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Precious Goods

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Abstract

Many of the most significant goods in human life are fleeting, fragile, and subject to loss. But this aspect of such goods, what I call their preciousness, is undertheorized. Here I provide an account of the nature of precious goods, and argue that this category of goods is significant. I argue that while the preciousness of goods is not a consistent contributor to their intrinsic value, preciousness nevertheless calls for a distinct attitudinal response on the part of rational agents: a focused, joyful attention I refer to as *cherishing*.

Keywords: Well-being; value; normativity; ethics

In Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle expresses skepticism of the claim that the good should be understood as honor. After all, to possess honor depends on the fleeting feelings of others, and "we intuitively believe that the good is something of our own and hard to take from us," (Aristotle (1999) *NE*, 1095b). This firm conviction seems to have caught on in the Ancient and Medieval periods. Augustine, for example, suggests that the good cannot be possessed "in this life," given that "when or where or how can [people] be so securely possessed in this life that they are not subject to the ups and downs of fortune?" (Augustine (1998) *City of God*, XIX).[1] Being subject to fortune – for Augustine – being pretty firm evidence that one's life isn't going well. The good, after all, should be hard to take.

But this can't be right. Leaving aside questions of honor or the afterlife, insistence that happiness or well-being should be stable or permanent seems to run counter to our lived experience of the good. Much of what makes our lives good, much of what contributes to happiness, does not seem particularly hard to take from us; it seems delicate, fleeting, and fragile.[2] These goods could cease at a moment's notice, depending on luck, happenstance, or simply the passage of time. And, indeed, if we're talking about the

[1]See also Aquinas, *Treatise on Happiness*, 5.4. Of course, the insistence on the stability of goods in the Greek period is a central theme of Martha Nussbaum's magisterial *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986).

[2]One might complain that I'm being unfair to Aristotle and Augustine here; after all, their notion of "happiness" refers to the "complete" good, which is lacking in nothing (*NE* 1097a-b). But it's not clear to me

goods for a person, then many, if not all, will be impermanent to some extent. Mortals die, and though this may not be the whole story of their good,[3] with them dies a wide range of goods.

In this essay, I want to inquire about goods that defy Aristotle's bold "intuitive belief." I argue not only that there is a special class of intrinsic values that are fleeting, fragile, or otherwise unstable or insecure (what I call "precious goods"), but that this fact is normatively interesting. Thus this paper proceeds in two stages. First, I provide the conceptual outline of precious goods, and how intrinsic values can possess the property of preciousness as I understand it, and how the nature of preciousness is distinct from other axiological categories (including, e.g., intrinisic and instrumental value, and what Gwen Bradford calls "irreplaceable value"). Second, I argue that precious goods display a distinct normative consequence, viz., they call for a particular sort of *attitudinal response* on the part of rational agents.

1 Preciousness

This section is dedicated to discussing, in some detail, the notion of a precious good. Note that I do not intend that *my* use of this term *in any way* matches on to some pretheoretic commonsense notion of the precious. Rather, I use that term to illustrate the particular phenomenon I'm interested in discussing, whether or not its everyday conceptual contours are precise enough for my purposes.

There are three key notions that go into understanding preciousness. First, the *value* of a given object or state; second, its *time-limitation*; third, its *repeatability*. I take these in turn.

1.1 Goodness and time-limitation

Here are some examples of the sort of thing I mean when I talk about a precious good:

> *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*: In 2021, famed artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped Paris's iconic *Arc de Triomphe* in a silver cloth and ribbon, a work of art that they had conceived some sixty years earlier. A monumental achievement, it was on display for two weeks only.

Take another example:

> *The Love of a Child*: A parent and young child form a tremendously close bond, which the parent values highly. As the child grows, this bond weakens, eventually becoming a different relationship altogether, one of distant respect and cordiality, but not the same loving intensity typical of parents and young children.

What do these examples have in common? First, they feature states of affairs, events, objects, and so on that are *valuable*. The intense, loving relationship between a young child and a parent is certainly good; valuable not only for the parent but also (plausibly) for the child, the ebbing of which is experienced by many parents as a loss. In addition, *L'Arc de*

that we cannot possess that which lacks nothing without it being the case that we cannot lose that which lacks nothing; this would appear to require modal security of the good that is beyond commonsense.

[3]See, for instance, Boonin (2021); Dorsey (2013).

Triomphe, Wrapped was a project of astounding esthetic value and cultural significance. Second, these goods are *time-limited*. The intense love of a child is not something that lasts forever (much to the chagrin of generations' worth of loving parents). And the very nature of the Christo and Jeanne-Claude piece is its impermanence.

