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# Being and Goodness: A Medieval Metaethical Thesis

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BEING AND GOODNESS: A MEDIEVAL METAETHICAL THESIS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Being and Goodness: A Medieval Metaethical Thesis

Thesis directed by Professor Robert Pasnau.


St. Thomas Aquinas, among others, adopted the following metaethical thesis: 'being' and 'good' are the same in reference and differ only in conceptual content. In the first chapter of this work, I exposit and defend this thesis. In the second chapter, I apply the thesis to the case of substances and argue that the thesis provides a compelling account of what it is to be a good x, where x is a substance. In the third and final chapter, I consider how the thesis, if true, might structure normative ethical debates.

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER

CHAPTER 1

*Being and Goodness: A Medieval Metaethical Thesis*

*Introduction*

This is a twofold introduction.  It is first of all an introduction to my project as a whole – a project that is comprised of three chapters.  Second, it is an introduction to the first of those three chapters.  I will begin by laying out the project as a whole.

The foundation of the project is a metaethical thesis about the concepts *being* and *good thing*, which was embraced in the medieval period by, among others, St. Thomas Aquinas.[1]  This thesis states, in Aquinas's words, that "'bonum' et 'ens' sunt idem secundum rem, sed differunt secundum rationem tantum."[2]  Which may be translated, "'good' and 'being' are the same in reference, and differ only in conceptual content."[3]  In brief, this thesis, which I will call the Coextensionality Thesis, suggests that that in virtue of which a given thing is a good thing is the very same set of essential and non-essential attributes that make a given thing a being; 'good' and 'being' are the same in reference.  But 'good' and 'being' differ in conceptual content.  That is, the other concepts most closely associated with 'good' and 'being' differ.  Aquinas argues that 'good' is primarily associated with desirability, in a very broad sense, and 'being' is primarily associated with actuality.

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[1] Perhaps the most influential early statement of the view is found in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, which Aquinas cites in the *sed contra* of *ST* 1a Q.5, a.1c: "inasmuch as we exist we are good."  Augustine, R.P.H. Green (tr.), *De Doctrina Christiana*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[2] Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a Q.5, a.1c. (*Summa Theologiae* will be abbreviated *ST* henceforth.).

[3] This translation is my own.  An alternative translation offered by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann reads as follows: "'being' and 'goodness' are the same in reference, differing only in sense." Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Being and Goodness," in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

Thus, Aquinas argues that 'good' and 'being' are the same in reference and differ only in conceptual content.

Even with this brief description of the Thesis, it remains opaque. And so one would be justified in asking, "In what sense this is a specifically *metaethical* thesis?" It is metaethical, if, as is commonly supposed, metaethics includes "questions about the nature of evaluative statements and judgments."[4] But it may not initially be obvious that the Coextensionality Thesis has anything to do with the nature of evaluative judgments. I assure you that in time it will be clear that this Thesis, when understood as Aquinas understood it, answers questions about the nature of evaluative judgments, insofar as evaluative judgments concern good substances and bad substances ('substance' understood here in the Aristotelian sense); the Thesis, in itself, suggests nothing about the nature of *rightness* and *wrongness* and so these concepts will not be addressed in this project.[5] Chapter 2 is almost exclusively devoted to the primary sort of evaluative judgment that can be grounded in the thesis. Namely, judgments of the form, "This x is a good x," where x is a substance.

One might take the Coextensionality Thesis to be metaethical in another sense as well. One might think that one function of metaethics is, in some sense, to structure the debate in normative ethics. In practice, this would involve noting how a particular metaethical view would impose limits on normative ethical views.[6] So,

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[4] Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), ix.
[5] Chapter 3 mentions 'right action' at various points, but nothing like an account of what it is to be a right action is entailed by the Coextensionality Thesis.
[6] Of course, metaethics and normative ethics exist in a sort of dynamic relationship in which one's views about either field may shape one's views in the other. Indeed, it seems that more often than not one's normative views will shape one's metaethical views, rather than vice versa. But, at very least in principle, a shift in one's metaethical views may force a shift in one's normative ethical views.

for example, if the metaethical thesis that 'good' and 'bad,' 'right' and 'wrong' refer to *sui generis* moral properties were true, then any naturalistic conception of normative ethics would be removed from serious consideration. In Chapter 3, I suggest that the Coextensionality Thesis may serve this sort of general metaethical function. In doing so, I argue that the thesis will clearly exclude some normative ethical candidates from serious consideration, including rule-consequentialism and certain deontological theories.

Now that it is clear why I take the Coextensionality Thesis to be metaethical in character, it is natural to wonder what general sort of metaethical approach the Thesis entails. Does the thesis entail a form of realism or anti-realism? If it entails a form of realism, is it a form of naturalism or non-naturalism? And so forth.

In brief, insofar as metaethics is concerned with *goodness* and *badness*, the Coextensionality Thesis entails realism. It entails naturalism. And it entails a form of naturalism that has been called "synthetic reductionism," which is a form of naturalism on which "the *meaning* of 'good' cannot be given using non-evaluative expressions, [but] one can explain *what goodness is* using non-evaluative expressions."[7] The reason for this may be clear from the brief description of the Thesis that I gave above. What it is to be a good thing has to do with having a set of essential and non-essential (non-evaluative) attributes. However, 'good' is connected conceptually to desirability. So on Aquinas's view, a thing's being desirable does not make it a good thing, but rather accompanies a thing's being

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[7] Huemer, xii.

good.[8]  Thus, the concept most closely associated with being good, namely

desirability, does not tell us what it is for a thing to be good. And what it is to be a

good thing can be explained using non-evaluative terms: being a good thing of a

particular kind has to do with being a perfect member of a kind, where 'perfection'

is connected to having the attributes that characteristically allow a thing of a kind

to attain its end(s).  So what it is to be a good thing, according to the

Coextensionality Thesis, at least as Aquinas understood it, is for a thing to have the

attributes that characteristically allow things of its kind to attain their end(s).

Perhaps because of its place in the metaethical taxonomy, the

Coextensionality Thesis will be compelling.  For, while preserving moral realism, it

makes the moral domain less spooky and obscure than it would be if one accepted

non-naturalism.  This is so because the Thesis implies that the goodness of human

persons is analogous to the goodness of things like oak trees.  Also, when compared

to forms of non-naturalism, comparative advantages attend this sort of view at least

in regards to moral knowledge, parsimony, and moral motivation.  Perhaps for

reasons such as these, metaethical views of this general form have been defended in

the contemporary literature by, among others, Philippa Foot and Michael

Thompson. I mention the Thesis's place in the metaethical taxonomy, some of its

basic implications, and contemporary advocates of similar views only with the

intent to convince that the thesis is sufficiently intelligible, sufficiently well

motivated, and sufficiently plausible to warrant further consideration.  For on its

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[8] *ST* 1a Q.5, a.1 ad1.  *"bonum dicit rationem perfecti, quod est appetibile."* Or, "'good thing' signifies 'perfect
thing,' which is desirable."

face the Coextensionality Thesis is opaque, if not mysterious, and may be off-putting for that reason.

In sum, the three-chapter project develops, defends, and applies a form of synthetic reductionism regarding the concept *good*, which has the medieval metaethical thesis that 'good' and 'being' have the same referents and differ only in conceptual content at its foundation. The basic development and defense of the Coextensionality Thesis takes place in Chapter 1; Chapter 2 focuses upon the application of the Thesis to statements of the form "This x is a good x," where x is a substance; and Chapter 3 suggests how the Thesis might be utilized in structuring contemporary normative ethical debates.

And so, moving forward, the present chapter has two main goals: (1) to make the Coextensionality Thesis comprehensible and (2) to make the Thesis plausible. The first two sections are relevant to the first of these goals. The first section will begin to lay the groundwork for understanding the Thesis by describing the reference of the concepts *being* and *good thing* in the context of the Thesis. The second section will address Aquinas's central argument in support of the Coextensionality Thesis and in so doing shed light on what the Thesis means. The second section will also mark the beginning of my attempt to make the Thesis plausible. For by considering Aquinas's argument in some detail, I hope to make the Thesis seem at least prima facie plausible. In section three, in an effort to make the view more readily comprehensible and plausible, I will explain in greater detail why I think the Thesis ought to be seen as a form of synthetic reductionism. In

section four, I will answer the most obvious sorts of objections to the view that I am defending. Finally, in the fifth section I will briefly draw attention to one feature of the view that will be particularly important going forward, namely, the implication that a substance, x, is good to the extent to which x is a perfect member of x's kind.

Before beginning the formal discussion of the Thesis, it is important to clarify whether I am talking about words or concepts when addressing 'being' and 'good' in the context of the Thesis. In addressing Thomas Aquinas's work, there is generally little need to distinguish between the two because he takes words to function quite straightforwardly as signs for concepts.[9] However, in the context of the Coextensionality Thesis, more must be said. For Aquinas recognizes that the term 'bonum' is not used univocally.[10] And it seems that this thesis involves the primary or central case of goodness around which the other uses of the term are built, namely the goodness of substances. For this reason, it seems more appropriate to treat 'bonum' as a concept, rather than a term because I take it that the term 'bonum' covers cases that are not covered by the Thesis. So in the present context, again, it seems appropriate to say that 'bonum' is a rather refined concept, which deals with the goodness of substances, signified by the more general term, 'bonum,' which deals with many others sorts of goodness all of which are presumably connected to the goodness of substances in some way.

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[9] Aquinas accepts Aristotle's views on the connection between signs and concepts as expressed in *De interpretatione*. The key text in this regard is Aristotle's *De interpretatione* 16a3-4, which states, "Spoken words are signs of concepts." See in, e.g., Richard McKeon, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, (New York: Random House, 1941). For a fuller discussion of Aquinas's philosophy of language see, for instance, E. Jennifer Ashworth, "Aquinas on Significant Utterance: Interjection, Blasphemy, Prayer," in Scott MacDonald and Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas's Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 207-234.

[10] Thomas Aquinas. *De Veritate (DV)*, XXI.4. "bonum non univoce dicitur de bonis."

*§1: What is the reference of* being *and* good?

In order to make plausible the Thesis that the concepts *good thing* and *being* are the same in reference and differ only in content, we must first have some understanding of the reference of the concepts *being* and *good thing*.

The Latin term translated as, 'being,' is 'ens.' Each and every existent thing of any kind is counted as an *ens*. However, the primary sort of *ens* is a substance, such as a horse, a rock, or a man, with its essential attributes.[11] The non-essential concrete attributes of substances, such as this particular blackness on this horse or this disposition in this man, are considered *ens*, but only in a certain respect.[12] Any sort of non-concretized property or non-existent thing is not properly considered an *ens*. Only existent things are *ens*. In Aquinas's general view, 'things' is taken in a very broad sense. Indeed, Aquinas accepts the idea that 'ens' may be predicated of all members of each of Aristotle's ten categories. This is so because Aquinas accepts the doctrine of the transcendentals, according to which *ens* is one of the concepts that transcends the boundaries of the ten categories and so can rightly be predicated of all real things.[13] However, Aquinas recognizes that 'ens,' like 'bonum,' is not predicated univocally. Again, the primary sort of being is a substance, and the secondary sorts of beings are non-essential concrete attributes of substances.

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[11] ST 1a Q5 ad1: "unde per suum esse substantiale dicitur unumquodque ens simpliciter."

[12] ST 1a Q5 ad1: "viewed in its complete actuality, a thing is said to be relatively."

[13] See Aristotle's *Categories* in, e.g., Richard McKeon, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, (New York: Random House, 1941). Aristotle suggested that these ten categories are an exhaustive list of all expressions that are in no way composite. Thus, all determinate forms of being were thought to fall into one of these ten categories.
For more information on Aquinas's views concerning the transcendentals in general, see Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: the case of Thomas Aquinas,* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1996).

*Bonum* too is considered a transcendental.[14] The reason for this may be clear enough from the broad range of cases in which the English concept, *good,* is deployed.  *Good,* like *bonum*, can be predicated of all sorts of disparate things, including cars, sleepovers, the situation in Britain, and dogs.  It is important to mention again that Aquinas does not believe that the term, 'bonum,' is a univocal term.[15]  That is, although there are connections between the ways in which we apply the term, 'bonum,' there is no single account concerning what makes things of disparate Aristotelian categories good.[16]  On the other hand, the concept *bonum*, or *good thing*, in the context of the thesis does seem to have only one sort of thing as its primary referent.

Like *ens*, *bonum* has both particular substances, and the concrete non-essential attributes of substances as its referents.  But unlike *ens*, a thing is *bonum* primarily because of non-essential attributes and *bonum* in a certain respect in virtue of having the essential attributes that it has just by existing as a member of its kind.[17] So, for example, an oak tree is good in a certain respect just because it

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[14] For a fuller discussion concerning Aquinas's views on Good and the Transcendentals see Jan Aertsen, "Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good," in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 56-73. And Scott MacDonald, "The Metaphysics of Goodness and the Doctrine of the Transcendentals," in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 31-55.

[15] *DV* XXI.4.

[16] Jan Aertsen, "Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good," in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 69.

[17] ST 1a Q5 ad1. "Viewed in its primal (i.e. substantial) being a thing is said to be simply, and to be good relatively (i.e. in so far as it has being) but viewed in its complete actuality, a thing is said to be relatively, and to be good simply.  Hence the saying of Boethius (De Hebdomadibus), 'I perceive that in nature the fact that things are good is one thing; that they are is another,' is to be referred to a thing's goodness simply, and having being simply."

For a discussion of Aquinas's treatment of Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*, see Ralph McInerny, "Saint Thomas

exists as a member of its kind.  But a particular oak tree is good absolutely

speaking because it has the appropriate set of non-essential attributes of an oak

tree.

Because the reference of *bonum* is fixed by the substantial and concrete non-

essential attributes of a substance, I will often translate the term, '*bonum*,' as the

substantive, 'good thing,' rather than simply as the adjective, 'good.'[18]

Even if we are right to understand *bonum* in the context of the Thesis in this

way, it seems that there are generally two ways in which we deploy the English

concept, *good*, in relation to substances.  First, we say that a substance is 'a good

thing, x,' when it performs its function well.  For example, I say that I have a 'good

car' when it reliably takes me from Denver to Grand Junction because the function

of a car is to reliably transport persons and things.  Second, we say that human

beings, who – of course – are substances, are 'good people' when they have certain

moral attributes, such as being compassionate and being honest.  So, according to

the thesis, is a substance good because it performs its function well or because of its

moral character?

The answer is both, for those who accept this Thesis consider the distinction

between these two sorts of goodness illusory.  In other words, one implication of the

Coextensionality Thesis, which will become clearer in time, is that moral goodness

is subsumed under a more general account of what it is to be good that is applicable

on *De hebdomadibus*" in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 74-97.

[18] The neuter singular term, 'bonum,' can rightly be translated as a substantive adjective and so rendered 'good thing' in English.  My reasons for doing so should be even clearer when considering Aquinas's argument on behalf of the thesis.  On the substantive use of adjectives in Latin, see, e.g., Andrew Keller and Stephanie Russell, *Learn to Read Latin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 52.

to all concrete substances.  That more general account is a something like the function-based account offered above.  Because we tend to think of moral goodness as a distinct category of goodness, this approach will undoubtedly seem altogether unacceptable to some. For now, I will only acknowledge that, indeed, the account that I am proposing entails that the moral goodness of rational agents is just a special kind of goodness, which is subsumed under a more general account that applies to all substances. Over the course of the first two chapters, I hope to show that such a view is plausible and that it in fact has certain advantages vis-à-vis non-naturalistic approaches, such as advantages related to parsimony and moral knowledge.

But certainly there are other sorts of goodness besides the goodness related to function and the goodness related to morality.  Indeed it seems that there are at least two more distinct sorts of goodness.  First, states of affairs are said to be good or bad.  For example, we might say that the situation in Britain is good and the situation in Haiti is bad.  And second, we use 'good' with reference to judgments concerning welfare.  For example, we might say that Patsi Ramsey's life was not good because of certain facts about her life.   Does the Thesis include these cases?[19]

If it speaks to them at all, it speaks to them only indirectly.  Given the notion that the concept *bonum* has only substances counted among its primary referents, it seems natural to judge the goodness of states of affairs in large part according to the aggregate goodness of substances included therein.  So, if the situation were better in Britain than in Haiti, this would be true because of facts related to the

[19] The fourfold distinction regarding goodness is Chris Heathwood's, given in conversation.

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substances in these two places.  Similarly, the Thesis does not entail any particular

view concerning *welfare*, but it lends itself quite naturally to a view on which the

welfare of a substance is related to a substance achieving its objective ends.  That

is, a thing would be thought to fare well to the extent to which it attained its

objective ends. Of course, at this point in the chapter, how precisely this view lends

itself to this position remains unclear.  I mention it only to make plain that there

will be *something* to say about the case of welfare in light of the Thesis, even though

it seems that nothing concerning welfare is entailed by the Thesis.

In this section, I have attempted to clarify the reference of the concepts *ens*

and *bonum* as deployed in the context of the metaethical thesis that *ens* and *bonum*

have the same referents and differ only in content.  It should now be clear that, in

the context of the thesis, *ens* and *bonum* are thought to share the same primary

referent, namely, particular substances with their essential and non-essential

concrete attributes.  However, it should also be clear that a thing is an *ens* primarily

in virtue of its essential attributes and *bonum* primarily in virtue of non-essential

concrete attributes.

*§2: Aquinas's argument in support of the metaethical thesis*

Now that the referent(s) of the concepts involved in the thesis is better

understood, we are in a position to consider what the Coextensionality Thesis itself

is claiming. The Thesis states that the concepts *being* (*ens*) and *good thing* (*bonum*)

have the same referent and differ only in content.  We might clarify what this

means by considering the case of the *morning star*. The concepts *morning star* and

*evening star* have the same referent, namely, the planet Venus, but the concepts

*morning star* and *evening star* differ in content (the former's content is something

like, "heavenly body bright in the east before sunrise," and the latter's, "heavenly

body bright in the west after sunset"). In the case of *being* and *good thing*, in any

given case *being* and *good thing* are thought to share their referents – namely, the

set of all the substantial attributes and concrete non-essential attributes of a

substance. So they are the same in reference. But we have little discussed how

*being* and *good thing* differ in content.

Before we do so, it is appropriate to quote Aquinas's argument for the

conclusion that *being* and *good thing* have the same referent and differ only in

content.  For the contents of the concepts *being* and *good* are the foundation upon

which Aquinas's argument rests:

> The conceptual content of *good thing* consists in this: that it is
> something desirable.  Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. I):
> "The good is what all desire."  Now it is clear that each thing is
> desirable insofar as it is perfect, because each thing desires its
> own perfection.  But each thing is perfect insofar as it is actual.
> Therefore it is clear that a thing is a *good thing* insofar as it is
> a being (ens) – for it is existence that makes all things actual…
> Hence it is clear that *good thing* and *being* are the same in
> reference.  But *good thing* presents the conceptual content of
> desirability, which *being* does not present.[20]

Aquinas's central claim in this argument is fairly clear.  Aquinas believes

that the concepts *good thing, desirable thing, perfect thing, actual thing,* and *being*

are <u>all</u> the same in reference.  That is, he believes that these concepts are all

coextensive – they all pick out the same set of substances and properties in the

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[20] *ST* 1a Q.5 a.1c.  My translation.

world, and so each thing is good to the extent to which it is desirable, desirable to the extent to which it is perfect, perfect to the extent to which it is actual, and actual to the extent to which it is a being.  It should now be even clearer why I have been referring to this thesis as the 'Coextensionality Thesis.'  Now, of course, Aquinas believes that all of these concepts have different conceptual contents. But the argument is based upon the idea that those contents are related in such a way that, when understood properly, one will just see that it is the case that *good thing* and *being* bear reference to the same thing and they differ only in conceptual contents.

