

# *Still Not ‘Good’ in Terms of ‘Better’*<sup>\*</sup>

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ABSTRACT. Erik Carlson puts forward a new way of defining monadic value predicates, such as ‘good’, in terms of dyadic value relations, such as ‘better’. Earlier definitions of this kind have the unwanted feature that they rule out some reasonable axiologies by conceptual fiat. Carlson claims that his definitions do not have this drawback. In this paper, I argue that they do.

There are two main approaches to defining monadic value predicates, such as ‘good’, in terms of dyadic value relations, such as ‘better’. One is the negation approach put forward by Albert P. Brogan. On this approach, a monadic value condition of a state of affairs is defined in terms of dyadic value relations between the state and its negation. For example, Brogan defines ‘intrinsically good’ as

- (1)  $p$  is intrinsically good =<sub>df</sub>  $p$  is intrinsically better than the negation of  $p$ .<sup>1</sup>

This approach, however, rules out some reasonable axiologies. Roderick M. Chisholm and Ernest Sosa’s example is a version of hedonism where the state of affairs *there being no unhappy egrets* is not intrinsically good but still intrinsically better than its negation.<sup>2</sup> (1) rules out this version of hedonism, which, being a fairly reasonable axiology, should not be ruled out by conceptual fiat.

The other approach is the indifference-point approach, favoured by Chisholm and Sosa. It has two steps. First, one defines an indifference

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<sup>1</sup> Brogan (1919, p. 98). While I shall only discuss intrinsic value, the discussion should also apply to final value, changing what needs to be changed.

<sup>2</sup> Chisholm and Sosa (1966, p. 245).

point in terms of dyadic value relations, or at least not in terms of monadic value predicates.<sup>3</sup> Second, one defines a monadic value condition of a thing in terms of dyadic value relations between the thing and the indifference point. For example, Chisholm and Sosa define an indifference point as follows:

- (2)  $p$  is intrinsically indifferent =<sub>df</sub>  $p$  is not intrinsically better than the negation of  $p$  and the negation of  $p$  is not intrinsically better than  $p$ .<sup>4</sup>

Then, given (2), they define ‘intrinsically good’ as

- (3)  $p$  is intrinsically good =<sub>df</sub> there is a  $q$  such that  $q$  is intrinsically indifferent and  $p$  is intrinsically better than  $q$ .<sup>5</sup>

Chisholm and Sosa’s definitions are not open to their counter-example to Brogan’s negation approach. But, as I have argued elsewhere, there are other examples where this and other versions of the indifference-point approach rule out reasonable axiologies.<sup>6</sup> Thus the indifference-point approach seems to have the same drawback as the negation approach. p. 855

Erik Carlson, however, puts forward a new take on the indifference-point approach. He claims that his definitions of ‘good’, ‘bad’, and ‘neutral’ in terms of ‘better’ do not rule out my examples of reasonable axiologies.<sup>7</sup> In this paper, I shall argue that Carlson’s definitions do, nevertheless, rule out some other reasonable axiologies.

Carlson adopts the standard definitions of ‘better’, ‘equally good’, and ‘incomparable’ in terms of ‘at least as good’. Hence  $p$  is intrinsically better than  $q$  if and only if  $p$  is intrinsically at least as good as  $q$  and  $q$  is not intrinsically at least as good as  $p$ . And  $p$  is intrinsically equally good as  $q$  if and only if  $p$  is intrinsically at least as good as  $q$  and  $q$  is intrinsically at least as good as  $p$ . Finally,  $p$  is incomparable in intrinsic value to  $q$  if and only if  $p$  is not intrinsically at least as good as  $q$  and  $q$  is not intrinsically at

<sup>3</sup> Here, I follow Danielsson’s (1968, p. 37) usage of ‘indifference point’.

<sup>4</sup> Chisholm and Sosa (1966, p. 245).

<sup>5</sup> Chisholm and Sosa (1966, p. 246).

<sup>6</sup> See Gustafsson (2014, pp. 466–468) for details.