These features are the key elements that explain or ground the preciousness of goods. To begin with an obvious point, precious goods must be, well, *good*: preciousness is at least in part dependent upon the presence of *value*. Being hit with a Mack Truck ends pretty quickly; one's time in the dentist chair is fleeting. But none of these are precious. Indeed, it seems right to say that precious goods of the kind I'm interested in discussing (and that plausibly have the normative significance I see in precious goods) must be *intrinsically* valuable, or perhaps "finally valuable" or "valuable as an end."[4] To be, say, merely instrumentally valuable, even if time-limited, is not sufficient to make this particular good *precious*, at least on my account (one might consider, for instance, a soon-expiring high-limit credit card; of time-limited instrumental value, but not precious). Notice that intrinsic value upon which preciousness can supervene can come in different flavors. For instance, some precious goods may have esthetic value (cf. the wrapped *Arc de Triomphe*). Some precious goods may have welfare value (the short-lived but intense relationship with one's small child). In addition, a precious good might instantiate intrinsic value "*tout court*" – it may just be a *good thing* (such as, e.g., Moore's beautiful world) (Moore (1903), §50).

In addition, these goods (to be precious) must be fleeting, fragile, or time-limited. I do not call intrinsic values that are permanent or "hard to take away" precious; rather, this term is reserved for goods that are time-limited in the way specified by the examples above. Now, it is surely the case that all goods are at least to some extent time-limited. Even if we imagine that goods can have that status independently of the existence of human beings, surely the heat death of the universe will destroy whatever good happened to exist. Just because this is true, however, it is nevertheless the case that we can and should talk about goods that are more precious; more time-limited. Preciousness, then, is a scalar phenomenon – the more time-limited an intrinsic good is (other things being equal), the more precious.

1.2 Time and fragility

So far, it would appear that being precious (or the extent to which preciousness is instantiated) is grounded in or explained by two properties, viz., being good, and being time-limited. And while this account is a good start, it needs amendment. Other examples of precious goods seem not to depend on the time-limitedness of the good, *per se*, but rather something like its *fragility* – the ease by which it *might be taken from us*. Take, for instance:

> *Ancient Canvas*: In the archives of an old monastery, a beautiful likeness of a young woman (representing the Madonna) is discovered, painted almost certainly over a millennium ago. But it is painted on a canvas that is extremely brittle and delicate.

[4]By "intrinsic value," I mean the sort of value a thing possesses as an end, in and of itself, for its own sake – what Christine Korsgaard and others have sometimes referred to as "final" value (1996). I will eschew any further analysis of intrinsic value, relying on the general intuitive notion here; nothing will hinge on any further details. But suffice it to say, for my purposes here, precious goods must be *intrinsic* goods, at least of this kind.

Consider also:

> *Worried Musician*: A violin player has worked exceedingly hard to ascend to the top ranks of his chosen life's pursuit. But he is also genetically susceptible to a nerve-related illness (focal dystonia[5]) that, were it to materialize, would render him unable to play with the skill he so aptly displays.

These cases are different than the former. The goods on display here (i.e., the beauty of the canvas, the achievement of the musician) are not – or, at least, not *necessarily* – time-limited. Suppose, for instance, that the dystonia never develops in the musician; the canvas is successfully preserved. But these goods are nevertheless *fragile*, *precarious*, and, it seems to me, precious. Their existence is unstable and subject to being lost.

The notion of fragility in this context calls out for analysis. But this analysis reveals that the differences between strictly time-limited goods and fragile goods are less than one might imagine at first. After all, when the worried musician worries, what, precisely, is he worried about? Presumably, that his career may be lost, that it may end up being *actually* time-limited or shortened beyond what he would value. When we take care to preserve the ancient canvas, we try to avoid the state of affairs in which it crumbles, lasts *less time* than we would ordinarily like. Put another way, fragility is typically understood as a paradigmatic instance of a *disposition* – the disposition to, say, break or in some other way be destroyed under certain conditions. But this disposition can simply be put in temporal language: the disposition to *endure for less time*.[6]

But if this is right, we can make a distinction between what we might call *objective* time-limitedness of goods (goods that are actually, in point of fact, limited in time), and *dispositional* time-limitedness of goods (viz., goods that are *apt* to be time-limited under certain conditions). So, for instance, if the musician's career never actually ends as a result of focal dystonia, we may say that his career is precious *given* that it maintains a degree of *dispositional* time-limitation – "fragility." One can interpret the relation between fragility and preciousness in different ways. One might say that *both* time-limitation and fragility ground preciousness. Alternatively, one might cleave the notion of preciousness itself; perhaps dispositional time-limitation yields only a form of dispositional preciousness. For my money, I'm inclined toward the former interpretation, but I won't argue for that in any strong way here.[7] Though I'll continue to talk about preciousness *tout court*, those who wish to mark a distinction between objective and dispositional preciousness are free to do so.[8]

[5]Dystonia is a form of nerve illness that affects many walks of life, but is especially devastating to musicians. Examples of performers who have succumbed to this illness include Bernard Zinck (violin), David Vining (trombone), Keith Emerson (keyboard), and this author.

[6]Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for very helpful comments here.

