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Why am I My Brother’s Keeper?

Donald H. Regan

I

I want to cast doubt on a proposition which many people would regard as the first axiom of moral theory. Joseph Raz has stated the proposition thus: ‘Morality is... concerned with the advancement of the well-being of individuals.’ Actually, Raz includes a qualifier—the full quote says that morality ‘is thought to be concerned with’ advancing the well-being of individuals. But the whole tenor of his ensuing discussion suggests that Raz generally shares this view of what morality is about.

As I say, I want to cast doubt on this axiom, but I shall not take issue with any particular judgement that the axiom might entail about how to act in a concrete case. My focus in this essay is not on what should be done, but on why we should do it. Hence my question, ‘Why am I my brother’s keeper?’ I do not ask, like Cain, whether I am my brother’s keeper, with the rhetorical implication that what goes on in others’ lives is no concern of mine. I accept that each of us should be concerned (intrinsically) with what goes on in others’ lives. The question is how best to account for or understand that obligation. Is it best understood as an obligation to promote others’ well-being, or as an obligation of some other sort?

It must be emphasized (because it is easy to forget) that ‘well-being’ as it is used in the supposed first axiom is a normative concept. One could have

a purely naturalistic concept of well-being that merely picked out a range of states and events in individuals' lives and that purported to capture some empirical common-sense notion or some scientifically useful category. But then just saying that something was part of Abel's well-being would not be to assert that anyone, even including Abel, should promote it. Obviously, the proponent of the axiom (whom I shall refer to as the well-being theorist) does mean, when he says some state or event is part of Abel's well-being, that that state or event is to be promoted. Indeed, he means something more specific still. As I have noted, I may agree perfectly with some well-being theorists about what states or events in people's lives are to be promoted. But we still disagree about the nature of the values and reasons involved. The well-being theorist thinks those states or events matter because they are part of the well-being or welfare of Abel, because they are good for Abel, because they are valuable to or for some particular valuing being. That is what I doubt. So far as I can see, well-being as a normative concept does not figure in the best account of why we are obligated to care about what happens in others' lives (or, for that matter, in our own).

As it happens, Raz himself provides the materials for a very simple and straightforward argument against the significance of well-being. First, Raz denies that there is any deep divide within practical reason between morality and prudence. (Questions about well-being and welfare and the like are often referred to as questions about 'prudential value'.) Raz refers to 'the essential identity of people's responsiveness to their own well-being and to morality', and he denies 'that there is a logical difference between a conflict of reasons which affect only the well-being of the agent, and such a conflict where the well-being of the agent is in conflict with that of others. Both types of conflict are rooted in values on which the well-being of the agent is founded, and their resolution depends on the guidance which these same values provide.' These remarks by themselves hardly seem to undercut the significance of well-being, even though they indicate that well-being is founded on other values. But elsewhere Raz says, 'it is neither

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3 As we shall see in section V, I agree more in this way with James Griffin and Joseph Raz than with Wayne Sumner.


5 Ibid. 320.
tautological nor true that we pursue our well-being, and 'it is false that
we pursue our goals because their pursuit serves our well-being'. Raz
believes that success in our goals serves our well-being (provided the goals
are valuable ones), but he denies that concern for our well-being is our
reason for pursuing our goals. In the realm of prudence, then, well-being
seems to be epiphenomenal. But if well-being is epiphenomenal in the
realm of prudence, and if the values that underlie well-being figure in
moral decision making in the same way they figure in prudential decision
making, why is not well-being epiphenomenal for morality as well?

There is more to say about Raz, and I shall come back to him. But for
my larger purposes, starting from these Razian theses would be making
things too easy for myself. Precisely because he sees that there is no
deep divide between prudence and morality, and that individuals aim at
their goals because they regard the goals themselves as valuable, Raz is
already much closer to the full truth (as I see it) than most moral philoso-
phers.

II

So, let us begin again. The question is why each of us should be concerned
with what goes on in others' lives. What is the best account of that obliga-
tion (and does it involve the notion of well-being)? So far as I can see,
there are three principal schemata for an account, which it will be useful
to sketch before we look at each in detail.

First, there is what I shall refer to as the Moorean approach. On this
approach, any agent's fundamental obligation is to bring about the exist-
ence of as much good as possible. The 'good' asserted here is an agent-
neutral good, not tied conceptually to any person's interests. But in fact the
most important goods are certain kinds of events or experiences that occur
within individual lives. Therefore, an important part of promoting the good
turns out to be promoting certain events or experiences in individuals' lives.
Since, from any particular agent's point of view, most individuals are
'others', promoting the good requires us to promote goods in others' lives,
and thus to be concerned with what goes on in others' lives.

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6 Ibid. 316. 7 Ibid. 317 8 Ibid.
The second principal schema reflects one source of unease with the Moorean approach. A standard objection to the Moorean view is that the notion of agent-neutral value makes no sense—that all value must be value 'for' some agent, or at least for some valuing being. This suggests that the basic category of the 'to be promoted' is not an agent-neutral good that just happens to occur primarily in people's lives. Rather, what is to be promoted is essentially the welfare, or the well-being, or the good of individuals—which I shall mostly refer to as the 'good for' individuals. So, on the second schema, what is to be promoted is what is good for various individuals, and each of us should be concerned, not just with what is good for himself, but with what is good for his fellows as well.

The third schema grows out of the feeling that even the second schema is too crude. Proponents of the third schema would say that the other's 'good for' does not make its claim directly on me as something to be promoted. Rather, the claim is indirect. In the first instance, I should respect or care for others because they are persons; and that respect or caring for others entails a concern for their welfare, for the good for them.

III

Let us start with the Moorean view. It is the simplest; in the end it seems to me the most plausible; and, as we shall see, it turns out to be a sort of 'strange attractor' that the other views gravitate towards for various reasons of coherence and plausibility, but that the other views must distinguish themselves from if they are to maintain a separate identity. So far as stating the Moorean view, it is not necessary to add anything to what I said in the sketch. In a nutshell, the Moorean says that we should be concerned with others' lives because we are concerned to promote the good wherever it occurs, and one of the places the good occurs is in others' lives.

There are a number of standard objections to the Moorean view. Two of them, as we have seen, lead to the two principal alternative schemata, and I shall discuss those objections in connection with the alternative schemata in later sections. But two other standard objections deserve mention. One is an objection to Moore's thoroughgoing consequentialism, according to which the only fundamental moral principle is that we should bring about as much good as possible. This objection, whether well founded or not, is not germane to the present discussion. We are not considering Moore's
overall view, but rather a Moorean approach to justifying one quasi-consequentialist obligation that every plausible theory must recognize in some form.

The other standard objection to the Moorean view, which is germane, is the claim that Moorean 'good' has insuperable metaphysical and epistemological problems—Moore has no account of the ontological or metaphysical status of his 'good' and no account of how we have epistemological access to it. The truth of this assertion must be conceded, but not its force as an objection. There is no objection here to 'good' that does not apply equally to 'well-being' or 'welfare' or 'good for' or whatever, in the sense that is relevant to our enquiry. As I have already noted, the concept of welfare is irreducibly normative. Stephen Darwall, himself a welfare theorist, gives a very nice argument for this proposition. He imagines a debate between two people who agree completely on the empirical facts about how a third person's life is going in some respect, but who disagree about whether that respect contributes positively to his welfare or not. (His example involves the perennial problem of whether it is better to know the truth about one's life or to suffer pleasing illusion.) As Darwall points out, what these two are disagreeing about is the application of a normative concept. Furthermore, it should be clear that the concept Darwall's controversialists are disagreeing about gives rise to exactly the same metaphysical and epistemological puzzles as Moore's 'good'. We may often find ourselves debating the relative importance to an agent's welfare of her desires and her needs and her health; and because these are all (more or less) empirical concepts that seem to have an intimate connection with welfare, we may be seduced into thinking that, whatever our disagreements about the content of 'welfare', it is at least a metaphysically unproblematic concept. But this is an illusion, as Darwall's example establishes.

