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## The Special Value of Others-Centeredness

Suppose you confront a situation in which you can either promote a good for yourself or a good for someone else, but not both. Suppose, moreover, that the values of these two goods are either equal or incommensurable. Perhaps, for example, you (being the philosopher you are) must choose between working on your own philosophical writing project or helping someone else work on his, where the values of the projects are equal or incommensurable. How should you proceed? The present paper argues that it is valuable for your conduct in such circumstances to be regulated by a character trait the possession of which constitutes one way of having one's life be centered upon others as opposed to centered upon oneself. The trait in question, which we shall call "others-centeredness," is a disposition to promote goods of others rather than one's own goods when the values of these goods are equal or incommensurable. We argue that one is less likely to maximize total value if one doesn't possess this trait.

In the first section, we offer some brief clarificatory remarks about the trait we are calling "others-centeredness". Then, in section two, we argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, possessing others-centeredness has a special value—a value that cannot be achieved without possessing it. It is necessary for living the life most likely to maximize value. In section three, we respond to four objections to the defense of the special value of others-centeredness developed in section II.

### 1. Clarifying Others-Centeredness

Our focus in this paper is on the disposition to promote goods of others rather than one's own goods when the values of these goods are equal or incommensurable. In this section, we offer five brief clarificatory remarks about this trait as well as the more general notion of others-centeredness.

First, we want to emphasize that, while we are calling the trait on which we are focusing "others-centeredness," we do this primarily for brevity's sake. We do not intend to claim that possessing the trait on which we are focusing is the only way for one's life to be centered on others. It is at most one way.<sup>1</sup> We say "at most" because, while it seems perfectly clear to us that possessing this trait is one way of being centered on others, it is not our primary aim in this paper to argue that this is the case. Rather, the primary aim of the paper is to defend the value of the trait in question, whether it is appropriately thought of as the very essence of others-centeredness, one among many versions of others-centeredness, or neither.

Nonetheless, as we say, it does seem perfectly clear to us that the trait in question is a way of being centered upon others. And we briefly defend this claim here. We propose that while there may be quite a number of ways for one's life to be centered upon others rather than on oneself, each of these ways will involve a tendency to display some kind of favoritism or preference or tilting toward others. For example, one might display a kind of epistemic favoritism for others over oneself, tending to think better things about others than one thinks about oneself. Or, one might display a kind of affective preference for others over oneself,

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<sup>1</sup> In making this proposal, we intend to follow several other recent authors who have proposed that there are frequently multiple versions of various virtues. See (Baehr 2011), (Zagaebkskwe 2010), and (Simpson 2012).

tending to desire the good for others more than one desires the good for oneself. Various traits involving favoritism of the kinds surveyed here have been discussed in the literature on humility,<sup>2</sup> and it has in fact been proposed by one author that the trait on which we are focusing is one version of humility.<sup>3</sup> While we will not defend the claim that others-centeredness is a kind of humility here, we do note that if our argument in this paper is successful, it may well have significant implications for the growing literature on humility. Moreover, we also note that the trait on which we are focusing—and this now provides a second clarificatory remark about our proposal—is, by contrast with the alternative accounts of humility mentioned above, primarily behavioral. It is a tendency to behave in such a way as to promote the goods of others rather than one's own goods under certain circumstances. By calling this disposition primarily behavioral, we do not mean to suggest that it does not also involve attitudes or affections. Certainly, for example, the others-centered person will think it is good to behave in an others-centered fashion.<sup>4</sup> However, we leave it open that there may be a variety of distinct attitudinal and affective tendencies that serve to undergird the distinctive behaviors characteristic of others-centeredness. One might display the behaviors characteristic of others-centeredness, for example, if one thinks that doing so is a moral requirement, or one might do so if one thinks that doing so promotes maximum value but is nonetheless not a moral requirement.

