

On the Value of Irreplaceable Objects

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Abstract. Bradford (2023) calls attention to the fact that the strength of our reasons to preserve distinctively valuable objects increases as the number of such objects decreases. Bradford develops an account of this phenomenon in terms of 'irreplaceable value', and in particular in terms of a notion of the degree of such value, which is distinct from its amount. We present an alternative explanation of this pattern in our reasons, which appeals to the value of diversity: the world is better, other things equal, insofar as it contains more kinds of value. We develop this view in two connected ways: one appeals to evidential probability under conditions of uncertainty, and the other appeals to the value of diversity. We conclude by discussing some explanatory advantages of our view over Bradford's.

Keywords: rarity; uniqueness; irreplaceability; diversity; variety; uncertainty

The master printmaker Hokusai (1760-1849) produced his *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, including the iconic *Great Wave off Kanagawa*, in 1830-1832. The original woodblocks used for the printing of this series survive, but it is likely that no new prints of similar quality can be made from the original blocks, since woodblocks deteriorate with use (Korenberg 2023). There are at least 100 original prints of the *Great Wave off Kanagawa* surviving, but these may be the only such prints that will ever exist.

We would contribute a considerable amount of money to prevent the destruction of one of these one hundred prints. But if, because of some tragic accident, there were only two prints left (and not a hundred), we would contribute a much greater sum to prevent the destruction of one of the last two. And, if there were only a single print remaining, we would pay an even greater sum to prevent its destruction. These are not, we think, idiosyncratic reactions, but reflections of underlying facts about what we have reason to do. There is greater reason to prevent the destruction of the very last print than there is to prevent the destruction of one of the last two prints, and there is greater reason to

prevent the destruction of one of the last two prints than there is to prevent the destruction of one of the last hundred.

Recently, Gwen Bradford (2023; 2024) has called attention to this phenomenon and developed a novel account of the increasing strength of our reasons to preserve non-replicable valuable objects as their number decreases. Bradford's account, which appeals to what she calls "irreplaceable value," is innovative and inspiring. But here, we suggest an alternative. After introducing Bradford's proposal (section I), we present an alternative explanation, with two components (sections II and III), and then outline some of its advantages (section IV).

I. Bradford's Irreplaceable Value Account

According to Bradford, an object has *irreplaceable value* if and only if some of the grounds of its good-making properties are *unreinstaniable* properties, that is, properties that cannot, given the laws of nature and our position in time, be instantiated by any objects other than those which currently instantiate them. For instance, *having been made in the Qin Dynasty* and *having been painted by Monet* are unreinstaniable properties, since there cannot in the future be any new objects that were made in the Qin Dynasty or painted by Monet. (We are assuming here and throughout that time-travel is impossible.)

As Bradford understands it, irreplaceable value is a distinct species of intrinsic value (2023: 433) and, as such, can be measured in terms of its *amount*. Although *having been painted by Monet* and *having been painted by Thomas Kincade* are both unreinstaniable properties, in Bradford's view the former confers a greater amount of intrinsic value on its bearer. But, we may assume, each Hokusai print has the same amount of irreplaceable value. So, the amount of this value alone cannot fully explain our stronger reasons to preserve the last Hokusai as opposed to the second-to-last. To explain this, Bradford posits a second quantitative dimension of irreplaceable value, distinct from amount, which she calls *degree* of irreplaceable value. The degree of irreplaceable value that an object possesses is a function of how many objects instantiating the same unreinstaniable properties currently exist. As that number decreases, the degree of irreplaceable value of each remaining object increases.

Bradford suggests that this second quantitative dimension explains the pattern of reasons described in our opening paragraphs: the greater an object's degree of irreplaceable value, the greater the reason we have to *preserve* that object. As we understand her, Bradford's argument for this component of her view is that it is the best explanation of the data about our reasons. Since the *amount* of irreplaceable value of a Hokusai print does not increase as the world loses other such prints, there must be a distinct quantitative dimension that accounts for the change in the strength of our reasons.

