ABSTRACT

Teleological Moral Realism: An Explication and Defense

David Alexander, Ph.D.

Committee Chairperson: Michael D. Beaty, Ph.D.

Contemporary moral realists assume that goodness is a property susceptible to Kripkean/Putnamian developments in philosophy of language and metaphysics. However, close attention to the actual use of the term 'good' reveals that 'good' does not refer to a property but to a predicate-forming functor. Relying on an argument advanced by P. T. Geach, I argue that the semantics of 'good' is such that statements of the form "x is good" are semantically incomplete. In order to complete such statements some substantive has to be understood. I go on to argue that the semantics of 'good' has profound implications for metaethics. First, I show that goodness is not a property capable of figuring into necessary *a posteriori* identities. Thus, most contemporary defenses of moral realism fail. Second, I show that the semantics of 'good' reveals that 'good' must modify something that has a nature and function. I go on to argue that if it is true that 'good' must modify something that has a nature and function, then human goodness is both unique and uniform. Human goodness is unique because human nature is. Human goodness is uniform because human nature is. Third, I show that the correct metaphysics for functions is a normative account that supports the semantics of 'good'

provided earlier. In the process of defending a normative account of functions I show that theories of functions that rely solely on evolutionary theory fail. Lastly, I consider and respond to some standard objections to moral realism. In particular, I examine the argument from motivation, the argument from queerness and the argument from the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral. I show that the metaethical theory that emerged in the first three parts of the dissertation easily handles each of these arguments.

Teleological Moral Realism: An Explication And Defense

by

David E. Alexander, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

_____
Michael D. Beaty, Ph.D., Chairperson

_____
Jonathan L. Kvanvig, Ph.D.

_____
Francis Beckwith, Ph.D.

_____
Margaret Watkins, Ph.D.

_____
Robert C. Koons, Ph.D.

_____
Mikeal C. Parsons, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
August 2008

_____
J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Page bearing signatures is kept on file in the Graduate School.

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PREFACE

Moral realism is not only the common sense view but it also makes more sense of moral disagreement and moral progress than moral anti-realism. Yet, contemporary versions of moral realism face some devastating objections, calling into question their truth. Even if it is true that contemporary versions of moral realism are fatally flawed, it does not follow that all versions are fatally flawed. If we are to maintain that moral progress and moral disagreement are possible and that contemporary versions of moral realism are in trouble, then we need to develop an alternative account of moral realism that is left unscathed by the objections to other versions.

Like several moral philosophers, I argue that contemporary accounts of moral realism fail. In doing so, I not only discuss several well-known objections but also some criticisms of my own of contemporary versions of moral realism. However, I am not content to merely criticize current accounts of moral realism. The lack of an adequate defense of moral realism must be remedied lest we lose our grip on the nature of moral discourse and moral progress. Hence, not only will I show that contemporary versions of moral realism fail, but also I will provide an alternative version of moral realism.
The overall strategy I employ in the dissertation is first to motivate the need for an alternative version of moral realism by critiquing contemporary versions. I then show that we need not abandon moral realism, for nearly all contemporary versions share a problematic but unnecessary assumption—namely, that moral terms, in particular the term ‘good’, refer to monadic properties. I then develop an alternative version of moral

realism, based on the semantics provided by Peter Geach, which I call teleological moral realism (TMR).[1] According to Geach the terms 'good' and 'bad' are logically attributive adjectives. A number of moral philosophers, working within a virtue framework (broadly conceived), appeal to an attributive account of 'good' in order to motivate various theses. For example, Rosalind Hursthouse begins her defense of ethical naturalism by noting "… that 'good', like 'small', is an attributive adjective."[2] Philippa Foot begins her most recent book by claiming that the attributive account of 'good' "… is very important and takes us some of the way in the task of bringing back words 'from their metaphysical to their everyday use'…"[3] Unfortunately, neither Hursthouse nor Foot attempt to defend the main argument for an attributive account of 'good' against a number of recent attacks. I remedy this lack of defense by arguing that the attributive account is as plausible as any other semantics for 'good.'

Geach goes on to argue that the semantics of 'good' is incompatible with various metaethical positions (e.g. Moore's objectivism and Hare's prescriptivism). I expand upon Geach's positive claim—that 'good' is essentially attributive—and his negative claim—that various metaethical positions are in conflict with the correct semantics of 'good'—in an attempt to articulate a version of moral realism (i.e. TMR) that is consistent with the semantic data. I then argue that investigation into the semantics of 'good' together with correlative theses regarding the metaphysics of function reveals that the goodness of a thing is dependent upon the nature and function of that thing.

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[1]Peter Geach, "Good and Evil," in *20th Century Ethical Theory*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 300-306.

[2]Rosalind Hurstehouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 195.

[3]Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

Showing that the goodness of a thing is dependent on the nature and function of that thing is no small task. There are a number of competing accounts of the metaphysics of function. By far the most popular account is an etiological one. Etiological accounts of function rely on evolutionary theory in such way that attempting to build a moral theory on top of them is at best implausible and at worst impossible. (Indeed, most advocates of etiological accounts are explicit about removing all normativity from its details.) Thus, one of my main tasks is to show that the correct account of the metaphysics of function is perfectly compatible with the claims of TMR.

Lastly, I argue that the conception of goodness I develop does not succumb to standard objections raised against other versions of moral realism. In particular, I show that TMR fares much better than contemporary versions when confronted with problems stemming from moral motivation, Mackie's queerness objection and Blackburn's supervenience objection. The fact that TMR is independently plausible together with its ability to handle standard objections to moral realism in a relatively straightforward way shows that TMR is worthy of serious consideration.

I wrap up the dissertation by presenting and responding to two objections to TMR. The first objection I look at is based on evolutionary theory. According to this objection, by relying on natures TMR is incompatible with our best theories in biological science. If TMR is to be a version of moral realism, then nature must be objective. However, according to evolutionary theory, natures are not objective, or at least are not as objective as TMR requires. I argue that recent advances in developmental biology have called into question the claim that evolutionary theory explains adaptiveness without relying on objective natures.

The second objection I examine claims that the semantic account that I develop implies a type of semantic relativism. Since semantic relativism is false, so is TMR. I argue that this objection misunderstands the nature of attributivity. I go on to show that even if the objection is correct at one level it is not a serious problem for TMR. The semantic account of 'good' may imply that 'good' is an analogical term requiring a focal meaning in order to ground analogous uses. I close the dissertation by speculating on what the focal meaning of the term 'good' might be. I suggest that one obvious candidate for the focal meaning of 'good' is God.

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The idea for my dissertation came after a series of discussions with Michael Beaty, Margaret Tate and Robert Koons. I am especially grateful to these three professors. Professor Koons was gracious enough to allow me to take a number of courses with him at the University of Texas at Austin. His guidance and patience are greatly appreciated. Furthermore, his willingness to speak openly and honestly about Christianity within a secular context is a model I hope to emulate. Professor Tate's courses provided a natural context for me to express some of the ideas in the dissertation in germ form. Tate's willingness to listen to me ramble and correct my many philosophical errors helped me write a much better dissertation as well as become a much better teacher. I want to express my gratitude to Professor Beaty for his encouragement and almost fatherly care for me during the process of writing the dissertation. The graduate students in the philosophy department often joke that Professor Beaty is the platonic form of a department chair. Apparently the form of a department chair and the form of a dissertation director are one and the same. During an independent study with Beaty the thesis for the dissertation finally came to me. The dissertation allowed me to combine my interests in philosophy of language, metaphysics and metaethics. Beaty was more than glad to help guide me as I attempted to navigate the landscape of contemporary philosophy.

Jon Kvanvig and Francis Beckwith asked a number of questions at the prospectus defense that forced me to rethink a number of issues and thus write a much better

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My mother, father, sisters, brother-in-laws, niece and nephews have all prayed for me and my family during this time. You have all been in my prayers as well and I could not have accomplished any of this without you.

Finally and most of all I wish to thank my wife, Genevieve and my children, Julian and Angel. They have had to put up with a lot from their dad. I thank God everyday for them and I hope that their sojourn into the wilds of Waco, Texas prepared them for the great things God has for them as much as it has prepared me to strive to fulfill my calling as a Christian philosopher and teacher.

DEDICATION

For Ida and Charles Alexander,
and
Genevieve, Julian and Angel Alexander

CHAPTER ONE

Contemporary Moral Realism: Problems with a Common Assumption

Contemporary versions of moral realism assume that the term 'good' refers to a property that falls within the scope of Kripkean and Putnamian developments in philosophy of language and metaphysics (hereafter I will use the less cumbersome Kripke/Putnam developments). These versions face challenges strong enough to warrant an investigation into an alternative account of moral realism. In order to defend these claims I first explain the account of moral realism common to contemporary moral realists. Contemporary accounts of moral realism have developed in large part as a response to G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument (OQA). The OQA assumes that goodness is a property. Thus, moral realists who share this assumption must meet the OQA by denying one of its other premises. Two representative versions of moral realism that assume that goodness is a property that falls within the scope of Kripkean/Putnamian developments and attempt to deny one of the OQA's other premises are Richard Boyd's moral naturalism and Robert Adams' moral supernaturalism.[1] In the second section of this chapter I explain the version of naturalistic moral realism represented by Boyd. I argue that Boyd's moral realism is not plausible because of its reliance on Kripkean/Putnamian styles of analysis. In the third and final section I explain the version

[1]The purpose of this chapter is to motivate a new version of moral realism. Thus it is sufficient to focus on two influential versions of moral realism rather than on each and every version that has been developed in recent years. Furthermore, many of the arguments presented in this chapter and in the next work equally well, *mutatis mutandis*, against these other versions.

of supernaturalistic moral realism presented by Adams. I argue that Adams' version suffers for reasons that Adams himself worries about. Thus, contemporary versions of moral realism fail. In the subsequent chapters of the dissertation I lay the foundations for a new version of moral realism that avoids the problems presented here.

1. Moral Realism: The Contemporary Account

In this section I argue that standard formulations of moral realism assume that 'good' refers to a property susceptible to Kripkean/Putnamian developments. Put briefly, if statements of the form 'x is good' are true, there must be a property of goodness. With this purpose in mind I limit my discussion of moral realism to two recent accounts.

In his introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* David Copp argues that moral realism consists of the following five doctrines: "(1) There are moral properties (and relations). … (2) Some moral properties are instantiated. … (3) Moral predicates are used to ascribe moral properties. … (4) [M]oral assertions express moral beliefs. … (5) The moral properties, in that they are properties, have the metaphysical status that any other property has, whatever that status is."[2]

Copp's account of moral realism includes metaphysical as well as semantic claims. The metaphysical part states that moral properties are on a par with other non-moral properties and that some things have moral properties. In a footnote Copp writes, "…[T]he first realist doctrine is to be interpreted such that the term "property," as it occurs there, ascribes the same metaphysical status to moral properties, such as *wrongness*, as it ascribes to a non-moral property such as *redness* when it is predicated of

[2]David Copp, introduction to *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (Oxford University Press, 2006), 8.

such a property."[3] Note that Copp's account is perfectly compatible with versions of moral realism that take the property *goodness* to be identical to some other property, where the identity is either analytic or synthetic.[4]

The semantic component of Copp's account of moral realism is comprised by (3) and (4). (4) with the assumption that moral beliefs are truth-apt commit the Coppian moral realist to cognitivism. According to cognitivism moral judgments are truth-apt. Cognitivism does not entail moral realism—in Copp's sense—but moral realism—again in Copp's sense—does entail cognitivism. Someone could accept cognitivism without accepting Copp's moral realism. One way to do this would be to deny that moral predicates refer to properties. Since, according to Copp, moral realism is committed to there being moral properties the cognitivist who denies the existence of moral properties would not be a moral realist.[5] Another, more subtle way of maintaining cognitivism without being a Coppian moral realist is to accept that there are moral properties but deny that moral properties have the same metaphysical status that non-moral properties have. For example, a Moorean moral realist thinks that there are moral properties, but argues that moral properties are quite different from natural or even supernatural properties. According to the Moorean moral properties are non-natural in the sense that they are

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[3]Copp, *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, 4n.

[4]Since, I know of no recent attempt to develop a version of moral realism that appeals to synthetic *a priori* identity claims the division between analytic and synthetic identities is the same as the division between identities discoverable *a priori* and those discoverable *a posteriori*.

[5]For example, certain versions of nominalism would deny that moral predicates refer to properties. As we shall see in chapters one and two the version of moral realism I favor appears to deny that the predicate 'good' refers to a property.

simple, unanalyzable and not discoverable in the same way that natural or supernatural properties are discovered.[6]

Copp's account of moral realism assumes that moral realists must countenance moral properties and that moral properties are no different than non-moral properties. Whatever its merits or demerits Copp's account is evidence in favor of my claim that contemporary versions of moral realism build in a commitment to moral properties that are capable of receiving a Kripkean/Putnamian analysis.

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord gives a different definition of moral realism:

> Moral realists hold that there are moral facts, that it is in light of these facts that peoples' moral judgments are true or false, and that the facts being what they are (and so the judgments being true, when they are) is not merely a reflection of our thinking the facts are one way or another. That is, moral facts are what they are even when we see them incorrectly or not at all.[7]

Sayre-McCord's characterization differs from Copp's in some crucial respects. For our purposes, the most important difference is that Sayre-McCord's account does not mention moral properties. The omission of moral properties from his account suggests that one could be a moral realist and deny the existence of moral properties. Nevertheless, appearances are misleading.

Sayre-McCord explains moral facts in terms of moral properties. He provides two accounts of what moral facts are. According to the first account, "…moral thought and talk [is] committed to properties, and facts, and truths, that could just as well be

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[6]That Copp's account of moral realism excludes versions of moral realism that distinguish moral properties from other non-moral properties is a strike against Copp's account. Copp's account implies that the Moorean is not a moral realist, a most unwelcome result.

[7]Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Moral Realism," in *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, 40.

expressed in nonmoral terms" (44). The first account goes further and claims that moral properties are identical with either natural or supernatural properties depending on who is articulating the view. The identity between moral properties and non-moral ones is thought to be knowable through analysis of moral concepts. G.E. Moore's Open Question Argument (OQA) challenged the idea that analysis of moral concepts reveals an identity between moral properties and non-moral ones. Thus, if moral properties are identical to non-moral ones mere analysis of moral concepts is not sufficient to reveal the identity. Sayre-McCord's second account of moral realism is an attempt to bypass the OQA by showing that moral properties can be identical with non-moral ones even though the identity cannot be known via conceptual analysis.

The second account of moral realism relies on Saul Kripke's pioneering work in 1972.[8] Kripke introduced a new way of discovering property identities. Most assumed that the only way to discover property identities was via conceptual analysis. Thus, a claim that properties *F* and *G* are identical was thought to be both necessary and analytic. Kripke argued that many property identities are not knowable *a priori* and hence not knowable via conceptual analysis. This new wave in philosophy of language and metaphysics opened the door for a new response to Moore's OQA. Moral properties could be identical with non-moral properties without there having to be synonymy between the moral predicate and the non-moral predicate that refer to these properties. Here's Sayre-McCord:

> But the most powerful grounds for rejecting the Open Question Argument came with the realization that two terms, say "water" and "H_20," could refer to one and

[8]Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

> the same property, even though one would be asking a substantive question (that can be settled only by investigating the world) in asking whether H_20 is water. The realization that a proposed identity could both be true and yet fail the test of the Open Question Argument encouraged the hope that, after all, a naturalized metaphysics for moral properties could be defended.[9]

Despite the fact that Sayre-McCord's characterization of moral realism does not mention moral properties it is clear from his exposition that moral facts include moral properties. Indeed, as is clear from the above quotation Sayre-McCord's account of moral realism explicitly includes reference to moral properties that are capable of Kripkean/Putnamian analysis.

Standard accounts of moral realism include, either explicitly or implicitly, reference to moral properties that are capable of figuring in analytic or synthetic property identities. In particular moral realists are committed to the claim that goodness is a property that is either analytically or synthetically identical to some other property. Consequently, the moral anti-realist need only show that each project fails in order to establish her position.[10] If the anti-realist can show that moral properties are neither analytically equivalent to non-moral properties, nor synthetically equivalent to non-moral properties, then moral realism is false.

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[9]Sayre-McCord, "Moral Realism," 50.

[10]Since standard accounts of moral realism do not consider Mooreanism with its commitment to *sui generis* moral properties to be a live option I won't consider it either. Though see Russ Shafer-Landau *Moral Realism: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) for a contemporary version of Mooreanism. It is important to note however that Shafer-Landau's version of Mooreanism continues to make use of the assumption that goodness is a monadic property capable of figuring into synthetic property identities. The main difference between Shafer-Landau's version of moral realism and other versions is that Shafer-Landau argues that goodness is constituted by natural properties and not identical with them. Note also that Shafer-Landau's attempt to resurrect a kind of Mooreanism is motivated by similar concerns expressed here. In particular Shafer-Landau finds fault with contemporary accounts of moral realism and attempts to develop his own account free from the defects he finds in others.

The chief aim of this dissertation is to argue that the standard account of moral realism implicitly assumes a false dichotomy. There is another option for moral realists besides the analytic and synthetic ones currently offered. Before providing the details of this third option, however, it is important to see some of the shortcomings of the analytic and synthetic accounts.

2. From Moore's OQA to A Posteriori Moral Naturalism

In order to be a moral realist one must be a naturalist, non-naturalist or a supernaturalist. If G.E. Moore is correct, moral naturalism is a non-starter. Moore's Open Question Argument (OQA) aimed to show that no naturalistic definition of a moral term is possible. Since analytic moral naturalism and analytic moral supernaturalism, which claim that the definition of 'good' is both analytic and purely descriptive, appeared to be the only options for the moral naturalist and supernaturalist these versions of moral realism looked doomed. Hence, if one opts for moral realism, then one must be a non-naturalist. But non-naturalism falls prey to a host of objections which have convinced most that non-naturalistic moral realism is plainly false.[11] Hence, given the soundness of the OQA, moral realism is false.

Through the work of Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam, a plausible semantics for synthetic property identities was developed.[12] Moral naturalists attempted to appropriate

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[11]The main objections to non-natural moral realism are epistemological and metaphysical. Since I do not discuss non-natural moral realism in this dissertation, I will not present the main objections to it. However, in chapters two and five I do present some semantic reasons for believing that Moore's version of non-natural moral realism fails.

[12]Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of "Meaning",' in *Mind, Language and Reality, Philosophical Papers* 2, 215-271. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

this work in order to show that the nature of goodness is entirely natural but cannot be known *a priori*. Hence, it is possible, according to their theory, to provide a definition of 'good' that is purely descriptive but *not* analytic. If successful, a version of moral naturalism emerges that avoids the OQA. To date, Richard Boyd's "How to be a Moral Realist" is the most detailed account of a semantics for 'good' that attempts to show that like 'tiger', 'water' and other natural kind terms, 'good' may refer to a property or kind that can be synthetically identified with a natural property.[13] In the next section I argue that Boyd's account fails.[14]

2.1. Moore's OQA, Boyd's Response and Trouble

The motivation behind moral realists' turn towards the work of Kripke and Putnam comes primarily from G.E. Moore's Open Question Argument. Here is a reconstruction of Moore's main argument: Either goodness is simple or goodness is complex.[15] If goodness is complex, then analysis should reveal its constituents. But

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[13]Richard Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, 181-228. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 181-228.

[14]By arguing that synthetic moral naturalism fails, I am in agreement with Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons who argue for the same conclusion in a series of papers. "New Wave Moral Realism Meets Moral Twin Earth," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 16 (1990-91): 447-465; "Troubles on Moral Twin Earth: Moral Queerness Revived," *Synthese* 92, (1992): 221-260; "Troubles for New Wave Moral Semantics: The 'Open Question Argument' Revived," *Philosophical Papers* 21, (1992): 153-175; "From Moral Realism to Moral Relativism in One Easy Step," *Critica* 28, (1996): 3-39; "Copping Out on Moral Twin Earth," *Synthese* 124, (2000): 139-152. However, my arguments for the same conclusion are, as far as I can tell, completely independent of theirs. Thus, if their arguments fail (which a number of philosophers have suggested), mine may still do the trick.

[15]I leave off Moore's third disjunct, namely "'good' is meaningless" in order to keep things relatively simple and because adding it does nothing to change the purpose of the chapter.

analysis does not reveal the constituents of goodness. Hence, goodness is not complex. The OQA is Moore's defense of the minor premise. Any identification of the property goodness with some other property (i.e. goodness = *F*) will always leave it as an open question whether the other property is indeed good. But since property identifications are a matter of analysis and if goodness is in fact identical with *F*, the question "is *F* good?" should never be open. There is no property that goodness is identical with and hence goodness is not complex. Hence, goodness is simple.

Moore's conclusion that goodness is simple, unanalyzable, and knowable only through intuition has left most moral realists unsatisfied.[16] In the early 70's Kripke and Putnam put forth a new semantics that explained how synthetic property identities are possible. Kripke and Putnam supported their semantics by arguing against the then prevalent descriptivism. One of the assumptions of descriptivism is that necessary truths and *a priori* truths are co-extensive. The identity of water and H_20 appears to show that it is possible for at least some statements—i.e. water is H_20—to be necessarily true but not knowable *a priori*. This advance opened the way for moral realists to respond to the OQA.

If synthetic property identities are possible with respect to natural kinds, then if 'good' is a natural kind term (or something like one), it may be that good = *F* is necessary but not knowable *a priori*. Thus, the OQA is unsound since one of its assumptions—property identifications are a matter of analysis—is false. Richard Boyd's semantics for 'good' argues just that. According to Boyd

> The reference of a term is established by causal connections of the right sort between the use of the term and (instances of) its referent. … *Roughly*, and for

[16]Not to mention Moore's conclusion has been grist for the anti-realists mill.

> nondegenerate cases, a term *t* refers to a kind (property, relation, etc.) *k* just in case there exist causal mechanisms whose tendency is to bring it about, over time, that what is predicated of the term *t* will be approximately true of *k* (excuse the blurring of the use-mention distinction). Such mechanisms will typically include the existence of procedures which are approximately accurate for recognizing members or instances of *k* (at least for easy cases) and which relevantly govern the use of *t*, the social transmission of certain relevantly approximately true beliefs regarding *k*, formulated as claims about *t* (again excuse the slight to the use-mention distinction), a pattern of deference to experts on *k* with respect to the use of *t*, etc. When relations of this sort obtain, we may think of the properties of *k* as regulating the use of *t* (via such causal relations), and we may think of what is said using *t* as providing us with socially coordinated *epistemic access* to *k*; *t* refers to *k* (in nondegenerate cases) just in case the socially coordinated use of *t* provides significant epistemic access to *k*, and not to other kinds (properties, etc).[17]

Boyd's semantic account for moral terms attempts to establish that moral terms, like natural kind terms, are rigid designators and are thus subject to the causal theory of reference (CTR). A term t is a rigid designator just in case t refers to the same thing in every possible world.[18] If, for example, 'good' is not a rigid designator, then 'good' refers to different properties at different times or in different possible worlds. In other words, 'good' would not refer to a kind that causally regulates the use of 'good.' The resulting theory would be a form of moral relativism which is not compatible with moral realism.

Rigidity and CTR are also needed in order to explain how two different terms can refer to the same thing despite the fact that it is not possible to know that the terms refer to the same thing without empirical investigation. The OQA is thus blocked for terms that are both rigid and subject to CTR. CTR claims that reference can be grounded

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[17]Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," 195.

[18]The distinction between weak and strong rigid designators is not important for the purposes of this chapter.

through an initial "baptism" or "dubbing" ceremony where the referent is baptized with some general or singular term. Subsequent uses of the term—reference-borrowing—are made possible by a causal chain leading from current uses back to the original baptism. For example, our use of 'tiger' refers to all and only tigers, in part, because of some initial labeling of a tiger or group of tigers with the term 'tiger.' Furthermore, the initial baptism of tigers as 'tiger' need not have had any true descriptive content. According to Kripke, "we might … find out tigers had none of the properties by which we originally identified them."[19] The descriptions we use to fix the reference of some term are all contingently true at best. Boyd's semantic account appears to be committed to the following theses:

> CSN: *Causal semantic naturalism*: Each moral term t rigidly designates the natural property N that uniquely causally regulates the use of t by humans.[20]
>
> PCTR: *Pure Causal Theory of Reference*: Reference-grounding is determined by way of an initial baptism such that it is possible that the initial baptism of some natural kind K or individual I with term t have entirely false descriptive content; and reference-borrowing is determined by way of an appropriate causal/historical chain leading from present uses of t to the initial baptism of K or I with t.

The trouble for Boyd's account is not difficult to see. In order to avoid the force of the OQA Boyd (and others who wish to appeal to synthetic property identities) has to appeal to the possibility that 'good' refers to some natural property N, without the descriptive content of 'good' uniquely determining a referent. If the descriptive content

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[19]Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 121.

[20]CSN is from Horgan and Timmons.

of 'good' uniquely determines a referent, then the nature of the referent will be known *a priori* and it will be possible to run the OQA. This suggests that Boyd would accept PCTR. From these commitments we can construct the following argument:

1. If t is a kind term susceptible to PCTR, then the nature of the referent of t is only discoverable empirically.
2. If the nature of the referent of t is only discoverable empirically, then it is possible for the nature of the referent of t to have the same extension as the referent of some other kind term that falls within the scope of PCTR.
3. Hence, if t is a kind term susceptible to PCTR, then it is possible for the nature of the referent of t to have the same extension as the referent of some other kind term that falls within the scope of PCTR.

Assume that 'good' is a kind term that falls within the scope of PCTR. The nature of goodness is thus only discoverable empirically. Given 2 it is possible that the nature of goodness is the same as the nature of badness or rightness or pleasantness or … (assuming, as seems perfectly permissible, that if 'good' is a kind term susceptible to PCTR then the others may be as well). But it is absurd to suppose that the nature of goodness could be the same as the nature of badness. It may not be absurd on some theories of morality to identify the nature of goodness with the nature of rightness or pleasantness but according to other theories such identities are absurd. The point is that once we allow that 'good' is a kind term that can be understood according to PCTR the theorizing involved in moral philosophy is a waste of time.[21]

[21]See Torin Alter and Russell Daw, "Free Acts and Robot Cats," *Philosophical Studies* 102 (2001): 345-357. Alter and Daw construct a similar argument directed towards a different target.

This objection assumes a pure version of CTR. PCTR has recently come under scrutiny. Many philosophers now reject PCTR, replacing it with a hybrid theory of reference according to which true descriptions must be a part of reference-grounding.[22] In the next section I present the hybrid theory and a revised version of Boyd's semantic account. I argue that the revised version also fails as a semantic account for moral terms.

2.2. The Hybrid Theory and The Moral Qua-Problem

According to the pure causal theory of reference singular terms and some general terms are capable of referring without either the reference-grounder or reference-borrower having any correct descriptive content in mind. PCTR is implausible not only with respect to moral terms but with respect to non-moral terms as well. For any naming ceremony, the referent is a member of numerous kinds (natural and non-natural). If the term is supposed to pick out the species (in the case of natural kind terms) or the individual (in the case of proper names) and nothing else, then reference-grounding must include at least some correct descriptive content. If reference-grounding does not include any correct descriptive content, then the term could refer to any of the numerous kinds of which the referent is a member. For example, S comes into contact with members of some species. S baptizes these members as 'tigers.' According to PCTR S's initial baptism refers to all and only tigers. But S's initial confrontation with tigers was also a confrontation with cats, mammals, animals, time slices of tigers, individual tigers, etc. How is it that S's baptism of the members of the kind tigers with 'tiger' is a baptism of all and only tigers and not cats, or mammals, or animals, or etc.? The fact that members

[22]See Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny, *Language and Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999).

of natural kinds belong to an infinite number of kinds—both natural and gerrymandered—suggests that PCTR is, as it stands, incomplete. Nothing in PCTR seems to rule out the possibility that S's initial baptism was a baptism of a different kind or even a disjunction of more than one kind. This objection to PCTR is now called the qua-problem. We need an account of reference-grounding for 'tiger' that gets the extension of the term right. That is, we need an account of S's initial baptism that explains how S managed to refer to tigers qua tigers and not tigers qua cat or qua mammal or etc.

The most common answer to the qua-problem is a hybrid theory where PCTR is replaced with something like the following:

> HCTR: *Hybrid Causal Theory of Reference*: Reference-grounding is determined by way of an initial baptism, but it is not possible that the initial baptism of some natural kind K or individual I with term t have entirely false descriptive content—the initial baptizer(s) of K or I with t must have some correct description of K or I in mind; and reference-borrowing is determined by way of an appropriate causal/historical chain leading from present uses of t to the initial baptism of K or I with t.

The only difference between HCTR and PCTR is that the hybrid account states that the initial baptizer must have some correct descriptive content in mind. HCTR appears to be capable of handling the qua-problem for singular and natural kind terms.

S refers to tigers qua tigers and not qua cats because S has some correct description of the members of the species that are before her that picks out tigers but not cats or animals, or mammals, etc. What exactly the description that S has in mind when

baptizing the members of the species before her with the natural kind term 'tiger' is a matter of some dispute.[23] For our purposes, what is important is not the exact nature of the description but rather that some kind of description is needed.

The fact that PCTR assumes that baptizers can have completely false descriptive content in mind when baptizing gave rise to some potentially absurd consequences for Boyd's semantic account. HCTR blocks those consequences. We can amend Boyd's account.

> CSN*: *Causal semantic naturalism**: Each moral term t rigidly designates the natural property N that uniquely causally regulates the use of t by humans and when N is baptized t by S, S must have in mind some correct description of N.

The additional clause will block some of the absurd consequences, but it will not solve all of the problems.

It is important to keep in mind that Boyd's semantic account is a response to the OQA and like nearly every moral naturalistic account it assumes that the prospects for defending analytic moral naturalism are bleak. Consequently, the descriptive content that S has in mind when baptizing N with 'good' had better not fall prey to the OQA. In other words, when S baptizes N with 'good' the description D that S has in mind must be such that all N things (i.e. all good things) are D. The converse does not hold. If the

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[23]Perhaps S must have the description '. . . is a species' in mind. This seems doubtful. As Richard Miller points out it shouldn't be necessary to have '. . . is a species' in mind in order to successfully refer to tigers qua tigers. Surely the initial baptizer could be ignorant about the difference between species and genera and nevertheless succeed in referring to tigers. It may be that there just isn't a plausible solution to the qua-problem that isn't committed to a robust form of descriptivism. If that is correct, then so much the worse for Boyd's account of moral naturalism. See Richard Miller, "A Purely Causal Solution to One of the Qua-Problems for the Causal Theory of Reference," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 70, (1992): 425-34.

converse—all things that satisfy D are N (i.e. good)—held as well, then the resulting biconditional—D iff N—would rule out the possibility of a synthetic property identity. The OQA enters straightforwardly at this point. The most that the baptizer can hope for then is that all instances of the thing baptized are members of the D class (i.e. the class of things that satisfy the description). If it turns out that some things with N are not in the D class, then it will be possible to run a slightly weaker version of the OQA. For example, if S baptizes the thing before her with 'tiger' and S has in mind the description 'quadruped', then it should turn out that every tiger is a member of the quadruped class. Whatever fails to satisfy the description is not a tiger. The fact that there are tigers that are not quadrupeds shows that the description was incorrect. According to HCTR S must baptize with a correct description in mind. Thus, if we can legitimately wonder whether all the things that fall under the baptizing term satisfy the description, we have good evidence that the description will not work to secure reference.

