

## **Good, Period. [Critical notice of J. Thomson, *Normativity*]**

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Judith Jarvis Thomson is one of the very best philosophers currently active, and if we extend the comparison class to philosophers living and dead, she still ranks very near the top. So it should come as no surprise to find that her recent book *Normativity* is brilliant philosophical work.<sup>i</sup> Philosophical brilliance can coexist with pervasive error. That's the case here.

The arguments of the book range widely, and the reader who follows along behind Thomson's fast-moving thoughts will be rewarded with insights on many topics. In this review essay I shall for the most part confine myself to a few arguments that appear early in the book. Versions of these arguments appear in prior writings by Thomson, which suggests she has considerable confidence in them.<sup>ii</sup> I shall try to show any such confidence would be misplaced.

1. Thomson's starting point is the rejection of some assertions made by G. E. Moore in the first chapter of his *Principia Ethica*. Moore made many strange, fascinating, and surely false claims in this chapter, but Thomson focuses on a central assertion she takes to be crucial for ethics and, once seen for what it is, obviously false.

Moore asserts that there is a property of being good, or goodness, and this is a property all good things have in common. Following an argument first made by Peter Geach,<sup>iii</sup> Thomson holds that there is no such property. Geach had urged that good is an attributive, not a predicative adjective. If good were a predicative adjective, then saying that someone is a good lawyer would be saying that the person is a lawyer and has the property of being good, so if the person is also a parent, we could conclude the person is a good parent, which might well not be so. Saying the person is a good lawyer is rather saying the person is good at lawyering, which is compatible with the further claim that the person is not a good parent, i.e., not good at parenting. The example generalizes: there is no such thing as being good simply (equivalently: good absolutely, or good simpliciter, or good, period). Thomson adds that besides being good of a kind, there are other ways of being good in a way. A rag might be good for washing dishes, a government policy might be good for Americans, an actor might be good in tragedies but not in comedies, and so on.

Is this really so? Suppose someone says, "Pleasure is good." I acknowledge straightaway that this is a somewhat pretentious-sounding and starchy assertion. It is hard to envisage a conversation in which this would be an apt comment. But the question is whether this is a well-formed assertion that says what it seems to say on its face, and is capable of being true or false. It is likewise hard to envisage a conversation in which "I am a human being" would be an appropriate comment, but nonetheless, said by you or by me on any occasion, it would be a genuine assertion, and true. Same goes with "Pleasure is good." If someone heard this assertion and responded along the lines that Thomson suggests, he might say, "What do you mean? In what way is pleasure good? Do you mean pleasure is good for some purpose, such as living long? Or do you mean that pleasure is good for some individual or group, e.g., that pleasure is good for wolverines, or good for Southern hillbillies, or good for Benedictan monks? You have to say more,

tell me in what respect you are claiming pleasure is good, or relative to what pleasure is being claimed to be good, or I cannot understand what you are saying and can neither agree or disagree with you.” To this stiff-arm response the initial speaker might with linguistic and conceptual propriety respond, “I mean that pleasure is good, period.”

To claim that pleasure is good simpliciter is to claim that if two possible states of the world are identical in all relevant respects except that in the second, some individual living being experiences some pleasure, then the second state of the world is better than the first. One could put the point by saying that pleasure has intrinsic value.

I’m not here affirming that the claim, so interpreted, is true. Someone might deny that pleasure is intrinsically valuable, on the ground, say, that there is no value to be had in experiencing sadistic pleasure. I’m affirming that the claim, true or false, makes sense, is not conceptually out of order.

I’m not denying there is good in a way, good in some respect, as analyzed by Thomson. The claim is that alongside good in a way there is another notion, good simpliciter. In the first instance the dispute between someone who asserts and someone who denies this second claim is an empirical dispute about the English language. Just suppose, contrary to what I believe, that Thomson is entirely correct about this empirical dispute and that when competent speakers of English use the term “good” what they are saying is never correctly interpreted in terms of the notion of good simpliciter. The more important point to note is that this would not by itself give Thomson the victory against Moore she seeks. Let’s suppose that the English language, along with all other languages people on earth use, at the beginning of the twentieth century lacked the resources to express the idea that *good* is a simple, nonnatural property. What blocks Moore, or anyone, from inventing the conceptual resources he needs to express the theoretical ethical claims he wants to make? Just as Albert Einstein needed to make conceptual innovations in order to formulate the scientific theories he wished to advance, so too a moral theorist might find it necessary or useful to define new terms that express or facilitate the expression of new concepts in order to develop the moral theory she wishes to advance. We assess the terminological and conceptual devices in tandem with assessing the theory in which they are embedded.

