ABSTRACT. This essay distinguishes personal from generic fame and accurate from inaccurate fame, and claims that only accurate personal fame could possess intrinsic value. Nevertheless, three common arguments why accurate personal fame might possess intrinsic value are shown to be unsound. After rejecting two Aristotelian arguments to the effect that no sort of fame possesses value, the author suggests that fame is valueless if one assumes a modern axiology in which the good life consists of self-regulation and self-expression.

Bacon began an essay on fame, but he never finished it. His indifference is typical. Philosophers have traditionally neglected the subject of fame, except for occasional pronouncements about its lack of importance. Nevertheless, anything which is so widely desired, and which is the object of such intense emotions, should not be neglected by students of human nature. We should have some idea of what fame is, why people desire it, and whether the reasons for which they desire it stand scrutiny.

I. CONDITIONS FOR FAME

To be famous is to be an object of public interest. Many types of object—masses like mountains, events like explosions—can be interesting to the public and considered "famous", but since we are interested in fame as a value, we will confine our attention to famous people. What conditions must be satisfied if some person—a Mr. Jones—is to be famous? Two seem to be necessary and sufficient. First, the public, or some fraction of it, must believe that Jones possesses some trait; second, they must consider this trait to be unusually worthy of interest.

It is worth noticing that Jones need not in fact possess the trait which has aroused public interest; it is sufficient that the public believes that he possesses it. Oswald is famous because the public believes that he assassinated President Kennedy. Whether he actually shot Kennedy is another matter, and irrelevant to his fame. It also follows from the conditions as stated that Jones can be famous, even if the public does not know who Jones is, in the sense of being able to identify him. The Son of Sam murderer, before he was arrested, was a famous person, even though no one knew who he was.
Since the public may or may not be able to identify the person on whom fame falls, there are two different ways a person can be famous. The celebrity can be a person known to the public, about whom the public has a certain belief, true or false. We could call this sort of fame personal fame, since it is an individual person who is famous, regardless of his generic traits. On the other hand, the public may be interested in someone as the sole possessor of a certain characteristic, and the celebrity may happen to be the person who possesses it. We could call this sort of fame generic fame, since it is not the celebrity qua individual who possesses it, but the celebrity qua possessor of a certain generic trait, which could have belonged to somebody else. Within the category of personal fame, we can distinguish two further sub-categories: accurate personal fame, which a person has when the public legend about him is true, and inaccurate personal fame, which a person has when the public legend about him is false.

II. THE DESIRE FOR FAME

People often desire fame because it is useful to be famous. A famous fashion model will earn much more per day than an unknown one. A famous actor will have little difficulty in obtaining work; an unknown actor often has great difficulty obtaining work. In such cases, fame is an instrument which brings financial or vocational rewards.

It is doubtful, however, that the usefulness of fame is the sole reason anyone has for desiring it. Many people, I think, would accept fame even if it did not bring them immediate practical rewards; people often desire, for example, to be famous after they die, when fame can be of no use to them. People who desire to be famous after they die consider fame to be intrinsically valuable. So do most people who desire fame or possess it.

It is often suggested, in philosophical discussions of value, that once a person comes to believe that X is intrinsically valuable, the question cannot be raised as to why he desires X. This view, however, is mistaken: there are a variety of questions that can be raised and answered about the desirability of intrinsically valued objects. If a person considers X to be intrinsically valuable, then it is indeed pointless to ask him to explain his desire for X in terms of the causal consequences of possessing or experiencing X. But it is still possible to ask him why he desires X, and for him to respond by pointing to non-causal features of X which make X intrinsically desirable. For example, Brown may desire to climb a certain mountain. We ask Brown if there is any result which he expects to obtain from having climbed the mountain, and he says that there is none. In other words, he considers climbing the mountain to be intrinsically valuable. Nevertheless, we can ask him again why he wants to climb the mountain, and he might respond by saying, "I've been climbing mountains for years, but I've never climbed one that no one else has climbed: there's something special about being the first. This mountain happens to be unclimbed, and I intend to be the first to climb it". Nothing in this answer refers to the causal consequences of climbing mountains, but it does explain why this person desires to climb this mountain. Likewise, if we encounter people who consider fame to be intrinsically desirable, we can ask them why they desire fame. We can inquire about what it is, in their opinion, that gives fame its intrinsic value. Different people, as we might expect, give different replies.
(A) FAME AS JUST DESERT