So far we have clarified that what we are calling “others-centeredness” is a behavioral disposition—a tendency to behave in such a way as to promote goods of others rather than one's own goods—and that possessing this trait is plausibly one way for a person's life to be centered upon others. However, the trait on which we are focusing is a disposition to promote the goods of others rather than one's own goods *under certain particular circumstances*—namely, when the values of these goods are either equal or incommensurable. Our third clarificatory remark illustrates and explains what it is for these values to be equal or incommensurable. We won't offer a definition of what it is for two goods,  $G$  and  $G^*$ , to be equal in value, as we take it that this idea is clear enough. An illustration, to refer back to the example that began this paper, would be a case where your philosophy paper and your friend's are, all things considered, exactly as good as one another. We will offer a definition of what it is for two goods,  $G$  and  $G^*$ , to be incommensurable in value. This is for it to be the case that there is no fact of the matter about their comparative values (i.e., neither is better than the other, nor are they equal in value). A plausible illustration of incommensurable goods, again drawing upon the example with which this paper began, would be a case where your paper and your friend's paper are each good, but in different and incomparable respects. Given the foregoing explanatory comments about equality in goodness, it follows that if a good  $G$  is equal in value to a good  $G^*$ , then for any worlds  $w$  and  $w^*$ , if the only difference between  $w$  and  $w^*$  is that  $w$  has  $G$  but  $w^*$  has  $G^*$ , then the total value of  $w =$  the total value of  $w^*$ . Similarly, if a good  $G$  is incommensurable to a good  $G^*$  then for any worlds  $w$  and  $w^*$ , if the only difference between  $w$  and  $w^*$  is that  $w$  has  $G$  but  $w^*$  has  $G^*$ , then there is no fact of the matter about whether  $w$  is better than  $w^*$ . Accordingly, the disposition on which we are focusing is a disposition to promote goods,  $G$ , of others rather than one's own goods,  $G^*$ , where, if the only difference between one world  $w$  and another  $w^*$  is that  $w$  has  $G$  where  $w^*$  has  $G^*$ , then the two worlds are either equal in value or there is no fact of the matter about which world is better than the other.

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<sup>2</sup> See (Driver 2001), (Flanagan 1990), (Spiegel 2003) and (Garcia 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See (Byerly forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Following (Annas 2003), then, others-centeredness is a “motivational” character trait.

Our fourth clarificatory remark concerns the nature of the “goods” at issue. These are events or states of affairs—the metaphysics is not our concern here—which are valuable in themselves, and also valuable for someone or other. In particular the goods of others are valuable events or states of affairs that are good *for* others, whereas one’s own goods are valuable states of affairs that are good *for* oneself. Of course, this requires us to say what it is for a good to be good *for* someone. Our proposal is that a valuable state of affairs A is good *for* someone S to the extent that A’s obtaining enhances S’s life. Defined in this way, it is plausible that not all valuable states of affairs are good for everyone, or at least that not all valuable states of affairs are good for everyone to the same degree. For example, a tree’s flourishing is good, but it is better for me than for you (*ceteris paribus*) if the tree is in my yard and not yours. Accordingly, the disposition on which we are focused is a tendency to promote the obtaining of valuable states of affairs that enhance the life of others rather than the obtaining of those that enhance one’s own life when the life-enhancement provided in each case is equal or incommensurable in value.

Our fifth and final clarificatory remark concerns the merely dispositional nature of the disposition in question. The trait on which we are focusing is a tendency to promote the goods of others rather than one’s own goods under certain triggering circumstances. But, it is merely a tendency. Even in cases where the triggering circumstances in question obtain, it needn’t be manifested. Indeed, the fully virtuous person who possesses this disposition may very well confront cases where she has to choose between promoting the goods of others or her own goods and where these goods are equal or incommensurable in value, and despite her being others-centered in the way described, she does not promote the goods of others. This can occur if, for example, despite the equality or incommensurability of the goods under consideration, there is some *other* difference in value between the options that is favorable toward promoting the goods of the others-centered person. A simple illustration might be a case where by behaving so as to promote the goods of others one is significantly less likely to bring these goods about than if one is to behave so as to promote one’s own good. This feature of the disposition of others-centeredness is not unique to it,<sup>5</sup> of course, as many valuable behavioral dispositions dispose their possessors to behave in a particular way only given that other values are equal. For example, it has been proposed that self-reliance disposes its possessor to rely upon herself, but that a self-reliant person may rely on others if by being self-reliant she would have to sacrifice other goods in order to obtain whatever goods are available through practicing self-reliance.<sup>6</sup> More generally, whether the constitutive manifestations of a trait are exhibited under those circumstances which constitute the triggering circumstances of the trait is in part a matter of what other traits the possessor of the trait has. Following the Aristotelian tradition, we would propose that different traits, including virtuous traits, can pull us in competing directions, and that it is the distinctive job of practical wisdom to settle matters where this occurs. As with other traits, others-centeredness exerts a pull on its possessor, a pull that is worthy of philosophical examination, but not a pull that cannot be overcome. In cases where all else is not equal, others-centeredness will not be the only trait that plays a role in a full explanation for its possessor’s conduct; yet, it may remain part of any such explanation.

