

# Structuring Wellbeing\*

Christopher Frugé

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Many questions about wellbeing involve metaphysical dependence. Does wellbeing depend on minds? Is wellbeing determined by distinct sorts of things? Is it determined differently for different subjects? However, we should distinguish two axes of dependence. First, there are the *grounds* that generate value. Second, there are the *connections* between the grounds and value which make it so that those grounds *generate* that value. Given these distinct axes of dependence, there are distinct dimensions to questions about the dependence of wellbeing. In this paper, I offer a view of wellbeing that gives different answers with respect to these different dimensions. The view is subjectivist about connections but objectivist about grounds. Pluralist about grounds but monist about connections. Invariabilist about connections but variabilist about grounds. Thus, the view offers a simple account that captures the complexity of wellbeing.

Wellbeing is not some ethereal balm that we rub over our skin to improve our lives. Instead, personal value depends on there being something that is good or bad for someone. A central task for a theory of wellbeing is to uncover not only on *what* it depends but also *how* it depends.

As for *what*, personal value is **grounded** in non-normative goings on. If pleasure is a basic good, then pleasure grounds positive wellbeing for the person who feels it. If having desires thwarted is a basic bad, then a frustrated desire grounds negative wellbeing for the frustrated person. If knowledge is a basic good, then someone knowing something grounds improvement in their life.

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This conception of value as being grounded shapes many of the debates over the nature of wellbeing. Take just three. **Subjectivism** versus **objectivism** is thought to turn on whether the grounds of personal value must include valuing attitudes. **Pluralism** versus **monism** is taken to be a dispute over the number of different sorts of grounds for value. And **variabilism** versus **invariabilism** is treated as the debate over whether value has the same grounds for all subjects.<sup>1</sup>

However, if we consider only just the *what* we neglect the *how*. For we can ask not only what are the *grounds* of value for someone, but also *what makes it the case* that those grounds generate value for them. If a feeling being pleasurable grounds that feeling being good for a person, then we can ask why pleasure grounds good for them. If a person's frustrated desire grounds that frustration being bad for them, then we can ask how it is that desire frustration generates badness. If knowledge is good for someone, then we can ask why knowing something produces positive value. Thus, the dependence of value on certain grounds itself depends on **connections** linking those grounds of value to the value that's grounded. A theory of wellbeing should not only disclose the grounds of value, but also disclose the *connections* between the grounds of value and value.

In this paper, I offer just such a theory. Using the distinction between connecting and grounding (§1), I offer a view that takes different sides of disputes with respect to grounding than with respect to connecting. Thus, I offer a view that is subjectivist about connecting but objectivist about grounding (§2). While the view is thus subjectivist overall, it captures some of the appearances motivating objectivism. I then show that this subjectivism about connections is invariabilist about connections but variabilist about grounds (§3). Such an approach captures the theoretical unity of

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<sup>1</sup> While explicit discussion of this last issue is relatively recent, it's a counterpart of traditionally important ethical issues revolving around universalizability, such as whether or not the same moral norms apply to all sentient beings.

invariabilism, while accommodating variabilism's insights about the diversity of wellbeing across subjects. I next turn to showing that the view is pluralist about grounds but monist about connections (§4). Thus, it has the theoretical simplicity of traditional monist views, while allowing for complexity of value for a given subject. The view therefore encompasses the truths contained within traditionally opposing positions.

I have two main aims in this paper. First, to use the grounding versus connecting distinction to reveal mutually independent dimensions of subjectivism versus objectivism, variabilism and invariabilism, and pluralism versus monism – where these dimensions induce a taxonomy of views about the structure of wellbeing. Second, to defend a specific view within this taxonomy that makes different choices with respect to each dimension. One can endorse the utility of the taxonomy, while rejecting the substantive view I defend – though one should, of course, accept both without hesitation.

## 1. Grounding versus Connecting

Much of the discussion over the structure of wellbeing has involved – at least implicitly – the notion of metaphysical **grounding**. Grounding is a form of non-causal metaphysical dependence, whereby what's **grounded** holds in virtue of its **grounds** (Fine 2012; Rosen 2010; Schaffer 2009).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Techie note:* I remain neutral on fact grounding (Rosen 2010; Audi 2012), sentential grounding (Fine 2012; Dasgupta 2014; Litland 2017), and entity grounding (Schaffer 2009; Bennett 2017). I'll sometimes use variable letters to pick out the 'relata' of grounding, whatever they may be. And I'll sometimes speak of grounding 'facts' that enter in as the 'relata' of the grounding relation, but a sentential grounding person can easily reformulate these claims with reifying facts. As a final clarification, throughout I invoke full grounding.

Personal value *itself* cannot obtain independently of *what* has value for someone. Thus, value is *grounded* in the aspects of reality that produce it.

From here on, let ‘value’ pick out personal value. Then, in terms of grounding, the standard understanding of the debate over subjectivism and objectivism is that subjectivism holds that value is always grounded in some valuing attitude, whereas objectivism denies this. In this vein, L.W. Sumner (1995) holds that:

A subjective theory will map the polarity of welfare onto the polarity of attitudes, so that being well-off will depend (in some way or other) on having a favorable attitude toward one’s life (or some of its ingredients), while being badly off will require being unfavorably disposed toward it. (767)

Objectivist theories, according to Sumner, deny this dependence (see also Shafer-Landau 2003: 15; Sobel 2001, 2019: 146-148). On this conception, desire-satisfactionism is a paradigmatic subjectivist view, because value is grounded in attitudes of satisfied or thwarted desires. And the ‘objective list’ theory is appropriately named, because it includes grounds of value, such as knowledge, that don’t involve valuing attitudes.