[7]One might imagine that the interpretation will depend on whether one is inclined to say, after the musician retires from a lifelong career, that his career *was* precious, or that it turned out that his career *wasn't* precious, though fragile. Again, I'm strongly inclined toward the former but will not commit one way or the other here.

[8]In addition, one might mark a third variety of time-limitation, viz., *subjective* time-limitation: the extent to which we may *believe* that a particular good is time-limited. Of course, we wouldn't want to say that just any old irrational belief is sufficient to ground preciousness: if I happened to believe, say, that the Grand Canyon was due to crumble any day because Bugs Bunny was about to bulldoze it, this doesn't make it precious, either subjectively or in any other way. But we may wish to include at least some rational beliefs; perhaps, say, the violin player was told by a doctor – competent but in this case mistaken – that his career

1.3 Repetition

Further amendment is required. Importantly, preciousness is not guaranteed simply by the fact that a good is time-limited or fragile. To see this, consider the following case:

> *First Cup*: Susan enjoys her first cup of coffee in the morning highly. This good is, of course, time-limited given the nature of coffee and the enjoyment she takes in it. So the good of this enjoyment is fleeting. But she has a first-cup of the day every morning.

I submit that Susan's experience of her first cup of coffee is not particularly precious, though it is intrinsically good and also time-limited. What is missing between the examples of precious goods I've so far outlined and Susan's, delicious though it may be, cup of coffee? Plausibly: the value contained in this cup of coffee (perhaps the pleasure of drinking it, etc.) is subject to *repetition*.[9] After all, Susan can have another cup of coffee tomorrow morning, or perhaps even later today.

Consider also:

> *Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Again*: Christo and Jeanne-Claude achieved and artistic and cultural *coup* with their extraordinary work in wrapping *l'Arc de Triomphe*. Indeed, it was such a success, that they decided to do it annually for two weeks in June.

The esthetic value of the original wrapped *l'Arc de Triomphe* was precious: time-limited. But surely it is the case that the *repetition* of this good tempers its preciousness. After all, it will happen again next year, and the next, and so on.

Two notes. First, being subject to repetition must be balanced against being time-limited. Imagine a flower that blooms once per year, and only overnight. This bloom, intrinsically valuable given its beauty, may be highly precious despite being subject to repetition. Thus being subject to replacement or repetition is not sufficient to strip preciousness from a given good; at best it is a tempering device. Second, a *lack* of repetition is not itself guaranteed to make a good precious. The Grand Canyon, for instance, is not subject to repetition. It is, as Gwen Bradford would suggest, an "irreplaceable good" (Bradford (2023), (2024)). But it is not ipso facto precious given its irreplaceability. The Grand Canyon, though finite given the structure of the universe and the laws of geology, lacks any *particular* time-limitation.

With all this in mind, what does repetition refer to? The answer is far from straightforward. Imagine, for instance, a parent engaged in a particularly intense loving relationship with their young child. Is this relationship subject to repetition? Well, in one sense, no: this child will clearly not be this young again, and hence the *particular* good of

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was about to end. This may be sufficient to render his career precious, or at least subjectively precious, despite its being neither fragile nor objectively time-limited. However, as with dispositional preciousness, I'm simply going to treat subjective time-limitation as grounding of preciousness *tout court*, rather than as some special form of preciousness (subjective preciousness) but, again, I leave this as an open matter for the reader's proclivities.

[9]Notice that repetition, like time-limitation, also permits of objective and subjective varieties (cf. note 8). And like subjective time-limitation, I'm inclined to treat *aptness* to be repeated as a factor in preciousness. See also note 7.

this intense relationship is not repeatable. On the other hand, the parent could have another child, and if they do, one might imagine that they have another relationship with their new child that is in many ways similar. Is the good of the original relationship repeatable? Or not? If the answer here is "yes," then it would seem as though that intense relationship is a less precious good than I would originally have thought. But if the answer is "no" then it's hard to see why the esthetic value of the Christo and Jeanne-Claude piece is subject to preciousness-tempering repetition; same for the good obtained by Susan's morning coffee. After all, this *particular* wrapping of the *Arc de Triomphe*; this *particular* cup of coffee, will not occur again.

To better understand the notion of repetition, I borrow from Bradford's analysis of irreplaceability. Take the cup of coffee. Intuitively speaking, this good is subject to repetition by, for instance, having another cup of coffee. But, literally, the experience of having that cup of coffee will not be identical – there will be a number of both intrinsic and extrinsic properties that will be distinct (the particular temperature; the particular moment the coffee is had after rousing from sleep; the unique bitterness of this cup given the slightly-harder-than-normal water that went into making it, and so on). Bradford rightly suggests that, when it comes to replacement or repetition, the key is to pick out the *relevant properties* that determine whether the good is or is not repeated. And put in this way, the question becomes more tractable. The proposal is that a good x is repeated to the extent that the *value-instantiating properties* of the particular good are repeated. Of course, how we understand this notion will depend on what we think the value-instantiating properties are. For instance, imagine that the value-instantiating properties of a cup of coffee merely include the such-and-such degree of pleasure one obtains from the coffee, of a certain temporal duration t. If that's right, then that good is not precious and will certainly be repeatable, not just by having another cup of coffee, but by doing anything that grants that degree of pleasure for that particular temporal duration.

