



---

Dissertations

Theses and Dissertations

---

2018

## Simple Goodness and Ethical Theory

Sarah Marie Babbitt

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss)



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Babbitt, Sarah Marie, "Simple Goodness and Ethical Theory" (2018). *Dissertations*. 3324.  
[https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/3324](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/3324)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
Copyright © 2018 Sarah Marie Babbitt

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

SIMPLE GOODNESS AND ETHICAL THEORY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY

SARAH MARIE BABBITT

CHICAGO, IL

DECEMBER 2018

Copyright by Sarah Marie Babbitt, 2018  
All rights reserved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee, Drs. Jennifer Parks, Julie Ward, and Vicki Wike, for their feedback and persistent encouragement during the years I worked on this project. I owe a special thanks to Dr. Parks, whose generosity and mentorship enabled me to see this project through to completion. I also thank Drs. Tom Carson and Diana Tietjens Meyers who challenged me and shaped my philosophical views in ways that I could not have predicted.

I owe a great debt to my family and friends in Los Angeles and Chicago who supported me in more personal ways throughout my doctorate work. I especially want to thank my mom and my grandma for consistently checking in on me and reminding me of where I come from. I also want to thank Thomas Bretz, Jean Marie Clifford, Robby Duncan, Silja Hillmann, Jessica Mefford-Katz, Ndidi Nwaneri, Peter Otieno, Marcella Russo, Ezgi Sertler, Rebecca Scott, Sharim Shoman, Carlo Tarantino, and Doug Walters for all that they did to make Chicago into my home away from home.

Finally, I want to thank Loyola University Chicago for the financial assistance I received as a graduate student and as a teaching fellow, without which none of this would have been possible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: THE GOOD & THE NONIDEAL	7
CHAPTER 2: CRITIQUES OF SIMPLE GOODNESS	36
CHAPTER 3: ARISTOTLE ON THE PLATONIC FORM OF THE GOOD	65
CHAPTER 4: AGAINST SIMPLE GOODNESS: EMPIRICAL ADEQUACY IN ETHICAL THEORY	107
CONCLUSION	158
BIBLIOGRAPHY	164
VITA	174

## INTRODUCTION

Many people in the United States feel that we are currently witnessing an era of unprecedented challenges to our traditional conceptions of reason, morality, and truth. Thinkpieces and op-eds recommending mandatory critical thinking and introductory philosophy courses are commonplace, while recommendations for courses in ethical theory are not. Meanwhile ethical topics and debates about healthcare, economic inequality, police brutality, sexual violence, and foreign collusion dominate the media. Movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo have developed powerful grassroots campaigns that imprinted contemporary socio-ethical issues of racial and gender injustice into public consciousness. Yet the most well-known moral philosopher in the U.S. is a fictional character on a popular TV show who finds himself in (literal) hell because his obsession with perfectly rational, ethical decision-making led him to make terrible life choices while he lived. How is it that at such a cultural moment, when we would expect moral philosophers to be particularly helpful, we are instead the butt of a joke?

My work in this dissertation is motivated by the concern that mainstream moral philosophy has sacrificed the relevance and applicability it could have outside of the academy for the sake of preserving a misguided vision of theoretical purity. I hold out hope that in an era such as this, the field is ready for a sea change. If it is, ethical theory and its methods could be reformed to achieve levels of clarity and relevance the field has never known.

This work is primarily an examination of the concept of simple goodness and its role in ethical theory. I argue on pragmatic and epistemic grounds that simple goodness (SG), commonly referred to as “good *simpliciter*,” is problematic for ethical theory and for ethical discourse generally. I begin by defining SG, focusing on the original account developed by G.E. Moore, and I argue that it is an intrinsic value in several senses. I review the arguments of prominent critics of SG, namely Peter Geach, Judith Jarvis Thomson, and Richard Kraut, who focus on the logical and metaphysical puzzles inherent to the concept of SG. I argue that concerns raised in these critiques can be traced back to Aristotle’s critique of the Platonic form of the good. I do share some of these concerns, but I argue that SG faces more serious problems when used in contemporary ethical theory.

I apply insights from feminist ethics and applied ethics to demonstrate how SG is used to support faulty methods of moral justification that privilege the perspectives of those with social power to the exclusion of alternative views. I argue SG is primarily invoked to support theoretical idealizations that offer the impression of philosophical sophistication at the expense of moral understanding. Relying on SG obscures moral justification and the lived experience of making and defending moral claims, thereby encouraging us to unreflectively endorse established moral norms. Finally, I suggest that new methods of moral justification being developed by feminist ethicists can provide a solution to the problems that emerge in the wake of my critique of SG.

In Chapter 1, “The Good & the Nonideal,” I provide an account of SG, and I explain a lesser-known critical approach that will prove central in my critique. I begin by clarifying terminology, since SG goes by a variety of names. Then I present an analysis of the Moorean

view of goodness simpliciter as the paradigmatic conceptualization of SG. Following the Moorean account, I explain some of the relevant distinctions in value concepts that have become standard in metaethics and intrinsic value theory, focusing on important works by Christine Korsgaard and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen. I situate SG within the schema of intrinsic values developed by Rønnow-Rasmussen. I explain how, on this view, SG is an intrinsic value in three senses: the finality sense, the supervenience sense, and the nonderivative sense. I find only the last two senses problematic. In the last part of the chapter, I explain the basic tenets of nonideal theory, as well as the role of ideals in ethical theory, to lay the foundation for the critique that is developed in Chapter 4. Discussions about problematic idealization are typically found in social and political philosophy, especially with reference to the ideal theory of John Rawls, but here I suggest that a similar line of critique can and should be applied to problematic idealizations within mainstream ethical theory. In short, the chapter begins by describing the problem, and ends by introducing the solution.

In Chapter 2, “Critiques of Simple Goodness,” I examine the arguments of the prominent critics of SG, namely Geach, Thomson, and Kraut. I proceed in chronological order, outlining Geach’s view first. Geach introduces the important distinction between the predicative and the attributive good, and he argues that “good” is always attributive, never predicative. Thomson’s critique also relies on this distinction, and she develops additional arguments to demonstrate that SG cannot be an independent logical predicate. I also describe Thomson’s novel theory of the good that identifies all goodness as goodness in some respect. Finally, I examine Kraut’s arguments, of which there are two. The first



attempts to prove that SG is never reason-providing. Because SG cannot provide reasons for action, Kraut argues that it is irrelevant to practical decision-making. Without any practical use for SG, Kraut argues it follows that SG can be eliminated from our conceptual repertoire without loss. I argue that all three of these critiques are instructive in the ongoing attempt to extricate SG from ethical theory, however, none of their arguments force the conclusion that SG must be entirely eliminated from ethical theory.

In Chapter 3, I provide more historical context for the debate, drawing mainly on Aristotle's critique of the Platonic form of the good in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Critics of SG often trace the philosophical problems of SG back to Moore's *Principia Ethica*, but I locate its origins in Aristotle's critique of the Platonic form of the good in Chapter 1, Book VI of the *Ethics*. I show how the arguments of the critics of SG from Chapter 2 share many of the same motivations and concerns as Aristotle. The work in this chapter provides a historical basis for the central problem at stake, namely the viability of SG as a concept applicable to practical or theoretical moral problems. Examining Aristotle's arguments reveals how both methodological and ontological problems are at issue in this debate. Aristotle's approach foreshadows my own, in some respects. For example, just as he has practical concerns regarding understanding the human good (i.e. the moral good) in terms of the Platonic form, I have similar concerns regarding understanding moral goodness in terms of SG. The work in this chapter also reveals the extent to which current critics of SG can be understood as Aristotelian.

In the fourth and final chapter, "Against Simple Goodness: Achieving Empirical Adequacy in Ethical Theory," I argue that relying on SG encourages us to endorse privileged

intuitions about value, and it divorces our moral claims from the practical realities of the world we live in. My approach to this problem draws on feminist ethics and nonideal theory, and I begin the chapter by detailing the feminist ethical perspective and explaining how nonideal theory fits within it. I propose a program for evaluating the empirical adequacy of theories and concepts which includes ensuring they maintain the standards of modest empiricism and pragmatic efficiency. I proceed to use this program to evaluate SG by applying the standards for empirical adequacy to the ways in which proponents of SG imagine the concept fits within ethical theory. I also explore the claim that SG is merely a rhetorical device. To do this, I investigate the social origins of Moore's theory, as well as several areas of applied ethics in which the authors argue that the rhetorical power of Moorean intrinsic value (a synonym for SG) is not enough to legitimately ground moral judgments or to motivate moral action. Finally, I argue that new methods of moral justification developed according to particular standards of feminist moral epistemology can provide a solution to the core problems revealed via this extended critique of SG.

My critique is feminist in that I ultimately argue that SG, and similar conceptualizations of values, represents a threat to anyone who has ever been oppressed by prevailing moral norms. My critique is also feminist in that I utilize theoretical and methodological innovations developed within feminist ethics and feminist moral epistemology. To be clear, these are only "innovations" to mainstream ethical theory. Many of the same theoretical commitments I bring to bear on this problem are also associated with other long-standing philosophical traditions. I share with classical phenomenology the recognition of the significance of lived experiences, with pragmatism an emphasis on

practical application, with Marxism the non-ideal theoretical perspective, and with Aristotelian ethics a particularist moral justification. Given this variety, it might be unclear if my approach is most accurately characterized as “feminist” or something else, however, as my critique will show, my overall perspective of ethical theory is reflective of the project of feminist ethics (insofar as it can be generalized as a single project).

## CHAPTER 1

### THE GOOD & THE NONIDEAL

Value theory has enjoyed renewed popularity in the last two decades, and, as a result, many traditional<sup>1</sup> value concepts have been called into question and many new distinctions in types of value are generating new, more nuanced, value concepts. One of these traditional types of value now generating controversy is generally known as good *simpliciter*, but it is also often referred to as “good, period,” “good, full-stop,” and “*simply* good.” This is the value concept that I focus on in this work and that I will try to illuminate in the first part of this chapter. It is, perhaps surprisingly, difficult to define good *simpliciter*. It goes by many names. In addition to the alternative names already mentioned, some philosophers have their own preference for still other names. For example, Richard Kraut (2011), a key figure in reviving this controversy, refers to it as “absolute goodness,” and other key figures, such as G.E. Moore (1903, 1912, 1922) and most formal value theorists, use “intrinsic value” as a synonym for good *simpliciter*. The formal value theory literature on intrinsic value has exploded in recent years, and many philosophers believe the traditional definition of the concept (i.e. that which has its value in itself or that which is valued as an end in itself) is often conflated with other types of value or that it actually is

---

<sup>1</sup> By “traditional” I refer to the mainstream Anglophone tradition of Western philosophy, particularly analytic philosophy, since it dominates the literature of formal value theory and ethical theory. Continental philosophy is certainly part of the Western tradition, but in these areas it is often excluded from the mainstream work on metaethics and value theory (i.e. prominent journals, textbooks, undergraduate courses, etc.).

a composite of several types of intrinsic value.<sup>2</sup>

So the identification with intrinsic value only adds to the difficulty of articulating a clear definition. I will not spend much time defending my claim that the names I have listed here are proper synonyms of good *simpliciter*. I will say that all authors mentioned in this project who call it by another name do acknowledge that they are concerned with the value concept that Moore once called “good *simpliciter*” and “intrinsic value.” Despite, and partly because of, the proliferation of names for good *simpliciter*, I call this value concept “simple goodness.” Simple goodness (SG) refers to what is now a mainstream philosophical conception of that value concept first developed by Moore.

Descriptions of SG often begin by pointing to standard statements that refer to this type of value. These statements are typically of the form, “It is good that X” or “X is good.” Some examples of the first form are, “It is good that Hitler did not prevail” and “It is good that you have friends.” The “good” in these statements picks out that type of goodness, predicated of an action, state of affairs, or object, that is sustained regardless of whether or not the value-bearer is good for anyone or anything. Chris Heathwood, in the *Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*, explains, “these kinds of judgments are not explicitly relational...we are saying that it is simply a good or bad [action, state of affairs, or object]” (Heathwood 2015, 137). And, for many defenders of SG, it is not only states of affairs that might possess SG. It is also the type of goodness referred to in the other form of statements about SG, such as, “Justice is good” and “Michelangelo’s ‘The Creation of Adam’ is good.” SG

---

<sup>2</sup> Some philosophers writing on distinctions in intrinsic value are Bradley (2006), Kagan (1998), Korsgaard (1983), Langton (2007), Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000, 2015), *et al.*

is not only non-relational (i.e., its value is not dependent on it being good for or to anyone in particular), it is also absolute. Anything possessing SG adds to the overall value of the world, regardless of context. In other words, even if the world were an empty void, if something possessing the property of SG materialized within it, then that something would add value to the world. Justice, friendship, great works of art, and the downfall of vicious totalitarian rulers all purportedly have the property of SG. These are things of which we can accurately say, "That is *simply* good," with the primary connotation being that each one is good in itself and adds absolute value to the world.

There is a small group of philosophers, myself among them, who argue that this conception of goodness is problematic, particularly when applied to moral judgments. One explanation for the relative dearth of critics of SG is that debates about the fundamental concepts for ethics are now largely focused on *reasons* as the single normative concept through which all others are defined. Moore's views on the methods of ethics and the special nature of value concepts remain in the spotlight, however, because they are the basis of an increasingly popular view within metaethics known as *moral nonnaturalism*. Moore is, in effect, the founder of nonnaturalism, a metaphysical and epistemological view of moral properties (Moore 1903). Moral nonnaturalism is the view that moral properties are real (i.e. objective), but they are not identical or reducible to natural properties (Moore 1903, 93, 89-110). The Moorean version of nonnaturalism also holds that fundamental moral truths and value judgments are self-evident (Moore 1903, 192-194). In other words,

it entails a version of intuitionism. Nonnaturalists Terence Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau remark on the reversal of fortune this view has experienced in recent years<sup>3</sup>:

At some point in the mid-20th century, philosophers threw nonnaturalist moral realism on the scrap heap of philosophical theories, allowing it to gather rust and be forgotten. While the view did gather rust, it was not forgotten. To the surprise of many, this form of moral realism...was retrieved, repaired, and reintroduced to the mainstream metaethical discussion as a view worthy of serious consideration. (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau 2014, 399)

The increased interest in Moore's work that this trend has generated is part of my motivation for developing and articulating my critique in this project. While some contemporary nonnaturalists try to distance themselves from Moore's view, I am not alone in perceiving contemporary views as subject to the same metaphysical and epistemological problems that were thought to undermine Moore's view in his time (Olson 2006, Timmons 2007). Nonnaturalists Terence Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau, for example, would qualify as Moorean nonnaturalists according to the definition I've provided here (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau 2014; cf. Shafer-Landau 2003).