Some people desire fame on the grounds that they deserve it. Suppose that Jones has made an important scientific discovery: he is the first to detect gravitational waves. He might feel that he deserves to be famous on this account; that the discovery is a desert, and that fame is the just reward for this desert. If his laboratory assistant steals his results, publishes them, and obtains fame instead of Jones, Jones will feel that this is unfair, because he deserved the fame and his assistant did not deserve it.

It is interesting that Jones' concern is not merely that his scientific discovery be recognized as an important discovery. If his assistant steals the fame that is his, the discovery has been recognized as important but that does not mollify Jones. Furthermore, Jones' concern is not with the generic fame that accrues to The Discoverer of Gravitational Waves. If his assistant steals his results, Jones nevertheless possesses that fame: the public wants to honor the discoverer of gravitational waves, and so, generically, the public is honoring him. What Jones wants is the personal fame of being the discoverer of gravitational waves; he wants the public to acknowledge that the unique person who is Jones and who occupies a particular volume of space-time is the person who first detected gravitational waves.

But Jones does not want, at any price, the personal fame of being the discoverer of gravitational waves. He wants the fame as his just reward, and consequently he wants the fame of being the discoverer of gravitational waves only if he is in fact the discoverer of gravitational waves. If Jones discovers that some scientists, in Austria in 1930, detected gravitational waves and published the result in a forgotten journal, Jones would, assuming that sole motive for desiring fame is the desire to receive a just reward, cease to desire the personal fame of being thought to be the discoverer of gravitational waves.

If the desire for justice is a reason for desiring fame, it is a reason that need explication. Normally, when a person desires X as a just reward, the value of X can be established independently of its use as a reward in this particular case. For example, if I contract to do work for $5 an hour and I do four hours work, my just reward is $20, and I have been done an injustice if I am paid less. In this case, however, the value of $20 can be established independently of its use as pay for my four hours work. Thus is someone says that fame is a just reward for some achievement, fame must have some value, independently of its use as a reward. Before we can accept the idea that fame is a just reward for anything, we must have some other account of its value. If there is no other account of its value, it cannot be a "reward" at all.

(B) FAME AS IMMORTALITY

One of the aspects of fame, which prompts many people to desire it, is that a person's fame may persist after he dies, securing for him a kind of immortality. The logic of desiring fame is this: fame is immortality, and immortality is desirable. Both points in the justification deserve
study. Does immortal fame confer immortality? If it does, is this a desirable form of immortality?

Obviously fame cannot confer immortality in any biological sense: after death, the body has dissolved, and that is that. But if Jones is famous, many people will remember Jones after he is gone. It is worth asking how Jones will be remembered. He will be remembered for the traits that made him famous; he will be remembered as the person who was X or did X. Napoleon, for example is remembered as the man who conquered Italy, but failed to conquer Russia. In short, the only possible fame for a person long dead is generic fame.

If our analysis is correct, and the fame of persons long dead is increasingly generic, then not all types of fame can secure immortality. In particular, inaccurate personal fame cannot secure immortality, since, as time passes, the focus of public admiration will shift from the person who possessed inaccurate personal fame to the person (if there is one) who in fact possessed the trait which the public admires. If Jones' assistant, Smith, is inaccurately thought to be the Discoverer of Gravitational Waves, then he will possess great inaccurate fame in the short run. But in a thousand years, the public, if they remember anything of the science of these years at all, will remember merely that someone, at about this time, was the discoverer of gravitational waves--and that someone happens to be Jones, not Smith. If a ceremony is held to commemorate the 1000th anniversary of the discovery of gravitational waves, then it is Jones who will be honored at that ceremony, and not Smith. Smith, in fact, will be forgotten.