Let us now turn to the task of trying to understand the connections that Aquinas sees between the contents of these concepts.  The first two concepts that Aquinas connects are *good thing* and *desirable thing*.  If, as I noted above, *good thing* has a particular substance with its essential and non-essential attributes as a referent in this context, it is unclear what it might even mean to say that the concept *good thing* is linked to *desirable thing*.  If we are to understand the connection between these concepts, which we must if we are to understand Aquinas's Coextensionality Thesis, we must first understand a feature of Aquinas's broader philosophical view, namely, his belief in universal teleology.

By 'universal teleology,' I mean the view according to which all substances have ends towards which they, in some sense, naturally tend. Aquinas expresses this general outlook by noting that "a certain inclination follows on any form whatever," and, of course, all existent things have forms.[21]  A natural tendency of

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[21] *ST* 1a Q.80 a1c. "considerandum est quod quamlibet formam sequitur aliqua inclinatio." See also ST Q.5 a5c.

this kind is designated by the Latin term, 'appetitus,' which is often, misleadingly, translated into English as 'appetite.'[22]  The misleading nature of this translation is apparent when one considers that the Latin 'appetitus' is derived from the Latin, 'adpeto,' which means 'to tend towards something.'  This etymological note hopefully makes clear that the sort of universal teleology that Aquinas embraces is not one on which all substances, including, e.g., rocks, literally have an appetite or desire for some end or set of ends.  Rather, Aquinas's universal teleology implies only that all substances tend toward certain things according to their natures and that the things towards which they tend can be designated 'ends.'[23]  Of course, Aquinas's teleological view becomes more nuanced and substantive as he discusses beings with increasingly complex natures and forms of life.[24]  This is to be expected, for the more complex a nature and the more complex a form life the more that can impede a substance from properly tending towards and attaining its end(s).  In other words, when discussing more complex cases, one cannot just say that the end of a thing is that towards which a thing *in fact* tends because, due to some impediment or defect,

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"But an inclination to an end... follows from the form, because everything insofar as it is in actuality acts and aims at that which is appropriate for it in accordance with its form."

[22] *ST* 1a Q.80 a1c. "Hanc igitur formam naturalem sequitur naturalis inclinatio, quae appetitus naturalis vocatur." Or, "therefore, this natural form is followed by a natural inclination, which is called the natural appetite."

[23] The following sentence from Mark Jordan lays out the various ways in which Aquinas describes the tendencies of non-rational beings: "Thomas speaks of the *appetitus* itself most often as 'inclination,' but also as 'natural desire,' 'appropriateness', 'impulse,' or 'force' 'being ordered to something,' 'seeking something, 'tending towards something,' and 'having a natural aptitude for an end.'"  For more information on appetites, particularly insofar as they relate to the human case, see Mark Jordan's "Goodness and the Human Will," in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 129-150.

[24] By 'nature,' I refer only to a set of capacities that one has as a member of one's kind.  For a discussion concerning Aquinas's views concerning the relationship between a thing's nature, its capacities, its acts, and its objects, see John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29 ff.

more complex things may tend towards the wrong sorts of things even though they, in some sense, have a more fundamental tendency that, again due to impediment or defect, does not move the thing. For example, in the case of human beings, because we have a rational nature that can be compromised in various ways, many will fail to approach the final human end, even though we all desire to attain it in the sense that we desire complete satisfaction of our appetites, which – by definition – can only be had in the attainment of our final end.[25]

Now with Aquinas's broader view in mind we are in a better position to answer the question: how do the contents of the concepts *good thing* and *desirable thing* relate insofar as they concern substances? First, it is important to note that the phrase Aquinas uses that may be translated, 'desirable thing,' is 'aliquid appetibile.'[26] So a thing should be considered an *appetibile thing*, in the relevant sense, insofar as it is a thing that is, in some sense, tended towards. (In what follows, I will retain the Latin 'appetibile' in order to avoid the possible confusion that may follow upon the use of the term 'desirable,' which seems appropriate only to sentient beings.) And, according to Aquinas's universal teleological view, among the things tended toward are the ends of substances. Indeed, on Aquinas's view, the ends of substances hold a special place among *appetibile things* because the attainment of its end is that towards which a thing tends most (at least by nature, when unimpeded by relevant defect or impediment). So, the most *appetibile thing*

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[25] Indeed, the whole of Aquinas's *De Malo,* which includes chapters on sin, the causes of sin, and on the specific natures of individual vices (e.g. anger and avarice), can be seen as an attempt to spell out many of the ways in which human beings may go wrong in their pursuit of their final end. Thomas Aquinas, Richard Regan (tr.), *De Malo*, (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2001).
[26] ST 1a Q.5, a1c.

to any given thing, x, is x's end as a substance. Thus, Aquinas quotes Aristotle with

approval as saying, "good is that towards which each thing tends," and, as we noted,

each thing tends towards its own end.[27]

It should now be clear that the content included in the concept *appetibile*

*thing* in the context of this argument is quite narrow in much the same way as the

concept *good thing*. And so, the connection between the content of *bonum* and the

content of *aliquid appetibile* in this context is rather bland.  It amounts to little

more than noting that each substance tends towards its own end and, because there

is a more general link between *being good* and *being appetibile*, we can ascertain

from this tendency that being a *good thing* is related to being the sort of thing that

successfully tends towards its own end.  And so we have a sense of what is included

in the *concept* of *bonum* in the context of the argument.  But, as of yet, we have not

addressed the *nature* of *bonum*.[28]  That is, we have not yet considered in virtue of

what a thing truly is a good thing.  In Aquinas's view, what it is to be a good thing

(or the nature of being a good thing) is connected to what it is to be a perfect thing.

So, if one remains unconvinced that *bonum* and *aliquid appetibile* are connected

conceptually in any helpful sort of way, it is important to note that, for the purposes

of this project going forward, the conceptual connection between *good thing* and

*appetibile thing* is far less important than the connection between *good thing* and

*perfect thing*.  Indeed, even Aquinas seems to recognize that one might bypass

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[27] ST 1a Q.1, a.5c.  My translation. "Bonum est quod omnia appetunt."
[28] I owe this distinction to Jan Aertsen and his chapter, "Thomas Aquinas on the Good: The Relation between Metaphysics and Ethics," in Scott MacDonald and Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas's Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 240.

*appetibile thing* in seeking to understand the nature of *bonum* (but clearly not the concept). For he says, "*good thing* signifies *perfect thing*, which is desirable."[29] And it is to the connection between *good thing* and *perfect thing* that Aquinas's argument turns next.

After claiming that there is a connection between *bonum* and *aliquid appetibile*, Aquinas says, "it is clear that each thing is *appetibile* insofar as it is perfect, because each thing desires its own perfection."[30] The idea seems to be that a thing is a good thing insofar as it is an *appetibile* thing and it is an *appetibile* thing insofar as it is perfect thing.[31] So, from the perspective of a given substance, x, if attaining x's end as a substance is that towards which it tends most (if attaining its end is the most *appetibile*), then the good of a particular substance, x, is related to x attaining its end. More particularly, x is a good thing, considered as a substance, insofar as x is equipped to attain x's end. And what it is to be equipped to attain an end as a thing is to have the attributes appropriate to attaining the end.[32] When a thing has the attributes that are appropriate to attaining its end, that thing is called a perfect member of its kind; or, in Aquinas's words, "a thing is said to be perfect if it lacks nothing in accordance with the mode of its perfection."[33] Thus, a substance, x, is a good thing in virtue of being a perfect member of its kind. So the

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[29] *ST* 1a, Q.5, a.1 ad1. My translation. "*bonum dicit rationem perfecti, quod est appetibile.*"

[30] ST 1a Q.5, a1 ad1. My translation. "Manifestum est autem quod unumquodque est appetibile secundum quod est perfectum, nam omnia appetunt suam perfectionem."

[31] Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.37. "That by which anything is said to be good is its proper virtue… but a virtue is a kind of perfection, for we say that anything is perfect when it attains its proper virtue, as is clear in *Physics* VII. And so everything is good from the fact that it is perfect. And that is why everything desires its own perfection as its proper good."

[32] ST 1a Q.5, a1 ad3. "bonum dicitur secundum magis et minus, secundem actum supervenientem; puta secundum scientiam vel virtutem." Or, "good is spoken of more or less according to a thing's non-essential concrete attributes; for example, knowledge or virtue."

[33] ST 1a Q.5 a5c. According to Aquinas, the mode of a thing's perfection is given it by its form.

nature of *bonum* – that in virtue of which a thing is a good thing – is related to perfection, whereas the concept of *bonum* – the content included in the concept – is related to being desirable.

To get clearer on the relations that are thought to hold between *good thing*, *desirable thing*, and *perfect thing*, let us consider the case of an oak tree. For any given oak tree, attaining its ends as an oak tree is that towards which it tends most. These ends are self-maintenance and reproduction; we believe this is so because the parts, characteristics, and functions of an oak tree can all be explained with reference to these two ends. Because being a good thing is related to tending towards the end(s) of that thing, we have reason to believe that being a good oak tree is related to attaining the ends of self-maintenance and reproduction. More particularly, we have reason to believe that this oak tree is a good oak tree, considered as an oak tree, insofar as it is equipped to attain its ends as an oak tree. Now, for an oak tree, what it is to be equipped to attain its ends is to have certain attributes that help it to maintain itself and reproduce itself – attributes like having strong roots and healthy leaves. If an oak tree has all the attributes relevant to maintaining itself and reproducing, we would call it a perfect oak tree, considered in itself. And so, in the case of an oak tree, we can conclude that an oak tree is a good oak tree in virtue of being a perfect oak tree; that is, in virtue of having the set of attributes that characteristically allow oak trees to attain their ends.

Here one might reasonably ask, if the most desirable thing to a substance, x,

is to attain its end, then shouldn't a substance be considered good to the extent to which it attains its end? Why think that what it is to be a good thing is related to having certain attributes that allow a thing to attain its end(s) rather than think that a thing is good to the extent to which it has attained its end(s)?

Here I think it is important to remember that what we are discussing is what it is to be a good *substance*. This objection rests on the idea that the more important case of goodness is related to judgments about something other than substances; perhaps what such an objector has in mind is the goodness related to judgments of welfare. If the end of a thing were only to have certain sorts of attributes, then – of course, substances, considered in themselves, could achieve ends. However, in most cases, we take the end(s) of a substance to be at least partially distinct from the attributes of that substance. This is particularly clear in two sorts of cases: (1) a case in which a thing has all the attributes that a thing should have as a perfect member of its kind, but fails to attain its end(s); and (2) a case in which a thing attains its ends even though it lacks attributes that we think it ought to have to be a perfect member of its kind. As an example of the first sort of case, a rusty red fox squirrel with all the attributes relevant to its perfection may swiftly climb into a tree only to be snatched by a large hawk and so, despite its perfection, fail to preserve itself. As an example of the second sort of case, imagine a rusty red fox squirrel that lacks attributes related to being a good climber. Imagine further that, in part because of this defect, the squirrel is captured and put into a zoo where he is given ample food and lady squirrels with which to mate. In

the case of the first squirrel, it seems that it is a good squirrel (considered as a substance) that ran into some bad luck and so did not achieve its ends. In the second case, it seems that it is a bad squirrel (considered as a substance) that ran into some good luck and so achieved its ends. So, in assessing the goodness of the squirrels, where goodness is an assessment of their character as substances and not an assessment of welfare, it seems that the relevant considerations have to do with the attributes of the animals and not end-attainment.[34]

Thus far, I have attempted to show the connections between the content of the concepts: *good thing*, *appetibile thing,* and *perfect thing*. Of course, Aquinas is not satisfied in showing just these connections because it is his belief that *good thing* ultimately is the same in reference as *being*. Thus, after introducing the connection between *appetibile thing* and *perfect thing*, Aquinas claims, "each thing is perfect insofar as it is actual."[35] That is, he claims that what it is to be a perfect thing is to be an actualized thing.

But what does it mean to be an actualized thing? Although a full explanation of this notion as Aquinas understood it would require a diversion into substantial forms and substantial and accidental being, for the purposes of this chapter and this project, such a diversion is unnecessary. In effect, Aquinas believes that every member of a given kind has certain capacities just in virtue of being a member of that kind.[36] However, those capacities in themselves do nothing to ensure that they

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[34] For a similar discussion, see Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 34.

[35] ST 1a Q.5 a1c. "intantum est autem perfectum unumquodque, inquantum est actu."

[36] Perhaps the best example of Aquinas's views regarding a form's conferring capacities is the human case. For Aquinas's views on human nature, see ST 1a Q.75-102. For a detailed analysis of Aquinas's views on

are well used. Indeed, in many cases, things have capacities that can't genuinely be used at all without the proper sorts of attributes. In the context of good things, 'actuality' is Aquinas's term for having the attributes that make a thing's capacities function as they ought, given the nature of the thing. For example, an oak tree would be actual (or possess actuality) to the extent to which it had the attributes that make it function well as an oak tree. So there is something in virtue of which a thing is a thing of its kind, namely, its nature, which just is a set of capacities that follow upon being a thing of a particular kind. And there is something else in virtue of which a thing realizes that set of capacities and so is a perfected member of its kind, namely, actuality. Given this brief discussion, the connection between *actualized thing* and *perfect thing* should be clear: A perfect thing is perfect in virtue of being an actualized thing and it is perfect to the extent to which it is actualized.[37]

And now for the final steps in Aquinas's argument. As I noted above, 'actuality' is Aquinas's name for that in virtue of which a thing realizes a set of capacities, and because capacities can be realized to varying degrees (e.g. over the course of my life, the realization of my rational faculties may vary), Aquinas considers a thing actual to the extent to which the capacities afforded to it by its nature are realized. So, just as we said that a thing is a good thing to the extent to which it is perfect, we can also say that a thing is good to the extent to which it is actual.

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human nature, see Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[37] ST 1a2ae Q.3 a2c. "Anything whatever is perfect to the extent to which it is in actuality."

Now, according to Aquinas, the conceptual content of *being* is *actualized thing*; that is, *being* includes as content the notion that a particular thing exists with a set of real attributes.  This connection is quite natural, for being an *actualized thing* involves the concrete existence of a substances with a set of non-essential concrete properties, and *a being* just is a thing of this kind.

So now the conceptual connections at every stage of Aquinas's argument should be clearer.  If the concepts are understood in this way, one can understand why Aquinas held the Coextensionality Thesis; that is, one can understand why he believed that the concepts *good thing, desirable thing, perfect thing, actualized thing,* and *being* are all the same in reference.  For if the contents of these concepts are as Aquinas suggested, it seems at least plausible to believe that the connections that he saw between them are genuine connections and so, in fact, these concepts all share the same reference and differ only in content.[38]

*§3: The Coextensionality Thesis as a form of synthetic reductionism*

Before considering objections to the thesis, I want to explain why I take this to be a form of synthetic reductionism.  That is, I want to make clearer why I think that the view implies that "the *meaning* of 'good' cannot be given using non-evaluative expressions, [but] one can explain *what goodness is* using non-evaluative expressions."[39]  By placing the thesis firmly into contemporary metaethical debates,

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[38] For more information on this thesis as I have defended it, I recommend two book chapters in particular. Though, admittedly, they cover much the same ground.  Eleonore Stump's "Goodness" in her monograph *Aquinas,* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 61-91. And Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann's "Being and Goodness" in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 98-128.
[39] Huemer, xii.

I hope to both further clarify its meaning and to make it seem more plausible, which
– of course – mirrors the twofold intent of the chapter.

The meaning of 'synthetic reductionism,' as applied to metaethics, is best
understood by way of analogy. Consider the concepts *water* and $H_2O$. These
concepts differ in content, as demonstrated by the fact that the question, "What is
the chemical formula of water?" does not mean the same thing as the question,
"What is the chemical formula of $H_2O$?"[40]  But they share a reference, namely,
molecules in which two hydrogen atoms are bonded in a particular sort of way to
one oxygen atom. However, even though the contents of the concepts *water* and
$H_2O$ differ, what it is to be water is, in a sense, reducible to being $H_2O$. That is, we
believe that the nature of water is its being $H_2O$ even though the contents of the
concept *water* is not (or at least need not be) connected to $H_2O$, as the fact that long
before the advent of modern chemistry the concept *water* was understood and
deployed accurately.[41]  How does the case of *water* and $H_2O$ relate to metaethics?

It seems that there are three features of the case of *water* and $H_2O$ that
might suggest a certain sort of metaethical view. Just as *water* and $H_2O$ differ in
their conceptual contents, so too may *good* and some other non-evaluative concept
or statement differ in their conceptual contents. But just as *water* and $H_2O$ share
their referent, so too may *good* and this other non-evaluative concept or statement
share a referent. And, then, perhaps just as what it is to be water is ultimately
reducible to its being $H_2O$, so too may what it is to be good be reducible to that

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[40] Huemer, 228.
[41] Huemer, 83, ff. and 228.

concept or statement that includes no evaluative terms.[42]

So there seem to be three features of synthetic reductionistic metaethical views concerning the concept *good*: (1) the contents of the concepts *good* and (fill in the blank) differ; (2) the reference of the concepts *good* and (fill in the blank) are the same; and (3) what it is to be good is reducible to its being (fill in the blank). It should be clear that these three features of synthetic reductionistic metaethical views in general are shared by the metaethical thesis under consideration. For (1) *good thing* and *being* are thought to have different conceptual contents; (2) *good thing* and *being* are both thought to bear reference to substances and their non-essential concrete attributes (they share a referent); and (3) what it is to be a good thing is ultimately reducible to any of three non-evaluative concepts – *perfect thing, actualized thing*, and *being*.

Now, with a better sense of where the thesis fits into contemporary metaethical debates, let us turn to the obvious sorts of objections that will be raised against the view – one of which is an objection to synthetic reductionism of whatever kind.

*§4: Objections to the thesis*

There are at least two rather obvious sorts of objections that one might raise against the view that I have exposited and defended. One involves the belief in teleology. The other involves the form of the view, namely, that it is a form of

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[42] Huemer, 228. If such a view of *good* were correct, then one would still be able to maintain a naturalistic view of the good despite G.E. Moore's open question argument. For Moore's argument is only effective if we take *good* and some expression to have precisely the same conceptual contents.

synthetic reductionism.  In this section, I will consider both of these sorts of objections in turn.