<sup>7</sup> Carlson (2016, pp. 215–218). Strictly, his definitions are in terms of ‘at least as good’ rather than ‘better’. See footnote 9.

least as good as  $p$ .<sup>8</sup> To state Carlson's definitions of the standard monadic value predicates, we need the concept of being universally null, which he defines as

- (4)  $p$  is universally null =<sub>df</sub> for all value bearers  $q$  such that  $p$ -and- $q$  is a value bearer,  $p$ -and- $q$  is intrinsically equally good as  $q$ .<sup>9</sup>

Following Carlson, we use 'value bearer' as an abbreviation of 'bearer of intrinsic value'.<sup>10</sup>

Taking the universally null value bearers as an indifference point, Carlson puts forward the following definitions:

- (5)  $p$  is intrinsically good =<sub>df</sub>  $p$  is intrinsically better than some universally null value bearer.
- (6)  $p$  is intrinsically bad =<sub>df</sub> some universally null value bearer is intrinsically better than  $p$ .
- (7)  $p$  is intrinsically neutral =<sub>df</sub>  $p$  is intrinsically equally good as some universally null value bearer.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the three standard categories above, Carlson defines a fourth category of value bearers as follows:

- (8)  $p$  is intrinsically indeterminate =<sub>df</sub>  $p$  is a value bearer and incomparable in intrinsic value to some universally null value bearer.<sup>12</sup>

This terminology seems a tad untoward. That  $p$  is intrinsically indeterminate suggests that it is indeterminate whether  $p$  is intrinsically good,

<sup>8</sup> While these definitions are standard, they are not unchallenged. See, for example, Danielsson (1998, pp. 18–19). Moreover, Rabinowicz (2008, p. 43) gives up these definitions because they conflict with his framework for value relations. See, however, Gustafsson (2013, p. 487n31) for a reply.

<sup>9</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 215). Given that we do not want to rule out incomparability, we cannot translate this definition of universally null into a definition in terms of 'better' rather than 'equally good' or 'at least as good'. That is, we cannot define that  $p$  is intrinsically equally good as  $q$  as that  $p$  is not intrinsically better than  $q$  and  $q$  is not intrinsically better than  $p$ , without ruling out value incomparability.

<sup>10</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 221n15).

<sup>11</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 216).

<sup>12</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 217). As I point out in Gustafsson (2014, p. 468), one might need to accept the possibility that some value bearer 'lacks a monadic evaluative status' in order to make sense of my counter-examples to the indifference-point approach.

indeterminate whether  $p$  is intrinsically bad, or indeterminate whether  $p$  is intrinsically neutral. But  $p$ 's being intrinsically indeterminate is supposed to be a fourth possibility that rules out that  $p$  is intrinsically good, bad, or neutral.<sup>13</sup> Instead, I suggest that  $p$  is intrinsically *blank in value* if and only if  $p$  is a value bearer and  $p$  is intrinsically not good, not bad, and not neutral.<sup>14</sup>

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First of all, note that the plausibility of (5)–(8) requires that there are no reasonable axiologies where

- (9) some state of affairs is intrinsically good, bad, neutral, or blank in value, but no universally null state of affairs is a value bearer.

A problem with (9) given (5)–(8) is simply that no states of affairs would be intrinsically good, bad, neutral, or blank in value if there were no universally null value bearers. To see whether there are any reasonable axiologies where (9) holds, we shall first consider whether there are any reasonable axiologies where no non-tautological states of affairs are universally null and then whether tautologies could reasonably fail to be value bearers.

Carlson presents, but does not endorse, the following argument that, for many reasonable axiologies, no non-tautological states of affairs could plausibly be universally null.<sup>15</sup> Consider a version of hedonism where a state of affairs is intrinsically good if and only if it entails more happiness than unhappiness and a state of affairs is intrinsically neutral if and only if it entails the same amount of happiness as unhappiness. Let  $p$  be a non-tautological candidate for a universally null state of affairs. And let  $q$  be the state of affairs *Smith's being happy to degree  $n$  if  $p$* . Then, for at least

<sup>13</sup> Along with these definitions, Carlson (2016, p. 216) assumes three axioms. Given his definitions and axioms, Carlson (2016, p. 220) derives that, for any value bearer  $p$ , exactly one of the following is true:  $p$  is intrinsically good;  $p$  is intrinsically bad;  $p$  is intrinsically neutral; and  $p$  is intrinsically indeterminate. One of the axioms says that 'at least as good' is transitive, which is contested. An awkward feature of Carlson's approach is that this somewhat controversial axiom is needed to derive the much less controversial claim that, for any  $p$ , at most one of the following is true:  $p$  is intrinsically good;  $p$  is intrinsically bad; and  $p$  is intrinsically neutral.