But now let us consider the more agreeable cases where there is no screen of false belief between a person and his fame. There is, for example, no question that Einstein invented the Special and General Theories of Relativity, and nowadays he is accurately remembered as "the man who discovered the theory of relativity". In what sense does this generic fame, which unequivocally points to Einstein, convey "immortality" upon him? Consider a literate man in the street, who, confronted with the question, "Who was Einstein?", replies, "A scientist... the inventory of relativity, I think." What is there in the quality of his memory that confers immortality on Einstein? All that the man recalls is that Einstein invented the Theory of Relativity, and, to him, the name "Einstein" is practically an abbreviation for "the discoverer of relativity". In effect, what the man on the street remembers is that the discoverer of relativity is the discoverer of relativity. The "memory" is so vacuous that it can hardly convey anything on anybody, much less confer immortality on Einstein.

There is a further puzzle about the alleged immortality conferred by generic fame. If a person has generic fame, he is remembered as the sole possessor of a certain generic trait. But what if this trait has nothing to do with the self, or personality, or identity, of the person who possesses it? In what sense is he "immortal", even if he is remembered? Suppose, for example, that Wilcox is remembered down through the ages as the only person known to have been killed by a falling meteorite. Wilcox' bizarre death might have brought him considerable fame: perhaps Alexander Solzhenitsyn writes a short story about the event as evidence of the inscrutability of fate and the inevitability of suffering; the cliche, "as unlucky as Wilcox" enters the English language, and so on. Nonetheless, the strange event which has made Wilcox famous has
little to do with the things that made Wilcox the person that he was: his heredity, his environment, his actions up to the moment of his death. The meteorite is external to all that, and the preservation of Wilcox in human memory as "the man who was hit by the meteorite" conveys about as much immortality upon Wilcox as would the preservation of his tennis shoes under glass. It is doubtful whether those who desire immortality desire immortality of this sort; they want themselves to be remembered, not their tennis shoes, or anything else so accidentally and marginally connected with their personal identities.

The upshot of our analysis of fame—as-immortality is this. Many people desire fame because they desire a certain sort of immortality—immortality in memory. But some kinds of fame, for example, inaccurate personal fame, cannot convey immortality in memory at all. Generic fame, on the other hand, can convey a weak sort of immortality—the immortality of being remembered as the possessor of a certain generic trait. But if these traits do not relate to the identities and personalities of the person who possess them, the grade of immortality conferred by generic fame is low indeed.

One could image people accepting all of the preceding points and still declaring that fame is intrinsically valuable in those cases in which it does confer immortality in memory. To many, some immortality, no matter how low grade, is better than none. Thus, we must address a second question regarding fame as immortality. Should immortality of memory be desired? Why is it a good thing to be remembered after one is dead?

One response that some people might offer, in a candid moment, is that their deeds deserve to be admired, not only during their lifetimes, but after their deaths. However, the argument that someone's deeds deserve to be remembered is a variation on the argument that some people achievements deserve fame, a view that we have already considered, and dismissed as derivative. It cannot be argued that an achievement deserves to be remembered until it is independently established that there is some value in being remembered. No such argument has so far been provided.

A second response to queries about the desire to be remembered might be that it is a good thing to be remembered, since those who remember will benefit by our experience. We might argue, in the style of Plutarch, that the incidents of our biographies will provide future generations with materials for practical instruction and moral edification. But on reflection everyone must admit that this justification is psychologically implausible and logically inadequate. It is hard to imagine a person who seeks fame solely for the edification of future generations, would abandon the search for fame if convinced that the incidents of his life in fact have no instructional value. It is harder still to imagine a person whose biography could supply future generations with food for thought that could not be supplied by the biography of someone else, real or fictional.

Since there seems to be no rational justification for the desire to be remembered, we are reduced to guesses about the psychological origins of this irrational drive. The drive to be remembered is one example of the desire to attract the attention of others, and the desire to attract the attention of others is probably part of a general survival instinct. Certainly persons who can succeed in attracting the attention of others
stand a better chance of surviving, other things being equal, than those who cannot. There is thus a biological explanation of the desire to be remembered, but the biological explanation cannot serve as a logical justification. Although our instincts connect the chances of being remembered with the chance of surviving, being remembered in truth helps no one to survive, since those who are "remembered" have by definition already perished.

