Free & Equal | A Journal of Ethics and Public Affairs

Jacob L. Blitz 2026 Traditions and Perspectives. *Free & Equal: A Journal of Ethics and Public Affairs*, 2(2): 536–558.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/fe.25873

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Traditions and Perspectives

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Traditions, from cultural holidays to personal rituals, have a certain place in many of our lives. On regular occasions, we interrupt our normal priorities to follow the dictates of some tradition, often without being able to explain why—and we're glad to do so. Can such a role be justified? I argue that traditions are well-positioned to help solve a problem in human life. On some level, a good life involves balancing different values. But values must compete for our attention, and miscellaneous attentional pulls can lead to a life misspent. As regularized and sticky occurrences that prescribe specific actions, traditions can guide us into new normative perspectives even at moments when we're unable to see the perspective's appeal. Thus traditions can preserve space for normative perspectives at risk of being neglected—helping ensure that all the values we care about get their due. Where prior accounts explain traditions in terms of interpersonal coordination, this account is intrapersonal, capturing a new range of cases and accounting for the particularities of traditions.

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https://doi.org/10.16995/fe.25873

Volume 2, Issue 2 (2026): 536–558

ARTICLE

TRADITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

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Traditions, from cultural holidays to personal rituals, have a certain place in many of our lives. On regular occasions, we interrupt our normal priorities to follow the dictates of some tradition, often without being able to explain why—and we're glad to do so. Can such a role be justified? I argue that traditions are well-positioned to help solve a problem in human life. On some level, a good life involves balancing different values. But values must compete for our attention, and miscellaneous attentional pulls can lead to a life misspent. As regularized and sticky occurrences that prescribe specific actions, traditions can guide us into new normative perspectives even at moments when we're unable to see the perspective's appeal. Thus traditions can preserve space for normative perspectives at risk of being neglected—helping ensure that all the values we care about get their due. Where prior accounts explain traditions in terms of interpersonal coordination, this account is intrapersonal, capturing a new range of cases and accounting for the particularities of traditions.

I. Introduction

Traditions have a significant place in many of our lives. We celebrate holidays; we adhere to personal rituals; when the appointed hour comes around, we set aside our workaday concerns to carry out some unusual formula or other. Often, we feel strongly pulled to engage in these traditions without being able to articulate why. We interrupt our normal priorities to follow the dictates of tradition, acting out of what may seem like mere accumulated habit—and we enjoy it, and we rarely miss the opportunity. Should we? Is there good reason for our adherence to traditions, especially when considering particular traditions in all their strange specificity? Do activities like these belong in lives like ours, or are we just wasting our time?

Such traditions can run from Earth Day to a weekly family dinner to a daily morning crossword. I'll focus on two extended examples.

Shabbat I began writing this paper not long after I started observing some aspects of Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest. Let's imagine what Shabbat might

look like to a somewhat more observant celebrant. Every Friday night, she lights candles, eats some designated food, and says a few prayers. For the next 24 hours, she avoids work—perhaps following the traditional prohibitions on everything from housework to electricity use or perhaps just committing herself to taking it easy. On Saturday night, she ends the holiday with the Havdalah ("separation") service. She does not believe that Shabbat is a divinely ordained moral obligation: she does it, as best she understands, because it's a tradition.

Yahrzeit My father is not at all religiously observant, with one exception: the annual memorial ritual of *yahrzeit*. On the anniversary of his father's death, he lights a candle that burns for about a day. He speaks of his father often during that day and takes on an atypically solemn and reflective mood. The next day, he's back to his usual self. [1]

I argue that traditions such as these can function as ways of managing our attention to balance competing values and so lead a better life.[2] When we are drawn to spend too much of our time in one particular normative perspective, a tradition can right the ship by carving out space for us to attend to a different value. The strange phenomenal structure of these traditions—their regular temporal interruption, their normative "stickiness," and their inarticulability—is just what's needed to achieve this function. The account thus neatly addresses traditions in their particularities. And the account takes the study of traditions in a new direction with a function that isn't centrally social, a story of intrapersonal rather than interpersonal coordination.

First, I'll take a moment to clarify my terms and situate my project. I use "tradition" quite differently from philosophers who speak of, e.g., "the liberal tradition" or "the analytic tradition." Those traditions, when firmly established, form the background of their adherents' lives, a set of "core assumptions" shaping salient options and goals rather than acting as an overt

1. The Jewish motifs in this paper reflect a here-backgrounded interest in an approach to Jewish philosophy that draws from and probes the values and practices of the more contemporary, progressive, assimilated Jewish culture with which I'm personally familiar. As noted in the body, a more religiously committed Jew will normally find adherence to tradition to be backed by divine commandment, for specific practices and perhaps quite generally. See Franz Rosenzweig, "The Builders," in *On Jewish Learning*, ed. Nahum Norbert Glatzer (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 72–93. The more thoroughgoing, traditional strands of Judaism prominent in the history of Jewish thought certainly have much to tell us. But I'm here interested in seeing what can be gained from taking more recent, hybridized strands of Judaism as sites of philosophically interesting practices in their own right.

2. Throughout, I'll remain noncommittal about what constitutes a good life. The argument works both in terms of preference satisfaction, valuing what one (at least some ideal observer version of one) wants to value, and substantive flourishing, valuing what would be good for one to value.

premise in reasoning.[3] They provide a frame or "horizon" that bounds the "practices" or "forms of life" within which we live.[4] The very thought that they are traditions, not just the way life is, can threaten their strength.[5]

In contrast, I'm interested in a subset of what we ordinarily call "traditions" that overlaps closely with what we call "rituals."[6] Traditions of this sort irrupt into a life as a departure from the norm. They bring with them a distinct mood or phenomenological texture, either momentarily or for a duration with clear start and end. The thought that they are traditions is commonplace and unthreatening. Specifically, the traditions I'm interested in, like *Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit*, share the following paradigmatic features:

(i) Regularity: A tradition occurs at regular temporal intervals. One of the rules that constitutes the tradition is that it is to occur at a certain time every so often.

(ii) Stickiness: A practitioner is strongly pulled to adhere to a tradition. This is first-personally evident to the practitioner, and third-personally evidenced in tendencies to carry out the tradition even when inconvenient and to express emotions like guilt when the tradition cannot be carried out. G. A. Cohen describes his attachment to a particular long-used eraser in this light: perhaps unreasonably, he would hate for it to be replaced by a better or even exactly similar eraser.[7] I'll

3. Lara Buchak, "Faith and Traditions," *Noûs* 57, no. 3 (2023), 755, https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12427.