The situation is even more difficult when it comes to specifying the correct description used by S when baptizing a natural property with a moral term. If the descriptive content that S has in mind is *philosophically* contentious, the purported identity between 'good' and N cannot be established until the philosophical debates reach a conclusion. Suppose, for example, that S baptizes N as good with the description "…results in pleasure" in mind. It should follow that every subsequent use of 'good'—cases of reference-borrowing—also satisfies this description, just as every subsequent use of 'tiger' should satisfy the description "…is a species." But, of course, there is widespread disagreement about whether uses of 'good' must always satisfy the description "…results in pleasure." A philosophically controversial description used

during the reference-grounding and carried into reference-borrowing threatens to result in a misunderstanding of the nature of the referent. Those who do not think that 'good' always falls under the description "…results in pleasure" will not accept any subsequent empirical investigation into the nature of goodness that relies on the description "…results in pleasure." Thus, before the *a posteriori* identity between goodness and N is established the philosophical debates regarding the descriptions used to pick out goodness (and thus secure reference) need to be settled. Indeed, the descriptions used in the naming ceremony must be both *a priori* and platitudinous.[24] Trouble is lurking near by.

Remember that for any naming ceremony, the referent is a member of numerous kinds (natural and non-natural). Take the purported referent of 'good'. Whatever the purported referent of 'good' is that referent will be a member of numerous kinds. To see this simply take any determinate and consider its determinable or take any species and consider its kind and so on.[25] In order to get the reference relation right and avoid the qua-problem the initial baptizer must have had some correct descriptive content in mind. But what descriptive content could the initial baptizer have had in mind that avoids the OQA by being both *a priori* and not philosophically contentious?

One suggestion might be that the descriptive content that S had in mind when baptizing N with 'good' was simply "… is an action." Does "… is an action" pass the above tests? No. It is false that all things that are good are actions (or at the very least it is philosophical contentious that all things that are good are actions). Furthermore,

[24]*A priori* in the sense that a competent user of the term could come to recognize them as being true.

[25]For example red falls under the determinable color and tigers are members of the cat genus.

actions fall under various other kinds and it is implausible to think that all good things will also fall under these other kinds. For example actions are happenings, events, non-substantial, etc. Is it at all plausible to think that all good things are happenings, events, non-substantial, etc.?[26] The OQA is applicable to each of these. For just about any descriptive content we imagine the initial baptizer to have in mind the problem is that descriptive content falls prey to our new version of the OQA and is thus philosophically contentious.

There may be a way out of the above problem. Instead of looking for some descriptive content that the initial baptizer had in mind which secures reference to goodness and only goodness, perhaps we should consider the possibility that there are conceptual constraints on our use of 'good'. For example, the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral and the action-guidingness of the moral may be conceptually necessary truths that constrain our use of 'good'. Flout these in your use of 'good' and you are not a competent user of the term.[27] It is important to see exactly what this response concedes. There are *a priori* truths—indeed analytic truths—about the nature of goodness. In other words, the response slides us far closer to descriptivism than those committed to an account of the nature of goodness in terms of synthetic property identities may be willing to allow. Furthermore, it may be that careful attention to our *a*

[26]Note that in the case of tigers and the description "… is a species" used to ground reference, it is plausible to suppose that whatever kinds species fall under tigers fall under them as well.

[27]Of course both of these are in fact philosophically contentious. James Griffin raises some interesting worries about moral supervenience in *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). I raise some concerns about moral supervenience in "Moral/Natural Supervenience Refuted" (unpublished manuscript). The action-guidingness of evaluative utterances is questioned by judgment externalists.

priori knowledge of what goodness is will result in determining the referent of 'good'. If this possibility is open, then while *a posteriori* knowledge may help in securing reference, it will not be needed. If *a posteriori* knowledge is not needed, then we do not have a synthetic property identity. So granting that we have some *a priori* knowledge of the nature of goodness threatens the entire project of avoiding the OQA by claiming that the nature of goodness cannot be known *a priori*.

Perhaps my objections against the *a posteriori* moral naturalist are not decisive. Simply conceding that we must have some *a priori* knowledge of the nature of goodness does not imply that the entire nature of goodness is knowable *a priori*. After all it does not follow from the fact that since we must know at least part of the natures of tigers, water and gold *a priori* (given HCTR) that it is possible to know the complete natures of tigers, water and gold *a priori*.

The reason the inference from 'S knows part of the nature of K *a priori'* to 'it is possible that S know all of the nature of K *a priori'* does not follow in general has do with the fact that the natures of natural kinds are microscopic structures. Since the natures of natural kinds are microscopic structures we know that the only way to discover them is via empirical investigation. That is, we know *a priori* that if the essence of K is a microscopic structure, then the essence of K cannot be known *a priori*. But do have any reason to think that the essence of goodness is similar? Not only do we not have good reasons to think that the essence of goodness is similar in structure to the essence of natural kinds, we actually have good reason to suspect that the essence of goodness is not at all similar.

The multiple realizability of goodness suggests that there is not some microscopic structure that is the essence of goodness. If there were such a structure, then it is plausible to suppose that goodness could not be multiply realizable in the way that it is. But since goodness is multiply realizable, it does not have some microscopic structure that is only knowable via empirical investigation. Thus, we have good reason to believe that goodness is not a natural kind term and hence that goodness does not have a natural essence.

Granting that there are conceptual constraints on our use of 'good' does not help solve the above worries. The conceptual constraints must not determine the nature of the referent. Thus, it must be the case that the nature of goodness is partially known at the time of reference-grounding and that it is not possible to know the nature of goodness entirely apart from empirical investigation. But for the reasons canvassed above it is implausible to suppose that the nature of goodness is in any way like the nature of natural kinds.

We have seen that attempts to argue that 'good' is like a natural kind term face serious, perhaps insurmountable problems. For the moment assume that the project is able to get off the ground. That is, assume that the conceptual constraints for 'good' are all worked out and the conceptual constraints clearly do not determine the nature of the referent. Should we conclude that synthetic moral naturalism is at least partially vindicated? I do not think we should. The reason that synthetic moral naturalism would not be vindicated is because a more serious qua-problem can be raised.

In order to see the more serious qua-problem consider the fact that every *morally* good thing—every good person, act, institution, state of affairs, etc—instantiates *non-*

moral goodness as well. Good persons are alive, good acts are complete, good institutions are working, good states of affairs are obtaining.[28] Moral goodness is thus a subset of non-moral goodness. Every time the property of moral goodness is instantiated, the property of non-moral goodness is instantiated as well.[29] In order for the synthetic moral naturalist to account for this feature she must claim that the initial baptizer had in mind moral goodness and not non-moral goodness when she baptized N with 'good'. If she did not, then the moral-qua problem looms. But what exactly is the difference, and is it at all realistic to think that initial baptizers had the difference in mind?

Perhaps the difference between moral goodness and non-moral goodness is that the former is concerned with persons and the latter is not. But persons instantiate non-moral goodness. To repeat, for any instance of *moral* goodness, an instance of *non-moral* goodness is present. This is why the moral qua problem is much more serious than the qua problem for natural kinds.[30]

Synthetic moral naturalism does not appear to be sustainable. Moore's OQA shows us that analytic moral naturalism is implausible. If these are the only two live options for the naturalistic moral realist, naturalistic moral realism appears implausible.

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[28]If you do not like my examples of non-moral goodness, I believe it will not take much effort to supply your own.

[29]I am assuming for the sake of argument that there is such a thing as the property of goodness and the property of non-moral goodness. Indeed, I am assuming for the sake of argument that we understand the difference between moral and non-moral goodness.

[30]Another response to the moral qua-problem is to take the initial baptism of N with 'good' as not differentiating between moral and non-moral goodness. That is, S baptizes N with good and S intends to baptize all and only morally and non-morally good things. The problem here is that S's baptism is clearly *not* a baptism of a natural kind with a natural essence. If it is not, then synthetic moral naturalism is implausible from the start.

Appearances are misleading. This section (and the one to follow) is meant to provide moral realists with the motivation to reconsider one of its most pervasive assumptions: that goodness is a property susceptible to Kripkean analysis. If it is possible to be a moral realist and deny that goodness is such a property, then it is possible for there to be a version of moral realism that is left completely untouched by the above concerns. With *a posteriori* moral naturalism behind us we will direct our attention to *a posteriori* moral supernaturalism to see if it fares any better.

3. Adams' Moral Supernaturalism

In *Finite and Infinite Goods* Robert Adams argues that the proposition expressed by "goodness is faithfully resembling God" is *a posteriori* necessary.[31] He appeals to Kripkean/Putnamian developments for the semantics of 'good'. Adams calls moral theories that endorse the view that "goodness is faithfully resembling God" versions of theistic Platonism. Yet, upon inspection of Adams' argument it is evident that a competent user of 'good' could know that goodness is faithfully resembling God without anything like empirical investigation (that is, a competent user of 'good' could know *a priori* that goodness is faithfully resembling God). If the details of Adams' account are correct, then "goodness is faithfully resembling God" is *a priori* necessary, not *a posteriori* necessary. Thus, Adams' appeal to Kripkean/Putnamian developments fails. According to Adams, if theistic Platonism implies that the nature of goodness can be known *a priori*, then theistic Platonism is implausible. In this section I argue that Adams' version of theistic Platonism implies that the nature of goodness can be known *a*

[31]Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

priori. Hence, Adams' version is implausible. Adams' version is by far the most developed version of supernaturalistic *a posteriori* moral realism. If his version fails, it is safe to conclude that all such accounts are likely to fail.

3.1. The Theory

Adams begins *Finite and Infinite Goods* by characterizing the nature of the Good. In connection with a Platonic conception of the Good Adams notes that this notion, "is not *usefulness*, or merely instrumental goodness. It is not *well-being*, or what is good for a person. It is rather the goodness of that which is worthy of love or admiration."[32] Adams states that he will be pursuing a version of theistic Platonism, the view that, "The role that belongs to the Form of the Good in Plato's thought is assigned to God, and the goodness of other things is understood in terms of their standing in some relation, usually conceived as a sort of resemblance, to God."[33]

In the section titled "The Semantics and the Metaphysics of Value" Adams relies on Kripkean/Putnamian developments in order to dispel what once was considered an insurmountable obstacle facing a Platonistic conception of the Good. If metaethics is meaning-analysis and nothing more, then theistic Platonism is quite implausible since it is clear that the meaning of goodness is not 'faithfully resembles God'.[34] With the emergence of Kripkean/Putnamian analyses for certain expressions we can separate the meaning of a word from the nature of the thing the word signifies. Hence, although the meaning of goodness is not 'faithfully resembling God' this now poses no threat to

[32]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods,* 13.

[33]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 14.

[34]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 15.

theistic Platonism since in general it is no longer thought to be the case that the meaning of some term t is or reveals the nature of the referent of t. In other words, given plausible theses in the philosophy of language, it is possible to claim that the *nature* of goodness is distinct from and not revealed in the *meaning* of goodness. Adams spells out some of the details of the Kripkean/Putnamian account as follows:

> This approach has been developed most famously with respect to natural kinds. It is the nature of water to be H_20, it is claimed; and the property of being water is, necessarily, identical with the property of being H_20. But the word 'water' does not *mean* H_20. What I must know, at least implicitly, about water in order to understand the sense of the word 'water', and so to be a competent user of the word, is that if there is a single chemical nature shared by most of the stuff that I and other English-speakers have been calling "water," then, of necessity, all and only stuff of that nature is water. The causal relations between concrete samples of water, on the one hand, and users and uses of the word 'water', on the other hand, serve to "fix the reference" of the word – that is, to determine which stuff the word names. But the nature of water is to be discovered in the water and not in our concepts.[35]

At least three important points emerge from this passage. First, in order for the claim that 'necessarily, water is H_20' to be true, the following necessary *a priori* claim must be true as well: 'if water has a certain type of chemical nature, then necessarily that chemical nature is water'. Second, the proposition expressed by 'necessarily, water is H_20' is only knowable *a posteriori*. This is crucial to Adams' account, since if it were knowable *a priori*, the nature of water would not have to be discovered *in the water*. If the nature of water could be discovered without investigating the water, then the distinction between meaning and nature collapses. The meaning of the term would reveal the nature of the referent. Third, Adams draws attention to the causal theory of reference. As we have seen, according to CTR the referent of a term is fixed by some causal connection between the referent and users of the term. So, samples of water help to fix

[35]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 15.

the reference of the term 'water', but the descriptions used to fix the reference do not reveal the nature of the referent.[36] Generalizing from the water example we have the following three claims:

(1) A necessary proposition knowable only *a posteriori* is based on a necessary proposition knowable *a priori*.

(2) There are some necessary propositions knowable only *a posteriori*

(3) The causal theory of reference explains the connection between some thing x and our use of a word T for x without making it necessary that our use of T for x includes the nature of x.

Adams claims that applying these developments in the philosophy of language to metaethics affords surprising results.

According to Adams the above account of the necessary *a posteriori* together with a more general account of reference fixing than the one provided by the causal theory of reference is applicable to at least some ethical terms. He writes:

> I am proposing that we do use ethical terms in an analogous way [analogous to what the causal theory of reference says with respect to natural kind terms], which enables us to distinguish between the semantics of ethical discourse and what we may call the metaphysical part of ethical theory. Not that good, for example, is a natural kind; but the meaning of the word 'good' may be related to the nature of the good in something like the way that has been proposed for natural kinds.[37]

Adams' proposal is to use the new semantics in order to separate the semantics of ethical discourse from the metaphysics of ethical theory. As noted already, doing so is necessary for the plausibility of theistic Platonism.

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[36]As we have seen the qua-problem puts significant pressure on this point.

[37]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 16.

Adams is quick to point out disanalogies between the causal theory of reference with respect to natural kinds and its relation to goodness. He states, "As good is not a natural kind in the way that water is, the meaning of the word 'good' does not direct us to anything like a chemical structure. And we cannot assume that causal interactions with concrete samples will fix the reference of 'good' in the same way that the reference of 'water' is fixed."[38] Hence, Adams wants to free his theory from a commitment to (3). But now we are in need of some other story that accounts for the connection between our uses of 'good' and the things that are good.

Adams attempts to fill this gap by providing a "general pattern for the relations of natures to meanings where the nature is not given by the meaning."[39] According to Adams what is true of both natural kind terms and ethical terms is that their meanings indicate a role that the referent of the terms is to play. "What is given by the meanings, or perhaps more broadly by the use of the words, is a role that the nature is to play. If there is a single candidate that best fills the role, that will be the nature of the thing."[40] The task given to the ethicist is to determine the meanings of ethical terms and thus determine the role that the referent of ethical terms plays. Adams does just this.[41]

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[38]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 16.

[39]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 16.

[40]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 16.

[41]Note that Adams' replacement for the causal theory looks strikingly similar to a full blown descriptivism. Aristotle is whoever satisfies all or most or many of the definite descriptions. Similarly, good is whatever satisfies all or most or many of the roles revealed by our use of the term 'good'. If this is right and Adams replaces (3) with descriptivism, then there is no way for him to support (1) and (2). The nature of a thing will be its nominal essence.

The first role, according to Adams, that is indicated by the meaning of the word 'good' (where goodness is understood as excellence) is that the bearer of this property cannot be a state of affairs. "A good candidate for the role of goodness in the sense of excellence … will not be a property of states of affairs."[42] The second role revealed by the meaning of 'goodness' is that goodness is treated as a property of things possession of which is independent of creaturely cognizers. This implies that in at least one context of use 'good' is best understood realistically. Adams recognizes that the semantics of goodness does not entail the truth of realism. His claim is simply meant to express the idea that if a candidate exists which allows for the truth of realism then this candidate fits the semantic data better than a candidate that does not allow for the truth of realism.[43]

The next role, mentioned by Adams, revealed by the meaning of 'goodness', is that the Good is pursued as an object of Eros. "Eros … prize[s] its object as intrinsically valuable. Being at least an object of Eros is an important part of the role that the excellent has in our lives and that is therefore assigned to it by our language."[44] Furthermore, the Good is not only pursued as an object of Eros; the Good is also admired. Indeed, according to Adams, the pursuit of the Good "…arises from the admiration."[45] In response to an objection to his claim that the Good is admired and pursued as an object of Eros, Adams uncovers another role that is assigned to goodness by the meaning of the term. The objection is that we make mistakes about what is good in that we often pursue

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[42]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 17.

[43]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 18.

[44]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 19.

[45]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 19.

and admire what is not, in fact, good. Adams grants the point but notes that his theory denies that the Good is to be analyzed in terms of desire. Rather the analysis goes the other way. Our desires are to be understood as responding to what we take to be good and this cannot be a wholly unreliable process. "Goodness is therefore an object not only of admiration and desire, but also of *recognition*, at least commonly and to some degree."[46]

Thus far we have uncovered a number of roles, revealed by the meaning of the term 'good', that the referent of 'good' must satisfy. Adams goes on to indicate a few others. Good things will be related to the Good in a number of ways. In particular they will not be against the Good. While being for the Good, desiring the Good and loving the Good may be appropriate ways to understand how persons relate to the Good without being against it, being for the Good is not broad enough to include every excellence. Thus, Adams claims that "[r]esemblance to the Good is a more plausible candidate."[47]

With the above roles in mind Adams argues that the best candidate for filling the roles "…is a person or importantly like a person."[48] He writes:

> …[M]ost of the excellences that are most important to us, and of whose value we are most confident are excellences of persons or of qualities or actions or works or lives or stories of persons. So if excellence consists in resembling or imaging a being that is the Good itself, nothing is more important to the role of Good itself than that persons and their properties should be able to resemble or image it. That is obviously likelier to be possible if the Good itself is a person or importantly like a person.[49]

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[46]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 20.

[47]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 28.

[48]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 42.

[49]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 42.

Adams next argues that Anselm's ontological argument may be recast as a metaethical argument showing that the Good must actually exist. Thus, the roles revealed to us by the meaning of goodness imply that the single best candidate that satisfies all of the roles is the Good itself, which is a person that actually exists.

Earlier I highlighted three claims involved in Adams' treatment of *a posteriori* necessities that involve natural kind terms. While I think that Adams' account of goodness is problematic on all three scores, the most significant problems arise in connection with Adams' attempt to satisfy the second claim and so I will focus on it.

3.2. Adams and Thesis (2)

Thesis (2) states: There are some necessary propositions knowable only *a posteriori*. According to Adams one necessary proposition knowable only *a posteriori* is that goodness is faithfully resembling God. Adams' account does not provide any indication that this proposition can *only* be known *a posteriori*. Indeed, his account seems to imply that the proposition expressed by "goodness is faithfully resembling God" is knowable *a priori*.

The roles revealed by our use of 'goodness' point us towards the nature of the thing that satisfies the roles. That is, if S uses the term 'good' competently, then S will know, or be in a position to know, the roles indicated by her use of 'good.' But if S knows the roles indicated by goodness, it is possible that S discover the nature of the thing satisfying these roles. Hence, a competent user of goodness will be able to discover the nature of the thing satisfying these roles. Hence, with respect to goodness the semantics reveals the metaphysics. According to Adams, "Platonist theories of the Good

… are not very plausible as accounts of what is ordinarily *meant* by 'good'."[50] It turns out that if Adams is right about this, then his theory is not very plausible.

A defense of the above objection is in order. Why think that the roles revealed by our use of goodness determine the nature of the thing that satisfies them and thus that Adams' account fails to show that empirical investigation is necessary to determine the best candidate for satisfying the roles revealed by our use of goodness? Well, in one sense this question hardly needs asking. What empirical investigation could be necessary to determine the best candidate for satisfying the roles (assuming for the sake of argument that the roles Adams uncovers are correct) revealed by our use of goodness if it turns out that the best candidate is God? If we grant that the roles provided by Adams are the right ones, then it seems that God is indeed the best candidate that satisfies them. In the presentation of the roles revealed by the meaning of 'goodness' we saw that Adams is able to arrive at the conclusion (based on inference to the best explanation) that the best candidate for satisfying the roles is an actually existing person. This is, of course, the conclusion that Adams wants. But it is not arrived at in the way Adams needs. If Adams is to keep the semantics of 'good' separate from the metaphysics of goodness as excellence, then some empirical investigation must be required in order to determine the reference of the roles. Adams provides none. He states, "A theistic theory of the nature of excellence obviously presupposes or implies the existence of God." [51] What should not be obvious, for Adams' theory at least, is that an account of the meaning or roles indicated by our use of goodness implies the nature of the referent as a matter of

[50]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 15.

[51]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 28.

conceptual analysis. Yet, according to Adams, all of the roles taken together imply just that.

That the roles revealed by the meaning of 'goodness' imply the nature of the referent can be seen from the discussion earlier of Adams' more general theory of reference. After empirical investigation, the best candidate to satisfy the roles indicated by our use of 'water' turns out to be H_20. Thus, empirical investigation is needed in order to determine the nature of the referent of 'water'. The semantics of 'water' is separate from the metaphysics of water because empirical investigation is required to discover the nature of the referent of 'water'. According to Adams, the best candidate that satisfies the roles indicated by our use of 'goodness' turns out to be faithful resemblance to God. However, Adams does not rely on empirical investigation when he argues that "faithfully resembling God" is the best candidate to fill the appropriate roles revealed by our use of 'good'. Rather, the fact that "faithfully resembling God" best fills the relevant roles is discovered simply by considering what would have to be the case given the roles indicated by our use of 'goodness'. Notice that this is true even if no *a priori* proof for God's existence is possible. If it turns out that the only way to know that God exists is to experience Him or aspects of creation, it does not follow that experience is necessary to know that the nature of goodness is faithfully resembling God. As long as we already possess the concept goodness and the concept God, then given the roles indicated by our use of goodness we can know *a priori* that the nature of goodness is faithfully resembling God. Nothing Adams has said, as far as I can tell, suggests otherwise. Thus, despite Adams' attempt to provide a general theory of reference that covers both natural kind terms and 'goodness' the fact that the nature of the former must

be discovered empirically does not in any way imply that the nature of the latter must be discovered empirically as well. Two brief examples from Adams' text provide evidence for my claim that the connection he draws is *a priori* and not *a posteriori*.

Consider, for example, Adams discussion of Anselm's ontological argument. He suggests that the argument "may indeed be best interpreted in a metaethical context, as an argument that supreme Good must be understood as an existing being and moreover as existing necessarily."[52] This is a fascinating suggestion, but it only hurts Adams' case for his *a posteriori* necessity.[53] The metaethical version of the ontological argument shows that the supreme Good must exist. Thus, one can know *a priori* that the supreme Good must exist.

A second example is Adams' argument for the implausibility of thinking that the being that satisfies the roles of goodness is merely possible. He writes, "…the Good is a being that actually appreciates things and has actual aims and actual causal influence on other things."[54] The roles of appreciation and aiming and casual influence are used here to argue in an *a priori* fashion that the Good is an actual personal being. Not only do we not need to engage in empirical investigation to discover the nature of goodness, we also do not need to engage in empirical investigation to discover if that nature is exemplified. Competent possession of the concept of goodness thus reveals the nature of the referent as well as the fact that it is exemplified.

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[52]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 42-43.

[53]Adams notes that Iris Murdoch also suggests something very similar.

[54]Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 44.

There are at least two possible responses to give to my objection. First, Adams could amend his claim that the meaning of goodness does not reveal the nature of the referent. Instead he could claim that the meaning does reveal the nature and thus that a grasp of the concept goodness includes grasping that goodness is faithfully resembling God. According to this amendment the proposition that goodness is faithfully resembling God is necessary *a priori*.

The difficulty with this response is that it has the unwelcome consequence that John the atheist and Steve the theist are not talking about the same thing when they talk about goodness. Steve does and John does not believe that the concept goodness includes the concept faithfully resembling God. Analogously, if our use of water revealed (before the empirical discovery that water is H_20) its nature, then if John disbelieved in the existence of H_20 but Steve did not, then John and Steve would not be talking about the same thing. Or we would have the equally unwelcome consequence that Steve does and John does not have a competent grasp of the meaning of goodness. This generalizes to the claim that theists do and non-theists do not have a competent grasp of the meaning of goodness. Analogously, if our use of water indicated its nature, then if John disbelieved in H_20, but Steve did not, then Steve is a competent user of water and John is not. Either way this response has unwelcome consequences.

Second, Adams could amend his claim that it is *a posteriori* necessary that goodness is faithfully resembling God. In its place he could put that it is *a posteriori* contingent that goodness is faithfully resembling God. If it is *a posteriori* contingent that goodness is faithfully resembling God, then in some other world the claim is false. The difficulty with replacing *a posteriori* necessity with *a posteriori* contingency is that it

seems to have the unwelcome consequence that a world qualitatively identical to our own is such that "goodness is faithfully resembling God" is false. So why think that it is true in this world? Notice that this consequence follows even if God is a necessary being. If "goodness is faithfully resembling God" is *a posteriori* contingent, the relation between goodness and faithfully resembling God is contingent. Nothing follows about the modal status of the relata. Thus, if Adams makes the amendment I suggest, then he would have to hold that there is a world such that God exists in it and goodness exists in it but the identity between goodness and God does not hold. But now it is a mystery as to why the identity holds in this world. Any appeal to abduction would equally apply in the other world since it is qualitatively like our own.

It is safe to conclude that Adams' attempt to identify goodness with resemblance to God fails. Given a grasp of the concept goodness and a grasp of the concept God one can discover without any empirical investigation that goodness is some sort of resemblance to God (granting of course that Adams' account of the meaning of goodness is basically correct). Thus, Adams' attempt to appropriate new developments in the philosophy of language fails. Adams' version of moral supernaturalism cannot then save moral realism from the grip of Moore's OQA.

Conclusion

In their current guises, both moral naturalism and moral supernaturalism rely heavily on Kripkean/Putnamian styles of analysis in order to avoid the OQA and other problems. The failures of moral naturalism and moral supernaturalism are taken by many to signal the end of moral realism. In what follows I attempt to provide the semantic and metaphysical foundation for a version of moral realism that does not rely on

Kripkean/Putnamian semantics and thus does not succumb to the problems presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Geach's Claim: Explication and Defense

At the end of chapter one I concluded that the standard ways of articulating and defending moral realism face what seem to be insurmountable obstacles. If analytic moral realism and synthetic moral realism are the only options, then moral realism is in serious trouble. In this chapter I argue that there is a third option, hitherto neglected by most moral philosophers. According to the third option, defended by P.T. Geach, 'good' and 'bad' are always attributive adjectives.[1] The attributive nature of 'good' and 'bad' reveals something important about the ontological status of their referents. Of particular interest, the attributive nature of 'good' and 'bad' reveals that their referent is not a property of the sort that falls within the scope of Kripke and Putnam's revolutions in philosophy of language and metaphysics.

In order to understand the claim that 'good' and 'bad' are always attributive I present and elaborate on an argument given by Geach. Lastly, I briefly defend Geach's claim by either refuting or neutralizing common objections. In the chapter to follow I indicate the relevance of Geach's claim to the common assumption that goodness is a property.

[1]Geach "Good and Evil."

1. Geach's Argument

Geach argues that there is a logical distinction between predicative and attributive adjectives. Sentences with predicative adjectives are of the form 'x is an A N' where it is valid to infer that 'x is an A' and 'x is an N.' For example, from 'x is a red bike' it is valid to infer that 'x is red' and 'x is a bike'. Sentences with attributive adjectives are also of the form 'x is an A N', but it is not valid to infer that 'x is an A' and 'x is an N'. For example, from 'x is a big flea' it is not valid to infer that 'x is big' and 'x is a flea'. This can be seen by noting that if such an inference were permissible it could easily be shown that 'x is a big animal' follows from 'x is a big flea', which of course it does not.[2] The following argument schemas illustrate these differences:

Splitting Test

Logically Predicative: *x* is a(n) *AN* ⊨ *x* is *A* and *x* is a(n) *N*.

Logically Attributive: *x* is a(n) *AN* ⊭ (with a slash) *x* is *A* and *x* is a(n) *N*.[3]

Thus, logically predicative adjectives pass what I will call the splitting test, while logically attributive adjectives do not.

According to Geach, 'good' is an attributive adjective. Geach reasons as follows. If 'good' were a predicative adjective then in the schema 'x is a good N' it would be permissible to infer 'x is good' and 'x is an N' just as it is permissible to infer from 'x is a red N' that 'x is red' and x is an N.' From x is a red bike we may infer that x is a red vehicle since all bikes are vehicles. But with respect to the adjective 'good' similar

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[2]'X is an A N', where A is attributive, is supposed to represent (or begin to represent) the logical form or deep structure of sentences containing attributive adjectives. Thus, a sentence of the form 'X is A' is elliptical for 'X is an A N'.

[3]I have adapted these from Mark Sainsbury, *Logical Forms: An Introduction to Philosophical Logic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 149.

inferences do not follow. From 'John is a good chemist' we cannot infer that 'John is good' and 'John is a chemist'. If we could, then it would follow from 'John is a good chemist' and 'All chemists are persons' that 'John is a good person'. Clearly this is an invalid inference.[4] Since the assumption that 'good' is a predicative adjective licenses invalid inferences, we must reject the assumption. 'Good' is not a predicative adjective.

'Bad' is attributive because, Geach claims, it is something like an *alienans* adjective. Since *alienans* adjectives are attributive and 'bad' is like an *alienans*, bad is also attributive.[5] Examples of *alienans* adjectives are 'forged', 'putative', 'alleged', and 'artificial.' The adjectives are *alienans* for at least two reasons. First, they function like attributive adjectives in that it is not valid to split the adjective and the noun. For example, it is not valid to move from 'x is a forged banknote' to 'x is forged' and 'x is a banknote', since a forged banknote is not a banknote. Second, *alienans* adjectives differ from other attributive adjectives in that statements true of an N will not necessarily be true of an N plus *alienans*. Few of the true statements about horses are true of rocking horses.[6]

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[4]Objection: From 'John is a good chemist' and 'all chemists are scientists' we may infer that 'John is a good scientist.' Reply: Consider a world W in which all and only chemists are physicists. Hence, in W all the scientists are chemists and physicists. John is a scientist. Hence, John is a chemist and a physicist. However, John is a good chemist but a bad physicist. Does it follow that John is a good scientist? I do not think it does. Even if I am wrong about this sort of example there is another kind of example in the neighborhood that does seem to work. From 'x is a good scientist' and 'x is a chemist' it does not follow that 'x is a good chemist'. x may be an average chemist but a superb physicist. However, from 'x is a red vehicle' and 'x is a bike' it does follow that x is a red bike even if x also happens to be an airplane (think of James Bond-like contraptions). See below for more discussion.

[5]This does not follow, but it is how Geach seems to move in the text.

[6]This second reason is what distinguishes *alienans* adjectives from other attributives. *Alienans* adjectives alienate the noun they modify from its normal role.

