

# The Value of Consciousness

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Forthcoming in *Analysis*

While we rehearse our measureless wealth, it is for thee, dear Mother!  
We own it all and several to-day indissoluble in Thee;  
—Think not our chant, our show, merely for products gross, or lucre  
—it is for Thee, **the Soul**, electric, spiritual!  
Our farms, inventions, crops, we own in Thee! cities and States in Thee!  
Our freedom all in Thee! our very lives in Thee!

Walt Whitman, "Song of the Exposition"

## Introduction/Abstract

Recent work within such disparate research areas as the epistemology of perception, theories of well-being, animal and medical ethics, the philosophy of consciousness, and theories of understanding in philosophy of science and epistemology has featured disconnected discussions of what is arguably a single underlying question: What is the value of consciousness? The purpose of this paper is to review some of this work and place it within a unified theoretical framework that makes contributions (and contributors) from these disparate areas more visible to one another.

## 1. Preliminaries: Three Kinds of Value

Before reviewing recent work bearing on the question 'What is the value of consciousness?', it might be useful to get clearer on what the question *means*.

When we speak about the value of X, there are three different *kinds* of value we might have in mind: epistemic, ethical, or aesthetic. These are fundamentally distinct

and incommensurable: one may find a certain quantity  $Q$  of epistemic value more valuable than some quantity  $Q^*$  of epistemic value, but when considering a quantity  $Q$  of epistemic value and a quantity  $Q^*$  of ethical value, no meaning attaches to the question of which is more valuable *simpliciter*.

The traditionalist formula 'the true, the good, and the beautiful' speaks to this three-way distinction between epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic value. It just builds in a commitment to three kinds of monism value: truth monism about epistemic value (the idea that truth is the only intrinsic epistemic value, with all other epistemic value being merely instrumental), goodness monism about ethical value (goodness as the only intrinsic ethical value, all other ethical value being instrumental), and beauty monism about aesthetic value (beauty the only intrinsic aesthetic value etc.).

Such monism is more or less defensible in each domain, but in none is it analytically true. Veritists such as Alvin Goldman (1999 Ch.3) have defended truth monism about epistemic value. Still, other intrinsic epistemic values have occasionally been proffered, notably *understanding* (Kvanvig 2003). Goodness monism about ethical value is perhaps easiest to hear as analytic, yet debates on the relationship between the right and the good (starting with Sidgwick 1874) are naturally taken to have implications for such monism. Beauty monism about aesthetic value, meanwhile, is by far the most contentious; indeed, its rejection has become something of an orthodoxy in contemporary aesthetics (see Danto 2002 for review).

Regardless of how these axiological debates pan out, the question 'What is the value of consciousness?' is profitably factorized into the following six questions:

- What is the intrinsic epistemic value of consciousness?
- What is the intrinsic ethical value of consciousness?
- What is the intrinsic aesthetic value of consciousness?
- What is the instrumental epistemic value of consciousness?
- What is the instrumental ethical value of consciousness?
- What is the instrumental aesthetic value of consciousness?

This factorization is the result of two crosscutting distinctions: between epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic value and between intrinsic and instrumental value. (I use the

expression 'intrinsic value' to denote non-instrumental value, not value that something has independently of its relations to other items. Another term often used for this is 'final value.')

A couple of further clarifications are in order. First, the term 'consciousness' introduces its own potential ambiguities, most notably between 'phenomenal' and 'access' consciousness (Block 1995): a mental state may be said to be conscious because it is something the subject *experiences* (there is something it is like for her to be in it), or because it is functionally highly integrated and influences information processing across many parts of the cognitive system. As most recent work about the value of consciousness concerns the *phenomenal* notion, this will be our focus hereafter.

Two kinds of questions should be distinguished, though, about the value of phenomenal consciousness. For the latter is a generic property that admits of several species: perceptual, algedonic, emotional, perhaps cognitive, perhaps agentic, and so on (Kriegel 2015). This introduces an ambiguity in the question 'What is the value of phenomenal consciousness?' Suppose that fish and birds are valuable but amphibians, reptiles, and mammals are not. If someone asks whether animals are valuable, in one sense we should answer positively, since fish and birds are valuable; but in another sense we should answer negatively, since being an animal is not as such valuable. Thus the question of the value of phenomenal consciousness is usefully disambiguated into a 'generic' and a 'specific' reading:

- What value does phenomenal consciousness *as such* have?
- What value(s) do some *species* of phenomenal consciousness have?

This is important, because Andrew Lee (2018) recently argued that phenomenal consciousness is not intrinsically ethically valuable, on the grounds that only algedonic phenomenology has intrinsic ethical value, while other types of phenomenal consciousness are value-neutral. But from a different perspective it is possible to argue that phenomenal consciousness is intrinsically valuable on the grounds that its algedonic species is. What all can agree on is that Lee answers in the negative the genus question and in the positive the species question.