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<sup>5</sup> Nor is this feature unique to dispositions which are character traits. For an example involving the disposition to roll, see (Mumford 2013).

<sup>6</sup> See discussion in (Byerly 2013).

In summary, the trait on which we wish to focus is a disposition, other values being equal, to promote goods that enhance the lives of others rather than goods that enhances one's own life where the value of the life-enhancements is equal or incommensurable. Worlds that differ only in that one of these life-enhancements is replaced by the other are equal in value or there is no fact of the matter about their relative value.

## 2. The Special Value of Others-Centeredness

Having clarified the nature of others-centeredness, our task in this section is now to argue that possessing it has a special value—a unique value not obtainable without possessing it. One is less likely to maximize overall value if one is not others-centered. We begin by saying a bit about what would be required in order to show that others-centeredness has a special value in this sense. We then discuss a tempting argument that others-centeredness *doesn't* have a special value. And we conclude by showing where this argument fails and offering a defense of the special value of others-centeredness.

Generally speaking, in order to show that a trait has a special value in the sense in which we are interested, one needs to show that by possessing the trait one is more likely to achieve goods the total value of which exceeds that of any goods one is more likely to achieve if one does not possess the trait. Traits with this kind of special value are, accordingly, essential components of the life that is most likely to achieve the greatest overall value. Knowing that others-centeredness has this sort of special value will be relevant for determining its moral status on a wide variety of competing metaethical views. Most obviously, given a strict consequentialism, the special value of others-centeredness will recommend it as a trait we should all possess. But, as Shelly Kagan (1998) has argued, non-consequentialist theories also often (and rightly) begin with the defeasible assumption that we ought to make the world better when we can; they simply end up differing from full-blown consequentialism in proposing that consequences are not *all* that matters when it comes to moral properties. Thus, on such views, while the special value of others-centeredness may not entirely settle the matter of the moral status of others-centeredness, it will nonetheless play an important role in settling the matter.

The special value of a trait in the sense articulated above can derive from two sources—either a fundamental and intrinsic value the trait has that is not had if it is not possessed, or some good for which the trait is instrumental, where the value of this good exceeds that of any goods for which the absence of the trait is instrumental. Thus, to show that others-centeredness has a special value, we need to show either that being disposed to promote the goods of others rather than one's own goods under appropriate circumstances is intrinsically valuable, or that it is instrumental to achieving something else that is good, where the value of this latter good exceeds the value of anything that one is more likely to achieve if one does not possess this disposition.

We will not in this paper take the approach of arguing that others-centeredness has an intrinsic value. Defending the intrinsic value of anything is notoriously difficult.<sup>7</sup> And, in this case it is unnecessary. What we will argue below is instead that being others-centered is instrumentally valuable because it makes the achievement of certain other goods more likely than if it is not possessed, and the value of these goods is greater than the value of any goods the

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<sup>7</sup> See discussion in (Zimmerman 2010).

achievement of which is more likely in the absence of others-centeredness. The others-centered person is more likely to bring about these goods than the person who is not others-centered, to do so because of her being others-centered, and the total value of these goods is greater than the total value of any goods that the non-others-centered person is more likely to bring about on account of her not being others-centered.

Before we follow through with the details of implementing this strategy for defending the special value of others-centeredness, we want to first consider an initially quite powerful objection to any kind of instrumentally-based defense of the special value of others-centeredness. Informally, the objection runs as follows. We proposed that in order for a trait to have a special value by virtue of its instrumental relationship to other goods, it must be that the person who possesses the trait is thereby made more likely to achieve greater total value than is the person who does not possess the trait. But, the objector argues, in the case of others-centeredness, this requirement is by definition not satisfied. For, while there are goods that the others-centered person is more likely to achieve than the non-others-centered person, the total value of these goods is by definition not greater than the total value of the goods that the non-others-centered person is more likely to achieve. This is because the goods the others-centered person is more likely to achieve than the non-others-centered person have values that are either equal to or incommensurable to goods that the non-others-centered person is more likely to achieve. Thus, others-centeredness cannot have a special instrumental value, and is not a necessary component of a life most likely to maximize total value.

