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## Are We of Equal Moral Worth?

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One of the most enduring and widely accepted ideas of the modern era is that human beings have an unconditional, intrinsic, and absolute worth—a dignity—that raises them up in the order of nature and that is possessed equally by each one of us. By ‘unconditional,’ I mean that the worth is not conditioned on what we have done, who we are, what is good for anyone or anything, or what we value. By ‘intrinsic,’ I mean that the worth is grounded in the intrinsic properties of human beings. Rarity is an extrinsic property; shape is an intrinsic one. Being a friend, or cousin, is an extrinsic property; being a person capable of reasoning is an intrinsic one. And by ‘absolute,’ I mean that the worth is nonrelational; i.e., the worth is a kind of goodness *simpliciter* rather than goodness of a kind, goodness relative to a point of view, instrumental goodness, or goodness-for.

This dignity sets limits to what others may, with justification, do to us. It also explains why we are owed a respect as persons that is independent of who we are, what we have done, or what we value. And yet the idea is notoriously difficult to defend. In virtue of what are we equal in worth? The most common strategy is to point to a natural property (or set of properties) that is possessed, and possessed equally, by all and only human beings. Prominent candidates include our capacity to produce and accumulate knowledge across generations, or to choose in accordance with reasons (or, more narrowly, to act in accordance with morality), or to love. There are three main problems with this strategy. The first is that the degree to which human beings possess these properties varies from person to person. But if the properties vary, then shouldn’t the worth vary along with them? A popular strategy of response posits a threshold above which variation doesn’t matter. As long as, for example, one has a sufficiently realized capacity to act in accordance with morality, then variation in that capacity above the threshold doesn’t matter. This leads to the second problem: Why should there be such a sharp cut-off in worth between individuals that possess moral capacities to degree  $n$  (just above the threshold) and those who possess it to degree  $n - 1$ ? And: If the scalar property underlying the threshold-based property matters below the threshold, then why should it suddenly cease to matter above it? The third problem is that it is difficult to explain why possession of these properties should make their bearers especially worthy. The argument, in its classic form,

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is *not* that these capacities are good *for* their bearers or for others. (I return to this possibility below.) The possession of the properties is meant to make their bearers *nonrelationally* good, or good *simpliciter*, and good in a way that imposes a set of moral duties to be treated a certain way both by others and by the bearer toward herself. But why? Why should mere possession of a capacity (rather than its exercise) bestow a worth that deserves respect?

In this paper, I will not explore the range of possible attempts to overcome these problems.<sup>1</sup> Rather, let us begin by assuming they all fail. What follows? Must we accept—like Nietzsche—that there is a rank order of human types, with those exhibiting the highest forms of, say, creative and vigorous excellence at the top? Must we accept the idea that those lower in the order must defer and serve those who are higher? No. The right conclusion to draw is that we should *not* abandon the commitment to moral equality but rather the idea that moral equality requires appeal to moral worth, or dignity. We should, that is, abandon the search for absolute-unconditional-intrinsic-good-making natural properties possessed to an equal extent by each one of us. But then what do we say about our commitment to the claim that we are, in some basic sense, one another's equals? Can we still vindicate it without reliance on some account of the equal worth of humanity?

We can make progress in answering this question by asking a different one first: What role does appeal to the idea of moral equality play in our social and political life? It seems clear that it has played a crucial role in the following major developments of the modern era: the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century, the revolutions of 1848, the abolition of slavery, the patchwork expansion of the franchise across all liberal democracies, labor movements (especially those associated with socialism), the development of human rights in the wake of the Second World War, decolonization in the 1960s, civil rights and women's liberation, the wave of democratizations in the 1980s and 1990s (including the end of apartheid in South Africa), and recent social movements such as Occupy, MeToo, and Black Lives Matter. In each of these cases, the focus of concern has been on the wrongfulness of *treating as inferior*. The role played by calls for equality has been, then, to undermine the structures that serve to enable the oppression of the 'inferior' by the 'superior.' Paradigmatic instances of such wrongful treatment include caste societies; slavery, sexual harassment and assault, segregation and apartheid, political persecution and exclusion, invidious forms of discrimination, demeaning forms of paternalism, concentration and death camps, and genocide. Each involves one or more of the following modes of treating as inferior: *stigmatization*, *infantilization*, *objectification*, *instrumentalization*, *marginalization*, and *dehumanization*.<sup>2</sup>

In view of this account of the role played by moral equality, the puzzle can now be restated. Our question becomes: When and why is treating someone as an

inferior a violation of this person's status as a moral equal, and wrongful for that reason? In seeking an answer to this question, we set aside attempts to ground moral equality in equal moral worth. Instead, we ground our commitment to moral equality in an independent account of harm that, in turn, explains why treating as inferior is wrong. Note that treating as inferior is not always wrong. Hierarchies in power, esteem, and status are an enduring part of all human societies.<sup>3</sup> All human societies contain differences in social status, power, and esteem related to the performance of roles and the possession of resources. Some will be ranked higher than others, and this ranking will affect—whether consciously or unconsciously—their relations with those lower (and those higher) in position. Relations between superiors and inferiors within any formal hierarchy will also always be marked by asymmetry. Military officers, for example, have powers and privileges of control and office that privates do not. This will shape not only their formal interactions but informal ones as well. The same is true of any large organization. Thus, there will always be, in any human society, some who treat others as inferior. But, crucially, not all such forms of treating others as inferior are wrong.

We want to resist the answer: Treating as inferior is wrong in one or more of the relevant senses (from now on, I will drop “in one or more of the relevant senses”) when and because it is incompatible with the equal worth bestowed on us by our equal possession of a set of distinctive psychological capacities. Instead, I have argued at length elsewhere that treating as inferior is wrong when and because it constitutes an attack on another's capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self (Sangiovanni 2017). It is wrong, that is, when and because of the threat it poses to a constitutive aspect of a person's flourishing—namely their capacity to integrate their choices, values, pursuits, and relationships into a narrative whole in which they see themselves reflected—rather than because it fails to properly recognize a person as equally, unconditionally, intrinsically, and absolutely valuable.

I will not repeat the argument here. Rather, I will extend the argument in two directions. In the first, I will develop the idea that treating as inferior is wrong, when it is wrong, because it is a form of harm. Dignity-based views hold that treating as inferior is a misrecognition of another's worth even if it does not count as an injury to a person's flourishing; the account I defend denies this. But in what sense is treating as inferior harmful? And what do we say about cases in which someone's capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self is not, in fact, undermined? What role does the idea of a (potentially unsuccessful) *attack* on another's integrity play? And finally, in what sense, if any, is treating as inferior bad not only for the victim but also for the perpetrator?

