

Introduction

God is dead, and we've killed Him. And with the death of God, we've lost too much. But the fall of theism from its place as a comfortable default is not what I am going to talk about here. Instead, I want to focus on what we've lost, and only *hint* at how that might relate to the death of God.

What we've lost is a *way of seeing the world*--a worldview, or a framework for understanding ourselves and our actions. In fact, I think most of us here, even the deeply religious among us, have lost this framework. This loss has poisoned our religion, has crippled our deliberative processes, and has stripped us of our ability to conceive of our lives as *meaningful*. It has also contributed to the moral and political polarization of American Society--our inability to see the world as we once did has created disagreement where there should be unity, and there is, I fear, *no hope* for unity unless we *all* adopt this way of seeing.

There is another, better way of seeing the world. But what is this way of seeing the world, and why have we lost it? And, since we have already given it up, why should we care about restoring it?

This "other way" of seeing is a way of thinking from an external point of view--of seeing external objects for themselves, and not only as they are related to us. It is a way of thinking, of feeling, of seeing, and of deciding what to do which does not revolve around oneself. But the worldview I am describing does not eliminate the self, since it still asserts the value and importance of our individual lives. Instead, it seems clear to me that this way of thinking is the *only* way to make sense of the value of the individual. Neither is this view novel or radical, and it does not require extensive theoretical training to grasp it. It is a deeply ingrained way of seeing the world. In fact, I have no new insights to share with you--I am simply bringing *back* to you the moral framework we have sadly abandoned.

I'll describe this worldview by explaining its two primary features: (1) seeing objects other than ourselves as intrinsically valuable for their own sake, and (2) thinking or reasoning from an external point of view.

Another Way to Think: Seeing Objects for Themselves and the Importance of Intrinsic Value

Seeing objects for themselves consists in the following: when we look at, think about, or estimate the value of an object, we do not merely or primarily judge it for what it can do. Our first inclination, on this way of seeing, is to ask about the *value* of an object *in itself*. We examine it, and see whether it is worth anything *on its own*. We ask, "what reason do we have to value this

thing? Is it worthy of our love, even if it doesn't do anything *for us*?"¹ After this, we might ask what it can do for us--what it can accomplish, or what it can be used for.

We do not, from this moral point of view, make the value or significance of objects dependent on *us*, or what it might help us achieve. That is, we are not assuming that things outside of us only have *instrumental* value--value based on the outcomes a thing can achieve--but instead are open to things other than ourselves having *intrinsic value*--value based on what the thing is in itself.²

I'm always surprised that so many people I encounter have *never consciously thought of the difference* between intrinsic and instrumental value. Our culture has conditioned us to think of our jobs, our lives, and our selves as taking their worth only from what they produce. As Americans, and as ardent capitalists, we feel worthless unless we are producing money, or some other good. We are not taught, and not encouraged, to see ourselves and our activities as having value *in themselves*, regardless of what they can be used for. Even when it comes to prayer, we have been conditioned to think of prayer as only worthwhile for *what it does for or to us*. To explain why we pray, we might cite the way prayer makes us feel, how prayer develops our character, and how prayer can get us what we want. We do not, as we should, see prayer as an intrinsically valuable activity. And what of beautiful works of art? We have also been conditioned to relativize the value of art to how it makes us feel. The same goes for the goodness in others, and the beauty of the natural world.

What I'm getting at is this: we have been trained, from birth, to only think of things in terms of their instrumental value. In doing so, we have conditioned ourselves to see other objects as only important if they relate to us in some beneficial way. Even if we take a less individualistic approach, and show more concern for not just ourselves, but our group, we have still been conditioned to care about objects or actions which only bring some benefit to whoever we consider "in" our group. Everything is about *humanity*! And even humans, as we have all seen, are only valuable insofar as they are *useful*.

But we can work to reverse this inclination in ourselves and in our culture. We can work to first consider the intrinsic value of others, of art, of prayer, of objects, and of God. How can we hope to ever love something besides ourselves if we can only see them insofar as they can benefit *us*?

We *must* train ourselves to see the external world as full of beauty, goodness and value *in its own right*. But why?

¹ In the contemporary philosophical literature on the nature of value, there is much disagreement on what value is. Some have opted to replace talk of value and goodness with talk of "reasons to value." I leave open the question of what intrinsic or final value consists in, or what talk of value *means*. For further reading, see: (Scanlon, T.M. *Being Realistic About Reasons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.) and (Korsgaard, Christine. "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason." In *Internal Reasons*, ed. Kieran Setiya and Hille Paakunainen, 204-248. London: MIT Press, 2012.) and (Korsgaard, Christine M. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.)