As for pluralism and monism, the usual understanding is that pluralism holds that there are a variety of different sorts of grounds for value, whereas monism holds that there is just one. As Eden Lin (2014) characterizes the debate, it concerns the number of ‘basic goods’ and ‘basic bads’, where

...a basic good (bad) is just a kind of positive (negative) welfare atom, so the dispute between monism and pluralism concerns how many kinds of positive and negative atoms there are... A kind *K* is a kind of welfare atom if and only if all of its members are atoms (i.e., are basically good or bad for you) *because they are Ks.*" (129; see also Lin 2015)

This 'because' claim signals grounding. Thus, desire-satisfactionism and hedonism are paradigmatic monist theories, because on each of these views there is only one sort of basic good and bad. By contrast, objective list views that include more than one item are paradigmatically pluralist.<sup>3</sup>

Turning to variabilism and invariabilism, though it's not often explicitly discussed, the common conception – if any conception about the issue can be called 'common' – revolves around grounding. As Lin (2018) characterizes the debate,

Invariabilism implies that the same kinds are basically good or bad for all welfare subjects – that is, that the same list of basic goods and bads applies to them... By contrast, variabilism implies...that no list of basic goods and bads applies to all subjects. (323)<sup>4</sup>

On this construal, variabilism is the view that different sorts of welfare subjects have different sorts of basic goods and bads, and invariabilism is the view that all welfare subjects have the same sorts of basic

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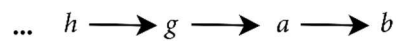
<sup>3</sup> As Lin (2016) points out, most subjectivist views – in what I've been treating as the grounding sense – are monistic – in what I've been treating as the grounding sense. He argues that the best sort of subjectivist view is pluralist – in what I've been treating as the grounding sense. The subjectivist view – in the connection sense – I argue for will be pluralist – in the grounding sense.

<sup>4</sup> Lin further characterizes invariabilism as holding that the degree of value received from a basic value good or bad is calculated in the same way for different subjects, where variabilism denies this. We can set this wrinkle aside in what follows, because the view I propose will offer a hybrid conception in terms of the number of basic goods and bads.

goods and bads. So variabilism holds that personal value is grounded in different sorts of things for different sorts of subjects, whereas invariabilism denies this.

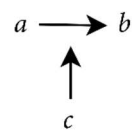
As we've seen, the notion of grounding is used to characterize many of the central issues about the structure of wellbeing. But the relation between ground and grounded is not the only sort of dependence relation. Consider that many facts about what grounds what are themselves metaphysically dependent. Hence, there is a sort of metaphysical dependence that involves what underwrites grounding facts (Frugé 2021). Nothing important in this paper turns on the detailed nature of this dependency relation beyond that it puts in place grounding facts, though, for simplicity and specificity, throughout the paper I treat it as just more grounding.

**Grounds of Grounds**



...*h* grounds *g*, *g* grounds *a*, *a* grounds *b*

**Connections: Grounds of Grounding Facts**



*c* grounds that *a* grounds *b*

To grasp the distinction between grounds and connections, start with a visual analogy. A fifth-grader glues pictures of the sun and a plant onto a science fair poster, and then glues an arrow between them. The arrow only points between the sun and the plant given that the glue holds all of them to the poster. The 'dependency' of the arrow between the sun and plant depends on the glue holding all of them together. Or, for further analogies, consider the dependence structure of logic and causation. As for logic, we can infer one proposition from another using an inference rule. For example, from  $(P \rightarrow Q)$  and  $P$  we can infer  $Q$  using modus ponens. Thus, the appropriateness of the inference depends on the rule of logic. As for the causal case, causation is mediated by laws of nature. A law of nature that

negatively charged things repel one another mediates that two electrons being nearby cause each other to repel. Thus, the causation depends on the law.

For an actual grounding example, it's plausible to think that a statue is grounded in shaped clay, where that grounding fact is itself grounded in the intention of sculptor to make the clay into a statue. For another example, take the fact that a building is over six-stories tall grounds it being illegal, where this grounding itself depends on the law in the jurisdiction that buildings can't be more than five-stories (Rosen 2017: 285-286).<sup>5</sup> As a final example, take the fact that Congress passed a bill that declares murder is illegal, where this grounding itself depends on our socially accepting that Congress has legal authority (Epstein 2015: ch. 6).<sup>6</sup>

Thus, elements grounded in a grounding fact depend on there being a ground of those grounding facts. When *a grounds b* such that this grounding fact is itself grounded in *c*, then the *grounded* element *b* depends on *c*. We can call this **connection-dependence**:

**Connection-Dependence:** Necessarily, *b connection-dependes* on *c* if and only if *c* grounds that *a grounds b* for some *a*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Though Gideon Rosen treats the law as a further ground, I find it more plausible to treat it as a ground of the grounding fact of the illegality of the building.

<sup>6</sup> Though Brian Epstein treats the intention as an 'anchor' – I think it's best to do away with anchoring in favor of grounding of grounding facts.

<sup>7</sup> *Another techie note:* The sort of grounding connection between *a* and *b* when *a grounds b* that I'm targeting is one that needn't hold just when *a* obtains, and hence the connection *c* grounds that *a grounds b* even when *a* doesn't obtain. To glance ahead, I hold that a valuing attitude serves as connection – say that valuing friendship makes it so that friendship grounds an improvement in wellbeing. But this valuing attitude sets in place the link between friendship and wellbeing, even without the subject being friends with anyone. It's still the case that friendship, due to the valuing attitude, is the right sort of thing to improve the quality of the person's life, regardless of whether they actually have friends.

One way to handle this is to hold these links concern *possible* grounding, so that *c* connects that *a grounds b* just in case were *c* and *a* both the case, then *b* would obtain and would obtain in virtue of *a* and all of that would obtain in virtue of *c*. But I take it that there is an *actual* link created by a connection, even when the grounds in the grounding fact don't obtain. There is an actual link between friendship and wellbeing, even before someone first comes to have friends.

