Against the Fundamentality of *GOOD*[*]
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INTRODUCTION

There is a common intuition about the structure of value—about the dependence of one form of value on another. If anything has value for us, then something must have value independently of having value for us.[1] There is more than one way to motivate this claim about value-dependence. For example, it appears in much-discussed arguments by infinite regress.[2] The argument that is in question

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[1] To begin, I will treat 'value' and 'good' (and their cognates) interchangeably. Later (Section 4), I offer a reason to distinguish them.

[2] For a defense of the absolute value of humanity along these lines, see David Velleman, "A Right to Self-Termination," Ethics 109.3 (1999): 606-628, and Joseph Raz, *Value, Respect, and Attachment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

in this article is a dependency argument, but it is not regressive. It says that when something is non-instrumentally good for a person, which is to say, non-derivatively beneficial for them, it is so (in part but necessarily) because it is good simpliciter. Good simpliciter is more fundamental than or prior to good for. Call this position 'G', and those who defend it 'G theorists'.[3]

G theorists formulate their proposals just as readily in explanatory as in metaphysical terms. In Susan Wolf's formulation: "what is good about [a work of philosophy] cannot be explained in terms of its benefits to us. The order of explanation, I have argued, must go the other way around. It is only because and insofar as there is something good about philosophy, or about its effect on us that is *independent* of its benefit to us that philosophy can also be good for us in noninstrumental ways."[4] And in Joseph Raz's words: "If something is intrinsically good for me it is so because it is good—'it would be good for you to read this novel. It is really excellent'—and it is that very quality which makes it good for others too. It would be good for you to read the book for the same reason

2004), chap. 4. A variant is proposed by Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The argument is challenged by L. Nandi Theunissen, "Must We Be Just Plain Good," *Ethics* 128. 2 (2018): 346-372, L Nandi Theunissen, "Explaining the Value of Human Beings," in Sarah Buss and L. Nandi Theunissen (eds.) *Rethinking the Value of Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 225-247, and Jeremy David Fix, "Grounds of Goodness," *Journal of Philosophy,* 120.7 (2023): 368-391.

[3] Prominent G theorists include Susan Wolf, "Good-for-nothings," *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA*, 18.2 (2010): 47-64, Joseph Raz, "The Role of Well-Being," *Philosophical Perspectives,* 18 (2004): 269-294, Thomas Nagel, "The Fragmentation of Value," in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 128-141, and Thomas Nagel, "Inequality," in *Equality and Partiality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 130-138. The *'GOOD'* as it appears in the title of this article is the good of G theorists.

[4] Wolf, ibid, p. 61.

it is good for me, i.e. because it is an excellent book."[5] I will characterize their position in the language of dependence.[6] The fact that some things are non-instrumentally good for us depends on the fact that they are good simpliciter.

As these passages indicate—and they are representative—G theorists have what Thomas Nagel has called 'perfectionist' values chiefly in mind, which is to say, forms of excellence or exemplariness in different domains.[7] Central examples are intellectual and scientific achievements, striking natural formations,[8] and worthwhile artworks. G theorists contend that the fact that engaging with perfectionist goods is non-instrumentally good for people depends on the fact that perfectionist goods are good simpliciter. I will follow their lead in focusing on the perfectionist kind of case; as I explain, it is thought to pose a hard case for their opponents.

G theorists occupy an intermediate position. On the one side are followers of G. E. Moore who share the view that some things are good simpliciter but reject the supposition that they are or can be good for people. Indeed, traditional Mooreans want nothing to do with the notion of good

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[5] Joseph Raz, "The Role of Well-Being," *Philosophical Perspectives,* 18 (2004): 269-294, p. 275. By 'really excellent' Raz explicitly means good simpliciter. Following Nagel, I will refer to the 'really excellent' as it figures in these discussions as "the Simply Excellent." See "Inequality," *op. cit.,* p. 131.

[6] In keeping with the G theorists themselves, I remain neutral on the precise analysis of the 'because' that figures in these claims, a question about which there is of course broader discussion and controversy. The term 'dependence' is intended to be intuitive and non-committal.

[7] In at least one instance, Nagel *defines* perfectionist values as "the intrinsic value of certain achievements or creations, apart from their value *to* individuals who value or use them." Nagel, "The Fragmentation of Value," p. 129. Since this is what is in dispute in this article, I will treat perfectionist values more neutrally as those involving exemplariness or excellence.

[8] We take an interest in the value of the natural world from more than one point of view. The G theorists are interested, not in the value of the *existence* of the natural world per se but, in whatever makes it remarkable or exemplary, and this tends to be understood in broadly aesthetic terms.

for.[9] On the other side are theorists who share the G theorist's view that some things are good for people, but they take the stronger view—in a slogan—that good *is* good for. Call this position 'GF', and those who defend it 'GF theorists'.[10] G theorists occupy a position between Moore and GF theorists, and as with all intermediate styles of proposal—which are more interesting for being intermediate—G is vulnerable to attack from both sides. Some will attack G by defending the traditional Moorean line, others by defending GF. I will largely focus on the debate between G and GF, though I return to the Mooreans at the end of the article. Against their GF counterparts, G theorists raise a pointed question, and their question has a familiar, Euthyphronic form: is something (a) good because it is good for someone, or (b) good for someone because it is good? G theorists

[9] See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), sec. 59, Donald Regan, "Why Am I My Brother's Keeper?" in R. Jay Wallace, Samuel Scheffler & Michael Smith (eds.), *Reason and Value: Themes from the Philosophy of Joseph Raz* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 202-230, and Tom Hurka, "Against 'Good For'/'Well-Being,' for 'Simply Good,'" *Philosophical Quarterly* 71.4 (2021): 803–822.

[10] Like all slogans, 'good is good for' admits of more than one reading and needs to be made precise; I turn to this in Section 4. Recent proponents variously include Christine Korsgaard, "The Relational Nature of the Good," in Russ Schaffer Landau (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-26, Katja Maria Vogt, *Desiring the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Richard Kraut, *What is Good and Why* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), Richard Kraut, *Against Absolute Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Stephen Finlay *Confusion of Tongues: A Theory of Normative Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 2, and L. Nandi Theunissen, *The Value of Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Judith Thomson explores a variant of the view in "The Right and the Good," *The Journal of Philosophy,* 94.6 (1997): 273-298, and Judith Thomson, *Normativity*, *The Paul Carus Lecture Series* (Open Court Publishing Company, 2008). I discuss Thomson's variant in Section 4. Connie Rosati discusses the nature of goodness for a person in "Objectivism and Relational Good," *Social Philosophy and Policy Foundation* 25 (2008): 314-349. For influential early discussion, see Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95.2 (1986): 163–207.

defend (b). More particularly, G theorists defend the claim that engaging with perfectionist values is good for people, when it is, at least, but necessarily, because the object is good simpliciter.[11]

I examine the G theorist's arguments for (b) in what follows (Sections 1-3), and my conclusion is negative: their arguments are insufficient to establish (b). More positively, I argue that GF theorists can do justice to perfectionist values (Section 4), and in making this case, I implicitly offer considerations in support of the philosophical commitments I find most congenial to GF (to look ahead, they are non-hedonic, non-utilitarian, and perfectionist, where 'perfectionist' is now being used to mark a substantive theory of well-being.) The GF theorist shares the G theorist's view that engaging with perfectionist goods is good for people but rejects the supposition that they must be good simpliciter. Indeed, the GF theorist wants nothing to do with the notion of good simpliciter. In the end, the GF theorist does not accept the proffered (a), the claim that something is good (simpliciter) because it is good for someone. Instead, she invokes the notion of *excellence* and makes an identity claim: excellence *is* benefit.[12] The result is a sophisticated value theory with the resources to provide an attractive account of the perfectionist goods that are thought to present a challenge to a view of the good as the beneficial. In fact, I give reason to think that the GF theorist has the dialectical advantage over the G theorist (Section 5), and I conclude by suggesting that the real dispute is ultimately between traditional Mooreans and GF theorists.