This account is, as we have said, innovative and inspiring. But Bradford's postulation of a new quantitative dimension of value—degree of irreplaceable value—gives rise to a significant explanatory challenge: that of explaining the structure of this new dimension of value. Our goal here will be to present an alternative account of the phenomenon—that the weight of our reason to protect distinctively valuable objects increases as the number of such objects decreases—which skirts this challenge. Our account starts from the thought that the world is better, other things equal, insofar as it contains more kinds of value. At the end, we sketch what we take to be comparative advantages of our account to Bradford's, but our primary aim is constructive: to further explore the landscape that Bradford's work has opened to view.

II. The Uncertainty Story

In this section we develop an alternative story that rests on two claims. The first is the axiological claim just mentioned, namely that the world is better when it contains many different kinds of value. In this section, we'll rely on a minimal construal of this idea—that an entity contributes more value to the world if it instantiates a kind of value that is not otherwise instantiated. As we understand this idea, it implies that, other things equal, the world is better when there is at least one Hokusai print in existence, since Hokusai prints instantiate a distinctive kind of value. We will motivate and develop the claim that these prints have a distinctive kind of value in more depth later, in section III, where we sketch a systematic account of talk of kinds of value in general. But we hope that the basic idea has enough intuitive force that the reader will be willing to explore it with us until then.

The second claim is that we are, as a matter of fact, uncertain about the continued existence of objects which instantiate diverse values. We can represent this uncertainty as a probability, which we will understand as an "evidential probability." We assume that the evidential probability (for a person, at a time) that some Hokusai prints will continue to exist over some time period is how confident the person should be, given their evidence at that time, that some such prints will survive over the relevant period.

Given the widely held assumption that the strength of our reasons to perform some action is proportional to the increase or decrease in probability of good or bad outcomes promoted by the action, these two claims deliver a simple explanation of why we have weightier reason to preserve one Hokusai print, if fewer of them are left.

To see how, consider an example. Suppose for simplicity that, for every Hokusai print, there is a 0.5 probability on our evidence that it will go out of existence in the next century and that, moreover, according to our evidence, such Hokusai disasters are not correlated. Given these assumptions, and the fact that there are only 100 Hokusai prints currently in existence, there would be a 0.5^{100} evidential probability that the world will no longer enjoy any Hokusai prints a century from now. Since 0.5^{100} is a tiny number (on the order of 10^{-30}

³¹), this model predicts that there is essentially no risk that this kind of beauty will go out of existence in our lifetimes. But suppose now that the number of Hokusai prints were not 100 but instead only 2. Then the probability that there would be no instances of these prints in the universe a century from now (making the same simplifying assumptions) would be 0.25. In this simplistic example, regardless of how many Hokusai exist, the destruction of one Hokusai print always doubles the probability that *all* of them will go out of existence in the subsequent century. But while this *multiplicative* change to the probability is constant, the doubling can lead to larger or smaller absolute changes in the probability. In particular, the probability that all would go out of existence in the subsequent century if there are 3 would be .125, while if there are only 2 it would be 0.25. The change from 3 to 2 ‘costs’ 0.125 in probability of total destruction. The change from 100 to 99, by contrast, ‘costs’ on the order of 10^{-31} , that is, next to nothing.

This is how the toy model predicts the structure of our reasons described above. If the 100th Hokusai is destroyed, the destruction barely increases the risk that the last one will be destroyed in the subsequent century. By contrast, if the third to last Hokusai is destroyed, the risk the last one will be destroyed in that period increases from 0.125 ($\frac{1}{8}$) to 0.25 ($\frac{1}{4}$). If the second to last Hokusai is destroyed, that increases the risk from 0.25 to 0.5. And if the final Hokusai is destroyed, the risk is increased from 0.5 to 1 (certainty). So the reason to preserve prints becomes weightier as their number decreases. In our toy model, in fact, the reason doubles with each loss, which is more than enough, we think, to explain our starting datum.

