Equality, Clumpiness and Incomparability

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The incomparability of two items is thought to pose a problem for making justified choices and for consequentialist theories that rely on comparing states of the world to judge the goodness of a particular course of action. In response, it has been argued that items thought incomparable by one of the three standard relations, 'better than', 'worse than' and 'equally good', are instead comparable by some fourth relation, such as 'roughly equal' or 'on a par'. Against such accounts, this article argues that values in virtue of which comparisons are made can be 'clumpy' and that in comparisons involving clumpy values, we have no reason to accept 'roughly equal' or 'on a par' as distinct from 'equally good'. The article supports the possibility of incomparability by arguing for an interpretation of incomparability as an instance of incommensurability.

Are Mozart and Michelangelo equally creative? If two items can be compared in terms of some value and neither item is better than the other, it is often assumed that the two items are equally good. In the case of Mozart and Michelangelo, however, even though the two artists can be compared and neither artist is more creative than the other, many people would judge it mistaken to conclude that two artists in such different fields are equally creative. On this view, Mozart and Michelangelo are related by a comparative relation other than 'equally good'.

This view has come to receive a good deal of support. Derek Parfit and James Griffin are among those who argue that two items can be 'roughly equal' in a manner that is distinct from 'equally good'.[1]

[1] See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, 1984, paperback edn. with corrections 1987), p. 431; James Griffin, *Well-Being* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 80–1, 96–8, 104; James Griffin, 'Incommensurability: What's the Problem?', *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*, ed. R. Chang (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 38–9. Parfit, to be clear, refers to the relation in terms of 'rough comparability'. Two other accounts of rough equality can be found respectively in Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford, 1993), p. 87, and George Harris, 'Value Vagueness, Zones of Incomparability, and Tragedy', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (2001). This article analyses Parfit's account and Griffin's account. The analysis applies to Hurka's account. I do not take up Harris's account because he examines comparisons in terms of making choices and relies on an epistemic and psychological conception of vagueness in the context of choice. I take choice to be a distinct problem from comparison. Joseph Raz also argues that two items can be 'roughly equal'. Raz, however, uses the term not as a distinct comparative relation, but rather to describe situations in which the choice between two incommensurable items bears little significance. See Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford, 1986), p. 330.

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Ruth Chang argues for the possibility that two items can be 'on a par'.[2] These accounts share the intuition that because something can be said about the relative merits of Mozart and Michelangelo, the two artists can be compared in terms of creativity, and yet, because their creativity is realized in such different ways, even though neither artist is more creative than the other, it is mistaken to conclude that they are equally creative.

In this article, I challenge such accounts. I defend the thesis that if two items can be compared in virtue of some value, and neither item is better than the other, then the two items are equally good. The view that two items cannot be equally good in a comparison like the one between Mozart and Michelangelo, I argue, rests on an oversight about the nature of the value in virtue of which the comparison is made. Following Chang, let us call the value in virtue of which the comparison is made the 'covering consideration'.[3] I argue that covering considerations can be *clumpy* and that once we recognize the way in which the relation 'equally good' functions in the context of clumpy covering considerations, items that appear to be evaluatively different can be judged to be equally good. Put simply, a clumpy covering consideration sorts items into clumps, and items belonging to the same clump are equally good. Given the fact of clumpiness, I argue that comparative relations such as 'roughly equal' or 'on a par' are not distinct from the comparative relation, 'equally good'.

The idea that covering considerations can be clumpy is not a new idea. For example, a 'range property', which was introduced by John Rawls into modern discussions of justice and recently highlighted by Jeremy Waldron, involves a clumpy covering consideration.[4] The idea of clumpiness has also received mention in debates about incomparability.[5] However, just as the implications of a range property have not been fully explored for debates about justice, so too have the implications of clumpiness not been fully explored for debates about incomparability. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to analyse what clumpiness implies for the range of possible comparative relations that

[2] Ruth Chang, 'The Possibility of Parity', *Ethics* 112 (2002); Ruth Chang, 'Introduction', *Incommensurability*, ed. R. Chang, pp. 25–7.

[3] Chang, 'Parity', p. 666.

[4] A 'range property' according to Waldron, 'may be understood in terms of a region on a scale. The idea is that although there is a scale on which one could observe differences of degree, still once a range has been specified, we may use the binary property of *being within the range*, a property which is shared by something which is in the center of the range and also by something which is just above its lower threshold' (Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 76–7; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 508).

[5] Chang, 'Introduction', p. 24.

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are said to obtain between two items when neither item is better than the other.

The incomparability of two items is thought to pose a problem for making justified choices and for consequentialist theories that rely on comparing states of the world to judge the goodness of a particular course of action. The account in this article, if correct, furthers our understanding of this problem in two ways. First, the account extends the range of items that can be considered to be comparable within the context of the Trichotomy Thesis. The Trichotomy Thesis holds that if two items can be compared in terms of some value, then the two items are related by one of the standard trichotomy of comparative relations, 'better than', 'worse than', or 'equally good'.[6] Accounts in defence of 'roughly equal' and 'on a par' aim to extend the range of items thought to be comparable by calling for recognition of comparative relations in addition to that of equality.[7] On the account in this article, items thought to be incomparable can be considered to be comparable, but without the need for recognizing such alternative comparative relations.[8]

Second, the account lends support to an interpretation of incomparability as an instance of incommensurability along the lines put forward by Joseph Raz.[9] As noted, the central thesis I defend is that if two items can be compared in terms of some value – by which is meant that they are commensurable – and neither item is better than the other, then the two items are equally good. In this manner, the account is consistent with Raz's account. The account in this article, however, distinguishes a way in which items that are incommensurable can also be compared, but not in virtue of a common value. Instead, they can be compared by way of what I call a *component comparison*, which involves specifying a set of values and making separate evaluations between the two items with respect to each value in the set. On a component comparison, in many instances, the evaluative relationship between the two items is indeterminate. Incomparability can thus be

[6] The Trichotomy Thesis states that 'if two items A and B are evaluatively comparable, then A must be better or worse than B, or A and B must be equally good'. See Chang, 'Parity', p. 660.

[7] Ibid., p. 661.

[8] The thesis advanced in this article provides only partial support for the Trichotomy Thesis, for two reasons. First, the thesis that I advance is silent with regard to whether items can be related by a relation other than 'better than' or 'worse than' when they are not equally good. Second, the thesis that I advance invokes two modes of comparison, both of which can be incorporated into the Trichotomy Thesis, but are not distinguished in the original statement of the thesis. For a defence of the Trichotomy Thesis, see the work of Donald Regan. Where I differ from Regan is that he argues against the possibility of incomparability. See Donald Regan, 'Value, Comparability, and Choice', *Incommensurability*, ed. R. Chang, pp. 129–50.