A note on the terms of the discussion. GF is a general thesis about the nature of value: to be good is to be good for. The focus of this article is a specific challenge to GF. The challenge takes the form of a dependency argument that foregrounds the class of perfectionist values. Naturally, this is

[11] 'At least' since for a perfectionist value to be good for a person, she will also need to actualize her potential to engage with it. For a complexity with this formulation of (b), see note 14.

[12] On the identity claim, see pp. 29-30.

not the only hard case for GF, and the dependency argument not the only challenge in town. But other kinds of argument, prioritizing other kinds of example, require separate discussion. Those arguments hail from distinct traditions, involve different starting points, and strategies.[13] The conclusion of this article, then, is not (and by force cannot be) a full vindication of GF. Rather, if the conclusion of the article is successful, then a prominent objection to GF from the broadly Moorean tradition cannot be made, and this constitutes a line of defense for GF.

SECTION 1: INTUITIONS ABOUT DEPENDENCE

How do G theorists propose to defend the fundamentality of good simpliciter—i.e. (b)? Sometimes G theorists motivate (b) by appealing directly to intuitions about dependence, and it is in this spirit that Raz offers the linguistic datum that "it would be good for you to read this novel. It is really excellent."[14] Intuitive evidence is generally admitted in assessing claims about dependence, though we should take care lest a report of our intuitions is just another expression of our metaphysical convictions.[15] Likely Raz does not intend the proffered datum as a conclusive argument. His discussion

[13] For Kantian arguments for the absolute value of humanity, see the references in note 2. For discussion of 'moral value', see L. Nandi Theunissen, "Realism about the Good For Human Beings," in Paul Bloomfield and David Copp (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 293-314.

[14] Raz, "The Role of Well-Being," *op. cit.,* p. 275. As Tom Hurka pointed out to me, Raz's datum has 'good for' and 'good simpliciter' (the Simply Excellent) predicated of different things: *reading* in the first case and *the book* in the second. In section 3.1 I suggest that Raz's considered view is that *reading* the book is good for the reader (when it is) because *reading* the book is good simpliciter. As I also make clear, Raz proposes that insofar as the book is an appropriate constituent of the simply good experience of reading it, then *the book* is (derivatively) good simpliciter. In this way, the difference in what the value predicates are predicated of is benign.

[15] This is a worry Barry Stroud gives voice to in *Engagement and Metaphysical Dissatisfaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), at pp. 10-13.

is brief, and it is possible he means to allude in a short-hand way to priority claims in the neighborhood which he takes to be plausible and to redound positively on (b). For example: "we love it (or desire it, or appreciate it, or engage with it, etc.) because it is good." The thought would be that just as claims about the priority of goodness over desire have the appearances on their side, so claims about the priority of good over good for have the support of common sense. This raises the question of how we are to understand the English sentence "it would be good for you to read this book. It is really excellent." It is widely agreed that ordinary uses of "good for" do not uniformly track the notion of the beneficial—the notion that is at stake in the present discussion.[16] For example, "good for you!" is an expression of praise, not an expression of what is *for your good* or beneficial for you.[17] And indeed, a ready way to construe Raz's datum is as "it would be a good idea for you to read this book because it is excellent," or simply, "you should read the book because it is excellent." Taken this way, however, the datum is not an expression of (b). I will later offer reasons to think that it does not support (b) either. The GF theorist can perfectly well accommodate claims to the effect that you have a reason to read the book because it is excellent.[18]

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16 Thomson drew attention to the "ways of being good" that are marked by prepositional phrases such as good to, good with, good as, good for. See Thomson, *Normativity, op. cit.* chap. 1. Finlay gives central place to these phrases in his search for a unified semantics of 'good'. See *Confusion of Tongues, op. cit.* chap. 2. In a longer discussion I would argue that the focus on these prepositional phrases is too narrow and can be distorting. I would urge that cognates of 'good' such as 'values', 'excellence', 'virtue', 'benefit', 'enriching', 'nourishing', 'well-being', 'happiness' (among others) belong in a study of ordinary uses of 'good'.

[17] The example is from Eden Lin, "Well-Being, Part 1: The Concept of Well-Being," *Philosophy Compass* 17. 2 (Feb. 2022), https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12812.

[18] See pp. 31-32.

Of course, it is open to Raz to insist that the relevant claim is that 'it would be beneficial for you to read the book because it is good.' And the claim that (b) is directly supported by linguistic practice in this way may be further substantiated by arguments to the effect that (b) better accounts for the character of our practices—our conception and experience of the facts and phenomena—than the alternative.[19] Indeed, G theorists *do* maintain that (b) is indirectly supported by our practices, observing that a philosophical argument's or artwork's *goodness* is our rationale for engaging with and thereby of benefiting from it. Take Nagel's tentative but suggestive remarks about perfectionist value in *The View from Nowhere*:

> Most of the apparent reasons that initially present themselves to us are intimately connected with interests and desires, our own or those of others, and often with experiential satisfaction. But it seems that some of these interests give evidence that their objects have an intrinsic value which is not a function of the satisfaction that people may derive from them or the fact that anyone wants them—a value which is not reducible to their value *for* anyone. I don't know how to establish whether there are any such values, but the objectifying tendency produces a strong impulse to believe that there are—especially in aesthetics, where the object of interest is external and the interest seems perpetually capable of criticism in light of further attention to the object.[20]

Nagel's suggestion is that perfectionist values are external to us in the sense that they exist independently of our thoughts about them. They are not (where they are not) products of our own

[19] Practices are what Kit Fine calls "the extended domain." See "The Question of Realism," *Philosophers' Imprint* 1 (2) (2001): 1–30, at p. 22.

[20] Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 153. Nagel uses worthwhile artwork as an example of a perfectionist value. For caveats about this example, see note 43.

minds. We take an interest in them and respond in thought, feeling, and action, but we can ask whether that interest is merited, and whether our responses are apt. We make these critical assessments by attending to the *values*, i.e. to the objects. Our interest is conditioned by the objects, so the thought is that the value must lie in the objects themselves. The value is a self-standing property of the objects, a non-relational property, whose presence, when properly apprehended or engaged, is good for us.

Some will resist the idea that our practices have the normative character that Nagel takes them to have. Others will allow that they have, but they will hold our practices in contempt—they will see them as systematically in error. These are not perspectives I propose to entertain in this article. We should allow that relevant judgments can be better or worse, and that our interests can be more or less merited, our responses more or less apt. And allowing this, I think Nagel's observation at least brings to light an important criterion of adequacy for an account of perfectionist value. The criterion is that appreciative engagement is, in a phrase, *object-directed*. The immediate question is whether G theorists provide the only or the best way to make sense of the object-directed nature of our engagement with perfectionist values. So let's think some more about it.

In our more robust forms of engagement, articulating our evaluative judgment is an important aim. We want to understand our reasons for finding something worthwhile, or not, and to refine them. We sometimes do this in conversation with others, or by reading what others have to say. We like it because we think it is good, and we think it is good because… This takes us beyond a citation of goodness and to an appreciation of the specific value bearing features of the work, for example, that it is formally interesting, tender and restrained. To the extent that G theorists aim to capture the character of our practices with perfectionist values, they should allow that more than making citations of goodness, we conceive of goodness as a resultant or consequential property. G theorists should say that works have the property of being good simpliciter on the basis of such

features. Whatever is good in this way can be good for people to engage with, and it will be good for them, when it is, in part for this reason.

