Sortal Quality: pleasure, desire, and moral worth

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Preface

This started as a book about desire. I was hoping to complement what I had said about belief in my (2022). To believe something, I argued, is to be positioned to do, think and feel things in light of a possibility whose obtaining would make one right. I argued that believing is not representational, that belief states are not causes or causal powers, and that the objects of belief are ways the world might be and not representations of things. Believing is not so much a response to the world as a way of being positioned in it, a way of having an environment, as Frege put it. (Frege 1956, 306) I was trying to put the believer as a rational agent positioned in a world at the heart of my account. I hoped an account of desire could round out this picture of a rational agent's psychology. But as I thought about desire, I came to see that two ideas about the nature of goodness, one negative and one positive, were really at the heart of my thinking.

The negative idea is that there is no such thing as what philosophers have variously called intrinsic goodness or simple goodness or absolute value. I guess I am a nihilist about that. The positive idea is that our world is rich in what I will call sortal quality, what others have called goodness-of-a-kind or attributive goodness. I came to think that sortal quality is at the heart not just of desire but also of pleasure and moral worth. A picture of *moral* psychology had come into view. And so I reorganised the book. I still say a lot about the nature of desire, or 'wanting' as I prefer to call it, and I think my view does complement my externalist view of belief. Wanting, I will argue, is a matter of falling short relative to a standard one falls under, failing to be as good as one could be. If believing is about having an environment to respond to, then desire is about

fitting into it well. And so my book offers a comprehensive picture of a moral agent in a world where nothing is simply or absolutely good but where many kinds of things, including people, can be very good and even splendid.

Chapter 1 Introduction

> [I]t is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking. (Anscombe 1958, 1)

1.1 A World Rich in Quality

Our world is rich in things of varying degrees of quality. People can often identify the relevant standards and figure out how a thing measures up. A little theory and a bit of observation are typically all it takes. Quality is not just an object of knowledge, though. It is also a primary source of pleasure. People enjoy things that are excellent of their kind. They are pleased when things they care about thrive, and enjoy it when things are done well. Even sensory pleasure is tied to quality. We enjoy foods that have a good taste, smell and texture. And of course, people don't just discern and enjoy quality, they also bear it. They are usually good in some ways and not so good in others, excellent at a few tasks and mediocre at some. Most importantly, people are more or less good *as people.* Most care deeply about their moral worth, about their quality as people. They feel shame when they fall short and resentment when others do. This book is about how sortal quality, as I will be calling it, is woven into our world and how it threads through the most fundamental parts of our lives.

In the chapters to come I clarify what I mean by sortal quality, detail its links to pleasure and desire, and explore the ideal of a morally good person, understood as a case of sortal quality. I also explain how sortal quality differs from what some have called simple or intrinsic goodness

or absolute value. So far as I can see, those evaluative ideas are not needed to understand our practical and emotional lives. I also doubt they are needed to understand morality, but I won't try to defend this here. And while I will explain how the idea of a morally good person, understood as a case of sortal quality, is distinctive both epistemically and ontologically, I won't consider all that a moral theory based on it might tell us. That is a project for another book. My aim here is to show how sortal quality sits at the heart of what Anscombe called a philosophy of psychology. I won't claim that she would have endorsed the accounts I offer of pleasure and desire. But I hope those accounts show her influence. The rest of this section sketches my view in broad strokes. The next one details each chapter.

Let's start with a brief tour of where sortal quality can be found in our world. There are outstanding umbrellas, mediocre movies, dreadful soccer players, terrific watches, good home remedies, deplorable teachers, excellent ways to remove wine stains, bad ways to learn the piano, good recipes for banana bread, and terrible strategies for writing a final exam. Dolphins and pikes are excellent swimmers and beavers and people are skilled builders. Pine trees are especially good at photosynthesis, cactuses do well during droughts, and ants excel at digging tunnels. Tofu and quinoa are good sources of protein, many of Canada's roads are in terrible condition, and Jane's favourite hoya is in excellent health. Cancer treatments get better every year and the science of climate change continues to improve. There is excellent evidence that employment will rise and good signs that spring is finally here. Chocolate tastes better than marmite to most people and a massage can usually do some good by improving one's mood. Many people are good parents and some friends are better than others. And while it is sad how deplorable some people can be, it helps to remember that many are decent and some are even splendid.