[9] See Raz, *Morality*, ch. 13.

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understood as the result of a situation in which the lack of a covering consideration necessitates a component comparison and the component comparison is indeterminate. This suggests, contrary to what has been argued, that the inquiry into the possibility of incomparability ought to focus on questions of incommensurability.[10]

One way in which it might help to clarify the account and its implications for the possibility of justified choice is to relate it to an interpretation of rational choice theory in which preferences over items are taken to reflect comparative judgements among items.[11] The account that I advance is consistent with the assumption in rational choice theory that between any two items for which there is a preference relation, one of the two items is at least as good as the other or they are both at least as good as each other, in which case the two items are equally good. At the same time, the account that I advance is not consistent with rational choice theory with regard to the assumption that preferences are complete, by which is meant that for any two items, a preference relation always obtains.[12] The account that I advance can be understood as interpreting incomparability as the incompleteness of preferences.

The article is organized as follows. In section I, I introduce the idea of clumpiness. In section II, I examine one recent conception of a comparative relation that is said to be distinct from 'equally good', which is that of 'on a par', as put forward by Chang. I argue that once the clumpiness of a covering consideration is acknowledged and its nature understood, we have no reason to accept 'on a par' as a distinct comparative relation. In section III, I extend this analysis to Parfit and Griffin's account of 'roughly equal', which is the second prominent alternative to 'equally good', and argue that we have no reason to accept the distinction between 'roughly equal' and 'equally good' as comparative relations. In section IV, I defend the account against objections that it invokes a non-standard conception of equality. Together, these first four sections provide a defence of the central thesis advanced in this article – namely, that if two items are comparable

[10] Chang has argued that incomparability, rather than incommensurability, ought to be the focus of attention. See Chang, 'Introduction', pp. 1–3.

[11] By this I mean to distinguish the kind of rational choice theory under consideration from a revealed-preference approach in which a preference can be established *ex post* on the basis of the choice made by a rational agent. For a discussion of the revealed-preference approach, see Amartya Sen, *Choice, Welfare and Measurement* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 41–53. Comparative judgements can be interpreted as including both holistic comparisons and determinate component comparisons.

[12] This is the standard definition of completeness in the rational choice literature. To avoid confusion, it should be pointed out that Harris refers to completeness as 'exhaustiveness', reserving completeness to express the idea that the Trichotomy Thesis is true. See Harris, 'Value Vagueness', p. 160.

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in virtue of a covering consideration, and neither item is better than the other, then the two items are equally good. In section V, I discuss the relationship between the account advanced in this article and the interpretation of incomparability as an instance of incommensurability. Section VI is a conclusion.

I. CLUMPINESS

I begin with a familiar, if not all too familiar, example of making comparisons: grading student articles. In the case of assigning grades to student articles, I take it that what is at stake is not the grade itself, but rather some quality like 'goodness as an undergraduate student article for a given course', and that this quality is comprised of a number of respects, such as originality, construction of argument, effectiveness of prose, and grasp of course material. Although grades are in part relative, they do provide a way to speak about 'goodness as an undergraduate student article for a given course' in more than a relative sense. To say that an article is a 'B' article is not only to say that it is better than a 'C' article with respect to the covering consideration, but that it is better in virtue of possessing certain qualities with respect to the covering consideration. For example, it might be well written, but not highly original.

Grading involves a covering consideration that is *clumpy* or exhibits *clumpiness*.[13] A clumpy covering consideration sorts items into classes, or clumps, based upon the degree to which the items possess each of the relevant respects that comprise the covering consideration. B-articles, for example, comprise a clump. For a given covering consideration, comparisons may be more or less fine-grained. What might be called the *resolution* at which a comparison is made specifies the degree to which possession of each of the relevant respects of the covering consideration sorts an item into one clump or another. One grading system may function in terms of the clumps, 'A', 'B', 'C', etc. Another grading system with a more fine-grained resolution may function in terms of the clumps, 'A+', 'A', 'A−', etc. Items within a clump may be more precisely described in terms of the respects that comprise the covering consideration. Given the resolution of the comparison, however, these differences are not relevant to the comparison. The clumps into which items are sorted, or belong, might be said to reflect the smallest unit of measurement for purposes of comparison in terms of the covering consideration. In turn, comparisons between items are made in terms of the clumps to which they belong. All articles that

[13] I draw inspiration from a teacher who said that she graded in terms of clumps. I thank Alan Strudler for relating this anecdote to me.

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belong to the 'B' clump are related by the comparative relation 'better than' to articles that belong to the 'C' clump. Articles that are in the same clump are related by the relation 'equally good'.

Clumpy covering considerations operate in terms of *holistic* rather than *component* comparisons.[14] 'Goodness as an undergraduate student article for a given course' is a covering consideration comprised of a number of respects, including originality, construction of argument, effectiveness of prose, and grasp of course material. To engage in a *component* comparison between two articles is to engage in a series of individual comparisons between the two articles on each of the respects that comprise the covering consideration. A *holistic* comparison similarly involves comparisons of the articles with regard to each of the individual respects. However, a holistic comparison involves an additional step. This additional step is the specification of the requisite degree to which an item must display the various respects that comprise the covering consideration for purposes of evaluative comparisons between items. One way to conceive of this is to imagine that a holistic comparison attaches a weight to each of the individual respects on the basis of their relative importance in determining the overall comparison between two articles. For example, on a component comparison, one article might be better in terms of originality and construction of argument whereas the other article might be better in terms of effectiveness of prose and grasp of course material. In this instance, the relation between the two articles is indeterminate on a component comparison. In contrast, a holistic comparison translates the individual component comparisons into a single evaluative comparison with regard to the covering consideration, 'goodness as an undergraduate student article for a given course'.

As a point of clarification, I do not assume that all covering considerations give rise to holistic comparisons. Although I take it to be plausible that they do, there may be other modes of comparison. What I do assume is that to perform anything more than a component comparison between two items, there must be a covering consideration against which to compare the two items, and that all clumpy covering considerations involve holistic comparisons.

Comparisons that involve clumpy covering considerations display what I call *dominance insensitivity*. Let us say that an item X *dominates* another item Y if on each of the individual respects that comprise the

[14] T. K. Seung and Daniel Bonevac make a similar distinction. They distinguish between algorithmic comparisons and non-algorithmic comparisons, which correspond, roughly, to component comparisons and holistic comparisons. Where their account differs is that the authors consider all non-algorithmic comparisons to be based on intuition. On the account in this article, holistic comparisons can be well-defined. See T. K. Seung and Daniel Bonevac, 'Plural Values and Indeterminate Rankings', *Ethics* 102 (1992), p. 801.

