Value Relations - Old Wine in New Barrels

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ABSTRACT: In Rabinowicz 2008, I considered how value relations can best be analyzed in terms of fitting pro-attitudes. In the formal model presented in that paper fitting pro-attitudes are represented by the class of permissible preference orderings on a domain of items that are being compared. As it turns out, this approach opens up for a multiplicity of different types of value relationships, along with the standard relations of "better", "worse", "equally as good as" and "incomparable in value". Unfortunately, though, the approach is vulnerable to a number of objections. I believe these objections can be avoided if one re-interprets the underlying notion of preference: Instead of treating preference as a 'dyadic' attitude directed towards a pair of items, we can think of it as a difference of degree between 'monadic' attitudes of favouring. Each such monadic attitude has just one item as its object. Given this re-interpretation, permissible preferences can be modelled by the class of permissible assignments of degrees of favouring to items in the domain. From this construction, we can then recover the old modelling in terms of the class of permissible preference orderings, but the previous objections to that model no longer apply. Thus, what we get is the old wine in new and hopefully tighter barrels.

1. Introduction

Value relations became my field of study several years ago, when I read Joshua Gert's paper on "Value and Parity" (Gert 2004). The subject of that paper was interpretation of Ruth Chang's well-known and controversial suggestion that 'parity' is a fourth form of value comparability, along with the classical trichotomy of better, worse, and equally-as-good-as (cf. Chang 1997, 2002a, 2002b).

Judgments of parity seem appropriate, in my view, in some of the cases in which the assessment of items depends on a number of factors, coming from different 'dimensions', in such a way that one item is superior to the other on some of the dimensions but inferior on other dimension. If the relative weights of dimensions might be set in different ways, with equal justification, several weight distributions could be seen as equally admissible. If such different admissible sets of weights would result in opposing relative assessments of the compared items, it is reasonable to deny that the items in question are equally good or that one is better than the other. But we might still view them as being essentially comparable. In cases like this, it might be suggested that the items under consideration are on a par.

But while this might help to clarify the scope of the notion of parity, it doesn't yet answer the analytical question. What does it mean to say of two items that they are on a par? Gert's suggestion is that the idea of parity can be made sense of if value judgments are interpreted as normative appraisals of preference. In this proposal, he follows the tradition of the so-called

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* This paper is dedicated to a fine philosopher and a good friend, Kevin Mulligan, on the occasion of his 60th birthday. I hope he will find it congenial.

fitting-attitudes analysis (*FA-analysis*), sometimes also referred to as *the buck-passing account*.

On the FA-format of analysis, to say that an item is valuable is, roughly, to make a claim that it ought to be favoured, where 'favouring' is a place-holder for a pro-attitude (or, more generally, a pro-response). Disvalues are correspondingly interpreted in terms of fitting con-attitudes (con-responses). What's characteristic of this approach is its treatment of deontic notions as being prior in relation to the axiological ones: Value is explicated in terms of the stance that *ought* to be taken towards the object. The features of the object in virtue of which it ought to be favoured, i.e. the factors on which the value of the object depends, are what philosophers call the object's value-making properties. That it is fitting to have an attitude, that there are normative reasons for the attitude, or that the attitude in question is appropriate, required or called for, can be seen as different ways of expressing the deontic component in FA-analysis. The buck-passing aspect of the analysis is simply the idea that normative reasons for a pro-attitude towards an object aren't to be found in the object's value, but in its value-making properties. Which of course is as it must be given that value itself consists in the existence of such reasons. (Cf. Rabinowicz, forthcoming.)

When the fitting-attitudes (FA) analysis is applied to value relations, the relevant attitude is preference. This suggestion goes back already to Brentano (1969 [1889]).[1] Thus, in particular, to say that an item *x* is better than another item *y* is analyzed as the claim that *x* ought to be preferred to *y*. Analogously, *x* and *y* are said to be equally good if and only if they ought to be equi-preferred. Gert's main innovation was to point out that the deontic component might appear in this kind of analysis either in a stronger or a weaker version: either as an 'ought' or as a 'may', or – using another pair of deontic notions – either as a requirement or as a permission. Bringing in these two levels of normativity makes it possible to account for a broader range of possible value relations, parity included. While Gert's own definition of parity was, as it happened, excessively complex and too demanding, he was, in my view, on the right track there. Simplifying his definition, I suggested in Rabinowicz (2008) that items *x* and *y* are on a par if and only if it is permissible to prefer *x* to *y* but also permissible to have the opposite preference, for *y* over *x*. We can connect this FA-style analysis of parity with the idea of multidimensional value comparisons if we suppose that each of the opposing preferences with respect to the items in question could be justified by an appeal to a different admissible set of dimension weights. Thus, each of the opposing preferences is a preference

[1] For a modern Brentano-inspired approach to FA-analysis, see Mulligan (1998).

all-things-considered, but it presupposes a specific relative weighting of the relevant dimensions – a weighting that is justifiable, but is not uniquely justifiable.