4. The quoted terms derive from, respectively: Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods," in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 17, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611964.008; Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, rev. 4th ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

5. G. A. Cohen, "Rescuing Conservatism: A Defense of Existing Value," in *Finding Oneself in the Other* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 20, https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691148809.003.0008. Readers attracted to this literature might take the kinds of traditions I'm interested in to be best explained as vestiges of once-powerful "core assumption" traditions. Such an answer is at a tangent to the line of investigation pursued here, which focuses on whether there is a justifiable place for traditions within moral life in modernity (*Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit* as set up here, where one takes up an age-old religious obligation as something optional and private, seem characteristically modern). If you further think, with MacIntyre, that a moral scheme not based in a "core assumptions"-type tradition is thereby bankrupt, you are unlikely to find this paper useful.

6. Particularly in the social theory of the rationality of ritual, "ritual" may be the more common label. But for the somewhat stipulative sense I'm using, I've opted for "tradition" to suggest something more comfortable and less elevated than "ritual," a shade of meaning that better captures the normative phenomenology I'm concerned with.

7. Cohen, "Rescuing Conservatism," 18. Cohen's eraser usage may be not a regular temporal irruption and so not a tradition; it's just an example of Stickiness. See also Robert

discuss the roots of Stickiness in Section III, but crucially, it's a psychological fact that doesn't directly derive from a clear understanding of the value of a tradition—it's not like driving to the supermarket, which I'm only pulled to do when and because my fridge is empty. It's important here that in *Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit*, the traditions aren't thought of as divine obligations. The Stickiness of tradition is more striking and in need of explanation when a tradition lacks such obvious grounds.

(iii) Inarticulability: It's often noted that many practitioners deeply attached to a tradition can't explain the value of the tradition.[8] Asked to justify their adherence, they might have to shrug: "Well, it's a tradition!"

Unlike Regularity and Stickiness, Inarticulability isn't a feature that helps traditions carry out the function I claim, but instead a natural consequence of that function. The fact of Inarticulability also makes the need for a functional story more pressing. If we can't articulate as practitioners why we're so attached to traditions, we badly need to figure out as theoreticians whether our attachment is justified.

Note also that while these features make traditions less weighty in normative life than the "core assumptions" kind of tradition, traditions remain more weighty than mere habits. I'll say more in Section III, but briefly, habits just aren't sticky in the same way. My accustomed route on my morning commute isn't mysteriously inarticulable—it's just fast and simple—and I won't feel bereft if I happen to take a different route.

A good deal of prior work deals with related senses of tradition. Early-20th-century sociologists analyze religious rites of distant peoples; game theorists model rituals as a type of convention able to solve coordination problems; recent anthropology adds the importance of collective cultural knowledge. But such accounts are interpersonal, concerned with bringing individuals into alignment, whether in affect, knowledge, or action. This paper's account is *intra*personal: I'll argue that traditions can help a person find balance among the various competing values they hold. The account will be able to

Cummings Neville, "Individual and Rituals," in *Moral Cultivation and Confucian Character*, ed. Peimin Ni and Chenyang Li (State University of New York Press, 2014), 155, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781438453248-009.

8. Joseph Patrick Henrich, *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 101–2, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400873296; Dimitris Xygalatas, *Ritual: How Seemingly Senseless Acts Make Life Worth Living* (Little, Brown Spark, 2022), 16.

vindicate traditions in their specifics and include cases yet untouched by existing accounts (or so I'll argue in Section IV). The account also won't vindicate every tradition—that wouldn't be a desirable outcome, I think, seeing as some traditions are plainly oppressive. The upshot will instead be conditions under which a tradition can have a valuable function, along with examples suggesting that it's plausible and familiar for some traditions to in fact have this function.

First, though, the argument proper: how tradition is well-positioned as a tool that can solve a certain problem in an individual human life. The problem will take a good deal of characterizing; this is the topic of Section II, including how the problem is possible and in what terms we should understand it. In a nutshell, it's about balancing the conflicting plurality of values in a life, which can come unbalanced due to attentional pulls. Section III shows how traditions are well-suited as one way to solve this problem, first with specific reference to Shabbat and *yahrzeit* and then more generally. With the argument in view, Section IV returns to dialectical issues, detailing how the account of tradition is an innovative one. Section V concludes.

II. Unbalanced Normative Perspectives

I can best elucidate the problem at issue by first giving a series of commonplaces and then precisifying.

At some level, a human life should hold different kinds of value. A good life would include several of the following: we would care for our loved ones, make the world a better place, appreciate beauty in art and nature, complete the work and chores necessary for our health and comfort, and pursue projects where we can find excellence or just enjoyment. The list goes on.

These values are in competition: we must balance them over time. The balance can be hard to find. We might get "caught up in our work" and "never stop to smell the roses." We might wake up one day and realize we've been "wasting our lives!" We might say any of these things even if we understand and appreciate the value we'd overfocused on—"hobbies are important, but don't let them take over your life."

A good deal of philosophy needs to be done to the above ways of speaking. What are these plural values? How exactly are they in competition? What does it mean to balance them, and why is it often difficult? We shouldn't assume the lay view gets things exactly right, but nor should we easily dismiss what often seems like a major issue in life as we live it. In the rest of this section, I'll sketch a picture of what's going on here—making things clear

enough to then explain how exactly traditions help, if not necessarily clear enough to stand alone as an analytic theory of balancing values.

Rather than making a decisive claim about what these plural values to be balanced look like, I'll remain ecumenical among several accounts. Most likely, the problem I'm describing is a structural problem, a shape that can occur at different levels and locations in the space of value. Different virtues or moral principles might need balancing in practical situations where their demands seem to conflict.[9] Justice and kindness might conflict, requiring us to see wrongdoers sometimes as fit for proportional punishment and sometimes as fit for humane mercy.[10] Individual virtues might be understood as balances among distinct objects—this is one view of Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean.[11] Flavors of normativity might need balancing, e.g. if you find morality, aesthetic appreciation, or personal projects important but don't endorse fanatical devotion to any one.[12] Often, the balancing occurs in a vaguer domain of ways of going about life. Valerie Tiberius gives the example of reflecting on one's whole life as opposed to immersing deeply in a particular project; Charles Taylor describes fundamental moral outlooks such as rational clear-sightedness, autonomic self-direction, and *agapic* healing of others, all sources of "incompatible prescriptions" which must be reconciled by anyone who's deeply committed to more than one outlook.[13] The competing contents in these cases are diverse, but they share the same structure. Nor-

9. E.g. Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, Second Edition (Princeton University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2tt8nd.6.

10. This is a traditional view in Jewish ethics. See Louis E. Newman, "Balancing Justice and Mercy: Reflections on Forgiveness in Judaism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41, no. 3 (2013): 435–56, https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12023. The balance of justice and care also arises in virtue ethics and feminist ethics—see A. D. M. Walker, "Virtue and Character," *Philosophy* 64, no. 249 (1989): 349–62, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100044703; Virginia Held, "The Meshing of Care and Justice," *Hypatia* 10, no. 2 (1995): 128–32, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1995.tb01374.x.