However, we may wish to expand our understanding of value-instantiating properties,[10] perhaps *via* a form of perfectionism (Hurka (1993), Brink (2008), Bradford (2015) or a so-called "objective list" approach to the good (Fletcher (2013), Rice (2013)). For instance, one might imagine that value-instantiating properties of the cup of coffee go beyond the simple pleasure of drinking it, but also include, say, the gustatory or cultural experience involved; perhaps there is a deeper esthetic appreciation one might have of specific elements of this or that coffee brew with a particular single-origin coffee beans, and so forth. If that's right, then depending on the sort of coffee we're dealing with, and depending on the sophistication of the consumer's palate, there may be additional goods derived from this particular cup, making the good less repeatable, more precious. In the case of, e.g., the Christo and Jeanne-Claude piece the value-instantiating properties will be, for instance, its audacity (it's the *Arc de Triomphe*!), as well as its grandeur, its delicacy, and so on. But if they choose to repeat their work, these properties will be instantiated again the next year, and the next, making this good subject to repetition.

In addition, we generally regard special relations to others, like children or other loved ones, as *not* subject to evaluative repetition or replaceability.[11] For instance, a key

[10]It's important to note here that I don't wish to dispute the various fundamental axiological accounts of value-instantiating properties, whether they be objectivist, subjectivist, and so forth. Rather, I intend only to show how different goods may or may not be repeatable under different substantive approaches.

[11]On this point, Joseph Raz writes: "Personal meaning [i.e., that which makes "our life worth living"] does indeed depend on attachments: we live for our relations with people we love, for the goals we pursue, be they professional, political, social, or other, and for those aspects of the world which have come to have special

objection to some accounts of friendship is what Kristán Kristjánsson calls the "problem of essential substitutability" (Kristjánsson (2022), 43), viz., the suggestion that the value of a friendship is divorced from the particular person; one could simply substitute one friend or loved one for another were the good-making properties of the other equivalent or superior. But this seems wrong: the value maintained by a *particular* relation – say, between this particular parent and this particular child, or these particular friends – is dependent upon the *particulars* (for instance, the particular relationship that has been built up (Jeske (2024)).[12] If that's right, then any parent's bond with an individual child will have unique evaluative properties that cannot simply be replicated, even if the proposed replication is by means of another child. If these reflections are correct, and if they can be sustained by an adequate account of such relationships,[13] then we should regard the valuable relationship between young child and parent as being both valuable, time-limited, and not subject to repetition – in other words, *precious*.

Alternatively, one might adopt something like a subjectivist account of the fundamental value-bearing properties. In this case, the value-instantiating properties of the cup of coffee will depend on the properties instantiated by the coffee that are valued or desired or otherwise taken a pro-attitude toward by the person who consumes it. Perhaps they like its strength, its dark creaminess, its tendency to jolt one into waking life, or its powerful hit of caffeine. Perhaps they just value drinking coffee for its own sake. The relevant good, then, will be subject to repetition to the extent that the objects of this person's valuing attitudes *that explained the value of the original good* are repeated – the strength, the darkness, bitterness, the intrinsic coffee-ness, or whatever. And, indeed, such an account seems plausible in the case of the parent and child's intense relationship. If we're talking about welfare value for the parent, part of what typically bears value for the parent is not that the relationship is with some child or other, but rather *this child in particular*. (See, especially, Raz (2001), 25.) Having another child, with which one has such an intense relation, will not be sufficient to repeat the first, given that this will be a different child, valued differently (perhaps because the relationship is one with *that* child). Of course, if the parent has a different sort of attitude, i.e., they just like to have intense loving relationships with whatever kids are around, then the preciousness of this particular relationship will be diminished, which seems overall like a plausible verdict in light of such a psychology and an underlying subjectivism.

Summing up these ruminations, then, the preciousness of a good seems determined by the following factors:

meaning fur us, those we have 'tamed'," (Raz (2001), 19). Here attachments are to particular, unique individuals. Note that Raz's use of "taming" refers to *Le Petit Prince*. There, the fox says to the Prince: "To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me ... But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world . . . " (Saint-Exupéry (1943), 66).

[12]Monique Wonderly, for instance, claims that bonds of this form are a result of "attachment," which entails a "non-substitutable particular" (Wonderly (2016)).

[13]Notice that there are a range of accounts of such relationships, but virtually all will hold that there is something importantly valuable about the *particular* other: Simon Keller (2013), for instance, holds that the significance (though, on his account, we're discussing normative significance) of a particular friendship is the valuable properties of the specific other; and though this view gives rise to the problem of substitutability, Keller is keen to suggest that a *particular* relationship is required for the reasons to be enabled. Cf. Keller (2013), ch. 5.