A last clarification: Although the question ‘What is the value of consciousness’ invites answers of the grammatical form ‘Consciousness is V’ (where V stands for a value property), philosophers may find consciousness valuable who do not take consciousness to be some *substance* that instantiates properties. (Might it be a first-order property that instantiates *second-order* value properties? For some substitution instances of V, this will not work. Thus, truth is likely an intrinsic epistemic value, but it is not a property that properties can have: beliefs, judgments, propositions, statements, etc. can be true or false, but properties cannot.) I propose that we see ‘Consciousness is V’ as claiming that anything that instantiates the property of being conscious will perforce also instantiate the property of being V – and will do so *because* it instantiates the property of being conscious. On this interpretation, the ‘deep grammar’ of ‘Consciousness is V’ is something like this: For any mental state *m*, if *m* is conscious, then *m* is V, and is V in virtue of being conscious. Accordingly, the question ‘What is the value of consciousness?’ really comes to this: What value properties do conscious states have in virtue of being conscious?

This is effectively a question about grounding: about what holds in virtue of what. In the theory of ground, a distinction is sometimes drawn between *full* and *partial* grounds (Fine 2012). For instance, we may say that knowledge is grounded in belief, meaning that belief is a *partial* ground of knowledge; but we may also say that belief is grounded in tracking relation R and mean that R is the *full* ground of belief. By the same token, when we claim that something is valuable in virtue of being conscious, we must specify whether we mean ‘in part in virtue of being conscious’ or ‘entirely in virtue of being conscious.’

With these clarifications of our question in place, let us review some elements of answer in various recent discussions of consciousness.

## 2. The Epistemic Value of Consciousness

The epistemic value of consciousness has been the most explicitly explored. In particular, there is a lively debate about the role of perceptual phenomenology in providing a special kind of epistemic justification. James Pryor and Michael Huemer

have argued, influentially, that perceptual experience provides immediate (roughly: belief-independent) *prima facie* justification for perceptual beliefs. (This is what they call ‘dogmatism’ and ‘phenomenal conservatism’ respectively.) Both have also made the additional claim that it is an aspect of the *phenomenal character* of perceptual experiences that confers on them this epistemic significance. Moreover, they seem to have roughly the same phenomenal feature in mind – what Pryor (2000: 547 fn37) calls ‘phenomenal force’ and Huemer (2001: 77) calls ‘forcefulness.’ This is a feature external to the experience’s content and is the phenomenal analogue of assertoric force: it presents the content of the experience as real or obtaining.

Naturally, Pryor’s and Huemer’s views have faced various objections. Recently, however, a number of authors have targeted specifically their views’ *phenomenological* dimension. A commonly explored line of objection goes like this: the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences – including their force(fulness) – is not relevantly different from that of certain *imaginative* experiences; yet imagining something does not provide justification (immediate or otherwise) for perceptual beliefs; therefore, nor does the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences (Ghijzen 2014, Siegel and Silins 2015, Teng 2018).

Interestingly, even if we grant that perceptual phenomenology plays a role in immediate justification, and to that extent has epistemic value, it is noteworthy that this value claim is limited in at least two ways. First, it concerns the epistemic value not of phenomenal consciousness as such, but only of one species of it – perceptual phenomenology. Secondly, it concerns only *instrumental* epistemic value. Certainly veritists will claim that epistemic rationality is valuable only insofar as it is instrumental in promoting true belief; but even such proposed alternative intrinsic values as understanding go beyond epistemic rationality.<sup>1</sup> Now, the fact that the relevant value is merely instrumental, and attaches only to perceptual consciousness, does not by itself mean that it is inconsequential. Pautz (2017), for instance, argues that this alone shows that most versions of physicalism are false (roughly: because they cannot explain how physical properties that differ in the physically tiniest ways can differ so dramatically in value). Still, it would be interesting to consider whether more ambitious epistemic-value claims could be made on behalf of consciousness.

