

## AGAINST 'GOOD FOR'/'WELL-BEING', FOR 'SIMPLY GOOD'

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*This paper challenges the widely held view that 'good for', 'well-being', and related terms express a distinctive evaluative concept of central importance for ethics and separate from 'simply good' as used by G. E. Moore and others. More specifically, it argues that there's no philosophically useful good-for or well-being concept that's neither merely descriptive in the sense of naturalistic nor reducible to 'simply good'. The paper distinguishes two interpretations of the common claim that the value 'good for' expresses is distinctively 'subject-relative'. One concerns the ground of this value, or the properties that make something good for you; it says these must involve some relation to you. The other concerns the resulting value itself, or what supervenes on this ground; it says that too involves a relation. Neither interpretation, the paper argues, yields a significantly distinct evaluative concept. The ethically fundamental evaluative concept is just 'simply good'.*

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Many moral views, consequentialist and non-consequentialist, tell us to promote good states of affairs, in some evaluative sense of 'good'. But there are disagreements about how the relevant good should be understood, or which specific evaluative concept we should use to identify it.

Some think this concept is that of what's good *simpliciter* or period, so we ought to promote outcomes that are, as I'll say, simply good. This was the view of G. E. Moore (1903), W. D. Ross (1930), and others of their era. But many present-day philosophers use a concept of 'good for' that they associate with 'well-being' or 'welfare' and distinguish sharply from simple goodness, so the 'prudential value' it involves, while equally irreducible to anything naturalistic, differs in kind from that expressed by 'simply good'. For them we should seek what's 'good for' individuals, where the 'for' is essential to the duty's content. Some who take this line use 'good for' merely as a supplement to 'simply good'. They think our ultimate duty is to produce outcomes that are simply good, but that these are wholly or in part ones that are good 'for' their subjects (e.g. Sumner 1996). Others reject simple goodness, saying either that talk of it is

ungrammatical, as P. T. Geach (1956) held (though for a different purpose), or that, though linguistically unproblematic, it makes no positive contribution to ethical thought (Kraut 2007, 2011). Either way, this group wants ‘good for’ to replace ‘simply good’, so our duty concerning the good is just to promote the good for individuals.

I’ll argue against this understanding of ‘good for’, whether intended to supplement ‘simply good’ or to replace it, and against the distinctive well-being concept many take it to express. More specifically, I’ll argue that there’s no philosophically useful understanding of ‘good for’ and related terms that’s *both* evaluative rather than merely descriptive or naturalistic *and* irreducible to other evaluative concepts, in particular ‘simply good’, and thus no understanding on which it makes a substantive contribution to ethics. The ethically fundamental value-concept is just ‘simply good’.<sup>1</sup>

It’s a little unclear how far the target of my argument extends, since it’s unclear how many philosophers do take ‘good for’ to express an irreducibly distinct evaluative concept. Those like Richard Kraut (2007, 2011) who reject ‘simply good’ certainly seem to, and some like L.W. Sumner (1996) who accept it explicitly do: his ‘good for’ is both not naturalistic and separate from ‘simply good’. This view is also suggested by the many writers who explain ‘good for’ largely by saying it’s part of a circle of concepts that includes ‘well-being’, ‘benefit’, ‘interest’, ‘prudential value’, and so on but not ‘simply good’ (e.g. Parfit 2011: 39; Campbell 2016: 403). That they exclude this last concept suggests that they reject any reduction to ‘simply good’, but they also seem to treat ‘good for’ as irreducibly evaluative. Their circle doesn’t include any merely descriptive item such as ‘fulfils a desire of’, and they often say, as much of the well-being literature does, that their concept allows competing theories of what *is* good for us: it could be pleasure, desire-fulfilment, or the items on an objective list, with the choice between these a matter for ethical debate (e.g. Parfit 1984: 493–502; 2011: 39–40). But there couldn’t be this debate if ‘good for’ had a merely naturalistic meaning. If it were equivalent to, say, ‘fulfils a desire of’, hedonistic and objective theories would be excluded on conceptual grounds. If they’re not excluded, ‘good for’ must have some purely evaluative content that allows them and makes claims like ‘pleasure is good for you’ synthetic (though necessary, if true), just as ‘pleasure is simply good’ is synthetic. Much recent writing, then, seems to assume that ‘good for’ expresses a concept that’s both evaluative and distinct. If some philosophers use it merely descriptively, say to mean ‘fulfils a desire of’, or to pick out a subset of the things that are simply good, as on a reductive view, I have no quarrel with them. My target is only the positing of a distinctive good-for value.

<sup>1</sup> My conclusion mirrors that of Regan (2004), though I address more types of good-for view and argue for the conclusion differently. Hurka (1987) was an earlier, inadequate attempt at a similar argument.

My argument will mostly abstract from two metaethical issues. Moore and Ross took 'simply good' to be primitive or unanalysable, but others define it as what we ought or what it's fitting or we have reason to desire. Henry Sidgwick (1907) took this reductive line, as do present-day defenders of 'fitting-attitudes' analyses of value. The proposed 'good for' can likewise be either irreducible or analysed as what there's a distinctive type of reason, say, a prudential one, to desire.<sup>2</sup> Since this issue arises similarly for both concepts, I'll mostly set it aside, but I'll assume that any claim that we ought to act to promote the good, whether the simply-good or the good-for, is synthetic. This is clearly so if the value-concept is unanalysable, but also holds if it's analysed in terms of 'ought or fitting to desire', since that's distinct from 'ought to act' and implies it only given a further principle requiring effective means to one's ends. I'll therefore read any duty to promote the good as substantive rather than tautological, and I'll likewise abstract from issues about how irreducibly evaluative claims of either kind are to be understood, whether as positing a non-natural property or in some anti-realist, for example non-cognitivist, way. These issues, too, are orthogonal to my main concern. Finally, I'll abstract from substantive questions about what *is* simply good or good for us: whether it's pleasure, desire fulfilment, or something objective. My topic is just the concepts themselves rather than what falls under them.<sup>3</sup>