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covering consideration, item X is equally good or better than item Y. A comparison is dominance insensitive when the fact that X dominates Y does not imply that X is better than Y with respect to the covering consideration. Consider two 'B' articles, for example, one written by Ahmed and the other by Anne. Even if Ahmed's article is better in all respects than Anne's article, it still belongs in the clump of 'B' articles. One might respond that there is a 'B+/B' clump to which Ahmed's article might belong so that it is no longer in the 'B' clump. Given that the grades themselves are an artefact of the way in which the grading system is constructed, as a general matter this point does not seem objectionable. However, given the resolution of the comparison, it no longer matters for purposes of comparison that articles differ in a more fine-grained manner. That is to say, although we might be able to see that Ahmed's 'B' article is better than Anne's 'B' article in all of the relevant respects that comprise the covering consideration, given the resolution of the comparison it simply is not meaningful to place the two articles in different clumps. They are equally 'B' articles, and therefore, equally good.[15]

This example calls for further clarification of the concept of the resolution at which a comparison is made.[16] In the case of grading, the resolution of the comparisons involved is determined by the purpose for which the comparisons are made. In one instance, such as for a final article, a relatively fine-grained resolution may be required to provide students an adequate sense of the quality of their writing and grasp of course material. In another instance, such as for a short-article assignment at the start of the term, a less fine-grained resolution may be all that is required to provide students with a sense of their potential to meet the standards of the course. To be clear, in both of these instances, the covering consideration is the same. What differs in each instance is the task at hand for which the comparisons are invoked, which in turn determines the resolution of the comparison.

This, however, is not the only way in which the resolution of a comparison may be determined. Consider comparisons of architectural beauty among a group of buildings of the same genre, say, villas by Andrea Palladio.[17] Part of their beauty derives from their symmetry.

[15] G. A. Cohen, in personal conversation, has raised the point that this understanding of the way in which covering considerations function commits one to the view that an item which is worse than another item in a component comparison might nevertheless be better from the perspective of the covering consideration. I am not certain that this is the case, and even if it were, I see no reason why a covering consideration cannot operate as such.

[16] I thank Joseph Raz for pressing me to clarify this point and for helpful suggestions for ways in which to do so.

[17] I owe the example of architectural design to Joseph Raz who put to me the example of symmetry.

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In judging the symmetry of two buildings, at some point, differences in their dimensions are no longer relevant to our judgement of their comparative symmetry. To be clear, clumpiness in this case is not the result of epistemic considerations. The dimensions of the buildings are susceptible to further measurement. Instead, at some point, the differences in the dimensions no longer matter for our judgement as to the symmetry of a building in terms of its architectural beauty. Symmetry is clumpy in that just as two equally good articles may differ in their display of the features that comprise the covering consideration, the differences in the dimensions of the buildings are not relevant to their comparison. Where the case of symmetry differs from that of grading is that the nature of the covering consideration itself, rather than the task at hand, sets the resolution of the comparison. That is to say, the differences in the dimensions of two villas no longer matters in our judgement of their symmetry, whereas in the case of grading articles, the differences may or may not be relevant, depending on the task at hand.

The resolution of a comparison is distinct from the covering consideration itself. In turn, the way in which the resolution is determined does not change the way in which comparisons involving clumpy covering considerations function. That is to say, just as the relation 'equally good' describes the relation between Ahmed's and Anne's articles, so does the same relation describe the relation between two Palladian villas with regard to their symmetry.

II. PARITY

Ruth Chang has advanced the case for a fourth comparative relation that is distinct from 'equally good'.[18] She advances this case in the context of comparing Mozart and Michelangelo in terms of creativity. According to Chang, Mozart is neither more nor less creative than Michelangelo. The two artists also are not equally creative, and yet, they are comparable. They are, according to Chang, 'on a par'. In advancing her argument, Chang assumes that Mozart and Michelangelo are not related by any one of the standard trichotomy of comparative relations. Because Mozart and Michelangelo display creativity in such different fields, this assumption might strike many as correct. In what follows, I examine this assumption in the light of the account of clumpiness.

Chang argues for the possibility of a fourth comparative relation by way of what she calls the 'Chaining Argument'.[19] Chang begins

[18] Chang, 'Parity', and Chang, 'Introduction'.
[19] Chang, 'Parity', p. 673.

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by asking us to imagine a sculptor who is worse than Michelangelo in one of the respects of creativity that Michelangelo possesses. If we continue this process of imagining sculptors who are successively worse in this one respect of creativity, but otherwise identical in all other respects of creativity, according to Chang, 'we can create a continuum of sculptors starting with Michelangelo and ending with Talentlessi, a very bad sculptor'.[20] Talentlessi can be compared to Mozart with respect to creativity. He is worse than Mozart. Chang then brings to bear the intuition that 'between two evaluatively very different items, a small unidimensional difference cannot trigger incomparability where before there was comparability'. The idea is that 'a small unidimensional difference just does not seem powerful enough to effect a switch from two such items being comparable to their being incomparable'.[21] Given this intuition, if Mozart is comparable to Talentlessi, then Mozart is comparable to Talentlessi+, a sculptor who is slightly better than Talentlessi in terms of the respect of creativity along the continuum between Talentlessi and Michelangelo. Continuing this line of reasoning, we arrive at the conclusion that Mozart is comparable to Michelangelo. Because the two artists are assumed not to be comparable by the relations 'better than', 'worse than', or 'equally good', and yet are comparable, Chang concludes that Mozart and Michelangelo are related by a fourth comparative relation, which she calls 'on a par'.

To help illustrate the nature of this relation, Chang asks us to imagine four points configured in such a way that if they were connected, they would form the shape of a diamond.[22] Comparisons among these points relative to the vertical axis reflect whether or not an item is better or worse than another item. If we label the point at the top A, the point at the bottom C, and the points horizontally across from one another B_1 and B_2, then we have the following evaluations: A is better than C, A is better than B_1, A is better than B_2, B_1 is better than C, and B_2 is better than C. A horizontal line between B_1 and B_2 illustrates that they can be compared, but because the distance between B_1 and B_2 reflects the fact that they are different, even though neither B_1 nor B_2 is better than the other, they are not equally good. Instead, according to Chang, B_1 and B_2 are on a par. I now turn to examine the distinctiveness of parity as a comparative relation.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Chang refers to this principle as the 'Small Unidimensional Difference Principle' (ibid., p. 674).