*Objection 1: Teleology is exceedingly implausible*

A first objection to the above account is that it requires a teleological worldview that has been discredited by evolution.  Plants and animals, including human beings, do not have ends given to them by God or Nature.  Therefore, any view of goodness that requires that biological entities have ends must be rejected.

Keith Ansell Pearson and John Dupré have raised this sort of objection, among others.  While reprimanding those who posit anything like a human essence, Pearson says, "essentialist ontologies like Debord's erase the trace of everything that has been discovered about the human animal and evolution since the middle of the nineteenth century, as if Darwin, Freud, Leri-Gourhan, and Simondon had never existed."[43] I think that, in this passage, Pearson expresses a fairly common sentiment about views of the kind that I am defending.

*Response*

The view I am defending cannot be plausibly maintained without recourse to teleology.[44] Having said that, obviously, anything like a full defense of even biological teleology – leaving aside universal teleology – would take us well beyond the scope of this chapter and this project.  So, in what follows, it is my hope to achieve the modest aim of showing that such a view is not absolutely untenable. I

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[43] Keith Ansell Pearson, "Timely Meditations on the Transhuman Condition: Nihilism, Entropy, and Beyond," in *Virod Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 160.
[44] For an examination of why this is so, see Jonathan Jacobs, "Metaethics and Teleology." *The Review of Metaphysics* (September 2001), 41-55.

will do so by noting that the teleological outlook that this view requires need not embrace belief in God or anthropomorphized Nature, nor such things as fixed essences and biological natural kinds.

If we reject belief in God, it is natural to ask, where are we to think these ends come from? It is clear from the work of, among others, Richard Cameron that belief in God or an anthropomorphic Nature is not required for belief in irreducible teleology in biological life. For Cameron defends a naturalistic teleological view on which teleological properties constitute a *sui generis* feature of biological entities. In arguing for this view, Cameron considers and rejects the notion that one must choose between some sort of supernaturalism and eliminitivism in regards to teleology in biological life.[45] So it seems that the notion that biological entities possess ends and are end directed is at least defensible. Of course, many will object to Cameron's proposal, but I take his proposal as evidence that the thesis is not entirely untenable simply in virtue of embracing a form of teleology.

But even if in any given case a biological entity will have teleological properties of a kind, the structure of the teleology employed by the metaethical thesis under consideration may seem to force one to embrace highly contentious entities, such as fixed essences and natural kinds. I will briefly argue that one who accepts the metaethical thesis need not accept the existence of such things.

First, let us consider fixed essences. A view of the sort that I am defending

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[45] Richard Cameron, "How to be a realist about *sui generis* teleology yet feel at home in the 21st century," *The Monist*, (vol. 87, no. 1, 2004), 72-95. See also Richard Cameron, *Teleology in Aristotle and Contemporary Philosophy of Biology: An account of the nature of life*. (PhD Dissertation, University of Colorado – Boulder, 2000).

need not claim that creatures have fixed essences. That is, it need not be the case that parents and children have precisely the same set of essential attributes, nor that all members of a kind have precisely the same essential attributes. All that is required is that (1) there be some set of ends that a being has in virtue of being an entity of its kind and (2) there be a set of characteristic ways in which these ends are attained that generally require a set of attributes or perfections. So the view clearly does not depend upon beliefs concerning fixed essences.

But perhaps this is too quick. For in answering Pearson's objection I have appealed to the language of 'kinds.' John Dupré argues vigorously against the notion that there are biological natural kinds and, in light of the above response, it seems that the view that I am defending requires that there be biological natural kinds.[46]

It seems to me that Dupré himself provides the beginning of an answer to this sort of objection, at least insofar as the problem of biological natural kinds relates to the thesis that I am defending. For he says, "the compilation of such a list [of biological universals, or behaviors that all humans seem to participate in] surely shows that there is something that might be called a *natural history* of *Homo sapiens*, but perhaps there is nevertheless nothing in such a project that answers to traditional conceptions of *human nature*. The creature behaves in various more or less characteristic ways, and often it is pretty obvious why it does so."[47] Here Dupré notes that even if there is no such thing as a human essence or human nature, we

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[46] See John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[47] John Dupré, "On Human Nature," *Human Affairs*, (vol. 13, no. 2, December 2003, 109-122), 110.

still may be able to give some sort of natural-historical account of what the life of a being properly referred to by the designation *Homo sapiens* is like. Michael Thompson and Philippa Foot have both argued that normative judgments are related, not to the essences of things, but to natural-history propositions of the kind that Dupré is acknowledging. Their basic approach also happens to be very similar to the thesis that I have been defending. They suggest that "if we have a true natural-history proposition to the effect that S's are F, then if a certain individual S – the individual here and now or then and there – is not F it is therefore not as it should be, but rather, weak, diseased, or in some other way defective."[48] So, according to Thompson and Foot, it is reasonable to believe that natural historical knowledge can help us to ground claims about what it is to be a perfect member of a natural historical grouping, or kind. If that is so, then it seems that the thesis remains defensible even in the face of work like Dupré's because all that the thesis I am defending requires is that things have ends as members of natural historical groupings (although, the view would admittedly be more compelling if biological entities were genuine natural kinds). So, for the purposes of this project, if one objects to the notion of biological natural kinds, one can understand "kinds talk" as "natural historical talk" (or talk about concrete resemblances between beings connected by a natural history).

Because I take Foot and Thompson's project to be defensible and similar to the thesis I am defending in all respects relevant to these objections, we can safely put aside the highly contentious debate concerning biological life and natural kinds.

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[48] Foot, 30.

But there is one more objection that must be dealt with under the heading of 'teleology.' For doesn't the thesis presume *universal* teleology and not just teleology about biological entities? And, although some may defend biological teleology, surely no one would defend universal teleology except for supernaturalists. So we ought to reject the thesis because it rests on such an implausible foundation.

Here, rather than offering one possible answer to this sort of objection, I will offer three.

First, one may accept that all things have been created by God and were made in such a way that God remains their end. This sort of view on which God is both Source and Final End was held by Psuedo-Dionysius and remains the view of some Catholic philosopher-theologians today.[49]

Second, one could deny universal teleology and embrace some limited version of teleology. For example, one could accept that life forms have ends, but non-life forms do not. This would amount to a rejection of the Coextensionality Thesis as I have defended it. For universal teleology is built into the Thesis as I have defended it because I have claimed that it is applicable to all substances in virtue of the fact that all substances have ends of a sort. However, it seems that one might limit the application of the thesis to, e.g., biological entities and still accept the main thrust of the Coextensionality Thesis that, in some set of things, what it is for them to be good things is for them to be appetibile things, what it is for them to be appetibile

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[49] See for a contemporary example, W. Norris Clarke, S.J. *The One and the Many: A contemporary Thomistic metaphysics*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). For a discussion of the views of Pseudo-Dionysius, see, e.g., Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Volume 2, Medieval Philosophy, Augustine to Scotus.* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1950.

things is for them to be perfect things and what it is for them to be perfect things is for them to be actualized things and what it is for them to be actualized things is for them to be beings. Such an individual might support a view on which only biological entities are capable of being good things in the relevant sense because only they have ends in virtue of which there is a set of attributes characteristically required for attaining those ends.

Finally, one might try to tell a deflationary story similar to the one I suggested as I introduced the notion of universal teleology. On such a view, all substances are thought to have ends towards which they, in some sense, naturally tend. How this sort of story goes with plants and animals is relatively clear. The difficult cases seem to be non-living natural things and artifacts. Here it seems like there are two possible paths for one telling this deflationary story. First, one could argue that only non-living natural things have ends in the relevant sense. So, for example, a rock's natural end as a substance may be remaining the kind of rock that it is and it certainly will have a tendency to do so. Although they at least seem to have artificial ends, the thesis may be seen as inapplicable to artifacts, perhaps because they are not considered substances in the relevant sense. Or, second, one could accept that both non-living natural things and artifacts have ends in the relevant sense. Then both non-living natural things and artifacts could at least in principle be evaluated by the lights of the Coextensionality Thesis.

In the next chapter, I will defend a view of this third kind, but I take it that any of these three proposals is defensible.

*Objection 2: As a form of synthetic reductionism, the view faces two serious problems*

*Problem 1: The difference between evaluative and natural properties*

"Evaluative properties seem, on their face, to be radically different in kind from natural properties. Being good, for instance, is obviously a different kind of thing from being round, weighing 200 pounds, or being positively charged. This can be seen on the basis of one's grasp of the concepts of the relevant properties, just as one can see, solely on the basis of one's understanding of the concept of a symphony and the concept of a planet, that the planet Neptune is not Beethoven's Ninth Symphony."[50]

*Response*

It can, of course, be granted that being good is a very different sort of thing from being round. But, from this, it does not follow that what it is to be good is not reducible to some formula that contains no evaluative terms. Although the Coextentionality Thesis permits of various formulations that state what it is to be good (e.g. a thing is good insofar as it is a being, or an actualized thing), the formula that seems the most informative and straightforward is as follows: a thing is a good thing insofar as it is a perfect member of its kind. One its face, it seems that I have included an evaluative term in the formula – namely, 'perfect.' But what it is to be 'perfect' in the relevant sense is itself reducible. To be a perfect member of a kind is to have the attributes that are characteristically required for a being of its kind to reach its end(s). Now, do 'good thing' and 'thing having the attributes that are

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[50] Huemer, 229.

characteristically required for a being of its kind to reach its end(s)' seem like utterly unrelated sorts of things, like Neptune and Beethoveen's Ninth Symphony? I don't believe so.

But there is a related worry. It seems that, if we take *good thing* to be ultimately reducible to a set of attributes, then some attributes will be both good-making and bad-making, which seems absurd. For example, in the case of a Tasmanian Devil blackness is a good-making attribute, but in a polar bear it is a bad-making attribute. So it seems that the absurdity that precisely the same attribute can be both good-making and bad-making follows from accepting this sort of reductive account of what it is to be a good thing.

Built into this understanding of being good is what we might call 'object-dependence.' In other words, the natural properties (or attributes) in virtue of which a thing is a perfect member of its kind will differ on the basis of the kind of thing that it is. And, although one must have those natural properties (or attributes) in order to be good, a natural property is good-making only given further facts about the thing's form of life and the properties needed to make it a perfect member of its kind. So, indeed, in one type of being, a natural property may be a good-making property and in another it may be a bad-making property – e.g. blackness in a Tasmanian Devil and blackness in a polar bear. Thus, it is right to say that being good cannot strictly be reduced to even a very large set of natural properties because some properties will be good-making for some and bad-making for others. But this is not an absurdity. It follows quite naturally from the account of being a

good thing that I have defended.  And it seems to me that this sort of 'object-dependence' is a strength of the thesis, rather than a problem.

*Problem 2: The inability to explain moral knowledge*

"The second problem is that synthetic reductionists cannot explain moral knowledge.  We do not know about wrongness in the way we know about water – we cannot observe with the five senses that an act is wrong.  Nor, according to the synthetic reductionists, can we know that an act is wrong by intuition.  Nor can one deduce evaluative propositions from non-evaluative premises."[51]

*Response*

The problem of explaining moral knowledge actually seems to be two problems: (1) how do we know that a particular thing is good?  And (2) how can we come to know that being good is reducible to some formula devoid of evaluative terms?  The first problem of moral knowledge is not a serious problem for a view of the sort that I am defending.  For it won't be particularly difficult to know that a particular thing is good if, given knowledge about the kind of thing the thing is, what it is to be good can be reduced to a set of natural properties.  If what it is to be good could be reduced to a set of natural properties, then surely we could interact with a set of natural properties through our senses and scientific equipment, and discover whether or not a particular thing were in fact good, again assuming that we knew which attributes characteristically allow things of the particular kind to attain their end(s).

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[51] Huemer, 229.

One might object to this claim by noting that I have implied, perhaps implausibly, that we can straightforwardly determine both what the ends of a given thing are and what attributes a thing of a particular kind ordinarily has in order to attain those ends.

I hope that I have not made it seem as though I think that it is, in all cases, straightforwardly clear what the ends of a given type of thing are and what attributes such a thing ordinarily has in order to attain those ends. Although I believe that the examples involving plants, for instance, are plausible, I do not think that I have given anything like a comprehensive account of what it means to be, e.g., a good oak tree. My examples were only meant to show in very basic outline what such an account would look like in practice. To respond to this moral knowledge objection, all that I need to show is that what is required for a being to be a perfect member of its kind, including human beings, can at least in principle be discovered empirically. And I believe that it is clear that, at least in the biological sciences, we have made progress in making sense of the ends and vital attributes of plants and animals because such things can, in fact, be discovered empirically. These discoveries should give us hope for the human case, but here it is important to acknowledge that, because human beings are a unique case, I do not believe that the biological sciences can tell us everything that we need to know about what it is to be a good human being. However, it does seem clear to me that a botanist knows a great deal about, e.g. the attributes, functions, and ends of an oak tree and that this information can be used to determine whether or not a particular oak tree is a

good oak tree, given my account of being good. And, further, that such progress suggests that, at least in principle, something similar might be learned through the study of human beings and human cultures.

But now let us consider the main thrust of Huemer's objection – the second sort of moral knowledge objection, which suggests that there is no plausible story that can be told about how we could come to know that being good is reducible to a formula without any evaluative terms. In the case of the metaethical view we're now considering, the question would be: how can we (or how did we) come to know that being a good x is reducible to being a perfect member of x's kind?

What follows is not a full account of precisely how we came to know that being a good x is reducible to being a perfect member of one's kind, but I hope to show that it is at least plausible to believe that we could discover what being good is, if a thing truly is good in virtue of being a perfect member of its kind. It seems that there are at least two relevant sorts of reflections: (1) reflections on language usage and (2) reflections on features of human life.

How we apply a property-term is not a perfect indicator of what the term refers to because, among other reasons, (1) we may be mistaken about a given thing (e.g. think that a light thing is heavy) and (2) language usage may change (e.g. *awesome* is now a property of French fries). However, it is very likely that there are at least some cases concerning any given property about which all competent users of a language would agree. In the case of *good*, we might expect that all people would call a tall stable oak tree with deep roots and green leaves a *good* oak tree.

We might also expect all competent English language users to call a healthy thoroughbred horse a *good* horse and a bottle opener that effortless opens bottles a *good* bottle opener. Of course, the question as to what a term is picking out in the world is not settled by its use in ordinary language or a discussion of paradigm cases. But we would expect that whatever property or properties the term is picking out would be found in all the agreed upon, or paradigm, cases. As it is obvious why all three of these example entities would be *good* on the account I'm defending, I will not spend time explaining what makes them good. Of course, the case that we are really concerned about is the case of human moral goodness. Although the three cases I have described may provide some evidence for the belief that being a good thing is reducible to being a perfect member of that thing's kind, these examples provide no direct evidence for the claim that the human case is identical to these. Admittedly this is the case. However, if the concept *good x* (or *good thing*) is deployed univocally in English when it is used with regard to substances, then, of course, it follows that human beings (considered as substances) are good insofar as they are perfect members of the human kind. It is well beyond the scope of this essay to argue for the conclusion that the concept is deployed univocally in these cases, but I think it is at least plausible to believe that it is so deployed, at least when deployed rightly.

Beyond the evidence of the term's use in ordinary language, we also need some story about how we could have come to know that a thing is good in virtue of its being a perfect member of its kind in the first place. In this vein, let us turn to

certain features of human life. It is not hard to imagine an early herdsman looking

at two animals and noting that one of them had natural properties that generally

lead to early death and failure to reproduce (e.g. very small and thin, and/or blind).

It seems that on this basis, he may (perhaps in conjunction with other herdsman)

begin to distinguish between animals that fall into two general categories – what we

would call, *good animals* and *bad animals*. These categories may have become

more refined over time as the herdsmen learned that some more subtle natural

properties also tend to lead to premature death or failure to reproduce (e.g. a

certain defect in the mouth). But, in the end, we might expect him to be able to

distinguish with some accuracy between animals that are perfect members of their

kinds and those with defects and that he would use a term to pick out the perfect

members. We could imagine a similar story about farmers who note certain traits

related to thriving plants and distinguishing between plants on that basis. It seems

possible that in this way terms like *good* and *bad* began to pick out perfect and

imperfect members of kinds, respectively. This understanding may then have been

transferred to artifacts, such as carts and houses; perhaps they thought, a good

house is one that protects us from the elements because what it is to be a house is to

be a thing that protects one from the elements. And, indeed, the same sort of

development may have taken place in regards to human beings. Of course, what it

is to be a perfect human being is far more contentious than what it is to be a good

sheep. However, the fact that there is disagreement on the issue is not in and of

itself conclusive evidence either that (1) this is not the appropriate formal account of

what it is to be a good human being (namely, the account that a human being is good insofar as she has the attributes that characteristically allow her to attain the human end) and (2) that there is no fact of the matter about what it is to be a good human being because, if there is a human end or set of ends, we could certainly have them without having knowledge of them (and the lack of knowledge would inevitably lead to disagreement).

Of course, this is highly speculative and extremely sketchy. I offer it not because it is essential that we came to understand goodness just so. Rather, I want it to be clear that it seems, at the very least, possible that we did in fact discover what it is for a substance to be good by interacting with the world. For the purposes of responding to Huemer's objection, it seems that it is enough to say that the sort of view I am defended is supported by (or at the very least is consistent with) paradigm cases of good things and it seems at least plausible to believe that we could discover that what it is to be a good substance is to be a perfect member of a kind.[52]

*§5: The Coextensionality Thesis moving forward*

As I dealt with the above objections, it may have become clear that I prefer the following formulation concerning what it is to be a good thing: a thing, x, is good

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[52] Someone might also object that he view only addresses a very limited topic in metaethics, namely the question: in virtue of what is a thing, x, a good x? What answer does it provide to the question, "What makes a given action right?"

I agree with the general thrust of this objection. I have not explained, nor do I intend to explain, what it is for an action to be right. Some will find this unsatisfying. I take explaining what underlies true claims about rightness to be a distinct project, one that may be guided by one's understanding of being good, but which may also – at least in principle – be pursued entirely independently of one's beliefs about what is good. So, rather than addressing the question, "In virtue of what are all evaluative propositions true or false?" I have focused upon the far narrower question, "In virtue of what is a thing, x, a good x?" I believe that the subject matter necessitated such an approach.

insofar as it is a perfect member of its kind. I will make extensive use of this formulation in Chapter 2. However, before moving forward, it is important that I make clear how this formulation falls out of the Coextensionality Thesis. For in the following chapters, I will just assume that the connection is apparent.

As you remember, the Coextensionality Thesis is the claim that the concepts *good thing, desirable thing, perfect thing, actualized thing,* and *being* are coextensive. Their extension is taken to be precisely the same and it includes both the substances and the non-essential concrete attributes of particular things. Further, in light of the teleology inherent in the view, it should also be clear that the non-essential concrete attributes of a thing that these concepts share in extension include those relevant to making the substance an actualized or perfect member of its kind. From these features of the view, it should be clear that the formulation, 'a thing, x, is good insofar as it is a perfect member of its kind' falls out of the thesis.

