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# Handout for Korsgaard's "Two Distinctions in Goodness"

## Summary:

**Problem:** Korsgaard argues that there is a tendency in moral philosophy to treat two distinctions as the same: the distinction between **intrinsic** and **extrinsic** goodness, and the distinction between **ends** (final goods) and **means** (instrumental goods). Korsgaard believes that this **conflates** two distinct ways of thinking about goodness, and that keeping them separate is important for understanding the nature of goodness and its role in our choices.

**Solution:** To solve this, Korsgaard proposes that we need to keep the two distinctions separate, which allows us to consider different ways of understanding the relationship between goodness and our choices. She argues that a **Kantian** approach, which allows for extrinsically valuable ends whose value comes from the interest that people take in them, offers a more flexible and nuanced way of thinking about goodness than the traditional approach, which equates final goods with intrinsic goods and instrumental goods with extrinsic goods.

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## I. Delineating the Types of Value:

Korsgaard's focus is on "goodness as a feature of ordinary ends and purposes, states of affairs, objects, activities, and other things—that is, with the kind of goodness that marks a thing out as worthy of choice." (page 169)

She distinguishes **three** kinds of judgments of goodness:

1. Good of its kind (having the virtues appropriate to that kind).
2. Good as a kind of thing.
3. **Good absolutely (the world is a better place because of this thing).**

## II. The Importance of Maintaining Two Distinctions in Goodness:

Korsgaard challenges the conventional philosophical tendency to equate **intrinsic** value with value for its own sake and **extrinsic** value with instrumental value.

- She argues that intrinsic value refers to the value something has **in itself**, while extrinsic value refers to the value something derives from another source.
- The distinction between **intrinsic** and **extrinsic** goodness is different from the distinction between **ends** and **means**.
  - It's possible for something to be extrinsically good and still be valued as an end.
    - "An example of this would be something that was good as an end because of the

interest that someone took in it, or the desire that someone had for it, for its own sake.”  
(page 172)

### III. The Equation of the Two Distinctions in Moore and Ross:

Korsgaard examines the views of philosophers like Moore and Ross, who argue that a thing's intrinsic goodness is independent of the interest people take in it or the desires they have for it.

- Moore and Ross see intrinsic value as belonging to things in themselves, separate from any relation to human interest or desire.
  - Moore: “And if this is so, then it shows conclusively that to judge that a thing is intrinsically good is not the same thing as to judge that some man is pleased with it or desires it for its own sake.” (page 176)

### IV. The Separation of the Two Distinctions in Kant:

Korsgaard contrasts Moore and Ross's views with Kant's, who allows for the possibility of extrinsically valuable ends.

- Kant's distinction between **unconditioned** and **conditioned** value is similar to the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value.
  - Unconditional value: good under any and all conditions.
    - “Nothing in the world—indeed nothing even beyond the world—can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will...” (page 178)
  - Conditioned value: good only when certain conditions are met.
    - Kant uses the phrase “inneren Wert” (inner worth) to describe the dignity of a morally good rational being.
    - He uses “relativen Wert” (relative worth) to describe the worth of everything else.
  - For Kant, only the good will is intrinsically good.
    - Everything else has a value that is **extrinsic** or **conditional**.
    - “It will be helpful to pause for a moment to match up Kant's view and the Kantian terms to what has gone before. On Kant's view there is only one thing that has what he calls unconditional value and what Moore calls intrinsic value, and that is the power of rational choice (when the choices are made in a fully rational way, which is what characterizes the good will). The value of everything else whatever is extrinsic or conditional. Yet when a thing is conditionally valuable and the relevant conditions are met, the thing has objective value. Things that are valued for their own sakes or as ends have this status. Their value is conditional but can be objective, given the real circumstances of the case. Thus, although Kant, like Moore, firmly separates intrinsic value from a thing's being desired for its own sake, he has resources for saying that a thing is objectively good as an end because it is desired for its own sake. And most things that are good will in fact be good in this way: they will be good because they are part of the happiness of a deserving human being.” (pages 182 - 183)

## V. Advantages of the Kantian Way of Describing Values:

Korsgaard highlights the advantages of Kant's approach to value, emphasizing its flexibility in describing everyday matters of value, especially "mixed values."

- A luxurious instrument (e.g., a mink coat) is valued partly for its own sake, under the condition of its instrumentality.
- The Kantian view avoids the problem of making everything that is not intrinsically good into a mere means to some further end, like pleasure.
- Korsgaard defends the idea that things can be good because we desire or choose them, within the framework of rational choice and justification.
- "On the Kantian view, not everything valued as an end need be intrinsically valuable or self-justifying for there to be sufficient reason for it. A conditionally valuable thing can still be fully justified, if the unconditioned condition of its goodness is met. Things that are not self-justifying can be justified by something else. In particular, ends whose condition is their desirability can be justified by the rational choices of human beings." (page 190)

## VI. Moore's Theory of Organic Unities:

Korsgaard discusses Moore's theory of organic unities, which allows him to deal with cases of mixed value.

- Moore argues that intrinsic value usually belongs to complex wholes, where the value of the whole is not simply the sum of its parts.
  - Consciousness of beauty is made more valuable when accompanied by an appropriate emotional response (appreciation).
- Korsgaard sees Moore's theory of organic unities as similar in function to Kant's notion of conditioned value, but goes on to criticize it for obscuring the internal relations within the whole that give it value.

## VII. Advantages of Kant's Theory Over Moore's:

Korsgaard argues that Kant's theory is superior to Moore's "perverse" theory because it focuses on the internal relations within a valuable whole, revealing why something is valuable in one case and not in another.

- Kant's theory connects our reasons for caring about something with the reasons why it is good, while Moore's theory separates them.
- Kant's theory avoids the intuitionism inherent in Moore's view, where goodness is simply a property that we intuit.
  - "Another way to put the point is this: Moore's theory drives a wedge between the reason why we care about something and the reason why it is good. Or rather, since on Moore's theory it is a mistake to talk about why something is good, we should say that it drives a wedge between our natural interest in something and

our moral interest in it.” (page 194)

- Korsgaard concludes that Kant's theory offers a more satisfactory account of the objectivity of goodness, recognizing the role of human desires, interests, and the conditions of human life in giving value to things, while still grounding this value in the intrinsic worth of humanity and the capacity for rational choice.