More formally, the objection is the following, where O abbreviates “the others-centered person” and  $\sim$ O “the non-others-centered person”:

1. If others-centeredness has a special instrumental value, then there must be some good, G, such that O’s being others-centered makes it more likely that O will bring about G than that  $\sim$ O will, and G must be more valuable than any good, G\*, that  $\sim$ O is more likely to bring about than O because of  $\sim$ O’s not being others-centered.
2. The only goods that O’s being others-centered makes it more likely that O will bring about than that  $\sim$ O will bring about are goods that are equal or incommensurable in value to goods that  $\sim$ O is more likely to bring about than O.
3. So, others-centeredness does not have a special instrumental value.

Premise 1 here simply follows from the account offered above concerning what it would take to show that others-centeredness has a special instrumental value. And Premise 2 is supposed to follow from the account of others-centeredness offered in section 1. According to that account, what distinguishes the others-centered person from the non-others-centered person is just that the former is disposed to promote the goods of others and the latter her own goods when the goods in question are equal or incommensurable. But, then, it would seem that the only goods that the others-centered person is more likely to achieve than the non-others-centered person are goods of others which are equal or incommensurable in value to goods of the non-others-centered person which the latter is more likely to achieve than the others-centered person. For example, in the scenario described at the outset of this paper, the others-centered person will be more likely to bring about another’s completing a philosophical writing project, while the non-others-centered person will be more likely to bring about the completion of an equally or incommensurably

valuable writing project of her own. Accordingly, the only goods that the others-centered person is more likely to achieve than the non-others-centered person are goods the value of which does *not* exceed, but instead equals or is incomparable to, goods that the non-others-centered person is more likely to achieve. So, premise 2 is secure, and 3 follows from 1 and 2 by modus tollens.

While the foregoing line of argument is certainly tempting, it makes a significant mistake. Moreover, by diagnosing the mistake, we can build a case for the special value of others-centeredness. The objector has assumed that when the others-centered person is disposed to promote the goods, G, of another rather than her own goods, G\*, the only goods she is more likely to promote than if she were not others-centered are goods G. But, this is false. For, her achieving goods G itself involves the achievement of other goods that are not required for her to achieve goods G\*. This is because, if she works to achieve the goods G of another, she in the very process of doing so achieves some amount of other goods, G\*\*, of interpersonal union. She in some form or fashion unites herself with another in the pursuit of G. But such union is not required for her to promote her own goods, G\*.

The clearest case of such interpersonal union occurs when the others-centered person and the person she benefits cooperate in a way that is recognized by each. Indeed, in some cases, one cannot reliably promote the goods of another without promoting them in a way that requires this kind of union. To draw again upon the example with which this paper began, there will certainly be cases where one cannot reliably promote the completion of another's philosophical writing project without some amount of mutually recognized cooperation. Moreover, this kind of union involving overt, mutually recognized cooperation is arguably quite valuable. First, several authors in the literature on love have argued that such unions form the basis of love, one of the greatest human goods.<sup>8</sup> Even if we don't ultimately accept these authors' accounts of love, the fact that they have argued that such a supreme good as love consists in such unions speaks in favor of the value of these unions. Second, to draw again on an Aristotelian theme, it has long been argued that humans are uniquely political animals and that as such part of our unique function involves cooperative endeavors. If it is good to fulfill our unique function, as the Aristotelian will maintain, then it follows that it is good to engage in these kinds of overt, cooperative unions. Finally, we would propose that the fact that overt, cooperative unions are valuable provides an attractive explanation for why it is that human persons so widely regard such unions to be valuable. As the psychological literature on pro-social behavior makes clear, human beings are deeply concerned with training their young to cooperate with others.<sup>9</sup> We make this a major goal of education; and it is tempting to think that we do so because we have correctly recognized that cooperative unions are a good thing.