[22] Chang, 'Introduction', pp. 26–7. Chang adapts an illustration from Adam Morton, *Disasters and Dilemmas* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 34–5.

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Mozart, according to Chang, is more creative than Talentlessi. What I take this to imply is that creativity, as it is understood in Chang's account, is a covering consideration that allows for comparisons between musical composers and sculptors. That is to say, creativity includes respects that define creativity in musical composition and respects that define creativity in sculpture. Otherwise, it would not be possible to compare Mozart and Talentlessi in terms of creativity. Creativity, for example, might be measured both in terms of harmonization and in terms of the visualization of figures in three dimensions.

The way in which creativity enables comparisons among artists in different media can be illustrated in terms of the image that Chang introduces to describe the nature of parity. Returning to this image, let B_2 represent Mozart and C represent Talentlessi. The fact that Mozart is not directly above Talentlessi reflects the fact that the two artists display creativity in different media, just as the difference between B_1 and B_2 as measured along the horizontal axis reflects the judgement that the two items are not equally good, but on a par. Comparisons in terms of 'better than', 'worse than' and 'equally good' are made with respect to the vertical axis. When two items are on the same vertical axis, then they are related by their relative position on that vertical axis. When two items do not share a vertical axis such that one item is not directly above another item, however, there must be a way to establish their positions on the vertical axis.[23] Creativity, as described above, provides such a way. Creativity allows for the comparison of the vertical distance between them by tracing horizontal bands that span the width of the diamond shape. Each band includes items that display creativity in terms of different fields. All of the items within each band thus become comparable in terms of the vertical difference relative to items within another band. Mozart belongs to a horizontal band that is 'above' the horizontal band to which Talentlessi belongs. In this manner, we are able to judge Mozart as being better than Talentlessi.

The bands that I have just described are clumps. By this I mean that creativity allows for comparisons among artists in different media by sorting them into clumps between which comparisons can be made. Recall that one of the features of a clumpy covering consideration is that items in possession of different respects can still belong to the same clump. The horizontal nature of the bands, or clumps, captures this intuition given that the horizontal distance between items is said to reflect the different ways in which artists display creativity.

To hold that neither Mozart nor Michelangelo is more creative than the other means that neither artist belongs to a clump that is judged to

[23] This position might be thought of as the projection of the item on the vertical axis.

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be better than the clump to which the other artist belongs.[24] In turn, we have no reason to reject the conclusion that Mozart and Michelangelo belong to the same clump. As already noted, the fact that they display creativity in terms of different respects in itself cannot count against their membership in the same clump. In fact, the covering consideration enables comparison of Mozart and Talentlessi precisely because it includes respects associated with both musical composition and sculpture.

The first objection that might be raised concerns the claim that creativity is a covering consideration that spans both musical composition and sculpture. On this objection, the judgement that Mozart is more creative than Talentlessi does not imply that creativity is a covering consideration that spans both musical composition and sculpture. For example, Mozart might be understood to be better than Talentlessi in the sense that he dominates Talentlessi in the context of a component comparison between them. The possibility of a component comparison does not imply the existence of a covering consideration that enables holistic comparisons between items that display different respects. In turn, on this objection, Mozart and Michelangelo cannot be equally good because there is no covering consideration that sorts artists of different respects into the same clump.

Although it is plausible to think that Mozart dominates Talentlessi along many of the respects that comprise creativity, grounding the comparability of Mozart and Talentlessi exclusively on a component comparison by dominance raises a difficulty for the argument in defence of parity. Chang is clear that Mozart, Michelangelo and Talentlessi are to be compared in virtue of creativity. From this, I take it that for the Chaining Argument to work, the set of respects against which the items are compared must be fixed. Indeed, the argument would lose its plausibility if Mozart were considered to be comparable to Michelangelo with regard to creativity on the grounds that Mozart is comparable with Talentlessi in terms of height, for example. What this implies is that Mozart, Michelangelo and Talentlessi are comparable in virtue of the same set of respects, whether the comparisons among them are component or holistic comparisons. For Mozart to be said to be comparable with Talentlessi on the basis of a component comparison by dominance, Mozart must be better than or equally good in comparison

[24] To complete the image, after putting Michelangelo at B_1, one might want to shift C horizontally so that it is directly below B_1. Recall that Talentlessi differs from Michelangelo by being significantly worse in one respect associated with creativity in sculpting. Moving C so that it is directly below B_1 captures the idea that the comparison between Michelangelo and Talentlessi does not require any respects that are associated with creativity in musical composition. Whether or not one makes this change to the image does not affect the analysis.

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to Talentlessi with regard to the respects through which Talentlessi displays creativity. Recall that Michelangelo is better than Talentlessi in terms of one respect of creativity, and that in all other respects, the two sculptors are equally good. It follows that Mozart must display creativity to at least the same degree in all of the respects of creativity that Michelangelo is said to display with the exception of the respect in terms of which Talentlessi is worse than Michelangelo. Call this respect, respect X. If Mozart is to be judged no better than Michelangelo, and the two display creativity in the same respects, then Mozart cannot display creativity with regard to any of these respects to a greater degree than that to which Michelangelo displays these respects. This leaves the only potential difference between Mozart and Michelangelo to be with regard to the degree to which they display creativity in respect X. Mozart is understood to be no worse than Michelangelo. In terms of a component comparison, this means that Mozart cannot display respect X to a degree less than that to which Michelangelo displays respect X. The only possibility left is that Mozart and Michelangelo display respect X to the same degree, in which case, on a component comparison, the two artists are equally good.

I now turn to a second objection that might be raised, which is based on the idea that the sense in which Mozart is better than Talentlessi differs from the sense in which Michelangelo is better than Talentlessi. Chang refers to the sort of comparison involving Mozart, Michelangelo and Talentlessi as a 'nominal-notable comparison'.[25] A notable bearer of a covering consideration is an example of excellence with regard to the covering consideration and a nominal bearer is a poor example. Mozart and Michelangelo are notable bearers of creativity. Talentlessi is a nominal one. Understanding the comparison between Mozart and Michelangelo in terms of excellence prompts an interpretation of the comparative relation between them as one in which the comparison proceeds by way of the relative positions of the artists in their respective fields. This interpretation reflects the sense in which both artists are examples of excellence with respect to creativity, while at the same time recognizing the differences in the way in which their creativity is realized. On this second objection, the way in which to understand the comparability of Mozart and Michelangelo is to say that Mozart occupies a position with regard to creativity in his field that is similar to the position that Michelangelo occupies with regard to creativity in his field. Because the comparison is not made directly in terms of their creativity, it would be a mistake to conclude that Mozart and Michelangelo are equally creative. Some comparative relation other

[25] Chang, 'Introduction', pp. 14–15.