This simple story immediately predicts an exponential jump in strength of reasons to preserve Hokusai prints as they decline in number, due to the exponential jump in the risk of non-existence of this particular value.¹ But there is an obvious problem with the story. Suppose you find yourself with the opportunity to prevent the destruction of some Hokusai prints, and suppose that your evidence in that circumstance justifies *certainty* that the final print is entirely safe from destruction. Arguably you would still have weightier reason to prevent the destruction of the second to last print than you would have to prevent the third to last print, and so on. The story we have developed so far cannot explain such judgements in conditions of certainty. If these judgements about the case are correct, that is a limitation of the account.

We’re unsure whether these judgements are correct—such cases of certainty arguably never occur in the real world, and our intuitions about them are attenuated. But we think they have some evidentiary weight. So we think it is of interest to explore whether a story can be given that explains such judgments.

¹ In noting the “significant jump in strength of reasons to preserve [an irreplaceably valuable object] when it is utterly unique as opposed to merely rare” (2023: 429), Bradford agrees with us that the increase is “nonlinear”, but does not take a stand on its precise form.

III. The Enriched Diversity Story

The uncertainty story depended on the idea that the world is better when it contains a diversity of value. But we required only very minimal assumptions related to this idea, namely, that the existence of some Hokusai prints adds value to the world beyond the intrinsic value of the Hokusai prints themselves. In fact, however, our ordinary notion of diversity in value is much richer than this; indeed, it may be sufficiently rich to explain our target phenomenon on its own. In this section, we show how.

To get a grip on this notion of diversity, we take a page from the literature on well-being. Several authors have suggested that one's life is better insofar as it contains many different kinds of goods. Thomas Hurka, for example, suggests that it is "better to know European history, astrophysics, and a friend's character than to concentrate understanding in a single area" (1993: 90). Dominic McIver Lopes writes that "a diversity of aesthetic opportunity is better than aesthetic monoculture" (2018: 222). Ben Bramble has claimed that "the diversity of our pleasures has a special value for us" (2016: 109). The basic idea of these authors is that a good life is, in part, a well-rounded life, where a well-rounded life is a life of engagement with diverse goods. A life monomaniacally focused on one good, such as sexual pleasure, is less good than a life that also contains friendships, knowledge, achievements, virtues, and much else besides. Even for hedonists, a life with the pleasures of learning, philosophy, good food, and sex is, other things equal, better than one with just the pleasures of sex. Well-being is not just a matter of having welfare goods in large quantities; it is also a matter of having diverse welfare goods.

It is not just that the first instantiation of a kind of value contributes to the diversity and hence to the overall value of a life. A single friendship, in a life whose primary good was sexual pleasure, would indeed increase the diversity of the life by a great deal. But a second friendship in the same life, dominated by sexual pleasure, would also contribute substantially to the diversity of that life, beyond the intrinsic value of the friendship. And a third friendship would also contribute to the diversity of that life (although less than the second), and so on.

In short, according to the ordinary notion of diversity, the more of each different kind of thing there is (or at least: the more balanced the ratio of them is), the more diversity there is. The first instance of a given kind of value contributes more to diversity than the second such instance, but the contribution of later instances to diversity does not tail off to zero immediately. Given this pattern of contributions to diversity, and the claim that more diversity in a life is better, it will also be true that a life is better insofar as there is more of each different kind of good in it.

Our proposal is that what's true for the value of lives is also true for axiology writ large. Just as how good a life is depends on the diversity of goods in it, how good a world is depends in part on the diversity of goods in it.²

How exactly does this work? That is, in what way does diversity contribute to the value of the world? One option would be to say that diversity is valuable in itself, i.e., that it is an intrinsic good like the beauty of the Grand Canyon or the pleasure of having a fine wine. But we prefer an alternative approach, which makes similar predictions about value without taking diversity to be valuable in its own right.³ This approach says that how much new instantiations of a kind of value contribute to the overall value of the world diminishes as there are further instantiations of that value. So when there are very few pleasurable experiences in a world, each pleasurable experience contributes a greater amount to the world's value.⁴ When the world is full of pleasure, each new pleasure contributes less to that value. When there are very few beautiful paintings in a world, each beautiful painting contributes a greater amount to the world's value. When there are very many such paintings, each contributes much less to overall value. And the same goes, of course, for Hokusai prints: the fewer of these that currently exist, the more each one contributes to the current value of the world.⁵

