

NORMATIVE PERFECTIONISM AND THE KANTIAN TRADITION¹

There is a perfectionist tradition that includes Aristotle, J.S. Mill, and T.H. Green that is committed to a form of *normative* perfectionism, because it grounds perfectionist ideals in a normative conception of human nature as involving *personality* or *agency*. It is worth considering the prospects of normative perfectionism for addressing concerns about perfectionism that we encounter in the Kantian tradition. Kant makes two kinds of criticism of perfectionism that deserve our attention. First, there is his worry, especially in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, that the perfectionist and eudaimonist traditions must be heteronomous and cannot express requirements of practical reason. Grounding moral requirements in perfectionist ideals, Kant claims, generates *hypothetical, rather than categorical, imperatives*. Second, there is Kant's claim in the *Metaphysics of Morals* that we must accept a *moral asymmetry* in which we aim at our own perfection but at the happiness, rather than the perfection, of others. In defense of this asymmetry, he argues that perfecting another subverts the other's status as a rational agent.

I want to explore the historical and systematic resources of normative perfectionism to address these worries. First, insofar as the normative perfectionist grounds perfectionist ideals in the normative category of personality or agency, rather than a biological category of humanity, it can represent perfectionist demands as categorical imperatives. This is clearest in Green, who self-consciously tries to synthesize Greek and Kantian ethical traditions. Second, the importance of autonomy in normative perfection explains why there are special constraints on how we can promote the perfection of another. This perfectionist recognition of Kantian concerns is nicely illustrated in Green's particular brand of liberalism and in Mill's defense of autonomy and skepticism about paternalism.

Seeing how normative perfectionism can answer these Kantian worries by appeal to moral personality paves the way for seeing perfectionist strands in Kant's own ethical theory. Despite his doubts about other forms of perfectionism, Kant appeals to moral personality as both *ground* and *content* of moral requirements, which is reflected in the Universality and Humanity formulations of the Categorical Imperative.

However, because the normative perfectionist, like Kant, grounds moral requirements in rational nature, she too must face the worry that Kantians face about the *incompleteness* of the appeal to rational nature. Hegelians and others have complained that Kant's appeal to rational nature to ground moral requirements is formal and empty. Likewise, if we conceive of moral personality, as the normative perfectionists do, in terms of reasons-responsiveness, we may worry that the perfectionist appeal to rational nature must be incomplete and requires supplementation with a list of objective goods or reasons that can guide rational choice. A radical version of the incompleteness worry treats the appeal to rational nature as empty and without content. By contrast, a moderate version of the incompleteness worry grants that the appeal to rational nature has content but insists that it provides incomplete ethical guidance unless supplemented by a list of

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non-perfectionist goods or reasons. However, the appeal to rational nature has content, which means that it is the moderate version of the incompleteness worry that we need to take seriously. I explore more and less concessive perfectionist replies that assign perfectionist elements smaller and larger roles within the personal good. Though I am sympathetic with the less concessive position staked out by pure perfectionist theories, even the more concessive replies by mixed theories of the good assign perfectionist ideals an important role.

My interest in the intersection of a normative perfectionist tradition that includes Aristotle, Mill, and Green with the Kantian tradition involves many moving parts and makes it difficult to provide completely self-contained discussions of each part. This sort of comparative study may seem especially difficult in light of the complexity of the parts involved. Even if the perfectionist reading of Aristotle is reasonably familiar, a perfectionist reading of Mill is heterodox, and Green's ethics of self-realization is not widely understood. Given the complexity of Kant's own ethical theory, such a comparative study may seem misguided. To study the intersection of the perfectionist and Kantian traditions, I will need to presuppose some familiarity with figures in the two traditions and present somewhat schematic versions of the essentials of their views. However, I hope that I won't over-simplify relevant details and that the value of comparing the two traditions will compensate for the need to be selective in my coverage of each. The proof will have to be in the pudding.

1. THE ESSENTIALS OF NORMATIVE PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionist theories understand the fundamental ethical demand to be the realization and perfection of one's nature. In this way, perfectionism rests on claims about human nature. Different perfectionist theories understand human nature and its perfection somewhat differently.

It is common to understand claims about human nature as involving a *biological kind* — human being. Aristotle defends a conception of eudaimonia or happiness that is a form of perfectionism by appeal to claims about the human function, and many believe that he understands the human function in biological terms. Thomas Hurka is a contemporary perfectionist who understands the perfectionist appeal to human nature as an appeal to a biological essence for human beings, grounding perfectionist goods such as knowledge, creativity, achievement, and athleticism in our biological essence.² However, grounding perfectionist ideals in a biological conception of human nature is problematic in at least two ways.

First, on familiar conceptions of species membership there simply is no substantive human essence.³ For instance, a common conception of species membership is reproductive closure or the capacity to interbreed. But the organisms linked by reproductive closure do not pick out a particular set of phenotypic traits or capacities as essential to human beings. Alternatively, species membership is sometimes understood in terms of common lineage with members of the same species all being organisms with a common ancestor who are sufficiently similar genetically. But common lineage does not pick out a particular set of phenotypic traits or capacities as essential to human beings.

Second, neither conception of *Homo sapiens* is likely to pick out all and only the capacities that we think of as distinctly valuable or normative. Admirable traits such as rationality, creativity, sociality will not be possessed to a high degree by all human beings on reproductive closure or common lineage conceptions of our species.

² Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), esp. chs. 2-4.

³ See Philip Kitcher, "Essence and Perfection" *Ethics* 110 (1999): 59-83. Whereas Kitcher takes skepticism about a substantive biological essence to raise doubts about perfectionism, I take it to motivate a form of perfectionism grounded in a normative, rather than a biological, conception of human nature.

Biological conceptions of human nature might eschew appeal to a substantive conception of species membership and instead appeal to characteristic activities of the species.⁴ However, the challenge is to identify valuable traits that have a biological basis. There are many traits characteristic of humanity, such as deviousness, cruelty, and *schadenfreude*, which do not seem normatively significant. To avoid this problem, we might appeal instead to valuable or attractive human traits, such as cooperation, creativity, and friendship. But without some biological ground for selecting these traits, the resulting theory does not involve a biological conception of human nature, and the appeal to human nature seems to do no explanatory work.⁵

An obvious possibility is to appeal to characteristic capacities and activities of the species that are the product of natural selection. Compliance with familiar other-regarding norms of cooperation, honesty, fidelity, fair play, and non-aggression is mutually beneficial, and so there is some case for thinking that these cooperative virtues might have been selected for genetically or culturally. But there are many traits that we have because they conferred selective advantage on our ancestors in hunter-gatherer tribes that it would be problematic to regard as good for us now or as providing us with reasons for action. There is some evidence that automatic affective discriminatory attitudes toward outsiders have a heritable basis in the amygdala and prefrontal cortex and likely proved to be adaptive traits for our ancestors who lived in small homogeneous tribal communities.⁶ But the biological basis of racism and xenophobia does not provide a normative ground for those traits. A history of selective advantage seems neither necessary nor sufficient for normative significance. If we insist on understanding human nature as a biological kind, the foundations of perfectionism appear problematic.

A more promising way to ground perfectionist ideals is by appeal to human nature understood as a *normative kind*, rather than as a biological kind. On this kind of view, perfectionist ideals are relative, not to our nature as human beings, but to our nature as *persons* or *agents*. Aristotle, Mill, and Green, I believe, are all normative perfectionists.⁷ Space constraints preclude reconstructions of the details of their ethical theories, but we can highlight some relevant aspects of their versions of normative perfectionism that bear on the articulation and defense of normative perfectionist essentials.