As far as generalizing from the perceptual case, one general strategy is to push broadly perceptual models of certain mental phenomena and then use them to extend perceptual phenomenology's epistemic role to other species of phenomenal consciousness. This line is pursued most clearly by Eli Chudnoff, who argues that the phenomenal feature crucial to perception's epistemic role – what he calls 'presentational phenomenology' (more on this below) – is also found in intuition, introspection, and recollection (Chudnoff 2012). Although he develops in detail mostly the account of how intuitions provides immediate justification for certain a priori beliefs in virtue of their presentational phenomenology (Chudnoff 2011), he would presumably also claim that introspective experiences immediately justify certain psychological beliefs and recollections immediately justify certain beliefs about the past – and do so in virtue of their presentational phenomenology. Other philosophers have also defended a broadly perceptual model of *emotional* experiences as value perceptions and argued that value beliefs can be prima facie justified by emotional phenomenology in the same way perceptual beliefs can be prima facie justified by perceptual phenomenology (cf. Elgin 2008).<sup>2</sup>

If every type of phenomenal consciousness could be shown to provide immediate justification for *some* type of belief, that epistemic value could be seen to belong to phenomenal consciousness *as such*. This is of course a tall order, and nothing like this has been approximated in the extant literature. Even then, in any case, it would still be merely instrumental value. What are prospects for finding some *intrinsic* epistemic value in consciousness?

The most promising approach, I suspect, might be found outside the veritistic fold – in particular in the idea that there is an intrinsically valuable form of *understanding* that is grounded in conscious experience. An argument to that effect is recently developed by Bourget (2017).<sup>3</sup> The argument proceeds in two steps. The first notes a common theme in theories of understanding within epistemology and philosophy of science, namely, that understanding requires *grasping*. Opinions differ on just what grasping is, and what exactly needs to be grasped for something to be understood; but they agree that without grasp there is no understanding (Gordon 2017). Bourget gives the following illuminating example: when told by trustworthy authorities that the sun is approximately 1,300,000 bigger than the earth, we believe this (correctly) but in a sense have no grasp of what this really means; when later we are

told that that is like the difference between a basketball and an apple seed, something happens with us which can rightly be described as an epistemic achievement. But the achievement is a peculiar one: we have not acquired any further evidence for the proposition that the sun is approximately 1,300,000 bigger than the earth. Rather, we have gained a measure of insight into what it really means that the sun is approximately 1,300,000 bigger than the earth – we *grasp* the fact in a way we did not previously. The second step of Bourget’s argument is to ask what distinguishes believing that *p* *without* grasping *p* and *with* grasping *p*, and argue that the difference has to do with phenomenal consciousness: we believe *with* grasping when our belief is accompanied by a phenomenal experience with the content *p*; we believe *without* grasping when our belief is not so accompanied. Bourget argues that this explanation is better in various respects than functionalist and other explanations.

One limitation of Bourget’s discussion is that he does not tell us what kind of experience makes for grasping, and indeed seems to suggest that *any* experience would do – something which seems rather implausible. (If one believes that the weather is nice while experiencing hope that the weather is nice, that does not seem to make for grasping.) But we may find help on this point in Chudnoff’s aforementioned notion of *presentational phenomenology*: a phenomenal characteristic whereby a mental state not only represents *p* but also makes it seem to the subject that she is aware of the *truthmaker* of the proposition *p*. Using this notion of presentational phenomenology, we may surmise that the key difference between believing that *p* with grasping and without grasping is that although both beliefs represent *p*, only the former involves a presentational phenomenology whereby the subject seems to be aware of the truthmaker of *p*.

## 5. The Ethical Value of Consciousness

At a most basic level, we engage in ethics to answer the following question: How should I live? From this perspective, it is useful to organize ethics’ agenda around three separate questions about the good life:

- 1) What makes a life good for the one who lives it?
- 2) What makes a life *morally* good?

- 3) What is the relationship between a morally good life and a life good for the one who lives it?

Let us say that what makes life good for the one who lives it is *prudential value*, while what makes life morally good is *moral value*. In these terms, most recent discussions of the ethical value of consciousness concern its prudential value; nonetheless some touch on its moral value.

### 5.1. *Consciousness and well-being*

The question of life's goodness for the one who lives it is addressed in the lively literature on well-being. A common if unloved classification divides theories of well-being into three types: hedonist, desire-satisfaction, and objective-list theories. Hedonism leads most directly to an intrinsic prudential value for consciousness. According to it, well-being is determined by the distribution of hedonically valenced experiences, notably pleasure and pain: the more pleasure and the less pain, the better the life for the one who lives it. To this we only need to add that pleasure and pain contribute to well-being *in virtue of their phenomenology* (Bramble 2016) to obtain an intrinsic prudential value of (one species of) phenomenal consciousness.

On its face, this additional claim is antecedently plausible. Imagine a functional duplicate of yours with the following peculiarity: its mental states that play the pleasure role always lack phenomenology, while its mental states that play the pain role are phenomenally experienced just as yours are. From a hedonic standpoint, this ill-fated duplicate seems to lead a rather sorrowful existence, and certainly not to live a life as good as yours.