11. Michael Stocker, *Plural and Conflicting Values* (Clarendon Press, 2004), chap. 5, https://doi.org/10.1093/0198240554.001.0001. See also Nancy Sherman, interpreting Aristotle: "A given circumstance may have multiple descriptions, and yield competing ethical claims to equally virtuous individuals who simply see things differently as a result of having developed the virtues differently." Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Clarendon Press, 1989), 29, https://doi.org/10.1093/0198239173.001.0001.

12. See Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (1982), 424, https://doi.org/10.2307/2026228; Dale Dorsey, "The Staircase Scene: Supererogation and Moral Attunement," in *Handbook of Supererogation*, ed. by David Heyd (Springer Nature Singapore, 2023), 97–8, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-3633-5. See also Thomas Nagel on the standpoints of impersonal morality and personal projects as two "perspective[s] of value" in tension. Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 18, https://doi.org/10.1093/0195098390.001.0001.

13. See Valerie Tiberius, *The Reflective Life* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 68, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199202867.001.0001; Taylor, "Diversity of Goods," 134–5.

mativity as these authors understand it asks us to act in multiple competing but valuable ways. If any of these authors are correct, we must sometimes balance different kinds of value.

In what way do these values compete? We can certainly believe multiple things to be good and important, and our actions can bear that out. One might think the problem is that some values are strictly incompatible. Perhaps some perfectly just actions are thereby unkind, and this is a problem inherent to the structure of justice and kindness, and justice and kindness remain real values—such that either taking or not taking the just action would involve a real failure. Such purely axiological conflicts may be part of the story (if conflict of this sort is coherent), but they would run too deep to be our central focus here. The problem of balancing values, as expressed by our commonplaces, is a feature of our lives that we can go a long way towards solving, not just a tragedy inherent to the nature of the good. It'll be best to frame the problem in terms of human nature instead.[14]

To a striking extent, authors who raise the problem of balancing values use language that's visional, specifically perspectival.[15] However many things we might think good, we can only see so many of them at a given time. Our limited attention brings only a certain subset of our values to the foreground at any given time, and seeing in light of those values guides our action.[16] I take my conception of attention to align with some recent, empirically informed work,[17] but the central commitment is more minimal. Our finite abilities and many tasks force us at any moment to focus on or foreground some subset of possible objects, whether in perception, cognitive processing, or broader dispositions to take into account. Here, attention is task-relative: which of the stimuli in our environments we focus on, and in what light, is inflected by our goals in focusing.[18] The values we've been discussing can be understood as setting such tasks. When I notice an apple in my kitchen, I can attend to its natural beauty (playing the aesthete), to how it's well shaped for cutting into even slices for a pie (playing the cook), or to its imbrication in a global sys-

14. For this reason, my discussion of balancing values appeals to more practical accounts of conflicts rather than classic statements of fundamental value pluralism in e.g. W.D. Ross.

15. In considering the visional in ethics I am indebted to Iris Murdoch, e.g. "Vision and Choice in Morality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian* Society, Supplementary Volumes 30 (1956): 14–58, https://doi.org/10.1093/aristoteliansupp/30.1.14.

16. See Tiberius, *The Reflective Life*, 68.

17. E.g. Wayne Wu, "We Know What Attention Is!" *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 28, no. 4 (2024): 304–18, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2023.11.007.

18. The different "manners" of attention indicated here need not indicate irreducibly qualitative differences, the existence of which is somewhat controversial. Attending to the same apple differently could just mean having a different pattern of alternating attention among different locations on the apple, features of the apple, thoughts about the apple, etc.

tem of exploitative farm labor (playing the activist).[19] All these thoughts may be true of the same apple, but the associated patterns of attention cannot all coexist simultaneously without great difficulty, given our limited mental capacity (and perhaps their divergent affective textures and valences). Call these *normative perspectives*: the patterns of attention that fit with a certain value.[20] Valuing improving the world means attending to what's wrong and how to fix it; valuing beauty means appreciatively attending to what's beautiful, perhaps without any further instrumental aims.[21] The domain of normative perspective is where values compete, vying for our attention.

You might worry here about a "unity of the values" thesis: does the case I've been making rely on an assumption that values are fundamentally plural and incompatible? I myself find the assumption appealing, but I need not commit to it here for at least two reasons. First, a single value might call for multiple normative perspectives. In self-effacing versions of utilitarianism, for instance, there might ultimately be only one currency of value, but it's best served by focusing on different individuals and objects in different situations rather than constantly tallying up expected utility.[22] Second, normative perspectives may only appear distinct due to imperfect moral development, which means balancing values would remain a problem for imperfect beings like (the vast majority of) us. Increased skill can allow us to simultaneously attend to and integrate features that previously seemed separate. I used to be unable to dribble a soccer ball forward while looking ahead to find open space, but now the foci no longer compete—they're just two components of dribbling. Similarly, where I currently think I have to balance justice and mercy, I might come to see them as integrated—just

19. My language here aligns with recent literature on "moral affordances" that are relative to particular competing forms of life or values. See Peter J. Hampson, Timothy L. Hulsey, and Phillip P. McGarry, "Moral Affordance, Moral Expertise, and Virtue," *Theory & Psychology* 31, no. 4 (2021), esp. 522, https://doi.org/10.1177/09593543211021662.

20. Elisabeth Camp (in several papers) and Ella Whiteley both further flesh out the notion of "perspectives" in recent work. But their projects seem concerned with the various perspectives one can take on any object rather than the high-level normative perspectives specifically at issue here. See, e.g., Elisabeth Camp, "Slurring Perspectives," *Analytic Philosophy* 54, no. 3 (2013): 330–49, https://doi.org/10.1111/phib.12022; Ella Whiteley, "Harmful Salience Perspectives," in *Salience: A Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. Sophie Archer (Routledge, 2022), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351202114-12. Cf. "agencies" as used in C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency As Art* (Oxford University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190052089.001.0001.

21. That's the case if you understand the aesthetic attitude as disinterested, e.g. Jerome Stolnitz, "The Aesthetic Attitude," in *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism: A Critical Introduction* (Houghton Mifflin, 1960).