We can reinforce this point with two other observations. First, remember Moore's distinction between the questions 'What is "good"?' and 'What is "the good"?' The answer to the second question will be some complex

9 Darwall, Welfare and Rational Care, 11.
10 Another way to see the normativity of the concept of welfare is to observe that the welfare theorist's objection to Moorean good is not just that it gets the extension of the to-be-promoted wrong, but that it misconceives the nature of the normativity involved. But if this is the welfare theorist's objection to Moorean good, then whatever he offers as an alternative must be supposed to get the normativity right; in other words, it must be a normative concept.
disjunctive natural property; 'the good' can be identified in naturalistic
terms. But the question remains what it is we are saying of 'the good'
when we say it is 'good' (and how we know what to say that of). That is
the question that creates the philosophical difficulties. But that question
arises equally with 'good for' (or 'welfare' or whatever). Darwall's contro­
versialists are arguing in effect about a particular instance of the question
'What is "the good for"?' But the question I want to press is the other
question, 'What is "good for"'? What are we saying about 'the good for
Abel' when we say it is 'good for Abel' (and how do we know what to say
that of)? Most theorists of 'good for' have given all too little attention to
this question;\(^\text{11}\) once we raise it, we see that 'good for' raises the very same
puzzles as Moore's 'good'. I have conceded that Moore has little by way of
an answer to these puzzles. He says 'good' is a simple, non-natural concept
that we all in fact possess as part of our common-sense endowment, if we
can just clarify our thinking enough to recognize that fact.\(^\text{12}\) But it would
be useful if the 'good for' theorists said even this much about their
favoured concept; their saying this would reveal clearly that their concept
has no metaphysical and epistemological advantage over Moore's 'good'.

The second observation is just that the most plausible recent theories of
the 'good for' (or welfare or whatever) all give an important role to what
Derek Parfit called an 'objective list'.\(^\text{13}\) James Griffin,\(^\text{14}\) Joseph Raz,\(^\text{15}\) and
Stephen Darwall,\(^\text{16}\) for example, all agree that part of what is good for an
agent is engaging in activities or being in states or relationships that are not
picked out simply by the agent's desires, but have some sort of objective
value. But the metaphysical and epistemological status of the 'objective list'
of relevant values is as problematic as the metaphysical and epistemological
status of Moore's 'good'.

In the remainder of this essay I shall often refer to 'welfare' or 'well­
being' or 'good of', and so on, by the phrase 'good for'. There are expository
advantages to the phrase 'good for', because it allows a natural contrast

\(^{11}\) If this seems unjust to a few careful theorists who have written extended discussions of
welfare or well-being, note that I shall discuss the views of Wayne Sumner, James Griffin, and
Joseph Raz in section V and of Stephen Darwall in section VII.


\(^{14}\) James Griffin, Well-being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance (Oxford: Clarendon

\(^{15}\) Raz, Morality of Freedom, ch. 12.

\(^{16}\) Darwall, Welfare and Rational Care, 17, 94–102.
between ‘good’ and ‘good for’ as the basic conceptions of to-be-promotedness. It is worth emphasizing that in this usage ‘good for’ is a normative concept, just like ‘good’ and ‘welfare’. Purely naturalistic explications of ‘good for’, which would equate ‘good for’ with ‘desired’, or even ‘desired under specified ideal conditions’, or ‘pleasurable’, or the like, are excluded. These are candidates for explications of ‘the good for’, but not of ‘good for’ itself. Similarly for ‘being an exemplary member of a species’, along the lines suggested by Philippa Foot. There is one other genuinely normative possibility for the ‘good for Brown’: we might take it to mean just ‘what Brown ought to promote’. The most interesting development of this idea is Michael Smith’s, although Smith sensibly prefers not to refer to his concept as a version of ‘good for’, but rather as a subscripted ‘good\textsubscript{agent}’. Interesting though this possibility is, it is clearly remote from any concept of welfare. The good\textsubscript{Brown} in this sense may include any number of states of affairs outside Brown’s life; and furthermore there is no plausibility at all in suggesting that the good\textsubscript{Brown} as such makes any claim on Jones. It may be, of course, that the good\textsubscript{Brown} and the good\textsubscript{Jones} overlap, or are even identical in extension, but it will not be the goodness\textsubscript{Brown}, the fact that Brown should promote it, that accounts for anything’s being good\textsubscript{Jones}. So we can ignore this subscripted good. ‘Good for’, as used in this essay, is a normative concept, and a synonym for the other normative concepts of ‘welfare’, ‘well-being’, and ‘good of’.

IV

Let us turn now to the second schema for explaining why I am my brother’s keeper, the schema that says that the basic category of the to-be-promoted is realized not in an agent-neutral ‘good’, but in an agent-relative ‘good for’, and that each of us must promote the good for every other. This schema is suggested, as we saw, by an objection to the Moorean view—the objection that value must be value ‘for’ some valuing person or being.

17 Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). I would construe this as a naturalistic concept. We might manage to construe it as a normative concept, but if so, it would be subject to the general dilemma I develop below: if the value of being an exemplary member of a species is really a value for the individual exemplar, then it is not clear how that value for the exemplar creates a reason for anyone else.

I admit that the 'good for' theorist seems to have a point. We come to the idea of value through our experiences of wanting and desiring and feeling needs, and so it may seem that when we ascribe value to something, we are necessarily ascribing value 'for' ourselves. On the other hand, the 'good for' theorist ought similarly to be able to understand the intuitive pull of the Moorean view. The issue of what is to-be-promoted, even what is to-be-promoted in people’s lives, is a normative issue. It is not settled by anyone’s desires or drives. Darwall’s question of whether someone is better off knowing the truth about his life or being contentedly deceived is not to be answered just by knowing what the person wants, or even by knowing what he would want under idealized circumstances. Even if we think that what we should promote in any person’s life is his always having just what he wants, or would ideally want, the fact that that is what we should promote in his life is not a fact about, or determined by, his desires. So it is not clear why we should think that the essence of ‘goodness’—even of the goodness of pure desire-satisfaction, if pure desire-satisfaction is good—is a ‘goodness for’.

It may seem that this focus on desire is beside the point. In principle, one could believe that value is completely objective, not determined by anyone’s desires, and still think that the essence of value is ‘value for’ as opposed to ‘value “from the point of view of the universe”’, or ‘value simpliciter’. True enough. One could try to understand ‘value for’ in terms of desire-independent ‘interests’, or some such (though that generates a problem of how to understand one’s ‘interests’ as something other than having what is ‘valuable for’ one). I focus on desire only because it seems to me that it is implicated in the aetiology, and to some extent the continuing plausibility, of the idea that value is essentially ‘value for’. Once we step resolutely into the realm of purely objective value, and then ask the fundamental question whether value is essentially ‘for’ certain value-supporting entities or whether it is essentially non-relative, it is hard to come up with any arguments at all (though I shall attempt to offer a general argument for non-relative value in section VIB and a special-purpose argument later in this section).