In recent discussions, however, the role of phenomenology in hedonic well-being has been called into question, with some authors defending non-phenomenological forms of hedonism. According to Heathwood (2007), for instance, what makes a mental state pleasure not any specific phenomenology, but a desire *directed at a* phenomenology. What motivates this is the thought that pleasures can be extremely varied phenomenologically, so that what unifies them is simply the fact that one desires them (Heathwood 2007: 26). In defense of phenomenological hedonism, we might note that the felt qualities of, say, seeing blue, tasting honey, and feeling velvet are just as different as the felt qualities of pleasures produced by orgasm and by a particularly



well-crafted George Eliot sentence. Yet as we saw in §2, many epistemologists assign epistemic value to perceptual phenomenology, as the genus (or determinable) of which visual, gustatory, and tactile phenomenology are species (or determinates). By the same token, we can assign prudential value to pleasure phenomenology as the genus of which many species can be recognized (Crisp 2006: 109). This is not to say that there need not be any phenomenal commonality among pleasures; rather, it is to say that the commonality is liable to be as phenomenally subtle as that among all forms of perception.

Arguably, in the background here is a question about what makes pleasure of value to us. The non-phenomenological hedonist thinks it is not simply the fact that pleasure *has* a certain phenomenology, but that we *like* that phenomenology and *want* to experience it. The phenomenological hedonist holds that this puts the cart before the horse: intuitively, we like and want the phenomenology of pleasure because of *what that phenomenology is like*. It would be odd, according to her, to treat as brute and inexplicable the facts that we like and desire pleasure phenomenology and dislike and are averse to pain phenomenology. These facts do not seem like rock bottom. They seem *obviously* explicable, namely by the nature of pleasure and pain phenomenology (see Bramble 2013 for discussion).

It is important to appreciate that phenomenological hedonists do not typically appeal to a narrow notion of pleasure and pain as punctate bodily sensations, but to a wider notion encompassing the whole panoply of hedonically valenced experiences in our psychological repertoire. Joshua Shepherd (2018) has recently presented a particularly developed account of what he calls ‘phenomenal value’ – in essence, phenomenally grounded prudential value – in terms of ‘affective-evaluative’ phenomenal properties. These are phenomenal properties which involve both hedonic valence and evaluation of their objects. Thus, taking pleasure in beer, being content with beer, and hoping for beer both feel good and evaluate beer positively; while pain, embarrassment, and anger both feel bad and evaluate their objects negatively. For Shepherd, then, there is an evaluative dimension that must supplement valence in the phenomenal grounds of prudential value. Arguably, however, the temptation to incorporate evaluative phenomenology in the phenomenal grounds of prudential value is shaken when we consider the rare instances in which the correlation between the evaluative and hedonic dimensions breaks down. Thus, yearning for *x* feels bad but

evaluates  $x$  positively. Intuitively, having a lot of yearning in one's life makes life (other things being equal) worse for one.

Hedonism is a minority position in contemporary ethics, largely due to Nozick's (1981: 42-3) 'experience machine' objection. This is the objection that hedonism cannot vindicate the intuition that it would be rational for us to decline an invitation to enter a machine that would simulate exactly the same life we would otherwise have but add to it a bit of extra pleasure (one more delicious strawberry!). Now, recent defenses of hedonism have multiplied the attempts to debunk the experience-machine intuition (Silverstein 2000, Crisp 2006, De Brigard 2010). It is worth noting, however, that even if we accept the experience-machine objection at face value, all it really shows is that experience is not *sufficient* for well-being, or that it does not determine well-being *all by itself*. The objection does nothing to undermine the *necessity* of experience for well-being, the idea that experience makes an ineluctable *contribution* to well-being. For suppose you had to choose between the following two options: either (a) you enter the experience machine and lead a life phenomenally approximately indistinguishable from the one you would be leading outside the machine; or (b) you stay outside the machine but lose all phenomenal consciousness, carrying on your 'public' life entirely undisturbed – but as a complete zombie. It would seem folly to choose (b) in this scenario. Thus the fact that in the original experience-machine scenario you are guaranteed a continued experiential life outside the machine is crucial in sustaining the intuition that it is preferable for you not to plug in. At most, then, the experience-machine argument shows that (hedonically valenced) experience is only a *partial ground* of intrinsic prudential value.

This is independently plausible. For consider the following choice: either (a) you submit today to a medical procedure that would irreversibly zombify you overnight (though it will leave your cognitive and motivational architecture as functionally unchanged as possible) or (b) your life from now on will skew consistently towards the unpleasant (it is not that you will be relentlessly tortured, but just that you will experience considerably more frustration and pain than pleasure and satisfaction). I think most of us will have no difficulty choosing (b). At least as long as the pain is not too overwhelming, most of us find it far better to live with it than to end our conscious life. This seems to suggest that we also value being conscious as such, regardless of the hedonic quality of our consciousness.<sup>4</sup> If this is right, then prudential value is at best

grounded partly in hedonic phenomenology and partly in phenomenal consciousness as such.