Of course, not all cooperative unions are created equal. A person may be disposed to cooperate with others, but always in a way where he ends up demeaning himself, becoming (albeit willingly) a doormat for those with whom he is cooperating. We think such cases do not impugn the value of others-centeredness, since others-centeredness does not dispose one to cooperate with others *in this way*. What these cases make clear is instead the disvalue of other traits—traits that regulate *the way* in which one tends to cooperate. Even in these cases, the fact

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<sup>8</sup> See (Solomon 1981, 1988), (Scruton 1986), (Nozick 1989), (Fisher 1990), (Delaney 1996), and (Pruss 2012).

<sup>9</sup> See (Mussen and Eisenberg 2001).

that cooperation is occurring is good; what is bad is the degenerative nature of the cooperation. Accordingly, we conclude that the overt, cooperative unions toward which others-centeredness disposes its possessor are valuable. Moreover, since these unions are required in order for the others-centered person to promote the goods of others in at least certain cases, but they are not required for the non-others-centered person to promote her own goods, they constitute a good that the others-centered person is more likely to achieve than the non-others-centered person because of her others-centeredness. Thus, the goods the others-centered person is more likely to promote than the non-others-centered person include more than the goods, G, of the other; they include these valuable, overt, cooperative unions, G\*, too.

Further still, we would propose that even when an others-centered person can and does promote the goods of another without the knowledge or cooperation of the other in a kind of behind-the-scenes manner her doing so uniquely involves the promotion of goods other than goods G. First, by consistently behaving in this manner, the others-centered person reinforces in herself the habit of others-centeredness. Her doing so makes it more likely that when cases of the former sort arise—cases where she can only promote the goods of the other through mutually recognized cooperation—she will indeed do so. In other words, practicing the promotion of others' goods, even when performed behind-the-scenes, reinforces one's others-centeredness, and this is uniquely instrumentally valuable because being others-centered makes it more likely that, when the opportunity arises, one will promote valuable unions of the kind already described. We also propose a second reason for thinking that, even where the others-centered person promotes the goods of another without overtly cooperating with the other, her doing so involves the promotion of goods other than G. This is because, while an overt, cooperative union is not created in such cases, there is still a certain kind of valuable union created. At minimum, we might say that a *moral* union is created, since a bond of *owing gratitude* now exists between the person who has been benefited and the others-centered benefactor. The union may not be one that both parties are aware of, but it is there nonetheless. Indeed, the fact that it is there and is valuable is revealed by the way we appropriately react when we find out after a period of ignorance that someone promoted our good in such a behind-the-scenes manner. We react by wishing we had known—wishing we had known of this valuable occurrence for which gratitude is deserved, wishing we had known that someone had been for us in this way. And the appropriateness of this gratitude signals that there is something valuable that has occurred beyond the achievement of the good that was promoted in the behind-the-scenes manner. The very activity of promotion itself, and not the achievement of the good, is what we are grateful for.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, nobody owes herself thanks for promoting her own goods. Accordingly, even these weaker unions, which can sometimes suffice for one to promote the goods of another, constitute goods other than G that the others-centered person is more likely to promote than the non-others-centered person.

To summarize, our defense of the special value of others-centeredness is as follows. Others-centeredness has a special instrumental value, because the person who possesses it is more likely than the person who does not to achieve certain goods the total value of which exceeds that of any goods that the non-others-centered person is more likely to achieve. The difference between the others-centered person and the non-others-centered person is that the

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<sup>10</sup> For more thorough development of this idea, as well as a detailed account of gratitude and defense of its value, see (Roberts forthcoming).



former is more likely to achieve certain goods,  $G$ , of others and the latter is more likely to achieve goods,  $G^*$ , of her own where these goods are of equal or incommensurable value. But, this does not imply that the others-centered person isn't more likely to achieve goods that have a total value that is greater than the total value of any goods the non-others-centered person is more likely to achieve. For, in addition to the goods  $G$  of the other, the others-centered person must also achieve certain goods  $G^{**}$  of interpersonal union that are necessary to advancing the goods,  $G$ , of the other. The total combined value of  $G + G^{**}$  exceeds the total combined value of the goods,  $G^*$ , that the non-others-centered person is more likely to achieve, at least in many cases. So, others-centeredness makes a necessary contribution to the life that is most likely to achieve the maximum overall value.

### 3. Objections and Replies

In this final section, we take up some of the best objections of which we are aware to the defense of the special value of others-centeredness presented above.