This is a legitimate sense of dependence. But it is not a dependence of the grounded element on its grounds. Rather, it's a dependence of the grounded element on the grounds of its being grounded. When *b* is grounded in *a*, *b* arises from *a* precisely because *a* grounds *b*. It's not just *a* but also the 'glue' between *a* and *b* – the metaphysical 'staple' that pins *a* to *b*. Thus, *b* owes its reality as much to *a* as to the *generation* itself from *a*. And in the case where *c* grounds that *a* grounds *b*, then that generation is itself generated from *c*. Thus, *b* *connection-depend*s on *c*, and *c* is the **connection** between *a* and *b*.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, we can distinguish between the **grounding-dependence** and **connection-dependence** of value. Something being good for someone *grounding-depend*s on its grounds, but *connection-depend*s on whatever makes it so that those grounds generate value. If hedonism is true, then pleasure grounds goodness, but that doesn't settle what makes it the case that pleasure grounds goodness. If desire-satisfactionism is true, then frustrated desires ground badness, but that leaves it open what connects frustrated desires to the badness of that frustration. If the objective list theory is true, then acquiring items on the list is valuable, but that leaves open what connects those members of

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Hence, I think we need something closer to *non-factive* grounding, which is grounding that can obtain in the absence of the grounds actually obtaining (Fine 2012).

<sup>8</sup> *Still another techie note:* These connections needn't be anything like metaphysical principles or laws. Indeed, I argue below that when it comes to wellbeing they are particular valuing attitudes. For example, a particular attitude of valuing friendship serves as connection in the generation of the fact that friendship grounds value for this person. Yet, this attitude isn't a metaphysical principle in the sense of being some conditional-like law, or even metaphysically necessary.

Since valuing attitudes can be contingent and yet serve as connections, then grounds needn't metaphysically necessitate the grounded – in absence of the connections. Some grounds only necessitate the grounded in conjunction with connections. In the case of the subjectivist view I defend in this paper, knowledge can ground value for someone given the presence of a valuing attitude serving as connection, but won't ground value for them without such an attitude as connection.

Moreover, whether or not wellbeing connections are principles, I leave it open whether other connections outside of the realm of wellbeing might be principles. And I remain neutral as to whether principles or even any further connections at all put in place that certain connections underwrite certain grounding facts. Perhaps there is a general metaphysical principle of subjectivism that explains why valuing attitudes serve as connections in grounding facts about wellbeing. Perhaps, instead, it's just brute.



the list to value. Each of these views about the grounds of value doesn't settle the connection between those grounds and value. Perhaps it's a brute normative law. Perhaps, as I argue below, it's something about the attitude of the subject.<sup>9</sup>

In what follows, I use the distinction between grounds and connections to separate two dimensions to each of the disputes over subjectivism versus objectivism, variabilism versus invariabilism, and pluralism versus monism. I develop a view that makes different choices with respect to the different axes of dependence. As we'll see, this view is able to capture the insights contained within undifferentiated proposals that fall on opposite sides of the disputes.

## 2. Subjectivism versus Objectivism

In the broadest terms, the dispute between subjectivism and objectivism is over whether value depends on minds. As we saw, the most common way to cash this out is in terms of grounding-dependence. On this construal, subjectivism holds that value is always grounded in a valuing attitude, whereas objectivism holds that some grounds of value don't involve attitudes. Regimented in this way, the debate is a useful one to have. But it leaves out a distinct axis of mind-dependence, which is whether or not the *generation* of value depends on valuing attitudes. Once we have the notion of connection-

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<sup>9</sup> At this point, one might worry about the difference between the grounds versus connections distinction and other distinctions more familiar in discussions of wellbeing – such as that between the sources versus nature of wellbeing (Sumner 1996), as well as that between enumerative versus explanatory theories of wellbeing (Crisp, 2006; Fletcher, 2013; Woodard 2013). I discuss the relation between these distinctions in the appendix.

dependence, we can ask whether or not the connections linking the grounds of value to value are themselves subjective or objective.

Let's return to the primordial spring of subjectivism about wellbeing, which is the thought that personal value must *fit* or *resonate* with the person (Rosati 1996: 299, 2006). It's expressed nicely in the obligatory quote by Peter Railton (2003):

It does seem to me to capture an important feature of the concept of intrinsic value to say that what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him. (47)

There are a variety of ways to spell out this thought.<sup>10</sup> But for our purposes it will be enough to note that it's an extremely plausible necessary condition on something being valuable for someone that it depends in some way on their valuing it:

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<sup>10</sup> A strong form of resonance is captured by the thesis of judgment internalism (Darwall 1983: 54-55): what a person thinks is good for them must in the right circumstances motivate them to seek it out, and what a person thinks is bad for them must in the right circumstances motivate them to avoid it. However, many, including myself, are inclined to deny such a strong connection in that a person may be weak-willed or lack the relevant information to be motivated by their good or bad, and it's hard to see how to specify the right circumstances in a way that avoids these problems without trivializing the thesis as that insofar as one is acting in rational self-interest one will be motivated in accordance with one's self-interested reasons (Korsgaard 1986). One way of trying to circumvent this problem is to appeal to one's idealized counterpart, but they will often want different things than oneself – for instance, they have no desire for more information (Sobel 2001).

**Resonance:** Necessarily, something being valuable for a person depends in some way on their valuing attitudes.

Where this ‘valuing’ is non-instrumental and understood to consist in what the subject ‘really’ values – so we do away with valuations based on false beliefs or failures of rationality, and where we might need to counterfactually idealize away from the subject’s actual or occurrent attitudes to get at what they ‘really’ value.<sup>11</sup>

One way to capture *resonance* is in terms of grounding-dependence. On this understanding, resonance leads to subjectivism about the grounds of value:

**Grounding Subjectivism:** Necessarily, the fact that *b* is valuable for person *s* is grounded in some fact involving *s* valuing *b*.<sup>12</sup>

Grounding subjectivism holds that, necessarily, something being valuable for a person is grounded in a fact involving their valuing it. Grounding objectivism, then, is the denial of grounding subjectivism: something can ground value without consisting even partly in a valuing attitude.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For this point, David Sobel (2009) and Dale Dorsey (2017a).

<sup>12</sup> Here and throughout, by ‘valuing’ *b* I don’t mean that the subject has a thought, necessarily, about *b* itself. It could be that *b* is an instance of a general feature that the subject values. So one can value a particular case of knowledge by valuing knowledge as such.