The leading critics of SG are Philippa Foot (1985, 2001), Peter Geach (1956), Richard Kraut (2011), Judith Jarvis Thomson (2008), and Paul Ziff (1960) and they all mainly focus on Moore's theory of the good. Foot's critique focuses on SG and its role in reinforcing consequentialist intuitions, and Ziff's focuses on the semantics of ordinary language, so I do not include their views here. I focus on Geach, Thomson, and Kraut because of their prominence in the current debate about the validity of SG as a value

---

<sup>3</sup> The contemporary nonnaturalists they identify are Enoch (2011), Fine (2002), FitzPatrick (2008, 2011), Hampton (1998), Parfit (2011), Scanlon (1998), Shafer-Landau (2003, 2006), and Wedgwood (2007).

concept. Geach's "On Good and Evil" (1956) is the earliest of these critiques, and his is most often cited when introducing the debate concerning SG. Thomson and Kraut revived the debate when they published their critiques of SG, in 2008 and 2011 respectively, and they remain the two foremost contemporary critics. The timing may seem odd for these critiques, coming more than a century after *Principia*, but Moorean goodness remains relevant to moral philosophers and value theorists. While the critics of SG don't explain why they continue to primarily target Moore's work, it is likely because Moore is still one of the few philosophers who has a developed account of SG. Those who defend SG in their philosophical work today do not put forward their own original accounts of SG.<sup>4</sup>

Metaethicists (such as Shafer-Landau 2003) who are Moorean nonnaturalists don't explain explicitly if they are committed to Moore's value theory. Other philosophers working in related areas of value theory (such as Richard Arneson 2010) are defending SG as part of objective list theories of wellbeing. Another likely reason the preoccupation with Moore's view persists is that his view remains relevant so long as it seems to make sense of so many of our intuitive normative judgments. For example, on some consequentialist views, SG is what's purportedly being measured when weighing the relative value of the worlds our actions might bring about. SG also occasionally appears in works of applied ethics, though it is generally referred to as (Moorean) "intrinsic value." I discuss the applied ethics literature in Chapter 4.

---

<sup>4</sup> Some recent attempts to defend Moore's value theory against Thomson and Kraut have been put forward by Arneson (2010), Bradley (2006), Campbell (2015), Crisp (2005, 2013), and Stroud (2013).



All this to say, Moore's value theory is still influential in many areas of contemporary moral philosophy and so it remains relevant, even central, to this discussion. Additionally, because so few contemporary philosophers explicitly explain or defend their Moorean commitments, it is difficult to formulate a general critique of the neo-Moorean account of the good. Thus, while I ultimately aim at contemporary moral philosophers as the target of my critique, and I do discuss various neo-Moorean philosophers throughout this work, I follow the leading critics of SG and focus primarily on Moore's views.<sup>5</sup> With that being said, Moore tends to get all of the credit for developing this account of goodness, but other philosophers invoke SG and use it for their own theoretical ends, sometimes illuminating the concept in the process. W.D. Ross and Henry Sidgwick, for example, might also be counted among the philosophical fathers of the contemporary conceptions of SG, even if they are less often cited. In what follows, I do refer briefly to the views of Ross and Sidgwick, but I continue to use "Moorean goodness" or the "Moorean view" as synonyms for SG for the sake of simplicity and consistency with the literature on this topic.

Critics of SG argue that SG is *not* the "good" predicated in statements of the form, "It is good that X" or "X is good." Some of these critics argue that this is because SG does not exist, others argue that it is because SG is an unintelligible concept, still others argue that SG is reducible to some other value concept. In the next chapter, I examine some of these

---

<sup>5</sup> In relation her own work on value theory, Christine Korsgaard has commented, "Moore is always ready to volunteer when a straw man would otherwise be wanted" (Korsgaard 2013, 1). In response to any accusations that I have chosen a straw man defense of SG, by focusing on Moore, I say that not only am I following the general trend in the literature, but I am focusing on the seminal account of the concept, and it is the one in which we find the general tenets of a mainstream account of goodness that is directly traceable to Moore's view.

arguments in depth, as they each demonstrate ways in which a Moorean account of SG can go wrong. My critique is more narrow in scope than those of the prominent critics of SG. I argue that it is a mistake to believe that SG, specifically the Moorean version that I identify below, could be relevant to ethical theory or to our practical judgments and decision-making. I argue that the persistent use of SG actually hinders our ability to make accurate moral judgments, and thereby harms ethical theory and public discourse. For these reasons (and some that will come to light in the last chapter), moral philosophers should eliminate SG from their conceptual repertoire. To be clear, I acknowledge that SG may still be of relevance to other areas of philosophy, such as axiology and philosophy of religion, but it is *not* relevant to ethical theory or any other branch of practical philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

### *Simple Goodness as Moorean Goodness*

The most well-known and developed account of SG is G.E. Moore's in *Principia Ethica* (*PE*), which was first published in 1903, and many of the critics of SG still take Moore as their primary target. In *PE*, Moore set out to lay the groundwork for a systematic science of ethics. He explains his motivation for taking on such a project in the following passage:

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. For 'good conduct' is a complex notion: all conduct is not good...other things, beside conduct, may be good; and if they are so, then 'good' denotes some property, that is common to them and conduct; and if we examine good conduct alone of all good things, then we shall be

---

<sup>6</sup> As my argument develops, it should become clear that SG is not relevant to the normative domains of philosophy, such as ethics, ethical theory, social, or political philosophy, all on the same grounds. My focus in this project is on ethical theory, but some examples and arguments overlap with social ethics and related topics.

in danger of mistaking for this property some property which is not shared by those other things. (Moore 1903, 55)

This explains, in part, why he focuses on clarifying the meaning of “good” at the outset of his project. The most basic concept for the study of ethics has not yet been defined, on his view.

For Moore, the “scientific” ethicist first searches for the fundamental principles or axioms upon which the rest of his theory will be built (*PE* 55-57). According to Moore, we cannot know what is good, let alone reasons for judging something as good (or bad), until we know what “good” means (Moore 1903, 57-58). Moore writes:

we can never know on what *evidence* an ethical proposition rests, until we know the nature of the notion which makes the proposition ethical. We cannot tell what is possible, by way of proof, in favour of one judgment that ‘This or that is good,’ or against another judgment ‘That this or that is bad,’ until we have recognised what the nature of such propositions must always be... This result, which follows from our first investigation, may be otherwise expressed by saying that the fundamental principles of Ethics must be self-evident. (Moore 1903, 192; cf. 57-58)

The *notion which makes a proposition ethical* is, of course, “good.” “Ethical” in Moore’s phrase, here, is equivalent to how we use “normative” today. We cannot know what has normative moral authority for us, on Moore’s view, until we know what is good. But we cannot know what is good, until we know what “good” means. The first investigation of *PE* is an attempt to illuminate the nature of the good that is the fundamental principle of ethics. In what follows, I will identify the basic tenets of Moore’s account of goodness.

The first of the basic tenets of Moore’s account of SG is based on Moore’s notion of “good” as unanalyzable. “If I am asked, What is good?” Moore writes in Book I, Section 6 of *PE*, “my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter” (1903, 58). He explains:

'Good,' then, if we mean by it that quality which we assert to belong to a thing, when we say that the thing is good is incapable of any definition, in the most important sense of that word. The most important sense of 'definition' is that in which a definition states what are the parts which invariably compose a certain whole; in this sense 'good' has no definition because it is simple and has no parts. It is one of those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are the ultimate terms by reference to which whatever is capable of definition must be defined. (PE 61)

One reason Moore gives for the unanalyzability of "good" is that goodness is a "simple notion," as opposed to a "complex" one, i.e. a composite that can be broken down into parts (PE 59-60). Thus, a standard analysis of "good" is impossible. I call this tenet of Moore's view the Unanalyzability Thesis (UA):

UA: SG is fundamental and thus unanalyzable (neither requiring nor admitting of any definition or explanation)

Moore thought it was methodologically necessary that the fundamental concept of a scientific ethics would be this way. As a fundamental concept, SG is not defined or constituted by any other ideas or concepts, rather all ethical ideas and concepts will be defined or constituted by it. Thus, the ethical concept of the "right" is defined as the "cause of a good result" (Moore 1903, 196). Similarly, "duty" is defined in terms of the good such that Moore claims, "the assertion 'I am morally bound to perform this action' is identical with the assertion "This action will produce the greatest amount of good in the Universe" (Moore 1903, 197).

"Good is good," Moore writes, and this is the only analytic definition that can be given (Moore 1903, 58). One way Moore argues for this is via what has come to be known as *the open-question argument* (Moore 1903, 67-70). The open-question argument is supposed to show how for any proposed definition of good, there remains an open

question about the truth of that statement. If the proposed definition were analytic, then asking about the truth of the statement would be either trivial or an obvious tautology. Suppose we are hedonists so we identify the good with pleasure, and we express this with what we intend to be an analytic definition, "Pleasure is good." Moore argues that because we can still make sense of the question, "But *is it true* that pleasure is good?" this proves that our definition is false. The question makes sense, on his view, because it is still an *open question* whether or not pleasure is identical to the good. But if "pleasure is good" were analytically true, then it would be a pointless or closed question. Since there is no identity statement of the form "X is good" that will not remain an open question, good must be unanalyzable.

Moore was especially concerned to discredit any attempt to define good in terms of a natural property, such as pleasure. To identify an evaluative property (e.g. good) with a natural one (e.g. pleasure) is to commit the "naturalistic fallacy" (Moore 1903, 62). SG stands in stark contrast to descriptive or natural properties, on Moore's view. SG is *sui generis* property. SG is special, in part, because it is not merely a value property, but it is a value property that purportedly has a particular normative force on us. Moore maintains that SG is a strange predicate, but he believes that is as it should be "since, *prima facie*, the nature of predicates of value does seem to be very peculiar" (Moore 1903, 23). This aspect of the nature of SG will be the basis for the second tenet of Moore's account. Call it the *Nonnatural Thesis* (NN):

NN: SG is nonnatural, not identical to any other property

Since Moore shared the perspective with his contemporaries that there was an impassable chasm between the descriptive and the evaluative, it is not surprising that he argues the popular, alternative views of the good must be wrong. He writes:

...if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it...[P]ropositions about the good are all of them synthetic and never analytic; and that is plainly no trivial matter. And the same thing may be expressed more popularly, by saying that, if I am right, then nobody can foist upon us such an axiom as that 'Pleasure is the only good' or that 'The good is the desired' on the pretence that this is the very meaning of the word. (Moore 1903, 58)

The claim that propositions about SG are never analytic is a reiteration of NN. SG cannot be identified with any other property. Moore argues that hedonist and desire-based<sup>7</sup> analyses of the good are plainly wrong.

The hedonist account defines goodness in terms of the natural property of pleasure, committing the "naturalist fallacy," on Moore's view. Pleasure might possess the property of SG, but it isn't itself SG. Hedonism is also problematic for Moore because it is a monist account of the good; all and only good things are pleasant and vice versa. Moore's view actually allows for value pluralism. Beauty, for example, is another basic value.

A desire-based account, on the other hand, defines goodness in terms of what is desirable. On a simplified version of this view, "X is good" translates to "X is desirable." Moore would have equated the latter claim with the claim, "I desire X." He found this subjective element of the view problematic. The good cannot be identified with desires much less with what any individual desires, since this introduces subjectivism and value

---

<sup>7</sup> A new kind of desire-based analysis enjoys popularity now. This analysis aims to eliminate that subjective element by defining goodness not simply in terms of what is desired or desirable, but in terms of what it is fitting or appropriate to desire. Fitting-attitude accounts, as they are now called, define the good as that which we *ought to desire* (or to prefer, or some similar pro-attitude).

relativism into the definition of the good. Moore claims that the good is absolutely good, and so everyone has a reason to desire it. He didn't think it even made sense to speak of "my own good," since this locution can only mean that I possess something that is absolutely good. It is "my own" because I possess it. He writes:

the only reason I can have for aiming at 'my own good,' is that it is *good absolutely* that what I so call should belong to me—*good absolutely* that I should have something, which, if I *have* it, then everyone else has as much reason for aiming at *my* having it, as I have myself. (Moore 1903, 150)

Moore objects to desire-based views because they seem to deny the absolute value of SG and instead define the good subjectively, according to personal preferences, feelings, and desires.

Though SG is not a natural property, the process by which we come to recognize and know it resembles the process by which we come to recognize and know natural properties. The meaning of "good" is self-evident. Moore claims that "the fundamental principles of Ethics must be self-evident" (Moore 1903, 192). A self-evident proposition, for Moore, is one whose "evidence or proof" lies in itself (Moore 1903, 193). He explains, "The expression 'self-evident' means properly that the proposition so called is evident or true, *by itself* alone," (ibid.) and "any proposition is self-evident, when, in fact, there are no reasons which prove its truth" (Moore 1903, 194). A priori truths are self-evident, but so are some synthetic truths, on Moore's account. He argues that propositions about the good are self-evident, and they are synthetic (Moore 1903, 58). As an intuitionist, Moore believes that certain people can recognize basic objective truths when confronted with them. And the nature of SG is one such basic objective truth. Call this tenet of Moore's account, concerning recognizing the "simple" character of the good, the *Self-Evident Thesis* (SE):

SE: SG is self-evident, known via intuition or observation

Moore explains in *Principia* that the good is analogous to the property yellow, calling it a “simple notion.” He writes:

My point is that good is a simple notion, just as yellow is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to anyone who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is. (Moore 1903, 59)

We cannot provide a definition of yellow, rather, we learn what yellow-ness is by observing it. We are presented with various yellow objects, and with recognition of the set, followed by a process of abstraction, we form the concept of yellow-ness. We come to see yellow as the universal uniting the set of yellow objects, but we can’t provide a definition of what it is that unites them. Yellow is not the kind of thing that admits of such explanation. And, on Moore’s view, we make SG intelligible to ourselves in the same way as the color yellow. Moore believes goodness is self-evident, much like the yellowness is self-evident. It is only by observing that property that all good things have in common that we can come to recognize what good actually is.

The next tenet of Moore’s theory is the *Absolute Value Thesis* (AV):

AV: SG is an absolute value (i.e., it is mind-independent; valuable for all, in all contexts)

Anything possessing SG does not depend on anything else for sustaining that value. If something possesses SG then it does so for all people, for all time, and in every context (including the utter absence of context) (Moore 1903, 75). Moore claims, “a judgment which asserts that a thing is good in itself...if true of one instance of the thing in question, is necessarily true of all” (Moore 1903, 78). A thing that is “good in itself” is absolutely good



because its goodness is not contingent on other people's desires, preferences, or particular circumstances being a certain way. Put another way, SG has its value mind-independently. Even if no subjective creatures existed to appreciate the value of something possessing SG, it would still retain its value. Moore's thought experiment known as *the isolation test* relies on this idea (Moore 1903, 145,147, 233-236). The test determines whether or not, and to what degree, a thing possesses SG by imagining that thing existing alone in the universe, and then judging from that perspective whether or not its existence adds value to the universe. If we imagine a friendship existing alone in the universe, and arrive at the conclusion that this friendship has value independently of anything else, simply in virtue of what it is, then we should conclude that it adds value to the universe and is proven to be simply good, according to Moore. The ideal value-bearers of SG, on Moore's view, are states of affairs, and the most valuable of these are "certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects" (Moore 1903, 237). Given SE, the instantiation of SG by these states, and the degree to which they possess it, will be obvious. Moore explains, "no one, probably, who has asked himself the question [about their value], has ever doubted [it]" (ibid.).