But once the point about specific value bearing features is admitted—and I do not know who would deny it[21]—the GF theorist is poised to make a familiar reply. When we engage with perfectionist values, what we respond to appreciatively is not the first-order property good (simpliciter), but other practically relevant qualities, qualities such as being formally interesting, tender, and restrained. For the GF theorist, the lesson of object-directedness is that perfectionist values have features that make them worth engaging with and are such that it would not be good for people to engage with them unless they paid attention to those features. Along these lines, the suggestion would be that Raz's claim that "it would be beneficial for you to read the book because it is good" expresses the proposition that the book has features that would make it beneficial for people to engage with.[22]

If the point of a buckpassing account of value is that goodness is not itself a 'master property', then the proposal is so far compatible with a buckpassing account, as here the labor is being passed from goodness to qualities like being restrained.[23] But insofar as buckpassing is part of a project of reducing the evaluative to the normative (of reducing value to reasons) then the proposal parts ways. First, as with the quality of being formally interesting, the features that may be

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[21] To my knowledge, talk of goodness as a 'consequential' or 'resultant' property dates back to W. D. Ross, a steadfast proponent of good simpliciter. See *The Right and the Good,* Philip Stratton-Lake (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 79 and *passim*.

[22] The argument shares Peter Geach's conclusion that we should not render claims about excellent books as claims about books that have the simple property of goodness. The argument is different, however, and the GF theorist is not defending Geach's further claim that good is always logically attributive. See "Good and Evil" *Analysis* 17 (1956): 32-42.

[23] The term 'master property' is from R. Jay Wallace, "Scanlon's Contractualism," *Ethics* 112 (2002): 429-70, at p. 462.

appealed to in generating normative conclusions can be themselves evaluative.[24] Second and more importantly, the GF theorist thinks there is more to say about how qualities like being formally interesting stand to make something practically considerable in specifiable ways. At this stage, the further story is a mere schema, but the schema is that the qualities in question can be suitably engaged in ways that are (subject to some theory or other) good for people. When we speak of a work's value, we are tracking the propensity of particular evaluative qualities to be beneficial, but we are not tracking the first-order property good (simpliciter).[25]

To sum up, the G theorist has made a case for (b) and the case is so far inconclusive. Raz's linguistic intuition about dependence does not conclusively support (b), and neither does Nagel's practice-based intuition about object-directedness.

SECTION 2: QUALITY NOT CONSEQUENCES

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[24] As others have argued, an informative and non-circular analysis of more particular evaluative qualities in terms of a combination of natural and normative terms seems unlikely to be forthcoming. To recall David Wiggins, the funny certainly licenses laughter, but it does so because it is…funny. See "A Sensible Subjectivism," in *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 185-215. Wallace pointed out that the qualities appealed to in generating normative conclusions themselves tend to be evaluative ones. Wallace, ibid, pp. 445-9. Scanlon avowedly took the point in "Reasons, Responsibility and Reliance: Replies to Wallace, Dworkin, and Deigh," *Ethics* 112 (2002): 507-528, at p. 513. Talbot Brewer has suggested that Scanlon cannot obviously do so in a way that is consistent with his commitment to the primacy of reasons. See *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 156-7. There is the further question of how to think about qualities like being tender for which it would be hasty or misguided to say that it is befitting of tenderness. Roger Crisp's distinction between concepts such as awesome, for which reference to a response is analytic, and concepts such as graceful, with no such analytic reference, is relevant here. See "Value, Reasons, and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck," *Analysis* 65.1 (2005): 80-85.

[25] The schema so far courts a version of (a). I return to the schema, and the topic of normative significance, in Section 4.

So, consider a second line of argument against GF. G theorists urge that it is the *quality* and not the *consequences* that determine the value of perfectionist goods.[26] For example, we (properly) appreciate the deftness and subtlety of a philosophical argument, not its effect upon us. By consequences or effects G theorists avowedly have in mind positive states of experience. Wolf's examples are finding enjoyable, being pleased, delighted, entertained, and amused.[27] Nagel also looks to distinguish the value of perfectionist goods from experiential satisfaction, and he likewise emphasizes pleasure.[28] It is not an accident that G theorists select states of experience that have an obviously hedonic character. Mill, who took pleasure to be what is ultimately good for people, is the interlocutor who is ready-to-hand.[29] But GF theorists need not be committed to hedonism, and they can be pluralists about the value of states of experience.[30] Does the G theorist mean to exclude any state of experience or felt response from the constituents of value, whether it is being invigorated or stirred, finding illuminating, edifying, or sobering, and so on?

When the list is expanded in this direction, it must be admitted that effects are quite central to our practices with perfectionist values. From the most quotidian to the most elevated, critical responses appear to take account of these and other forms of response. We say that a work of scholarship is subtle, deft, and ingenious, and equally, that we find it fascinating or illuminating. We say that a drawing has an impersonal and rather cold beauty, and equally, that it is inexplicably

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[26] Wolf, "Good for Nothing," *op. cit.,* p. 51.

[27] Ibid, pp. 53-55.

[28] See Nagel, "Inequality," *op. cit.,* p. 131.

[29] See John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism,* Roger Crisp (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 2. For engagement with Mill, see Wolf, "Good for Nothing," *op. cit.,* pp. 54-55, and Nagel, "Inequality," *op. cit.,* pp. 130-131.

[30] For recent defense of the non-reducibility of valuable states of experience to pleasure, see Richard Kraut, *The Quality of Life: Aristotle Revised* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), chap. 1.

moving.[31] In these ways our engagement is both object and subject involving. We do not appeal to qualities *as opposed to* responses in our reasons for valuing something highly, but the qualities *together with* them. That the qualities cannot drop out is one of the lessons of Section 1: our practices are importantly object-directed. Without attention to qualities, engagement sinks to the level of an impressionistic report of individual felt reactions and emotional states. But the point *also* goes in the other direction. Our felt responses to an object are part of what allow us to name it in adequate ways. We are able to identify *this* as a relevant value-bearing feature because we are responding to it in very particular ways.

Nagel, for one, is prepared to give our felt responses an epistemological role in the assignation of value, but he insists that the "evidence not be confused with the thing itself."[32] It is noteworthy, however, that among the terms that are naturally given as *constitutive* grounds for a thing's value are terms for which our responses are actually *analytic*—i.e., part of their meaning. Moving, funny, and awesome are obvious examples, and so are fascinating and illuminating. It is hard to see how our responses play a merely evidential role when they can be ineliminable constituents of at least some of our grounds for finding a work worthwhile.[33] The lesson is that we should not be forced into a false contrast between qualities and effects. We naturally appeal to both, and some qualities cannot be stated independently of our responses.[34]

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[31] So the critic Calvin Tomkins speaks of the work of Vija Celmins in "Vija Celmins's Surface Matters," in *The New Yorker,* September 2, 2019. I am grateful to Katja Vogt for discussion.

[32] Nagel, "Inequality," *op. cit.* p. 131. See also James Shelley, "Against Value Empiricism in Aesthetics," *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 88, No. 4 (2010): 707-720, at p.718.

[33] One misses discussion of this point in Shelley, ibid, sec. 4.

[34] For a related point, see Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism," *op. cit.* sec 8.

3.1: Interlude: A possible reformulation

The G theorist may wish to reformulate her position at this juncture. She has so far been understood to maintain that engaging with perfectionist values is good for people (when it is) because (in part but necessarily) the perfectionist value (i.e. the object) is good simpliciter. But the discussion brings out the scope for another possibility, namely, that it is primarily *experiencing* the object appropriately that is good simpliciter, and for that reason such that experiencing it can be good for people. This is a distinct version of G, call it Ge—'e' for experience. Like the considered Moore who eventually took the view that "nothing can be an intrinsic good unless it contains both some feeling and also some other form of consciousness," the bearer of good simpliciter is here held to be a complex consisting of a certain kind of object that is felt and experienced in a particular way.[35] For example, the state in which the subtlety and deftness of a work of scholarship are (properly) found illuminating and compelling is good simpliciter. For Ge theorists—now departing from Moore who does not take this further step—experience of this kind is held to be good for people. The Ge theorist grants the relevance of felt experience to the ground of value. But against the GF theorist, she denies that the value of the felt experience is or is explained by its value for someone. It is not the case that the experience is good by being or because it is good for the one who experiences it (though it is or can be good for them).[36]

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[35] G. E. Moore, *Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1965), p.129. Ross followed suit in maintaining that good simpliciter belongs primarily only to states of mind. See Ross, *The Right and the Good, op. cit.,* p. 122 and *passim*. Cf. Robert Audi, "Intrinsic Value and Reasons for Action" in Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons (eds.) *Metaethics After Moore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 79-106.