That said, why prefer it to other equally valid formulations, such as the formulation that a thing is good insofar as it is an actualized thing of its kind? Of the concepts, *appetibile thing, perfect thing, actualized thing,* and *being*, only *perfect thing* and *actualized thing* seem to be desirable options. For *being* is an extremely obscure term and is liable to cause confusion; also, it is not particularly informative when taken in itself. *Appetibile thing* is a poor candidate because I take it to be related to the concept of *good thing* and not the nature of a good thing. And, if it is not already clear, in this project I am interested in the metaphysics of goodness. I

have chosen to emphasize the *perfect thing* formulation rather than the *actualized thing* formulation for two main reasons. First, like 'being,' 'actuality,' 'actualized,' and 'being actual' are terms that lend themselves to misunderstandings, even though they are rather informative for those who understand them. Second, contemporary views similar to the one that I am defending utilize the *perfect thing* formulation. So, rather than advancing a different construction that is virtually the same in meaning, I decided that it would be preferable to accept the formulation that a thing is good insofar as it is a perfect member of its kind.

And so I have briefly noted how the *perfect thing* formulation falls out of the Coextentionality Thesis and given a rationale for preferring it to other equally legitimate formulations, which also follow from the Coextensionality Thesis.

*Conclusion*

As I noted at the outset, the present chapter has two main and rather modest goals: (1) to make this metaethical thesis comprehensible and (2) to make this metaethical thesis plausible. I strove to meet them by, first, describing the reference of the concepts *being* and *good thing* in the context of the thesis; expositing Aquinas's central argument in support of the thesis; and considering objections related to its being a form of synthetic reductionism and the universal teleology that seems to be required by the view. And, in an effort to clarify the connection between the metaethical thesis that the concepts *being* and *good* are the same in reference and differ only in content and the project moving forward, I explained how the *perfect thing* formulation falls out of this Coextensionality Thesis. And so it is to

the work of demonstrating the force of that formulation in the context of substances

that I now turn.

CHAPTER 2

*Being a good x*

*Introduction*

Consider steak knives, oak trees, and human beings. At least in ordinary English usage, a particular steak knife, or oak tree, or human may be called 'good.' Of course, any particular ascription of goodness to a knife or a tree or a human may be contested. And, indeed, we would almost certainly say that it is possible to be mistaken in calling a knife, a tree, or a man 'good.' For example, as I know little about steak knives, a cunning knife salesman might convince me that a particular steak knife is a good knife even when it is in fact a bad knife and, having been thoroughly flummoxed, I may utter the false proposition, "This steak knife is good." All of this leads to a fundamental, but deeply perplexing question: assuming, as we clearly do in ordinary language usage, that evaluative facts of the form, "this $x$ is a good $x$," obtain and so are capable of being true or false, in virtue of what are they true or false?[53]

This chapter is an attempt to answer this metaethical question by appealing to the Coextensionality Thesis – that is, the medieval thesis that the concepts *being* and *good thing* (as well as *appetibile thing, perfect thing,* and *actualized thing*) are

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[53] Of course, some would challenge this assumption and argue that ordinary usage is confused. There are no objective evaluative facts, they would claim, and so ascriptions of *good* and *bad* are not the kind of thing that can be true or false; they either express how one feels about a certain thing (emotivism), or they express how one believes everyone ought to feel about a certain thing (prescriptivism).

the same in reference and differ only in conceptual contents.[54]  Over the course of

this chapter, I will attempt to show that the *perfect thing* formulation of the

Coextensionality Thesis is capable of providing a compelling explanation concerning

what underlies a true ascription of the form "this x is a good x," where x is a

substance (such as a watch, a hibiscus, or a human being). In so doing, I will

proceed in two sections.  First, I will apply the *perfect thing* formulation to cases

involving plants, non-human animals, human beings, inanimate, non-artificial

objects, and, finally, artificial objects; I hope to show that in all these cases this

formulation provides a compelling explanation as to what underlies the truth or

falsity of claims about their being good. Then, in Section 2, I will respond to three

objections to my account.

It is important to note at the outset not only what will be addressed in this

chapter, but also what will be left aside, at least for the time being.  For some will

undoubtedly be wondering how the rather specific question that I am asking is

relevant to other seemingly more pressing questions in normative ethics and

metaethics, such as, "What is welfare? What makes an action good or bad? What

motivational force does morality have?  How ought we reason practically?  Etc."  I

believe that the present inquiry is connected to these questions in important ways,

but I cannot defend this conviction adequately in the context of this chapter.  So for

now I will leave it aside.  But it may be of some consolation to know that in Chapter

3 I will address goodness in action in the context of the Thesis and in relation to the

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[54] In this chapter I will not concern myself with *rightness* and *wrongness*.  My focus will be entirely on the case of *goodness* and, more specifically, on the case of the goodness of particular subjects.

*perfect thing* account I am offering in the present chapter. It may also be comforting to know that the present chapter deals somewhat with the relation between welfare and being a good human being. It seems clear to me that much of interest could be written about these related questions. So I certainly acknowledge that there are questions worthy of serious study other than those with which I deal in this chapter. And I further acknowledge that the view that I am defending here may force one into or out of particular positions in regards to these other pressing questions. That said, let us turn to the question at hand.

*§1: A good x, where x is a substance*

"That is a good man." "This is a good tomato plant." "That is a good squirrel." What makes ordinary statements like these true or false? It seems like human beings, tomato plants, and squirrels are so different from one another that no single account of what it is to be good will suffice. Despite this apparent difficulty, in this section, I will advance a single account that can explain what underlies the truth or falsity of a claim about the goodness of a particular thing when that thing is (1) a plant, (2) a non-human animal, (3) a human being, (4) an inanimate, non-artificial object, or (5) an artificial object. The basis of this account will be the *perfect thing* formulation of the Coextensionality Thesis, which I discussed near the close of the previous chapter. That formulation states that a thing, x, is a good thing insofar as it is a perfect member of its kind. In this context, a thing is considered a perfect member of its kind to the extent to which it has the non-essential concrete attributes that are characteristically required for things of

its kind to attain their ends.  The essential attributes of a thing – that is, those attributes that a thing has just in virtue of being a thing of a particular kind – are far less important to an assessment of a thing's perfection.  This is so because what it is to be a perfect x is to have those attributes that are characteristically required to attain the ends of x's and, unless a thing characteristically attains its ends just in virtue of being a thing of its kind, that in virtue of which a thing characteristically attains its ends will be non-essential concrete attributes.  So what it is to be perfect is to be well positioned to attain ends and a thing is generally well positioned to attain its ends because it has the non-essential concrete attributes that are characteristically required to attain those ends.  Thus, generally, a thing is perfect because it has the right sorts of non-essential concrete attributes.  With this formulation and framework in mind, let us turn to the five cases mentioned above.

*§1.1: A good tomato plant: the case of plants*

The topic of goodness in non-human living organisms like plants has recently been taken up by philosophers such as Michael Thompson and Philippa Foot.  Foot wrote a short, but intriguing book entitled, *Natural Goodness*. In that work, she describes what she calls, *natural goodness*, which is a kind of goodness "attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics, and operations, [and] is intrinsic or 'autonomous' goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the 'life form' of its species."[55]  As I noted in the previous chapter, her view is similar to the one entailed by the Coextensionality Thesis, at least as

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[55] Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 26-27.

Aquinas understood it.  For she believes that particular members of a species are good to the degree to which they are perfect (or non-defective) members of their species.  Thus, for Foot as well as for Aquinas, an assessment of a living thing's goodness depends upon an understanding of the end(s) of a given creature – what the creature is supposed to do or achieve – and an understanding of the characteristic ways in which the end(s) are achieved by members of the species.[56]

In the case of a tomato plant (as is the case with plant life in general), the chief ends seem to be self-maintenance and reproduction.  All the parts, characteristics, and operations of a tomato plant can be explained with reference to these two processes.  A tomato plant is thus good to the extent to which it has the non-essential concrete attributes appropriate to a tomato plant, in virtue of which the tomato plant will at least characteristically attain the ends of self-maintenance and reproduction; by 'non-essential concrete attributes' I mean those concrete attributes that a thing need not have in order to be a member of its kind, but that may inhere in the substance nonetheless.  Insofar as the plant lacks the appropriate non-essential concrete attributes (e.g. a strong root system or healthy leaves), it is a bad tomato plant.  For a particular tomato plant, x, is a good tomato plant insofar as it is a perfect member of its kind.  And it is a perfect member of its kind insofar as it has the attributes that characteristically allow tomato plants to attain their ends.[57]  So it is in virtue of having the attributes that characteristically allow a

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[56] For more on this topic in Foot, see *Natural Goodness*, 33-34.

[57] One might worry that, because plant species are susceptible to change, the attributes that a particular sort of plant has to have in order to meet these ends will not be sufficiently fixed to ground claims about being good.  I take it that this sort of worry has already been addressed in my discussion in the previous chapter on

tomato plant to attain its end that a particular tomato plant is good (not in virtue of having attained those ends).[58]

*§1.2: A good rusty red fox squirrel: the case of non-human animals*

As with the case of tomato plants, a rusty red fox squirrel is good insofar as it is a perfect member of its species. An assessment of its perfection is dependent upon an understanding of its ends – self-maintenance and reproduction[59] – as well as the characteristic ways in which rusty red fox squirrels attain those ends. So, for example, a rusty red fox squirrel that is a poor climber is, at least in that respect, a bad squirrel because rusty red fox squirrels characteristically escape and avoid danger by way of climbing and nesting in trees. A rusty red fox squirrel with the non-essential concrete attributes appropriate to it, or without relevant defect – as

natural kinds. However, it may bear repeating here.

Although there is a great deal of debate on the issue, I think that there is still good reason to believe that some account of plant life on which species are genuine natural kinds is possible; such an account will have to, among other things, explain at what point local adaption becomes a genuine change in species. For now, we should acknowledge that the debate concerning natural kinds will figure prominently in future discussions regarding views of the sort that Foot and Aquinas have defended. But let us leave aside the controversial question as to whether or not plant species should be considered natural kinds, for it seems that there is no need to consider plant species robust natural kinds in order to make a proposal of this kind operable. Indeed, even if it were the case that there are only concrete similarities between plants and their progeny and, properly speaking, each individual plant is a unique species, the proposal may still go forward. For concrete resemblance between large numbers of plants (say, all heirloom tomato plants) and the general stability of properties between generations of plants are enough to allow for an understanding of the shared end(s) of such plants and of the parts, characteristics, and operations whereby they attain their ends. Even if "tomato" is just an elaborate conventional kind (that is, a *kind* constructed by human convention, rather than given by nature), instances of tomato plants may be sufficiently similar, and tomato progeny sufficiently similar to tomato "parents" to allow this conventional kind to function as a kind of pseudo-natural norm. In other words, if we can understand both the ends of these plants that resemble each other and the ways in which they characteristically attain those ends, then we can evaluate the goodness of individual plants on the basis of this understanding.

[58] In the previous chapter, I offered a brief explanation as to why this is so. But I will also offer a more detailed account in the objections section of this chapter as I take it that many will find it strange to think that a thing is good in virtue of having certain attributes rather than in virtue of attaining ends.

[59] Perhaps rusty red fox squirrels have other ends as well, but these two seem to be excellent candidates because it seems that all ordinary squirrel behavior could be explained with reference to one of these two ends.

established by an understanding of the ends and characteristic activities of the species, *rusty red fox squirrel* – is a perfect member of its kind and so is a good rusty red fox squirrel. And, as in the case of plants, it is in virtue of having the attributes that characteristically allow a rusty red fox squirrel to attain its end that a particular rusty red fox squirrel is good, not in virtue of having attained those ends.

One might object to this account of what it is to be a good non-human animal by noting that very many creatures lack one of the attributes that makes a rusty red fox squirrel good, namely the ability to climb trees. For example, dogs can't climb trees. If rusty red fox squirrels are bad when they lack that ability, shouldn't all dogs be considered bad, at least in a sense, because they lack that ability altogether?

Aquinas answers this sort of objection by distinguishing between two ways in which a thing may lack a certain attribute. A thing may lack an attribute that it ought to have, given its nature, "as, for instance, the privation of sight" in a cat.[60] Or, a thing may lack an attribute that does not belong to its nature. "For instance, a man…who had not the swiftness of the roe, or the strength of a lion."[61] To lack what is not appropriate to one is not a defect. It is a defect only if one lacks what one ought to have, given one's nature as a member of one's species.

One might also object to the account by drawing our attention to a case in which a thing lacks some non-essential concrete attribute appropriate to being a thing of its kind, but lacking that attribute does not detract from its ability to

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[60] ST 1a Q.48, a3c.
[61] ST 1a Q.48, a3c.

perform its characteristic activities.  For example, a rusty red fox squirrel may be

born with a patch of black fur upon its back.  In this case, it seems that we must say

that the squirrel should be considered *bad* because it has a defect (that is, it lacks a

non-essential concrete attribute (rusty redness), which most members of its species

possess).

This objection fails to distinguish between the attributes of a thing that "play

a part in the life of a living thing" and those that don't.[62]  But what counts as an

attribute that "plays a part?"  As Aquinas argued and as Foot reminds us, the

attributes that play a part in the life of a living thing are those that are

characteristically appropriate to its attaining its ends.  In the case of the black

backed, rusty red fox squirrel, assuming that the red coloration is not

characteristically required for it to attain the ends of self-maintenance and

reproduction, this purported defect is not a genuine defect.  And so this purported

defect does not make the squirrel bad.  However, in another creature, say a male

peacock, the wrong sort of coloration may interfere with the attainment of the end

of reproduction.  So, in a male peacock, coloration plays a part in its life, for a male

peacock is colored in a particular way in order to attract a female and so to attain

one of its ends.  Thus, it is apparent that it is not the type of attribute (e.g. a color)

considered in itself which decides the question, "does this attribute play a part in

this creature's life?"  Rather, one must understand the ends of a given creature and

the characteristic ways in which those ends are attained in order to determine

whether or not a particular non-essential concrete attribute plays a part in the

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[62] The distinction is Foot's.  See, *Natural Goodness*, 30-31.

creature's life and, concomitantly, whether the attribute represents a genuine defect when absent. Whether or not a particular attribute is a genuine defect will then, of course, affect our assessment as to whether this x is a good x.

*§1.3: A good man: the case of human beings*

Having considered the relatively clear cases of good plants and good non-human animals, let us consider the more involved and important case of being a good human being. My procedure in the previous two sections was to suggest that there are recognizable ends that all creatures of a particular kind share and then to note a set of non-essential concrete attributes that may be considered vital for the attainment of those ends, at least if the ends are to be attained in the ways characteristic of the species. This procedure will undoubtedly seem inadequate for the case of human beings. Debates are ongoing about whether there even is such a thing as a human end (or a set of human ends) and, even among those who would accept that there is such an end (or ends), there is vigorous debate about what that end is (or what those ends are). I will not pretend to settle these debates here.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient that we create a formal account of what constitutes goodness in human beings and leave the work of filling it out largely undone. For my concern is not to provide an exhaustive list of the non-essential concrete attributes that a particular thing must have in order to be considered a perfect member of its kind, but rather to suggest the structure that any well-formed attempt at providing such an account should follow. In keeping with the classical tradition, let us call the attainment of the human end – whatever

it is – 'eudaimonia.' I use the term solely as a placeholder that is intended to convey the notion of "the attainment of the human end" whatever that end may in fact be. So perhaps *eudaimonia* is experiencing great pleasure, or psychological harmony, or becoming a rock star, etc. A human being would then be good to the extent to which he or she has the non-essential concrete attributes that characteristically lead to *eudaimonia*. These attributes have often been referred to as 'virtues.' Of course, if we are to use this term, we must remember that this account is entirely formal and that the term, 'virtue,' is also merely a placeholder that means, "a non-essential concrete attribute that characteristically leads to the attainment of the human end." So maybe being tall is a virtue, or being temperate, or being prone to tell white lies. Therefore, according to an account of this kind, a human being is good to the extent to which he or she has the virtues appropriate to a human being – that is, insofar as he or she has the non-essential concrete attributes that characteristically lead to *eudaimonia*, or the attainment of the human end (whatever that end is).[63]

Some might object to the idea that this account can be applied to human beings as follows: even if this account of goodness works in the case of a maple tree or a cricket, it clearly does not work in the case of a human being. This is so because humans differ fundamentally from plants and non-human animals. We are rational beings in a way that they are not. And because we are rational, we *choose* our ends. Perhaps plants and other animals are, in a sense, given ends as members of their species, but such ends are certainly not given to us. Because of this, there is no

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[63] Some contemporary philosophers have also argued for this sort of view of human goodness. Rosalind Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) is an excellent example of such an approach.

matter of fact about which attributes human beings ought to have in order to attain their ends. Therefore, this account of goodness should not be considered applicable to human beings.

This objection brings out an obvious, but important point: human beings are far more complex than non-human animals and any satisfactory account of goodness will make room for this fact. I certainly agree with this sentiment. However, I disagree with the central thrust of the objection. That is, I disagree with the assertion that we must think of human beings as choosing the ends that are relevant to this thesis. I am certainly not denying that human beings do, in fact, choose certain ends, if by 'ends' we mean fixed goals or purposes towards which we aim in action. What I am denying, or at least challenging, is the notion underlying the objection that human beings can choose their *final* ends; that is, that they can choose the ends that they have as members of the species *Homo sapiens*. Of course, arguing that human beings do in fact have such final ends would take us far afield. Thus my extremely modest aim in this paragraph is only to help us see that one might acknowledge that human beings choose ends of many kinds, but that it is possible that they also have ends that are independent of their choices. For instance, if God exists and our final end as human beings is friendship with God, then we have that end independently of our choosing to have it.

Even if we believe that the view that human beings have a final end or set of final ends is plausible, some may say that this account is so formal that it tells us almost nothing about what human goodness actually consists in. For, indeed, I

have said nothing concrete about what the human final end might be nor have I laid out a set of human virtues.

Of course it is true that the account that I have offered is formal. But two points are worthy of note. First, it should be noted that even in the realm of ethics this account does some work. More particularly, it describes the structure that a rightly formed account of being a good human will take. So it eliminates some possible accounts of human goodness – e.g. an account on which the non-essential concrete attributes of the agent were left unconsidered in an assessment of his or her goodness. Second, it is important to mention that this formal account is very close to being a substantive account. All that one would need do to change this formal account into a substantive account would be to insert a clear view about the final end or ends of human life. Many people already have views about this issue. For them, the formal account can be filled out quite naturally and powerfully. For example, a Kantian may say that the end of human beings is to be a certain kind of rational agent. If that were so, then virtues such as understanding and insight as well as virtues that limit the interference of reason by what are often called 'the passions' would be central to human goodness.

Let us consider one more objection before moving on to the case of rocks. One might object by pointing out that we usually think of the goodness of human beings solely in terms of their moral goodness. This account seems to force us to say that people with certain non-moral defects are worse than people without such defects. But that is absurd. A blind person isn't bad because she is blind, nor is a sighted

person good because she can see.  An assessment of a human agent's goodness should be based solely upon the moral uprightness of the agent and any account that denies this should be rejected.