22. The classic argument is Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *Journal of Philosophy* 73, no. 14 (1976): 453–66, https://doi.org/10.2307/2025782. An attentional framing can be found in Dorsey, "Staircase Scene," 96.

two components of virtue.[23] But this is at best a hopeful prediction about the exceptionally virtuous *phronimos*. For the rest of us, it does seem that sometimes two genuinely valuable perspectives are in competition for our attention at a moment. Even if this understanding is non-ideal, it is still a live problem, and we will still want tools to help us navigate it.[24]

I've now explained what it means to balance values. It remains to explain why they can be so hard to balance. From a certain philosophical angle, it's puzzling how the problem can get off the ground. Take, for instance, the mid-level office drone who gets "caught up with work." This is not just a few hours of working mindlessly where he might never consider other values—he might go through weeks, months, or even years of misprioritization. During this time, we can imagine, he takes weekends off, he spends some time talking to loved ones or pursuing hobbies, and he reflects some, perhaps even ruing his focus on work. If he really thinks work isn't that important, why doesn't he ever take a longer weekend, cut corners on the job to make space for a hobby, or take more time off to visit his family? Contrapositively, if he spends so much time in a perspective valorizing work, doesn't that prove he in fact values work more than these other things?[25]

Our perspectives can come apart from our preferred values in part because attention isn't fully volitional—what we attend to isn't wholly up to us. Bright colors, sudden motions, and loud noises, most archetypally, tend to grab us whether we want them to or not. Features of our environment (e.g. loud, bright TV ads) can exploit our natural tendencies to draw our attention against our best judgment. When I get a notification from my work email, my phone buzzes and an angry red "1" pops up. In some range of situations where I'd rather not think about work but I wasn't deeply engrossed in another task, my attention has now been redirected, and I'm likely to enter the perspective of work.[26] And once I've been pulled into a certain perspective,

23. And what of the seeming conflicts? At the point where impartial justice denies needed mercy, I would come to understand the former as not true justice, and vice versa. See Walker, "Virtue and Character," Sec. 6; Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 89–91, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199228782.001.0001.

24. See Berlin, "Pursuit of the Ideal," 13–14.

25. You might worry that the very fact our office drone spends so much time at work is a "revealed preference" proving that he truly does find work more important—even if he says in a reflective mood that he wishes he spent less time attending to work, isn't that just one more perspective? But any realistically sophisticated moral psychology should be able to separate time spent from preferences by positing psychological complexities like weakness of will or second-order desires.

26. Attentional pulls can get much more complex than this. Some pulls are internal: if I am anxious about a deadline at work, thoughts may pop up insistently during all sorts of other activities. Some pulls involve your environment broadly: if you're at the grocery store, with a basket in your hand and teeming aisles surrounding you, you're in an environment conducive to thinking about what to buy, not to (e.g.) idle philosophizing.

I'm more likely to stay in that perspective for the next little while, all else being equal. The work email might get me thinking about the larger project or mentally composing my reply, and there goes my evening. These unwanted attentional pulls can add up into bad habits. Over time, countless attentional pulls can combine to significantly affect how, and how well, one's life has been spent.[27]

Here, attention is just the right level at which to frame the problem. Our values—what's important to us in life—seem in some way a plurality that we must balance appropriately. What normative perspective we attend to isn't wholly within our immediate control, so we can end up with unbalanced values. But attention is also improvable, through modifying our environment or through training, so we can make significant progress towards balancing normative perspectives. We can misspend our attention, but so too can we come to spend it well.

That's the story of unbalanced normative perspectives. It follows from plausible and precedented claims about values and attention, and it fits with familiar thoughts about how one might become stuck in a perspectival rut. Too, it gains plausibility as part of what I hope will be a cohesive and convincing account that satisfyingly vindicates traditions' odd features.[28]

III. What Traditions Can Do

Traditions can use attentional pulls to give normative perspectives the right amount of space in a life. This is likely not the only thing traditions do, nor is it the only way to solve the problem of unbalanced normative perspectives. But it is an explanation that captures central features of traditions and suggests how they might earn their place in our lives. I'll return to the *Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit* cases, both of which can be neatly explained using this framework. Then I'll show traditions are generally well-suited to draw attention, draw us into new normative perspectives, and thereby help balance normative perspectives.

In his classic work *The Sabbath*, Abraham Joshua Heschel explains in perspectival terms how Shabbat formalizes a cycle of work and rest.[29] For six days a week we labor; we "race"; we "war with nature" to "subdue the

27. Some of our everyday practices take advantage of attentional pulls to help us attend to what we want to, e.g. loud alarms or prescheduled calendar reminders.

28. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

29. It is, famously, the same cycle described in Genesis, where God creates the world in six days and declares the seventh a holy day to rest.

earth" for our safety and comfort as part of "technical civilization."[30] Our labor is not misguided: it is "the destiny of man," and "endowed with divine dignity."[31] But it is a never-ending task—"Does not our work always remain incomplete?"[32] Here intervenes the seventh day, the institution of Shabbat, as "a sanctuary in time."[33] Shabbat creates "a different climate; it is as if the appearance of all things somehow changed."[34] The task of labor disappears—we "rest even from the thought of labor," "as if all your work were done."[35] In its place is a different imperative: "to stand still and to embrace the presence of an eternal moment."[36] During Shabbat, we live with and appreciate time as it passes; its "significance and beauty do not depend on any work, profit, or progress."[37]

In Heschel's view, Shabbat creates a new normative perspective where our experience of the world is altered by a focus on appreciation as opposed to improvement. How does it do that? Shabbat begins with a meal, often the most elaborate of the week, and prayers thanking God for the meal's components. It continues with explicit prohibitions on work of various kinds, and it ends with a ritual clearly marking the distinction from everyday life.[38] If someone were to invent an institution that forced you to stop working and attend to the goodness of good things, it might look a lot like Shabbat.

Something similar can be said about how *yahrzeit* manages the place of grief. Start with a recent line of thought in the philosophy of emotion: an emotion can be a fitting response to a specific kind of value or disvalue, registering and attending to that value. Grief responds to the disvaluable loss of a loved one, in turn reflecting the loved one's value. But since the fact of loss remains a fact forever, we seem to have reason to take up grief forever, and even (for a significant enough loss) to devote ourselves entirely to grief. To step away from grief is to fail to properly register the magnitude of the loss—to betray the deceased by no longer acting so as to reflect their importance. Once we enter the normative perspective of grief, focused on honor-

30. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 27–29.
31. Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 27.
32. Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 32.
33. Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 29.
34. Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 21.
35. Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 32.
36. Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 29.
37. Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 20.
38. The final blessing of the Shabbat-ending *havdalah* ceremony reads: "Praise to you, Adonai who distinguishes between the holy and ordinary." Elyse D. Frishman, ed., *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007), 310.

ing the deceased by responding to their loss, this logic can make it hard to ever leave.[39]