[36] Some G theorists express openness to Ge. Raz canvases a view according to which evaluative *experience* is more evaluatively fundamental than the value of the *object* experienced. Having appropriate experience of works of art is valuable and the works themselves are valuable insofar as they are (appropriate) constituents of these experiences (more on this

Ge is vulnerable to a charge of vicious circularity which I want to briefly mention and respond to.[37] Ge explains the value of an object in terms of the value of an experience. Now among theorists who treat *experience* as the primary bearer of value, there are those who regard the *object* as valuable insofar as it *conduces* to that experience, making the object itself instrumentally valuable.[38] This is not the position of the Ge theorist. The Ge theorist regards the *object* as good simpliciter (and to this extent, such that it merits appreciation, engagement, and so on). The object is held to be good simpliciter, not insofar as it prompts a certain kind of experience, but insofar as it is itself an

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below). See Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), chap. 7, esp. pp. 200-201. In some remarks, Wolf is naturally interpreted as accepting Ge. Ibid, p. 56.

Of course, Ge is not the only option for taking account of felt response and experience. Another option is to treat response dependent qualities as among the grounds of the value (simpliciter) of objects. So it may be said that being disposed or apt to move subjects appropriately is part of what makes an object (simply) good. The proposal could be worked up in such a way that insofar as the object is disposed or apt to move subjects appropriately, and is simply good on that basis, the state in which someone is moved by the object appropriately is good simpliciter, and accordingly, good for the one who is moved. The object may inherit the property of being good for subjects to the extent that it is disposed or apt to play this role. While I wish to acknowledge this possibility, I make no further reference it. I focus on Ge because it captures the spirit of some of the G theorists, and because treating experience as the primary bearer of value simpliciter has gained orthodoxy after (the considered) Moore and Ross. Thanks to Akeel Bilgrami for discussion.

[37] Raz's formulation of Ge seems to invite this objection. Raz, *Morality of Freedom*, *op. cit.,* pp. 201.

[38] Ross influentially takes this (as it is sometimes called) 'instrumentalist' view. See Ross, *Right and the Good, op. cit.,* pp. 120-131. Ross appears to change his mind in *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956-5), p. 270. For discussion of Ross's view early and late, see L. Nandi Theunissen, "A 'Personal' Account of Aesthetic and Intellectual Values: A Reply to Ross, in "A 'Personal' Account of Intellectual and Aesthetic Values: A Reply to Ross," in Robert Audi and David Phillips (eds.) *The Moral Philosophy of W. D. Ross* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Instrumentalism is widely criticized for the reason that it makes artworks seem fungible. Raz makes this objection in *Morality of Freedom, op. cit.,* p. 200-201.

ineliminable *constituent* of that experience, so that the experience is what it is because it is *of* the object. Just to this extent—and here comes the circularity objection—it may seem as if the Ge theorist must make prior reference to the value of the object. For presumably the experience is valuable because it is of something valuable, namely a valuable object. In that case the value of the object derives from the experience, and the value of the experience derives from the object.[39]

Exploiting a version of the point made in Section 1, there is a natural way for the Ge theorist to avoid this charge. The objection rests on a coarse-grained conception of value and it is resolved by drawing finer distinctions. For the Ge theorist, goodness need not be a first-order, perceptible property of the work.[40] It is open to the Ge theorist to maintain that the experience is of more particular evaluative qualities like being subtle and deft, and equally, of non-evaluative qualities like having this or that subject-matter, or structure (or whatever). For reasons given in Section 1, there is no imperative to maintain that these qualities, as objects of experience, are also good simpliciter. For the Ge theorist, it is appreciation of the complex—finding the deft, subtle, subject-matter illuminating—that is the primary bearer of good simpliciter. And it is insofar as the object is an ineliminable constituent of the complex that it is, derivatively, good (simpliciter). Ge theorists are poised to, and typically, add a veridicality clause, so that what is good, and in turn good for people, is to understand the deftness and subtlety of an argument when it really has those qualities.[41]

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[39] For a recent statement of this objection, see Shelley, "Against Value Empiricism in Aesthetics," *op. cit.,* p. 711. Nagel remains committed to G over Ge on broadly these grounds. See Nagel, "Inequality," *op. cit.,* p. 131.

[40] Ross gives an independent argument for the view that good simpliciter is an intellectual and not a perceptual property. See Ross, *Right and the Good, op. cit.,* p. 87.

[41] On the veridicality clause, see Raz, "The Role of Well-being," *op. cit.,* p. 272. Questions about non-veridical experience are of course much discussed in the literature on well-being.

To sum up: I began this section by considering a second line of argument for G, viz., that it is the quality as opposed to the consequences that determine the value of perfectionist goods. I urged that the emphasis on qualities is overly one-sided, and that the argument does not take account of qualities for which responses are analytic. I offered a reformulation of G, Ge, that treats felt experience as among the constitutive grounds of good simpliciter, showing how the view has resources to respond to a charge of vicious circularity. Naturally, G theorists may reject the proffered Ge—and some do—but it is a reformulation that some adopt, and it presents a standing alternative to GF.

SECTION 3: GOOD FOR IS TRANSPARENT

The Ge theorist allows that felt experience is among the grounds of value. But she denies that the value of this experience either is or is explained by its value for a person. A further line of argument against GF—call it the 'transparency' objection—pushes this point. It urges that good for is not salient from the first-person standpoint. For example, when we appreciate perfectionist goods, we are not properly focused on their being good for us. Indeed, good for is transparent in the sense that when we focus on it, it disappears, leaving only the value of the object and our experience of it.[42]

[42] These formulations closely follow Tim Scanlon's discussion of this issue. See *What We Owe To Each Other* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 133. For comparable claims, see Raz, "Role of Well-Being," *op. cit.,* part II. Scanlon's stated target is "net overall well-being," where that is, "a notion that brings together and balances against one another all the disparate things that contribute to the quality of a life." Scanlon, ibid, p. 134. The GF theorist is not appealing to net overall well-being in Scanlon's sense. She is claiming that the value of engaging with an activity on some occasion is or is explained by its value for a person. This does not involve quantitative ideas, nor the perspective of a life as a whole. I consider the transparency objection as it arises for the GF theorist so construed, and I assume that Scanlon's arguments are intended to include this sort of position.

It is worth considering a specific GF account of perfectionist values, for in the absence of a specific account, the transparency objection is hard to assess. The value of worthwhile *artworks* is a natural place to turn since of perfectionist values—worthwhile artworks, striking natural formations, intellectual and scientific achievements—they are the most systematically discussed.[43] Insofar as G and Ge theorists take exemplary artworks to present a *hard case* for GF, it is worth pointing out that GF is arguably the dominant theory in philosophical accounts of aesthetic value.[44] So let's briefly consider a canonical proposal from this camp. Take the account given by the influential twentieth century value theorist Monroe Beardsley—an early skeptic about good simpliciter.[45] Beardsley takes the primary bearer of value to be aesthetic experience,[46] and he takes aesthetic experience to have several separable

[43] Two caveats. (I) Not everyone regards aesthetic value as a species of perfectionist value. Some counsel against a narrow focus on aesthetic excellence to the exclusion of aesthetic failure, imperfection, variation, and specialization. See for example Eileen John, "Learning from Aesthetic Disagreement and Flawed Artworks," The 2019 Richard Wollheim Memorial Lecture, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 78, No. 3 (2020): 279-288; C. Thi Nguyen, "Autonomy and Aesthetic Engagement," *Mind* Vol. 129, No. 516 (2020): 1127-1156, at p. 1140; Dominic Lopes, *Being for Beauty: Aesthetic Agency and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Nick Riggle, "On the Aesthetic Ideal," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 55. 4(2015), 433–447. (II) Discussions of the value of artworks appeal to and depend on ideas in value theory, so philosophical aesthetics does not have a privileged, independent status in the debate between G/Ge and GF theorists.