Aristotle. In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle identifies the final good with eudaimonia or happiness and recognizes three main formal constraints on eudaimonia — that it be complete, that it must be suitable for the sort of beings we are, and that it must be comparatively stable and within our control.⁸ He develops the suitability constraint by appeal to the human function (I 7). The function argument draws on the taxonomy of characteristic activities and souls in *De Anima*, but that taxonomy is functional in character and so is grounded in philosophical and moral psychology, not biology. There, Aristotle conceives of us as rational animals with normative capacities to regulate our passions and actions in accordance with practical reason. These constraints support a comprehensive conception of eudaimonia in which virtue, conceived of as a

⁴ For one example of this approach, see Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

⁵ Also see Dale Dorsey, “Three Arguments for Perfectionism” *Noûs* 44 (2010), pp. 64-68.

⁶ See, e.g., L.M. Brown, M.M. Bradley, and P.J. Lang, “Affective Reactions to Pictures of Ingroup and Outgroup Members” *Biological Psychology* 71 (2006): 303-11; M. Forgiarini, M. Galluci, and A. Maravita, “Racism and the Empathy for Pain on our Skin” *Frontiers in Psychology* 2 (2011): 1-7; and M.M. McDonald, C.D. Navarette, and M. Van Vugt, “Evolution and the Psychology of Intergroup Conflict: The Male Warrior Hypothesis” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 367 (2012): 670-79. For evidence of the malleability of stereotyping and prejudicial affect, see I.V. Blair, “The Malleability of Automatic Stereotypes and Prejudice” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6 (2002): 242-61.

⁷ Also see David O. Brink, “The Significance of Desire” *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 3 (2008): 5-45.

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trs. T. Irwin, 2d ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999). I also draw selectively on the *Eudemian Ethics* and *Magna Moralia* in *The Revised Oxford Translation of the Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols., ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

life in which the passions and desires are regulated by the rational part of the soul, is the dominant component. The virtues are regulated by the common good, which we can see clearly in the case of general justice, which involves complete virtue in relation to another (*NE* 1129b15-30). We can begin to see how the common good contributes to the agent's own eudaimonia by reconstructing the relationship between justice and friendship and the way in which friendship completes and perfects a rational being with finite capacities (this is the importance of *NE* VIII-IX). Though virtue is the controlling element in an agent's happiness, such that it is always best to choose virtue, whatever its opportunity costs, a complete good nonetheless includes fortuitous goods (externals) and pleasure, which explains why virtue is not sufficient for happiness.⁹

*Mill.*¹⁰ As a utilitarian, Mill embraces a teleological ethical theory in which the fundamental demand is to promote happiness impartially. In *On Liberty* he defends individual rights to basic liberties, but he tells us that these individual rights have a utilitarian foundation based on "utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being" (*OL* I 11). This progressive conception of happiness is reflected in *Utilitarianism's* distinction between higher and lower pleasures, the dignity passage in which Mill explains the preference of competent judges for higher pleasures by appeal to their sense of dignity (II 6), and in *On Liberty's* defense of individual autonomy and experimentation in lifestyle as necessary and important aspects of self-development. This is a progressive conception of human nature and happiness, because it depends on our capacities for self-government that Mill says are requisite for our being responsible and, hence, moral agents (*A System of Logic* VI.ii.3). This perfectionist conception of happiness shapes a great deal of what is distinctive in Mill's contributions to the utilitarian and liberal traditions.¹¹

Green. Green is the least familiar member of this troika. In the *Prolegomena to Ethics* he aims to synthesize the best elements in ancient and modern ethical traditions, in particular, Aristotelian and Kantian claims.¹² He criticizes hedonist conceptions of desire, the will, and the good. Following Butler and Kant, he argues that agents have capacities for practical reason that allow them to distinguish between the intensity and authority of desire, to deliberate about their ends, and to regulate their actions according to superior principles. In doing so, he explicitly criticizes Kant's appeal to transcendental freedom and defends a compatibilist understanding of the will. Like the Aristotelians, Green understands acting on superior principles in terms of acting on a conception of one's own overall good and interprets the agent's own good in terms of self-realization. The demand for self-realization is appropriate given our nature as persons or agents. Because this demand is grounded in features of moral personality or agency, Green regards its dictates as categorical, rather than hypothetical, imperatives. Proper self-realization requires a constitutive concern for others that should be genuinely cosmopolitan in character, involving respect for all other rational agents. Hence, Green accepts Kant's Humanity Formula of the Categorical Imperative, but he understands these moral demands as grounded in self-realization.¹³

In all three cases, but most clearly in Green, perfectionist ideals are grounded in a conception of *moral personality*, understood in Butlerian terms as the capacity to distinguish

⁹ Hence, I assume a comprehensive conception of eudaimonia best captures the first nine books of the *NE*, even if *NE* X introduces an alternative strict intellectual conception.

¹⁰ The definitive edition of Mill's writings is *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 volumes, ed. J. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965-91). To facilitate common reference among readers using different editions of his texts, I mostly refer to those works using natural divisions in his texts, such as chapter, section, and/or paragraph. Otherwise, I will refer to Mill's works using pagination in his *Collected Works*.

¹¹ See David O. Brink, *Mill's Progressive Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013).

¹² T.H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, ed. D. Brink (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

¹³ I reconstruct and assess some main elements of Green's perfectionism in David O. Brink, *Perfectionism and the Common Good: Themes in the Philosophy of T.H. Green* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

between the *power* and *authority* of passion and desire (*Sermons* II 14).¹⁴ This involves capacities to distinguish oneself from one's desires, frame the question of what one ought to do, deliberate about the merits of alternatives, and regulate one's actions in accord with one's deliberations. Moral personality, on this view, involves a form of *reasons-responsiveness*.

Interestingly, Green thinks that moral personality or agency involves just one form of reasons-responsiveness. He thinks that we are rational agents engaged in both thought and action. Rational agency requires moral responsibility, which requires one form of reasons-responsiveness. But rational agency also requires epistemic responsibility, which requires a distinct but parallel form of reasons-responsiveness (*PE* §§84, 120, 125).¹⁵ To be epistemically responsible, one must be self-conscious and able to distinguish appearance and fact, reason about the credentials of one's appearances, and regulate one's beliefs and epistemic behavior in accordance with this reasoning. Epistemic and moral responsibility are both parts of agency or personality, and so a unified conception of agency requires both forms of reasons-responsiveness.

A plausible ethical conception should accommodate most of our considered judgments about what sorts of actions and lives are good or bad and right or wrong or, failing that, provide us with principled reasons for revising our considered judgments. But a plausible ethical conception also owes us an account of its *normative authority*. Why should we care about conforming to its requirements? That question is not easy to answer, and many familiar conceptions do not address that question or have unsatisfying answers. For instance, it is not clear why we should care about pleasure as such. Equally, it is not clear why we should care about conforming to demands grounded in traits that have been selected for in very different environments that our ancestors inhabited. Normative perfectionism has a more promising answer to questions about its normative authority. By grounding perfectionist ideals in a normative conception of human nature as persons or agents, normative perfectionism explains why we should care about the realization of perfectionist ideals by appealing to the very capacities that make us reasons-responsive rational agents in the first place. If there are lives that exercise those rational capacities that make us responsible agents, subject to reasons for action, then we have reason to care about and pursue those kinds of lives.¹⁶

There are many different ways of developing the essentials of normative perfectionism. In effect, there are difference choice points in the architecture of normative perfectionism. Two such choice points deserve brief discussion.