(C) FAME AS CERTIFICATION

For some people, fame functions as a certification of the value of their achievements. Most people have their own assessments of the quality of their work, but few people can sustain these assessments in the face of public indifference or public scorn. An author may think that his work has quality, but if the public remains indifferent, it will take considerable fortitude for him to maintain his high opinion of himself. On the other hand, an author who is uncertain about the quality of his work may be relieved to discover that his work has received a favorable public reception, and will accept the verdict of the public with equanimity.

If fame can serve to certify an achievement, then the desire for fame is part of the desire for self-knowledge. We desire to know the value of our actions, and fame provides a clue; we desire to make justified judgments about the value of our achievements, and fame seemingly provides us with a justification.

It is difficult to estimate what percentage of the people who seek fame seek it for this reason. Not everyone is afflicted with self-doubt, and some thick-skinned people feel no need for public certification of their personal qualities and achievements. It is very likely, however, that some people are caught up in the search for fame for this reason. For such people, fame does not, in their conception, contribute to the value of their lives; they believe that it contributes to their knowledge of the value of their lives.

Most philosophers, I believe, would reject the view that fame could certify the value of an experience. Suppose that Jones writes a book, and cannot make a justified estimate of its value. The book turns out to be a best seller, and Jones infers from this that the book has value. But the estimate of the public must itself be justified, or else it cannot serve as a certification, and if any judgment is justified, the judgment must refer to qualities of the book, not to features of public attitudes towards the book. These features are theoretically as available to the author, or to an intelligent group of readers, as to the public at large. Public opinion is thus neither necessary nor sufficient as a certifier of the values of items of public interest.

This argument sounds complicated, but it accords with common sense. Not just snobs, but average citizens, know that there is no close correlation between the value of an object and its popularity, especially in the short run. If people seek certification of their actions, they would do well to study the actions themselves, not their effects. The public cannot certify what is not in the act itself, nor can their negative opinion deprive an act of what is in fact already there.
(D) FAME AS A CREATOR OF VALUE

Only a thin line, often obscured, separates the opinion that fame certifies the value of an achievement from the opinion that fame creates the value of an achievement. Many people feel that value is the same thing as importance, and that the importance of something is measured by the number of people who are interested in it. It follows that the value of anything is directly proportional to its fame; your life and actions have value if they interest many people, and that they have no value, or diminished value if they interest no one besides yourself.

What reasons can be given to justify the view that fame can create value? One argument derives from the undergraduate dogma that "values are subjective". The dogma, so stated, has innumerable interpretations, but the one that seems relevant here is the view that values are "mind-dependent", in the sense that values exist in the minds of evaluators and not in the objects which they evaluate. If values are mind dependent, then someone might argue that the fame of a famous object creates more value than of an unknown object, because more minds containing value surround the famous object than the unknown object.

But in fact this argument is unsuccessful, since the thesis that values are mind dependent and the thesis that fame can create value are logically distinct. More deeply analyzed, the mind-dependency thesis implies that there is no such thing as value as such; there is only value-for-a-given-mind. It follows that on the mind dependency thesis values are irreducibly personal, and they cannot be added one to another to create a sum of value.

If value exists only in minds, then if X is valued by Smith and Jones, and Y is valued by Smith alone, we still cannot conclude that X is twice as valuable as Y: there is no mind that X is twice as valuable to. Thus, even if we adopt the mind dependency thesis and concede that value is created by individual minds and exists "in" them, it still does not follow that fame—the joint evaluation of many minds—creates value, and that an object is more valuable if it interests many rather than one.

By the mind dependency thesis, there is no value in X or of X in either case. If I become famous my life does not become more valuable; certain minds in this case have created values, but they remain, discrete and not summable, in the minds of those who admire me.

Another reason why people might come to believe that fame can create value is that objects which are famous in most cases provide pleasure to those who admire them, and almost everyone thinks that pleasure is a valuable thing. The flaw in this argument is that the pleasure created by a famous object is a product of the object itself, not the fame of the object, and so it is not the fame as such which is the creator of value. Furthermore, although some objects are famous for the displeasure they cause. Thus we cannot equate the famous and the pleasurable; we cannot define fame as "pleasure producing" and we cannot argue that fame creates value because it creates pleasure.
III. ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE VALUE OF FAME

The upshot of our discussion thus far is this. We agreed that fame in some cases has practical value, but we noted that most people believe that fame has intrinsic value as well as practical value. But despite the popularity of this view, it is difficult to supply reasons in its support. Let us now consider the contrary case, the arguments that fame does not possess intrinsic value?