That sortal quality is all around us, in a wide range of degrees, is not a deep or surprising fact. It does not call out for special explanation. The fact that umbrellas come in varying degrees of quality is no deeper or more puzzling than the fact that there are umbrellas. It is not as if there could have been umbrellas but no good, mediocre, or excellent ones. Quality is as essential to an umbrella as size and shape. This point extends to all corners of our quality-rich world. Beavers might not have existed, but there could not have been beavers swimming about, building dams, raising kids, and catching fish with none of them being good, bad or indifferent at any of these things, with none of them in better or worse health than any others, with none finding certain foods better tasting than others. All of this is true of people too. It is contingent that there are people but not that people can be good or bad, admirable or deplorable. Any world containing bits of evidence, medical treatments, stain removing techniques, living things, carpenters, soccer players and friends is a world containing things of varying degrees of quality. Quality, including that of a good person, is as much a part of the fabric of our world as size and shape.

Quality also threads through our practical, emotional and moral lives. Our actions, preferences and choices are most reasonable when guided by assessments of quality. Medical specialists seek the best diagnostic tools and choose the top treatments and medicines. Good carpenters collect the finest tools they can afford and stay up to date on the best methods and materials. Even ordinary people usually seek the best available means for doing what they want done and try to buy good quality things at the best prices. All else equal, our actions, preferences and choices are best when formed under the guise of sortal quality.

Our most central attitudes essentially involve assessments of quality. We appreciate well-built furniture, admire excellent cooks, and approve wise plans. Even pleasure is connected to quality. People like good tasting food, take pleasure in talented dancing and athleticism, and

enjoy activities and hobbies they are good at. Enjoying the flavour of a cold beer on a hot summer evening is a way of knowing that it tastes great, and the fact that something will be pleasant can be a reason to pursue it. Most importantly, perhaps, our moral emotions are keyed to quality, to the ideal of a good person. One feels shame at falling short of that ideal and resentment when others do.

A person's wants and desires too are fixed by facts about quality. Things are normally wanted because of their quality or because of a benefit they would provide or a harm they would prevent. Benefiting and harming are modifications of a thing's quality. People sometimes want ice cream because it tastes great to them and can improve their mood, and they want vaccines in order to stay in good health and prevent severe illness. In understanding someone's wants, we think about how satisfying them might improve the quality of their lives or of those they care about. What a person wants depends on what it would take for them be, say, a good soccer player, a skilled carpenter, a better parent, or to maintain their good health. In thinking about our own wants, about how we hope our lives will go, we think about ways to improve our relationships, our health, our careers, or our possessions. In planning our lives we keep an eye on quality. Practical reasoning is under the guise of sortal quality.

At these most fundamental levels, our practical, emotional and moral lives are tied to patterns of quality in our world, patterns we can detect, enjoy, and act on. In describing where sortal quality is found in our world and in tracing how it threads through our practical, emotional and moral lives, I have not mentioned what some theorists have called intrinsic or simple goodness or what others have called absolute value. I have not said that certain things have a distinctive normative property, one not shared by even the most excellent knives and the most splendid dancers, a property that many think provides a deeper ground for our practical and

moral lives. Some will say that my picture leaves out the most important evaluative ideas of all. But I am not so sure.

It helps to separate talk of valuing from talk of goodness, and my view has plenty of room for valuing things. To value something is to care about it, to give it some priority in one's life and plans. Different people value different things to different degrees and caring doesn't always line up with quality. As we all know, it is more than a little grim what some people seem to care a lot about. Still, there are things a person ought to value and I think my view can help to explain this. As I see it, what a person ought to value follows from what it would be for them to excel in their roles and positions or, more significantly, as people. Teachers should generally care about their student's success, because an excellent teacher would. People should care about being good and about developing their virtues partly because it is so difficult to be good if one doesn't care. Valuing and caring fit squarely into my picture of a world rich in quality.