Moreover, I allow that ‘some fact involving *s* valuing *b*’ can include elements beyond just the attitude of valuing. Thus, it might be some conjunctive fact with non-attitudinal conjuncts and attitudinal conjuncts.

<sup>13</sup> Grounding objectivism leaves open hybrid views where grounds sometimes involve valuing attitudes and other times not. An extreme grounding objectivist view would hold that grounds never involve valuing attitudes.

As an example of grounding subjectivism, hedonism is a grounding subjectivist view in that pleasure is a valuing attitude. And, likewise, desire-satisfactionism is a grounding subjectivist view in that something being valuable for someone is grounded in their desiring it and that desire being satisfied or thwarted. But objective list theories that include knowledge are grounding objectivist, because knowledge can ground value – where knowledge doesn't consist in a valuing attitude. Thus, grounding subjectivism is worthy of the label 'subjectivist', and it contrasts with a view worthy of the label 'objectivist'.

Therefore, grounding subjectivist views capture resonance in that value depends on valuing by being grounded in valuing attitudes. Hence, they do better in tying value to valuing than, say, a view that holds that it's simply a brute fact that certain things not involving attitudes – like the preservation of nature – make a person's life go better. However, I think a *stronger* version of resonance is motivated, where views that are merely grounding subjectivist fall afoul of this stronger constraint. This form of resonance is motivated by the thought, as Joseph van Weelden (2019: 147) puts it, that “a person can *confer* prudential value upon a given thing by caring about it.” Views that are merely grounding subjectivist don't capture this more extreme form of subjectivism.

The first way that grounding subjectivism doesn't capture the full sweep of resonance is that even though grounding subjectivism holds that valuing attitudes serve as constituents of wellbeing, it still allows that one needn't value those constituents. Thus, it allows that one can be *alienated* from one's valuing attitudes in that some of one's valuing attitudes themselves fail to resonate with oneself. We may not care about certain putative grounds of value. Even if these putative grounds involve caring attitudes themselves, we may not care about having those caring attitudes or having them satisfied. Consider pleasure. Someone may enjoy feeling pleasure, but not particularly value living a life full of

pleasure. So while a pleasurable feeling resonates with them in that, well, it's pleasurable, it still may not be the case that pleasure as such resonates with them in the stronger sense as being the sort of thing they care to promote in their life. Consider desires. Something that satisfies a desire resonates with a person. But the prospect of satisfied desires may not itself resonate with them. They may desire something without caring to live the sort of life that has satisfied desires. In this case, it seems wrong to think satisfied desires makes their life go better, because desire satisfaction as such doesn't resonate with them. In general, even though a putative ground may resonate with someone, the putative *grounding fact* may not.<sup>14</sup>

In this way, grounding subjectivism, by itself, allows that value is not conferred by the subject in that they have no say over what grounds value. Given just grounding subjectivism, the subject might not have any say over connections, and hence what puts in place the grounding facts of value – even if those grounds themselves include their valuing attitudes. Thus, a subjectivism that captures how subjects *confer* value must hold that facts about the grounding of value must themselves resonate with a subject. A subject must 'really' value the grounds themselves, even if those grounds already involve valuing attitudes.

A subjectivism that admits of this *stronger* kind resonance would hold that a valuing attitude grounds the *grounding fact* in which value is grounded. We can call this **connection subjectivism**:

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<sup>14</sup> This is so even for views that make the constituent of wellbeing both the attitude and the object of the attitude. The person may not care about this complex state itself. For this point, see van Weelden (2019) and Dorsey (2012a).

Moreover, compare this to Connie Rosati's (1996) two-tier internalism. She holds that for subjectivist views that appeal to idealized counterparts, the non-idealized person must care about the conditions under which their counterpart is idealized. However, presumably Rosati's view still holds that the grounds of value must include valuing attitudes, just those of our idealized counterpart whose idealization conditions we value. Thus, her view and mine are 'two-tier' in different ways.

**Connection Subjectivism:** Necessarily, the fact that *b* is valuable for person *s* is grounded in *a*, where the fact that *a grounds b being valuable for s* is itself grounded in some fact involving *s* valuing *a*.

Connection subjectivism holds that, necessarily, something gives rise to value for someone only if they value it. Connection objectivism, then, is the denial of connection subjectivism: grounding facts of value need not even be partially grounded in valuing attitudes.<sup>15</sup>

As an example of how connection subjectivism differs from grounding subjectivism, consider desire-satisfactionism. As we saw, desire-satisfactionism is grounding subjectivist, but it's not necessarily connection subjectivist. Desire-satisfactionism is compatible with it being a brute normative law that a person's desires being satisfied or thwarted is valuable for them. This would make it a connection objectivist view. If so, desire-satisfaction would be true whether or not the person themselves cares about having their desires satisfied. At the same time, desire-satisfaction is compatible with a connection subjectivist view, whereby satisfied and thwarted desires are valuable because a subject cares about their desires. Thus, grounding subjectivism is neutral with respect to connection subjectivism, but the stronger form of resonance suggests connection subjectivism.

The second way that grounding subjectivism fails to capture the full sweep of resonance is that grounding subjectivism is false! Many things that don't inherently involve valuing attitudes can resonate with someone. A person may value knowledge, but knowledge doesn't consist in satisfying valuing attitudes. In such cases, it places the explanation in the wrong place to treat the *grounds* of value

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, there are hybrid views, where sometimes the connections involve attitudes and other times not. These would be connection objectivist in the strict sense, but there are extreme connection objectivist views that hold that attitudes never even serve as partial connections for value.

as involving valuing attitudes. *What* is good for them is knowledge – without that consisting in a valuing attitude. *Why* it is good for them – given connection subjectivism – is that they value knowledge as making their own life go better. Therefore, while grounding subjectivism certainly achieves some rapprochement of value with valuing, it doesn't do enough and doesn't do it in the right way.