[44] Indeed, some regard it as a dogma of sorts. For expression of this sentiment, see Servaas van der Berg, "Aesthetic Hedonism and its Critics," *Philosophy Compass* 15. 1 (2020): 1-15. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this point.

[45] See Monroe C. Beardsley, "Intrinsic Value," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 26. 1 (Sep. 1965): 1-17. Beardsley's account was developed in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism,* Second Edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), chap. XI. I refer to his discussion in "In Defense of Aesthetic Value," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association,* Vol. 52, No. 6 (1979): 723-749, pp. 741-2.

[46] Beardsley was himself an instrumentalist, but I assume the view can be amended along the lines suggested in Section 2.

but largely co-present features. The first of these we encountered earlier under the heading of object-directedness. In aesthetic experience:

1. We are focused on and allow ourselves to be guided by a phenomenal object. For short, object directedness.

To this Beardsley adds four characteristics which I abbreviate as follows:

2. A relaxation and sense of harmony with what is presented or semantically invoked so that what comes has the air of having been freely chosen. For short: felt freedom.

3. A certain detachment of affect, so that even when we are with dark and terrible things, and feel them sharply, they do not oppress but make us aware of our power to rise above them. For short: detached affect.

4. A sense of actively exercising constructive powers of the mind, of being challenged by a variety of potentially conflicting stimuli to try to make them cohere, so that there is a sense of achieved intelligibility. For short: active discovery.

5. A sense of integration as a person, of being restored to wholeness from distracting and disruptive impulses, and a corresponding contentment that involves self-acceptance and self-expansion. For short: a sense of wholeness.

The account raises all sorts of questions and it is neither the most recent nor the most refined iteration of its kind.[47] But what is striking about it for present purposes is that several of the features enumerated—felt freedom, detached affect, active discovery, a sense of wholeness—are suggestive hallmarks of value for a person. When she approaches her analysis of what it is for something to be non-instrumentally good for a person, Connie Rosati reflects on her experience of engaging in activities that she regards as non-derivatively good for her, and she gives the example of reading philosophy. Her description resonates, at least, with Beardsley's felt freedom and sense of wholeness: "I would experience a sense of calm. Kinesthetically, a warmth spread throughout my body; my muscles and mind were relaxed. Psychologically, I felt at home with myself and my activity; I understood and felt comfortable with who I was and what I was doing."[48] Without offering her full endorsement, Rosati outlines a view of value for a person in terms of a related set of features. On this view, what it is for something to be directly beneficial for a person is for it to support their sense of their own value; to enliven rather than enervate; to provide a sense of direction; and to furnish self-supporting sources of motivation.[49] If these are not all occurrent psychological states, they are associated with positive internal states, and these are states of the kind that interest Beardsley (felt freedom, sense of wholeness, active discovery).[50] The suggestion I am making is that on a proposal such as Beardsley's, it is false that good for is transparent from the standpoint of appreciative engagement. It plays a crucial role in explaining why we have reason to engage with worthwhile artworks. We engage to be benefited or enriched in the ways described, and

[47] For contemporary heirs, whose accounts in one way or another develop related ideas, see Berg, ibid, p. 12, n. 2.

[48] Connie Rosati, "Personal Good," in Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons (eds), *Metaethics after Moore* (Oxford: and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 107-132, at p. 119.

[49] Rosati, ibid, p. 120.

[50] Cf. Railton, "Moral Realism," *op. cit.,* p. 179, n. 21.

our enrichment is salient from the first-person point of view; it may even partly constitute the experience itself.[51]

Of course, it will not do to lean too heavily on one or another substantive account, and I will formulate an independent lesson shortly (Section 4), so that Beardsley's account serves as something of a ladder that may be kicked away. But working with the proposal for a moment, consider some follow-up objections. (I) *A focus on the good for one from the standpoint of appreciation represents something as valuable because of its propensity to bring certain results. This gives the one who engages an instrumentalizing cast of mind that misrepresents her relationship to the objects and activities in question.*[52] It is true that GF theorists take there to be something that perfectionist values typically or characteristically *do*, and true that they think people engage appropriately to the extent they have this work in view. For example, the point of contemplating worthwhile artworks may be for the participant to suspend her preoccupations with the exigencies of the moment and allow herself to be absorbed by an object and its constituent parts in such a way that she must work to put them together and make something of the whole, a constructive activity whose keyed-upness, whose exhilarations, are quite apparent to her. We could put this by saying that the person is concerned with results, but the formulation is misleading. She is not engaging for the sake of some end apart from the activity. Engaging in the activity in ways that are appropriate to it *is* the end she seeks. The activity is beneficial in and of itself, regardless of a productive reward that may be imagined to come from it (seeming cultured; having something to say at the dinner party).

[51] Beardsley himself may not have identified as a GF but as some kind of Ge theorist. My suggestion is only that his view invites a GF construction.

[52] I draw this objection from Scanlon, *What We Owe*, *op. cit.,* p. 133.

(II) *OK, but this still makes a person's aims seem self-interested. From the agent's point of view, many of the things that are good for her are valued for quite other reasons.*[53] It is a familiar refrain that a concern with the self involves a concern with other things.[54] In a similar spirit it is said that if a concern with our well-being is not to be self-defeating, then we must cultivate a concern with other things.[55] Quite right. As we have seen, engaging appropriately with perfectionist values involves attention to something that is independent of us (hence, *object-directedness*). But we should take care not to draw a false contrast. It can *also* be true that engaging with this independently existing thing—putting its parts together, being struck by realizations about it, responding sensitively to it—is something which, when done well, is enriching in ways that are not lost on the one who engages. That we stand to be enriched is a natural motivation, and that we are enriched, when we are, is typically salient to us.[56] If we think that it should not be then we may be laboring under a familiar but loaded set of assumptions, for example, that there is a deep tension between *self-interest* and *morality*. But that is a reckoning for another occasion.[57]

Perhaps the present objection has more purchase with respect to *creating* (rather than *engaging with* or *appreciating*) perfectionist values. When we sit down to write some philosophy, or compose a suite, we are not focused on our own edification. This seems right to me. Rather, we endeavor to create

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[53] Again, this is drawn from Scanlon, ibid, p. 133.

[54] For classic discussion, see Harry Frankfurt, "The Dear Self," *Philosophers' Imprint* 1 (2001): 1-14.

[55] The 'self-defeating' formulation of this longstanding idea is due to Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," 13. 2 (1984): 134-171.

[56] This is not to deny that acquiring the ability to appreciate a perfectionist value is often a painstaking process that unfolds over time through much diligent effort. For the GF theorist, this is the work of actualizing our potential to engage successfully.

[57] For a start, see Frankfurt, "The Dear Self," *op. cit.*

something *worthwhile*. As creators we are unlikely to have worked out ideas about what it is for something to be worthwhile, and at times we may be confused or unsure about the point of our activity. Aiming to make something *worthwhile* is a placeholder that needs to be substantiated in one way or another by a theory of value. The proposal under discussion now is that a work is worthwhile insofar as it stands to enrich, not the creator in the first place, but a suitable audience. As creators we may consider ourselves part of that audience, but it extends beyond us, and we ourselves are not the arbiters of success.[58] The truth in the objection is that as creators we do not aim at what is good for ourselves, and neither is this the standard for success. But these points are compatible with GF which takes the value of the works created to be a function of their propensity to benefit appreciators.[59]

(III) *Whether we engage with perfectionist goods appropriately—attending to the object, putting the parts together insightfully, etc.—is one thing. Whether it is good for us to so engage is another. Let's say someone has a sensitive disposition. They are insightful about the features of a perfectionist good, are commensurately moved, and so on, but that very engagement is not easily borne—is not salubrious for them.*[60] When the GF theorist says that

[58] Naturally, this is not to deny that creative activity can be good for the one who creates.