First, perfectionism might be understood as a claim about the good, whether relational or absolute, or as a claim about practical reason. It might also be understood as both if we accept a broadly teleological conception of practical reason. This seems to be a point of normative architecture on which Aristotle, Mill, and Green all agree. They offer perfectionist conceptions of the personal good that informs their conceptions of practical reason.

Second, perfectionism might be understood in agent-relative or in agent-neutral terms. Aristotle and Green are perfectionist eudaimonists, who understand the fundamental perfectionist

¹⁴ Bishop Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel and A Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue*, ed. W.R. Matthews (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1953), references by chapter/sermon and paragraph number.

¹⁵ This reverses Green's actual order of exposition, since he introduces the role of self-consciousness in epistemic responsibility at the end of Book I (§84; cf. §§120, 125), which sets the stage for his introduction of self-consciousness in moral responsibility in Book II (§§85-86, 92, 96, 103, 107, 220).

¹⁶ Some writers doubt that we can derive normative demands from the conditions that are constitutive of agency, because it is always open to rational agents not to care about the demands of agency. See, e.g., David Enoch, "Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come from What is Constitutive of Agency" *Philosophical Review* 115 (2006): 169-98. But it is rational to care about what rationality consists in, and there is something self-defeating about the agent who asks for a reason why she should conform to the demands of rational agency. There is a legitimate question about whether agency imposes any demands, which I address below (§5), but not about whether there is reason to care about the demands it does impose.

demand to be for the agent to promote her own good. By contrast, Mill is a perfectionist utilitarian, who understands the fundamental perfectionist demand to be for the agent to promote the general happiness, understood in terms of the nature of progressive beings. This is an important difference in normative architecture. But it may turn out to be substantively less important than first appears if the eudaimonist recognizes the common good as a constitutive commitment of self-realization, as both Aristotle and Green do, and the utilitarian recognizes the importance of various forms of partiality in the promotion of human perfection, as Mill does.

2. ARE PERFECTIONIST IDEALS REQUIREMENTS OF REASON?

Given this brief summary of the essentials of normative perfectionism, we are in a position to explore how, if at all, that doctrine can respond to worries about perfectionism that we encounter in the Kantian ethical tradition.¹⁷ We might begin with some of Kant's doubts about the viability of a perfectionist ethics. Famously, Kant thinks that all previous moral philosophies are heteronomous insofar as they base morality on human nature, sentiment, inclination, interest, or perfection (*G* 4: 432-33, 442-44; *KpV* 5: 20-28, 35-36, 40-41, 111-12). Though he does sometimes distinguish happiness and perfection as ends (*G* 4: 442-43; *KpV* 5: 40-41), it is significant that his criticism treats them together, and, of course, some of his actual and potential eudaimonist targets provide perfectionist conceptions of happiness. Indeed, as long as the eudaimonist appeals to a conception of the agent's happiness that identifies it in whole or significant part with the exercise of her rational nature, eudaimonists will be normative perfectionists.

Kant's discussion of eudaimonism focuses on the Epicureans and Stoics, curiously omitting discussion of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. He is critical of eudaimonist theories for identifying virtue and happiness and consequently treating morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives (*G* 4: 425, 441-45; *KpV* 5: 20-28, 35-36, 111-12). Insofar as perfectionists base morality on a conception of a person's good or happiness, as Aristotle, Mill, and Green do, in different ways, these perfectionist theories should also be guilty of conceiving morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives.

Kant conceives of happiness as consisting in the pleasure attendant to the satisfaction of desire, and this influences his view about empirical motivation, which he regards as prudential and, ultimately hedonistic, insofar as inclination aims at happiness (*KpV* 5: 21-23).¹⁸ This helps explain his concerns about both Epicureanism and Stoicism. Kant thinks that both the Epicureans and Stoics identify virtue and happiness, but that they recognize different explanatory asymmetries between these concepts. He regards the Epicureans as explaining virtue in terms of happiness, hedonistically conceived. So, he correctly understands them as defending virtue as having only instrumental value and treating moral requirements as hypothetical imperatives. By contrast, he understands the Stoics as explaining happiness in terms of virtue, which he regards as an

¹⁷ My discussion of the Kantian ethical tradition draws primarily on Kant's three main ethical works: *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* [*G*], *Critique of Practical Reason* [*KpV*], and *Metaphysics of Morals* [*M*]. I refer to these works using Prussian Academy pagination in the translations by M. Gregor in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). However, I also draw, more selectively, on Kant's lectures on ethics (Collins and Mrongovius) in Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* [*Lectures*], trs. P. Heath (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) (Prussian Academy pagination); Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, [*R*] trs. A. Wood and D. Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) (Prussian Academy pagination); and Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* [*History*], trs. L.W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963).

¹⁸ For an attempt to interpret Kant's conception of happiness non-hedonistically, see Andrews Reath, "Hedonism, Heteronomy, and Kant's Principle of Happiness" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 70 (1989): 42-72. Reath reads Kant as understanding happiness in terms of the satisfaction of desire, but I don't think that this does justice to Kant's insistence that desire aims at pleasure. In any case, the resolution of this debate would not much affect the merits of Kant's own conception of happiness or his understanding of Greek conceptions.

improvement on the Epicurean view (5: 111-12). However, he understands the Stoics as identifying happiness with the pleasurable consciousness of virtuous action, and so he thinks that the Stoics still mistakenly identify rational and empirical concepts.

Even if Kant's understanding of Epicurean ethics is largely correct, his understanding of Stoic ethics is badly mistaken. The Stoics identify happiness with virtue, understood as the expression of our rational nature (DL vii 84-89; De Fin iii 11, 20-21, 26-28).¹⁹ In identifying virtue and happiness, they insist that virtue is sufficient for happiness and deny that fortunate outcomes and circumstances are genuine goods, treating them as preferred indifferents (DL vii 102-08; De Fin iii 53-54, iv 20, 69). While the Stoics may believe that the virtuous person will experience pleasure in the course of practicing virtue, this is a by-product of virtue and not to be confused with it (DL vii 86; De Fin iii 17). The Stoics identify happiness with virtue, conceived as a life realizing one's rational nature, not with pleasurable consciousness of one's virtue. It is Kant's own hedonistic conception of happiness that leads him to misunderstand Stoic happiness.

One might respond to Kant's criticisms of a morality of happiness and, hence, to perfectionist conceptions of happiness by rejecting his assumptions about empirical motivation. First, not all non-moral motivation aims at the agent's own happiness or pleasure. Sympathy and benevolence aim at the happiness of others, and even the miser values money and the vainglorious person values honor out of proportion to the happiness or pleasure it brings him. Second, even if agents will be pleased when their desires are satisfied and expect to be pleased in this way, it doesn't follow that their actions aim at producing this pleasure. As Butler observed, pleasure in the satisfaction of one's desires is consequential on the prior desire whose object itself is (typically) not pleasure (*Sermons XI* 6).