(A) FAME IS VALUELESS BECAUSE BESTOWED

Several arguments against the alleged intrinsic value of fame are given in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*. In the chapter devoted to different types of human life (E.N. i, 5), Aristotle dismisses the life of pleasure and then turns to the life of honor:

A consideration of the prominent types of life shows that people of superior refinement and active disposition identify happiness with honor. But it seems too superficial to be what we are looking for, since it is thought to depend on those who bestow it rather than him who receives it, but the good we define to be something proper to a man and not easily taken from him. (1095B, 22-8, trans. Ross)

This is an important passage, but it is not easy to interpret. By this point in his discussion Aristotle has identified happiness as the ultimate end, on the grounds that it alone is sought exclusively for its own sake. This passage, then, claims that fame cannot be the ultimate end because it cannot be identical with happiness. Now, it is possible to accept the conclusion of this reasoning and still maintain, without being inconsistent, that honor has some intrinsic value, short of being the ultimate end. Several paragraphs later (1097B 1-5), Aristotle does concede that honor, and even wealth, are occasionally sought for their own sakes. This leads to a puzzle: how can honor be something which is sought for its own sake and yet not be an ultimate end? There are a number of resolutions of this puzzle, but the text does not clearly indicate which resolution would be preferred by Aristotle. One resolution is to say that some people consider honor to be an ultimate end, but these people are simply mistaken. The trouble with this solution is that it clashes with Aristotle’s view that people who consider honor to be desirable in and of itself are persons of “superior refinement”. A second resolution is to say that Aristotle does believe that honor is an intrinsic good, but does not hold it to be the highest or most valuable intrinsic good. In support of this interpretation is the fact that Aristotle did consider that there might be several intrinsic values; he says at one point, "If there is only one final end, that will be what we are seeking, or if there is more than one, the most final of these will be what we are seeking" (1097A 27), but against this is the consideration that Aristotle nowhere in his writings develops an axiology involving a hierarchy of intrinsic values. Perhaps the safest comment that can be made about 1097B1-5 is that Aristotle felt that honor is somehow less valuable than happiness, and therefore not to be identified with happiness.

But what of the arguments themselves? The first is that that honor is superficial, since it depends upon those who bestow it rather than on those who receive it. Certainly many have felt that Aristotle is right on this point. The contingency of fame is a recurrent theme in the his-
tory of value theory, and there is considerable appeal that anyone who is living a truly good life should be independent of changes in external circumstances, including the vicissitudes of public opinion. Philosophers have in general not favored conceptions of the good life in which a man living a good life might develop worries that the goodness of his life could be suddenly snatched away.

Beyond question there is something psychologically distressing in the idea that the goodness of a life should depend upon something so fickle as the opinion of a mob, even the opinion of a mob of good men. But psychological distress does not constitute an argument, and the relationship between the summum bonum and personal independence must be analyzed with care. At a minimum, it is logically possible that the perfection of a perfect life might depend on the opinion of others. In the Christian tradition, for example, the summum bonum is the vision of God, and the achievement of the vision is a free gift of God. It follows, in this tradition, that the good life depends upon God, who bestows, rather than on him who receives it. It is odd that numerous thinkers have accepted Aristotle's argument that the summum bonum cannot be dependent upon others when the target of the argument is fame, but have failed to apply the same reasoning when the target of the argument is the Beatific Vision.

The fact that fame is bestowed from without implies that it is possible to possess fame at one time and to lose it at another, regardless of who one is or what one does. It is not obvious that this result proves that fame cannot be the Supreme Good, unless one assumes that the Supreme Good is something which is possessed forever if it is possessed at all. It is clear that Aristotle himself did not feel this about the Supreme Good. In his own attack on the Platonic theory of value, which did profess that the Supreme Good is an eternal good, Aristotle argued, in an epigram worthy of Nietzsche, "(The Form of the Good) will not be good any the more for being eternal, as a white thing which lasts long is no whiter than that which perishes." (1096B4) Given Aristotle's own premises, it does not follow that fame cannot provide a happy life because fame is bestowed from without.