Parity should be distinguished from *incomparability*, which I suggested obtains between two items when it neither is permissible to prefer one of them to the other nor to equi-prefer them both. We have to do with incomparability when what is being required is a preferential 'gap' with respect to the items in question.

While Gert's suggestion that we should make use of two levels of normativity was fruitful, the formal model he proposed to represent the different value relations has serious disadvantages. In this *'interval' model*, each item in the domain is assigned a range – a closed interval – of permissible preference strengths. An item x is then taken to be better than another item y if the lower boundary for the interval assigned to x exceeds the upper boundary of the interval assigned to y. That is, if the weakest permissible preference for x is stronger than the strongest permissible preference for y. x and y are on a par if the intervals assigned to them have an area of overlap. Etc. It is easy to show that this interval approach is not sufficiently general: There are very natural structures of betterness relationships between items that cannot be represented in this way. In technical terms, this is just another way of saying that the relation of betterness need not be an interval order (i.e., it needn't be representable by an assignment of numerical intervals to items). To see this, consider a case with four items, x, x^+, y and y^+, in which the only betterness relations that obtain are those between x^+ and x on the one hand and y^+ and y on the other. Intuitively, we can think of x^+ and y^+ as small improvements of x and y, respectively, with x and y being on a par. While x^+ is better than x, it doesn't improve on x so much as to become better than y, and similarly for y^+: The latter is better than y, but it doesn't improve on y so much as to become better than x. It is easy to show that one cannot assign intervals to the four items in question in such a way that this intuitive structure of betterness relationships is preserved. If we set up the intervals so as to make x^+ better than x and y^+ better than y, then either x^+ will come out as better than y or y^+ will come out better than x. Another problem with the model is that it lacks resources to represent incomparabilities. Given the interval representation, for all pairs of items, either one item will be better than the other, or they will be on a par, or they will be equally as good. (This last possibility, however, will be a very rare phenomenon, which itself is a further problem with the interval approach. On that approach, two different items are equally good only in the rare case when the intervals assigned not only coincide, but are minimal in size: consist of a single point.). The reason the interval model doesn't work is that it is too 'atomistic', so to speak. It specifies permissible degrees of preference strength for each item,

but it has no constraints on permissible *combinations* of such degrees for different items. We need a more holistic approach.

In Rabinowicz (2008), I therefore proposed an alternative formal modelling, which instead of assigning intervals postulates the class of permissible preference orderings of the item domain. On this approach, an item *x* ought to be preferred to an item *y*, and thus is better than *y*, iff it is ranked above *y* in every permissible preference ordering. The relation of betterness is in other words the intersection of all permissible preference orderings. In this *intersection model*, *x* and *y* are on a par, if some permissible preference orderings place *x* above y, while other permissible orderings place *y* above *x*. If permissible preference orderings are allowed to be incomplete ('gappy'), there is room in such modelling for value incomparabilities. As I show in that paper, the logical taxonomy of all possible binary value relations that the intersection model gives rise to is quite rich: There are fifteen atomary types of such relations. Four of them are better-than, worse-than, equally-as-good-as and incomparable-with, while parity turns out to be a collection of four other atomary types. The remaining seven types are new additions. Thus, the logical space of value relations is even more multifaceted than Chang has envisaged.

Unfortunately, the account I have proposed leads to a number of problems. All of them have to do with the underlying notion of preference, which, following Gert, I interpreted more or less on the standard choice-dispositional lines, with some qualifications. As it turns out, this connection to choice spells trouble for value analysis. The problems I have encountered can be avoided if the relevant notion of preference is re-interpreted. Instead of treating preference as being essentially choice-related – as a 'dyadic' attitude directed towards two items at a time – I now want to think of it as a certain relation between between 'monadic' attitudes of favouring. Each such monadic attitude has just one item as its object and it exhibits a degree of strength. Preference for one item over another consists in it being favoured to a greater degree. Below, I will therefore present an interpretation of preference orderings in terms of assignments of *degrees of favouring* to items in the domain. On a given assignment, one item may be favoured to a greater degree than another, or to the same degree, or the degrees in question might be incommensurable. (It is not assumed that degrees are representable by numbers.) Each assignment of degrees determines a preference ordering on the domain of items. The class of permissible assignments of degrees determines the corresponding class of permissible preference orderings, which means that we have what we need to analyze value relations on the lines of the intersection model. Formally speaking, that analysis is the same as before, but the underlying notion of preference is interpreted in a

different way. Thus, what we get is the same old wine but the barrels are new, to some extent: The underlying notion of preference is changed.

Here, then, is the plan of what follows. In section 2, I briefly present Gert's two-level approach to FA-analysis and suggest some emendations and extensions. The intersection model and the taxonomy of value relations are presented in section 3, while section 4 lists different objections to this proposal. Section 5 presents an interpretation of preferences in terms of degrees of favouring, which allows a defence of the intersection model against the listed objections. Section 6 concludes.