Moreover, Kant is wrong to think that all conceptions of happiness are hedonistic. Though the Epicureans were hedonists about happiness, the Stoics were not. Plato and Aristotle, whom he does not discuss, also reject hedonism. Unlike the Stoics, they do not identify happiness and virtue, denying that virtue is sufficient for happiness, because they recognize the value of externals. However, like the Stoics, they regard virtue as the controlling element of happiness, such that one is always better off choosing virtue, whatever its opportunity costs (*Rep II*, esp. 357b-367e; *NE I.7-I.13*). Also, like the Stoics, they think that virtue normally affords pleasure, so that pleasure is a typical by-product of virtue (*Philebus* 63e3-6, *Laws* 662b1-663d5, 734b8-e1; *NE* 1153b15-18, 1174b20-33, 1176a16-19). This means that Kant's criticisms of perfectionist eudaimonism rest on a mistaken understanding of their conceptions of happiness, reflecting Kant's own hedonistic conception of happiness.²⁰

Though eudaimonists can be perfectionists, Kant distinguishes perfectionism and eudaimonism, associating perfectionism with Leibniz and Wolff (*G* 4: 442-43; *KpV* 5: 40-41). When he distinguishes them, he suggests that perfectionism involves a lesser mistake than eudaimonism, but a mistake nonetheless (5: 40-41). Kant claims that an agent's rational perfection cannot generate categorical imperatives. His exact complaint about perfection is unclear, but he seems to think that morality cannot be founded on any independent material principle without rendering morality heteronomous. It is not that nonmoral motivation is contingent that renders it unsuitable for categorical imperatives. Kant thinks that the desire for happiness is necessary, yet it yields at

¹⁹ Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2 vols., R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Loeb, 1925) and Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, trs. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Loeb, 1914). For useful comparisons of Aristotelian and Stoic conceptions of happiness, see Terence Irwin, "Stoic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Happiness" in *The Norms of Nature*, ed. M. Schofield and G. Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

²⁰ Also see Terence Irwin, "Kant's Criticisms of Eudaemonism" in *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics*, ed. S. Engstrom and J. Whiting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

most hypothetical (assertoric) imperatives (4: 415-16). The worry seems to be about making morality conditional on an ideal that is external to rational agency itself.

Kant may see the perfectionisms of Leibniz and Wolff as making morality depend on an objectionable material principle, because of the role they give to pleasure. For instance, Leibniz recognizes the end as happiness, which he treats as enduring joy or pleasure.

In morals I set up our *happiness* [*felicitas*] as an end; this I define as a state of enduring joy [*laetitia*]. Joy I define as an extraordinary predominance of pleasure [*voluptas*]²¹

However, the context of this passage suggests the more Stoic conception of happiness in which pleasure is understood as *consequential* on and a *by-product* of the perfection of one's rational nature. After identifying perfection with a kind of harmony, Leibniz claims that from this "sense of harmony, that is, observation of agreement [*consensus*] might bring forth pleasure." And after the apparent commitment to hedonism (quoted above), he insists that "pleasure is the sensation of perfection." Elsewhere, Leibniz makes a similar perfectionist claim about pleasure, claiming that "pleasure is nothing other than the feeling of an increase in perfection."²² On this reading, pleasure is consequential on virtue, understood as the expression of one's rational nature, not the ground of it.

Wolff is even clearer that happiness, which he understands in terms of pleasure, is consequential on the highest good, which he understands to consist in perfection.

[T]he highest good of man or his blessedness is rightly explained as an unhindered progress to greater perfections. ... He who progresses unhampered from one perfection to another and avoids imperfection, and is aware of this, has an intuitive awareness of perfection. Intuitive knowledge of perfection affords pleasure or enjoyment; so he has continuous pleasure. So the highest good or blessedness of man is connected with happiness.²³

Because Wolff regards perfection as an expression of one's rational nature, pleasure is a correlate or by-product, rather than ground, of duty and the highest good.

Because Leibniz and Wolff treat pleasure as consequential on the perception of perfection and, hence, as a by-product, rather than ground of duty, the importance they attach to pleasure should not render their views heteronomous. However, Kant may think that it is their form of perfectionism, rather than any apparent commitment to hedonism, that renders their views heteronomous. For he sees them as perfectionists who conceive of perfectionism as a metaphysical principle concerned with unity and harmony in nature that determines the content of the rational will (*Lectures Mrongovius* 29: 622). He regards this as making the rational will dependent on something other than itself, which results in heteronomy. Only *moral perfection* — understood as the full realization of one's capacities in rational willing — can serve as the ground of duty (*Lectures Collins* 27: 265-66, 470).

Assessing this complaint would require exploration of the perfectionisms of Leibniz and Wolff with an eye to whether they are normative perfectionists in the relevant sense, which is beyond the scope of this essay. But the normative perfectionist, who bases morality on the very capacities for reasons-responsiveness that make us agents, has a ready reply to Kant's worry.

²¹ Leibniz's letter to Wolff of 18 May 1715 in Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

²² "Aphorisms Concerning Happiness, Wisdom, Charity, and Justice" *Leibniz on God and Religion*, ed. L. Strickland (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 138.

²³ Christian Wolff, *Reasonable Thoughts about the Actions of Men, for the Promotion of their Happiness in Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant*, ed., J. Schneewind (Cambridge University Press, 1990), vol. I, p. 338.

Because Green sees himself as preserving what is defensible in Kantian ethics and reconciling it with Greek eudaimonism, it is no surprise that he is clearest about how the perfectionist can recognize categorical imperatives.

At the same time, because it [self-realization] is the fulfilment of himself [as an agent], of that which he has in him to be, it will excite an interest in him like no other interest, different in kind from any of his desires and aversions except such as are derived from it. It will be an interest as in an object conceived to be of unconditional value; one of which the value does not depend on any desire that the individual may at any time feel for it or for anything else, or on any pleasure that ... he may experience [T]he desire for the object will be founded on a conception of its desirableness as the fulfilment of the capabilities of which a man is conscious in being conscious of himself [Self-realization] will express itself in [the] imposition ... of rules requiring something to be done irrespectively of any inclination to do it, irrespectively of any desired end to which it is a means, *other than this end, which is desired because conceived as absolutely desirable* [PE §193].

Because the demands of self-realization depend only on those very normative capacities that make one an agent, they are categorical imperatives.

We might consider how Green's conception of normative perfectionism can respond to a dilemma that Kant poses for the perfectionist in the Preface to the first edition of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.²⁴ After rejecting attempts to ground duty in a hedonistic version of self-love, Kant considers two alternative grounds.

But then there are only two determining grounds left: one that is rational, namely one's own *perfection*; and another that is empirical, the *happiness* of others. Now, if by the first they do not already understand moral perfection, which can only be one thing (namely a will unconditionally obedient to the law), in which case they would however be defining in a circle, then they must mean the human being's natural perfection inasmuch as it is capable of enhancement; and of this perfection there can be many aspects (such as skill in the arts and sciences, taste, physical agility, etc.). But these are always only conditionally good, that is, good only on condition that their use does not conflict with the moral law (which alone commands unconditionally); hence natural perfection cannot be, when made into an end, the principle of the concepts of duty [6: 4n].