## I. MANY MEANINGS, MANY CONCEPTS

The phrase 'good for' occurs often in English, and well-being or w-theorists (as I'll call them) often say this shows their distinctive concept is central to everyday ethical thought and a familiar element in practical reasoning (e.g. Sumner 1996: 20; Kraut 2007: 1–2, 84; Rosati 2008: 317). But in neither ordinary language nor philosophy does 'good for' have just one sense or use. It's multiply ambiguous, with many possible meanings and many different concepts it can express, many not the w-theorists' but either merely descriptive or reducible to 'simply good'. A brief survey of these will serve two purposes: it will undermine the theorists' claim that their concept is common in everyday thought, and will lay the groundwork for this paper's main argument: a redundancy argument that asks what the concept adds to ethics that isn't as well done by others.

<sup>2</sup> Darwall (2002) gives a more complex such analysis, saying the good for someone is what you would have reason to want for her if you cared for her for her own sake. But this seems circular, since to care for someone arguably just is to want what's in some sense good for her (Rosati 2006: 620–6; Fletcher 2012: 7).

<sup>3</sup> I discuss the concepts 'good' and 'good for' rather than the property or relation they refer to, partly because I see no important difference between these approaches and partly because it's what other writers on the topic have done (Sumner 1996: Ch. 1; Campbell 2016).

Many uses of ‘good for’ are descriptive or naturalistic. In one such use the ‘good for you’ is whatever you believe is good or that seems to you good, in some other sense of ‘good’. A common everyday meaning relates ‘good for’ to health, so something is good for you if it promotes or preserves your health. But other similarly descriptive meanings are possible and even common. Consider ‘good for’ said of beings that can’t have a well-being in the w-theorists’ sense, as in ‘Regular oil changes are good for a car’ or ‘The tax cut was good for corporations’. The second of these arguably makes only a naturalistic claim such as that the cut furthered the corporations’ goals or increased their profits. The same kind of use is possible about beings that can have a well-being; thus ‘The tax cut was good for the rich’ may say only that it gave them something they wanted or just gave them money, with no evaluation implied. Some philosophers have explicitly endorsed meanings of this type. H. A. Prichard took ‘a good to us’ to mean ‘something which *pleases*, i.e. excites pleasure in us’ (2002: 174), while E. F. Carritt said it refers, again just naturalistically, to whatever someone ‘wants, or which gives him satisfaction’ (1937: 51–3, 60). Less restrictive meanings of this type are also possible. One calls a thing good for you if it’s the object of some pro-attitude you have, where this can be desire, enjoyment, or any other positive emotion. This more permissive meaning arguably fits much everyday usage and, like other descriptive meanings, isn’t one I object to since in itself it has no ethical import. As far as the concepts go, one can agree that something is good for a person in a merely naturalistic sense but deny that anyone has any reason, even an outweighed one, to care about or pursue it. That will follow only given some further, independent claim about value or reasons. No descriptive ‘good for’ has the ethical significance w-theorists claim for their concept, since it merely abbreviates something non-ethical.

A different type of meaning reduces ‘good for’ to ‘simply good’ plus some descriptive content. The simplest of these is a ‘locative’ meaning that equates the good for you with what’s simply good and a state of you, or located in your life. This is the main meaning Moore allowed (1903: 98–9) and it was also used by Sidgwick, who defined ‘the ultimate good on the whole for me’ as what I ought to desire ‘assuming my own existence alone to be considered’ (1907: 112), or counting only states of me.

Other reductive meanings add further descriptive content. It’s been objected that the locative meaning doesn’t fit everyday usage because it implies that a painting’s beauty, if that’s good, is good for the painting (Sumner 1996: 50), and deserved punishment good for the person who is punished (Kagan 1992: 185; Sumner 1996: 47n). But a reductive view can avoid these implications by adding content from one of the descriptive meanings, so anything good for you must be simply good, be a state of you, *and* be good because it, say, gives you pleasure or fulfils your desires. The resulting concept has the same extension as a merely descriptive one and a similar fit with everyday usage, but it adds an

evaluation. It both restricts 'good for' to beings that can have attitudes, which excludes paintings, and implies that being punished isn't good for someone unless he wants or enjoys it.<sup>4</sup>

In another meaning the good for you is what's simply good and somehow suited to you, most simply to your abilities. Here appreciating literary fiction can be good for an adult but not for an infant, and the good for a god not good for humans. More importantly, 'good for' can express the very different concept of agent-relative goodness, where something is good 'relative to you', or 'from your point of view', if you, and perhaps only you or you especially, have reason to desire it. As Moore argued, 'good' can't be relativized if it's unanalysable (1903: 98–9), but it can if it's analysed as what you ought or have reason to desire. Sidgwick, who gave this analysis, used 'good for' in a sense distinct from the locative one when he said rational egoism is coherent if it says only that each person's pleasure is the one good for her, in the sense of her one 'rational ultimate end' (1907: 420–1, 497–8). But agent-relative goodness isn't the w-theorists' well-being, since, unlike your well-being as usually understood, the good relative to you needn't involve states of you. Ross recognized a secondary kind of goodness that's analysable and had by pleasure, but held that, relative to you, what's good is only other people's pleasure and not your own, so you have a duty to promote their pleasure but none to promote your own (1939: 271–83). Surely no w-theorist would allow your well-being to consist only in other people's pleasure. Your child's pleasure can likewise have more value relative to you, so you have more reason to care about it, but it isn't part of your well-being. Conversely, in some w-theories, for example utilitarian ones, the good for you grounds only agent-neutral reasons, which apply as much to others as to you; their 'good for' isn't agent-relative. Though agent-relative goodness is a relational value, it's not the w-theorists' well-being; it's a relativized form of simple goodness.<sup>5</sup>

Some uses of 'good for' are instrumental, calling good for you whatever promotes some other state of you; they include many of the descriptive uses, for example about health or pleasure. Reductive analyses, which equate the good for you with a subset of the intrinsic simple goods, yield an instrumental

<sup>4</sup> A philosophical use is in the 'person-affecting' claim (Parfit 1984: 393–401) or 'Slogan' (Temkin 1993: Ch. 9) that anything good must be good 'for' some person. On what Parfit calls a 'wide' reading, it may say only that any good must be a state of some person, or make some individual's life simply good. The more restrictive 'narrow' reading, which has distinctive implications in 'non-identity cases', may say that any morally relevant good must make some person's life simply better than that same person's life would otherwise be. Neither reading requires a fundamental evaluative concept other than 'simply good'.