These claims suffice to explain the phenomenon with which we started. Given that original Hokusai prints instantiate a distinctive kind of value, our world is more diverse if there are more of them. But the amount of value each new print contributes to the world diminishes as there are more prints. In particular, the destruction of the hundredth to last Hokusai print would detract less from the value of the world than the destruction of the second to last such print would, and this in turn would detract less than the destruction of the very

² What Chisholm (1986: 70-1) calls the "the principle of the *bonum variationis*" expresses a very similar idea. Claiming inspiration from Brentano, Chisholm suggests that "other things being equal, it is better to combine two dissimilar goods than two similar goods." For a somewhat less straightforward invocation of the value of diversity, see Nozick (1981: 415-8).

³ One important reason for preferring our account is a kind of 'leveling down' objection that can be raised to the view that takes diversity to be valuable in its own right, namely that taking diversity to be valuable in its own right would lead to the verdict that there are *pro tanto* reasons for destroying the total amount of intrinsic value in the world, in exchange for increasing the diversity of value in the world. As this objection illustrates, the contrast between accounts which take diversity to be intrinsically valuable and our preferred account has some parallels with the contrast between strict egalitarianism and prioritarianism.

⁴ A different view would be that the value of each individual pleasure is augmented when it contributes more to the diversity of the world. Hurka (1998) argues that there's little practical difference, in reasons for action or attitudes, between this style of view (where objects have increased intrinsic value in virtue of extrinsic properties about the world) and the view we've advanced (where it is the world that carries this value), so we won't discuss it further here.

⁵ This can be seen as a version of the domain-specific proportional view described in Lovett and Riedener (2019: 251-3), where each kind of value is a domain.

last print. In line with these facts about contributory value, our reasons to protect Hokusai prints become weightier the fewer such prints there are.

In what sense, though, do Hokusai prints instantiate a distinctive *kind* of value? It's now time to return to this question, and to the more general question of how to understand our talk of *kinds* of value. We have suggested that each new item with a given kind of value makes a diminishing marginal contribution to how good the world is. Those who believe in a well-defined notion of *kinds* of value may be willing to accept this claim as stated. But we ourselves see talk of such "kinds" as merely a convenient, but ultimately not completely correct, way of introducing our general approach. In our view, a more accurate way of understanding the heuristic talk of kinds of value is in terms of a graded notion of *similarity in value*, as we will now explain.

We will begin from the notion of similarity *simpliciter*. The idea that two objects can be more and less similar is a familiar and intuitively well-motivated one. A typical orange is more similar to another typical orange than it is to an apple. The orange and the apple are more similar to each other than they are to an orangutan. These similarity judgments are *overall* similarity judgments, based on all features of the objects in question. In addition to such overall comparisons, however, we can also make judgments of similarity between objects which are based on a restricted class of their properties. The orange and the orangutan are more similar in color than the orange and the apple (even though they are not more similar overall). In addition to similarity-in-color, we can judge similarity-in-shape or -size, as well as much more abstract relations of similarity: architectural similarity between two buildings, stylistic similarity between two pieces of music, thematic similarity between two films and so on. This capacity for similarity judgments can be leveraged to characterize the notion of *similarity in value*, in a way that makes sense of when valuable objects increase the diversity of values in the world.⁶ To do so, we need simply identify a class of properties such that our judgments of similarity with respect to this class aligns with and can thus help explain our independent judgments about diversity in value. To make this idea more concrete, we will describe two ways of identifying such value-relevant properties below, though we will officially remain neutral between these two more detailed views (and also between them and other possible accounts of similarity in value).