Second, I will expand the response to an important objection: even if I am right that treating as inferior is wrong as a distinctive kind of harm, don't I still

need to assume that humanity has unconditional, intrinsic, and absolute value in order to explain why human flourishing matters in the first place? Which beings' flourishing matters, and why? In answering this objection, I will take up a powerful recent account, namely Nandi Theunissen's (2020) *The Value of Humanity*.

## 1.

The best way to test a harm-based account of the wrongfulness of treating as inferior, and so also an account of the grounds of moral equality, is to work through examples that seem to involve *harmless* violations of equal moral status. To focus ideas, I will discuss cases involving invidious racial discrimination, which represent paradigms of an inferiorizing societal practice.

Before turning in Section 2 to cases that might strike one, at first glance, as harmless, I begin with cases of uncontroversially harmful discrimination, but where we need to do some work in isolating the kind of harm at stake. Racial discrimination is harmful, it is often said, when and because it arbitrarily denies opportunities afforded to others on the basis of false empirical beliefs or racial animus regarding members of the racial minority. But it is harmful even when there is neither differential denial of opportunity nor false empirical beliefs about or racial animus toward members of the race in question. For an example of the former, consider *Palmer v. Johnston*, a case decided in the United States in 1971.<sup>4</sup> In 1962, the mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, following federal desegregation legislation, decided to close down five public swimming pools (four of which had been white-only and one of which was Black-only). The mayor closed down the pools to avoid desegregating them: "We will do all right this year at the swimming pools but if these [civil rights] agitators keep up their pressure, we would have five colored swimming pools because we are not going to have any intermingling."<sup>5</sup> The mayor feared that desegregating the pools would lead them to become de facto all-Black because whites would no longer want to swim in them—and further believed that all-Black pools were not worth maintaining, while all-white ones were. This case is relevant because the freedom at stake, namely swimming, is relatively trivial; the opportunities available to Blacks in Jackson—in this case opportunities to swim in public pools—were diminished to exactly the same extent as whites, and we might easily imagine that there were no further downstream effects on equality of socioeconomic opportunity more broadly considered. The closing of the pools is undoubtedly an act of morally wrongful discrimination. But why? And in what sense, if any, is it harmful?

For an example of wrongful discrimination that does not involve false empirical beliefs or racial animus, consider so-called reaction qualifications.<sup>6</sup> Suppose the owner of a city restaurant has a policy of turning away Blacks, not because

of any racial hatred or beliefs in the inferiority of Blacks but because he believes *correctly* that his discriminatory policy will make his business more profitable. In this variation of our example, we would still judge the policy to be wrongful. Supposing, moreover, that the policy has no effects on the overall distribution of equality of opportunity, since there are many other restaurants close by, makes no difference to our assessment of its wrongness. Again, why? In what sense, if any, is it harmful?

The distinctive wrong in both these cases does not lie either in the mental attitudes of the actors (consider reaction qualifications) or the causal consequences for distributions of socioeconomic opportunity (as we have seen in both cases, those consequences were negligible). It lies in the *social meanings* of the policies, where a social meaning refers to the beliefs, desires, emotions, commitments, or dispositions expressed by a policy or action.<sup>7</sup> Interpreting social meanings always requires reference to the wider social, political, and cultural background in which a policy or action occurs. In the first case, the policy sends a stigmatizing message to the Black community, tied to white fears of swimming with and undressing in a shared space with Blacks. In the second, it sends a message of indifference and quiet acquiescence to the racist attitudes of the larger population.

Such stigmatizing messages harm when and because they undermine the psychological bases of self-respect. But what is self-respect, and why is it important?<sup>8</sup> As the Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* famously held:

To separate [Black children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.<sup>9</sup>

Feelings of inferiority undermine the sense that one's projects, commitments, and pursuits ought to matter to others. We are, ultimately, sociable beings who have a central interest in social recognition. We each develop a sense of self in dialogue and interaction with others similarly engaged. We are constantly involved in the presentation of a self to a world of other selves. But our capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self will not endure—unless we possess unusual strength and resilience (on which more below)—without receiving a some positive echo in the societies of which we are a part. It is for these reasons that rigid, systematically imposed, and negatively tainted identities attack our sense of ourselves *as* self-presenters, as beings who need some degree of control over the terms in which we appear to others in public.<sup>10</sup> As Frantz Fanon (1952, 88) writes:

And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. . . . I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro! . . . Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle.

Such stigmatization is, in turn, deepened and reinforced when the imposed identity denies wholesale the very interiority and capacity for self-presentation on which, paradoxically, the attack depends. The stigmatization then becomes dehumanization—the treatment of another “like an animal.” A good example here is the image of the Black man as a hypersexualized and dangerous brute that governs the social background of public bathing in *Palmer*.<sup>11</sup> And, as the Fanon passage highlights, stigmatization has a further predictable effect on our ability to maintain and develop an integral sense of self. The attitudes that express and reinforce the stigma are often echoed in our own self-conception, and so infect the way we interact with others, both intimately and publicly.<sup>12</sup> At the extreme, such stigmatized identities, when fully internalized, undermine our ability to access and realize the most important goods in a human life, such as intimacy and the successful pursuit of our final ends.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to distinguish the account I have given from conventional Kantian understandings of self-respect. On conventional views, one has self-respect when one's relationships both to oneself and to others reflect a sense of one's own absolute, unconditional, and intrinsic worth as a person. One must respect oneself, then, just as one respects others and for the same reason: one must recognize the worth of one's capacity for autonomous choice, and hence act in accordance with only those maxims that are compatible with the laws governing the exercise of that capacity. One must not commit suicide, thereby destroying the life that is at the root of that capacity, or take drugs that destroy one's cognitive abilities, or let others act in ways that deny one's absolute, unconditional, and intrinsic worth. One also has a duty to do what is reasonable to develop the capacity, and its associated talents, through education and training.

Again, my aim here is not to argue directly against this view. Rather, I assume that it cannot be defended. And I ask: Can anything else replace it? In addressing this question, it is worth noting, first, that someone could still have self-respect without believing that they have a special kind of worth, let alone a worth that is due to their possession of a capacity for autonomous choice. They might simply act in a way that is consistent (across many different situations) with the requirements of self-respect without being motivated by the thought that this is required by the worth of their psychological capacities; they might, for example,

just be the kind of person who does not surrender easily, takes pride in their achievements, works hard to develop their talents, and demands respect from others. There might be many factors that explain why they have the dispositions they do.

