinate that y is *F*er than the standard. So, for example, for any point within the upper zone of second-order vagueness it is neither true nor false that an item located at that point "it is definitely *F*er than the standard".

If we find the Dyadic Collapsing Principle to be intuitively appealing we should also be willing to accept a second-order Dyadic Collapsing Principle. Carlson formulates such a principle in the following manner:

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[121] I take it that the best way to respond to this kind of objection is to argue that if it is only being large up to a certain size that contributes positively then, if the size of the countries does not fall within the relevant scope, their size does not contribute positively and principle P* is not applicable. I can, however, see how this reply might face problems on its own.

> *Second-Order Dyadic Collapsing Principle:* "For any *x* and *y*, if it is false that *y* is definitely *F*er than *x* and not false that *x* is definitely *F*er than *y*, then it is true that *x* is definitely *F*er than *y*"[122]

For any point within the upper zone of second-order vagueness, it is not false that "it is definitely *F*er than the standard". At the same time, for any such point it is false that "the standard is definitely *F*er than this point". But then, according to the Second-Order Dyadic Collapsing Principle: this point is definitely *F*er than the standard. If the point is definitely better than the standard, then it is no longer a case of vagueness. Thus, this second-order principle seems to rule out second-order vagueness and this is an unwanted consequence according to some philosophers.

Granted that this is a problematic consequence—how are we to respond to this? Broome argues that it may be problematic, but it is "the lesser of two evils".[123] According to him, if we allow for the Collapsing Principle and consequently the second-order formulation, then there is a sharp transition between the points where it is true that "this point is *F*er than the standard" and the points where it is not true. Intuitively, this transition is less sharp than the transition between the points where it is true that the points are *F*er than the standard and the points where it is false. Thus, the sharpness of the first transition is the lesser of two evils.

Carlson has objected that the Collapsing Principle also implies that there is a sharp transition between the points where it is true that "this point is *F*er than standard" and the points where it is not false that "the standard is *F*er than this point".[124] It may then be that this sharp transition is more unwanted than the transition from where it is true that "this point is *F*er than the standard" to where it is false. I am not convinced that this would be more unwanted. Broome's argument that the absence of second-order vagueness is the lesser of two evils may still be correct. However, Carlson follows this up with an objection that I find more troublesome:

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[122] Carlson (2012, p. 10).

[123] Broome (1997, p. 85).

[124] As Carlson also notes, one cannot argue that the transition is not as sharp as one may first believe by arguing that it may be not false that the standard is *F*er than this point but that it is more false than true that the standard is *F*er than *x*, since the collapsing principle would then imply that the point is *F*er than the standard.

> More importantly, incomparability implies sharp truth-value boundaries only if the collapsing principle is true. Otherwise, incomparability is compatible with first- as well as second-order vagueness. If second-order vagueness is taken on board, the truth-value transitions are even less sharp than they are according to Broome's version of semicomparabilism.[125]

At first glance this objection seems to be, once again, about second-order vagueness. However, it could be interpreted in a more forceful way: The Collapsing Principle implies that incomparability is not compatible with vagueness. If there is no vagueness, then there is a sharp boundary between those points in the continuum that are incomparable to the standard and those that are comparable to the standard. This is not intuitive and thus we should, according to Broome, deny the existence of incomparability. However, we might as well conclude that the Collapsing Principle is wrong. This way incomparability would be compatible with both first- and second-order vagueness. So the objection is not really about second-order vagueness but about the overarching structure of Broome's argumentation: Carlson and Broome both agree that the Collapsing Principle implies that incomparability cannot coexist with indeterminacy. According to Broome the Collapsing Principle is true and therefore incomparability cannot coexist with indeterminacy. According to Carlson incomparability can coexist with indeterminacy and therefore the Collapsing Principle is false. Broome's modus ponens is Carlson's modus tollens. Unfortunately, without a good argument in favour of the Collapsing Principle this stalemate might be hard to end. It is no longer enough to argue that the Collapsing Principle is intuitively appealing.

To conclude: the Collapsing Argument's weakness is the Collapsing Principle. The arguments in favour of this principle are not fully convincing. This becomes extra pressing when several good counterexamples have been presented. I have, stubbornly, tried to respond to these counterexamples and even though I believe that some responses are satisfactory, others are less so, and some are clearly not.[126] For this reason I do not think it is safe to depend on the Collapsing Argument in order to rule out the possibility of parity and incomparability. This means that, even if ignorance and vagueness seem to be able to account for many hard cases of comparison, one question still remains,

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[125] Carlson (2012, p. 10). Semicomparabilism is the view that there is indeterminacy but no determinate incomparability.

[126] Admittedly, the two main weaknesses are probably that I depend on principle P, and the lack of an argument in favour of the Monadic Collapsing Principle.

i.e., whether the explanatory powers of the accounts given are enough or whether we must expand our explanatory toolkit. Since the Collapsing Argument could not rule out the possibility of there being incomparability and parity, we must move on to consider whether there is any reason for us to accept the Incomparability View and the Parity View. We need to explore how these accounts should be understood and whether they add anything to our understanding of hard cases or whether we can suffice with the Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View.

8. The Incomparability View

I take the Incomparability View to be the most ontologically parsimonious view of the two remaining views. After all, this is the view that claims that some hard cases of comparison are cases in which there holds no positive basic value relation, and clearly things cannot become more ontologically parsimonious than this.

It seems that an argument in favour of the Incomparability View must have two parts. First, it must be established that there is conceptual space for incomparability. That is, it must be shown that it is conceptually possible for items not to be related by a basic positive value relation. Second, if there is conceptual space for incomparability, there must, in the words of Joseph Raz, be provided "some account of how that conceptual possibility might be realised".[127] In other words, an explanation must be given as to what can give rise to incomparability. Such an explanation will hopefully not only explain how the conceptual possibility can be realised, but in doing so it will also further our understanding of incomparability.

In this chapter I will consider several arguments in favour of the Incomparability View, many of which will be due to Joseph Raz who has provided several interesting arguments in favour of the possibility of instantiated incomparability. It will, however, be concluded that it seems hard to provide a fully satisfactory argument in favour of the Incomparability View. Most notably, even if there is a conceptual space for incomparability, there are no satisfactory explanations as to how this possibility could be realised. Furthermore, some of the extant explanations make assumptions that are more demanding than what could be wished for, making the argument for the Incomparability View less theoretically parsimonious.

[127] Raz (1986, p. 119).

Conceptual Space for Incomparability

According to Joseph Raz the mark of incomparability is the failure of transitivity.[128] Raz uses this fact in order to distinguish incomparability from the standard three value relations that are all transitive. To be more specific: the failure of transitivity is used to separate incomparability from equality. Since incomparability is not transitive, one item, *x*, can be better than one of two incomparable items, *y* and *z*, without being better than the other. This could not be the case if *y* and *z* were equally as good. For example, if *y* and *z* are equally as good then a small improvement to one of them would make this improved item better than both *y* and *z*, this need not be the case if *y* and *z* are incomparable.

Raz emphasises the fact that this test, i.e., the failure of transitivity, is not a necessary condition for incomparability but a sufficient one.[129] For this reason it cannot be used as a definition of incomparability. Accordingly, Raz does not seem to believe that the failure of transitivity plays an explanatory role. He merely exploits this non-transitivity as a test to distinguish equality from incomparability. "We have here a simple way of determining whether two options are [incomparable] given that it is known that neither is better than the other. If it is possible for one of them to be improved without thereby becoming better than the other or if there can be another option which is better than the one but not better than the other, then the two original options are [incomparable]."[130]

I, however, believe that the failure of transitivity could play an even more important role for the adherents of the Incomparability View. It could take the adherents further; if we can conceptually distinguish one kind of relation from the three standard relations, then there must be a conceptual space for that

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[128] Raz (1986, p. 326). Raz actually says that this is the mark of incommensurability, but he uses the terms "incommensurate", "incomparable", and "incommensurable" interchangeably. This means that he uses the terms differently from how I use them and this can potentially lead to some confusion. When referring to Raz's arguments I will use the terms as I have defined them and when there is a risk of potential misreading of Raz, due to a difference in terminology, I will try to be explicit about this.

[129] The ordering of items may be discrete and thus it might not be possible to make a small enough improvement. It is only for sufficiently small improvements to one of two incomparable items that the improved item might not be better than both original items. That is, if the improvement is too big then it might make the improved item better than both *y* and *z*. Raz (1986, p. 326).

[130] Raz (1986, p. 325).

relation. It could thus be concluded that incomparability is a conceptual possibility.

The Small-Improvement Argument

The test just described has been discussed by many different philosophers and in many different forms. Before Raz, it was for example discussed by Ronald de Sousa, Derek Parfit, and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong.[131] The test is now often referred to as the Small-Improvement Argument and as I mentioned, it does more than just separate equality from incomparability. The argument takes the following form: Consider A, B, and A^+, where A^+ is just like A except that it is slightly improved:

If A is neither better nor worse than B with respect to some covering concept V and A^+ is better than A with respect to V while A^+ is not better than B with respect to V, then A is neither better than, nor worse than, nor equally as good as B with respect to V.

The test is meant to establish that if two items relate in this manner, then they are incomparable. If it can be shown that there are items that stand in such a relation then clearly there is conceptual space for incomparability. In fact, the example would even show that incomparability sometimes is instantiated.

Thus, by coming up with an example of items that stand in this relation, the adherents of the Incomparability View have come a long way in proving their point. Allegedly, items in hard cases stand in such a relation. Thus, Mozart and Michelangelo may stand in such a relation with respect to creativity. When comparing Mozart and Michelangelo we probably judge that Mozart is neither better nor worse than Michelangelo with respect to creativity. It is, however, still possible that they are equally good in this respect. Now, imagine a small improvement to Mozart, perhaps a Mozart who wrote one more symphony or was a slightly better composer; call him Mozart$^+$. Mozart$^+$ is better than Mozart in terms of creativity. However, we are not willing to judge that Mozart$^+$ is better than Michelangelo. This implies that Mozart and Michelangelo are not equally as good. Consequently, none of the standard value relations holds between Mozart and Michelangelo.

[131] De Sousa (1974), Parfit (1984), and Sinnott-Armstrong (1985). De Sousa discussed it in the context of preference relations and Sinnott-Armstrong in the context of moral requirements.

The argument is interesting and central in discussions about value relations and I shall discuss it further later on, but for now it is enough to consider one fatal objection. The biggest problem with the Small-Improvement Argument is that it only succeeds in establishing that the two items are not determinately related by any of the three standard value relations. It does not rule out the possibility that they are related by some fourth basic positive value relation.[132] Remember that at the outset incomparability with respect to a covering concept was defined as a case in which no basic positive value relation holds between two items with respect to that covering concept. The Small-Improvement Argument can only establish that the three standard value relations fail to obtain.[133] This, however, is not sufficient. In order to reach the desired conclusion it must be combined with an argument for the claim that the three standard relations are the only ones that can obtain. Without such an argument, the Small-Improvement Argument does not establish that things can be incomparable.

It should be noted here that this objection only applies to incomparability as I have defined it. Raz, however, defines incomparability differently. According to his definition, items that are not related by the standard three relations are *ipso facto* incomparable.[134] For this conception of incomparability the objection obviously fails. I am, however, more interested in the stricter conception of incomparability and will continue to focus on this phenomenon. When Raz discussed incomparability the idea of a fourth basic positive value relation was not that much discussed. Therefore, these discussions run the risk of being somewhat anachronistic, but as we will see many of Raz's arguments could be interpreted as being arguments in favour of the possibility of the instantiation of this strict form of incomparability.

When the proponent of the Incomparability View no longer can rely on the Small-Improvement Argument, it is hard to see how an argument for the claim that there is conceptual space for incomparability could be formulated. However, it is hard to see why there should not be conceptual space for incomparability. There is nothing *prima facie* contradictory in denying that there always must exist a basic positive value relation between any two items. In fact, this might be the case when there is non-comparability. When we are to

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[132] This objection has been presented by Chang. See for example Chang (2002a, p. 25).

[133] Or more exactly, it presupposes that two of these relations do not obtain and then it is used to show that the third relation, equal goodness, does not obtain either.

[134] Or more exactly Raz gives the following definition: two options are incomparable if it is neither true that one of them is better than the other, nor true that they are of equal value (1986, p. 322). This is a very broad conception of incomparability since it encompasses not only parity but also indeterminacy.

compare, e.g., the number nine with a sunset with respect to taste it seems reasonable to conclude that they are not related by any of the three standard value relations.[135] If this is true, then, for some covering values and items, it is reasonable to assume that with respect to this covering value there holds no basic positive value relation between the items in question.

Cases of non-comparability might not only support the claim that there is a conceptual space for incomparability. They also seem to lend support to the claim that sometimes incomparability can be instantiated. Before concluding that non-comparability actually can give this support, the phenomenon of non-comparability ought to be investigated more closely.

Non-Comparability Revisited

The existence of non-comparability seems to make a strong case for the existence of incomparability. It is hard to deny that there are cases of non-comparability and furthermore, it is easy to understand what gives rise to non-comparability.

Non-comparability is, however, a peculiar phenomenon. In many ways it seems to be a case of incomparability, i.e., when there is non-comparability there holds no positive value relation between the items we consider. Some may, however, want to resist this conclusion. As was mentioned in chapter 2, they may want to argue that when there is weak non-comparability one item may be better than, worse than, or equally as good as the other item. Others may argue that non-comparability is not a case of incomparability since it is not the case that it is false for each value relation that it applies. In fact, they claim, it is neither true nor false that a value relation holds when there is non-comparability.[136] It seems as if intuitions differ here, so perhaps we should not focus too much on this reply. Another interesting reply is that non-comparability differs from incomparability since it cannot be the case that an item is incomparable to itself, but clearly an item can be strongly non-comparable to itself. Michelangelo cannot be incomparable to himself with respect to creativity—he is equally as good, but the number four can be non-

[135] Then again, they could of course be related by some other basic positive value relation, but since this comparison does not seem to belong to the realm of practical reason I find it questionable that *any* normative value relation whatsoever could hold between them with respect to taste.

[136] Raz proposes this in his discussion about "radical incomparability". Raz (1986, p. 329). Chang proposes something similar. Chang (1997, p. 28).

comparable with itself with respect to taste.[137] For this reason we should reject the claim that non-comparability is a case of incomparability.

There are two ways to respond to this. One may argue that the number four is actually equally as good as itself with respect to taste. It is absurd to consider eating number four, but it is nevertheless equally as tasty as itself. This line of response might, however, be a dead-end, since if one accepts this line of reasoning one may also accept that, since it is equally impossible to taste number nine and the colour blue, then they are equally as good in terms of tastiness. If that is the case then, they are not incomparable. This would mean that the existence of non-comparability does not support the existence of incomparability. A more promising strategy is to accept that items can be incomparable to themselves; comparing number four to itself with respect to taste would then be a case in point.

Even if this line of reasoning might not be fully convincing, let us from now on work under the assumption that non-comparability in fact is a form of incomparability. Since it seems hard to deny that there exists non-comparability, this means that there also is incomparability, but it does not necessarily support the claim that some hard cases are cases of incomparability. Non-comparability seems rather uninteresting from a normative point of view, since it is more formal in character. Why would we ever bother to compare the number four and the colour blue in terms of tastiness? Comparisons such as these can hardly ever cause a problem for practical deliberation. Non-comparability seems, by definition, to always be nonsensical and therefore of little interest. Hard cases of comparison, on the other hand, are interesting since they seem to be cases in which it is meaningful to make a comparison. When we compare Mozart and Michelangelo in terms of creativity, we are genuinely interested in how they relate and thus alleged incomparability raises a genuine substantive problem. Things are not the same, however, when we compare the number four with the colour blue in terms of tastiness. So even if non-comparability is incomparability, this form of incomparability is uninteresting since it has no implications that are relevant within the domain of practical reason.[138]

The examples I have used so far may be considered to be very extreme; in one case it is obvious that the covering concept applies and in another it is obvious

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[137] I owe this point to Jakob Green Werkmäster and Samuel Kazen Orrefur.

[138] The important difference between these phenomena is that in cases of non-comparability the covering concept does not apply to one or both of the things we are comparing, which is not the case when it comes to incomparability of the interesting sort. This could of course be added to the definition of incomparability in order to demarcate the difference between incomparability and non-comparability.

that it does not apply. There are perhaps cases in-between, in which we are uncertain as to whether the covering concept applies or not. Perhaps these are cases that we sometimes experience as hard cases of comparison. I am very hesitant about this suggestion. After all, we experience many of the hard cases as frustrating because we do find the comparison to be meaningful, i.e., we do not experience an uncertainty as to whether the comparison is meaningful or nonsensical. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that there may be some hard cases of comparison that fit this characterisation, but if we are uncertain as to whether the covering concept applies or not then there are two possibilities: either it applies or it does not apply. If it applies then one of the standard value relations probably obtains, and these are not cases of incomparability. If they do not obtain, then these are cases of non-comparability, but if so, then the comparison in fact is nonsensical. So it still seems as if non-comparability cannot account for any normatively interesting cases of incomparability.[139]

In conclusion I find it difficult to believe that non-comparability can play any significant role in accounting for hard cases of comparison. However, let us conclude that there might be conceptual space for incomparability and move on to consider other explanations as to how this possibility can be realised.

Raz and Constitutive Incomparability

Many of the arguments that I am to present in favour of the Incomparability View are due to Joseph Raz. Raz wrote on the topic before Chang's influential work on value comparisons and consequently some of his chosen terminology is different from how I have presented things. For example, Raz does not clearly distinguish indeterminacy from incomparability.[140] Consequently, it is

[139] As Jakob Green Werkmäster has pointed out to me, one might find it reasonable that for some cases it is indeterminate whether item *A* is better than, worse than, equally as good, or non-comparable with item *B*. In supervaluationistic terms: just as there may be different admissible precisifications for which *A* is better than, worse than, and equally as good as *B*, there might also be a precisification for which *A* and *B* are non-comparable. It is, however, reasonable that the context plays some part in determining what counts as an *admissible* precisification. When comparing *A* and *B* it does not seem as if a precisification of the covering concept such that the covering concept is not applicable to *A* or *B* could be admissible (unless all admissible precisifications make the covering concept inapplicable to the item in question). For this reason it cannot be indeterminate whether an item is better than, worse than, equally as good as, or non-comparable to another item.

[140] To clarify; he is of course aware of the distinction but with his choice of terminology he does not clearly distinguish them from each other. He writes: "we can distinguish the narrow

sometimes hard to separate his argument for incomparability from the arguments for indeterminacy. In what follows I will discuss what I take to be his arguments in favour of incomparability and leave the arguments for indeterminacy to one side.[141]

According to Raz: "The most important source of incomparability is 'incomplete' definition of the contribution of criteria to a value."[142] And this is prominent in comparisons for which the value is complex and consists of several contributing aspects. Another possible source of incomparability is due to judgements of probability that are incomparable. "These are contagious and are transmitted to the value of the relevant option."[143]

However, when Raz argues for the existence of incomparability, his argument does not build on these suggestions. Instead, he focuses on our *judgements* about how things sometimes relate. He argues that sometimes we judge that things are incomparable. In fact, we are even likely to sometimes refuse to judge how two things relate. This he takes to be the denial of the claim that the things in question are comparable.

To this it could of course be objected that even if we often refuse to compare things they might still be comparable. Raz, however, responds to a similar kind of reasoning:

> The problem with pursuing this suggestion and trying to work out the comparative value people assign to options that they refuse to compare is that it leaves out of account the refusal to compare values itself. It bypasses and ignores it. To do so is to falsify people's judgements of comparative value.[144]

That is, when I respond to Raz's argument by claiming that we should not trust our judgements when we judge that two things are incomparable, I am not taking seriously the initial judgement. I am in fact claiming that all of those who ever made such a judgement made a mistake. However, the reply need not be

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meaning of incommensurability, i.e., that it is false that one of the options is better and false that they are of equal value, from the broader meaning of the term which does leave room for another kind of failure of comparability, the one we called *indeterminacy*." (1986, p. 329)

[141] I take it that most of his writings concern incomparability as defined by me. This becomes clear in the following quotation about indeterminacy: "I am not aware of any very significant implications it has for practical thought. Except for the occasional incidental reference I will therefore disregard it from now on." Raz (1986, p. 324).

[142] Raz (1986, p. 326).

[143] Raz (1986, p. 327).

[144] Raz (1986, p. 337).

this dogmatic; there is an explanation as to why we tend make these judgements. Raz himself points this out:

> One retort is that the refusal is not ignored. While it is denied relevance to the valuation of the options one is refusing to compare, it is given its proper and separate place as being a negative valuation of the activity of comparing values.[145]

That is, the reason we refuse to compare need not be that the items are incomparable, but rather that we do not like to compare them or think it is wrong or bad to do so. Raz, however, is not satisfied by this reply; it might just be that we refuse to compare because the items are incomparable. Given how the reply was presented, Raz is of course right in that it is not satisfactory, but if we can explain why we refuse to compare the items without invoking incomparability, then I cannot see why we should believe that this refusal must be due to incomparability. It could be, as Donald Regan notes, that people might be expressing something different than beliefs in incomparability when they talk or behave as Raz describes. In fact, even if they claim that two things are incomparable, their use of the term may differ very much from how Raz and I use the term.[146] All they might mean is that the comparison is hard to make.

It therefore seems that the above reasoning does not suffice to support the Incomparability View. However, I take the discussion about our refusal to compare to be only the backdrop to Raz's real argument for incomparability. His very curious argument is meant to establish that there is a special kind of incomparability that we may call Constitutive Incomparability. This is what he has to say about items that are constitutively incomparable:

> First, if A and B are incomparable options of this kind then if an agent is in a situation in which option A is his and B can be obtained by forgoing A he will normally refuse to do so. Similarly if B is his he will not exchange it for A. Agents tend to remain in the position they are in. Second, they [i.e. relations of this kind] obtain between options which have special significance for people's ability successfully to engage in certain pursuits or relationships: the refusal to trade one option for the other is a condition of the agent's ability successfully to pursue one of his goals. Finally, it is typical, where options of this kind are involved, for agents to regard the very thought that they may be comparable in value as

[145] Raz (1986 p. 336).

[146] Regan (1988, p. 1058).

> abhorrent. There are many gradations of lesser or greater reluctance to undertake such comparisons. But for almost every person there are comparisons he will feel indignant if asked to make, and which he will, in normal circumstances, emphatically refuse to make.[147]

According to Raz, an example of two such items could, for some parents, be the comparison of their child and money. The value of having children cannot be compared to that of having money and the mere thought of exchanging their child for money would be abhorrent. This is, for some people at least, not due to the fact that their child is much more valuable than money; to buy a child would be just as abhorrent as to sell a child. Perhaps a story could be given about how we rank our children in relation to money and to exchanges of children for money, but this would be to misrepresent people's actual valuations according to Raz. According to him "significant social forms, which delineate the basic shape of the projects and relationships which constitute human well-being, depend on a combination of [incomparability] with a total refusal even to consider exchanging one [incomparable] option for another."[148]

Raz elaborates on this by considering the spouse who is willing to leave her partner for a month to work in order to earn money but who will not leave her partner for a month if offered only the money in exchange (i.e., without having to work for it). In the latter case, there is a brute trade-off between money and the company of the spouse, and this will make some people indignant according to Raz. The reason that they would feel indignant is the symbolic significance of such an exchange. This significance is due to social conventions that determine the meaning of the action. This in turn can explain why people react in the manner described: "the symbolic significance of the fact that one cannot trade companionship for naked money but one can for a job is that while companionship is not up for sale, it is but one ingredient in a complex pattern of life including work."[149] The fact that money is a means for fast and easy exchanges means that it comes with a certain meaning, a meaning that is constituted by conventions, just as a relationship is constituted by certain social conventions. One can thus ask about the symbolic significance of the judgement that partnership is incomparable with money. According to Raz, in order to have certain relationships, one must believe that there is incomparability. The relationship is partly constituted by this belief. Thus, if one does not believe that

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[147] Raz (1986, p. 346).

[148] Raz (1986, p. 348).

[149] Raz (1986, p. 349).

there is incomparability, then one cannot have such a relationship in which incomparability is a symbolic constituent. Of course, some may have a relationship, believe that this is incomparable with money, and yet compare it with money. However, according to Raz, this would be damaging to the relationship.

It seems that the judgement that there is incomparability is constitutive of certain relationships; only those who believe that money and friendship are incomparable are capable of having friends. I agree with Raz that it may very well be that if you believe that money is more important than friends then you may not be capable of having friends, but I believe, *pace* Raz, that if you value friends more than money you are capable of having friends. This is the kind of reply that Raz discusses in the example of children and money. According to him, it would be just as abhorrent to buy a child as to sell a child. It is true that it seems abhorrent to buy your child just as it could be to sell it, but that could be because the value of the child is infinitely greater than that of the money.[150] Setting a price on your friend or your child would be abhorrent, but that could entail that the friend, or the child, is so much better than the money.[151]

Even if I am mistaken in this, it seems that it is the *belief* that friendship is not comparable with money that is constitutive of the relation, but from this we cannot draw the conclusion that they in fact are incomparable. All that Raz at best achieves with this argument is to establish that it very often may be that we *judge* that certain things are mutually incomparable and that a society in which we do not make such judgements would be very different from ours. Hence, Raz's argument fails to establish that there is incomparability. The belief in incomparability may be constitutive of friendship but the existence of friendship does not entail the existence of incomparability.

Let us therefore go on and consider other arguments for the Incomparability View. Or, rather, let us consider other explanations as to what it is in the hard cases that gives rise to incomparability.