Finally, we come to the last tenet of Moore's theory. This tenet states the way Moore defines the scope of SG. Moore originally argues that SG is a global universal, something like the Platonic form of the good, or simply the most general value concept. It is that which unites all good things (Moore 1903, 55-57). Call this the *Global Universal Thesis* (GU):

GU: SG is the goodness common to all good things

Some neo-Mooreans still view SG this way. Geach and Thomson's arguments seem to presume GU. In the (posthumously published) preface to the second edition of *Principia*, however, Moore revises his view. In an attempt to strengthen his account, he writes, "the predicate I am concerned with is *that* sense of the word 'good,' which has to the conceptions of 'right' and 'wrong,' a relation, which makes it *the* sense which is of the most fundamental importance for Ethics" (Moore 1903, 5). Thus, he narrows his view of the good. His revised view is that SG isn't a global universal, observable in *all* good things, rather it is the universal good observable in all *morally* good things. Call his later position the *Moral Universal Thesis* (MU):

MU: SG is the goodness common to all morally good things

In the second preface, Moore revises his view in another way, as well. He apparently regretted putting too much emphasis on the unanalyzability of SG (Moore 1903, 5-7). Moore slightly softens his view on the analyzability of the good. The debate today about the most basic normative concept for ethics is about whether reasons, values, duties, or some other class of normative properties are most basic, but during Moore's time the debate was generally between the right and the good. Moore maintains that the good is more basic, but, in the second preface of *PE*, he suggests that if the good is analyzable, then it is likely analyzable in terms of the right (Moore 1903, 5). So his revised view is that SG is *probably not* analyzable (Moore 1903, 6). Though if it turns out that SG is analyzable, he maintains his earlier positions, namely that (1) it will not be identical to or analyzable in terms of any natural or metaphysical properties, and (2) some unanalyzable concept is fundamental to ethical theory and moral judgments (Moore 1903, 14). Moore's revised view is that it is

*possible* that the good supervenes on whatever the right thing to do is or whatever the right state of affairs is. Call this the *Unanalyzability Thesis Revised* (UAR):

UAR: SG is either fundamental and thus unanalyzable (thus, neither requiring nor admitting of any definition or explanation) *or* SG is not fundamental but can only be defined or explained in terms of some other value concept that is fundamental and unanalyzable

With the core tenets of Moore's view(s) identified, we can now clearly formulate two accounts of Moorean SG. These accounts are meant to represent Moore's views as expressed in PE as well as how this view is reflected in neo-Moorean theories. The first account is found in the main text of *PE*. The second account is Moore's revised view; it includes the main text of PE as well as the revisions Moore makes in the second preface to *PE*.

SG - PE Original	SG - PE Revised
NN: SG is nonnatural, not identical to any other property	NN: SG is nonnatural, not identical to any other property
SE: SG is self-evident, known via intuition or observation	SE: SG is self-evident, known via intuition or observation
UA: SG is fundamental and thus unanalyzable (neither requiring nor admitting of any definition or explanation)	UAR: SG is either fundamental and thus unanalyzable (neither requiring nor admitting of any definition or explanation) <i>or</i> SG is not fundamental but can only be defined or explained in terms of some other value concept that is fundamental and unanalyzable
AV: SG is an absolute value (i.e., it is good in itself; mind-independent; valuable for all, in all contexts)	AV: SG is an absolute value (i.e., it is good in itself; mind-independent; valuable for all, in all contexts)
GU: SG is the goodness common to all good things	MU: SG is the goodness common to all morally good things

The right column, in the table above, reflects Moore's revised theory of the good. Though this is not the version of his theory that receives the most attention in the literature, it will be relevant for discussing the prominent critiques of Moore's view as well as my own critique. The original account of SG in *PE* contains Moore's more extreme claims, particularly UA and GU, and so is perhaps an easier target for critics. Nevertheless, it is the account addressed by Geach, Thomson, and Kraut, who are the focus of the next chapter. Kraut's arguments stand out among these since, while seemingly aimed at the original view, they also apply to the revised view of SG.

### *Simple Goodness as Intrinsic Value*

As I mention above, for Moore "goodness simpliciter" and "intrinsic value" are synonymous. Introducing intrinsic value (IV) into the discussion has the potential to complicate my project for at least two reasons. First, there is currently a prolific subfield of formal value theory that focuses exclusively on IV, and this work has problematized the traditional definition of IV (i.e. that value which is possessed by whatever is good as end). This work, as we will see, is technically about intrinsic values (plural), since various types have been identified. While it isn't always clear how older theories of IV, such as Moore's, map onto the debates in that literature, I will attempt to do so in what follows. The second potential complication results from the fact that once I introduce a discussion of IV, even if I mean to restrict it to exclusively Moorean IV, these discussions may at times appear misleading because my overall critique in this project is not directed at the traditional account of intrinsic value. I find no conceptual or epistemic problems with the concept of "good as an end in itself." Though Moore states that whatever has intrinsic value is "good as

an end,” this is not an aspect of his theory that I take issue with (Moore 1903, 75). My critique is directed at a particular theory of the good, that originates with Moore and continues to influence moral philosophy.

In my outline of Moore’s account of SG, in the last section, I identify the *Absolute Value Thesis* (AV) which states:

AV: SG is an absolute value (i.e., it is good in itself; mind-independent; valuable for all, in all contexts)

AV encapsulates Moore’s core ideas about what it means to possess IV, and the core ideas are the most problematic in his theory. While I don’t intend to critique IV generally, my work in this project can be viewed as a critique of intrinsic value when “intrinsic value” is identified with absolute value. On Moore’s view, that which is *good in itself* possesses intrinsic value and is *necessarily always* good in itself (Moore 1903, 78-79). Moore’s “isolation test,” introduced in the last section, replicates this scenario as a way to test for the presence of IV (i.e. SG). Moore explains:

it is necessary to consider what things are such that, if they existed *by themselves*, in absolute isolation, we should yet judge their existence to be good; and, in order to decide upon the relative *degrees* of value of different things, we must similarly consider what comparative value seems to attach to the isolated existence of each. (Moore 1903, 236)

SG or intrinsic value has its value in itself, independent of any external relations or conditions obtaining. Consequently, *everyone* has a reason to pursue that which is absolutely good (Moore 1903, 151). Moore inquires on this point:

Is there any sense in which a thing can be an ultimate rational end for one person and not for another? By ‘ultimate’ must be meant at least that the end is good-in-itself—good in our undefinable sense; and by ‘rational,’ at least, that it is truly good. (Moore 1903, 151)

It isn't possible that something could be absolutely good exclusively *for you*. There is no relative sense of "good for so and so" or "my own good" (Moore 1903, 150). "My good" has only two possible meanings, according to Moore. It either means, "I possess something absolutely good" or "I possess that thing, the possession of which is absolutely good" (Moore 1903, 150).

With Moore's view of IV in mind, we should now consider new developments in the theory of intrinsic value. Discussions concerning intrinsic value typically begin with an examination of the familiar, traditional distinction between instrumental value and intrinsic value. The traditional distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values can be traced at least as far back as Plato. The traditional distinction characterizes instrumental value as the value possessed by that which is "a means to some (good) end" or "good for the sake of something else;" it is that which produces, leads to, or otherwise causes some good. While intrinsic value is characterized as that value possessed by whatever is "good in itself," "good as an end in itself," or "good for its own sake." It is that which has its value in itself and is valued for itself. Formal value theory finds the traditional definition of instrumental value and intrinsic value too coarse-grained for many of our contemporary discussions about value. The contemporary focus is on IV, and the different ways in which it is described, and the extent to which different descriptors indicate substantive philosophical distinctions. There is debate about the descriptors that are traditionally synonymous with IV (i.e., "good in itself," "good as an end in itself," or "good for its own sake) and whether they have distinct meanings that warrant theorizing ontologically or conceptually distinct types of intrinsic value. Christine Korsgaard and Toni Rønnow-

Rasmussen both contribute to this work. They both try to disambiguate the different types of value that have been identified by an intrinsic/extrinsic distinction.

Christine Korsgaard's "Two Distinctions in Goodness" (1983) is a pioneering paper in the critical work on IV. Korsgaard argues that the traditional contrast of intrinsic versus instrumental value leads us to conflate our value concepts. In this paper, she teases out the various senses of instrumental value and IV by homing in on the ambiguities in the phrases we use to talk about them. Korsgaard argues that though it is common to use phrases such as "valued for its own sake" and "valuable in itself" interchangeably, this is a mistake. Korsgaard claims we fail to make two important distinctions: (1) a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goodness and (2) a distinction between final goods (ends) and instrumental goods (means) (Korsgaard 1983, 169-70). Distinction (1), she claims, is about the *source* of some thing's value. If X possesses IV, then X has its value in itself, and so it is its own source of value.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, if X possesses extrinsic value, then X has its value in virtue of some other thing Y, which is external to X. Another way to put this is that an intrinsic value depends or supervenes on internal properties exclusively, whereas an extrinsic value depends or supervenes on extrinsic properties to have value. Notably, SG would have IV, in this sense. Distinction (2), Korsgaard argues, is a distinction in *the way we value* things. If X is valuable as a means, or for the sake of some other end Y, then X possesses instrumental value. If X is valuable as an end in itself, or for its own sake, then X possesses *final value*.

---

<sup>8</sup> This evokes the Kantian notion of the goodwill which has its value in itself, i.e. unconditionally or not on condition of anything else being the case. Kant famously likens it to a jewel that sparkles on its own, independently of any light shining on it.

This notion of final value, as that which is valuable for its own sake, dominates contemporary discussions in value theory. Unfortunately, some working in value theory equate SG with final value, which is a mistake.<sup>9</sup> As I will show, it is possible to reject SG without rejecting final value.

Korsgaard's distinctions have been refined and amended by many philosophers since her paper was published.<sup>10</sup> Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen makes one of the most important refinements to note for this discussion. He uses Korsgaard's intrinsic/extrinsic distinction to provide an even more fine-grained account of intrinsic value. He argues that the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction can be understood in three different senses: the finality sense, the supervenience sense, and the derivation sense (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2015, 31). When the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction is made in the derivation sense, it is relevant to questions regarding basic or fundamental values. This is the operative sense when philosophers use "intrinsic value" to refer to nonderivative value or that value which "provides justification for other values *and* is not [itself] justified by any other value" (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2015, 32). A value is extrinsic, in this sense, if its value is derivative, i.e., "if it needs to be justified or is valuable in virtue of other things being valuable" (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2015, 32). Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, or flourishing, is an example of something thought to be intrinsically valuable in the nonderivative sense. *Eudaimonia* is the ultimate end of a good life, and every action performed in that life is only justifiably deemed good insofar as it contributes to *eudaimonia*. Actions performed for the sake of

---

<sup>9</sup> See Rowland 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Langton (2007), Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen (2002), Rønnow-Rasmussen (2015), Connie Rosati (2008).



*eudaimonia*, on the other hand, are derivatively good. Consequently, the value of *eudaimonia* is nonderivative. No justification is needed for valuing (and thus pursuing) the good, flourishing life of *eudaimonia*.

The second sense of the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction, on Rønnow-Rasmussen's view, is the supervenience sense. This sense is relevant to questions about the features of the value-bearer, namely the features on which its value supervenes. A value is intrinsic in this sense if it supervenes only on the internal properties of the value-bearer. While a value is extrinsic if it supervenes on any extrinsic properties (possibly in addition to internal ones). There is some controversy concerning the proper bearers of this kind of intrinsic value. Some argue that only states of affairs or actions can possess intrinsic value in this sense, and others argue that objects can also possess this intrinsic value. In any case, this kind of intrinsic value is thought to be important because it is valuable independent of any context or consequences.

The last sense of the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction is the finality sense. This sense is relevant to questions of choiceworthiness of ends, questions traditionally couched in terms of intrinsic and instrumental value. This distinction is between "what is valuable (and what is not valuable) for its own sake" (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2015, 30). Something possesses intrinsic value in this sense if it is valuable for its own sake, and it possesses extrinsic value if it is valuable for the sake of something else. This sense of intrinsic value is also equivalent to the notion of final value, i.e. what is valuable as an end in itself, identified above in my discussion of Korsgaard. In much of the value theory literature today, this sense of intrinsic value is called *final value*, and I will follow this convention hereafter.

Rønnow-Rasmussen suggests that final value may be intrinsic *or* extrinsic in the supervenience sense, and this is a significant claim because it suggests there are two ways in which a thing can possess final value (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2015, 32). This is a challenge to the claim that SG should be identified with final value. Value-bearer *V* can be finally valuable (i.e., valuable for its own sake or as an end in itself) in virtue of *V*'s internal properties exclusively. For example, if *V* is the study of philosophy, then it is valuable simply for the study itself and exclusively on account of the activity of studying philosophy. Alternatively, *V* can be finally valuable in virtue of properties or conditions that are external to *V*. For example, if *V* is my having an enamel pin that belonged to my grandfather. The pin is not valued for its design or even its functionality; I just value having the pin itself. But the value of the pin is on account of the association it has with my grandfather. Now, the study of philosophy might be simply good, on Moore's view. However, my possessing my grandfather's pin could not be simply good, because its value depends on properties external to my having the pin. This example demonstrates that final value and SG are not referring to the same value property.

Now I can characterize the Moorean view of goodness according to the schema provided by intrinsic value theory. SG is intrinsic in the supervenience sense (i.e. its value supervenes exclusively on intrinsic properties), in the final sense (i.e. it is valued only for its own sake), and in the derivation sense (its value is justified in itself). This, precisely, is the value concept that I argue should play no role in our substantive ethical theories. The final sense of intrinsic value is the only sense that is not problematic for uses of intrinsic value within ethical theory.