Partly under the pressure of the experience-machine objection, many ethicists today prefer a desire-satisfaction theory, according to which a person's well-being is a function of her desires being satisfied. It is not the distribution of pleasure vs. pain that matters, but the distribution of satisfied vs. frustrated desires. Importantly, the notion of satisfaction at play here is not subjective but objective: for a person's desire to be satisfied is not for that person to experience a phenomenal feeling of satisfaction, but for the desire's content-fixing satisfaction conditions being met. It is this notion of satisfaction that helps the desire-satisfaction theorist avoid the experience-machine problem: in the experience machine, we have the *impression* that our desires are being satisfied, and accordingly experience feelings of satisfaction, but our desires are not *really* satisfied.

Neil Levy (2014) uses the desire-satisfaction account of well-being to argue that phenomenal consciousness is not particularly valuable. Even if we suppose, rather implausibly, that all desires are phenomenally conscious, and even more implausibly, that their satisfaction conditions are fully fixed by their phenomenal character, what matters for prudential value on this view is not just the *having* of desires, but their being satisfied. Prudential value comes into the world when we move from desires to satisfied desires. And what makes a desire satisfied has nothing to do with consciousness, but with the objective facts about the world (except of course when consciousness is part of what the desire is a desire *for*).<sup>5</sup>

Charles Siewert (forthcoming) offers a sustained argument *against* this desire-satisfaction-based threat to prudential value in consciousness. His argument proceeds somewhat as follows. Suppose you are offered the following deal by an omnipotent deity: if you submit to a zombification procedure that retains as much of your cognitive and motivational architecture as possible but deprives you of phenomenology, the deity will see to it that an overwhelming majority of your current desires be satisfied. Should you accept the deal if you want to make your life better (for you)? Intuitively, you should not. Intuitively, your life will not be better for you if you submit to this procedure; it will be much worse. In fact, there is a perfectly good sense in which *your*

life will be no more (Cutter 2017). For suppose you are offered a variant of the deal where after a week in a state of zombiehood, you would be killed and replaced with another zombie cooked up in a Petri dish – but your current desires will continue being methodically satisfied one by one. It is entirely unclear what reason you have to find this new variant of the deal any less appealing than the previous one. Both offers are, intuitively, really terrible *for you*: far from making your life better for you, they would end your life in any prudentially significant sense of ‘your life.’ (It is important here to screen off intuitions about whether it would be *morally* good to accept the deal. You might affect a great deal of good in the world if you thus sacrifice yourself to secure the prospective satisfaction of all your geopolitical and macroeconomic wishes. But that would still be a *sacrifice*: your own well-being would be the price you would heroically pay for things going well for others.)

The third type of theory of well-being (in common taxonomies) is the objective-list theory. The general idea is that a life is good for the one who lives it to the extent that it features as many items from a privileged set of goodness-conferring elements. Strictly speaking, however, hedonism and desire-satisfaction theory also satisfy this general characterization. What marks off objective-list theories is two main features, one captured in ‘objective’ and one in ‘list.’ The ‘objective’ part is that the goodness-conferring elements must be such independently of our subjective reactions to them: it is not because we enjoy or want them, or even because we are aware of having them, that they make our lives better. The ‘list’ part intimates a strong tendency toward pluralism: we expect the goodness-conferring elements to be several, rather than reduce to a single source. Thus a typical objective-list theory would cite love and friendship, achievement and self-realization, play and free time, appreciation of beauty, and a number of other elements the very presence of which in one’s life – regardless of one’s awareness of or attitude toward them – makes it a better life.

Objective-list theories may seem initially to be least accommodating for a special role of consciousness in well-being. But in fact most such theories do cite hedonically valenced experiences in their list of objective goodness-conferring elements. Thus, Fletcher (2013) includes happiness and pleasure in his objective list, while Murphy (2001) includes happiness, aesthetic experience, and ‘inner peace’ (which presumably feels quite nice!). To be sure, the fact that for such objective-list theories valenced

experience is only one among many elements responsible for well-being diminishes considerably the prudential value of consciousness; but it does not annihilate it.