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[150] It could perhaps be objected that if the value of a child is much greater than the value of money, then it would be an excellent deal for you to buy a child if it happens to be cheap to buy children, and consequently you are willing to buy a child. In order to avoid this objection one can claim that you as a buyer are not respecting the value of the child and this is in itself abhorrent.

[151] Regan notices another peculiarity with this argument. Raz claims that those who choose money rather than friendship are not acting wrongly. This claim and others seem to treat money and friendship as symmetrical. And according to Regan, "[t]hat suggests that the person who opts for friendship is making a choice which has a significant cost: She is giving up the opportunity for a deep and meaningful relationship with money." Regan (1988, p. 1068).

Evaluative Difference

One explanation as to why hard cases of comparison are cases of incomparability could be that the comparison involves two objects that are evaluatively very different but that nevertheless fall under the same covering concept.[152] For example, even though both Mozart and Michelangelo are creative, they are not comparable in terms of creativity, since their creativity is very different; Mozart has creativity properties related to music, while Michelangelo has creativity properties related to sculpting.

However, since this is not a case of non-comparability, they are not only creative *as musicians* and creative *as sculptors*, respectively—they are both creative *per se*. If so, then they might not be so different after all; why should we assume that they are incomparable in terms of creativity?

Furthermore, this view seems a bit simplistic. Evaluative difference is not sufficient to explain alleged incomparability. There are many items that are evaluatively very different and yet comparable.[153] A case in point is if a very bad exemplar of its kind is compared to something very evaluatively different that is a very good exemplar of its kind; we tend to say that the latter is better than the former.[154]

Complex Comparisons

It may seem reasonable to argue that the reason we get incomparability is that the comparison is complex and hard cases of comparison are complex; thus they are cases of incomparability. By complex comparison I mean that there are several aspects (or properties, features, or what have you) that contribute to the goodness; aspects that the two objects may both share, but may share to a different degree. So for example comparing a specific cup of coffee with a specific cup of tea in terms of taste might be a complex comparison; they are both hot drinks, but they may not be equally as hot, sweet, bitter, and so on.

This might sound reasonable, but it is not a satisfactory explanation unless it is also explained why the complexity gives rise to incomparability. There are

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[152] See Chang (1997, pp. 14–16).

[153] See Chang (1997, pp. 14–15).

[154] Unless we are dealing with a case of non-comparability.

several different possible explanations, but unfortunately none succeeds in providing a satisfactory account. This will become clear as I present such different explanations in which the complexity of the comparison plays a central part. As each explanation will be shown to fail, I hope to be able to reject the overarching idea that complexity yields incomparability.

One possible way to go is to argue that the aspects that contribute to the value as a whole are themselves incomparable and thus the wholes are incomparable. However, this does not seem to amount to much. To begin with, the aspects do not seem to be incomparable. Say that we compare A with B and that there are two aspects that contribute to the values of A and B. Let us call these aspects x and y. x_A and x_B seem to be comparable with each other since they are the same sort of property or aspect, only instantiated in different objects. Clearly they must be comparable. The same goes for y_A and y_B. Of course it could be argued that x is not comparable with y since this is a comparison across aspects and perhaps therefore the complex (x_A, y_A) is not comparable with (x_B, y_B).

However, this view, that two items are incomparable if the aspects that contribute to the whole are incomparable, does not provide a satisfactory explanation; it just seems to pass the buck. Now we need an explanation as to why the aspects are incomparable. Also, as was discussed above, mere evaluative difference cannot explain incomparability.

Another possibility is that each aspect that contributes to the value as a whole is comparable with the other aspects but, nevertheless, we do not know how much x_A and y_A individually contribute to the overall value (x_A, y_A). Because of this, unless x_A=x_B or y_A=y_B, we cannot make a pairwise comparison, such as comparing x_A to x_B and y_A to y_B, in order to determine whether A is better than, worse than, or equally as good as B. However, if that is the case, then we need an explanation as to why we do not know how x_A and y_A individually contribute to the overall goodness of A.

As I see it, there are three possible explanations. The first is that we simply do *not know* how to weigh the different aspects of the value. The second is that there is *nothing to know* concerning how we are to weigh the different aspects of the value. The third is that we know of *several different admissible ways to weigh* the different aspects of the value.

The first explanation tells us that the source of the incomparability is epistemic. If so, then the two objects are not incomparable, but rather it is not known what relation holds. We simply do not *know* how to compare the two objects. This does not lend support to the Incomparability View. Thus this idea is stillborn.

In one passage Raz seems to subscribe to something similar to the second explanation:

> There is a strong temptation to think of incomparability as an imperfection, an incompleteness. Why don't we develop the function from the different features to the overall valuation until it is complete and eliminate thereby all [incomparability]? The mistake in this thought is that it assumes that there is a true value behind the ranking of options, and that the ranking is a kind of technique for measuring this value. It is true of course that when we express a judgement about the value of options we strive to identify what is true independently of our valuation. But the ranking which determines the relative value of options is not a way of getting at some deeper truth, it constitutes the value of the options. Values may change, but such a change is not a discovery of a deeper truth. It is simply a change of value. Therefore, where there is [incomparability] it is the ultimate truth. There is nothing further behind it, nor is it a sign of an imperfection.[155]

It is not perfectly clear what Raz wants to say, but one interpretation is that Raz claims that it is not for epistemic reasons that we cannot know how the features contribute to the overall good of the object. Rather there is no function for how the features contribute to the goodness that we are comparing, and that is why there is incomparability. Such a view is, however, problematic. Consider the following: If there were no such function for an object *A*, then *A* could not be comparable to *any other object*! This is, however, not a characteristic of hard comparisons. Comparing Mozart to Michelangelo might be hard, but both of them can easily be compared to others in terms of creativity.[156]

A somewhat less extreme and more plausible view would be that the function that determines the ranking of the different items is only partial. Sometimes it gives a determinate answer as to which item is better than another and sometimes it does not, but we already knew that the ranking was partial; we wanted an answer as to why it is only a partial ranking. Getting the explanation

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[155] Raz (1986, p. 327).

[156] There could be something to this line of thought. However, it will not be an explanation of incomparability. Consider the following scenario which I find intelligible: For some reason we cannot determine which value relation holds between two wholes and thus we compare the values of the parts, but this cannot determine which value relation holds between the two wholes, since the aggregated value of the parts does not equal the value of the whole. This makes sense, but it is not an explanation of why the two wholes are incomparable—it is still unclear why the two wholes are incomparable.

that this is because the aggregation function from features to the value of wholes is partial is not very illuminating.

The third explanation might provide us with an answer to these questions. According to it, there are different admissible ways of weighing aspects and therefore we get different rankings of the items we compare. So for example assume that *A* and *B* are compared in terms of *V* and that there are two aspects of *V*: *x* and *y*. *A* may have more of *x* and *B* may have more of *y*. As far as *x* goes *A* is better than *B* but as far as *y* goes *B* is better than *A*. Let us assume that there are different admissible ways to weigh *x* and *y* and that on some *A* is better than *B* and on others *B* is better than *A*. This is, according to the adherent of the Incomparability View, the reason why *A* and *B* are incomparable. However, this explanation is problematic. Let us assume that there are only three different admissible ways to weigh *x* and *y*. On one weighing *x* weighs more than *y*, on another *y* weighs more than *x* and on the third they weigh equally as much. Consequently, the ranking of *A* and *B* depends on how much weight we give to *x* and *y*. On the first weighing *A* is better than *B*, on the second *B* is better than *A*, and on the third they are equally as good. This suggests that "*A* is better than *B*, or *A* is worse than *B*, or *A* and *B* are equally as good" is true: this disjunction is true on each admissible weighing. However, according to the adherent of the Incomparability View, this disjunction is false. Consequently, the adherent of the Incomparability View cannot make sense of the hard cases of comparison by appealing to multiple admissible ways to weigh the different aspects.[157]

Rule-Given Incomparability

Even if incomparability is not due to the complexity of the comparisons, it may seem reasonable to argue that incomparability is due to some specific structure of the comparisons. There do seem to be some kinds of comparisons with a very specific structure that do give rise to incomparability. Consider the comparative "pareto-better than". Say that an object *A* is pareto-better than another object *B* if at least one aspect is better in *A* than in *B,* and every aspect is better in *A* than in *B* or equally as good. If all aspects in both objects are just as good then the two objects are "pareto-equally as good". Now, if one object is better in one aspect but worse in another, none of the two objects is pareto-equally as good as

[157] One may think that this difficulty could be avoided by a Fitting-Attitudes account of incomparability. See appendix C for a further discussion about the Fitting-Attitudes account of value relations and hard cases.

the other or pareto-better than the other. It seems that they must be incomparable in terms of "pareto-better than/pareto equally as good as". The application of "pareto-better than" is very precise, so it is not a case of vagueness and it is not a case of non-comparability, since the two objects can be compared in terms of "pareto-better than". This can be shown by considering the following: *A* is just as *B* except that *A* has an attractive property *x* which *B* lacks; because of this *A* is pareto-better than *B*. *C* is just like *B* except that *C* has an attractive property *y* which *B* lacks; because of this *C* is pareto-better than *B*. So "pareto-better than" applies to *A* and *B*, and *B* and *C*. If *B* and *C* are non-comparable then it does not seem plausible that there is an item such as *A* that is comparable to both.[158] Therefore, *B* and *C* are not non-comparable, nevertheless *A* is incomparable with *C* in terms of "pareto-better than" since *C* lacks *x* and *A* lacks *y*.

We have here defined a comparative that does not always apply to the items we are comparing. That we can define comparatives in this way is not surprising.[159] The more interesting question is whether natural comparatives behave like this and more specifically, whether natural evaluative comparatives behave in this way. There are several points to be considered.

First, John Broome has argued that it is not as easy as it might seem to construct artificial comparatives of this kind.[160] According to Broome comparatives of this kind are incomplete "and that suggests it may be a fragment of a complete comparative rather than a comparative in its own right."[161] This claim is backed up by the observation that it seems hard to define a monadic predicate that has "pareto-better than" as its comparative. Closest to the mark seems to be "good" but the comparative of "good" is "better than". It may be that "pareto-better than" is closely connected to "better than", but it is not the complete comparative of "good".

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[158] This assumption implies that in cases of weak non-comparability, one item cannot be better than another. If, for example, a cake can be better than both number seven and the colour blue with respect to taste, then the argument above fails.

[159] It is easy to construct comparatives for which two items will be incomparable. For example, the following comparative whose schematic definition could be given in the following manner:

(a_1, b_1) is better than (a_2, b_2) iff a_1 is better than a_2 and b_1 is equally as good as b_2

(a_1, b_1) is equally as good as (a_2, b_2) iff a_1 is equally as good as a_2 and b_1 is equally as good as b_2

All the cases in which b_1 is not equally as good as b_2 will yield incomparability.

[160] Broome (1997, p. 84).

[161] Broome (1997, p. 84).

Second, I am sceptical about the possibility that many hard cases of comparison are such that we are using a strictly defined comparative that happens not to be applicable to the items that we want to compare. At most it might be a peripheral phenomenon.

Furthermore, the very general phenomenon of pareto-incomparability does not entail the more specific incomparability of value. If it did, then, by contraposition, comparability would entail pareto-comparability. But one item can be better than another item without that item being pareto-better than the other.

For the above reasons I conclude that rule-given incomparability is a highly artificial kind of incomparability that cannot make sense of our hard cases of comparison.

Incomparability and Probability

There is one final explanation for what gives rise to incomparability that ought to be considered. According to Joseph Raz, incomparability could be explained in terms of the incomparability of judgements of probabilities:

> [V]alue is often determined by the probability that the option will produce certain effects. Judgements of probability are infected by considerable [incomparablities] of their own. These are contagious and are transmitted to the value of the relevant options.[162]

I take it that the argument is the following: Assume that the probability that you will reach your goal if you choose option *A* is *x* while the probability that you will reach your goal if you choose option *B* is *y*. If *x* and *y* are incomparable, then option *A* and *B* might also be incomparable. It is thus not an argument for incomparable outcomes, but rather for incomparable options.[163]

If the value of the option is determined by the value of the outcome then the argument fails. That is, it could be argued that the incomparability of the probabilities is only an epistemic hurdle in determining which option is the better; the best option is the option that leads to the best outcome Unfortunately we often do not know what the outcomes will be, but this does

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[162] Raz (1986, p. 327).

[163] Even if the options are incomparable the outcomes can of course still be comparable.

not make the options incomparable. The option that leads to the outcome that is closest to your aim (everything else being equal) should be the best option (and if both will, then they are equally as good).

If the argument is to work then this view on the value of options must be rejected. Perhaps the value of an option is instead more closely connected to its expected value. The procedure for determining expected outcome value is clearly defined: identify the possible outcomes of an action, determine their value, and then multiply each value by the probability of that outcome. When these probability-weighted values are added together, we get the expected outcome value of the act. Now say that we are to compare two options in terms of expected outcome value. In determining which option is the best in terms of expected outcome value we should be able to compare the two resulting values. The worry, however, is that that if the probabilities are incomparable then the comparison cannot be as straightforward as proposed—in fact they may be incomparable.[164]

There are several issues we should be aware of here: First, it could perhaps be argued that this account might not explain that many alleged forms of value incomparability. If this is what it is for something to be incomparable, then incomparability might be a rare phenomenon, since we seldom compare two options in terms of expected outcome value and we should not expect too many of these cases to involve incomparable probabilities.

Second, this case of incomparability falls under the category of rule-given incomparability. As hinted above, I believe that rule-given incomparability is a peripheral phenomenon that is of little interest in the debate. However, these objections assume that we do not compare options in terms of the value and probabilities of their outcomes very often, and that we always follow a well defined procedure as calculation of expected value. Perhaps we do make such comparisons more often than I have thought and perhaps they need not follow such a strict procedure.

However, the following is a more important objection: This account of value incomparability presupposes the somewhat unclear and controversial concept of incomparable probabilities. Consequently, the Incomparability View might not be as theoretically parsimonious as first expected. Furthermore, it is reasonable to expect that arguments in favour of the existence of incomparable probabilities will run into objections very similar to objections that have been presented in this chapter against the existence of value-incomparability. And it is not clear

[164] If the probabilities are incomparable, then probabilities cannot be single numbers (since numbers always are comparable). For this reason the idea of multiplying the value of each outcome by its probability becomes problematic.

why the arguments in favour of incomparable probabilites will be more successful in dealing with such objections. It does not seem promising to elucidate one kind of incomparability in terms of another kind of incomparability. In many respects this argument in favour of incomparability then seems to be passing the buck. This objection alone seems devastating for this approach.

Conclusions

It seems safe to assume that we cannot rule out the possibility that there is conceptual space for incomparability. It is, however, unclear what it would take for this possibility to be realised. The best argument in favour of the view that there could be instantiated incomparability should probably be made in terms of non-comparability. The problem with this approach, however, is that it seems to be, by definition, an uninteresting case from a normative point of view.

It might be thought that a better explanation could be made in terms of "rule-given incomparability". This approach, however, seems to only allow for peripheral cases of incomparability. An explanation of incomparability in terms of incomparable probabilities seemed at first to do better. But this approach could be criticised for depending on the controversial concept of incomparable probabilities. Consequently, if the Incomparability View can explain some hard cases then these cases are only fringe cases of hard comparisons. Since the Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View have much more explanatory potency and make fewer assumptions, I submit that we should reject the Incomparability View.

9. A Fourth Positive Value Relation

There is a possibility that some hard cases should be understood in terms of a fourth basic positive value relation. This view has been held by several philosophers, but most famously by Derek Parfit and Ruth Chang. These two philosophers have different views on how this relation should be construed, but they both deny that there are only three positive value relations. The main challenge for this view, besides establishing that a fourth relation really holds, is to explain how we are to understand this relation.[165] Without such an explanation the relation may seem rather mysterious. Of course, for the present discussion, the adherents of this view must also explain why some hard cases of comparison are cases of a fourth value relation. In this chapter I will consider whether the adherents of this view succeed in their task. The conclusion will be that, even though there are some reasons to take this view seriously, it will ultimately fail since it cannot rule out that the alleged cases of a fourth positive value relation could just as well be examples of the more familiar phenomenon of indeterminacy due to vagueness.

[165] As Anders Herlitz has kindly suggested to me in private correspondence, there is really no need to assume that there are *only* four value relations rather than three. There might just as well be even more instantiated value relations. If one is willing to accept that there is a fourth value relation then one may also be willing to accept that there are four *or more* basic positive value relations. This line of reasoning may also find some support in Wlodek Rabinowicz's argument that there is conceptual space for many more than four value relations. Rabinowicz (2008, 2012). However, as mentioned in the introduction, if it can be shown that there is no instantiated fourth basic positive value relation then there is no reason to believe that there are four *or more* such relations.

Rough Comparability and Imprecision

In his *Reasons and Persons* Derek Parfit entertains the idea that there could be a fourth value relation:

> Consider three candidates for some literary prize, one Novelist and two Poets. We might claim, of the Novelist and the first Poet, that neither is worse than the other. This would not be claiming that these two cannot be compared. It would be asserting rough comparability. There are many poets who would be worse candidates than this Novelist, and many novelists that would be worse candidates than the First Poet. We are claiming, of these two, that something important can be said about their respective merits. Neither is worse than the other. They are in the same league. Suppose next that we judge the Second Poet to be slightly better than the first. (When we are comparing two poets, our judgments can be less rough.) Does this judgment force us to conclude either that the Second Poet is better than the Novelist, or that the First is worse? It does not. We can claim that, though the Second Poet is better than the First, neither is worse than the Novelist, who is worse than neither […] Rough comparability is, in some cases, merely the result of ignorance. When this is true, we believe that there is in principle precise or full comparability. This would be true, when we compare the Novelist and either Poet, if the only possibilities are that one is better, or that both are exactly equally as good. In such a case, this is not plausible. The rough comparability is here intrinsic, not the result of ignorance. Must it be true, of Proust or Keats, either that one was the greater writer, or that both were exactly equally as great? There could not be, even in principle, such precision. But some poets are greater writers than some novelists, and by more or less.[166]

It is not clear how one is to interpret this claim, but one reasonable reading is that Parfit believes that there actually exists a fourth value relation; i.e., the relation he refers to as rough comparability.[167] However, in *Reasons and Persons*

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[166] Parfit (1984, p. 431).

[167] According to Chang, Parfit claims that there are in fact six value relations. She understands Parfit's claims in the following way: The trichotomy of value relations can be "roughed up". This means that "better than" and "worse than" also can be rough or precise. When x is

he does not discuss this possibility much further. Specifically, he does not provide much argument in favour of the view that this fourth value relation is in fact a new value relation and not a case of indeterminacy. Lately, however, he returned to the idea of a fourth positive value relation. In his more recent writings he says that the relations can be imprecise. This is central to the *Normative Imprecisionism View* that he defends:

> On this view, there are often no precise truths about the relative goodness of different things. There can be fairly precise truths about the relative value of some things. One of two painful ordeals, for example, might be 2.3 times as bad as the other, by involving pain of the same intensity for 2.3 times as long. In most important cases, however, relative value does not depend only on any such single, measurable property. When two pains differ greatly in both their length and their intensity, there are no precise truths about whether, and by how much, one of these pains would be worse. There is no scale on which we could weigh the relative importance of intensity and length. Nor could five minutes of ecstasy be precisely 7.6 times better than two hours of amusement. When we are choosing between different ways in which our life might go, by choosing between two careers, for example, or deciding whether to have children, there are only imprecise truths about which life would be better. And there are only imprecise truths about the relative goodness of most different acts or outcomes, such as acts that would benefit a few people, or give lesser benefits to many others. Such imprecision is not the result of our lack of knowledge, but is part of what we would know if we knew the full facts. When two things are qualitatively very different, these differences would often make it impossible that one of these things is better than the other by some precise amount, or that both things are precisely equally as good.[168]

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precisely better than *y, x* is better than *y* by a precise amount; and when *x* is roughly better than *y*, *x* is better than *y*, but not by a precisely specified amount. Consequently, we have in one sense six value relations "precisely better than", "roughly better than", "precisely worse than", "roughly worse than", "precisely equally as good as", and "roughly as good as". This could also be interpreted to mean that there are only three value relations, but that they can be rough or precise. This is, however, only partly true: "Parfit thinks 'better than' and 'worse than' are sufficiently capacious to admit of both precise and rough interpretations, while 'equally good' means 'exactly equally good' and thus 'roughly equally good' is in some sense a new relation." Chang (2002b p. 661 n. 5). So it seems that there are several interpretations of Parfit's claim: According to one, there are three positive value relations but these can be precise or rough. According to another, there are four basic positive value relations. And according to a third, there are six positive value relations.

[168] Parfit (2014a, p. 5).

What I find most interesting is Parfit's idea of "imprecise equality", which he describes in the following way:

> Two things are imprecisely equally as good if it is true that, though neither is better than the other, there could be some third thing which was better or worse than one of these things, though *not* better or worse than the other.[169]

This could be understood to be a claim that there is a fourth positive value relation, but it is just a definition of such a relation and not an argument that there is such an instantiated relation. It needs to be established that this is in fact a form of comparability, that it is not due to ignorance, and that it is not a form of vagueness.

As was made clear by the previous quotation, Parfit is explicit that imprecision is not due to lack of knowledge. He has also stated that it is not due to vagueness, though he admits that these two concepts seem to be closely related to imprecision.[170] To me imprecision seems indistinguishable from indeterminacy due to vagueness.[171] Unfortunately, it does not help to consider the sources of these phenomena in order to separate them. Parfit states that imprecision can arise when the items we are comparing exhibit great qualitative differences, so perhaps this is the source of the imprecision.[172] However, when there is indeterminacy the items also often seem to exhibit great qualitative differences, so this does not help us to distinguish imprecision from indeterminacy.[173]

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[169] Parfit (2014a, p. 6).

[170] In private conversation.

[171] When discussing vagueness Parfit seems to believe that the most important form of vagueness is of the ontic kind. For example he writes: "In the cases that are relevant here, indeterminacy is produced, not by the vagueness of some concept, but by features of the things to which this concept refers." Parfit (2014b p. 3). However, even this ontic indeterminacy is something different from imprecision according to Parfit.

[172] However, qualitative differences do not seem to be the only source of imprecision. Parfit also employs the notion of imprecision when discussing comparisons between possible worlds with different number of people. The salient difference between the populations is the difference in size, thus it seems that quantitative differences also can be a source for imprecision. Parfit refers to this as "different-number-based imprecision". I find it curious how quantitative differences can give rise to imprecision, but perhaps a quantitative difference in a population always gives rise to a qualitative difference as well.

[173] Parfit might not worry about the potential conflation of the two phenomena, since he might believe that there is no such thing as indeterminacy due to vagueness in the moral domain. If that is the case, then we do not risk conflating indeterminacy with imprecision. I take the

It is unfortunate that Parfit does not provide more arguments to support his claims. Without a more elaborate account of this imprecision it is difficult to consider its plausibility and treat it as a serious contender for being a correct account of some hard cases.

Before moving on to discuss a more worked out argument in favour of a possible fourth value relation, it might be illuminating to consider another account of rough equality put forward by James Griffin. He writes:

> Some values are only roughly equal, and the roughness is not in our understanding but ineradicably in the values themselves. Still, rough equality is a long way from incomparability.[174]

Griffin admits that it sometimes can be hard to compare things. For example, it can be hard to compare two novelists since they are good in very different ways. One may for example be funny, but not provide many insights, and the other is full of insight, but dry. That they are good in different ways just means, according to Griffin, that it is hard to compare them, but not that it is impossible to compare them. If one novelist was, as Griffin puts it, "an absolute hoot" while another provided minor insights; the comparison would not be as hard. So the mere difference cannot give rise to incomparability. However, when both novelists are good, the comparison becomes harder and that is when we are dealing with rough equality. And, according to Griffin, rough equality may be very common.

The claim that the roughness is "not in our understanding but ineradicably in the values themselves" may suggest that rough equality is a primitive positive value relation, but this I think is a mistake. According to Griffin, rough equality does not give rise to a partial ordering but to what he calls a vague ordering. In 2002, Griffin in fact explicitly stated that rough equality is vagueness: "What, in fact, I say is that rough equality is vagueness".[175] Thus, on this account of "rough equality" this concept is nothing over and above vagueness.

I believe that this position is a common one when discussing what seems like a fourth value relation. For example, the same seems to be true of another account of the notion of rough equality, namely that of Thomas Hurka. As he

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following quotation to support this interpretation: "The concepts *good* and *bad* are vague, but so is the concept *tall*. The concept *taller than* is not vague, nor are the concepts *better than* and *worse than*." (2014b, p.1). Unfortunately, Parfit does not give any arguments to support the latter part of this claim. As already mentioned, it might be that "taller than" is not vague, but from this we cannot draw the conclusion that "better than" and "worse than" are not vague.

[174] Griffin (1986, p. 80).

[175] Griffin (2000, p. 287).

expounds the notion of rough equality it seems to end up as an account of vagueness.[176]

Ruth Chang, however, is very clear in her argumentation in favour of a fourth basic positive value relation that this relation is not due to vagueness. It is now time to consider her arguments in favour of parity.