But I admit that there is no place in my picture for something's being simply or absolutely or intrinsically good. The idea of simple goodness—as I will call it—is central to standard accounts of both ethics and mind. Many consider it the fundamental moral notion, grounding our duties and obligations. Theorists differ over just which things are intrinsically good, but pleasure, well-being, knowledge, and achievement are on many lists. Some say that every rational being has intrinsic value or that our shared humanity does. According to these theorists, moral theory tells us to promote or respect what is simply good because it is simply good. The idea of simple goodness is also central to standard accounts of desire and practical reasoning. Many say that desire aims at simple goodness in something like the way belief aims at truth. Some consider desire to be a source of simple goodness while others say that desire is like

an appearance of it. The accounts I will offer of desire, pleasure and moral worth won't involve simple goodness.

For, to be frank, I find the idea of simple goodness hard to get a grip on. Fred Feldman, who used the phrase "intrinsic value" for it, once said that "friends of intrinsic value (and here I include myself) often lapse into poetry when they try to describe the object of their common interest. They speak in metaphor, analogy, and hyperboles." (Feldman 1998, 339) That rings true for me. It does not help that some of its most thoughtful champions, such as Moore, say that simple goodness is indefinable or, such as Wittgenstein, that it exists outside our world. It is not so much that I doubt that anything is simply good, but that I don't know what it would be for me to believe that something was simply good or that our world contained things of absolute value. I suspect that modern emotivists and expressivists about goodness are partly moved by a similar uncertainty. But proponents of these views are often equally suspicious of quality, assuming perhaps that a world without simple goodness must also lack sortal quality. I think that is a serious mistake. There can be healthy beavers, excellent watches, and splendid people even if nothing is simply good. Sortal quality is one thing; simple goodness, if there were such a thing, would be another.

Here is another personal remark. My attitude to the idea of simple goodness is like my attitude to the idea of God. I have never had religious faith and I find it hard to understand in part because I am not sure what it would be for me to have faith. I'm not sure what I'd have to add to my conception of the world, or what changes I'd have to make to it, to include God and my own faith in it. Likewise, I'm not sure how to add simple goodness to my conception of the world and of my place in it. But many philosophers I admire do believe in both God and simple goodness. So these personal remarks are meant to be just that, *personal*. They are not meant to carry

authority or suggest that I think I have decisive criticisms. They are merely meant to express my perspective and I acknowledge that, like any perspective, mine is surely both limited and limiting.

All the same, I think we don't need a notion of simple goodness (or of God) to understand our world or our place in it as moral beings. Our world is already rich with quality and this includes moral quality. That there is such a thing as being a good person seems to me as plain as that there is such things as being a healthy beaver, an excellent medical treatment, a good bit of evidence, or a mediocre toaster. It is not easy to say what it is to be a good person or why we should care about being good, but it also isn't easy to say what makes a beaver healthy or what makes a bit of evidence good or why anyone should care about these things. And I recognise that moral worth is special in important ways. It is distinctive both ontologically and epistemically and this helps to explain its special importance in our lives. I think that seeing how moral worth is continuous with sortal quality in other corners of our world can help us understand what makes it distinctive.

But my present point is that we can understand fundamental aspects of our practical, emotional, and moral lives without relying on a notion of simple goodness and without resorting to expressivism or emotivism about it. Most importantly, we can understand the idea of a good person as a special case of what I will be calling *sortal quality*. As I see it, sortal quality is the fundamental evaluative and moral notion. And our world is rich in it.

1.2 Plan for the Book

Here is a detailed summary of each chapter.

Chapter 2 describes what I mean by sortal quality. The label is new but the idea is not.[1] Others have called it 'attributive goodness', 'relative goodness', or 'goodness of a kind'. Sortal quality is what we have in mind when we say that something is a fine pen, a healthy root system, an excellent movie, or a good way to bake cookies. The word "quality" is meant to distinguish such properties from simple goodness and the word "sortal" is meant to mark how standards of quality are relative to specific sorts of things—pens, root systems, movies, ways of baking cookies. In each case, certain properties contribute to a thing's sortal quality. These quality-making properties are virtues relative to that sortal. Being well-paced and visually interesting are virtues in a movie because a movie that lacks those properties, and many do, is not as good a movie as it could be.