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than equality would be required to describe the comparison between the two artists, and this relation might be 'on a par'.

As a general matter, I accept that it is possible to make comparisons in terms of the relative position occupied by items in their respective fields and that it is mistaken to use the comparative relation 'equally good' to describe the relation between items occupying similar positions within their respective fields. Furthermore, I accept that Mozart and Michelangelo can be compared in this manner. However, the difficulty with this second objection is that it does not appear to be consistent with the way in which the Chaining Argument compares Mozart and Talentlessi. On this second objection, strictly speaking, Mozart is not better than Talentlessi. Instead, Mozart is better than a bad composer – call him Tonedeafi – who occupies a similar position in the field of musical composition as does Talentlessi in the field of sculpture. The Chaining Argument, however, presents Mozart as being better than Talentlessi with respect to creativity by way of a direct comparison.

In response, it might be said that it is possible to translate indirect comparisons by way of relative position into direct comparisons by modifying the covering consideration to be something like 'creativity as measured by their position in their own field'. In the context of such a covering consideration, to say that Mozart is better than Talentlessi is to say that Mozart occupies a higher position with respect to creativity in the field of musical composition than Talentlessi occupies with respect to creativity in the field of sculpture.

If we adopt such a covering consideration, however, we still have no reason to reject the judgement that Mozart and Michelangelo are equally creative. Recall that the reluctance to judge Mozart and Michelangelo as being equally creative stemmed from the fact that they occupied different fields and displayed creativity in different ways. By comparing them in terms of the covering consideration 'creativity as measured by their position in their own field', the fact that they occupy different fields no longer precludes their direct comparison by way of the standard trichotomy of comparative relations. It might be objected that a comparative relation other than 'equally good', such as 'on a par', is required to distinguish comparisons of this sort, but if so, then there also must be alternatives to 'better than' and 'worse than'. Furthermore, it seems that the alternative set of comparative relations is invoked only to distinguish the nature of the covering consideration involved, rather than the nature of comparative relations. Hence, once we recognize the clumpiness of certain covering considerations and what this means for the way in which equality functions as a comparative relation, there is no reason to invoke the comparative relation 'on a par' as a distinct comparative relation.

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III. ROUGH EQUALITY

Another prominent conception of a comparative relation that is distinct from equality is that of 'rough equality'. This is a conception found in the work of James Griffin and Derek Parfit.[26] Parfit, for example, asks us to compare 'one Novelist and two Poets' for a literary prize. In the example, neither the Novelist nor the First Poet is worse than the other. According to Parfit, 'they are in the same league'. 'Suppose next', Parfit continues, 'that we judge the *Second* Poet to be slightly better than the First. (When we are comparing two poets, our judgements can be less rough.)'[27] Rather than conclude that the Second Poet is better than the Novelist, which would be the case if the Novelist and First Poet were equally good, Parfit argues that comparisons between novelists and poets are inherently rough in such a way that the relation that obtains between the Novelist and the First Poet need not be transitive. Following Griffin and Hurka, let us call the comparative relation that is said to obtain between the Novelist and the First Poet, 'roughly equal'.[28]

In this section, I question the distinctiveness of 'roughly equal' as a comparative relation. Before continuing, it should be noted that the lack of transitivity said to characterize rough equality has also been associated with the incommensurability of two items. Joseph Raz, for example, takes such a lack of transitivity to be a 'mark of incommensurability'.[29] Given that rough equality is understood to imply that the items under comparison are comparable, there is a conflict between Raz's view and the account of rough equality as a lack of transitivity. I address this issue in section V. For the moment, I assume that items said to be roughly equal can be compared with respect to some covering consideration.

The intuition underlying the plausibility of 'roughly equal' as a distinct comparative relation is that certain covering considerations are inherently rough in a way such that the relation that obtains between items does not embody the property of transitivity normally associated with the relation, 'equally good'. For example, in describing comparisons with regard to literary merit, Parfit asks, 'must it be the true, of Proust and Keats, either that one was the greater writer, or that both were *exactly equally* as great?' He continues, 'There could not be, even in principle, such precision'.[30] Similarly, when compared for a

[26] See Parfit, *Reasons*, p. 431; Griffin, *Well-Being*, pp. 80–1, 96–8, 104; Griffin, 'Incommensurability', pp. 38–9; and Hurka, *Perfectionism*, p. 87.

[27] Parfit, *Reasons*, p. 431.

[28] Griffin, for example, writes that a feature of two items, A and B, being roughly equal is that 'C's being clearly better than B does not allow us to conclude that C is better than A' (Griffin, *Well-Being*, p. 81). Hence although Parfit does not name this relation that he describes, I use the term 'rough equality' to encompass the relation that Parfit describes.

[29] Raz, *Morality*, pp. 325–6.

[30] Parfit, *Reasons*, p. 431.

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literary prize, the Novelist and the First Poet are said by Parfit not to be equally good, but only roughly equal.

The account of clumpiness, however, gives us a way to understand the Novelist and the First Poet to be equally good, despite the inherent roughness in the nature of literary merit as a covering consideration. Regardless of the distinctions that we may want to draw between the work of students and the work of novelists and poets, comparing novelists with regard to literary merit bears similarities to grading student articles. Both kinds of comparisons involve covering considerations comprised of a number of respects that do not readily combine into a single judgement. Recall that the Novelist and the First Poet were said to be 'in the same league'. If we understand comparisons with regard to literary merit in terms of membership in clumps, then the fact that neither the Novelist nor the First Poet is better than the other can be understood to mean that they do not belong to clumps that are better than one another. Instead, they can be said to belong to the same clump, thereby making them equally good.

At this juncture, the objection might be raised that this account fails because it does not adequately accommodate the additional judgement that the Second Poet is better than the First Poet.[31] Recall that in the case of grading, even if Ahmed's article is better in all respects than Anne's article, for purposes of the comparison, this difference is not relevant. In the case of comparing the Novelist and two Poets, however, the Second Poet is better than the First Poet in a manner that is relevant for purposes of the comparison at hand. We would not award the literary prize to the First Poet. In the example, in a manner similar to the Novelist and the First Poet, neither the Novelist nor the Second Poet is worse than the other. In turn, it might be objected that unless we ignore the transitivity normally thought to apply to the relation 'equally good', to judge the Novelist and First Poet to be equally good is to imply that the Second Poet is better than the Novelist, which contradicts the judgement that neither is worse than the other.