2. So far I have treated Thomson’s position as though it amounted to the following unpromising argument: There is a relative sense of *good*, such that anything good in this sense is good in some way or some respect; therefore there is no absolute sense of *good*, such that some things are good simply or good, period. This would be a non sequitur, so I’m reluctant to foist this interpretation onto her words. It’s better to view Thomson as issuing a challenge to the erstwhile consequentialist. The consequentialist holds that what is morally right, what one ought morally always to do, is to choose an act of those available that would bring about an overall state of the world no worse than the state of the world that would occur if she did anything else instead. This proposal presupposes that states of the world can be at least partially rank ordered in terms of goodness, so that one state of the world can contain more good overall than another, one state of the world can be overall better than another. Some theorists doubt that this way of talking makes sense. The consequentialist owes us some account of the concepts she is deploying, so we know what she is talking about, before we can sensibly consider her proposal a genuine proposal that is worthy of appraisal.

This is a sensible challenge, and Thomson presses it forcefully. Before responding, I want to reiterate, and expand, a point already made.

3. It would be a mistake, in my view, to concede to Thomson that the idea of good as a simple property is a theoretically motivated invention of philosophers. The idea is perfectly at home in ordinary discourse. Someone concerned about the plight of people in New Orleans and elsewhere who lived through Hurricane Katrina might rehearse the ills that nature inflicted on these unfortunates. Suppose I respond that Hurricane Katrina was not an unmitigated disaster. I have a relative who owns rental property in Houston, and in the aftermath of this natural disaster, the financial value of his property increased substantially. Not to mention that hurricanes have aesthetic appeal for some people. So like almost all large-scale events, Hurricane Katrina was bad for some and good for others. My interlocutor is unimpressed. “Overall, Hurricane Katrina was a great evil, a horribly bad thing to have happened,” she says. In this comment “evil” and “bad” are not being used attributively. Nor are they shorthand for any claim that Katrina was bad in a way or bad in some respect. My interlocutor is saying that Katrina was simply bad, overall bad, bad all things considered. Whether the claim she is making is true or false, in making it she is not misusing the English language. Nor is she revealing that she is conceptually confused. Nor would it be reasonable for someone who hears the comment to infer that the one who makes it must be a follower of G. E. Moore, or committed to act consequentialism, or in the grip of one or another controversial philosophical theory.

In her essay “The Right and the Good,” Thomson had suggested that without countenancing the suspect notion of good simpliciter, we can accept that we can sensibly add together different goods and bads accruing to different people and come to reasoned conclusions about what is better or worse all things considered. We can do this with the notion of being good for. As she notes, “A person might have a proneness to ‘maximizing goodness-for’—that is, he is prone to doing a thing wherever it would be on balance better for people that he do it than that he not do it.”<sup>iv</sup> I confess to being mystified by this concession. If things that are good and bad for people can be balanced against each other, such that one can come to reasoned and in principle correct or incorrect verdicts about what is on balance, all things considered better for people overall, what concepts do we lack, that we would need in order to state the act consequentialist principle and show that it makes perfectly good sense and is then a possible candidate for the status of correct moral principle (whether or not there are good reasons to accept it as such)? So far as I can see, this concession does not reappear in *Normativity*.

4. From the fact that ordinary people frequently use words in a certain way, it does not of course follow that what they are saying makes sense. (Ordinary Americans of my acquaintance make theological claims that to my ear are marred by conceptual confusion.) Same goes for my interlocutor’s claim that Katrina was bad in the imaginary conversation reported in the previous paragraph. Moreover, suppose it turns out to be true, as I firmly believe, that the ordinary concept of being good in an absolute sense is perfectly in order. It would still be an open question whether the notion of good that

figures in act consequentialist moral theory is conceptually in order or defective in some way.