1. Two levels of normativity in FA-analysis

On FA-analysis, value is analyzed in terms of two components: a deontic component and an attitudinal one. Roughly, for an object to be valuable is for it to be such that we ought to favour it. Here, favouring is a stand-in for a pro-attitude, or – more generally – for a pro-response toward an object. To avoid the so-called *wrong-kind-of-reasons problem* (*WKR-problem*), the supervenience base for the relevant ought needs to be restricted to the features of the object and exclude the features of the favouring itself (such as, say, that this attitude would have such-and-such consequences or that it would have such-and-such-intrinsic features). If the features of favouring can sometimes make favouring permissible or required, they don't thereby make its object valuable. Thus, to the extent they provide (normative) reasons for favouring, these reasons, however good they might be, are of the wrong kind from the point of view of the FA-analysis. At the same time, the distinction between the features of the object and the features of favouring it is not easy to draw in a precise way. This gives rise to the WKR-problem. (Cf. Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004), for discussion.) Here, however, we are going to ignore this difficulty.

When FA-analysis is applied to value relations, the attitudinal component is usually taken to consist in preference. Thus, Gert (2004) works with something like the following analyses of betterness and equal goodness:

> *Betterness:* An item *x* is *better* than an item *y* iff it is required to prefer *x* to *y*.
>
> *Equal Goodness: x* is *equally as good as y* iff it is required to equi-prefer *x* and *y*, i.e. to be indifferent between them.

Three remarks are in order at this point: (i) The notion of preference used by Gert is strongly connected to choice: He takes preferences to be dispositions to choose. Preference for *x* over *y* is a disposition to choose *x* rather than *y*, while equi-preference (indifference) consists in

being equally disposed to choose either. (ii) Either we take requiredness to be 'objective', i.e. independent of the agent's information, or we interpret it on subjective, information-dependent lines. In the latter case, preferential requirements must be understood as directed only to agents who know the items that are being compared. (iii) Gert's notion of requiredness (oughtness) is qualified: He is interested in what is being *rationally* required. This qualification and the analysis of the concept of rationality need not concern us here; we shall in what follows treat the notion of a requirement as primitive and abstain from discussing how it should be interpreted. This doesn't mean, of course, that the issue is unimportant. Thus, for example, interpreting the relevant requirement as *moral* would probably aggravate the WKR-problem: It might be morally required to favour an object despite the fact that the object lacks value. It might be morally required to desire things that aren't desirable, or to love our neighbours even though they are not loveable persons. Consequently, a moralized interpretation of requirements on attitudes is probably inappropriate in the context of FA-analysis.

Gert's main contribution to the FA-approach is his appeal to the distinction between two versions of the deontic component: the stronger and the weaker one. There are two levels of normativity: the stronger level of *requirement* and the weaker level of *permission*. In terms of the vocabulary of 'oughts', we express this difference by distinguishing between 'ought' and 'may'. This difference between normativity levels can, according to Gert, be put to use in the analysis of value relations. As he points out,

> … only very rarely do we think of our particular personal preferences as the uniquely rational ones. This view of preference and value allows that two people in the same epistemic situation, who have the same perfectly precise standards for assessing the value of items […], could make different, but equally rational choices … (Gert 2004, p. 494).

This suggests that we might define Chang's notion of parity as being applicable precisely in those cases in which it is permissible to have each of the opposing preferences with respect to a pair of items (which of course doesn't mean that it is permissible to have them jointly):

> *Parity:* x and y are *on a par* iff it is permissible to prefer x to y and also permissible to prefer y to x.

Gert's own definition of parity is more demanding. In order to be on a par, x and y must according to him additionally satisfy the condition that for any third item z, "the rational status" (i.e., the normative standing) of various possible preference attitudes towards x and z is the same as that of the corresponding attitudes towards y and z (cf. ibid., p. 506). This would in particular imply that if it is required to prefer z to x, then it must also be required to prefer z

to *y*. Consequently, any item better than *x* would have to be better than *y*, and vice versa. This is obviously an excessively strong demand: In typical cases of parity obtaining between two items, *x* and *y*, a small improvement x^+ of *x* need not be better than *y*. Thus, to take an example, a trip to Australia (*x*) is intuitively on a par with a trip to South America (*y*). And the same still applies to a small improvement of the former alternative: say, to a trip to Australia with a discount of $100 ($x^+$): That small improvement of one alternative is still on a par with the other alternative. In fact, for Chang, the possibility of such situations is quite central for the cases of parity. Typically, small improvements or small worsenings of one item in a pair do not eradicate the relation of parity.

I am therefore going to assume a relatively undemanding definition of parity: the one I presented above. In addition, I find it useful to extend Gert's framework in one important respect: Along with different possible preferential attitudes concerning two items (preference for one item, preference for the other, and indifference), I also want to allow situations in which a preferential attitude is absent, i.e.. in which the agent neither prefers one item to the other nor is indifferent between them. Such situations seem to be important to take account of if we want to analyze the notion of incomparability in value. More precisely, I'd like to suggest that two items are incomparable if it is normatively inappropriate to prefer one of them to the other or to be indifferent between them. What's required in such case is a preferential 'gap' with respect to the items under consideration – an absence of a preferential attitude.