If perfection is understood as moral perfection, then grounding duty in perfection is circular. If perfection is understood as natural perfection, then grounding duty in perfection is heteronomous, because natural perfection is empirical and only conditionally good. But this is a false dilemma, because Kant's alternative conceptualizations of perfection are not exhaustive. If perfection is understood as personality or rational nature, as the normative perfectionist conceives it, then perfection can ground the good or duty in a distinct normative concept that is not empirical. Indeed, as we will see shortly (§4 below), Kant's own ethical theory gives rational nature an important role in grounding the Humanity formula of the Categorical Imperative. If so, Kant's own ethical theory shows the possibility of a form of normative perfectionism that is neither circular nor empirical.

Kant's critical target is the attempt to found morality on an *empiricist* conception of human nature that is prior to and independent of reason. But he has no reason to reject attempts to found morality on a *normative* conception of human nature that understands human nature in terms of reason-responsiveness. But then it seems that Kant's criticism of perfectionism are misplaced when applied to normative perfectionism.

²⁴ Thanks to Rosalind Chaplin for drawing this passage to my attention.

3. CAN WE AIM AT THE PERFECTION OF ANOTHER?

What conception of moral demands does normative perfectionism support? That is a large topic, the details of which are beyond the scope of this essay. But it seems fair to say that an agent has reason to develop her own normative competence and to pursue a life that exercises her rational agency well in activities that embody deliberative control and reasons-responsiveness. For instance, we might agree with Aristotle and Mill that we have reason to pursue active lives that exercise our distinctive capacities for practical reason, rather than lives of contentment or animal satisfaction. Among other things, such a life will assign priority to higher pleasures. If normative perfectionism takes an agent-neutral form, as it does for Mill, or if it recognizes the common good as an important part of self-realization, as it does for Aristotle and Green, then an agent also has reason to promote the normative perfection of others.

This limited claim about the content of the perfectionist demand to perfect one's own rational nature and that of others already seems to conflict with Kant's insistence in the *Metaphysics of Morals* on a fundamental *self/other asymmetry* in which we aim at our own perfection but at the happiness, rather than the perfection, of others. In the Doctrine of Virtue, Kant describes the basic ends that are our most fundamental duties as "*one's own perfection and the happiness of others*" (MM 6: 385). In commenting on the fundamental moral asymmetry, Kant insists on distinguishing the ends of perfection and happiness. This asymmetry rests on two claims. First, Kant claims that one can't be under a duty to promote one's own happiness, because each agent necessarily desires his own happiness, and one can only be under a duty if one might have contra-moral motivation (MM 6: 386; cf. *KpV* 5: 20, 37). Second, Kant claims that one's duty of self-perfection is a duty to make one's free choices conform to duty (6: 386-87).

We might question the first prong of Kant's asymmetry. Even if all agents desire their own happiness, that doesn't show that they desire only their own happiness. But then agents may well have motivation contrary to a duty to promote their own happiness. Moreover, we may doubt that agents necessarily desire their own happiness, citing cases of masochism and depression. Finally, we might wonder if it's true that you can't be obligated to do something that you are disposed to do. I am obligated to nurture and care for my children even though I am disposed to do so. And it may seem that I would still be obligated to do so even if I couldn't help but do so. Perhaps in that case I wouldn't perceive it as a burden or constraint, but I would still have a duty to do so.

However, it is the second prong of Kant's asymmetry that threatens perfectionism, inasmuch as it claims that I cannot have a duty to aim at the perfection of others. Kant claims that your perfection consists in your making your free choices conform to duty, and I cannot do this for you.

So too, it is a contradiction for me to make another's *perfection* my end and consider myself under an obligation to promote this. For the *perfection* of another human being, as a person, consists just in this: that he *himself* is able to set his end in accordance with his own conception of duty; and it is self-contradictory to require that I do (make it my duty to do) something that only the other himself can do [6: 386].

Here, Kant seems to reason as follows.

1. An agent's perfection consists in her freely choosing to conform to the moral law.
2. I can freely choose to conform to the moral law in my own actions.
3. Hence, I can aim at my own perfection.
4. I can't make another freely choose to conform to the moral law; that would bypass that person's agency.
5. Hence, I cannot aim at the perfection of another.

However, this moral asymmetry between self and others should be surprising in light of the moral symmetry contained in the Humanity Formula of the Categorical Imperative.

Act so that you treat humanity [personality], whether in your own person or that of another, always as an end and never merely as a means (G 4: 428-29).

In commenting on the Humanity Formula, in both its application to duties to oneself and to others, Kant insists that our actions must not only not conflict with humanity but also *harmonize* with it (4: 430). In the case of duties to others, this requires making their ends my own.

Now, humanity might indeed subsist if no one contributed to the happiness of others but yet did not intentionally withdraw anything from it; but there is still only negative and not a positive agreement with *humanity as an end in itself* unless everyone tries, as far as he can, to further the ends of others. For, the ends of a subject who is an end in itself must as far as possible be also *my* ends, if that representation is to have its *full* effect in me [4: 430].

But if another agent's end is his own perfection, then it seems I should make his perfection my end. Yet, this conflicts with the self/other moral asymmetry Kant recognizes in the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

Interestingly, Green agrees with Kant, both in accepting the moral symmetry of the Humanity Formula of the Categorical Imperative, and its injunction to aim at the perfection of others, and in having doubts about whether one person can promote the perfectionist good of another directly. He expresses this second point in his essay "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract."²⁵

[I]t is the business of the state, not indeed directly to promote moral goodness, for that, from the very nature of moral goodness, it cannot do, but to maintain the conditions without which a free exercise of the human faculties is impossible [*Works* III 374].

Here, Green makes sense of Kant's admonitions against aiming at the perfection of another by interpreting them as constraints on *how* we aim at the perfection of others. Given the role of one's own agency in one's perfection, I can't perfect others any more than I can win competitive races for them. But just as I can help another to win a race by training with her, discussing strategy, and sharing nutritional tips, so too I can help others perfect themselves by helping them develop their normative competence and deliberating with them, identifying options, discussing the comparative merits of these options, and providing them with opportunities to exercise their normative powers. I can help others perfect themselves, just not in ways that bypass their agency. If so, (5) does not follow from (4).

In effect, this is to insist on the importance of *autonomy* in a normative perfectionist conception of the good and the ways in which this constrains paternalistic intervention in the lives of others. In this connection, Mill's perfectionist critique of conventional forms of paternalism in *On*

²⁵ T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract" in *The Collected Works of T.H. Green*, 5 vols., ed. P. Nicholson (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997), vol. III.

Liberty and his defense of society's role in developing the normative competence of individuals are instructive about how a normative perfectionist might try to accommodate what is defensible in Kant's moral asymmetry.

However, Mill's perfectionist critique of paternalism does not endorse a blanket prohibition on paternalism. One exception to the usual prohibition on paternalism that Mill recognizes concerns a prohibition on selling oneself into slavery.

The ground for thus limiting his power of voluntarily disposing of his own lot is apparent, and is very clearly seen in this extreme case. ... [B]y selling himself for a slave, he abdicates his liberty; he foregoes any future use of it beyond that single act. He, therefore, defeats in his own case, the very purpose which is the justification of allowing him to dispose of himself [OL V 11].