At this point I am going to digress, in order to try persuade the reader of Thomson that act consequentialist moral theory is not rendered hopelessly unacceptable in virtue of being based on an intractably confused concept as she argues. My discussion will be sketchy. I'll describe a particular family of consequentialist views, but the class of such views includes many other families, and it would serve my purposes if any view within the broad class turned out to be both conceptually coherent and plausible enough to be a viable candidate moral theory.

First, I think it is acceptable to take the idea of being simply good (or in other words good absolutely or good, period) as an unanalyzable primitive. Attempts to analyze it either seem deficient or introduce a pretty much synonymous phrase in the proposed analysis. For example, consider the suggestion that the good is what one ought to desire for its own sake. Desires play an administrative role in our psychic economy. They should harness our energy toward goals we should be pursuing. I ought not to desire physics accomplishment, even though physics accomplishment is a significant good, because I have no talent for physics, and hankering after it would be, for me, a distraction. Better for me that I desire plumbing achievement, if plumbing is the meaningful work that in my circumstances I am best suited to perform. Not desiring physics accomplishment, I am disposed not to choose it even if it were to become an option in my life; but it won't, so no worries on that score.

Second, we should not try to pack into the idea of the good substantive conclusions about the right. For example, we should not assent to Moore's assertion that "'right' does and can mean nothing but 'cause of a good result' and is thus identical with 'useful.'"<sup>v</sup> A successful account of good and what is good underdetermines the idea of right and what is right. There is a thin connection. That an action would bring into the world something that is good simpliciter, or even bring about the best possible state of affairs as measured by the standard of good simpliciter, is so far compatible with this action's being morally required, permissible, or impermissible. But that an action would bring about good is always a reason in its favor though not necessarily a conclusive one.

What is simply good is what has intrinsic value. But this is not an illuminating characterization, because the notion of intrinsic value is not itself transparent. What is simply good stands in a somewhat intricate relation to the idea of something's being good-for. Nothing is simply good, nothing has intrinsic value, except what is good for people and other sentient beings (beings capable of having good in their lives).<sup>vi</sup> What is good for people we can label "well-being" or "welfare." An immediate qualification is needed: nothing is intrinsically valuable except what is good for people and other sentient beings and its being well distributed across those who might get it. Since being well distributed involves notions of fairness, moral notions, perhaps it is useful to distinguish two notions of intrinsic value. What is intrinsically valuable is well-being and it is intrinsically morally valuable that the aggregate of well-being be greater rather than smaller and that well-being be distributed fairly across persons and others.<sup>vii</sup>

What is good for an individual is to gain well-being. There are rival accounts of well-being. In my view, we should regard an individual's well-being over the course of her life as greater, the more she gains the items that are entries on what has been called an "Objective List" of goods.<sup>viii</sup> The list includes such items as pleasure and the absence of

pain, friendship and love, healthy family ties, meaningful work, knowledge and understanding, and physical, creative, and intellectual achievement. The list is open-ended, and our current understanding of its contents is fallible. But there is one list, that fixes what is good for any individual, regardless of its individual or species nature. It would enhance the quality of my cat's life if it were to learn quantum gravity theory, but sadly, it lacks the capacity for that achievement. Still, if the cat were to be given a cognitive enhancement pill, that gave it physics capacity, it would be good for the cat, other things being equal, to develop and exercise this capacity. (That is, it would be good in and of itself for any individual to achieve physics achievement, but not necessarily good for the individual all things considered, because, for example, gaining that achievement might bring other bads with it, or hinder the attainment of other goods, in such a way as to yield a net loss.) The same goes for me: I lack capacities for some types of items on the Objective List, but still, it would be in and of itself better for me, boost my well-being, if I were to gain these capacities and attain the associated things. What has intrinsic value is valuable noninstrumentally, for its own sake. What is instrumentally good for an individual is relative to that very individual's nature and characteristics and to the circumstances she will actually encounter over the course of her life. What is instrumentally good for a person is to gain things and do acts that will maximize her lifetime attainment of well-being. Of course, one should not pursue one's own good to the maximum; that would show great selfishness, and fail to show due consideration for other individuals.