The fact that standards of quality are tied to specific sortals means that good swimmers and excellent bakers need not have any sortal quality in common. The word "good" as it appears

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[1] Moore (1905) does not discuss goodness of a kind as a distinctive variety of goodness. Ross (1930) and Wittgenstein (1927) recognise it but say it has nothing to do with morality. Hare (1952) offers a broadly 'prescriptivist' analysis of it. The best early systematic discussion of this variety of goodness is in (Urmson 1950) and (Thomson 2008) is the best recent one. Geach (1956) argues that there is no such property as simple goodness, an idea that seems to be in the background of Anscombe (1958). Geach and Anscombe suggested that morality could be grounded in the idea of a good human action, understood as a case of sortal quality, though they did not use this label. Important discussion of a good life are in von Wright (1963), (Foot 1961), (Rawls 1972), and (Foot 2001). See also (White 1975), (Wiggins 2009), (Rind & Tillinghast 2008), (Kraut 2011), (Blackman 2012), (Vogt 2017), (Wolfsdorf 2019) and (Theunissen 2020).

in “good pen” and “good movie” or “good person” does not denote a property shared by good pens, good movies and good people. Some say that to mark this linguistic point we should think of sortal quality as ‘attributive goodness’, but one recurring theme in this book is that we do best if we resist thinking of sortal quality as a form of goodness at all.

A thing’s quality is always a contingent matter. It can improve or degrade. There are ways to benefit a thing by improving or sustaining its quality, just as there are ways to harm it by degrading its quality. What is good or bad for a thing depends on the sort of thing it is and so is to be understood in terms of sortal quality. (2.2) What a thing needs also depends on what it would be to enhance or maintain its quality. What a thing must (or ought to) be, have or do depends on what it would it would take for it to be of high quality as a thing of its kind. (2.3)

Chapter 3 contrasts sortal quality with valuing and with simple goodness and responds to complaints that sortal quality is unfit to ground morality. Sortal quality is an ontological matter and is distinct from the psychological attitudes of valuing or caring about something. (3.1) The fact that something is of good quality does not entail that anyone values it or cares about it or gives it a central place in their life. It is a nasty business what some people care about. Still, there are things a person ought to care about and value. This depends on what roles and positions they have or should have and on what it is to be a good person. But it is important to distinguish a thing’s having a certain degree of quality from its being valued. Valuing is a psychological matter while sortal quality is not.

It is also important to distinguish a thing’s having a degree of quality from a thing’s being simply good. (3.2) Sortal quality and simple goodness as it is standardly conceived differ in several fundamental ways. Sortal quality is a matter of degree relative to a standard, but simple goodness would not be. Simple goodness is meant to be a property shared by all simply good

things whereas a good toaster and an excellent swimmer need have no sortal quality in common. A thing's simple goodness could be derivative, but its sortal quality cannot. Simple goodness is thought to be essential to at least some of the things that have it, but a thing's quality is never essential to it. Finally, the existence of sortal quality and our knowledge of it are no more mysterious than the existence and our knowledge of the things that have it while the existence of simple goodness and our knowledge of it seem deeply mysterious even to some of its ardent fans. To mark these ontological differences and to resist the mistake of conflating quality and goodness, I think it is best not to think of sortal quality as a form of goodness. We can then say, rather bluntly, that our world is rich in quality, including moral worth, even if it is empty of goodness.