Mill represents this as a principled exception to the usual prohibition on paternalism, because the very same values that normally speak against paternalism here speak in favor of it. If the usual reason we oppose paternalism is out of respect for the normative powers of the agent, then respect for those normative powers gives us special reason to prohibit the use of those normative powers to permanently undermine all future use of those same powers. This requires Mill to treat autonomy as a value to be *promoted*, rather than *honored* on each occasion, and to recognize *autonomy-enhancing forms of paternalism*.²⁶

Mill notes that the reasons for allowing paternalism in "this extreme case" are "evidently of far wider application" (V 11). That makes this principled exception to the usual prohibition on paternalism the tip of a normative iceberg. The contours of the iceberg are not immediately clear, though there is reason to see Mill as anticipating his later arguments in *The Subjection of Women* in which he argues that Victorian marriage law with its requirements that women unilaterally surrender their normative powers, including their rights of self-ownership, is a form of slavery that cannot be defended by appeal to a woman's consent to be married.²⁷

4. KANTIAN PERFECTIONISM

The normative perfectionist who appeals to moral personality, understood in terms of rational nature and reasons-responsiveness, can answer Kant's explicit concerns about perfectionism in a way that respects Kant's own commitments to the connections among agency, rational nature, and moral requirements. This gives us reason to take seriously a normative perfectionist reading of Kantian essentials. As we noted, Kant's critical target is the attempt to found morality on an empiricist conception of human nature that is prior to and independent of reason. But he has no reason to reject attempts to found morality on a normative conception of human nature that understands human nature in terms of rational agency. Indeed, Kant himself clearly wants to found morality on an appeal to rational nature.²⁸ Though he frequently associates morality with humanity and even formulates the Categorical Imperative at one point in terms of respect for humanity, it is clear that he must understand humanity in terms of moral personality

²⁶ For the distinction between honoring and promoting values, see Philip Pettit, "Consequentialism" reprinted in *Consequentialism*, ed. S. Darwall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). Mill appeals to intrapersonal promotion of autonomy here. I discuss the significance of autonomy-enhancing restrictions on liberty in *Mill's Progressive Principles*, chs. 7-8.

²⁷ See John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* [SW], CW XXI 270-71, 284-89, 323. Cf. OL V 12.

²⁸ This is a central theme in Irwin's conception of Kant's place in the history of ethics. See Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007-09), vol. III, chs. 66-72.

and the ability to set and act for the sake of ends (*G* 4: 428, 430-31; *KpV* 5: 87).²⁹ Kant treats rational nature as both *ground* and *content* of duty.

Kant treats rational nature as the ground of duty when he insists that duty must be knowable a priori. This may seem strange. Surely, my duties — for instance, my contractual duty to sell you my widgets — depend upon empirical facts about what I have done — for instance, that I signed a contract to sell you my widgets. Kant does not deny this. But he wants to make two claims. First, he thinks that my duties apply independently of my willingness to comply. I can't defeat an ascription of an obligation simply by pleading disinclination. Second, he also thinks that the derivation of our duties has an important a priori element. It might help to think of Kant as deriving such duties via a syllogism.

1. It is a duty to keep one's voluntary agreements.
2. I voluntarily agreed to sell you my widgets.
3. Hence, it is my duty to sell you my widgets.

This duty is derived from the major premise in (1) about fidelity plus the minor premise in (2) which is contingent and known empirically. Presumably, Kant's claim is not that all duties, including duties like (3), are knowable a priori. His claim is that the *grounds* of our duties, including moral principles, such as (1), are knowable a priori.

Moral requirements, Kant thinks, must depend upon essential, rather than contingent and variable, features of agents, which explains why moral requirements must express categorical, rather than hypothetical, imperatives (*G* 4: 416, 425). If moral requirements are not to be based on variable empirical conditions, then they must be universal. To achieve this sort of universality, Kant requires an agent to be able to will her maxims or principles to be universal. His reasoning seems to be something like this.

1. Because moral requirements are inescapable, they express categorical imperatives.
2. Hence, moral requirements must apply to rational agents as such, independently of their empirical motivations.
3. Hence, moral requirements must be universal.
4. Hence, an agent's maxims or principles must be capable of serving as universal laws.

This yields the first of Kant's three main formulations of the Categorical Imperative — the Formula of Universality.³⁰

²⁹ In the *Religion* Kant recognizes three "predispositions" — to animality, humanity, and personality (6: 26-28). Animality involves instinctual self-love, humanity involves reflective self-love, and personality involves the capacity to be motivated by the moral law. He concludes: "If we consider the three dispositions ... according to the conditions of their possibility, we find that the *first* does not have reason at its root at all; that the *second* is rooted in a reason which is indeed practical, but only as subservient to other incentives; and that the *third* alone is rooted in reason practical of itself, i.e. in reason legislating unconditionally" (6: 28). The *Religion* distinguishes humanity and personality, as the *Groundwork* does not. But the *Religion* is later than the *Groundwork*, and it seems that we must read the *Groundwork* as identifying humanity with personality, at least for purposes of the Humanity Formula of the Categorical Imperative, if only because the Universality and Humanity formulas are only equivalent, as Kant believes (*G* 4: 436), if humanity is understood as personality. Here, I disagree with Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 118-21.

³⁰ I allude to the Universality, Humanity, and Kingdom of Ends formulae. This tripartition simplifies a more fine-grained taxonomy of the formulae. Some commentators identify six formulae: (1) universal law (4: 421), (2) universal law of nature (4: 421), (3) the end in itself (4: 429), (4) universal legislation by every rational being (4: 431), (5) the kingdom of ends (4: 438), and (6) autonomy (4: 440). See H.J. Paton, *The Categorical*

F1: Act only maxims that you can will to be a universal law of nature (4: 421).

We should interpret F1 as asking what rational beings can consistently will. But this claim is ambiguous. F1 might be interpreted as asking what rational beings can consistently will, that is, what someone who is rational can consistently will. This test can depend on the contingent interests and desires possessed by rational beings. But this makes it difficult to distinguish F1 from the Golden Rule, which Kant clearly wishes to do (4: 431n). Alternatively, we can understand what a rational being can consistently will as what someone can will *insofar* as she is rational. On this interpretation, F1 asks what we can will, not insofar as we have particular, contingent wants and interests, but what we can will insofar as we are rational beings.

What, if anything, would we will just insofar as we are rational beings? Kant believes that rational nature is the proper object, as well as ground, of moral requirements. This is clear in his second main formula of the Categorical Imperative — the Formula of Humanity.

F2: Treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of any rational agent, always as an end in itself and never merely as a means (4: 429).

Kant thinks that insofar as one is rational one will make rational nature one's end (4: 428). Happiness, he claims, can have only conditioned or instrumental value; rational nature alone has intrinsic value that does not depend on contingent and variable circumstances. So only rational nature could be valued regardless of one's contingent circumstances and sentiments. Rational nature is the capacity to set ends and act for the sake of ends (*G* 4: 428, 430-31; *KpV* 5: 87). But then a rational agent will value activities and lives that express rational nature. And Kant might argue that a rational agent has no other basis for finding anything intrinsically valuable. Moreover, if I choose rational agency solely insofar as I am a rational being — solely in virtue of the properties of rational agents as such — then it seems I choose to develop rational agency as such, and not the rational agency of this or that particular rational being (*G* 4: 427). If so, then F1 directs me to be concerned about other rational agents, as rational agents, for their own sakes. Kant concludes that insofar as we are rational beings we would will that all rational agents be treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means (4: 429). This is how he gets from ground to content and from Universality to Humanity.