*Nonideal Theory as Critical Approach*

Now that I have specified the target of my critique, I want to introduce part of the critical approach I will be using. Nonideal theory is not widely discussed within mainstream moral theory. When philosophers invoke “the” ideal/nonideal theory debate they may be referring to one of several theoretical distinctions that have been given this label. Laura Valentini’s “Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map” (2012) and Alan Hamlin and Zofia Stemplowska’s “Theory, Ideal Theory, and the Theory of Ideals” (2012) are helpful for parsing these distinctions, especially for political philosophers hoping to make sense of the various texts in which the distinction is invoked.<sup>11</sup> These articles both emphasize the differences among the debates while neglecting to account for a more general understanding of ideal/nonideal theory. A more general understanding of the ideal/nonideal theory distinction is endorsed by O’Neill (1996), Mills (2005), Jaggar (2016), et. al. This more general understanding is the sense that has the most relevance for normative ethical theory. Charles Mills’ “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology” (2015) is an extended treatment of this more general sense of the debate. Mills writes, “Morally, idealization involves the modeling of what people should be like (character), how they should treat each other (right and good actions), and how society should be structured in its basic institutions (justice)” (Mills 2005, 168). Nonideal theorists are just as likely as ideal theorists to use and endorse idealizations when theorizing in these areas. “What

---

<sup>11</sup> Laura Valentini, “Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map” Alan Hamlin and Zofia Stemplowska’s “Theory, Ideal Theory, and the Theory of Ideals” / Both articles discuss the distinction between partial compliance and full compliance theories. A full compliance theory in political philosophy is one that assumes all agents fully or perfectly comply with the rules and standards of the theory. Rawls’ early theory of justice is a full compliance theory because it assumes that all agents abide by the principles of justice. Perfect compliance is, of course, an idealization since we cannot expect perfect compliance in practice.

distinguishes ideal theory,” Mills goes on to say, “ is the reliance on idealization to the exclusion, or at least the marginalization, of the actual” (ibid.). And it is not merely the ideal theorist’s reliance on idealization that is problematic. The ideal theorist’s assumptions about how to formulate ideals are just as problematic as their persistent prioritization of the ideal over the actual.

I want to reiterate that the nonideal approach I take does not reject the use of ideals and idealization within ethical theory. Rather, my approach is cautious, even suspicious, when accepting ideals because of the historical tendency to endorse values and norms that have been formed by and in the interest of those in positions of privilege. I agree with those who argue that ethics requires the use of aspirational ideals and values. Ethicists are trying to answer questions about how one ought to act or what type of life one ought to live. One of the most helpful ways of providing some answers to these questions is by developing substantive ideals. A substantive ideal specifies the features and standards of excellence for a particular type of person or thing (Rosati 1998). Substantive ideals range from the universal to the specific. A universal substantive ideal is meant to apply universally or generally. Philosophers make use of a *universal* ideal when they discuss “human rationality,” for example. We know that humans are not perfectly rational, yet we often use human rationality as the standard for evaluating the behavior of others. An example of a more *specific* substantive ideal is being a “good mother.” The standards of a good mother are not universally applied; this substantive ideal applies to specific individuals, namely mothers. Nonideal theorists do not object to the use of substantive ideals, but they are often suspicious of the content of these ideals and of the assumptions that shape their

construction. So, as a nonideal theorist, I do not take these concepts for granted as if they were natural features of the universe. In a discussion of human rationality or of being a good mother, I would need some elaboration and definitions of terms before I would be able to assess the validity of the standards implicit in these ideals.

The construction of an ideal is not always an intentional endeavor, but let's consider what a theorist is trying to accomplish when they construct an ideal. An ideal, at a fundamental level, is a model or an exemplar of something in the actual world. But if an ideal is a model of thing T, it is not an identical copy of T. The ideal must accurately represent or describe T, to be sure, but like all models it will differ in some respects from the original. Some aspects of the original will need to be simplified or abstracted or eliminated, and certain features will necessarily be enhanced. Those enhanced features are the source of the ideal's characteristic function as something *ideal* (Mills 2005, 167). How and why T is modified in these ways is of concern to the nonideal theorist. The nonideal theorist wants to be sure that T is appropriately described or represented and that the ways in which T is enhanced in its ideal form do not reinforce standards and norms only relevant for some subset of members of society (i.e., those occupying positions of privilege and power).

A familiar example of a nonideal critique of an ideal is the feminist critique of Kantian personhood. Kantian personhood is an ideal constructed by certain privileged males, of a particular socio-economic class, living in a specific Western context, and yet it is meant to identify the criteria that determine whether an individual qualifies as a member of the special class of "persons." This conception of personhood is used by social, political,

and moral theorists as a universal ideal. The way in which the ideal was constructed alone is only cause for suspicion. But the feminist critique of Kantian personhood takes issue with at least two substantial aspects of the ideal. First, it presumes that an ideal person utilizes a purely intellectual, rational autonomy. Second, it assumes that persons will exercise that autonomy as independent individuals, optimizing their own interests. A feminist non-ideal theorist finds this notion of personhood deficient because important features of personhood have been simplified or eliminated. The feminist ethicist emphasizes the central role of relationships and interdependence as an essential experience in the development of persons. From this feminist ethicist's perspective, dependent others and our empathic emotions must be factored in as part of making rationally autonomous decisions. The feminist ethicist recognizes that persons are essentially interdependent and so any "self-interested" decision is necessarily a decision involving many connected selves. By taking on a (traditionally) feminine perspective, this ethicist discovers that an alleged universal ideal is not applicable to all, indeed not applicable to any. If we revise our conception of personhood to incorporate the insights of this kind of feminist ethics, the result is still an ideal but the ideal is now more complex to account for actual, essential features of personhood.

The example of the feminist ethicist is supposed to show that nonideal theory is *not* a wholesale rejection of the use of ideals within theory. Ideals become problematic when they have been assumed to be true or universal with little or no justification for constructing them just so (O'Neill 1996, 43). Before circling back to connect this approach with my critique of SG, I want to briefly address some other common misconceptions about

nonideal theory. First, nonideal theory is *not* a rejection of general moral principles. Rather, nonideal theorists are opposed to generalizing moral principles that have not been adequately justified as generalizable.

In addition, nonideal theory is *not* a rejection of abstractions. Onora O’Neill makes a helpful distinction between abstractions and idealizations that explains how abstractions avoid the pitfalls of idealizations. O’Neill explains that a straightforward abstraction “never arbitrarily augments a given starting point, so will not lead one validly from a truth to a falsehood” (1996, 40). An abstraction generalizes the specific content that constitutes its starting point, but the goal is to generalize, not to optimize. Idealizations, by contrast, can easily lead to falsehoods because idealizing requires that the specific content be augmented and this process entails ascribing “optimal” features that are false of the specific content and denying other features that are true of them (O’Neill 1996, 41). Finally, nonideal theory is *not* a rejection of objective truth. It *is* a rejection of universal absolute truth. Because nonideal theorists prioritize the actual and the empirical, it is difficult to justify universal or absolute claims, particularly claims to moral truth, given that the standards for justifying such a claim would be impossible for any actual human to meet. Yet nonideal theorists still value objective truth. We just recognize that our subjective experiences are the data that help us come to know the objective world. That does not make nonideal theorists relativists. There are things in the actual world that limit how we can legitimately construct and use concepts.

Nonideal theory informs my critique of SG because I use it to argue that SG is invoked by normative and metaethical philosophers to justify evaluative and moral

judgments that result from problematic idealizations. Nonideal theory is only one part of my critical approach in this project and my general orientation as a philosopher. My perspective is also influenced by analytic feminist ethics and feminist epistemology, as well as neo-Aristotelian ethics, and these influences all play their own roles in my critique of SG. Nonideal theory, however, is not very well known among moral philosophers and given its sizable role in my critique, it deserves the special attention given here.



## CHAPTER 2

### CRITIQUES OF SIMPLE GOODNESS

As I noted in Chapter 1, several philosophers, including Philippa Foot, Peter Geach, Richard Kraut, Judith Jarvis Thomson, and Paul Ziff, have developed critiques of the Moorean conception of simple goodness (SG). In this chapter, I examine the most prominent critiques of SG in the contemporary literature, namely those put forward by Geach, Kraut, and Thomson. I argue that their arguments fail to prove that we ought to do away with SG altogether, even while they successfully illuminate some of the problems that result from accepting SG as the fundamental value concept in our ethical theories.

I begin with Geach's paper "Good and Evil" (1956) since it is the earliest, and probably the most influential, extended critique of Moore's early value theory. Geach wrote the paper over fifty years after Moore wrote *Principia Ethica* (1903), the text in which Moore first explicates this conception of goodness and, subsequently, ignited a controversy about the value concepts at work within ethical theory. The controversy is reignited by Thomson, forty years after Geach's paper was published, when she begins developing her own arguments against SG, often drawing on Geach's paper (Thomson 1997, 2008). Finally, Kraut ventures into the debate with *Against Absolute Goodness* in 2011, presenting his view as of a piece with the work of Geach and Thomson (2011, 38). While each of their critiques are original in many respects, Geach, Thomson, and Kraut all seem to share a

similar perspective on the issue of SG. In Chapter 3, I suggest that this similarity may be understood, in part, as an Aristotelian disposition. I show that there are parallels between the contemporary arguments and the ancient arguments of Aristotle in his critique of the Platonic form of the good. Here, in Chapter 2, I present their critiques as representing a sort of progression, with each new critique adding to the case against SG. My critique, then, can be seen as the next step in this progression, picking up where Kraut left off. By tracing the trajectory of these critiques of SG in this chapter, I hope to show the work these arguments accomplish and the work they leave undone. My own view, addressed in Chapter 4, complements and ultimately goes beyond that of previous critics of SG.

I will begin with an examination of Geach's arguments, but first I should note a few things about terminology. While it is clear that each of these authors presents their view as a response or alternative to Moore's view, they use different terms to identify the Moorean conception of goodness that I call "simple goodness" (SG). All of the authors, at times, address this type of goodness as "goodness *simpliciter*," but they also use different terms such as predicative goodness (Geach and Thomson), just plain goodness (Thomson), and absolute goodness (Kraut). I use "simple goodness" in part because Moore argues that the goodness that concerns him is a "simple property." By referring to it as "simple" I am emphasizing that this notion of goodness should be understood as unanalyzable and basic. I also wish to avoid the cumbersome "goodness *simpliciter*" and the ambiguous "good," and to distinguish the discussion here concerning Moorean goodness from other work on intrinsic value in formal value theory. In what follows, I will make it clear that all of the

views considered intend to address Moorean goodness or SG (which should be understood as synonyms throughout this project).

*Geach and Attributive Goodness*

In “Good and Evil,” Geach’s main argument is that goodness itself is never a logically independent predicate. “Predicative” and “attributive” are technical terms Geach appropriated from English grammar. Geach argues that all claims about SG that appear to be predicating a property, namely goodness, are actually reducible to claims about attributive goodness. He plainly states, “ ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are always attributive, not predicative, adjectives” (, 33). According to Geach, an adjective is (logically) attributive if it cannot be predicated independently of the noun or substantive it modifies. An adjective is (logically) predicative if it can be predicated independently of any substantive noun. Geach states:

Even when ‘good’ or ‘bad’ stands by itself as a predicate, and is thus grammatically predicative, some substantive [i.e., noun] has to be understood; there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so. (If I say that something is a good or bad thing, either ‘thing’ is a mere proxy for a more descriptive noun to be supplied from the context; or else I am trying to use ‘good’ or ‘bad’ predicatively, and its being grammatically attributive is a mere disguise. The latter attempt is, on my thesis, illegitimate.) (Geach 1956, 34).

The more familiar way of making this grammatical distinction between attributive and predicative adjectives is by noting the position of the adjective in a sentence. A predicative adjective directly follows a verb and so comes after the noun it modifies (postnomial position) while an attributive adjective precedes the noun it modifies (prenomial position). Some adjectives have strictly attributive uses and others strictly predicative uses, but, according to standard English grammar, most adjectives can appear in either the

predicative or attributive position without alteration of meaning. For example, I can say, “My dinner is healthy” (postnomial, predicative adjective) or “I’m eating a healthy dinner” (prenomial, attributive adjective) without altering the meaning of “healthy.”

Geach’s distinction between attributive and predicative terms is meant to mark a difference in the logical grammar of their usage. Predicatives indicate logically independent predicates of the nouns they modify while attributives do not. Consider the example “X is a large mouse.” This sentence cannot be analyzed as if “large” and “mouse” are both predicative, because it doesn’t follow from “X is a large mouse” that both “X is large” and “X is a mouse.” Large is not a predicative property. If it were, then when analyzing any other claim to largeness we would be identifying an identical property in each case, but we are not. Consider the claim, “Andre the Giant is large.” We aren’t predicating the same property of both Andre the Giant and X the mouse. In other words, large *simpliciter* is not an intelligible concept, on this view, because “large” is a relative term. Instead, “X is a large mouse” means that X is large *qua* mouse. The meaning of “large” is relative to the substantive that it describes; it is a logically attributive adjective. The way “large” and similar relative terms are used slips easily into ambiguity because they can be used in the predicative position without the substantive noun that it modifies. Consider another sentence, “X is a brown mouse.” Here “brown” and “mouse” are both predicative because the predicate phrase “brown mouse” can be logically split into two independent predicates of X. Geach argues that the logic of our use of “good” and “bad” is strictly attributive; its logical grammar is analogous to that of “large.” The meaning of good and bad cannot be understood as independent predicates even if they appear in the predicative position in a

sentence. Understood this way, their meaning is unintelligible. This is the main point Geach makes in his critique.

According to Geach, the attributive sense or meaning of the adjective is the primary sense because we cannot understand the predicative sense without it. We understand “the mouse is large” (grammatical predicative) because we take it to mean “the mouse is a large mouse” (logical attributive). In the former sentence the substantive noun that anchors the meaning of “large” in this context is implied, and in the latter sentence it is made explicit. Consider again the claim, “X is good.” While it is grammatically correct to use “good” in the predicative/postnominal position, *good simpliciter* is not an independent predicate of the noun in the phrase. In this usage, the noun that “good” modifies is implied or otherwise supplied by context. Geach argues that this is also the case when we use proper names in these “good” claims. If I say, “Marilynne Robinson is good,” referring to Robinson as a novelist, this is shorthand for saying “Marilynne Robinson is a good novelist.” Without knowing the context (i.e. that I am referring to her capabilities as a novelist), the first statement is ambiguous. It could be referring to Robinson as a good writing professor, in which case it is shorthand for “Marilynne Robinson is a good writing professor.” It could be referring to her moral character, in which case it is shorthand for “Marilynne Robinson is a morally good person.” What the initial statement means depends on context, in this case that is to what “Marilynne Robinson” is meant to refer. The designated reference to Robinson, in this particular utterance, is what Geach calls the proper name’s “nominal essence” (, 34). Geach explains that proper names have implicit common nouns (e.g., novelist, writing professor, etc.) which are often made explicit by the context. I suspect

Geach's notion of a nominal essence raises its own problems, but the important takeaway here is the basic idea that context and the substantive noun in the claim are key to understanding what the adjectival term means. We cannot make the adjectival term intelligible unless we understand the substantive noun it modifies. Thus, Geach concludes, "there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so" (1956, 34).