Preciousness: an occurrent good *g* is precious to the extent that it is (a) intrinsically valuable and (b) time-limited/temporally fragile (tempered by repeatability).

2 Preciousness and value

I have so far outlined a notion of value that I call "preciousness." The extent to which a good is precious is a factor of its time-limitation, tempered by the extent to which this good is subject to repetition. But one might wonder why preciousness is interesting or worth investigation. Just because some intrinsically valuable things may be blue, for instance, does not entail that "blue goods" is a class that seems worth positing and analyzing.

In response, it could be that preciousness has a certain kind of *evaluative* significance. For instance, we might say that precious goods are, given their preciousness, of greater intrinsic value; or of greater instrumental value, and so on. However, evaluative effects like this seem to me not to track preciousness consistently. Take instrumental value first. Some of what is special about precious goods – especially those that are particularly fragile – is surely instrumental in character. For the sake of his career, the musician must, say, reduce his stress levels to avoid potential dystonia triggers, leading to better overall mental states, etc. Because their intense, loving relationship is short-lived, the parent may rationally dive into it with far more gusto, and maintain a more fulfilling and valuable relationship as a result. On the flipside, however, the worried musician is, after all, *worried* – the precious nature of his career is clearly the cause of regrettable mental states that he would be better-off avoiding if possible. The short-lived nature of the intense love of a child can cause a parent real sadness and anxiety about the day it eventually fades away. And so on. So any instrumental value (whether negative or positive) seems dependent upon highly contingent and contextually embedded factors, and not a consistent result of preciousness *per se*.

Does the preciousness of a good say anything about its intrinsic value? Perhaps, but *mostly no*: the mere fact that something is precious is not itself a good-maker. To see this, one might compare *Worried Musician* with:

Calm Musician: A violin player has worked exceedingly hard to ascend to the top ranks of his chosen life's pursuit. His talent and ability are not threatened (or abnormally threatened, anyway) by looming illnesses and disorders.

Assuming that *Worried Musician* and *Calm Musician* both maintain a career of equivalent duration, they value their careers to the same extent, and so forth, it seems wrong to say that a career in violin is not as valuable for *Calm Musician* as it is for *Worried Musician*. That is to say, the *career itself* is not *made better* because it is precious or fragile. Now, I say "mostly no" because there do seem to be cases in which time-limitation can be an aspect of intrinsic value; this seems most plausibly true in certain esthetic cases. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's wrapping of *L'Arc de Triomphe* is one such case: it may be that part of its esthetic value is that it is fleeting, time-limited, not meant to be a permanent feature of the Paris scene. But, again, this result is not consistent. For instance, we would hardly say that the ancient canvas was more intrinsically valuable than other such works of art simply for being brittle.

If this is correct, then while the preciousness of some goods clearly has some evaluative effects, whether intrinsic or instrumental, these effects cannot themselves

explain any more general, consistent relation between value and preciousness. If that's right, preciousness may seem more like a "blue good": though some goods may be more valuable the bluer they get (for instance, some Picasso piece), we would hardly say that "blue goods" is a significant category because of this fact.

One might attempt to assimilate the precious and the irreplaceable (Bradford (2023), (2024)). On Bradford's analysis, the value of something is irreplaceable if the properties upon which its value depends are "un-reinstantiable." This is true of, say, the value of the Sistine Chapel ceiling. No matter how exact a qualitative duplicate is, it could never reinstantiate the property of being painted by Michelangelo. And it seems quite true that many instances of precious goods will be irreplaceable: the musician's career, the love of a child, and so on. Hence one might imagine that preciousness is a *form* or *kind* of irreplaceability.

But this is not correct. Though there is substantial overlap between goods that are precious and goods that are irreplaceable, Preciousness is a distinct axiological category. Of course, the extent to which a good is replaceable (i.e., repeatable) may temper its preciousness. But being irreplaceable (or, perhaps, being *less replaceable*) is neither necessary nor sufficient for preciousness. The Sistine Chapel's ceiling is anything but fragile or time-limited (or, I should say, is not *particularly* fragile or time-limited), though irreplaceable. Furthermore, not all precious goods will be irreplaceable, though many of the central examples may be. The extent to which repetition affects preciousness is highly scalar and can be balanced against the extent to which the good involved is time-limited. The annual nightly blooming of a beautiful flower can be precious despite its repeatability, given that its bloom is *so* short-lived. Furthermore, *L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped* is certainly *replaceable*; were it to have been damaged during its display it could have been fixed or replaced in any way that matters for its intrinsic value. But it was nevertheless precious given its time-limitation.[14] Irreplaceability simply picks out a different feature of goods, distinct from the time-limitation picked out by the precious.