<sup>5</sup> Fletcher (2012) defends a locative analysis with the added condition that anything good for you must give you agent-relative reason to desire it. He doesn't say it must also give you agent-relative reason to promote it, since that would exclude the view that there are only agent-neutral reasons to promote well-being. The different treatment of reasons to desire and to promote here seems ad hoc; shouldn't a value be either wholly agent-relative or wholly agent-neutral? As a reductive view Fletcher's isn't part of my target, but on this point it seems unmotivated.

use on which a thing is good for you if it promotes something that's simply good and, say, is a state of you. W-theorists, too, distinguish what contributes directly to your well-being and what causally promotes it. But the intrinsic use is again primary: only if some things are intrinsically good for you in their sense can others be instrumentally so.

Unfortunately, and as Kraut acknowledges (2007: 77), by far the most common everyday uses of 'good for' are instrumental. Consider 'Pleasure is good for you'. On the w-theorists' view its primary meaning says that pleasure is an intrinsic constituent of your well-being, but that's not how it would normally be understood. It would normally be heard to say that pleasure has some further effect, for example on your health; maybe it lowers your blood pressure. 'Pain is bad for you' would likewise be taken to describe an effect. Revealingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines 'good for' only instrumentally, as 'beneficial to one's health' or 'able to be put to some purposed end or use; suitable or fit for a particular purpose; useful'. If the *OED* is any guide, the w-theorists' primary meaning isn't at all an everyday one.

Associated terms such as 'well-being', 'welfare', and 'benefit' can likewise express many concepts. 'Well-being' and 'welfare' can be understood not only in the theorists' way but merely descriptively, for example in terms of pleasure or desire fulfilment. Kant took this line with 'das Wohl', naturally translated as 'welfare' and which he contrasted with a 'das Gute' that's close to 'simply good'. For him 'das Wohl' indicated 'only a relation to our condition of pleasantness or unpleasantness'; it was 'not a concept of reason but an empirical concept of an object of sensation' (1949: 168–9), one with only naturalistic content. The *OED*, too, defines 'well-being' only naturalistically, as 'the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous'; again the w-theorists' meaning isn't given. These various terms can also connote what's simply good, is a state of you, and meets any further conditions; thus Sidgwick used 'well-being' as equivalent to 'intrinsic' or 'ultimate' good (1907: 391–2, 396–7, 453–4), as did Hastings Rashdall (1907: I 184, II 59, 107). 'Benefit' sounds more instrumental, but the instrumentality can be to something descriptive or to some simple good. Like 'good for', all these terms can express many concepts.

Given this multiplicity, it can't be assumed that any use of 'good for' or a related term, whether in ordinary language or philosophy, expresses the w-theorists' specific concept. To me everyday uses of 'good for' are only partly determinate and often shifting, either straddling different meanings or alternating between them. Many philosophical uses, too, are ambiguous, as when Sidgwick used 'good for' sometimes locatively and sometimes for agent-relative goodness. Commentators on Aristotle's *Ethics* often say it concerns the 'good for a human being', but by this do they mean well-being in the w-theorists' sense, a good suited to human abilities, or one only that person has reason to pursue? They rarely say, and it's hard to believe the text clearly favours

one reading over all others.<sup>6</sup> I see no one meaning of 'good for' as uniquely correct but many as possible, including of course the w-theorists'; that others are available doesn't mean theirs isn't too. It does, however, bring sharply into question their assumption that their concept is familiar from, because central to, everyday thought.

This concept is a very specific one, at once evaluative rather than naturalistic but also distinct from other evaluative concepts such as 'simply good'. And it's simply not plausible that everyday thought intends anything that precise by 'good for'. Many other concepts the phrase can express can equally well figure in ethical thought. A descriptive one like 'fulfils a desire of' can if we take whatever does that to be simply good or something we ought to promote; so can any concept that reduces to 'simply good', as can agent-relative goodness. To intend the theorists' concept in particular, everyday thought would have to recognize the features that distinguish it from all these others and intend them specifically. What evidence is there that it does any such thing? If the everyday phrase isn't that determinate, it's hard to believe the everyday concept is. Though w-theorists often say their good-for is familiar from common sense, their claim reads philosophical content into a deliberative practice too imprecise to contain it.

None of this means mean the w-theorists' concept isn't, as they say, vital for ethics. It may just be a concept that everyday language doesn't unambiguously express and some philosophers haven't grasped. We may then need to introduce it to do ethics properly, perhaps by giving 'good for', 'well-being', and so on technical meanings. My question now will be whether this is so: whether 'good for', understood in the w-theorists' way, makes a substantive contribution to ethics. But I'll ask it with the points just made in the background: does this concept add ethical content that can't be as well expressed in a view whose only basic evaluative concept is 'simply good'?