It helps to see where the idea of sortal quality shows up in twentieth century moral theorising in the English tradition. (3.3) It usually does so under the labels 'relative goodness', 'goodness of a kind', or 'attributive goodness.' That century was dominated by debates over simple goodness, over which things have it, and over how it relates to what a person ought to do. The vast majority of theorists assumed that sortal quality is just a form of goodness. Proponents of simple goodness treated it as a lesser form, of at most side-interest to ethics, whereas those suspicious of simple goodness viewed it with equal suspicion. Even the fans of sortal quality, those who urged that it was the fundamental moral notion, failed to clearly distinguish it from simple goodness. (3.3) Somewhat surprisingly, Rawls (1971) gave the idea of sortal quality (though not under that label) a central place in his account of goodness as rationality and, more specifically, in his discussion of Kant's views about moral worth (Rawls 2000). Rawls' embrace of it, both early and late, is especially interesting since he is standardly and correctly viewed as prioritising the right over the good in morality. This prioritising is true of simple goodness, but

not of sortal quality. His interpretation of the Kantian ideal of a good person, understood as a case of sortal quality, figures prominently in my final chapter.

Those theorists who viewed sortal quality as a lesser form of goodness lodged several complaints against it. They said that it is descriptive and not properly evaluative or normative. They claimed that it is subjective and so unsuited to ground morality. And they charged that it lacks the 'moral magnetism' needed to motivate genuinely moral action and deliberation. I argue (3.3) that the first complaint illicitly runs together linguistic, epistemic and ontological matters. Describing is a linguistic matter while evaluating is an epistemic one and neither is ontological. And while sortal quality can be a subjective matter it is not invariably so. (3.4) Whether a beaver is in good health has nothing to do with us. I address the third complaint in chapters 4 and 5 where I discuss how sortal quality relates to pleasure and desire.

The main aim of chapters 2 and 3 is to make clear what sortal quality is and how it differs from valuing and from simple goodness. A central lesson is that the standard concerns that make philosophers suspicious of simple goodness simply get no grip on sortal quality. There is nothing incoherent in thinking that our world is rich in quality but free of simple goodness. The next two chapters explore links between sortal quality and our practical and emotional lives. The final chapter considers how the idea of a good person, understood as a case of sortal quality, is distinctive both epistemically and ontologically.

In Chapter 4, I argue that pleasure, along with other attitudes of assessment, is a cognitive response to sortal quality. I argue (4.1 and 4.2) that taking pleasure in something requires believing that it has a certain degree of quality. Pleasure, that is, requires an evaluative belief. Because this belief can be mistaken, some pleasure are false. Facts about pleasure can be reasons for action, and one can act on that knowledge. One can eat a cookie because it will taste

good. But the links here between facts about pleasure and reasons for action are subtle. That one thing will be more enjoyable than another can be a reason to choose it, but that one will be pleased afterwards is not.

Enjoying something is intimately related to the belief it requires. (4.3) An attractive idea is that enjoying is itself a form of knowing or believing. In paradigm cases, anyway, for one to know or believe of a sensation or activity one is engaged in that it is in an appropriate way good just is to be enjoying it. Interestingly, this extends to other attitudes of assessment including admiration and appreciation. As Gilbert Ryle said, in "this field, the partitions are down between the Faculties of Cognition, Conation, and Feeling." (1958, 385)

Taking pleasure in something, I argue, is not essentially tied to desire, and neither is acting on pleasure. (4.4) First, being pleased by something is not a form of desire, since being pleased entails believing that it obtains or is occurring but wanting it to obtain or occur does not. Second, one can be enjoying something without wanting it to continue or even to be occurring. Third, though imagining or anticipating enjoying something can itself be enjoyable, one can enjoy imagining or anticipating something without wanting to be imagining or anticipating it and without wanting the imagined or anticipated thing. Nor is there reason to insist that such imagining or anticipating is itself a form of desire. Finally, acting in the knowledge that something will be pleasant does not require wanting that pleasure. It is true that people generally seek out pleasure, but that is because facts about pleasure are reasons and people are rational, not because people have an independent desire for pleasure. This point is subtle but I think it is essential in an account of philosophical psychology.

In Chapter 5, I offer an account of desire or, as I prefer to call it, wanting. As I see it, what a thing wants depends on what is needed to maintain or improve its quality relative to a

sortal it falls under. Wanting involves failing to measure up to the standards of quality relative to some sortal, and so lacking something that would be beneficial in some way. (5.1) Without sortal quality there would be no wanting. An example might help. People need protein to maintain good health and so those who are not getting enough lack something that it would benefit them to have. It would benefit them by improving or sustaining the quality of their health. If they lack protein, then because they need protein to be in good health, they want some. That pattern—lacking something needed to maintain or improve quality—is all there is to wanting. Wanting, on this conception, is not a distinctively psychological matter. Even beings without minds can have wants.