Yet all things considered, we shouldn't spend all our lives grieving, pushing all our other values aside. The disvalue of the loved one's death just isn't the only thing that matters to us.[40] Here as elsewhere, we must balance values. As time passes, the lost loved one remains among the things we value, and valuing them still means responding to the badness of their death with grief—only some of the time. The normative perspective of grief should have its rightful place, neither completely neglected nor taking over a whole life.[41]

Yahrzeit is well designed to encourage attention to grief in proper proportion. The flickering flame of the candle pulls one to thoughts of the occasion and the grief it represents. The day traditionally includes recitation of the Mourners' Kaddish, a prayer only said by those in mourning and so further emphasizing the day's focus. For someone not generally religiously observant (like my father), the very strangeness of having a ritual day marked on the calendar and in the household might provide a continuous light attentional pressure to take a break from normal routines and make space to

39. Christopher Howard, "Forever Fitting Feelings," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 107, no. 1 (2023): 80–98, https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12904; Dan Moller, "Love and the Rationality of Grief," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Love*, ed. Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts (Oxford University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199395729.013.35; Berislav Marušić, "Do Reasons Expire?: An Essay on Grief," *Philosophers' Imprint* 18, no. 25 (2018) (a particularly powerful evocation of the perspective of grief). See also parallel worries about anger in Agnes Callard, "The Reason to Be Angry Forever," in *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, ed. Myisha V. Cherry and Owen J. Flanagan (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), https://doi.org/10.5040/9798881817145.ch-8; Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2018): 123–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12130.

40. This tension is acknowledged in Howard, "Forever Fitting Feelings," Sec. 6; Marušić, "Do Reasons Expire?," 9–10. In the Talmud, after the fall of the Second Temple occasioned mourning, Rabbi Yehoshua rebuked a group that took up extreme asceticism: "To not mourn at all is impossible…but to mourn excessively as you are doing is also impossible." Adin Steinsaltz, ed., *The Koren Talmud Bavli: Tractate Bava Batra, Part 1*, vol. 23 (Koren Publisher, 2010).

41. For a similar attentional solution to the problem of forever fitting grief, see Andrew Peet and Eli Pitcovski, "Emotion, Attention, and Reason," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 110, no. 2 (2025), esp. Sec. 3.2, https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.13109. Note also that *yahrzeit* comes after the first and deepest period of mourning, when the perspective of grief is no longer a constant presence. I don't address the topic of how we escape the perspective of grief this first time. Some authors take the cessation of mourning as a strange, subrational psychological fact. Marušić, "Do Reasons Expire?," 2; Moller, "Love and the Rationality of Grief," 595–7. But the escape might be managed by one-time ritual, e.g. Judaism's successive periods of gradually decreasing mourning rites. *Yahrzeit* might involve a way of valuing a loss somewhat transmuted from the original period of grief—for a defense of such a change, see Cathy Mason and Matt Dougherty, "Mourning and the Recognition of Value," in *The Meaning of Mourning: Perspectives on Death, Loss, and Grief*, ed. Mikołaj Sławkowski-Rode (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2023), 93–106, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781978734807.ch-6.

mourn. When the candle burns out and the day is done, the attentional pulls disappear, leaving grief in its small, distinct place in the calendar.[42]

These analyses of *Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit*, I should be clear, are speculative and tidy—they certainly don't capture everything that's going on in these two ancient and variform practices. But if illuminating, the analyses strongly suggest the fruitfulness of understanding traditions as pulling us into normative perspectives and so creating a well-balanced life. Now, you might worry that for this purpose, *Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit* are atypical examples. Not all traditions are ancient or imbued with lofty spiritual significance,[43] and not all traditions provide such explicit instructions and rituals.[44] So I'll zoom out to consider the whole range of traditions, using general features of the class to show their ability to balance normative perspectives.

I claim that traditions can help balance normative perspectives. I'll argue for this in three stages: traditions are generally well-suited to a) grab attention, b) direct attention towards a variety of normative perspectives, and c) thereby contribute to balancing normative perspectives in a life. Each stage is necessary for traditions to play the unique role I've claimed for them, as opposed to nearby phenomena that wouldn't serve. Many of the things that might help us with our normative perspectives—good therapists or self-help books, say—only appear to us if we seek them out, already aware of and hoping to solve a problem in ethical life (or by lucky coincidence). To meet a), to help us when we're liable to get stuck in one perspective, traditions must appeal even to people who aren't especially tempted to seek them out. As for b), many an attentional phenomenon directs us only to the phenomenon itself. Annoyingly loud noises, for instance, might only suc-

42. For both Shabbat and *yahrzeit*, the question remains open of whether they provide the quantitatively *right* balance of values. Should you really grieve for one day a year, and rest for one day a week? I take it there's some range of best answers, at least for particular individuals at particular times of life. Cf. Confucian discussions of the appropriate length of mourning in Confucius, *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Edward G. Slingerland (Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 17.21; Xunzi, *Xunzi: Basic Writings*, ed. Burton Watson (Columbia University Press, 2012), 64–65.

43. Although I've stipulated the observants in *Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit* are not religious enough to make their observation more about law than tradition, the fact that a practice has historical spiritual significance might still create a broader sense of heritage and connection that provides some pull.

44. Too, not all tradition-like phenomena end by returning the observant to their prior normative perspective: some, like harvest festivals and coming-of-age ceremonies, indicate a lasting change in normative priorities and attentional foci. While I think such cases can be explained using the resources of this paper, they're not regular or about balancing perspectives as directly as my central cases, so I won't focus on them further. I do think such phenomena will often *also* involve a temporary entry and exit from a normative perspective: *b'nai mitzvah* services both initiate a lasting new relationship to the Jewish community and entail a day particularly focused on the rights and responsibilities of adulthood.

ceed in drawing our attention to the noise and how annoying it is. Traditions need to get us thinking not just about tradition itself but about some specific normative perspective, and different traditions should be able to draw us into a wide variety of normative perspectives. Stage c) is needed as well, if we want traditions to tend towards the good rather than join the many attentional phenomena that tend towards unbalanced addictions or obsessions. None of these stages is meant to hold for every member of the class of traditions. But well-remarked features of traditions in general support each of the three stages.

I'll start with a), the way traditions grab us. This is the fact of Stickiness, introduced in Section I. Even when traditions are inconveniencing and not obviously valuable, we are often loath to give them up. Because traditions tend to be sticky, they are efficacious attentional pulls, drawing our attention even when at the moment it's not what we would prefer. If our office worker is stuck at his desk, ensconced in a perspective that sees objects as valuable only to the extent they help him with work, a tradition will often provide a strong enough pull to get him following its prescriptions into a new normative perspective. But what, in turn, explains Stickiness? Why are traditions so good at capturing and holding attention? In fact, a variety of factors might be at play.