Parity

The most elaborate argument in favour of a fourth basic positive value relation is provided by Ruth Chang. According to her, things can be *on a par*. Parity is thus to be construed as a fourth positive value relation. Since she takes this relation to be primitive she cannot give an analysis of it, but she does point out some of its features. For example, the relation seems to hold between items that are very different. This is the case with Mozart and Michelangelo; they are both creative but in very different ways and thus when comparing who is the best with respect to creativity we are drawn to the conclusion that they are on a par.[177] It would of course be helpful if it was possible to account for what it is to be "very different". Chang gives one account of the difference between items that are on a par. It begins with the claim that evaluative difference can take two forms, or rather, that it can be understood along two axes:

> [M]agnitude—whether the difference is *zero* or *nonzero*, on the one hand, and direction—whether the difference is *biased* or *unbiased*, on the other. A difference is zero if it exists but does not have magnitude. A difference is biased if it favors one item and, correspondingly, disfavors the other (i.e., if there is a difference between the difference between A and B and the difference between B and A). A zero difference, then, must be unbiased.[178]

By introducing the notions of zero/nonzero and biased/unbiased Chang believes she can account for the trichotomy of value relations and parity. If the difference between two items is nonzero and biased, one of the items will be better than

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[176] See Hurka (1993, p. 86).

[177] Note that this is not a sufficient condition for parity. As will be clear soon, things that satisfy this requirement can still be related by e.g., a better-than relation.

[178] Chang (2002a, pp. 141).

the other, while if the difference is zero and unbiased they will be equally as good. Two items that are on a par will have a nonzero and unbiased difference. According to Chang such a difference is not an unfamiliar idea. For example, when we compare the length of two novels the novels may differ in magnitude, thus the difference is nonzero, but we could still be unbiased between them. That is, we need not specify which novel is longer than the other. I take it that this example is meant to establish that there is nothing queer about the idea of a nonzero unbiased difference and consequently we should be willing to conclude that items can relate in this manner with respect to their value. However, the example is problematic, since there is in fact a biased difference between the novels. Even if we do not specify which novel is the longer, it is still the case that one novel is longer than the other. This is an underlying biased difference. In fact it seems very difficult to come up with an example of something that is nonzero and unbiased; for all suggestions of a nonzero and unbiased difference there always seems to be some underlying biased difference. Chang acknowledges that this is the case for the non-evaluative, but still believes that it could be different in the evaluative domain.[179] Nevertheless, it seems difficult to argue for the existence of parity via this analogy. In her later writings about parity Chang does not discuss these notions very much, so perhaps this is not a good tool for characterising parity.

There are, however, other suggestions for how one could characterise parity. Erik Carlson, Joshua Gert, and Wlodek Rabinowicz, for example, have all tried to provide an analysis of parity.[180] It is, however, questionable whether they succeed. According to Chang, parity is a primitive concept, but according to the accounts provided by those above it is not a primitive notion and thus, if Chang is right, it cannot be an analysis of the relation Chang presents. It may of course be that Chang is mistaken on this issue. It is possible that one of the accounts provided may give a correct analysis of parity and Chang is wrong when she claims that the concept is primitive. Of the three accounts I take Rabinowicz's to be the most successful. He provides an account of a value relation that seems very similar to how Chang characterises the parity relation.

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[179] Chang (2002a, pp. 142). It may seem as if spatial distance could be an example of when there is no underlying biased difference. However, as Erik Carlson points out, such an analogy will be flawed: "Unlike goodness, length, price, and mass, absolute distance is not a property, and, *a fortiori*, not a *comparative* property of an item. While an item can be better, longer, heavier, or more expensive than another item, i.e., have greater goodness, length, mass, or price, it cannot have 'greater absolute distance'". Carlson (2010, p. 121).

[180] Carlson (2010), Gert (2004), and Rabinowicz (2008, 2012).

If Rabinowicz's account is correct then he has succeeded in showing that there is conceptual space for this relation. I am, however, more interested in arguments that may show that parity is instantiated and such arguments are mostly to be found in Chang's work.[181] That is, even if there might be other accounts of a possible fourth basic positive value relation it is only Chang who has extensively argued for the possibility of such a relation to be instantiated. For this reason, I will focus on Chang's writing on parity.

It is time to discuss the arguments in favour of the possibility of parity. Chang's argument in favour of this fourth positive value relation consists of three parts. First, she argues that there are cases in which none of the standard value relations holds. In order to reach this conclusion, she employs the Small-Improvement Argument. As was described above, it has traditionally been assumed that if two items stand in a relation to which the Small-Improvement Argument applies, then they must be incomparable, but Chang argues that the Small-Improvement Argument only shows that the items are not related by any of the three standard value relations; thus they could still be comparable. In the second part of her argument, Chang employs what she calls the Chaining Argument to show that the items under consideration indeed are comparable. However, even if it can be argued that neither of the three standard value relations determinately holds and yet two items are comparable, this is not enough in order to conclude that a fourth positive value relation holds between them. Chang must also establish that this is not merely a case of when it is indeterminate which of the standard three value relations obtains.

I shall now discuss each of these separate sub-arguments in detail to show that the argument she provides for parity ultimately fails to establish that there is such a relation.

The Small-Improvement Argument Revisited

When I discussed the Small-Improvement Argument, it was noted that it does not establish incomparability but it could help to establish that there are items that are not related by any of the three standard value relations. For Chang this is enough. Of course, it is still possible that the items in question are incomparable, but that is dealt with in the second part of her argument. It is, however, unclear whether the Small-Improvement Argument does succeed in

[181] For more on Rabinowicz's account see appendix C.

establishing that there are items that are not related by the standard three value relations.

One kind of objection to the Small-Improvement Argument is common: How do we know that one more symphony would actually have made Mozart better in terms of creativity? Perhaps one more symphony is not enough; perhaps a larger improvement is needed. It could then be that whatever makes Mozart$^+$ better than Mozart would also make Mozart$^+$ better than Michelangelo.[182] There is something to this objection, but it does not take seriously the fact that we sometimes do make judgements in accordance with the Small-Improvement Argument. Thus, in order for the objection to be convincing, it must also be claimed that such judgements are mistaken. I will get back to this kind of a more general objection later on. There is also the similar objection that it may be that one more symphony makes Mozart$^+$ better than Mozart in terms of musical creativity, but it does not necessarily follow that it makes Mozart$^+$ better than Mozart in terms of overall creativity. Thus, Mozart$^+$ may be better than Mozart on a narrow reading of creativity, while Mozart$^+$ is not better than Michelangelo in overall creativity. Consequently, the claim that there are only three basic positive value relations is not threatened.[183] I am not convinced by this objection, however. I do agree that when we compare Mozart with Mozart$^+$ we do compare them in terms of musical creativity, while when we compare Mozart and Mozart$^+$ with Michelangelo we compare them in terms of overall creativity, but I also believe that an improvement to Mozart's musical creativity will also be an improvement to his overall creativity.

There are, however, other objections to the Small-Improvement Argument. I shall now discuss two of them in detail.

The Indeterminacy Objection

The conclusion that needs to follow from the Small-Improvement Argument is that it is *determinate* that *A* is neither better, worse, nor equally as good as *B*. It has however been questioned whether the Small-Improvement Argument succeeds in this. In order to arrive at the desired result it must be shown that it is *determinately* false that *A* is better than *B*, and *determinately* false that *B* is better than *A*, furthermore, it must be *determinately* true that A^+ is better than *A*. It is

[182] E.g., Klocksiem (2010, p. 321).

[183] See Klocksiem (2010, p. 321) and Hsieh (2005).

far from easy to establish conclusively that three items stand in such a relation. For all of the alleged cases of parity, the adherents of the Vagueness View can always respond that it is indeterminate how the items relate, and precisely because of this, a small improvement to one of them will not make it determinately better than the other. So even if it is determinate that A^+ is better than A, it may be indeterminate whether A^+ is better than B and indeterminate whether A is equally as good as B.

Ruth Chang provides two arguments against the possibility that it is only indeterminate how the items relate in the Small-Improvement Argument. Her first argument focuses on the phenomenology of the cases. She argues that paradigmatic cases of vagueness differ from the hard cases. In the borderline cases, we are just as willing to say that a predicate applies as that it does not apply.[184] For example, for Harry, who is borderline hairy, we are just as willing to call him bald as we are willing to call him not bald. In the hard cases, on the other hand, we are willing to say that e.g., Mozart is not better than Michelangelo (with respect to creativity), but we are *not* as willing to say that Mozart is better than Michelangelo (with respect to creativity). It is, however, not obvious to me that this is how we would be willing to judge in these cases; I find it somewhat difficult to see why we would treat the cases differently.

Things might become clearer if, as proposed by Ryan Wasserman, we compare the case of Mozart and Michelangelo with a case of comparative vagueness.[185] Assume that we are to determine who is the more bald of two borderline bald men: Harry and Curly. Imagine that their baldness is of different kinds; Harry has more hair, but not as evenly spread out; and Curly has less hair, but more evenly spread out. I believe that most people are willing to judge that Harry is not balder than Curly, but are we just as willing to judge that Harry is balder than Curly? I am hesitant. I cannot see that there is a bigger asymmetry in how willing we are to make the two judgements when it comes to

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[184] Johan E. Gustafsson has presented an interesting objection to this claim. He notes that even if there is vagueness it need not be the case that we are as willing to judge that a predicate applies, as we are willing to judge that it does not apply. In his example the two borderline bald men have very similar hair, only that one of them, Harry, is more hairy than the other, Larry. "Even though both are borderline cases of baldness, we might be less willing to call Harry bald than Larry. Yet we would not therefore be less willing to call Harry not bald than to call Larry not bald. Thus the extent to which one is willing to judge that a term applies in a borderline case can be lesser than the extent to which one is willing to judge that it does not apply." Gustafsson (2011, p. 441).

[185] Wasserman's example is similar to the one presented here. "Suppose that Harry has 100 hairs distributed more-or-less evenly across his scalp. Suppose that Curly has 99 hairs that are perfectly distributed across his scalp. Is Harry balder than Curly?" Wasserman (2004, p. 396).

Mozart and Michelangelo than there is when it comes to how willing we are to make the two judgements about Harry and Curly.[186]

Chang seems to be aware of this sort of possible objections and provides a second argument:

> Perhaps the force of the argument from phenomenology is not altogether clear. In that case, we might allow that there is some "perplexity" over whether one item is better than the other, where this perplexity is consistent with the possibility of semantic indeterminacy. The question

[186] Wlodek Rabinowicz has suggested to me that one possible reason for this is that the Harry-Curly case is actually a case of parity. According to Chang parity arises in multidimensional comparisons and the Harry-Curly case is a multidimensional comparison. This would, of course, not only be true for this specific example. I take it that the Harry-Curly case is a paradigmatic case of vagueness. It is commonly assumed that comparatives can be vague due to multidimensionality. For example in *Theories of Vagueness* Rosanna Keefe writes: "[…] comparatives can be vague, particularly when related to a multi-dimensional positive […]" Keefe. (2000, p. 14). And in the debate over whether hard cases are to be understood in terms of parity or vagueness the adherents of the Vagueness View seem to take it as a given that multidimensionality can give rise to vagueness. This is obvious in Wasserman's Harry-Curly case, but he is not alone. Elson writes: "In *comparative* borderline cases, the relevant question is […] 'is a Fer than b?' If Hank has fewer hairs widely distributed over his head, and Henry has more thick hairs concentrated in a ring around his scalp, then it may be indeterminate or unknowable whether Hank is balder, or Henry is balder, or they are precisely equally bald." Elson (2014c, p. 7). Consequently, if it is true that the Harry-Curly case is a case of parity then it means that parity it not only a value relation but applies in a bigger domain; it might apply in all cases we standardly refer to as cases of multidimensional vagueness. This is surprising; how can it be that we have been ignorant of the fact that these are all cases of parity, for such a long time? Note, that if cases of multidimensional vagueness are cases of parity then it will not be either true or false that Harry is balder than Curly; rather it will be false. We have thus misconstrued the truth-value of all such cases. This claim is thus very revisionary and this should make us less willing to accept it. Furthermore, one can always substitute the Harry-Curly example for a case in which the vague comparative is not multidimensional. It seems to me that the argument would still be as convincing—since there still seems to be no obvious difference from how we experience such a case and how we experience an alleged case of parity. All we need is a case of a unidimensional vague comparative. A good example of such a comparative is presented by Elson: It cannot be denied that "is a heap" is vague and it is unidimensionally vague since it is only the number of grains of sand that counts. As it turns out, comparatives can be parasitic on this vagueness. "Say that a is 'heap-richer' than b if a owns more heaps than b. Sarah has twenty clear heaps, and no other piles of sand. Sally has fifteen clear heaps, ten borderline-heaps, and no other piles of sand. It is vague how many heaps Sally has, and so it is vague which of them is heap-richer: if Sally has less than twenty heaps, then Sarah is heap-richer than Sally; if Sally has twenty heaps, then Sarah and Sally are equally heap-rich; if Sally has more than twenty heaps, then Sally is heap-richer than Sarah." Elson (2014c, p. 9).

> then is whether this perplexity has its source in the vagueness of predicates.[187]

Chang goes about answering this question by considering how the perplexity could be resolved. More exactly, she compares how one may resolve the perplexity in cases of vagueness with how the perplexity could be resolved in cases of alleged parity. If we are dealing with vagueness, there is not much to be resolved. The perplexity of the case is due to vagueness and there is not much more to it. But of course, and as Chang points out, there is still a further question that can be posed, namely: how are we to resolve the borderline status?

> That is, we ask, apart from any context, the following hypothetical: If we had to choose between application or not, how would we do so—what would be a permissible way of resolving the indeterminacy? It is in this broad, intuitive sense of "resolution" that we can ask whether the resolution of perplexity in [alleged cases of parity] is like the resolution of indeterminacy in borderline cases.[188]

Of course, according to Chang, the answer to the second question is no. When it comes to vagueness it is permissible to resolve the indeterminacy by arbitrary stipulation, but in the hard cases that are allegedly cases of parity, it is not permissible to resolve the perplexity by arbitrary stipulation. For example, say that you have to make a judgement as to whether Harry is balder than Curly or not balder than Curly. In this case you are allowed to arbitrarily pick a stipulation of "balder than" and make your judgement according to this stipulation. In contrast, when it comes to comparing, e.g., Mozart and Michelangelo with respect to creativity you are not allowed to just arbitrarily pick a stipulation. There are admissible resolutions in this case according to Chang, but it is not appropriate to arbitrarily pick one such resolution.

The difference in these cases is not obvious to me. To tease out this difference Chang claims that if one person, Jack, arbitrarily picks a stipulation of "better with respect to creativity" and another person, Jill, picks another, such that, according to Jack, Mozart is better than Michelangelo and, according to Jill, Michelangelo is the better of the two; Jack and Jill will disagree and "this is no clash of arbitrary decisions but a substantive disagreement in which

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[187] Chang (2002b, p. 682).

[188] Chang (2002b, p. 682).

arguments can be brought to bear."[189] However, if Jack and Jill were to compare Harry and Curly, and Jack made an arbitrary stipulation so that he judged Harry to be balder than Curly, while Jill made a stipulation so that she judged Harry not to be balder than Curly, then there is no genuine substantive disagreement between them. Thus the difference is that if we arbitrarily choose to focus on the vividness of Mozart's and Michelangelo's art, one question lingers: why should we focus on vividness? While in the case of arbitrarily choosing to focus on the numbers of hair when comparing Harry and Curly the question of why we focus on the numbers of hair does not linger.

It is not clear to me what the difference between these two cases is. Chang, however, claims that the difference can be made clearer by considering normatively significant comparatives.

> Consider a superhard case involving comparison of a particular act of promise keeping and a particular act of bringing about great happiness with respect to moral goodness. As the case is hard, the promise keeping is morally better in some respects—for example, it fulfils one's obligation to keep promises—while the bringing of great happiness is better in other respects—for example, it addresses legitimate interests of many people—and yet it is not obvious that one is morally better than the other overall. Now the question before us is, Could the resolution of the case be an arbitrary matter—could the perplexity concerning which is morally better be answered by the flip of a coin? Clearly, the resolution of this superhard case cannot be a matter of arbitrary stipulation but is a substantive matter concerning which is better.[190]

It is true that *if* it was the case that it is not indeterminate which act is the best then it seems somewhat wrong to settle the issue by the flip of a coin. However, it has not yet been shown that it is not a case of indeterminacy. If we knew that it is indeterminate which of the two acts is the better we *might* be willing to let the flip of a coin determine the outcome. In other words, the reason we hesitate about flipping the coin could be that we do not know whether this is a case of indeterminacy or whether some positive value relation determinately obtains.

I say "might", since it is not clear that we can flip a coin in order to decide which alternative is the best. Even if it is true that both interpretations of "balder" are equally permissible, it does not follow that we can determine the

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[189] Chang (2002b, p. 685).

[190] Chang (2002b, p. 685). By "superhard case" Chang refers to those cases in which the items appear to pass the Small-Improvement Argument and yet seem to be comparable.

meaning of "balder" with a flip of a coin. Or, more importantly, it does not follow that we can decide how to act by a flip of a coin. We want to choose the person who is balder than the other; we do not want to choose the person who is balder than the other according to *one* permissible interpretation.

If there is some phenomenological difference between the cases discussed, I believe that some of this difference should be spelled out in terms of the practical implications of the judgements. When making a judgement between two possible careers, it seems more reasonable to be hesitant as to whether one of them is better than the other and it is the fact that the consequences are of great importance that makes us hesitate. Similarly, we might find the comparison of Mozart and Michelangelo to be more important than that of Harry and Curly. If the latter comparison should have grave consequences, we would probably find it more similar to the alleged cases of parity. In those cases it would be true that any interpretation of "balder" would be permissible, but it would still be the case that we would hesitate to let the flip of a coin determine the outcome.

There is also a competing explanation in these cases. The reason it seems wrong to let the toss of a coin determine what we ought to do could be that one of the acts is the right thing to do. Thus, in some cases it is not indeterminate how the two things relate due to semantic vagueness; rather, one item may be determinately better than another, but since we lack full knowledge we do not know which item it is. For example, the reason the Mozart-Michelangelo case may have a resolutional remainder could be due to epistemic issues; we know far from everything about their creative skills and therefore we are left with this feeling of not having settled the questions. The resolutional remainder is nothing more than a feeling of not being competent enough to judge what relation holds.

Consequently, in order for the conclusion to strictly follow from the Small-Improvement Argument, it must be ruled out that the there is indeterminacy in play and it must also be ruled out that we reach the conclusion due to ignorance. As should be clear by now, it is doubtful that Chang succeeds in the first task. The second task will be considered in the next section.

The Epistemic Objection

As I mentioned above, if there is a difference in the phenomenology between hard cases and paradigmatic cases of vagueness, this is not enough to support the idea that the hard cases are not cases of the standard three value relations. It

could just as well be explained in terms of ignorance—it could be that we do not know how the items relate. That is, the Parity View must show that the Trichotomy View is not equally as good in dealing with these hard cases. Furthermore, it could even be that we judge that it is determinately false that A is better than B, determinately false that B is better than A, determinately true that A^+ is better than A, and determinately false that A^+ is better than B, but there is still the further question as to why we should trust our judgements.[191] For example, it may be that we do not have all the relevant information about Mozart and Michelangelo and it may very well be that if we did it would be clear that Mozart and Mozart$^+$ actually are better than Michelangelo in terms of creativity. Furthermore, even if turns out that we have all the relevant information, there is also the further question of whether our judgements really tell us what relations there actually are. Just because we judge that Mozart$^+$ is not better than Michelangelo it might still be that, contrary to what we believe, Mozart$^+$ is better than Michelangelo.

According to Chang, there are some cases that avoid this sort of scepticism. An example is when you try to determine whether a cup of coffee or a cup of tea tastes better to you. Say that you judge that the coffee neither tastes better nor worse than the cup of tea. A more fragrant cup of tea would taste better than the original but the more fragrant tea would still not taste better than the coffee. In this example we have all the relevant information and our judgements tell us what value relation holds between the cups in terms of "tasty according to me". According to Chang, examples such as these make it possible to move from what is rational to judge, to the truth of the comparatives.

It seems that the only comparative that can guarantee that we do not make a mistake and which gives us a first-person authority must be a value comparative that supervenes solely on phenomenological properties. There might, however, be some problems with relying on such relations in order to rule out the epistemic objection. To begin with, it might be hard to come up with an example of a value relation that solely supervenes on phenomenological properties, but even if that were possible there are some oddities about such a relation. Let us assume that "tastes better according to me" is such a relation. If you compare two drinks that we cannot distinguish between, then they must taste equally as good to you. If we make a small change to one of the drinks, a change that is indistinguishable for you, then they still taste equally as good. In this way we can construct a spectrum consisting of drinks for which you cannot discriminate a difference between adjacent drinks and thus each adjacent drink

[191] For more on this see Regan (1997).

will taste equally as good according to you. It seems reasonable to conclude that you can distinguish a difference between two drinks that are far apart from each other in the spectrum. It also seems reasonable to conclude that these need not taste equally as good according to you. We can then conclude that the relation is not transitive, but as already been argued the trichotomous relations are transitive.

This could mean that we should not use covering concepts of this kind and consequently we should deny that, e.g., "tastes better according to me" is a value relation. At least, it can be concluded that if there are value relations that supervene solely upon phenomenological properties, then these relations seem to differ greatly from the value relations that we are more familiar with. To depend on these in order to respond to the epistemic objection could be problematic precisely because they seem to be different from most other value relations. We could also go in another direction and claim that since all value relations are transitive, the above reasoning shows that value relations such as "taste better according to me" do not solely supervene on phenomenological properties, they also supervene on differences that are imperceptible for us. This way the relation may be transitive, but, consequently, we will sometimes make faulty judgements since we do not always have first-person authority over our judgements.

Chang seems to accept this latter line of response:

> None of what I say here should be taken to suggest that we can never be wrong about which of two things tastes better to us. There may be imperceptible differences in taste, hotness, painfulness, and so on, such that although there is an added grain of sugar, joule of heat energy, or microwatt of electric current and, ex hypothesi, the item is sweeter, hotter, more painful, we nevertheless judge that the taste, hotness, and painfulness is the same. In such a case, the truth about how things taste (and so on) outstrips our ability to discern differences. In the case at hand, in contrast, there is a very definite, perceptible difference in taste—the coffee has a sharp, pungent taste, and the tea has a smooth, fragrant taste—but nevertheless one judges that neither tastes better than the other. The present argument needs only the limited claim that we have first-person authority over certain judgments of taste.[192]

It is true that the argument only needs the "limited claim that we have first-person authority over certain judgements of taste". I take it, however, that the above reasoning showed that we can never with certainty know whether we have

[192] Chang (2002b, p. 669, n. 15).

first person authority over any judgement.[193] Even though there are perceptible differences in taste between the coffee and the tea there might be other imperceptible properties of the two drinks that make it indeterminate how they relate. At least Chang's argument does not rule out this possibility.

I hope it will be clear by now that it is far from obvious that the Small-Improvement Argument succeeds in establishing that there are items that are not related by the three standard value relations. I have not provided a knockdown argument against the Small-Improvement Argument, but I hope to have shown that the argument is far from as convincing as could be wished. This, combined with what I am about to argue, should make the prospects of the possibility of a fourth positive value relation look grim.

The Chaining Argument

Let us, for the sake of the argument, assume that none of the three standard value relations holds between Mozart and Michelangelo in terms of creativity. Chang still needs to show that they are not incomparable.[194] The Chaining Argument is meant to show just this; i.e., that Mozart and Michelangelo are still comparable in terms of creativity. The argument takes the *Small Unidimensional Difference Principle* as its key premise. According to it, "between two evaluatively very different items, a small unidimensional difference cannot trigger incomparability where before there was comparability."[195] According to the principle, if two items are comparable, then a small unidimensional change made to one of them cannot trigger incomparability. Chang finds this principle intuitively appealing, and therefore she accepts it as a premise.

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[193] If we ever have first person authority over our judgments of taste it is perhaps most reasonable that this would be a case in which we judge that two items are not equally as good. However, this is not helpful since the judgement that one thing is not equally as good as the other is not a premise in the Small-Improvement Argument.

[194] It might seem odd that I once again discuss the possibility of instantiated incomparability. It was, after all, concluded in the previous chapter that there is no reason to assume that incomparability can be instantiated. But remember that I argued that alleged cases of incomparability could just as well be explained in terms of the theoretically more parsimonious Vagueness View. However, as I will come back to later, Chang now assumes that there is no vagueness in the domain. If this is the case, then the Incomparability View once again becomes relevant.

[195] Chang (2002b, p. 674).

Let us now move to the argument: Michelangelo has several features that contribute in different respects to his creativity. By making a small change to Michelangelo we could arrive at a sculptor that is identical to Michelangelo in all respects, except that he is slightly worse than Michelangelo in terms of creativity in one respect. By repeating this procedure and varying the respects, we could create a continuum of sculptors starting with Michelangelo and ending with the sculptor Talentlessi. Each two adjacent items on the continuum will be exactly similar except for a small unidimensional difference. Different steps in this continuum may, however, involve different respects in which creativity is diminished. For each move down the continuum we will get a slightly less creative sculptor. Therefore, Talentlessi, who is at the bottom of the continuum, will be a very bad sculptor in terms of creativity. Talentlessi's creative skills are clearly comparable to Mozart's—he is much worse than Mozart in creativity. If Mozart is comparable to Talentlessi, then—since according to the Small Unidimensional Difference Principle a small unidimensional improvement cannot give rise to incomparability—Mozart must also be comparable to a slightly improved Talentlessi, Talentlessi^{+}. By the same reasoning, if Mozart is comparable to Talentlessi^{+} he must also be comparable to Talentlessi^{++}. By repeating this procedure we will finally reach Michelangelo, who must be comparable to Mozart in creativity. Mozart and Michelangelo are thus comparable, but not related by the standard trichotomy of relations. From this Chang draws the conclusion that they must be related by a fourth basic positive value relations, i.e., that they are on a par.