So we have yet to see what is "special" in precious goods in comparison to other goods – and if this is right, then I have not yet vindicated the claim that precious goods form an interesting or noteworthy class. But I think if we are looking for the specialness of precious goods in their evaluative consequences we are barking up the wrong tree. Rather, the significance of precious goods is not *evaluative* but *normative*.

3 Preciousness and cherishing

In this section, I argue that the significance of precious goods should be understood in the following way, viz., that they call for a distinct fitting attitude or response on the part of rational agents. Note that certain kinds of value call for certain responses: the (or perhaps a) proper response to intrinsic value is promotion or preservation (which also seems the proper response to irreplaceable value, cf. Bradford (2023)); the proper response to "signatory" value (value as a sign of something intrinsically good) is acknowledgement; the proper response to instrumental value is *use*, and so on.

[14]Gwen Bradford also calls my attention to the following difference. Irreplaceable goods, for Bradford, call for preservation (Bradford (2024), 155). But this isn't always true in the case of the precious; we have no reason to preserve the wrapped *Arc de Triomphe* insofar as its esthetic value, in part, depends on its time-limitation.

But these responses seem ill-fitting for precious goods *insofar as they are precious*. (Though, of course, we can admit general reasons to promote the good insofar as it is *good*.) It would hardly be plausible to say, for instance, that one ought to spend one's time and energy promoting the time-limitedness of goods. Second, while some precious goods should be preserved, preciousness *itself* does not call for preservation. As discussed in note 14 above, the right response to the preciousness of the wrapping of *l'Arc de Triomphe* is not to *preserve* its wrapping. And while, for instance, the worried musician surely has reason to take steps to preserve his career, this advice doesn't really seem to apply if it became clear that his career was time-limited as a result of more humdrum factors, such as his impending retirement.

But I argue here that there is a proper response to precious value. To see this, let's imagine that the worst happens. The worried musician starts to discern early, but nevertheless quite clear, symptoms of focal dystonia. He realizes that while he won't be unable to play for, say, another two years or so, his inability is surely coming. What sort of advice would we, or would a sympathetic and compassionate advisor, have for this person? Plausibly, one such bit of advice would be to "enjoy every minute" of what one has left – take special care to, as it were, to *revel* in the value of his career, while there is yet time. It would be, in short, to recognize that the goodness of his career is fleeting, likely to end soon, and to pay special attention to its goodness while it lasts.

I'm going to call this rough catalog of responses "cherishing."[15] And it is *this* sort of response that I think is special about precious goods. Indeed, the appropriateness of cherishing seems to track the various dimensions by which preciousness is grounded. If a good is less valuable, other things equal, it seems as though there is less cause to cherish it. If a good is less time-limited the same seems to follow; equally for goods that are less fragile. Furthermore, if a good is to be repeated, it seems right to say that there is weaker reason to cherish that good in comparison to one that is not, or is going to be repeated less frequently. The preciousness of a good, or so I claim, is a reason to cherish it, in a way that weakens as a good gets more stable, robust, or time-tested.[16]

3.1 Cherishing as attention

So far I have argued that precious goods call for a distinct attitudinal response from agents that I call "cherishing." But what is cherishing? What does this attitude amount to? My answer runs like this: cherishing seems to me a quasi-cognitive, quasi-affective orientation toward the good in question. I think there are two essential elements of this orientation, though I don't want to rule out the possibility that there could be others. To begin, it is an *appreciation* of the good in question. Appreciation, as I understand it here, is a form of attention, and a recognition of the goodness inherent in the particular good. In this way, appreciation of the value of a precious good is in some ways different than the more familiar notion of esthetic appreciation. Typically, esthetic appreciation is

[15]Bradford ((2024), 155, 171) also suggests that we have reason to cherish irreplaceable goods. But the extent to which we do so seems not a factor of a good's replaceability or lack thereof, but rather its *preciousness*. Irreplaceable goods that are nonetheless not in any way time-limited do not seem to call for cherishing in the same way; at least as I explain it here.

[16]Notice that it is not the preciousness *itself* that is cherished – unless, as in the case of *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, the preciousness is itself a good-maker, or part of the good itself. Rather, it is the *good* that should be cherished *because* it is precious – because it is good and fleeting. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this helpful clarification).

understood as a cognition of the value-making properties of an object, understood by a kind of first-personal acquaintance or confrontation.[17] For instance, Page (2022) suggests that an "appreciative understanding" of an esthetic object involves two key components, viz., "the capacity to form and communicate an appreciative interpretation of an artwork and an experiential sensitivity to the artwork's particular esthetic character and/or value," (52). Here esthetic appreciation crucially involves understanding and cognizing the *value-making* properties of an object, and cognizing those properties as valuable (perhaps first-personally, communicably, and so on). When it comes to cherishing, it seems right not only that one will cognize the relevant properties as valuable, but rather that this *valueableness* will be part of that to which one directs one's attention. So cherishing has at least the following feature, viz., a specific orientation toward the goodness of the precious good. *Caveat*: I want to be careful that cherishing not become too intellectualized. To be attentive to the goodness of some good is not necessarily to be attentive to the goodness of that good *under that description*, or as an instance of, say, some Platonic form of goodness, etc. It is sufficient, it seems to me, that the attention paid to the good abstract *positively* from the individual properties that bear value. (So, rather than just paying attention to the feeling in one's stomach when on a wild roller-coaster, one notices not only this feeling, but also that it is "fun," "great," "enjoyable," or of some *positive* valence.)[18]