What is it to be good for someone? Good for is a relation, what sort of relation? If X is good for individual Y, then X and Y are related in such a way that X is suitable for Y or fits Y, so that Y's getting X boosts her well-being. What this amounts to depends on what conception of well-being is best. On the conception of well-being I have adumbrated, the suitability relation is trivially satisfied if we are speaking of what is noninstrumentally, intrinsically good for Y. If X is an item on the Objective List, then getting it would be good for Y, whatever Y's nature, characteristics, or circumstances. If we are speaking of what is instrumentally good for Y, then the answer will be relative to the particularities of Y's nature, characteristics, and circumstances.

Given what I have said in the previous paragraph, the reader might wonder whether the concept of what is good-for-someone is doing any work in the story I am telling. If I am going to affirm act consequentialism, and hold that one ought always to do an act that would bring about an outcome no worse than the outcome that would have been brought about by anything else one might instead have done, and further hold that the standard for evaluating outcomes is the degree to which the items on the objective list, appropriately weighted for their importance, are attained and well distributed across persons in that outcome, then the notion of well-being or of what is good for someone is otiose. At any rate, philosophers influenced by Moore have denied that any such notion as that of being good-for-someone plays an essential role in ethics. Donald Regan writes, "So far as I can see, well-being as a normative concept does not figure in the best account of why we are obligated to care about what happens in others' lives (or, for that matter, one's own)."<sup>ix</sup>

I deny that the question, what are we obligated to care about and why, should exhaust our interest in the concept of well-being. Given our psychology, we (the overwhelming majority of people who shall ever live) do care specially about our own

well-being, about making our own life go well for us. Each person cares intensely about what is good for herself and about what is good for those to whom she has special close ties. The question, insofar as one cares for what is good for oneself, what exactly is it one cares about, or should care about if one is thinking clearly about this matter, is thus of some interest. Our interest in what's good for us is not incorporated without remainder in our interest in what the theory of right tells us we ought to do. I may end up pursuing what's good for me, even if I believe this is not morally acceptable, and in that case I will want to understand this idea and correctly identify the objects of choice that would really be good for me and pursue those things and not anything else.

The idea that nothing is intrinsically valuable except what is good for individual conscious beings rules out the idea that there might be impersonal intrinsic values that don't occur in the lives of individuals. Only individual conscious beings with certain capacities have a capacity for well-being. In this way also the idea of well-being does work in ethics. There is such a thing as plants flourishing; and it makes sense also, as Thomson reminds us, to talk about what is good for artifacts such as tools. But to repeat the claim, nothing has intrinsic value except what is good for people and other individual conscious beings. Suppose we learn that beautiful, elegant redwood trees are thriving on Jupiter. That's nice, in a way, but does not in and of itself qualify as an intrinsically valuable state of affairs. Suppose we learn that millions of toasters located in a warehouse in Hong Kong, which we had assumed had rusted away, are actually in fine shape. Again, if the toasters will not serve in any way to advance the well-being of anyone, it's the case that the toasters have been treated well and have what is good for them is a don't care from the standpoint that registers intrinsic value.

The notion of being an item on the Objective List is an amalgam of intrinsic value and good-for. According to this conception of value, the content of what is good for any individual is fully specified by taking an inventory of the entries that appear on this List. The concept of the Objective List is the concept of a list of attainments that constitutes what is good for any individual. On the other hand, the same list of items could be generated, on this conception, by posing and answering the question, what is good simpliciter, that is, what things are good simpliciter. The notions of what is good simpliciter and what is good for individuals are distinct and independent notions; so it's a substantial claim that these notions interlock as here claimed.

5. It should be plain by now how Thomson challenges the person who wants to use the idea of what is good simpliciter as a building block for ethical theory. Some of her challenges, I am claiming, clearly don't succeed, but others are more formidable. She holds that there is no ordinary concept of good simpliciter used by speakers of English. This (I claim) is false. She might be taken to hold that whether used in ordinary discourse or not, under examination the concept of good simpliciter proves to be defective. So far though, I don't see the defects she claims to descry. A further Thomson challenge is that in general terms, we have been given no adequate way of determining what has intrinsic value and what does not, and there is no prospect that this problem will prove tractable. "Discovering" intrinsic value looks to be an arbitrary process. In the context of the specific conception of intrinsic value as the entries on an Objective List (you might say this just puts the basic intrinsic value idea in other words and makes no analytic advance), Thomson will object that the friends of this conception have provided

no way to determine, for any candidate entry on the Objective List, whether it really deserves a place or not. Also, if we are to make sense of the idea of some states of the world being better than others, we need a nonarbitrary, indeed rightly authoritative way of determining, for any extent of attainment of any dimension of value, any entry on the List, what the value of that bit of good simpliciter is compared to all other bits of good simpliciter. We have no nonarbitrary standard for measurement of intrinsic value and no one has any clue how to develop one.