While it is not valid to infer that 'bad' is attributive from the claims that bad is *like* an *alienans* adjective and *alienans* adjectives are attributive, Geach does enough to show that 'bad' is attributive. *Alienans* adjectives have the two features spelled out in the previous paragraph—(1) it is invalid to split an *alienans* adjective from the noun it modifies and (2) what is true of the noun that the *alienans* modifies is not necessarily true of the noun plus *alienans*. These two features are sufficient for *alienans* adjectives to be in the class of attributive adjectives. Indeed, given Geach's earlier argument that the essential difference between attributive and predicative adjectives is that the latter but not the former pass the splitting test the fact that *alienans* adjectives do not pass the splitting test is sufficient for *alienans* adjectives to be in the class of attributive adjectives. Since 'bad' does not pass the splitting test it belongs to the attributive class. Geach's reference to *alienans* adjectives is beside the point.[7] Even if 'bad' does not belong to the class of *alienans* adjectives the mere fact that 'bad' does not pass the splitting test is enough to ensure that 'bad' is an attributive adjective.

[7]It's beside the point in the sense that not passing the splitting test is sufficient for inclusion in the attributive adjective class. The fact that 'bad' is more like an *alienans* than 'good' is relevant to other considerations, such as the differences between badness and goodness. I won't explore these differences here but I will note that the fact that 'bad' satisfies both features mentioned above strongly suggests that something like a privation theory of evil is implied. A bad K lacks properties or degrees of properties that a K and a good K possess. Also, notice that the following equivalence seems true: The privation theory is true if, and only if, the convertibility of goodness and being is true. If the equivalence holds, then Geach's claim that 'good' and 'bad' are essentially attributive has quite interesting implications hitherto unnoticed. I explore some of these themes in the last section of the fifth chapter.

Geach claims that these considerations show that 'good' and 'bad' are essentially attributive. That is, it is necessary that for all x, if x is good, then x is a good K.[8] Another way of stating Geach's thesis is that 'good' is a non-intersective adjective. If we think of the meaning of a predicate as a set, then intersective adjectives are those adjectives that can combine with other intersectives such that the meaning of the combination is the intersection of the two sets. For example, in 'x is a red ball' the predicate means the intersection of the set of red things with the set of things that are balls. Notice that if A and N are intersective, then it is valid to infer from 'x is A N' to 'x is A' and 'x is N.' 'Good' does not appear to behave like an intersective adjective. If it did, then the meaning of the predicate in 'x is a good man' would be the intersection of the set of good things with the set of things that are men. But this apparently assumes that from 'x is a good man' it is valid to infer 'x is good' and 'x is a man', which it is not.[9]

Furthermore, notice that if x is a red K and x is also a member of some distinct kind K*, then x is also a red K*. For example, from x is a red bike and all bikes are vehicles we may infer that x is a red vehicle. Similarly, from x is a red vehicle and x is a bike we may infer that x is a red bike. When the noun that a predicative adjective modifies belongs either to a higher-order kind or a lower-order kind the predicative adjective modifies those kinds as well. This does not hold for good Ks. From 'x is a good K' and 'x is also a member of some distinct kind K* (higher or lower-order)' it does

[8]The move from 'x is a good N' to 'x is a good K' is deliberate. I will explain the motivation below.

[9]See Paul H. Portner, *What is Meaning?: Fundamentals of Formal Semantics*, (Blackwell: Oxford, 2005).

not follow that 'x is also a good K*'. When the noun that an attributive adjective modifies belongs either to a higher-order kind or a lower-order kind it is not necessarily the case that the attributive adjective modifies those kinds as well. In general

Higher-Order and Lower-Order Kind Test

Logically Predicative: *x* is a(n) *AK* and *x* is a(n) K* ⊨ *x* is a(n) *AK**

Logically Attributive: *x* is a(n) *AK* and *x* is a(n) K* ⊨ (with a slash) *x* is a(n) *AK**

Thus, logically predicative adjectives pass what I will call the higher-order and lower-order kind test, while logically attributive adjectives do not.

2. Some Corollaries

Geach appears to think that the noun that 'good' modifies must denote something with a function or a nature. Geach expresses this point as follows: "If I do not know what hygrometers are for, I do not really know what 'hygrometer' means, and *therefore* do not really know what 'good hygrometer' means; I merely know that I could find out its meaning by finding out what hygrometers were for …."[10] Hence, in order to understand the phrase 'good x' I must know the function or essence of whatever takes the value of x. In general for instances of the claim 'x is a good K' to be intelligible, the value of K must refer to something with a function or nature.[11]

In his *The Virtues* Geach relaxes his claim that in order to understand the phrase 'good x' one must know the function of x.[12] Geach argues that it is possible to know all sorts of things that are good for humans without knowing the function of humans. For

[10]Geach, "Good and Evil," 304.

[11]The addition of nature will be explained in the chapters to follow.

[12]Peter T. Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), chapters 1 and 5.

example we know that a just government is good for humans and that temperance is good for humans without knowing what humans are for.

Geach's reasoning seems to be that since it is possible to know many things that are good for humans without knowing what humans are for, it is not necessary to know what humans are for in order to understand the statement 'x is a good human.' But this does not follow. What is needed is a premise to the effect that it is possible to understand the statement 'x is a good human' without understanding what humans are for. In the next chapter I will argue that natures and functions are intimately connected. More specifically, I will argue that in some cases the nature of a thing determines its function, while in other cases the function of a thing determines its nature. Thus, in order for Geach's new argument to go through he would have to argue that it is possible to understand the statement 'x is a good human' without understanding the nature of a human. But this seems implausible. If I do not know the nature of humans, then I do not know whether justice and temperance are good for them. Surely it is conceptually possible that Thrasymachus was right and justice is actually bad for humans.

By relaxing the claim that to understand 'x is a good K' we have to understand what K's are for Geach does point to a feature that is important. It is implausible to think that in order to understand 'x is a good K' we have to have comprehensive understanding of the function or nature of Ks. A limited understanding or a partial/incomplete understanding of the nature of K will allow us to know some things about a good K. Thus we can distinguish between two kinds of claims:

> In order to *completely* understand 'x is a good K' one must *completely* understand the nature or function of Ks.

In order to *partially* understand 'x is a good K' one must *partially* understand the nature or function of Ks.[13]

Geach's relaxation of his original claims is thus by no means a denial of the claim that 'good' and 'bad' are essentially attributive. Nor does the relaxation of his original claim imply that the nature or function of a thing is irrelevant to its goodness.

The point of Geach's argument is to establish that 'good' and 'bad', unlike logically predicative adjectives, cannot be separated from the noun they modify. Statements of the form 'x is good' are either semantically incomplete or are elliptical for 'x is a good K', where K is understood as indicating a kind or substantive. The argument is relatively simple. The consequences for metaethics are quite impressive. The best way to begin to see some of these consequences and to further elucidate the thesis that 'good' is essentially attributive is by considering objections.

3. Objections and Responses

There seem to be only three types of objection that can be leveled against the argument proper[14] that Geach presents for the claim that 'good' is always an attributive

[13]The phrase 'nature or function' can at this early stage be understood to mean one or the other or both. The next chapter will argue that natures determine functions in some cases and functions determine nature in some cases. Something may have functions in a secondary sense but these too will be related to the nature of the thing insofar as the nature has properties that are either accidental or non-essential necessities. For example, the nature of a book determines its function. The nature of a book includes its being a written work in some language intended for an audience. A book may also be used for a doorstop. A book's having the function of being able to be used as a doorstop is accidental to its nature, in the sense that in order to be a book it need not be even capable of being a doorstop—e.g. an e-book.

[14]Geach actually employs a number of arguments against the predicative use of 'good' in "Good and Evil". The argument proper is the one that is central in this chapter. The others will be brought to bear in defending the argument proper. I assume that this

adjective. One type claims that while 'good' is often an attributive adjective it is not always one.[15] The second type of objection claims that 'good' is never an attributive adjective. Objections falling into the first type are weaker than those falling into the second. One reason for this weakness is that by claiming that 'good' functions as both an attributive and a predicative adjective, this type of objection succumbs to a different argument for the claim that 'good' is always attributive. If 'good' is always attributive this accounts for the seemingly semantic unity of our ascriptions of goodness to diverse things.[16] But if 'good' functions as attributive and predicative, then it is unclear how these seemingly radically different functions can be unified in a way that respects the semantic data.[17] Furthermore, the attempts to provide examples of predicative uses of 'good' are easily translated into an attributive use, and the converse does not hold.

The second type of objection claims that good is never an attributive adjective.[18] The objections that fall into this class do not however straightforwardly commit themselves to the claim that good is always predicative. Rather what is common to objections of this sort is the claim that the attributive use of good is parasitic on some

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was Geach's intention all along, contrary to what Charles Pigden seems to imply in "Geach on Good," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 40, no. 159 (1990): 129-154. See below for a discussion of Pigden's objection to the argument proper.

[15]Geach's claim: necessarily, for all x, if x is good then x is a good K. The first type of objection claims: there is an x such that x is good and x is not a good K and there is an x such that x is good and x is a good K.

[16]In chapter five I'll take up an objection to the semantic unity claim.

[17]Obviously this style of argument will not work against those who claim that good is always something other than attributive.

[18]This amounts to the following: it is not the case that there is an x such that x is good and x is a good K.

different use of good; one that does not admit of an attributive translation. In essence objections of this sort use Geach's own argument against him, claiming that although the attributive use is grammatically appropriate it is semantically incomplete.

The third type of objection claims that while Geach's argument may be sound it is uninteresting. According to this third kind of objection it is plausible to suppose that at some level of specificity all adjective are attributive. Hence, Geach's argument does not reveal anything distinctive about the nature of the adjective 'good.'

3.1. Type One Objections

The objections considered in this section agree that there is an attributive use of 'good'. It is not the case, according to type one objections, that the attributive use is the *only* use.

Objectivism

Geach's argument against the predicative function of 'good' is specifically directed at objectivism[19] and prescriptivism or expressivism. I'll consider a prescriptivist challenge in section 3.2 below. Objectivists like Moore and W.D. Ross grant that there is an attributive use of 'good.' But, they argue, there is also a predicative use of 'good.' Indeed, according to Moore the predicative use is the one that is central to ethics. Moore's chief concern is to show that moral philosophers have not paid enough attention to the questions that are central to their endeavor. One of these central questions is "What is good in itself?"[20] And, according to Moore, the things that are good in

[19]Objectivism is Geach's term for G.E. Moore's metaethical theory.

[20]G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethics* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1988), iiiv-ix.

themselves have nothing in common with each other than the fact that they all possess the property of goodness.[21]

Moral philosophers' chief concern should be to explain what goodness, by itself, is. Moore attempts to show this by arguing that ethics is for the most part an attempt to explain what a good man is. Since good men are men who perform good acts, ethics is primarily in the business of explaining good conduct. Moore writes, "Ethics is undoubtedly concerned with the question what good conduct is; but, being concerned with this it obviously does not start at the beginning, unless it is prepared to tell us what is good as well as what is conduct."[22] Thus, Moore's attempt to explain the nature of the referent of 'good' in the phrase "good conduct" is an example of the objectivist approach.

Geach's argument works against objectivism by showing that predicative uses of 'good' license invalid arguments. Hence, the statement, "That's good" is semantically incomplete if no substantive is understood. There is no simple property of goodness as the objectivists maintain. (The way in which Geach's arguments works against prescriptivism is also relevant to his case against objectivism.)

Bad K to K

Alfred MacKay claims that Geach is wrong to think that 'bad' is an *alienans* adjective and thus wrong to think that 'bad' is attributive.[23] MacKay assumes that from the fact that 'bad' is not *alienans* it follows that 'bad' is not attributive. But this is false.

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[21]Moore, *Principia Ethica*, x.

[22]Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 2.

[23]Alfred F. MacKay, "Attributive-Predicative" *Analysis*, 30, (March 1970): 113-120.

Geach's reference to *alienans* adjectives is not necessary for his claim that 'bad' is attributive.

MacKay's reasons for thinking that 'bad' is not *alienans* appear to stem from confusion. MacKay writes,

> [W]e have uncovered two features that might generate attributivity for an adjective: the breakdown in entailment from the original ('x is an AN') to the two conjuncts which result from "splitting" it ('x is a N' and 'x is A'); and the deviance of one of the resulting conjuncts.[24]

Taking the second feature first MacKay's point is that *alienans* adjectives like 'putative' grammatically cannot stand alone. 'x is the putative father of y' cannot split into 'x is putative' and 'x is the father of y' because 'x is putative' is grammatically deviant and there is a breakdown in entailment. Thus, the two features that MacKay mentions hold for 'putative' and other genuinely *alienans* adjectives.

MacKay goes on to argue that neither of the two features is present with respect to 'bad.' He states,

> But neither of these features obtains in 'bad'. 'X is bad' is not grammatically deviant, and a bad argument, a bad driver, and a bad movie are, respectively, an argument, a driver, and a movie. I even think that, contrary to Geach, that bad food is food (117).[25]

MacKay's first point is correct. 'x is bad' is not grammatically deviant. Of course, Geach never claimed it was. Geach's claim is that 'x is bad' is either elliptical for 'x is a bad K' or semantically incomplete. MacKay's second point is again correct and again irrelevant. Geach never claims that bad food is not food. Rather Geach claims "we

[24]MacKay, "Attributive-Predicative," 116-17.

[25]MacKay, "Attributive-Predicative," 117.

cannot infer e.g. that because food supports life bad food supports life."[26] This claim corresponds to the second feature of *alienans* adjectives that I pointed to above—statements true of an N will not necessarily be true of an N plus *alienans*. But as I said above strictly speaking the fact that 'x is a bad K' does not logically split into 'x is bad' and 'x is a K' is enough to warrant the claim that 'bad' is attributive.

Good K to Just Plain Bad

Charles Pigden's paper "Geach on 'Good'" contains a number of arguments against the general view that Geach aims to defend.[27] For the purposes here I only focus on his objections to the argument proper. Pigden writes, "Nobody would deny that there *is* an attributive 'good'. … What *is* debatable is whether 'good' (and 'bad') are *only* used attributively" (131).[28] Pigden argues that there are cases when 'good' and 'bad' are used predicatively. In fact he argues that in some cases the attributive use may presuppose the predicative use. Here's the argument: Something can be a good K and nevertheless be bad. If something can be a good K and nevertheless be bad, then the attributive use of good K in this case presupposes the predicative use of 'bad' in this case. Hence, the attributive use of good K sometimes presupposes the predicative use of 'bad'. Here's the example:

> I may think it [an ICBM] bad (indeed evil in the highest degree) without believing it falls short *as* an ICBM or lacks the characteristics one associates with ICBMs. It is both bad and an honest-to-goodness full blown ICBM. Hence the 'bad' is not *alienans* or quasi-*alienans*. Of course the 'bad' is not being used attributively here (or at least it does not seem to be) since the missile need not be a bad ICBM

[26]Geach, "Good and Evil," 301.

[27]Pigden, "Geach on Good."

[28]Pigden, "Geach on Good," 131.

(indeed, it may be a very good one). But this merely confirms the existence of the predicative 'bad' – the very point at issue (131-132).[29]

As we shall see Pigden's point though in conflict with some of the other objections shares something in common with them. One of the objections to Geach's view claims that for some uses of 'good' no suitable K term can be supplied in order to complete 'good' or in this case 'bad'. Pigden concludes that this affirms the predicative use, while others conclude that this only confirms the non-attributive use (where the class of non-attributive uses includes more than just the predicative use). Thus, one way to answer these objections is simply to argue that there is, contrary to appearances, a K term in the context that is being tacitly assumed when something is pronounced 'good' or 'bad'. The specific example that Pigden uses seems to have one readily available.

As Geach notes we must know what something is for or know what a thing's nature is before we can say that it is either good or bad (keeping in mind the qualifications at the end of section 1). The function of something may itself be bad for something else. Thus, the function of an ICBM is to destroy cities and kill people. An ICBM may, as Pigden notes, fulfill its function well or poorly thereby making it a good or bad thing according to its kind. However, if an ICBM also belongs to a kind that is uniformly bad for humans, then the ICBM can be both good according to its kind and bad according to another kind.[30]

Indeed, Geach's account appears to explain the data far better than Pigden's. Why, we should ask, is the ICBM bad? Just about every moral philosopher agrees that

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[29]Pigden, "Geach on Good," 131-132.

[30]Think also of malaria and the aids virus. While these seem to be uniformly bad for humans it is also possible to assess malaria and aids in terms of their functioning.

the moral supervenes on the non-moral. What, then, is the badness of the ICBM supervening on? We've already been told that the ICBM is a good instance of its kind. The badness of the ICBM must supervene on something other than the properties essential for its inclusion in the missile kind. The badness of an ICBM supervenes on its relation to some other kind, namely living things. That the badness of an ICBM is due to its relation to some other kind (that is, other than the ICBM kind) is no problem for Geach.

We can specify the various kinds at issue in the statement 'Good ICBM's are bad'. The most salient kinds are the missile kind and the human kind. After specifying the kinds at issue we can then assess the claim by looking at the relationship that these kinds can bear to each other in order to fix the meaning of the statement. Good members of the human kind have certain characteristics just as good members of the missile kind have certain characteristics. When the missile kind interacts with the human kind in certain ways the characteristics that make members of the human kind good or that are necessary conditions for these good-making characteristics are seriously threatened. Hence, to say that 'Good missiles are bad' is just to say that good missiles typically display characteristics that typically cause the elimination of certain good-making characteristics or conditions for good-making characteristics for humans. This type of story can be repeated *mutatis mutandis* for other kind relations. Hence, it is not that ICBMs are just plain bad. Rather ICBMs are bad when they are brought into certain relations to other kinds such that these relations result in bad members of the other kinds. More precisely,

Good to Bad Kind-Interaction: A good member of some kind K may enter into relations with some other kind K*. Some of the relations that K enters into with K* may be bad for members of K* or bad for members of K.

Additionally it is important to note that bad members of a kind may be good for members of some other kind. For example, a slow gazelle is good for a cheetah.[31]

Bad to Good Kind Interaction: A bad member of some kind K may enter into relations with some other kind K'. Some of the relations that K enters into with K' may be good for members of K' or good for members of K.[32]

These analyses appear to get things right. If Pigden claims that ICBMs are bad but denies that they are bad for anything at all, then it is not at all clear what he could mean.

I have been relying on the idea that ascriptions of goodness and badness to members of some kind are in some sense relational. In the most basic or focal sense of 'good' the relation is between a member x of a kind K and the kind K. ICBMs are members of the missile kind. The missile kind has certain characteristics. A particular ICBM is a good or bad member of its kind depending on how it exemplifies the characteristics that define its kind.

Furthermore, the missile kind is itself relational. That is, part of what makes a missile a missile is its relation to something else. Obviously, being an artifact a missile bears a certain relation to its designer. If there is no designer with such-and-such

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[31]Or sickle cell may be good for humans infected with malaria.

[32]The two accounts of kind-interaction outlined in the text are similar to what Brian Davies and Herbert McCabe attribute to Aquinas. See Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1987). I discovered this similarity after formulating the two accounts.

intentions, there is no missile.[33] Thus, while missiles themselves are not actions they are necessarily dependent on actions. The dependence on actions that artifacts have may be lurking in the background of Pigden's objection in the following way. ICBMs are bad to make. The focus is thus turned away from the outcome or consequences to the intentions of the designer. Once again, however, Pigden's objection fails. The making of ICBMs is bad because the intention to kill indiscriminately is a bad human intention. This is simply a special case of what I above termed bad to good kind interaction. A bad human action may result in an artifactual kind that is bad because part of the nature of the artifactual kind is determined by the intentions of its designer(s).

3.2. Type Two Objections

Objections of this type fall into two different classes. According to the first class 'good' functions attributively but in a much different way than other attributive adjectives. Various versions of expressivism may fall into this first class. According to the second class of type two objections, every appearance of 'good' functioning as an attributive adjective is elliptical for some non-attributive use.

Expressivism

The prescriptivist or more broadly the expressivist may happily endorse Geach's argument against objectivism. There is no property of goodness *simpliciter*. At this point, however, the expressivist turns Geach's argument on its head. The expressivist

[33]Lynne Rudder-Baker "The Ontology of Artifacts" *Philosophical Explorations* 7, no. 2, (2004): 99-111. Rudder-Baker has an interesting discussion of the nature of artifacts and artifactual malfunction. In chapters three and four I return to artifacts and actions and argue that the nature of humans and intentions must be brought to bear on artifactual and action evaluation.

argues that in order to avoid rampant ambiguity it is necessary to give 'good' something other than a descriptive meaning. The function of 'good' is not to describe whatever it modifies but to praise it or endorse it or express some attitude of approval. The expressivist argues that if 'good' is primarily descriptive, as Geach claims, then it is hopelessly ambiguous. It is ambiguous because ascriptions of good to knives, trucks, people, and other kinds of things must mean something different since the things that make these various kinds good are all different. For example, a knife is good if it is UVW and a truck is good if is XYZ. Hence, 'good knife' means UVW and 'good truck' means XYZ.[34] Since 'good' cannot be ambiguous in this way, the expressivist argues that 'good' is not primarily descriptive. Rather 'good' is primarily expressive of some pro-attitude.[35]

There are two related replies to make. First, why single out 'good' in this way? There are other adjectives that behave more or less like 'good' does. That is, there are other attributive adjectives. If 'good' is not primarily descriptive because of its attributive nature, then is 'big' or 'small' or 'tall' or 'short' or … similarly not primarily descriptive?

Second, Geach claims that the expressivist argument assumes that in order for 'good' to be descriptive it must be predicative. But this is false. Consider the adjectival phrase 'square of …'. From the facts that "square of 2" means "double of 2" and "square of 3" means "triple of 3" it does not follow that "square of" is hopelessly ambiguous. 'Square of' is a predicate-forming functor. By itself it is incomplete, in need of some

[34]Geach, "Good and Evil," 303.

[35]In the fifth chapter I will discuss a different but related worry.

argument to yield a value. That is, 'square of x' is incomplete apart from some value for x. The same is true of 'good'. 'Good' is a predicate-forming functor.[36] By itself 'good' is incomplete. Just as 'square of' is descriptive despite its yielding radically different values for different arguments, 'good' is descriptive.

Adjunctive Uses

Judith Jarvis Thomson's objection to Geach's account is an instance of what I have labeled type-two objections. While she objects to some of the details of Geach's account it is important to note that she is in agreement with Geach on much else. For example, like Geach, Thomson denies that the term 'good' stands for some monadic property or a property that falls within the scope of Kripkean/Putnamian developments. Indeed, Thomson's reasons for rejecting various versions of Moore's objectivism are scarcely different than Geach's. She is also prepared to give a functional account of most uses of 'good'. That is, Thomson, for the most part, endorses Geach's claim that the predicate–forming functor 'good' can only take as arguments things with functions or natures.[37] Despite their widespread agreement she denies that 'good' is an attributive adjective (in the sense presented in this chapter).

Thomson argues that the attributive account of 'good' is parasitic on what she calls the adjunctive account of 'good'. The attributive account is semantically

[36]In chapter three I attempt to elaborate on this.

[37]The 'for the most part' qualification is obviously important. Thomson does not think that the function of humans is relevant for determining what a good human is. Apart from humans, Thomson does appear ready to endorse the claim that the function of a thing is relevant to determining its goodness.

incomplete, according to Thomson.[38] I'll argue that a proper understanding of function and essence supports the attributive account. Since Thomson's account is quite close to Geach's account and since a complete response to her objection will take us into chapters three and four, I will present her account in some detail.

Thomson argues that all goodness is goodness in a way. Alternatively, for all x, if x is good, then x is good in a way. Alternatively, it is not the case that there is an x such that x is good and x is not good in a way. There are two orders of ways in which a thing can be good. The first-order way of being good is the most fundamental way of being good in that all other ways of being good somehow rest on it. A first-order way of being good is explained by Thomson as being good-plus-adjunct, where good-plus-adjunct is explained by giving a list of examples. For instance, x may good at, good for, good to use, good with, good for us, etc. x is a first-order way of being good $=_{df}$ that x is good-plus-adjunct.

The second-order way of being good rests on but is not reducible to the first-order way of being good. Or, more perspicuously, second-order ways of being good rest on but are not reducible to good-plus-adjunct form. Thomson's primary example of a second-order way of being good is a good act. Normally an act is good if it is just, or generous, or some other display of virtue. But a just act is not reducible to the form good-plus-adjunct. That is, a just act is something over and above an act that is good to, good at, good with, good for use in, or good for. However, second-order ways of being good (of which a good act is an instance) rest on first-order ways of being good. They rest on first-order ways of being good because in order for an act to possess one of the virtue

[38]Judith Thomson, "The Right and the Good," *The Journal of Philosophy* 94, no. 2, (1997): 278.

properties it must be successful.[39] That is, Thomson claims that it is success and not simply intention that matters when ascribing virtue properties to acts. Presumably, if an act is just, then it is successful. Thus, success is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for ascriptions of virtue properties to acts. Apparently success is to be understood as a first-order way of being good. Hence, for an act to be just the act must rest on some first-order way of being good.

Goodness-for is the type of success or first-order way of being good Thomson thinks is relevant to second-order ways of being of good. That is, a second-order way of being good rests on but is not reducible to goodness-for.[40] The moral second-order ways of being good are the virtue properties. When an act or a person possesses one of the virtue properties the act or person is good in a second-order way. On Thomson's account the virtues are

> … entirely other regarding. That is a consequence of the fact that my account of the virtues, and therefore my procedure for picking out the virtue properties, construes them as fundamentally social: that is, my account of what fixes whether a character trait is a virtue, is its effect on others.[41]

This is important because it leaves Thomson's account neutral on whether possession of the virtues is good for their possessor. Whether or not possession of the virtues is good for their possessor, possession of the virtue must be good for others.

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[39]By requiring success in order for an act to possess a virtue property Thomson seems to be committing herself to some sort of virtue-consequentialism.

[40]Thomson distinguishes between goodness-for and 'on balance goodness-for' and argues that the former and not the latter is what is needed in order for some act to possess a virtue property.

[41]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 288.

So far, Thomson's story is the claim that all goodness is goodness in a way and there are two orders of ways in which a something can be good. For all x, if x is good then x is either a first-order way of being good or a second-order way of being good. Something is a moral second-order way of being good, only if it possesses one of the virtue properties. Thomson explains that some thing is a first-order way of being good if it benefits some thing or person. "Intuitively, for a thing X to be good in one of the first-order ways is for X to *benefit* someone or some thing Y (which might or might not be X itself) in the appropriate way, or to be capable of doing so."[42] There are many ways that X might benefit Y. X may be good to look at, or taste, or good at babysitting, or good for use in making cheesecake. Given the above analysis of first-order ways of being good, these various forms of good-plus-adjunct must benefit someone or some thing. Thomson focuses on cases where X is good for Y, since goodness-for is what moral second-order ways of being good rest on.

Thomson provides analyses of goodness-for for artifacts, inanimate non-artifacts and animate objects. Goodness-for for artifacts depends on the artifacts' design functions. Goodness-for for inanimate non-artifacts depends on people's wants. Goodness-for for animate objects is a bit more complicated. Some animate objects have design functions that are relevant to determining what is good for them. Thomson's example is plants. Some animate objects have design functions that are not relevant to determining what is good for them. Thomson's example is people. What is good for people depends not on their design function but on what helps them in achieving their ideal goals.

[42]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 289.

As we have seen Geach's story attempts to show, among other things, that, contrary to objectivists, there is no property of goodness. Thomson's story attempts to show, among other things, the same. In this Geach and Thomson are agreed; there is no property of goodness. But, Thomson argues, Geach's story is, like Moore's story, incomplete. According to Thomson, Moorean statements of the form "That's good" are incomplete. Similarly, according to Thomson, Geachean statements of the form "x is a good K" are incomplete. Both types of statements are intelligible only in a context where the way in which the thing is good is understood. Along these lines Thomson argues that Geach's thesis—that good is essentially an attributive adjective (that some substantive has to be understood whenever good is used)—is false. There are some cases where good is used and no substantive is or can be understood. "That's good for use in making cheesecake" or "That's good for Alfred" are understood without a substantive being understood. Thomson suggests that no substantive could be understood. In a parenthetical comment she writes, "In fact, for what K could it at all plausibly be thought that being good for use in making cheesecake is being a good K? For what K could it at all plausibly be thought that being good for Alfred is being a good K?"[43]

The argument that Thomson presents may be represented in the following way: Geach's thesis: for all x, if x is good then x is a good K. Thomson's objection: there exists an x such that x is good and x is not a good K (rather x is good in a way). Hence, Geach's thesis is false. Indeed, given the charge that Geach's story is incomplete, Thomson's argument amounts to the following: Geach's thesis: for all x if x is good then

[43]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 278.

x is a good K. Thomson's objection: for all x if x is good then it is not the case that x is a good K.[44] Hence, Geach's thesis is false.

I will offer two tentative responses to Thomson's objection. Each response is incomplete in its own way. Filling in the gaps to my responses will take us into chapters three and four.

Thomson's story and Geach's story only apparently conflict, Thomson's claim notwithstanding. The motivation for this response is due to Thomson's analysis of first-order goodness, which in her story is the fundamental kind of goodness. According to that analysis "Intuitively, for a thing X to be good in one of the first-order ways is for X to *benefit* someone or some thing Y (which might or might not be X itself) in the appropriate way, or to be capable of doing so."[45] She then applies this analysis to artifacts, inanimate non-artifacts, and animate objects divided according to those animate objects whose design functions determine their benefit and those animate objects whose design functions do not determine their benefit.

According to Geach's story X's goodness is determined by its nature or function. If S does not know the function of X, then S cannot understand statements of the form "X is a good K." "X is a good K" may be true, but in order for S to know this S must know what X is for or S must know the nature of X.

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[44]The first reconstruction of Thomson's objection amounts to the claim (Ex)(x is good & x is not a good K). The second reconstruction of Thomson's objection which takes into consideration her claim that Geach's story like Moore's is incomplete amounts to the claim ~(Ex)(x is good & x is a good K). The first is of course compatible with (Ex)(x is good and x is a good K); the second is not compatible with this.

[45]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 289.

Geach's story may be reconciled with Thomson's story. First, both Thomson and Geach seem to say the same thing with respect to artifacts. In order for some thing X to be good for some artifact Y, X must benefit Y by conducing to Y's design functions. Geach, it seems, would say the same thing.

Second, if it is true that inanimate non-artifacts do not have design functions, as Thomson claims, then Geach too would agree that there is nothing good for them. That is, if X is such that it does not have a design function, then strictly speaking the statement 'X is a good K' is false. According to Geach, something is itself good—independent of certain extrinsic relations—only if it has a function or nature.

The third case is the most difficult. According to Thomson, there are some animate objects that have design functions that determine what is good for them and there are some animate objects that have design functions that do not determine what is good for them. Thomson holds that all animate objects have design functions, but not all design functions are relevant to determinations of what is good for a thing. For example, although persons have design functions (provided by natural selection), these are not relevant to determining what is good for persons. Rather if X is good for some person P then X must benefit P such that X's benefiting P contributes in some way to P's realizing one of her ideal goals.

Geach, as we have seen, thinks that 'X is a good K' means that X is a well functioning member of K. Thus, for Geach some thing Y is good for X only if Y contributes to X's being a well functioning member of K. It seems then that for Geach what is good for X is determined by X's functions. Hence, if X does not have functions, nothing is strictly speaking good for *it*. Hence, Thomson's claim that, although persons

have design function these are not relevant to consideration of what is good for persons, is apparently in conflict with Geach's claim.