We can capture the stronger form of resonance without requiring that the constituents of wellbeing necessarily involve valuing attitudes by appealing to connection subjectivism. The best subjectivist view, I maintain, is subjectivist about connections but holds that, for at least some subjects, some of the grounds of value are objective. This lets us maintain a broadly subjectivist view while upholding a form of grounding objectivism. Through a subject's valuing attitudes they make it so that certain items serve as grounds of value. If they value pleasure as the sort of thing that makes their life go better, then pleasure serves as a ground for value. If they value knowledge as making their life go better, then that makes it so that knowledge generates good for them. Given a particular subject's valuing attitudes as connections, these may well make it so that the grounds of value for them aren't themselves valuing attitudes.

At this point, let me offer a few words of clarification about what sort of valuing attitudes can serve in connections. Officially, connection subjectivism is neutral about the nature of valuing attitudes. But, for the sake of specificity, let me sketch what I think is a plausible view. To my mind, valuing is not like pleasure or desire in any straightforward sense. Rather, it's a distinctive mental state that orients the person toward the world such that things are presented in a prudentially valuable way. Positively valuing, then, is akin to what T.M. Scanlon (1998) calls desire in the "directed-attention sense", in which things are presented in a "favorable light" (39). And valuing as such is what Sharon Street (2008) says is the "experience of various things in the world 'counting in favor of' or 'calling for'

or ‘demanding’ certain responses on our part” (240). Personally valuing, then, is an affective state that orients one toward the world such that there are good-for-me-seemings and bad-for-me-seemings.<sup>16</sup> Of course, we need some amount of idealization to fix on what the subject ‘really’ values but what we’re idealizing is this distinctive orientation toward the world.

Importantly, this attitude is psychologically basic, unsophisticated, and not conceptually laden. Indeed, such states are simple enough to be had by infants and many non-human animals. And they certainly don’t require any concepts of ‘personal value’ or ‘grounding’. Ultimately, which beings can value in this minimal sense is an empirical question,<sup>17</sup> but I think it’s plausible to hold that infants and dogs value in this way. They at least, for instance, value comfort and satiation in that they are oriented toward these things as good-for-them. Thus, the valuing subject needn’t have any *conceptualization* of the *metaphysical role* their valuing attitudes play as connections between grounds of value and value.

Therefore, the connection subjectivist view captures a strong form of subjectivism in that it secures the sense in which subjects confer value. However, at the same time it can capture some of the motivations for thoroughgoing objectivist views. Primarily, it can capture the sentiment that some constituents of wellbeing are objective, non-attitudinal parts of the world. On my account, *what* is good for someone needn’t consist in satisfied desires – or even attitudes at all. Rather, the constituents of wellbeing can be completely non-attitudinal affairs like the preservation of nature. Thus, the

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<sup>16</sup> So, in order to value, I deny that the subject needs to be making judgments in the sense of having a belief (contra Dorsey 2012b). And I also deny that valuing must be a second-order attitude about an attitude – such as a desire about a desire (contra Lewis 1989). While someone may value having certain attitudes, they needn’t only value attitudes. When someone values the preservation of nature as making their life go better, they aren’t having an attitude about an attitude, but an attitude about preserving nature. Thus, subjects can value without having the reflective capacities to think about their own attitudes.

<sup>17</sup> Much animal psychological research into normative thinking pertains to moral as opposed to evaluative cognition, but some suggest some other species do have moral practices (see Andrews 2016: sec. 4.5). The sort of simple evaluative attitudes I’m envisioning are much less sophisticated than moral ones involved in cooperation and empathy.



subjectivist who adopts my view can completely agree with the objectivist about *what* is valuable for a given person. They can completely agree that many of the constituents of a good life don't involve valuing attitudes at all. They just account for *why* it is valuable in a different way by appealing to subjectivism about connections to establish objectivism about grounds. Certainly, this won't appease the objectivist who denies that personal value can be conferred by subjects. But my view at least captures the appearances that some substrates of value are non-attitudinal aspects of the world. In this respect, it does better than grounding subjectivist views, like hedonism and desire-satisfaction theory, that require all grounds of value to involve valuing attitudes.

Moreover, my view has the resources to directly undermine some arguments for objectivism, namely some of those that don't appeal to intuitions about a mind-independent realm of value. Eden Lin (2017a) has offered one such argument in the form of a dilemma. Either subjectivists hold that the grounds of personal value vary between different sorts of subjects or they don't. In the first case, Lin argues that subjectivists have no good explanation for this. In the second, he argues that they generate implausible verdicts about welfare subjects who lack complex valuing attitudes. For subjects like infants and dogs, Lin argues, the subjectivist must either hold that they do not have wellbeing or that a subject's wellbeing can be radically changed simply by coming to acquire sophisticated valuing attitudes. Neither, according to Lin, is palatable.<sup>18</sup>

To see how the subjectivist can respond to this argument, we must first get clearer on the background debate between variabilism and invariabilism that's at play in this argument. Once we do, we'll see that the connection-dependent subjectivist has resources to grab the dilemma by the horns.

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<sup>18</sup> Though see Dorsey (2017b) for the claim that the second horn is in fact palatable. He holds that we can explain why subjects come to have radically different levels of wellbeing due to changes in attitudes. As I discuss below, part of my response to Lin makes the same point.

### 3. Variabilism versus Invariabilism

**Variabilism** holds that the nature of wellbeing can differ across subjects, whereas **invariabilism** denies this (Lin 2018). Variabilism denies that the nature of wellbeing is universal in that different sorts of value ‘fit’ different sorts of subjects, while invariabilism upholds universality in trying to capture that there’s something common to value for all subjects.<sup>19</sup> Yet, given the distinction between grounding and connecting, we can distinguish two disputes over whether wellbeing varies across subjects. Ultimately, we can use this distinction to capture an invariant account of how value can ‘fit’ particular subjects. But to build up to this, let’s first consider the most sustained argument against variabilism.