[59] The discussion contains a rationale for the priority of *engagement* (appreciation) over *creation* in the order of value. The rationale is that creative activity is a form of *poesis*, meaning that the end of the activity is to produce a *work,* where 'work' needs to be understood broadly so that a painting, a piece of scholarship, a proof, a dance or musical performance all count as 'works'. The excellence of creative activity is a function of the excellence of the work created, and for all parties to the present dispute, the excellence of the work turns (in one way or another) on engagement. While I disagree with the G theorist's way of developing the point, I think they are right to prioritize engagement for the reason given.

[60] Take the bay of Balbec thought by Legrandin to be too stirring for so melancholic a temperament as Proust's narrator: "that land of pure fiction makes bad reading for any boy, and is certainly not what I should choose or recommend for my young friend here, who is already so much inclined to melancholy—for a heart already predisposed to receive

engaging with perfectionist goods is good for people, she is making a generic claim that admits of exceptions. She is making a claim about how certain kinds of object are apt to affect minds like ours, without imagining that there aren't also differences among us. "I can recognize that it is good, but it is not for me" is a sentence she is happy to assert, meaning that she can see how an object is appropriately experienced and felt in ways that are generally enriching for people, but that owing to particularities about her, or about her at a particular time, it is not suitable for her. And these are familiar moves in discussions of how we can countenance standards together with variation.[61]

(IV) *OK, but can't it be true that some perfectionist goods are such that appropriate engagement and response is generically bad for us? Can't engagement be excellent and harmful for people because painful, difficult, or brutal?* The objection assumes that painful feelings are bad for us. This is straightforwardly true on a hedonistic theory of well-being, though one need not be a hedonist to endorse it. But the claim that pain is intrinsically bad for us is rejected by others, for example, those who think that what is ultimately good for people just is to engage thoughtfully and sensitively with appropriately constituted objects. As I explain below, I am sympathetic to such views, though a response to the objection does not depend on vindicating them. The reason is that painfulness by itself is not obviously excellent-making. It is rather pain transfigured or made intelligible or experienced in such a way as to permit release or integration, and so on. One might put this in terms of the complex intermingling of pain and pleasure, or of the pleasure that attends our ability to overcome something difficult. The point is that the standing of pain to contribute to excellence co-varies with its standing

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its impressions." Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way: In Search of Lost Time,* Vol. 1, Lydia Davis (trans.) (New York: Penguin, 2002), p. 135.

[61] They are moves spelled out thoughtfully and at length, *mutatis mutandis*, by Hume and the sensible subjectivists who followed him. See David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in Eugene F. Miller (ed.) *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics), 226-249. See Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivist," *op. cit.*

to contribute to the beneficial, and this can be seen in light of its relationship to pleasure (or enrichment, or catharsis, or substitute a preferred term) which is apt to be recognized as good for us in pre-philosophical ways.

SECTION 4: A VALUE-THEORETIC LESSON

In evaluating the G theorist's arguments, it has been useful to foreground a specific GF proposal such as Beardsley's. Under the rubrics of active discovery, felt freedom, sense of wholeness, and detached affect, it gives content to the otherwise abstract claim that the value of engaging with a perfectionist good consists in the benefit it affords. But the case for or against the GF theorist should not be made to rest with one or another substantive account—not least with one that gives so prescriptive a rendering of the phenomenology. For understandable reasons, critics of GF tend to target hedonic or preference-based forms of 'welfarism' in particular, or they object to forms of experientialism of which Beardsley's proposal is an example.[62] But the GF theorist need not be committed to these views. In fact, she needn't take the primary value of engaging with perfectionist goods to consist in a state of *experience* at all. It is open to (and I think plausible for) GF theorists to explain the value of perfectionist goods in terms of the valuable *activities* of engaging with them—of putting the parts together, of exploring them, and of coming up with generative readings and responses. These activities are typically accompanied by positive states of experience, such as pleasure, but the value of the activities need not be taken to consist in pleasure or any other occurrent mental state.[63]

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[62] Berg, "Aesthetic Hedonism and its Critics," *op. cit.,* moves back and forth between discussion of hedonism, empiricism, and experientialism.

[63] Cf. Aristotle's claim that pleasure 'completes' the successful exercise of our agential capacities. See *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.4 (1174b20-1175a).

C. Thi Nguyen has recently argued that the primary value of aesthetic appreciation lies in the "engaged process of interpreting, investigating, and exploring the aesthetic object."[64] The GF theorist may share—I would say plausibly shares—this point of emphasis. With Nguyen, she may regard the primary bearer of value as an *engaged* activity, or better, an *achieved* activity in which one participates in a process of reflection, interpretation, and exploration of an object, and does so successfully insofar as one's reflections are insightful, one's interpretations generative, one's responses apt, and so on. Plausibly this activity can be done well and is worthwhile even when one renders a critical judgment. As Nguyen says, "It can be a valuable form of engagement to critically analyse a movie and to come, after significant consideration, to realize that it is hollow and manipulative."[65] As the GF theorist would put it, engaging well in this critical activity can be good for people. After all, it engages imaginative, emotional, and cognitive powers it is good for people to engage. For the GF theorist, a work of this kind is 'of value' (in a sense I explain below) insofar as it is an apt constituent of these activities.[66] But insofar as the GF theorist is interested in *perfectionist* values in particular—a concern that is both broader and narrower than a concern with appreciating *artworks*[67]—she is concerned with

[64] Nguyen, "Autonomy and Aesthetic Engagement," *op. cit.,* p. 1127.

[65] Nguyen, ibid, p. 1140.

[66] Is it not paradoxical to say that a work is of value in virtue of the desultory qualities that occasion generative reflections about its very desultoriness? No. I use 'of value' here to mean positive normative status. As I explain below, the status is such that the bearer of value should not be destroyed, and more positively should be protected, so that it can be engaged in the relevantly fruitful way. This position is consistent both with the philosophical concept of value and with defenses of imperfect or failed artworks. On the concept of 'small' values, see Joseph Raz, "Agency, Reason, and the Good," in *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 30-31. On imperfect works, see the references in note 43.

[67] A concern with perfectionist values is broader than a concern with artworks because it is not restricted to artworks, and it is narrower because it is concerned with worthwhile or exemplary artworks in particular.

the value of the activity of engaging well or successfully with *exemplary* works. What is the GF theorist's explanation of the value of engaging with exemplary works? A ready explanation—it is a 'perfectionist' explanation in the well-being sense—is that exemplary works engage powers that are, subject to some theory or other, higher or better for people to exercise.[68] Perfectionist values are such, are *excellent*, insofar as they are constituted in such a way as to appropriately engage powers whose exercise is (or can be) constitutively *best* for people.[69]

On this style of proposal, the status of some works as 'excellent' is fixed by the appreciative activities of people whose capacities to engage have been actualized, who are well-situated, and suitably experienced. 'Fixed' is meant to be loose enough to allow that someone's standing as a suitable judge or expert in this sense is institutionally defined, but also fraught and contestable in familiar ways. The

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68 As a theory of well-being, perfectionism is familiarly glossed in terms of the "perfection of human nature." See for example Roger Crisp, "Hedonism Reconsidered," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73.3 (Nov. 2006), 619-645 at p. 622. Richard Kraut gives it the name 'developmentalism'. See Kraut, *What is Good and Why, op. cit.,* chap. 3. Thomas Hurka develops a version of perfectionism on which it is a theory, not of the good for human beings, but of what is good (in a 'moral' rather than 'prudential' sense) in human life. See his *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Dale Dorsey has argued that Hurka's rejection of perfectionism as a theory of the good for human beings is 'unmotivated'. See his "Three Arguments for Perfectionism," *Nous* 44. 1 (March 2010): 59-79. Perfectionism is typically construed as a theory of the *good life* for human beings: to live well is to exercise and cultivate some set of characteristic human capacities. I am canvassing a narrower claim here. Engaging with exemplary works ('perfectionist goods') exercises capacities that are higher in us and that means better for us to exercise. The further claim that the *life* of exercising higher capacities is best is familiar from discussions of Aristotle. I leave open the possibility that a life in which we exercise a range of capacities is best. See Hurka's discussions of complexity and well-roundedness. Ibid, chaps, 7 and 9. Compare Vogt, *Desiring the Good, op. cit.,* chap 1 on a 'well-mixed' life.