The conflict may be reconciled if we add something to Thomson's story. Geach may claim that it is part of the function of a person that they have ideal goals perhaps in conflict with their design function *qua* animate object. That is, persons *qua* free individuals have the function of attempting to realize their ideal goals. Persons *qua* animate objects have the function to survive and reproduce etc. Where these functions conflict the function of persons *qua* free individuals wins.

It may be objected that this attempted reconciliation is only relevant to one first-order way in which something can be good, i.e. good-for. In other words, the proposed reconciliation between Thomson and Geach only works when we are considering what is good for a human. The other first-order ways in which something can be good (e.g. good with, good at, good for use, good to) cannot be reconciled with Geach's claim that the function or nature of a human is relevant to determining whether or not someone is a good human. For example, it may be good to do all sorts of things to humans or a human may be good with all sorts of things that are not at all related to the nature or function of a human. Furthermore, the various first-order ways of being good are not reducible to some other way of being good such that each first-order ways of being good has something in common with all of the others. Hence, it may be that the function or nature of a human is relevant with respect to some first-order ways of being good but not to each of them. Although this objection has some initial force, I think Thomson's analysis of what makes something a first-order way of being good seriously threatens the prima facie force of this objection.

Something has to be benefited in some way for there to be first-order goodness. Geach's story simply focuses on the thing benefited. That is, for Geach the thing with a function or nature is what is primary. In order to know what counts as beneficial for something we need to know its function or nature. So, Thomson is right to emphasize the various first-order ways of being good, but none of this is problematic for Geach. The various first-order ways of being good do have something in common, namely being beneficial, contrary to the above objection. According to the Geachian proposal I am developing the common feature of first-order ways of being good is what is primary. There is a primary way of being good and that way is determined by a thing's nature or function. Hence, what is good for a thing depends on the thing's function. This is precisely the account of good that we have drawn out of Geach's story. Thus, there is no real conflict.

The above response helps to show how Geach is able to address the objection presented by Thomson that there are some things that are good where no substantive is needed. In order for the statement 'That's good for use in making cheesecake' to be true, it must be the case that the thing referred to by 'that' benefits someone or some thing. The benefited will be good to the degree that 'that' benefits it. Geach is simply focusing on the thing benefited, whereas Thomson is focusing on the thing doing the benefiting. But the difference in focus does not amount to a real conflict. Both seem to agree that something must be benefited and both agree that something must be doing the benefiting.

Another way of looking at the proposed reconciliation is by noting that Thomson is simply wrong to think that there are no kinds in the offing for some of her adjunctive uses of good. For example, the statement 'That's good for use in making cheesecake'

does implicitly refer to a kind—namely, the making-cheesecake kind or something close. By examining the function of making cheesecakes we can discern things that are beneficial to the process and things that are not. Again Geach's hygrometer example is relevant here. If we have no idea what making a cheesecake amounts to we will not have any idea as to what is good for use in making cheesecake. The notion of kind-interactionism spelled out above in response to Pigden is also relevant here.

In the case of making cheesecake we have one kind—the cheesecake kind—interacting with another kind—the utensil or ingredient or whatever kind. Presumably a good member of the latter kind may benefit the former kind.[46]

There are some problems with the proposed reconciliation. The main problem is that it seems to change Thomson's account in order to make it fit Geach's. In order to reconcile Thomson's story with Geach's we have to commit her to the claim that the most fundamental way of being good (i.e. the benefiting or being benefited way) depends on a thing's function or nature. In other words, we get reconciliation without mutual compromise. In effect, Thomson's story is compatibile with Geach's only if Geach's story is more fundamental. A thing's goodness is determined by its function or nature, which in turn determines how it can be benefited (as well as how it may benefit). Hence, all of the first-order ways of being good rest on the attributive account. While Thompson may not like this outcome, it does have certain advantages.

One of the advantages of the reconciliation of Thomson and Geach is that it is now possible to tell a more seamless story about goodness. Thomson's story is seamless

[46]Indeed a bad member of the latter kind may also benefit the former kind. For example, an extremely dull knife may help to flatten the cake whereas a perfectly sharp knife may cause dents in the surface.

to the point of human goodness. Once Thomson begins to consider humans the relevant features that make non-humans good (i.e. nature and/or function) are no longer relevant. By grounding Thomson's story in Geach's the relevant features that make non-humans good also make humans good. Another advantage of grounding Thomson's proposal on Geach's is that Geach's provides a better way to understand first-order ways of being good. According to Thomson all first-order ways of being good are ways of benefiting someone or some thing. The notion of "ways of benefiting" is left largely unanalyzed. By turning to natures and/or functions we can provide an analysis of benefiting.

It is important to notice where the debate with Thomson has gotten us. In terms of the semantics of 'good' there does not appear to be a substantial objection. There is always a substantive lurking in the background to be supplied by the context of utterance. Furthermore, Geach's claim that some substantive is needed appears supported by all the examples that Thomson alleges show the contrary. Finally, even if, *per impossibile*, there are some ways of being good such that no substantive is needed, the attributive account is more fundamental. First-order ways of being good (good-plus-adjunct) rest on—and, we can grant for the sake of argument, may not be reducible to—the attributive use of 'good'. Where Geach and Thomson differ then is not over the semantics of 'good' but over what the semantics reveal (or presuppose). For Geach the semantics of 'good' suggest that the goodness of a thing is determined by its nature and/or function whereas for Thomson this is true for only a subset of the things that can be good. Persons, according to Thomson, are the exception to Geach's claim. In chapters three and four I return to some of these issues arguing that Thomson's story concludes as it does because of an impoverished view of human nature and a false analysis of function.

3.3. Type-Three Objection

According to Michael Zimmerman "…Geach's tests are simply irrelevant, pointing up no essential difference between the properties expressed by "red" and "good" and revealing no important insights into the nature of these properties."[47] Zimmerman suggests that there is no essential difference between 'red' and 'good' by noting the context-dependency of both adjectives.[48] He writes, "what's red as far as Macintosh apples go may not be red as far as Red Delicious apples go."[49] Indeed, "*very many* properties are determinable (to some extent) rather than (fully) determinate, including all those just mentioned [red, visible, poisonous]."[50] The upshot is supposed to be that in some contexts hardly any adjective passes either the splitting test or the higher-order and lower-order test. Thus, Zimmerman's objection threatens to dissolve the distinction Geach needs in order for his argument to get off the ground.[51]

There are three replies to make. First, if 'red' does not behave in the way Geach thought, it does not follow that there is no difference between attributive adjectives and predicative ones. All we need to do is find one that satisfies either the splitting test or the

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[47]Michael Zimmerman, "In Defense of the Concept of Intrinsic Value," *Canaadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, (1999): 389-410; *The Nature of Intrinsic Value* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 15.

[48]This same point regarding the context-dependency of all adjectives is made quite clearly and forcefully by Ran Lahav, "Against Compositionality: the case of adjectives," *Philosophical Studies* 57, no. 3 (1989): 261-279.

[49]Zimmerman, *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*, 14.

[50]Zimmerman, *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*, 15.

[51]Zimmerman does not explicitly state the upshot, but it is clear that this is what Zimmerman has in mind. Nor does Zimmerman refer to what I have called the higher-order and lower-order test. Nevertheless, for Zimmerman's objection to stick it must be the case that most adjectives fail *both* tests.

higher-order and lower-order kind test and the difference is plain. Perhaps the adjective 'even' will do as it is used in the following statement: 4 is an even number or 'valid' in '*modus ponens* is a valid argument form.'

Second, Zimmerman's examples appear to pass both tests. Consider the statement "x is a red Macintosh apple." This statement seems to imply that x is a red and x is a Macintosh apple. The original statement appears to pass the high-order and lower-order kind test. From "x is a red Macintosh apple" and "all apples are fruit" we may infer that "x is a red fruit."

Third, and perhaps most importantly, even if all adjectives are logically attributive (and thus the first two replies fail) the essence of Geach's positive claim still follows. According to Geach 'good' is always in need of a substantive and 'red' is not. Assume that all adjectives are attributive. Thus, all adjectives are always in need of a substantive. Thus, contrary to Geach 'red' is always in need of a substantive. But this does nothing to Geach's main point that 'good' is always in need of a substantive. Zimmerman's point supports the claim that all adjectives are attributive, and thus subverts his objection to Geach.

If Zimmerman's point is accepted and Geach's argument does not reveal an essential difference between 'good' and 'red' it simply does not follow that Geach's argument does not reveal something important about the natures of these properties. Zimmerman appears to argue as follows:

1. Both 'red' and 'good' are attributive.

2. If both ‘red’ and ‘good’ are attributive, then there is no essential difference between the types of properties expressed by ‘red’ and the types of properties expressed by ‘good’.
3. If there is no essential difference between the types of properties expressed by ‘red’ and the types of properties expressed by ‘good’, then the fact that both ‘red’ and ‘good’ are attributive does not reveal anything important about the natures of these properties.
4. Hence, the fact that both ‘red’ and ‘good’ are attributive does not reveal anything important about the natures of these properties.

The third premise is false. If all adjectives are attributive, then it is never valid to move from ‘x is an AN’ to ‘x is an A’ and ‘x is an N’. That’s an interesting point because the nature of whatever it is that adjectives refer to would be tied to the nature of whatever the adjective modifies. Indeed, it sounds like a vindication of a full-fledged Aristotelianism. We may conclude that nothing Zimmerman says threatens Geach’s argument proper.

Conclusion

The attributive account is left unscathed by the objections we have considered in this chapter. There are other objections to it to be sure and we will attempt to address some of them in the chapters to come, but at the very least we have shown that the attributive account should be taken far more seriously than its detractors and ignorers thought. With the account firmly in place we are ready to begin drawing out some implications. One of the most important implications is that goodness is not susceptible to Kripkean/Putnamian developments. In the next chapter I will present a number of reasons to support the assertion that goodness is not susceptible to a Kripkean/Putnamian

account. In addition, I will begin to develop the attributive account into a much more substantive metaethical theory.

CHAPTER THREE

Some Metaethical Implications of the Attributive Account of 'Good'

In chapter one I argued that the two most fashionable versions of moral realism face serious problems. In chapter two I began to set the stage for an alternative version of moral realism by explaining and defending the claim that 'good' is an attributive adjective. In this chapter I will argue for the following conditionals:

> *No Property Claim* (NP): If 'good' is attributive, then the common assumption—that goodness is a property susceptible to Kripke/Putnam theories—is false.
>
> *Goodness Depends on Nature and/or Function Claim* (GNF): If goodness is attributive, then the goodness of a thing is in some sense determined by the nature and/or function of that thing.

A defense of the antecedent of both theses was provided in chapter two. In this chapter I draw out some of the implications of the claim that 'good' is attributive. While there are numerous important implications of the attributive account the three most relevant to this dissertation are: (1) the falsity of the common assumption, (2) that goodness is inextricably connected to natures and/or functions and (3) that human goodness is unique and uniform.[1] I will argue that (3) is a consequence of GNF and the plausible claim that humans have natures.

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[1]The privation theory of evil and the convertibility of being and goodness may be implications of the attributive account of 'good' and 'bad'. I suspect that Geach's relative identity thesis is also connected to the attributive account in important ways, but I cannot pursue the matter here.

1. In Defense of the No Property Claim

According to the common assumption goodness is a property. Moral naturalists identify goodness with a natural property, while moral supernaturalists identify goodness with a supernatural property. As discussed in Chapter One, in response to the OQA naturalists and supernaturalists reject *a priori* property identities and embrace *a posteriori* property identities. Thus, according to the moral naturalist and moral supernaturalist, goodness is the type of property that is susceptible to *a posteriori* property identities. The attributive account of goodness implies that goodness is not the sort of property that can figure in *a posteriori* identities. In this section I provide six reasons for why the attributive account conflicts with the necessary *a posteriori* account of goodness.

1.1. From Functions

According to the attributive account, 'good' is a predicate-forming functor similar to 'square of'. Terms like 'square of' cannot be given a Kripkean/Putnamian analysis and since 'good' is relevantly similar to 'square of' it too cannot be given a Kripkean/Putnamian analysis. 'Square of' is a function from numbers to numbers. Similarly 'good' is a function from kinds to magnitudes of properties. By magnitudes of properties I mean properties that can be possessed in varying degrees. For example, if my pen is a good pen, then it must exemplify the properties required for being a member of the pen kind to such and such a degree. Thus, a good K takes us from kinds (the value of K) to magnitudes of properties. It is plausible to suppose that the arguments and values of some functions have essences that are knowable only *a posteriori*. It is not plausible to think that the functions themselves have essences that are knowable only *a posteriori*. Functions simply take items from some domain and map them onto items in

the range. Different domains yield different ranges and different functions yield different mapping relations. As such one cannot identify a function with any of the arguments or values that it delivers. As an operation performed on arguments the nature of a function is not determined empirically. Hence, functions cannot figure into necessary *a posteriori* identities.

1.2. From Intensionality

In the classic examples of the necessary *a posteriori*, the contexts created by necessary *a posteriori* statements are extensional. It is always possible to substitute one of the terms flanking the identity with an extensionally equivalent term *salva veritate*. If the appearance of 'good' in some statement results in a non-extensional or intensional context, then goodness is not a property of the sort that can figure into necessary *a posteriori* identities.

Consider the paradigmatic synthetic property identities: being water is being H_20, heat is molecular motion, temperature is mean kinetic energy, gold is atomic number 79. Each term in the synthetic identities passes the substitutivity test. Replacing 'water' with some extensionally equivalent phrase does not change the truth of the identity. For example, if we replace 'water' in "water = H_20" with the rigidified definite description 'Angel's actual favorite drink' the truth-value of the identity does not change. Hence, in identity statements these terms create extensional contexts. The same is not true with respect to 'good'. If it were true that 'good' creates extensional contexts then from x is a good *F* and *F* is *G* we should be able to infer that x is a good *G*, where *F* and *G* are coextensive. Such an inference is invalid. From Suzy is a good dancer and all and only

dancers are violinists, it does not follow that Suzy is a good violinist.[2] Hence, good is not extensional. This is yet further evidence that goodness cannot figure into synthetic identity statements.

1.3. From Attributivity

Consider 'tall', 'big', and 'small'. Is it plausible to suppose that these can figure into necessary *a posteriori* identity statements? In other words, could a proposition such as 'Tall is *F*' be necessary *a posteriori*? If, as seems obvious, the answer is no, then since 'good' is also attributive it is reasonable to conclude that 'good' too cannot figure into necessary *a posteriori* identity statements. The differences between comparatives such as 'tall', 'big', and 'small' and non-comparatives such as 'good' and 'bad' are not sufficient to call into doubt the claim that if one group of attributives cannot figure into necessary *a posteriori* identity statements, the other cannot either.

Prima facie, the main reason for thinking that comparatives cannot figure into necessary *a posteriori* identities has nothing to do with their being comparative. Rather, comparatives cannot enter into such identities because taken in isolation (e.g. "that's tall") comparatives have no semantic value (unless one is implicitly provided by the context). That is, comparatives need to be completed by some reference class in much the same way that 'good' needs to be completed by some kind term. The attributive nature of comparatives is why it is implausible to suppose that they can figure into necessary *a posteriori* identities. Thus, while there are differences between comparative

[2]This example is taken from Zoltan Gendler Szabo's, "Adjectives in Context," in *Perspectives on Semantics, Pragmatics, and Discourse*, ed, Istvan Kenesei and Robert M. Harnish, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 119-145. It should be noted that he uses the example to refute the attributive account, whereas I think that the example actually helps show the plausibility of the attributive account.

attributives and non-comparative attributives the differences do not appear to be relevant to our present concern.

1.4. From the Necessary A Posteriori

A fourth reason for the incompatibility between the attributive account and necessary *a posteriori* accounts of goodness can be seen by considering the standard form by which *a posteriori* necessities are derived. Kripke provides a now classic example:

> [I]f P is the statement that the lectern is not made of ice, one knows by *a priori* philosophical analysis, some conditional of the form "if P, then necessarily P." If the table is not made of ice, it is necessarily not made of ice. On the other hand, then, we know by empirical investigation that P, the antecedent of the conditional is true—that this table is not made of ice. We can conclude by *modus ponens*:
>
> (1) If P, then necessarily P
>
> (2) P
>
> (3) Therefore, necessarily P
>
> The conclusion—'Necessarily P'—is that it is necessary that the table not be made of ice, and this conclusion is known *a posteriori*, since one of the premises on which it is based is *a posteriori*.[3]

Thus, (1) is knowable *a priori*, (2) is knowable only *a posteriori* and (3) is knowable only *a posteriori*. If we replace P with 'goodness is *F*' we get the following:

(1*) If goodness is *F*, then necessarily goodness is *F*.

(2*) Goodness is *F*

(3*) Therefore, necessarily goodness is *F*

In chapter one I showed the problems that arise for attempting to argue that (2*) is knowable only *a posteriori*. Thus, if (2*) is not knowable only *a posteriori*, then the

[3]Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 532.

conclusion cannot be a necessary *a posteriori* truth. From the fact, if it is one, that (2*) is not knowable only *a posteriori*, it does not follow that (2*) is knowable *a priori*. It may be the case that (2*) is not knowable at all. For example, if (2*) does not express a proposition, then (2*) is not knowable.

According to the attributive account, (2*) does not express a proposition. If the semantics of 'good' mirrors (or something of the sort) the metaphysics of goodness, then one cannot split the property of goodness from what bears the property of goodness. Assuming that the semantics of 'good' does indeed mirror the metaphysics of goodness it follows that one cannot split the property of goodness from what bears the property of goodness.[4] But (2*) appears to assume that one can split the property of goodness from the thing that bears the property. Thus, in order to accept (2*) one must assume that the attributive account is false, and this is enough to show that the attributive account is incompatible with *a posteriori* necessity accounts.

1.5. From the Necessary A Posteriori (Again)

The claim of this section is that the attributive account of 'good' implies that *a posteriori* property identities involving goodness are impossible. Assume that this is false. That is, assume that the attributive account of 'good' is compatible with an *a posteriori* property identity involving goodness. For ease of exposition, let's assume that 'goodness is *F*' is a true necessary *a posteriori* property identity and let's call this G. In order for G to be true goodness can be neither analytically equivalent to *F* nor can the identity between goodness and *F* be discoverable *a priori*. The fact that G is true is thus

[4]Throughout the dissertation I simply assume that the semantics of 'good' is closely related to the metaphysics of goodness. I think there are reasons to support this but providing them as well as defending them would require a separate dissertation.

discoverable by empirical means only. But in order to discover by empirical means that goodness is *F*, it is necessary that goodness have an essence. Scott Soames expresses the same point.[5]

According to Soames the following route to the necessary *a posteriori* is the only sound route provided by Kripke. Soames calls it The Essentialist Route to the Necessary *A posteriori* (ERNA).

> Let p be a true proposition that attributes a property (or relation) F to an object o (or series of objects), conditional on the object (or objects) existing (while not attributing any further properties or relations to anything). Then, p will be an instance of the necessary *a posteriori* if (a) it is knowable *a priori* that F is an essential property of o, if F is a property of o at all (or a relation that holds essentially of the objects, if F holds of them at all), (b) knowledge of o that it has F, if it exists (or of the objects that they are related by F, if they exist) can only be had *a posteriori*, and (c) knowing p involves knowing of o (or of the objects) that it (they) have F, if it (they) exist at all. (o can be an individual or a kind.)[6]

The crucial thing to notice is that according to Soames *a posteriori* property identities are true only if the property flanking the right side of the identity is essential to the property or object flanking the left side of the identity. Hence, in order for the statement 'goodness is *F*' to be true, *F* must express properties that are essential to goodness. Similarly, statements of the form 'water is *H*' must express an identity that holds between water and *H*, such that *H* expresses properties that are essential to water. Thinking of the notion of *a posteriori* property identities in this way helps to bring out the way in which the *a posteriori* property identity account of goodness cannot be correct if the attributive account of 'good' is correct.

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[5]I discovered Soames's expression of the same point after I had made the same discovery (if it is one).

[6]Scott Soames, "Kripke on Epistemic and Metaphysical Possibility: Two Routes to the Necessary Aposteriori," in *Saul Kripke*, ed. Alan Berger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

In order for goodness to figure into *a posteriori* identities it must have an essence that can only be discovered empirically. But it is plausible to suppose that in order to discover the essence of goodness empirically goodness must be separable from the things that it modifies. In other words, the supposition that goodness is susceptible to Kripkean/Putnamian analysis assumes the falsity of the attributive account. To see that one must assume the falsity of the attributive account in order to make sense of the *a posteriori* account consider the property of redness.

It is plausible to suppose that redness has an essence only discoverable *a posteriori* because it is plausible to suppose that the redness of a thing can be discovered independently of the thing that is red. In other words, it is possible to know that something is red without having any idea what the thing that is red is. The redness of something does not depend on the thing that is red in the way that the goodness of a thing depends on the thing that is good. But this appears to imply that the redness of things can be empirically investigated apart from the thing that is red. That is, the possibility of there being an *a posteriori* identity of the form 'redness is *F*' assumes that it is possible to empirically investigate redness (in such a way that the nature of the thing that is red is irrelevant to the nature of redness). Generalizing from the red case the following seems to be a necessary condition for the possibility of a property having a nature that is discoverable only *a posteriori*:

> *Necessary Condition for A Posteriori Identities* (NCA): If *F* is a property with a nature that is only discoverable *a posteriori*, then the nature of *F* must not depend on the thing(s) that *F* modifies.

If we substitute goodness for *F* it is easy to see why the attributive account and NCA are incompatible. NCA states that properties susceptible to Kripkean/Putnamian analysis have natures that do not depend on the things that instantiate the property. Thus, the nature of redness (if susceptible to Kripkean/Putnamian analysis) is independent of the nature of the thing that is red. The attributive account states that it is not possible for 'good' to be separated from the thing that it modifies. The nature of goodness is dependent on the nature of the thing that is good. Hence, given the truth of the attributive account of 'good', it follows that goodness does not fall within the scope of a Kripkean/Putnamian analysis.

1.6. From Adverbialism

Perhaps, the most promising line of argument for the claim that goodness cannot figure into synthetic property identities is simply that in order for goodness to do so it would have to be detachable from what it modifies. Since 'good' is not detachable from what it modifies, goodness cannot figure into synthetic property identities (again assuming that the semantics mirrors to some degree the metaphysics). In sections 1.4 and 1.5 I considered this line of argument by focusing on the nature of *a posteriori* necessities. In this section I consider this line of argument by focusing on the nature of the attributive account. It will be helpful to consider an analogy between the attributive account of 'good' and adverbial theories of mental states.

According to the adverbial theory of mental states statements of the form 'John has an itch' are grammatically misleading. The grammatical form of 'John has an itch' is similar to the grammatical form of 'John has a car'. In the latter the subject is John and the object is a car. The similarity between these two sentence forms leads many to think

of both cars and itches as objects capable of existing on their own. The adverbialist denies the inference. The similarity in grammatical form does not warrant the inference to similarity in logical form and hence does not warrant the inference to similarity in ontological form. In other words statements of the grammatical form 'S-V-O' (where S stands for subject, V for verb, and O for object) do not imply that there is a subject and there is an object. In the case of the statement 'John has an itch' there is no such thing as itches existing independently of the subjects that have them. As Michael Tye puts it, "Any pain or itch or image is always *somebody's* pain or itch or image."[7]

Michael Loux has drawn a similar analogy between adverbialism and Aristotle's claim that only substances exist. *Prima facie*, statements such as 'Plato believes that Fido is a dog' suggest that Plato stands in the believing relation to something, usually said to be a proposition. In order to square Aristotle's claim that only substances exist, the Aristotelian needs to explain away the commitment that propositional attitudes appear to have to the existence of propositions. In other words, like the attributive account of 'good' and the adverbial account of mental states, the Aristotelian needs to argue that surface grammar is misleading in statements the appear to commit one to the existence of other things beside substances. Loux writes,

> [H]ere the Aristotelian has characteristically argued that the surface grammar of intentional discourse is misleading. It suggests a relational interpretation of conceptual activity, where we have a mental state or act a person undergoes and an object that the state or act takes… The Aristotelian insists on rejecting this act-object interpretation in favor of what is often called the act theory of intentionality, according to which expressions like 'believes that Fido is a dog'

[7]Michael Tye, Mental states, adverbial theory of. In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by E. Craig, (London: Routledge, 1998), http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/V002 (accessed June 5, 2007).

> and 'thinks that 2+2=4' are construed not in relational terms but as one-place predicates enabling us to say how it is with persons.[8]

Loux goes on to suggest that the Aristotelian construe propositional attitude reports in the same way that adverbialist's construe perceptual reports. He states, "One obvious form the act theory can take involves an adverbial account of intentional discourse where the recalcitrant that-clauses are construed as adverbs expressing *how* a person thinks, conceives, believes, and so on."[9] Rather than being committed to the existence of propositions, the act theorist, like the adverbialist, can argue that propositions, like itches, do not enjoy an existence on their own. In the statement 'Plato believes/thinks/conceives/etc. that Fido is a dog' the subject Plato is in a certain mental state. The only thing that exists is Plato. The statement simply "expresses how [Plato] thinks, conceives, believes, and so on."

Loux suggests another way for the Aristotelian to explain away the misleading surface grammar. He writes, "Alternatively, the act theorist can deny that verbs like 'believes' and 'conceives' are complete predicates, construing them, say, as predicate-forming functors that take declarative sentences as their arguments and yield as their values one-place predicates true or false of persons."[10] This analysis is quite similar to the attributive account of 'good'. Like the attributive account of 'good' the predicate-forming functor analysis of propositional attitudes claims that verbs such as 'believes' and 'conceives' do not relate persons to objects but rather describe persons.

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[8]Michael Loux, "Toward an Aristotelian Theory of Abstract Objects," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy: Studies in Essentialism* 11, (1986): 498.

[9]Loux, "Toward and Aristotelian Theory of Abstract Objects," 498.

[10]Loux, "Toward an Aristotelian Theory of Abstract Objects," 498.

The attributive account of 'good' claims that statements like "That's good" are incomplete. Keeping with Loux's terminology the attributive account claims that 'good' is a predicate-forming functor that takes kinds as arguments and yields as values one-place predicates true or false of particular instances of the appropriate kind. Hence, 'good', like 'believes' on the predicate-forming functor account, does not relate things to the property goodness. Rather, 'good' describes things without itself referring to some unique property.

Each of the above elaborations on the attributive account of 'good' implies that it is a mistake to think that goodness could figure into *a posteriori* necessities. First, there is no property of goodness that exists apart from the kind it modifies. If it were possible to provide a synthetic property identity for goodness, goodness would have to be a property that exists independently of the thing it modifies (or have a nature that is not intimately connected to the nature of the thing it modifies). The attributive account implies that 'good' is inseparable from the noun it modifies. The appeal to the *a posteriori* necessity as a way of avoiding the OQA requires that 'good' be separable from the noun it modifies, i.e. that 'good' all by itself refer to something with an essence of its own independently of whatever it modifies. Second, 'good' is something like a predicate-forming functor. It is by itself incomplete. Further since 'good' requires completion by a kind term the function of 'good' is to describe the kind term it modifies similar to the way that Loux suggests propositional attitudes describe the persons they modify.

In this section I have argued that 'good' does not refer to a property of the sort needed by moral realists who wish to maintain that goodness is a property and that the

nature of goodness may be knowable only *a posteriori*. Indeed the function of 'good' is nothing like the function of terms referring to properties. In the case of 'x is a red o' the statements tells us that o belongs to the set of red things. In the case of 'x is a good K' the statement does not tell us that x belongs to the set of good things. Rather the statement tells us that x is a K and x has the attributes required for membership in K to such-and-such a degree. In other words a thing's being a good K is somehow connected to the nature of Ks. The next section attempts to make this connection explicit.

2. In Defense of the Goodness Depends on Natures and/or Functions Claim

The attributive account of 'good' implies that only things with natures and/or functions can be good. Nearly every commentator on the attributive account assumes that the account implies that only things with natures and/or functions can be good. In chapter two, I pointed out that one objection to the attributive account arises from the apparent fact that things without natures and/or functions can be good. In this section I argue that the attributive account does imply that only things with natures and/or functions can be good, but that this is not a problem. A full defense against the objection that things without natures and/or functions can be good is provided in chapter four.

The attributive account of 'good' rules out the Kripkean/Putnamian gambit. The inseparability of 'good' from the noun it modifies implies that goodness is not the type of property that can figure into synthetic property identities. The inseparability of the term 'good' from the noun it modifies also suggests that a correct understanding of goodness will have to include an account of the type of thing that goodness is being attributed to. In other words a correct understanding of the statement 'x is a good K' requires understanding something about the modifier 'good' and the modified 'K'. This is as it

should be. In the last chapter I appealed to the notions of nature or essence and function in order to dispel various worries. In this section I will argue that the attributive account of 'good' implies that the goodness of a thing is determined by the nature and/or function of that thing. Although different types of things can be good, what makes different types of things good is determined by the nature and/or function of the thing.

The goodness of a thing is determined by its nature and/or function. If x is a member of some kind K, then x is a good K iff x is a functioning member of K to such-and-such a degree.[11] This definition is silent on the issue of the primary K a thing belongs to. Thus, the following could very well be true: everything is a good member of some kind. Surely it is possible that each thing is a good member of some kind or other. The book on the shelf may be a bad book, but a good doorstop. The man on the stage may be a bad actor but a good violinist. Context will often determine the salient kind. It is not all up to context however. The nature of a thing determines the things primary kind.[12] *War and Peace* is most fundamentally a member of the book kind or the fiction book kind. It is only secondarily a member of other kinds. What we need then is a way to determine the primary kind that a thing belongs to. My suggestion is that natures will help here.

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[11]What about rocks and corpses? It seems that a rock or corpse could in some sense be a functioning member of the kind it belongs to, but that it is not appropriate to call either rocks or corpses good. In this case, only one direction of the biconditional is satisfied. Hence, these examples are not counterexamples to the biconditional. In the next chapter I will consider contexts where it is appropriate to say "that's a good rock" or "that's a good corpse". As we will see, contexts where it is appropriate to call a rock or a corpse good actually enhance the plausibility of the present account by referring to an implicit function.

[12]The distinction between primary and non-primary kind is important here because I am claiming that a thing's nature and/or function establishes evaluative criteria (or helps to determine whether or not it is good).

Kit Fine has provided compelling reasons to think that a thing's nature or essence is not co-extensive with a thing's unique necessary properties.[13] Fine gives the example of Socrates and the singleton set {Socrates}. The singleton {Socrates} is a necessary property of Socrates. There is no possible world in which Socrates exists and the singleton does not.[14] Nevertheless, Fine argues, it is implausible to suppose that the singleton is essential to Socrates. The singleton reveals nothing about the essence or nature of Socrates. Hence, necessary properties, even those that are unique to the individual are not necessarily essential. From these considerations Fine suggests that the essence of a thing is its definition as understood in the ancient and medieval sense. The definition of a thing in the ancient and medieval sense is the thing's most fundamental genus and differentiating species. For example, the most fundamental genus and differentiating species that humans belong to has been thought to be rational animal. Assuming that the standard account is correct, the essence or nature of human is rational animal.

