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978-0-521-83783-5 - Appearances of the Good: An Essay on the Nature of Practical Reason

Sergio Tenenbaum

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Appearances of the Good

An Essay on the Nature of Practical Reason

“We desire all and only those things we conceive to be good; we avoid what we conceive to be bad.” This slogan, which Kant dubbed “the old formula of the schools,” was once the standard view of the relationship between desire or motivation and rational evaluation. Many contemporary critics have rejected this scholastic formula as either trivial or wrong. It appears to be trivial if we just define the good as “what we want” and wrong if we consider apparent conflicts between what we seem to want and what we seem to think is good. In *Appearances of the Good*, Sergio Tenenbaum argues that the old slogan is both significant and exactly right, even in cases of apparent conflict between our desires and our evaluative judgments. Maintaining that the good is the formal end of practical inquiry in much the same way that truth is the formal end of theoretical inquiry, this book provides a fully unified account of motivation and evaluation.

Sergio Tenenbaum is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Toronto. He has contributed to *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Noûs*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, and *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, and he is editor of *New Perspectives in Moral Psychology*.

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SERGIO TENENBAUM

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Acknowledgments

I came to graduate school certain that I was going to write a dissertation on the philosophy of language. However, as I started my graduate work in Pittsburgh, I suddenly became captivated by issues in ethics, practical reason, and philosophy of action, issues to which I had previously paid very little attention. Doubtless my conversion was due in large measure to the outstanding pool of faculty and fellow graduate students I was lucky to have found in the area at that time. Although a number of years have passed since I wrote my dissertation, many of the ideas in this book were born from my philosophical conversations at Pitt. It would be unforgivable not to take this opportunity to acknowledge the enormous debt I owe to the teachers with whom I first discussed many of the ideas in this book: Bob Brandom, Stephen Engstrom, David Gauthier, the late Tamara Horowitz, John McDowell, Michael Thompson, Jennifer Whiting, and especially my ideal (and real) supervisor, Annette Baier. I also owe thanks to the many friends and colleagues with whom I went on to discuss these ideas in the years that followed. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to those who provided extensive and valuable comments at various stages of writing this book: Donald Ainslie, Talbot Brewer, Phil Clark, Jimmy Doyle, Joe Heath, Pamela Hieronymi, Tom Hurka, Hans Lottentbach, Arthur Ripstein, Fred Schueler, Amy Schmitter, Gopal Sreenivasan, Aladdin Yaqub, and an anonymous referee at Cambridge University Press.

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