Abstracting away from particular substantive theories of value, Lin offers two arguments for invariabilism. The first is that of simplicity (2018: 324). All else equal, we should prefer simpler and more unified theories, and invariabilism is a simpler and more unified theory. The second argument is that there is no good explanation for why variabilism would be true, which Lin defends by rejecting several candidate explanations (2018: sec. 2). However, appealing to the distinction between grounds

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<sup>19</sup> While this debate is a newcomer to the value theory scene, it’s a cousin of more traditional debates in moral theory concerned with the universality of moral principles. Thus, many Kantians famously hold that the Categorical Imperative applies to all agents, and many welfarist utilitarians claim that maximizing the welfare of all subjects is the singular moral aim. These are ‘invariabilist’ positions about moral principles, while the view that Robert Nozick (1974) labels “utilitarianism for animals, Kantianism for people” (39) is a ‘variabilist’ view of moral norms. Seen in this light, the debate over variabilism and invariabilism about wellbeing is over the ‘universality’ of the structure of personal value.

and connections allows us to offer a simple and explanatory theory that is invariabilist along one dimension but variabilist along another.<sup>20</sup>

As for the variabilist aspect, recall that the connection subjectivist view I've been developing holds that a subject's valuations set up grounding facts of the form: *a* grounds *b* being valuable for *s*. These valuations, then, create the candidate goods for a subject. Yet, different subjects value differently, creating different candidate goods for a subject. In fact, certain subjects are not able to value certain things that others can. A table can't value anything, but Fluffy can value their hunger being sated. Fluffy can't value free jazz aesthetic activity, but Ornette Coleman can. Insofar as it is impossible for a subject to value *a*, then *a fortiori* they don't value *a*. But given the variation in the nature of subjects, a different subject might be able to value *a*, and they might in fact value it. Given connection subjectivism, this means that for certain subjects, *a* makes *b* valuable for them, but for others it doesn't. Thus, given this sort of subjectivism, there is what we can call **grounding variabilism**:

**Grounding Variabilism:** Possibly, for some subjects *s* and *s'*, there are an *a* and *b* such that *a* grounds *b* being valuable for *s* but it's not the case that *a* grounds *b* being valuable for *s'*.

Given connection subjectivism, *a* grounds *b* being valuable for *s* only if *s* values *a*. It might be that some subject *s'* cannot or does not value *a*. Thus, different subjects have different sorts of grounds of value.

As for the invariabilist aspect, the connection subjectivist view I've developed holds that there is just one sort of *connection*. There is just one sort of ground of grounding facts of value – namely, that

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<sup>20</sup> I thank a reviewer for pointing out an issue with one of my previous arguments, which made me reformulate the whole section.

the subject ‘really’ prudentially values something. While this sort of valuing can *apply* to a range of different objects, it is one and the same attitude at the relevant generality for normative theorizing. There is a unified attitude of valuing – despite vagaries of the realization of valuing across different instances of the attitude. In this way, the view entails what we can call **connection invariabilism**. Roughly, this holds that if something serves as a connection for the grounding of value for one subject, then that same sort of thing serves as a connection for the grounding of value for another. To state this a bit more carefully:

**Connection Invariabilism:** Necessarily, for all subjects  $s$  and  $s'$ , if a connection  $c$  grounds the fact that  $a$  grounds  $b$  being valuable for  $s$ , where  $a$  and  $c$  may involve  $s$ , then  $c'$  grounds the fact that  $a'$  grounds  $b$  being valuable for  $s'$ , where  $a'$  and  $c'$  are just like  $a$  and  $c$  except any involvement of  $s$  is replaced with  $s'$ .

Given connection invariabilism, connection subjectivism offers a simple and unified explanation of grounding variability. Different subjects are able to value differently. These different valuations set up different grounding facts with different possible grounds of value for different subjects. But the way those valuations set up the grounding facts is the same for all subjects: valuation creates value.<sup>21</sup>

This view lets us respond to Lin’s argument against subjectivism. To remind you, the argument was that either subjectivists need to be variabilityists or they need to make implausible claims about the

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<sup>21</sup> This view differs from Dale Dorsey’s (2017b) variabilityist view that personal value is given by ‘kinship relations’ that ensure that the valuable thing ‘fits’ the person. For valuing subjects, Dorsey holds that such kinship relations are selected by what they value, but holds that for non-valuing subjects – among which he includes infants – the kinship relations are different. But then it’s mysterious what selects the relation in the case of non-valuing subjects, and also what explains why the selection process is different for different subjects.

welfare of certain subjects of wellbeing. Lin argues against the first horn, because he thinks there is no simple and explanatory account of variabilism. He argues against the second, because he thinks it's implausible that subjects like infants and dogs either don't have wellbeing after all or that their wellbeing can radically change as soon as they come to have more complicated valuing attitudes that fail to be satisfied.

My view grabs both horns of the dilemma. As for the first, it offers an explanation for variabilism about grounds via a simple and unified invariabilism about connections. As for the second, the view holds that infants and dogs have wellbeing insofar as they have valuing attitudes. Recall, the view as I've developed it holds that the relevant sort of valuing is so minimal that it's plausible that these simple subjects value. Thus, it also makes sense that in coming to have more complicated valuations a subject's wellbeing can radically change, because they become more vulnerable to the state of the world. When what's good for someone transitions from simply being warmed and nourished to wanting to know or achieve or love, then there are more ways to be harmed – but also more ways to be benefitted (Dorsey 2017b).

To be clear, this increase in complexity of valuations is compatible with connection invariabilism. As I see it, increase in complexity doesn't involve a fundamental change in what serves as connection for grounding value: it's always the same sort of valuing attitude. Indeed, as I discussed earlier, on my view all valuing consists in a distinctive normative orientation toward the world. Therefore, the complexity comes in the *content* of what's valued, not the attitude itself. Compare: one can have the belief that grass is green, and one can believe in the theory of general relativity – but they're both beliefs. If there were fundamentally distinct sorts of valuing attitudes across – or even within! –

subjects, then connection variabilism would be true. But I think there is a unity across all valuing such that this common sort of valuing activity serves in connections for all value.