The situation is made more difficult by the fact that on the best versions of each theory of value, ‘the good’ and ‘the good for’ may have the same extension. For example, the Moorean thinks that pain is bad (simpliciter); the ‘good for’ theorist thinks that pain is bad for the subject who experiences it. They agree that pain is negatively valenced. With regard to positive
values, the Moorean of today (I can speak with authority, because I am a large fraction of the relevant population, perhaps the unique member) believes that the good is pleasurable experiences of objectively appropriate activities and relationships; so everything the Moorean recognizes as good will seem a ‘good for’ to most ‘good for’ theorists, because of the pleasure involved. Similarly, more and more ‘good for’ theorists are becoming ‘objective list’ theorists; they are coming to the view that what is good for people is engagement in objectively valuable pursuits. So we are approaching the point, if we are not there already, where the extensions of the Moorean’s ‘good’ and the ‘good for’ theorist’s ‘good for’ are effectively indistinguishable. In such a situation, we will not be able to decide between the concepts by adducing counterexamples to one theory or the other—states or events which the proponents of one theory can claim the other theory attaches the wrong valence to. What we need is conceptual arguments, but it is not easy to find arguments that have any purchase on such a fundamental disagreement.

Moore’s own discussion of ‘good for’, in the course of his famous ‘refutation of Egoism’, suggests an argument which I think is very powerful in the present context, although for reasons that will appear, it is not an argument Moore himself makes. Moore thought that the notion of a normatively fundamental ‘good for’, which could compete with ‘good’ for the central role in the account of to-be-promoted-ness, was incoherent; but he acknowledged that there were a number of other things that one could coherently mean by ‘good for Jones’. One might mean, for example, ‘what Jones ought to aim at, for instrumental reasons’, or alternatively, ‘what Jones thinks is good’, or else, ‘something which is good, and which occurs, or would occur, in Jones’s life’. None of these, of course, establishes a sense of ‘good for’ which is logically independent of ‘good’—that is Moore’s point. But the idea that ‘good for Jones’ might mean ‘good, and occurring in Jones’s life’ suggests a further argument, in the form of a dilemma for the ‘good for’ theorist.

I shall explain why this does not make ‘good’ a ruse for covert concern with ‘good for’ in section VIA.

Moore, _Principia Ethica_ §§59–60.

Although I make my own use of the possibility Moore raises that ‘good for’ might mean ‘good, and occurring in the life of’, I do not suggest, and I think it would be a mistake to suggest, that this is Moore’s own theory of ‘good for’ or ‘welfare’. Moore has no theory of these concepts. He has no use for them. And in the end I agree with Moore about this too.
Clearly no 'good for' theorist can accept that 'good for' means 'good, and occurring in the life of'. That would amount to abandoning 'good for' as an independent concept. Still, accepting that definition would have one definite advantage for the 'good for' theorist. It would explain why Cain should concern himself with the good for Abel. If 'good for' meant simply 'good, and occurring in the life of', then Cain would be required to care about the good for Abel because the good for Abel would be just a part of the good simpliciter.\textsuperscript{22}

As I say, this move will not do for the 'good for' theorist. For the 'good for' theorist, the relativization of goodness signalled by the 'for' must somehow appeal to each individual's interests, or desires, or point of view, or valuations, or something of that sort. The good for Abel must be peculiarly Abel's—the goodness or the value must be peculiarly Abel's—in a way that the mere occurrence of universal good in Abel's life does not necessarily satisfy. But if the good for Abel is peculiarly Abel's—if its value is somehow essentially a value for Abel—then why indeed should Cain care? We think there is a deep connection between value and reasons. That suggests precisely that if the good for Abel is a matter only of value for Abel, then it creates reasons for Abel, and for no one else.

Hence the dilemma: any understanding of 'good for' which distinguishes it clearly from 'good, occurring in the life of' also undercuts the possibility that one individual's 'good for' should make a claim on any other

\textsuperscript{22} The 'good for' theorist might ask how I can so casually assert that if the 'good for Abel' were 'good, occurring in Abel's life', then Cain ought to care about it because he ought to care about the good simpliciter. Why so? What reason has any agent to care about this free-floating good? Obviously a complete answer to this question would take us deep into the debate about internal and external reasons. (I am of course an externalist.) For purposes of argument, I am prepared to concede that there is an ordinary language usage in which Cain does not 'have' a reason to promote the good simpliciter unless he somehow takes an interest in it; but then the question before us is not what reasons Cain 'has', but what reasons there are for him to behave in certain ways. What I said in the text was not that if the 'good for Abel' were 'good, occurring in Abel's life', then Cain would 'have' reason to promote it; I said he would be required to care about it—in other words, there would be a reason for him to care about it, and hence to promote it. The best credential for this desire-independent sense of what reasons there are is the fact that this is the sense involved in the question the agent asks himself when deciding what to do. At the most fundamental level, the agent does not ask himself what reasons he 'has'—he does not ask himself what he takes an interest in. Rather, he asks himself what he should take an interest in, or in other words, what reasons there are. See the further brief discussion of agency and the 'desire-transcending question' in section VI B below.
individual. In effect, the problem is ‘What does the “for” in “good for” mean?’ If ‘for’ means ‘occurring in the life of’, this gives us an empirical relativization to the agent, but the normativity involved is still the universal normativity of ‘good’. We need some other understanding of the ‘for’ to give us a concept of ‘good for’ that is distinct from ‘good, occurring in the life of’ and independent of ‘good’. The relativization signalled by the ‘for’ must be a relativization of the normativity. But that is precisely the move that undercuts the possibility of Abel’s ‘good for’ making a claim on Cain.

I hope it is clear by now that we cannot escape the dilemma by saying that the ‘for’ means something like ‘desired by’. Imagine that there is some activity Abel wants to engage in, and imagine further that we are all agreed that Cain ought to promote Abel’s opportunity for engaging in that activity. Still there is the problem of how to account for this obligation of Cain’s. Is the correct account that Abel’s engaging in this activity, or perhaps his engaging in any activity he wants to engage in, is good simpliciter, and that Cain should promote that good? This account makes sense, but of course it operates without any normative ‘good for Abel’. Or is the correct account that Abel’s engaging in an activity he wants to engage in is (normatively) good for Abel, and that Cain should promote the good for Abel? This account simply raises again the question why. How is a value for Abel a reason for Cain?

We could of course say that (1) Abel’s engaging in an activity he wants to engage in is good for Abel, and (2) Abel’s having the ‘good for Abel’ is a good simpliciter. And then of course, (3) Cain should promote the good simpliciter. (2) is the significant new bridging premiss. I suspect that many ‘good for’ theorists actually operate unconsciously with some such schema as this. But this does not eliminate ‘good simpliciter’, so it is no use to those who think that ‘good simpliciter’ is incoherent and who want to eliminate it

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23 This is no problem of course for the ‘good for’ theorist who is prepared to abandon the idea that Abel’s ‘good for’ makes a claim on Cain—in particular, it is no problem for the Egoist that Moore was arguing against. That is why this is not Moore’s argument. But today there are even fewer Egoists than there are Mooreans. Present-day ‘good for’ (welfare, well-being) theorists do want Abel’s ‘good for’ to make a claim on Cain. And they face the dilemma.