> *Incomparability: x* and *y* are *incomparable* iff it is not permissible to prefer one of these items to the other or to be indifferent between them.

This proposal invites a natural objection. In some cases in which the items intuitively are incomparable, the agent might still be required to choose between them. But then, if preferences are interpreted as choice dispositions, it would seem that the choice made reveals the preferential attitude. After all, doesn't it reveal what the agent is disposed to choose? To deal with this problem, but also because of other considerations, I suggested in Rabinowicz (2008) that preferences should be seen as choice dispositions in a more narrow, qualified sense – as dispositions to make choices based on *balancing of reasons*. If the notion of preference used in the FA-style analysis of value relations is to be interpreted in choice-dispositional terms, then it is arguable that the relevant choice dispositions should be qualified in this way. It makes sense to maintain that pro-attitudes that figure in FA-analyses of value should be reason-based. (For the argument, see Rabinowicz and

Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004, pp. 414-418.) This would mean that the agent who chooses without having resolved the conflict of reasons, perhaps because she finds this conflict impossible to resolve, does not thereby reveal a preference. In fact, under such circumstances she might have no preference at all, in this qualified sense. In other words, there is room for preferential gaps, if preferences are interpreted as dispositions to make reason-based choices.

3. Intersection model and taxonomy of value relations

In this model, which implements the idea of holistic conditions on permissible preferences (see the introductory section above), we work with the class **K** of permissible preference orderings on the domain of items (cf. Rabinowicz 2008). It is convenient to think of each preference ordering as a relation of weak preference (i.e. preference-or-indifference). In terms of this relation, both (strict) preference and equi-preference (indifference) are immediately definable in the standard way: *x* is preferred to *y* iff *x* is weakly preferred to *y*, but not vice versa. If weak preference does hold in both directions, then *x* and *y* are equi-preferred. Each ordering in class **K** is assumed to be a quasi-order, i.e. transitive and reflexive. On the other hand, it is not assumed that the orderings in **K** must be complete. Some of them might contain preferential gaps: for some items *x* and *y*, it might be that none of them is weakly preferred to the other. (For the argument, see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004, pp. 414-418.)

In terms of **K**, it is then straightforward to define betterness, equal goodness, parity, and incomparability. In particular, betterness is the intersection of preferences that are present in all permissible orderings (and thus corresponds to required preference), equal goodness is the intersection of indifferences present in all such orderings (required indifference), while incomparability is the intersection of gaps obtaining in all of them (required gap).

x is *better* than *y* iff *x* is preferred to *y* in every ordering in **K**.

x is *equally as good* as *y* iff *x* is equi-preferred with *y* in every ordering in **K**.

x and *y* are *incomparable* iff every ordering in **K** contains a gap with respect to *x* and *y*.

Parity consists in the presence of opposing permissible preferences:

x and *y* are *on a par* if *x* is preferred to *y* in some orderings in **K** and dispreferred to *y* in some other orderings in **K**.

In the introductory section, I mentioned that Gert's interval model cannot represent some betterness structures. This applies, in particular, to a case with four items, x, x^+, y and y^+, in which the only betterness relations that obtain are those between x^+ and x on the one hand and

y^+ and y on the other. Intuitively, we can think of x^+ and y^+ as small improvements of x and y, respectively, with x and x^+ being on a par with both y and y^+. We can illustrate this situation with our example of two trips, to Australia (x) and to South Africa (y), with x^+ being the trip to Australia with a small discount and y^+ the similarly slightly discounted trip to South Africa. This example, which doesn't allow interval representation, is easily representable in our intersection model. We just need to stipulate that (i) in all orderings in **K**, x^+ comes above x and y^+ above y, and (ii) **K** contains an ordering in which x comes above y^+, and another ordering in which y comes above x^+. These two assumptions are easily satisfiable together and they give us the betterness structure that we have been after: x^+ is better than x and y^+ is better than y, but all other pairwise relations between the four items in questions are instances of parity.

Some readers might feel that the intersection model is nothing but a version of the standard supervaluationist approach as applied to value sentences, with different orderings in **K** being different 'precisifications', or sharpenings, of the predicates "better than" and "equally as good as". This diagnosis, however, would be a mistake. On the supervaluationist approach, a sentence is true iff it is true on all admissible sharpenings of its predicates, false it is false on all admissible sharpenings and indeterminate in truth-value if it is true on some admissible sharpenings and false on others. Or, if we apply this idea to value sentences and put it terms of their propositional content, value sentences can be neither true nor false if the value ordering they refer to is partly indeterminate and allows of different sharpenings. If x is ranked above y in some admissible sharpenings of the value ordering but below y in other admissible sharpenings, then it is neither true nor false that x is better than y. In the approach I have suggested, however, the orderings in **K** are *not* potential sharpenings of the value ordering, but permissible *preference* orderings from which the value ordering is constructed. Consequently, if x is ranked above y in some orderings in **K** but below y in other orderings in **K**, then it is definitely *false* that x is better than y and definitely true that they are on a par. (For a discussion of a more complex modelling that combines the intersection approach to value relations with a supervaluationist approach to indeterminacy in value judgments, I refer the reader to Rabinowicz 2009a and Rabinowicz 2009c.)