Geach argues that the Moorean approach identifies the good with a simple property that is an independent logical predicate, but this is misguided and even results in a dilemma (, 35-36). On one horn, the good might be identified as a "natural" property, such as being conducive to pleasure or as desire-satisfaction. But Moore has already rejected this position because, he argues, it is subject to what he calls the *naturalistic fallacy*: "good" (i.e. an evaluative property) cannot be identified with or reduced to some natural property (1903, 89-95). Since evaluative properties cannot be logically derived from natural ones, Moore argues that defining SG in terms of natural properties or facts is an error in reasoning. Now the other horn of the dilemma emerges. If good cannot be a natural property, then it must be a nonnatural property. Yet Geach rejects this possibility because, he claims, no formidable account of nonnatural properties has been given (, 36). He seems to see the appeal to nonnatural properties as a philosopher's trick, an ad hoc solution to a deeper problem. Geach responds, "how can we be asked to take for granted at the outset that a peculiarly philosophical use of words necessarily means anything at all? Still less can we be expected at the outset to know what this use means" (ibid.). Geach's objection was arguably valid at the time of his writing, because the notion of nonnatural properties was

not yet widely discussed. But today this is not a particularly satisfying objection as several philosophers defend formidable accounts of nonnatural properties, though nonnatural goodness itself is not typically the focus of these discussions.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Geach's own theory of goodness allows for a connection between goodness and recommending. On his view, calling a thing a "good X" implies that one would recommend to someone who wants an X that they should choose *this* one, namely the good one (Geach 1956, 38). He argues that an imperative (e.g., "you should do your duty") can be a logical consequence of a descriptive sentence (e.g., "doing your duty is a good human act"). Geach claims that when someone asks, "Why should I?" in response to some imperative, we must appeal to the questioner's interests or desires, if we want to genuinely motivate her. Simply

---

<sup>1</sup> Cuneo (2014), Enoch (2011), Parfit (2011), Scanlon (1998), and Shafer-Landau (2003, 2014), have developed accounts of moral nonnaturalism.

<sup>2</sup> The last negative argument in "Good and Evil" (1956) is not against Moorean SG. Instead, Geach addresses a popular view held by non-cognitivist philosophers who would agree with his above criticism that "good" fails to pick out a *sui generis* property. However, these philosophers (Geach calls them "the Oxford Moralists"), as moral non-cognitivists, argue that "good" is a purely evaluative term. On this view, a judgment that a thing is "good" merely expresses the speaker's preference, evaluation, or commendation of that thing. In this way, all moral claims are subjective. "Generosity is good" is tantamount to saying, "I like generosity." Thus, the non-cognitivist argues that it does not make sense to speak of objective moral truths. Geach rejects this view for two reasons. First, arguing that a person may rightly call a thing "good" without praising it. For example, I might say that Bernie Madoff is a *good*scam artist. This suggests that he is good in some sense, but I am in no way commending him. Second, a person may be clearly conveying descriptive information by calling a thing "good." When I say, "Bernie Madoff is a *good*scam artist" I am conveying descriptive information about Madoff. The features that make a someone good at scamming others are not determined by my praise or preference. These features are determined by what it is to be a scam artist and what makes a scam artist a successful one. If "good" has a primarily descriptive role, as Geach argues, then the conditions which must be met for a thing to be called "good" will vary depending on the object of the statement. A knife is not called good for the same reasons a scam artist is called good. The Oxford Moralists insist that goodness must have one unvarying meaning across all uses, so they rule out this descriptive sense as too ambiguous (Geach 1956, 37). They insist that we can know what statements of the form "that is a good X" mean without knowing what X is because calling X "good" simply means that X is commendable. Geach, however, argues that there is descriptive content entailed by the meaning of X that determines the truth of statements such as "that is a good X" (Geach 1956, 38). For example, I know what a good knife is by knowing what "knife" is referring to and knowing what knives are used for. The function of a knife is inherent to the concept of a knife (i.e., what it is to be a knife) and a standard of goodness (i.e., what it is to function well as a knife) is entailed by the function.

stating the imperative “doing your duty is good (period)” doesn’t appeal to the questioner’s interests. It doesn’t give the questioner any substantive explanation or reason for complying. Simply calling a thing “good” is not going to motivate the questioner, but the thing’s being a *good human act* will motivate the questioner (i.e. by appealing to her interests or desires). Geach assumes that all humans, when faced with the task of choosing, are motivated to choose well. Human beings, as rational agents, have to deliberate about their actions, and they all have an interest in choosing *good* human actions (Geach 1956, 40). Geach argues that, whereas we know the basic content or essence of the term “human act,” we cannot make sense of the general claims that some X is a “good thing” or “good event” (ibid.). The latter terms lack the descriptive content required to make sense of the claim to goodness. The special context of the utterance may provide the content needed for a hearer to make sense of the claim, but the terms themselves are “empty,” Geach says (Geach 1956, 41). “Human act,” on the other hand, is among the terms which have an essence or a “criterion of identity or a standard of goodness” built into their meanings (ibid.). An accurate judgment of a “good X” indicates that certain standards fixed by whatever X is have been met. Having met those standards, X is a good specimen of the kind of thing that X’s are.

One problem with Geach’s proposal, here, is that “human act” does not seem to provide the kind of specificity that he thinks it does. I am not convinced that Geach can help himself to the assumption that “human act” is sufficiently descriptive to provide criteria for determining whether or not anything counts as a human act, much less a good one. Without some account of human nature or humanity, surely “human act” will still be too general to



specify standards of excellence. Surely “human” is supposed to be doing significant work otherwise “good human act” would not be much of an improvement on “good thing.” A “good act” is no more informative than a “good thing to do.”

We can, however, reject this part of his view and even his theory of nominal essences, and still accept the arguments that make up his critique. He has, after all, shown that “good,” alone, is too vague and ambiguous to supply the descriptive content needed to understand what the predicative good refers to. The context of in which a claim to SG is made affects the meaning of the claim. If SG is supposed to justify valuing and choosing particular things or actions over others, then it seems those of us who echo Geach in finding this concept “empty” are owed something more. It isn’t clear why we should take proponents of SG seriously otherwise. This is an epistemic impasse that proponents and opponents of SG do not seem to be able to overcome, even in more recent literature on SG. Proponents argue that the property of SG or propositions about SG are in some sense self-evident. Those who are not able to perceive this are left in the dark. This is point that Thomson picks up on in her critique of SG.

The criticism that SG is an “empty” concept points to another argument that becomes more central in the critiques of Thomson and Kraut. It suggests that SG cannot provide normative reasons for action. In other words, the fact that some act A is SG does not thereby provide anyone with an imperative or a reason to do A. This criticism is not articulated by Geach in this way, but the germ of it is in “Good and Evil.”

Geach’s critique is instructive in that it brings out this disconnect between SG and a human agent’s interests. To respond to the question, “Why should I be generous?” with the

assertion, "Being generous is simply good," fails to give the moral agent any motivation to choose to be generous. This argument resurfaces under different guises in the critiques of Thomson (2008) and Kraut (2011), but Philippa Foot develops this line of critique first (1985). Arguably Foot's position shaped the way this problem would be addressed in later critiques. Instead of focusing on the descriptive content of SG, Foot focuses on the description of this kind of value as entirely distinct from what is good or bad for any particular person. Foot calls this way of understanding "good" claims, such as "X is a good state of affairs," the *impersonal* use of goodness. She writes:

I do not know why these *impersonal* uses of 'good state of affairs' and likewise 'good thing' and 'It is good that...' are supposed to be unproblematic. It seems to me that there is every reason for being suspicious of them as they are talked about in philosophy, where it is supposed that judgments of this form though having no original connection with anything that a particular agent sees as *a* good, or with any object of his interest or desire, are nevertheless held to compel, persuade, or at least give him reason for choice. (Foot 1985, 31)

In this article, she argues that moral theory should do away with this way of talking about goodness (i.e. as detached from any individual human interests) (1985, 36). Foot argues that talking this way is the result of utilitarian appropriation of certain ways we ordinarily (outside of philosophical contexts) discuss moral problems. We share the intuition that we should always choose to bring about the best outcome, and so this is viewed as a neutral claim, but if we understand the "best outcome" as that state of affairs that contains the most impersonal good, then we have made a leap from a neutral to a utilitarian way of understanding moral actions (1985, 29-31). In effect, hers is an objection to the strict impartiality entailed by this way of thinking. But it is also another way of highlighting the

suspect assumption that there is an inherent connection between an absolute good and reasons to choose or act.

The most significant success of Geach's critique is the argument demonstrating the distinction between predicative and attributive uses of "good." However, the argument was supposed to support a conclusion much broader than that; he intended to argue that "good" is always attributive, never predicative (Geach 1956, 33). Unfortunately, this is not a conclusion that we can infer from his arguments. Nothing in what he's said precludes the possibility of an analysis of "good" that actually specifies a predicate. Though, if such a view provided an analysis of good or identified "good" with some natural property (e.g. pleasure), then the predicative good would no longer be Moorean SG. It may be that Geach's view captures the truth of ordinary usage, namely that there is no predicative sense of "good" in standard English grammar. Thomson later argues for this claim, but her argument emphasizes that the predicative good is an unintelligible concept. This is, perhaps, a better way to argue against SG, since this would show that no predicative use of "good" can be viable, even if an alternative account of SG were supplied.

#### *Thomson and Goodness in Some Respect*

Thomson uses Geach's distinction between predicative and attributive adjectives to argue that "good" is attributive, never predicative (Thomson 2008, 3, 4-17). "In that 'good' is like 'big' in being an attributive adjective," Thomson writes, "there is no such property as goodness just as there is no such property as bigness (Thomson 2008, 11). According to Thomson, inquiring into *the goodness simpliciter of X* is as intelligible as inquiring into *the goodness simpliciter of a melon* (i.e., not its goodness as a melon) (Thomson 2008, 13).

That is to say, it is not intelligible at all. Thomson argues, SG is “epistemologically dark” (Thomson 2008, 11). We can figure out how to determine if someone is a good novelist or if something is a good toaster, but the process by which we come to know if something is simply good is mysterious. This epistemic obscurity of SG is assumed throughout her critique. This point seems to mark an impasse between friends and foes of SG. Proponents argue that it is often or always self-evident, while opponents claim it obviously is not. Thomson ultimately argues that our “good” claims are actually claims about *goodness in some respect*. A “good” claim such as, “this melon is good” communicates that “this melon is good *in some respect*” (Thomson 2008, 17). The claim might be communicating that this melon is good *qua* melon, but if the speaker is looking for a melon to drop from a tall building as part of a physics experiment, then the speaker means that the melon is good in some other respect, namely it is good for the experiment. On Thomson’s view, claims about what is “good” are always claims about what is *good in some respect* or (synonymously) *good in a way*. There is no SG. She argues there are instead various ways of being good and various goodness properties (1992, 2008).

Thomson’s critique mainly addresses Moore’s early account of goodness, and she does so, in part, because she claims this is the view that has had the biggest impact on metaethics and normative theory (Thomson 2008, 10-17). The first argument she develops focuses on what Thomson calls Moore’s *Goodness Thesis*. The Goodness Thesis states that “there is such a property as being good...it is the property that all good things have in common” (Thomson 2008, 2). (This is equivalent to the *Global Universal Thesis* I identify in Chapter 1.) This highly general account of goodness, which is supposed to account for the

connection among all things called “good,” is the conception of goodness that Thomson claims is unintelligible. She argues that the Goodness Thesis when combined with Moore’s example of “good conduct,” implies another thesis, the *Rationale* (Thomson 2008, 3). Thomson derives the Rationale from Moore’s claim “that for a thing to be an instance of good conduct is for it to have the following two properties: being good and being an instance of conduct” (ibid.). The Rationale is the thesis that attributive uses of “good” are predicating two logically independent properties: “being good and being of the relevant kind” (ibid.). Accordingly, on Moore’s view, “good tennis player” can be broken down into two logically independent predicates: 1) being good; and 2) being a tennis player. But this leads to absurd results. If (1) A is a good tennis player and (2) A is a chess player, then on Moore’s view it would follow that (3) A is a good chess player. But (3) does not in fact follow from (1) and (2), therefore the Rationale is false, and “good” is not predicated as an independent property (Thomson 2008, 4-5). Thomson argues that the Goodness Thesis combined with the Rationale leads to other counter-intuitive conclusions. For example, the argument below:

If A is a good tennis player, then “A is good simpliciter.”  
 A is a good tennis player.  
 If A is a bad chess player, then “A is bad simpliciter.”  
A is a bad chess player.  
 Therefore, A is both good and bad simpliciter.

If it is possible to be good and bad *simpliciter* simultaneously, then these must be very strange properties (Thomson 2008, 10). This result suggests some serious conceptual confusion lurks within the Moorean account of goodness.

Thomson considers a revised version of the Rationale that characterizes the property of goodness as the property had in common by all the things of which we can (correctly) say, “that is good” (Thomson 2008, 7). Thomson writes:

Perhaps what Moore had in mind was really this: when we say “A is good,” we are ascribing to A the property goodness—and the property goodness just is the property had in common by all those things such that if you said the sentence “That is good” about them, you would be speaking truly.

Yet Thomson does not believe this solves any problems. Instead, it reveals new ones. If “that is good” indicates a special sense of good, then we are still left with the question of how attributions of this good connect to those of the attributive good (e.g. “that is a good X”). “After all,” Thomson says, “it is one and the same word ‘good’ that appears in both sentences” (Thomson 2008, 7). I return to this point shortly.

It is possible that “good” is like other adjectives that change their sense when used as attributive or predicative adjectives. Thomson addresses this potential objection to her view. “Famous” is the example she uses of an adjective that has both an attributive and a predicative sense (Thomson 2008, 13-14). X might be a famous K (i.e. famous *as* a K) or *simply* famous. Thomson argues, however, that the important difference is we have a clear idea of what it is to be simply famous—to be *simply* well-known. We have no reason to doubt the validity of the predicative use of “famous.” By contrast, we do not have a clear idea of what it is to be simply good, so we have good reason to doubt the validity of the predicative use of SG (Thomson 2008, 14).