As Chang admits, this argument looks suspiciously similar to a sorites. The similarity lies in that the Chaining Argument shares the same structure as a sorites. A sorites takes the following form. From the two premises:

R1: One grain of sand is not a heap,
and
R2: The addition of one grain of sand cannot turn something that is not a heap into a heap,

we can conclude that two grains of sand are not a heap. However, we can also conclude, by applying the second premise n times, that n+1 grains of sand is not a heap, for any n. But this is false because for some number n, n+1 grains of sand is clearly a heap. The above argument is clearly not sound and the reason is that it exploits the vagueness of "is a heap".

In the Chaining Argument we also use two premises:

C1: Talentlessi is comparable to Mozart,
and
C2: A small change in one aspect cannot make a sculptor who is comparable to Mozart into sculptor who is not comparable to Mozart,

The suspicion is that Chang's Chaining Argument is not sound either and that it exploits the vagueness of "is comparable to Mozart".

A sorites is not sound, but some structurally similar arguments, such as mathematical induction, are. Therefore, even though it is clear that the Chaining Argument has the same structure as a sorites, this is not enough for us to conclude that it is not sound. However, if the Chaining Argument exploits the vagueness of "comparable", then it not only has the structure of a sorites, but it also is a sorites. That is, there might not be a sharp border between incomparable and comparable, and that is why a small unidimensional change cannot determinately trigger incomparability. If so, then the result of the Chaining Argument need not be that Mozart and Michelangelo are comparable. Rather, Mozart and Michelangelo might be incomparable in terms of creativity. Chang needs to rule out this possibility in order for her conclusion to follow. As I have argued, it is uncertain whether she succeeds with this.[196] However, let us for now assume that "comparable" is not a vague predicate and thus that the Chaining Argument is not a sorites.

An Objection

Let us have a closer look at the Small Unidimensional Difference Principle. According to Chang we should accept the principle since it is intuitively appealing. She writes:

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[196] Chang does not directly argue that "comparable" is not vague. She claims that if she can establish that the hard cases are not cases of indeterminacy then there is no need to "ask the further question of whether superhard cases are borderline cases of the predicate 'comparable'." She continues: "if we can show that superhard cases are not borderline cases of the former sort, it very plausibly follows that they are not borderline cases of "comparable." After all, the only way we could have indeterminacy in application of 'comparable' given determinate failure of each of the standard three relations is if comparability included a fourth value relation beyond the standard three which, by hypothesis, determinately fails to hold in the given cases. Such a position would give the game away by entailing the possibility of parity." Chang (2002b, p. 681).

> The Small Unidimensional Difference Principle has deep intuitive appeal. It is just plain hard to believe of two evaluatively very different but by hypothesis comparable items that making a small unidimensional improvement or detraction in one of them can thereby effect a switch from the items' being comparable to their being incomparable.[197]

However, the intuitive appeal of the principle can be questioned. In fact, Chang admits that sometimes it may not be correct. According to her, it only holds in some scenarios and it does not hold when it comes to some rule-given comparisons.

An example of when it might not hold would be a comparison by a Pareto Rule such as the following: One distribution of well-being is better than another if and only if at least one person is better off by that distribution than by the other and everyone is at least as well off. Two distributions are equally good if and only if everyone is equally well off in one distribution as the other. If none of these two relations holds, the two distributions are incomparable. It can be shown that the Small Unidimensional Difference Principle does not hold for such comparisons by considering the following: Everyone is equally as well off in distribution x as they are in distribution y except for John who is better off in x than he is in y. This means that x, by the Pareto rule, is better than y and thus that x and y are comparable. Now consider z that differs from x by a small unidimensional difference: everyone is equally as well off in distribution x as they are in z, except for Jane who is slightly worse off in z. z is then not comparable with y by the Pareto rule, since z is better than y for John, but worse for Jane. The difference between x and z is a small unidimensional difference, x is comparable with y, yet z is not comparable with y by the Pareto rule.

Since the principle does not hold for all cases, it has to be restricted. According to Chang: "The Small Unidimensional Difference Principle holds only when comparability and incomparability are not rule generated in this way."[198] This means that the intuition that supports the unrestricted principle is wrong, since this intuition does not discern the one case from the other. One should therefore find a restricted principle that does not apply to some rule-given comparisons more intuitive, but such a restricted principle may also be wrong. When Chang discusses the possibility that there exists a continuum of small unidimensional differences that connects two items such as Michelangelo and Talentlessi, she identifies a potential worry and paraphrases Hegel: "with

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[197] Chang (2002b, p. 675).

[198] Chang (2002b, p. 667).

enough of a change of one kind, a change of another kicks in."[199]. The worry is that if a small unidimensional change triggers new values, then it cannot be assumed that there is a continuum of small unidimensional differences that connects Michelangelo with Talentlessi. She concludes that this "Hegelian worry" needs not arise in all cases and that the Michelangelo-Talentlessi case could be an example in which it does not arise. But a similar worry is also relevant when it comes to the Small Unidimensional Difference Principle; if a small change of one kind can trigger changes of another kind, then why should we assume that a small unidimensional change cannot trigger incomparability where there before was comparability?[200]

The fact that the Small Unidimensional Difference Principle does not apply to certain cases seems to point towards the conclusion that our intuitions are wrong about the principle. That is, if it is shown that a principle does not apply to many cases then this casts doubt upon it. And even if the principle seems intuitive, the fact that it does not apply to many cases should make us question it. Therefore, we should not just accept the principle based on its intuitive appeal. We need some argument in the principle's favour but Chang does not present any. This brings us to my objection to the Chaining Argument. As it will turn out, Chang is begging the question when she accepts the Small Unidimensional Difference Principle without any arguments in its favour. This becomes clear when one considers that all differences can be understood as being composed of a number of small unidimensional differences. If this is taken into consideration, it can be shown that Chang assumes what is to be proven. In this particular case, what is to be proven is that Mozart is comparable with Michelangelo in terms of creativity. Then how does Chang assume this? Well, she assumes the following:

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[199] Chang (2002b, p. 678).

[200] The Small Unidimensional Difference Principle applies to cases when there is only a difference in *one* aspect. This means that the principle might not apply in cases such as those expressed by the "Hegelian worry", since these might be cases in which a small unidimensional change in the supervenience base causes other changes in the supervenience base. Of course, this could in turn lead to evaluative changes, but then the there are changes in more than one aspect. My claim, however, need not be understood as the claim that the "Hegelian worry" constitutes an objection to the Small Unidimensional Difference Principle. Rather, if one finds the "Hegelian worry" reasonable, i.e., that a small unidimensional change within the supervenience base can cause other changes within the supervenience base then one should also find it reasonable that a small unidimensional change within the supervenience base can cause the *evaluative* change of introducing incomparability where there before was comparability.

P1: A small unidimensional difference cannot trigger incomparability where before there was comparability (except for some cases of rule-generated comparability).[201]

However, the following seems true:

P2: All differences can be understood to be composed of a finite number of small unidimensional differences.[202]

For any two items, *x* and *y,* P1 and P2 together entail that *x* is comparable to *y*. Since *x* is trivially comparable to itself and the difference between *x* and *y* is composed of a number of small unidimensional differences (according to P2) and such differences never trigger incomparability (according to P1), *x* must be comparable to *y*. Consequently, Mozart is comparable to Michelangelo. So given the very plausible P2, P1 is question-begging since it immediately entails what is to be proven.[203]

It should be noted that in my argument above it is assumed that there is no vagueness. If "comparable" is vague then a small unidimensional difference can never determinately trigger incomparability and thus Chang would not be

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[201] Chang specifies that this is the case for "two evaluatively very different items". I believe that her claim is stronger than P1. If it is the case for evaluatively very different items then surely the same must be true for evaluatively similar items. After all, it is between very different items that we expect there to be incomparability and not between similar items. Therefore I choose to leave out the qualifier.

[202] I take it that P1 and P2 are claims regarding differences in the supervenience base. Chang could of course object to this and say that P1 is a claim about evaluative differences. However, I do not believe that this would make much difference for my argument. It does not seem to strengthen P1; it may at first seem to cast some doubt on P2, but to think so would be to make a mistake. If P2 is interpreted as a claim about evaluative differences, its correctness may seem controversial, as it may conflict with alleged cases of superior goods. That is, it may seem that the evaluative difference between two items of which one is superior to the other may not be decomposable into a finite number of small unidimensional evaluative differences. I do, however, believe that such decomposition is possible. It has been shown by Arrhenius and Rabinowicz (2005) that it is possible to move from a superior item to an inferior one by a sequence of small evaluative steps. Furthermore, even if P2, as a claim about evaluative differences, does not to apply to cases of superiority, there is no reason to doubt that it applies to all other cases. Mozart is clearly not superior to Michelangelo, therefore, P2, in its evaluative form, applies to Mozart and Michelangelo. So for these cases, the cases of our interest, P2 may be assumed to hold.

[203] One possibility for Chang is to accept P2 and since it follows from P1 and P2 that all items are comparable she can reach the conclusion that Mozart and Michelangelo are comparable. In this way her Chaining Argument becomes superfluous, but she reaches her wished-for result. However, since we lack arguments in favour of P1 this would still be question-begging.

begging the question. However, as already noted, if there is vagueness, then the Chaining Argument most likely is a sorites.

Of course this only follows if P2 is true. To me P2 seems true. It is hard to understand why all differences cannot be decomposed into several small unidimensional differences.[204] P1 on the other hand is, as already noted, more problematic. Why should we accept P1? There are no arguments in favour of it; the unrestricted version may at first have its appeal but is false and the "Hegelian worry" should make us doubt the restricted version. By simply assuming it to be true we will be assuming what is to be proven.[205]

To summarise: Chang seems to be between a rock and a hard place. If she is right in that there is no vagueness at play in these cases, then her argument fails, since she seems to be begging the question, and she cannot conclude that parity is a form of comparability. If, on the other hand, she accepts that there can be vagueness at play then it is unclear why we need parity to account for the hard cases of comparison; vagueness seems to suffice.

A Weaker Objection

It could be interesting to see whether her argument succeeds if P2 is not true. Chang nowhere explicitly assumes P2 to be true, but she does assume that "for at least one pair of items (X, Y) not related by the trichotomy, there is a continuum of small unidimensional changes connecting X to an X_n that is

[204] This argument could, of course, be made stronger if I had provided an independent argument in favour of P2. Even though it might be done, I am afraid that it would be too vast an undertaking. Nevertheless, even in the absence of such argument, my point still stands: our disbelief should be focused on P1.

[205] Interestingly, if both P1 and P2 are true, then the scope of incomparability becomes severely limited: All items are comparable to themselves, therefore when we compare two items the difference between them cannot trigger incomparability; since a difference cannot trigger incomparability where first there was comparability. So no difference whatsoever can trigger incomparability where before there was non-rule-generated comparability. This way there is no space left for non-rule-generated incomparability. Those who want room for both parity and incomparability in the taxonomy of value relations might find this to be an unwanted consequence. Of course, there is still this small room for incomparability that is rule-generated, but this constraint on the scope of incomparability may seem rather *ad hoc*. The fact that incomparability can only be rule generated might not correspond to the characterisation some would give to incomparability. However, if P2 does not apply for items that belong to different ontological categories then items that belong to two such different categories can still be incomparable as well. So there might still be room for non-comparability.

clearly comparable with Y." [206] One possible instantiation of this claim, given that the three standard value relations do not apply to Mozart and Michelangelo, is the following:

> P3: The difference between Michelangelo and Talentlessi is composed of a finite number of small unidimensional differences and Talentlessi is worse than Mozart.[207]

P3 has two substantial parts: The first part, let us call this P3a, is the claim that Talentlessi can be reached by a series of small unidimensional changes from Michelangelo. The second part, which I will refer to as P3b, is the claim that Talentlessi is worse than Mozart in terms of creativity. From P1 and P3 it does not follow that all items are comparable, but it does follow that Michelangelo and Mozart are comparable. Thus her argument depends on P3. But why should we accept P3?

I believe that there are arguments for P3a just as there are arguments for P3b, but the difficulty is to argue for their conjunction. P3b may seem very reasonable; there may be a person who is worse than Mozart with respect to creativity. A very bad sculptor can be worse than an excellent composer with respect to creativity. Talentlessi is very bad in terms of creativity and Mozart is excellent in terms of creativity. Thus Talentlessi is worse than Mozart in terms of creativity.[208] It is however unclear how P3a can be established, i.e., how it can be confirmed that Talentlessi only differs from Michelangelo by a series of small unidimensional changes.

It could be held that intuitively it seems that the difference between Talentlessi and Michelangelo can be decomposed into a finite number of small unidimensional differences. But this cannot be restricted to only Talentlessi and Michelangelo; remember that Chang seems to believe that parity is a widespread phenomenon, since it can explain many hard cases of comparison. If that is the case, it must also be common that the difference between two items can be

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[206] Chang (2002b, p. 674).

[207] Chang (1997, p. 15, 2002a, p. 130, 2002b, p. 673).

[208] This might not convince the incomparabilist who claims the opposite: two persons that exhibit creativity in very different respects are incomparable. It is the fact that two items are evaluatively very different that makes them incomparable; that the items are, respectively, notable and nominal bearers of a certain valuable feature (such as creativity) should be irrelevant. However, this might not be an attractive position to hold since it seems to conflict with our intuitions about these cases.

decomposed into a number of small unidimensional differences.[209] This comes uncomfortably close to P2, which, for the sake of the argument, was assumed to be false. It thus seems problematic to appeal to intuition in order to defend P3a, since the same intuition seems to support P2. More generally: the problem with P3a is that the intuition that supports it also seems to support the more general P2. So, if P2 is false, we cannot rely on this intuition. Consequently, we have no support for P3a.

However, as it turns out, one is not forced to rely on intuition in order to support P3a. In fact, there is an interpretation of Chang's argument that makes P3a come out as trivially true.[210] The idea is that we need not assume that there is a person such as Talentlessi but rather we can construct such a person. By making a series of small unidimensional changes to Michelangelo we can end up with a, real or hypothetical, person such as Talentlessi. Now, since we have constructed this person in this specific manner, it *follows* that this person is related to Michelangelo by a series of small unidimensional differences. Therefore, it is not a substantive question whether the difference between Michelangelo and this person is composed of several small unidimensional differences; that claim now comes out as trivially true and we need not consult our intuitions. But while P3a can be guaranteed by constructing a person in this manner, it is not guaranteed that this person is worse than Mozart, thus in this interpretation there is nothing that supports P3b.

So, separately P3a and P3b may seem reasonable, but the whole of P3 has not been established. That is, we can imagine a person who is worse than Mozart, but this person need not be related to Michelangelo by a series of small unidimensional differences. Or we could construct a person that relates in such a manner to Michelangelo but then we can no longer assume that this person is worse than Mozart. The constructed person may be incomparable with Mozart. To put it differently: It seems that it can be argued that there is a person that is worse than Mozart and it can be argued that there is a person that is related to Michelangelo by a series of small unidimensional changes, but there is nothing

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[209] To this it could be objected that parity may still be a widespread phenomenon even though there are only a few cases for which it can be shown that there is parity. This may be true, but if so, it is no longer clear why we should believe that parity is a widespread phenomenon. If Chang's arguments do succeed then it is only established that items for which it intuitively seems that their difference can be decomposed into a finite number of small unidimensional differences may be on a par. If one rejects P2, then items of this kind may be sparse, and parity consequently a peripheral phenomenon.

[210] Wlodek Rabinowicz has suggested this interpretation to me and it might very well be what Chang has in mind. At least some parts of 2002a and 2002b seem to fit well with this interpretation.

that guarantees that these two will ever be one and the same person. This is simply assumed by Chang and since she sets out to conclusively argue for the existence of parity, this is a lacuna in her argument.

Conclusions

I have argued that if all differences could be understood as being composed of small unidimensional differences, then, by assuming the Small Unidimensional Difference Principle, Chang is begging the question. This means that parity might not be a form of comparability. This all depends on the correctness of P2. I cannot see any reasons to doubt it. However, even if one rejects P2, it is not obvious that parity is a form of comparability. If it turns out that not all differences are composed of small unidimensional differences, then it becomes uncertain why we should believe that there is a person such as Talentlessi that is comparable to Mozart and yet can be reached from Michelangelo by a series of small unidimensional changes. To sum up, there is no conclusive reason for us to conclude that parity is a form of comparability.[211]

Above I assumed that there is no vagueness in the domain, and the objection I presented towards the Chaining Argument exploited this fact. If on the other hand there is vagueness in the domain then the arguments for the Parity View seem even more problematic. Most notably: If there is vagueness in the domain, then the Chaining Argument might be a sorites. Furthermore, the Small-Improvement Argument has to deal with the objection that, due to vagueness, it is might not be determinately the case that the two items are not related by any of the trichotomous relations.

It is interesting that the argument for parity repeatedly runs into problems concerning vagueness. Chang argues that parity is not a form of indeterminacy and that there is no vagueness in the domain. I believe that this is a weak spot in her argumentation. Chang fails to rule out this possibility, and by doing so she fails to establish that hard cases of comparison are cases of parity; they might just as well be understood in terms of vagueness. Furthermore, since Chang provides the most worked-out account of the possibility of an instantiated fourth basic positive value relation, we have reasons to rule out this possibility.

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[211] Towards the end of Luke Elson's (2014b) he argues, just as I do, that if we assume that the predicates are not vague, then the Chaining Argument begs the question. Elson's discussion is somewhat different from mine, but it is nevertheless interesting to note that we reach the same conclusion.

It might be objected that I demand too much from the arguments in favour of parity. Adherents of the Parity View might agree that it does not strictly follow that there could be instantiated parity, but it could still be a reasonable view, they might claim. I do, however, believe that this is not enough; it must be shown that it strictly follows. Chang has, after all, presented formal arguments in favour of a controversial view. Parity is in many aspects a mysterious relation for which it seems hard to give a good account, and the Parity View does not provide us with more explanatory power, since all cases of alleged parity could just as well be understood in terms of vagueness or ignorance. Consequently, in order for the Parity View to be accepted, I take it that Chang's conclusion must strictly follow.

From this I submit that hard cases that cannot be explained in terms of ignorance are to be understood in accordance with the Vagueness View.

10. The Best Views

In this short chapter I will discuss the different merits of the views that I have presented.

Comparing the Competing Accounts

The aim of this thesis is to determine how things can relate with respect to their value. In my exploration of the value relations I began with the assumption that each of the trichotomous value relations can be instantiated. Sometimes one thing is better than another and sometimes one thing is equally as good as another. But then there are cases for which it is not obvious how the things relate. These are the "hard cases of comparison" and they are of extra interest, since for these comparisons it is not obvious that one of the standard value relations obtains. I have presented four different views on how we could understand these cases. It is, however, important to remember that these views are not meant to explain the "hardness" of these cases. The answer to such a question is probably epistemological: we find them hard because we do not know how the items we are comparing relate. The views are rather accounts of how the items we are comparing may relate.

It seemed natural to begin with the Trichotomy View in trying to make sense of these cases. According to this view some hard cases are just like most other cases, i.e., the items are related by one of the standard three value relations. These cases only differ from most others in that we do not know which of the standard three value relations obtains. We are fully familiar with the standard three value relations and the phenomenon of ignorance; it is obvious that we sometimes do not know how things relate but we do know that one of the standard three relations holds between the items in question. For this reason it seems natural to assume that some hard cases of comparisons should be given this explanation. Contrasting the Trichotomy View with other accounts, it

seems to be the most appealing, since it requires no revision to our standard conceptions of value and theories of value.

I doubt, however, that this can account for all hard cases of comparison. Even though it is hard to come up with an example in which we confidently can rule out an explanation like the above, it still seems reasonable to conclude that all of the hard cases cannot be of this kind. This is not how we conceive of all the hard cases; i.e., sometimes there seems to be more in play than ignorance about which of the standard three value relations obtains. One can hope that I am wrong in this since the view that one of the three standard value relations always determinately obtains between the items we are comparing is even more attractive than the view I argue for. However, due to the above it seems as if accepting only the Trichotomy View is too simplistic; some hard cases of comparison seem to merit a different explanation.

Next, I considered the Vagueness View. This view is in many respects similar to the Trichotomy View. To begin with, they both explain the hard cases in terms of a familiar and well-known phenomenon. Furthermore, they treat the hard cases in a similar way. According to the Trichotomy View, we do not know how the items we compare relate. It is true that one of the three standard value relations holds but we do not know which one. The Vagueness View, on the other hand, claims that it is true that one of the three standard value relations holds but it is indeterminate which one. The merits of the Vagueness View should thus be clear: it is a parsimonious position in the sense that it makes little assumptions and requires little revision to our common conception of value, yet it is explanatorily potent. Furthermore, the features of vagueness seem to be similar to the features of the hard cases of comparison—there seems to be a good fit. These are the main claims that the argument for the Vagueness View is dependent on.

The Vagueness View in combination with the Trichotomy View thus seems to be able to account for many hard cases of comparison. The remaining question was whether we needed to assume more than this in order to account for all hard cases of comparison. It was concluded that the Collapsing Argument did not conclusively succeed in establishing that there can only be vagueness and for this reason I considered the merits of the remaining views.

The Parity View is an intriguing position in that it highlights an interesting possibility that has received very little attention throughout the history of philosophy. The view, however, had the drawback of failing to clearly distinguish itself from the Vagueness View, and since we cannot deny the existence of vagueness it seems redundant to introduce a new and mysterious relation such as parity into our framework. For this reason the Parity View was

rejected as an explanation of hard cases of comparison; and consequently there is very little reason to assume that there can be a fourth basic positive value relation that is instantiated.

Then there is the Incomparability View. This seems to be an ontologically parsimonious view, since it introduces no new value relation, but only claims that sometimes there holds no positive basic value relation. However, the Incomparability View lacked a straightforward explanation as to exactly how there can be incomparability in the hard cases, i.e., it failed to provide a satisfactory explanation of what gives rise to incomparability. The best account was made in terms of non-comparability, but this seemed to be a rather uninteresting case of incomparability from a normative point of view, since it is nonsensical in its nature. The most promising explanations depended on the concept of incomparable probabilities and rule-given incomparability. Accounting for incomparability in terms of incomparable probabilities depended on a controversial possibility and could also be accused of passing the explanatory buck. An explanation in terms of rule-given incomparability was more successful but I argued that this is a highly artificial form of incomparability and a very rare way of comparing items. So if the Incomparability View can account for some hard cases of comparison then they are peripheral cases. Since the Trichotomy View and the Vagueness View also can account for a broad range of cases and do so while being theoretically parsimonious, I find little reason to accept the Incomparability View; the Trichotomy View and the Vagueness View suffice.

So far I have only talked about the accounts taken separately, i.e., one account per hard case, however, there is also a possibility to combine the different accounts in a treatment of one and the same case. For example, the Vagueness View could allow that it may be indeterminate whether one item is better, worse, equally as good, on a par, or incomparable with another item. When I have argued for the Vagueness View I have, however, argued that there are only three value relations that are of interest: better than, worse than, and equally as good. The reason that I have not included incomparability and parity is that since there are no convincing arguments for the claim that these can be instantiated, it follows that it cannot be argued that the relation may be instantiated but it is indeterminate whether it is.

With this, the main topic of this thesis has been explored, i.e., how things can relate with respect to their value. It has been argued that two things can be related by one being better than the other, worse than the other, or equally as good as the other. However, sometimes we do not know how they relate and sometimes it is indeterminate. I have argued for this by claiming that it is the

most parsimonious position with as much explanatory power as the competing views. Unsurprisingly, this is not a knockdown argument; it is after all a work in philosophy.

Many should find it comforting that there is no reason to assume that there exist such things as incomparability and parity, and that the standard three value relations can account for all value comparisons of interest. This should mean that we do not require big revisions in our normative theorising. An even more welcome result would of course have been that one of the trichotomous relations always determinately holds between the items we are comparing. However, knowing that one of the relations holds, but that it is indeterminate which one, seems to be a close second. It is not obvious, however, what the normative consequences are in the cases for which the Vagueness View gets it right. And I justified the need of this investigation in terms of the impact it may have on practical deliberation. Consequently, it seems fitting to end this thesis with some remarks on what this impact may be.

11. Rational Choice

Now that it has been settled that hard cases of comparison should be understood in terms of vagueness or ignorance, I will move on to consider the normative consequences hard cases of comparison may have. That is; whether the Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View will affect the question of how we ought to act.

Different Views of Rational Choice

At the outset of this work I noted that value comparatives seem to play a central part in normative theorising. I even made the claim that value comparisons seem central to practical reason. It is difficult to back up such a general claim, since value comparisons may play a different role within different views and theories. I do, however, believe that it is safe to say that they play an important role according to most theories about practical reason. This applies, for example, to a moral theory according to which what we ought to do is to perform the best action among the available alternatives (or one of the best actions if several of the alternatives are best); or a decision theory that tells us that we ought to make our choice in such a way that we maximise the expected value of the outcome; and some theory may, more generally, claim that reasons for action are given by the values that an action can realise. If we find it hard to say which alternative is best, or which alternative maximises the expected value of the outcome, then these theories will run into problems. I take it that the Incomparability View has been the prevailing position when it comes to making sense of these hard cases, but I now wish to consider whether rejecting the Incomparability View and embracing the Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View will have any consequences for the question of how we are to act.