If normative perfectionism is an ethical theory that grounds ethical requirements in moral personality or the reasons-responsive capacity to set and act for the sake of ends, then the essentials of Kant's own ethical theory admit of a normative perfectionist reading. For he regards both the grounds and content of moral requirements as consisting in moral personality or rational nature. Moreover, Kant treats moral perfection as the goal of human history in his progressive view of history as the intergenerational quest to perfect humanity's rational nature (*History; Lectures Collins* 27: 470).³¹

5. IS THE APPEAL TO RATIONAL NATURE INCOMPLETE?

So far, normative perfectionism seems well positioned to address some of Kant's explicit worries about perfectionism and related doctrines, such as eudaimonism, and to accommodate

Imperative, 5th ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1947), p. 129 and Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, vol. III §917. However the tripartite taxonomy does not oversimplify inasmuch as (1) and (2) are equivalent versions of Universality, (3) corresponds to Humanity, and (4)-(6) represent different aspects of the Kingdom of Ends. Here, I focus on Universality and Humanity.

³¹ Progress, the 2016 elections remind us, is not a monotonic function.

what is reasonable in Kant's concerns. Indeed, we have seen reason to take seriously a normative perfectionist reading of some central aspects of Kant's own ethical theory.

This makes it appropriate to address a worry that has been raised about the adequacy of Kant's own appeals to rational nature, because normative perfectionism appeals to rational nature in many of the ways that Kant does. The general worry is that the ideals of rationality and perfection do not themselves provide complete ethical guidance.³² Rationality is a matter of recognizing and responding to reasons, but then rationality does not provide adequate guidance without some specification of the substantive reasons for action that a rational agent would recognize. Similarly, perfection, understood in terms of the development and exercise of deliberative capacities, does not seem to provide adequate guidance. We deliberate by recognizing and weighing goods. But then deliberation seems to be an incomplete guide without some specification of the objective goods that should guide deliberation.

We can distinguish radical and moderate versions of this worry about the adequacy of perfectionism's guidance. The *radical critique* is that rationality is a formal or procedural concept and, hence, is empty until there are substantive reasons or objective goods to weigh in the deliberative scale. By contrast, the *moderate critique* is that rational nature has some content and provides some guidance but does not provide complete guidance without a specification of substantive reasons or objective goods.

We can dismiss the radical critique, because content is a function of what is ruled out, and rational nature rules out some kinds of lives. There are a variety of kinds of lives and activities in which one can exercise one's rational capacities well. But rational nature speaks against selling oneself into slavery and discriminates between higher and lower pleasures, between the examined life and the life of sensory contentment, between a self-directed life in which one meets and copes with various challenges and a shallow and undemanding life, and between the life of an artisan who has control over the nature of her work and the distribution of her products and the life of a couch potato. Normative perfectionism can be pluralistic, recognizing a diversity of good lives exercising practical reason in comparably good but different ways, but it is not content-neutral.

By contrast, the moderate critique needs to be taken more seriously. According to the moderate critique, even if perfectionist values are not empty, they provide an incomplete ethical guide and need to be supplemented by additional non-perfectionist kinds of value. Different moderate critiques might appeal to different non-perfectionist values. Presumably, any conception of ethical guidance that recognizes a set of perfectionist goods as incomplete would be *pluralist* in character. Some familiar pluralist conceptions of the good include knowledge, achievement, pleasure, beauty, friendship, and moral goods. The moderate critique is that adequate ethical content presupposes some such pluralist conception that is not exhausted by perfectionist goods.

Adequately addressing the moderate critique is beyond the scope of this essay. But we can frame how that discussion might proceed by distinguishing different kinds of response to that critique. In particular, we can distinguish more and less concessive responses, depending on how many non-perfectionist values we recognize and how important they are.

Perhaps the most concessive response would be to defend a form of *partial perfectionism* that is based on a mixed conception of the good that includes perfectionist elements. Even if perfectionism provides incomplete guidance and must be supplemented by a list of independent objective goods, even a very long list, it would still be true that our conception of the good would be incomplete if it did not recognize perfectionist goods.

A less concessive response would be to embrace a form of *dominant perfectionism* that recognizes a mixed conception of the good in which perfectionist goods are most important. There

³² An early formulation of this worry is Hegel's concern that the Categorical Imperative is formal and empty. See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trs. T. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) §135R. A contemporary formulation is Donald Regan, "The Value of Rational Nature" *Ethics* 112 (2002): 267-91.

are different ways in which perfectionist goods might dominate others. First, even if we must accept a mixed conception of the good, it might still be true that perfectionist goods are *individually the most important goods* insofar as they exercise the most important constraint on the content of an ethical life. Second, perfectionist goods might *condition* the value of other goods, so that the other elements only count as genuine goods when they do not offend against or compromise perfectionist elements.³³ On such a view, perfectionist demands to develop and exercise one's own normative powers and those of other rational agents constrain what other things might be good. Third, whether or not perfectionist goods are the most important individual goods or the only unconditional goods, they might be *superordinate goods*. One might distinguish between primary and secondary goods. Though perfectionist goods are among the primary goods, they may also be important secondary goods insofar as practical reason helps organize the primary goods in one's life. Practical reason is exercised in the comparison of primary goods, the correct ordering of primary goods, and the resolution of conflicts among primary goods. If so, practical reason is an important secondary or superordinate good. If perfectionist goods are both primary and superordinate goods, then our conception of the good is arguably a form of dominant perfectionism. The case for dominant perfectionism will be even stronger if perfectionist goods are the individually most important primary goods or the only unconditional goods.

Both of these responses to the moderate critique concede that the correct conception of the good must be mixed, containing both perfectionist and non-perfectionist elements. A still less concessive response would be to defend *pure perfectionism*. Here, the idea would be to combine two pure perfectionist strategies — *accommodation* and *reform*. Accommodation brings apparently non-perfectionist goods under the perfectionist umbrella if possible, explaining their value in perfectionist terms. Where accommodation is not possible, reform recommends denying that the alleged goods are genuine goods. The merits of accommodation and reform depend on how much the perfectionist can accommodate, how much requires reform, and whether the resulting reforms seem reflectively acceptable. This strategy would have to be assessed on a case-by-case basis by considering alleged non-perfectionist goods and evaluating strategies for accommodation and reform. Here, I can only sketch what such a discussion might look like.

Knowledge and Achievement. It is not hard to understand how knowledge or achievement might be understood as perfectionist values. Knowledge is arguably the state at which our capacities for theoretical reason aim, and certain kinds of achievements are what we aim at in our practical deliberations. We can perhaps understand how an appeal to moral agency might explain the perfectionist value of practical achievements, and we can perhaps understand how an appeal to epistemic agency might explain the perfectionist value of knowledge, but we might doubt that *either* conception of agency can explain *both*. This worry raises interesting questions about the ability to explain theoretical achievements in terms of practical deliberation and the ability to explain practical accomplishments in terms of theoretical reasoning. I suspect that explanations of both kinds are possible, treating successful actions as expressing theoretical wisdom and treating theoretical knowledge as expressing practical wisdom about mental acts of acceptance and epistemic trust. Nonetheless, such justifications of the theoretical in terms of the practical or of the practical in terms of the theoretical may seem too derivative. But there is no need for the

³³ This sort of view might be structurally similar to Korsgaard's idea that rational nature conditions or constrains the reasons that reflective endorsement and practical identity provide. See Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *Self-Constitution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009). However, there appear to be differences between the view I am discussing here and Korsgaard's. Though Korsgaard does recognize the demands of rational nature as categorical imperatives, it is not clear that she recognizes them as perfectionist demands. Moreover, as a constructivist about practical identities, it is not clear that she recognizes that which rational nature conditions as objective goods or external reasons.

normative perfectionist explanation of the values of knowledge and achievement to be hostage to either sort of justification, provided that normative perfectionism is grounded, as Green believes, in a *unified* conception of agency — one that sees rational agents as reasons-responsive in ways that make them both morally and epistemically responsible. For this reason, the best case for a mixed conception of the good probably lies elsewhere.