Intersection model readily lends itself to a taxonomy of all possible dyadic value relations. The idea behind the taxonomy is simple. For each pair of items, the value relation that obtains between them is determined by the list of preferential positions that are permissible with respect to the two items in question. There are four such positions: preference for the first

item ($\succ$), preference for the second item ($\prec$), equi-preference ($\approx$) or preferential gap (/). Consequently, there are $2^4 - 1$ atomary types of value relations, where the number of atomary types is simply the number of ways a non-empty subset can be selected from the set consisting of four elements. We thus get the following table in which rows correspond to the four preferential positions and columns stand for the different atomary types of value relations. In each column, the permissible preferential positions are marked with a plus sign.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
$\succ$	+			+		+	+	+	+	+	+				
$\approx$		+		+	+		+		+		+	+	+		
$\prec$			+		+	+	+	+	+				+	+	
/								+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	B	**E**	**W**			**P**	**P**	**P**	**P**						**I**

Better (**B**), Worse (**W**) and Equally-as-good-as (**E**) are all atomary types, and so is Incomparability (**I**). Parity (**P**), on the other hand, is a type in a broader sense: It is a collection of four atomary types, 6 to 9. It's interesting to note that some of the atomary types (3-4, 10-14) lie outside the familiar classifications: They aren't instances of **B**, **E**, **W**, or **I**, nor do they fall into the **P**-category. One should be aware, however, that the taxonomy lists logical possibilities. There is no guarantee that one can find real-life exemplifications of every atomary type of value relation. In fact, further conditions might exclude some atomary types. To illustrate, it might seem reasonable to expect that if two items are on a par, i.e., if preference for each is permissible, then it should also be permissible to be indifferent between the items in question. This 'convexity' condition would exclude types 6 and 8. If we were to stipulate, in addition, that in cases of parity preferential gaps should also be allowed, parity would reduce to type 9. Note, however, that such extra conditions importantly differ from, say, the condition of transitivity on preferences. The latter is a constraint on each ordering in **K**, while the extra conditions instead impose constraints on class **K** taken as a whole. They stipulate that **K** must contain orderings of certain kinds provided it contains orderings of

certain other kinds. Whether such conditions are generally compelling is often difficult to decide.

One final remark. The taxonomy distinguishes between various way in which two items can be permissibly preferentially situated vis-à-vis *each other*, but it disregards the preferential positions they are allowed to have with respect to *other* items in the domain. To put it differently, it is a classifification of 'internal' dyadic value relations. External value relations, which obtain between items in virtue of their permissible preferential relationships to other items, are disregarded.

4. Problems

The account I have proposed faces several problems, some of which were already mentioned in Rabinowicz (2008). Four problems, in particular, seem to be rather difficult to deal with.

Analyticity. The first problem has to do with some of the formal properties of value relations, such as transitivity of betterness or of equal goodness. Intuitively, these properties are analytic, or at least this seems to be the common view.[2] That betterness is transitive is generally thought to be a conceptual truth. However, in the intersection modelling these formal properties of value relations are derived from conditions imposed on permissible preference orderings. Thus, betterness is transitive just because permissible preferences are taken to be transitive. The case of equal goodness is analogous. On the interpretation of the intersection modelling I was assuming, according to which preferences are dispositions to make pairwise choices, such conditions on permissible preferences had to be treated as rationality constraints, i.e. as normative requirements of some sort. If someone is disposed to choose *x* when confronted with *x* and y, and to choose *y* when confronted with *y* and *z*, then it is arguable, though perhaps not compellingly so, that this person would be irrational if she at the same were disposed to choose *z* when confronted with *x* and *z*. To have such a set of dispositions would not be impossible, but it could be claimed to be irrational, especially if we take the relevant choices to be reason-based. Though it might be that such a choice pattern could after all be rationalized, even in the case of reason-based choices. It is well-known that changes in the alternatives available for choice might effect changes in the weighting of dimensions that are considered to be choice-relevant. Be that as it may. What's important is that the formal properties of value relations are in this approach derived from normative

[2] There are, however, exceptions to this consensus about the transitivity of betterness. See, for example, Rachels (1998), Temkin (1996), (2001) and (forthcoming). For criticisms of these attacks on transitivity, cf. Carlson (2003), Quizilbash (2005), Arrhenius and Rabinowicz (2005).

constraints on preferences. Clearly, even if we ignore the issue as to how compelling such constraints might be, this is not a satisfactory outcome. It seems to be incompatible with the claim that the transitivity of betterness is a conceptual truth. [3]