<sup>14</sup> Espinoza (2009, p. 35) suggests a definition similar to (8) and calls states of affairs of this value category 'void'. This terminology, however, has the unwanted connotation that those states are not value bearers.

<sup>15</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 218) presents the argument as a possible objection to his proposal and only claims that the argument at most shows that any universally null state of affairs must be a tautology on this version of hedonism.

some degree of happiness  $n$ ,  $p$ -and- $q$  is not intrinsically equally good as  $q$ . Hence  $p$  is not universally null. According to the argument, the above holds for all non-tautological candidates for a universally null state of affairs on this version of hedonism.

Yet this argument does not work. The problem is that  $p$  need not be logically compatible with  $q$ , and, in that case, we can plausibly deny that  $p$ -and- $q$  is a value bearer. Let  $p$  be the non-tautological state of affairs *there being no happiness and no unhappiness*. Then, for all  $q$  such that  $p$ -and- $q$  is not contradictory,  $q$  is intrinsically equally good as  $p$ -and- $q$ , since neither  $q$  nor  $p$ -and- $q$  entails that there is any happiness or unhappiness. And, given that contradictory states of affairs are not value bearers, we have that  $p$  is universally null on this version of hedonism.

But a variation of the argument works for some other fairly reasonable axiologies. Consider, for example, an axiology where pain is intrinsically bad, the absence of pain is intrinsically good, pleasure is intrinsically good, but any combination of pain and pleasure is intrinsically bad because of the asymmetry between pain and pleasure.<sup>16</sup> On this axiology, a non-contradictory state of affairs is intrinsically good if (i) it entails that there is no pain or (ii) it entails that there is pleasure and it does not entail that there is pain; a non-contradictory state of affairs is intrinsically bad if it entails that there is pain; and a non-tautological state of affairs is intrinsically neutral if it neither entails that there is no pain nor entails that there is pain or pleasure. Let  $p$  be a non-tautological, non-contradictory candidate for a universally null state of affairs. And let  $q$  be the state of affairs *there being pain if  $p$* . If  $p$  and  $q$  are logically incompatible,  $p$  entails that there is no pain, which makes  $p$  intrinsically good on this axiology. Then let  $r$  be the state of affairs *there being stones*. (Or, if  $p$  entails that there are no stones, let  $r$  be the state of affairs *there being no stones*.) Since  $r$  is intrinsically neutral and  $p$ -and- $r$  is intrinsically good, we have that  $p$ -and- $r$  is intrinsically better than  $r$ , which yields that  $p$  is not universally null. Thus, if  $p$  and  $q$  are logically incompatible,  $p$  is not universally null. On the other hand, if  $p$  and  $q$  are logically compatible,  $p$ -and- $q$  entails that there is pain while  $q$  neither entails that there is no pain nor entails that there is pain or pleasure.<sup>17</sup> So, on this axiology,  $p$ -and- $q$  is

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<sup>16</sup> See Benatar (2006) for a similar view.

<sup>17</sup> One might worry that this does not hold in case  $q$  logically entails  $p$ . To see that  $q$  cannot logically entail  $p$ , let  $r$  be the state of affairs *there being pain*. Then  $q$  is logically equivalent to  $p \supset r$ . If  $q$  logically entailed  $p$ , then  $(p \supset r) \supset p$  would be a tautology. But, if so, either the antecedent of  $(p \supset r) \supset p$  is false—that is,  $p \& \neg r$  is true—or both

intrinsically bad and  $q$  is intrinsically neutral, which makes  $p$ -and- $q$  intrinsically worse than  $q$ . Thus, if  $p$  and  $q$  are logically compatible,  $p$  is not universally null. We have then, regardless of whether  $p$  and  $q$  are logically compatible, that  $p$  is not universally null. Hence, for some reasonable axiologies with some intrinsically good, bad, or neutral state of affairs, no non-tautological, non-contradictory state of affairs is universally null.