These objections, if they prove cogent, would be decisive in establishing Thomson's conclusion that act consequentialism, relying on the integrity of the good simpliciter notion, is after all a nonstarter. If we can't tell what is intrinsically good and what is not, we cannot begin to assess possible states of the world as better or worse. And even if we could tell what is intrinsically good and what is not, if we can't even in principle measure the comparative size of the various types of intrinsic value and the comparative size of all possible tokens of the types, we can't determine which states of affairs are intrinsically better or worse. And if we can't do that, we can't ever, even in principle, determine what is morally permissible and impermissible according to act consequentialist principle.

These objections raise familiar problems for consequentialism but should not stampede anyone into abandoning it. Any moral theory articulated in detail will base some claims on substantive judgment. In the account Thomson eventually offers, truths about ought are tied to what would make one a defective member of one's kind. If one is a human being, then one ought to do X just in case, if one knows what will probably happen if one does and does not do X, one would be a defective human being if one does not do X. Presumably being admirable varies by degree, and shades off into despicable. Where on this scale does one locate the level such that one is defective if one falls below that level? Here is one clear place substantive ethical judgment or intuition enters the account. Thomson intuitively feels that the appropriate level is met by someone who avoids acting viciously, that is, avoids acting unjustly or ungenerously, with avoidance of injustice the dominant requirement. The claim then is that setting the line here is more intuitively plausible than setting it higher or lower.

Any nonskeptical moral theory will allow that some such judgments can be right and others wrong, or at least more and less acceptable. We invoke coherence or reflective equilibrium method to select among rival substantive judgments. We do this in the domain of good as in the domain of right. To work toward standards of intrinsic value that enable us to determine, for any given combination of disparate intrinsic goods, which combination has more value, we consider a wide variety of cases and seek a standard that tracks the judgments we would endorse after ideally extended critical reflection. Nothing guarantees success in this enterprise, but there is no reason to adopt prior to reflection an asymmetry claim that rational agreement on the good is unattainable and on the right, attainable.

6. If the arguments urged so far are accepted, the upshot is that Thomson's reflections on the nature of good leave the issue between consequentialist and nonconsequentialist moral theories right where it was before she offered these reflections as decisive refutation of consequentialism. This purported refutation argued that the norm that we ought always to do the act among the alternatives available that would

bring about the best outcome presumes what is false, that we are in possession of a concept of good with which we can identify a coherent idea of the best outcome. There is another line of thought in her book that might be thought to bear decisively on the acceptability of consequentialism. Thomson rigorously shows that, eschewing altogether the idea of good simpliciter, from notions of being good-for and being good of a kind we can develop an account of the virtues and from that an account of right. The suggestion here might be that, even if there were a coherent concept of good of the sort that Moore was gesturing at, there would be no useful ethical work for such a notion to perform.

This is a wonderful, rich discussion. This review essay does not attempt to engage it. In conclusion, I offer one comment.

The concept of intrinsic value is not merely a building block in consequentialist theories, and if this concept (or the best revision of it we can construct) is found wanting, the loss would have wide reverberations. More is at stake than the status of consequentialism. I suspect any plausible nonconsequentialist morality would include as a component a principle of beneficence. In a consequentialist theory some beneficence principle is the sole fundamental principle; in a nonconsequentialist theory beneficence would be one principle among others. Whatever its exact contours, a beneficence principle to fill its role must rank some states of the world as better or worse, and direct us to bring about the better ones within the limits imposed by other principles that introduce moral constraints and moral options. We need some commensurability, a measurable notion of good. We need the idea of what is good simpliciter. A related point is that a nonconsequentialist moral theory that prizes the virtues of generosity and self-sacrifice needs to be able to distinguish self-abnegating self-sacrifice from the genuinely virtuous non-self-abnegating sort. A self-abnegating person is prone to sacrifice her own interests in order to bring about less than compensating gains for others; she treats her own interests as counting for less than the interests of others in the calculation of what to do. Self-abnegation is not a virtue. But we need a notion of good that makes room at least for partial commensurability among the various goods to maintain this distinction.