But cherishing some good *g* involves more than just attention to, or appreciation of, the goodness of *g*. Rather, it is to treat the attention to or appreciation of the goodness *g* as especially urgent or significant; more urgent, more significant, than other occurrent intrinsic values. For instance, one might think that there's reason to appreciate all goods, but that to cherish a good is to treat the appreciation of that goodness as *especially* urgent or important, at least in comparison with other goods one may have reason to appreciate. It is an orientation toward paying attention to *this good* rather than *that good* (and the goodness they instantiate), insofar as the goodness of the former is especially worthy of urgent appreciation.

So far, the attitude of cherishing is primarily cognitive: to attend to or recognize the goodness of the goods to be cherished. But, as stated before, cherishing has a crucial affective feature, as well. To cherish a good is, at least in part, to *revel* in its goodness. And by this I mean to grant the good in question a *focused*, *joyful* attention. When I cherish, say, my relationship with my young child, I focus my attention on its goodness, and that attention will have a particularly positive affect or valence: it will, as I suggest, be *joyful*. However, I want to be careful here. Different theorists have different understandings of the nature of "joy." According to Roberts (2019), for instance, one is joyful only insofar as one is aware of a concern of theirs being satisfied. But this seems too bloodless for *cherishing* (even if it is an adequate account of joy). Rather, what I mean by a "joyful" attention is something more intense: an occurrent, positive affective state directed toward the particular good in question. (Cf. Watkins, et. al. (2017).) To sum up, then:

> *Cherishing*: to cherish a good *g* is to (a) afford *g*'s goodness a focused, joyful attention ("reveling") and (b) to treat appreciation *of g*'s goodness as especially urgent or pressing.

[17]The first-personal nature of esthetic appreciation is of course controversial. Cf. Konigsberg (2012).

[18]Thanks to Abdul Ansari for very helpful comments here.

To hold that we have reasons to cherish (in the sense I mean) precious goods is commensurate with common sense. In the case of the worried musician, our advice would be, likely, to try to reduce stress, to avoid activities that are likely to lead to the development of focal dystonia, and so on. But our advice will also touch on the right sort of attitude he should display toward his career while it remains: "*enjoy* or *embrace* it while it lasts"; to gather, as it were, one's rosebuds while one may. And we would regard failure to do so as a form of normative failure. If the musician failed to attend to the goodness of his career – failed to give its goodness the sort of focused, joyful attention that is constitutive of cherishing – and *lost it*, we would feel a sense of tragedy. Tragedy not only in the fact that his career is now gone – tragic thought that is – but that he didn't property attend to its goodness while it was around.

3.2 Some clarifications

So far I have argued that precious goods call for a specific form of psychological response on the part of agents, viz., cherishing. But there are some clarifications I'd like to discuss here lest my view be thought too narrow or burdensome.

To begin, precious goods call for a cherishing response. "Call for" is normative in content, viz., grounds a *reason* to cherish the good in question. But the reason to so cherish goods can, and often will, be overridden by contrary concerns. For instance, as many new parents will realize, the activity of cherishing one's intense relationship with a young child can be exhausting, draining, frustrating, and so forth. Sometimes parents just "need a break," and need to forget their parenthood for a space of time. Of course, the reason to actively cherish one's relationship with a child tells against such an activity; doing so will certainly not involve focused, joyful attention on the good of such a relationship. But that's OK – the normative significance of precious goods can be overridden given sensible prudential, moral, or other demands that tell against such an attitude.

In addition, though *precious* goods certainly call for a cherishing response, I do not mean to suggest that one cannot or should not cherish robust rather than precious goods. We may perfectly rationally, say, cherish the Mona Lisa despite its robustness. But I do claim that robust goods do not ground reasons to cherish in the same way. We may have, say, *permission* to cherish the Mona Lisa, but no command to do so. The reason to cherish precious goods seems to have the form of a *requiring* rather than simply *permitting* reason (cf. Gert (2005)), and failure to do so seems to be a normative failure in the way that failure to cherish more robust goods does not.[19]

So, to sum up: the evaluative effects of precious goods are varied and inconsistent. Preciousness can be good and bad in instrumental terms, and the fact of preciousness