In response, I raise three points. First, recall that in describing the example, Parfit writes that 'when comparing two poets, our judgements can be less rough' than they are when comparing novelists and poets. What I take Parfit's statement to imply is that the resolution at which the comparison is made between poets is more fine-grained than the resolution at which the comparison is made between novelists and poets. Even if the covering consideration is the same, however, I see no reason to expect comparative relations to be transitive when the comparisons are made at different resolutions.

[31] I thank Joseph Raz for raising this objection and for pressing me to clarify my response to it.

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Second, recognition of the concept of the resolution of a comparison enables us to accommodate the judgement that the Second Poet is better than the First Poet without the need to introduce an additional comparative relation, such as 'roughly equal'. If novelists and poets cannot be compared at a resolution as fine as that at which poets can be compared, then we are able to judge the Second Poet as better than the First Poet at one resolution, while retaining the judgement that the Second Poet is equally good as the Novelist and the judgement that the First Poet is equally good as the Novelist. I see no reason why a series of comparisons cannot be made at different resolutions in the aid of making a choice. The problem of choice is distinct from the problem of comparison. In the case of grading articles, the aim is not to seek the single best article, and the comparisons all involve the same resolution. However, if the aim of the comparisons is to choose the best article, which is analogous to awarding a literary prize, then I see no reason not to involve comparisons of different resolutions as a way to narrow the range of candidate articles.

Third, 'roughly equal' is a comparative relation that cannot be understood with just two items under comparison, which raises a question about the nature of 'roughly equal' as a comparative relation. Without the Second Poet, there is no reason to reject the judgement that the Novelist and First Poet are equally good. It is only upon introducing the Second Poet in relation to the Novelist and First Poet that the concept of rough equality gains potential significance. As such, 'roughly equal' would appear to occupy a different status as a comparative relation in comparison to the standard trichotomy of relations. 'Roughly equal' describes the relation among three items: 'A is as good as B' (at a less fine-grained resolution), 'A is as good as C' (at a less fine-grained resolution), and 'C is better than B' (at a more fine-grained resolution). It is only meaningful in virtue of comparing three items or more. The standard comparative relations are all binary, meaning that they describe the comparative relation between two items. Whether or not they are transitive is a separate feature. Given that the relation, 'roughly equal', can be decomposed into the standard trichotomy of relations by acknowledging the clumpiness of covering considerations, it would appear that 'roughly equal' is not so much a distinct comparative relation as a useful shorthand for a particular combination of comparative relations.[32]

[32] A more general point to consider is the assumption of the transitivity of 'equally good' as a comparative relation. The assumption that comparative relations are transitive is held, in part, that otherwise a person may be a 'money pump'. This, for example, is Chang's concern. The problem of the money pump, however, is a problem of choice, which is distinct from the problem of comparison. Only when choices are exclusively governed

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All of this is not to deny the intuitive sense in which some comparisons, such as those with respect to literary merit, are rougher than other comparisons, such as those with respect to height. Given that comparisons are made with regard to a covering consideration at a given resolution, however, the equality that obtains between Proust and Keats is no less precise than the equality that obtains between two items that are of the same height. The fact that the resolution of one comparison is less fine-grained than the resolution of another comparison does not mean that the comparative relations themselves are somehow rough. Using concepts such as rough equality may be a useful shorthand to call attention both to the fact that the covering consideration only allows for comparisons at less fine-grained resolutions and to the resulting combination of binary comparisons at different resolutions. If the account in this section is correct, once properly specified, judgements in which rough equality was thought to obtain can be understood as judgements in which items are equally good. Hence, we have no reason to accept the distinction between 'roughly equal' and 'equally good' as comparative relations.

IV. EQUALITY

At this point, it might be objected that the conception of equality that I invoke is a non-standard conception, and that the account that I have advanced simply redescribes parity or rough equality. In order to address this objection, in this section, I defend the account against three charges that it invokes a non-standard conception of equality.

The first objection follows from the association of equality with a degree of precision that appears to distinguish it from other comparative relations. This precision can be understood as a kind of 'sameness' that is required of the items under comparison for them to be understood as equally good. For example, whereas the relation 'greater than' obtains between two items weighing respectively 6.0 and 5.0 kilograms as well as between two items weighing respectively 5.1 and 5.0 kilograms, the relation 'equally good' obtains between items weighing exactly 5.0 kilograms. The fact that equality has associated with it a sense of precision or a requirement of 'sameness' might give rise to an objection against the account advanced in this article on the grounds that the account allows for items that are not the same in terms

by comparisons is the assumption of transitivity of comparative relations necessary to avoid the possibility that a person may be a money pump. The view that choices are exclusively governed by comparisons, however, is not an uncontroversial view. Joseph Raz, for example, challenges this view in 'Incommensurability and Agency', *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*, ed. J. Raz (Oxford, 1999). See Chang, 'Introduction'.

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of their underlying respects to be equally good. Mozart, it might be said, can only be equally good in comparison to another composer who displays creativity to the same degree in the same respects. 'Equally good', on this objection, should be reserved for the relation between items that are exactly the same in terms of their underlying respects, such that some other relation should be invoked to describe the relation between items that differ in their underlying respects yet belong to the same clump.

I raise two points in response to this objection. First, there are standard uses of 'equally good' to describe the relation between items that differ in their underlying respects. Take, for example, the concept of a range property, as discussed by Jeremy Waldron. A range property, according to Waldron, 'may be understood in terms of a region on a scale'. He continues,

> the idea is that although there is a scale on which one could observe differences of degree, still once a range has been specified, we may use the binary property of *being within the range*, a property which is shared by something which is in the center of the range and also by something which is just above its lower threshold.[33]

Items within the range stand in a relation of equality, regardless of any underlying differences in the degree of the respect that comprises the scale.[34]

Second, the objection overlooks the distinction between a component comparison and other modes of comparison, such as a holistic comparison. In a component comparison between two items, it would be incorrect to judge two items to be equally good if they differed in

[33] Waldron, *God*, pp. 76–7.

[34] Similarly, consider the practice in American paediatric medicine of classifying newborn babies as 'small', 'average' or 'large' relative to their gestational age at birth. For example, for babies born at forty weeks, those who weigh less than 2.5 kilograms are 'small', those who weigh more than 4.0 kilograms are 'large', and those whose weight falls between these two categories are 'average'. Let us call the designation that a baby is assigned by this practice her 'paediatric birth weight'. Suppose that Zoe weighs 3.0 kilograms and Zachary weighs 3.5 kilograms, and that they are both born at forty weeks. In terms of paediatric birth weight, they are equal; they are equally 'average'. It might strike some as mistaken, however, to call them equal because they differ in terms of their actual birth weight. Zachary, in fact, weighs more than Zoe. However, even though they are not the same in terms of the covering consideration on which they are normally compared, there is nothing inherently unequal between them as measured by the covering consideration of paediatric birth weight. Comparisons, to reiterate, are made with respect to a covering consideration. It would be mistaken to say that Zachary and Zoe are equal with respect to actual birth weight. However, this should have no bearing on their comparison with regard to paediatric birth weight, even when paediatric birth weight is comprised by actual birth weight. Note that the categories are defined in terms of standard deviations within the population of babies born. Although they use the same categories of weight, some classification schemes name the categories differently. I thank Sara Toomey for this example.