*First Objection:  $G^{**}$  can be had through self-centeredness, too.* It is crucial to our defense of the special value of others-centeredness that the goods of interpersonal union,  $G^{**}$ , are required in order for a person to promote the goods,  $G$ , of another, but that these are not required for the promotion of one's own goods,  $G^*$ . However, one might object that while achieving goods  $G^{**}$  is not required by *just any approach* to promoting one's own goods,  $G^*$ , there are at least some approaches to promoting  $G^*$  that *do* require promoting  $G^{**}$  as well. For example, while a person might be disposed to promote her own goods rather than those of others when these are equal or incommensurable in value, she might be disposed to do so *through welcoming others into the process of promoting her goods*. Rather than tilting in the direction of others, we might say that she tilts others toward herself. She has a kind of gravitational pull that is just as likely to result in valuable unions as the outward-directness of the others-centered person.

*Response: Attracting others requires either force or inconsistency.* We reply that the person who is disposed to attract others to the promotion of her projects when other things are equal either does so through coercing others or through non-coercively persuading them. In neither case will she be as likely to promote valuable interpersonal unions as the others-centered person. If she coerces others, there might be a high likelihood of others promoting her projects. But, there will not be the same kind of valuable interpersonal union that the others-centered person is likely to achieve. For, the kind of interpersonal union the others-centered person is likely to achieve is a voluntary union, and voluntary union is more valuable than involuntary union.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, if she instead attempts to persuade others, the unions that result may be voluntary, but she will not be as likely as the others-centered person to promote these voluntary unions. For, there is good reason for her persuasive activities to be viewed with suspicion, since by attempting to persuade others to promote her projects when all else is equal, she seems to be unwilling to do unto others as she would have them do unto her. As Kant (2004)

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<sup>11</sup> Here again, see the literature on love as union referenced above. See, also, the literature on "significant freedom," which stresses that *ceteris paribus* significantly free acts are more valuable than acts that are not significantly free (e.g., Plantinga 1974 and Swinburne 1979).

might put it, she cannot coherently “universalize her maxim.” She cannot, that is, coherently will for everyone to attempt to persuade others to promote their goods when all else is equal just as she aims to do. After all, there could be no rational basis for all such attempts at persuasion to succeed. For, where all other values are equal, such persuasion will amount to each person arguing that others should promote her goods just because they are hers, and this strategy is unlikely to convince.

*Second Objection: G\*\* can be had through graciously accepting help.* A second, related objection is that the goods, G\*\*, of interpersonal union can be advanced by a non-others-centered person who is simply disposed to graciously accept help. Here it isn't that the non-others-centered person *tilts* or *attracts* others to promoting her goods as in the first objection, but rather that she stands ready to receive others' efforts to promote her goods if and when they offer. One might argue that this non-others-centered person who is disposed to graciously accept help is just as likely as the others-centered person to advance the goods of personal union, G\*\*. After all, these unions take two—one who offers the help and one who accepts. By standing ready to receive help, one does just as much to advance such unions as the one who offers the help.

*Response: Two Problems.* We respond that there are two problems with this second objection. First, the objector overlooks the value of unions that do not require overt, mutually recognized cooperation. As we explained above, there are cases where another's good is advanced in a behind-the-scenes manner, where the benefactor's help goes unrecognized. There may even be cases where overt, mutually recognized cooperative union is not achievable, but where only such behind-the-scenes union is. The person who is others-centered is more likely to promote these latter unions than the person who is disposed to graciously accept help when it is offered. For, being others-centered increases the likelihood that behind-the-scenes promotion of another's good will take place, since the others-centered person will engage in such promotion; but standing ready to receive help when it is offered does nothing to promote behind-the-scenes help. Second, we propose that the person who merely stands ready to receive help in promoting her goods does not thereby do anything to promote cooperative union with her would-be helper, any more than by standing ready to receive a 30% bonus from my employer I do something to promote my reception of this bonus. Rather, the person who stands ready to receive help only does something to promote her union with another if help is indeed offered and she displays her readiness by accepting it. Whether her exhibition of non-others-centeredness involves promoting union with another, in other words, depends on help being offered to her by another—something beyond her control. By contrast, the person who exhibits others-centeredness in attempting to help another does do something to promote cooperative union with the other, even if her efforts at doing so are not accepted by the other. She can legitimately say that she tried to promote cooperative union with the other, while the person who merely stands ready cannot say this unless help is given and she accepts. Thus, whether the exhibition of the kind of non-others-centeredness described in the second objection promotes union with another is dependent upon what others do, but whether the exhibition of others-centeredness promotes union with others does not. And, as such, the others-centered person is able to exert greater control over whether valuable unions are promoted. Others-centeredness is a surer route to promoting valuable unions than is standing ready to accept help if it is offered.