## II. 'GOOD FOR' AS A SUPPLEMENT TO 'SIMPLY GOOD': RELATIONAL GROUNDS

I start with well-being views that use both concepts, saying we should promote what's simply good but that this is wholly or in part what's good for individuals. (They appear most in a strand of the 'good-for' literature with affinities to utilitarianism.) Consider a view that takes well-being to be the only thing that's

<sup>6</sup> Kraut argues that by 'good' (*agathon*) Aristotle always meant 'good for' in the w-theorists' sense (2016), but to do so he must claim, among other things, that Aristotle changed the meaning of 'good' in the middle of *Nicomachean Ethics* I 1 without indicating that he was doing so and in response to examples that, contra Kraut, don't require any change because they use 'good' instrumentally. Other Aristotelian claims, such as that the divine substances are the best things in the universe, require something like 'simply good'.

simply good or worth promoting (Sumner 1996: Ch. 6; Crisp 2006: 37) and to consist only in pleasure. It says the following:

- (1) We ought to promote what's simply good.
- (2) What's simply good is only what's good for individuals.
- (3) What's good for individuals is only pleasure.
- (4) So what's simply good is only pleasure.
- (5) So we ought to promote only pleasure.

A related view that uses only 'simply good' says:

- (1) We ought to promote what's simply good.
- (2) What's simply good is only pleasure.
- (3) So we ought to promote only pleasure.

Both views start by telling us to promote what's simply good and end by telling us to promote pleasure. How does the first differ from the second, and what exactly does 'good for' add to it?

It could add something substantive given some of the meanings identified above. If the good for you is what's simply good and a state of you, as on the locative reading, the first view's claim (2) says that only states of individuals can be good. This can be accepted apart from any more specific valuing of, say, pleasure and has been by some simply-good theorists; Rashdall said, 'there is no good that is not the good of some individual' and on that basis denied that equality in distribution is good (1907: I, 281). Claim (2) would also restrict what can follow if the good for you were just, as on one descriptive meaning, what fits some pro-attitude of yours; then only that could be good. But if 'good for' is either reducible or merely descriptive, all the ethical work in the resulting view is done by 'simply good'. To make an independent contribution, the phrase must have some distinctive evaluative content.

Here w-theorists often say the 'for' in 'good for' makes it relational in a way 'simply good' is not. In an influential discussion Sumner calls the prudential value the phrase expresses 'subject-relative' (1996: 20); Kraut emphasizes that 'is good for' is a two-place predicate, as against the one-place 'is good' (2011: 70); and Alicia Hall and Valerie Tiberius talk of 'subject-dependence' (2016). But there are two importantly different ways of understanding this claim of relationality. On one it concerns the ground of the proposed value, or the properties that make for this value, so if something is good for you it must, as a conceptual matter, be because of some other, usually naturalistic relation it stands in to you. The second understanding concerns the good-for value itself, qua value, which it says is relativized or a value-for, so what the ground makes for, or what supervenes on the ground, involves a relation. This second understanding may entail the first if a relational value requires a relational ground, but the two are different. Neither, I'll argue, gives w-theorists the distinctive concept they need.

That the ground of 'good for' must be a relation is, I take it, uncontroversial. Though the happiness of beings on a distant planet who you've never heard of can be simply good, it can't, as a conceptual matter, be good for you. For something to be good for you, it must stand in some significant relation to you. Some w-theorists place further restrictions on what this relation can be. (Though these reduce the scope for debate about what *is* good for you, they don't eliminate it.) Peter Railton says it's a 'feature of the concept' that anything good for a person must connect with 'what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive', or find 'an internal resonance' in his attitudes (2003: 47). This 'resonance' condition leaves open which specific attitudes are relevant and whether they must, for example, be informed or autonomous; it allows some competing substantive theories of well-being. But it requires any admissible theory to be subjective, or to make the good for you depend on some relation to your attitudes. (Railton's 'good for' is actually naturalistic, but his resonance condition is accepted by many whose concept is evaluative.) Kraut, in contrast, imposes an objective restriction. He says the generic meaning of '*G* is good for *S*' is that *G* is suitable to *S*, so their properties match in a way that enables *G* to serve *S* well (2007: 86–7, 111). His more substantive theory, which adds further content, identifies the good for a living organism with the full development of its capacities, or its 'flourishing' (2007: 131; 2011: 69–70). His theory has a subjective component, since he says nothing can be non-instrumentally good for you unless you enjoy it (2007: 127–8). But his initial conceptual claim requires an admissible good-for theory to be largely objective, since the properties of you a *G* must match are identified independently of your attitudes, as is how well it matches them.

Sumner's official view is that the ground of well-being must be just some relation to a subject, and he therefore counts objective theories, which he in the end argues against, as conceptually admissible. But when he considers a 'teleological' theory that, like Kraut's, equates our good with the development of our nature, he argues that it conflates the prudential value expressed by 'good for' with perfectionist value or goodness of a kind, as in 'good human being' (1996: 78–80). But why is there any conflation if prudential value requires just some relation? The teleological theory says anything good for you must be a state of you and develop your, rather than anyone else's, nature. Sumner's objection to it seems to invoke a further subjective restriction he sometimes suggests. Having first called prudential value 'subject-relative', he later says it's 'perspectival' and based on a subject's 'perspective', or the 'point of view' from which she views the world (1996: 25, 31), which it's natural to think is defined by her attitudes. And he says the gap between prudential and perfectionist value emerges when we have 'subjects in the strict sense, namely those with a subjective point of view', and is opened in particular by their 'own hierarchy of projects and concerns' (1996: 79). Despite his official view, he seems at times to build something like Railton's resonance condition into his concept.