24 Although I find it revealing to pose the question as ‘What does the “for” mean?’, I would emphasize that the dilemma is not just an artefact of a particular locution. If we were talking about well-being, for example, the corresponding question would be, ‘In what sense precisely is Abel’s well-being Abel’s?’ Merely that it occurs in Abel’s life is not enough to distinguish ‘his’ well-being from the occurrence of good simpliciter, but a thicker relationship to Abel threatens to undercut the claim on Cain.
in favour of 'good for'. And worse, this schema invites us to apply Occam’s razor and eliminate the ‘good for’. Instead of saying first that a certain state is good for Abel, and then that Abel’s having what is good for him is good simpliciter, why not just say that the state in question is good simpliciter? It is not clear that the reference to 'good for' is doing anything significant.\(^{25}\)

\[\text{V}\]

The dilemma argument is an argument about why the good for Abel cannot make a claim on Cain if the concept of 'good for' is genuinely independent of Moorean good. It is not a general argument for the incoherence of 'good for'; it leaves open the possibility that there is a coherent, independent concept of 'good for', the significance of which is that each agent is either required or permitted to give special attention to the good for herself. (I shall suggest a broader argument against 'good for' in section VII.) But in connection with our central question—why one agent should be concerned with what happens to others—it seems to me that the dilemma argument is a powerful argument against the usefulness of 'good for'. In this section I want to consider how the dilemma manifests itself in connection with three contemporary theories based on well-being.

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In *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, Wayne Sumner’s primary project is to define ‘welfare’. His conclusion is that welfare is informed and autonomous happiness; and happiness is satisfaction with the way one’s own life is going or has gone for oneself.\(^{26}\) The crux of happiness is thus a doubly subjective evaluation—subjective first because it focuses on how the subject’s life is ‘for him’, and second because Sumner tells us there is no right answer to this question beyond the subject’s own judgement.\(^{27}\) In the last chapter of

\(^{25}\) I have suggested in the text that we need to bring in good simpliciter to link up the good for Abel with a reason for Cain. The need for good simpliciter seems even clearer when we consider the problem of how to balance the (reasons created by the) good for Abel and the good for Seth. Balance we must, and that seems to require a 'good' (explicit or implicit) which is not a 'good for'.


\(^{27}\) Ibid. 153–71.
the book, Sumner argues that 'prudential value [welfare] is the sole ult­
imate bearer of ethical value'. In other words, in so far as we make choices
that bear on others' lives, our ultimate concern should be with their
welfare, as Sumner defines it. But why exactly should each agent care
about others' welfare? Does Sumner have any argument that avoids the
dilemma I posed for the 'good for' theorist? So far as I can see, he does not.

At the most fundamental level, I do not think Sumner squarely ad-
dresses the meaning of the concept 'welfare', or equivalently 'good for'. This
criticism may seem unjust; Sumner certainly deserves credit for a serious
attempt to give a general account of welfare (his account in terms of
authentic happiness), as opposed to just listing standard sources of welfare,
such as achievement and rich personal relationships. Even so, Sumner
seems to be offering an answer to the question 'What is “the good for”?'
rather than to the question 'What is “good for”?' A symptom of the
uncertainty about the latter is Sumner's treatment of perfectionist value as
an element of welfare. This is an issue he confronts in a variety of contexts,
and his conclusion is always that perfectionist value has no independent
significance beyond its possible contribution to happiness as Sumner defines
it. But sometimes Sumner speaks as if there is conceptual room for a
genuine substantive question about the role of perfectionist value in wel-
fare; and sometimes he speaks as if claiming a role for perfectionism in
the specification of welfare is just a fallacy, a bald mistake in conceptual
analysis, which consists of failing to distinguish between how well a life is
going and how well it is going for the subject of it. These different
arguments seem to reflect different implicit answers to 'What is “good
for”?' As I have noted before, I cannot criticize Sumner for not defining
'good for'. The 'good for' theorist can claim about 'good for' what Moore
claims about 'good'—that it is a simple, non-natural concept we all have.
But saying this explicitly would make it clear that authentic happiness is
not determined as the content of welfare by mere conceptual analysis.

Leaving aside the uncertain status of the concept of welfare, Sumner
tells us that welfare is constituted by an agent's feelings of satisfaction with
his life, so long as those feelings are informed and autonomous. Hence, a
life devoted to trivial or even demeaning pursuits could be a good one,

28 Ibid. 25. (It may seem odd that I cite p. 25 for a proposition I say Sumner discusses in his
last chapter. The full discussion is in the last chapter, but the most succinct statement is in
the first chapter.)
29 Ibid. 140 n. 1.
30 Ibid. 78–9.
provided the subject is satisfied with it. But why should other agents have any positive obligation to facilitate such a trivial or demeaning life? Why, in other words, should welfare, as Sumner understands it, be the sole bearer, or even a bearer, of 'ethical value'? When it comes to explaining this, Sumner seems just to beg the question. Thus: 'The fact that a course of action would make someone better off counts in favour of it, and the fact that it would make someone worse off counts against it.' ‘Our ethical sensibilities seem to have much to do with our ability to see things from the point of view of potential victims and beneficiaries.’ How well the lives of other creatures are going must matter to us because it matters (from the inside) to those creatures. Now, no one would deny that some facts about how a life is going from inside can make a claim on others. Even for the Moorean, pain is intrinsically bad, for example. But Sumner is claiming much more than that. He is claiming in effect that each of us has some positive obligation to facilitate others' engagement in trivial or demeaning pursuits, if that is what they find satisfaction in (and not just on the ground of their painful frustration if they are deprived of these pursuits). This seems problematic. Perhaps those pursuits are indeed what we should regard as good for them; but if so, it is hard to see why the good for them, so understood, makes a claim on anyone else. Sumner has neither given us a conceptual scheme from which this would follow, nor made it plausible in the concrete case.

B

James Griffin has a theory of prudential value (his favoured term is 'well-being') that is some degrees more perfectionist than Sumner's. Griffin offers a list of 'the ends of life' that he thinks are values in anyone's life: accomplishment, the components of human existence (autonomy, physical integrity, mental composure, liberty), understanding, enjoyment, and deep personal relations. Sumner would agree that most or all of these things would contribute to most people's welfare; but he objects, with some justice, that theories like Griffin's provide no general theory that accounts

31 Ibid. 182.
32 Ibid. 191.
33 Ibid. 211.
34 Ibid. 217.
35 Griffin, Well-being, 67–8.
for what is on the list and what is not.\textsuperscript{36} If there is any general theory suggested by Griffin’s discussion, it is that these various goods respond to universal and relatively stable human motivations. In any event, Griffin does not give pure subjective satisfaction the role Sumner does. Indeed, while Sumner says that a life of trivial or demeaning pursuits could be a perfectly good life if the informed, autonomous subject is satisfied with it, Griffin explicitly denies that.\textsuperscript{37} To be sure, Griffin rejects a perfectionism which would posit one ideal form of life for all individuals. Griffin’s moderate perfectionism gives us rather a list of basic elements. But even in discussing which elements from the list each individual should concentrate on, Griffin seems to de-emphasize pure preference and emphasize instead individuals’ divergent capacities for different sorts of pursuit.