[69] The view allows that engagement with inferior works can be worthwhile, but it takes perfectionist goods to be special. The view has consequences for canonization and the curriculum which are admittedly controversial, but which, handled thoughtfully and with care, I would accept.

capacities exercised by a suitable judge are *human* capacities: capacities of a subject with a mind like ours. And the excellent expression of human capacities sets a standard or is authoritative for *individual people* with those capacities. We use the self-consciously generic statement "engaging with perfectionist goods is *good for people*" to mark this, with the suitable judge serving as the benchmark. Whether engaging in the relevant activity is good for *this* person or *that* person will depend on whether she has actualized her capacity to engage, has the relevant experience, and there are likely other conditions.

Naturally, a defense of a perfectionist version of GF is well beyond the scope of the present discussion. But let me say how it would avoid an apparently intractable problem for GF. G theorists contend that there is a structural or formal difference between excellence and benefit. As they see it, benefit takes account of the number of people whose interests are affected, while excellence simply has to do with standards or levels of achievement.[70] The worry is that insofar as they elide this difference, GF theorists lack the resources to distinguish between what *is* really excellent and what is *not* really excellent. They must draw the distinction in terms of what is really beneficial and what is not. And according to a ready way of spelling this out, we should understand this in terms of the "spread of gratification," which is to say, what people most readily consume—Dan Brown rather than George Eliot.[71] And this is a sort of reductio. The worry is understandable given that we are most often exposed to teleological theories in a utilitarian form. But it need not be that one work is better than another because it is capable of generating the greatest amount of aesthetic activity for the greatest number—the GF theorist is not compelled to make the consequentialist moves—but because it engages our capacities in a more 'marked' way or to a 'higher' power. So it is quipped (and this is

[70] See Nagel, "Fragmentation of Value," *op. cit.,* p. 132.

[71] The examples are from Wolf, "Good-for-nothing," *op. cit.*, p. 54. Talk of the "spread of gratification" is from Nagel, ibid.

Beardsley again): "the heavier the sledge, the greater its force, but the fewer who can use it well."[72] *How do we know which capacities are such that developing them constitutes an enrichment, and on what basis do we distinguish the kind of engagement that is thought to improve us from kind that does not*?[73] I doubt there is a practice independent answer to this question. Following Wiggins, who followed Hume, when critical questions occur, we can do no more than submit considerations and make arguments.[74] We move back and forth between talking about features of the work and our responses to it. We compare our perceptions and responses with those of relevant experts. And so on. A version of the question arises no less for G—how do we know what is and is not Really Excellent?—and the response will be the same.

I have sought to show that the GF theorist need not be committed to hedonic welfarism or experientialism. Let me now draw the broader, value-theoretic lesson that has emerged from the discussion. Go back to the original Euthyphronic question: is something (a) good because it is good for someone, or (b) good for someone because it is good? In posing this question, the G theorist supposes that there are two properties, the property of being good simpliciter *and* the property of being good for someone, and she asks about the direction of priority. The GF theorist is not accepting this construction. She is not making use of the notion of good simpliciter. Her view is that the primary bearer of *excellence*—a superlative attributive adjective which we mark with superlative forms of the prepositional phrase 'good *at*' ('better at', 'best at', etc.)—is the achieved activity of engaging with perfectionist values. Engaging well in this activity *is* (i.e constitutively) best for those whose capacities to engage have been actualized. So, the G theorist makes an identity claim. Engaging with appropriately constituted objects successfully and well just *is* what it is to be benefited (to a high or

[72] Beardsley, *Aesthetics, op. cit.,* p. 532. The terms 'more marked' and 'higher power' are also his.

[73] This question is raised by Wolf, "Good-for-nothing," *op. cit.*, 54, and I follow her formulations.

[74] Wiggins, "Sensible Subjectivism," *op. cit.,* sec. 10.

the highest degree). If the primary bearer of excellence is the *activity* of engaging with perfectionist values, then the perfectionist values themselves (the *objects*) have the quality of being excellent insofar as they are appropriately constituted so as to be engaged in the relevant ways. The objects are excellent because they are ineliminable constituents of these activities.[75]

The primary point of this article is to respond to the Euthyphronic question raised by the G theorist. And as we have just seen, the GF theorist rejects the question as posed. She does not invoke the notion of good simpliciter, and she makes an identity claim in the first place. It is not that engaging successfully is good *because* it is good for us. Rather, engaging successfully (excellently) *is* what it is for the engagement to be good for us, and that is the very essence of its value. What I want to suggest now is that there is also scope for the GF theorist to accept a qualified form of (a), the claim that something is *good because* it is *good for* someone. In making this qualified dependence claim, the GF theorist appeals to commitments that warrant a fuller discussion than I can offer here.[76] But the claim is worth spelling out inasmuch as it bears on the Euthyphronic question.

To see the qualified dependence claim, consider the concept of being good or of value. Judy Thomson once wrote that the concept of being good or of value is the concept of that property possession of which makes its bearer "pro-tanto ought making."[77] I will mark the relevant concept as the concept of being *of value*, and I will say that the concept of being of value is the concept of having

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[75] Isn't the molecular structure of the paint in a painting also a constituent of the relevant activity? Doesn't it follow that it is a perfectionist good? No to both questions. The activity is concerned with the object at a certain level of description, a level that is fixed by the practice. We don't think it makes sense to apprise the works of the Group of Seven by putting them under a microscope and reflecting on the molecular structure of the paint.

[76] They are commitments that belong in a fuller discussion of the normativity of good for. See Theunissen, *The Value of Humanity, op. cit.,* chap. 5.

[77] Thomson, *Normativity, op. cit.,* sec. 5.

a property that licenses forms of practical response.[78] Just what forms of practical response are made appropriate by whatever is of value are up for discussion, but according to some views they are, minimally, responses of non-destruction, non-interference, and protection, where these responses are owed by agents generally regardless of their motives, ends and so on.[79] Now, Thomson herself canvassed three possibilities for what the property that does the work of generating reasons could be. Her candidates were goodness simpliciter, oughtness itself, and goodness for. She famously rejected all of them, maintaining the quite skeptical position that nothing has the property of being of value in this sense.

It is open to the GF theorist to be more sanguine.[80] It is open to her to say that it is sufficient for something to be pro-tanto ought making, in other words, reason-giving to human agents, and in this sense *of value*, that it be constituted so as to be good for people. That is a claim about the ground of value in general, and more needs to be said.[81] But here is the claim applied to perfectionist values in particular. Perfectionist values have the property of being of value because they are constituted in such a way as to be appropriately engaged in excellent activities that are good for (indeed, ex hypothesi

[78] It is at this juncture that I distinguish between 'good' and 'value', using 'value' to designate positive normative status. Cf. Scanlon's remarks about 'value' versus 'good' in *What We Owe To Each Other, op. cit.,* pp. 78-79.

[79] See Raz's discussion of reasons of respect and reasons of engagement in Joseph Raz, *Value, Respect, and Attachment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chap. 5.

[80] 'Open to' but not mandatory for. It is not my proposal, but some GF theorists may side with Thomson in denying the existence of the property of being of value (and there may be other options).