On my view, acting in ways that are consistent with what we have called the requirements of self-respect is good, undoubtedly, but good insofar as and because it is good *for* the person who acts in this way. A person who acts in accordance with the requirements of self-respect lives a more flourishing life, all else equal, than one who doesn't. Self-respect is, in turn, the natural byproduct of someone who acts from an integral sense of self. When someone is capable of integrating their values, pursuits, commitments, and relationships into a narrative whole with which they identify, this is in part because they believe that their projects matter and are worth pursuing. A sense that their projects and relationships don't matter, or are failing in systematic ways, can lead to a loss of integrity, as one struggles to make failure and a sense of worthlessness meaningful. And the loss of integrity often comes with a disposition to let oneself go, or to let oneself be degraded or humiliated by others, or to punish or sabotage oneself in basic and irreversible ways. An attack on one's integrity—as I described above in the case of discrimination—is then also an attack on the psychological bases for self-respect. But this is wrong not as a failure to recognize and appreciate the worth of someone's capacity for autonomous choice, but as an attack on one of the constituents of a flourishing life. Note that, on my view, there is then no *duty* to act in accordance with the requirements of self-respect; there is no duty, for example, to develop one's talents, or to govern oneself with a proper pride in their achievements, or to resist being humiliated; no duty to oneself not to act in a servile way, or not to commit suicide.<sup>14</sup> It is good if one does act in accordance with the standards of self-respect, but only because we then live more flourishing lives than we otherwise would have. Suicide is, on this view, a tragedy rather than a moral wrong.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.

So far, we have characterized the wrongfulness of two kinds of discrimination, neither of which involved the denial of opportunities afforded to others, the involvement of false empirical beliefs, or animus. I have argued that, even in these cases, the wrongfulness of discrimination is impossible to understand without appeal to its harmfulness, and specifically to the way in which it constitutes an attack on the capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self, and hence on one of the key psychological bases of self-respect. We are now in a position to address two important challenges to such a harm-based view of discrimination.

Similar examples, of course, could be reproduced for all of the other modes of inferiorization I have mentioned, but it helps to have a concrete instance of inferiorization in mind to assess the force of the objections.

The first challenge is the following. Suppose the target of a particular act of, say, discriminatory exclusion (or, in other contexts, a particular act of dehumanization, instrumentalization, and so on) is resilient and steadfast. Being subject to such inferiorizing treatment does not beat them down, or undermine the integrity of their sense of self, or cause them to interiorize a negative and tainted self-image.<sup>16</sup> Rather, being subject to discrimination strengthens their resolve, stokes their sense of pride, and pushes them into action against the injustice. Their life no longer, let us add, lacks the purpose it once did. The discrimination has caused their life to flourish in ways it otherwise wouldn't have. As a result, it seems unreasonable to argue that there is any, even *pro tanto*, harm, and certainly no harm of the kind I have described. Similar examples can be given for all cases of inferiorizing treatment that we discussed above. Does this kind of case provide a counterexample to the account I have given of the wrongness of treating as inferior? Note that dignity-based views have a ready answer, since they do not rely on any concept of flourishing or well-being to establish the wrongfulness of inferiorizing treatment.

It might seem tempting to argue that the discrimination is still a form of harm, but of harm to the *group* of which this person is a member. But even if we could explain how a harm to a group isn't merely an aggregate of the harms to its members, the counterexample would still retain its force. This is because we want to preserve the judgment that the discriminatory act wrongs the *target* (namely, our resilient protester) rather than just the judgment that the act harms the group of which the target is a member. We want an explanation that accounts for the fractured *moral nexus* between the discriminator and the target. If my account can't provide the required explanation, then it fails.

We can concede that the act does not harm the target but argue that its wrongfulness must still be explained in terms of the *attack* on the target, which is wrongful because of the harm it *would* or *might have* done.<sup>17</sup> What matters is its nature as an attack. Consider an analogy. When the burglar shoots the gun that he doesn't realize is jammed, he fails to kill or harm the homeowner, who is, we may add, still sleeping in his bed. The act is wrong, we say, as an *attempted* murder. And attempted murder is wrong because it *threatens* to harm.<sup>18</sup> The wrongfulness of the completed act, as Gideon Yaffe has written in an important article on attempts, *transfers* to the attempt.<sup>19</sup> Harm, then, is in the driver's seat in explaining *both* the completed act and the attempt: our objection to the attempt is an objection to the harm that the act would or might have caused. Note further that such attempts are wrong even if the type of gun used has a high failure rate. It is the same with the discriminatory act in question, which is wrong as an attempt



on the integrity and self-respect of the target, even if it fails, and even if discriminatory acts have a high failure rate, i.e., they often fail in harming their targets.

One might think that the discriminators in our examples could argue that they didn't *intend* to harm since all they intended to do was to *exclude*, and so, because an attempt requires intent, they did not attempt to harm at all. In defense of this claim, couldn't they argue that they would, indeed, be happier if it turned out there was no harm from their exclusion (recall, in particular, the shopkeeper who just wants to keep his business going)? This defense is no better than the defense offered by the smuggler who has been paid to carry what he believes to be cocaine across the border but who argues that he didn't intend to smuggle *cocaine*, since he would have been happier had it turned out not to be cocaine but a harmless white powder. As Yaffe argues, the smuggler is committed to smuggling for two reasons. First, he is committed because it would make no rational sense for him to reconsider his intention upon finding out that the powder really is cocaine, given his belief that the white powder is, in fact, cocaine. Second, he is committed because he cannot complain about the way the world turned out—given that he believes the powder is cocaine—when the white powder really turns out to be cocaine. Analogously, the mayor and shopkeeper in our examples cannot rationally reconsider their intention to exclude—given their awareness of racism and its associated practices and effects—when they find out their exclusion, in fact, would harm in all the ways mentioned. And the mayor and shopkeeper cannot complain about the way the world turned out—given their awareness of racism and its associated practices and effects—when they find out that their respective exclusions harm in all the ways mentioned. How could they not have been aware, we say, of the harms that racism does? (How can someone not be aware that when they pull the trigger the gun kills?)<sup>20</sup> Hence, in excluding, they cannot but be understood as *trying* to harm—even if they fail, as in our example of the resilient protester.

It should now be clear how one can respond to a second counterexample. Imagine a racist landlord turns away a couple because they are Black.<sup>21</sup> But suppose that the couple does not know that they have been turned away for this reason. And also imagine that they could have permissibly been turned away because they had pets (which the landlord had never bothered to inquire about). Here again there seems to be no harm, and yet we surely want to say that turning away the couple because they are Black is wrong. A dignity-based view has a ready answer: the landlord fails, in his deliberations, to recognize the equal moral worth of the couple. But an account like the one I have been defending also has a ready answer. Recall that, even if we assume that the victim was asleep, the burglar's pointing the gun and pulling the trigger still count as a wrongful attempt. And so it is, I want to argue, with the landlord: in turning away the couple because they are Black, he cannot but be understood as aiming to harm them,

both by aiming to deny them an opportunity they would have otherwise had (even if they would not, in fact, have had that opportunity) and by aiming to support and maintain a broader societal practice—sustained, in part, by myriad actions of the same general kind—that attacks the couple in all the ways mentioned. It is relevant here that, had the landlord known about the pets and been merely relieved that he could turn away the couple as a result, the turning away would not have been, on my view, objectionable. Turning away because of race and turning away because of pets describe the same behavior, but they have two very different social meanings, even if the meanings remain hidden (cf. Davidson 2001; Anscombe 1963). This strikes me as the right conclusion: a person who has racist beliefs or desires is criticizable, but the mere having of a belief or a desire is not a wronging of another, any more than the burglar's desires or beliefs regarding the death of the houseowner make it an attempted murder. Mere thoughts cannot be crimes.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.