Whatever their claims, none of these views give ‘good for’ the distinctive content w-theorists need. Since they concern only the ground of the proposed value, or the properties that make for this value, their claims can be mirrored in a view that uses only ‘simply good’. If something must resonate with your attitudes to be good for you, a simply-good view can say resonance, and perhaps only resonance, makes states of you simply good. If the good for a being must suit its nature, it can say that only what suits some nature can be good, and likewise for any other potential distinguishing ground. We’re considering views that use both evaluative concepts and say that anything good for you is also simply good; they take the concepts’ extensions and therefore their grounds to overlap, so what makes for one also makes for the other. That ‘good for’ requires a specifically relational ground makes it a ‘thick’ ethical concept (Williams 1985), one whose content limits to some degree what properties can make a thing fall under it. But ‘simply good’ is entirely ‘thin’ and involves no such limitation, so anything whatever can make for simple goodness. It follows that any property that grounds the w-theorists’ ‘good for’ can equally well ground ‘simply good’; there’s no substantive difference here.

It may be replied that this argument fails if the ground of ‘good for’ must be a relation and ‘simply good’ is ‘intrinsically good’ in Moore’s (1922) sense, and so can depend only on a thing’s intrinsic, not relational, properties. But Moore’s restrictive view of intrinsic value was implicitly rejected by several of his contemporaries (Sidgwick 1907: 398–405; Rashdall 1907: I 72, 153, II 37–8) and has recently been explicitly rejected (Kagan 1998; Hurka 1998). And however we use the phrase ‘intrinsically good’, there’s no reason why simple goodness, an entirely thin concept, can’t depend on relational properties. Simply-good theorists have often valued relational states, such as knowledge, which involves a correspondence between belief and the world; achievement, or the converse relation of successfully affecting the world; and desert, where good things happen to good people or bad things to bad ones. Any relational ground for the thick ‘good for’ can equally well ground the thin ‘simply good’.

Though this is clearest for views of ‘good for’ like Railton’s that require a naturalistic ground, it’s also true of a more complex proposal of Connie Rosati’s (2008) about the normativity of ‘good for’. If something is good for you in a way that gives you and others reason to promote it, she says, its value derives from an independent value you have as a person: it’s because you’re good that it has the reason giving well-being value it does. But this idea, too, can be accommodated in a view that uses only ‘simply good’. It can say persons are simply good—Rosati allows that their goodness may be Moorean (2008: 339–40n64)—and that this fact grounds and explains a further simple goodness in, say, their pleasure, which then is a source of reasons. Again what’s said to distinguish ‘good for’ can pick out a subset of the things that are simply good, those whose goodness has a certain basis. The proposed ground can again equally well ground ‘simply good’ and doesn’t distinguish ‘good for’.

### III. 'GOOD-FOR' AS A SUPPLEMENT TO 'SIMPLY GOOD': RELATIONAL VALUE

The other understanding of the relationality of 'good for' concerns not the ground of the value it expresses but that value itself, or what supervenes on the ground. It says this is distinctively a value-for, so what a relational property like fitting your attitudes makes for also involves a relation. The question now is what this amounts to, or how a value, rather than just what underlies it, can be 'for you'. This isn't at all obvious, and w-theorists have done little to explain it. While a claim like Sumner's about 'subject-relativity' could be taken to concern the value as well as its ground, he never explicitly distinguishes the two, nor do others who echo his language (e.g. Campbell 2016; Hall and Tiberius 2016). W-theorists seem not to have recognized that there are two possible understandings of 'relativity'. None of them clearly state, let alone explain, the idea that their good-for value is, qua value, relational.

Claims about resonance or suitability aren't relevant here, since they concern only the value's ground. A value can be for you, qua value, in one sense if it's a value you believe in, but that can't be what's intended here. Nor can the relationality at issue turn just on facts about reasons you alone or more than others have, since that conflates the theorists' 'good for' with agent-relative goodness. (Recall that the good relative to you can involve only states of other people, while in some w-theories the good for you grounds only neutral reasons.) But if a value's being 'for' you is something over and above its having a relational ground, and is distinct both from your beliefs about value and from any facts about reasons you in particular have, what does it involve? What other relation could be relevant? When it's properly isolated, the idea of 'value for' is puzzling (compare Brewer 2009: 214–18).

Some may say the idea doesn't need explaining, because the relation the 'for' indicates is unanalysable, as 'simply good' was for Moore. Goodness-for is relativized in a way simple goodness isn't, but nothing more can be said about what this involves. Its relationality, and indeed the whole good-for concept, is irreducible.

Views like this are hard to refute, because it's hard to prove that an unanalysable concept doesn't exist; such views can also be defensible if their concept is common in everyday thought. I've argued, however, that this isn't so here: there's no evidence the everyday 'good for' expresses the w-theorists' concept. And without this validation from common sense it's unclear why we should accept an unanalysed 'good for' and, if we did, what ethical contribution it would make. We're considering views that use both 'simply good' and 'good for' and can make claims using the first that exactly match the extensions of ones using the second. How does saying something is good for you on a certain basis, read as ascribing a primitive value-for, differ from saying it's simply good on the very same basis? It can't be because of what falls under the

first concept, which is the same, nor because of what makes that so. It must be just because of the relativization itself. But if nothing more can be said about this, and it makes no difference to what we should care about or why, what of substance does it add? It seems redundant.

It may be said that this objection can be made against any unanalysable concept, including 'simply good'. Many, including Moore, have held that claims about what's simply good entail ones about what we ought to desire. This invites the charge that 'simply good' adds nothing substantive to the claims about 'ought', and defenders of fitting-attitudes analyses do say this. But Moore can reply that 'simply good' must have distinctive content because a thing's being good explains why we ought, or why it's fitting, to desire it, as its being fitting to desire doesn't explain why it's good. Can w-theorists likewise say a thing's being good for you explains why it's simply good, and so must differ from it?