The final piece of Thomson’s critique is a call back to that idea found in Geach and Foot that proponents of SG misunderstand the connection between a thing’s value and the reasons anyone might have to choose that thing. Put another way, we might say that

proponents of SG fail to appreciate the distinction between deontic and evaluative properties. Thomson proposes a “hypothesis” to explain what goes wrong in the thinking of proponents of SG (Thomson 2008, 14). When these philosophers ask, “Is action A good?” what they really mean is “Ought I to choose (or promote, pursue, supply your favorite pro-attitude) A?” They are inquiring to find out whether A has the property that is “*prima facie* ought-making” or “*pro tanto*<sup>3</sup> ought-making” (Thomson 2008, 15). Thomson does not follow Geach in supposing that SG is an empty concept. Thomson suggests this alternative interpretation:

[If] my hypothesis is right, then the philosophers we are concerned with do mean something when they ask, “Is pleasure good?” What they are asking is whether pleasure has the property that is *prima facie* ought-making. (Thomson 2008, 15)

Thomson does not find this particularly informative since we are still left wondering what property has this normative authority. If the property is simply the property of being *prima facie* ought-makingness, then there does not seem to be a rationale for speaking in terms of SG (Thomson 2008, 16). Why inquire into whether pleasure, for example, is simply good? It would be more accurate to ask whether “other things being equal, we ought to promote pleasure” (*ibid.*). These philosophers must think that SG is that property that makes it true

---

<sup>3</sup> The qualifier “*pro tanto*” should be distinguished from “*prima facie*.” *Pro tanto* reasons are often invoked in contemporary metaethics, but here it is probably more helpful to explain this in terms of *pro tanto* duties. A *prima facie* duty is a duty that appears to be binding for someone, but it may turn out not to be, given overriding concerns or circumstances. For example, person P has a *prima facie* duty to be honest, but if P is confronted with a murderer at their door seeking P’s friend inside, then we would say that given the circumstances P no longer has the duty to be honest. A *pro tanto* duty is a duty that is always binding for someone, so while it may turn out that some other duty overrides the *pro tanto* duty, that *pro tanto* obligation remains. For example, P has a *pro tanto* duty not to harm innocent children, but P is a military officer who has orders to bomb an area where children will be harmed. P has overriding circumstances compelling them to fail to fulfill the *pro tanto* duty, but we would not say that the *pro tanto* duty was no longer binding for P. These definitions are adapted from Kagan (1989).

that pleasure is *prima facie* ought-making. This is a fair conclusion to draw, particularly of Moore's view. Recall that Moore claims, "the assertion 'I am morally bound to perform this action' is identical with the assertion 'This action will produce the greatest amount of good in the Universe'" (PE 197). And even more to the point, he says, "The only possible reason that can justify any action is that by it the greatest possible amount what is good absolutely should be realised" (PE 153). Goodness and ought-makingness are inseparable in this way.

But still, following Thomson's hypothesis, we are left wondering how to characterize the property that "good" is supposed to refer to (Thomson 2008, 16). I cannot be SG, if Thomson's arguments succeed, but it cannot be attributive goodness either. Attributive goodness, on Thomson's view, is goodness in some respect, and all things might be characterized as good in some respect, but it would be absurd to conclude that all things are *prima facie* ought-making (Thomson 2008, 16-17). In conclusion, Thomson argues that if we adopt her theory of goodness, by accepting that all goodness is goodness in some respect, then we can make sense of the two problems left unresolved by Moore's theory of goodness. First, we can explain how all of our ascriptions of "good" are united; they are all ascriptions of goodness in some respect. Second, we explain the connection between ascriptions of goodness and *prima facie* ought-makingness. Thomson explains:

Arguably, it is never the case that a person ought to do a thing unless his doing it would be good in certain respects; and arguably, there are respects in which a person's doing a thing would be good such that it follows that other things being equal, he ought to do it. (Thomson 2008, 17)

Her view has the advantage of being able to make sense of the connection between the deontic and the evaluative, as well as the connection between the goodness of an action and the reasons one has to choose to do it. She concludes by reiterating her diagnosis of the



problem: “What goes wrong in the literature I refer to is only the idea that there is something *simple* at work here” (emphasis mine, *ibid.*).

Geach argues that all predicative uses of good actually refer to attributive goodness, where attributive goodness is understood as goodness of a kind. Thomson broadens the scope of this view when she argues that all goodness is goodness in some respect. Thomson’s view also goes beyond Geach’s in that she specifies various goodness properties (Thomson 2008, 19-33). For example, the property of *being a good Y*, only if *Y* is a goodness-fixing kind, designates what it is for a thing to be a good specimen of its kind (i.e. *Y* is good *qua Y*). The qualification that the goodness property is only instantiated in things that are members of a goodness-fixing kind is important. This is the goodness property operative in “*Y* is a good tennis player,” for example. Tennis player is a goodness-fixing kind; the standards for being a good tennis player are fixed. The goodness property ascribed in “Those are good tennis shoes” is *not* the same goodness property precisely because “tennis shoes” is not a goodness-fixing kind. “Tennis shoes” is a term synonymous with many others, e.g. sneakers, trainers, athletic shoes, etc. Not all tennis shoes will be suited for playing tennis. If the speaker intends “good tennis shoes” to mean “shoes that are good for playing tennis” then this goodness property is what Thomson calls *good-modified*. A thing is *good-modified* when it is good as/for/at/with something (Thomson 2008, 30-33). The accounts of these goodness properties could be the basis of an indirect argument against Moore’s original view of SG. These distinctions represent a small sample of the variety of properties that “good” refers to in our talk and in our moral theories.

I find Thomson's theory of goodness to be the most compelling of those offered by the critics of SG. It is a plausible alternative that does not result in wholesale relativism or subjectivism about value. I find her critique less compelling because it relies so heavily on Moore's Global Universal Thesis about the good, part of his original view in *PE*. She successfully demonstrates the flaws of this view, and even the untenability of maintaining this theory of SG. However, any contemporary Moorean can reject this thesis and escape most of her critique. What is left of her arguments is not enough to show that SG is a hopelessly confused concept. Kraut is able to make a much stronger case for abandoning SG, in part because he addresses a viable, and fairly popular, way of making sense of SG. While I share Thomson's perspective that SG is epistemically obscure, I think more needs to be done to show the extent of this obscurity and its destructive role within ethical theory. Thomson acknowledges that SG has had lasting negative effects on metaethics and normative ethical theory, but given her assessment of the problem these can largely be remedied by giving more attention to attributive goodness (Thomson 2008, 10-13). I explain, in Chapter 4, why this is too narrow a focus to remedy the problems caused by appealing to SG in moral theoretical contexts. Over all, Thomson's arguments do advance the case against SG, especially by clearly demonstrating the counter-intuitive claims entailed by Moore's original account of SG. In some ways, Thomson's discussion of the ought-makingness of SG is in the background of Kraut's critique, as we will see in the next section.

*Kraut and "Good For"*

Richard Kraut is a relative newcomer to the debate concerning SG, but he quickly established himself as one of its key figures with the publication of his 2011 book, *Against Absolute Goodness*. Initially, Kraut distinguishes himself from Geach and Thomson by rejecting their claim that SG is an unintelligible concept. Kraut argues instead that while the concept of SG is intelligible, it fails to be action-guiding (Kraut 2011, 79-81). SG is conceptually coherent, but it cannot help us in our practical decision-making. Like Thomson, Kraut provides a novel way of making our "good" claims intelligible by offering an alternative theory of goodness. In short, he argues that all claims to SG are intelligible only because they are reducible to claims about *good-for*, i.e. *welfare goodness*. They are essentially claims about what is advantageous to or beneficial for someone or something. Kraut identifies Moore and, to a lesser extent, Ross as his primary opponents, but much of what he argues would apply to the views of contemporary philosophical friends of SG. Indeed, several philosophers, such as Michael Campbell (2015), Roger Crisp (2013), Richard Rowland (2016), Sarah Stroud (2013), have defended a Moorean view of SG against Kraut's position.

Kraut likens his view to the buck-passing account of value popularized by Thomas Scanlon in *What We Owe to Each Other* (Kraut 2011, 60, 74). On a buck-passing account of goodness, the property of goodness itself provides very little information; it simply indicates that there is some reason to value that which instantiates the property of goodness. SG functions as if it were a generic X marked on the surfaces of whatever has value (alternatively, whatever is "good"). Note that the marker does not provide a

substantive reason to value whatever is underneath. We need to discover what lies beneath the X to uncover the actual source of value. It is the underlying property (or properties) that provides the substantive content necessary for supplying reasons for action or choice. Knowing that something has the property of goodness does not make a reason to value it explicit, rather it indicates that such a reason exists, on Scanlon's view (Scanlon 1998, 95-100). As I noted in Chapter 1, a commonly held view among metaethicists is that reasons are the most fundamental normative property. That is to say, reasons are more fundamental than goodness (contra Moore), and all of our other normative properties (including goodness) can be defined in terms of reasons. Thus, Scanlon can provide a buck-passing analysis of good such that "x is good iff there is reason to have some pro-attitude towards x" (Scanlon 1998, 95-97). To be clear, Kraut does not defend a buck-passing account of goodness (2011, 60-62; 2013, 489). If he did, then his account of goodness would suggest that all "This is good" means is "There is a reason to value this." Kraut uses Scanlon's account to demonstrate the plausibility of identifying "goodness" with reasons, and one could be forgiven for taking him for a buck-passer because he does occasionally agree with Scanlon's insights. For example, Kraut says:

I take Scanlon's general thesis that value and goodness do not themselves constitute reasons, but only reflect the presence of other factors that are reason-giving, to commit him to saying that when something is a good member of a kind, that fact is not a reason for valuing it—it is rather what makes it a good member of that kind that does so. That seems plausible. (Kraut 2011, 57).

Kraut accepts Scanlon's general thesis, but he does not think that this thesis entails passing the buck (ibid.). Kraut does not want to pass the buck, in part, because he claims that would beg the question against Moore, who believes that SG is genuinely reason-providing (Kraut

2013, 489). Instead, Kraut's argument assumes that SG is reason-providing property over and above other reason-providing properties, which is the view held by Moore and many contemporary proponents of SG.<sup>4</sup>

Before sketching Kraut's arguments, I should speak to a few important, but potentially confusing, terms that appear in his work. As I noted in Chapter 1, Kraut uses the term "absolute goodness" (AG) to refer to what I've been calling SG. It is clear from his description of AG and his interaction with Geach and Thomson's work that Kraut and I are concerned with the same concept of goodness. Without speculating too much about Kraut's rationale for using this particular term, it's worth reflecting on the aspects of SG that are emphasized by using the term "absolute goodness," namely that it is non-relational and fundamental. A non-relational value is valuable absent any relations obtaining between the value-bearer and anything external to it, including persons. SG is valuable in this way; thus, Foot calls SG "impersonal value" (Foot 1985, 31). In addition, the most fundamental value must be absolute because, on Moore's view, there must be some nonderivative ground through which all other (relational) values secure their value. Together these aspects of SG safeguard our value concepts from the threat of relativism and from the threat of a vicious regress. Kraut's view, however, aims to show that these threats need not worry us because we can maintain a non-relativistic value system with a relational type of goodness at its foundations. A relational value can be objective, in the sense that it is not relative to any particular person's subjectivity, though it will be relative to certain facts about someone or

---

<sup>4</sup> Proponents of this view include Arneson (2010), Campbell (2015), Crisp (2013), Rowland (2016), Stroud (2013).

something's welfare. For example, if regular exercise is good for person P, then the value of regular exercise is good relative to P, but it is nevertheless objective because what makes this value claim (about P) true are objective facts about P's welfare. The things that are *good for* P will be so regardless of what P thinks, wants, or desires. By using the "absolute" terminology, Kraut reveals his primary conception of SG and the direction he intends take his own theory of goodness.

Kraut has also opted to speak about *welfare goodness* (WG) in terms of *good-for*. It is important not to confuse Kraut's "good for" with instrumental goodness. When something is good for X, on Kraut's view, it contributes to X's flourishing or X's welfare, i.e. it is beneficial or advantageous for X (Kraut 2011, 71). If I were to say, "this knife is good for cutting bread," I would not be using the same sense of *good-for*. A knife that is good for cutting bread is instrumentally good (i.e. it is good for a particular purpose). For Kraut, anything that has WG contributes to the flourishing of someone or something, and this is a more fundamental value than SG, on his view (ibid.). In other words, this is the conception of goodness that explains and grounds SG, not vice versa, as Moore would have it.

Kraut provides an in-depth analysis of his theory of goodness in *Against Absolute Goodness* (2011) and in *What is Good and Why* (2007). I will briefly describe it here. "What is good for living things is their flourishing," Kraut says, "but this is a general concept, the details of which must be specified for each kind of living thing and sometimes further specified to individuals within a kind" (2011, 71-72). The good for living things is not one single thing or property; it can only be discovered and explained by looking to the individual living things to which it is supposed to apply. On Kraut's view, the assertion "X

makes a contribution to *S*'s flourishing" can also be expressed by the assertion "X is good for *S*" (Kraut 2011, 70). Whatever can be said to constitute a thing's flourishing is the same as that which can be said to constitute its good.

The first and main argument that Kraut mounts against SG aims to prove that we can eliminate SG from our schema of value concepts without loss. Kraut argues that SG is not necessary to make sense of our "good" claims. Kraut says that "if [SG] does no explanatory work, that gives us sufficient reason to doubt its existence" (Kraut 2013, 497). He tries to show that WG ("good for") supplies all of the genuine reasons for action or reasons for choice, thereby making SG redundant to the motivating and explanatory processes of practical reasoning. He essentially argues that claims to SG are reducible to claims about WG. Kraut's main argument has two parts. The first part presents a thesis to which we are all expected to agree: welfare goodness exists, as does welfare badness (alternatively, welfare value and welfare disvalue). Some things obviously and unquestionably exhibit the relation of being good for or bad for persons and things. Kraut uses the example of smoking tobacco (Kraut 2011, 42; 2013, 489). It is an empirical claim that smoking tobacco is bad for people. We should all be able to accept that this is objectively true. Now, Kraut doesn't provide an example to demonstrate the existence of welfare goodness, so I will supply one for him. Physical touch is good for people. It is an empirical claim that physical touch is good for people, as it is an essential component of child development. We could list many examples, but this is enough to demonstrate that this kind of value exists.

Kraut then argues that we also ought to accept that three types of welfare value exist. Welfare value can be “instrumental” or “noninstrumental” or both (Kraut 2011, 34). Noninstrumental value corresponds to the concept of “final value,” introduced in Chapter 1, and I prefer the latter term because it is now used widely to refer to that which has its end (good) in itself, alternatively that which is good for its own sake. And what Kraut tries to show is that some things are good for persons on account of their consequences, while other things are good for persons just in themselves, apart from their consequences. Still other things are good for persons in both senses. Physical touch is good for persons instrumentally. Physical touch promotes healthy brain development, so it is good for a person in virtue of these causal consequences. This is an example of instrumental WG. Kraut claims that justice is an example of something that possesses final WG. Justice, itself, is good for persons, apart from its consequences. But justice actually falls under the third type of WG, because it is not only good for persons in itself, it is also good for person in virtue of its consequences (Kraut 2011, 34).

As we have seen, it is fairly easy to understand WG and even to establish its existence. Kraut argues that the same cannot be said for SG. Whether we consider SG as it appears in ordinary usage or in philosophical usage, we would need some elaboration before we could know what a speaker means when she says, “that is simply good” (Kraut 2011, 38-42).

In the second part of Kraut’s argument, he first argues that WG is not ontologically or epistemically dependent upon SG, contra Moore who famously argued that it was. Moore’s argument begins with the idea that if we want to know what “good conduct” is,



then we need to know both what conduct is (which, he assumes, we already do) and what “good” is. Setting aside other objections to this line of reasoning, Kraut argues that SG and WG are ontologically independent from one another. Kraut writes:

Let’s allow, temporarily, that there is such a thing as being bad (period), and let’s allow that smoking might have that property. Even so, we could not establish that smoking is bad simply by establishing that smoking is bad for someone. Being bad for someone and being bad absolutely are two different properties. So being bad for someone should not be taken to consist simply in being bad (period). Similarly, being good for someone should not be taken to consist simply in being good (period). (Kraut 2011, 31)

Though Kraut seems to be arguing, here, that SG cannot be defined in terms of WG, this is not an uncommon way of adapting Moore’s view (see Arneson 2010 and Orsi 2013).

