

Book Review

The Value of Humanity

By L. Nandi Theunissen.

A Review By

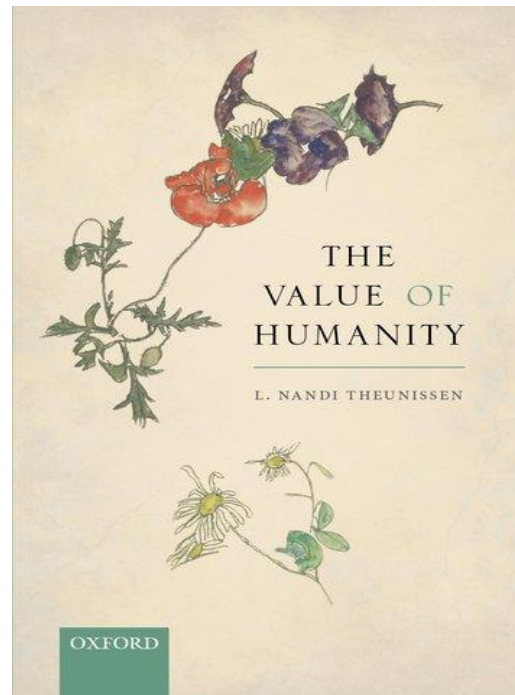
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The present book from L. Nandi Theunissen is to provide us with a new and much interesting conceptualization of the value of humanity in a relational framework. The new framework is to lessen the plausibility of the older one which is from an absolute conceptualization of the value of humanity, and from the greatly renowned philosopher Immanuel Kant.

For Theunissen to tackle with the notion of value conceptualized as something valuable in itself independently of a human being who is making his/her judgment, she argues that for one to consider something good it must always be *good for* that one (*p. 2*; her italics). So, it means that one should be in a valuable relationship with that thing because it is with its practical relevance (*p. 8*). This is also the case with the value of humanity because one should value it especially in a relationship with making one's own life good. Of course, this is definitely against Kant's view of humanity as something absolutely valuable in itself (*pp. 1-2*). Moreover, Theunissen disagrees with formation of nomenclature of human dignity and human right as the global consequence of Kantian notion of absolute value of humanity because it is with inadequate understanding of the nature of that value (*pp. 4-5*). To some extent, therefore, the main thesis of this present book is to urge us to take seriously a new understanding of the value of humanity.

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In chapter 2 and 3, Theunissen takes up a careful re-examination into Kantian belief in the superlative value of humanity. It is for her to cast doubts on that belief. Roughly, Kantian belief about the value of humanity is based on the nature of human agents who can make a judgment of value. For things to be valued, they are always dependent on human's capacity of reasoning. This is considered in Kantian belief that the source of normativity and its process must be relevant with human good will. However, when it comes to term with this very nature of humanity itself, the situation seems to differ. The good will is not good for anything else because it is absolutely good. The good will with Kantian notion of 'the-end-it-itself' is not to lead us to make a moral judgment depending on others. In sum, arguing from this very position of considering humanity, the value of humanity cannot be relational at all (pp. 34-41). This is the main tenet from Kantian consideration of human value that Theunissen wants to reject. She explains that the value of humanity must be understood with a conceptualization of benefit. The value must be "of benefit to something or someone" (p. 55). She gives us a number of possibilities of when and why it could be the case that the value of humanity is at least good for the one who is living a life. The value is relationally, or sometimes reflexively, good for the valuer. So, the limited conception of Kantian non-relational nature of the good should be rejected (pp. 57-86).

Moreover, for us to accept that the value of humanity is relational does not mean that it either is an instrumental value. From an example given in her book, a work of art and its admirer can be explained in a relation of being benefited to each other (p.73). Again, the value can be explained in the relational scheme. It can be considered in the same vein with a previous statement from Joseph Raz's "Relational goods should not be confused with instrumental goods...Relational goods can be intrinsically valuable" (1999: 255). In other words, the value of humanity can still be intrinsically good for the one who is living a life. It is not necessary for it to be considered as a means to another end.

From her analysis, Theunissen points out that her proposal of a value theory is about "*relational value theory, realism, and pluralism*" (pp. 117-118; her italics). The value properties are objective even though it is relational. When it is good for the one that is living a life, it should be considered good either for any human beings who would hold it dear (pp. 118-121). However, Theunissen's argument of realism and pluralism is framed in a conceptualization of practical relevance when 'being good for' is interpreted. This is somewhat different from Katja Maria Vogt (2007)'s examinations of conception of human motivation since ancient philosophy.

In my opinion, Theunissen's view is remarkable in its line of argumentation from a metaphysical stance of value as property. It can be considered from the very maxim found along the way in this entire book; the value of humanity is good for that one who is living a life. This is to emphasize that that one is the very bearer of that value in the same way with any other values which are good for that one. When an individual is making a judgment of value, he or she must be in a relation to himself or herself. So, the value is relational.

Theunissen's present book's lines of argumentation are concise, clear, and systematic. It gets a good start with the statement against Kantian system of non-relational value conception that is embedded in a number of contemporary value systems. This book can be considered one of the 'must-read' items in contemporary metaethics, if I am to sum up.

References

- Raz, Joseph. (1999). **Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Vogt, Katja Maria. (2007). **Desiring the Good: Ancient Proposals and Contemporary Theory**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.