But in people, wanting has important connections with knowledge and choice. A person can know that they want something and they can act on that knowledge. They can know what it would take to improve their health, wealth, or mood, and what they need to do their jobs well, to enjoy their hobbies, to enhance their children's lives, and to plan for their retirements. Such knowledge is always under the guise of sortal quality. A person can act on that knowledge and when they do those facts about sortal quality can rationalise their action. But acting on a want is no different from acting on any other fact and, this point is crucial, a person's mistaken beliefs about what they want are just as important in understanding, predicting and rationalising their actions. What a person mistakenly thinks they want often matters more for understanding them than what they do want. (5.2)

This account of wanting contrasts with standard ones in several fundamental ways. On standard accounts, wanting is a mental or psychological state that plays a causal role in generating rational action. I deny both elements. Wanting lacks the standard marks of the mental. It is not a representational or intentional state, it has no characteristic phenomenology, and it is

not the right sort of thing to be a cause. I also deny that desire has any inherent tie to simple goodness. It is not an appearance of the good and simple goodness is not its form. Wanting is tied to sortal quality, not to simple goodness.

My account of wanting fits neatly into the account of belief that I developed in earlier work (Hunter 2022). I argued that belief is not a representational state and that it plays no causal role in generating rational action. To believe something, I argued, is to be in position to act in light of a possibility whose obtaining would make one right. My slogan was that believing is being in a certain position in a world of possibilities, ready to act in light of how things are or might have been. In more recent work (forthcoming) I argue that we shouldn't think of believing as a response to the world, but rather as a matter of having a world to respond to. In this way it differs fundamentally from hoping, fearing, intending and the other attitudes that are responses to how things are (or how we take things to be). To extend this slogan, I think of wanting as being located in a space of sortal quality, lacking something that would sustain or improve one's quality. Knowing that one wants something and mistakenly believing that one does are psychological matters, but wanting is not. It is a matter of failing to be as good as one can be.

I acknowledge that my account is unorthodox. To many it will sound like I am denying that anyone really has desires. But in my defense, our ordinary and philosophical talk about wanting and desire covers a wide range of ontological categories. Short-lived occurrent feelings and urges have been called desires, and so have non-occurrent long-lasting states. Even processes and activities have been treated as desires. It is hard to find unity in such diversity. Some regimentation seems to me inevitable in an account of wanting. Regimentation can be justified if it is transparent and if it yields insight. I believe that my account of wanting is clear and that it helps us to better understand its links with sortal quality and its role in rational action.

I end the chapter by addressing what I suspect many will feel are obvious counterexamples to my view. (5.3)

The book ends by discussing the idea of a good person, understood as a case of sortal quality. I don't offer an account of what it is to be a good person, of moral worth. My focus is on ontological and epistemic matters and on their links. Like all standards of quality, those for being a good person are universal. They apply to all people. When we assess someone's quality as a person we invariably take that standard to apply to everyone, including to ourselves. We can't coherently think that there is a special standard of quality just for us. There is such a thing as my being a good person, but no such thing as my being a good me.

But unlike some other standards of quality, those for being a good person are not contingent. The standards of quality for toasters depend on the nature of bread and so could change if that nature changes. The standards for being a healthy beaver depend on environmental factors and so could change if those factors change. The same is true of the standards for being a healthy person. But the standards of quality for a person do not depend in this way on other things. They don't depend on changeable features of our world or our physical natures. In assessing someone's quality as a person we employ a standard we can recognise and whose universality we must acknowledge without having to discover what our world happens to be like. This makes our knowledge of being a good person, as a case of sortal quality, unique and special. (6.1)

These ideas about moral worth are inspired by Rawls (1971). I take a brief side-trip to consider how what I am calling sortal quality fits into his conception of morality. (6.2) It is true that he saw no role in ethical theorising for the idea of simple or intrinsic goodness. But he offers a rich (though often overlooked) account of the ontology and epistemology of sortal quality, and

he says that the idea of a good person is continuous with that of a good knife or a good root system. Tracing how Rawls' ideas about sortal quality, present in his earliest writings and in his later interpretation of Kant, fit alongside his broadly Kantian and Constructivist ones is a huge project for another day. My main aim is just to point to this underappreciated part of his moral theory.