Since we may plausibly deny that contradictory states of affairs are value bearers, this means that, unless tautologies are both universally null and value bearers, some reasonable axiologies satisfy (9). It seems clear, however, that tautologies are at least universally null. If we let  $p$  be a tautology, then, for any state of affairs  $q$  such that  $q$  is a value bearer, we have that  $p$ -and- $q$  is intrinsically equally good as  $q$ —at least given that all logically equivalent value bearers are intrinsically equally good.<sup>18</sup> Hence it seems that, for all reasonable axiologies, tautologies are universally null. So whether (9) holds in any reasonable axiology depends on whether one can reasonably deny that tautologies are value bearers.

Before we go on, however, note as well that the plausibility of (5)–(8) also requires that there are no reasonable axiologies where

- (10) some tautologies are universally null, value bearers, but not intrinsically neutral.

A problem with (10) given (5)–(8) is that some value bearers would not be intrinsically equally good as themselves, since, if some tautologies were intrinsically equally good as themselves, they would be intrinsically equally good as some universally null value bearer and hence both intrinsically neutral and not intrinsically neutral. So, if one can reasonably deny that tautologies are intrinsically neutral, there will be some

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its antecedent and its consequent are true—that is,  $(p \supset r) \& p$  is true. In either case,  $p$  would be true. So, if  $(p \supset r) \supset p$  were a tautology,  $p$  would also be a tautology. But this contradicts that  $p$  is a non-tautological candidate for a universally null state of affairs. I thank Karl Pettersson for this point.

<sup>18</sup> Although this assumption is plausible, it can be questioned given another standard assumption in the logic of value. Halldén (1957, p. 28) assumes that  $p$  is equally good as  $q$  if and only if  $p$ -and-not- $q$  is equally good as  $q$ -and-not- $p$ . Moreover, von Wright (1963, p. 57) expresses a similar view. Given Halldén's assumption, however, a state of affairs can only be equally good as a logically equivalent state of affairs if a contradictory state of affairs is equally good as some contradictory state. And then a state of affairs cannot be equally good as itself unless a contradictory state of affairs is a bearer of value, which seems a bit odd.

reasonable axiologies where either (9) or (10) holds; and, if so, Carlson's definitions rule out some reasonable axiologies.

Carlson provides a general argument that universally null states of affairs are intrinsically neutral. From the definition of universally null, he argues that

a universally null state does not affect the intrinsic value of any whole of which it is a part. To adopt Chisholm's and Sosa's parlance, such a state rates any possible universe a zero.<sup>19</sup>

The idea is that a state of affairs  $p$  does not affect the intrinsic value of the conjunction  $p$ -and- $q$  if this conjunction without  $p$  (that is,  $q$ ) is intrinsically equally good as the conjunction with  $p$  (that is,  $p$ -and- $q$ ). While this reasoning might be convincing for non-tautological states of affairs, it seems to me that whether a tautology is universally null is independent of whether it is intrinsically neutral. Consider Carlson's own argument that tautologies must be universally null. He offers the following *reductio*:

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If a tautology  $p$  is not universally null, there is a value bearer  $q$ , such that  $p$  &  $q$  differs in intrinsic value from  $q$ . Since  $p$  &  $q$  and  $q$  are logically equivalent, it follows that two logically equivalent states of affairs differ in intrinsic value. This is implausible, since logically equivalent states entail exactly the same amount of whatever property or properties intrinsic value supervenes on.<sup>20</sup>

Carlson's explanation of why, for any tautology  $p$  and state of affairs  $q$  such that  $q$  is a value bearer,  $p$ -and- $q$  must be intrinsically equally good as  $q$  does not assume anything about the intrinsic value of  $p$ . His explanation merely turns on the fact that  $p$ -and- $q$  and  $q$  are logically equivalent, which is consistent with that  $p$  is intrinsically good, bad, blank in value, or not even a value bearer. And, since this explanation applies for all states of affairs  $q$  that are value bearers, we have an explanation of why tautologies are universally null that neither entails nor rules out that they are intrinsically neutral. Thus whether a state of affairs is universally null seems orthogonal to whether it is intrinsically neutral—or, at least, it seems so

<sup>19</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 216). Compare Chisholm and Sosa (1966, p. 245).