Elusiveness of Incomparability. The second problem concerns value incomparability, which was equated with a required preferential gap. One would expect that incomparability shouldn't be a very rare phenomenon. However, if preferences are interpreted in partly behavioural terms, as dispositions to make reason-based choices, then it is difficult to provide examples of items (within one and the same ontological category) with respect to which such choice dispositions would be, normatively speaking, out of the question.[4] That it sometimes is *permissible* to lack a disposition to make a reason-based choice between two items is one thing. It doesn't seem to be especially problematic that sometimes, when a decision is called for, we make our choices without having resolved the conflict of reasons that tell for and against the alternatives among which the choice is made. Furthermore, choosing while remaining in such a conflicted state of mind may well be permissible. But that in some cases we should be *required* to proceed in this way does seem strange. Probably, the most promising examples would be instances of tragic dilemmas, such as Sophie's Choice. It is arguable; I suppose, that when Sophie had to choose which of her children was to be saved, it was impermissible for her to arrive to this choice by weighing reasons for and against her options. It is arguable, in other words, that it was required of Sophie to remain in her conflicted state of mind while making a choice. But this requirement, if present, appears to be distinctively moral in nature. As I suggested above, it is probably unwise to give a moralized interpretation to the deontic component of the FA-analysis of value. It is therefore doubtful whether tragic dilemmas really are good examples of value incomparability. And I don't quite see what other examples would fit the bill, as long as preferences are interpreted as choice dispositions.

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[3] There is nowadays an influential view in philosophy according to which rationality conditions are not genuinely normative (see Kolodny 2005; cf. also Broome 2005, 2008, who does not hold this view, but who still rejects extant arguments in favour of the normativity of rationality). But the philosophers who take this position have of course no intention to suggest that rationality conditions on mental states instead are analytically or conceptually true. It should be noted, though, that the conceptual character of rationality requirements is an important tenet of Donald Davidson's philosophy (cf. Davidson 1985). But Davidson only takes it to be conceptually true that principles of the rationality, such as transitivity of preference, must be satisfied by an agent *for the most part*, in order for us to be able to intelligibly attribute propositional attitudes to such a being. This position is therefore fully compatible with the presence of limited rationality violations.

[4] It's another matter if the items belong to different ontological categories. It doesn't make sense to choose between, say, a person and a state of affairs, or between an idea and a material thing.

Preferences vs. Value Judgments. The third problem has to do with the relation between preferences and judgments of value. Suppose the agent judges *x* to be on a par with *y*. Given the analysis I have suggested, this implies that, in her opinion, *x* is not better than *y* but preferring *x* to y is permissible. However, can she herself, given her judgment of value, have this preference for *x* over *y*, if preference involves some kind of a reason-based comparison (or, more perecisely, a disposition to make a choice based on such a comparison)? It is not clear that she can, without inconsistency. It would mean that she can deny that *x* is better than *y* but still consistently view reasons in favour of *x* as being stronger than those in favour of *y*. This seems problematic.[5]

Domain of Preference. The fourth problem concerns the potential objects of preference. On the interpretation I have been assuming preferences are essentially related to potential choices. However, for some item domains, the notion of choosing between items doesn't make much sense, if taken literally. We might choose one option rather than another. But what would it mean to choose, say, Mozart rather than Haydn? We might choose to listen to Mozart's music rather than to Haydn's. Or choose to rank Mozart higher than Haydn in a contest for the title of the greatest eighteenth century composer. But this means that the two composers aren't themselves possible objects of choice, at least not literally. Consequently, if one analyzes value relations in terms of permissible preferences among items, then connecting preferences too closely to choice spells trouble.

There may be ways to allay these worries, or at least some of them, while still retaining the interpretation of preference that I was using in my 2008-paper. Thus, in particular, the problem of Preferences vs. Value Judgments could be dealt with if we take seriously the idea of different admissible sets of weights for various respects or dimensions of comparison. If the weights are optional to some extent, the resolution of the conflict of reasons which an agent arrives at can go hand in hand with the recognition that this conflict might just as well be resolvable in a different way. Consequently, such an agent might take reasons in favour of *x* to be stronger than reasons in favour of *y*, but – to the extent she is aware of the optional nature of this resolution – she can at the same time be willing to deny that *x* is better than *y*.

Still, other objections are more difficult to deal with. To deal with them all, I think we need to re-interpret the notion of preference.

4. Preferences re-interpreted

[5] I owe this objection to Andrew Reisner and Sarah Stroud (personal communication).