They can say this, but the explanation must follow from the right part of their concept. If anything good for you must, for example, resonate with your attitudes, that descriptive condition can combine with the fact that a thing fulfils a desire to help explain why it's simply good: its fulfilling the desire makes it resonate, which contributes to its being good. But the same condition can figure in a view that uses only 'simply good', and in that context can be equally explanatory. W-theorists need their unanalysable 'good for' to be explanatory apart from any descriptive content it has, or just as irreducibly evaluative, and that's harder to understand. Moore's unanalysable concept is in a different category from the ones it's said to explain, since it's evaluative whereas 'ought' and 'fitting' are deontic; this lets its explanation of 'ought' be informative. But the w-theorists' 'good for' is evaluative, just like 'simply good', and in the comparison we're considering is grounded in the same relation to a subject and has the same implications for action. We're asking how 'good for on the basis of relation  $R$ ' could explain 'simply good on the basis of relation  $R$ ' just in virtue of some unanalysable content. That value qua value can be relative is already mysterious; that it can be independently explanatory is even more so.

W-theorists may say their 'good for' explains, not what people's goods consist in, but why we should care about them, especially when they conflict. Imagine that we can produce either a lesser pleasure for  $A$  or a slightly greater one for  $B$ . We should think this choice matters and feel conflicted about it, and w-theorists may say their view explains why: the situation contains competing distinct values, one for- $A$  and the other for- $B$ . But no such explanation is possible given just the single, homogeneous 'simply good'. Then one choice will produce more of that one value than the other, and there's no ground for concern or regret if we forgo a lesser quantity of it for a greater.

But it's not true that 'simply good' doesn't allow conflicts to matter. Even if  $A$ 's and  $B$ 's pleasures are instances of the same simple goodness, they're distinct

instances of it. *A*'s pleasure is felt by *A* and is part of *A*'s life; *B*'s pleasure is part of *B*'s. So if we produce *B*'s pleasure rather than *A*'s, there's a simply good state of affairs that could have existed but doesn't and whose absence we can regret; our choice was between separate incompatible good things. The situation here differs crucially from two others. In one the lesser of two goods is contained in the greater as a proper part, as when we can give someone pleasure of a concert or that same pleasure plus the pleasure of a dinner. The other involves merely instrumental goods, as when we can give someone either \$20 or \$50. In neither case is there any reason to feel conflicted: nothing in the lesser good will be missing if we produce the greater. But there is a reason if our choice is between intrinsic goods neither of which is contained in the other: then a distinct simple good will be forgone. It's true that simply-good views value the total or aggregate of such good, but this aggregate is composed of individual good states, such as individual pleasures, which are the primary bearers of value and should be the primary objects of concern. 'Good for' isn't needed to explain why a choice between different people's goods matters; 'simply good' can too.<sup>7</sup>

A different account of the 'for' says it concerns oughts or reasons, but their type or 'flavour' rather than their content or addressee. W-theorists may say a thing's being good for you means you have a specifically prudential reason to desire and pursue it, where prudential reasons differ in kind from moral, aesthetic, and other reasons. The claim that what's simply good is only what's good for individuals then means that impartial or moral oughts depend on prudential ones, so what 'good for' connotes is a distinctive type of normative demand.

One difficulty for this view is that if prudential reasons persist alongside the moral ones they ground, there can't be a purely agent-neutral normative view telling us only to promote everyone's well-being impartially; each person will have some more reason to promote his own. In addition, a parallel question can be asked about the proposed prudential 'ought' as about 'good for': What does it add to an ethical view that speaks only of what you ought simply or generically to do?

Prudential oughts can be defined as ones with a distinctive content or ground, so they must concern what relates to you, perhaps by answering to your attitudes or suiting your nature. But the same restriction on content can be combined with the simple 'ought' to identify a subset of the acts you ought simply or generically to do, ones that apply the same deontic concept in a specific domain or on a specific basis. This again yields a derivative rather than truly distinct concept. Alternatively, the 'prudential' in 'prudentially ought' could be unanalysable, as in the parallel view about 'good for'. But then we can ask how 'you ought prudentially to do *x* because of relation *R*' differs

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller related discussion see Hurka (1996).

from ‘you ought simply to do  $x$  because of relation  $R$ ’, and here the question is especially pressing. The ultimate aim of deontic theory is to identify what you ought or are permitted, in a generic sense, all things considered to do. If there are distinct prudential, aesthetic, or other oughts, they’re important mainly because of their implications for this generic all-things-considered one. Thus that you ought prudentially to do something matters mainly because it implies that you ought generically, other things equal, to do it. But then what does the prudential ought add to the other-things-equal generic one it implies? Both concepts are deontic and give the same directives for action on the same basis. On the view we’re considering the fact that an experience would be, say, pleasant gives you an unanalysably distinct prudential reason to pursue it, which in turn gives you and perhaps others a generic reason to pursue it. How does this sequence of claims differ from just saying an experience’s being pleasant directly gives you and others a generic reason to pursue it? It’s hard to see what substantive difference the prudential ‘ought’ makes here, and if it makes none, it can’t define an importantly distinct good-for concept.

I’ve distinguished two understandings of the subject-relativity of ‘good for’, one about the ground of the value it’s supposed to express and the other about that supervening value itself. Neither, I’ve argued, yields the distinctive concept *w*-theorists need: the first because any ground of ‘good for’ can equally well ground ‘simply good’, the second because it’s hard to see how value can be ‘for’ a person except in a way that leaves its ethical contribution a mystery. The two understandings must, however, be kept separate, since otherwise their respective weaknesses can be obscured. The first, about the value’s ground, draws an intelligible distinction that isn’t conceptually significant; the second, about that value itself, would be conceptually significant if it were intelligible but it’s not. Conflating the two can encourage the thought that there’s a good-for distinction that’s both intelligible and significant, and some *w*-theorists may be guilty of this slide. They may assume that, since they understand how ‘good for’ can have a distinctive ground, they also understand how it ascribes a distinctive value. But a relational ground doesn’t entail a relational supervening value: simple goodness, too, can depend on a relation. In neither of two possible ways, then, does ‘good for’ differ significantly from ‘simply good’ or add substantively to a view that uses only that simple concept.