#### 4. Pluralism versus Monism

As they are usually portrayed, **pluralism** holds that there are a variety of different sorts of goods and bads, whereas **monism** holds that there is just one. Hedonism is a paradigmatically monist view in that it holds pleasure is the only good and pain the only bad. Desire-satisfactionism is a monist view as well, because it claims that the only good is having one's desires satisfied and the only bad is having them thwarted. Objective list theories that allow for a variety of basic goods and bads – such as both pleasure and desire-satisfaction, or friendship, or knowledge, or whatever – are paradigmatically pluralist theories.

This way of framing the dispute between pluralism and monism makes it turn on the *grounds* of value. It's a dispute over the number of different possible sorts of grounds of value for subjects. However, once we distinguish grounding from connecting, we'll see that a view can be pluralist or monist along the connection axis as well. We'll also see that whether a view is connection pluralist or monist doesn't entail one way or the other whether it's grounding pluralist or monist. As I've developed the connection subjectivist view, however, it's pluralist about grounds but monist about connections. This lets it simultaneously satisfy motivations for monism as well as pluralism.

Before proceeding, let me offer some important clarifications. We need to be careful in interpreting pluralism and monism, given the separate issue of variabilism versus invariabilism. Speaking roughly, if variabilism were true, it might be that pluralism is true for some subjects and monism is true for others. The strong form of monism comes packaged with invariabilism, so that for all subjects monism holds. The weak form of pluralism comes packaged with variabilism, so that for at least some subjects pluralism holds. The arguments for monism naturally suggest the strong form, whereas the arguments for pluralism only suggest the weak. So take those to be the relevant views in what follows.

Aside from commitment to a particular substantive theory of wellbeing, the most common sort of argument for monism comes from theoretical considerations. In this vein, Ben Bradley (2009) argues for monism on the basis of theoretical simplicity:

Simplicity is a very desirable feature of a theory... Pluralists will say there are many other things that are good for people besides pleasure... I disagree. Sometimes we need to learn to live with the apparently counterintuitive implications of our philosophical theories when the alternative is to accept a convoluted monstrosity. (xx)

He then goes on to argue for monism on the basis of theoretical unity:

Pluralism seems objectionably arbitrary. Whatever the composition of the list, we can always ask: why should these things be on the list? What do they have in common? What is the rational

principle that yields the result that these things, and no others, are the things that are good?

(16)

In terms of grounding, Bradley argues that monism is a simpler and more unified theory in that it posits just one sort of ground of value, whereas pluralism is objectionably complicated and ad hoc by positing a whole list of grounds.

By contrast to these considerations of theoretical virtue, perhaps the strongest argument for pluralism is that, unlike monism, it accommodates the appearances. A variety of different sorts of things seem good and bad for people – and other sentient beings as well (Lin 2014). If so, then pluralism allows this by holding that there a variety of different grounds of value.

As framed so far, the debate over pluralism and monism turns on grounding. Monism is supposed to be theoretically more appealing theory in positing one sort of ground of value, while pluralism is supposed to be a more accurate theory by positing a variety of them. We can therefore more accurately label this dispute as between **grounding pluralism** versus **grounding monism**. However, once we distinguish grounding from connecting, we see that there is in addition **connection pluralism** versus **connection monism**. Connection pluralism holds that – at least for some subjects – different sorts of connections can ground grounding facts of value, while connection monism requires that – for all subjects – there is just one sort of connection for value.

Appealing to the distinction between grounding and connecting, we can simultaneously satisfy motivations for monism and pluralism. We simply hold for at least some subjects grounding pluralism is true, but for all subjects connection-dependence monism is true. For all subjects, there is just one sort of connection for creating grounds of value, but for a particular subject this sort of connection can



create a variety of different grounds for value. This view is theoretically simple and unified in that it posits a single sort of connection. But it also accommodates the appearances in that it allows for variety of different grounds of value. Thus, we have a weak form of grounding pluralism, with a strong form of connection monism.

The particular connection subjectivism I've been defending has exactly this structure. It's connection monist, because for each subject their valuing creates the grounding facts of value. Yet, for subjects with diverse valuations, they have a variety of grounds of value. A person might value pleasure, but they might also value knowledge. For this person, grounding pluralism is true. However, for subjects with homogenous valuations, they might have just one ground of good and one ground of bad – such as, perhaps, a late-stage fetus who is only attracted to comfort and only averse to discomfort. For this sort of subject, grounding monism would be true.

However, one might worry that connection-dependence monism is incompatible with grounding-dependence variability.<sup>22</sup> Yet, this is not so. A single form of valuing can give rise to a plurality of different grounds, and different people can value different things – even if the form of valuing is the same. Thus, someone may value solely pleasure, and another may value pleasure as well as friendship. The contents are different but there is no need to think the nature of their valuing attitudes are different – hence connection invariabilism is true. Despite the vagaries of psychology there is a unified valuing attitude at the relevant level of generality – hence connection monism is true. Yet, this same attitude can apply to different things for different people, as well as different things for one and the same person. Grounding-dependence monism is true for the first person, while grounding-

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<sup>22</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this concern.

dependence pluralism is true for the second. Hence, grounding-dependence variabilism is true, despite connection-dependence monism and invariabilism.

This view can accommodate the data at least as well as traditional grounding pluralist views. A variety of different things are valuable, and, indeed, for different subjects different things are valuable. Yet at the same time, the connection monism aspect of the view is theoretically simple and unified, which is a feature that motivates grounding monism. Despite a variety of different sorts of valuable things for different sorts of subjects, these are all explained by the same metaphysical structure. There is a single sort of connection flowing from valuing that can explain the diversity of valuable sorts of things.