In order to investigate this, a framework is needed. I will assume that there is a set of norms such that, if we do not comply with them we are open to rational criticism; i.e., we are rationally required to comply with the norms. The

normative force of value relations can consequently be expressed as a requirement of practical rationality. There is a risk of framing the normative role of value relations in terms of rationality, since the topic of rationality is vast and intricate and I have no interest in taking a stand on these matters. I consequently ask the reader to have in mind that this choice of terms is made merely to elucidate the normative role of value relations. If one prefers to frame it in other terms of such as e.g., "correctness" then I leave it up to the reader to understand the following discussion in such terms.

In order to see what consequences hard cases of comparison may have for practical deliberation, I will consequently set other reasonable views aside. For example, for all the cases to be presented, I will assume that the agent has a preferential gap when facing a choice, i.e., the agent does not prefer the one option to the other, nor is she indifferent. This is, of course, somewhat absurd; clearly it is not the case that for all hard cases of comparison we have a preferential gap, but by assuming that we do, the role of value relations will be in focus and one need not consider which preferences the agent has. Some may find it stillborn to discuss practical deliberation and rational choice for an agent with preference gaps, since they may believe that rationality fully consists in acting in accordance with one's preferences. I am sure that preferences play some part when determining what is rational, perhaps even a very central part, but for the purpose of this chapter I am afraid that considering preferences will make us lose focus on the role of value comparisons. Therefore I will assume that the agent has no preferences whatsoever between the options she is comparing.

With these clarifications in mind we can now move on to consider how we are to act when we are facing a choice between two options. Consider the following:

> *The Best Alternative View:* Practical rationality requires of you to choose the best alternative or, if the alternatives are equally as good, to choose either.[212]

There are several objections that could be raised against the Best Alternative View, and the view is in need of clarification. For example, it could be questioned whether rationality really requires us to choose the objectively best

[212] Note that this is for a choice between two options. If there are more options available the Best Alternative View must be revised. The formulation would then take the following form: Practical rationality requires of you to choose the best alternative or, if there are several best alternatives that are equally as good, to choose one of them. For the ease of exposition I will only consider choices facing two options, but for all of the views to be discussed an amendment of the kind mentioned is always available.

alternative; is it not enough that we choose what we *believe* to be the best alternative? I shall leave this aside since I am more interested in the general idea put forward by the Best Alternative View. I take it that this general idea is shared by many normative theories. This view can thus be used as an illustrative framework to highlight the possible consequence of accepting the Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View.

However, before considering the possible normative consequences of accepting the Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View it is instructive to consider the possible normative consequences of accepting the Incomparability View. This will highlight the possible problems that we face when we are to encompass hard cases of comparison within our normative theorising.

If the Best Alternative View is the only normative requirement for choice situations, that is, if rationality requires nothing more, then the Best Alternative View and the Incomparability View together imply that there are items for which no rational choice is available. However, when considering cases such as choosing between holiday destinations that seem to be incomparable, it may seem reasonable to conclude that it is rational to choose either of them. For this reason, one may reject the Best Alternative View and instead accept the following:

> *The Not Worse Alternative View:* Practical rationality requires of you to choose an alternative that is not worse than any other.

Since one of the trips is not worse than the other you are rational if you choose either of them. This view seems to do well when there is only one choice to be made. However, if there is a series of choices, then the view entails that we are rational when we make choices that will lead to a situation that is worse than our starting point. To illustrate: assume that *A* is better than *B* and both *A* and *B* are incomparable to *C*. Say that you start out with *A* but have a choice to swap from *A* to *C*. You are rational if you choose *C*, since *C* is not a worse alternative than *A*. You choose *C*. Now you are faced with a new choice, whether to swap from *C* to *B*. Since *B* is not worse than *C* it is rational to choose *B*. However, you have now ended up, through a series of rational choices with an item that is worse than the item you started out with. It seems questionable that the series of choices that has led to this situation really is rational.

These are well-known problems that the Incomparability View poses for practical deliberation.[213] I have, however, ruled out the Incomparability View in

[213] Of course there are several suggestions in the literature for how we are to avoid the unfortunate result. The most promising route is probably to endorse the claim that rationality requires of

favour of the Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View. Consequently, the more interesting question is what these views entail when it comes to the topic of practical deliberation.

Vagueness and Rational Choice

Consider the following claim:

> *Value Completeness*: It is true, for any two items *A* and *B* and covering concept *V*, that either *A* is better than *B* with respect to *V*, *A* is worse than *B* with respect to *V*, or *A* and *B* are equally as good with respect to *V*.[214]

If Value Completeness is accepted, then the Best Alternative View entails that there is always a rational choice to be made. The Incomparability View rejects Value Completeness; the Vagueness View by contrast accepts it. If a comparative is vague then it may be indeterminate whether *A* is better than *B*, worse than *B*, or equally as good as *B*. However, if this is the case, then it still is true on each precisification that: *A* is better than *B*, worse than *B*, or equally as good as *B*. According to the Vagueness View, the disjunction is true, and so is Value Completeness. This means that according to the Vagueness View there is always a rational choice to be made. However, this might seem like a pyrrhic victory for the Vagueness View, since it is silent on which alternative one is to choose. That is, there is a rational choice to make, but it is indeterminate which alternative it is rational to choose.

The indeterminacy of the rational choices can be traced back to the vagueness of the comparative. Consequently, the indeterminacy can be resolved by precisifying the comparative. When one faces a hard choice one could thus always consider whether a more precise covering concept can be employed, i.e., whether there is a more precise covering concept that rightly reflects the choice situation. Let us, for example, assume that a choice between two different careers is hard to make. In such a case, we should consider if there is a precise covering concept that can be used for the comparison of the two careers. If "salary" is a

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us to hold on to earlier resolutions in cases like the one described above. It is after all the final outcome that counts when making choices and therefore it cannot be rational to make choices to that you end up with *B*.

[214] One may want to specify that this does not hold for all covering concepts in order to rule out cases of non-comparability, which may seem to be an obvious counterexample to this claim.

fitting covering concept then we might be able to solve the hard choice; we can just pick the career with the highest salary. It could, of course, also be that there is still indeterminacy even if we precisify the covering concept to some extent. This more precise covering concept might also be multidimensional and give rise to indeterminacy. In such a case we would have to precisify further.[215]

This proposed solution might be possible for some choices, but for most, or at least some hard choices, it would be a too naïve and simplistic solution. The cases I am thinking of are the cases in which we *want* to and perhaps even *should* use the vague covering concept. By changing the covering concept to a more precise one, we have not answered the initial question of how to act or what to choose in the situation at hand. We still need an answer as to how this is to be done.

When it is indeterminate how *A* relates to *B*, it is not determinately irrational to choose *A*, but indeterminate whether it is rational to choose it.[216] Therefore it might be tempting to stick with the Best Alternative View since it can at least tell us that our action is not determinately irrational. Another possibility is to revise the Best Alternative View and accept the following claim:

> *Indeterminate Alternatives View:* Practical rationality requires that you choose the determinately best alternative, or, if both alternatives are determinately equally as good, it is rationally permissible to choose either. If it is indeterminate how they relate, then it is rationally permissible to choose either.

If we accept the Indeterminate Alternatives View, then there is a rational choice to be made when facing two options for which it is indeterminate how they relate. Whichever you choose, you have chosen a rationally permissible option. But just as with the Not Worse Alternative View the Indeterminate Alternative View would lead to a cycle of choices. Assume that *A* is better than *B*, and it is indeterminate how *A* and *B* relate to *C*. Say that you start out with *A*; according to the Indeterminate Alternatives View it is rational to swap from *A* to *C*, and it

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[215] One point of clarification is in order: In my presentation, I am ambiguous between changing to another, more precise, covering concept and precisifying the vague covering concept, i.e., choosing one of the admissible precisifications of the vague covering concepts and using that as the covering concept. I take both of these routes to be possible. I owe this point of clarification to Frits Gåvertsson.

[216] If *A* and *B* were determinately incomparable, choosing *A* would be determinately not rational. That is, of course, if the Better Alternative View is the only normative requirement in play in the choice situation.

is rational to swap from *C* to *B*. However, by doing these swaps you have arrived at an alternative that is worse than what you started out with.

One way to block this unfortunate end-result is always to act on the same precisifications. In the above example when choosing between *A* and *C* one acts in accordance with one set of precisifications, but when choosing between *C* and *B* one acts in accordance with another set of precisifications. If one always acts in accordance with one set of precisifications then this would block the cyclical and unwanted result. On each precisification all items are related by an "at least as good" ordering and since this ordering is transitive there cannot be a cycle. Consequently, we should choose a precisification and stick to it. This is the formal solution to the problem but it must be matched with a justification of why we should use one set of precisifications rather than another.

An explanation as to why one should stick to one set of precisifications rather than another could be that one set of precisifications may have some sort of precedence as compared to the other sets. From this it seems reasonable to conclude that one would be more rational if one acts in accordance with this set rather than the other. Of course, something needs to be said about what gives a set such precedence.

What could give you reasons to choose a particular precisification? It cannot be that one precisification is *the correct* precisification, because if that were the case there would be no vagueness to begin with. That is, if there is only one correct precisification, then the other precisification must be incorrect and consequently cannot be admissible, and, if so, there can be no vagueness. There might, however, be other ways to account for the precedence.

Consider the propositions "When you are 13 years old you are a grown-up" and "When you are 17 years old you are a grown-up". Neither of these two propositions seems to be determinately true or false. Rather it is vague whether they are true or false. However, we would probably be less willing to assert that a 13-year-old is a grown-up than we would be willing to assert that a 17-year-old is a grown-up. Thus vagueness seems to come in degrees. Supervaluationism can account for this by measuring sets of admissible precisifications. The size of a set of admissible precisifications on which a proposition comes out as true can be measured and from this measure one can ascribe the degree to which the proposition is true.[217] If the set is big in comparison with the set in which the proposition comes out as false, then the degree of truth will be higher. In this way vague propositions can be true to different degrees and it might seem reasonable to conclude that one should act in accordance with the set that is

[217] See Keefe (2000, p. 171).

bigger. One could argue that a choice is rational if it is the better option according to the biggest set of admissible precisifications.

This would be a neat solution to the problem at hand, but I believe that it is a mistaken position. Even if the set of admissible precisifications in which a proposition comes out as true is bigger than the set in which it comes out as false, the proposition will still be neither true nor false. This fact, I believe, speaks against building a theory on degrees of vagueness. It is true that supervaluationism can account for degrees of vagueness in this way, but it is uncertain whether this should be spelled out in terms of degrees of truth. If a proposition is true in almost all admissible precisifications, then the proposition has vagueness to a low degree, but it is not obvious that it is true to a very high degree. A counterexample that highlights this would be a case in which a proposition is only true on one precisification but false on many others. Furthermore, assume that the precisification in which the proposition is true is central to the context or to the meaning of the proposition. Then clearly, this should be taken under consideration. Consequently, we would not judge the proposition to be more false than true.

This shows that it could be hard to point to what makes a set of precisifications to have precedence. I will not argue for how we should choose sets of precisifications, but it seems reasonable that some sets of precisifications can have precedence and from this it seems that we should act in accordance with this set.[218] Furthermore, according to the Indeterminate Alternative View we then act rationally.

If this intuition is mistaken and there is no way to sort out the sets of precisifications, we can at least just pick one set of precisifications in order to avoid cyclical choices. That is, we might not have reasons to choose a particular set of precisification, but we may have reasons to choose *some* set of precisifications, no matter which one, and stick to it. The reason we should choose one and stick to it would be pragmatic. If we knew that there was a possibility that we would get into the problems sketched above then we have a reason to avoid those problems by sticking to the same set of precisifications. This seems as a rational policy and the result following this rational policy seems rational as well.

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[218] Or, if one prefers the Best Alternative View then the conclusion would be that even though it is indeterminate whether it is rational to act in accordance with this precisification, it may be more rational to act in accordance with this precisification rather than one of the others. And if we act in accordance with this precisification it is indeterminate whether we act rationally but it is determinate that we do not act irrationally.

To conclude so far: In hard choices there is a rational choice between the choice options. Furthermore, according to the Best Alternative View, one is not determinately irrational if one picks either of them; rather, it is indeterminate whether the choice is rational. If some set of admissible precisifications has precedence over other sets and one acts in accordance with this set, then it is more rational to choose this rather than the other option. If we reject the Best Alternative View in favour of the Indeterminate Alternative View, then, in hard choices, one is rational if one acts in accordance to one specified precisification and then sticks to it.

Ignorance and Rational Choices

I have acknowledged that not all hard cases of comparison are due to vagueness; some of them are due to ignorance about which standard relation obtains. Let us consider how we are to act when facing such comparisons.

Within classical decision theory there are many suggestions as to how to deal with epistemic issues when making a decision. A much discussed case is when we cannot decide the value of two options due to the fact that we do not know with certainty what the outcome of these options will be. In such cases, decision theory can help us. However, in some hard choices due to ignorance the problem is somewhat different. In some cases we cannot determine how two items relate (or how the possible outcomes relate if we compare choice options) and classical decision theory provides no widely accepted answer as to how to act in such cases. There is of course sometimes an easy solution: educate yourself about the things you are comparing. If you simply do not know how two things relate, then try to find out.

For some cases, however, it may be impossible for us to know how two things relate. Then, according to the Best Alternative View, there is a rational choice to be made, but as it happens we do not know which alternative it is rational to choose.[219] It may be thought that one should adopt a view similar to the Indeterminate Alternatives View. Remember that according to this view, if it is indeterminate how alternatives relate it is permissible to choose either. If we are to accept such a position, it may be thought we should accept the following:

[219] In such a case the Not Worse Alternative View cannot help us either.

Unknown Alternatives View: Practical rationality requires that you choose the best alternative, or, if the alternatives are equally as good, it is rationally permissible to choose either. If it is unknown how the alternatives relate to each other then it is rationally permissible to choose either.

To accept such a view would be a mistake, since it is contradictory. Say that it is unknown how *A* and *B* relate when in fact *A* is better than *B*. The Unknown Alternatives View then states that rationality requires you to choose *A* and yet that it is permissible to choose *B* rather than *A*!

I think that it is safe to conclude that it is uncertain how we are to act in cases of comparison that are hard due to ignorance about which standard value relation obtains. In these cases there is a rational choice to make, since a value relation holds between the two items, but if it is impossible for us to know how they relate, then it is impossible for us to make the rational choice with certainty. This could perhaps explain the frustration that we may experience in hard cases; we know that there is a right answer as to how we should choose, but it is impossible for us to figure it out. This is, however, somewhat odd. I am, after all, discussing practical rationality. It seems to lie in the nature of practical rationality that what is rational to do should in principle be epistemically accessible to the agent. Everything else would be paradoxical.

This is, unfortunately, not just restricted to hard cases that are accounted for by the Trichotomy View; it seems to hold for *all* hard cases of comparison. So far I have separated the hard comparisons that are due to ignorance from the hard comparisons that are due to vagueness. However, most of the time when we are facing a hard comparison, we do not know whether it is hard due to vagueness or due to ignorance about which standard relation obtains. That is, in most cases, we do not know whether it is indeterminate which value relation obtains or whether we are ignorant as to what value relation determinately obtains. We thus seem to run into a new epistemic problem: a case of second-order ignorance.

The best thing to do in these cases is of course to try to learn whether we are facing a hard comparison due to ignorance or a hard comparison due to vagueness. This might, however, be difficult. There does not seem to be any clear-cut test to distinguish the former from the latter. I concluded that it was uncertain how we are to act in hard comparisons due to ignorance and the same seems to be true for these cases of second-order ignorance.

Reasoning along the lines above is often taken as an argument for abandoning the externalistic view I have been presenting and for moving to an

internalist position.[220] This would mean that the subject's mental states are decisive when determining whether a choice is rational or not. Perhaps a choice is rational only if it is the choice the agent believes to be the best. That is, one adds an epistemic condition to the views I have been presenting. For example:

> *The Internalist Best Alternative View:* Practical rationality requires of you to choose what you believe to be the best alternative or, if you believe that the alternatives are equally as good, to choose either.

The internalist formulation of the Best Alternative View will not help us in hard cases of comparison due to ignorance since in such cases one does not believe that a specific alternative is better than the other, nor that it is equally as good as all the other alternatives. Consequently, according to this formulation, there is no rational choice to be made.

Let us however consider an internalist formulation of the Indeterminate Alternatives View.

> *The Internalist Indeterminate Alternatives View:* Practical rationality requires that you choose what you believe to be the best alternative, or, if you believe the alternatives are equally as good, it is rationally permissible to choose either. If you believe that it is indeterminate how they relate to each other, then it is rationally permissible to choose either.

If we take "indeterminate" to include epistemic uncertainty of the kind discussed in hard comparisons accounted for by the Trichotomy View, then the Indeterminate Alternatives View tells us that it is permissible to choose either of the alternatives. In this way practical rationality can guide us even when we do not know how the items relate. Consequently, if norms are internal in this sense, then given the Internalist Indeterminate Alternatives View, hard cases of comparison due to ignorance will have the same normative consequences as when they are due to vagueness.[221] If this is the case, then the phenomenon of second-order ignorance, as it was characterised above, is no longer a problem

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[220] Amia Srinivasan makes an interesting case that this is not in itself sufficient justification to abandon the externalist view. She argues that even internalism may confront similar epistemic problems. Srinivasan (2015).

[221] There is, however, one shortcoming with this suggestion. In the epistemic cases, even if we believe that we do not know whether *A* is better than *B* or vice versa, we can sometimes assign higher probability to one of them. If this probability is much higher than the probability of the other then it does not seem rational to choose either.

either. In these cases we know that either it is indeterminate how the alternatives relate due to vagueness or indeterminate due to ignorance. According to the Internalist Indeterminate Alternatives View it is then permissible to choose either alternative.

I do, however, wish to maintain an externalist view of these norms and rational requirements. This thesis has focused on instantiated value relations and I have claimed that these play a normative role. However, by accepting an internalist view of norms I would be, in the worst case, contradicting this commitment. At least it seems that an internalist view forces us to downplay the normative role of the instantiated value relations by putting more focus on the subjects mental states.

I have now fleetingly investigated the impacts on the normative realm that the findings regarding instantiated value relations may have.[222] As should be clear, I have merely provided brief suggestions as to the possible consequences. More needs to be done here, but I shall not explore this further. The main topic of the thesis is rather to decide which value relations can be instantiated. An answer to this question has been provided; there is no need to assume that two items cannot be related by our standard three value relations. However, sometimes we might not know which of the relations holds and sometimes this can be indeterminate. Nevertheless, the two items are related by one of the three basic positive value relations: "better than", "worse than", and "equally as good". This is how it all relates.

[222] It could be interesting to consider the normative consequences of accepting the Parity View. The Parity View might succeed better than the Incomparability View, since it claims that the options are comparable, and if so, it seems more likely that a rational choice can be made. However, it is clear that it cannot depend on the Best Alternative View to guide us, since when two items are on a par neither of them is better than the other, nor are they equally good. Ruth Chang has however, developed a view of how to act in cases of parity that takes a voluntaristic form. For more on this see Chang (2013). And see the last section of Rabinowicz (2008) for another view that is more similar to the view I have advanced here.

Appendix A: Covering Concepts and Goodness Simpliciter

Even though so little has been written on the Requirement for Specification, most philosophers writing on the topic of how to understand hard cases of comparison seem to implicitly or explicitly accept it. There are several interesting points that need to be clarified regarding the requirement. In this appendix I shall consider one of these; how does the requirement relate to concepts such as "absolute good", "all things considered good", "good period", and "good simpliciter"? To be more specific: are they specifications that can satisfy the requirement or do they constitute an objection against the requirement? Let me begin by discussing the notion of "all things considered".

All Things Considered

Within value theory one often comes across the notion "all things considered". It is interesting to consider whether this notion can be used in order to satisfy the Requirement for Specification. This, of course, depends on how we are to understand the notion. Sometimes philosophers implement it as a strictly technical term, but it also seems to refer to some concept that is more familiar to all of us.

There are several ways in which we could interpret "all things considered". I take it that there is an interesting distinction to be made in *what* we are to consider. When stating that we are to consider all things, it could be that we should consider all the *features* of the items that we are comparing, or it could be

that we are to consider all the possible *covering concepts* that can apply to both items.[223]

According to the latter interpretation, when we are to compare a vegetarian dish with a steak we are to compare their taste, their healthiness, their price, and so on. "All things considered" is then treated as a special kind of covering concept or perhaps as the conjunction of all possible covering concepts.[224] If this is how we are to understand the notion, then I do not believe that it differs much from other concepts of this kind such as "goodness *simpliciter*" and "absolute good". I will soon get back to how concepts such as these relate to the Requirement for Specification.

Then there is the interpretation of "all things considered" that focuses on the features of the items rather than the covering concepts. If we are to compare two works of art with respect to their beauty we should not just focus on their composition, but also on all the other features, such as their colour scheme, their motif, and so on. All the features of the items we are comparing need perhaps not only be restricted to internal features but may include external ones; in short, everything that is relevant for the comparison.[225]

The focus on all the features is important since it highlights the fact that "better than", "worse than", and "equally as good" are transitive relations. Consider the comparative *larger than.* This comparative is clearly multidimensional since there are several factors that contribute to an item's largeness. Let us stipulate a definition of larger than:

A is larger than *B* iff *A* is taller than *B* or heavier than *B*.[226]

Say that *A* is taller than *B* and *B* heavier than *C*, *A* is then larger than *B*, just as *B* is larger than *C*. However, *A* need not be taller nor heavier than *C* and thus, even though *A* is larger than *B* and *B* is larger than *C*, *A* need not be larger than

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[223] This distinction was developed with the help of Jakob Green Werkmäster.

[224] It seems odd that an item must be better with respect to *each* covering concept in order to be better than another all things considered; since for most comparisons it will turn out that no item is better than the other with respect to all covering concepts. In order to make the notion of "all things considered" more interesting it needs to be matched with a first-order theory of how the conjunction of the different covering concepts is to be treated. That an item is better all things considered is then interpreted as "better when we consider all the relevant covering concepts".

[225] Which, in some cases, could mean that we have to consider *everything* in order to determine what is relevant.

[226] This definition is borrowed from Temkin (2012, p. 164).

C. This result is arrived at because the definition tells us that it is enough to consider one of two factors and not both. If we considered all the features we would not end up with this result; i.e., in cases such as these we would not end up with non-transitive value comparatives.

More should be said about "all things considered" interpreted in this sense. It seems, for example, odd that *all* things must be considered. Some restriction is probably in place here, probably in terms of "relevancy", but it is unclear how the exact formulation of such a restriction ought to be spelled out. I will not discuss this interpretation further, however. What is important about this reading of "all things considered" is that it should not be understood as a covering concept. It is, of course, compatible with the Requirement for Specification, since we can consider whether, all things considered, *A* better than *B* with respect to covering concept *V*.

Goodness *Simpliciter*

This leaves us with the notion of "all things considered" that is more similar to concepts such as "goodness simpliciter", "absolute goodness", and "goodness period". Some may want to treat all of these concepts as completely different from each other, while others may find the terms to be synonyms. I will here treat them as synonyms and stick to the term "*simpliciter*". The reason for this is that I find one reading of them extra interesting in relation to the Requirement for Specification.

It seems that the Requirement for Specification entails that there is no such thing as goodness *simpliciter*. This was noted by Chang when she introduced the notion of a covering concept:

> Whether the covering value requirement implies that there is no such thing as *goodness* – as opposed to betterness – simpliciter is a question I leave unexplored, though it is highly plausible that the possibility of goodness simpliciter entails the possibility of betterness simpliciter.[227]

If there is no such thing as betterness *simpliciter*, which the requirement seems to entail, then it is reasonable to claim that there is also no such thing as goodness *simpliciter*; if something is good *simpliciter,* then it should also be possible for it

[227] Chang (2002a, p. 34).

to be better *simpliciter*. It is claimed that it is not possible for something to be better *simpliciter,* so it follows that there is no such thing as goodness *simpliciter*.

The claim that the Requirement for Specification entails that there is no such thing as goodness *simpliciter* merits, however, some further investigation. It may be a good idea to start such an investigation by considering the concept of "goodness *simpliciter*". It is not easy to specify what is meant by "goodness *simpliciter*". When discussing this notion, it is commonplace to start out by mentioning G. E. Moore. His writings on "absolute goodness" have clearly set the path for a lot of philosophy that followed. Moore positioned himself against the view that we should do what is good *for us*. Instead he believed that: "The only possible reason that can justify any action is that by it the greatest possible amount of what is good absolutely should be realised."[228]

Since Moore famously argued that no essential definition can be given of goodness, we cannot look to a definition to become clearer on the concept. There are of course other ways to understand the idea of goodness *simpliciter*. Many of these suggestions are framed in the negative. They say what it is *not*. Among the suggestions one can find claims such as that a thing that is good as a particular kind of thing is not (as such) good *simpliciter*; or a thing that is good for a particular purpose is not (as such) good *simpliciter*; and similarly a thing that is good for something, or someone, is not (as such) good *simpliciter*. This will have to suffice for now when it comes to clarifying the meaning of "goodness *simpliciter*".

One should also distinguish between two kinds of criticism against goodness *simpliciter*.[229] One can come from a conceptual sceptic and the other from a metaphysical sceptic. A metaphysical sceptic claims that there is no reason to believe that there is such a property as goodness *simpliciter*. An argument of this kind takes its departure from a suggestion that the property is normatively redundant.[230] Say, for example, that experiencing pleasure is intrinsically valuable. Then it is clearly the case that the fact that an action is pleasurable gives us a reason to do this action. We do not need to add that the fact that this action is intrinsically valuable gives us a further reason for doing this action. In this sense, the property of being intrinsically good seems redundant.[231]

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[228] Moore (1903, p. 101).