<sup>20</sup> Carlson (2016, pp. 218–219).

for tautological states of affairs.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to his above points, however, Carlson provides a case in three steps that universally null states of affairs must be intrinsically neutral. First, he argues that, if a universally null state of affairs is a value bearer, it is not intrinsically good (nor intrinsically bad). Second, he argues that, if a universally null state of affairs is a value bearer, it is not intrinsically blank in value. And third, he argues that universally null states of affairs are value bearers. Hence the only remaining possibility is that universally null states of affairs are intrinsically neutral.

We shall consider these three arguments in turn. The first—that is, the argument that universally null states of affairs are not intrinsically good if they are value bearers—runs as follows:

A state  $p$  cannot be intrinsically *good* unless there is some value bearer  $q$ , such that  $p \ \& \ q$  is intrinsically better than  $q$ . If there are organic unities, it may be false that an intrinsically good state must

<sup>21</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 221n13) also mentions Danielsson's argument that a tautology must be intrinsically neutral. Danielsson (1968, p. 38) argues that,

besides being intuitively very peculiar, a moral system asserting that the tautology is intrinsically good, also has other strange features. For if we assume, as Åqvist does, the validity of 'Good  $p \rightarrow \neg(\text{Good}\neg p)$ ', then such a moral system will assert either that the tautology is minimally good in the sense that nothing is worse than the tautology and still good, or that, if there be some  $p$  'between' the tautology and the indifference point, this  $p$  is either incomparable with its negation or such that both  $p$  and  $\neg p$  are worse than the tautology.

My interpretation is that Danielsson makes three implicit assumptions: first, the principle of disjunctive interpolation, that is, the principle that the value of  $p$ -or- $q$  is intermediate in value between  $p$  and  $q$  if  $p$  and  $q$  are comparable—see Hansson (1968, p. 438) and Hansson (1997, p. 437)—second, the principle that any good state of affairs is better than any state of affairs that is not good—see Chisholm and Sosa (1966, p. 248)—and, third, that the tautology is not minimally good, that is, that it is not both good and, for every  $p$  such that  $p$  is good, the tautology is worse than, equally good as, or incomparable to  $p$ . Oldfield (1977, pp. 245–246) proposes an alleged counter-example to the first assumption, and Carlson (1997, pp. 103–104) endorses Oldfield's objection. The second assumption is implausible if we allow, following Carlson (2016, pp. 216–217) and Zimmerman (1983), that some states of affairs are either blank in value or not value bearers. And then we might have that the tautology is better than some  $p$  such that  $p$  is good and  $p$  is incomparable with not- $p$ . The third assumption is also questionable. The tautology's being minimally good could perhaps be explained by the tautology's being minimal in other respects; it is, for example, the logically weakest of all states of affairs. Finally, the argument does not work against the most plausible alternative to a tautology's being neutral, namely, that the tautology is not good, not bad, and not neutral.



rate *any* possible universe a plus. But it cannot plausibly be denied that an intrinsically good state must rate *some* possible universe a plus. An axiology according to which the addition of an intrinsically good state to the world is *never* an improvement would be incomprehensible.<sup>22</sup>

If this argument is cogent, there is, changing what needs to be changed, an equally cogent argument that universally null states of affairs are not intrinsically bad.

Nevertheless, I shall argue that the argument is unconvincing for tautological states of affairs.<sup>23</sup> Note, however, that I do not deny that it might, for independent reasons, seem unreasonable that a tautology could be intrinsically either good or bad. For my overall argument, it suffices that it is reasonable that tautologies are either intrinsically blank in value or not value bearers. Hence I only need to rebut Carlson's second and third arguments. The point of also rebutting the first argument is mainly to shed some light on what is wrong with the structurally similar second argument.