*Third Objection: Others-centeredness leads to paralysis.* We argued above that possessing others-centeredness is a necessary component of the life that is most likely to maximize value. But, one might worry that this leads to a conundrum if it is supposed to be possible for there to be a community in which every person leads a life that maximizes value. For, suppose each member of a community is disposed to promote others' goods rather than her own when the values of these are equal or incommensurable. Whenever opportunity arises for displays of others-centeredness, won't all of the members of the community try to help each other, and none of them accept help themselves, leading to the promotion of *none* of their goods? Won't this paralyze the community such that no goods are ever advanced in such circumstances, because everyone is too concerned with promoting others' goods and not concerned enough with promoting her own? To reference the example with which this paper began, can't we prophecy the death of the philosophy paper?

*Reply: Others-centeredness is merely dispositional.* We reply by again emphasizing that others-centeredness is merely dispositional. Specifically, the person who possesses it is, *other values being equal*, disposed to promote the goods of others rather than her own goods. This leaves it open that in a community of others-centered persons, some of them, despite their tendency to promote others' goods, will yield and allow others to promote their goods, rather than yield to the kind of unproductivity with which this objection is concerned. Similarly, in a community of generous persons, some members will yield and accept the favors of others rather than allow the group to contain no generous actions.<sup>12</sup> We would propose here in line with our earlier comments about the Aristotelian tradition that it will be the distinctive role of practical wisdom to curb the tendencies of two or more equally others-centered individuals such that one of them decides to accept help from the others. Such a decision needn't be begrudged, since part of what motivates the others-centered person from the start will be the value of interpersonal unions she aims to achieve through her others-centeredness. Because she wants such unions, and the most reliable way for her to go about ensuring that something is done to secure them, as we've just argued, is for her to tilt toward others, she does so; yet, if she fortuitously finds herself in a community whose members share her tendency, there is nothing out of character in her accepting the help of another others-centered person.

*Objection 3: If G and G\* are incommensurable, so are G + G\*\* and G.* Whereas the non-others-centered person is likely to produce her own goods, G\*, we claim that the others-centered person is likely to produce both the goods, G, of others and the goods, G\*\*, of interpersonal union. Moreover, we claim that because of this, the others-centered person is more likely to produce goods the total value of which exceeds that of any goods that the non-others-centered person is more likely to produce because of her not being others-centered, at least in a good many cases. Thus, we are committed to the claim that, in a good many cases, the value of G + G\*\* exceeds that of the value of G\*. Now, this is plausible where the value of G and G\* is equal. But, it isn't clear that this is so where G and G\* are *incommensurable* in value. Indeed, if G and G\* are incommensurable, it's not clear that the conjunction of G with anything else will

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<sup>12</sup> It is hard to over-stress the mere dispositionality of others-centeredness. There are many other objections we might have considered in the text that it helps to address as well. For example, one might worry that the others-centered person will promote patronization, stunting the growth of others. We would again reply that the others-centered person is only disposed to promote others' goods *other things being equal*, and here other things certainly are not equal.

be commensurable with  $G^*$ , or that the conjunction of  $G^*$  with anything else will be commensurable with  $G$ . In fact, one might think that if  $G$  and  $G^*$  are incommensurable, then the union of  $G$  with anything else will likewise be incommensurable with  $G^*$ . So, it's not clear that the others-centered person is more likely to produce goods the total value of which exceeds that of any goods the non-others-centered person is more likely to produce because of her non-others-centeredness.