Furthermore, we should keep in mind the coherence of a sort of limit case of objective-list theory that includes on its list *only* conscious experiences, though not only hedonic ones. This kind of 'list-experientialism' is defended by van der Deijl (forthcoming) and is endorsed by Siewert (personal communication). Van der Deijl cites self-understanding and novelty as experiential goods that supplement pleasure in making life good. Other philosophers have belabored the value of *cognitive* phenomenology. Galen Strawson (2011: 299), for instance, argues that without cognitive phenomenology life would be 'pretty boring.' Thus one may draw a longish list of valuable experiences that go beyond the hedonically valenced, and ground well-being in it. And as noted above, we may well value having conscious experience as such (so long it is not too agonizing). In this limit case of objective-list theory, then, experience regains its status as *full* ground of intrinsic prudential value.<sup>6</sup>

## 5.2. *Consciousness and morality*

Modern moral philosophy is dominated by three main approaches: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. In what follows, I will bracket virtue ethics, as I am unfamiliar with any links between it and the value of consciousness in the extant literature. But what is the outlook for a moral value for consciousness in the consequentialist and deontological frameworks?

Consequentialism is typically characterized as the view that an act is morally right to the extent that its consequences are morally good, with different versions of consequentialism issuing from different views on what would make a consequence morally good. One version is 'welfarist consequentialism': good consequence = more well-being in the world. In this version, consequentialism embeds theories of well-being in its account of moral value. Thus if one combines welfarist consequentialism with either phenomenological hedonism or 'list-experientialism' about well-being, one would obtain the result that consciousness is also the full ground of *moral* value. The former combination enjoys a sustained contemporary defense in Roger Crisp's work. The combination of welfarist consequentialism and list-experientialism, however, is to my knowledge unexplored.

Deontological approaches emphasize motivation over consequences: they commend acting from the motive of duty rather than for the promotion of well-being. There is any number of views about what our moral duty is, of course, but the paradigmatic view here is surely Kant's: our duty is to treat human beings as ends in themselves rather than as mere means to our own ends. There is something about the presence of another person in a situation that, for Kant, puts the breaks on our pursuit of self-interest – the person 'exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world' (Kant 1797: 186-7). That in virtue of which a person exacts respect and merits being treated as an end is what Kant (1785: 52) calls 'dignity.' Our fundamental duty, then, is to respect and treat as ends all creatures possessed of dignity; all our other, more 'local' duties derive essentially from this one.

For our purposes, the key question here is: What gives some things dignity and not others? Presumably, dignity is not a brute, inexplicable attribute that arbitrarily attaches itself to some entities and not others. More plausibly, things have certain empirical properties that *ground* their dignity – be these genetic, psychological, or other empirical (i.e., non-evaluative) properties. We have duties to other people, but not to rocks – and this must have to do with the factual differences between people and rocks. This opens up the possibility, argued for in Kriegel 2017, that the ground of dignity is precisely phenomenal consciousness. In broad strokes, the argument is this: to describe someone as having dignity is to ascribe to her a certain *inviolability*; and such inviolability attaches to conscious creatures precisely in virtue of the fact that the conscious experiences of each conscious creature can only be experienced by them. I can know about your sadness, and through empathy I may even experience a token sadness type-identical to your token sadness; but I cannot feel *your* token sadness. On the emerging view, an entity exacts respects and merits treatment as an end just if it is a phenomenally conscious creature.<sup>7</sup>

It might be objected that this fits poorly with Kant's idea that dignity attaches to rational beings capable of setting ends. But bracketing the fact that a deontological view need not be Kantian in every respect, the objection faces a dilemma. Could an unconscious automaton be a rational end-setting being? If not, then (a) it would seem that rational end-setting status implies consciousness. But if a rational end-setting automaton is possible, then (b) intuitively, there is no particular reason for us to treat it as an end rather than a means. Insofar as we can envisage a future in which end-setting

household robots set their own ends, as long as they remained certified zombies we would feel no more pressure to treat them as ends than we do our current-day Roombas. Both those future robots and today's Roombas are characterized by one simple fact: *there is nobody home*.

It is worth noting that one could always adopt a hybrid ethical theory combining deontological and consequentialist elements. Consider the following ecumenical moral maxim: Always maximize well-being in the world consistently with treating all creatures possessed of dignity as ends rather than mere means. To follow this maxim to the letter is to consider all one's available courses of action, rule out the subset involving treating some creatures with dignity as a means, and of the remaining courses of action pick that which maximizes well-being in the world. For all we said here, this kind of simple hybrid theory *could* be doubly consciousness-invoking, namely, if one adopts (a) either a hedonist or list-experientalist account of well-being and (b) the thesis that dignity is grounded in consciousness.

## 6. The Aesthetic Value of Consciousness

One area that remains virtually unexplored in the current literature is the *aesthetic* value of consciousness. We have many experiences of beauty in life, occasioned by encounter with art, nature, and even abstract structures. But do we have experiences that are themselves beautiful, and beautiful *because* they are experiences? This may seem doubtful. Certain experiences may, by their rarity and intricacy, exhibit aesthetic value; but it may well be their rarity or intricacy that grounds this value, rather than their being experiences.