The problem with the first argument relates to the fact that adding a tautology to some other state of affairs (that is, forming a conjunction of the states) differs in important respects from adding a non-tautological state of affairs. First, remember that Carlson needs to assume that logically equivalent value bearers are intrinsically equally good. Without this assumption, there is no reason to think that tautologies are universally null, which is crucial for his argument, since, as we have seen, in some reasonable axiologies no non-tautological state of affairs is universally null. Therefore, he has to accept that the intrinsic value of a state of affairs supervenes on the states of affairs that state entails.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, this means that, when a non-tautological states of affairs is added to some logically weaker or independent value bearer, the supervenience base is expanded. And then, barring holistic effects due to organic unities, the intrinsic value increases if the states in the expansion entail whatever

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<sup>22</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 219).

<sup>23</sup> The final remark in Carlson's first argument does not seem relevant for tautologies. Tautologies cannot sensibly be added to a world, because tautologies cannot fail to obtain.

<sup>24</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 219). This fits with various versions of Harman's equation, that is, the idea that the intrinsic value of a state of affairs is equal to the sum total of the intrinsic value of the basic states of affairs the state entails. See Harman (1967, pp. 799–780), Carlson (1997, p. 101), and Danielsson (1998, p. 16).

property or properties intrinsic goodness supervenes on. On the other hand, when one adds a tautology  $p$  to some state of affairs  $q$  that is a value bearer, there is no change in the supervenience base, and thereby there is no change in intrinsic value. This does not rule out that  $p$  is intrinsically good, because, even if  $p$  were intrinsically good, its intrinsic value would already have been accounted for in the intrinsic value of  $q$ .<sup>25</sup> This is because the supervenience base for the intrinsic value of  $p$  is already part of the supervenience base for the intrinsic value of  $q$ .<sup>26</sup> For any tautology  $p$ , we have that there being no state of affairs  $q$  such that  $p$ -and- $q$  is intrinsically better than  $q$  is not a cogent argument that  $p$  is not intrinsically good, since it seems that the former would be the case regardless of whether the latter were the case. Hence, while adding a tautology to some state of affairs never results in an improvement, this does not rule out that the tautology is intrinsically good or, changing what needs to be changed, that it is intrinsically bad.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> It might help to consider a non-tautological example. Let  $p$  be the state of affairs *Jones's experiencing 1 unit of pleasure*, and let  $q$  be the state of affairs *Jones's experiencing 1 unit of pleasure and Smith's experiencing 1 unit of pleasure*. Then, assuming hedonism,  $p$  is intrinsically good, but  $p$ -and- $q$  is intrinsically equally good as  $q$ . Even though  $p$  is intrinsically good, the addition of  $p$  to  $q$  yields no increase in intrinsic value, because it yields no change in the supervenience base. The supervenience base does not change, because the supervenience base for the intrinsic value of  $p$  is already part of the supervenience base for the intrinsic value of  $q$ . When  $p$  is a tautology, it is like this for any state of affairs  $q$  that is a value bearer.

<sup>26</sup> We have here that, if a value bearer  $p$  is entailed by a value bearer  $q$ , the intrinsic value of  $p$  is accounted for in the intrinsic value of  $q$  in the sense that the supervenience base for the intrinsic value of  $p$  is part of the supervenience base of the intrinsic value of  $q$ . One might object that this need not hold given Chisholm's (1981, p. 100) account of intrinsic value, where a state of affairs  $p$  is intrinsically better than a state of affairs  $q$  if and only if  $p$  and  $q$  are necessarily such that, for any person  $x$ , the contemplation of just  $p$  and  $q$  as such by  $x$  requires that  $x$  prefers  $p$  to  $q$ . And the contemplation of a state of affairs *as such* is, in Chisholm's words, 'the contemplation just of *that* state of affairs—as distinguished, for example, from the contemplation of some wider state of affairs which one may think that the given state of affairs brings along with it.' As mentioned above, however, a premise in Carlson's (2016, p. 219) argument that tautologies are universally null is that it cannot be that 'two logically equivalent states of affairs differ in intrinsic value.' So, if  $p$  is a tautology and  $q$  is a state of affairs that is a value bearer,  $q$  must be intrinsically equally good as  $p$ -and- $q$  (which, by the way, also Chisholm (1975, p. 299) accepts). Hence either Chisholm's proposal rules out Carlson's assumption or it cannot necessarily be such that, for any person  $x$ , the contemplation of just  $p$  and  $p$ -and- $q$  as such requires that  $x$  prefers one of  $p$  and  $p$ -and- $q$  to the other when  $p$  is a tautology.