I have argued that treating as inferior is wrong, when it is wrong, because it involves either harm or the threat of harm. Thus far, we have focused on harm and threatened harm to the *targets* of inferiorizing acts. But attacking another's capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self is also, I now want to argue, harmful to the *attacker*. A life that involves such attacks is, all else equal, less flourishing than one that doesn't. I conclude with an important asymmetry. If I am right, then, while the cruelty implicit in wrongful acts of inferiorization is *necessarily* bad for the perpetrator, such acts are only *contingently* bad for the target. As we have seen, targets can escape the harm threatened by wrongful inferiorization (recall the resilient and steadfast protester). I will argue that the perpetrator, on the other hand, cannot avoid the disfigurement that cruelty leaves in the shape of their life.

Something can be good for someone without being *useful*. This is often missed. The mistake can arise as a result of reasoning in the following way. Knives are good for cutting, flour for baking, arrows for shooting, food for growing. Whenever something is good for something else, this must then be because it contributes to it, and if it contributes to it, then it is a means to it, and hence useful. It makes no sense to say, then, that something can be *noninstrumentally* good *for* something or someone. When we say that friendship is good *for* us we must mean that it is good because of its effects on flourishing or well-being or happiness. On this picture, friendship contributes to well-being as a means to an end, and so instrumentally. This doesn't imply that people must value it instrumentally<sup>23</sup> (they might correctly value it as an end rather than as a means to an

end), but it does imply that it derives its value from its instrumental contribution to well-being.

The mistake is that something can contribute to flourishing without being a *means to* flourishing. It can simply be constitutive of flourishing. Water is good for a plant because it is useful: without it, a plant cannot flourish. But the vigor and growth of the plant is good for it not in the sense that it instrumentally contributes to its flourishing. Rather, its vigor and growth make their contribution constitutively: they are what its flourishing consists in.

We can say the same for goods like love, pleasure, knowledge that reflects one's interests and passions, the appreciation of beauty, and health.<sup>24</sup> Each of these is good for us (when they are good for us),<sup>25</sup> not instrumentally but constitutively. The presence of them does not lead to something else, namely our flourishing. Rather, our flourishing just consists in a certain arrangement of the goods of which it is made, just as something's being a sculpture just consists in a certain arrangement of the lump of clay of which it is made. Not all things that are good for us are good in this way. Many things are good for us (when they are good for us) as means to the realization of things that are noninstrumentally good for us: water, shelter, leisure, attractiveness, intelligence, and so on. Note further that something can be noninstrumentally good for us because of its effects. This will be true for many activities that are noninstrumentally good for us, such as reading a good novel. In that case, reading the novel might cause a deeper reflection on our most important relationships, trigger a diffuse feeling of at-homeness in the world, shock us into a sense of the absurdity of our own self-regard, or make us feel the pain of loss, grief, and alienation. Each of these further states is part of the overall experience of reading the book. But the value of reading the book is not to be understood as deriving from its instrumental use in attaining these states, which are the ultimate, noninstrumental repository of value. (That would be true on only the narrowest kind of mental state hedonism.) Reading the book engages all our senses, imagination, and understanding. The connected effects and experiences of this engagement, then, make their contribution to our flourishing constitutively, just as the vigor and growth of a plant.<sup>26</sup>

So far, we have focused on things that are noninstrumentally good for us. And so does most of philosophical writing on the topic. But experiences, relationships, pursuits, and activities can also be noninstrumentally *bad* for us. There is an obvious sense in which some things can be *instrumentally* bad for us. This would be the case if and when they prevent the realization of something noninstrumentally good. Dehydration and unemployment are examples: each of these is bad for us insofar as and because it prevents our being in a state of good health in the first case, and prevents us, among other things, from being able to provide for our family and experience the sense of accomplishment attained by valuable work in the second.

Experiences, relationships, pursuits, and activities can, however, also be *noninstrumentally* bad for us. Such things are not bad for us merely because they prevent something noninstrumentally good; they are also bad for us in their own right. They are constitutive of what Richard Kraut (2007, 148–168) calls ‘unflourishing.’ Pain or nausea, for example, aren’t merely bad for us because they prevent us from experiencing pleasure; rather, they are like the withering or etiolation of a plant. Permanent cognitive impairment provides another example. While such things may prevent us from realizing things that are noninstrumentally good for us, they are *also* states of unflourishing *as such*. Their contribution to unflourishing is direct rather than indirect. It is important that they are bad for us not merely because we dislike them. Our dislike is, after all, a reaction to what pain or nausea feels like, not the other way around. It gets things backwards to say that they are bad for us merely because we dislike them.

One might think that, because their contribution to our flourishing is direct, there is no way for things like pain or even cognitive impairment to be noninstrumentally *good* for us. But this is false. We are self-reflective, sociable, and purposive beings for whom meaning and structure are important. This makes our flourishing very different from that of a plant. Our attitudes toward our own capacities, experiences, relationships, pursuits, or activities can, as a result, affect whether they are noninstrumentally good for us. For example, pain might *not* be noninstrumentally bad for us—might not be an instance of unflourishing—if that pain is perceived as a meaningful part of a larger activity, such as childbirth. (Or consider deafness for many in the deaf community.) Here desire can play a part in making something that would otherwise be bad, good, but the desire is just one element. As sociable and meaning-creating beings, many of the things that are noninstrumentally good for us become so only as a result of their overall role in our life. We might say that noninstrumental goods are, then, only *conditionally* good.<sup>27</sup> This is true even in cases where someone finds no more enjoyment, say, in their chosen profession as a sculptor, and desires to quit. It may still be true that sculpting is noninstrumentally good for them, even though they have lost touch with why or how. This would be the case once we put in focus their overall values and aspirations, their past works and current relationships, and place them within a larger context or narrative. The fulfillment of desires isn’t all there is to human flourishing.