Still, there is a broadly subjectivist tradition in aesthetics that grounds value in experience in a different way. I have in mind the kind 'secondary-quality' account whereby an object's being aesthetically valuable is a matter of its being disposed to elicit the right kind of aesthetic experience in the right kind of subject under the right kind of circumstance. The approach continues to command philosophical defense and development (e.g., Matthen 2018) and may be generically states as follows: For any item  $x$  and intrinsic aesthetic value  $V_i$ , such that  $x$  is  $V_i$ , there is a kind of subject  $S$ , a kind of circumstance  $C$ , and a kind of aesthetic experience  $\mathcal{A}_i$ , such that (i)  $x$  is disposed to

elicit  $\mathcal{A}_i$  in  $S$  under  $C$  and (ii)  $x$  is  $V$  in virtue of the fact that (i). Presumably, the phenomenology of aesthetic experience is crucial here: if an object elicited in us internal states with the functional role of aesthetic experience, but without the corresponding phenomenology, most subjectivists would be disinclined to consider it aesthetically valuable.

The notion of aesthetic experience had been out of favor for much of the second half of the twentieth century, largely due to Dickie's (1965) influential critique, but has returned to center stage in recent aesthetics, often in the guise of application of ideas from recent philosophy of perception to aesthetic perception. A deeper issue, however, concerns what separates aesthetic from non-aesthetic perception. After all, it is perfectly possible to look at a painting or listen to a symphony without undergoing aesthetic experience. Nanay (2015) has argued that paradigmatic instances of aesthetic experience display a distinctive distribution of perceptual attention, absent in non-aesthetic perception. But it is also possible to appeal here to a non-perceptual, purely *affective* element. After all, intuitively a perceptual experience of a painting or a symphony does not amount to an aesthetic experience unless one also *enjoys* what one perceives. Indeed, a recent line of thought, starting from the observation that aesthetic experience occasioned by (e.g.) literature and conceptual art is not perceptually based (Shelley 2003), has led some authors to *identify* aesthetic experience with the relevant affective element, recasting perceptual experience as merely contingently and causally linked to aesthetic experience proper (Goffin 2019). Alternatively, one might construe aesthetic experience as a pleasure taken *in the apprehension* of certain objects, where 'apprehension' covers both perceptual and non-perceptual (e.g., imaginative, intellectual) awareness (Matthen 2017). Such affect-first accounts render more urgent the question of what distinguishes aesthetic from non-aesthetic enjoyment. A traditional thought is that aesthetic enjoyment in an object is enjoyment in it for its own sake, that is, independently of any further good that might come out of it. This approach is developed within a rich functionalist framework by Matthen (2017), but criticized by Nanay (2018: 78), on the grounds that aesthetic experience is often directed at everyday scene, and these are poor candidates for being enjoyed for their own sake.

Regardless of how aesthetic experience is ultimately understood, the secondary-quality account of aesthetic value yields a grounding of aesthetic value in aesthetic



phenomenology. However, the aesthetic value thus grounded in phenomenal consciousness is not an aesthetic value *of consciousness*: it is not the aesthetic experience *itself* which is beautiful, but the *object* of the experience. This raises the question of whether there is some intrinsic aesthetic value that attaches to consciousness itself.

Niikawa (ms) argues that the traditional notion of *the sublime* – something so incomprehensibly grand and imposing as to induce feelings of eluding our grasp and inspiring awe in us – may apply to phenomenal consciousness. His argument centers on this reaction of awe that is either constitutive or at least diagnostic of the sublime. When we contemplate particularly vividly the so-called explanatory gap between phenomenal consciousness and the rest of the natural order, a certain intellectual type of awe descends on us, and does so fittingly. (Importantly, as many philosophers recognize, it is fitting to experience this awe even when one has credence higher than .5 in physicalism.) If consciousness is a fitting object of awe, and being a fitting object of awe is the mark of the sublime, then consciousness is sublime.

## Conclusion

The primary purpose of this paper has been to sketch out a general framework within which the question of the value of consciousness – increasingly prominent in a variety of discussions across quite disconnected research areas – could be addressed in a systematic manner. In the first instance, the question is usefully factorized into six types of question: about epistemic, ethical (both prudential and moral), and aesthetic value, either intrinsic or instrumental. To make progress on these questions, we must first have clear views on what the intrinsic values in each domain are. Once we do have such views on the table, we can use standard philosophical techniques of analysis and argumentation to try and establish various relatively concrete theses. The more comprehensive our collection of such theses, the more comprehensive our account of the value of consciousness.