Moderate perfectionist or not, Griffin regards himself as setting out a theory of prudential value—a theory of the value of a life for the subject of it. And he insists that morality needs prudential value as a base.\textsuperscript{38} But why this is so—indeed, why prudential value as such matters at all to morality—is much less clear. The only argument I can find to explain why one person should care about another’s prudential value is roughly that because anyone’s prudential value is composed of the sort of universal elements Griffin has identified, it makes a claim on others too.

That it is my, or any one individual’s, pain or accomplishment is not a constituent of my, or anyone’s, conception of prudential value. How well a person’s life goes matters—matters immediately to that person, of course, but also matters generally in this sense: depending upon what happens to him, his life will be more or less valuable. . . . That value has the role in a life of point and direction that it does, and that the locus of value is not just oneself, brings one to a certain sort of impartiality. . . . [I am required to be concerned for your interests because] one’s concerns have to be responsive to how worthy of concern its possible objects are.\textsuperscript{39}

Griffin says that in thinking this way, an agent is neither looking at things from the other’s point of view nor viewing them sub specie aeternitatis.\textsuperscript{40} But the viewpoint embodied in the quoted remarks seems quite ‘aeternitist’ to me. Perhaps Griffin’s idea is that if the driving force is impartiality, then

\textsuperscript{36} Sumner, \textit{Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics}, 164–5.
\textsuperscript{37} Griffin, \textit{Well-being}, 34 n. 29, discussing the grass-counter.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. 69–70.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. 157–8.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. 157.
the agent is just extending to the other's prudential value the concern he naturally has for his own. But that raises both the question (1) what is the nature of the agent's concern for his own prudential value (whether even that is not sub specie aeternitatis for the agent who has fully recognized the inadequacy of his natural motivational system for grounding genuinely justifying reasons), and the question (2) why does it not make all the difference that the agent's own prudential value is his own and the other's is the other's. One would think that an agent is required to be concerned only with what is valuable for him—which does not include a prudential value that is essentially for another.

It may seem that my last remarks do not sufficiently acknowledge the force of impartiality. To clear things up a bit, we must observe that there are two possible modes of my concern for 'value for me'. My remarks at the end of the last paragraph assume implicitly that my concern is direct: value for me translates directly into reasons for me, and that is why, or how, I care about it. In this mode, value for others translates into reasons for them, which simply do not engage me in the same way. Impartiality has no purchase. In contrast, my concern for value for me might be indirect: it might be that I am concerned in the first instance for myself, and this leads to a concern for value for me. But now, if impartiality means that I ought to be concerned for others in the same way as I am concerned for myself, then it would follow that I ought to care about what is valuable for them in the same indirect way that I care about what is valuable for me. I shall explain why I reject this second possibility, which involves my responding to value for X (myself or another) through the mediation of a concern for X, in section VII.

I do not mean to deny the intuitive force of Griffin's argument about why we should be concerned for others' welfare. But it seems to me that what intuitive force there is militates against the idea that what we are concerned with is really prudential value. The intuitive force depends on the universal value of the perfectionist elements of good lives that Griffin has identified; and what the possession of those elements most obviously leads to is lives that are better simpliciter, not lives that are in any distinct sense better for the subject. It is interesting that a few pages further on, when Griffin is addressing the issue of conflict between our own prudential value and our moral obligations (apparently grounded in others'
prudential value), he says that we transcend the distinction by appealing to 'values, neither expressly prudential nor expressly moral but values taken at a higher level of abstraction...: the notion of what, all things considered is worth our concern'. But once we introduce this non-relativized notion of 'worth our concern', the idea that we were dealing with a 'good for' in any stronger sense than 'good, occurring in the life of' seems to have vanished. And if this is where we finish in hard cases, this is where, in principle, we might have started.

The lesson from this discussion of Griffin is not that a significant concept of prudential value must not contain a perfectionist element. That would be to forget what we learned in discussing Sumner. Rather, the joint lesson of the discussions of Sumner and Griffin is that 'good for' is a chimera. If we take seriously the dependence on the agent's subjective evaluation, which Sumner plausibly claims is the best realization of the 'for', we get the very implausible conclusion that a life spent in trivial pursuits can be as valuable as Bach's life or Darwin's if the subject is as satisfied, and that the life of trivial pursuits can make as strong a claim on others to be promoted, so far as intrinsic prudential value is concerned. This is not plausible; the 'for', in Sumner's account, undermines the 'good'. In contrast, emphasizing the perfectionist element, as Griffin does, seems to attenuate the 'for' to the point where it is a mere empirical accident ('occurring in the life of') rather than an aspect of the normative concept. In Griffin's account, the 'for'-ness is totally unrelated to the nature of the value.

We could of course just stipulate that the good for a subject must be perfectionistically valuable activity which the subject himself enjoys or approves of. But to my mind, this produces a conceptual monster, unmotivated by anything except the desire to avoid counterexamples from two directions. There's nothing wrong with the extension of the suggested chimeric concept. As I have said, I think this is pretty much the extension of the Moorean good. But, as I shall explain in section VIA, the Moorean has a way of making sense of the joint requirement of objectively valuable activity and enjoyment by the subject, in the notion of appreciative engagement with appropriate objects. By contrast, the 'good for' theorist's gerrymandering of the extension of 'good for' to avoid counterexamples does nothing to help the 'for' aspect, which is meant to involve normative

42 Griffin, Well-being, 161.
relativization, and the 'good' aspect, which requires normative neutrality if it is to account for claims on others, fit together in an intelligible unity.

C

The most interesting approach to fitting these aspects together into an intelligible whole is Joseph Raz's. Raz starts from the idea that well-being is (largely) a matter of success in one's goals. That sounds like it emphasizes the subject-relative 'for' side of 'good for'. But Raz points out that agents want their projects to be valuable. We choose our projects because we think they are valuable; and our allegiance to them is conditioned on our belief in their value. So, if my goal, loosely described, is to count the blades of grass in the Law School quadrangle, my fully described goal is to engage in the valuable activity of counting those blades of grass. If counting them is not in fact valuable, then even if I complete a perfectly accurate enumeration, I have not achieved my goal, and the 'success', which is only apparent, does not contribute to my well-being. Raz combines the neutralist and relativist aspects of 'good for' by building a concern for non-relativized value into the agent's desires.

This move of Raz's is not just ad hoc counterexample blocking. I think Raz is right that we intend to have valuable goals, and that if we are mistaken about the value of our goals, then even empirical 'success' does not amount to achieving what we intended. Hence, if well-being is a matter of achieving our goals, it follows that well-being depends on achieving genuinely valuable goals. But it seems to me that Raz's move just highlights the question why we should think in terms of well-being at all. Raz directs our attention to the agent's own view of his goals. But, as we noted right at the start, Raz recognizes that the agent does not aim at his own well-being at all. If the agent does not pursue his goals with an eye to his well-being, why should we use his success at his goals to measure his well-being? Indeed, why does the problematic notion of 'well-being' even enter the picture? Why should we not just promote all agents' valuable activity, without worrying about anyone's well-being? Of course there will be trade-offs to be made between different people's valuable activity, as

45 Ibid. 299, 316–17. My reasons for agreeing with this claim of Raz’s are suggested in section VII B below.
46 Ibid. 316–17.
there are trade-offs to be made between different valuable activities in our own lives. But Raz has also told us that the same values are involved in these interpersonal trade-offs as in the intra-personal ones.\textsuperscript{47} We can make the trade-offs without thinking about well-being, so why not do so?