As the objector makes clear, we must distinguish between two types of goodness in human beings – *moral goodness* and *non-moral goodness*.  *Moral goodness* is the kind of goodness associated with character traits like generosity, courage, and temperance whereas non-moral goodness is the goodness associated with physical traits like healthy eyes.  When we hear the phrase 'good woman' or 'good man,' we immediately think of a *morally* good woman or a *morally* good man.  This is so because, generally, we think that moral goodness is far more relevant to an assessment of the goodness of persons than non-moral goodness.  This, it seems, may be good evidence to suggest that we take the final end of human beings to be more closely related to moral goodness than non-moral goodness.  But if it were the case that the final end of human beings was characteristically achieved in virtue of a set of physical attributes, then, according to this account, certain physical attributes would be considered among the virtues.  So, for example, if pleasure were the final end of human beings, and human beings characteristically attained pleasure through some activity that blind people could not participate in, then blind people would be considered less good than their sighted counterparts, at least in that respect.

So it is true that, if physical attributes were important virtues, or non-essential attributes that characteristically allowed human beings to attain their

ends, we would be forced to conclude that, e.g. the blind are less good in a certain respect than the sighted. But in some sense, we may think that it is clear that sighted people are better off than their blind peers – better off with respect to sight. So it may not seem strange to say that a sighted person is better than a blind person, all else being equal. Of course, the blind are not in any sense culpable for being blind, assuming they were not made blind by their own intentional act. Nor are the blind barred from the attainment of the human end, given the rather mundane assumption that sight is not *essential* to attaining the human end. So it seems that nothing particularly disturbing follows from the notion that non-moral, non-essential concrete attributes may be relevant to an assessment of human goodness, broadly construed.

But there is more to be said. For here it is also important to note that the Coextensionality Thesis, at least as Aquinas understood it, rests upon a distinction between two sorts of goodness onto which the non-moral-moral distinction maps quite nicely – the distinction between *substantial goodness* and *accidental goodness*. Both in the previous chapter and in the current chapter, I have made reference to the grounding of this basic distinction by noting that there are non-essential concrete attributes of substances and there are substances, which considered in themselves include only essential concrete attributes (including the capacities to do certain things).

As one might expect, the attributes that are *substantially good* are those that a thing has simply in virtue of being a substance of its kind. In the human

case, this would include the capacities for sight, movement, reason, et cetera.[64]  The

attributes that are *accidentally good* are those that a thing does not have simply in

virtue of being a thing of its kind, but – given a thing's nature – they are attributes

that a thing may gain or lose while remaining a thing of its kind; these are the non-

essential concrete attributes of substances I have spoken of in this and the previous

chapter.  In the human case, this would include moral and intellectual virtues.

Aquinas believes that "good is spoken of as more or less according to a thing's

superadded actuality, for example, as to knowledge or virtue.""[65]  That is, Aquinas

believes that that in virtue of which a substance is, all things considered, a good

thing is primarily connected to accidental goodness.  In the human case, it seems

clear that the most important such attributes are those related to moral goodness,

rather than non-moral goodness.  And it seems equally clear that moral goodness is

almost entirely unrelated to substantial goodness.  Thus, it seems that, given

Aquinas's views surrounding the Coextensionality Thesis, one has principled

grounds on which to elevate moral goodness far above non-moral goodness in the

assessment of goodness in human beings.[66]

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[64] If you lack one of these capacities, Aquinas attributes the lack to a corruption of matter, rather than a corruption of form.  So being blind, for instance, results from a corruption of matter and not the presence of some less than human substantial form.  ST 1a2ae Q85 a6c: "Consequently as regards his form, incorruption is more natural to man than to other corruptible things. But since that very form has a matter composed of contraries, from the inclination of that matter there results corruptibility in the whole. In this respect man is naturally corruptible as regards the nature of his matter left to itself, but not as regards the nature of his form."

[65] ST 1a Q.5 a1 ad3.

[66] Perhaps more interesting than the case of physical blindness is its analogue with respect to intelligence – namely, ignorance.  It does seem that certain sorts of knowledge may be among the non-essential concrete attributes that are relevant to the evaluation of a human being.  For the human capacity for reason is a specifying capacity and is thus integral to the human good.  Of course, such a view goes well with Aquinas's overall intellectualism about morality: that wrongdoing can often be understood as a kind of ignorance.  So in

*§1.4: A good piece of granite: the case of inanimate, non-artificial things*

Thus far, I have moved from objects that are relatively simple cases of goodness to cases that are increasingly complex – from tomato plants and squirrels to human beings. It may initially seem strange to think that the goodness of a rock may be harder to make sense of than that of a human being. But a moment's reflection makes it clear that it seems odd to label something like a piece of granite 'good' when you consider it in itself whereas it does not seem strange to call a man like Ghandi 'good.' The reason that it seems odd will be brought out as we consider the application of the *perfect thing* formulation of the Coextensionality Thesis to inanimate, non-artificial things, like a piece of granite.

Let us begin with the now common construction: a piece of granite is good insofar as it is a perfect member of its kind. When expanded, this means that a piece of granite is good insofar as it has the attributes that granite characteristically has if it is to attain its end(s). But here it will be pointed out that granite doesn't seem to have an end. Indeed, what could it possibly mean to say that a piece of granite has an end, when considered in itself? And then a further question comes to the fore: even if there were such an end, doesn't one piece of granite always have exactly the same attributes, generally speaking, as any other piece of granite (assuming that they are both pure pieces of granite of the same kind)? And if that is so, then it seems that rocks only have substantial goodness because *all* of their concrete attributes are essential to them. So all this talk about

the case of human reason, it seems clear that, according to a view of the sort Aquinas embraces, sufficiently serious intellectual failings are bad-making, just as moral failings are bad-making.

granite being good insofar as it has the attributes that granite characteristically has if it is to attain its end(s) is absurd.

In understanding what makes a piece of granite good on this account, we must remember that all things that tend toward something have appetites or desires in the relevant sense. And all the appetites and desires of a thing can ultimately be traced to some final end or ends. Because granite is, relatively speaking, a very simple thing we would not expect it to have many appetites even in this broad sense of appetite. However, it does seem to have at least one such appetite or tendency – namely, the tendency to remain a piece of rock of a certain kind. So, if the final end of a piece of granite is simply to remain a piece of granite, then a piece of granite is good insofar as it has the attributes characteristic of granite. And, of course, a piece of granite will always have all of the characteristics of granite – if it lacked any of the genuine characteristics of granite, it would no longer be granite. So each and every piece of granite, as well as each and every inanimate, non-artificial thing considered in itself, is a perfect member of its kind and so is good.

If it turns out that all rocks are good, we would surely need to explain why it sounds strange to call a rock, considered in itself, 'good.' Well, if it is true that all rocks are good, it seems that it might sound strange to call a rock 'good' because we generally call things 'good' only when there are also bad members of the same kind – that is, members of a kind that do not have the accidental goodness appropriate to them; in other words, members that lack the non-essential concrete attributes that

characteristically allow them to achieve their ends.  For example, we call some

tomato plants 'good' because they are healthy (i.e. have the non-essential concrete

attributes characteristically required for attaining their ends) and others 'bad'

because they lack some of the non-essential concrete attributes of tomato plants

that characteristically allow them to attain their ends (e.g. healthy leaves). But, let

us imagine a world in which all tomato plants were precisely the same and they all

were equally healthy and so equally proficient producers of fruit.  If this were so, it

might seem strange to hear someone say, "I have a good tomato plant," even if it

were true, because we generally don't call a particular thing 'good' if all members of

a kind have precisely the same non-essential concrete attributes. If this view were

correct, then rocks would be similar to the case of the otherworldly tomato plants

because there are no rocks that are bad members of their kinds.  That is, there are

no rocks that lack non-essential concrete attributes in virtue of which they could be

thought to have accidental goodness.  This is so because rocks only have substantial

goodness.  In other words, there are no non-essential concrete attributes that a

piece of granite needs in order to attain its end and so granite has no accidental

goodness.  Thus, all pieces of granite are good to the same degree.  If this is all

correct, then this explains why the claim, "This is a good rock," sounds strange.[67]

In response to this account, someone may point out that, despite my claim to

the contrary, we do in fact say that some rocks are 'good' and that others are 'bad.'

Take marble, for instance. Good marble is that which is capable of being used in

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[67] This, again, relies upon the notion that a substance is good in a certain respect because of its essential
attributes, but it is good considered absolutely when it has all of the non-essential concrete attributes that are
characteristically required for a thing of its kind to attain its end(s).

construction projects or by sculptors, whereas bad marble has defects that make it unusable.

Here we must make a distinction between what is *good considered in itself* and what is *good for something further.* The cases that we have been considering have all been cases in which we are concerned with what is good considered in itself. In other words, we have been concerned with what it is to be a good substance. Of course, we also believe that things can be good for something further. That is, we think that some things are useful or appropriate for achieving some further aim. Thus, marble can be considered good *for* a construction project or good *for* a sculpture, but then we have entered into a use of the term 'good' other than the one on which we are focusing for the purposes of this chapter. So, although it is true that we may say that a particular piece of marble is a good piece or a bad piece, with some further project in mind, if the marble is considered in itself, all marble may still be considered equally good because each piece is a perfect member of its kind. In other words, each piece has all the substantial goodness appropriate to it just in virtue of being a piece of its kind; rocks have no accidental goodness because there are no non-essential concrete attributes that rocks characteristically requires to achieve their end; and so each piece of rock is an equally good member of its kind.

Now, someone might then say, we call a particular piece of marble 'good' or 'bad' after it has been made into a sculpture and at that point we call it 'good' or 'bad' considered in itself. Indeed, this is so. But then we are no longer considering the marble as marble, but rather as a human creation that employs marble. And

this brings us to the final class of things that we will consider – artifacts, or objects made by human beings.

*§1.5: A good straw: the case of artifacts*

As you might now expect, on the account of goodness we're considering, an artifact is considered good insofar as it is a perfect member of its kind. Thus, for example, a straw is good insofar as it is a perfect straw. 'Perfection' in this context refers to having the non-essential concrete attributes appropriate to doing the function of a straw well. So a straw is good insofar as it has the attributes that allow it to be used by a human being to readily suck a liquid into his or her mouth. Thus, a straw that cannot preserve a vacuum due to, e.g., a punctured tube is a bad straw (at least in that respect) because it has a defect that renders the straw less able to fulfill its function. A straw without relevant defect is a perfect straw and, thus, it is a good straw.

Some may object to this analysis by pointing out that the project rests upon the Coextensionality Thesis and according to that thesis a thing is good insofar as it is a being, where 'being' refers to a substance. A straw does not seem to be a substance in the relevant sense because it seems to be an artificial and thus composite creation. Therefore, the Coextensionality Thesis does not apply to artifacts because they are not genuine substances.

One may respond to this sort of objection in one of three ways. (1) One may accept the premises and so accept the conclusion that the Coextensionality Thesis does not apply to artifacts because artifacts are not genuine substances. Or (2) one

may argue that, although artifacts are not genuine substances, they have features that make them an analogous case to the case of genuine substances and so the thesis may be applied to them in some analogous way. Or, finally, (3) one may argue that artifacts are genuine substances on par with granite and human beings. All of these approaches seem defensible, on their face, and so I will consider how one might proceed in light of each of them.

If one accepts the first of these options, then the Coextensionality Thesis will contribute little to an account of what it is to be a good artifact. Presumably there will be another story to be told.

If one accepts the second of these options, then one will point out the similarities between genuine substances and artifacts. The most important similarities for the purpose of the Coextensionality Thesis will be the end-directedness of both and the fact that artifacts, like most genuine substances, can lack non-essential concrete attributes that are characteristically required in order to attain the artifact's end. So, for instance, the kind, 'candle,' has the end of burning consistently so as to produce light. Candles can lack certain non-essential concrete attributes, such as having a wick that draws wax well. So, like in the case of genuine substances, we can judge particular candles (or artifacts in general) on the basis of whether or not they have the non-essential concrete attributes that characteristically allow them to achieve their end or perform their function well.

Finally, if one accepts the third of these options, in applying the thesis, one will take an approach that is similar to the second. However, one will have some

work to do in explaining why we ought to regard artifacts as genuine substances rather than as a group of substances put together in some way. In attempting to give an explanation, one might appeal to Neo-Aristotelian metaphysics of the sort defended by Kathrin Koslicki in her book, *The Structure of Objects*.[68] For if one could show that artifacts are genuine wholes, it may then seem natural to regard them as genuine substances of a kind.

But, an adherent of the first approach may object to the second and third approaches by pointing out that artifacts can be used for purposes other than those for which they were designed. For example, a shoe can function as a doorstop. In such cases, is a shoe good in virtue of having the characteristics of a perfect doorstop or is it only good when it is perfect considered as a shoe? If a shoe can be considered good in virtue of its being a perfect doorstop, then it seems that artifacts are not members of kinds in the way required to make the *perfect thing* formulation applicable to artifacts. If a shoe cannot be considered good in virtue of its having the attributes characteristic of a perfect doorstop, then it seems that we must somewhat arbitrarily assign a function to a thing even when it may be as well suited for multiple tasks.

It seems to me that, generally speaking, adherents of the second option listed above may embrace either of the two horns of this dilemma. That is, they may say (1) that a shoe, when functioning as an excellent doorstop, may be considered good in virtue of its functioning as a doorstop. Of course, the term 'shoe' would then not designate the kind according to which the object referred to as a 'shoe' is being

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[68] Kathrin Koslicki, *The Structure of Objects,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

evaluated. That is, if the object is considered as a doorstop, the kind, 'shoe,' is not

the kind against which the perfection of the object is being considered, but, rather,

the kind, 'doorstop', is applicable. Or (2), they might say that the nature of the

thing and so its kind, is fixed in virtue of its initial design. So, although a shoe may

function as a doorstop, we ought not evaluate its goodness as a thing in light of its

value as a doorstop, but rather according to its perfection as a thing of its kind,

namely, as a shoe. This is not an arbitrary choice, as the objector suggests. For

artifacts are, by their very natures, designed entities and so part of what it is to be

an artifact is to have a designated function or set of functions, given by the artifact's

creator. Of course, artifacts may be significantly altered (e.g. I may break a leg off

of a table and use it as a baseball bat), but in that case it seems that the artifact has

been re-designed (so to speak) and so has taken on a new nature, which will then be

the nature relevant to an evaluation of the thing.

It seems that only this latter approach is available to adherents of the third

option mentioned above. For if one believes that artifacts are genuine substances

because they are structured wholes, then its being structured for a particular

purpose seems to be a part of what makes the artifact both a whole and a substance.

*§2: Objections*

The previous section served two primary purposes: (1) to apply the *perfect*

*thing* formulation of the Coextensionality Thesis to five different types of substances

(or pseudo-substances, depending upon one's view); and (2) to respond to case-

specific objections related to each of these five applications. In this section I will

briefly consider three further objections that, if sound, would undermine the plausibility or attractiveness of the view. The first concerns the way in which we are to understand pain; the second concerns the priority of non-essential concrete attributes over ends in determining what counts as a good thing; and the third concerns a problem associated with the relation between virtues and ends in the human case.

*Objection 1: The problem of pain*

There are at least some attributes of things that seem to be genuine beings (in the broad sense) and yet are intrinsically bad, such as pain. Given the Coextentionality Thesis, this should be impossible. For a substance is good insofar as it has being and pain is being that inheres in a substance. Thus, the case of pain is a counterexample to the Thesis.[69]

What is an adherent of the Coextentionality Thesis to say about pain? It seems that one might say at least three things.

First, one might deny that pain is a being at all. In other words, one could argue that pain has no genuine reality, but it is unclear how one could do so in any plausible sort of way. And so I will spend no more time discussing it.

Second, one might argue that pain is a being, but that it is not bad. This sort

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[69] Pain has long been used as a counterexample to this thesis. For example, in the 16th century, Francisco Suárez considered the following sort of counterexample to the Coextensionality Thesis: "pain is an evil of penalty and yet it is something positive. Nor could it be said that pain is evil because it prevents the opposite pleasure; for, although the privation of pleasure may be an evil, nevertheless the existence of pain is a much greater and different kind of evil. Therefore, evil is not just privation, nor is it something positive only by reason of privation, but it is also itself positive." Jorge Gracia, "Evil and the Transcendentality of Goodness: Suárez's Solution to the Problem of Positive Evils," in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 155.

of view might be motivated by noting that pain functions as a kind of warning-system in the body.  Certainly this function is not bad.  This line of argument seems more promising than the first, but, if one were to take this approach, one would need to explain why the positive instrumental value of pain (at least in some circumstances) makes it any less compelling to believe that pain is instrumentally or intrinsically bad at the same time.  For, at the very least, pain can be debilitating and so disallow one from doing beneficial activities, which seems to make it obvious that pain is at least instrumentally bad (that is, bad because of what follows from it).

Thirdly, one might argue that pain is a being and that it is bad, but it is only instrumentally bad and not intrinsically bad.  In other words, one might accept that pain is a being and that it is bad, but argue that it is not bad insofar as it is a being. It is bad because of certain relations that it generally bears to other things. This sort of response could be seen as an attempt to make the second sort of response more plausible. Francisco Suárez took an approach of this kind.  Suárez accepted that pain is a being and that it is bad in character, but he attempted to fit pain into the Coextensionality Thesis by distinguishing between "evil in itself" and "evil for another."[70]  On this picture, pain is not evil in itself, but only evil for another – namely, the one suffering from it.  This approach is similar in certain respects to Richard Kraut's views on pain as expressed in his essay, "Desire and the Human

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[70] Gracia, 158.

Good." [71] In that paper, Kraut argues that pain is not intrinsically bad. [72] He notes, "We don't notice any characteristic of pain that grounds our aversion to it; we just hate the way it feels. But according to my proposal that is not enough to show that it really is bad in itself."[73] The badness of pain, on Kraut's view, is related to: (1) the fact that it normally accompanies some physical malady and (2) the fact that it distracts us or renders us less able to do as we ought.[74] So, in effect, Kraut denies that pain is bad in itself and argues that it is instrumentally bad, or bad because of what follows from it. A proposal of this kind seems defensible and, because it allows us to deny that pain is intrinsically bad, it preserves the Coextensionality Thesis.

*Objection 2: Do attributes or end-attainment make us good?*

On the view supported by the Coextensionality Thesis, a non-essential concrete attribute is good-making because of the relation that it bears to the ends of the substance in which it inheres. In other words, the value of a non-essential attribute is derived from the fact that it characteristically allows a thing to attain its ends. Now, that which is valued as a means to an end is of less value than the end. Therefore, end-attainment is more important than having a set of attributes. And, thus, a thing ought to be considered good to the extent to which it has attained its ends rather than to the extent to which it has the appropriate set of non-essential concrete attributes.

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[71] Richard Kraut, "Desire and the Human Good." Presidential Address at the 92nd annual central division meeting of the American Philosophical Association, 1994.
[72] Kraut, 46.
[73] Kraut, 46.
[74] Kraut, 46.