A first view is that certain properties count as *value properties*, and that entities are more or less similar in value insofar as they are more or less similar with respect to these value properties. Two friendships, for example, might be similar in value in virtue of sharing the value property of *wholesomeness*. By contrast, a friendship might be very dissimilar in value from the Giant Sequoia Forest, if the two have no or very few value properties in

⁶ Given our goal—of helping to explain judgments of diversity in the values in a world—the target notion of similarity in value cannot be understood as similarity in *amount* of value. A meaningful friendship may be exactly as valuable as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, but the two entities would still not be similar in value in the sense we intend here. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing us to clarify this point.

common. The predictions of this view with respect to diversity depend on how rich an array of value properties one accepts. If the only aesthetic value properties one accepts are beauty and sublimity, for instance, then any two beautiful but not sublime works of art (no matter how intuitively different) will be perfectly similar in value. The view's verdicts will align more with intuitions about diversity if one is happy to say that in addition to beauty or sublimity, and (say) wholesomeness or generosity, there is even (say) mountain-sublimity in contrast to tornado-sublimity. A second, alternative view holds that certain properties of an object are responsible for how valuable each thing is, and that entities are more or less similar in value insofar as they are similar with respect to the properties responsible for how valuable they are. The notion of responsibility here could, in turn, be made precise in many further ways. One simple story would be that the properties responsible for the values of an entity are the properties which metaphysically ground the instantiation of the relevant values.⁷ Thus a friendship will be dissimilar in value from the Giant Sequoia Forest because the properties which ground how valuable the friendship is—the character of its many shared experiences, say—are very different from those which ground how valuable the forest is—the size and shape of its many trees, for instance.

On either of these more specific ways of spelling out the notion of similarity in value (and many others besides), the notion of similarity in value will align with judgments about when objects increase the diversity of values in the world. One friendship will be more similar in value to another friendship than either is to the Giant Sequoia Forest. And, on either theory, each print of the *Great Wave off Kanagawa* will be very similar in value to the other prints, and not as similar in value to other artworks. In each case, these judgments about similarity-in-value correspond to judgments about when the relevant entities would increase the diversity of values: a forest will do more than a friendship for the diversity of a world full of friendships and with few forests. Similarly, a Hokusai will do more than a Monet in a world full of Monet and without much Hokusai.

Using this notion of similarity in value, we can state the official version of the core idea of this section, namely, that: how much a given valuable entity contributes to the world's value diminishes to the extent that more similarly valuable entities exist. Given this thesis, the verdicts about similarity in value in the previous paragraph vindicate corresponding judgments about the difference specific objects make to the value of a world. The difference one friendship makes to the value of a world full of friendships will be less than

⁷ We can use insights from a view Bradford develops elsewhere—that irreplaceable value is to be understood as value centrally grounded in unreinstantiable properties (2024: 161-4)—to make progress beyond this simplistic idea. Inspired by Bradford, one might hold that entities are similarly valuable to the extent that the properties that ground their value are more similar, but that this similarity in properties should be weighted by the degree to which the relevant properties are central to the relevant value. Like Bradford (2024: 163), we think there are important questions here, which we would like to see pursued. But our aim here is just to show that something like the view is workable, not to develop it in full detail.

the difference the same friendship would make in a world full of forests (but few friendships). Correspondingly, the difference one Hokusai print makes to a world with ninety-nine other such prints will be less than the difference the same print would make in a world with no others. And this last observation suffices to explain the key datum of this section: why, as we lose Hokusai prints, even if we were somehow to be certain that they would not disappear forever, we would still have increasingly weighty reasons to protect each remaining print.

This completes our explanation of our target phenomenon. We close with two clarifications. First, the view in this section implies that when one destroys the second to last Hokusai print, the last print now makes a bigger contribution to the world's value than it did previously. But it does not follow from this claim that there is any reason to destroy the penultimate print. When one is trying to make the world a better place, one does not seek to increase the amount that one particular object contributes to overall value. Instead, one seeks to bring more overall value to the world. Destroying the second-to-last print would not increase the diversity of the world or the amount of total value in it. If we have reason to do something only insofar as it makes the world better than the alternatives, we have no reason to destroy the penultimate print.