Michael Rea has recently provided the following definition of a thing's primary kind.[15]

> K is *x's primary kind* $=_{df}$ *x* belongs to K and any term that refers to K is a (metaphysically) better answer to the question "What kind of thing is *x*?" than any term that does not refer to K.[16]

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[13]Kit Fine, "Essence and Modality," *Philosophical Perspectives* 8, (1994): 1-16.

[14]Assuming, of course, that sets exist.

[15]I have replaced Rea's term 'dominant' with 'primary'.

[16]Michael Rea, "In Defense of Mereological Universalism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58, no. 2 (1998): 358.

For example, if asked "What kind of thing is Julian?" the answer "He is a human." is better than the answer "He is an animal." or "He is an organism." Each answer is correct but the first provides the most fundamental or primary kind that Julian belongs to. Rea's suggestion nicely elaborates Fine's. Thus, the definition of a thing (in Fine's sense) corresponds to a thing's primary kind (in Rea's sense).

Using Fine's distinction between essence and necessary properties, we can now say that a thing's most fundamental kind is identical to its essence or nature. With the distinction between fundamental kind and non-fundamental kind in hand we can explain how it is possible for a thing x to be both a good K and a bad K' and a bad K but a good K'. Where K designates a thing's most fundamental kind and K' designates a thing's non-fundamental kind it is easy to see how, for example, a lawnmower might be a good lawnmower (K) and a bad piece of yard furniture (K') or a good piece of yard furniture and a bad lawnmower (of course it could also be a good lawnmower and a good piece of lawn furniture).[17] Lawnmower's most fundament kind is revealed by its essence or nature.[18] In the case of artifacts it is plausible to suppose that the essence of an artifact just is its function. Hence, the essence of a lawnmower is something like being a

[17]This example is taken from Thomson's "The Right and the Good," 291.

[18]I assume throughout that artifacts have natures and thus really exist. This assumption has been denied most recently by Peter van Inwagen, David Lewis and Trenton Merricks. Nothing crucial to my account hangs on the ontological status of artifacts, so I will not attempt to defend the assumption here. See Peter van Inwagen, *Material Being* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); David Lewis, *Parts of Classes* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). For defenses of the claim that artifacts really exist see Amie Thomasson, "Realism and Human Kinds," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2003; Lynne Rudder-Baker, "The Ontology of Artifacts," *Philosophical Explorations* 7, no. 2 (2004): 99-111.

machine that cuts grass. If a specific lawnmower does not cut grass efficiently then it is a bad lawnmower. The same sort of thing could be said for non-human animals. While non-human animals are not artifacts and thus identifying their natures with their function is perhaps implausible, the essence or nature of a non-human animal determines to some degree its goodness. Since the essence of a rabbit is different from the essence of a horse, a good rabbit will necessarily possess different features from a good horse.

The above account of the distinction between natures and necessary properties provides us with the means to specify the most fundamental kind that a thing belongs to. Doing so allows us to distinguish between a thing's being a good member of its most fundamental kind and a thing's being a good member of some other non-fundamental kind. In certain cases such as non-human animals (I leave the discussion of human animals for the third section of this chapter) and plants a thing's nature is not identical to its function, though the two are intimately related.[19]

Consider for example the function of a heart. The function of a heart is to pump blood. If the function of a heart and the nature of a heart were identical then anything with the property of pumping blood (the function of the heart) will be identical to a heart. But clearly this is not so. Is an artificial heart a heart? How about a machine that someone is hooked up to that pumps blood? The natural answer to both questions seems to be no. An artificial heart is, well, an artificial heart not a heart just as artificial leather

[19]I suspect that the relationship between natures and functions with respect to non-human animals and plants is one of necessary co-extension. If one takes necessary co-extension to imply identity, then the relationship between functions and natures in the non-animal and plant cases will be the same as the relationship between functions and natures in the artifactual cases.

is not leather.[20] Someone has an artificial heart because her heart has stopped functioning as it ought. But if the function of a heart is identical to its nature, it wouldn't make sense to say that the person's heart stopped functioning so she now has an artificial heart. Rather we should say that her heart stopped functioning so she now has a new heart. But in the latter case we would normally suppose that she underwent a heart-transplant, not that she has an artificial heart. Hence, the nature of certain kinds (e.g. natural kinds as opposed to artifactual kinds) is not identical to their function.[21]

Despite the fact that the nature of certain kinds is not identical to their function, natures and functions are nevertheless intimately related. Consider again a heart. Let N designate the nature of a heart and F its function. N and F are not identical. Something can have F for its function but not N as its nature. That is, something can have pumping blood as its function without being a heart (e.g. an artificial heart or an external machine). Does the converse hold? That is, can something have N as its nature without having F as its function? It seems not. If a heart's nature is N, then its function is F. The nature of a heart determines or includes its function. The relationship between natures and functions helps explain how it makes sense to say that this heart is a bad heart. If x is a bad heart, x nevertheless is a heart. A bad heart is still a heart. In every possible world in which hearts exist, they are N. The distinction between a bad heart and a good heart is thus not

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[20]Recall the discussion in chapter about *alienans* adjectives. One of the features highlighted in that earlier discussion was that if A is an *alienans* adjective, then in statements where A modifies N what is normally true of an N minus A will not necessarily be true of an N plus A. Artificial is an *alienans* adjective. Thus, what is normally true of hearts is not necessarily true of artificial hearts.

[21]This is but one difference among many between artifacts and natural kinds. See Amie Thomasson, "Artifacts and Human Concepts," in *Creations of the Mind: Essays on Artifacts and their Representation*, ed. Stephen Laurence and Eric Margolis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

a distinction between the natures of each heart. Rather, it is a distinction between the functioning of each heart. A bad heart is one that does not function as it should, as its nature determines. A good heart is one that does function as it should, as its nature determines. Hence, x is a good K, where K is the most fundamental kind that x belongs to, iff x is a properly functioning member of K. Hence, the attributive account implies that things without functions and/or natures cannot be good.[22]

2.1. Objections

J. J. Thomson and others have noted that, strictly speaking, the attributive account does not rule out attributing goodness to things that do not have functions.[23] For example, "x is a good pebble" or "x is a good corpse" appear to satisfy the desiderata revealed by the attributive account. But, since we are prompted to ask, "a good pebble for what?" or "a good corpse for what?" statements such as "x is a good pebble" or "x is a good corpse" do not make sense; they are semantically incomplete requiring some adjunctive phrase in order to complete them, argues Thomson and others. Thus, "x is a good pebble for breaking windows" or "x is a good corpse for anatomy" make sense. Given that the attributive account licenses incomplete statements, the attributive account should be replaced by the adjunctive account, which does not appear to have the same consequence.

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[22]Another way to see the connection between goodness and function is by considering cases where a thing's function and nature are completely unknown. In such cases, it seems impossible to assert with any assurance that the thing is good or bad or that doing such and such to it would be good or bad. Cases like these strike me as providing reasons to support the claim that things without functions and natures simply cannot be good.

[23]Thomson, "The Right and the Good." See also, R. M. Hare, "Geach: Good and Evil," *Analysis* 18, (1957): 103-12.

There are at least two responses to be made to the above objection. I will postpone the second response to the next chapter where we will cover the metaphysics of function in some detail. The first response states that the semantic incompleteness found by Thomson and others is based on a misunderstanding. The attributive account begins by saying that 'good' cannot be separated from the substantive (to use Geach's term) or the noun it modifies. The attributive account need not end there (and Geach does not). The nature of the substantive is relevant to determining whether or not it can properly occupy the argument position in the incomplete statement 'x is a good____'. The suggestion of this section is that only things with natures and/or functions can properly fill the argument position. Since there is no natural or conventionally understood function of pebbles or corpses, the phrases are odd. The fact that statements such as "x is a good pebble" or "x is a good corpse" sound odd or even absurd is nicely explained.

Jyl Gertzler defends a Socratic account of goodness along the same lines. According to Socrates there is a good and a bad for each thing.[24] Socrates' claim seems absurd with respect to pebbles and corpses. What, we wonder, could be good for a pebble or a corpse? Gertzler provides the following response:

> While Socrates suggests that there is a 'good and a bad for each thing', it might seem that there are some types of things—e.g., a pile of trash, the smallest elementary particle [pebbles and corpses]—for which it is impossible to conceive of benefits or harms. But these cases, one might argue, are the very exceptions that prove the rule, since the first is a case of something that fails to count as a genuine thing …, and the second is a case of something whose unity is always guaranteed (and so cannot be benefited or harmed). I suspect that our hesitation to agree with Socrates' suggestion that things can be good for wood or bad for iron is due to the fact that the 'stuffs' of wood and iron lack sufficient unity to count as genuine things. Once we have in mind a particular wooden or iron thing,

[24]See Jyl Gertzler, "The Attractions and Delights of Goodness," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 54, no. 216 (2003): 361.

> say, a statue, we are no longer at a loss to think of things that might count as good or bad for it.[25]

Gertzler's main concern is to defend the idea that the oneness or unity of a thing provides a criteria of evaluation. While that is not my concern her remarks are relevant to the attributive account. It may be that neither pebbles nor corpses are genuine things and thus cannot have a nature or a function. Hence, a good pebble or a good corpse is simply a category mistake. Or it may be that pebbles and corpses have natures and functions but that they are guaranteed to fully realize them. If pebbles and corpses are guaranteed to realize their natures (or to fulfill their functions), then they cannot be benefited or harmed. Thus, nothing could count as being good or bad for a pebble or a corpse. Furthermore, a good pebble would just be a pebble. The fact that a pebble fully realizes its nature and function would imply that simply being a pebble entails being a good one. The redundancy helps explain the oddity in the claim that this is a good pebble.[26]

To many the implication that only things with functions can be good is a *reductio* of the attributive account. Two different types of counterexample are often cited as posing problems for this implication. First, there are things with functions that are not good because of their proper functioning. An example often cited is humans. John, it is claimed, may be a good human, despite the fact, that John is not a properly functioning

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[25]Gertzler, "The Attractions and Delights of Goodness," 361.

[26]Interestingly, Brian Davies seems to suggest something similar in the case of divine goodness. Since God cannot fail to fully realize his nature and function God cannot fail to be good. Thus, calling God good is (in the sense we are considering) redundant. See Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*.

human.[27] Another example is news.[28] The statement "That's good news." does not refer to the function of news. Second, there are things without functions that can be good. For example, it seems perfectly intelligible to say, "that is a good sunset" and the statement does not appear to have anything to do with the function or nature of sunsets.[29]

According to the first type of counterexample, there are some things that are good independently of their function. That is, some member x of kind K may have function F and x may be a good K despite the fact that x does not perform F well. Thus, the performance of a function is, in some cases, irrelevant to its goodness. The function of news is to convey information not previously known. But, it is urged, something can be good news despite the fact that the function of news is not properly executed. That is, it is possible for there to be a case where previously unknown information is conveyed quite poorly and nevertheless the news is good news.

It is important to notice that the *good news* objection (as we might call it) trades on an ellipsis. Whenever someone claims "That's good news" the statement is elliptical for something like "That's good news for me" or "That's good news for you" or "That's good news for such and such." These statements make explicit that what is good is not

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[27]Since the topic of human goodness is large I save a discussion of this example for the next section.

[28]See Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 272-273. Zagzebski's discussion is influenced by a similar point made by Stuart Hampshire. See Stuart Hampshire, "Ethics: A Defense of Aristotle," in *Freedom of Mind and Other Essays* ed. Stuart Hampshire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[29]Notice that the response I gave to the good pebble/good corpse objection may apply to the good sunset objection as well. If sunsets are not genuine things, then they are barred from occupying the argument position in the predicate-forming functor 'good'.

the news qua news (i.e. the conveyance of previously unknown information) but the content of the news. The news is good news not because of its presentational features but rather because the content is in some sense beneficial to someone (or some collection of beneficiaries).[30] If the news is indeed good news, then it must be good for someone or something. As we have seen in chapter two and will explore in the next section, whether or not something is good for someone depends on the nature and/or function of humans.[31] Thus, contrary to the objection, something's function is relevant for determining the truth of the claim "That's good news."

The second type of counterexample claims that it is possible for things without functions to be good. Other than the first reply, the replies to this type of counterexample hold, *mutatis mutandis* for every instance, so I'll focus on just one example. Consider the claim that some sunset is good. The claim appears to be a counterexample because sunsets do not have functions and yet some are good and some are bad. Thus, it is false that only things with functions can occupy the argument place in 'x is a good_____'.

First, it is worth pointing out that the statement "That is a good sunset" is not often heard. Instead, "That is a beautiful sunset" or "That is a pretty sunset" or some other statement involving terms that are closer to response-dependent than 'good' is usually offered. Second, the statement "That's a good sunset" usually means that the sunset is good for viewing or good for drawing or good for … The 'good for'

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[30]If it is clear that the claim "that's good news" is not elliptical, then the only way to evaluate the claim would be by considering the function of news qua news.

[31]Consider the following piece of fictional news. The Nazis have won the war. Is that good news or bad news? It may be deemed good news if you are a Nazi or Nazi sympathizer and bad news if you are not. Who's correct? Given realism, I assume that someone is correct. I argue in the next section that the nature and/or function of humans is relevant to deciding whether or not such news is good or bad.

construction will be dealt with in a bit more detail in chapter four. For now it is enough to point out that 'good for' constructions do not threaten the attributive account because it is plausible to suppose that there is something in the offing with a function that is relevant to determining the truth-value of the claim.

So far we have discussed artifacts, plants, and non-human animals. We have seen that in the artifact case the function of an artifact is (or may be) identical to its nature. In the plant and animal cases natures and functions should probably be distinguished. Nevertheless, in the plant and non-human animal cases natures and functions are intimately related. Natures determine (or include) functions, and functions determine the goodness or badness of a thing. It is now time to consider humans.

3. In Defense of the Uniqueness and Uniformity of Human Goodness Claim

The attributive account of 'good' together with GNF and the plausible assumption that humans have a nature implies that human goodness is unique and uniform. If S is a human, then there is one and only one good for S qua human.[32] For many moral philosophers this implication is enough for them to reject the attributive account of 'good' or to argue that the attributive account does not imply that human goodness is

[32]Throughout this section I assume that if John is a human, then John's primary kind is human. Furthermore, I assume (though I do provide some reasons for believing) that the goodness that is determined by a thing's primary kind has more weight than the goodness determined by a thing's non-primary kinds in the following sense: if John is a human and a teacher, then in situations where the evaluative standards determined by the nature of being a teacher conflict with the evaluative standards determined by the nature of being a human (assuming there are some), then the evaluative standards determined by the nature of being a human outweigh the evaluative standards determined by the nature of being a teacher. For a defense of the basic strategy here (though with a kind of non-realist perspective) see Christine M Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

unique and uniform.[33] I argue that the claim that human goodness is unique and uniform does follow from the attributive account of 'good' together with GNF and the claim that humans have a nature. Second, I argue that this implication is a virtue of any moral theory, and that the objections raised against it are based on either thin accounts of human nature or a misunderstanding of the claim that human goodness is unique and uniform.

For each thing with a nature or essence, there is a fundamental kind that that thing belongs to (for all x, if x has a nature, then there is a K such that K is the most fundamental kind that x belongs to). Indeed, the fundamental kind that a thing belongs to just is, given Fine's work, its nature or essence. Humans belong to a kind. Each human is a member of the same fundamental kind. For our purposes it is not necessary to specify the fundamental kind that humans belong to. Let us call the fundamental kind that humans belong to RA (for rational animal). RA is the nature of each member of the human kind. In order for x to be a member of the human kind x must be a rational animal (or whatever you think the nature of humans is). Since we have already shown that the goodness of a thing depends on the nature and function of that thing, it follows that the goodness of a human depends on a human's nature and function.

According to the attributive account of 'good', 'good' cannot, logically, be separated from the noun it modifies. As we have seen the noun that 'good' modifies must be a noun that refers to a kind.[34] However, not just any kind will do. The pebble and corpse kind do not work because these kinds do not have members with functions

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[33]For example, Thomson's "The Right and the Good" as well as her more recent *Goodness and Advice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Each can be read as being partially motivated by a concern to avoid this implication.

[34]It is important to remember that by 'kind' I do not privilege natural kinds over others (e.g. artifactual).

and/or natures. Thus, 'good' must modify kinds whose members have functions and/or natures. A simple—perhaps too simple—argument gets us to the desired conclusion. It is perfectly intelligible to talk of good humans. Hence, human kind has members that have a nature and/or function. Given GNF the goodness of a thing is, in some sense determined by the thing's nature and/or function. Hence, the goodness of a human is determined, in some sense by the nature and/or function of humans. Given that humans have one nature and that that nature determines what a good human (qua human) is it follows that human goodness is unique and uniform. Human goodness is unique because human nature is unique. Human goodness is uniform because each thing that has the nature of a human is essentially a human. That is, the property being human is both necessary and essential to anything that has it (drawing on Fine's distinction between necessary properties and essential ones discussed above).

There are many objections that can be raised against the claim that human goodness is unique and uniform. Considering these objections and the responses will help to clarify that claim.

3.1. Objections

As we shall see the most pressing problem for theories that attempt to ground morality in human nature has to do with the diversity with which humans seem to be able to express that nature. The worry is that there are many forms that human goodness can take and that only a small number of these forms are grounded in human nature. The objections that we shall consider in this section can all be seen as species of this more general concern.

The Gauguin Problem

Bernard Williams raises an interesting problem for theories of morality that appeal to human nature.[35] We can, felicitously, recast Williams's argument in the form of a dilemma.[36]

1. Either human nature determines a set of moral standards that collectively pick out one way of life as exemplifying that nature or it does not.
2. If human nature does determine a set of standards that collectively pick out one way of life as exemplifying that nature, then it is likely that the way of life picked out will not have much to do with morality (and thus human nature is not grounding morality).
3. If human nature does not determine a set of standards that collectively pick out one way of life as exemplifying that nature, then human nature is not grounding morality.
4. Hence, human nature does not ground morality.

Williams calls this the *Gauguin Problem* because the life of a creative genius seems to exemplify human nature in a high degree but such a life may not have much or anything to do with morality.[37] Indeed such a life may conflict with morality. As Williams puts it:

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[35]I am ignoring Williams' distinction between ethics and morality.

[36]See Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

[37]Readers may be puzzled at my reconstruction of the *Gauguin Problem*. Premise 2 is meant to be a generalization that includes cases like Gauguin's but also includes cases where rather than conflict arising between considerations of human nature and other considerations there is simply independence.

> A moralist who wants to base a conception of the right sort of life for man on considerations about the high and distinctive powers of man can scarcely disregard the claims of creative genius in the arts or sciences to be included preeminently among such powers; yet he will find it hard to elicit from, or even reconcile with, an ideal of the development and expression of such genius, the more everyday and domesticated virtues and commitments of which morality has to give some account.[38]

There are, at least, two responses to be given to the *Gauguin Problem*. Consider the following parody argument:

1*. Either the nature (or function) of a time-keeping device (e.g. a watch or a clock) determines a set of standards that collectively pick out one way of exemplifying that nature or it does not.

2*. If the nature of a time-keeping device does determine a set of standards that collectively pick out one way of exemplifying that nature, then it is likely that the way picked out will not have much to do with how time-keeping devices ought to behave.

3*. If the nature of a time-keeping device does not determine a set of standards that collectively pick out one way of exemplifying that nature, then the nature of a time keeping device is not grounding how time-keeping devices ought to behave.

4*. Hence, the nature of a time-keeping device does not ground how time-keeping devices ought to behave.

For convenience we will call the parody argument the *Watch Problem*. That the *Watch Problem* is no problem at all is fairly obvious. 2* seems clearly false. The nature of a time-keeping device is to tell time. A time-keeping device may tell time poorly or it

[38]Williams, *Morality*, 61.

may tell time well. If a time-keeping device tells time poorly, then it is a bad time-keeping device, and if it tells time well, then it is a good time keeping device.[39] The nature of a time-keeping device not only determines a set of standards that collectively pick out one way of exemplifying the nature of a time-keeping device; it also determines how time-keeping devices ought to behave.

While the nature of a time-keeping device does determine how a time-keeping device ought to behave, the nature does not specify each and every detail of how specific time-keeping devices ought to be. For example, a good time-keeping device may be a clock or a watch. It may be large or small, made of plastic or metal or wood. In other words, while the nature determines a kind of homogeneity at one level it does not rule out heterogeneity at other levels.[40]

Returning to Williams's argument we can now locate the problem in the second premise. Human nature (whatever it is) can specify a distinctive and uniform kind of

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[39]A time-keeping device is a good one qua time-keeping device if and only if it tells time accurately. The various types of time-keeping devices will determine further standards of evaluation (e.g. watches need to tell time accurately and be lightweight, legible, etc.).

[40]The lesson of the *Watch Problem* may help a bit (I stress a bit) with some interesting problems that arise in missiology (the study of missions). I know a number of native Africans who complain about the importation of Christianity. The main complaint (from both Christians and non-Christians) is that the importation of Christianity brought about a significant decline in African culture. The worry is that Christianity is incompatible with the diversity of cultures. The problem is not, it seems to me, with the complaint of the Africans. Rather, the problem is with the identification of Christianity with some specific culture. No doubt the importation of Christianity into a non-Christian area will result in the abandonment of certain beliefs and practices at odds with the beliefs and practices essential to Christianity. But this does not entail a total abandonment of the culture. For example, dress, language, dance, food, art, and other cultural features may largely remain intact after Christianity has become fixed as it were. Thus, it is possible to have homogeneity at a basic level (fundamental beliefs, desires, etc) and heterogeneity at non-basic levels.

goodness that is perfectly compatible with the artistic genius and with the "more everyday and domesticated virtues and commitments of which morality has to give some account." The primary kind the artist or factory worker belongs to is the human kind. If the artist or factory worker flouts the standards (and Williams recognizes that there are standards associated with human kind) associated with being human, then she is a bad member of her kind. The non-primary kinds the artist or factory worker belong to will, no doubt, also provide standards of evaluation. As we layer these non-primary kinds upon each other a much more substantive ethics emerges. The main point of the response to Williams's objection is that the primary kind provides standards of evaluation that must be met by any good member of the kind. That the standards of evaluation picked out by the primary kind do not specify every detail that members of the kind must meet should be seen as a virtue of the theory not a vice.

Second, Williams's argument may rest on a thin account of human nature. Indeed I suspect that many of the objections to moral theories such as the one presented here rely on assuming a thin account of human nature. The thinner the account the more difficult it will be to ground morality on it.

Williams worries that artistic geniuses will either be left out of the moral picture or artistic geniuses will force us to leave out the main concerns of morality. His worry appears to rest on the assumption that the artistic or creative genius exemplifies human nature more than anyone.[41] It does not appear as though the structure of the moral theory presented here would in any way commit us to the claim that creative genius is the

[41]Of course, this is precisely the worry that many come to after finishing Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The contemplative life seems divorced from the political life. But the political life is where we find the "domesticated virtues" that Williams speaks of.

highest expression of human nature any more than the nature of a time-keeping device commits one to the claim that a Rolex is the highest expression of that nature.

The Argument from Agreement

R.M. Hare has noted that any theory of human goodness that claims that some human is a good member of its kind just in case it fulfills the function of humans to such-and-such a degree fails from the start since we know what it means to be a good human without knowing what the function or nature of a human is.[42] Geach appears to think otherwise. He writes, "If I do not know what hygrometers are for, I do not really know what 'hygrometer' means, and *therefore* do not really know what 'good hygrometer' means; I merely know that I could find out its meaning by finding out what hygrometers were for …".[43] Though Geach here talks of artifacts, his point is, I take it, meant to generalize to non-artifacts as well. Thus, if we do not know what humans are for, we will not really know what 'human' means, and therefore will not really know what 'good human' means. Most, I assume, will find the substitution of humans for hygrometers preposterous. Perhaps in order to know the meaning of a term that refers to an artifact we must know what the artifact is for, but granting this in no way commits one to the view that in order to know what the term 'human' means one must know what humans are for. Thus, we can break the present objection into two parts: (a) Geach is wrong to suppose that the meaning of a term is somehow intimately connected to the nature of the thing the

[42]Thanks to Anselm Muller for this objection. According to Muller, the objection is due to Hare.

[43]Geach, "Good and Evil," 69.

term refers to, and (b) Geach is wrong to suppose that we must know the function or nature of a thing before we can judge it good or bad.

First, it is important to remember the effect that the qua-problem had on the pure causal theory of reference. This effect has not, in my judgment, been sufficiently grasped in the literature. If the qua-problem is indeed a problem and the hybrid solution is indeed the only way to save the causal theory of reference, then for many terms (especially natural kind terms) the meaning of the term will include at least a partial understanding of the nature of the referent.[44] According to the hybrid theory of reference in order to initially baptize the natural kind tiger when confronted with an instance of tiger one must have some necessarily true description in mind. The description cannot be too general, lest the qua-problem reemerges. Thus, the description must be such that at least part of what it is to be a member of the tiger kind is included. The term 'tiger' then does not refer without any descriptive content. Rather, it refers with some content that specifies at least one characteristic that tigers have that demarcates them from non-tigers. Such a description is, it seems, at least a partial specification of the nature of tiger. If this is correct, then Geach is not as far off as the first part (part (a)) to the above objection implies. Terms that refer to things that have natures must include in their meaning at least a partial specification of the nature of the referent.

But if the meaning of a term must include a partial specification of the nature of the referent, the fact that in some cases the nature is identical with the function implies

[44]At the very least the meaning of the term will include the correct category that the referent belongs to.

that the meaning of the term includes (at least partially) the thing's function.[45] That the meaning of a term includes the referent's function is not implausible with respect to artifactual terms. The meaning of 'hygrometer' just is whatever hygrometers are for. But what about the term 'human'? The meaning of 'human' does not appear to have anything to do with the function—if there is one—of humans.

Again, the hybrid theory helps here. The initial baptism of the species human could not have been a purely causally referential one given that the qua-problem is a problem and the hybrid theory is the best solution. The initial baptism must have included at least a partial specification of the nature of the referent. However, since natures and functions are not identical in the case of organisms, it does not follow that the meaning of 'human' is constituted in part by the function of human. What we now have is the following: if we do not know what humans are (at least partially), we will not really know what 'human' means, and therefore will not really know what 'good human' means. It appears that part (a) to the objection has been met; the meaning of a term is, at least partially related to the nature of the thing the term refers to.

Part (b) to the objection claims that we can truly judge of x that it is a good K without knowing what K's are or what K's are for. Geach's hygrometer example is again relevant here as are other artifacts. In the case of good humans the nature of a human must still be, at least partially, grasped in order for us to know what it is to be a good human. In the second chapter I noted that if we do not need to know anything at all about the natures of humans in our evaluations, then we could not know whether justice or temperance or courage are indeed good-making characteristics. At least some

[45]I am assuming that given the identity of nature and functions it is permissible to substitute one for the other *salva veritate*, at least in transparent contexts.

rudimentary knowledge of what humans are is necessary for determining whether x is a good human. Furthermore, at least rudimentary knowledge of what humans are is necessary for determining whether y is good for humans.

Nevertheless, Hare and others may persist. We simply do not know what human nature is in anything more than a rudimentary way and we have no idea what the function of a human is. But we do know what a good human is. The claim that we do not know either the nature or function of humans is, I think, false. However, an adequate response does not depend on its falsity. If we grant that we do not know what the function of a human is, we can use this fact in order to account for widespread moral disagreement. If we can account for widespread moral disagreement, then one of the major obstacles to moral realism is removed. Thus, by assuming, with Hare, that we do not know what the nature or function of a human is we can account for widespread moral disagreement.

One of the major objections to moral realism is that the type of disagreement we find in morality is different from the type of disagreement we find in science. In science disputes are often settled. In morality disputes are rarely settled. The discrepancy between moral and non-moral disagreement is then cited as evidence that ethics does not deal with an objective reality. According to the version of moral realism being offered here, however, the discrepancy is easily explained. Given that human goodness depends on the nature and function of humans and that there is little agreement on what the nature and function of a human is, it is not surprising to find so much moral disagreement. Until we agree that humans are such-and-such and have function so-and-so we will never agree

on less basic moral issues.[46] Thus, the moral theory advocated here nicely explains the nature of moral disagreement in a way that is consistent with moral realism.

Being able to explain moral disagreement in terms of disagreement over the nature and/or function of a human helps to dissolve Hare's objection. The fact that the moral theory advocated here explains such phenomena, where other theories fail, helps to increase its plausibility. Moral disagreement persists, in part, because the disputants are not sure what a good human is, and they are not sure what a good human is because they are not sure what the nature and function of a human is. Thus, human nature is relevant and the claim that human goodness is dependent on human nature and human function makes perfect sense of both our overall use of the term 'good' and one of the most significant objections to moral realism.

Hare's objection assumes that there is agreement about what features a good human would have. Is it at all plausible to suppose that if there is such agreement, the relevant features do not reveal, in part, the nature of humans? It seems the answer is no. If there is agreement about what features a good human would have, then from this agreement we can discover the nature, in part, of humans. Imagine an analogous situation in which someone does not know the nature or function of a pen but is told of some particular example that it is a good pen. Knowing that the pen is a good one would enable the individual to discover the nature or function of pens. Similarly, knowing that this particular person is a good human would enable us to discover the nature of a human. Does this imply that the claim that morality is grounded in human nature is false? Not at

[46]This does not imply that agreement about the nature and function of humans would settle every moral dispute. Many moral disputes have to do with the natures and functions of non-humans or the nature and function of various practices.

all. To say that our knowledge of the features required for being a good human reveals the nature of a human is epistemological. To say that morality is grounded in human nature is metaphysical. That the metaphysics of morality is revealed by our moral knowledge is perfectly compatible with the claim that morality is grounded in human nature.

Ideal Goals

A closely related objection has been proffered by J.J. Thomson. According to Thomson some animate objects have design functions that are not relevant to determining what is good for them. Thomson's example is humans. What is good for humans depends not on their design function but on what helps them in achieving their ideal goals. She writes, "X is good for Alfred just in case X benefits him in that it conduces to his reaching one or more of (what I shall call) his *ideal goals*".[47] Thomson's account of ideal goals is the familiar one. An ideal goal of Alfred's "is what Alfred would aim at in ideal conditions of full information about costs, assessed "in a cool hour," and lack of improper preference bendings".[48] Given this characterization of what benefits Alfred, Thomson concludes that Alfred's design functions may or may not aid him in achieving his ideal goals. Hence, Alfred's achieving his design functions may or may not be good for him. On this score Thomson states,

> [N]ot only do use function and role functions fail to fix what is good for a person, but so also do design functions. Suppose that Alfred was designed by nature to *A*. Conducing to his *A*-ing may conduce to his reaching one or more of his ideal goals. But it may not. Doing so may even conflict with reaching one or more of his ideal goals. If conducing to his *A*-ing does not conduce to his reaching an

[47]Thomson, "The Right and the Good", 296.

[48]Thomson, "The Right and the Good", 296.