The first step in the story is habit. Habits—well-established personal temporal regularities—are a powerful non-volitional means of affecting how we act, including by pulling our attention. This may be surprising: habits are automatic and so sometimes thought of as sub-attentional.[45] But at the least, habits can direct us to new thoughts and environments that in turn can shift our normative perspective. If I'm accustomed to standing up and walking to the office door the moment my watch beeps for 5:00, I will before I know it be away from my desk with all its prompts to work, and I'll realize I need to figure out what's for dinner. The regularized temporal structure of traditions creates habits of thought and action that help us start following the tradition at the appointed time.

But various sources of attachment make traditions particularly strong pulls, of a different order than mere habits.[46] Regularity is a contributing

45. Though this is contested—see Laura Bickel, "Why the Performance of Habit Requires Attention," *Mind & Language* 39, no. 2 (2024): 260–70, https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12467.

46. Mere habits might direct our attention momentarily but then be overridden: if I wake up early and automatically start my workday routine on a weekend, I can shake off the habit as soon as I realize. It is here that deeper sorts of attachment, often with a phenomenal texture of desirability or normativity, keep us hooked to start observing the tradition and let it direct us to the relevant normative perspective. That's not to deny that mere habits can grow into traditions with the proper additions.

factor, creating a comforting rhythm to which we can become attached. As Samuel Scheffler puts it, traditions create a "'home' in time," a reliably familiar point we can return to in the vast, impersonal flow of time.[47] But other factors can contribute too. Many traditions are imbricated with cultural meaning that makes them part of powerful social identities—we can belong to some broader group or history of practitioners. More individualized traditions are liable to become part of our own personal or familial identities, becoming especially notable as phenomenally unusual but temporally regular events. Religious traditions like Shabbat and *yahrzeit* may draw residual strength from the historic belief that they're morally obligatory. We might even be hardwired to follow traditions due to their evolutionary advantages.[48] Temperament and personal history also matter: some people seem more predisposed than others to take "it's a tradition!" as motivating. Any or all of these features might contribute to making a particular tradition feel broadly desirable (we want to observe it) or normatively motivating (we feel we should observe it), attitudes which help traditions pull and hold our attention. Importantly, these features remain compatible with Inarticulability: none of them require explicit understanding of the instrumental value of tradition, nor the prior presence of the normative perspective into which a tradition pulls us. Broad positive affect can help make an object attractive for sustained attention.[49]

Now to stage b), how traditions lead us to a normative perspective beyond just the perspective of valuing tradition itself. There's not much to say in general here, as the point depends on the particular rituals and actions prescribed by the tradition more than facts about traditions in general. Shabbat and *yahrzeit*, as analyzed above, clearly demonstrate how directly rituals can

47. Samuel Scheffler, "The Normativity of Tradition," in *Equality and Tradition: Questions of Value in Moral and Political Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 297; see also Cohen, "Rescuing Conservatism," 19.

48. Longstanding traditions have the particular advantage of preserving the experiential knowledge of long-dead predecessors so we don't need to figure it out for ourselves. The traditions I focus on need not be longstanding, but Stickiness that functionally originates in the benefits of longstanding traditions might end up subrationally attaching us to newer traditions as well. The thought about longstanding traditions is worked out in detail in the "cultural knowledge" accounts of tradition I'll mention in Section IV; it's also central to some strands of conservatism and is mentioned in Buchak, "Faith and Traditions," 754; Scheffler, "Normativity of Tradition," 292.

49. David Hall and Roger Ames, writing on John Dewey and Confucius, similarly attribute the importance of "ritualistic celebrations" to "the fact that both pleasure and prudence are thereby given their due"—in my terms, that traditions combine Stickiness and instrumental value. David L. Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (SUNY Press, 1987), 78, https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.18255044.

draw us into new perspectives. Nor is this particular to religious traditions. There are many actions a tradition might have us take, and many values it might thereby lead us to promote, appreciate, or respect; the value of tradition itself is just one among many. A weekly family dinner sits us at the table together, inviting interpersonal discussion and attention, or an annual vacation drops us someplace with exciting new things to explore. Appreciating tradition itself might be a moment in the story—"isn't it great we do this every week?"—but it fades to the background as we actually engage. Some traditions are intentionally designed to encourage a particular normative perspective (e.g. Earth Day or a pre-performance breathing exercise that you've become attached to), making them especially likely to succeed at b), but our other examples make clear that no intention is needed.

Finally, stage c), why traditions tend towards balancing perspectives instead of getting stuck in one. The answer here lies in the oft-remarked phenomenon I'll call efficiency via conventionality. Traditions create conventions, arbitrary rules that improve coordination among agents—or, in this case, agent-internal balancing among one's competing values. Each value should take up some space in a life, but only *some* space. Various actions on various occasions would suffice; taking every opportunity to appreciate or grieve, or taking no opportunity, would be a failure. So there's no wrong in ignoring any one opportunity to act according to a certain value. But this is risky: it's easy to get in the habit of ignoring every opportunity and pushing back your appreciation time to the dubious day when you finally finish all your work, or else constantly worrying about whether or not you ought to take each opportunity that arises. Convention can solve this worry by telling us which opportunity to take, sacrificing flexibility for the ability to balance values without needing to deliberate. It's not as if the day of rest *has* to be on a Saturday to serve its function, but picking *some* day in the week allows us not to constantly worry about when we should take our rest.[50] Efficiency via conventionality explains why traditions have the right shape for balancing values. Arbitrarily regularized interventions turn out to be a generally useful way for making sure we don't miss out on important parts of our normative lives.

50. See Scheffler, "Normativity of Tradition," 291–3. This line of argument is inspired by a parallel approach to ensuring the fulfillment of imperfect duties. See, e.g., Allen Buchanan, "Perfecting Imperfect Duties: Collective Action to Create Moral Obligations," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1996): 27–42, https://doi.org/10.2307/3857239. But note a disanalogy: where taking more opportunities than needed to fulfill an imperfect duty is usually supererogatory, taking too many opportunities to follow one normative perspective is usually neutral or bad, given opportunity costs in terms of other values.

Stickiness and efficiency via conventionality make us attached to traditions without clearly understanding the benefit of traditions in our lives. This might seem an unacceptable kind of irrationality (as suggested by our opening puzzlement at the phenomenon of tradition). But given the function I've argued for, traditions *need* to move us when we don't understand why. That is, Inarticulability is a natural concomitant, not a flaw. Traditions help us when we are failing to balance normative perspectives: when the value of perspectives fails to move us past competing attentional pulls. But traditions are valuable because they help us access normative perspectives which are themselves valuable (in due measure). If we were able to see the value of perspectives when we needed to, we wouldn't need traditions in this way. Traditions are tools for a world where the full story of traditions and perspectives isn't accessible and motivational to us at the crucial moments.[51] Traditions outstrip articulability—and therein lies their power.