So far we have focused on states, activities, and capacities, but relationships can also be noninstrumentally good and bad for us. Relationships of love and affection are, in normal circumstances, noninstrumentally good for us. They are good for us when and because they are complex developments of our powers of empathy, concern, sociability, understanding, cooperation, and imagination. Love, among other things, is the development of a power to learn about and from others with whom we share a common world. The knowledge of ourselves and

others we attain is not, however, propositional but experiential. Love involves a knowing *how* rather than a knowing *that*. We learn, as it were, *how* to be ourselves and how it is to be another rather than learn a series of true propositions *about* ourselves or another. And it involves knowledge acquired *with* another, over time, and through a shared life. We learn together, as a result of a shared history of mutual exploration, regard, and activity. As a development of our fundamental powers—some of which, like sociability and empathy, are essentially relational—love is therefore a constitutive element of a flourishing life rather than just an instrument for obtaining one.

On the other hand, relationships of strife—like war, class or ethnic struggle, or enmity—are, in normal circumstances, bad for us. This is not only because they lead to, say, death or suffering. They are also noninstrumentally bad for us. Of course, conflict will also be part of even the best of relationships of love and friendship. The existence of such conflict is not necessarily to be regretted (although sometimes it should be). It can be an essential part of the experiences and relations described above; conflict can be, as it were, productive. In contrast, the kind of strife I am referring to is constitutive of the relationship itself. Such relationships are not noninstrumentally bad for us solely because of the stress, fear, anxiety, and so on that characterize them. They are not bad for us, that is, solely because of the way they feel. (Recall that negative emotions, like grief or pain, can be good for us depending on their role in our lives.) They are bad for us, I want to argue, because they represent a destruction or inversion of the sociability that is at the root of so many of the most important goods in a human life (cf. Seneca 2010, “Anger”). Strife requires us to shut others out, to shut down our ability to project ourselves imaginatively into another’s place and seek a reconciliation with that perspective. It is also associated with the disfigurement of our emotional lives. The infliction of pain and suffering on others is not easy. It is no surprise it often comes with numbness; it often also closes down the possibility of both self-knowledge and knowledge of others. This is not, of course, to deny that good things can come out of what is noninstrumentally bad for us, like good poetry out of war. Or to deny that it is possible to derive meaningfulness from strife. But there will still be loss; these further goods might compensate, but the harm is still there. We may, by contrast, compare the pain, for example, of childbirth, or the grief felt at the death of a loved one. All else equal, strife makes one’s life worse; grief at the death of a loved one or pain in childbirth need not.

But surely, it may be objected, we can imagine someone who *thrives* on the infliction of pain and suffering on others, or who actively seeks out relationships grounded in conflict or strife as final ends for their life. I think it is revealing that it is difficult to imagine such individuals without imagining they are ill or disabled in some way. The psychopath, for example, lacks the capacity to feel empathy or to regulate their violent impulses; it is unlikely, as a result, that

they will be able to have relationships with others characterized by love or intimacy. They will be lonely and disaffected, often rudderless. Psychopathy, that is, is noninstrumentally bad for the person who suffers from it. But what about someone who *compartmentalizes*: whose life is characterized by relations of strife and conflict in one domain but not in other parts of their life? Examples might include a soldier or a leader of the workers' movement. In these cases, however, it will not be true that either *thrives* from the strife *as such*. The conflict is a necessary, but unwelcome, means to a bigger end. Given all their other commitments, pursuits, plans, and so on, it is not as if either the member of the military will be less flourishing if there is no one to kill or maim, or if class struggle ceases. Indeed, what makes the struggle meaningful to the leader is its role in *ending* class oppression, just as what makes war meaningful to the soldier is the prospect of *returning* to a better peace. Again, there may be derivative benefits that come from class struggle or war—the sense of solidarity with fellow workers or soldiers, the meaning that belonging to a movement or fight against injustice provides, and so on. And of course there can be instrumental benefits from war and class struggle itself. But these derivative and instrumental benefits do not make class struggle *as such* or the killing involved in war noninstrumentally good for anyone. Unlike grief at the death of a loved one or pain in childbirth, relationships founded on strife and conflict cannot, then, be noninstrumentally good for us.

It is also important to distinguish strife as I have characterized it and the conflict that is part of *competition*. Competition, as in games or sport, is different precisely insofar as it does not involve the attempt to maim or destroy another's life. Competitive games, for example, are characterized by a larger spirit of cooperation that provides the background to the regimented and circumscribed conflict that is intrinsic to the game. This background cooperation—the compliance with the game's rules, the spirit of rivalry, the limited nature of the conflict, and so on—is essential to its nature as a *game*. The same background applies to other forms of competition, such as in political elections or the market. Conflict in each of these cases is disciplined and limited by rules whose aim is to stabilize and reproduce a broader cooperation. The kind of strife I have focused on lacks such a cooperative background. War, ethnic or racial violence, persecution, torture, and so on—while they may be structured by rules with which all parties comply—lack the cooperative aim of games, politics, markets, and sport.

It should now be clear why attacking another's capacity to maintain and develop an integral sense of self through one or more of the inferiorizing practices we identified above is noninstrumentally bad for the attacker. The cruelty of such attacks disfigures the life of the attacker. It is an inversion or destruction of the sociability and empathy that underlies the realization of the most important goods in a human life. A person therefore makes a mistake if they think that

participating in, for example, racist practices makes their life better as a consequence of, let us imagine, the feeling of domination and superiority that comes with it. If I am right, then the life of the attacker is made worse *directly* rather than merely *indirectly*. Even if there are other compensating goods in their life, or other derivative benefits from participation in racism, their life is still blighted by the harm they threaten. The life of the target, on the other hand, is not made worse in the same way. While their integrity is attacked, it is not necessarily undermined. Resistance and resilience can make one's own life, and the lives of others, better.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.

In this section, I want to address an additional objection. Even if I am right that treating as inferior is wrong as a distinctive kind of harm, don't I still need to assume that humanity has unconditional, intrinsic, and absolute value in order to explain why human flourishing matters in the first place? The objection is most forcefully put via an argument by David Velleman.

The argument has this shape. Some things are of value because they are good for something or someone else (stairs, for example, are good for climbing, friendship is good for human beings). But, if X is good in virtue of being good for Y, then we must presuppose that Y is good. But if Y is good, then it must either be good for something else, Z, or good-in-itself (rather than good for anything else). Because the chain cannot go on forever, and because the goodness of means derives from the ends to which they aim, there must be some things that are good-in-themselves without being good-for-anything; these things are intrinsically or absolutely or nonrelationally good; they are good *simpliciter*. Applied to persons, we can say that if something, say, friendship or appreciating an artwork, is good because it is good for *someone* then *they* must either be good *simpliciter* or good for something or someone else. Eventually the chain must come to an end, and it seems plausible that it should come to an end with the person themselves. According to Velleman (1999, 613):

[V]alue *for* a person stands to value *in* the person roughly as the value of means stands to that of the end: in each case, the former merits concern only on the basis of concern for the latter. And conditional values cannot be weighed against the unconditional values on which they depend. The value of means to an end cannot overshadow or be overshadowed by the value of the end, because it already is only a shadow of that value, in the sense of being dependent upon it. Similarly, the value of what's good for a person is only a shadow of the value inhering in the person, and cannot overshadow or be overshadowed by it.