An adherent of the Coextensionality Thesis as I have described it must agree with most of what the objector has said.  For instance, it does indeed seem like attaining an end as a being must be more important than having the appropriate attributes, if what makes these attributes important at all is their relation to the end.  In responding to this sort of objection, there are at least two possible approaches.

First, one could argue that there is a far closer relation between attributes and end-attainment than the objector supposes.  For the objector seems to assume that the non-essential concrete attributes have merely instrumental value in helping things attain their ends.  Perhaps, instead, some non-essential concrete attributes are partially constitutive of end-attainment; let's call these non-essential concrete attributes 'ingredients,' for the sake of simplicity.  So, in other words, perhaps ingredients have final value – i.e. value as ends – because they partially constitute end-attainment.[75]  To bring this proposal into focus, consider the following analogy.

In order to make a good pie, one requires a set of ingredients that will be partially constitutive of the pie itself (e.g. flour, sugar, et cetera).  For ease of making the pie, one would also be glad to have a mixer, a spoon, and the like.

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[75] As many see *intrinsic value* as the opposite of *instrumental value*, it is important to briefly clarify how *final value* differs from *intrinsic value.  Intrinsic value* is the value that something has in itself, that is, in virtue of its intrinsic, nonrelational properties.  A nonrelational property is a property that a thing has independently of any relationships that it has with other things.  (For example, squareness is a nonrelational property, as is having a certain mass.  In general, one might say that a nonrelational property is a property that something might have even if it existed in a world all its own.) *Final value*, on the other hand, is the value that something has as an end.  That which has final value may fall in the category of intrinsically valuable things (things valued due to intrinsic, nonrelational properties) or extrinsically valuable things (things valued for relational properties). Christine Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions in Goodness", *Philosophical Review*, 92, 169-95 (1983), 170.

However, the goods of this second type do not directly add anything to the pie itself and so, at least in principle, a pie could be made without them. Not so with the ingredients. Without at least some recognized set of ingredients, one can no longer be said to have a pie at all. One might say that end-attainment is similar to a delicious pie. The ingredients are like the goods constitutive of the human end, which, we might think, includes some virtues. The cooking tools are like the instrumental goods that are useful to the attainment of the human end.[76]

The objection rests on the idea that I am treating virtues like cooking tools, rather than like ingredients. That is, it rests on the idea that I am treating virtues as valuable only because of what follows from them, rather than as things that are valuable in themselves. If virtues are partially constitutive of the human end, then this objection is misguided because the objection rests on the idea that end-attainment and virtue are genuinely distinct categories.

But why think that virtues are valuable in themselves? W.D. Ross famously gave us reason to think as much. He asked us to imagine two worlds, $W_1$ and $W_2$. The worlds are precisely the same, except in one respect - $W_1$ contains virtuous agents (who are disposed to act from right motives) and $W_2$ contains vicious agents (who are disposed to act from wrong motives). Remember, the worlds are precisely the same and so there are equal amounts of pleasure, equal amounts of suffering, equal amounts of every sort of valuable thing (except virtue) in the past, present,

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[76] As with any analogy, there are limits to the use of this analogy. The analogy may become strained if you consider such elements as the heating of the pie and the eating of pie. I use it, despite its weaknesses, because I believe it demonstrates what might be meant by saying that a relation is constitutive, rather than instrumental and how this might be relevant to the case of virtues and the human end.

and future of these two worlds. Which world is preferable?  It seems that $W_1$ is

preferable.  Ross believes that the reason that this is so is that virtue is intrinsically

good, which for our purposes is more or less equivalent to virtue's being valuable in

itself.[77]

There is also a second possible response to this objection: one could reject the

inference from (a) end-attainment is more important than having a set of attributes

to (b) a thing ought to be considered good to the extent to which it has attained its

ends.  The suppressed premise between the two statements seems to be, "A thing

ought to be considered good to the extent to which it has accomplished or come to

possess what is most important."  One might deny this suppressed premise.  Indeed,

it seems that there is a principled reason to do so.  For there are clearly cases in

which we think that a thing, x, is good, but that it has failed to attain its ends.  And

there are clearly cases in which we think that a thing, x, is bad, but that it has

attained its ends. I will offer one example of each.

First, consider the case of Job in the Hebrew Scriptures.  The story goes that

Job, who is a righteous man, loses all his possessions, his family, and all that he

has, save three 'friends' to harass him and a wife who tells him that it is time to die.

In the case of this story, it seems right to say that Job is a good man because of his

righteous character, even after losing everything.  But it certainly doesn't seem that

he has attained the human end in his misery.  So, despite the contention of the

objector, it seems that a thing is not good to the extent to which it has attained his

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[77] W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930),134.

end.

Let's consider a second case, the case of the squirrel with a thyroid problem. Imagine that, due to a defective thyroid, this squirrel balloons when it eats. The squirrel becomes so fat that it can no longer climb trees. A zookeeper, seeing the plight of this squirrel, has compassion on it, (easily) captures it, and puts it in an exhibit at the zoo. The squirrel is well fed and is given a mate. Assuming that self-maintenance and reproduction are the ends of squirrels, it seems that this squirrel has attained those ends. How would we characterize this situation? It seems that we would say that the squirrel is a bad squirrel, but that it has a high level of welfare. That is, we would say that the bad squirrel is faring well. But, if the objection were sound, we should characterize this squirrel as a good squirrel. Which leads us to the fundamental mistake I believe the objector to be making.

The objection conflates two sorts of goodness: (1) the goodness of a substance (whether functionally or morally understood) and (2) the goodness related to welfare. It is true that we use the term 'good' to convey a certain quality of life or welfare that one enjoys. So, we might say that Smith's life is good because he has lots of friends, meaningful labor, etc. However, it seems unlikely that we would say that Smith is a good man just in virtue of Smith's having friends and meaningful labor, etc. The Coextensionality Thesis is concerned with, e.g., what it is for Smith to be a good man, rather than what it is for Smith to live a good life. Of course, questions concerning the good life are important and they will almost certainly be connected to questions about what it is to be a good human being. And, indeed,

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with the objector we might say that living a good life (that is, attaining the human end) is more important than being a good human being, at least in certain sense. But, again, the Coextensionality Thesis is concerned only with that in virtue of which a statement of the form, "This x is a good x," is true. Given the case of Job and the case of the fat squirrel, it still seems quite right to believe that what it is to be a good x (where x is a substance) is related directly to having a set of attributes, rather than to end-attainment.

*Objection 3: A problem with human beings: what it is to be good is relative*

Even if the human ends are in fact fixed ends, the virtues that characteristically allow us to attain them are contingent. For example, if among the human ends is having genuine friendships, then the virtues (or non-essential concrete attributes) that one characteristically must have in order to have such friendships are contingent. Perhaps in one's culture one must characteristically be jovial and outgoing to make genuine friends and perhaps in another culture one must characteristically be somber and introverted. But if the virtues are contingent, then so too is what it is to be a good human being. So this proposal is ultimately relativistic in nature because what it is to be a good human being is dependent upon what non-essential concrete attributes, given one's historical and culture situation, are required to attain one's ends.

One could, of course, respond to this objection by saying, "What's the problem?" What it is to be a good human being just is historically situated because which attributes one needs in order to attain certain fixed ends will vary by epoch

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and situation.  Indeed, some might see this as a positive feature of the account – it is adaptable to different contexts.

For those who would prefer a more stable account of what it is to be a good human being, it seems that one may proceed in two ways.

First, one might agree that what counts as a virtue is contingent, but, perhaps due to certain facts about human beings, they happen to be very stable. This is the sort of approach that Martha Nussbaum defends in her essay, "Non-relative virtues: an Aristotelian approach."[78]  In that work, Nussbaum identifies a series of spheres of human experience in which nearly all human beings operate, such as the spheres of bodily appetite, social association, and intellectual life.  She suggests that there may be a single objective account of the human good, which is built off of these stable spheres of experience.[79]  But she also emphasizes that the content of some of the virtues will differ in certain respects depending upon one's context.  In this way, Nussbaum argues, "the Aristotelian virtue-based morality can capture a good deal of what the relativist is after, and still make a claim to objectivity."[80]  In other words, even though the virtues are contingent, both the spheres in which virtues operate and the content of those virtues are in fact very stable.  So what it is to be a human being is not relative in any objectionable sense.

But, if an approach similar to Nussbaum's is still too unstable for one, it is possible to stabilize the account further by accepting special sorts of ends that will

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[78] Martha Nussbaum, Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.), "Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian approach," *The Quality of Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[79] Nussbaum, 660.
[80] Nussbaum, 671.

make it the case that certain virtues (with specific contents) are necessary in all cases, if the human end is to be attained. There are two obvious sorts of ends that would make certain virtues necessary to the attainment of the human end: (1) an end that is largely constituted by possession of the virtues (understood as having specific contents) and (2) a supernatural end, e.g. of the sort accepted by Christians. I will consider both sorts briefly in turn.

In dealing with the previous objection, I suggested that we might take virtues to be partially constitutive of the human end. From that discussion it should be clear that, if one accepts that the human end is largely (or entirely) constituted by the possession of particular virtues, then the virtues will not be contingent in the sense suggested by the objection. For, if the final end were constituted by a set of virtues, then the very same virtues (understood in the very same way) would have to be possessed by any and all persons who attain the final end.

Also, if the human end were supernatural, then it would seem plausible to think that – as in the case of the end being constituted by particular virtues – a set of particular virtues would be required in every case to attain the end. For if the supernatural end is, e.g., friendship with a God of the kind that most Christians believe in, then it may be reasonable to believe that friendship with a God – who is unchanging – requires a fixed set of virtues. So perhaps, because of certain facts about God, human beings must have the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity in order to enter into this supernatural relationship and so to attain their supernatural end. If that were so, then – of course – the set of virtues would not be

contingent in the sense relevant to the objection, for the same virtues would have to be possessed by all people in order to attain this supernatural end.

*Conclusion*

In this chapter, I argued that the *perfect thing* formulation of the Coextensionality Thesis is capable of providing a compelling explanation concerning what underlies a true ascription of the form "this x is a good x," where x is a substance (such as a fish, a candle, or a woman). I argued for this conclusion by applying this formulation to distinct sorts of beings (e.g. artifacts, humans, and plants) and considering case specific objections. Then I responded to what I take to be three of the more important general challenges to the application of the *perfect thing* formulation.

Despite having applied this formulation to human beings and considered some objections related to the human case, the implications of the *perfect thing* formulation for how we are to understand the goodness of human beings and human actions remains very sketchy. In the next chapter, it is my goal to bring further clarity in this regard by considering the implications of the *perfect thing* formulation for normative ethical theories. And so it is to that subject that I now turn.

CHAPTER 3


*Being, Good, and Normative Ethics*

*Introduction*

    In the first chapter, I exposited and defended St. Thomas Aquinas's Coextensionality Thesis according to which the concepts *good thing, appetibile thing, perfect thing, actualized thing,* and *being* are the same in reference and differ only in conceptual contents. In Chapter 2, I suggested that we might make use of the *perfect-thing* formulation of the Coextensionality Thesis in understanding what underlies true claims of the form, "This x is a good x," where x is a substance. In that chapter, I briefly dealt with the statement, "This human being is a good human being," but because of the constraints of the chapter I did little beyond sketch an extremely formal account of human goodness.

    In this chapter, I intend to address directly the implications of the Coextensionality Thesis for normative ethical theories, namely, virtue ethics, consequentialism, and deontology, so as to suggest how one might begin to fill out the account offered in Chapter 2, depending upon the normative framework that one accepts. I will do so by, first, considering the implications of the thesis for virtue ethics. Then, in Section 2, I will note the ways in which various forms of consequentialism might make use of the metaethical thesis, and, as a part of that discussion, argue that rule-consequentialism and consequentialist theories on which acts are weighed as part of states of affairs cannot be held if the thesis is true. In Section 3, I will argue that, as in the case of consequentialist theories, if the

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Coextensionality Thesis is true, then certain sorts of deontological theories cannot be consistently maintained, although others, it seems, can. Finally, in Section 4, I will briefly argue that it may be fruitful to think of normative ethical theories as fundamentally divided between consequentialist theories and virtue ethics, and to think of deontology as a variant of virtue ethics.

*§1: Being, Good, and Virtue Ethics*

'Virtue ethics' is a normative ethical approach on which moral character is of predominate concern, rather than duties or the consequences of actions. It is also characteristic of virtue ethicists to argue that an action is morally good, absolutely speaking, if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances and it is done as the virtuous agent would characteristically do it (i.e. with the appropriate motives, reasons, etc.).[81] In light of Chapter 2, it may already be clear that such an approach resonates with the Coextensionality Thesis. In the following two sub-sections, I will note the ways in which the Coextensionality Thesis supports the notion that it is appropriate to evaluate moral agents and actions in a way that is consistent with naturalistic versions of virtue ethics.

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[81] This definition of morally good action is closer to Aristotle than Hursthouse, but has been influenced by both, as should be clear from the following: Hursthouse's definition of right action states, "an action is right iff it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances." Whereas Aristotle says, "...what is true of crafts is not true of virtues. For the products of a craft determine by their own qualities whether they have been produced well; and so it suffices that they have the right qualities when they have been produced. But for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them" (Nicomachean Ethics, 1105a27-32). Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 28.

*§1.1: The Virtuous Agent*

How are we to evaluate the goodness of human beings? I suggested an answer to this question in the previous chapter, an answer connected to the *perfect-thing* formulation of the Coextensionality Thesis. And the answer that I suggested is the very same as that generally given by naturalistic virtue ethicists. It begins with the claim that a human being is good insofar as she is a perfect member of her kind. A human being is considered a perfect member of her kind insofar as she has the attributes that characteristically allow human beings to achieve the human final end(s). These attributes are called 'virtues' and the end(s) '*eudaimonia*.' So, a human being is good insofar as she has the virtues that characteristically allow human beings to attain *eudaimonia*.

I took the discussion no further than this in the previous chapter and it is not my intention here to offer a substantive account of the human end(s), or to develop an elaborate theory of the virtues. I refrain from doing so both because many far abler than I have undertaken that sort of project and because such a project would take us too far afield.[82] However, for the purpose of clarity, I will briefly lay out one possible substantive account and note the way in which it may connect to the *perfect-thing* formulation of the Coextensionality Thesis.

Any such account will begin with a characterization of the human final end, rather than an account of the virtues (or non-essential concrete attributes that characteristically allow a thing to attain its end(s)). The reason for this should be

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[82] See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings need the Virtues*, (Chicago: Open Court, 2001) and Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

clear from what has been said in the previous chapter: the virtues are designated 'virtues' because they characteristically are required if a thing is to achieve its end. So what makes a thing a 'virtue' is its relation to the final end. Because I take it to be a useful example to consider, as it is relatively easy to work through its implications, let us say that the human final end is perfect union with the Judeo-Christian God. This union is taken to be analogous to the case of a human relationship in which there is perfect intimacy characterized by knowledge and deep love.

After identifying a fixed final end, any virtue ethical account will then specify the non-essential concrete attributes (or 'virtues') that characteristically allow human beings to attain that final end. So, again, the character of the final end dictates the set of virtues that are required in order to attain it. If the final end is perfect union with the Judeo-Christian God, then the requisite attributes include moral virtues, such as temperance and fortitude, as well as so-called theological virtues, such as faith and charity (or love). These traits are considered virtues because, given the cluster of beliefs surrounding the Judeo-Christian God, perfect union with God requires them.

It is important to note just how deeply connected these virtues are to the final end, for any compelling proposal in virtue ethics will explain why a given set of virtues should be considered genuine virtues (or non-essential concrete attributes that characteristically allow one to attain the human end). If God is morally perfect and due to this perfection cannot be experienced by the immoral without great

anguish, then, of course, if one is to be united to God, one must be perfectly moral (and moral in the way that God specifies). Also, if this union is partially characterized by a kind of knowledge, then one must have the virtue that is required for 'knowing,' at least in some sense, that which is above natural reason. That virtue is generally called 'faith.' And, finally, if the union is characterized by deep love, then one must have the virtue of charity, if one is to enter into loving relationship with God.[83]

Now, having briefly considered the general form of the account, let us turn for a moment to the metaphysical view that is just below the surface, namely, the view developed in connection with the Coextensionality Thesis. Relative to the case of human beings, the *perfect-thing* formulation of the Coextensionality Thesis states that a human being is good to the extent to which she is a perfect member of her kind. And, given the hypothesis that the human end is union with God, she would be a perfect member of her kind to the extent to which she had the virtues (or non-essential concrete attributes) appropriate to achieving that end. So, if she had all of the appropriate moral and theological virtues, she would be considered completely good because she would have both the full amount of substantial goodness and accidental goodness possible. If she had none of the virtues, she would be considered good in a certain respect (namely, good with respect to substantial goodness), but entirely bad with respect to accidental goodness, which is the primary sort of

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[83] Aquinas calls the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, "theological virtues" and "infused virtues." They are "theological" because they direct us towards God as our final end. They are "infused" because they are, ultimately, God's gift to us and they are thus infused into us by God. For a discussion regarding the taxonomy of virtues that Aquinas accepts, see Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, et. al., *Aquinas's Ethics: Metaphysical Foundations, Moral Theory, and Theological Context*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2009), 129-151.

goodness in creatures, because she lacks the non-essential concrete attributes appropriate to attaining the human end. If she had some of the virtues, she would be good to a lesser extent than the first of these and to a greater extent than the second. For she would have both substantial goodness and a share in accidental goodness and thus she would be closer to having the attributes characteristically required to attain union with God. So virtues are considered good-making in a primary sort of way because of their close connection to the final end; that is, because they characteristically are required if one is to attain the final end. Essential concrete attributes of things are considered good-making in a very secondary sort of way and, indeed, they are considered more or less irrelevant to an assessment of a thing's genuine goodness, all things considered. This is so because the essential attributes of a thing, those attributes that one has just in virtue of being a member of one's kind, do little more than establish a thing's end and provide a set of capacities, whereas the appropriate set of non-essential attributes of a thing characteristically allow a thing to attain its end. And the goodness of a thing is related to end attainment, rather than end establishment.

Of course, I could fairly easily outline an entirely different sort of theory than the theological one I have just described. All that one need do is designate a different sort of human final end. For example, we could designate happiness (understood as the experience of pleasure and the absence of pain) as the final end and derive a set of virtues characteristically required to achieve this sort of happiness. However, I hope that the way in which the Coextensionality Thesis

relates to an account of the goodness of an agent from the standpoint of virtue ethics is sufficiently clear from the example I have given.  So let us turn to the case of virtuous action.

*§1.2: Virtuous Action*

An ethical theory naturally seems incomplete if it includes only a theory of the goodness of agents.  A theory of the goodness of actions is clearly also required. In this section, I will consider the account of good actions often given by virtue ethicists, namely, that an action is morally good (absolutely speaking) if and only if it is done by a fully virtuous agent.  I will argue that such an account of good actions is supported by the Coextensionality Thesis because the thesis suggests that whatever morally good actions are, they must be morally good in a derivative sense. In the case of virtue ethics, the moral goodness of actions is believed to derive from what virtue ethicists consider to be the primary case of moral goodness, namely, the moral goodness of agents.