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the degree to which they displayed the component respects in virtue of which the comparison is made. It might be said that 'on a par' or 'roughly equal' should be used to describe the relation between two such items in the context of a component comparison. It strikes me, however, that the more appropriate description of their relation is one of indeterminacy. The reason for this is that judgements of parity or rough equality are not based exclusively on a component comparison; they invoke some judgement about the relative importance of the component respects, which in turn, relies on there being a covering consideration. Covering considerations can be clumpy, and once we introduce the possibility of clumps, there is no reason that items differing in the respects that comprise the covering consideration cannot belong to the same clump.

At this point, a second objection might be raised. It might be objected that even if we accept the account of clumpiness, 'equally good' should be reserved for covering considerations that do not display clumpiness, and that the comparative relation that obtains when items belong to the same clump should be given another name. On this objection, 'equally good' should be reserved for comparisons in virtue of covering considerations that are not clumpy, because doing so avoids judging two items to be equally good when they differ in their underlying component respects. This second objection is similar to the first objection in that it associates equality with a kind of precision or sameness. The second objection differs from the first, however, by locating the idea of precision at the level of distinguishing between clumpy and non-clumpy covering considerations.

In response, I raise the point that even a covering consideration that does not appear to be clumpy, such as height, can be considered clumpy. I take it that height is a covering consideration with regard to which people would think it makes sense to say that two items can be equal in a precise, non-clumpy sense. Now imagine comparing two biological twins in terms of height. When we compare them we must specify the resolution at which we compare them. The twins might be equally tall when measured in centimetres even though they differ in height when measured in millimetres. As a covering consideration, height, when measured in centimetres, is clumpy relative to height when measured in millimetres, because it takes to be equal those items that might differ when measured in millimetres. Recall that clumps reflect the smallest units of measurement for purposes of comparison. The clumpiness of a covering consideration appears to be a matter of degree, not kind. That is to say, even a covering consideration that is associated with precision, such as height, can be clumpy.

Of course, it might be objected that what distinguishes height from a covering consideration such as creativity is that in the case of height, there is nothing inherently clumpy about it as a covering consideration

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in the same way that there is in the case of creativity. Although there is something intuitively plausible about this distinction between the two covering considerations, I am not certain to what extent the distinction matters for our purposes, at least with regards to distinguishing the role of 'equally good' as a comparative relation. If we consider height, equality functions in a manner that is identical to membership in a clump as defined by the covering consideration. The judgement that the twins are the same height is functionally equivalent to saying that they each belong to the set of items that have a certain height. Such a set is a clump. Equality, which I have defined as membership in the same clump, is consistent with our standard notion of equality as it obtains in covering considerations that are not clumpy. In the end, it is unclear how much is gained by reserving the use of 'equally good' for covering considerations that are not inherently clumpy.

The third objection that might be raised against the account that I have advanced is that the account allows two items to be equally good even though a person is not indifferent between the two items when she is required to choose between them. Consider the example put forward by Joseph Raz in which an individual must choose between pursuing a career as a lawyer and pursuing a career as a clarinettist.[35] The individual is well suited for both and has an equally likely chance of success at either career. Because something can be said about the relative merits of these two careers, some people might hold that the two careers are comparable. Given that neither career is better than the other, on the account that I have advanced, it might appear that the two careers are equally good. The objection arises that if the two careers were in fact equally good, the individual would be indifferent between them when confronted with such a choice, and yet, the choice between careers is a choice about which one is far from indifferent. It is a choice about which one should care deeply.[36] Hence, the third objection against my account is that it renders equally good those items toward which it is inappropriate to be indifferent with regard to the choice.

In response, I raise two points. First, as noted in section III, I understand comparison to be distinct from choice, and I take it to be an area of further inquiry as to how comparative relations of the sort discussed in this article function in the context of choice.[37] Second, the

[35] Raz, *Morality*, p. 332.

[36] 'To be indifferent to this kind of choice', as Raz writes, 'is not to have proper respect for oneself' (ibid.).

[37] There are situations in which a person is not indifferent to a choice between items that are equally good. Suppose that I am driving in my two-seater car and come across two victims of a hit-and-run accident at the side of the road. I am confident in my belief that each victim will be made better off to an equal degree by my taking the victim to the hospital in my car. Given the nature of their injuries, I can take only one victim if

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thesis that I defend is a conditional one. The thesis is that if two items are comparable in virtue of a covering consideration, and neither item is better than the other, then they are equally good. Nothing in the thesis requires that two items are always comparable in virtue of some covering consideration. To be certain, by arguing that items related by rough equality or parity are in fact equally good, I might be interpreted as arguing against incomparability. The reason for this is that accounts describing rough equality or parity have been advanced to demonstrate that two items are comparable despite the apparent failure of one of the standard trichotomy of comparative relations to obtain between them. Although the account that I advance extends the range of items thought to be comparable, the account leaves open the possibility that items can be incomparable. In the case of the career choice example, like Raz, I take it that the legal career and the musical career are not equally good, because they are incomparable.

This response brings us to the issue of the possibility of incomparability. The plausibility of the account that I have advanced would appear to depend, in part, on accounting for the way in which some items, such as the legal career and the musical career, are incomparable. In itself, I do not take this to pose a problem, given that it remains a matter of debate whether or not certain items are incomparable. In the next section, I discuss what the account in this article suggests about the nature and possibility of incomparability.

V. INCOMPARABILITY AND INCOMMENSURABILITY

Let us continue with the comparison of the legal career and the musical career and introduce a third option, which is an improved version of one of the initial options – say, the legal career with an additional $1,000 in salary.[38] Because the improved legal career is better than the initial

I am to help either of them at all. From the perspective of the value of well-being, it is equally good which victim I take to the hospital. Nevertheless, it is inappropriate to adopt an attitude of indifference with regard to the choice of which victim I elect to take in my car, even if I take my decision solely with regard to the covering consideration of well-being. As such, the fact that a person is not indifferent to the choice between the legal career and the musical career in itself need not count against the possibility that the two careers can be understood as being equally good. This example highlights the differences between a generic comparison between two items and a choice between two items. One difference is that choice requires us to think of the items not only in terms of reasons for their choice but also in terms of reasons not to choose them. For discussion of some of the differences between comparison and choice, see Ian Carter, 'Choice, Freedom, and Freedom of Choice', *Social Choice and Welfare* 22 (2004).