> ideal goal, then the familiar theory [the theory that grounds what is good for a person in his or her achieving their ideal goals] tells us that doing so is not good for him. So design functions have not the role of fixing what is good for a person that they have in fixing what is good for artifacts (297).[49]

According to the theory I am advocating, x is a good K just in case x fulfills its function or nature to such-and-such a degree. Among other things, this means that x must function as befits Ks. Thomson's theory appears to be in conflict with this theory. But perhaps appearances are misleading. After all, Thomson speaks of what is good for a person and not of what a good person is. What is good for a person is whatever conduces to their achieving their ideal goals. It seems perfectly consistent to maintain Thomson's notion of goodness-for along with my notion of a good K.[50]

The problem with the attempt to reconcile the two views is that (granting Thomson the coherence of her account of ideal goals) according to my account it should be among a person's ideal goals to be a good human. To see why my account implies that one of a human's ideal goals is to be a good human consider the standard account of the nature of a human; the standard account tells us that humans are essentially rational animals. Thus, being a good human means exemplifying one's rationality and animality to such-and-such a degree. Given Thomson's characterization of ideal goals it seems that one of an agent's ideal goals (perhaps the ideal goal) would be a desire to be a good rational animal.[51] Being a good K involves the achievement of one's design functions.

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[49]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 297.

[50]Because Thomson's story and the story presented here are quite close on many details (see chapter two for some of the details) attempting and failing to reconcile them will help us see exactly where the two stories differ.

[51]Indeed on at least one account of rationality it is analytic that Thomson's ideal agent would have as a goal to be ideally rational.

Hence, achieving one's design functions cannot conflict with one's ideal goals, contrary to what Thomson claims.[52]

The conflict with my account and Thomson's is thus not merely apparent. Nevertheless it may be that a bit of tweaking can reconcile the two views while leaving both relatively the same. For example, Thomson could argue that it is among one's design functions to be a good human and that this design function is necessarily among one's ideal goals. That is, there is an ideal goal that every human has simply in virtue of being human. While this seems to me to result in reconciliation it may cost Thomson far too much.

Thomson's account of design functions, at least for animate objects, is the familiar etiological theory. Thomson articulates this theory with reference to plants.

> Where *Y* is a plant, *Y* is designed to *A* if it was designed by nature to *A*. That is so if *Y* has some features *F* because possession of *F* by *Y*'s ancestors increased the likelihood that they would *A*, where increasing the likelihood that they would *A* conduced to their reproductive success.[53]

Although Thomson is not explicit, she clearly thinks that the etiological theory is sufficient for explaining the function of humans as well. Given her reliance on the etiological account of function, it seems as though Thomson cannot, after all, accept my proposed emendation. To accept it would require her to say that evolution designed humans in such a way that being a good human was among their functions. As far as I

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[52]Objection: The argument in the text begs the question. It presumes that rationality must be desired by everyone as an ideal goal. Reply: The argument in the text attempts to establish an inconsistency between Thomson's account and my account by assuming the correctness of my account. If my account is true, then Thomson's account is false. That is, since my account seems to imply that rationality must be desired as an ideal goal because of what one's design function is and Thomson's account does not imply any such thing, the accounts are incompatible.

[53]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 293.

know no evolutionary story would dare say such a thing. Perhaps the chief reason is that doing so would amount to making selection for traits based on (at least for humans) the good of the individual or species.[54] Making selection for traits based on the good of the individual or species undercuts one of the main motivations for etiological accounts, which is to offer a theory of proper function that is value-free.

The reconciliation works only if Thomson expands her notion of human nature and human function in such a way as to include being a good human as a necessary ideal goal of all humans. But to allow this Thomson must give up the etiological account as it is standardly conceived. Are there independent reasons for Thomson to give up the etiological account? In the next chapter I argue that there are

[54]See Mark Bedau, "Where's the Good in Teleology?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, (1992): 781-801.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Function of 'Good' and Good Function

Throughout the last chapter I relied upon the notion of a function without explicitly explaining what exactly a function is. In this chapter I argue for a normative account of functions. We also saw that J. J. Thomson's account of what is good for a human conflicts with the account I defend. Thomson's account of what is good for a human is divorced from the function of a human. I located the root of the disagreement in our differing conceptions of the nature of functions and the nature of humans. Thomson's account relies on an etiological theory of functions, while my account is either incompatible with etiological accounts or requires a more substantial conception of the nature of humans or both. Either way an account of functions is required in order to more fully explain the kind of moral realism I am advocating. According to the version of moral realism I advocate the nature and function of a human ground morality. For ease of exposition I will hereafter call my account of moral realism Teleological Moral Realism or TMR.

Teleological moral realism presupposes a theory of functions. Yet, some theories of functions are not compatible with teleological moral realism (e.g. Thompson's). Theories of functions fall into three categories: etiological, statistical, and normative.[1] I will argue that the best account of the metaphysics of functions is a normative one that

[1]This way of breaking down the different accounts of functions is due to Michael Rea. See Michael Rea, *World Without Design*: *The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108-127.

distinguishes between system and part functions and that this account of functions supports TMR.

1. Etiological and Statistical Theories of Function

Etiological theories, which claim that *F* is the function of x when x exists because of its tendency to *F* and statistical accounts of functions, which claim that *F* is the function of x when x belongs to a kind whose members normally (understood statistically) *F*, are incompatible with teleological moral realism.[2] Etiological accounts are incompatible with TMR because such accounts rely too heavily on evolutionary theory. Such reliance rules out the possibility of constructing a moral theory based on the nature and function of humans because the primary function of a kind will be to survive and reproduce (or for members of the kind to survive and reproduce). If all there is to the function of a human is survival and reproduction, then ethics cannot be derived or built upon the function of a human. Statistical accounts of functions are incompatible with TMR because if one tried to build an ethical system upon them it would not be a version of moral realism. Instead it would be a version of moral relativism. Relativism follows from a statistical account because the function *F* of x or kind K changes as soon as a majority of the members of K no longer *F*. Thus, it is possible that the function of humans at time t is to *F* and the function of humans at t* is to *F**. At t and t* the function of humans is different and thus if morality is grounded on the function of humans, the morality would be different as well.[3]

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[2]Rea, *World Without Design*, 114.

[3]Assuming, of course, that *F* and *F** are sufficiently different.

Fortunately for TMR, etiological and statistical theories of functions are false, or so I will argue. Neither theory provides plausible necessary and sufficient conditions for functions. In this chapter I will first explain and refute statistical normality accounts of functions. Second, I will explain and refute etiological accounts of functions. Third, I will explain and defend normative accounts of functions. Lastly, I will argue that a slightly modified version of a normative account of functions provides both support for TMR and plausible responses to alleged counterexamples to the claim that something is good iff it is fulfilling its function to such-and-such a degree.

Statistical Theories of Functions

According to statistical normality theories of functions (SNF) a function is analyzed in terms of statistical normality. Thus, *F* is the function of x just in case the kind that x belongs to normally *F*s. For example, pumping blood is the function of this heart since the kind that this heart belongs to—namely, the heart-kind—normally pumps blood. The normally in the analysandum is to be understood in a statistical sense. Hence a more perspicuous way of rendering SNF is the following:

> *SNF*: *F* is the function of x iff x is a member of some kind K such that the majority of K's actually *F*.

SNF gains some plausibility from the fact that it is difficult to see how someone might defend the claim that *F* is the function of x and x belongs to a kind K that never *F*s. For example, claiming that the function of trees is mobility seems absurd because no tree is mobile and none that we know of have ever been mobile. Hence, to claim that *F* is the function of x and x's belong to a K that never *F*s seems absurd.

Objections to SNF

There are basically two types of direct objections to SNF: those that deny the necessary condition and those that deny the sufficient condition. I will also raise three indirect objections to SNF.

Against the Necessary Condition of SNF

The necessary condition, according to SNF, for *F* being the function of x is that x belongs to a K such that the majority of K's actually *F*. Michael Rea, drawing on some criticisms made by Alvin Plantinga, argues that it is possible for *F* to be the function of x despite the fact that x belongs to a K such that the majority of the Ks do not actually *F*.[4] Consider, for example, the function of the optic nerve. The function of the optic nerve is to transmit information to the visual cortex. If this became abnormal, that is, if the majority of optic nerves no longer did transmit information to the visual cortex, it would not follow that transmitting information to the visual cortex is not the proper function of the optic nerve.[5] Hence, it is not necessary for *F* to be the function of x that a majority of xs *F*. Another example is that of sperm. Few sperm manage to fertilize an egg. Nevertheless, the function of sperm is to fertilize an egg. However, according to SNF the function of sperm cannot be to fertilize an egg since statistically few ever do.

Against the Sufficient Condition of SNF

If a majority of xs that belong to K *F*, then *F* is the function of x. The sufficient condition of SNF is problematic. The major difficulty is that the antecedent does not

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[4]Rea, *World Without Design*, 116-117; Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 199-201.

[5]Rea, *World Without Design*, 117.

distinguish between a thing's function and its accidental properties. Consider the thumping sound that hearts make. The majority of hearts make a thumping sound. But making a thumping sound is not the function of the heart. By not distinguishing between a thing's function and its accidental properties SNF implausibly attributes far too many functions to a thing. Since the majority of hearts make a thumping sound hearts have the function of making a thumping sound, according to SNF. But making a thumping sound is not the function of a heart. Hence, SNF is false.[6]

SNF also suffers by not being able to adequately explain malfunction. If all of the xs *F*, then *F* is the function of x. Now imagine that the majority of hearts stop pumping blood. It would seem that the correct thing to say is that the majority of hearts are malfunctioning. But the SNF advocate cannot say that the majority of hearts are malfunctioning. Hence, SNF is false.[7]

Indirect Objections to SNF

According to the first indirect objection SNF implies that fulfilling the function of x is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for x being a good K. But fulfilling the

[6]Larry Wright's etiological account of functions is motivated in large part by examples like these. See Larry Wright, "Functions," *Philosophical Review* 82, (1973): 139-168.

[7]Malfunction considerations provide a great deal of the motivation behind Millikan's etiological account. See Ruth Millikan, *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984); "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science* 56, (1989): 288-302.

function of x is necessary (and may be sufficient in some cases) for x being a good K. Hence, SNF is false.[8]

If *F* is the function of x, then the majority of xs *F*. The claim that the majority of xs *F* is a necessary condition for *F* being the function of x. It is possible for x to be a good instance of its kind and nevertheless not perform *F* as the majority of xs, *ex hypothesi*, do. Consider again Rea's example of the optic nerve. A good optic nerve is one that transmits information to the visual cortex. Imagine that the majority of optic nerves fail to transmit information to the visual cortex. Hence, according to SNF, in order to be a good optic nerve, an optic nerve need not transmit information to the visual cortex. But this is false. Good optic nerves transmit information to the visual cortex.

According to SNF, if the majority of xs *F*, then *F* is the function of x. Consider again the thumping sound hearts make and assume, for the sake of argument, that making a thumping sound is the (a) function of hearts. A heart, however, could be a bad heart and make a thumping sound. Hence, SNF implies that satisfying the sufficient condition for something's being a function is not sufficient for its being a good instance of its kind.[9]

According to the second indirect objection SNF fails because it analyses functions in terms of the actual behavior of members of a kind. In other words, SNF does not

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[8]Quite obviously this objection relies on the claim that functions are relevant to evaluations. I am thus assuming that the arguments presented in chapters two and three above made the claim reasonable.

[9]It may be objected that this first indirect objection simply assumes that SNF is false. If SNF were true, then a thing's goodness could still be determined by its function. I think this rebuttal misses the point. What the indirect objection brings out is a further reason to regard SNF as susceptible to the direct objections. Someone not convinced by the direct objections may become so after considering the first indirect objection.

provide a metaphysical account of function but an account of function that if true (and we have seen that there are good reasons to think that it is not true) is indexed to the actual world only. This is a serious objection because in other worlds SNF may have no application and yet these other worlds could have entities that have functions.[10]

The third indirect objection comes from the connection between natures and functions spelled out in chapter three. The essential connection between natures and functions has the consequence that the changing of the function of K's results in the going out of existence of K's. The primary function of a member of a kind is essential to it. On SNF a thing can change its function by the change in function of other things. For example, suppose the function of hearts is to pump blood because this is what the majority of hearts actually do. If over time or simultaneously the majority of hearts no longer pumped blood, then the function of hearts would no longer be pumping blood. Now consider some heart that continues to pump blood. That heart's function is not pumping blood. If the primary function of a heart is to pump blood, then a heart cannot lose this function and continue to be a heart. Thus, the heart that continues to pump blood while the rest stop, is no longer a heart. This makes the nature of a thing completely extrinsic. But natures are not extrinsic is such a radical way.[11] I continue to be a human no matter what my peers do.[12]

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[10]Robert C. Koons presses these kinds of worries in his *Realism Regained: An Exact Theory of Causation, Teleology, and the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[11]Rea makes this same point with respect to proper functions.

[12]The case of artifacts is importantly different. Given the connection between natures and functions, the nature of an artifact is extrinsic because the function clearly is.

Etiological Theories of Functions

Since Ruth Millikan's etiological theory of functions is by far the most developed account I will focus on her version. Millikan presents her version in numerous places, but the most detailed comes in her book *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories*.[13] It is important to note at the outset that etiological accounts do not commit the same mistakes that SNF does. Millikan notes that "It is not then the actual constitution, powers, or dispositions of a thing that make it a member of a certain biological category."[14] This conclusion is arrived at by noting that, for example, the biological category heart and the connection that this category has with pumping blood must be specified more precisely than simply noting that hearts pump blood. Some hearts cannot pump blood and some things that are not hearts can pump blood. Hence, the function of actually pumping blood cannot be what distinguishes hearts from non-hearts. The proper function of a thing places it in its biological category and the proper function of a thing has to do with its history not its powers, according to etiological accounts.[15] By focusing on history Millikan seeks to define proper function in naturalistic, nonnormative terms.

While the details of Millikan's account are given in *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories* Millikan provides a much more manageable description of proper function in her article "In Defense of Proper Functions." There she writes:

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[13]Ruth Millikan, *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984).

[14]Millikan, *Language, Thought and Other Biological Categories*, 17.

[15]Millikan, *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories*, 17.

> The definition of "proper function" is recursive. Putting things very roughly, for an item *A* to have a function *F* as a "proper function," it is necessary (and close to sufficient) that one of these two conditions should hold. (1) *A* originated as a "reproduction" (to give one example, as a copy, or a copy of a copy) of some prior item or items that, *due* in part to possession of the properties reproduced, have actually performed *F* in the past, and *A* exists because (causally historically because) of this or these performances. (2) *A* originated as the product of some prior device that, given its circumstances, had performance of *F* as a proper function and that, under those circumstances, normally causes *F* to be performed by *means* of producing an item like *A*. Items that fall under condition (2) have "derived proper functions," functions derived from the functions of the devices that produce them.[16]

Millikan's account is meant to stress the historical. An object's or kind's function is determined in part by what its ancestors did. Thus, when characterizing Millikan's etiological account it is important to include the historical condition. For brevity the following summary of Millikan's account will suffice:

> *Etiological Account*: x has *F* as its function iff x exists because of its tendency to *F* and x has a tendency to *F* because x's ancestors *F*ed.[17]

The connection between Millikan's account and evolutionary theory should be clear. Hearts have the function of pumping blood because their tendency to pump blood helps to explain their existence and the tendency to pump blood is present because ancestor hearts pumped blood. Thus, pumping blood was selected for in hearts.

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[16]Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," 288.

[17]I realize that Millikan states that conditions (1) and (2) are close to sufficient. Nothing hangs on my stating her theory in terms of both necessary and sufficient conditions since both directions of the biconditional will be criticized.

Objections to EA

Like objections to SNF, direct objections to EA challenge either the necessary condition or the sufficient condition. Again, like SNF, EA faces a couple of indirect objections.

Against the Necessary Condition of EA

EA appeals to a thing's reproductive history, as a necessary condition, in order to specify what the thing's proper function(s) is (are). If the proper function of x is *F*, then *F* must figure into the reproductive history of x in such a way that the presence of *F* contributes to the survival and fitness of x. Alternatively, if *F* does not figure into the reproductive history of *F*, then *F* cannot be the proper function of x. In order to generate a counter-example to EA's necessary condition one must show that it is possible for *F* to be the function of x despite the fact that *F* does not figure into the reproductive history of x.

According to Alvin Plantinga, "A thing need not have *ancestors* to have a proper function…."[18] Plantinga points out that this seems to be so in both natural and conscious (artifact) cases. With respect to conscious cases he points out that the first telephone could have had a proper function. If it is possible that the first telephone had a proper function, then EA is false. Recall Millikan's first necessary condition for an item A to have *F* as a proper function. "*A* originated as a "reproduction" (to give one example, as a copy, or a copy of a copy) of some prior item or items that, *due* in part to possession of the properties reproduced, have actually performed *F* in the past, and *A* exists because (causally historically because) of this or these performances." In Plantinga's example the

[18]Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 203.

first telephone is clearly not a reproduction of some prior item. Hence, the very possibility of a first artifact with a proper function seems to suggest that Millikan's necessary condition is not necessary after all. That is, it is possible for something to have a proper function without having ancestors and *a fortiori* without having ancestors that actually performed the function.

With respect to natural cases Plantinga points out that God could have created Adam and Eve instantaneously. Hence, Adam's heart would have had a proper function even though his heart has no ancestors. Thus, Plantinga concludes, the ancestral condition in etiological accounts is not necessary.

Against the Sufficient Condition of EA

According to EA, if x exists because of its tendency to *F* and x has a tendency to *F* because x's ancestors *F*ed, then x has *F* as its proper function. Michael Rea argues that there is no important connection between reproductive history and proper function since they can diverge. Imagine that S is an incompetent demigod. S designs x intending x to *F*. x evolves and does not *F*; instead x non-*F*s. The fact that x non-*F*s and non-*F*ing is a part of x's reproductive history does not mean that non-*F*ing is x's proper function.

Reproductive clay crystals provide another sort of counter-example to the sufficient condition of EA. Damming up streams is something that clay crystals do and it is involved in their reproductive history. Thus according to EA damming up streams is the proper function of clay crystals. But "no one would want to say that there is any metaphysically important sense in which the crystals are *supposed* to dam up streams."[19]

[19]Rea, *World Without Design*, 120.

Plantinga raises a different objection to the sufficient condition. Imagine that Hitler's scientists introduce a mutation in non-Aryans' visual system. The mutation is such that for those who have it, life is awful. Hitler also begins to wipe out any non-Aryan without the mutation. The mutation spreads and "the number of nonmutants dwindles. But then consider some nth generation mutant *m*."[20] This member's visual system will meet all of the purported sufficient conditions for having a proper function but surely we do not want to say that *m's* visual system is functioning properly. Thus, it is possible to satisfy EA's sufficient condition for having a proper function without having a proper function. Hence, EA is false.

Indirect Objections

One indirect objection that Rea raises works against both EA and SNF and comes in two parts. Notice than according to both EA and SNF x has a proper function just in case it bears some relation to something other than itself. In the case of SNF x must bear some relation to other members of the kind that x belongs to in order for x to have a proper function. According to EA x must bear some relation to x's ancestors in order for x to have a proper function. Hence, according to both EA and SNF, "biological organisms cannot exist alone- they can only exist in groups."[21] Given that biological organisms cannot exist alone it follows that there was not a first cell.[22]

0. There was a first cell.

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[20]Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 204.

[21]Rea, *World Without Design*, 115.

[22]Indeed, if EA and SNF purport to tell us the nature of functions, then it follows that there *could not* have been a first cell.

1. If a cell exists, it has modal properties.[23]
2. If a cell has modal properties, it has proper functions.[24]
3. If a cell has proper functions, then there are other cells.[25]
4. Therefore, there was no first cell.

Thus, EA and SNF appear to imply that there was no first cell or indeed no first member in any series with a function.

Robert Koons and many others have also noted that EA implies that the members of a kind with function *F* cannot have a first member with *F* as its function.[26] This appears to follow straight-forwardly from EA. Functions are derived from ancestors. In order to stop an infinite regress of ancestors with function *F* there must be a first member in the series that does not have the relevant function. If the first member in the series does have *F* as its function, then EA is false since there are no ancestors. Granting that EA implies that the first members in a series cannot have the function that other members in the series have seems to many philosophers to be a serious objection to EA. I am not so sure.

We noted that in order to stop an infinite regress EA advocates must claim that in a series where members have function *F* first members cannot have *F* as their function. But, we may ask, first members of what? Consider the heart kind. Hearts have the

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[23]The defense of this premise is that cells are distinct from non-cells. Since distinctness implies necessary distinctness, cells have modal properties.

[24]The defense of this premise is that the modal properties of a thing determine what the thing is and hence determine what it does or what it is supposed to do.

[25]Both EA and SNF are committed to this premise.

[26]Robert Koons, *Realism Regained*: *An Exact Theory of Causation, Teleology, and the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 147-148.

function of pumping blood and hearts have this function, in part, because of their history. At some point in the history of the heart some ancestor A began to pump blood without pumping blood being A's function. But according to EA kinds are distinguished by their functions. Thus, in order for A to be a member of the heart kind A must have the function of a heart. *Ex hypothesi* A does not have the function of a heart. Thus A is not a heart.

The first member objection (we may call it) seems to assume that the first member in the series of things that have *F* for their function must have *F* for its function. But this just seems to beg the question against EA. The first member is not a member of the heart kind, for example, since it does not have the function of hearts as its function. Rather, the first member in the series of things with *F* as their function is a member of the class of things that has *F* as a property. Thus, the first item that began to pump blood in an organism does not have pumping blood as its function but nevertheless has being able to pump blood as one of its properties. Thus, the first member passes on the property of being able to pump blood to its progeny and the progeny (via natural selection) gain the property of being able to pump blood as their proper function. As it stands the first member objection appears to fail. However, there may be a way to repair the first member objection in such a way that it is even more damaging to EA than its original formulation.

Consider again the etiological account. x has *F* as its proper function iff x exists because of its tendency to *F* and x has a tendency to *F* because x's ancestors *F*ed. According to the etiological account inclusion into a biological category depends on a thing's proper function. Thus, if x's proper function is *F* and *F* is necessary and

sufficient for being a member of biological category B, then x is a member of B. If x loses *F* as its proper function, then x no longer is a member of B. Now it is plausible that being a member of a biological category is an essential property of anything that has it. Thus, being a member of B is essential to x.

According to EA and simplifying a bit, x has proper function *F* only if x's ancestors performed *F*. But if *F* is the proper function of x, then x is a member of biological category B. So if x's ancestors had *F* as their proper function, x's ancestors are members of B. Now assume that x's ancestors have *F* as their proper function only if their ancestors had *F* as their proper function. Again *F* is sufficient for inclusion in B. Hence, the ancestors of the ancestors are members of B. Repetitive application results in the following dilemma: either the biological category B always had members in which case Darwinism is false or there was a time t such that at t some ancestor A of x (where x has *F* as its proper function) performed *F* but at t A's performance of *F* was not A's proper function. If the first disjunct is adopted, then contrary to the purveyors of etiological theories, etiological theories actually entail the *falsity* of Darwinism. Thus, EA theorists must grasp the second disjunct. But the second disjunct has a serious problem.

EA theorists must, it seems, accept the following: there was a time t such that at t some ancestor A of x (where x has *F* as its proper function) performed *F* but at t A's performance of *F* was not A's proper function. Given that having *F* as a proper function is sufficient for inclusion in biological category B, EA advocates would also appear to be committed to the following: for all x, y, if x has property *F* and *F* is the proper function of y, then it is possible that *F* is not the proper function of x. In the artifactual case this

is clearly true. My book has the property of being used as a doorstop, whereas the doorstop I just purchased has the proper function of being a doorstop. Thus, it is possible for x to have the property *F*, y to have *F* as its proper function and x not to have *F* as its proper function.

In the biological case it is not as obvious that something can have a property that is sufficient for inclusion in biological category B without itself being in biological category B. Consider a human. If x is a human, it is plausible to suppose that being a human is x's most fundamental kind. Furthermore, it seems plausible to suppose that if anything has the property being a human, it is essentially a human. That is, in the biological case (or at least some instances of the biological case) it is necessary that if x has property *F* and *F* is the most fundamental kind for y, then *F* is the most fundamental kind for x. If the principle is true, then EA is in serious trouble. Indeed, even if the principle is false but there is one instance in the biological realm where possessing a property that is fundamental for one kind implies that possessing it is fundamental for anything that has it, EA is in serious trouble. For, the principle implies that for at least some biological cases it is not possible for x to pass on a property to y that is essential to y but not to x. For example, it is impossible for a non-human to pass on the property of being human because whatever has the property being human is essentially human.[27]

Robert Koons raises a second indirect objection to EA. Koons notes that EA advocates have busied themselves attempting either to refine the account in order to

[27]Earlier I raised some worries about the first member objection by noting that it seems to assume that first members cannot have F as a property without having F as a function. In this objection I am granting the assumption and attempting to raise a more difficult challenge.

escape the first member objection (e.g. prospective accounts that are forward looking) or by biting the bullet and arguing that the benefits of the account outweigh the costs. Koons goes on to note that "[t]here is, however, a more fundamental problem with all of these accounts: the fact that they make the truth of Darwinism a matter of ontological necessity."[28] In a world where Darwinism is false, the individuals in that world do not have functions, according to EA. But this seems implausible (to say the least). If we go on to discover that Darwinism is false, we would not conclude that hearts and language and optic nerves do not have functions.

Plantinga raises the same objection. According to Plantinga, since evolutionary theory is at best contingently true, no account of proper function can presuppose the truth of evolutionary theory. If an account of proper function presupposes the truth of evolutionary theory, then the account would only be contingently true. But if evolutionary theory turns out false, which it could, then our account of proper function would be false. Things would still have functions, just not functions that are to be explained in terms of evolutionary theory.[29]

Etiological accounts of function fail on several levels. As such, any theory of morality that attempts to use functions as part of its base must avoid being committed to EA. Furthermore, any criticisms that are leveled against a theory of morality that uses functions as part of its base must not assume the truth of EA. Given that both SNF and EA are false, we must look elsewhere for a theory of functions upon which to ground morality. In my estimation Robert Koons' normative theory is the best place to look.

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[28]Koons, *Realism Regained*, 147.

[29]Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 202.

2. Normative Theories of Functions

I argue that something like a normative account of functions supplemented with a distinction between system and part functions is correct – where normative accounts are able to explain the fact that if *F* is the function of x, then x is *supposed* to *F*. A normative theory of functions is not only compatible with TMR, it supports TMR.[30]

According to Koons, "[a] thing is capable of well-being just in case the sum of its Wright-functions forms a highly coherent, mutually supportive totality."[31] A thing has a Wright-function just in case "the fact that things in kind *v* have state φ is causally explained (at least in part) by the existence of a causal law linking (φ & *v*) to ψ as cause to effect."[32] The Wright-function by itself will not succeed in capturing what a function is though since it too falls prey to some of the objections canvassed above. For example, Plantinga's objection to the sufficient condition of etiological accounts is applicable to Wright-functions. The members of *v* have a state—a mutation in their visual system—that is causally explained by the existence of a causal law linking the visual system and the members of a kind to ψ as cause to effect. By adding that the Wright-functions form a "highly coherent, mutually supportive totality", Koons thus sidesteps Plantinga's objection.

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[30]While my focus will be on Robert C. Koons' account Mark Bedau also argues for a normative account of function. See Mark Bedau, "Can Biological Teleology be Naturalized," *The Journal of Philosophy* 88, no. 11 (1991): 647-655; "Where's the Good in Teleology?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (1992): 781-801.

[31]Koons, *Realism Regained*, 144.

[32]Koons, *Realism Regained*, 145.

Koons goes on to claim that a thing has a good if and only if it has proper functions.[33] The good of a thing consists in the successful exercise of its primary proper functions. Primary proper functions are distinguished from secondary proper functions in that the latter are operative only when the former malfunction or fail.[34] Furthermore, accidental satisfaction of well-being is distinguished from non-accidental satisfaction of well-being in that the latter but not the former is explained by a things aiming towards a sum of Wright-functions that forms a highly coherent, mutually supportive totality. In other words, since it is possible for some things to have the sum of Wright functions form a highly coherent, mutually supportive totality without there being any functional organization we need to be able to distinguish between cases where there is functional organization and cases where there is not. For example, ice in a rock crevice causes the crevice to remain open and the existence of the ice in the crevice is caused by its power to keep the crevice open.[35] There seems to be a highly coherent, mutually supportive totality here and yet we would not attribute functionality to the ice. It is not the ice's function to keep the crevice open.

Koons is able to separate the accidental satisfaction from the non-accidental satisfaction of well-being by adding an additional clause. If the existence of the thing is caused (in part) by the highly coherent, mutually supportive totality plus Koons' other

[33]Note the connection between Koons account and TMR. If something does not have a proper function then it does not have a good. According to TMR the expressions that the predicate-forming functor 'good' takes as arguments must refer to things that have a nature and/or function.

[34]Koons, *Realism Regained*, 146.

[35]Koons, *Realism Regained*, 143.

conditions, then the thing has a proper function. From these considerations Koons' develops the following account of proper function:

Aristotelian Definition of Proper Function:

A state φ has the proper function ψ in kind *v* if and only if:

1. The fact that things in kind *v* have state φ is causally explained (at least in part) by the existence of a causal law linking (φ & *v*) to ψ as cause to effect (Wright's condition).
2. The system of functions $<\varphi_i, \psi_i>$ meeting condition (1) for *v* forms a mostly harmonious, mutually supportive whole, and the $<\varphi, \psi>$ function contributes to this harmony.
3. The existence of things of kind *v* is causally explained (at least in part) by the harmony mentioned in condition (2).

Koons goes on to explain the notion of harmony at work in the second and third conditions. Koons writes:

> Let us say that function x harmonizes with system S just in case
>
> (1) for many, but not necessarily all, members y of S, the fulfillment of x increases the probability of the fulfillment of y
> (2) for most but not necessarily all members y of S, the fulfillment of x does not significantly decrease the probability of the fulfillment of y.

The ice in the rock crevice fails to meet the third condition. While it is plausible to suppose that the ice in the rock crevice keeps the rock crevice open and that the opening in the crevice keeps the ice where it is because of some causal law (first condition) and that the crevice and the ice form a mostly harmonious, mutually supportive whole, the fact that the existence of the ice or the crevice is *not* causally explained by the mostly harmonious, mutually supportive whole shows that it is false, according to Koons' criteria, to attribute a proper function either to the ice or the crevice. Thus, failure to meet the third condition is sufficient to show that there is no proper

function. As we shall see critics of Koons' account sometimes fail to appreciate the force of the third condition.

Before moving on to discuss some objections to Koons' account it is important to note the implicit connection between natures and functions at work in the above definitions. Koons explains that a function harmonizes within a system if, and only if, the function increases the probability of the fulfillment of the system and does not decrease the probability of the fulfillment of the system. The kind of system is clearly relevant. In some systems fulfilling the function of x would increase the probability of the fulfillment of the system (where fulfillment of the system is understood in terms of fulfillment of the thing's primary functions), whereas in other systems fulfillment of x would not increase the fulfillment of the system and may decrease the fulfillment of the system. Lubricating one's lawnmower with oil helps to increase the lawnmower's fulfillment of its primary functions, whereas lubricating one's stomach with oil would not. Hence, the nature of a thing will determine to a large extent the nature of the functions that harmonize within it. As Christopher Megone notes while explaining and defending an Aristotelian or normative account of function, "…it is not possible to understand the sense in which illness is a failure of function without grasping the way in which certain changes contribute to a good human life as a whole. Functional explanation only makes sense in the light of the function of the whole."[36] In order to claim that part of a system is malfunctioning one must have some idea of the function of the whole system. Koons' account helps us determine what the function of the whole

[36]Christopher Megone, "Aristotle's Function Argument and the Concept of Mental Illness," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 5, no. 3 (1998): 195.

system is by implicitly drawing our attention to the nature of the thing and emphasizing its primary functions.