<sup>27</sup> One might object that, if some tautology  $p$  is intrinsically good and, for some non-tautological state of affairs  $q$ , the conjunction  $p$ -and- $q$  is intrinsically equally good as  $q$ ,

The second argument—that is, the argument that universally null states of affairs are not intrinsically blank in value (or, in Carlson’s parlance, intrinsically indeterminate)—runs as follows:

Nor is it plausible to claim that a universally null state may be intrinsically indeterminate. If  $p$  is intrinsically indeterminate, there must be some value bearer  $q$ , such that  $p \& q$  is incomparable in intrinsic value to  $q$ . The only remaining possibility is that any universally null value bearer is intrinsically neutral.<sup>28</sup>

But this argument suffers from the same problem as the first. Namely, for any tautology  $p$ , the lack of a value bearer  $q$  such that  $p$ -and- $q$  is incomparable in intrinsic value to  $q$  need not be due to  $p$ ’s not being intrinsically blank in value. As before, the reason might simply be that the supervenience base for the intrinsic value of  $p$ -and- $q$  is the same as the supervenience base for the intrinsic value of  $q$ , since  $q$  entails  $p$ . And, if there is no change in the supervenience base when  $p$  is added, there is no change in intrinsic value. This does not rule out that  $p$  is intrinsically blank in value, because, even if  $p$  were intrinsically blank in value, the intrinsic value of  $p$  would already have been accounted for in the intrinsic value of  $q$ , since the supervenience base for the intrinsic value of  $p$  is already part of the supervenience base of the intrinsic value of  $q$ . Hence, for any tautology  $p$ , we have that there being no value bearer  $q$  such that  $p$ -and- $q$

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then  $p$ -and- $q$  is an organic unity. This seems to follow given that (i) a state of affairs is an organic unity if and only if its intrinsic value is not equal to the sum total of the basic intrinsic value of its parts, see Moore (1903, p. 28) and Zimmerman (2001, pp. 168–169), and (ii) a state of affairs  $r$  is a part of a state of affairs  $s$  if and only if  $r$  is different from  $s$  and  $r$  is a conjunct or conjunction of conjuncts of  $s$ , see Carlson (1995, p. 49). While several reasonable axiologies entail that there are organic unities, it is perhaps not clear that it is reasonable to regard tautologies as necessarily being components of organic unities in this manner. One response to this objection could be to drop requirement (ii) and accept that the parts of a state of affairs are the states of affairs it entails. But, for various reasons, one might not want to make this move. My main response to this objection is instead to note that, even if it shows that there is no reasonable axiology where tautologies are either intrinsically good or intrinsically bad, it does not affect my overall argument. The objection is an independent argument that tautologies are not intrinsically good, which does not show that Carlson’s argument is cogent. More to the point, the objection does not show that there is no reasonable axiology where tautologies are either intrinsically blank in value or not value bearers. As mentioned above, it suffices for my argument that it is reasonable to hold that tautologies are either intrinsically blank in value or not value bearers.

<sup>28</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 219).

is incomparable in intrinsic value to  $q$  is not a cogent argument that  $p$  is not intrinsically blank in value.