The main idea is simple. We need to give up the assumption that preference is an attitude that consists in comparing items to each other. We should deny that that it is an attitude directed to several items at a time. This treatment of preference as a polyadic, or – more specifically – a dyadic attitude is part and parcel of its interpretation in choice-dispositional terms. To be disposed to choose *x* rather than *y* is an intentional stance that takes both *x* and *y* as its objects. An alternative I here want to consider is to interpret preference for *x* over *y* as *a relation that obtains between monadic attitudes*, where each of the latter takes a different item, *x* and *y* respectively, as its object. As long as we only consider items that are valuable, i.e., fit to be favoured, the relevant monadic attitudes should be thought of as the attitudes of favouring.[6] I take it that for each such attitude we can talk about its *degree*, where these degrees of favouring can vary and are ordered by the transitive and asymmetric greater-than relation. An item *x* is preferred to another item *y* iff it is favoured to a greater degree than *y*. Or, to put it in a slightly different vocabulary, iff it is favoured more than *y*. Two items are equi-preferred iff they are favoured to the same degree, and there is a preferential gap between the items iff the degrees to which they are favoured are incommensurable: they aren't the same but neither is greater than the other.

Incommensurability of degrees is possible if we suppose that, in some cases, the ways two items are favoured are very different. In one case, for example, it might be a matter of liking, while in the other of, say, admiring. And even if the favouring attitudes with respect to the two items belong to the same category, they might significantly vary. To give an example, even though we admire both Mother Teresa and Isaac Newton, the nature of admiration is quite different in these cases. In situations like this, it would be hopeless to try to commensurate the degrees of favouring. Formally, there is no obstacle in allowing degrees of favouring to be incommensurable, since we don't need to assume that degrees are representable by numbers.

x is weakly preferred to *y* iff *x* is preferred to *y* or equi-preferred with *y*. Thus, in order to determine the preference ordering on the domain of items it is sufficient to specify to what degree each item is being favoured.[7] As is easily seen, the so-defined relation of weak preference is transitive and reflexive (a quasi-order), but it need not be complete given the possibility of incommensurable degrees.

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[6] For a more general account, see Rabinowicz (draft)

[7] How such specification can be done in practice is an issue in theory of measurement. I am going to disregard this matter here. It is arguable that specifying the degrees of different attitudes must at bottom be grounded in comparing these attitudes with each other. But this doesn't mean of course that the attitudes themselves are comparative in their intentional content.

Thus, let us suppose that **D** is a set of possible degrees of favouring, which is ordered by a transitive and asymmetric relation $\succ$ (greater-than). Let *f* be a particular assignment of degrees of favouring from **D** to items in the domain. I.e., *f* is a mapping from the item domain to **D**. This assignment straightforwardly determines a preference ordering on the domain of items:

x is *weakly preferred* to *y* in *f* iff

$f(x) \succ f(y)$ (in which case *x* is *preferred* to *y* in *f*)

or

$f(x) = f(y)$ (in which case *x* and *y* are *equi-preferred* in *f*).

Now, suppose that **F** the class of *permissible* assignments of degrees of favouring. In terms of **F**, we can define the class **K** of permissible preference orderings as the class of orderings that are constructible from assignments *f* in **F** in accordance with the above definition of weak preference. In terms of **K**, we can then proceed to define various value relations, in the way we have done in the intersection model.

Note that this approach is somewhat more demanding than the old one. The resources it uses are stronger. By this I mean that the specification of class **F** contains more information than the specification of **K**. This is easily seen if one notes that two different degree assignments, *f* and *f'*, could sometimes give rise to exactly the same weak preference relation. This will be happen whenever *f'* is a monotonic transformation of *f*, i.e., whenever $f'(x) \succ f'(y)$ iff $f(x) \succ f(y)$, and $f'(x) = f'(y)$ iff $f(x) = f(y)$, for all *x* and *y* in the item domain. Consequently, if there is a mapping from **F** onto a class **F'** such that every assignment in **F** is mapped to its monotonic transformation in **F'**, then **F'** and **F** will give rise to exactly the same class **K** of permissible preference orderings.

As long as we only are interested in defining those value relations that we have distinguished in the intersection model, the extra resources of the degree-assignment model do not increase the expressive power of our approach. From this point of view, therefore, the new model might be criticized for containing more than we really need. Still, this disadvantage is not especially serious, I think. If we wish, we could simply decide to treat the choice of **F** as arbitrary up to monotonic transformations. This would mean that we discount the extra information the degree-assignment model contains.

Let us now consider how this new approach to preference can deal with the problems we have indentified for the old approach. As for the problem of Analyticity, this difficulty is now

avoided, since *all* preference relations are now transitive by definition. Thus, transitivity is no longer just a property of permissible preferences, which means that it no longer is seen as a normative requirement of some kind. That equi-preference is transitive immediately follows from the transitivity of the identity relation on the degrees of favouring. And that preference is transitive follows from the transitivity of the greater-than relation on the set of degrees. That the latter relation is transitive is, it seems to me, a conceptual truth. It is true solely in virtue of meaning of "greater", that whatever is greater than something that in its turn is greater than something else, must itself be greater than that something else. "Greater" shares this analytical property of transitivity with other comparative predicates: "longer", "louder", "lighter", etc. And, for that matter, it also shares this property with "better", which is just another comparative predicate.[8]

Incomparability is no longer an elusive relation on the new approach. It can obtain when two items call for significantly different attitudes of favouring, which is possible even if they belong to the same ontological category. Then it might well happen that, in all permissible assignments, the degrees in which they are favoured are incommensurable. I have mentioned some such examples above. An object fit to be liked and an object fit to be admired might well be incomparable in value.[9] But even when the favouring attitude that is called for in both cases is of the same broad type, say, even if it is admiration in both cases, the nature of this attitude might significantly vary. The kind of admiration Newton and Mother Teresa respectively call for is very different, which makes it reasonable to expect that the permissible degrees of admiration are mutually incommensurable in a case like this. These two individuals are both great human beings, deserving of admiration, but it is fair to say that they are incomparable in value.