To be sure, we cannot relate to others' projects \textit{exactly} as we relate to our own, for two main reasons. First, even if both I and my colleague are doing analytic number theory, I \textit{do} my own research activity, but I cannot \textit{do} his. I can support his activity, and encourage it, and provide resources, and eliminate obstacles; I cannot actually do his doing. But I do not see how this difference lends any support to the idea that I should value his activity as a contribution to his well-being even though that is not how I value my own. The reason I do not value my own activity as a contribution to my well-being is that I value the activity directly. But I can value his activity directly in the same way, even though I do not engage in it. (In the case of my own activity, the valuing explains the engagement and partly constitutes it; but the engagement \textit{does not} constitute the valuing.) I see no reason why the activity's being his and not mine means I must value it as a contribution to his well-being. The idea of his well-being does not force itself on me any more than the idea of my own does.

It may seem that the plausibility of the argument in the last paragraph depends on the fact that my colleague and I are both doing analytic number theory, which we know I value precisely because I have chosen to do it. Suppose I, the number theorist, am considering the life of an acquaintance who is a jazz saxophonist, or a construction worker, or a full-time stay-at-home parent. Now it might seem that if I do not value the other's activity for itself, I have no choice but to value it as contributing to his well-being. But this is a mistake. Recall that on Raz's view no activity contributes to anyone's well-being unless it is valuable. So I cannot even decide that the activity contributes to the other's well-being without first deciding that it is valuable (even though for whatever reason I have not pursued it in my own life); and if I recognize it as valuable, then I can value it directly. My lack of personal engagement with the value in question may increase the chance of my making a mistake, but that is true whether I think in terms of well-being or in terms of the value of the activity for itself.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. 319–20.
VI

In this section I shall redeem two promissory notes from earlier sections. First, I shall respond to the suggestion that the Moorean view, because it regards only pleasurable experiences as valuable, must really be driven by 'good for' impulses. Then I shall offer an argument against the whole concept of 'good for' from first principles.

A

It may seem that by restricting the good to pleasurable experiences, the Moorean reveals that his real concern, like the 'good for' theorist's, is with value for the subjects of these experiences. Why else should an experience of a beautiful sunset, or a great mathematical theorem, or a Bach cantata, need to be enjoyable in order to be valuable? I cannot answer this point fully here. The short answer is that what is really valuable (non-relatively) is the appreciative engagement of the subject with a worthy object. The subject's pleasure is relevant because pleasure is an inevitable concomitant, and therefore a sign, of the right sort of engagement. But it is the engagement of subject and appropriate object that is valuable. To my mind, when there is the right sort of engagement, we could as well say that the value created is value 'for' the sunset, or the theorem, or the cantata, as insist that the value is 'for' the subject. The object of appreciation is brought to life by being attended to and appreciated. But in fact, the real value is neither 'for' the subject nor 'for' the object. The value is just there, in a whole to which both subject and object make an indispensable contribution.

In support of this, notice that when I am fully engaged in either listening to or performing a Bach cantata (for example), there is no thought in my mind of any value 'for me'; indeed, there is no thought in my mind of me. My consciousness is occupied with the music, and the beauty of the music and the texts, and the singing. I am fully present; I am, as an integral aspect of the activity, recognizing the value of the activity and choosing continuously to go on with it. But I am present only as subject, as appreciator and agent. I am not present as an object for my own thinking or feeling or choosing. The paradoxical truth is that the very sort of activity which many philosophers view as paradigmatically 'good for' an agent does not present itself to that agent, when he is engaged in it, as a 'good for' at
all, because it does not present itself in conjunction with any thought about the subject of the activity. The subject is indispensably present, but only as subject, not as object of an additional thought beyond the thought internal to the activity. Thus the experience presents itself as 'good simpliciter'.

My argument here extends an argument that Thomas Nagel makes in *The View from Nowhere*. Arguing for the claim that severe pain is a neutral disvalue, which anyone has reason to alleviate even when the pain is another's, Nagel says in a variety of ways: 'The pain can be detached in thought from the fact that it is mine without losing any of its dreadfulness.' '[The agent's] awareness of how bad [pain] is doesn't essentially involve the thought of it as his.' 'In its most primitive form, the fact that it is mine—the concept of myself—doesn't come into my perception of the badness of pain.' This all seems to me exactly right, and it justifies Nagel's continuation after the first quote above: '[The pain] has, so to speak, a life of its own. That is why it is natural to ascribe to it a value of its own.' I am suggesting that the argument has much broader application than Nagel allows it. When I am fully engaged in hearing or performing a Bach cantata, the concept of myself also doesn't come into it. If the 'selflessness' of great pain means that the disvalue of pain is agent-neutral, so does the 'selflessness' of experiences with great positive value mean that their value is agent-neutral also. The self disappears at our best moments as well as our worst.49

B

I turn now to the argument against 'good for' as the (or a) fundamental 'to-be-promoted-ness' concept. I said in section IV that we come to the idea of value through our experiences of wanting, and desiring, and feeling needs; and that may account for our intuition that value must be relative to a valuing agent. But if we in fact develop into fully competent agents, then we come to realize that we must look beyond our desires and needs for the full truth about value—even for the full truth about value in our


49 Paradoxically, even when I am writing a philosophy paper, which I hope is a valuable activity, and speaking in the first person, the concept of myself doesn't really come into it. When things are going smoothly, the authorial 'I' is more a literary device than a self-conscious personal obtrusion.
lives. In the course of developing towards full-fledged agency, we learn first to limit some desires in light of conflicting desires, and then to criticize lower-order desires in light of higher-order desires. Eventually, inevitably, it occurs to us to ask ourselves whether our most fundamental desires (either our highest-order desires if the structure is essentially hierarchical, or the entire complex of our desires if we are more coherentalist) are justified and directed at worthy ends. This is the step, raising what I have elsewhere called the ‘desire-transcending question’, that makes us agents.50 When we ask this question, we are asking for a standard for our desires, a standard that cannot be grounded in our desires themselves. It is this desire-transcending question, of course, that gives rise to the metaphysical and epistemological problems that ‘good’ suffers from and that I have claimed ‘good for’ (or indeed any fundamental normative concept) suffers from as well. Still, acknowledging this question and confronting it—not in every individual decision we make, but sometimes, at crucial junctures—is the crucial passage to agency.

If it is the connection of valuing with desiring that initially makes it seem plausible that value is ‘value for’, what happens when we come to the point of realizing that we must at least try to transcend our desires completely as we seek to identify the to-be-promoted?51 Does the agent who has reached the desire-transcending question and who is deliberating ideally about what to promote think in terms of ‘good’ or in terms of ‘good for’? Remember that the issue here is about the choice between the concepts ‘good’ and ‘good for’. As we have seen, it is perfectly possible that ‘the good’ and ‘the good for’ should be identical, in the sense that the things which are actually good, if the Moorean view is correct, are the very same things that are actually good for some agent or other, if the ‘good for’ theorist is correct. But the question remains, which is the proper fundamental concept?