Let's again imagine our office dweller who's liable to get caught up in his work. But now, let's say he observes Shabbat. Every Friday evening, he habitually makes no plans, leaves work right at 5, and sets out the wine and candles as soon as he arrives home. If his mind starts to wander to his next deadline, it's not long before he again notices the holiday accoutrements and starts anticipating the day of rest. Then, when he says the prayers and enjoys the ritual foods, he starts appreciating as the holiday asks. The tradition of Shabbat has successfully pulled him into a normative perspective of appreciation, helping him balance his values and not spend too much time attending to work.

IV. What's New

I have argued that unbalanced normative perspectives are a problem endemic to human life and that traditions can help us solve the problem. Now that the account is on the table, I'll return to the dialectical issues from Section I, bringing in existing accounts of the value of tradition. There's a long history in the social sciences of attempts to explain the possible good of traditions; in that history, I'll argue, this contribution represents a unique step forward.

51. The objector unhappy with traditions' irrationality can still find traditions a disappointment or tragedy. What I want them to accept is that traditions can use the irrationality of attention to respond to the irrationality of attention and make us in some way more rational in our behavior. The fault is in our attention, and traditions merely exploit it.

Much of the relevant literature is on the rationality of ritual, starting from the early-20th-century sociologists who saw the religious rites of distant peoples as means of building community or creating comfort and control in a capricious world.[52] These lines of thought have found recent parallels in both empirical anthropology and in formal social science on the utility of convention.[53] Rituals can bind us together by making overt the common knowledge that enables coordination or by forcing us to sacrifice for and so commit to a group.[54] And rituals can improve our individual lives by putting us in tune with useful social regularities. Traditions might fall under the umbrella of arbitrary conventions like driving on the right, which can solve coordination problems. When the benefit of acting in a coordinated way is high enough, following a convention can be rational however strange or costly its substance. Our reason to adhere becomes yet stronger when conventions take the form of social norms backed by sanctions.[55] Too, rituals can preserve cultural knowledge that exceeds individual understanding. Over many generations of trial and error, a society might learn how to detoxify a certain foodstuff, say; the average denizen may not even know the food is toxic, and certainly wouldn't be able to figure out the detoxification process themselves, but with a sticky, inarticulable tradition, they can avoid the poison.[56] None of these accounts are specifically concerned with regular, sticky, and inarticulable traditions, but they might seem to successfully justify that

52. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (Free Press, 1995); Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Doubleday Anchor, 1954). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to several of the theories in this paragraph.

53. The latter stems from David K. Lewis, *Convention: A Philosophical Study* (Blackwell, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470693711.

54. Michael Suk-young Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* (Princeton University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691158280.001.0001; Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-Riding in Cults, Communes, and Other Collectives," *Journal of Political Economy* 100, no. 2 (1992): 271–91, https://doi.org/10.1086/261818.

55. Robert Sugden, "Spontaneous Order," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 3, no. 4 (1989): 85–97, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.3.4.85; Cristina Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511616037.

56. Henrich, *Secret of Our Success*, ch. 7; Neil Levy, *Bad Beliefs: Why They Happen to Good People* (Oxford University Press, 2021), ch. 2, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192895325.001.0001. Many of these authors purport to explain not why rituals are good but rather why we engage in rituals at all. But I wish to be cautious about the argumentative step from the former to the latter, especially when describing a practice often inarticulable to practitioners. Cultural and biological evolution provide some suggestion of connection between the utility of a practice and its uptake, but instead of attempting an oversimplified evolutionary story, I will stick to the normative question appropriate to a value theorist.

subset. I find many of these accounts plausible, and I am happy to believe that many traditions are multi-functional. If so, this paper's account will add another function.[57]

Yet the function I have proposed is something special. It's intrapersonal rather than interpersonal, a story of how traditions can help individuals balance their various values. As such, it can do more than the existing literature—at least three things more.

First, the intrapersonal account can do more than many to vindicate traditions on their own terms: to justify traditions in their details, giving a role to both the peculiar features of tradition and the peculiar formulae that particular traditions ask us to follow. I opened with the question of whether it's appropriate to spend our time following traditions. But as the introduction and cases of *Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit* suggest, this question isn't just one a theorist asks about utility to a society. It's a question the individual practitioner asks herself, as might confused or curious people around her. And it's a question they ask about the particular actions involved in particular traditions: why do I take all these strange actions—is all this rigamarole really necessary? Is it just mumbo-jumbo? Can't I just skip it?[58] If we want to figure out what place traditions merit in our life, we need to find what a tradition uniquely brings to the table.

Many existing theories of the rationality of ritual won't satisfy us here. Some accounts are too unlinked from the individual. If traditions force us to sacrifice for a group, they may be strengthening the group at cost to the rank-and-file group member—that's not a good reason for *me* to engage. Other accounts are too unlinked from the substance of the tradition. If traditions just exist to build community or give us a comforting sense of control, then a day of rest, day of mourning, and a day of humility might all be functionally

57. One might think of the goal as what Philippa Foot calls a phenomenon's "Aristotelian function": "What part does it play in the life cycle of things of the species…What good does it do?" Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Clarendon Press, 2003), 32, https://doi.org/10.1093/0198235089.001.0001. Again, in a world that isn't all to the good, we shouldn't take this as the final word on the phenomenon—but it satisfies a need for rationalizing explanation, and it's a valuable step in trying to understand and evaluate the lives we lead. There may also be good simply in noticing and appreciating beneficial features of our ways of life, even when critique is also needed (a version of the rest/work distinction seen in *Shabbat*!).

58. Here I hope that traditions will be in a way non-arbitrary. In introducing efficiency via conventionality in Section III, I referred to traditions as arbitrary—but the arbitrariness lies in exactly when a regularized tradition occurs, whether the day of rest is Friday, Saturday, or Sunday. The actions composing the tradition will be less arbitrary: this is stage b), where the details really are crucial in getting us to leave our old normative perspective and enter a particular new one.

interchangeable.[59] *Our* traditions won't be addressed in their particularity. The intrapersonal account, in contrast, gives a special role to the phenomenal features of traditions—explaining why the recurrence and stickiness that surround traditions are crucial to their success. And I further explain the use of the particular actions that compose tradition, as ways of bringing us into new normative perspectives (stage b in Section III).