Hedonic Value. It is common to regard hedonic values as non-perfectionist values. Pleasure is to be sought and pain to be avoided in themselves, independently of their relation to perfection. Pain is often extrinsically bad insofar as it is an insistent form of consciousness that distracts one from the pursuit of one's activities and, hence, impedes the pursuit of perfectionist goods. Indeed, if the nature of pain is to be insistent and disruptive in this way, then the perfectionist can even recognize pain as being intrinsically bad. The interesting and difficult question is whether pleasure is inherently good and pain is inherently bad independently of their effects on one's valuable activities. Compare the lives of two artists who are each engaged in creative work, producing beautiful art, and exercising control over their professional lives, one of whom appreciates the value she creates and takes delight in her art and the other of whom is depressed and takes no joy in her art. Clearly, it might seem, the first life is better than the second, even though they seem to realize the same amount of perfectionist value. The natural explanation for this difference in value is that pleasure is an independent, non-perfectionist value. But in this case the pleasure that the one artist has that the other lacks appears to be a *delight in her creative activity*. Following Leibniz and Wolff, we might treat such delight as an *appreciation* of perfectionist value, and this appreciation might seem to be a further perfectionist value.³⁴ Whether all genuine hedonic goods can be fit under the perfectionist umbrella in this way is an open question.

Beauty. It is sometimes said that beauty is an objective good, which can and should guide choice. On some views, beauty might well be an independent non-perfectionist good. G.E. Moore thought that if one applied his method of isolation, in which one imagines something in isolation from sentient beings to see if it has value in those situations, one would see that beauty was an objective good.³⁵ If we compare a bare lunar landscape with a similar landscape containing our favorite work of art, we will see that the second world is better than the first. This fact attests to the objective value of beauty, or so Moore thought. But works of art are artifacts, created by artists and typically consumed and appreciated by audiences. For the method of isolation to evidence that beauty is an objective value, we would have to imagine that objects that are beautiful and choiceworthy when produced and appreciated by intelligent beings would still be beautiful and contribute to the value of the worlds in which they occur even when they were neither the product of creative activity nor the object of aesthetic appreciation. But this is not clear. In fact, there are two claims that Moore must establish — first, that there is beauty in a world with no sentient creatures, and, second, that beauty in such a world is an intrinsic good. But both claims are open to doubt. We may regard Da Vinci's Venus de Milo as beautiful. But the method of isolation requires us to imagine a world containing a piece of stone with the same qualitative properties as the Venus but that was neither the product of creative design nor the object of aesthetic appreciation — perhaps occurring in a lifeless world as the result of erosion. It is simply not clear that the stone in that world is beautiful. Perhaps the best case for Moore's claim about beauty is natural beauty. Would a landscape containing the Grand Canyon be more beautiful than a lunar landscape even if no sentient creature ever appreciated it? One can doubt that there is beauty in worlds without sentient creatures, and even if we do recognize beauty in worlds in which sentient creatures are

³⁴ Cf. Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 93-101. Adams proposes to understand the personal good as the enjoyment of the excellent. I would add that the excellent is good even when it is not enjoyed, even if it is better still when it is enjoyed, and that the enjoyment of the excellent is itself excellent.

³⁵ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 83-84, 90-91.

neither producers nor consumers of beauty, we may wonder if those worlds are better as a result. If so, we might think that beauty is a relational good and that its value lies in its relation to perfectionist values.

Friendship. Friendship might seem to be a non-perfectionist good that nonetheless ought to guide choice. But all of the normative perfectionists believe that certain forms of interpersonal association extend and complete the agent's rational nature. Aristotle believes that in the right sort of friendship one's friend provides a kind of mirror on oneself and so provides a perspective that makes self-understanding and self-criticism possible, providing a kind of completion or perfection for cognitively limited beings (*NE* 1162a20-24, 1169b4-6, 1170a5-7; *EE* 1244b1-12; *MM* 1212b24-1213b2; *Politics* 1261b10-15). Mill believes that friends enhance each other's higher faculties by helping each other enlarge the menu of deliberative options and better assess the merits of the options on the menu, which is why he thinks that freedom of association and friendships among equals are uniquely valuable forms of association (*OL* II 20-33, III 1; *SW* 293-95, 326, 334-36). Green thinks that each has an interest in being part of and contributing to a larger and more permanent good than he could acting on his own, explaining why an individual's contribution to the common good is a form of perfection (§§183-84, 190-91, 199, 223, 229-32, 234). Of course, the details of these perfectionist rationales for friendship need to be filled in and defended, but such claims promise to bring the good of friendship under the perfectionist umbrella.³⁶

Moral Goods. We might concede the promise of pure perfectionism as an account of prudential value but harbor doubts about its adequacy to explain the importance of other-regarding moral virtues, such as justice. Different forms of normative perfectionism have different commitments here. Any agent-neutral or otherwise impartial concern for rational agents will build concern for others in at a foundational level. So a perfectionist like Mill or Kant seems to have no special problem accommodating an agent's concern for the good of others. By contrast, eudaimonist perfectionists have an agent-relative or egocentric concern for the agent's own rational agency. So perfectionists such as Aristotle or Green need to explain how a concern for others emerges within a eudaimonist framework by explaining how the rational agency of others contributes to the agent's own rational agency. However, both Aristotle and Green do believe that an agent's own perfection requires pursuit of a common good. My remarks above about how they hope to provide a perfectionist explanation of friendship and other associational goods indicate how they could begin to explain the emergent value of moral concern for the perfection of others within a eudaimonist framework.

This discussion of the challenge to pure perfectionism and its resources to meet this challenge has necessarily been abstract, sketchy, and impressionistic. It shows some hope for the project of extending the domain of the perfectionist empire, but whether all genuine goods admit of perfectionist analysis remains an open question, worth further investigation. Even if we cannot extend the perfectionist domain as far as the pure perfectionist must, there remain more concessive replies that recognize the importance of perfectionist goods within mixed conceptions.

³⁶ I have written about eudaimonist and perfectionist explanations of the importance of friendship and other associational relationships elsewhere. I have discussed Greek eudaimonist conceptions of friendship in "Self-love and Altruism" *Social Philosophy & Policy* 14 (1997): 122-57; "Eudaimonism, Love and Friendship, and Political Community" *Social Philosophy & Policy* 16 (1999): 252-89; and "Eudaimonism and Cosmopolitan Concern" in *Virtue, Happiness, and Knowledge: Themes from the Work of Gail Fine and Terence Irwin*, ed. D. Brink, S. Meyer, and C. Shields (Oxford: Clarendon Press, forthcoming). I have discussed the role of perfectionist values in Mill's discussion of liberal associations and friendships among equals in *Mill's Progressive Principles*, chs. 6-11. Lastly, I have discussed Green's perfectionist justification of friendship and the common good in *Perfectionism and the Common Good*, §§XV-XX.