² There are more complexities within the philosophical literature regarding the nature of intrinsic value. Recently, some authors have posited two distinct concepts related to intrinsic value: intrinsic value and final value. Intrinsic value is value which supervenes, or stems from, the nature of the thing itself. Final value is worthiness of an object to be pursued as an end in itself. This division is most clearly articulated by Korsgaard.

I cannot give a full proof of why we should care about moral truths like this. I cannot *prove* to you why you should learn to love things for themselves. I do not think anyone can.³ There are limits to theoretical reason. But I can offer some reasons to want to adopt this point of view.

Ask yourself how you want to be loved. What sort of love do you feel is worthwhile to receive? Do you want to be loved only because you can do something for me? Or do you want to be loved *for your own sake*? Do we not want the social goods, like mutual love and respect in friendship, which require taking intrinsic value seriously? I think it's obvious that we already, despite our training, value this way of loving and thinking over our self-centered inclinations.⁴

Further, what is the point of anything if we do not think in terms of intrinsic value? If there is no intrinsic value, then everything we do is just to get something else. But that something else is just to get another thing, and so on. Whatever the ultimate "point" of doing anything is, it has to be *worth* it for its own sake. Without intrinsic value, we see the world and our actions as without any point. Think about how we reason: we do x because x will get us to y; but why get to y? Perhaps because y will get us to z. But what about z? Unless we think we can just go on forever, in an infinite series of purely instrumental reasons to act, we have to admit that this great chain of reasons to live ends with something worth doing or living for *in its own right*. So, if we think of only instrumental value, if we think only of the utility of the world around us, we lose our ability to justify our actions and lives. For there to be instrumental value or reasons at all, there must be intrinsic, or non-instrumental, value and reasons.

Finally, we see ourselves as intrinsically valuable, and expect others to treat and love us in this way. But how can we consistently understand ourselves to have intrinsic value if we do not extend this to others? And not just other people--why should we expect our artworks, our jobs, our accomplishments to be met with praise and respect for their own sake, if we do not see any reason to value others' work in this same way? I am *not* giving you practical advice--I am *not* saying that, "if you want to be treated right, the best way to do that is to treat others right." No, I am saying that your belief that YOU are intrinsically valuable makes no sense if you are unable to recognize this same value in others. What makes you, and not others, valuable? What makes your work, and not other others', valuable? It is a totally ad hoc division to think of yourself in this way, and not others.⁵ To consistently and rationally believe in the intrinsic value

³ Humean and Kantian philosophers have tried to link morality with rationality, and thereby prove with theoretical and practical reason that we have compelling reason to be moral. I will adopt some of these arguments, but, in my mind, they do not constitute proofs, and are easy to cast doubt upon.

⁴ Korsgaard develops these sorts of arguments, which she identifies as originating in Hume, in: (Korsgaard, Christine. *The Sources of Normativity*, 58-60).

⁵ For a full treatment of this argument, see Nagel. Nagel argues that being able to consider oneself as inherently worthy or intrinsically valuable necessarily commits one to deliberation from an external point of view under which every agent's interests have equal weight, since the concept of inherent worth involves others as being obligated to view one's own interests as equally weighted with theirs. "I believe that the crucial question he has to answer is whether he is prepared to regard that individual, reflectively considered, as worthless...Egoism as a general principle is equivalent to regarding myself as valueless from a reflective point of view, because it says that my interests, like those of every other person, provide others with no reason for action except in so far as they can be linked to the other person's prior motives" (Nagel, Thomas. "Universality and the Reflective Self," 207.).

and worth of yourself, you must extend that to others. And that involves taking the notion of intrinsic value seriously.

In the end, I think we already want to see the world in this way--deep within us, perhaps suppressed by a wicked culture, we already take this way of seeing the world seriously. In a sense, we're already halfway to this new moral framework--this new way of seeing.

Another Way to Think: The Importance of an External Perspective

The second aspect of this way of thinking involves reasoning from an external perspective--a point of view from outside yourself. Of course, this is metaphorical. What this means is that, when we are deliberating about our actions, about our beliefs, about what we have reason to do, we try to decide on a solution which treats the preferences, desires and goals of others as equal to ourselves (unless, of course, we have some very good reason not to). If I try to decide where to eat, I "step outside of myself," and consider what my wife feels or wants. In doing this, I don't give my preferences the power to automatically override hers; I adopt an external point of view by pretending as if I am an unbiased observer, looking at both of our desires and goals, and weighing them from an equal starting point.

As I mentioned above, I extend to others the value I believe myself to have in deliberating, and this is the external perspective. The example I've given is trivial, but this same way of thinking, of seeing others, can be extended to more important issues. If I am deciding whether to give my money to charity or to buy an Xbox, I can either enter into an external point of view, or an internal one. I could easily train myself to give priority to my desires by default, thereby training myself to value you less than I value myself. Or, I could train myself to give our desires equal footing at the beginning of deliberation--I can train myself to assume that my desires do not automatically trump yours, and then, from this equal footing, I can weigh my desire to buy an Xbox with your desire not to starve. (Note that I am not saying that we have to consider all desires to be equal; instead, I am saying that we should start on this presumption, and then try to weigh who's desires and goals are more important, if we must.)