Given the distinction between grounding and connecting, I've developed and defended a view of wellbeing that makes distinct choices with respect to these distinct axes of dependence. The view is subjectivist about connections but objectivist about grounds. It thereby allows wellbeing to resonate in a deeper way than those that are solely subjectivist. Yet at the same time, it can capture the insight of objectivism that grounds themselves needn't resonate with the subject. The view is also invariabilist about connections but variabilist about grounds. Hence, we have a simple and unified explanation for why different sorts of things are valuable for different subjects. Finally, the view is monist about connections but pluralist about grounds. So we have an elegant explanation for why different sorts of things can be valuable for one and the same subject. By distinguishing grounding from connecting, we can distill the same metaphysical structure throughout the complexity of wellbeing.

## **Appendix: The Normative Significance of Grounding versus Connecting**

I argued for the importance of distinguishing between grounds and connections when it comes to separating distinct dimensions of subjectivism versus objectivism, variabilism versus invariabilism, and pluralism versus monism. Yet one might worry that the distinction between grounds and connections appears to be similar to other distinctions that are more familiar in discussions of wellbeing. In particular, one might worry about the extent of the difference between the grounds versus connections distinction and, first, the sources versus nature of wellbeing distinction and, second, the enumerative versus explanatory theories distinction. Therefore, in this final section, I want to show how distinguishing grounding versus connecting takes us beyond these other distinctions.<sup>23</sup>

As for the sources versus nature distinction, Sumner (1996) tells us that the sources of wellbeing are the “particular things capable of being beneficial,” while the nature of wellbeing is given by “the conditions which constitute someone’s being benefitted by something” (16). Sumner requires, as part of a ‘formality’ constraint, that a theory of welfare must hold that “however plural welfare is at the level of its sources...it is unitary at the level of nature...which applies equally to all the different varieties of welfare, all of its sources, and all of its many subjects” (17). Thus, it might seem like my view and Sumner’s views provide similar taxonomical resources, with sources corresponding to grounds and nature corresponding to connections.

In fact, it might seem like our views even coincide substantively. As part of his substantive view, Sumner upholds a broad subjectivism. He claims that authentic happiness about something makes it a source of wellbeing. (1996: ch. 6). Authentic happiness involves an “experience requirement” (138)

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<sup>23</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for posing the concern about the difference from the distinction between sources versus nature, and I also thank them as well as another reviewer for posing the concern about the difference from the distinction between enumerative versus explanatory theories.

such that “a condition of someone’s life counts as an intrinsic source of well-being for her just in case she authentically endorses it, or finds it satisfying, for its own sake,” (180) where endorsement and satisfaction involve experiencing it (sec. 6.1). Because of the variety of people’s experiential sentiments, someone can derive happiness from multiple things and different things can make different people happy. Sumner, then, is subjectivist about the nature of wellbeing, pluralist about the sources, and invariabilist about the nature while variabilist about the sources.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it might seem like our views are substantively similar as well.

However, while Sumner’s view is clearly a precursor to my own, the views are importantly different in both substantive and taxonomical respects. The biggest substantive difference is that I reject the experience requirement. On my view, a valuing attitude can make it such that an unexperienced item is a constituent of wellbeing. Our conceptual taxonomies are importantly different as well. As part of his ‘formality’ constraint, Sumner explicitly requires that the nature of wellbeing – the set of conditions which constitute welfare – is unitary and applies equally to all subjects. In my idiom, this is to require that a proper theory of wellbeing must be monist and invariabilist about connections. Thus, his taxonomy bans pluralist as well as variabilist connections by fiat, which makes the sources versus nature distinction unable to articulate a wide swath of views about wellbeing. For example, it cannot capture the Robust Hybrid view of Steven Wall and David Sobel (forthcoming), which holds that certain things are objectively good for someone while for other things subjective attitudes can make them valuable. By contrast, my framework can capture this in terms of pluralism about connections. As another example, Sumner’s taxonomy cannot accommodate Dale Dorsey’s (2017b) view that welfare requires a relation of ‘fit’ that is significantly different for valuing and non-valuing creatures.

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<sup>24</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for asking how my view differs than Sumner’s in its substantive elements.

Yet my framework can capture this in terms of variabilism about connections. While my substantive view, like Sumner's, is monist and invariabilist about connections, I defend this on *substantive* grounds, not by decree. The substantive view I defend is just one within the larger taxonomy disclosed by the distinction between grounds and connections. Half the point of this paper is to offer that taxonomy.

As for enumeration versus explanation, Roger Crisp – and those who follow him (Fletcher 2013: 206; Woodard 2013: 790-792) – hold that enumerative theories list the things that are valuable for you, while explanatory theories explain why they are valuable for you. Since most substantive theories of wellbeing offer a mixture of enumeration and explanation (Lin 2017b), it's best not to invoke a distinction among theories themselves but instead among different aspects of the structure of wellbeing. In this light, Crisp (2006) holds that enumeration lists the “substantive goods” that “make someone's life go better for them”, while explanation provides the “*good-for-making*” properties possessed by all the constituents of wellbeing (102). In a related vein, Guy Fletcher (2013) distinguishes between “*which* things enhance wellbeing” and “*why* something enhances well-being” (206), and he goes on to offer as his paradigm explanatory claim David Sobel's (2009: 337) subjectivist formulation that “something is good for a person...*because* she has a desire of the right sort for it” (207). And as Christopher Woodard (2013) formulates the distinction, it is between answers to the question “what are the constituents of (some subject's) welfare?” and the question “in virtue of what is any given item supposed to be a constituent of (some subject's) welfare” (790-791)?

Certainly, then, the distinction between grounds versus connections is in the same spirit as that between enumeration and explanation. However, I deny that thereby nothing new is gained. First, the distinction between grounds and connections is enfolded within a rich theory of grounding, and the precise distinction between grounds and connections allows for a clearer taxonomy and formulation

of views. Hence, I take the grounds versus connections distinction as an important development of the enumeration versus explanation distinction. Second, proponents of the enumerative versus explanatory distinction have mostly focused on the issue of subjectivism versus objectivism (Fletcher 2013: sec. 2; Woodard 2013: 797-802). They have not differentiated in detail the distinct dimensions of pluralism versus monism, or variabilism versus invariabilism along the grounding and connecting axes. Much of the strength of my view comes from separating these dimensions.

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