*Reply:  $G + G^{**}$  may exceed  $G^*$  even if  $G$  and  $G^*$  are incommensurable.* We respond by denying the claim that if  $G$  and  $G^*$  are incommensurable, so are  $G + G^{**}$  and  $G^*$ . Certainly, this will not be the case wherever  $G^{**}$  itself exceeds  $G^*$  in value. For, generally, if the value of  $x$  exceeds the value of  $y$ , then the value of the conjunction of  $x$  and anything having a value incommensurable with the value of  $y$  exceeds the value of  $y$ . Thus, at least in cases where the value of interpersonal union,  $G^{**}$ , is more valuable than the value of the goods,  $G^*$ , one would promote by promoting one's own goods over those of others, the value of  $G + G^{**}$  exceeds that of the value of  $G^*$ , despite the incommensurability of  $G$  and  $G^*$ . Moreover, the comments about the value of the more overt unions described above suggest that there are some cases where this value is more valuable than the value of the goods one would promote for oneself if one did not perform an others-centered act. Further, we would venture to propose that this is not the only case where the principle proposed in objection four fails. The logic of incommensurability seems to be much like that of inscrutability. Despite the fact that the likelihood of a proposition  $p$  is inscrutable and so we cannot tell whether  $p$  is more likely than another proposition  $q$ , if we disjoin  $p$  with a proposition  $r$  that has a positive likelihood, it may now become quite clear that  $p$  or  $r$  is more likely than  $q$ . Likewise, despite the fact that the value of a good  $G$  is incommensurable with the value of a good  $G^*$ , if we combine  $G$  with a good  $G^{**}$  that has a positive value, it may now become quite clear that the value of  $G + G^{**}$  exceeds the value of  $G^*$ . For instance, there will be cases where, despite the incommensurability of your philosophy project and your friend's, it is clearly more valuable for you to unite with your friend in the promotion of her project than it is for you to promote your own project. Thus, we would propose that in at least a good many cases, the value of  $G + G^{**}$  will exceed the value of  $G^*$ , despite the incommensurability of  $G$  and  $G^*$ .

We are not claiming, of course, that in any case where  $G$  and  $G^*$  are incommensurable,  $G + G^{**}$  will exceed  $G^*$ . In some cases,  $G + G^{**}$  may remain incommensurable with  $G^*$ . We offer two comments in response to this observation, however. First, we apply the same reasoning we offered earlier in our discussion of different kinds of unions. When one promotes the goods of another rather than her own goods in cases where these goods are incommensurable, doing so solidifies the disposition to promote the goods of others rather than one's own in cases of incommensurability. And, by doing so, one makes it more likely that one will promote greater total value when the opportunity arises—that is, when one of the kinds of cases discussed in the previous paragraph takes place, where  $G + G^{**}$  indeed does exceed  $G^*$ .

Second, we emphasize that while it is possible for the value of  $G + G^{**}$  to exceed that of  $G^*$ , it is *not* possible for the value of  $G^*$  to exceed that of  $G + G^{**}$ . At best,  $G^*$  can equal  $G + G^{**}$ . For, if  $G^*$  were to exceed  $G + G^{**}$ ,  $G^*$  would have to exceed  $G$ , since  $G + G^{**}$  exceeds  $G$ . But,  $G^*$  cannot exceed  $G$ , since these are by stipulation incommensurable. Accordingly, while being others-centered can lead to the promotion of goods the total value of which exceeds that of

goods promoted through non-others-centeredness, even when G and G\* are incommensurable, being non-others-centered cannot.

We might summarize these lessons as follows. By being others-centered in cases of incommensurability, one can never go wrong with respect to promoting total value. But, one can go wrong with respect to total value in cases of incommensurability if one is not others-centered. Moreover, by being others-centered in cases of incommensurability, one can and often will go right with respect to promoting total value. And, acting so as to solidify the disposition of others-centeredness only makes this more likely. So, we conclude that others-centeredness as defined throughout this paper, including cases of incommensurability, continues to have a special value.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has offered a defense of the special value of others-centeredness, a disposition to promote goods of others rather than one's own goods when these goods are equal or incommensurable in value. We argued, specifically, that others-centeredness of this sort is a necessary component of the life most likely to maximize value, because there are certain goods one is more likely to promote with it than without it, and the value of these goods exceeds the value of any goods one is more likely to promote without others-centeredness. A key component of this defense was our proposal that the goods that the others-centered person is more likely to promote than the non-others-centered person include goods of interpersonal union. This result is an important one for assessing the moral status of others-centeredness on a wide variety of metaethical positions.

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