So let us now turn to the case of good human actions.  It is important to note that here I am concerned with good actions, rather than right actions.  By 'right action,' I mean an action that one is obliged to perform because it is in accord with a moral principle.[84]  If the Coextensionality Thesis is true, then what it is to be a 'good action' is not immediately clear. So let us investigate the matter further.

According to the Coextensionality Thesis, the primary bearers of goodness are substances.  That is, whether the goodness in question is functional or moral,

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[84] Charles Lamore, "Right and good," in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1998), retrieved March 25, 2011, from http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/L087SECT2.

the primary good things are substances (e.g. a man, a horse, a cactus).  And substances are considered good to whatever extent in virtue of having the set of attributes that are characteristically required to attain their ends.  Now, if substances are the primary bears of good and they are good in virtue of attributes, where does that leave the notion of a 'good action'?

It seems that actions, considered in themselves, cannot be good, if the Coextensionality Thesis is true.  For actions are clearly not substances and so they are not among the primary bears of goodness.  (Of course, an action may be precisely the sort of thing that bears rightness and, indeed, it seems correct to say that actions are the primary bearers of rightness.)  It also seems clear that actions may bear goodness in a secondary, or derivative, sort of way.  For we certainly believe that some actions are good, even if they are not good in a non-derivative sense.  Thus it seems to follow from the Coextensionality Thesis that *good* actions – whatever they are – are not good when considered simply as actions, but good in some derivative sense.  For, again, an action is not the sort of thing that is good, considered in itself; an action is not a substance.  But this, again, does not exclude the possibility that actions are good in a secondary sense, nor the possibility that actions are right or wrong in themselves.

No doubt, this conclusion will seem to some to prove that the Coextensionality Thesis and the view that I have built up around it are false.  For an action seems to be the sort of thing that can be good or bad considered in itself.  For instance, saving a drowning child seems to be a good action considered in itself.

So, if this action cannot be considered good in itself by the lights of this thesis, then the thesis must be false.

Here it is important to note that there is a threefold distinction to be made between (1) an action considered in itself, (2) an action considered in relation to the character of an actor, and (3) an action considered in relation to its consequences. An action considered in itself is an action considered conceptually apart from the character of an actor and apart from its consequences. It does not seem particularly strange to think that all actions considered in this way do not bear the quality of being good or bad. This is obvious to consequentialists, for on a consequentialist view, actions are good or bad only in relation to their consequences. And, indeed, even in the objection, that in virtue of which the action is a good action seems to be the consequence of the action – namely, the saving of the child. One might change the objection and say that it is obviously a good action, in itself, even if (or perhaps especially if) the person attempts to save the child and both the 'hero' and child drown in the attempt. But then, it seems that the reason the action is considered good has to do with our assessment of the character of the actor, not the action considered in itself. (This sort of view on which an action is considered good because of a set of facts about the actor is precisely the sort of view that virtue ethicists defend.) Thus it seems that the view of good actions entailed by the Coextensionality Thesis is at least prima facie plausible because a good action seems to be good in a derivative sense; good either because of a relation it bears to the character of an actor, or because of the relation it bears to a set of consequences,

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or perhaps both.

But before concluding that actions must be derivatively good either because of some relation that holds between actions and actors or between actions and consequences, we must consider a third possibility.  Perhaps actions derive their goodness from some relation to a set of rules or principles that outline one's duties.  What sort of relation could that be?  It seems that there are two somewhat plausible options.  First, one could argue that a good action is an action that is required by a set of moral principles and it derives its goodness from being so required.  Second, one could argue that a good action is an action that is consistent with the set of moral principles.  That is, an action is good if and only if the set of moral principles doesn't forbid the action.  I will consider both of these options in turn.

If one argues that a good action is an action that is required by a set of moral principles and a good action derives its goodness from being so required, then in effect one is arguing that a good action just is a right action.  For, as I noted above, a right action is an action that one is morally required to perform because it is in accord with a moral principle. But it doesn't seem right to say that a good action is precisely the same thing as a right action because, at the very least, there are some cases in which we would say that an action is good even though one isn't morally required to perform it (i.e. even though it isn't 'right' in the relevant sense).  For example, if I jump on a grenade in a foxhole in order to save the lives of my compatriots, it seems obvious that I have performed a good action, but few would say that I was morally required to jump on the grenade.[85]  So the action isn't a

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[85] A maximizing utilitarian might say that the action is right in this sense, but because a utilitarian would also

'right action' in the relevant sense and, thus, it seems that an action isn't good just in case it is right.

But it seems that there is an obvious way to revise the theory. Instead of saying that an action is a good action if it required by the moral principles (which leads to this absurdity related to 'good action' and 'right action' being synonymous), say that an action is good if and only if the relevant set of moral principles doesn't forbid the action. This is, of course, the second proposal that I suggested above. This proposal does avoid the absurdity noted above. For, given this understanding of a good action, we can say that I acted well by jumping on the grenade because doing so was consistent with the relevant set of moral principles and by being consistent with those principles the action took on the character of goodness. Because all right actions are consistent with the set of moral principles, this proposal also allows us to conclude that all right actions are good actions, which seems to be an excellent result. There is, however, a serious problem with this proposal as well. If what it is to be a good action is for that action to be consistent with a set of moral principles, then we will be forced to conclude that many strange sorts of actions are good. For example, picking my nose is presumably consistent with this set of moral principles, as are turning on a light, sneezing, itching a scratch, and yawning. All of these actions are good actions, if this proposal is true because they are all presumably consistent with the relevant set of moral principles. But that seems absurd. So this proposal should also be rejected.

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say that the reason the action is right and good is because of certain facts about the consequences of the action. Thus, the maximizing utilitarian poses no threat to the notion that goodness is related either to the character of the actor or the nature of the consequences.

But perhaps there is one final revision that can be made. Maybe actions aren't good at all. Maybe actions are only ever right or wrong and never good or bad.

A view of this kind would be consistent with the Coextensionality Thesis, but there seems to be at least one major flaw with such a view. Namely, we think that some actions are good. For example, it is good to care for widows and orphans and it is good to save drowning children in ponds. An adherent of the sort of view that I just described will have to say that, although these may be right actions, they are not good actions. But this, again, seems absurd. It clearly seems that there are some actions that are good and others that are bad. And if some actions are good and, as this sort of objector has assumed, these good actions are not good in themselves, then they must be good in some derivative sense. Having dispensed with the notion that they may be good because of some relation they bear to a set of rules, there seem to be only two options left. Namely the two with which we began: (a) an action is good because it is performed by a good agent, or (b) an action is good because of the good consequences that result.

Having argued that the moral goodness of actions cannot be a feature of actions considered in themselves (even if the actions conform to a set of moral principles), moving forward, I will take it for granted that there are only two relations that may be relevant to an assessment of the moral character of actions: (1) the character of the actor, or (2) the nature of the consequences.

In light of this discussion, it seems that we now have a possible justification

for the belief common among virtue ethicists that an action is morally good, absolutely speaking, if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances and it is done as the virtuous agent would characteristically do it (i.e. with the appropriate motives, reasons, etc.). If virtue ethicists have been assuming something like the Coextensionality Thesis that I defended in Chapter 1, then, as I argued a moment ago, it seems that actions *cannot* be considered morally good or morally bad when considered in themselves (if virtue ethicists don't hold something like the Coextensionality Thesis, then this implication of the view may lead them to consider it). Thus, actions must take their moral character from something else. As I noted above, one obvious possibility is that they take their moral character from their source, namely, the human actor. And, indeed, if one is a virtue ethicist, it is quite natural to suppose that a human action does in fact take on a certain moral character in virtue of its relationship to the character of the actor who produced it because the moral goodness of agents is the primary case of moral goodness. So given the Coextensionality Thesis, it is natural to think that an action is morally good, absolutely speaking, if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e. acting in character) do in the circumstances and it is done as the virtuous agent would characteristically do it (i.e. with the appropriate motives, reasons, etc.).

But this will seem entirely unsatisfying to some. They may object to this view as follows: The view under consideration is not action-guiding. If one believes

that the goodness of action is tied entirely to the goodness of the agent, then no practical sort of advice can be given to those who have less than perfect characters to help them act morally. This is an unacceptable result because among morality's chief concerns is guiding the actions of moral agents. Any ethical account that cannot guide moral agents as they seek to live moral lives should be rejected. Therefore, virtue ethics should be rejected as a normative ethical approach.

Although it is true that according to this view one cannot act morally well without having the appropriate virtues, it does not follow from this that no advice or practical guidance can be given about what we ought to do and about what kind of people we ought to be. The ways in which the view may guide our decision procedure take at least two forms, both of which have been suggested by authors very much concerned with virtue ethics: (1) virtue terms, such as 'just,' have action-guiding content associated with them as do vice terms, such as 'greedy,' and so an understanding of virtue and vice terms is the beginning of approximating virtuous behavior,[86] and (2) general principles of practical reasoning may be used by the virtuous actor as she decides what to do and these principles may be explained to the non-virtuous to help them approximate the actions of the virtuous.[87] And, of course, advice can be given about the kind of people that we ought to be. The advice can take a didactic form – e.g. enumerating and explaining the virtues of character – or it can take an experiential form – e.g. hearing stories of, observing, or

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[86] See Rosalind Hursthouse,"After Hume's Justice", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 91, 1991: 229–45, and see Hurthouse's *On Virtue Ethics*, particularly Chapter 1.
[87] John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), particularly 79-89, and 103-131. .

accompanying the virtuous.

Having briefly described the ways in Coextensionality Thesis may support at least moral-realist, naturalistic, virtue ethics, it should be clear that the thesis might be attractive to adherents of such a view. And, unsurprisingly, well-known virtue ethicists such as Philippa Foot already employ something quite similar to this thesis.

*§2: Being, Good, and Consequentialism*

Although the Coextensionality Thesis rather obviously supports certain forms of virtue ethics, it is far less clear whether or not it supports, or even allows for, any consequentialist ethical theories. Consequentialist theories can be thought of as two part theories, as Samuel Scheffler suggests. As Scheffler says, first, a consequentialist theory "gives some principle for ranking overall states of affairs from best to worst from an impersonal standpoint," and, second, such a theory "says that the right act in any given situation is the one that will produce the highest-ranked state of affairs that the agent is in a position to produce."[88] In the following sub-sections, I will argue that the Coextensionality Thesis can provide conceptual support for both of these parts of consequentialist theories.

*§2.1: The nature of the consequences to be weighed*

Consequentialist theories begin by giving a principle for ranking states of affairs. Perhaps the best known such principle is the one employed by utilitarians:

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[88] Samuel Scheffler, "Introduction," *Consequentialism and its Critics,"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1.

"the best state of affairs from among any set is the one that contains the greatest net balance of aggregate human pleasure..."[89] If the Coextensionality Thesis is true, then it seems to place certain constraints on the nature of the consequences to be weighed as we consider states of affairs.  But it seems that these constraints are amenable to most popular versions of consequentialism.

What is the nature of these constraints?  Simply put, if the Thesis is correct, then all claims concerning goodness are grounded in substances.  More particularly, if the thesis is correct, a thing is good insofar as it has the perfections appropriate to attaining its end(s).  And so, if states of affairs are conceived of as aggregations of the realized good of individuals, states of affairs must be good to the extent to which the things in them have the perfections appropriate to them. Of course, this is precisely the sort of story that consequentialists often want to tell.  Let us take Utilitarianism as an example.  Many utilitarians wants to say that the end of human beings (and perhaps other animals) is a kind of happiness and that 'happiness' is to be understood as the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain.[90] So, for the utilitarian, the experience of pleasure is the sole (non-instrumental) perfection and thus states of affairs are to be weighed as a function of the presence of this perfection and the absence of its opposite, pain.

Before considering a possible objection to the notion that this metaethical thesis in fact supports consequentialism, let us consider a more sophisticated form

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[89] Scheffler, 2.

[90] See for example, J.S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*, "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, hold that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.  By happiness in intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure." J.S. Mill, Henry West (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's* Utilitarianism, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 68.

of consequentialism in order to demonstrate that the thesis is compatible with consequentialist views other than utilitarianism. Consider the case of a consequentialist who is a value pluralist and so believes human happiness to be intimately related to the presence of a collection of perfections that includes knowledge, pleasure, health, etc. For this sophisticated consequentialist, there is a collection of relevant (non-instrumental) perfections characteristically required to attain the human end(s) and thus states of affairs are to be weighed as a function of the presence of these perfections, at least insofar as states of affairs are to be weighed according to the presence of human goods.

The final clause in the last paragraph brings to light an objection that might be raised against the notion that the Coextensionality Thesis is compatible with consequentialist theories. For the thesis seems to force us to consider the good of all sorts of strange things as we weigh of states of affairs – things like plants, animals, and rocks as well as humans. But weighing states of affairs with such things in mind (particularly plants and rocks) is absurd, or at least not what the consequentialist wants to say.

It does seem to follow from the Coextensionality Thesis that, because a thing is good insofar as it has the perfections appropriate to attaining its end(s), states of affairs must be good to the extent to which the things in them – of whatever kind – have the perfections appropriate to them. But this conclusion does not seem absurd, nor does it seem to undermine the plausibility of consequentialist theories. In fact, in a way, it makes consequentialism more plausible by providing such

theories a less anthropocentric standard against which to judge states of affairs.  Of

course, just because you include trees as you weigh states of affairs does not mean

that it is appropriate to weigh their goodness heavily.  Indeed, it seems entirely

appropriate to weigh goods as an increasing function of the capacities of things, in

which case human goods are of the highest value, followed by animals, plants, et

cetera.  A full theory would, of course, have some story to tell about how the goods of

various sorts of things compare to one another, but such a full theory is not

necessary to demonstrate that the metaethical thesis is at least consistent with

broadly consequentialist views.  In sum, although the Coextensionality Thesis may

force consequentialists to recognize that to at least some extent the good of non-

human entities must be considered in calculations of states of affairs, the character

of the evaluation of human goods need not change, nor need the decision procedure

change so long as the good(s) of humans and/or all conscious beings are considered

to be significantly greater than the goods of other sorts of entities.[91]

Before considering the metaethical thesis in relation to good action, it is

important to note that there is at least one sort of consequentialism with which the

Thesis seems to be incompatible because of the nature of the consequences that it

deems weighable – namely, the sort in which actions are to be weighed as a part of

a state of affairs. Amartya Sen defends an account of the first sort in "Rights and

Agency."  Sen calls this sort of view a "Goal Rights System." On such a view the

"fulfillment and non-realization of rights are included among the goals, [and]

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[91] Here again it should be pointed out that one may reject the idea that inanimate things of any kind are good in the sense relevant to the Thesis.  This would, of course, mean rejecting certain elements of the Thesis as I have defended them, but it certainly remains a possibility.

incorporated in the evaluation of states of affairs."[92]

A view of this kind is at least prima facie incompatible with the Coextensionality Thesis because to make such a view plausible the violations of rights must be bad considered in themselves in order to affect our evaluation of a given state of affairs. That is, violating rights must be bad in and of itself and not because of the consequences which follow from such violations. However, if the thesis is true, then actions considered in themselves – even rights violations – are neither good nor bad because they are not substances and so they are not among the primary bearers of goodness. For an action to be considered bad, it must take its character from something else. As noted above, the most promising candidates seem to be from the agent or from the consequences of the action. Sen obviously cannot avail himself of the notion that rights violations take on their character in virtue of the consequences of rights violations because then he would be forced to conclude that rights violations are not bad so long as they lead to good consequences, which is precisely the sort of thing that he doesn't want to say. Perhaps he could argue that rights violations take on the character of moral badness in virtue of their relationship to the character of the agent, but then he would need to embrace a fairly robust virtue theory. So it seems that, if the metaethical thesis is true, then consequentialist theories on which actions considered in themselves are the sort of thing that are to be weighed during the evaluation of states of affairs must be

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[92] Amartya Sen, Samuel Scheffler (ed.), "Rights and Agency," *Consequentialism and its Critics,"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 199.

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considered false, unless they are seriously revised to incorporate virtue in a quite

substantive way.[93]

*§2.2: Good actions*

Most versions of consequentialism are concerned with 'rightness' in action

rather than 'goodness,' although there are notable exceptions (e.g. Alasdair

Norcross's 'Scalar Utilitarianism'[94]).  However, even those consequentialists who

hold 'rightness' in pride of place in their theories will surely grant that goodness

and badness in action are a matter of degree.  For example, all else being equal, if

two children are drowning and you are capable of saving both, it is best (i.e. the

most good is done) to save both, worst to save none (i.e. the least good is done), and

in between the two other scenarios to save one (i.e. more good is done than in saving

none, but less good is done than in saving both).  Given this rather obvious

implication of consequentialism, it seems that we can develop a theory of goodness

in action even for theories that prize rightness above goodness.

What would such a theory look like?  Well, presumably a consequentialist

would deny two things.  First, she would deny that an act can only be good if the

actor is good.  So, even if someone saved the two drowning children only to collect

reward money, that would not affect our appraisal of the act itself, although –

obviously – it would affect our assessment of the 'hero.'  Second, she would deny

that an act can be good or bad considered in itself.  So, although the act of saving

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[93] It does seem to be an implication of the metaethical thesis that actions can be considered during the evaluation of states of affairs, but no particular action can seemingly be given a different weight than any other so long as the actions are considered in themselves.
[94] Alasdair Norcross, Henry West (ed.), "Scalar Utilitarianism," *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's* Utilitarianism, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

two children from drowning may seem to be the kind of act that we can describe as absolutely good, the act may in fact be bad, if, e.g., one of the children were Hitler and the other Stalin.  Now, the consequentialist need not deny that certain acts tend to produce certain good outcomes and that their tendency to do so gives us reason to do them even if on occasion we may inadvertently do what is wrong objectively speaking.  The consequentialist need only deny that any particular act, considered in itself, is either good or bad.

In light of this brief description, it should be clear that the consequentialist theory of goodness in action is well-supported by the Coextensionality Thesis.  For the consequentialist rejects the notion that acts are good or bad, morally speaking, in themselves, which is a conclusion that follows from the Thesis.  The consequentialist, then, is in agreement with the virtue ethicist about at least one thing – acts are not the kind of thing that can be morally good or morally bad when considered in themselves.  Acts take on their moral character due to a relation that holds either between the act and the agent (in the case of virtue ethics) or between the act and its consequences (in the case of consequentialism).

So it seems clear that a consequentialist may be attracted to the Coextensionality Thesis as it provides a metaphysical basis both for their views concerning what ought to be weighed in states of affairs and their views concerning from whence an action takes its moral character.  However, before considering deontological theories, it is important to note that one other sort of consequentialist theory seems to be inconsistent with the metaethical thesis in question because of

its account of good actions, namely, rule-consequentialist theories. I have chosen to treat it here, rather than in the section on deontological theories, even though it is a matter of dispute as to whether it is, properly-speaking, a consequentialist or deontological theory because the theory so clearly relies upon elements of consequentialism.