[19]For those who wish to countenance the distinction between objective and subjective preciousness (see note 8), it seems as though the reason to cherish a precious good could also permit of objective and subjective varieties. If, for instance, it were true that the musician's career in fact was not time-limited, then it may seem that there was no objective reason for the musician to cherish his career, though there was surely a subjective reason to do so, given his beliefs, risks, and so forth. If a good that seems to an agent for all the world perfectly robust nevertheless ends or is lost, it is plausible to say that there was an objective reason, in that case, to cherish this good though perhaps a weakened subjective reason to do so. (For instance, one might imagine a person who reasonably believes their spouse to be in good health, etc.; were this person to unexpectedly pass away they may rightly wish they had cherished their marriage or spouse while there was still time; this seems to plausibly track the distinction between subjective and objective reasons to cherish precious goods).

can contribute to, but also detract from, the intrinsic value of a particular good. But preciousness *per se* seems to generate a reason to *cherish*: to grant the goodness inherent in the precious good a focused, joyful attention and to treat the appreciation of such a good as urgent in comparison with other values.

3.3 Objection: preciousness per se

An objection should be discussed here. One might say that the fact of preciousness does not have any *per se* normative significance. Rather, the reasons we have to cherish precious goods just arise from the fact (a) one has reason to appreciate any good and (b) one only has a certain amount of time to appreciate goods that are time-limited. And so of course to appreciate such goods is a more urgent matter than to appreciate more robust goods; one just has a lot more time to appreciate the latter rather than the former. But this is not an *intrinsic* reason-grounding fact of preciousness.

In response, the attention that seems called-for in the case of precious goods is not *simply* the form of appreciation that one would give any old good, made more urgent given the fact of time-limitations. This argument misses the significance of *reveling* in the goodness of precious goods; the importance of granting such goods one's focused, joyful attention. While, in other words, the simple fact of time limitation may seem to explain, as it were, the *scalar* increase in significance of *appreciation*, it does not explain the additional attitudinal aspect of cherishing that one has reason to adopt in the case of precious goods.

3.4 Objection: one thought too many

Let's say you and I are competing in an intense chess match, say, the deciding game of the World Championship. Playing in this game is a profound good for both of us, but it is also fleeting, precious: we will never play such a game again. But it would seem that, given the nature of chess, especially at the highest levels, were I to attend to the fleeting goodness of this game, it would break my concentration, I would blunder my position, and lose. This sort of example could generalize: if I'm concentrating on the goodness of my fragile violin career, I might flub a note; if I'm concentrating on the fleeting nature of the intense relationship with my child, I may not pay my child the fundamental attention that would make our relationship even better.

And this may seem to constitute an objection to the current thesis. Why believe that precious goods call for cherishing if their very goodness is at risk in so doing? Perhaps to cherish a precious good can be *one thought too many* (Williams (1981)) in the classic sense: attending to some normative or evaluative feature of one's circumstances can undermine the value of worth of those circumstances. My reply to this objection is twofold. First, it seems to me an important empirical question the extent to which cherishing some good has or might have these various value-defeating effects. Offhand, and from the armchair, it seems quite plausible to say that one can *both* cherish the goodness of an activity, and pursue that activity with abandon. In addition – in a more conciliatory vein – the reason to cherish a good isn't a reason to do so *continuously*. Perhaps, in the case of the musician, one can attend to the exceptional value of one's career, say, between movements.

But let's say that this isn't always possible. Perhaps there are cases in which cherishing cannot be accomplished without a sacrifice or diminishing of the value of a precious good. This is no problem for my proposal. Note again that the reason to cherish a given

good provided by the fact of its preciousness is not necessarily overriding. It could be that if genuinely cherishing some good *g* would render *g* less valuable, then the reason to cherish that good is overridden by the loss of value in so doing. This is perfectly compatible with the view I advocate. It is sufficient for my purposes simply to insist that agents have good reason to so cherish, whether or not, as rational agents, they will do so in every case.

4 Conclusion

Security was important for Aristotle and his intellectual descendants. The good should be *hard to take away*; happiness is not achievable unless one recognizes that it will not end, or will end only with substantial difficulty. But with all due respect, this just can't be right. Even if we conceive of happiness as the *supreme*, *complete* good – that which makes a life choiceworthy and lacking *in nothing* – it could nevertheless remain the case that much of what I have when I lack nothing is fragile, fleeting, destined for loss. And this, or so I humbly submit, is an important thing about which to theorize concerning the good. When we come to understand how rational agents ought to approach the good, we miss out on a substantial variety of goods if we ignore the unique demands of the fragile or fleeting: the precious.

Because there is a diversity of precious goods, there is a diverse set of evaluative impacts when it comes to preciousness. But precious goods are special not because of their evaluative character, but rather because of the reasons rational agents have to cherish them. Two children forming a brief summer friendship at a sleepaway camp have every reason to attend even to the most robust goods in their lives. But their friendship is special in at least the following sense: because it is limited, confined to the summer months, they have reason to cherish it while it is there; to attend to their friendship and its goodness with urgency and joy.

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