Not all of the existing theories fail here. If traditions preserve cultural knowledge, the details matter, just like in the intrapersonal account, as part of "a mental tool that allows its users to achieve a desirable outcome through obscure means."[60] But a cultural knowledge account requires cultural knowledge, which already limits its reach. This is the second unique feature of the intrapersonal account: it extends the value of tradition to cases where interpersonal coordination looks less appealing. Coordination is of course fundamental to human success and perhaps to altruistic morality. But sometimes the people with whom we might coordinate are evil, or the procedure preserved by cultural knowledge has unacceptably high costs. To follow the crowd in such cases might be to hurt others badly or to hasten our own oppression. Or the individual doubting the value of their traditions might be a loner, a desert island dweller, or a staunch misanthrope: other people? Feh, who needs them? Appeals to social coordination won't rightfully apply to everyone, nor will they practically convince everyone. But the intrapersonal account, since it shows how traditions can promote the values a single individual already holds, applies to these cases too. This is a particularly powerful function: tradition is a versatile tool, able to promote values of all sorts. Whatever you value, even if you value it alone, you'll want to not get sidetracked in your pursuit of that value—you too will have reason to take up some traditions.[61]

Third and finally, the intrapersonal account can explain the possible value of traditions that an individual creates and observes by themselves. Perhaps I decide to not start my Sunday morning until I've spent a short while watching the birds in my backyard. I keep it up, and the habit develops Stickiness and becomes a weekly tradition. I'm not building community in any straightfor-

59. Further elaboration could save a theory of this sort. But further elaboration may make it not truly a competing theory—the intrapersonal account already incorporates community and comforting Regularity as factors contributing to Stickiness.

60. Xygalatas, *Ritual*, 27.

61. There may be other cases where intrapersonal balancing arguments won't apply or convince. Emergencies might necessitate laser focus on a single perspective. Or unusual second-order values might cause someone to eschew balancing or tradition itself, e.g. someone who wants to be entirely unstructured and whimsical. I don't mean to claim that the intrapersonal account is invulnerable, just that it can extend further in some valuable directions not captured by existing accounts.

ward way, nor am I adhering to a social regularity or taking advantage of the fruits of cultural evolution. Still, my idiosyncratic tradition can bring me into a new normative perspective, turning towards nature and slow appreciation. *Shabbat* and *Yahrzeit*, as set up, already reflect a take on tradition along these lines, not directly involving attunement or synchronicity with others; their central benefit seems likely intrapersonal rather than interpersonal. Purely individualistic traditions like Sunday birdwatching go yet further, limiting even residual links to communal practices.[62] In this domain, traditions concern the self, and the intrapersonal account proves uniquely satisfying.

V. Conclusion

I've just discussed how the intrapersonal account contributes to the theory of tradition. But it should also serve as a useful elucidation in its own right. I have attempted to articulate a problem endemic to pursuing value in a human life—an underexplored difficulty in trying to live well. And I have posited a means to help resolve it. To recap: a good life involves different kinds of value, but sometimes the vicissitudes of attention make it hard to access in due proportion the "normative perspectives" of our various values. Traditions, with their hard-to-resist attraction and regular recurrence, can prescribe specific actions that draw us into new normative perspectives even at moments when we're inclined to resist and unable to articulate the appeal.

I'll finish by clarifying what exactly I take this paper to have shown. I have laid out a particular good and how traditions are characteristically well-suited to achieve it. I have not proven that traditions are good, not on average and certainly not categorically. The mechanism central to the good I've described, of attentional pulls into new normative perspectives, can also be used for the bad.[63] Traditions can pull us into perspectives that are always

62. Humans are social animals, and my birdwatching will likely connect to cultural knowledge in some ways. I might be partially inspired by others' practices or cultural tropes; if someone else says they have a similar tradition, I'll probably feel good. But these connections are much weaker than the claim that my birdwatching tradition is itself a piece of cultural knowledge I've picked up. Now, though, you might worry: with such a weak connection to the social, how could a self-invented tradition manage to be structured just right to balance normative perspectives? Maybe by happenstance: I might be inspired by a poster or a friend reminding me to stop and smell the roses, or I might try birdwatching on a whim and find I enjoy it (perhaps enjoying it more because it helps me live a satisfyingly balanced life). Or I might construct a tradition intentionally if I'm at least vaguely aware of the power of regularity and balance (though this would lack Inarticulability). In the complex flow of attention, all sorts of pulls might help us—again, perhaps picking up scraps of inherited ideas, but not taking on a shared cultural practice.

63. One obvious example is the Two Minutes Hate from George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harcourt, Brace, 1949).

bad, or that already have too much space in our lives, or that come at the wrong time to be good for us. What I've provided is a framework to explain when a tradition succeeds at helping balance normative perspectives: when it's sticky (stage a), its details suggest some coherent normative perspective (stage b), and entering the perspective for the length of time indicated is on balance good for us (stage c).

Nor are traditions the only tools or institutions that can moderate normative perspectives. Internal psychological phenomena force us to attend to getting food when we need it and to attend to our safety when endangered.[64] Social roles and institutions can conventionalize perspectives: democratic government, e.g., might create a sphere for the perspective where we think beyond our interests or consider our obligations to distant others.[65] Good old reflective deliberation, though we've seen its limits in the face of nonvoluntary attentional pulls, can at times set us on the right path. These phenomena might sometimes complement and sometimes outdo traditions at addressing the problem of unbalanced normative perspectives.

Still, we should expect that observing the right traditions can be a great boon. We've seen how the balance of values can easily become skewed, and we've seen how traditions can be just the right fix—a balancing pole to ease our tightrope walk through the space of values. This is a way to make sense of practices like Shabbat and *yahrzeit*. And it's a step towards feeling at peace with the great variety of bewildering and beautiful traditions that occupy our lives.

Acknowledgements I'm grateful to the many people whose feedback and support has been indispensable to this paper, including audiences in Allen Buchanan's Ethics of Social Change seminar, CEU's Ethics of Attention summer course, ASU's Southwest Philosophy Graduate Conference, and the 2025 APA Pacific Division Meeting; Alex Bacall, Will Cailes, April Chan, Liz Levinson, Michael McKenna, Mark Timmons, Jonathan Weinberg, and others I'm surely forgetting; and two anonymous referees and the editorial team at *Free & Equal*. Special thanks to my dad for graciously allowing me to use his example, and to the spaces that taught me to see traditions as a joy, including my family, Temple Sinai DC, and Scav.

Competing Interests The author has no competing interests to declare.

64. For example, we can evaluate hunger as an attentional tool in light of its phenomenal features. Paradigmatically, hunger gradually builds up until it pulls extremely strongly (this strong pull is what's caricatured when a starving *Looney Tunes* character envisions Daffy Duck as a tasty drumstick, no longer able to see him as anything but a potential meal), and it disappears completely once a good deal of food has been consumed. Are these features helpful in ensuring food has its needed place in our lives? It seems so.

65. This spin on a broadly Rawlsian picture comes from Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*.