Second, this view is compatible with, but does not require, simple intuitions related to conservatism about value. Imagine, for example, that you had the opportunity to destroy the 100 surviving Hokusai prints in order to create 101 new artworks of greater, and also distinctive, value. The conservative intuition is that you have *sui generis* reasons to conserve valuable things, even when destroying them would produce more good. So you have *sui generis* reason not to destroy the prints in this case (Cohen 2011). One can straightforwardly accept (or reject) this conservative intuition at the same time as accepting that diversity is valuable. But the conservative intuition is far more minimal than Bradford's postulate—of a distinctive dimension of value, degree, with a quite specific structure. In particular, the intuition cannot on its own explain our target phenomenon—that one has stronger reasons to preserve Hokusai prints the fewer of them are left—since it is compatible with the strength of such reasons remaining constant no matter how many such prints remain.

IV. Explanatory Advantages

We have given a two-part story, each part of which explains, in different ways, the jump in strength of our reasons to preserve non-replicable valuable objects as their number decreases. Each of these parts could be accepted independently of the other. But we're inclined to think that both capture part of the truth. In the real world, the jump can often be completely explained just by facts about uncertainty together with the added value of there being any items at all of a particular kind. But, when we assume away uncertainty,

the phenomenon is explained by independently motivated aspects of our notion of diversity. In this section, we outline some advantages of this two-part account of the phenomenon over Bradford's.

Bradford explains the phenomenon, as we've said, by postulating a new dimension of value: degree of irreplaceable value. In order for this to be a satisfying explanation, she also needs to say precisely how this dimension of value works. She says that a thing's degree of irreplaceable value increases as the number of things with its unreinstantiable properties decreases (2023: 437). Degree of irreplaceable value increases at a faster rate the fewer things have the relevant unreinstantiable properties, and the higher the degree of something's irreplaceable value, the stronger are the reasons to preserve it (2023: 437). She says that irreplaceable value gives rise to just that kind of reason—reason to preserve things—and not reason to (for instance) make more of them (2023: 434-5). And she says that these reasons are often weighty compared to other reasons—it might, for example, be worth taking a bullet for the last Stradivarius (2023: 429).

We find this general account, as we have said, inspiring. But a drawback of it is that these claims about irreplaceable value seem to us only motivated by contemplating the very phenomenon that is Bradford's (and our) target.

Our account, by contrast, explains the phenomenon via independently motivated claims—that is, via claims that can be motivated on grounds besides their ability to explain the phenomenon under discussion. Our claims about diversity are motivated simply by reflection on the value of lives and the value of worlds. Quite apart from our judgments about Hokusai prints, more diverse lives and more diverse worlds seem better to us. And the claims about uncertainty are derived from the probability calculus and widespread assumptions about rational choice under risk. We take these facts to be significant explanatory advantages of our account. Generally, when one view explains the phenomena with independently motivated claims, and another view does not, that is to the credit of the first view. How to label this advantage is controversial—perhaps it makes our view more conservative, or parsimonious, or simpler, than Bradford's. But, labels aside, this seems like a consideration in favor of our view.

We can illustrate the point further by looking at connections, on Bradford's view, between irreplaceable value and reasons. Start with the fact that a higher degree of something's irreplaceable value yields stronger reasons to preserve it. It is typically thought that our reasons to prevent the loss of a greater *amount* of value are stronger than our reasons to prevent the loss of a smaller amount of value. But one cannot use this thought to explain the connection between *degree* of value and strength of reasons. Instead, a new such connection must be postulated.⁸ Or consider the claim that degree of value generates

⁸ Another relevant connection which must be postulated afresh concerns time. Do we have reason, as we seem to, to preserve objects with irreplaceable value *for longer* if we can (e.g. if we had a choice *now*,

reasons to preserve a thing, rather than make more of them. Bradford suggests that this arises from the fact that it is impossible to make more things with irreplaceable value (2023: 435). But even so, it is possible to increase the degree of irreplaceable value in the world. If an artist has made some distinctive artworks, one can make their artworks irreplaceable by killing them, and thus increasing the total degree of irreplaceable value in existence. But one clearly doesn't have reason to kill the artist, even though this would increase the degree of irreplaceable value in the world. So we think that Bradford must make a further postulate here: that irreplaceable value gives rise to only a special kind of reason—reasons to protect rather than multiply things.