There are some difficulties for Koons' account. By considering the difficulties we will be able both to understand some of the details of Koons' account better and be in a position to see what needs to be added to Koons' account in order to stave off counter-examples.

Objections Normative Accounts of Function

Michael Rea summarizes Koons' account thusly: "The proper function of a thing in a system is to perform whichever of its functions appropriately contributes to the well-being or flourishing of the system."[37] Rea goes on to argue that Koons' account appears to make the damming up of streams a proper function of clay crystals.

> Imagine a kind of clay that improves its own chance of being deposited by damming up streams. The streams form shallow pools which then dry up. The clay dries and is blown away as dust, only to be deposited in other streams. The new crystals reproduce themselves and dam up their respective streams.[38]

Rea claims that "no one would want to say that there is any metaphysically important sense in which the crystals are *supposed* to dam up streams."[39]

The phenomena described above seem to satisfy the first condition of Koons' definition of proper function. "These crystals exist where they are in part because they

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[37]Rea, *World Without Design*, 122.

[38]Rea, *World Without Design*, 120.

[39]Rea, *World Without* Design, 120. See also Bedau, "Can Biological Teleology be Naturalized."

dam up streams."[40] What about Koons' second condition? According to Rea this condition is also satisfied if we imagine that clay crystals are part of a larger system (the ecosystem) such that the existence of clay crystals contributes to the flourishing of this larger system. Interestingly, Rea is silent on whether Koons' third condition is met. In order for the third condition to be met Rea would have to say that it is possible that clay crystals exist, in part, because they contribute to the flourishing of this larger system. But notice that once we add this third condition—that is, if we grant that clay crystals exist because they contribute to the flourishing of the ecosystem—it *does* seem as though clay crystals' proper function is to dam up streams. After all, that is why clay crystals exist (granting that the third condition is met) and their existence does indeed contribute to the flourishing of the system of which they are parts.

If the third condition is not met—that is, if we deny that clay crystals exist because they contribute to the flourishing of the ecosystem—then the clay crystal example is not a counter-example. If the third condition is met, then it is far from obvious that "no one would want to say that there is any metaphysically important sense in which the crystals are *supposed* to dam up streams." The crystals exist (granting that the third condition is met) in part because they dam up streams. That seems metaphysically important. I conclude that Rea's first objection fails because either it does not meet the conditions Koons specifies or if we elaborate on Rea's example in such a way as to make it satisfy all of Koons' conditions the objection loses considerable force.

[40]Rea, *World Without Design*, 123.

Another way to see the failure of Rea's objection is by considering a different example that Rea uses and by heeding a distinction that Rea himself articulates. First, the example that Rea believes undermines Koons' account:

> [L]ower organisms in a food chain are plausibly thought to owe their existence in part to the fact that they themselves serve as food for organisms higher in the chain. For example, zooplankton feed on phytoplankton and, in turn, serve as food for larger fish which are ultimately converted into nutrients that support zooplankton. Thus, there is a clear sense in which zooplankton owe their existence in a marine ecosystem in part to the fact that they serve as food for larger fish. Thus, zooplankton apparently have the Wright-function of feeding larger fish. Furthermore, it is quite plausible to think that this Wright-function is a contributing member of a mutually supportive harmonious system of similar Wright-functions performed by other parts of the same ecosystem, and that the relevant harmony partly causally explains the existence of ecosystems of that sort. But then it follows that zooplankton have as their proper function the property of being food for higher organisms.[41]

The reason that this is supposed to present a problem for Koons is because Koons' account appears to require that proper functions somehow contribute to flourishing.[42] But if the proper function of zooplankton is being food for higher organisms, then the proper function of zooplankton does not contribute to zooplankton's flourishing. Indeed, it would seem as if the proper function of zooplankton is deleterious to zooplankton. What is needed is a distinction between the proper function of zooplankton qua zooplankton and the proper function of zooplankton qua members of an ecosystem. Rea himself provides such a distinction.

Rea distinguishes between proper system and proper part functions. The proper system function for some organism is simply that organism's proper function considered without reference to some larger system of which the organism is a part. For example,

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[41]Rea, *World Without Design*, 124.

[42]Indeed, Koons' account appears to imply that the only way to know that *F* is the proper function of x is to know what flourishing for x consists in.

the proper system function of a cat may be something like being healthy. The proper part function of something depends on the contribution that the thing makes to the overall system of which it is a part.[43] With the distinction between proper system and proper part function in mind we are now in a position to see just where Rea's objection goes wrong.

Rea suggests that when considering proper system functions (e.g. the proper function of zooplankton qua zooplankton) we are considering whether or not the thing is healthy or something analogous to health in the case of artifacts (e.g. the proper function of the thing's primary functions). Thus, a healthy zooplankton will not be one that has been used for food by some higher organism. But this is compatible with saying that the proper part function of zooplankton is being food for higher organisms. A healthy ecosystem may require something bad for some of its parts. This is not surprising. In chapter two I argued that the following is true:

> *Good to Bad Kind-Interaction*: A good member of some kind K may enter into relations with some other kind K*. Some of the relations that K enters into with K* may be bad for members of K* or bad for members of K.

The case we are now considering is such that one of the parts of the ecosystem has a proper system function that cannot be preserved if the ecosystem is to fulfill its proper function. In other words, the fulfillment of the proper functions of K may be deleterious to the fulfillment of the proper functions of K*. There is nothing at all counter-intuitive about this.

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[43]Rea, *World Without Design*, 113.

The problem with Rea's objection is that it equivocates on two different notions of proper function—the very notions that Rea himself highlights. When Rea claims that Koons' account of proper function implies that the proper function of zooplankton is being food for higher organisms Rea assumes that most readers will find this consequence absurd. But given the distinction between proper part functions and proper system functions the objection loses much (if not all) of its force. Koons' account does not imply that the proper system function of zooplankton is being food for higher animals.

The final objection that Rea raises against Koons' account is in my opinion the most pressing.

> [C]onsider an artifact whose overall design plan includes a self-destruct mechanism. Plausibly, a self-destruct mechanism is supposed to destroy the artifact of which it is a part—that is its proper function. But except in contrived cases, self-destruct mechanisms make no contribution whatsoever to the overall well-being of the things of which they are parts. Thus, even if Koons's definition does provide a sufficient condition for having a proper function, it does not provide a necessary condition.[44]

In other words, the proper function of the mechanism is to destroy the artifact. But destroying the artifact does not contribute to the "well-being" of the artifact. Hence, it is possible for something to have a proper function that does not contribute to the well-being of the system of which it is a part.

We need to present the objection a bit more clearly, and in the process we will see that the objection fails. There are at least two different ways of understanding Rea's worry. The first way of understanding the self-destruct objection (we may call it) is a diachronic reading of the objection. The second way is a synchronic reading.

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[44]Rea, *World Without Design*, 125.

According to the diachronic reading of the self-destruct objection the artifact has some function *F* that it can successfully perform only if once performed the self-destruct mechanism performs its function and destroys the artifact. In other words, the artifact has a proper function and is capable of performing this proper function without interference from the self-destruct mechanism. The self-destruct mechanism begins to operate after the artifact has successfully performed its function. It does not appear that this way of understanding the objection poses any problem to the normative account of functions under consideration.[45]

The artifact achieves the analogue of well-being when it successfully performs its proper function. Each of its parts other than the self-destruct mechanism, we may assume, contributes in some way to the artifact's performance of its proper function. Hence, contribution to well-being plays a vital role in the artifact's performance of its proper function. The fact that the self-destruct mechanism functions properly only after the artifact has successfully performed its proper function does not seem to show that the self-destruct mechanism's proper function in any way inhibits the proper function of the artifact or the artifact's well-being.

According to the synchronic reading of the self-destruct objection the artifact has some function *F* that it can perform only if the self-destruct mechanism simultaneously performs its proper function. There are two types of cases we can consider under the

[45]There is a different diachronic case that I will not discuss because it is very similar to the first synchronic case that I do discuss. According to the second diachronic reading of the objection the artifact has a function that it can perform only after the self-destruct mechanism successfully performs its function. This implies that if the function of the artifact is distinct from the function of the self-destruct mechanism, then the artifact can never perform its function. I am not sure that in this case we have a genuine artifact.

synchronic reading of the self-destruct objection. The first case states that the function of the artifact is different from the function of the self-destruct mechanism, while the second case assumes that the function of the artifact is the same as the function of the self-destruct mechanism. I will argue that neither case shows that the normative theory of functions fails.

The case under the synchronic reading of the self-destruct objection states that the function of the artifact is different from the function of the self-destruct mechanism. If we assume that the artifact's proper function is different from the proper function of the self-destruct mechanism, then if it is possible for the artifact to perform its function it must be possible that the artifact performs its function simultaneously with the successful performance of the self-destruct mechanism's function.[46] For example, imagine an artifact with three parts and assume that the artifact does not come into existence until all of the parts are properly arranged. Once the parts are properly arranged the artifact simultaneously sprays water and destroys itself, just as the designer intended. The artifact appears to function precisely as it is supposed to.

According to the second case of the synchronic reading of the self-destruct objection the artifact has some function that it can perform only if the self-destruct mechanism simultaneously performs its proper function. In this second case we are to assume that the artifact's proper function is the same as the proper function of the self-destruct mechanism. Hence, the proper function of the artifact is self-destruction. For example, imagine an artifact with three parts and assume that the artifact does not come

[46]I am assuming that it must be possible for the artifact to carry out its function in order for it to count as an artifact. If it is not possible for something to carry out its function, then it seems as though the thing is not an artifact.

into existence until all of the parts are properly arranged. Once the parts are properly arranged the artifact immediately destroys itself, just as the designer intended. The artifact appears to function precisely as it is supposed to.

The two different versions of the synchronic reading of the self-destruct objection do pose a challenge to normative theories of function. Nevertheless the challenge can be met. In the case of artifacts it is plausible to suppose (as we did in the third chapter) that the nature of the artifact is determined by its function. Furthermore, the function of the artifact is determined by the intentions of the designer. Assuming with Rea that the designer intended the artifact to self-destruct, it follows that the function of the artifact is to self-destruct. Presumably, the designer's intention for making an artifact that self-destructs is viewed by the designer as some kind of good.[47] Perhaps the designer enjoys seeing things self-destruct. Perhaps the designer intends the artifact to deliver a message that once received the artifact self-destructs (this is the diachronic case considered above). What is important to realize is that artifacts cannot exist without intentions. In a world without intenders, there cannot be any artifacts. What this shows is that it is misleading to consider the function of an artifact apart from the intentions of the

[47]I am assuming something like the thesis that intentions or desires are had or directed towards objects (or states of affairs) that the agent views as in some sense good for something. The "guise of the good" is a traditional doctrine and it has come under recent attack. See David Velleman, "The Guise of the Good," *Nous* 26, (1992): 3-26; Michael Stocker, "Desiring the Bad: an Essay in Moral Psychology," *Journal of Philosophy* 76, (1979): 738-753. For defenses of the "guise of the good" that respond to Velleman and Stocker see Sergio Tenenbaum, *Appearance of the Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jennifer Hawkins, "Desiring the Bad Under the Guise of the Good," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (2007): 1-21; and Kieran Setiya, "Sympathy for the Devil," unpublished manuscript. Setiya does not defend the traditional version of the guise of the good. He does make room for a weaker version of the guise of the good according to which humans (as distinct from rational agents) normally intend or desire under the guise of the good. As far as I can tell the weaker version is all that I need in order to adequately respond to the self-destruct objection.

designer. If the designer intends an artifact to *F*, then the designer believes that performances of *F* in circumstances C are good for someone or something. But this implies that the well-being of an artifact is determined not simply by the artifact considered in isolation but rather by the artifact considered as a part of a system where intentions are a significant part. If it turns out that the intentions of the designer decrease the well-being of the designer or decrease the well-being of others, then, given that a person intends to A only if a person believes that A contributes to his or her well-being or the well-being of his or her community, it follows that the intention fails to perform its proper function. Thus, the function of the artifact is dependent on an intention and intentions can fail to perform their function of contributing to the well-being of the intender and/or the intender's community.

Here is an example of what I have in mind. Suppose Steve intends to make a device that kills all and only Jews. The device performs its function quite well. Hence, the device we might say is properly functioning. But Steve's intention can be evaluated as well.[48] Does Steve's intention contribute to the over-all well-being of Steve or of Steve's community? Clearly, it does not. Hence, even if the device never manages to perform its proper function its having the proper function it does is dependent on an intention that is deleterious to both the intender and the community. Given that one of the functions of intentions is to contribute to the well-being of the intender (and/or others in the community) it follows that the intention to kill all and only Jews malfunctions.

The intention to kill all and only Jews does not fulfill the function of contributing to the well-being of the intender. So, in one sense the device can properly function and in

[48]Recall the discussion in chapter two of Pigden's ICBM objection to the attributive account of 'good'.

another sense the device cannot. The device properly functions just in case it fulfills the intentions of the designer. The device fails to properly function just in case it does not fulfill the intentions of the designer. In the case we are imagining the designer actually has two intentions. One is a sort of meta-intention: do all and only those things that contribute to the well-being of myself or my community. The other is a first-order intention: make a device that kills all and only Jews. At the first-order level the device performs its proper function just in case it succeeds in killing all and only Jews (and does so non-accidentally). At the meta-level the device fails to perform its function, since its function fails to contribute to the well-being of the designer and the community. My suggestion is that by failing to recognize this distinction Rea's objection fails.

We cannot specify the proper function of the artifact that has a self-destruct mechanism as a part without knowing the intentions of the designer. Assume that the artifact in question does contribute to the well-being of the designer. In this case the artifact performs its proper function and fulfilling its proper function is good for the designer. The artifact fulfills both the first-order intentions and the meta-level intentions of the designer. As such the artifact has fulfilled its proper function and its proper function does, contrary to Rea, contribute to the overall well-being of the system of which it is a part. Rea simply focuses on the wrong system.

Assume that the artifact in question does not contribute to the well-being of the designer. In this case, the artifact fails to perform its meta-level proper function. Since it fails to perform its meta-level proper function the artifact malfunctions. The fact that the artifact malfunctions at the meta-level is sufficient for the artifact to malfunction. That is, in order for the artifact to properly function it must properly function at both the first-

order level and the meta-level. Thus, Rea's objection works only if we assume that the function of the artifact is exhausted by the first-order intentions of the designer. But I see no good reason to assume this. Hence, Rea's final and most pressing objection fails.

3. Answering Objections to TMR with the Normative Theory of Functions

Now that we have an account of function that is both free from the defects affecting other accounts and in clear support of the version of moral realism defended here, I am now in a position to respond to perhaps the most common and seemingly difficult objections to TMR. The attributive account of 'good' implies that only things with functions are good. This implication is viewed by many to be a *reductio* of the attributive account. For, things without functions can be good. Hence, the attributive account must be wrong. A normative theory of functions together with a distinction between system and part functions provides TMR with a plausible response to this objection.

The claim that things without functions can be good is ambiguous between the following three claims: (1) things without system functions can be good; (2) things without part functions can be good; and (3) things without both system and part functions can be good. I argue that only (3) spells trouble for TMR and that (3) is false.

In chapters two and three I argued that the claim 'x is good' is elliptical for 'x is a good K'. I went on to argue that this implies that x has a function and that the function of x is determined by its primary kind. The normative account of functions supports the claim that x is a good K iff x has a function. According to the normative account a thing has a function if and only if a thing has a good. But now consider the claim (assume that it is true) that this rock is good. According to TMR this implies that this rock is a good K

and that the K supplies the rock with its function. But this looks implausible. Rocks simply do not have functions. Or consider the claim that this particular sunset is good. According to TMR this implies that the sunset is a good K and the K supplies the sunset with its function. But sunsets do not have functions. Examples can be multiplied but these two should suffice. These objections to TMR assume that TMR is committed to the following:

> If x is good, then x has a proper system function and x is performing its proper system function to such and such a degree.

But TMR is not committed to such a claim. Given the distinction between proper system functions and proper part functions TMR is committed to the following:

> x is good iff:
>
> x has a proper system function and x is performing its proper system function to such and such a degree
>
> Or
>
> x has a proper part function and x is performing its proper part function to such and such a degree.

Thus, it is no objection to TMR to say that rocks do not have system functions but rocks can still be good. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that anyone would ever say of some rock that it has a proper system function. Instead if someone claims that this is a good rock she likely means that the rock is good for storing heat or as a doorstop or etc…. But to say that a rock is good because it contributes to something is just to say that the rock is performing is proper part function to such and such a degree.

The diagnosis of the objection with respect to rocks will also work with respect to sunsets. First, notice that the claim that this is a good sunset is likely to mean something like this is a good sunset for viewing or drawing or, etc… But once again this means that the sunset is good because it contributes to something else. Hence, the goodness of the sunset is a function of its contribution to a larger system and thus the sunset has a proper part function.

We can apply the same style of response, *mutatis mutandis*, to claims that deny a proper part function to something while claiming that the thing is good. In these cases it is likely that the thing's function is well-being or some analogue of well-being. The proper part function/proper system function distinction allows TMR to sidestep these common objections in a way that fits the best account of functions we have.

If something does not have a proper part function and does not have a proper system function, then according to TMR that thing cannot be good. I simply cannot think of anything that does not have (or could not have) either kind of function and yet could be good. The reason for the difficulty in coming up with a plausible example is because it will always be possible to rephrase the claim in terms of either proper part function or proper system function. The above rephrases with rocks and sunsets are examples of how to do it.

I want to close by making an observation about the nature of predicate-forming functors or as we may also call them property-markers. From the claim that good is a predicate-forming functor it does not follow that anything can be substituted as an argument and a value will result. Consider another predicate-forming functor 'square-of'. 'Square-of' takes certain objects as arguments and yields certain objects as values.

But it is just a mistake to think that it is permissible to put whatever one likes in its argument place. The functor itself determines what the permissible arguments are. The same, it seems, is true of the predicate-forming functor ‘good’. ‘Good’ determines the nature of its arguments, which when substituted determines the nature of the value.

CHAPTER FIVE

Teleological Moral Realism Left Standing

In the previous chapters I attempted to lay the foundations for a new version of moral realism. We have seen that contemporary accounts of moral realism assume that there is a property of goodness that can, in principle, figure into *a posteriori* necessities. This assumption is questionable for at least two reasons. First, both naturalistic and supernaturalistic versions of moral realism, which assume that goodness is a property, face seemingly insurmountable problems. Second, as we saw in chapters two and three, the attributive account of 'good', if coupled with the claim that the metaphysics of goodness closely mirrors the semantics of 'good', implies that the assumption common to most versions of contemporary moral realism must be false. In this final chapter I aim to summarize the results of the preceding chapters as well as consider how the metaethical theory that emerges from this summary (what I call teleological moral realism or TMR) handles long-standing objections to moral realism. After I discuss how TMR is able to answer some note-worthy objections to moral realism I will consider two objections to TMR itself. I will conclude with a very brief attempt to show that the semantics of TMR may have some interesting consequences for the philosophy of religion.

1. Summarizing the Main Points of Chapters 1-4

The main problem with contemporary versions of moral realism is their commitment to the claim that goodness is capable of receiving a Kripkean/Putnamian

analysis. As I attempted to show in chapter one this commitment renders contemporary versions of moral realism subject to a number of seemingly insurmountable objections.

TMR is not committed to analyzing goodness in terms of Kripkean/Putnamian developments. Indeed, according to TMR goodness is not capable of figuring into necessary *a posteriori* identities.[1] The main reason that goodness cannot figure into necessary *a posteriori* identities is that the term 'good' is an attributive adjective. Attributive adjectives cannot be separated from the nouns or substantives they modify. As such attributive adjectives do not refer to properties that can be analyzed apart from the natures of the things they modify. Thus, there is no such thing as goodness simpliciter. Rather there are only good Ks.[2] Thus, TMR both denies the common assumption of contemporary moral realists that goodness is a property and explains why goodness is not capable of receiving a Kripkean/Putnamian analysis.

If the arguments of chapters two through four are sound, there is nothing to which the term 'good', all by itself, refers.[3] 'Good' is a predicate-forming functor that takes objects with functions and/or natures as arguments and yields as values various degrees of traits or features of those objects. For example, 'good bicycle' takes bicycle as argument and delivers various features of bicycles as values—e.g. strong frame, proportioned handle bars, adjustable seat, lightweight, etc.

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[1]See the third chapter for detailed discussion of this point.

[2]For a more complete defense of these claims see chapters two and three.

[3]Or more weakly, if the conclusions of the arguments presented in chapters two through four are true.

We have also seen that the semantics of 'good' has interesting metaethical consequences.[4] One such consequence is that the goodness of a thing with a function is unique and uniform. Obviously, this has special importance within metaethics. If humans have functions, then to say that S is a good human is to say, in part, that S has the features necessary for fulfilling the function of humans to such-and-such a degree. Since being a human is different from being a horse or a car or an angel, the contribution that human makes to the functor 'good_____' is different from the contribution that angel or car would make to the functor 'good_____'. Human goodness is thus dependent on the nature and function of humans and since the nature and function of humans is different from the nature and function of non-humans, human goodness is unique.[5]

That goodness for humans is uniform follows from the fact that goodness for humans is unique. If humans have a function, then for all x, if x is a human, there is some combination of traits or features such that that combination is necessary for humans to be good humans. In other words, being a good human requires having some combination of traits or features to such and such a degree. There is homogeneity or uniformity amongst good humans. It is important to notice that the homogeneity amongst good humans does not imply an identity. If we supplement the necessary condition for being a good human with some specification of the notion of roles that are necessary in

[4]Assuming, as we did in chapter three, that the metaphysics of goodness mirrors, to some degree, the semantics of 'good'.

[5]I am assuming that the nature and function of humans is different from the nature and function of non-humans. I think that this is a plausible assumption but I recognize that not everyone will agree. In particular, the assumption may appear to be in conflict with current biological science. In the third section of this chapter I argue that evolutionary theory does not pose the threat to the idea that humans have a nature and function distinct from non-humans that many have thought it did.

order for humans to thrive in society, we easily get past the illusion that TMR implies that all humans should be the same. Indeed, it is plausible to suppose that it is part of the function of humans to live in societies—that is, humans are essentially social as well as rational animals. Thus, from the function of humans alone we can avoid the idea that in order to be a good human, every human has to be the same as every other human. The idea that either (a) TMR implies some sort of monolithic picture of good humans or (b) TMR implies a kind of relativism for good humans are both species of the same falsehood; namely, that the function of humans is so thin the goodness that results when 'human' is inserted into the argument position of the functor 'good_____' inevitably results in either (a) or (b). The way to challenge (a) and (b) is not by abandoning TMR (e.g. Thomson and Williams) but by thickening our conception of the nature and function of humans. Once this is done neither (a) nor (b) results.[6]

Thus, TMR does not suffer from the criticisms given to naturalistic or supernaturalistic version of moral realism because TMR does not countenance the property of goodness. The criticisms raised in chapter one against both naturalistic and supernaturalistic versions of moral realism had to do with the assumption that moral realism requires the property of goodness. TMR denies this. John is a good man not because John has the property of goodness, which is sharable with paintings, cars, and horses. Rather, John is a good man, in part, because John possesses the traits to such-and-such a degree necessary for fulfilling his function of being a human (and, perhaps,

[6]See the third section of chapter three for a brief sketch of what I have in mind here. In that section I deal with Bernard Williams' objection to ethical theories that rely on human nature.

John is not a failure in each of his contingent roles).[7] In this way TMR does countenance the possibility of *a posteriori* necessities that are relevant to morality. But the *a posteriori* necessities of TMR are not equivalent to those of other versions of moral realism. For example, it is plausible that it is *a posteriori* necessary that in order to be a good human one must be just, courageous, wise, temperate, etc. Knowing what a good human is requires knowing what a human is and knowing what a human is may very well require *a posteriori* knowledge. Hence, knowing what a good human is may very well require *a posteriori* knowledge. Claiming that knowing what a good human is requires *a posteriori* knowledge is not the same as claiming that knowing what goodness itself is requires *a posteriori* knowledge. Those, like Boyd, who claim that the property of goodness can figure into *a posteriori* necessities, assume that goodness is either identical to or constituted by some natural property or properties. Just what natural property or properties goodness is identical to or constituted by can only be known *a posteriori*.

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[7]From the claim that John is a bad teacher is does not follow that John is a bad man. From the claim that John is a bad husband it probably does not follow that John is a bad man. Nevertheless, if John is a bad teacher, husband, friend, son, father, etc., it probably does follow that John is a bad man. That is, being bad in each of one's contingent roles is sufficient for being a bad human, but being good in each of one's contingent roles is not sufficient for being a good human. Here are two reasons to think that being good in each of one's contingent roles is not sufficient for being a good human. First, and perhaps most obviously, the nature of humans may be such that it includes necessary roles, roles that cannot be abandoned without ceasing to be human. As such it seems as though someone could be good in all of her contingent roles and fail in her necessary roles. Such a person would not be a good human. Second, if we assume that there are no necessary roles, it seems as though someone could adopt an extremely limited number of roles and be good in each of them without being a good human. For example, imagine that someone wants to be a great chef. Imagine further that this person takes a pill that renders them unconscious whenever they are not in the kitchen. It seems plausible to maintain that such a person could be a great chef and nevertheless not a good human. For a more pedestrian example, simply imagine that someone contingently occupies the role of being a bank robber. Suppose further that this is the only role the individual occupies. Being good in the bank robber role obviously does not entail being a good human.

According to TMR there is no property of goodness. Since there is no property of goodness, goodness is not susceptible to Kripkean/Putnamian developments. Rather, the *a posteriori* necessities that TMR is willing to tolerate arise, not from an *a posteriori* analysis of goodness, but from an *a posteriori* analysis of humans. Thus, x is a good human iff x is *F, G, H* may be *a posteriori* necessary because the property of being a human can figure into *a posteriori* necessities. In other words, from the fact, if it is one, that being a good human is capable of figuring into *a posteriori* necessities it does not follow that being good is capable of figuring into *a posteriori* necessities.

The attributive account and the consequences we have drawn from it helps us steer clear of two temptations within metaethics. The first temptation is to grant that there is a property of goodness. The second temptation is to deny that there is a property of goodness and maintain that all ethical discourse is either subjective or expressive. In "Good and Evil" Geach effectively argued against both temptations. In particular Geach argued against the metaethical views advanced by G. E. Moore and R. M. Hare.[8] A number of moral philosophers have argued that Moore's OQA does not make sense without assuming that goodness is a property. J.J. Thomson points out that

> Moore's story begins with the good. Some things are good, Moore said, and some things are not good; so there is such a property as goodness—all good things have it and all things that are not good lack it. … The second part of the story flows from the first: there being such a property as goodness, there is also such a relation as being better than, or *betterness*. … Moore's story then concludes: the right is analyzable in terms of the relation betterness.[9]

Thomson goes on to state that, while most philosophers reject Moore's story, the reason for rejecting it is because of the third part of the story. That is, most philosophers accept

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[8]See chapter two for more discussion.

[9]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 273-274.

the first and second parts of Moore's story—i.e. there is a property of goodness and a betterness relation—and object to analyzing rightness in terms of betterness (Thomson 1997, 274).

By accepting the first two parts of Moore's story moral philosophers, according to Thomson, have an uphill battle when it comes to rejecting the third part.

> Suppose that Alfred is under the following threat by the Mafia: kill Bert, or we shall kill Charles, David, and Edward. Moore's opponents say [i.e. those who accept the first two parts and reject the third]: under those conditions, the world will surely be better if Alfred kills Bert than if he leaves the Mafia to kill the three others. After all deaths are surely bad, and three of them surely three times as bad as one. But, they go on: moral intuition delivers, firmly, that it would be wrong for Alfred to kill Bert.[10]

If there really is such a thing as the property of goodness and the relation betterness, then it seems that killing one for the sake of many is better than letting many die for the sake of not killing the one. Of course, those moral philosophers who buy the first two parts of Moore's story and reject the third part have busied themselves attempting to show that the third part does not follow from the first two parts. Thomson's point is that the first two parts of Moore's story increase the plausibility of the third part and that rejecting only the third part requires providing an alternative picture that is likely to be less plausible (given that there is a property of goodness and a relation betterness).

The first two parts of Moore's story increase the plausibility of the third part. Thus, if you want to reject the third part of Moore's story the most effective way of doing so is by not embracing one of the first two parts. Since, the second part—the better than relation—flows from the first part—the property of goodness—the most effective way of rejecting the third part of Moore's story is by rejecting the first part. Thomson notes that:

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[10]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 274.

> [A] deeper objection to Moore's story not only is available but has been available for many years now. Peter Geach, … Paul Ziff, … and G. H. von Wright … gave the excellent advice that we should *look and see* how the word 'good' is actually used. They showed, conclusively, that it does not function in the way in which adjectives like 'visible' and 'happy' do. In saying 'That's good', we are not ascribing a property goodness—indeed, there is no such thing.[11]

By not countenancing a property of goodness TMR does not let Moore's story get off the ground. Nor does TMR need to address Moore's OQA. For Moore's OQA, like Moore's story, does not even make sense if TMR is correct and there is no property of goodness. The OQA assumes that goodness is a property that is either analyzable—i.e. complex—or unanalyzable—i.e. simple. But, according to TMR there is no such property of goodness. Hence, the OQA cannot even get started.

According to Hare's metaethical views statements about goodness are primarily prescriptive statements. According to TMR statements about goodness are primarily descriptive statements. Hare's view presupposes the fact/value distinction.[12] TMR flatly rejects the fact/value distinction. According to the fact/value distinction statements of fact are made true by states of affairs independent of cognizers' attitudes, whereas statements of value are made true by states of affairs dependent on cognizers' attitudes. Thus, if the truth-value of a given proposition is independent of beliefs, desires, hopes, etc, then the proposition is factual; if the truth-value of a given proposition is dependent on beliefs, desires, hopes, etc, then the proposition is non-factual. Values statements, being dependent on beliefs, desires, hopes, etc are a species of non-factual statement, according to proponents of the fact/value distinction.

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[11]Thomson, "The Right and the Good," 275.

[12]For present purposes I am assuming a somewhat extreme version of the fact/value distinction.

According to TMR the truth-value of statements of the form x is a good K, where K refers to a kind with a function is independent of creaturely beliefs, desires, hopes, etc. Thus, according to TMR, value statements are just as factual as scientific statements—the paradigmatic factual statements. Indeed, according to TMR many value statements are abbreviated factual statements. For example, the statement "That's a good knife" is an abbreviated way of saying "That knife cuts smoothly, easily, safely, etc." But the descriptivism of TMR raises a worry. In the section to follow we will look at the worry raised by the descriptivism of TMR along with two other standard objections to TMR.

2. Three Standard Objections to Moral Realism

Descriptive judgments in general do not seem to have motivational force. But evaluative judgments do seem to have motivational force. Thus, we must distinguish between descriptive judgments and evaluative judgments. Since TMR implies that judgments involving 'good' are descriptive, TMR is false. Let's call this the motivation objection.