Therefore, the person themselves—*qua* being with a capacity for autonomous choice—must have value independently of whatever is good for them (and hence independently of their interests), the person's value must be incommensurable with the value of what is good for them (and hence their interests), and the person's value must be of higher value than what is good for them (and hence whatever is in their interest). In virtue of their capacity for autonomous choice, persons, then, are absolutely, unconditionally, and intrinsically good, and so good *simpliciter*.

There are several places where the reasoning has been questioned.<sup>29</sup> I want to deny that if something is good for Y, then Y must possess a distinct kind of value—nonrelational, unconditional, and intrinsic value. Our flourishing (along with other sentient animals) might matter in a way that, say, a plant's flourishing doesn't *not* because we possess a distinct and higher kind of value that makes our flourishing more worthy of attention, but simply because we meet a condition that explains why our flourishing matters morally. An analogy: possessing a ticket is a condition required for entry to the show, not a condition of our worthiness to attend. As I argue in *Humanity*, our flourishing matters in its own right and for its own sake because we possess a perspective from which it matters what happens to us. We (along with all other sentient beings) are, that is, *evaluative* beings: we react with conscious aversion, attraction (and sometimes indifference) to how the world affects us. The fact that something promotes the flourishing of a being with a subjective perspective explains why we have (final) reasons to promote, protect, and so on, the things that are good for beings of this kind.<sup>30</sup> We do not need to say, in turn, that subjectivity gives such reasons because it bestows a higher worth on its bearer; rather, we say that subjectivity provides reasons because and insofar as it affects the kind of flourishing that is available to us. As I will argue in more detail below, our flourishing has, that is, relational, conditional, and extrinsic value (given by its relation to our subjectivity), but so does our subjectivity (given by its relation to our flourishing). Our subjectively experienced flourishing can, then, function as the needed regress-stopper: that a walk with a friend is good for Y gives us moral reasons not to interfere because Y is a being with a subjective perspective on the world, not because Y possesses a higher, nonrelational, unconditional, or intrinsic worth.

What do we gain? First, there are many reasons to resist ending the regress with something whose goodness is nonrelational (or, equivalently, absolute). Some doubt the very concept of nonrelational goodness, the idea that something can just be good (period), rather than a good member of a kind or good for someone or something (Geach 1956; Thomson 2008). Others grant the coherence of the concept, but believe that such a property either doesn't exist, or, even if it did, fails to provide us with reasons to do anything (Kraut 2011). Others still have more substantive worries: the problem with nonrelational goodness is



that it seems hard to explain why it ought to be of practical concern for us and from our point of view. “When something is of value,” what we mean is that it “contribute[s] . . . to the quality of the life of human beings (or, more broadly, of beings)” (Theunissen 2020, p. 8). Pointing to our practical concerns makes it intelligible *why* and *in virtue of what* something has value. The problem with making the value of human (and other sentient) beings *nonrelational*, on this picture, is that it seems to require a kind of value of a very different sort, entirely disconnected from our (or anyone’s) practical concerns. Nonrelational goodness seems, we might say, altogether too other-worldly.

Second, ending the regress with the relational value of subjectively experienced flourishing rather allows us to distinguish *having value* from *having worth*. On the Vellemanian regress, it is appropriate to refer to the regress-stopper as having a *worth*, or dignity, because the ultimate, nonrelational value—possessed by our capacity for autonomous choice—is of a *higher* order compared with the value of everything else. As I mentioned in the introduction, this leads to worries about whether variation in the underlying capacity should lead to differences in worth. On the view I am defending, subjectively experienced flourishing has a distinct kind of relational value that is neither higher nor lower than the value of other things. It is not as if beings that possess such a point of view ought to be treated in a certain way because such a point of view puts them higher in the order of nature. The difference in relational value between a being with a subjective point of view and one without is *categorical* rather than *ordinal*. Value here just correlates with reasons to promote, protect, respect, not with higher (or lower) worth.

Third, and closely related, ending the regress in this way allows us to distinguish between *basic* and *equal* moral status. *Basic* moral status only tells us that a being’s flourishing matters in its own right and for its own sake. Arguing that a being has *equal* moral status requires a further stretch of argument. *Basic* moral status, that is, is not sufficient for *equal* moral status. There is no comparative judgment in the idea of basic moral status, no conclusion implied about how its flourishing ought to be compared to the flourishing of other beings with a similar standing. It also doesn’t tell us when and why it is wrong to treat another as inferior. Standards for basic moral status are, to draw an analogy, like eligibility conditions for office (such as, for example, being at least thirty-five years of age is a qualifying condition for election as US president). The qualifying conditions get one in the game; they do not fully determine what makes for a good President, or who will be elected. Suppose, then, that a being has a richer or deeper evaluative response to the world around it. On the view defended, this does not imply that it deserves greater consideration, or that it is more worthy as a result. But it also does not imply that the depth and richness of its experience is morally *irrelevant*.<sup>31</sup> What kind of moral consideration it deserves needs further

argument, which ought to be sensitive to, among other things, the kinds of evaluative response open to it.<sup>32</sup>

One might worry that, if there are moral constraints that arise from a being's having *basic* moral status, then shouldn't the constraints apply *equally* to everyone who has this status? And if they do, then isn't that all that is required for establishing a being's equal moral status? Couldn't we just stop there? As I argue elsewhere, the sense here of a constraint applying *equally* to all beings that have a certain status is purely formal. It means something like "Treat all who have this status in accordance with the constraints, unless there is reason to treat them differently" (Sangiovanni 2017, chap. 1; see also Westen 1982; Raz 1986, chap. 9). This is not sufficient for moral equality, since it is not sufficient to block even the most heinous forms of invidious discrimination. The most egregious racist, for example, could hold that there are *some* constraints that apply equally to all beings, whether Black or White, but deny that these constraints bar prohibiting miscegenation or denying civil and political rights to Blacks. For moral equality, we need, that is, an account that gives us something more than the set of rights and duties that attach to us as evaluatively laden, conscious beings. We need something that explains why treating as inferior in the ways we have identified is wrong. That further stretch of argument, on my account, is provided by the harm (and threat of harm) of attacking the integrity of another's sense of self.