[81] Is it also a necessary condition? What about the good for other things or beings? For discussion, see Theunissen, *Value of Humanity, op. cit.*

best for) people to engage in.[82] As above, what fixes the value bearing status of a perfectionist value is not *this* person's activities or *that* person's, but the activities of the suitable judge who is here setting a standard for people. The claim is that what is apt to be good for people in this generic sense is reason-giving for individuals. At a minimum, it gives individuals a reason *not to destroy* the works in question whether or not they have actualized their capacity to engage and thereby to be benefited. For individuals to have a reason *to engage* with the work, they also need to have actualized their capacity to do so, and there are likely other conditions.[83] In this way, the GF theorist can accept a version of (a)—a dependence claim. Perfectionist goods are of value (not in the sense that they are good simpliciter but in the sense that they are constituted so as to be reason-giving to human agents) *because* engaging with them is good for people.[84]

To sum up: according to GF, perfectionist goods (i.e objects) have the property that gives things a positive normative status because they are constituted so as to be engaged in ways that are good for people. Perfectionist goods also have the property of being excellent. This is because they

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[82] Being constituted so as to be engaged in *excellent* activities is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for a work's being of value in this sense. Again, I am leaving open that works that are imperfect, experimental, and even 'failed' are also positively reason-giving and in that way of value.

[83] The G theorist makes a comparable claim. To go back to Raz's example, for it to be true of some individual that she has a perfectionist-based reason to read the book, the book must be of value simpliciter, but the reader also needs to have an aptitude for reading it, doing so must fit into her life, and the list goes on. See Raz, "Role of Well-Being," *op. cit.,* 275.

[84] This is how the GF theorist makes sense of claims to the effect that "it is good that it is good for you". The proposition expressed by this statement is that the fact that something is good for a person is reason-giving. As I have indicated, there are questions about the ground and scope of these reasons. The position canvassed above is externalist, and it rests on objectivism about the human good. For further discussion, Theunissen, *The Value of Humanity, op. cit.,* and Theunissen, "Realism about the Good For Human Beings," *op. cit.*

are constituted so as to be appropriately engaged in activities whose successful engagement is constitutively beneficial for their participants to a high degree.

SECTION 5: PRESSURE IN THE MIDDLE

I have suggested that the G theorist's arguments for (b) are insufficient, and that their case against GF is not so compelling. GF theorists need not be hedonic welfarists or experientialists. They can preserve standards of excellence, give an objectivist account of the human good, while offering a position that is more sophisticated than the proffered (a). In fact, as I will now explain, I think GF has the dialectical advantage. To make this argument, I need to recall the sense in which G theorists occupy an intermediate position between the traditional Moore and GF. As I said at the outset, the position is more interesting for being intermediate, but it is under pressure from both sides.[85]

Start by considering the G / Ge theorist's departure from the traditional Moore. G / Ge theorists depart from the Moore who said that there can be value in a world without (actual or possible) subjects—that the beautiful sunset that is and cannot be seen and enjoyed is nevertheless good (simpliciter).[86] G / Ge theorists disagree with the Moore who wrote these lines because they think that for there to be perfectionist values there must be (actual or possible) subjects to appreciate them. G theorists say things like, "there would be no value in the Frick collection if all sentient life were destroyed,"[87] and that "in the absence of the subjects capable of appreciating them," books and compositions and such like would be "dead and worthless things."[88] At this juncture it is useful to ask

[85] Cf. Shelly Kagan's argument against 'ordinary morality' in Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), chap. 1.

[86] I refer to Moore's thought-experiment in *Principia Ethica* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), sec. 50.

[87] Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, *op. cit.,* p. 153. Compare *Equality and Partiality, op. cit.,* pp. 132-3.

[88] Wolf, "Good-for-nothings," *op. cit.,* p. 56.

about their explanation of this fact. Why do G /Ge theorists think that subjects are a condition on the existence of perfectionist value?[89]

The explanation G/Ge theorists tend to provide is that perfectionist values are *for us*.[90] They make the point that perfectionist values have a communicative function in that they are addressed to an audience and designed to invoke a certain response.[91] Indeed, as we saw, for the Ge theorist, felt response and experience are among the grounds of the value itself. The *possibility* of appreciative response and experience is enough to instantiate the value of objects, but the value of what is possibly appreciated is thought to derive from *actual* appreciation. Taken this way, there is no perfectionist value without the possibility of subjects to appreciate them because these values are *for us*. While perfectionist values are for us, the G / Ge theorist denies that they are for us in the sense that they are *for our good* (for our benefit).[92] Perfectionist values do benefit us, but their doing so is not what their value consists in. Being beneficial is a quality of all that is (simply) good, but it is not what it is to be good.

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[89] We find this point in Sidgwick: "no-one would think it made sense to aim at the production of beauty in external nature apart from any possible human experience of it." Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1874), Bk. 1, ch. 9, s. 4, quoted by Moore, *Principia, op. cit.,* sec. 50. Sidgwick is Moore's interlocutor in the latter's reflections on the value of the uninhabited beautiful world, and he quotes Sidgwick at *Principia, op. cit.,* sec. 50. Ross takes over the language of 'possibility' in *Right and the Good, op. cit.,* p. 130. Raz expresses the point that value requires the possibility of appreciation by saying that that value is 'personal' rather than impersonal'. Raz, "The Role of Well-Being," *op. cit.,* p. 274.

[90] A different explanation is given by Raz, *Value, Respect, and Attachment*, *op. cit.,* p. 154. Cf. Sarah Buss, "The Value of Humanity," *Journal of Philosophy* CIX: 341-377.

[91] Wolf, "Good-for-nothings," *op. cit.* p. 56. Natural beauty may be an intended exception here. On the other hand, since it is not the *existence* of the natural world that is supposed to be in question, but its *aesthetic value,* natural beauty may be taken to be 'for us' in the sense that it is found beautiful by us given our constitution, sensibility, or whatever.

[92] Wolf, ibid.

The GF theorist takes a different view. It is not that our experience is simply good, and, *because* it is simply good, *also* good for us. Rather, *what it is* for the activity of engaging to be good *is* for it to properly engage human powers of understanding, imagining, contemplating, etc., and in this way to be good for us. So being beneficial is the very essence of value. Without suggesting that it tells decisively in favor of GF (that awaits a fuller defense of perfectionism), I think the difference gives the GF theorist a dialectical advantage. Hers is the simpler position. She denies that there is a gap between being *for us* and being *good for us*. She is not positing two evaluative properties, but one. By her lights, the Ge theorist is simply missing the category of the *constitutively* beneficial. And this raises the question of how the Ge theorist is conceiving of the benefit. Perhaps the Ge theorist imagines that the activity conduces to a beneficial result that is distinct from the activity itself. Perhaps she assumes that this result is, say, the experience of pleasure. If so, she must defend these assumptions. One of the claims of this article is that we should not be forced to adopt a 'lowly' conception of well-being against which 'goodness' shines out as a deliverance.

How does the G theorist fare on the other side—the side of the traditional Mooreans? Mooreans will simply deny that values require the possibility of appreciation, perhaps balking at the sense of 'possibility' that is being invoked here.[93] If the Moorean grants a necessary role for subjects in the existence of value, she will likely opt for a more traditional formulation in dispositional or fittingness terms. (As it happens, these are also the terms the GF theorist prefers, as my formulations in the language of the 'aptitude' or 'suitability' of objects to be engaged in the relevant activities makes clear.) Either way, Mooreans will reject the claim that values are good for people,

[93] G theorists work with the idea of 'live' possibility. The notion is meant to be intuitive—roughly, if there is a live possibility to φ, there is actionable scope to φ. See Raz, "The Role of Well-Being," *op. cit.,* p. 290. I am grateful to Gwen Bradford for discussion of the likely Moorean reaction to appeals to possibility.

arguing that the relation *good for* either adds nothing to *good* or is spurious.[94] The greater dispute, it seems to me, is between the Mooreans and the GF theorists. I have said nothing to settle that dispute here.[95] The final conclusion of this article is simply that G / Ge theorists face pressure from Mooreans *and* the GF theorist in a way that makes their intermediate stance uncomfortable.

[94] See the references in note 9 above.

[95] I take up this dispute in Theunissen, "A 'Personal' Account of Aesthetic and Intellectual Values," *op. cit.*