Having shown that WG exists, and that WG and SG are distinct, Kraut then proceeds to argue that WG is reason-providing, while SG is not. Here is an example he uses in a reply to his critics:

Accordingly, when we ask ourselves why works of art should be produced and appreciated, we should not assume from the start that the only possible way of answering this question is to say that they are good (period). We might try to see how far we can illuminate the value of such works by thinking of them as constituents of human well-being—that is, as objects that are non-instrumentally good for us to appreciate. Whether we succeed in this project depends to a large extent on how we understand human well-being. I favor a theory of well-being in which the notion of human flourishing plays an important role, and I think of the fine arts as activities that have an important role to play in a flourishing life. But even if I were wrong about that, it would not follow that the reason why we should want artists to produce beautiful works is that beauty is a good thing. (Kraut 2013, 499)

According to Kraut, we can explain the value of art, and explain why art should be appreciated, without appealing to SG. In other words, adding the value of SG does not make a stronger case for appreciating or promoting art. Kraut suggests that SG provides a reason the way an outdated scientific theory explains natural phenomena. It may capture some

aspects of the truth, but ultimately we do better to rely on more accurate theories that have been developed since (Kraut 2011, 27). The conclusion Kraut wants us to draw is that SG is superfluous for practical decision-making, and we already have a much less problematic account of goodness to take its place, namely WG.

Kraut does develop another argument against SG that is secondary to the one I sketch above. He describes this secondary argument as “an ethical objection” to using SG in our practical deliberations. This argument is not as compelling as the primary one, so I will only briefly explain this argument before returning to the main argument.

Kraut’s ethical objection relies on a thought experiment meant to show that practical deliberations involving SG lead agents to unethical conclusions and actions (Kraut 2011, 79-90). The thought experiment pictures a brilliant mathematician and mother who believes mathematical knowledge possesses SG. Believing herself to be a good person, the mother prioritizes SG in her practical deliberations. Believing that she should she always endorse and promote whatever has SG, when possible, she has studied mathematics diligently. She is not necessarily preoccupied with maximizing SG or with promoting mathematical knowledge over other things that possess SG. But when she has a son she compels him to learn math believing that producing more mathematical knowledge in him will increase the overall value of the universe. Importantly, she does not consider whether or not mathematics is good *for* her son. She has reason enough to promote it, given that it is SG. After all, something that is simply good is valuable (i.e. ought to be promoted) completely unrelated to whether it is good for anyone or anything. Kraut argues that something has gone wrong in this case, namely the mother has failed to consider what is

perhaps the most important thing to consider: her child's welfare (Kraut 2011, 86). In taking SG to be both a special type of value and reason-providing, her ethical judgments are warped.

This concern is certainly worth considering, and there are other potentially helpful insights that we can glean from this thought experiment, however, the argument as it stands isn't very compelling. One easy way for proponents of SG to brush aside this objection is to simply claim that the mother is mistaken and mathematical knowledge does not possess SG. Another, perhaps more likely, response would be to argue that SG should not be used in our practical deliberations in the way that this mother uses it. They might say that even if mathematical knowledge possesses SG, it shouldn't be treated as a conclusively overriding value. Even if not entirely successful, Kraut's ethical argument does take a step in the right direction by inquiring into the practical effects of SG. He calls into question the legitimacy of SG by trying to show how it impedes ethical reasoning. While I do not think his argument successfully shows this, I do take up this line of thinking in my own critique in Chapter 4. However, I focus on a different way that SG leads our ethical reasoning astray. As for Kraut's main argument and his theory of goodness, I think we have to grant that they have substantial intuitive weight. WG does seem to make sense of many (or most) of our "good" claims. Nevertheless, I worry that his theory puts too much emphasis on WG. The advantage of Thomson's view is that it does not designate one type of goodness as necessarily more fundamental or more significant at the outset. There is greater room for trying to understand our values and valuings as they are by starting with a conceptually light theory of goodness, such as Thomson's. Whereas Kraut effectively

reduces all claims to SG to claims about WG, which then requires other values to be defined in terms of how they contribute to someone or something's welfare.

### *Conclusion*

There are several objections to Kraut's view that I will address along with my own critique in Chapter 4. There is one type of objection in particular that is relevant to my own view and to anyone who would argue that we should do away with SG within some area of philosophy. This is the objection that there is some conceptual or theoretical work that will be left undone if we eliminate SG from our conceptual repertoire. Richard Arneson (2010), Michael Campbell (2015), Roger Crisp (2013), Richard Rowland (2016), and Sarah Stroud (2013) all raise objections of this type. My critique rests on the argument that most of this work that invokes SG is itself problematic. This work represents a certain mode of ethical theorizing that divorces our philosophical work from important facts about the world and our experiences living in it. I elaborate on this in Chapter 4.

Kraut's argument might be seen as modest in comparison to those of his predecessors, Geach and Thomson, because he makes a major concession to the friends of SG in allowing that the concept itself can be intelligible. We can make sense of "good" talk (i.e., claims to SG), but only with further explanation. The upshot of Kraut's view, however, is supposed to be that appeals to SG cannot themselves provide anyone with legitimate reasons for valuing (or for choosing) anything. Thus, SG is irrelevant to practical decision-making. Including it in our deliberations only threatens to warp our ethical judgments, on his view. These final conclusions are summarily rejected by Kraut's critics.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps that is

---

<sup>5</sup> See Campbell (2015), Crisp (2013), Orsi (2013), Rowland (2016), Stroud (2013), and Thomson (2013).

to be expected. It is difficult, if not impossible, to argue that some property can never provide a reason for anyone. While I agree with Kraut, that SG should not be one of the values factored into deliberations, I ultimately argue for another thesis, one that I am reasonably certain he and Thomson would agree with. I argue instead that including SG among our value concepts, within the context of ethical theory, prevents us from acquiring moral knowledge and impedes the purposes of ethical theory generally.

Before moving on to explaining my own diagnosis of the problems associated with SG, I want to provide the broader context for the debate between friends and foes of SG. In the next chapter, I argue that we find parallels to this debate in the work of Aristotle and Plato. I argue, in particular, that the critics of SG often develop arguments that resemble Aristotle's arguments in his critique of the Platonic form of the good.

## CHAPTER 3

### ARISTOTLE ON THE PLATONIC FORM OF THE GOOD

In this chapter, I explain how some of Aristotle's arguments against *the good set* historical precedent for the current debate concerning the property of *simple goodness* (SG) and its role in moral theory and decision-making. I argue that Aristotle's critique of the Platonic form of the good, as presented in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I, Chapter 6, resonates throughout contemporary arguments against SG. The work in this chapter contributes to my overall project in at least three ways. First, it provides a historical basis for the central problem at stake, namely the viability of SG as a concept applicable to practical or theoretical moral problems. Second, an examination of Aristotle's arguments reveals how both methodological and metaphysical problems are at issue in this debate. Aristotle's approach in his ethics, in some respects, foreshadows my own, in that his concerns are as much methodological as they are metaphysical, and just as he ultimately has practical concerns regarding understanding the human good (i.e. the moral good) in terms of the Platonic form, so I have similar concerns regarding understanding moral goodness in terms of SG. Third, the work in this chapter reveals the extent to which current critics of SG can be understood as Aristotelian. I focus on the first two since they are most relevant for understanding my position in the SG debate. I devote most of the chapter to examining Aristotle's critique of the Platonic theory of the good as presented in

*Nicomachean Ethics* Book I, Chapter 6. Aristotle presents a number of arguments in this critique, and I will consider five of them here. I use these arguments to draw out comparisons to the contemporary literature, with a focus on the argument in which Aristotle argues “good” does not have one univocal meaning but instead has many senses. This *multivocity of the good* helps explain how Plato’s theory goes wrong in maintaining that the good is a single universal. Further, Aristotle’s *theory of homonymy* can explain why the multiple senses of good appear interconnected, though each is distinct. Aristotle’s central concerns regarding the multivocity of the good can be mapped onto the central concerns of the contemporary friends of SG. I ultimately argue that Aristotle’s theory of homonymy is an untapped conceptual resource that offers useful insights for taking the contemporary discussion of SG in a new and more productive direction. These insights provide a way for moral philosophers to make sense of the claims that (1) all of our value concepts bear a non-arbitrary connection to one another and yet (2) a Platonic conception of the good must be irrelevant to our knowledge and theories of the human good. The five of Aristotle’s arguments that I consider will be compared to the work of the three most prominent critics of SG, namely Peter Geach, Judith Jarvis Thomson, and Richard Kraut. I want to emphasize, however, that I am not arguing that Aristotle’s arguments are reiterated by these authors, rather, I argue that the contemporary critics of SG are motivated by the same aims and concerns that motivated Aristotle’s critique of the Platonic form of the good.

Aristotle’s critique of the Platonic form of the good (PFG) is laid out in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*). Aristotle’s introduction to the critique in *EN*I, 6 suggests

that his audience would have been amenable to the Platonic view. He says:

We had perhaps better consider the universal good and discuss thoroughly what is meant by it...for the sake of maintaining the truth...especially as we are philosophers; for, while both [our friends and truth] are dear, piety requires us to honour truth above our friends. (1096a11-1096a16)

Though his audience respects the Platonic view, as a matter of conscience they must show reverence for the truth, even if that means criticizing the views of their friends. Aristotle's critique of Plato's theory of the universal good consists of several arguments meant to discredit this theory and reveal the truth about the good. I won't explain all of the arguments in Aristotle's critique, rather I will focus only on those arguments that have relevance for the work of contemporary philosophers who critique SG.

### *Platonic Goods*

At the start of *ENI*, 6, Aristotle mentions those who "believe that there exists over and above these many goods another good, good in itself and by itself, which also is the *cause* of good in all these things" (emphasis mine; 1095a26-28) making it clear that he has Plato and the PFG in mind as the target of his critique. In *Republic*, VI, the PFG is described by way of two analogies, namely the analogy of the sun and of the divided line. Socrates uses these analogies in an attempt to explain the connection between the many good things and the good itself (*to auto agathon*) (R507b2-10). The analogy of the sun in *Republic* VII is used to illustrate the causal relationship of the form of the good to the things that share in its nature (505a2-6). The sun, as the source of light, makes sight possible and gives us the power to see the things that exist in the visible realm (R507d-508e). The light of the sun is also essential for the existence of the things in the visible world. The sun makes the processes of generation and growth possible. The sun is the cause of these processes and



the visible world as a whole (*R* 509b2-4). Analogously, the good itself is the cause of the processes involved in understanding and of the intelligible world as a whole (*R* 509b). Truth proceeds from the good like rays of sunshine, figuratively illuminating the intelligible realm, making intelligence (i.e., the activity of the intellect, *nous*) and knowledge possible (*R* 508d-e, 509b6-10). In other words, the good is the eternal source of truth just as the sun is the eternal source of light. Light is a necessary condition for the possibility of sight and likewise the truth is a necessary condition for the possibility of understanding or the activity of knowing the truth (i.e. intelligence). This is why Plato says that the sun is the cause of visible things and the ability to see (or know) them, just as the good is the cause of truth and the ability to know it (*R* 508e). The transcendent reality of the intelligible world depends on the good in the same way that the visible world depends on the sun.

Plato describes the nature of the forms and of the PFG in particular, in *Parmenides* and in *Republic* Books VI and VII. In *Parmenides*, the forms are described as models or paradigms, with each form understood as the perfect realization of a universal. The class of universals in Plato includes the forms of natural biological kinds (e.g., human, horse) as well as forms of properties (e.g., white, large, beautiful). Because fundamental universal truths are necessarily both true and unchanging, the cause and paradigm of all that exists must be found within the intelligible realm and not the changeable visible realm. The intelligible world is the realm of understanding, which is grasped via the intellect (as a result of dialectic), and the forms themselves are a special type of entity within that realm (*R* 511b). They are purely intelligible, i.e. the purest form of objective reality. The forms are “what is” or “what really exist” (*ho estin*), Plato claims (*R* 507b7). Their existence is what

grounds the existence and objectivity of all else that exists. The instantiations of the universal that we encounter in the intelligible or visible realms are only likenesses and replicas of these perfect forms (*P*132d1-3). Good things not only have the nature of the PFG imperfectly, but they exist imperfectly. Their being is not as real as the form that is their cause and paradigm.

Plato's theory of forms is famously an ontologically robust conception of universals.

<sup>1</sup> The good is not merely a universal property rather it is an entity itself. While SG is not the good, it is a transcendent ideal form and so an absolute value. As the ideal form it is goodness itself, and good by itself. Because it is the eternal, transcendent good, it is also the most true and real form of goodness, and this type of goodness is self-evident. On the Platonic picture, the PFG guarantees the objective, metaphysical reality of all goodness

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's first argument demonstrates how Plato's own view seems to preclude the possibility of the PFG. On Plato's view, any set consisting of prior and posterior members cannot have a form. But Aristotle holds that good is predicated of entities that are necessarily prior and posterior to one another, and so, by Plato's own lights, a series of good things cannot have a form of the good. Aristotle's ontological theory, as described in the *Categories*, is an attempt to schematize the various ways of being, or of predicating being, and this theory shows how ontological entities and their predicates are ordered. A primary substance is an individual entity, literally a "this." For example, Socrates is a primary substance. A secondary substance is a universal, a predication that applies to more than one individual, literally a "such." If we say that "Socrates is human," then we've predicated a secondary substance of Socrates. A predication of some non-essential feature of Socrates, such as his beardedness, requires that Socrates exist and that Socrates is human. "Socrates is bearded," on the other hand, is not predicating anything essential to Socrates; it is predicating one of his incidental qualities. Beardedness is not an independent entity, rather it is a predicate of substances, specifically human substances. This is true for all of the other non-substance types of predications or categories, as Aristotle calls them; they are dependent upon the *prior* or primary substance for their own existence. And goodness is also predicated according to such an order, admitting of priority and posteriority. Thus, Aristotle claims:

things are called good both in the category of substance and in that of quality and in that of relation, and that which is *per se*, i.e. substance, is prior in nature to the relative (for the latter is like an offshoot and accident of what is); so that there could not be a common Idea set over all these goods. (*EN*1096a19-23)

Since Plato's principle excludes the possibility of a form "set over" ordered entities, and the set of good things does betray an essential order, there can be no form of the good. It's an *ad hominem* showing that Plato's theory is internally incoherent.

properties.<sup>2</sup> As the fundamental form of the good all other good things derive their goodness from it. In other words, it is goodness at its most basic. The PFG shares its nature with *all* things properly called “good.”