#### IV. ‘GOOD FOR’ WITHOUT ‘SIMPLY GOOD’

The preceding argument addressed views that use both evaluative concepts, and may therefore seem irrelevant to ones that reject ‘simply good’ and use only the *w*-theorists’ ‘good for’. (They’re more common in an Aristotelian strand of the ‘good-for’ literature.) This isn’t so, however. These views still need to explain what the ‘for’ in ‘good for’ indicates and how it distinguishes

their concept from the one they dismiss. Proposing to use one concept rather than another requires an account of how they differ no less than proposing to use the one as well as the other. And here the views face our familiar difficulty if they say either that their concept has a distinctive ground or that it ascribes an ineffable value-for. They don't, however, face quite the same redundancy objection, since they don't use another value-concept whose extension can match that of 'good for'. Moreover, if their objections to 'simply good' succeed, my entire case against 'good for' collapses, since then my proposed replacement for it is illusory. I turn now to these views, beginning with their objections to 'simply good'.

The more radical of these takes up Geach (1956) claim that predicative uses of 'good', as in 'pleasure is simply good', are linguistically improper, in his view because the only legitimate uses of the word are attributive, as in 'good knife' or 'good human act' (also Foot 1985; Thomson 1997).<sup>8</sup> As many critics have shown, however, this claim is false (Butchvarov 1989; Pigden 1990; Zimmerman 1999; Sinnott-Armstrong 2003; Arneson 2010; Kraut 2011, 173–83). Far from being 'peculiarly philosophical' the predicative 'good' is common in everyday speech, for example in the phrase 'It's good that ...'. The more serious line of objection is represented by Kraut. He grants that 'simply good' is grammatical but argues that, like 'phlogiston' it has no reference because it makes no useful contribution to ethical thought (2007, 2011). He in effect reverses the argument I've given, asking what 'simply good' adds to ethics that isn't better done by 'good for'.<sup>9</sup>

One of his objections says 'simply good' doesn't vary between subjects as an acceptable value-concept should. Since whether *G* is good for *S* depends on facts about both *G* and *S*, what's good for one *S* needn't be good for another, whereas anything simply good must, he claims, be equally good in all (2007: 42–50; 2011: 69–78). But his main examples of 'good for' varying, such as that eating oats is good for horses but not for humans (2007: 3, 70, 90; 2011: 21, 70, 76), involve only instrumental value, and a simply-good view can handle these by reading 'good for' either descriptively or as referring to what causes something simply good, where what has simply-good effects in one *S* needn't have them in another. The view can also make variable judgements of intrinsic goodness, since nothing prevents 'simply good' from resting on a relation. If it values lives with a balanced achievement of many goods, for example, it can say some additional knowledge that would greatly enhance a life that's been mostly athletic will do less for one that's focused on the intellect. It can even

<sup>8</sup> Geach was therefore not defending the w-theorists' 'good for'; he had a different preferred evaluative concept.

<sup>9</sup> The objection that 'simply good' involves a suspect non-naturalist metaphysics and epistemology isn't one w-theorists can make if their own concept is irreducibly evaluative: if 'good for', too, isn't naturalistic, they face the same metaethical issues. Moreover, both concepts can equally well be given a non-cognitivist reading.

value Kraut's own suitability-relation, so what's simply good in a being's life is what develops its capacities and depends on what those capacities are. In whatever way good-for judgements vary, simply-good ones can.

Kraut also charges that 'simply good' introduces an objectionable double-counting. If a pleasure is good for someone, he says, this normally gives her and others a reason to promote it. If it were also simply good, there would be a second reason to do so and her pleasure would count twice in deliberation (2011: 42–50). But a simply-good view will deny that 'good for' is an independent source of reasons, either reading the phrase descriptively or analysing it as what's simply good on a certain basis. Either way, there's just one reason, derived from 'simply good' (compare Rowland 2016: 1386–9).

Another objection is one many w-theorists make. Kraut says evaluations using 'simply good' are objectionably impersonal and inhumane, since they treat people as mere receptacles for an abstract property of goodness rather than caring about them as individuals (2011: 12, 79–97). He describes a mathematician who values mathematical knowledge just in itself and regardless of whether it's good for the knower or anyone else; she wants mathematics as such to flourish. She teaches her son the subject not because this will be good for him, say because he'll enjoy it, but only because it will be simply good, as an aspect of the discipline's flourishing, if there's mathematical knowledge in him. Kraut calls her motivation 'chilly', saying she should instead care about what benefits or is good for her son (2011: 81–90).

But a simply-good view can endorse much of this critique. It can say that although the flourishing of mathematics could in principle be simply good—nothing in the concept forbids this—it isn't in fact good, whereas a son's enjoyment of it is. The mathematician therefore prefers something valueless to something of worth. Alternatively, it can agree that a discipline's flourishing is good but say other things, too, are good, such as a son's enjoyment, so she should also care about them. It can even say she should care more about these other things, since whatever simple value the advance of mathematics has, the enjoyment of it by people has more, so she cares more about a lesser good. It can say this especially if it allows agent-relative goodness, as Sidgwick and Ross did. Then it can say her son's enjoyment has more value from her point of view than a stranger's would, which makes her neglecting it for the lesser good of mathematics even worse. Far from having to applaud Kraut's mathematician, a simply-good view can fault her on many grounds.