In fact, in some cases, Bradford's restriction to reasons to preserve the entities may be too restrictive.⁹ Suppose it is 1980 and we are faced with a choice between whether to allocate resources to Andrei Tarkovsky (who had a famously small oeuvre) or to Jean-Luc Godard (who was prolific). Suppose also that these resources will allow the making of a film, and there are no other obstacles to its creation. There is a clear judgment that, if the quality of the two films would be the same, we should allocate the money to Tarkovsky. Our view can explain this judgment, on the supposition that Tarkovsky's film will be less similar in value to existing valuable entities. But it is unclear that Bradford's theory can deliver this prediction. It is true that, since we know that both filmmakers will die, we could have known in 1980 that at a later time (e.g., 2025), a world in which we devote more resources to Tarkovsky's oeuvre will have a greater degree of irreplaceable value. But Bradford does not think that degree of irreplaceable value generates reasons for bringing an object into existence, so for her this fact about the future world does not obviously give us reasons to give the money to Tarkovsky (or even to prefer the world in which he makes an extra film).¹⁰

that we will not have again, between (i) a world where an original Hokusai exists for 100 more years and (ii) one in which it exists for 20, but other replaceable value of the same amount replaces it for the remaining 80 years)? It's standardly held that the world is better if it has more value at more times. We can appeal to this fact to explain the above contrast. But Bradford must postulate it as a further primitive feature of reasons generated by degree of irreplaceable value.

⁹ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting the point in this paragraph.

¹⁰ This claim would follow directly if the value of creative activity is determined exclusively by the values of the objects produced. But Bradford herself has a more nuanced view about the reasons for creating art. Most strikingly, she writes that reasons for creating art "are more plausibly reasons to engage in creative activity, which is intrinsically valuable, in the quantitative sense. Just as qualitative uniqueness can be a byproduct of creative activity, unreinstantiable uniqueness and irreplaceable value can also be byproducts of creative activity. The fact that some artworks are irreplaceably valuable is not what explains why we have reason to create art. That is explained by the aggregative intrinsic value of art or creative activity" (2023: 435). Given this view, Bradford may have other resources to produce the desired judgment in favor of Tarkovsky over Godard in our example (by appeal to the intrinsic value of the relevant creative activity). But she could not explain the contrast by appeal to features of the objects thereby produced.

Finally, Bradford suggests that irreplaceable value can give rise to very weighty reasons—one might sacrifice one’s life, and so an enormous amount of value, to prevent the destruction of the last of something with a very high degree of irreplaceable value. As she acknowledges, this kind of judgment ultimately requires “a complete trade-off schedule of the relevant strengths of reasons [that arise] from the different dimensions of value” (2023: 438 n. 24). The exact structure of this trade-off schedule also seems hard to motivate except by considering the phenomenon under discussion. In contrast, our view invokes only the notion of amount of value, and so requires no such novel trade-off schedule. For us, questions about what one should do when one can pay to avert the destruction of a Hokusai print reduce to much more familiar questions about how to weigh different amounts of value, perhaps in combination with facts about uncertainty.

We do not see this as fatal for Bradford’s notion of irreplaceable value. Bradford has shown us that it is possible to formulate a coherent notion of irreplaceable value. Instead, our point is that when constructing any such notion one has to say a lot about how it works. Claims of this kind seem difficult to motivate independently of the phenomenon one is trying to explain. Our view, by contrast, rests on independently motivated claims about the value of diversity, about amounts of value, and about choice under uncertainty. We take this to be the chief explanatory advantage of our view over Bradford’s.¹¹

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¹¹ This paper is the product of serendipity. After Gwen Bradford visited Robbie Kubala’s UT Austin seminar in Fall 2023, Harvey Lederman approached Kubala with an idea for a response to Bradford’s work based on uncertainty, and together they produced a rough draft. In February 2024, Lederman happened to describe the idea to Adam Lovett over Sri Lankan food in Melbourne. Lovett suggested a different approach based on the value of diversity. The authors then worked jointly to produce the current paper, which involved significant elaboration of both sets of ideas. Thanks to Gwen Bradford for her generous feedback, as well as to two anonymous referees for comments that substantially improved the paper. Harvey Lederman would also like to thank Chiara Damiolini for helpful conversations.

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