In the same spirit, I note that what looks to be a plausible conception of individual moral rights requires some commensurability of consequences.<sup>x</sup> On this conception, one ought to respect rights, not maximize good consequences, but any moral right is overrideable. A moral right in particular circumstances is overridden just in case the overall net harm that would accrue to nonrightholders if the right in question is respected is sufficiently worse than the overall harm that would accrue to rightholders if the right in question is not respected. Again, this proposed conception of how rights are overridden in a nonconsequentialist framework cannot get off the ground if harm cannot be measured.

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<sup>i</sup> . Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Normativity* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2008).

<sup>ii</sup> . See Judith Jarvis Thomson contribution to Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); also Thomson, "The Right and the Good," *Journal of Philosophy* 94, No. 6 (1997), 273-298; also Thomson, *Goodness and Advice*, with commentary by Philip Fisher et al., ed. by Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Richard Kraut also voices skepticism about the existence, or maybe



rather about the importance, of a nonrelativized use of “good,” in his *What Is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), chapter 2.

<sup>iii</sup>. Peter Geach, “Good and Evil,” *Analysis* 17 (1956), 33-42.

<sup>iv</sup>. Thomson, “The Good and the Right,” 284. I may be reading too much into the quoted sentence, and misreading Thomson’s position here. It does seem to me that if what is good for me and what is good (or bad) for you can be aggregated, there is some nonrelative good, had by both of us, and (to a degree) measurable.

<sup>v</sup>. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 147.

<sup>vi</sup>. The reference to sentient beings in the text is not quite right. A being could be conscious and sentient, able to experience warm and cold feelings and to have dark-colored and light-colored visual experience, but not be capable of attaining pleasure or any other item on the objective list. Let me add a comment about the moral treatment of human persons (and any other persons there may be) and nonperson conscious beings. I suppose there is a hierarchy of beings, with beings that have greater cognitive powers being morally more considerable than those beings that have less. A normal human person is on this ground morally more considerable than a gorilla and a normal gorilla is morally more considerable than a normal lizard. If you are morally more considerable, your well-being gains and losses count for more in the determination of what is morally right and wrong to do. So a human eating crunchy granola and gaining one unit of well-being counts for more than a cat’s eating kibble and gaining a same-sized unit of well-being. This plausible broadly Kantian account of moral considerability leads to a difficulty about the assertion that all humans within a broad range of cognitive powers are equally morally considerable. I explore this difficulty without resolving it satisfactorily in Arneson, “What, if Anything, Renders All Humans Morally Equal?”, in Dale Jamieson, ed., *Peter Singer and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 103-128.

<sup>vii</sup>. A smaller aggregate of well-being might be associated with greater moral value than a larger one if (for example) more of the smaller aggregate goes to people who are otherwise worse off over the course of their lives, or perhaps if more of the smaller aggregate goes to deserving persons (saints) rather than undeserving ones (sinners). On the former fairness norm, see Derek Parfit, “Equality or Priority?”, reprinted in Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams, eds. *The Ideal of Equality* (New York: Macmillan and St. Martin’s Press, 2000). On the latter norm, see Shelly Kagan, “Equality and Desert,” in Louis Pojman and Owen McLeod, eds. *What Do We Deserve? A Reader on Justice and Desert* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 298-314; also Richard Arneson, “Desert and Equality,” in Nils Holtug and Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, eds. *Egalitarianism: New Essays on the Nature and Value of Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 262-293.

<sup>viii</sup>. See Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?”, in his *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), Appendix I, 493-502.

<sup>ix</sup>. Donald H. Regan, “Why am I My Brother’s Keeper?”, in R. Jay Wallace, et al., eds. *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 202-230, at 203.

<sup>x</sup>. The view sketched in the next sentence is roughly one affirmed by Thomson except that she qualifies it by adding what she calls the High-Threshold Thesis. The effect of the qualification is to disallow that infringing my right against suffering an assault that breaks my leg could be permissible if there is not one single nonrightholder who would suffer sufficiently worse harm if this right is not infringed, but instead any large number of nonrightholders each of whom would suffer a harm that is just a whisker shy of suffering a harm equivalent to a broken leg. See Judith Jarvis Thomson, *The Realm of Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1990.