(B) FAME AS NOT PROPER TO A MAN

In the same passage in which Aristotle remarks that fame is bestowed from without, he also remarks that fame cannot be the good since it is not "proper" (οἰκείον) to its possessor. It is not easy to determine, on the basis of the text alone, whether oikeion is intended to introduce a new idea. Perhaps Aristotle meant by "not proper to a man" nothing more than "bestowed from without". On the other hand, one would think that Aristotle would not have added this clause unless it contributed something new to the argument.

But if we assume that the phrase "not proper to a man" does mean something different from "bestowed from without", we must determine what it does mean. The basic sense of the Greek oikeion is "related to the household", that is, related to personal property, but, by Aristotle's time, the sense has been generalized to something like "suitable". Since fame has little to do with household goods, etymology is no guide to interpretation.
One possible view is that Aristotle meant by "proper" something like "essential", so that what is proper to a man is something without which he could not possibly exist. But this suggestion, in addition to its technical difficulties, is refuted by Aristotle's remark that what is proper to a man "cannot be easily taken from him." Now, what cannot easily be taken from a man can, with effort, be taken from him, and this shows that "proper" cannot be anything like what is meant by "essential".

Another suggestion is that Aristotle meant by "proper to a man" something like "relating to his peculiar characteristics", that is, to characteristics which set him off from other men. But there are difficulties in this view, at least for a philosopher who is trying to show that true happiness cannot consist in fame. Aristotle nowhere suggests that my happiness or well-being must consist in something which is special to me, and not shared by others. On the contrary, true happiness, which for Aristotle is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, requires me to act virtuously, in a way similar to other men. Furthermore, fame is, more often than not, generated by the performance of a rare or unique deed. It follows that if "proper" means "relating to peculiar characteristics" fame is, more than almost anything else, "proper to a man". The upshot of the discussion seems to be that, whatever Aristotle might have had in mind by the phrase "not proper to a man", the argument that fame is not happiness because it is not proper to a man fails through.

(C) FAME AS UNIMPORTANT BECAUSE IRRELEVANT TO SELF-EXPRESSION

Aristotle, in the oikoioi passage, seems to have been convinced that if any good is to serve as a person's ultimate end, it must have some special relationship to that person. We have seen, however, that Aristotle does not have much of a theory about this relationship, and the classical axiologists who followed Aristotle did not even avail themselves of the Aristotelian metaphor of intrinsic goods as household properties.

There are, however, a number of modern concepts, not present in the Aristotelian system, which might be helpful in illuminating this relationship. I suggest that one particularly promising theory is the theory that the relationship between individuals and their ultimate ends is the relationship of self-expression. Aristotle suggested that intrinsic goods, if they are to constitute my happiness, must somehow be mine. The present theory suggests that intrinsic goods which make up an individual's good life are his if they are the products of his self-expression. Of course, the concept of self-expression is itself in need of analysis. But whatever the best analysis of self-expression should prove to be, there is something basically appealing in the notion that my life can only be a good life if I have created it, in the sense of imposing my own pattern or organization upon it. In this theory, my life may contain many good things, health, for example, but if my life is not my own creation, then the good things in my life do not relate to me, and cannot be said to increase the quality of my life.

It is not possible, in an essay devoted to fame, to develop in any detail the theory that ultimate ends must be the products of self-expression. But if some development of this theory is correct, then fame cannot be something which improves the life of the person who possess-
es it. My fame consists in the professed admiration of others and thus my fame is not a product of my own self-expression, but the self-expression of the others who admire me. Fame, like health, can be a good thing in my life, but not an improvement of my life.

Thus we have reached, by a new route, the agreeably classical conclusion that fame is not particularly important to living a good life. This result should be a consolation to that vast majority of persons who lack fame, since it entails that there is no reason to regret that one is not famous. One can still, of course, regret that one has done nothing which deserves fame, but such regrets, however justifiable or deeply felt, are directed to a different object, and in no way demonstrate the importance of fame.