I end by considering three questions thar arise when one thinks of moral worth as a case of sortal quality. One is whether there is anything good in a person's being good. (6.3) Because I don't think anything is simply good, I don't think that there is anything simply good or intrinsically valuable about being a good person, any more than there is about being a good swimmer or a healthy beaver. Being generous and just can be good for other people. It can benefit them by sustaining or improving their wellbeing. But being a good person is no guarantee of wellbeing. It is not even a requirement. Good people can lead miserable lives and terrible people can be happy and comfortable. The idea that being a good person is itself a way of thriving, and so might be a good thing in itself, seems to me a prime example of Feldman's hyperbole about simple goodness.

But then, and this the second question, why should one care about being good? If there is nothing simply good about moral worth, and if being good might only benefit other people, then why give it a central place in one's life? It is after all possible not to care about it. Some people don't or anyway don't care enough. But I think one should care, one should make being a good person a priority in one's life. The reason, though, may seem a little uninspiring. One ought to care about being a good person just because one is unlikely to *be* good unless one does care about it. It is not that the standards for being good are hard to know. It is that it is hard to measure up if one doesn't try. A person ought to care about their moral worth because caring is

needed for having some. And this requirement to care about one's moral worth is a moral one, since it is a requirement on being a good person. This is so even if there is nothing intrinsically good about excellent moral worth.

My final question is this: *should* one be a good person? This is different from the second question. One ought to *care* about being good, I think, because caring is needed for being good. The requirement to care comes from what it is to be a good person. But where would a requirement to be a good person come from? If one thought that being a good person was itself simply good or that it somehow produced simple goodness, then one might think that the requirement to be a good person could flow from a requirement to promote simple goodness. But I don't think anything is simply good. And I don't think that a person *ought* to be good, at least not in the sense that there is a moral requirement on them to be good. This, I argue, is just a logical point about the nature of sortal quality.

As I see it, a person ought to be good relative to a given sortal if, but only if, it is a sortal they ought to fall under. If a person ought to be, say, a teacher, then plausibly he ought to be a good one. The requirement that he be a good teacher would then flow from the requirement that he *be* a teacher. If being a good teacher itself requires being a good person, then a requirement that he be a good person would also flow from the requirement that he be a teacher. He ought to be a good person for the sake of being a good teacher. But should he be a good person, for its own sake? That would make sense if he were required to be a *person*. But how could that be? A knife ought to keep a sharp edge because that is needed to be a good knife. But ought a knife be a good knife? Only if it ought to be a knife. But how could that be? Likewise, it seems to me, a moral theory might tell us that we ought to be generous and just because those are virtues in a

person, and it might say that we ought to care about being morally good because that too is a virtue in a person, but it might not say that we *ought* to be good people. Or so I will suggest.

The final section of the last chapter tackles the epistemology of moral worth. Following an idea in Diamond (1978), I suggest that we figure out what it is to be a good person, not through empirical investigation or via a special form of intuition, but through what might be called contemplation or reflection. In general, getting clear on what it is to be a good thing of some kind is not separable from getting clear on what it is to be a thing of that kind. The standards are, in this epistemic sense, internal. It is an empirical matter what it is to be a healthy human being, because it is an empirical matter what it is to be a human being. We need to study our own biological natures. But it is not an empirical matter what it is to be a good person, for it is not an empirical matter (it seems to me) what it is to be a person. It is to be a being who can reflect on how well they measure up as a being who can reflect on how well they measure up. This familiar idea is a broadly Kantian one and we can see it in Existentialist thinkers. But I find a more sober version of it in Rawls' work and his views inform my final chapter.

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