Bad Attitudes
Dr. Clea F. Rees

Hurka offers an account of the vices (and virtues) which is not a variety of virtue ethics. Rather, his account is consequentialist. On Hurka’s view, the vices (virtues) are intrinsically, but derivatively, evil (good).

Discussion: Terminology

In Hurka’s sense and roughly speaking…

**Intrinsic evils (goods)** are evils (goods) which are evil (good) for themselves or for their own sake.

**Instrumental evils (goods)** are evils (goods) because they are a means to other things which are evil (good).

**Derivative evils (goods)** are evils (goods) whose badness (goodness) depends on the badness (goodness) of other things.

**Non-derivative evils (goods)** are evils (goods) whose badness (goodness) do not depend on the badness (goodness) of anything else.

On Hurka’s view, something can be intrinsically evil (good) without being non-derivatively evil (good). See table 1.

- In a group, discuss questions 1–4 (thesis and terminology).
- How does Hurka’s account apply to the ‘vices of inattention’ discussed by Jenni (2003)?
- How does Hurka’s account apply to ‘general efficiency’ in the sense discussed by Setiya (2005)?

**Hurka’s ‘higher-level’ evils**

- A recursive account of the virtues and vices.
- Given a set of base-level goods and evils, ‘whenever something is intrinsically good or evil, certain attitudes to it are also intrinsically good or evil’ (Hurka 2001, 196).
- Example base-level goods: ‘pleasure, knowledge, and achievement’.
- Example base-level evils: ‘pain, false belief, and failure’.

The basic recursive account


1. For some base-level $g_1, g_2, \ldots, g_n$ and $e_1, e_2, \ldots, e_n$, $g_1, g_2, \ldots, g_n$ are intrinsically good and $e_1, e_2, \ldots, e_n$ are intrinsically evil;
2. ‘whenever something is intrinsically good, loving it for itself, that is, desiring, pursuing, or taking pleasure in it for itself, is also intrinsically good’
   e.g. benevolence;
3. ‘whenever something is intrinsically evil, desiring, pursuing, or taking pleasure in it for itself is also intrinsically evil’
   e.g. malice;
4. ‘if something is intrinsically good, hating it for itself is intrinsically evil’
   e.g. spite;
5. ‘if something is intrinsically evil, hating it for itself is intrinsically good’
   e.g. compassion.

Virtues consist of the higher-level intrinsic goods
e.g. benevolence, compassion.

Vices consist of the higher-level intrinsic evils
   e.g. malice, spite.

See figure 1.

Hurka’s additions

**Thresholds**: indifference to an intrinsic good or evil is not morally neutral. Rather any attitude below a certain threshold is vicious (Hurka 2001, 197).

**Degrees of virtue and vice**: the degree to which an attitude is virtuous or vicious depends at least on the attitude’s intensity and the intrinsic value of its object (Hurka 2001, 197).
Figure 1: Hurka’s recursive consequentialist account of the vices and virtues.
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Bad Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intrinsic</th>
<th>Non-Derivative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>malice, envy, sloth, callousness, selfishness</td>
<td>pain, ignorance, failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compassion, honesty, benevolence</td>
<td>knowledge, achievement, pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>natural disasters?, small pox virus?, salmonella?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Examples of goods and evils illustrating distinctions between (i) intrinsic vs. instrumental and (ii) derivative vs. non-derivative.

**Holistic proportionality:** one’s attitudes to intrinsic goods and evils should ideally be proportionate to their intrinsic value (Hurka 2001, 199). If not proportionate, they are, taken as a whole, to that extent evil. The greater the disproportion, the greater the evil. The total value of one’s attitudes is the sum of the value of each less the evil of any disproportion.

**Hurka’s vices**

**Pure vices:** from the four recursion clauses in the basic account.

**Vices of indifference:** from the threshold condition.

**Vices of disproportion:** from the holistic proportionality condition.

**Vices of disproportion**

The third category of vices, the ‘vices of disproportion’, involve two or more attitudes both of which are appropriately oriented and above the threshold intensity, so that on their own they are good. But these attitudes’ intensities are so out of proportion to their objects’ values that their combination is evil not just as a combination, as in some shortfalls in virtue, but on balance. These vices are therefore made evil by the holistic proportionality principle, or by that principle as weighed against the first and last recursion-clauses. (Hurka 2001, 204)

Examples: extreme selfishness; extreme cowardice; self-abnegation; foolhardiness; intemperance; pedantry; and nepotism (Hurka 2001, 204–205).

**Discussion: The Argument**

- In a group, please discuss question 5. **What is Hurka’s argument?**
- Clarify the conclusion.
  - The conclusion is the claim that the author is trying to persuade you of.
  - What are the premises of this argument?
    - Premises are claims which an argument relies on i.e. the points it starts from.

**Discussion: Evaluation**

- In a group, please discuss question 6. **Is Hurka’s argument a good one?**
- Is the argument valid?
  - An argument is valid if, and only if, the conclusion follows logically from the premises so that the premises could not possibly be true without the conclusion being true as well.
- Is the argument sound?
  - An argument is sound if, and only if, two conditions are satisfied. First, the argument must be valid. Second, all of the premises must be true. It follows that the conclusion of a sound argument is true.

**Reflection**

- Are there vices whose viciousness Hurka cannot explain?
- Would it be better if compassion did not involve
any pain or discomfort? What should Hurka say about this?

References