I have argued that the flourishing of beings with a subjective point of view matters in its own right and for its own sake. For some, this may sound like it concedes too much to Velleman (and other Kantians). To say that "having a subjective point of view on the world" has special reason-giving weight is just to say that it has value. But its reason-giving force as a value, some might object, doesn't seem relational. I have not argued, for example, that "having a subjective point of view" gives us special reasons because it is *beneficial* to the beings that possess it. I also haven't argued, relatedly, for the voluntarist thesis that our flourishing matters when and because we value it. Rather, we (along with other sentient beings) have a basic moral status in virtue of the fact that we have a perspective on the world from which things matter to us, whether negatively or positively, not in virtue of the fact that our flourishing is the (contingent) object of our valuing. The flourishing of someone who has ceased valuing their life still ought to matter to us precisely because they have a subjective point of view from which their despair, as it were, makes sense.<sup>33</sup> Isn't the value of our subjectivity, then, non-relational?

No. Recall that I said above that subjectivity has relational value in virtue of its relation to our flourishing. Nandi Theunissen has offered an ingenious solution that we can appeal to in defending this claim. According to Theunissen, we can end the Vellemanian regress not with a monadic, nonrelational bearer of value, but with a dyadic, relational one. On her view, we can say that a being

matters because its flourishing matters from its point of view, but we can *also* say that its (subjective) capacity to value matters because it contributes to that being's flourishing. The relation at the end of the regress is, that is, self-reflexive, but still relational. We can unpack the account in our terms in the following way. The capacity for conscious intentional action, for responding to the world in evaluatively-laden ways, makes beings of this kind, *valuing* beings. These are beings for whom their life and how it is going is, as Theunissen writes, an *issue* for them and from their point of view (cf. plants, who do not have such a point of view). This is the first half of the circle: these beings matter because how their life is going matters from their point of view. (This is where we left things above and in *Humanity*.) But the fact that they are valuing beings also gives them the capacity to make their lives go well (or badly), and determines, in part, *what it is* for their life to go well or badly (recall the examples we have already discussed about how to determine what counts as noninstrumentally good and bad for human beings). This is the second half of the circle: the (subjective) capacity for valuing matters because it determines, in part, whether and how a being flourishes.<sup>34</sup> At the end of the regress, then, is a mutual relation between ourselves, understood as (subjectively) valuing beings, and our flourishing, each of which is important for, and because, of the other.

Taking stock, this solution allows us to say that both *basic* and *equal* moral status are relational all the way down. Both basic and equal moral status are grounded in facts about what contributes to (and threatens) a good or flourishing life, rather than in facts about the nonrelational worth or dignity of a being, independently of their flourishing. With respect to equality and inequality, what matters is the effect of treating as inferior on the quality of the lives of self-conscious, sociable beings like us, rather than the inherent and equal worthiness of a capacity to act in accordance with reason.

I end with a response to the following important objection. We may wonder whether this argument shows, at best, that a being's flourishing matters for itself as a valuing being, and its having the capacity to value contributes to its flourishing. What it doesn't show is why *any other being* has reason to give this fact about one's relation to oneself any special standing in their deliberation. I want to highlight two possible responses to this worry. One, adopted by Theunissen, is to point to a conceptual truth about value. On this view, (1) the concept of being "of value" is the concept of being such as to make something practically relevant or reason-giving for human beings; (2) being good for human beings is the relation that explains why something is of value when it is; (3) when a person leads a flourishing life she instantiates something that is good for human beings; therefore, (4) every human being has reason to value what is good for another, and hence their flourishing (see Theunissen 2020, 123–124 and her chapter in this volume, sec. 4). The trouble with this argument is that the conclusion at (4) looks

to be assured only if we build it into the concept of value at (1), such that to be “of value” is for something to be reason-giving for *every* human being. This leaves it open for an opponent to argue that, conceptually, it is surely possible for something to be of value for one person, and hence reason-giving for that person, without also being of value, or reason-giving, for others. Unless we show, substantively, that the agent-relative reason to take my own flourishing to matter also generates a co-occurring agent-neutral reason for *every* person to take my flourishing to matter, we haven’t really answered the objection.<sup>35</sup>

Another response, for which I argue at greater length elsewhere, is simply to say that the fact that flourishing is good for another as a valuing being (and we can add, in line with Theunissen, *also* that its capacity for valuing is good for its flourishing) is a *basic* (agent-neutral) reason to give another’s evaluatively laden flourishing a special moral standing in our deliberation (Sangiovanni 2017, 67–71). By “basic” here we mean that its status as a reason isn’t grounded or derived from any other reasons. Indeed, the very recognition of the reason as basic seems essential to having a moral point of view in the first place. In this light, the objection, then, really amounts to the question: Why be moral? If that is right, then we face Prichard’s dilemma: any answer to the question must either give further moral reasons to be moral, and so presuppose what it is meant to show, or to give nonmoral reasons, in which case it provides the wrong kind of reason. But this is not the only thing we can say in response.

We can also provide *evidence* that the basic reason is genuine by showing the way it contributes to and fits into a good life. We show, that is, that a person who recognizes the basic reason lives a (noninstrumentally) better life as a result of this recognition than someone who doesn’t. This is because a recognition of this fact as a reason underlies and makes possible some of the most important goods in a human life, such as friendship and love. It is worth repeating that this is not itself the reason to treat another’s flourishing as mattering—that reason, recall, is the fact that another has an evaluatively laden conscious perspective. Rather, the argument seeks to show that a recognition of this basic reason is also good for us—it seeks to show, as we might say, that there is congruence between the right and the good. By showing that the recognition of the reason as basic contributes to the good, we thereby strengthen the reflective equilibrium that supports our judgment that the reason is genuine.

## Notes

1. I discuss Kantian (and some Christian) attempts to resolve these problems—including some by Korsgaard, Darwall, Forst, Velleman, and George—in Sangiovanni 2017, chap. 1.