Now, it seems to me that saying the fundamental concept is ‘good for’ amounts to imposing an unexplained a priori constraint on the agent’s deliberation. The agent has realized he needs a standard to guide his choice which transcends his naturalistically given motivational system. He is looking at the world and asking what things are truly to-be-promoted. So

50 See Donald H. Regan, ‘How to Be a Moorean’, *Ethics* 113 (2003), 651–77, §I.
51 Of course, once we have identified the to-be-promoted in general terms, our desires will be highly relevant, in a variety of ways, to figuring out how we can best promote it. But our desires do not figure in the specification of what matters ultimately.
far as I can see, there is no reason why he should assume at this stage, when he first begins his survey of the world and his search for the to-be-promoted, that the to-be-promoted is necessarily limited to occurrences within people's lives—and even less reason why he should assume that the to-be-promoted is necessarily limited to occurrences within people's lives that might seem in some intuitive sense to involve benefit 'for' them. But these limitations are what would correspond to the claim that the question the agent asks himself should be understood as a question about the 'good for'. If the agent does not begin with these a priori limitations, then we should understand him as asking about the 'good'. Even if it turns out that 'the good' is entirely constituted by things in people's lives, and even things that might be thought of as 'benefiting' them in some sense, still, the agent's question is about 'the good'.

It might be said that the agent's question is about 'good for' in a different sense. The agent is faced with the problem what she should do—simply because it is only her own actions that she does. It might be suggested that the agent is therefore enquiring in effect into what is to-be-promoted by her. Notice that even if we accept this suggestion, it does not lead us to a concept of 'good for' that is equivalent to the concept of 'welfare' or 'well-being'. Rather, it leads us to the sort of good agent posited by Michael Smith. But I am inclined to reject the suggestion, for reasons like those that figured in my argument in section VIA for the neutral good of valuable activities. There is nothing in the agent's situation that compels

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52 This is as good a place as any (there is no really good place) to mention a quite particular argument for the necessity of a concept of 'good for' that is made by Darwall, Welfare and Rational Care, 3, 53, following Mark Overvold, 'Self-Interest and the Concept of Self-Sacrifice', Canadian Journal of Philosophy 10 (1980), 105–18. The argument is that if we have no concept of the good for an agent, then self-sacrifice, which is sacrificing one's own good for another's or for some universal good, becomes impossible. This is logically correct, of course, if we define 'self-sacrifice' as the sacrifice of one's own good. But why must self-sacrifice so defined be possible? What would we lose if it were not? The idea, plainly, is that self-sacrifice is praiseworthy or admirable, and we would be poorer if we lost an occasion for justified praise because our concepts made it impossible to recognize the occasion. True. But it seems to me that any action we would be tempted to identify as 'self-sacrifice' in ordinary usage will involve the agent ending up with significantly less of some natural good—less pleasure or enjoyment, less physical integrity or freedom or life. And therefore the self-sacrificing agent will have had to act against strong natural impulses in the service of (what he saw as) the overall good. Surely we can praise and admire this self-control, this ability to resist strong natural impulses in the service of the good, whether or not we see the agent as sacrificing some 'good of her own'.

53 See the last paragraph of section III above.
her to attend to the fact of her own particularity as an agent. To be sure, the empirical circumstances in which she acts are particular, and when it comes to deciding precisely how best to promote whatever is to be promoted, she will need to take her circumstances into account. But at the stage of formulating the general theory of the to-be-promoted, there is simply nothing to suggest that there is a special to-be-promoted-by-her. Just as appreciative activity is transparent to particular personal identity, so, I suggest, is action in general, at least ideally (and it is the ideal situation that gives us the fundamental concepts).\textsuperscript{54}

VII

The third schema for arguing that I am required to care about what happens in others' lives involves the claim that I must care about others, or that I must respect them as persons. Remember the problem with the second schema was that it was not clear how another's 'good for', if it was normatively relativized enough to distinguish it from 'good, occurring in the life of', could make any claim on me. The advantage of the care/respect approach is that it might seem to explain why I must take others' point of view, at least to some extent. And in so far as I take their point of view, I arguably put myself within the scope of the normativity of their 'good for'. Hence, if I am required to manifest care or respect for them, I am required to be moved by their 'good for'.

Of course, the care/respect approach may still trip over another point we have developed above—that agents do not aim at their own well-being. If Abel does not aim at his own well-being, then even when Cain takes Abel's point of view, Cain will not aim at Abel's well-being. Abel does of course care what happens in his life, and therefore if Cain takes Abel's point of view, Cain must care what happens in Abel's life. But we have suggested that Abel's own concern about his life is that it should contain valuable activity; in which case that is also Cain's concern when Cain takes Abel's point of view. Practically speaking, this brings us back to the Moorean view: Cain cares about Abel's life because he cares about the good wherever it may occur.

\textsuperscript{54} For a similar point about the transparency of action, in the context of a discussion of the right and the good, see Regan, 'How to Be a Moorean'.
As it happens, the most interesting recent discussion of care and caring side-steps this difficulty, at least on the face of things. Stephen Darwall does not say that in caring for others we take their point of view, nor that we care about their (independently identifiable) welfare. Rather, he defines a person's welfare as what someone who cares about that person ought to want for him. But the essential difficulty noted in the previous paragraph—the tendency of the care-based approach to collapse into the Moorean approach—reproduces itself within Darwall's framework. Remember that the Moorean and the 'good for' theorist (second schema) agreed that we should want and promote valuable activities both in our own lives and in others'. The question that divided them was whether we want those activities just as the valuable activities they are, or as components of the subjects' welfare. Is our focus on the good simpliciter or on the good for individuals? Analogously, what is necessary for the care-based approach to be distinctive, as Darwall fully recognizes, is that it involve caring about what happens in a person's life for that person's sake.

So, what is it to care about someone for his sake? Darwall eschews any definition of such caring. As I have made clear already, I have no objection in principle if someone wants to claim that some fundamental moral concept is indefinable; the only issue then is the plausibility of the concept and the system built on it. But Darwall takes a slightly different route. He claims that the attitude of caring about others for their own sake is a natural kind, and therefore needs no definition. This appeal to a natural kind seems to me problematic for two basic reasons. First of all, if the relevant attitude of caring is a natural kind, then it seems that its objects—the things that one who cares wants intrinsically for the cared-for individual—are just whatever they are naturally. The question of what the objects ought to be, or what they are rationally required to be, simply does not arise. It seems quite implausible to suggest that we can usefully pick out a normative concept ('welfare') by defining it as the proper object of a natural-kind attitude. There may be no difficulty about saying that some independently given normative concept is the required object of a very general

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55 Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care*, 7. The point of this surprising move is to avoid defining the individual's welfare in terms of her own concerns. An individual may not have the relevant sort of care for herself if, say, she is depressed. And even if she does care for herself, she may have other concerns that are not generated by that self-caring. Hence there are possible discrepancies, in both directions, between an individual's own concerns and her welfare.
natural-kind attitude; we often say that one should desire the good. But we do not ordinarily propose to *pick out* the good as the proper object of some particular naturally given desire, as Darwall proposes to pick out welfare as the proper object of care for another.

Secondly, I am not persuaded that there is a natural-kind attitude of the sort Darwall posits. One way to establish the existence of such a natural-kind attitude would be by psychological experimentation, and Darwall tries to find evidence for his sort of caring in the psychological literature. The experiment that Darwall puts most reliance on shows that subjects are more likely to help someone out of a difficult situation if they are invited to attend to how the other *feels*, as opposed to just attending to the crude facts of the situation. Darwall admits that the experiment does not distinguish clearly between caring about what happens to the other (which of course includes her feelings as a crucial element) and caring about it *for her sake*, but to him the experiment more strongly suggests caring for her sake.\(^56\) So far as I can see, that just reflects the view he began with.