In the course of our discussion, we have identified a number of lines of thought leading to an intrinsic value for consciousness. First, if (1) understanding is an intrinsic epistemic value, (2) grasping is an ineluctable component of understanding, and (3)

presentational phenomenology or some such phenomenal feature is necessarily involved in grasping, then (4) there is an intrinsic epistemic value partially grounded in (a species of) phenomenal consciousness. Secondly, if either phenomenological hedonism or 'list-experientialism' is true about well-being, then intrinsic prudential value is fully grounded in (certain species of) phenomenal consciousness (and may be partially grounded in phenomenal consciousness as such, namely, if the latter shows up within our list-experientialism). Thirdly, if (1) either phenomenological hedonism or list-experientialism is true of well-being and (2) welfare consequentialism is true of moral value, then (3) intrinsic moral value is fully grounded in (the relevant species of) consciousness as well. Fourthly, if (1) phenomenal consciousness is the ground of dignity, and (2) dignity the ground of moral value, then by transitivity of ground, (3) phenomenal consciousness (as such) is the ground of moral value. Fifthly, if (1) the sublime is an intrinsic aesthetic value, (2) anything is sublime that elicits fitting awe, and (3) there is an intellectual kind of awe fittingly elicited by phenomenal consciousness, then (4) there is an intrinsic aesthetic value that attaches to phenomenal consciousness (as such).

Each of these lines of thought is of course controversial. Some have courted actual controversy (e.g., phenomenological hedonism about prudential value). Others may increasingly do so over the coming years, as the topic of the value of consciousness comes more transparently to the forefront of a number of areas intersecting with the philosophy of consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some naïve realists, notably Keith Allen (forthcoming), have argued that perceptual experience, insofar as it provides us with contact with reality, is intrinsically rather than instrumentally valuable. It is not entirely clear from Allen's discussion, however, whether he has epistemic or ethical value (or both) in mind. In any case, I am skeptical of Allen's argument. The argument is that naïve realism is the only view of perceptual experience that can account for its intrinsic value as constituting contact with reality, because other views must claim that it is only in belief (and action) that contact with reality is achieved, and so perceptual experience is valuable only insofar as it is instrumental to the formation of beliefs (and actions). But most opponents of naïve realism would presumably claim that contact with reality is established in *some* perceptual experiences, namely the *veridical* one; it is just that it is the veridicality of the experience, not its sheer occurrence, that establishes contact. (Indeed, an appeal to belief here would be strange, since most opponents of naïve realism think that false belief and true belief belong to a single psychological kind just as veridical and falsidical perceptual experiences do.)

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, this is denied by Chudnoff himself (Brogaard and Chudnoff 2016), roughly on the grounds that emotions derive their representational content from non-emotional states.

<sup>3</sup> Siewert (2013) argues for a central role for consciousness in specifically *linguistic* understanding. But this kind of understanding could be claimed to reduce to a species of knowledge (namely, knowledge of meaning), and this threatens to reduce the *value* consciousness plays in understanding to the value it plays in knowledge and justification (which, as we have seen, is merely instrumental).

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Géraldine Carranante and Anna Giustina for making me see this.

<sup>5</sup> Levy deploys desire-satisfaction theory also to bear on a lively issue in medical ethics: whether patients in permanent vegetative state (PVS) can lead lives worth living. The debate has been shaken by the recent dramatic emergence of very strong evidence of consciousness in PVS

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patients. Levy and Savulescu (2009) argue, however, that phenomenal consciousness is not what matters here, but the patient's hope that many of her interests will be satisfied.

<sup>6</sup> A hedonist may object that novelty, self-understanding, and so on are themselves pleasurable. But this seems to be so in a merely causal and not constitutive sense: novelty tends to *produce* pleasure, it is not *itself* a pleasure. So van der Deijl is quite right that his theory is not a form of hedonism. The hedonist may still suspect that it is the tight causal link to pleasure that tempts our intuition toward this kind of list-experientialism.

<sup>7</sup> This 'phenomenally grounded dignity' approach entails that we have duties toward not only human beings but all conscious beings, including nonhuman conscious animals: these animals ought to be treated as ends, quite independently of the hedonic quality of their lives (Kriegel 2013).

<sup>8</sup> This paper is influenced by an immense number of philosophical exchanges over the years. Exchanges with Lorenza D'Angelo, Anna Giustina, Tricia Magalotti, Olivier Massin and especially Charles Siewert stand out in my memory, but there were many others. I have also benefitted from presenting it at the Jean Nicod Institute, and am grateful to the audience there, in particular Géraldine Carranante, Anna Giustina, Michele Impagnatiello, Slawa Loew, and Takuya Niikawa.