This way of reasoning from an external point of view is just to view ourselves, our desires, our goals "from the outside," as an impartial judge. But why care about adopting this external perspective?

Again, ask yourself, do you believe that others should consider *your* desires, goals and life with the same respect they grant themselves? When others make decisions, do you believe they should take you into account? If so, then why do you not believe that you should do the same for them? Why do they--beings which are totally similar to you--have a responsibility which you do not? To avoid inconsistency and arbitrary divisions of value, it seems we have to enter into this external point of view! To be able to rationally think of *ourselves* as worthy of respect by others, we *must* commit ourselves to reasoning from this external perspective.⁶ Once again, we already, deep down, know this stuff, but are trained to rebel against it.

⁶ Again, for a full development of this argument, see: (Nagel, Thomas. "Universality and the Reflective Self.")

In short, the way of seeing the world I'm describing is not self-centered, although it makes room for the self, and, if my arguments are correct, seems to be necessary for rationally seeing the self as valuable. So, this less self-centered way of seeing the world is needed, or else we can't rationally believe in our own worth and value!

Cultural Influences on our Thinking

But if this way of seeing the world is so important, how have we lost it? And what does God have to do with this?

Here, in short, is how I think our culture has come to rebel against this way of seeing the world. This is a bit of speculation, but I'm a philosopher--it's what I do.

First, our society is organized around buying and selling. It's become critical for survival to work, and to think about the productivity of our work. If we don't have any material productivity--a kind of instrumental value--we don't survive. So, it makes sense that we have learned to pressure ourselves to be productive: to give lots of thought to our instrumental value. This isn't bad in and of itself, but it can be abused, and overemphasized, as it has been in recent years.

Second, our employers, whom we depend on, seem to only care about what we can do for them, not about what they can do for us, or about what we can do together. If we get sick, we lose our job, or lose our pay. The relationship between many employers and employees is one in which the employer sees us primarily as instrumentally valuable, not as an intrinsically valuable person. Our desires and goals only matter to many employers insofar as they can be used to benefit them. I think this idea is contagious: we're so scared of being thrown away by an employer, that we start prioritizing making our employer happy. After a while, I think we start to believe that our worth comes from our productivity, and how happy it makes others. This is why we have so strongly come to idolize "the economy" over the people *in* that economy.

Third, our constant prioritizing of our instrumental value, and our increasingly stressful jobs, distracts us from thinking of our intrinsic value, much less the intrinsic value of others or inanimate works of art. This trains us to become even more self-centered.

Fourth, our culture is less serious about God or something like God than we've been in the past. When the idea of god, or something like God, is burned into our mind, we are *forced* to think how God sees us and what God thinks of us. That is, a belief in something like God encourages one to think of the self from an external point of view! As we take this idea less seriously, even if we still believe, we lessen the externalizing pressure on ourselves, and more easily slip into a purely internal point of view.

Fifth, and finally, many people feel that, without God, moral truths are not really true. Whether this is true or not is controversial, and I won't take a stand on it here. But certainly within the Christian tradition, we've been trained to think this.⁷ In fact, the Christian tradition

⁷ For one of the most popular arguments for the reliance of morality on God, see: (Craig, William. "The Most Gruesome of Guests." In *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?* Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2009.) For an analysis of the psychological import for religion on morality, see: (James, William. "Lectures IV-VII." In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 78-168. Dover, 2002.) As James notes, certain forms of religion provide us with hope of a "life not correlated with death, a health not liable to illness, a kind of good that will not perish, a good in fact that flies beyond the goods of nature."

univocally identifies God with the good, and as the foundation of moral value. So, especially for Christians, as we lose our confidence in God, we lose our confidence in morality. And so we lose the feeling that there's something we *must* do, something we *must* care about. We start to believe that it's "all relative," and prioritize ourselves. It is much easier to be primarily motivated by our own desires, if we lack a strong conviction that morality is *real*, authoritative, and obligatory. This applies, in my experience, to Christians more than non-Christians. Typically, even my students who identify as moral relativists have stronger, more sincere moral beliefs than many of the Christians I know, and I suspect this is one reason for it.

Conclusion

Those are the ways I think we've been trained to abandon this way of seeing the world. I close with a recommendation:

- Whenever you love or hate something, whenever you enjoy or are displeased, ask why. Do I love this thing for itself, or for what it can do? Does my pleasure stem from an appreciation of the thing itself, or from my recognition that this thing can serve *me*?
- Ask whether the things you love have intrinsic value, or merely instrumental value. Of course, they could have both.
- Ask whether objects are worthy of your love in and of themselves, or only because they can get you something.
- Lastly, whenever you attempt to decide what to do or think, force yourself to step outside yourself, and adopt an external point of view.