[229] For a nice exposé of this see Olson (2015).

[230] See Kraut (2011) and for a reply Olson (2015).

[231] This is merely meant as an example of such an argument. Depending on one's conception of value and reasons the strength of the argument may vary significantly. For more on metaphysical scepticism see Olson (2015) and Dancy (2000).

The conceptual sceptic on the other hand argues that the concept of "goodness *simpliciter*" can be reduced to other value concepts. This means that those who use the concept and claim that it is not reducible are conceptually confused.

The worry then is that by subscribing to the Requirement for Specification one also accepts conceptual scepticism about "good *simpliciter*". By accepting the Requirement for Specification one is claiming that it is conceptually confused to compare two things *simpliciter*.[232] This is not quite the same as the conceptual scepticism I characterised above but some might find it alarmingly close. There are two ways to look at it; either we might now have an argument in favour of the goodness *simpliciter* scepticism or, if we are firm believers in the existence of goodness *simpliciter,* we have a modus tollens argument against the Requirement for Specification. The latter would be a setback for the argument that I presented in favour of the Vagueness View since it depends on the Requirement for Specification in order to explain where the vagueness is located.

Is the Requirement for Specification an Expression of Conceptual Scepticism?

I shall now investigate whether the Requirement for Specification in fact is an expression of conceptual scepticism. The most famous argument for this kind of scepticism is probably due to Geach. It can however be shown that his argument against the existence of goodness *simpliciter* is orthogonal to the Requirement for Specification. Geach argued against the Moorean view that there is only goodness *simpliciter* by highlighting the grammatical distinction between attributive and predicative uses of adjectives.[233]

According to Geach this grammatical distinction suggests another distinction: that between a *logically* predicative adjective and a *logically*

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[232] The requirement could instead be understood as implying a metaphysical claim that there is no two-place relation such as e.g., better-than. But that our value relations are three-place, e.g., "__ is better than __ with respect to __" and this would entail that goodness is not a monadic property but a dyadic one. Interestingly, this is not to deny that there is only one property of goodness that is shared by all that is good; it is only a denial that there is a monadic property that is being shared—in fact it is a dyadic property. I take it, however, that the adherents of "goodness *simpliciter*" would claim that the property is a monadic property. I shall, though, leave the metaphysical scepticism aside in order to focus on the conceptual scepticism.

[233] Geach (1956).

attributive adjective. The distinction could be understood in the following way: if a phrase can be split up logically into two phrases such that one contains the noun and the other the adjective, then the adjective in the phrase is a logically predicative adjective. However, if it does not logically split up into two phrases, then the adjective in the original phrase contains a logically attributive adjective. By "logically split up" I, for now, take him to mean that if the original sentence is true then so must the two resulting sentences be.[234]

For example, "red" in "*x* is a red book" is a logically predicative adjective since the phrase can be split up into "*x* is a book" and "*x* is red". But "big" in "*x* is a big flea" is logically attributive since the compound sentence does not split up into "*x* is big" and "*x* is a flea".[235] This test teaches us that "good" and "bad" are logically attributive adjectives. Just as "*x* is a big flea" does not logically split up, "*x* is a good car" does not split up either.

The test is meant to show whether the adjective is independent of the noun in the relevant sense. That is, the phrase "*x* is a good car" can only split up into "*x* is a car" and "*x* is good" if "*x* is good" is independent of "*x* is a car". According to Geach, it does not make sense to say of something that it is good without knowing what sort of a thing it is. As Geach himself clarifies:

> Even when "good" or "bad" stands by itself as a predicate, and thus is grammatically predicative, some substantive has to be understood; there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so.[236]

This kind of reasoning leads Geach to conclude that there is no such thing as good *simpliciter*. Instead of discussing the plausibility of Geach's claim, I will just assume that it is a plausible view that should be taken seriously.[237] What needs to be examined is whether the Requirement for Specification is dependent

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[234] This is probably not exactly how Geach would understand the claim, but I believe it is close enough and fits the present purposes.

[235] It is not obvious how the grammatical distinction between predicative and attributive adjectives relates to this distinction. If we look at the noun phrase in "*x* is a red book" i.e., "a red book", "red" is clearly a grammatically attributive adjective. But instead of focusing on the grammatical distinction, I believe that we should focus on the test that Geach provides us with.

[236] Geach (1956, p. 34).

[237] I am here presenting a very compressed version of Geach's argument. For a recent and more elaborate argument inspired by Geach's see Almotahari & Hosein, (2015). And for a response see Byrne (forthcoming).

or somehow related to Geach's claims or whether they are conceptually independent of each other.

Geach does not focus on comparatives, but his reasoning can still be applied to comparatives. According to Geach, it does not make sense to say that "*x* is good" without knowing what sort of thing it is. Analogously one can consider whether it makes sense to say that "*x* is better than *y*" without knowing what sort of things *x* and *y* are.[238] Geach would probably answer in the negative.

The claim that the statement is dependent on some noun phrase in order to make sense—i.e., that we must know what sort of things *x* and *y* are—seem to be orthogonal to the Requirement for Specification. By saying that "*x* is better than *y* in terms of covering concept *V*" we satisfy the requirement but we do not seem to satisfy those who share Geach's intuition, since we still do not know what sort of thing *x* and *y* are. This seems to lend support to the claim that Geach's distinction between logically attributive good and logically predicative good is separate from the Requirement for Specification. Thus, by claiming that comparisons ought to be specified one is not claiming that good and bad are logically attributive adjectives. The Requirement for Specification seems to be orthogonal to the distinction between attributive and predicative good.

Thomson and Specifications

The reasoning above is very similar to a line of thought expressed by Judith Jarvis Thomson. She partly agrees with Geach but takes things further. It may very well be that "*X* is a good *K*" is not equivalent to "*X* is good" and "*X* is a *K*",

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[238] Here I choose not to use the test but rather focus on what the test is meant to show. It could, however, be interesting to consider how the test deals with comparatives. Let us put the phrase "*x* is a bigger flea than *y*" to the test. This sentence logically splits up to "*x* is bigger than *y*", "*x* is a flea" and "*y* is a flea". There is no problem with this split, since the flea has its place in a "bigger than" ordering, i.e., the flea is bigger than another flea but it need not be bigger than an elephant. Thus it seems like "bigger than" is a logically predicative adjective which may be surprising since "big" is a logically attributive adjective. Interestingly, the result is not the same when the test is applied to value comparatives. Consider the comparative: "*A* is better than *B* in terms of *V*" can this logically split up into "*A* is *V*", "*B* is *V*" and "*A* is better than *B*"? As I have argued, such a split cannot be made. Thus, betterness in terms of *V* seems to be logically attributive. So the analogy between "big" and "good" seems to cease when we consider their comparatives. Luke Elson kindly pointed out to me that this may be due to the fact that the two comparatives have a somewhat different structure. Even though I find all this to be interesting, it should all be taken as a side note. What needs to be investigated is whether the Requirement for Specification *entails* that there is only attributive goodness.

but it must also be made clear in what way *X* is a good *K*. Is the book good to read or is it good to look at or is it good to use when levelling a table, or good for a child to read, or good for teaching? Consider the following quotation:

> [A]ll goodness is goodness in a way, and that, if we do not know in what way a man means that a thing is good when he says of it "That's good", then we simply do not know what he is saying of it. Perhaps he means that it is good to eat, or that it is good for use in making cheesecakes, or that it is good for Alfred. If he tells us, "No, no, I meant that it is just plain a *good thing*," then we can at best suppose he is a philosopher making a joke.[239]

She follows this up with what could be understood to be the same view as the one I have advocated:

> The same is true of betterness: it, too, is always betterness in a way. People do say the words "This is better than that", but what they mean is always that the first thing is better to eat, or better for use in making cheesecake, or better for Alfred, and so on.[240]

Thomson seems to argue that all comparisons must be specified and this is according to her an indication that there is no such thing as goodness *simpliciter*. The considerations that speak in favour of the Requirement for Specification seem to be almost identical to the argument Thomson is presenting.[241]

If one agrees with Thomson, then there should not be a problem accepting the Requirement for Specification.[242] What is perhaps more interesting is to consider the combination of the views that there is goodness *simpliciter* and that there is a requirement for specification.

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[239] Thomson (1997, p. 276).

[240] Thomson (1997, p. 276).

[241] There are, however, some differences. According to Thomson, one way of being better is to be better for Alfred. It is uncertain whether "for Alfred" satisfies the Requirement for Specification. It should probably be added in which *way* it is better for Alfred in order for the requirement to be satisfied. What is important here is not whether the claims are identical but that they seem similar enough. They are similar enough in the sense that the Requirement for Specification seems to entail what Thomson is arguing for. Of course, it should not be denied that the difference is interesting. Perhaps this difference makes the Requirement for Specification a better or worse case for the conceptual scepticism, but it plays no relevant role in the continuation of this paper.

[242] For a recent discussion about good-for and covering concepts see Rønnow-Rasmussen (2016).

The requirement tells us that we must specify in which way something is better. By specifying that something is better "*simpliciter*", we satisfy the requirement and acknowledge that there is such a thing as goodness *simpliciter*. However, even though I have not made explicit what can count as a covering concept, it seems unlikely that "*simpliciter*" can be a covering concept. It does not seem to be the kind of specification that we need, since there is still the lingering question of what way something is better when it is better *simpliciter*.

Analysable Goodness *Simpliciter*

As was noted above it might not be that just stating that a thing is better/worse/equally as good *simpliciter* is enough to satisfy the Requirement for Specification. Is this really a respect in which something is good in the sense that we are looking for when we claim that all comparisons must proceed in a respect? It is difficult to clarify this if we stick to the Moorean idea of non-analysable goodness *simpliciter*. However, if we abandon the claim that goodness *simpliciter* is non-analysable then it could be possible to say something more substantive about how this concept relates to the Requirement for Specification. If we hold, *pace* Moore, that goodness *simpliciter* is analysable, then it could be possible to say in which way something is good when it is good *simpliciter* and thus we can agree with Thomson and yet claim that there is goodness *simpliciter*. The same would be true for the comparatives and, consequently, the Requirement for Specification would not entail that there is no such thing as goodness *simpliciter*.

This is, of course, only possible if we can specify in which way something is better/worse/equally good when it is better/worse/equally good *simpliciter*. I shall not argue for a specific way to make such a specification but instead provide an example of how one could go about specifying the covering concept.

Consider Michael Zimmerman's interesting reply to Thomson's argument.[243] Very roughly, Zimmerman acknowledges that there is only goodness in a way but he claims that one way in which something can be good is by being good *simpliciter*. Zimmerman's response starts out by claiming that goodness *simpliciter* seems to be the same as *intrinsic* goodness. This means that there is an answer to the question of what way something that is good *simpliciter* is good: it is intrinsically good! As Zimmerman notes, this would probably not satisfy

[243] Zimmerman (2001).

Thomson; this is not the *way* that Thomson has in mind. This is probably also true for the Requirement for Specification. It would not be enough to say that A is intrinsically better than *B*. So the question still lingers, in what way something is good when it is intrinsically good? According to Zimmerman: "The answer is: *ethical* goodness. When it's said that beauty, or knowledge, or pleasure, or virtue is *intrinsically* good and that, for example activities that promote such states are *extrinsically* good, what's meant is that all these things are *ethically* good."[244]

We can now see how the Requirement for Specification might be compatible with the existence of goodness *simpliciter*. We simply specify that the value relation is that of goodness *simpliciter*. Of course, "*simpliciter*" cannot be a covering concept, since "*simpliciter*" is not a way in which something is better. However, by following the reasoning of Zimmerman, we can say that the covering concept is "ethically". "Ethically" is a way in which something can be better and it coincides with goodness *simpliciter*. That which is ethically good *for its own sake* seems to be intrinsically good. So when *A* is better than *B simpliciter* we can satisfy the requirement by saying that "A is ethically better than *B*".

I take this to be a good strategy if one wants to embrace the Requirement for Specification without abandoning goodness *simpliciter*. I want to stress that it is the strategy that is important here and not the particular covering concept "ethically". Perhaps it is possible to use the same strategy, i.e. to claim that e.g. betterness *simpliciter* is betterness in some specific respect, and argue that the correct covering concept is something different from "ethically". One reason for doubting that "ethically" is the correct covering concept could be that one might find it odd to say that beauty, pleasure, and knowledge which are not moral goods, still are ethically good. However, according to Zimmerman, they share something with things that we would say are moral goods, namely that there is a *moral requirement to favour* these things *for their own sake*. I shall continue to use "ethically" as a covering concept, but treat it as a mere example of a possible covering concept. What is important is rather the strategy that is being used here: by giving an analysis of goodness *simpliciter* it could be possible to say in which way something is good when it is good *simpliciter.*

[244] Zimmerman (2001, p. 24).

The Vagueness View and Goodness *Simpliciter*

It could be interesting to consider how the notion "goodness *simpliciter"* relates to the Vagueness View. In the chapter *The Vagueness View Defended,* I argued that the adherents of the Vagueness View should locate the vagueness in the covering concept. If the hard cases of comparison are cases in which we compare the items *simpliciter,* then the adherent of the Vagueness View should locate the vagueness in the covering concept "ethically". This is of course only possible if the covering concept is vague. Consider the covering concept "ethically"; as was already noted, beauty, knowledge, pleasure and virtue are all ethically good according to Zimmerman. This means that this covering concept applies to very different things. For example, we can compare beauty with knowledge in terms of the same covering concept. That it encompasses many very different things could speak in favour of interpreting it as a multidimensional predicate. If so, then it could be indeterminate how the different dimensions are to be weighed and thus it can be indeterminate how things relate. In this way it can be claimed that if we find it hard to make a comparison *simpliciter,* then it is to be understood in terms of vagueness.

Some might, however, want to argue that the covering concept is not multidimensional or at least that there is no indeterminacy in how the different dimensions are to be weighed. If we have all the relevant knowledge this would entail that there is no such thing as hard moral comparisons *simpliciter*.[245] It is, of course, possible that there are no hard cases of this kind.[246] For these cases I

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[245] If it could be shown that, nevertheless, there can be hard cases of comparisons *simpliciter*, then this would constitute a counterexample to my claims. I am not sure how one could argue for this position, but perhaps it could be claimed that if there is only one property of being good *simpliciter,* then the comparison cannot be multidimensional in such a way that it is indeterminate how the dimensions are to be weighed. Either one item exemplifies this property to a higher, lower, or equally as high degree as the thing we are comparing it with. (But of course, just because being good *simpliciter* is one property it does not follow that this property can supervene on several factors, which could in turn give rise to indeterminacy.) However, if this is the case, then it is also difficult to understand how it can be hard to compare things *simpliciter.* If there is this one generic property that is being shared by all things that are good *simpliciter,* then it seems odd that there can be hard comparisons of this kind. We should just compare how much the items have of this property in order to determine how they relate.

[246] The observation that most of the examples of hard cases do not seem to be cases of comparisons *simpliciter* may lend some support to the view that there is no such thing as a hard case of comparison *simpliciter.* It is thus important to distinguish hard cases of comparisons *simpliciter* with other forms of hard cases. As Schroeder notes: "These questions may be parallel

would argue that the covering concept is multidimensional but it is determinate how the different dimensions are to be weighed.

So, here the Vagueness View can take any route. It can account for the hard cases of comparison *simpliciter*, if there is such a thing, by locating it in the vague covering concept of e.g., "ethically". If, on the other hand, there are no hard cases of comparison *simpliciter,* then this does not constitute a counterexample to the Vagueness View.

Conclusion

I began this appendix by discussing the role of "all things considered". But the main bulk of this appendix focused on the relation between "goodness *simpliciter*" and the Requirement for Specification. I have shown how the Requirement for Specification can play an important role for the Vagueness View. It has also been clarified how the requirement relates to goodness *simpliciter* scepticism. The requirement is clearly not the same as the criticism expressed by Geach, but it is very similar to the scepticism expressed by Thomson. This leaves two possibilities for the adherents of the Vagueness View. The first and perhaps most natural route is to accept that the requirement entails that there is no such thing as goodness *simpliciter*. The second and more interesting route is to claim that there is a Requirement for Specification and yet that there is such a thing as goodness *simpliciter*. This route is possible if *simpliciter* can be accompanied by a covering concept. Following Zimmerman, the covering concept that accompanies goodness *simpliciter* is "ethically". If there is such a thing as hard cases of comparison *simpliciter,* then the Vagueness View can explain this in terms of the vague covering concept. It is questionable, however, whether there is such a thing. This is not a problem for the Vagueness View, since the considerations that should make us doubt that there are hard cases of comparison *simpliciter* should also make us doubt whether the covering concept is vague. From this we can conclude that the Vagueness View can be neutral on the question of whether there is such a thing as goodness *simpliciter.*

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or closely related, and investigation of each may be instructive in consideration of the other, but they still need to be kept separate." Schroeder (2012).

Appendix B:
The Transitivity of Better Than

There are those who believe that our value comparatives are not transitive. They claim that it is possible that *A* is better than *B*, *B* is better than *C*, and yet *C* is better than *A*. I believe that they are mistaken. This raises the question of how they can make such a mistake. Many times I think that the mistake can be avoided by realising that all value comparisons must proceed with respect to a covering value. It may be that *A* is better than *B* with respect to *V*, *B* is better than *C* with respect to *V'*, and *C* better than *A* with respect to *V*, but from this we cannot conclude that "better than with respect to a covering concept" is not transitive. Once one acknowledges the Requirement for Specification, it becomes harder to argue for the non-transitivity of our value relations. There are, however, other reasons to doubt that our value relations are transitive. In his book *Rethinking the Good,* Larry Temkin has provided many arguments in favour of the view that "better than" is not transitive.[247] As already mentioned, his explanation as to why our standard value relations might not be transitive is that, depending on what I compare a specific object with, different considerations will be more or less weighty. Or, as Temkin puts it, the assessment of relative goodness is sometimes "essentially comparative".

Temkin's arguments are very detailed and sophisticated so it is impossible to do justice to them here. However, one central argument is his spectrum argument.[248] I will attempt to give a brief recapitulation of this argument and argue that it has some weaknesses.

Temkin uses the spectrum argument in order to argue that some widely held beliefs are in fact incompatible. One such belief is that "better than" is transitive,

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[247] He discusses the very specific value relation "all things considered better than in a wide reason implying sense." Temkin describes the relation in the following way: "Roughly, on this use, outcome *A* is better than outcome *B*, all things considered, if one would have more reason to prefer *A* to be realized than *B*, from an impartial perspective." Temkin (2012, p. 13).

[248] Which is inspired by Stuart Rachels (1998).

and since this belief is incompatible with beliefs that are more intuitive, we should conclude that "better than" is not transitive.

The following views seem intuitively appealing:

> *View One:* For any unpleasant or "negative" experience, no matter what the intensity and duration of that experience, it would be better to have the experience than one that was only a "little" less intense but twice (or three or five times) as long.
>
> *View Two*: There is, or could be, a spectrum of unpleasant or "negative" experiences ranging in intensity, for example, from extreme forms of torture to the mild discomfort of a mosquito bite, such that one could move from the harsh end of the spectrum to the mild end in a finite series of steps, where each step would involve the transformation from one negative experience to another that was only a "little less intense" than the previous one.
>
> *View Three:* The mild discomfort of a mosquito bite would be better than two years of excruciating torture, no matter how long one lived and no matter how long the discomfort of a mosquito bite persisted.
>
> *View Four:* "All-things-considered better than" is a transitive relation. So, for any three outcomes, A, B, and C, which involve unpleasant experiences of varying intensities and durations, if, all things considered, A is better than B and B is better than C, then A is better than C.[249]

Now consider a series of lives from P_1 to P_n. All these lives are very lengthy and all include fifteen mosquito bites per month. P_1 and P_2 are similar in all relevant aspects, except that P_1 includes two years of excruciating torture, while P_2 includes four years of almost as intense torture. P_3 stands in the same relation to P_2 as P_2 stands to P_1, i.e., P_3 includes eight years of almost as intense torture as in P_2. We would say, in accordance with View One, that P_1 is better than P_2, and that P_2 is better than P_3, and so on. However, in accordance with View Two, eventually we will reach P_n, which is such that it does not include excruciating torture, but a very minor discomfort for a very long time. It may very well be that this minor discomfort is just one extra mosquito bite per month. Given View Four P_1 is better than P_n, but according to View Three P_n is better than P_1. It has thus been shown that View One, View Two, View Three, and View Four

[249] Temkin (2012, p .135).

are inconsistent. Something has to go, but all four premises seem sound! And more so, rejecting any of the four premises seems to lead to both practical and theoretical problems. Temkin argues that it is View Four that must be rejected. To reject any of the other views would come at too high a price.

There are, of course, ways in which one can object to spectrum arguments of this kind and Temkin discusses several of them. There is however one kind of objection I wish to discuss further. The objection is that there must be a point in the spectrum where View One does not apply between two adjacent outcomes, thus breaking the chain of "better than" relations. One explanation as to why that might be the case is that differences in degree may give rise to a difference in kind, and since there clearly is a difference in degree in the Spectrum Argument, then there could be a difference in kind. Furthermore, the reason that View Three applies to items at the far ends of the spectrum seems to be that there is a difference in kind between the items. Temkin agrees so far, in fact he thinks that this is an explanation as to why transitivity does not hold; excruciating torture is clearly different in kind from a few mosquito bites, and that is why View Three holds.

The objection, however, states that this difference in kind may arise somewhere in the spectrum so that the transitivity of "better than" is not threatened. That is, for some two adjacent points in the spectrum, there is a difference in kind and thus it may very well be that a slightly less intense pain that lasts twice (or three or five times) as long will not be worse than its immediately neighbour. The difference in degree is not enough to outweigh the difference in kind.

I feel quite positive towards the gist of such an objection. However, Temkin is not convinced by it. His reply takes the following form: P_1 is clearly of a different kind than P_n and the objection states that there is a break somewhere in the spectrum from P_1 to P_n where this change takes place. Let us call the two adjacent items for which View One does not hold for P_{k-1} and P_k. Temkin then asks whether View Three applies to P_{k-1} and P_k:

> For our opponent's argument to work, he needs the difference between P_k and P_{k-1}'s pain to be *akin to the difference between the pain of intense torture and the pain of a mosquito bite.* If there *were* such a difference, then, indeed, we would agree that View Three applied to the two "nearby" pains P_k and P_{k-1}; correspondingly, we would reject View One, and the threat to the transitivity of "better than" would evaporate.[250]

[250] Temkin (2012, p. 272).

I am not sure why Temkin focuses on View Three. The real issue is whether View One applies or not, or rather: is the difference in kind enough for View One not to apply? Temkin believes that the difference is not enough. According to him, even though P_{k-1} and P_k may differ in kind they are clearly very similar. For example, P_{k-1} is more similar to P_k than to P_1 and P_k is more similar to P_{k-1} than to P_n. Granted that they are so very similar, we should expect View One to hold between them.

It is interesting that Temkin seems to acknowledge that the items may differ in kind. According to Temkin, however, the focus on different kinds is a red herring; instead we should focus on the similarity of the adjacent items. He writes:

> In sum, though it may have helped illuminate how it could be the case that different factors could be relevant and significant for comparing different alternatives, the issue of different *kinds* is a red herring, and I ought not to have put some of my earlier discussions in those terms. The point is simply that when the difference between two pains is "sufficiently" great, View Three is appropriate for comparing them, whereas when the difference between two pains is "sufficiently" small, View One is appropriate.[251]

This, however, does not address the issue of whether differences in kind are insurmountable to View One. If P_{k-1} is of a different kind than P_k then View One might not be applicable. I do, however, admit that it seems odd that there is such an abrupt break in the spectrum. How could it be that two adjacent outcomes could differ so much in kind when they, besides this, are so similar?[252]

Let us grant Temkin that a *sharp* break of this kind seems implausible. It could, however, still be that there is a break but that this break is not sharp. This suggests that there could be a zone in which it is indeterminate whether View One applies to the adjacent outcomes. It may, for example, be indeterminate whether the difference in kind is to be found between P_k and P_{k-1}, P_{k+1} and P_k, or P_{k+2} and P_{k+1}. This means that we cannot determinately judge for which outcomes in the spectrum View One does not apply, but it will not be true for all adjacent items that View One will apply since for P_{k-1} – P_{k+2} it will be indeterminate.

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[251] Temkin (2012, p. 274) and Knapp (2007).

[252] Temkin (2012, p. 275).

Temkin discusses a similar objection presented by Christopher Knapp.[253] Knapp's argument is that trade-offs between intensity and time only seem to be desirable when we are dealing with quantitative differences and not when it comes to qualitative differences. If we have a spectrum ranging from very intense pain (600) to very mild pain (1) there is a difference in quality for the pains at the different ends of the spectrum, while two pains at the same end of the spectrum will only differ in quantity. For pains in the middle of the spectrum (300 and 301) it is indeterminate whether they are very intense or very mild. And since it is indeterminate for two adjacent points in the middle of the spectrum whether there is a difference in quality, then it is indeterminate whether one of these outcomes that lasts for a certain time is better than its adjacent outcome that lasts much longer. Consequently, it is neither true nor false that View One holds (the same goes for View Three) and thus we have a break in the chain. However, Temkin is not too impressed by this objection:

> We must clearly reject its key premise that a pain's being a borderline case of a qualitative distinction guarantees that it would be indeterminate whether or not View One or View Three applied for any comparisons involving that pain. This is simply not so. After all, even if one grants that pain 301 is both indeterminately very intense and indeterminately very mild, and so a borderline case of qualitative distinction, it *doesn't* follow that a trade-off between *one* year of pain 301 and *five* years of pain 301 would involve a borderline case *where a qualitative difference* was at stake! Since there is *no* difference between the intensity of pain in the two cases, only a difference in duration, it cannot be indeterminate whether a qualitative difference is at stake.[254]

According to Temkin, it might very well be that it is indeterminate whether pains 300 and 301 are very intense or very mild, but it is determinate that the difference between them is small and View One is appropriate to apply when we compare pains with a small difference in intensity.