Moreover, it can underwrite its critique by drawing its own distinction between more and less personal goods. Some simple goods don't involve states of individuals but rest, for example, on certain relations between them; equality in the distribution of happiness is one such. Call these goods fully impersonal. Other simple goods do involve states of individuals and so are at least partly personal, but they can differ in the way they contribute to the goodness of larger units such as the individual's life, the overall condition of humankind,

and the total state of the universe. What I'll call fully personal goods make the individual's life—that specific unit—better, and only by doing that make the species or universe better. Their contribution to more global values runs through the intermediate value in a life; by this criterion enjoyment is a fully personal good, since it first improves the life of the person who experiences it. But other partly personal goods don't affect the value of the life they figure in; they improve only larger wholes, their contribution to which bypasses the unit of the life. Thomas Nagel has said it's important to make intellectual advances even if few people come to understand them because 'the mere existence of such understanding, somewhere in the species' has value (1979: 32). On this view a mathematician's proving a new theorem makes the world better, but not by making her or anyone else's life better. The value it adds appears first at the level of the species, and it would therefore make no difference to this value if the theorem were proved by someone else. Goods like this one of Nagel's are partly impersonal because, while they involve states of individuals—any theorem is proved by a particular mathematician—they don't improve those individuals' lives but contribute only to the value of larger wholes.

Kraut's mathematician cares only about a good that's in this sense partly impersonal, and a simply-good view can fault her attitude if it holds either that the only genuine goods are fully personal or that, though some may be wholly or partly impersonal, the greatest goods, the ones we should care most about, affect the values of individual lives and are fully personal. Either way, it can say her motivation is 'chilly' because she ignores a crucial simple good that, unlike that of a discipline, makes someone's, in this case her son's, life better.

Kraut may reply that, however it uses the word 'personal', a view that values the son's enjoyment as simply good still values it inhumanely, since it doesn't see it as good *for him*. But this returns us to my earlier redundancy argument. A simply-good view can value the same state as Kraut's and on the same basis: that it's an enjoyed exercise of a capacity. It can also value this state in part because it makes the son's life better, as more impersonally good states of him don't. What's missing here that Kraut's 'good for' would add other than some words? The proposed reply again invokes an ineffable value-concept that makes no difference to what we should care about or why and is therefore idle.

## V. 'GOOD FOR' NEEDS 'SIMPLY GOOD'

That the objections to 'simply good' fail doesn't mean there can't be a moral view that uses only the w-theorists' 'good for'; there just can't be these arguments for it. But it's doubtful that a view *can* use only good for'. Especially if it's not egoistic, it needs to make some judgements that require an unrelativized evaluative concept.

The principal such judgements compare the good-fors of different people. If one act will promote *A*'s well-being while another will promote *B*'s, we can only determine which act is right by determining which outcome is in some sense better. But this can't be a relativized sense of 'better'. The first outcome is better for *A* and the second for *B*, and we need a judgement that's neutral between the two, which we can't make using only 'good for' (Regan 2004: 213–25; Stroud 2013: 463).

In some good-for theories such as Kraut's neutral judgements are needed, first, to compare the grounds of the relativized values. He thinks animals and plants as well as humans can flourish, but that if you can save either a plant's life or a human's you should save the human's because her flourishing is better for her than the plant's is for it (2007: 211–2). But if a plant develops its capacities to, say, 80% of the maximum possible, and a human develops to 80% of her maximum, how can he make this judgement? If the degrees of suitability in the two cases are the same, how can the degrees of good-for value differ? What seems needed here is the thought that the human's capacities are somehow higher or better, but that's not a relativized or good-for thought; it's close to the thought that her capacities are simply better. A similar thought can be needed to compare a single species' capacities with each other, for example to say developing 80% of our human capacity to love is better for us than developing 80% of our capacity to whistle. Again the comparison can't rest just on facts about suitability.

More generally, any good-for view needs neutral judgements to compare the supervening values themselves. If one outcome is better for *A* in a sense that makes the value qua value relative to him, and another is in the same sense better for *B*, we don't yet have a judgement that allows us to choose between them. We just have two claims that are relativized to different people and in that way incommensurable. Agent-relative goodness isn't the w-theorists' well-being, but in this respect the two are similar. If one outcome is better from *A*'s point of view, so he has more reason to desire it, and another better from *B*'s, the two judgements can't be combined because they point in different directions. The same holds of 'good for' if not only the ground of the value it expresses but also that value itself is relational. Then 'good for *A*' and good for *B*' point in different directions and can't be compared; that again requires an unrelativized concept.

Could a good-for view dispense with neutral evaluations and just say its good-for judgements directly ground reasons for everyone, with 'good for *A*' sometimes grounding a stronger reason than 'good for *B*'? But to say there's more reason for everyone to desire one of two outcomes just is, on a fitting-attitudes analysis, to say that outcome is better. So neutral evaluations aren't avoided. And it remains obscure how relativized values *can* ground neutrally comparable reasons. Surely what follows from a value depends on its character as a value. Moore's 'simply good' is agent-neutral and grounds only neutral

reasons; mustn't a relativized 'good for' likewise ground just relativized ones? An acceptable ethical view must be able to compare the goods of different people; it's hard to see how it can do this using just the w-theorists' 'good for'.

The redundancy argument of Sections 2 and 3 targeted views that use both 'good for' and 'simply good' and could in principle be avoided by using only the w-theorists' 'good for'. I've now argued that that's not possible. Any good-for view needs an unrelativized evaluative concept, and once it has that, 'good for' adds nothing.

## VI. CONCLUSION

I've challenged the view that 'good for' expresses a distinct and ethically important evaluative concept, but it doesn't follow that philosophers should never use that phrase; they may so long as they give it a clear meaning. Too often, however, they don't, never explaining whether they understand 'good for' descriptively, reductively, or as expressing the w-theorists' concept. This leaves the content of their claims unclear, and it can also create dangers. Philosophers who seem to be defending competing substantive theories of the good-for may in fact be talking past each other, because they understand the phrase differently (Campbell 2016). Arguments that use the phrase can equivocate, moving from premises that are plausible given one meaning of 'good for' to a conclusion that requires another, for example from a claim that's undeniable given a descriptive meaning like 'fulfils a desire of' to one that's ethically significant. Finally, it can seem as if important substantive questions turn on the conceptual question of how 'good for' is best understood. The ethically central evaluative concept is unambiguously expressed by 'simply good'; it would serve clarity if philosophers used only that phrase.<sup>10</sup>

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