Do these things and, over time, you'll adopt a new way of seeing the world. It will open up a view of the world that enables you to love others for their own sake, and you will realize how full the world is: there are more objects worthy of your love than you can conceive of, and you can only come to realize the grandness of the world by restoring in yourself this way of thinking..

I want to remind my American, Christian audience, who I think have most severely abandoned this way of seeing the world, that the Christian religion absolutely requires of us to adopt this new way of seeing. Christ Himself affirms the intrinsic value of not only the human being, but of nature. Consider Christ's own words:

*Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*⁸

*Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*⁹

God Himself, incarnate in the flesh, vindicates this way of seeing the world I am begging you to adopt! There is much more within and without the text of the Bible which reinforces the

⁸ Matthew 6:25-27 (NKJV)

⁹ Matthew 10:29-30 (NKJV)

importance of this way of viewing the world. The Christian tradition in one voice proclaims that all that exists, in virtue of existing, is good. The creation, down to every particle, is a beautiful work by God. Augustine even declares this to be a fundamental Christian doctrine, saying that,

*We, Catholic Christians, worship God, from whom are all good things, great or small, all measure great or small, all form great or small, all order great or small. All things are good ...every natural existent is good.*¹⁰

What's more, Augustine's recognition of this doctrine was a pivotal part of his conversion to orthodox Christianity from Manichaeism. He writes,

*There is no health in those who find fault with any part of your creation; as there was no health in me when I found fault with so many of your works....*¹¹

You cannot genuinely hold to the goodness of God and His creation unless you train yourself to see the world in the way I am describing. If you claim to be Christian, you *must* take this other way of seeing the world seriously. *This* way of seeing the world is the first step to death to the self. *This* way of seeing the world is the cross you must bear. You *cannot* be Christian if you abandon an external point of view, and are only apathetic to the notion of seeing objects for themselves.

I have not always believed that humans were capable of this sort of love, because I didn't love anything for its own sake. But now that I've been given this gift of stepping outside of myself, even if this gift is incomplete and partial, I see how we are capable, if only we seek to *learn* how to love.

But how are we to learn to love from the external POV? Human emotion and sentiment shape moral belief; the emotions partially determine, reinforce and reflect our moral convictions. You cannot truly divorce belief from sentiment. To shape our beliefs, and the way we see the world, we change our emotions, and to shape our emotions, we develop our beliefs. The first step for most is to shape emotion through recognition of the *importance* of doctrine, and philosophical reflection. You must *force* yourself to think more deeply, and to stretch out the boundaries of your world by reading more widely. Combat your ignorance, and your world expands, making you aware of the breadth and beauty of creation. Your love is shallow and selfish because your world is small; you do not know how to love, nor do you even know how many different objects of love there are. You must *see* how many things there are to love, and you must *learn* the ways in which you ought to love them. Doing this, you learn to *feel* actual love, which is a sort of *feeling* which most of us do not feel. The doctrine that love is not an emotion is misleading: true, deep love is necessarily emotional, because the emotions are an extension and reflection of your rational self. To divorce them is to disintegrate the human being. Fully embracing the external POV is to learn to love with theoretical reason, practical

¹⁰ Augustine. "The Nature of the Good Against the Manichees." In *Augustine: Earlier Writings*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1953.

¹¹ Augustine. *Confessions*, 7.14.20.

reason, *and* sentiment. This is why the Christian tradition has described mystical experience of God as *erotic*. In a moment of deep erotic love, one is forcibly taken from one's world, and is caught up *in the other person*.

Consider again Augustine's own process:¹² through reflection on God's creation, Augustine came to love creation for its own sake. He only achieved this through philosophical reflection paired with prayer, and a sincere desire to understand. Seeing how beautiful creation really was, Augustine was overwhelmed with a sincere belief that God is totally beautiful, totally good, even just in virtue of having created. But the process is slow and painful--as love grows in breadth and intensity, desire for Goodness and Beauty grow; but being drawn to Goodness and Beauty means being increasingly *disgusted and saddened* by the enemies of Goodness and Beauty, including ourselves. Even more painful is the awareness of one's isolation from God: you *do not* possess God, yet as you learn to love Him, your desire to possess God becomes greater, and the separation becomes more painful. As love grows, so does discontent, loneliness, and angst.

To love in a loveless world is for your love to be continually unrequited. But to fail to love, to fail to internalize the external POV, is to live totally disconnected from those things which make life worth living.

For Further Study

Scruton, Roger. *Beauty: A Short Introduction*.

Scruton, Roger. "Of Beauty and Consolation." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoybTk6TEX4>

¹² Described in (*Confessions*, Bk. 7).