As for the problem of Preferences vs. Value Judgments, and in particular the issue of apparent incompatibility between preferences and judgments of parity, we have already seen how this difficulty can be dealt with if one stays with the original interpretation of preference

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[8] For the argument that transitivity is an analytic feature of "better", because it is an analytic feature of all comparative predicates, see Broome (2004), section 4.1. The argument is based on the assumption that each comparative "*F*er than" is a synonym of "more *F* than" for some non-comparative predicate *F*. Broome's reasoning is compelling, but perhaps not fully convincing. Johan Brännmark has suggested that some comparative predicates are cyclical and therefore cannot be transitive. An example is "later than" when applied to the times of day. Three in the morning is later than nine in the evening, which is later than three in the afternoon, which is later than nine in the morning, which is later than three in the morning. Broome tries to disarm this example (ibid., pp. 52ff), but I am not convinced that he succeeds. Still, even if he doesn't and transitivity cannot be assumed to be a feature of all comparatives, I find it intuitively very plausible that it is an analytic feature of both "greater" and "better".

[9] Might, but need not. Nothing hinders that we could have some limited commensurability among degrees even if the favouring attitudes are very different. It is plausible to assume that a highly admired object is favoured to a greater degree than an object of a lukewarm liking.

as involving some kind of a reason-based comparison between the items. If the balance of reasons is seen by the agent as being optional to some extent, then she can consistently deny that *x* is better than *y* while taking the reasons in favour of *x* to be stronger than those in favour of *y*. But on the new interpretation, the solution to this problem is even more immediate. If preference for *x* over *y* is not a dyadic attitude that has both *x* and *y* as its intentional objects, but a relation between monadic attitudes directed separately towards these items, then the agent who holds that preference does not thereby engage into a direct comparison between the items in question. Consequently, on this new interpretation, her preference for *x* over *y* is not even prima facie inconsistent with her denial that *x* is better than *y*.

Note, by the way, that this re-interpretation of the notion of preference need not imply that we give up the view that preferences have to be reason-based. While preference is now seen as a relation between monadic attitudes and thus does not involve any direct comparison of reasons in favour of one item with reasons in favour of another item, we might well require that the monadic attitudes themselves should be based on reasons (and on weighing of reasons) in order to be of interest from the point of view of FA-analysis.

As for the last problem, concerning the Domain of Preference, this difficulty now disappears. On the re-interpreted conception of preference, there is no essential connection between preferences and choice. The monadic attitudes of favouring, such as admiration, liking, etc., need not consist in choice dispositions. Some of them might be choice-related, but others need not be. Consequently, the items on which preference relation operates need not all be potential objects of choice. This domain restriction is now lifted altogether.

A nice feature of the new model is that it is allow us to deal not just with general value relations, better , equally good, etc., as we have done here, but also with more specific relations of value, such as being more admirable or being more desirable, and so on. To account for these more specific relations we simply specify the kind of favouring attitude that we are interested in (admiration, desire, or what have you) and then develop the degree assignment model restricted to the attitudes of this kind. (For a proposal along this lines, see Rabinowicz 2009b.)

Conclusion

In a way, the degree assignment model reminds of Gert's original proposal, which also assumed that for each item one could specify the degree to which that item is preferred (= favoured). But there are obvious differences as well between the two approaches. The three

most important ones are:

(i) In Gert's approach, preferences were thought to be dispositions to choose and the degree assignments were representations of these dispositions. This is not how the degrees of favouring are meant to be understood in our approach.

(ii) We replace Gert's model of permissible intervals of degrees for different items with a modelling that postulates a class of permissible degree assignments. Thereby, our definitions of standard value relations, such as betterness and equal goodness, can avoid problems that plague Gert's account.

(iii) We give up the idea that degrees must be representable by numbers, to allow for incommensurable degrees. Thereby we make room for value incomparabilities.

It seems that the degree assignment model gives us what we have been after: a versatile FA-framework for a study of value relations, which allows us to do everything we have been doing using the intersection model, while avoiding the problems the latter model had to face. These problems disappear when the notion of preference is re-interpreted – when the essential connection between preference and choice is severed and preference is treated as a difference of degree between monadic attitudes directed to separate items.

Needless to say, instead of the old problems, we might now encounter new ones. But, hopefully, the new problems will be easier to deal with.[10]

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[10] Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at the philosophy departments in Uppsala, Toronto, Bayreuth, and Geneva. I am indebted to the participants in these events for useful comments and suggestions.

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