The third argument—that is, the argument that universally null states of affairs are value bearers—considers two possible reasons for denying that an entity is a value bearer and argues that none of them applies for these states. Let us home in on the second of those reasons. In Carlson's words,

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The second reason for denying an entity status as value bearer is that it is in some sense insufficiently specific, making it unclear exactly what its intrinsic value would be, if it were to have such value. This reason, too, fails to apply in the present case, since it is clear that any universally null state is intrinsically neutral, on the assumption that it is a value bearer.<sup>29</sup>

But this last claim is based on the first two arguments, neither of which convinces. Even if tautologies could not reasonably be intrinsically good or bad, it still seems reasonable to hold that it is unclear whether tautologies would be intrinsically neutral or whether they would be intrinsically blank in value if they were value bearers.

While I cannot think of any positive reason why tautologies would be intrinsically good or bad, there are some positive reasons why one might reasonably claim either that tautologies are blank in value or that they are not value bearers. First, one might hold that in order for a state of affairs to be intrinsically good, bad, or neutral there must be some possible world where the state fails to obtain. If a state of affairs cannot fail to obtain, it might be unclear how it could, in Chisholm and Sosa's terms, rate the universe a plus, a minus, or even a zero.<sup>30</sup> And, unlike other states of affairs, tautologies cannot fail to obtain. So it seems that one might reasonably hold either that tautologies are not value bearers or at least that they are intrinsically blank in value if they are value bearers.

Second, one might hold, following Carlson, that any state of affairs which is a disjunction of an intrinsically good state of affairs and an intrinsically bad state of affairs is too unspecific to be intrinsically good,

<sup>29</sup> Carlson (2016, p. 219).

<sup>30</sup> Chisholm and Sosa (1966, p. 245). This kind of reasoning was perhaps what motivated Chisholm's (1978, p. 125) view that ' $p$  is a bearer of intrinsic value =  $Df$   $p$  is an intrinsic value state and not- $p$  is an intrinsic value state', where an intrinsic value state is, roughly, a state of affairs that can reflect all the good and bad that there is in a possible world. This should yield that contradictory states of affairs cannot be intrinsic value states and thereby that tautologies cannot be bearers of intrinsic value.

bad, or neutral, so it is instead intrinsically blank in value.<sup>31</sup> Given this proposal, we can simplify the earlier example with the axiology where pain is intrinsically bad and the absence of pain is intrinsically good. Let  $p$  be the state of affairs *there being pain*. Then  $p$  is intrinsically bad and not- $p$  is intrinsically good. Which yields that the tautology  $p$ -or-not- $p$  is intrinsically blank in value. Yet, as we noted earlier, tautologies are universally null; so  $p$ -or-not- $p$  is also universally null. But then we have a reasonable axiology where (10) holds.<sup>32</sup>

Given then that it is reasonable to hold that the tautologies are either intrinsically blank in value or not value bearers in combination with one of those reasonable axiologies we discussed above, where at least one state is intrinsically good, bad, neutral or blank in value and no non-tautological state of affairs is universally null, we have that either (9) or (10) holds in some reasonable axiologies. And, since Carlson's definitions rule out each of (9) and (10), they do rule out some reasonable axiologies.

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Carlson (1997, p. 101). Carlson (2011, p. 58) claims that, '[i]f states of affairs can be bearers of value, the disjunction of a good and a bad state might be an example of an object with indeterminate value.'

<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, suppose that one accepts a version of the isolation test where a state of affairs is a value bearer if and only if it can reflect all the good and bad that there is in a possible world, see Chisholm (1978, p. 124). And consider again an axiology where pain is bad and the absence of pain is good and where, if a state of affairs is a value bearer, it is intrinsically bad if it entails that there is pain and intrinsically good if it entails that there is no pain. It seems then that any state of affairs which can reflect all the good and bad there is in a possible world must be either intrinsically good or intrinsically bad, since it either entails that there is pain or entails that there is no pain. There are then some intrinsically good or bad states of affairs, and there must, given Carlson's definitions, be a universally null state of affairs that is a value bearer. But, since this universally null state is a value bearer, it must then be either intrinsically good or intrinsically bad. In either case, we get a contradiction, because this state is also intrinsically neutral as it is intrinsically equally good as a universally null state of affairs, namely, itself.

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