What reason do we have for thinking that evaluative judgments have motivational force? Samantha judges that giving money to charity is a good thing to do. Samantha has an opportunity to give money to charity. If Samantha does not give, we will want an explanation. If Samantha simply shrugs her shoulders and tells us that she just did not feel like giving, we will be perplexed. Our being perplexed is explained by the fact that normally, when S makes an evaluative judgment, S is thereby motivated to act in accordance with the content of the judgment. That is, evaluative judgments are motivating. Michael Smith characterizes this feature of morality in the following way:

> *Judgment Internalism*: If an agent judges that it is [good] for her to φ in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to φ in C or she is practically irrational.[13, 14]

TMR seems committed either to denying the putative evidence that evaluative judgments have motivational force, or to denying that evaluative judgments are descriptive. The second horn is not available to TMR since TMR clearly claims that evaluative judgments are descriptive. But TMR is not forced to grasp the first horn either. The alleged dilemma is a false one.[15]

It is important to notice that the claim that evaluative judgments are motivating is in need of the qualification that Smith gives it. Judgment internalism is concerned with judgments about actions and not with every evaluative judgment. Suppose that Julian judges that the Phoenix Suns are a good basketball team. Julian's judgment is evaluative but it is unclear what motivational force the judgment has. Remember the argument we are considering states that since TMR implies that 'good' is primarily descriptive, TMR is false. TMR is false, according to the motivation objection, because descriptive

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[13]Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 61. I replaced 'right' with 'good'. It should be noted that internalism is almost always formulated in deontic terms. Thus, my formulation of it is not standard. The chief reason for using deontic terms when discussing internalism is because the thesis is much more plausible with respect to judgments about obligation. Nevertheless, the thesis still has some plausibility when formulated with respect to judgments about actions that are good.

[14]The reason for the 'or she is practically irrational' clause in the consequent is that without it, the conceptual connection between judging that an act is good and being motivated to perform the act is too strong, according to Smith.

[15]A number of contemporary moral realists respond to the motivation objection be denying judgment internalism. It seems that sufficiently stated judgment internalism has a lot going for it. Thus, if a version of moral realism can accept judgment internalism then that version is, all things considered, superior. For the now classic denial of judgment internalism see David Brink, "Moral Realism and the Skeptical Arguments from Disagreement and Queerness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62, (1984): 111-125.

judgments are not motivational, whereas evaluative judgments are. Since judgments involving 'good' are evaluative, it follows that judgments involving 'good' are not primarily descriptive, contra TMR. But the example involving Julian shows that it is false to say that all evaluative judgments are motivational. Geach makes a similar point.

> I totally reject this view that "good" has not a primarily descriptive force. Somebody who did not care two pins about cricket, but fully understood how the game worked …, could supply a purely descriptive sense for the phrase "good batting wicket" regardless of the tastes of cricket fans.[16]

In other words, there are clear cases where evaluative judgments do not involve motivation. Smith is correct to restrict judgment internalism to judgments about actions.

Nevertheless, the objector may continue. The fact that there is a species of evaluative judgments that are motivational is all that is needed to show the falsity of TMR. For, according to TMR any judgment involving 'good' is primarily descriptive. But, again, descriptive judgments are not motivational. Hence, TMR is false.

Why is it that evaluative judgments about actions are motivational, whereas evaluative judgments that are not about actions are not motivational? Hare and other non-cognitivists suggest that the difference lies in the fact that evaluative judgments about action are primarily commendatory and not primarily descriptive. TMR, of course, cannot give the non-cognitivist response. Instead, TMR must appeal to the nature and function of the thing modified by 'good'. In other words, TMR must appeal to the nature and function of human action. Again, Geach alludes to the same thing.

> It ought to be clear that calling a thing a good A does not influence choice unless the one who is choosing happens to want an A; and this influence on action is not the logically primary force of the word "good." "You have ants in your pants," which obviously has a primarily descriptive force, is far closer to affecting action than many uses of the term "good." And many uses of the word "good" have no

[16]Geach, "Good and Evil," 303.

> reference to the tastes of a panel of experts or anything of the sort; if I say that a man has a good eye or a good stomach my remark has a very clear descriptive force and has no reference to any panel of eye or stomach fanciers.[17]

If S wants an A, then S will normally want a good A. The motivational aspect involved in evaluative judgments about action is connected to the nature of wanting and intentionally acting.[18]

TMR claims that ascriptions of goodness attach to a kind with members that have functions. Furthermore, the correct theory of functions states that the function *F* of members of kind K is for members of K to achieve well-being suited to the nature of K. Given that humans have a function, the function of a human is to achieve the well-being that is suited to the human kind. Performance of good human acts as opposed to performance of bad human acts is a necessary condition for someone to be a good human. Actions that do not contribute to the well-being of the actor or the actor's community are bad actions, while actions that do contribute to the well-being of the actor or the actor's community are good actions.[19] Hence, the nature of humans is such that performance of good acts contributes to their proper-functioning and thus the well-being of a human. Furthermore, it is plausible to suppose that humans are constituted in such a way that first-order intentions are always accompanied by meta-intentions that have to do with the agent's well-being (and/or the well-being of the agent's community).

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[17]Geach, "Good and Evil," 303.

[18]By intentionally acting I mean to focus on what Aquinas calls human acts rather than acts of a human. In the latter category or such things as blinking (as opposed to winking) and other such unintentionally acts of a human (or a non-human as the case may be). See Ralph McInerny. *Aquinas on Human Action: A Theory of Practice* (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

[19]For a more detailed discussion of the theory of functions that this relies on as well as for a brief statement about the notion of well-being see chapter four.

In the fourth chapter we put the first-order intention/meta-intention distinction to use in order to respond to one of Michael Rea's objections to normative theories of function. We can put the same distinction to use to respond to the current objection.[20] Judgments of the form "act A is a good act to perform in circumstances C" are, all things considered, motivating precisely because performance of such acts contributes to the well-being of humans (or are believed to contribute to the agents well-being). Given that it is in the nature of humans to intend to contribute to their own and/or others' well-being it is no surprise that judgments about some act being good for the agent (or for others) motivate.

The motivation objection states that the motivating nature of evaluative judgments about action shows that evaluative judgments are not primarily descriptive. What the above response shows is that evaluative judgments about action are not primarily motivating. The motivational force accompanying judgments about action is parasitic on the primarily descriptive nature of evaluative judgments about action. "That's a good action to perform" is motivating because good acts contribute to well-being, and wanting and intending have well-being as their formal ends. This response to the motivation objection is also relevant to another problem that has vexed moral realists.

J. L. Mackie argues that moral realism is committed to the existence of properties that are both metaphysically and epistemologically queer. Mackie writes:

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[20]The following principle (or something like it) seems to be true: if some theory T helps to deflect a number of objections to some other theory T*, and T and T* are compatible, then adherents of T* have reason to endorse T. The first-order intention/meta-intention distinction helps to deflect both Rea's objections and the objection now under consideration (the motivation objection) to TMR, and the first-order intention/meta-intention distinction and TMR are compatible. Thus, I, being a TMR adherent, have reason to endorse the first-order intention/meta-intention distinction.

> [The argument from queerness] has two parts, one metaphysical, the other epistemological. If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would to be by some special faculty of moral perceptions or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.[21]

I do not have much to say with respect to Mackie's epistemological objection. The epistemological objection relies on a thoroughgoing empiricism. Richard Price offers what seems to be a cogent objection to empiricism. The basic argument that Price uses against empiricism is quite simple. It has the following form:

> 1. According to empiricism, all ideas are derived from impressions (impressions covering both sense impressions and reflective impressions).
>
> 2. There are some ideas not possibly derived from impressions.
>
> 3. Hence, empiricism is false.

In defense of premise 2 Price argues that the following ideas are not possibly derived from impressions: impenetrability, substance, duration, space, infinity, contingency, necessity, power and causation.[22] Mackie recognizes the power of Price's objection. "This is an important counter to the [epistemological] argument from queerness. The only adequate reply to it would be to show how, on empiricist foundations, we can construct an account of the ideas and beliefs and knowledge that we have of these matters."[23]

The metaphysical objection is a bit more pressing for TMR. If moral realism requires the existence of entities or properties that are completely alien, and if, as Mackie

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[21]J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 38.

[22]Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* ed. D. D. Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 22-25.

[23]Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 39.

argues, we can get by without such properties, then so much the worse for moral realism. TMR is a species of moral realism. Thus, if the metaphysical queerness objection is sound, so much the worse for TMR. The problem with Mackie's metaphysical queerness objection is the same as the problem infecting contemporary moral realism—both assume that in order to be a moral realist one must countenance the property of goodness. Mackie states,

> Plato's forms give a dramatic picture of what objective values would have to be. The Form of the Good is such that knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it. An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it.[24]

If moral realism is true, then there must be a property (or form) of goodness that is both "intrinsically action-guiding and motivating."[25] Mackie's metaphysical queerness objection is dependent on the claim that there is a property of goodness. TMR rejects this claim. Thus, TMR is not touched by the metaphysical argument from queerness.

Furthermore, the fact that judgments about good actions typically motivate does not involve anything queer outside of the agent doing the judging. Judgments about good actions typically motivate because good actions contribute to well-being and well-being is the formal end of intentional action. Hence, if an agent judges that this act is good and that act is not good, then the agent is motivated, all things considered, to perform the good act. The motivational force of the judgment supervenes on the nature of the agent and intentional action. Invoking supervenience with respect to motivation

[24]Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 40.

[25]Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 49.

and action has not received much attention in the literature. But a different, broader supervenience relation has been subjected to critical scrutiny.

Simon Blackburn argues that moral realists are unable to account for the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral.[26] Russ Shafer-Landau presents Blackburn's argument with characteristic clarity and brevity:

> Blackburn claims that the realist cannot explain why the moral supervenes on the non-moral, since realists are also, he thinks committed to the *lack of entailment thesis*. This holds that no set of non-moral truths entails any particular moral evaluation. This lack of entailment makes supervenience a mystery. For if no non-moral description entails any moral evaluation, then it should be possible for the very same kind of non-moral state of affairs to sometimes be good and at other times bad. But supervenience tells us that any such 'mixed world' is impossible: that if some set of base properties [B*] once subserves some property [S], then B* must (in that world) always do so. Endorsing the lack of entailment thesis makes it very difficult to explain why this should be so.[27]

Blackburn's concern is that if there is no entailment between non-moral properties and moral ones, then the relation amongst them is mysterious. Why is it not possible to change the moral properties without changing the non-moral ones? If moral realists cannot explain why dramatic changes in the supervening properties must accompany changes in the subvening base, then moral realism loses significant explanatory power (and Blackburn goes on to argue that on his expressivist account supervenience is not mysterious).

Shafer-Landau, rightly it seems, argues that moral realists should abandon the lack of entailment thesis. But Shafer-Landau's attempt to articulate exactly what denying the lack of entailment thesis amounts to seems to come up short. He states that moral

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[26]Simon Blackburn, "Moral Realism," in *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); "Supervenience Revisited" in *Essays in Quasi-Realism*.

[27]Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 84-85.

realists will "… explain the ban on mixed worlds by claiming that a duly specified set of non-moral properties metaphysically must give rise to a certain moral property."[28] But now the metaphysical connection between the moral and non-moral is in need of explanation. Blackburn's demand for an explanation from the moral realist for the ban on mixed worlds is met with the introduction of a seemingly mysterious metaphysical tie that binds the moral and the non-moral together.

Shafer-Landau recognizes that explaining the entailment between the moral and the non-moral vis-à-vis metaphysical necessity will not satisfy Blackburn.

> Blackburn himself notes the possibility of such a response but remains undeterred. He simply moves the problem to a different modality—logical or conceptual (as opposed to metaphysical) necessity. That moral features supervene on descriptive ones is thought a conceptual truth, but no propositions specifying entailment relations between moral and descriptive properties are true in virtue of the meanings of the incorporated terms. So the problem of explaining a mixed possible world re-emerges: why should it be a conceptual truth that a moral property once resulting from a descriptive one must (in that world) always do so, when it is conceptually possible for any configuration of descriptive properties not to underlie the moral property it actually does?[29]

The first supervenience argument assumes that the relation that obtains between moral and non-moral properties is metaphysically necessary. According to the first supervenience argument, moral realists, by embracing the lack of entailment thesis, cannot explain why it is metaphysically necessary for the moral to supervene on the non-moral. Moral realists, it seems, should not embrace the lack of entailment thesis. However, moral realists now owe an account of the kind of entailment at work in the supervenience relation between moral and non-moral properties. It does not appear as though the entailment can be analytic. For one, if the entailment is analytic, then it

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[28]Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 85.

[29]Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 86.

should be the case that moral truths can be discovered simply by analyzing the meaning of non-moral terms. Furthermore, if the entailment is analytic, there is no need to postulate moral properties, as distinct from non-moral ones, in the first place.

As Shafer-Landau explains the second supervenience argument (or the argument from the conceptual supervenience of the moral on the non-moral) claims that (a) it is a matter of conceptual necessity that the moral supervenes on the non-moral and (b) given moral realism, it is conceptually possible for moral properties (the supervening ones) to change without a change in non-moral properties (the base or subvening properties). The challenge to the moral realist is to explain how both (a) and (b) can be true.

The apparent incompatibility between (a) and (b) arises from considering cases of the following sort. S judges that some world w is better than some world w*.[30] Given (a) S must, as a matter of conceptual necessity, believe that there is some natural (or non-moral) difference between w and w*. But given (b) it is conceptually possible for there to be a moral difference without a non-moral one (this is true given that the lack of entailment thesis is replaced with metaphysical necessity and not conceptual necessity). Thus, it seems as though (a) and (b) are incompatible.

Shafer-Landau attempts to show that (a) and (b) are not incompatible by paying close attention to the distinction between metaphysical and conceptual necessity. He writes:

> Assume for now that it is a conceptual truth that moral facts/properties/relations are supervenient ones. The problem, then, should be that competent speakers of a language can conceive of a world in which the base properties that actually underlie particular moral ones fail to do so. But there is no mystery here, since people can conceive of many things that are not metaphysically possible. If

[30]The example I use assumes global supervenience. A similar example could be constructed by relying on strong supervenience, though I will not attempt to do so here.

> certain base properties *metaphysically* necessitate the presence of specified moral properties, the *conceptual* possibility that they fail to do so reveals only a limitation on our appreciation of the relevant metaphysical relations. There is no deep explanatory puzzle resisting resolution here.[31]

It seems to me that Shafer-Landau's response misses the force of the second supervenience argument. If one accepts (a)—the moral supervenes on the non-moral as a matter of conceptual necessity—then it should not be conceptually possible for a competent user of moral terms to conceive of a world w that is a good world and a world w*, relevantly similar to w, that is not a good world. But Shafer-Landau appears to grant that it is conceptually possible. Thus, Shafer-Landau's attempt to show that (a) and (b) are not incompatible appears to fail.

I think it is plausible to locate the problems with Shafer-Landau's response to the second supervenience argument in two areas. First, Shafer-Landau assumes that in order to be a moral realist one must countenance that goodness is a property. Second, and this follows from the first, the only way to tie moral and non-moral properties together in a way that respects supervenience is by denying the lack of entailment thesis and replacing it with metaphysical necessity. But, given that the moral supervenes on the non-moral as a matter or conceptual necessity, metaphysical necessity does not appear strong enough.[32] TMR, it seems, is immune to the supervenience objection, at least with respect to the supervenience of the property of goodness on non-moral properties. Shafer-Landau invokes a metaphysically necessary entailment relation between moral properties and non-moral properties in order to respond to the first supervenience objection. It turns out,

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[31]Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense*, 86.

[32]Conceptual necessity implies metaphysical necessity but metaphysical necessity does not imply conceptual necessity. The second supervenience argument exploits this difference.

however, that the relation is too weak to answer the second supervenience argument. By not countenancing a property of goodness TMR is able to invoke a much stronger entailment relation. According to TMR, if a watch tells time accurately, is lightweight, legible, etc., then it is a good watch as a matter of conceptual necessity. The watch kind determines what it is to be a well-functioning member of its kind. In order to understand what a watch is one must understand what it is to be a good watch. I think something similar can be said with respect to human goodness. As an approximation we may say that a well-functioning human is a good human and that this too holds as a matter of conceptual necessity. There is no property of goodness over and above the properties that constitute a well-functioning human. Furthermore, in order to understand what a human is one must, at least partially, grasp what it is to be a good human. That is, there is an intimate connection between understanding the nature of a human and understanding what a well-functioning human is.[33] Jean Porter puts the point succinctly. "We cannot even begin to grasp what it means to be a human being unless we have some idea of what it means to do well as a human being."[34] Thus, TMR responds to the first supervenience argument by denying the lack of entailment thesis and replacing it with a conceptually necessary entailment relation. That is, the entailment relation that obtains between the moral and the non-moral is conceptually necessary. Someone who claims that S is a well-functioning human but S is not in fact a good human is conceptually (not just metaphysically) confused. TMR is thus immune to both the first and the second supervenience arguments.

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[33]See chapter three for a more detailed discussion.

[34]Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law*, (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2005), 118.

In this section we have considered three different objections to moral realism. No doubt, contemporary moral realists have come up with ingenious responses to each of the above objections. Nevertheless, the objections exploit the fact that most versions of moral realism are committed to there being a property of goodness. The fact that TMR denies that there is a property of goodness means that TMR does not face the standard objection to moral realism. Given that TMR is a coherent position its immunity from the standard objections to moral realism warrants taking TMR seriously.

TMR is immune to the standard objections to moral realism. Nevertheless, TMR faces some serious objections of its own. In the next section we will look at two objections to TMR that are likely to be raised.

3. Objections to TMR

We have already considered many objections to various aspects of TMR: some semantic objections were dealt with in chapter two, some metaethical objections were dealt with in chapter three and some metaphysical objections were dealt with in chapter four. In this section we will briefly look at two different objections to TMR.

Objection from Evolutionary Theory[35]

Perhaps the most obvious objection to TMR is that it conflicts with contemporary evolutionary theory. Evolutionary theory, we are told, was the last nail in the Aristotelian coffin. A number of contemporary biologists and philosophers of biology recognize that

[35]In what follows I simply draw on the conclusions of recent developments in evolutionary theory. Even if I could (which I cannot) adequately summarize all of the evidence for the conclusions I will cite doing so would take far too long for the purposes of this section. Interested readers should refer to the works cited below.

functions are indispensable for biology.[36] Thus, TMR's appeal to functions is not per se incompatible with evolutionary theory. Rather, TMR's appeal to natures, such as human nature, is incompatible with evolutionary theory.

We can state the evolution objection as follows. TMR assumes something like Aristotelian essentialism. Aristotelian essentialism is incompatible with evolutionary theory. Hence, TMR is false.

In response I think the objection may be guilty of assuming that natural selection can account for every feature of an organism. Natural selection works by selecting for traits advantageous to survival and reproduction. But evolutionary theory does not claim that natural selection produces traits. As David J. Buller notes, "[N]atural selection causes only changes in gene frequencies and, hence, changes in the frequencies of traits in a population; selection is not a cause of the presence of any trait."[37] Natural selection selects for traits already present in the population. Thus, the traits selected for by natural selection with respect to cheetahs are quite different than the traits selected for with respect to roses, or even humans because cheetahs, roses and humans are different things. The 'because' in the last sentence may seem problematic. By saying that the traits are different because the things that have the traits are different appears to imply a commitment to natures. However, as is becoming clearer, evolutionary theory seems to presuppose just such a commitment.

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[36]See chapter 4.

[37]David J. Buller, "Etiological Theories of Function: A Geographical Survey," *Biology and Philosophy* 13, (1998): 520.

According to Denis Walsh evolutionary theory cannot explain why certain features are adaptive without assuming that there are stable natures in the world for natural selection to operate on. He writes:

> Aristotelian natures play an explanatory role in evolutionary biology that neither the Ancients nor those who forged the current modern synthesis theory of evolution could have anticipated. Recent evolutionary developmental biology shows that one cannot understand how natural selection operating over a population of genes can lead to increased and diversified adaptation of organisms unless one understands the role of individual natures (essences) in the process of evolution.[38]

Thus, according to Walsh, Aristotelian natures play an indispensable role in explaining natural selection.

While defending a scholastic account of the natural law, Jean Porter argues that teleological explanations as well as Aristotelian natures are required in order to fully grasp what the scholastics had in mind. Thus, Porter too is interested in showing that there is no fundamental conflict between an ethics based on the scholastics and current biological science. After reviewing a number of prominent biologists Porter summarizes their findings in the following way:

> We cannot fully understand the evolutionary history of any kind of creature without appealing to some considerations stemming from the kinds of creatures with which we are dealing. And that means that at some points we must appeal to formal causes, that is to say explanations which irreducibly refer to the kind of creature that is in question.

If Walsh and Porter are correct, then evolutionary theory not only does not pose a threat to the metaphysics of TMR, current evolutionary theory vindicates it. Thus, TMR's explicit appeal to natures is not (or so it seems) incompatible with evolutionary theory.

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[38] Denis Walsh, "Evolutionary Essentialism," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 57, (2006): 426.

Objection from Evaluative Standards

Another objection to TMR that needs to be dealt with is that TMR implies relativism. There are two forms this objection can take. The first is provided by James Drier and suggests that semantic accounts of 'good' like the one given in chapter two are right but that morality does not fit the semantic picture. The second suggests that the semantic and metaphysical accounts of chapters two and four respectively imply that goodness is something altogether different when it is applied to different things.

James Drier argues that something like the semantic picture explained and defended in chapter two for 'good' is correct. He writes:

> It is easy to see how something could be good *relative to a standard*, but difficult to see how something could be good, not merely according to this or that standard, but simply. The idea of something's being good, not according to some standard but just by possessing the property of goodness, does not even make much sense. If some standard were special, were the *right* one, then something could be good absolutely by being good relative to that standard. In some contexts, there does seem to be a standard that is built in conceptually, and in these contexts we are comfortable with attributions of goodness. Even here, though, we are not apt to resist the suggestion that good and bad are relative to the standard in question.[39]

Drier's suggestion, not unlike my own in chapter two, is that in order for the statement "x is good" to make sense there must be some contextually salient standard that x can be measured against. Drier goes on to argue that clocks, astronomers, shepherds and perhaps organisms can be measured against some standard and hence that attributions of goodness to these types of things can make sense relative to the standard.

[39]James Drier, "Moral Relativism and Moral Nihilism," *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, 242.

Drier's next move is to argue that the notion of moral goodness, unlike the notions of goodness relative to standards for artifacts, roles, and perhaps organisms does not conceptually commit one to any definite standard. Drier writes,

> How, then, can things be morally good and bad, and morally right and wrong? If the concept of morality came with a definite set of rules and standards, moral goodness would be no more controversial that clock goodness, and moral wrongness would seem no more controversial than the wrong move in chess. Doesn't the concept of morality come with at least some built-in rules? A restriction on harming innocent people, a requirement that we tell the truth, a low evaluation of refusing to help those in need? Some have thought that the concepts of the virtues can fill the role filled by the functions in attributions of goodness to artifacts or professions. But although we may have more or less firm views about what is morally permissible and which traits of character are virtuous, these views are not matters of linguistic or conceptual competence in matters of ethics as they are in discussions of artifacts and jobs and games. Someone who thinks that rooks are permitted to move diagonally simply doesn't know chess. Someone who thinks that killing the innocent is permissible when it increases gross domestic product may be morally defective, but his deficit is not semantic.[40]

Drier seems to think that the only way to avoid relativism is if the standards for good and bad and right and wrong are somehow built into the concept of moral goodness. Since the standards and rules are not built into the concept of moral goodness we cannot have absolutism. Hence, relativism is true with respect to morality. Given that relativism is incompatible with moral realism, it follows that moral realism is false.

A few things can be said on behalf of TMR. First, TMR agrees that attributions of goodness to things without standards are meaningless. But this agreement only implies relativism for moral goodness if the locus of moral goodness does not have standards. In chapters three and four I argued that the locus of moral goodness is humans or human nature. If trees and other organisms can have standards for goodness, then humans can. The way to discover what the standards are is by investigating the nature

[40]Drier, "Moral Relativism and Moral Nihilism," 244.

and function of these organisms. That humans have a nature and function is assumed (though some arguments were given in chapter four to motivate this assumption). What the nature and function of humans is has to be spelled out in more detail than I can provide here, but I have hinted throughout that human function is intimately tied to human nature; that human nature is best thought of as comprising rationality, sociality and animality; and that these three features reveal functions that humans have independently of anyone's beliefs or desires about humans. If this brief sketch is right, then the standards for morality are built into the nature of humans.

Drier in effect cuts off his account of attributions of goodness too short. He grants that attributions of goodness makes sense when dealing with artifacts and jobs and games but denies it when dealing with morality. The main reason for this is likely because Drier agrees with Thomson that the function of humans is too thin to ground morality. But neither provides good reason for thinking that the function of humans is too thin. As I argued in chapter three Thomson fails to realize that the function of humans may be to have and aim at goals where one of these goals constitutes an end that enables one to makes sense of one's other goals. Why can not this be a part of the human function? Thomson's only reason is (a) her commitment to an etiological account of function and (b) her commitment to Darwinism. But as we saw in chapter four etiological accounts of function are false, and as we saw in reply to the objection to TMR from evolutionary theory, there is good reason to believe that evolutionary theory is compatible with a robust account of human nature.

The second type of relativism objection states that if the semantic and metaphysical accounts of chapters two and four respectively are correct, then attributions

of goodness share nothing in common. For example, a good horse and a good pen do not seem to possess very many properties in common. There are two ways to respond to this objection. First, it may be that the semantic account given in chapter two and the metaphysical account in chapter four imply that goodness and being are convertible or identical in reference but different in sense. One reason for thinking that the attributive account implies the convertibility of being and goodness comes from the attributive nature of 'bad'. As I noted in chapter two each statement true of a K will not be true of a bad K. For example, each statement true of a car will not be true of a bad car. The most obvious reason for this is that bad cars lack certain features that cars have (just as bad food lacks certain features that food has). The attributive account of 'bad' seems to imply something like the privation theory of evil (or badness). Thus, x is a bad K just in case x does not have the features that Ks are supposed to have—that is, the features specified by a things nature and function. Moreover, the following seems to be true (though I will not argue for this here): the privation theory of evil is true just in case the convertibility of being and goodness is true. If the privation theory of evil and the convertibility theory imply each other, and if the attributive account of 'bad' implies the privation theory of evil, it follows that the attributive account of 'bad' implies the convertibility theory. If the attributive account implies the convertibility theory, then the kind of relativism that the present objection is concerned with does not arise. Attributions of goodness turn out to refer to the same thing—namely, being.

The second way to respond to the present objection is by introducing God into the metaethics. Attributions of goodness would still pick out different features in different kinds of things. Nevertheless, with God as creator and the end of all creation, each things

function will be directed in its own way towards God. God would then serve as the unifier of all of the diverse attributions of goodness. Indeed, there may be a few interesting arguments here for the existence of God that begin with the attributive account of goodness.

4. Implications for Philosophy of Religion

Assume that x is good only if x is a good K. But for different Ks x will be good in different ways. This consequence may lead some to think that attributions of goodness to members of different Ks will imply a kind of semantic relativism. 'Good' never means the same thing. If the semantic story is correct, and if semantic relativism is false, then there must be something that unifies all of our various attributions of goodness. The only candidate unifier is something that all Ks or things with functions are directed towards; have their end ultimately satisfied in. This ultimate satisfier of ends to which all things are directed is what we call God.

A different argument for the existence of God likewise starts with the attributive account of 'good'. The attributive account of 'good' seems to imply one of the following: either attributions of goodness are univocal, equivocal or analogous. It seems clear that on the attributive account attributions of goodness are not univocal. Assuming that semantic relativism is false and thus attributions of goodness cannot be equivocal, attributions of goodness must be analogous. If 'good' is an analogous term, then there is some one thing to which all attributions of goodness are related.[41] That is, analogy assumes that there is a focal meaning, a non-analogous application of the analogous term

[41]Robert Adams discusses analogy in *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 39-40.

to which all other applications are related. A natural suggestion for the focal meaning of 'good' is something that is completely good—namely, God.[42]

Finally, it may be possible, using the resources of TMR, to provide an interesting defense of the crucial premise in one version of the ontological argument. According to the version of the ontological argument that I have in mind, from the possibility of God's existing it follows that God exists. The argument assumes that God, if He exists, is a necessary being and that S5 is true. Thus, if it is possible for a necessary being to exist, then, given S5, the necessary being exists. The crucial step in the argument is the possibility premise.[43] What reason do we have for thinking that it is possible that a necessary being exists? One reason may be provided by the attributive account of 'good'. If the attributive account of 'good' is best understood as implying that 'good' is an analogous term, then there must be a focal meaning of 'good'. It seems plausible to suppose that the focal meaning of 'good' is something that is completely good or wholly good. That is, it is possible that there is something that is completely or wholly good. Furthermore, it is plausible to suppose that something wholly good exists in every possible world because in every possible world 'good' is analogous. Thus, it is possible that something is wholly good implies that something is wholly good. Thus, a necessary being exists that is wholly good and this being we call God.[44]

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[42]While I do not have the space to develop this here, I think that something like the argument just given is at work in Aquinas's fourth way.

[43]This is not to say that the other assumptions in this version of the ontological argument are without detractors.

[44]Objection: the attributive account implies that 'good' cannot logically stand alone. But it does not seem as though the statement "God is good" admits of an interpretation that is consistent with the attributive account. In other words, there is not K term that 'good' is implicitly modifying in the statement "God is good." There are at

that something is wholly good implies that something is wholly good. Thus, a necessary being exists that is wholly good and this being we call God.[45]

The above three arguments for God's existence are by no means complete. Much more work is needed in order to develop and defend them. Nevertheless, they point to some of the many interesting areas for further investigation.

P. T. Geach has played a prominent role in this dissertation. As such it is appropriate to conclude with a quote from him that I fully endorse.

> I am well aware that much of this discussion is unsatisfying: some points on which I think I do see clear I have not been able to develop at proper length; on many points … I certainly do not see clear. … But perhaps, though I have not made everything clear, I have made some things clearer.[46]

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[45]Objection: the attributive account implies that 'good' cannot logically stand alone. But it does not seem as though the statement "God is good" admits of an interpretation that is consistent with the attributive account. In other words, there is not K term that 'good' is implicitly modifying in the statement "God is good." There are at least four responses to this objection (note that the responses are not necessarily jointly consistent). First if 'good' is indeed an analogous term, then it is not surprising that its focal meaning is different from its analogous meaning (indeed this follows from the notion of analogy). The attributive account would need to be modified but not in such a way as to render any of the arguments in the dissertation problematic. Rather than stating the attributive account in terms of unrestricted quantification we would simply restrict the domain of discourse to everything except God. Second, the attributive account suggests that the K term that 'good' implicitly or explicitly modifies refers to things that have natures and functions. The correct metaphysical account of functions implies that something is a good instance of its kind just in case it fulfills its function to such-and-such a degree. It seems the God's goodness satisfies these considerations. "God is good" means that there is nothing lacking in God, there is nothing waiting to be fulfilled. God's nature is, as the medievals say, fully actual. Third, it may be that a K term is readily available. For example, "God is good" is elliptical for "God is a good God" or "God is a good diety." I am reluctant to fully endorse this response for reasons having to do with the Thomistic claim that God is outside of all categories and thus does not belong to a genus.

[46]Geach, "Good and Evil," 306.

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