Rule-consequentialism is the view on which "rules are to be selected on the basis of their aggregate net benefits; actions are to be evaluated by the rules thus selected."[95] In other words, possible rules are judged by and selected on the basis of consequentialist considerations. That is, they are selected on the basis of their tendency to increase, e.g., utility. But actions are judged without reference to their consequences. So, the rule, "Do not kill an innocent person" is justified on the basis of the fact that following such a rule will, in general, lead to greater utility. But, even in a case in which utility would be maximized by the killing of an innocent person, it would be wrong to do so on the rule-consequentialist account.

A view of this kind seems to be inconsistent with the Coextensionality Thesis because, after the rules are laid down, actions in themselves are considered good or bad without reference to the actor or to the consequences of the action. But, as we know, the Thesis entails that actions considered in themselves are neither morally good nor bad and that the moral character of actions must be drawn from some other source than the actions considered in themselves. It is tempting to think that, on the rule-consequentialist view, actions draw their moral character from

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[95] Brad Hooker, Henry West (ed.) "Right, Wrong, and Rule-Consequentialism," *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 233.

consequences because the rules were agreed upon because of their tendency to lead to good consequences. But such a view is manifestly incorrect. For once the rules are set, the consequences of rule-following are irrelevant to appraisals of actions. If the consequences of following a rule were taken into account as one appraises a rule-following action, then the view would no longer be rule-consequentialism. It would be act-consequentialism. And although act-consequentialism is consistent with the metaethical thesis, surely a rule-consequentialist doesn't want to be forced to become an act-consequentialist.

A rule-consequentialist might object by arguing that I have misconstrued rule-consequentialism. An action is not *good* in itself because a rule says that one ought to do it, this objector might say. An action is only *right* in itself if it is in accord with the set of rules. And, if that is so, then we may still evaluate the goodness of an action in light of its consequences, even if the rightness of an action is unassociated with its consequences. This provides a way out of the conclusion suggested above, namely, that rule-consequentialism is incompatible with the metaethical thesis under consideration.

I agree that one might escape the inconsistency by divorcing the right and the good in action. Certainly one might say that actions considered in themselves are right or wrong, but actions considered in themselves are not good or bad; they are only good or bad when considered in relation to their consequences. But, if one does so, it seems that rule-consequentialism will almost certainly collapse into act-consequentialism. For, on a rule-consequentialist view the *right* is a creation meant

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to serve the *good*. The right is not independently motivating. Its motivational force is entirely derived from its relation to the good. So, because the motivational force of the right is derived from the motivational force of the good, it seems that an assessment of the rightness or wrongness of an action should not motivate one apart from considerations concerning the good because whatever motivational force the right has it has in virtue of the relation it bears to the good. But, if one's assessment of the good to be produced by an action is the ultimate motivation for acting in a particular way, then one is no longer a rule-consequentialist. One has become an act-consequentialist.

*§3: Being, Good, and Deontological Theories*

As in the case of consequentialism, it is not particularly clear whether deontological theories are generally compatible with the Coextensionality Thesis. In this section, I will, first, argue that contractarian deontological theories and patient-centered deontological theories as they are generally understood cannot be maintained if this Thesis is true. Then I will briefly describe the sorts of deontological theories that might be consistent with the Thesis and argue that such theories are best understood as a sub-species of virtue ethics.

*§3.1: The sorts of deontological theories that must be rejected*

Generally speaking, if the Thesis under consideration is true, then any deontological theory on which actions considered in themselves are thought to have the character of moral goodness or moral badness must be rejected. This is so because, as I argued above, actions considered in themselves do not bear moral

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goodness or badness because they are not substances and, if the Coextensionality Thesis is true, substances alone are the primary bearers of goodness.  Thus an action must take its moral character from something external to the action itself. So any deontological theory that holds that actions are morally good or morally bad when considered in themselves must be rejected.  But does anyone hold such a view?

It seems that at least two sorts of deontological theories may hold a view similar to the one that I have described: (1) contractarian deontological theories and (2) patient-centered deontological theories.  I will describe versions of both of these sorts of theories that seem to be incompatible with the Coextensionality Thesis, but I leave open the possibility that, with revision, theories of these general sorts may be made consistent with the Thesis.  Let us consider both of these theories in turn.

*§3.1.1: Contractarian deontological theories*

Because of the influence of John Rawls, contractarianism is better known as a political theory than a moral theory. But contractarianism has been defended as a moral theory, most notably by David Gauthier in his *Morals by Agreement*.[96]  In general, a contractarian deontological theory "claims that moral norms derive their normative force from the idea of contract or mutual agreement."[97]  In *Morals by Agreement*, Gauthier asks us to imagine a group of entirely self-interested individuals seeking to maximize their own utility.  He thinks that each individual

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[96] David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
[97] Ann Cudd, "Contractarianism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/contractarianism/>.

in such a group would agree to certain moral norms because doing so would minimize the concessions that one must make relative to the concessions made by other parties to the bargain. In effect, agreeing to a set of moral norms minimizes the dangers that one faces vis-à-vis one's compatriots and increases the benefits of social cooperation.

Why believe that a contractarian theory of this sort is incompatible with the Coextensionality Thesis? Simply put, because once the moral norms are set, actions considered in themselves are considered the bearers of certain moral characteristics apart from considerations about their sources or their consequences. So once it is agreed that, "Cheating others is wrong (or bad)," an action considered in itself bears the moral character of badness. It bears this character without reference to the actor who might cheat others and without reference to the consequences that might follow from cheating another in a particular case. Thus it seems that a contractarian view of this kind is incompatible with the metaethical thesis under consideration.

Of course, a contractarian might reply to this sort of argument by noting that it is not his intention to provide an account of moral properties or moral characteristics on which they are genuine properties of persons, actions, etc. Rather, he might maintain that they are conventional properties or characteristics – properties or characteristics that are *entirely* dependent upon an agreement. Of course, such an option is open, but it amounts to little more than a denial of the metaethical thesis under consideration and so, because we are assuming that the

thesis is true for the purposes of this chapter, I will not consider this response any further.

*§3.1.2: Patient-centered deontological theories*

Patient-centered deontological theories are those on which people's rights are central to moral considerations, rather than people's duties.  At the core of most such theories is "the right against being used only as means for producing good consequences without one's consent."[98]  Robert Nozick, Eric Mack, Peter Vallentyne, and Hillel Steiner, among others, defend theories of this general kind.[99]

Not all patient-centered deontological theories are, or at least need be, inconsistent with the Coextensionality Thesis.  Only those that claim that rights violations considered in themselves – without reference to the actor perpetrating the violation or those affected by the rights violation – are bad.  Now, of course, it seems that some would say that a rights violation is not bad, considered in itself.  Rather, it is bad for some deeper reason.  The deeper reason will probably bottom out in considerations regarding respect for the autonomy or rationality of others.  If that is so, then, depending upon how one describes this deeper reason, the view may either be compatible or incompatible with the thesis under consideration.

If what makes a rights violation a bad thing is that a rights violation harms or in some sense injures the one whose rights have been violated, ultimately

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[98] Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, "Deontological Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/ethics-deontological/>.

[99] See, for example, Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Eric Mack, "In Defense of the Jurisdiction Theory of Rights," *Journal of Ethics*, (vol. 4, 2000: 71-98). Peter Vallentyne and Hillel Steiner, "Why Left-Libertarianism Is Not Incoherent, Indeterminate, or Irrelevant: A Reply to Fried," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, (33(2), 2005: 201-215).

because of some harm to that person's autonomy or rationality, then the moral character of the action is drawn from the consequences of that action. That is, then it seems that the act of violating someone's rights isn't bad considered in itself. Rather, it is bad because of some relation between the action and the action's effects. This sort of view is clearly compatible with the Thesis in question.

However, if the badness of violating someone's rights is derived from the intrinsic badness of disrespecting the autonomy or rationality of a person, then it seems that such a view is incompatible with the metaethical thesis. For if a right's violation is intrinsically bad, then an action that violates a right is intrinsically bad, apart from considerations of the act's effects. And, as should be clear by now, if an action is considered bad (or good) in itself, then such a view is incompatible with the Thesis under consideration.

*§3.2: The sorts of 'deontological' theories that can be consistently maintained*

In this section, I will note that a variety of 'deontological' theories are consistent with the Coextensionality Thesis. However, after considering these theories, I will further note that, if the thesis is true, such theories apparently must ultimately evaluate actions either as virtue ethicists do or as consequentialists do. But, as should be clear, it seems preferable from the perspective of a deontologist to evaluate actions as virtue ethicists do, rather than as consequentialists do.

In general, a deontological theory will be consistent with the Thesis if, according to the theory, in every case an action is considered morally good or morally bad because of a relation that holds between the action and either some

characteristic(s) of the actor or because of a relation between the action and the consequences of the action. (I am, of course, assuming that a right action is considered a good action on the deontological view and that wrong actions are considered bad. If a right action is not considered a good action according to a given deontological theory, then, as I noted above, such a theory need not be in conflict with the Coextensionality Thesis, but seems objectionable for other reasons.) Given this description, it may sound as though many, if not most, deontological theories will not make the cut. However, popular contemporary deontological accounts can seemingly be consistently maintained even if the Coextentionality Thesis is true.

For example, consider the broadly deontological theory advanced by Christine Korsgaard in her book, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity.*[100] She maintains, "A good action is one that constitutes its agent as the autonomous and efficacious cause of her own movements. These properties correspond, respectively, to Kant's two imperatives of practical reason. Conformity to the categorical imperative renders us autonomous, and conformity to the hypothetical imperative renders us efficacious."[101] It seems, then, on Korsgaard's view that, although actions must have certain characteristics in order to be considered good, the relevant characteristics are relational in nature and not characteristics of actions considered in themselves. That is, a good action must bear a particular sort of relation to the agent responsible for the action in order to be considered good. If that is so, then it seems that one might say that the action draws its character from

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[100] Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[101] Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity,* xii.

certain features of the agent because a good action requires that the agent be rational in a particular sort of way in order to perform good actions, that is, in order to perform actions that conform to the categorical and hypothetical imperatives. And, if that is the case, then one might suggest that the actions draw their moral character from a set of facts about the agent and the agent's process of decision-making. Then, it would be right to conclude that Korsgaard's theory is consistent with the Thesis that we are considering.

Again abstracting away from any particular theory, it seems that any deontological theory on which the relation between the agent and the action is central to an assessment of the action's moral character is consistent with the Thesis. So, if a theory maintains that actions are only good if they express the rationality of the agent by conforming to some rational law (such as the categorical imperative), such a theory would be consistent with the metaethical thesis. For then the moral character of the action would be drawn from the rationality of the agent. Or if we agree with Kant's dictum that "it is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will," because the will is a faculty of an agent, we might say that actions are good in a derivative sense that follows from the goodness of the will of an agent. [102] These two approaches, as well as that of Korsgaard, have three features: (1) they are consistent with the Thesis; (2) they seem to be faithful deontological theories; and (3), at least in outline, they share the same sort of

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[102] Immanuel Kant, Mary Gregor (ed. & tr.), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.

account of good actions as virtue ethicists.

It seems that another sort of approach is consistent with the metaethical thesis that at least has the appearance of deontology. As suggested above, it is possible to think that, e.g., rights-violations are wrong because of the harm that is consequent upon such violations. Of course, if one believes that this is why rights violations are bad, then one believes that rights violations draw their moral character from the nature of their consequences. But because of the centrality of rights in such theories, in order to preserve the priority of rights over considerations of goodness, one might say that the good protected by rights is lexically prior to goods of other sorts, such as pleasure; that is, one could argue that no amount of good of other sorts can justify rights violations. In so doing, it seems that one can preserve a largely deontological theory even if the moral character of rights violations is taken from the nature of the consequences of such violations.

Of course, this sort of view seems entirely unsatisfactory because it seems to force one into a well-recognized problem.[103] Imagine that I am captured by an evil dictator. The dictator takes me to a room with six prisoners that are bound and gagged. He tells me that I can either kill one of the six or he will kill five of the six. Let's further say that I have every reason to believe that he is telling the truth. Obviously, if I kill the one person, I would violate her rights. But if I refuse to do so, I am almost certain that five rights violations of precisely the same kind will occur. What am I to do? If we say that I should kill the one, then it seems that this

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[103] See, for example, Samuel Scheffler, "Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues," in Samuel Scheffler (ed.), *Consequentialism and its Critics,"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 243-260.

deontological theory is, in many respects, just a form of consequentialism. But if we say that I should refrain from killing the one and allow the dictator to kill the five, then there is a sort of inconsistency in the view. For if we take the route suggested in the paragraph above, then rights violations aren't bad in themselves. They are only bad because of what follows from them. So given a case like this one in which one rights violation would prevent five of precisely the same kind of rights violation it seems that we must admit that it is better to kill the one to save the five. But, again, then it seems that we have embraced a consequentialist theory, one that is more complicated and robust than utilitarianism, admittedly, but consequentialist in nature nonetheless.[104]

So it seems that, although deontological theories could at least in principle be maintained whether they ultimately rest the moral character of actions in consequences or characteristics of agents, it seems that deontologists ought to prefer the latter option. Indeed, as in the case of Korsgaard, it seems that some have already embraced something very much like it.

*§4: The Coextensionality Thesis as restructuring the normative debate*

Before concluding the essay, I would like to briefly argue that, if the Coextensionality Thesis is true, it may be illuminating to recast the normative debate as a debate between virtue ethics and consequentialism rather than, as is often done, a debate between deontology and consequentialism. This is so because deontology can profitably be seen as a variant of virtue ethics. A full defense of this

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[104] See Scheffler, "Agent-Centred Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues."

notion is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I would like to briefly lay out a set of

reasons in support of the idea that we ought to see deontology as a form of virtue

ethics, particularly if the Coextensionality Thesis is true.

First, consider theories regarding good actions. If the Coextensionality

Thesis is true, then it seems that there are only two possible sources from which

actions may draw the character of goodness – the character of the agent or the

character of the consequences. So, as regards the evaluation of goodness in action, it

seems that there are only two possible accounts – an action is good if and only if it is

done by an agent with particular good-making characteristics, or an action is good

to the extent to which it produces good consequences.[105] These accounts are

obviously those already accepted by virtue ethicists and consequentialists

respectively. Thus it seems that, if the Thesis is true, the debate, as least as it

regards good actions, naturally divides along the line between virtue ethicists and

consequentialists rather than along the line between deontologists and

consequentialists. And, indeed, it seems that some prominent deontologists,

Christine Korsgaard foremost among them, see good actions as actions that draw a

particular sort of character from features of the agent. So for Korsgaard  and those

deontologists with similar views, even if the Thesis were false, it may seem natural

to say that an action is good if and only if it is done by an agent who is fully rational

(in some way to be specified, perhaps with reference to the categorical and

hypothetical imperatives).

Now, what would follow for deontological views concerning the goodness of

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[105] It may also be possible to form some sort of hybrid account.

actors, if deontology were seen as a variant of virtue ethics? It seems obvious that most deontological theories would fit quite easily into the general frame provided by the Coextensionality Thesis in regards to good actors. The non-essential concrete attributes that are relevant to goodness would primarily be those in virtue of which one's reason is perfected – virtues such as insight, understanding, et cetera. A deontologist may then fill out this picture by discussing certain secondary virtues that allow one to act in accord with reason once reason has rendered a verdict (e.g. temperance and fortitude). So, generally speaking, what it is to be a good actor from a deontological perspective is primarily related to having the virtues related to being a fully rational agent and secondarily to those virtues related to being an agent who can act in accord with the prescriptions of reason. As in the case of actions, this understanding of deontology seems quite natural, despite the fact (or perhaps because of the fact) that it is being considered as a form of virtue ethics.

There may, however, be one genuinely distinct feature that deontology would add to virtue ethics as I have described it: an emphasis on the relevance of certain *essential* concrete attributes to claims about goodness – namely those essential attributes related to being a person, or rational agent, in the relevant sense. For it seems that deontologists often believe the capacity for reason to be a very important good-making attribute of a thing. And this emphasis as well as the emphasis on reason – broadly construed – may distinguish deontology from conventional forms of virtue ethics in such a way that, though they are understood as two species of a single genus, they are rightly considered distinct normative options.

Finally, if deontology is understood as a variant of virtue ethics, it seems that a deontologist may be in a better position to give a fairly compelling response to a significant objection that is frequently made to deontological theories; it is the same objection that I noted above. Consider Samuel Scheffler's statement of the problem: "how can it be rational to forbid the performance of a morally objectionable action that would have the effect of minimizing the total number of comparably objectionable actions that were performed and would have no other morally relevant consequences? How can the minimization of morally objectionable conduct be morally unacceptable?"[106] If we understand deontology as a variant of virtue ethics, then it is immediately clear how one might begin to respond to this objection. Scheffler is assuming that actions must be evaluated morally either in themselves (as a kind of action) or in relation to their consequences. But if deontology is a form of virtue ethics, then there is another option available to the deontologist: an action is morally good or morally bad because of certain characteristics of the agent performing the action – e.g., the agent's rationality. Properly speaking, conduct is not morally acceptable or morally unacceptable in itself. So it seems that faced with a situation in which a particular action would prevent the occurrence of many actions of the same kind, the ideal deontological agent (the characteristics of whom would, of course, be theory-dependent) has two options. First, she could do the action in question and prevent the occurrence of other actions of the same kind. If she did so, then her action would be morally good and not morally objectionable at all. Second, she could refrain from doing the action in question and allow other

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[106] Samuel Scheffler, "Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues," 244.

actions of the kind from which she refrained to occur. If she did so, then her action

would be good and the moral character of the actions of others would be dependent

upon facts about those agents. In either case, the consequences that follow from the

ideal deontological agent's action are irrelevant to its moral appraisal. The kind of

action that it is is irrelevant as well. The only feature relevant to the action's moral

appraisal is the set of characteristics of the agent. Of course, this is not a full

treatment of the issue, but it does seem to provide the beginnings of a new sort of

response.

*Conclusion*

Over the course of this chapter, I considered what would follow for normative

ethics, if the Coextensionality Thesis were true. I addressed the three major

normative theories in turn – virtue ethics, consequentialism, and deontological

theories. I argued that this Thesis may be attractive to all persuasions of realist

virtue ethicists (particularly of the naturalistic variety) as a grounding for such

views. Although, how precisely virtue ethicists develop their views will depend upon

their understandings of the human final end. I also argued that, although some

consequentialist theories would necessarily be inconsistent with the metaethical

thesis, it seems that some consequentialist theories can be grounded in the thesis as

well. I then similarly argued that any deontological theory on which acts do not

derive their moral status from the character of the acts considered in themselves

likewise may be grounded in the Coextensionality Thesiss. Finally, I briefly argued

that it may be illuminating to recast the normative debate as fundamentally

divided between virtue ethics and consequentialism, rather than between deontology and consequentialism. I hope that it is now clearer how the Coextensionality Thesis, if true, might affect normative ethical theory and normative ethical discourse.

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