This reply seems to misconstrue the original objection. It was argued that if adjacent items differ in kind, then View One is not applicable, just as for the same reason View One is not applicable to items at the opposite ends of the spectrum. It may not be determinate where this difference in kind kicks in, but rather it is indeterminate. It does, however, kick in. For this reason View One should be rejected. View One is supposed to be applicable for any two pains

[253] Temkin (2012, pp. 534–538).

[254] Temkin (2012, p. 536).

such that one is slightly less intense than the other. We now know that this is false, since for some such pains there is a difference in kind and for these pains View One is not applicable.

Since View One is rejected there is no need to reject View Four; and it cannot be concluded that "better than" is not a transitive relation.

Superiority and Spectrums

Let me try to make the same point but in a somewhat different manner. The argument I am about to present presupposes transitivity, so it is an argument as to why we should reject View One if we want to keep transitivity. Transitivity is fundamental to our conception of value and thus the following argument shows us why it is View One that should be rejected.

It seems reasonable to conclude that if we construct a sequence of objects ranked by how good they are and in which the first object is superior to the last then for some object in the sequence this object will be superior to the one that immediately follows. Gustaf Arrhenius and Wlodek Rabinowicz have, however, argued that it need not be the case that there is such an abrupt break in the sequence, but there must be some point where one item is *weakly* superior to an adjacent item[255]. There are thus two kinds of superiority:

> *Strongly superior:* An object e is strongly superior to an object *e'* if and only if *e* is better than any number of *e'*-objects.

> *Weakly superior:* An object e is weakly superior to an object *e'* if and only if for some number *m*, *m e*-objects are better than any number of *e'*-objects.

Arrhenius and Rabinowicz prove that if an object at one end of the sequence is strongly or weakly superior to an object at the other end, then some object in the sequence must be weakly superior to the object that immediately follows. But it need not be strongly superior. For this current discussion it is perhaps more fitting to talk about strong and weak *inferiority*.

> *Strongly inferior:* An object *e* is strongly inferior to an object *e'* if and only if *e* is worse than any number of *e'*-objects.

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[255] Arrhenius & Rabinowicz (2005).

Weakly inferior: An object e is weakly inferior to an object e' if and only if for some number m, m e-objects are worse than any number of e'-objects.

I also take it that the results arrived at by Arrhenius and Rabinowicz are true for weak inferiority and strong inferiority. That is, if an object is weakly or strongly inferior to another object, then, in the sequence between them, there will be some object that will be weakly inferior to the one that immediately follows.

Objects can be added together into wholes. So if e is two years of excruciating torture, then the even worse experience of four years of excruciating torture can be represented as $2e$.

It also seems reasonable to construe Temkin's spectrum as a sequence of the sort described above. Ranging from excruciating torture e_1 to the mild discomfort of a mosquito bite e_m. Between these extremes the spectrum is made up of (pairwise) ordered objects of unpleasant experiences: $e_1, e_2, e_3, \ldots e_{m-1}, e_m$.

We can now see that View Three expresses the view that e_1 is strongly inferior to e_m. This means that somewhere along the spectrum one object will be weakly inferior to one of its adjacent objects. Consequently, there is this difference in kind between two adjacent items in the spectrum. With such a difference one can doubt whether View One really holds for these two objects. That is, if one item can be weakly inferior to its adjacent item, then it might be the case that these items are so different so that View One does not apply. At least, it makes View One lose some of its intuitive appeal. By assuming transitivity, it has now been shown that the sequence must contain a pair of adjacent objects such that one is weakly inferior to the other. But then there is a difference in kind between these two objects and View One does not hold for this pair.

It should be noted that even though the existence of weak superiority in the spectrum should make us doubt View One I have not ruled out View One on formal grounds. That one item is weakly inferior to another is compatible with View One applying to these items. This is so even in the spectrum argument: If Temkin's argument is to work View One must be applicable to all adjacent objects in the spectrum. View One claims that for any pain e_i, a slightly less intense experience that is twice (or three or five times) as long is worse. From this it follows that e_k is better than e_{k+1}. But this does not contradict the result arrived at by the definition of weak inferiority: for some number m, m e_k objects are worse than any number of e_{k+1} objects. e_k may be better than e_{k+1} and yet m e_k may be worse than any number of e_{k+1}.

However, with one very reasonable assumption we do reach a contradiction. According to Temkin e_k is very similar to e_{k+1} and if that is the case it seems reasonable that if we prolong both experiences so that they become, e.g., twice as

long, then clearly e_k would still be better than e_{k+1}. If 10 years of intense headache is better than 20 years of slightly less intense headache then clearly 20 years of intense headache must be better than 40 years of slightly less intense headache. Or, more generally, if e_k is better than e_{k+1} then $k\ e_k$ must be better than $k\ e_{k+1}$. This means that $m\ e_k$ is better than $m\ e_{k+1}$, which contradicts the result arrived at through the definition of weak inferiority: $m\ e_k$ objects are worse than any number of e_{k+1} objects. This contradiction can be avoided by rejecting View One.

I take this to strengthen the claim that if we are to reject one of the four views, it is not the transitivity of "better than" that ought to be rejected but we should rather reject View One.

Appendix C:
The Fitting Attitudes Analysis of Value Relations

The Fitting Attitudes analysis of value (henceforth the FA-analysis) has for a long time been advanced as an account of value and recently it has gained even further interest.[256] Roughly put, value is analysed in terms of a normative component and an attitudinal part. To be valuable is to be a fitting object of some positive attitude. Here "fitting" plays the normative role. Other may prefer "reasons", "correct", or "appropriate", and examples of positive attitudes could be "desiring", "loving" and "admiring". While this analysis mostly has focused on "good" and "bad", it can be developed to include value comparatives. To be better than something else may for example mean that it is *more* fitting to have a positive attitude towards this thing rather than the other, or it may mean that it is fitting to have a *stronger* positive attitude towards this thing rather than the other.

Such an analysis is silent on the issue of which value relations are instantiated, but it can help to determine the conceptual possibilities that are available. This appendix will discuss the FA-analysis of value comparatives and can, correspondingly, be read as a brief survey of one possible way to understand the conceptual terrain of value relations. That being said, it will be clear that the analysis of value relations might also provide some insights into how one can argue for their possible instantiation.

The analysis of the comparatives that was sketched above seems to be a straightforward development of the FA-account, but the developments suggested above only include the three standard value relations. Joshua Gert, however, realised that there might be a way to expound this analysis so that it can include parity. His suggestion draws on the fact that there are two levels of normativity:

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[256] For an historical overview see Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004). Scanlon is often credited with igniting the new interest in the FA-analysis. See Scanlon (1998).

something can be *required* or it can be *permissible*.[257] This gives the adherent of the FA-analysis the tools to expand their account. Unfortunately, Gert's proposed analysis had some serious flaws, but the main idea seems promising.[258] Inspired by Gert's original idea, Wlodek Rabinowicz developed an analysis of value relations that includes parity and incomparability. In this appendix I will give a rough presentation of the account offered by Rabinowicz.

By using "required" Rabinowicz accounts for the standard three relations:

> *Better than:* x is better than y if and only if it is rationally required to prefer x to y.
>
> *Worse than:* x is worse than y if and only if it is rationally required to prefer y to x.
>
> *Equally as good:* x and y are equally as good if and only if it is rationally required to be indifferent between x and y.

By using "permissible" Rabinowicz believes that he can include parity in his analysis:

> *On a par:* x and y are on a par if and only if it is rationally permissible to prefer x to y and also rationally permissible to prefer y to x.[259]

Rabinowicz also gives an account of incomparability:

> *Incomparability:* x and y are incomparable if and only if it is not rationally permissible to prefer one to the other or to be indifferent.

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[257] Gert (2004).

[258] See Rabinowicz (2008).

[259] Johan E. Gustafsson has also provided an interesting and competing fitting attitude analysis of incomparability and parity. First he argues that there is a symmetry between value relations and preference relations so that "for every value relation, there is a corresponding preference relation, and vice versa." (Gustafsson 2013, p. 477). If this is the case axiological parity and axiological incomparability can easily be defined in the following manner:

"x and y are *axiologically on a par* if and only if it is fitting to hold x and y preferentially on a par.

x and y are *axiologically incomparable* if and only if it is fitting to have a preferential gap between x and y." (Gustafsson 2013, p. 487).

As Rabinowicz acknowledges, this definition might be too demanding. There might be a weaker form of incomparability:

> *Weak Incomparability:* x and y are weakly incomparable if it is rationally permissible neither to prefer one to the other nor to be indifferent.

Preferences or the lack of them can be combined with the two different levels of normativity in more than four ways. There are 15 different ways in which these can be combined. One can prefer (>), disprefer (<), be indifferent (≈) or have a preferential gap (/) when it comes to two items.[260] Above, we saw the four different ways in which the preferences can be required and we saw two ways in which preferences can be permissible. There are, however, nine more ways in which we can combine different permissible preferences:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
>	+	+				+	+	+	+	+	+				
≈		+	+	+			+		+		+	+	+		
<				+	+	+	+	+	+				+	+	
/								+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

In the first, third, and fifth columns we can identify the standard three relations. In column 6 we can find parity, but columns 7, 8, and 9 also fit the characterisation of parity. In column 15 we can find the strict characterisation of incomparability while in 8–14 we can find the less strict form of incomparability.

If one is convinced by Rabinowicz's account, then one learns that the conceptual space for value relations is much bigger than previously thought. This is all fully compatible with most of my claims. My central claim is that there are only three value relations that are instantiated and this does not rule out that there could be conceptual space for more than three value relations. There may very well be conceptual room for 15 relations, but it could still be the case that only three of these ever obtain between two items.

[260] If there is a preferential gap then one neither prefers one item to the other nor is indifferent.

Potential Problems with the FA-Analysis

It should be noted that the proposed analysis of value relations comes with some problems. To begin with, it is vulnerable to the so-called *wrong kind of reasons problem.* This is a well-discussed objection to the FA-analysis of monadic value predicates but it also seems to apply to value comparatives. Very roughly put, the objection draws on the possibility that it may be fitting to have a positive attitude towards something that is not good. In such a case it is not the evaluative profile of the object that we analyse that makes the object a fitting object of a positive attitude. A standard example to illustrate this is Roger Crisp's evil demon that will punish you if you do not have a positive attitude towards a certain saucer of mud.[261] It seems that the evil demon's threat makes it fitting to have a positive attitude towards the saucer, but the threat clearly does not make the saucer valuable. The normative component seems to be wrong in the case explained. If the normative component is to be understood in terms of "reasons", it seems that the reason to have the positive attitude towards the saucer, is of the wrong kind. This is the wrong kind of reasons objection.[262]

A similar objection holds for the FA-analysis of comparatives as well. Perhaps the demon threatens to hurt you unless you prefer the saucer of mud to an ice cream cone. In such a case it seems that you are rationality required to prefer the saucer. According to Rabinowicz's analysis this means that the saucer is better than the ice cream cone.

Another potential problem with the FA-account is that it seems circular. In order to expound the concept of "positive attitude", one might have to use the concept of "evaluations".[263] Consequently, the analysis of the concept of value seems dependent on the concept of value! Most adherents of the FA-analysis, however, do not seem to be affected by this objection. One potential reply is to admit that there is circularity but that it is benign since the analysis is still informative.

Rabinowicz's analysis could be claimed to suffer from this form of circularity. This becomes clear if preferences are understood to express valuations. If we accept that the circularity is not a problem, Rabinowicz's account faces a

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[261] Crisp (2000, p. 459).

[262] For more on this objection see for example Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) and Hieronymi (2005).

[263] Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) trace this objection all the way back to Ross (1939, pp. 276–278). They also suggest why the circularity may not be problematic. For a more recent elaboration see Bykvist (2009).

different problem. If preferences are understood to express valuations, then if I prefer *A* to *B* I also judge *A* to be better than *B.* On Rabinowicz's account this is a false judgement, since it may not be required to prefer *A* to *B*. Consequently, when *A* and *B* are on a par it is permissible to prefer *A* to *B*, i.e., to judge that *A* is better than *B*, but how could it be permissible to have this false judgement?[264]

Of course, this does not follow on all understandings of preferences. For example, if preferences are understood in terms of choice dispositions this objection might not hold, but another worry arises: There could be a case that we intuitively would say is a case of the strong form of incomparability—i.e., a case in which it is not permissible to prefer one of the items to the other or to be indifferent between them—and in which the agent is required to make a choice. If preferences are choice disposition then making a choice will reveal the disposition to choose, i.e., it will reveal the preference. In order to avoid this objection Rabinowicz suggests that the disposition to choose should be understood in a narrower sense; they must be reason-based. This would mean that if I prefer *A* to *B* I am disposed to choose *A* before *B* which in turn means that I have stronger reasons to favour *A* than *B*.

This, however, means that I can judge that it is false that *A* is better than *B* and yet be permitted to prefer *A* to *B*, i.e., have stronger reasons to favour *A* to *B*. This seems odd and it could be argued that it is not permitted to have such a preference.[265]

However, according to Rabinowicz this is not a problem since this conflict of reasons only mirrors the fact that there are different ways to weigh the two items.[266] Just because there are different admissible ways to weigh the different aspects of *A* and *B* and the agent is aware that these are optional, the agent can take herself to have stronger reasons to favour *A* than *B,* and yet admit that it is false that *A* is better than *B,* since she is aware that there are other ways to solve this conflict of reasons. There is something to this, but it may come at the cost of rejecting the isomorphism of reasons and value. It is reasonable to assume that if there is stronger reason to prefer *A* to *B* then *A* is better than *B*.[267]

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[264] This objection is discussed by Rabinowicz (2012, p. 151).

[265] See Rabinowicz (2012, p. 151).

[266] Rabinowicz (2012, p. 151).

[267] It could perhaps be replied that an agent who has adopted a certain admissible way of weighing thereby acquires a stronger reason to prefer *A* to *B*. So the agent may have a stronger reason to prefer *A* to *B*, but from this it does not follow that there are stronger reasons to prefer *A* to *B*. The isomorphism of reasons and value tells us that if it is false that *A* is better than *B* then there are, in an *impersonal* sense, no stronger reasons to prefer *A* before *B*. But, the reply goes; the *agent* may nevertheless have stronger reasons to prefer *A* to *B*. I am uncertain, however, as

It should also be acknowledged that Rabinowicz argues that there are other potential ways around this objection. According to him, this objection, and others, can be avoided by treating the attitude of preferring as a "difference of degree between 'monadic' attitudes of favouring".[268] I shall not go into the details of this reply, but note that this might be a successful way to avoid the kind of objection discussed.

To recapitulate: That there are several different admissible ways to weigh the different aspects of two items need not mean that one item is better than the other in view of one weighing and worse in the view of another; all it means, according to Rabinowicz, is that it is permitted to have different preference relations. This implies that one might have stronger reasons to prefer *A* to *B* and yet correctly judge that it is false that *A* is better than *B*, which seems problematic. According to Rabinowicz it is not problematic as long as the agent is aware that there are different admissible ways to weigh the different aspects.

The FA-analysis might give the adherents of the Incomparability View or the Parity View the means to support their views. It should, however, be noted that some of these non-standard relations perhaps ought to be given a new characterisation if we are to accept the FA-analysis. For example, Chang claims that parity is just as fundamental as the standard three relations, but given the FA-analysis it is not, since it is analysed in terms of several permissible preferences rather than one required preference. Leaving such issues to the side, it is time to consider whether the FA-account can solve some of the problems that I claim the Incomparability View and the Parity View face.

Fitting-Attitudes and Incomparability

I rejected the Incomparability View on the grounds that it cannot explain what gives rise to incomparability. With the FA-analysis the Incomparability View may fare better. Of course, Rabinowicz's account does not explain what gives rise to incomparability, but at least it can give us a further understanding of what it is for two items to be incomparable.

It seems unlikely that the strict form of incomparability is instantiated in the hard cases of comparison. In examples such as the Mozart and Michelangelo case, it seems reasonable to conclude that it is at least permissible to prefer, e.g.,

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to whether this leaves the isomorphism intact, since argument can be applied to a fitting-attitude analysis of this sort of agent-relative value.

[268] Rabinowicz (2012, p.131).

Mozart to Michelangelo—surely it cannot be the case that one is required to have a preference gap. It seems more likely that the hard cases could be examples of when the weaker form of incomparability is instantiated; it is not the case that one is required to have a preferential gap but it may be permissible to have a preferential gap.

But then what is it about the hard cases of comparison that makes it permissible to have a preferential gap between the items we are comparing? In the chapter *The Incomparability View,* I mentioned the idea that incomparability may arise when the comparison is complex in the sense that there are different aspects that are to be compared but due to different admissible ways of weighing these aspects we get different rankings. So, for example, assume that x and y are compared in terms of V and that there are two aspects of V: a and b. x may have more of a and y may have more of b. As far as a goes, x is better than y, but as far as b goes, y is better than x. Let us assume that there are different admissible ways to weigh a and b and that on some x is better than y and on others y is better than x. This is, according to the adherent of the Incomparability View, the reason why x and y are incomparable.

I claimed that this is not a promising route for the adherents of the Incomparability View, since it seems to imply that "x is better than y or y is worse than x or x and y are equally as good" is true according to each admissible weighing, but according to the adherent of the Incomparability View, the disjunction is false. Consequently, I concluded, the adherent of the Incomparability View cannot make sense of the hard cases of comparison by appealing to multiple admissible ways to weigh the different aspects.

The FA-account can reply to this objection. The adherent of the Incomparability View can argue that the different ways of weighing do not directly determine value relations. When there are different ways of weighing, there are also different *permitted* preference relations. So it is not that x is better than y on the first weighing, but rather that, due to this weighing, it is permitted to prefer x to y, in view of the second weighing it is permitted to prefer y to x, and in the view of the third it is permitted to be indifferent between x and y. Because of this it is false that x is better than, worse than or equally as good as y.

It could be objected here that an argument is needed as to why these rankings should give rise to permissible preferences rather than required preferences. But let us assume that such an argument can be made. There is, however, a more pressing problem with this defence of the Incomparability View. Let us grant that it may be permissible to prefer x to y, permissible to prefer y to x, or permissible to be indifferent between x and y. However, from this it does not follow that x and y are incomparable. In order for x and y to be weakly

incomparable it must be permissible to have a preference gap between them. But the example in itself is not such that it is clear why it would be permissible to have a preference gap. If it is not permissible to have a preference gap then this is not a case of incomparability but rather a case of parity. If, so the adherents of the Incomparability View find little support in Rabinowicz's FA-analysis.

It could, perhaps, be argued that if it is permissible to prefer *x* to *y*, permissible to prefer *y* to *x*, and permissible to be indifferent, then it is permissible to abstain from choosing a particular way of weighing which entails that it is permissible to have a preference gap. I take this to be the best way for the adherents of the Incomparability View to argue, but for the argument to be successful one needs an explanation as to why it would be permissible to abstain from choosing.

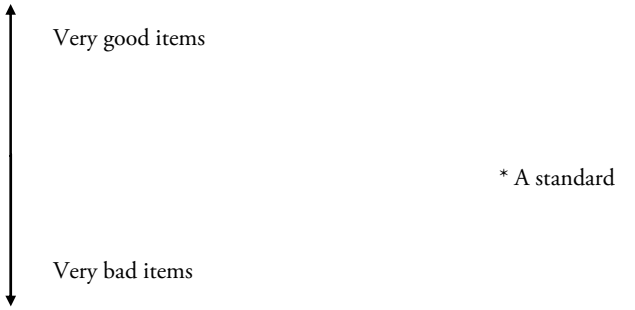
Conclusion

The FA-account may establish that there is conceptual space for incomparability and parity, but it is an account of the concepts and as such it does not let us conclude that parity or incomparability are instantiated. It should also be noted that Rabinowicz's FA-account is compatible with the Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View. The Vagueness View and the Trichotomy View claim that it is only columns 1, 3, and 5 that are actually instantiated value relations, but in some cases we might not know which relation it is or it is indeterminate. It could, for example, be argued that hard cases of comparison are cases in which it is unclear what ways to weigh are admissible and thus we have an epistemic explanation for the hard cases.[269]

[269] For more on this see Rabinowicz (2009).

Appendix D:
Some Standard Configurations

As already mentioned, John Broome's framework with Standard Configurations provides us with a convenient way to investigate value relations. Remember that in a Standard Configuration a chain of items is constructed by ordering the items by how good they are. At one end we have items that are not very good at all and at the other far end we have items that are very good. The chain may for example consist of musicians ordered by how good they are in terms of creativity. At one end we have a very poor musician and at the other end we have some very talented musician. We now have a linearly ordered sequence.[270] These musicians may be compared to something that is not part of the chain. Broome calls this item a "standard". Here is what this situation will look like:



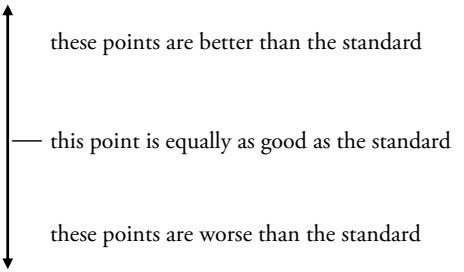
A vertical line illustrates the sequence. At the top we have items that are very good and at the bottom items that are very bad. These items can be compared with the standard that is marked out with *.

[270] As mentioned in *The Collapsing Argument for the Vagueness View,* this sequence should ideally be dense, but it is not obvious that all items can construct such a dense sequence. However, for most items we can imagine such a sequence.

Determinate and Indeterminate Comparability

The most common Standard Configuration is probably the one that is illustrated by the following setup.

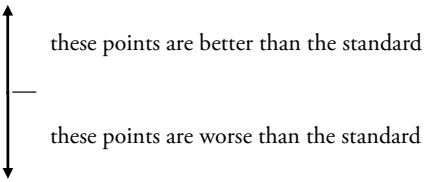
Determinate Comparability:



Here the borders between value relations are marked out with a dash and I have left out the standard. Points in the upper part of the sequence are better than the standard and as we move down we will reach one point which is equally as good as the standard. The very next point however, will be worse than the standard. That is, there can only be one point that is equally as good as the standard. A point that is better (or worse) than this will also be better (or worse) than the standard. If we only accept the Trichotomy View and reject all the other views then this is the only possible configuration; so even in hard cases of comparison, the Standard Configuration will have this form, but we fail to know where in the sequence the item we are comparing is to be found.

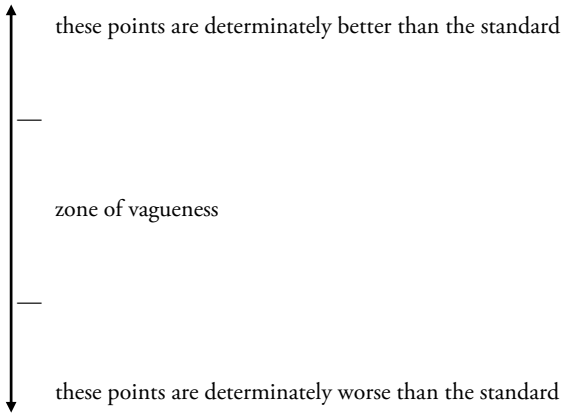
There is one more Standard Configuration that illustrates determinate comparability.

Restricted Determinate Comparability:



In this Standard Configuration there are no points that are equally as good as the standard. This means that as we move up in the sequence we will go from one item that is worse than the standard to one that is better than the standard. If we assume that the sequence is continuous it is hard to imagine that this configuration is possible. The best way to make sense of this is if we take the sequence not to be dense but to have big gaps. Depending on what objects it consists of there might be big gaps, but in general it seems to me that sharp breaks like these should be rare. It seems reasonable to conclude that if the sequence has no gaps, then there will never be such a precise point for which an item is worse than the standard, while its adjacent item is better than the standard. At least, it seems counterintuitive that we can pinpoint the exact location of such a point.