Of course, the fact that we cannot clearly isolate the attitude of 'caring for another for her sake' experimentally doesn't mean it doesn't exist. It could be that we all just experience it and can recognize it in ourselves. But I don't think I recognize the attitude as Darwall describes it in myself. The main stumbling-block is a further claim Darwall makes about 'caring for another for her sake'. Darwall tells us that one who cares for another in the relevant way believes in the 'worth' of the other, and believes that this worth should be recognized by all.\(^57\) My wanting something 'for Carol's sake' necessarily involves my viewing Carol as having such worth. I am sceptical about such 'worth', and therefore about Darwall's version of caring.

Since my scepticism about the worth of persons runs against the grain of all contemporary philosophical rhetoric, let me ease into the topic, beginning not with the worth of persons but with the worth of animals. Animals appear in Darwall's discussion only in passing, but he does speak of 'caring...for every sentient creature' as a possibility,\(^58\) and he refers to 'the worth of living beings'.\(^59\) I have trouble identifying such a core 'worth' in an animal, even a loved pet. I have had pets; I have cared for them, and

\(^{56}\) Ibid. 66–8.

\(^{57}\) Ibid. 8, 48, 83.

\(^{58}\) Ibid. 16.

\(^{59}\) Ibid. 75.
about them, and I have made sacrifices for them. I have been saddened more than I ever expected when it was necessary to put them to sleep. I have no doubt that they were ‘worth caring about’ in the sense that my relationship with them was a good in my life (and probably in theirs), and also that they were ‘worth caring for’ in the sense that it was appropriate to take measures to improve their lives. But I do not see that all of this adds up to, or is grounded in, or requires, any further distinctive claim about their intrinsic worth.

The point applies to people as well. Lest I offend anyone else by doubting their worth, let me begin by doubting my own. I am not depressed; I think I have an adequate sense of self by standard psychological criteria; I think I am not deficient in ordinary self-esteem; I am certainly not deficient in everyday self-centredness and selfishness. And yet, if I ask myself in a cool hour whether I have some deep intrinsic ‘worth’ that grounds the importance of what happens to me, or that justifies anyone, myself or another, in caring about things for my sake, I do not find it. Much that goes on in my life is important (in a small way); much of it has intrinsic value, both positive and negative. And those facts matter to how I should be treated. But the idea that they either depend on or manifest my personal ‘worth’ is what escapes me. Similarly, I hope I can now decently say, with regard to other people, I think I am not markedly deficient in ordinary natural impulses to improve others’ lives in various ways—to do things we would refer to in everyday parlance as ‘for’ other people. I also regard some of my relationships with others as great goods in my life and, I hope, in theirs. But I do not see that either these impulses or these beliefs are based on a perception of others’ ‘worth’.

One natural response to scepticism such as mine is to focus on intimate relations, and to ask, rhetorically, ‘Don’t you do things for the sake of your spouse, or your children, or your siblings or closest friends?’ But if such intimate relations seem to provide the best evidence for ‘caring for another for her sake’, that should also make us pause to consider closely just what sort of attitude such cases are evidence for. I take it that, on the welfare theorist’s view, I can act, and I even have some obligation to act, to promote the welfare of starving or oppressed people in distant countries that I have never seen and can barely imagine in any concrete way. So I have some obligation to act to bring about the results in those people’s lives that people who cared for them for their own sake would want. It does not quite follow that I must care for them for their own sake; but
such an inference is certainly suggested. Now, I do not argue against the logical possibility of such caring; but it seems much less obvious what such distant caring involves than the (supposedly clear) case of caring for an intimate. This ought to make us wonder whether the case of caring for the intimate is as perspicuous as it seems. Similarly, there is a good dose of partiality for our friends and intimates built into our natural dispositions (and philosophers argue about whether such partiality is reflected in the most fundamental structure of our moral obligations). But surely no one would say he cares specially for his child or spouse because they are of greater 'worth' than someone less favoured; if we believe in this sort of worth, one of its essential features is that all persons possess it equally. Again, this does not refute the possibility of 'caring for another for her sake'; but it does suggest to me that whatever the attitude is that we see most clearly in our dealings with intimates, it is less moralized, and therefore less interesting for morality, than Darwall suggests.

My scepticism about 'worth' extends also to 'dignity', which is thought to require respect as worth requires caring. I resent what I perceive as affronts as thoroughly as the next person, and I am as quick as the next person to see affronts even when they exist nowhere but in my imagination; I care about my status in various groups; I always want at least my share of any good that is being distributed; I do not want to be manipulated or sacrificed for goals I do not endorse. And yet, if I ask myself in a cool hour whether this is all a manifestation of my Kantian dignity as an agent—once again, I see no such dignity. It might be said that some of these attitudes cannot be normatively justified except on the assumption of my Kantian dignity. Perhaps in so far as the attitudes are fundamentally self-centred that is true. But then, is the correct further inference by modus ponens to Kantian dignity, or by modus tollens to a lack of normative justification for attitudes of precisely such a form and content?

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60 Almost the only case that Darwall discusses that does not involve an intimate involves someone seeing a child on the verge of falling into a well (ibid. 69). Here the child may be a stranger, but the child's plight is extreme and immediate and vividly presented, and it is a child, so the situation seems likely to provoke a strong and quite unmoralized natural reaction.

61 Ibid. 14.

62 For further discussion of why we cannot get a duty to promote others' well-being from a Kantian approach, see Donald H. Regan, 'The Value of Rational Nature', *Ethics* 112 (2002), 267–91, especially 276–8.
It may be, of course, that the final product of reflection on all our moral intuitions, general and specific, will be a structure in which some notions of worth and dignity are fundamental. This seems to me unlikely, but it could be the case. But Darwall’s view, which he shares with many others, seems to be that our perceptions of worth and dignity are immediately given in a form that makes their moral significance manifest. That is what I do not see. Perhaps I am revealing my moral blindness, but it seems to me more likely that believers in ‘worth’ and ‘dignity’ have partly misconstrued and partly transposed too quickly into the moral sphere certain undeniably important and deep-seated (purely) natural attitudes.

VIII

When one is operating at such a high level of abstraction, there is the danger that one will see only what one is inclined to see. Perhaps that is what has happened to me. It is presumably no accident that, to my mind, both the ‘good for’ (well-being, welfare) theory and the care-based theory threaten to collapse into the Moorean view. The ‘good for’ theorist needs some equivalent of Moorean good to forge a link between any genuinely independent normative concept of ‘good for Abel’ and reasons for Cain. The care-based theory would seemingly collapse into Mooreanism if it required each agent to take the other’s point of view (if we remember that the other, qua agent, herself aims at the good); to avoid this, the care theorist needs the problematic notion of caring for another for her own sake, on the basis of her worth.

It’s not as if Moorean good is unproblematic. It is the worst imaginable foundation for a moral theory—except for the alternatives.63

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63 I am grateful for the very helpful comments, in response to this or earlier versions, of Joseph Raz, Connie Rosati, Tim Scanlon, and Michael Smith.