[38] Joseph Raz has noted in personal conversation that the addition of $1000 is not necessarily an improvement with respect to the covering consideration of goodness of career, but rather an improvement with respect to another value, namely, having a higher salary. For purposes of discussion, let us take it to be an improvement with respect to goodness as a career.

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legal career, if the initial legal career and musical career are equally good, by transitivity, the improved legal career should be better than the musical career. Because it seems incorrect to hold that the improved legal career is better than the musical career, the initial legal career and musical career are held not to be equally good. The failure of any one of the standard trichotomy of relations to obtain in this example is taken to be one of the strongest illustrations of the possibility of incomparability.[39]

At first, this apparent failure of transitivity might appear to be structurally similar to the apparent failure of transitivity thought to arise in the example of the comparison of the Novelist and Two Poets in section three. Recall, however, that because the comparisons in that example are made at different resolutions, we found no reason to hold that there is a failure of transitivity. Having made this point of clarification, I now turn to examine what the account advanced in this article suggests about the nature of incomparability as described in the above example.

To begin, the judgement that the improved legal career is better than the initial legal career requires nothing more than a component comparison, because the improved legal career dominates the initial legal career. The fact that we can compare the two legal careers, however, does not imply that there is a covering consideration, such as 'goodness of career', that allows us to compare the initial legal career and the musical career. In turn, if nothing other than a component comparison is possible between the initial legal career and the musical career, then it is possible that on a component comparison, the comparison between the two careers is indeterminate. As such, one way to understand cases of incomparability is in terms of the indeterminacy of a component comparison in situations where the lack of a covering consideration precludes anything more than making component comparisons between items.

In this manner, the account is broadly consistent with Raz's interpretation of incomparability as an instance of incommensurability. Raz labels the apparent failure of transitivity, discussed above, the 'mark of incommensurability'. As a 'mark', it is neither a definition of incommensurability nor a necessary condition of incommensurability.

[39] Chang labels this case for incomparability, the 'Small Improvement Argument'. Chang takes this argument to be an argument for the failure of one of the standard trichotomy of relations to obtain, rather than as an argument for incomparability. See Chang, 'Parity', pp. 667–73; 'Introduction', pp. 23–6. Others, as Chang points out, take this argument to be an argument for incommensurability. In particular, she cites Raz, *Morality*; Ronald de Sousa, 'The Good and the True', *Mind* 83 (1974); and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Moral Dilemmas* (Oxford, 1988), p. 67.

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Instead, 'it is a test of incommensurability which is likely to be adequate'.[40] According to Raz, the legal career and musical career are incommensurable, meaning that there is no common value against which they can be measured as careers between which one must choose.[41]

On the account that I have advanced, in the absence of a covering consideration, to say of two items that neither is better than the other is to say that neither item dominates the other. If the two items possess each of the relevant respects to the same degree, then the two items can be understood as equally good. In all other instances in the absence of a covering consideration, however, no further comparison can be made, in which case the relationship between the two items is indeterminate. For example, item A might possess more of respect x than item B and less of respect y than item B. Without a covering consideration, there is no way in which to translate the component comparison into an overall judgement, making the comparison between item A and item B indeterminate. Hence, the account lends support for an interpretation of incomparability as an instance of incommensurability.

In response, it has been argued that there is always a covering consideration in virtue of which a comparison can be made. Ruth Chang, for example, can be understood to make such a claim. She writes:

> In choosing between two careers, various considerations are relevant – for example, how good the salary and benefits are, how interesting the work is, whether one has an affinity with people in the field, how much time it leaves for family life, and so on. If, indeed, there is no further single consideration that combines those considerations, we can simply stipulate one, for example, 'goodness of career,' which is nothing more than a list of the various relevant considerations.[42]

Given that there is always a covering consideration on her view, Chang defines incomparability to be the absence of any comparative relation obtaining between two items in virtue of a covering consideration. As such, it would appear that Chang's understanding of incomparability is at odds with the account of incomparability as the result of incommensurability.

Notice, however, that Chang's description of a covering consideration as 'nothing more than a list of the various relevant considerations' leaves open the possibility that what she means is that at most it is

[40] Raz, *Morality*, pp. 325–6.
[41] Ibid., p. 326.
[42] Chang, 'Parity', p. 667. I do not address Donald Regan's argument against incomparability. See Regan, 'Value'.

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always possible to engage in a component comparison between two items. If we adopt such an interpretation of what Chang means by a covering consideration, there is no conflict with the account advanced in this article. Incomparability can be understood to be in virtue of a covering consideration in the sense that two items can always be compared on a component basis and when the relation between them is indeterminate, they are considered to be incomparable. In turn, the account in this article supports the possibility of incomparability.

To summarize, the account advanced in this article is consistent with a version of the Trichotomy Thesis in which incomparability is understood to be the result of incommensurability. That is, items that are not related by one of the standard trichotomy of comparative relations are incomparable because they are incommensurable. However, the account does not imply that items are either incommensurable or related by one of the standard trichotomy of comparative relations. Such a reading of the Trichotomy Thesis follows only if relations of dominance and equality in component comparisons are not counted, respectively, as relations of 'better than' and 'equally good'. I leave it an open question whether relations of dominance and equality in virtue of component comparisons should be counted, respectively, as relations of 'better than' and 'equally good'.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that once we recognize the clumpy nature of covering considerations and the features associated with clumpiness, items thought to be roughly equal or on a par can be understood to be equally good. I have also argued that this way of understanding two items to be equally good with respect to some value is consistent with standard conceptions of equality. As such, I defend the thesis that if two items can be compared in virtue of some covering consideration, and neither item is better than the other, then the two items are equally good.

If correct, the account informs the broader debate about incomparability in two ways. First, the account provides support for an interpretation of the phenomenon of incomparability as the result of incommensurability, and more generally for the possibility of incomparability. Second, the account in this article argues for extending the range of comparability, but in a way that does not require us to reject the Trichotomy Thesis. Accounts such as those of Parfit and Chang extend the range of items thought to be comparable by calling for recognition of comparative relations in addition to that of equality.[43]

[43] Chang, 'Parity', p. 661.

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On the account in this article, a similar extension of comparability is possible, but without the need for recognition of such alternative comparative relations. We need look no further than 'equally good'. 'Equally good', that is to say, is good enough.[44]

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