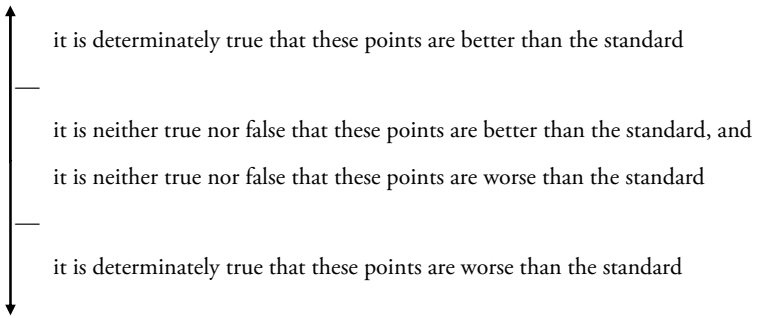
It is perhaps more interesting to consider Standard Configurations that incorporates zones of vagueness. In a Standard Configuration, vagueness would be modelled like this:



For items at the very top of the sequence it is obvious that they are determinately better than the standard. For some items in the middle of the sequence the vagueness of the comparative makes the comparison hard to carry out. Further down in the sequence the items will be determinately worse than the standard. Or in supervaluationistic terms: for items at the top of the sequence each sharpening of the predicate will make it better than the standard. In the zone of vagueness the items will be better than the standard on some

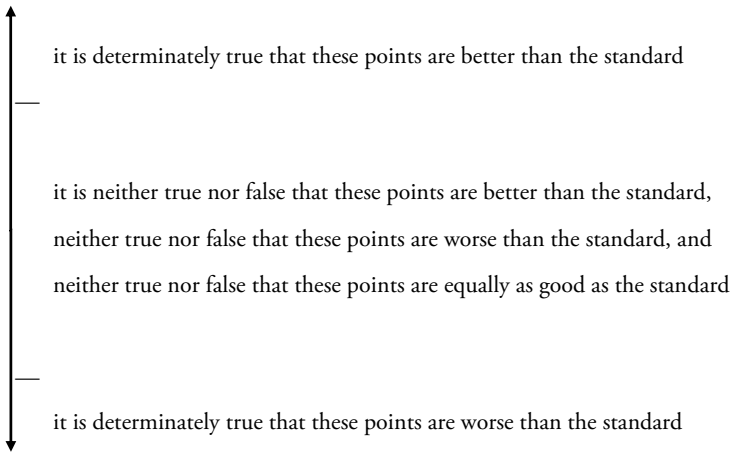
sharpenings and worse on others. That is, these will be neither determinately better nor determinately worse than the standard. The configuration will thus look as follows:

Restricted Indeterminate Comparability:



In this configuration it becomes clear that it is indeterminate whether items in the vagueness zone are better than or worse than the standard. However, as the configuration is presented above, this means that on each sharpening there is a sharp border between those items that are better than the standard and those that are worse than the standard. But, as was argued above, it would seem more reasonable that on each sharpening there is also an item that is equally as good as the standard. It could be thought that a configuration such as the following allows for this:

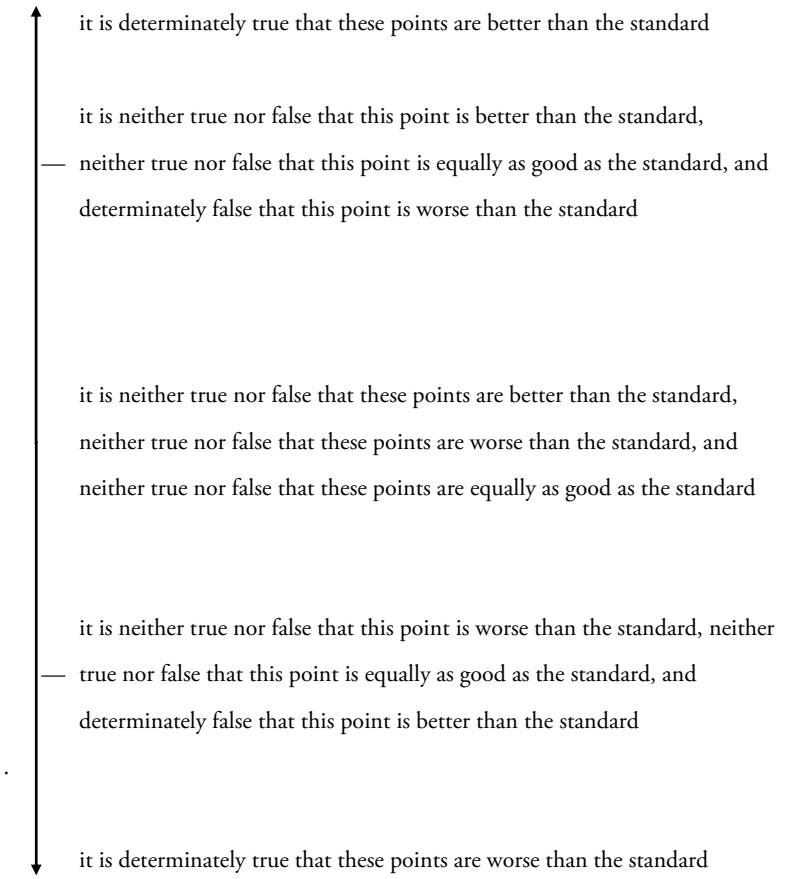
Indeterminate Comparability:



In this configuration there is a zone of vagueness in which it is indeterminate whether the items are better than, worse than, or equally as good as the standard. However, even with this configuration there will be some admissible sharpenings such that for two adjacent items one will be better than the standard and the other will be worse than the standard. According to the supervaluationist account of vagueness the top point of the zone of vagueness will on some sharpenings be worse than the standard and we know that all points above this top point will be better than the standard. Consequently, on some sharpenings we have this sharp break. It may be argued that this abrupt transition is not as problematic as the sharp transition in Restricted Determinate Comparability, since in the latter configuration there is such an abrupt break in *all* sharpenings, i.e., there is such an determinate break.

I do not think that this sharp transition should be of a worry for us. There are, however, ways that the configuration could be restricted so that the top point is either better than or equally as good as the standard. The zone of vagueness is then construed as an open interval for which it is indeterminate which of the three value relations holds.

Indeterminate Comparability (open interval):

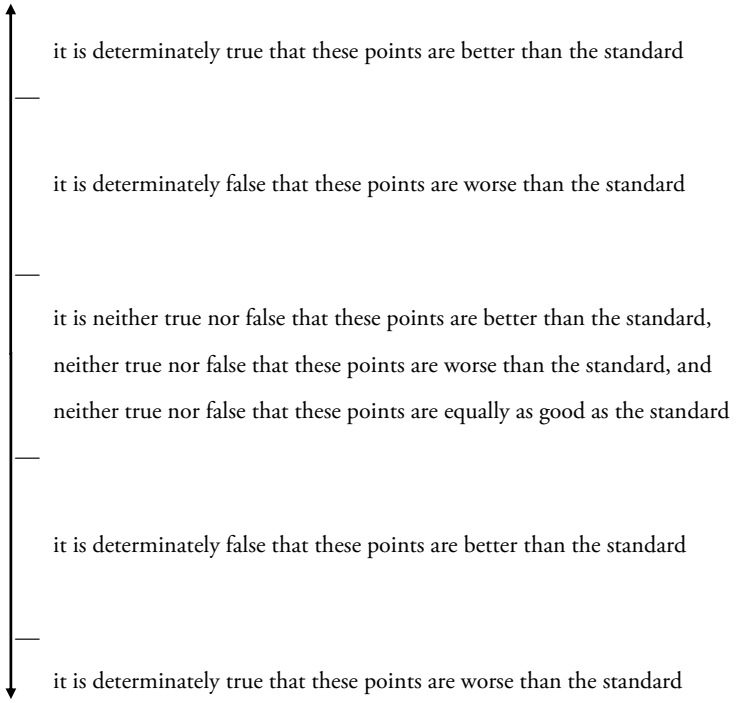


Note that if we accept the Collapsing Principle this would not be possible since for the top point of the sequence it will be not false that it is better than the standard and yet false that the standard is better than this point. According to the Collapsing Principle this point must thus be better than the standard, which contradicts our initial assumption.

If we set aside the Collapsing Principle and embrace this idea that there is an item in the zone of vagueness that cannot be worse than the standard, it might seem intuitive that this is the case for several points at the top of the sequence. This would make the transition from points in the sequence that are worse than the standard to points that are better than the standard appealingly smooth.

This idea that the vagueness is only partial could be illustrated in the following way:

Indeterminate Comparability with Partial Vagueness:



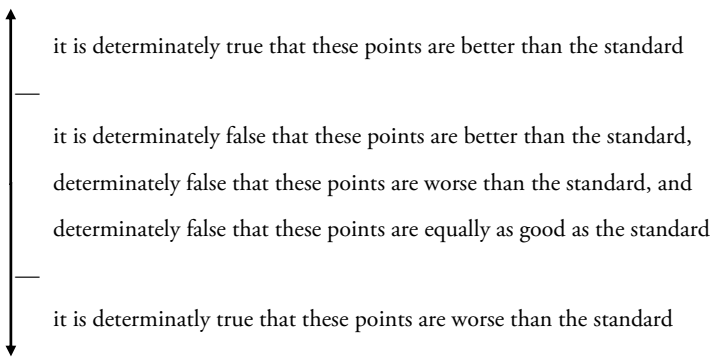
This configuration is however, incompatible with supervaluationism. For the points that are only partially vague, it is neither true nor false that they are equally as good as the standard, and for the points in the upper zone of partial vagueness it is neither true nor false that they are better than the standard. According to supervaluationism: for a point in this zone it will be the case that on some sharpenings it will be better than the standard and other sharpenings it will be equally as good as the standard. However, if the point is equally as good as the standard, then points below it will be worse than the standard and we have stipulated that there are no such points in this upper zone. Thus all points in the upper zone of partial vagueness must be better than the standard on every

sharpening, which is a contradiction.[271] Partial vagueness thus collapses into full vagueness.

Determinate and Indeterminate Incomparability

Even though I have argued that there is no such thing as instantiated incomparability or parity, it could be interesting to consider which Standard Configurations are logically possible when none of the standard value relations applies. For ease of exposition I will refer to these cases as cases of incomparability, i.e., I will assume that there are only three positive value relations and when none of these obtains the items we are comparing will be incomparable. There are several interesting possibilities:

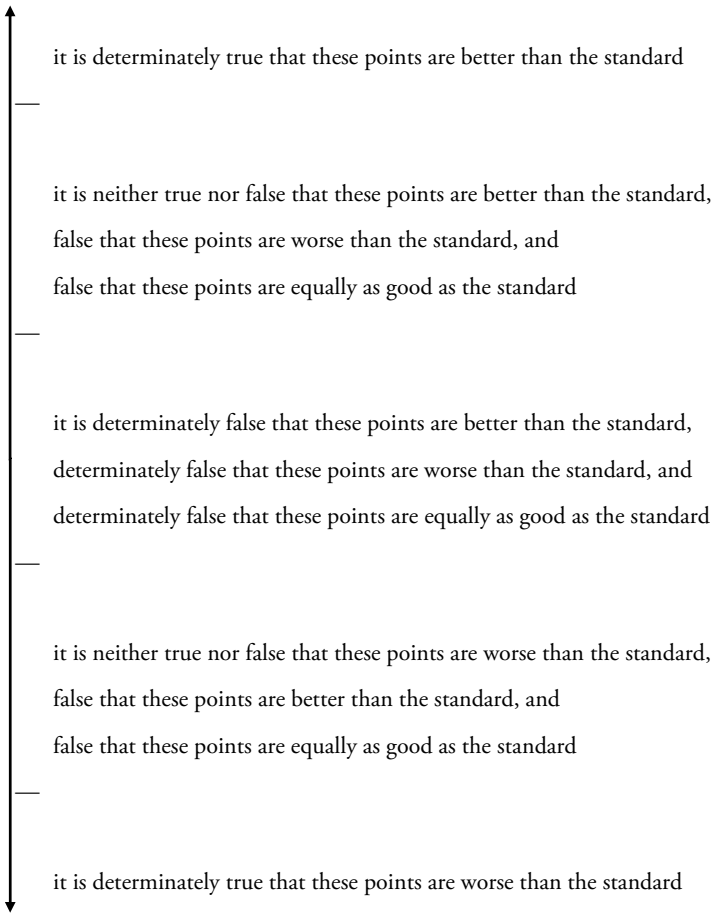
Determinate Incomparability:



I take this to be the most straightforward illustration of determinate incomparability. It might seem rather unintuitive that there is a sharp border between incomparability and comparability. The following configuration takes this into account.

[271] Of course there is still the possibility that there is only one point for which it is false that it is worse than the standard.

Determinate Incomparability with Vague Borders:

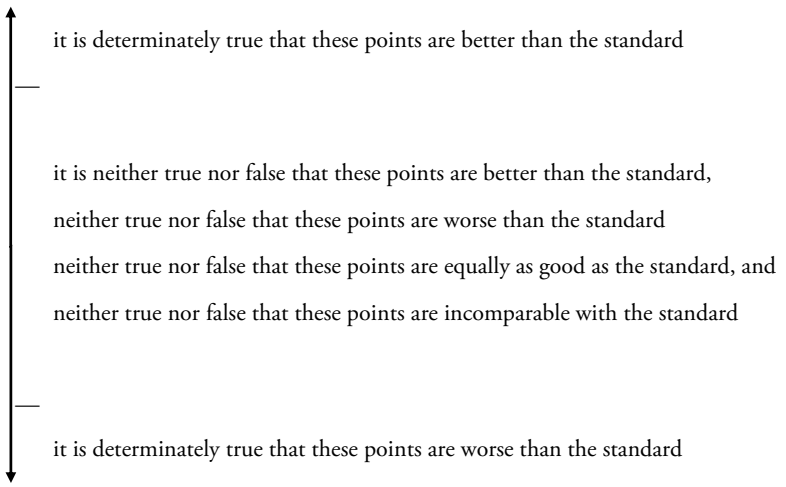


It is important to note that in the zone of vagueness it must be false that the points are equally as good as the standard. If this was indeterminate it would mean that on some sharpenings it could be true that they are equally as good, but then points below would be worse than the standard. This would be a contradiction, so, as opposed to Indeterminate Comparability, this Determinate

Incomparability allows for partial vagueness. On the other hand, if one accepts the Collapsing Principle, then, according to the Collapsing Argument, Determinate Comparability with Vague Borders must be ruled out.[272]

One can also consider the logical possibilities of combining indeterminacy and incomparability in a Standard Configuration. When combining them it is not only indeterminate whether a point in the sequence is better, worse, or equally as good as the standard, but it could also be indeterminate whether it is incomparable to the standard.

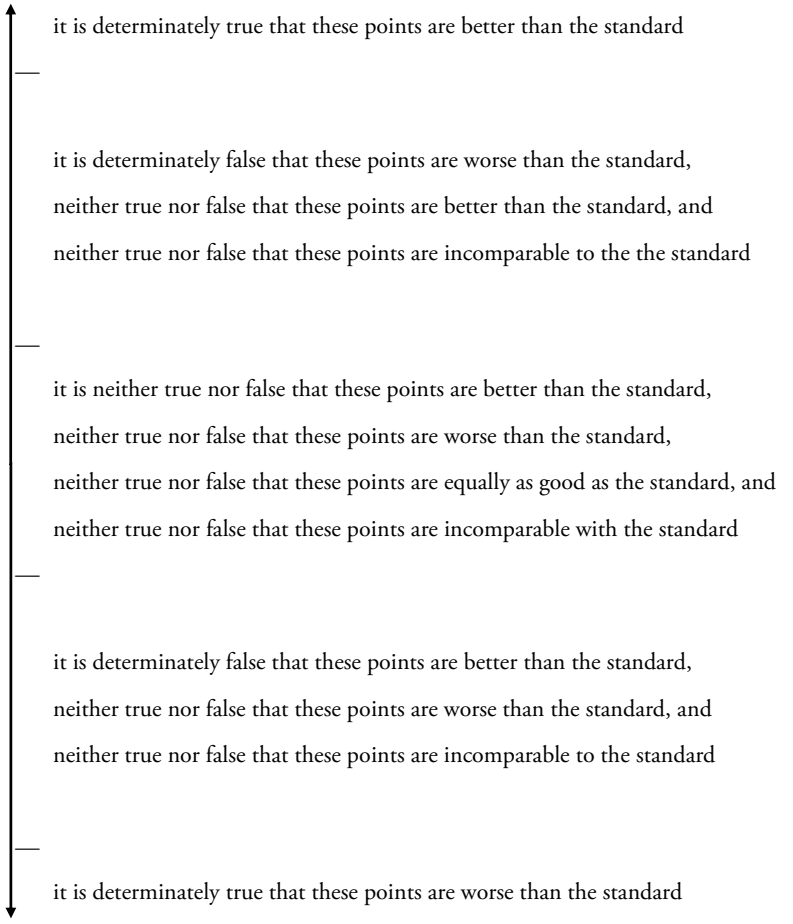
Indeterminate Incomparability:



[272] For more on this see *The Collapsing Argument for the Vagueness View.*

Indeterminate Incomparability could also have partial vagueness.

Indeterminate Incomparability with Partial Vagueness:



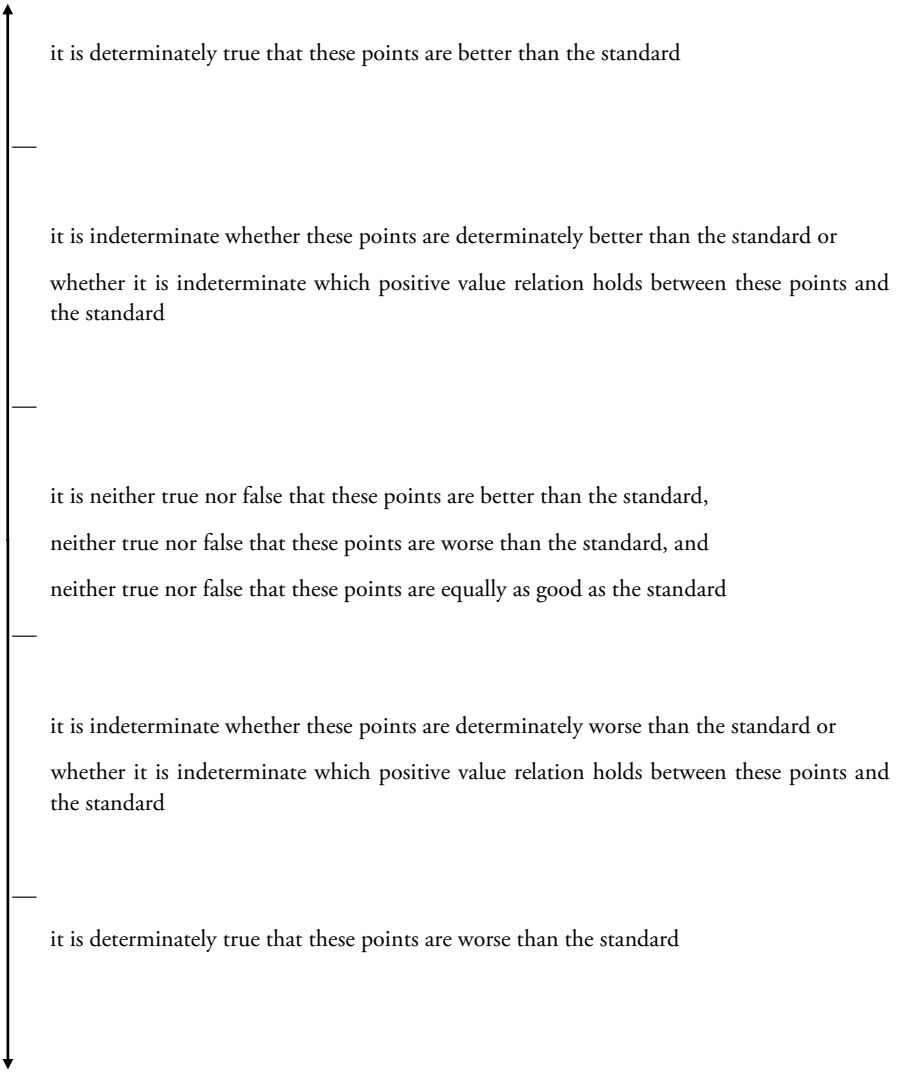
One should note that in the zone of partial vagueness it cannot be indeterminate whether the points are equally as good as the standard. If that was the case then on some sharpenings the point in the continuum would be equally as good as the standard, leaving points below to be worse than the standard. This would be a contradiction. This means that the zone for partial vagueness is a zone in

where it is indeterminate whether the points are better than the standard or whether the standard is incomparable to the points. Furthermore, if one accepts the Collapsing Argument, then this configuration should be rejected on the grounds of containing a contradiction. In the zone of vagueness it is false that the points are worse than the standard, but at the same time it is neither true nor false that the standard is better than the points in the vagueness zone.[273] According to the Collapsing Principle this means that it is true that the standard is worse than the points in the vagueness zone. Thus, we reach a contradiction.

Second-Order Vagueness

I believe that I now have presented the most basic possibilities. However, there are some further Standard Configurations that are of interest. For example, the borders between the zone of comparability and incomparability, indeterminacy, or indeterminate incomparability, might in themselves be vague. This gives us three more configurations to consider:

[273] Since "neither true nor false that the points in the zone of vagueness are better than the standard" is equivalent to "neither true nor false that the standard is worse than the points in the zone of vagueness."


it is determinately true that these points are better than the standard
it is indeterminate whether these points are determinately better than the standard or
whether it is indeterminate which positive value relation holds between these points and the standard
it is neither true nor false that these points are better than the standard,
neither true nor false that these points are worse than the standard, and
neither true nor false that these points are equally as good as the standard
it is indeterminate whether these points are determinately worse than the standard or
whether it is indeterminate which positive value relation holds between these points and the standard
it is determinately true that these points are worse than the standard

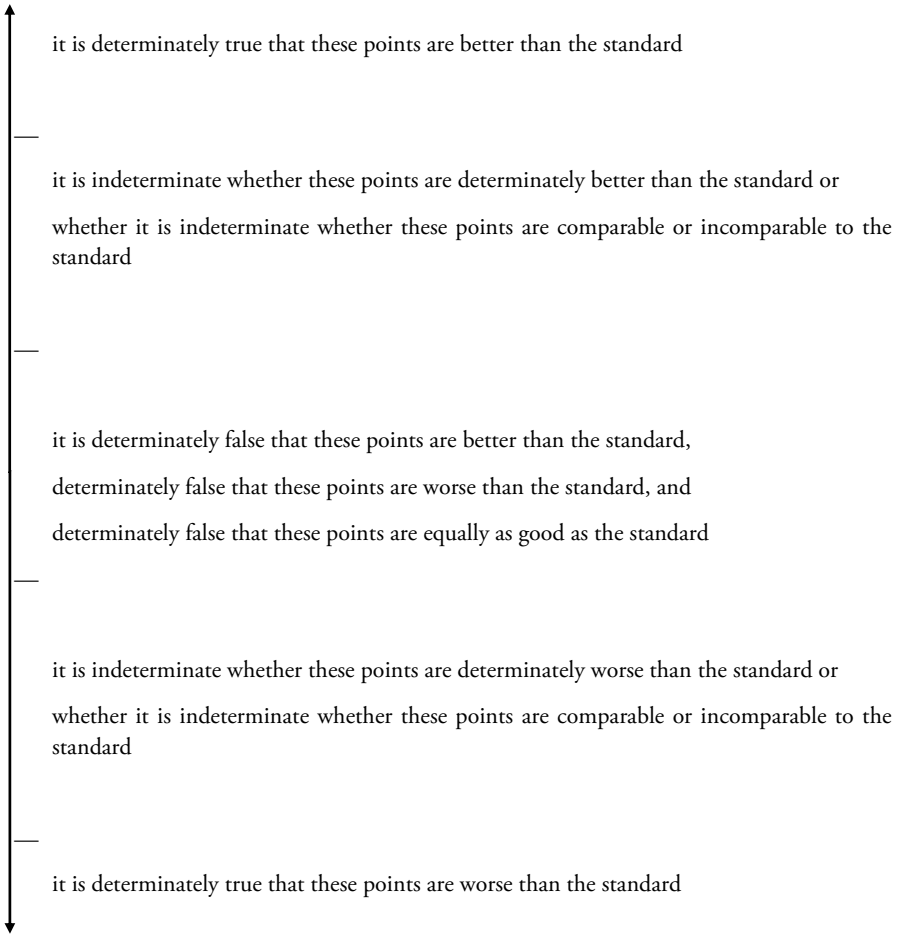
it is determinately true that these points are better than the standard

it is indeterminate whether these points are determinately better than the standard or whether the relation between these points and the standard is indeterminate

it is neither true nor false that these points are better than the standard,
neither true nor false that these points are worse than the standard,
neither true nor false that these points are equally as good as the standard, and
neither true nor false that these points are incomparable with the standard

it is indeterminate whether these points are determinately worse than the standard or whether the relation between these points and the standard is indeterminate

it is determinately true that these points are worse than the standard



When it comes to Determinate Incomparability with Second-Order Vagueness, the zone of second-order vagueness could be expressed differently. For these points it will be indeterminate whether they are determinately better than the standard or whether it is indeterminate whether they are better than the standard. That is, it is neither true nor false that they are determinately better than the standard and it is neither true nor false that it is neither true nor false that they are determinately better than the standard.

If one accepts the Second-Order Dyadic Collapsing Principle, all of these second-order vagueness configurations must be ruled out. Thus, if one accepts the Collapsing Principle and its second-order formulation there is only logical space for Determinate Comparability, Indeterminate Comparability, and Indeterminate Comparability. However, since the conclusion in the chapter *The Collapsing Argument for the Vagueness View* was that we should not depend on the Collapsing Principle, there are more logical possibilities left.

By using the Standard Configurations framework some of the logical constraints that are in play when it comes to value relations have now been illuminated. Hopefully, this has provided some further insights into the logic of value relations.

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Comparisons play a central part in our everyday reasoning. The same is true for value comparisons; we want to choose the best alternative when we are making a choice. Sometimes, however, it is hard to determine what the best alternative is. In fact, it may seem as if neither alternative is better than, worse than, nor equally as good as the other. Such cases have recently been much discussed and it has been argued that the alternatives may be incomparable or be related by some previously overlooked fourth value relation. In this thesis such claims are rejected. After an in-depth exploration of value relations and topics such as semantic vagueness, it is argued that there is no reason to assume that things cannot be related by the three familiar value relations.

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Faculty of Humanities
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