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2. I discuss these modes of inferiorization at greater length in Sangiovanni 2017, chap. 2; here I also add marginalization. Note that I use definitions of each of these modes that are unmoralized; i.e., I allow that there can be permissible forms of stigmatization, etc. The task is then to explain when and why each of these modes of treating as inferior is wrong.
3. This is a staple of any text on social stratification in sociology.
4. *Palmer v. Thompson*, 403 U.S. 217 (1971), §87.
5. *Palmer v. Thompson*, §87.
6. On reaction qualifications, see Alexander 1992; Arneson 2006.
7. I say much more about what a social meaning is, and why it matters in Sangiovanni 2017, chap. 3. See also Hellman 2008; Eidelson 2015. For critique, see Lippert-Rasmussen 2013.
8. In Sangiovanni (2017), I did not discuss self-respect. Here I show how self-respect can be given a nondignitarian formulation. See also Schemmel 2019; Moody-Adams 1995; Dillon 1997.
9. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), 494.
10. Cf. Goffman (1956), on which I draw. And see also Velleman 2003.
11. For a lucid account of the racial politics of community swimming pools in the United States, see Wiltse 2007.
12. See, e.g., the powerful account of the wrongness of racial inequality, and its roots in stigma, in Loury 2009, chap. 2. See also Fanon 1952, esp. chap. 5, “L’expérience vécue du Noir” (or “the lived experience of blackness,” translated in the English edition, somewhat misleadingly, as “The Fact of Blackness”) and Baldwin 2013. See also Haslanger (2012, 65): “A good objectifier will, when the need arises—that is, when the object lacks the desired properties—exercise his power to make the object have the properties he desires.”
13. On the importance and usefulness of final ends, see Frankfurt 1999, chap. 7.
14. This doesn’t, strictly speaking, follow from adopting a harm-based account, but it is compatible with such an account in a way that a Kantian view is not.
15. I leave aside cases in which suicides might represent wrongs to *others*. We are here focused on duties to self.
16. In Sangiovanni (2017), I discussed a similar counterexample by referring to Zora Neale Hurston’s Janie Crawford from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Here I expand on that discussion.
17. As I discuss in Sangiovanni (2017, chap. 3), even if the agent lacks an intention, the fact that an action undermined another’s capacity to develop and maintain an integral sense of self can also be wrong when the action is negligent or reckless, as in cases of systematic indifference. The indifference sends a demeaning message, and is wrong for that reason. In the following, I focus on intentional attacks.
18. On the connection between threat and attempt, see Westen 2008. Note that it is still attempted murder even if we assume that the probability that the gun will go off is zero.
19. Yaffe 2014.

20. Suppose they really were ignorant about the way racial exclusion harms, and suppose further that they were not culpable in their ignorance. In this case, they would have an excuse, just as someone who puts arsenic in your tea thinking it is sugar has an excuse (in the case in which the person turns out in any case to be immune to the effects of arsenic), and just as the smuggler who nonculpably believes they are carrying talcum is excused (in the case in which the drug dealers are mistaken about the cocaine they falsely believe they are getting the smuggler to carry for them).
21. The example is from Scanlon 1998, 73.
22. I here give a different response than the one I gave in Sangiovanni (2017), which argued that the turning away was harmful in the same sense as an unknown betrayal is harmful. The response I give here can be used also to answer similar counterexamples in Slavny and Parr 2015.
23. For this distinction, see Korsgaard 1996.
24. I do not argue here for a substantive account of human flourishing as an account of well-being, which would take us too far afield. For such accounts, see Foot 2001; Kraut 2007; Thompson 2008. Other accounts of well-being, such as ideal-desire theories, are compatible with everything I say in this paper.
25. All of these goods, that is, can sometimes be bad for us, depending on what else is true of our lives. Pleasure can sometimes be bad for us, just as love can. But when the conditions are right, each of these things makes their contribution to our flourishing constitutively. So, we might say, their value for us is conditional but constitutive. I say more about this below.
26. For this point, see Raz (2001, 147–148) and the very helpful discussion in Theunissen 2020, 42–43.
27. Are there things that are *unconditionally* good for us? This is one of the questions Plato asks in the *Meno* and answers with wisdom.
28. Cf. the master/slave dialectic in Hegel.
29. See also Conee (1982) and Kraut (2011, 35–37) for the idea that the end of this chain need not result in something *good*; it could just as well result in something that is *neither good nor bad*.
30. See also Sher 2014, Ch. 1 and Regan 1985.
31. The dignitarian, on the other hand, believes that the argument establishing a being's basic status also serves to establish its equal status. This is why the dignitarian usually argues that, above some threshold, the worth-grounding psychological capacities *cease to matter* for determining what kind of consideration a being is due. From this it follows that all beings above the threshold are due *equal* consideration. On the view I defend, this inference isn't warranted. We need further argument to establish whether (and in what way) we should treat beings with basic moral status as equals. I also suggest, as I mentioned earlier, that using the idea of worth to elucidate what treating as equals requires is bound to produce skepticism. Again, the fact that being thirty-five years of age is an eligibility criterion for office does not imply that *being older* is the only appropriate standard for selecting among candidates for President; neither does not imply that it is the most important or salient consideration in selecting someone for President.

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32. For example, its degree of psychological connectedness might matter in determining what kinds of harms it is liable to, and so what kinds of harms ought to enter, morally, into our deliberations regarding whether, say, it is permissible to kill it. See, e.g., McMahan 2002, on the relevance of time-limited interests. On this kind of view, a higher degree of psychological connectedness modifies the kinds of harms a being is liable to rather than makes it more worthy.
33. Cf. Korsgaard 2004. And see Langton 2007 for a response wondering, among other things, what to say about someone who has ceased valuing their own life or how it is going. The point here is that, even for this person, how their life is going is an issue for them as an evaluative creature. Indeed, there is no other way to make sense of their *rejection* of their own life as mattering.
34. This account is developed in discussion, among others, with Buss 2012, who argues that human beings are of value because of their (rational) capacity to appreciate the value of things that are good *simpliciter*. On this kind of account, human beings have noninstrumental value because they are good for things of value, rather than the other way around. Theunissen, I think correctly, argues that this can't be right: works of art, for example, are valuable because and insofar as they are good for us, given the role of making and enjoying art in our lives. To argue that human beings are valuable because and insofar as they act as instruments for the appreciation of works of art makes human beings oddly fungible.
35. At 122–124, Theunissen (2020) denies that it is conceptually possible for something to count as a reason for an agent (because it is good for them), but not generate reasons for others not to interfere, to respect, to promote, and so on. This is because, if something is good for an agent, it must be good in virtue of quite general features about her as a human being. Something is good for an agent, then, only if it is, ultimately, an instance of the human good. Let us accept this for the sake of argument. She then goes on to claim that, insofar as an agent's pursuits, etc. are instances of the human good, they must therefore generate reasons for *everyone*. But there are problems here, I think, since the slide from good for me (qua human good) and reason-generating for everyone is too quick: we need some further argument why everyone has reason to promote the human good, and hence this person's pursuits as instances of that good. Furthermore, as Theunissen herself notes, the kinds of reasons something of value creates will vary according to the kind of thing it is and one's relation to it. So, conceptually, it is (I think) fully possible for something to be good for me as an instance of the human good, but not to generate (even *pro tanto*) reasons for others not to promote, interfere, and so on. The reasons not to interfere, if there are any, need to come not from a conceptual claim about relational value as flowing from general features of the human good, but from a substantive argument about why my particular pursuit—or my particular realization of the human good—generates reasons for others of distinctive kinds. I don't deny, of course, that there may very well be such reasons for others not to interfere, etc., as there certainly are in the case of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro; what I deny is that such reasons flow from a conceptual truth about relational value. (And, conversely, note also we could have reasons not to interfere even if no one's good is promoted, in cases, that is, where what I am doing is *bad* for me and good for

no one else). I thank Maria Alvarez, David Owens, and Nandi Theunissen for helpful discussion.

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