SG is Platonic in the three respects just mentioned: it is (1) an absolute value, (2) self-evident, and (3) fundamental. Many of these similarities are preserved via Moore’s claim that the good is unanalyzable (*PEI*, 7 58). I call this the *unanalyzability thesis* (UT). Proponents of SG do not defend the UT in the way that Moore did, but by arguing for the absolute, non-natural, and self-evident character of SG as a value property, they effectively continue to endorse it. Defenses of SG are based on the assumption that the good must have an absolute, *non-natural* character. As an evaluative property it cannot be reducible to nor dependent upon the existence of any natural properties. As the most basic, fundamental value property there is, SG needs no justification or explanation. It just is, and when a thing possesses this property, the property is self-evident. Proponents of SG argue that this special character of the good is what guarantees the objective, metaphysical reality of all goodness properties. SG is not merely an important value concept, it is metaphysically necessary value concept upon which all other values depend.

This way of thinking about the good in connection with contemporary ethical theory is directly traceable back to G.E. Moore. His work, mainly in *Principia Ethica* (*PE*), is the catalyst for a variety of philosophical discussions about the peculiar nature of the good. For this reason, the critics of SG—Peter Geach (1956), Judith Jarvis Thomson (2008), and Richard Kraut (2011) among them—typically take Moore’s views as presented in *PE* to be

---

standard view of SG. Given his historical position and continued influence, it makes some sense to continue to focus on Moore. Still, I would like to note that there are neo-Mooreans working in formal value theory and in every domain of ethics—applied ethics, normative ethics, and metaethics. All discussions in moral theory that refer to the good and the moral good should be aware of the critiques developed by the foes of SG. Metaethicists are most likely to have some familiarity with these arguments, but, not surprisingly, moral philosophers working in the different domains of ethical theory rarely engage one another's work, and so these critiques of SG don't yet have the impact that they should. To complicate matters, neo-Mooreans<sup>3</sup> generally adopt his view of the good for different theoretical ends, making it difficult to identify the definitive position of friends of SG as if a clear, unified theory unites them all. What I try to do in this project is to highlight some ways in which the critique of SG crosses over and through ethical domains. I also argue that while there is no definitive neo-Moorean view of the good, Moore and his descendants have adopted views of the good that share several core features. For simplicity's sake I refer to any view of the good that shares these core features as *the Moorean view*. The Moorean view holds that goodness is an objective, *sui generis* property that has an absolute, intrinsic value (i.e. its value is a mind-independent, universal, unchanging property that transcends the natural, descriptive world).

To flesh out the Moorean view, I will first consider some key passages of *PE*. These passages are commonly the initial target of those who critique SG. These passages also

---

<sup>3</sup> Some contemporary philosophers who defend a Moorean theory of value or of moral properties are Arneson (2010), Bradley (2006), Campbell (2015), Crisp (2005, 2013), Shafer-Landau (2003), and Stroud (2013).

illustrate some of Moore's Platonic tendencies. There is one passage in particular, in Book I, Chapter 6 of *PE*, that reveals that Moore, like Plato, conceives of the good as a single universal. Moore begins this passage saying that a study of the good is necessary because it is the central value concept for ethics. He argues that philosophers have failed to properly study the good, and if we hope to understand the subject matter of ethics, namely good conduct, then we should examine the nature of goodness. He 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. For 'good conduct' is a complex notion: all conduct is not good; for some is certainly bad and some may be indifferent. And on the other hand, other things, beside conduct, may be good; and if they are so, then, 'good' denotes some property, that is common to them and conduct; and if we examine good conduct alone of all good things, then we shall be in danger of mistaking for this property, some property which is not shared by those other things: and thus we shall have made a mistake about Ethics even in this limited sense; for we shall not know what good conduct really is. (Moore 1903, 54-55)

Moore assumes that "we all know pretty well what 'conduct' is," so we should focus on trying to discern the nature of the idea denoted by "good" (1903, 55). Moral philosophy has thus far failed to recognize its appropriate focus: "Hence the primary and peculiar business of Ethics, the determination what things have intrinsic value and in what degree, has received no adequate treatment at all" (*PE* 78).

Moore's call to "start at the beginning" and his ensuing discussion of the nature of goodness represent a shift in focus within ethical theory and arguably this shift led to the development of modern metaethics. He is concerned that so many philosophers seem content to define goodness either by reducing it to some natural property (e.g. pleasure) or to analyze it in other terms (e.g. to be commendable). In opposition to this general trend,

Moore declares that “good is good,” and that no definition of “good” could provide more clarification on the nature of goodness. He explains that goodness is actually a property akin to the property of yellowness. He writes:

My point is that good is a simple notion, just as yellow is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to anyone who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is. (Moore 1903 I, 7; 58)

According to Moore, the good should be understood as a simple property, a property that all good things share. A property, such as “good,” is *simple* just in case it is unanalyzable and irreducible to any other property or definition. If the good is simple in this way, then it must also be a self-evident, *sui generis* property. This fits nicely with Moore’s intuitionism. The good is obvious, in this sense, and we can only study its nature by observing the whole variety of good things available to us. We are in search of the common predicate shared by all “good” things.

In short, Moore’s metaphysics of goodness, like Plato’s, envisions the good as (1) an absolute value, (2) a self-evident property or predicate, and (3) a fundamental ideal (i.e. the paradigm of that which all good things share). I’ll briefly describe some of the neo-Moorean views of the good that share these core elements. Within contemporary metaethics, one of the most popular theories that makes use of the Moorean conception of the good is the realist view of moral properties known as *moral non-naturalism*.<sup>4</sup> Moral non-naturalists argue that only non-natural properties can establish fundamental value claims and value properties as objective and ontologically robust (i.e. real or substantive). They argue that normative properties (and claims) are not part of the natural, descriptive

---

<sup>4</sup> Cuneo (2014), Enoch (2011), Parfit (2011), Shafer-Landau (2014), et al.

world, and neither are they reducible to or dependent on any natural properties. The good exists mind-independently. It is simply a basic fact that this goodness exists, and if no subjects existed to observe the good that would do nothing to diminish its value. If it existed in a vacuum, it would still be good. Moore's thought experiment known as *the isolation test* relies on this idea. The test determines the objective value (note: objective value is synonymous with SG or "intrinsic value" on Moore's account) of a thing by imagining it existing alone in the universe, and then judging from that perspective whether or not its existence adds value to the universe (Moore 1903, 145,147, 233-236). The test's usefulness relies on the acceptance of some form of intuitionism, at minimum an intuitionism about basic properties or truths. Since SG is a self-evident property, every isolation test should produce the same value judgments. These judgments about the entities that add value to the world are mind-independent and absolute because their value persists even if nothing else exists. Another area in which we find a Moorean view of goodness is in a theory that speaks to metaethical and normative ethical concerns, namely *objective list theorists of wellbeing*.<sup>5</sup> Unlike hedonist theories that reduce wellbeing to pleasure and desire theories that argue wellbeing consists in the satisfaction of desires, objective list theorists argue that there is a set or list of absolute goods and wellbeing consists in pursuing and acquiring these goods. SG, according to objective list theorists, must exist as a fundamental value concept to ground the objective goodness of the items on the list. The good must be, like SG, an absolute value because items on the list are thought to contribute to the wellbeing of anyone (and some argue anything) that possesses it. The

---

<sup>5</sup> Arneson (2010), Dorsey (2013), Fletcher (2016), Hurka (1993), et al.

value-added by these basic goods is thought to be self-evident, a deliverance of our intuition. In summary, both objective list theorists and moral non-naturalists, two mainstream views within ethical theory, argue that in order to make objective claims about what is fundamentally valuable in the world or in a life, we need SG. Because these theories make use of a conception of the good that is (1) an absolute value, (2) a self-evident property or predicate, and (3) a fundamental ideal, I argue that they defend the Moorean view of the good. And because the PFG is a conception of the good that also meets this definition, I argue that these views are of a piece and that on this basis we can view the contemporary debate about the good as a version of the historical critique of the PFG put forward by Aristotle.

*“Good” is Predicated in Many Ways*

The main argument that Aristotle uses to discredit the PFG as a viable value concept is that the “good” (*agathos*) is not a single universal. This argument presumes some familiarity with the ontological framework of the *Categories*, but a superficial understanding is enough to make sense of Aristotle’s argument. Aristotle’s analysis of being in the *Categories* specifies ten categories, or types of predication, for all of the things that exist. The primary category indicates a substance. A particular entity, i.e. a primary substance, just *is* and it’s this predication of primary being that is a prerequisite for the other categories. This substance is the subject of the other types of predication. For example, Socrates is a primary substance, and we predicate being in the category of substance when we say, “Socrates *is* (i.e. exists).” This is the primary predication that must be the case before there can be any other things predicated of Socrates. Aristotle identifies



ten categories of being, only six are clearly mentioned in *ENI*, 6: substance, quality, quantity, relation, time, and place. Aristotle famously says that “being” is predicated in a different sense in each category. We predicate (being in the category of) quality when we say, “Socrates is pale.” We predicate a relation when we say, “Socrates is taller than Glaucon,” and so on. These are different senses in which Socrates *is*.

In *ENI*, 6 Aristotle explains that just as being (to be) is said in many ways, so is the good (to be good). The text reads:

Further, since things are said to be good in as many ways as they are said to be (for things are called good both in the category of substance, as God and reason, and in quality, e.g. the virtues, and in quantity, e.g. that which is moderate, and in relation, e.g. the useful, and in time, e.g. the right opportunity, and in place, e.g. the right locality and the like), clearly the good cannot be something universally present in all cases and single; for then it would not have been predicated in all the categories but in one only. (1096a23-29)

This claim, that *good is said in many ways*, has come to be known as the *multivocality of the good*. For Aristotle, this claim has both semantic and ontological implications because if good is said in many ways, then “good” refers to many different things in the world. The meaning of “good” depends on the nature of the good things that exist in the world. Things are said to be good according to the definition of what they are *qua* (i.e., insofar as they instantiate the definition of) what they are. An example might help make my point clearer. The meaning of the word “horse” is just what the word refers to, namely an actual horse. More precisely, “horse” is the universal name for any animal that has the form or nature of a horse in the world. A good horse is one that performs its characteristic function as a horse well. The properties that make up the goodness of a horse will be different than those that make up the goodness of a knife. The function and nature of good horses and knives are

obviously different. This illustrates that there is no univocal “good” because there is not one nature that all things called “good” share, on his view. There is no single fundamental form of goodness because there is no single nature predicated in every use of “good.”

Aristotle uses examples showing how good is predicated in each of the categories to demonstrate that “good” refers to some distinctive thing or some distinctive properties in each of the categories (“in the category of substance, as God and reason, and in quality, e.g. the virtues, and in quantity, e.g. that which is moderate, and in relation,” etc. *EN*1096a25-27). “Good” is instantiated in distinct forms across the categories. If we predicate goodness in the primary category of substance and we predicate goodness in the subordinate category of quality, then we can’t be predicating “good” in the same sense in both categories. Things are said to be good according to the definition of what they are *qua* (i.e., insofar as they instantiate the definition of) what they are. What makes a thing good *qua* substance will not be identical to what a thing good *qua* quality. Aristotle claims that goodness predicated in the category of quality refers to the virtues; when predicated in the category of quantity it refers to the appropriate amount, and so on. Since Aristotle claims that an example of “good” predicated in the category of substance (i.e., predicated “*en tō ti*”—literally “in the what” or “in the this”) refers to the intellect (*nous*) or the Divine (*théos*). Aristotle is claiming that the best activity that exists is the activity of the intellect, which is the divine activity of contemplation. The nature of the good in the category of substance is obviously and substantially different from what it is to be good when predicated of things in any of the other categories. Aristotle’s argument effectively shows that there are more senses of “good” than Plato can account for simply by appealing to the

PFG. While, on Plato's own view, the goodness predicated of the form is not conceived of as identical in nature to the goodness of other things, Plato maintains that the good is still, to some degree, universally predicated. Aristotle's argument from the categories demonstrates that the good cannot be, as Plato contends, "something common, universal, and single" (*koinon ti katholou kai hen*) (*EN*1096a27-28). In the context of Aristotle's ontological framework, Plato's view is an untenable view of the good.

Plato's view does, however, have the advantage of accommodating a common intuition that all good things must belong to the same set, but the view rests on a misunderstanding of the nature of the good. For Aristotle, good things cannot be unified into a single set because "X is good" does not always predicate the same thing (i.e., nature or property) in the way that, for example, "X is yellow" does. The disagreement about predicating "good" has a contemporary analogue in the critique of Moore's view of the good that was first put forward by Peter Geach (1956) and later developed by Judith Jarvis Thomson (1997, 2008). Moore, and many who uphold the Moorean view, want to accommodate the intuition that all predications of "good" have an essential connection. Geach's critique of Moore's position as developed in "On Good and Evil" (1956) rests on the same objection Aristotle raises against Plato, namely that "good" is not univocally predicated. There is a disanalogy between predicating the yellowness versus the goodness of something. "Yellow" always refers to the same property, but the referent of "good" is going to be relative to context. What "good" predicates will be determined by (i.e. relative to) the nature of that entity of which good is predicated. According to Aristotle, even a short list of examples of predications of goodness across the categories demonstrates that

“good” predicates a variety of properties (*EN*1096a 24). Geach also argues that “good” is not univocally predicated because the property or properties that are predicated will be determined by the nature of the subject of predication.

Geach’s critique of Moorean goodness is clearly different from Aristotle’s critique of the PFG in that it isn’t based on Aristotle’s metaphysics. Geach offers several arguments to discredit Moore’s view, but the main argument can be summed up in the slogan: *the good is always attributive and never predicative*. The crux of this argument is the claim that whenever “good” is predicated of a subject, the nature of the subject determines the features or properties that are instantiated; the meaning or referent of the predicate “good” is relative to the subject of which it is predicated. In this way, Geach’s understanding of the good resembles Aristotle’s. They each have their own way of demonstrating the same conclusion, namely that predications of the good cannot be universal. Geach and Aristotle both argue that “good” necessarily predicates a variety of properties. Geach’s argument is a welcome update of Aristotle’s precisely because Geach does *not* rely on Aristotelian metaphysics.

Instead of starting from Aristotelian metaphysics, Geach’s argument starts with some insights from English grammar. Geach argues that Moore’s mistake concerning predications of goodness are, at least in part, the result of the ambiguity of ordinary grammatical usage of adjectives. Geach argues that “‘good’ and ‘bad’ are always attributive, not predicative, adjectives” (Geach 1956, 33). “Attributive” and “predicative” are Geach’s technical terms appropriated from English grammar. In their grammatical sense, these terms designate the positions that adjectives can take in a sentence. When we make a

grammatical or syntactical distinction between attributive and predicative adjectives, predicative adjectives follow a verb and come after the noun they modify (i.e. they take a postnominal position) while attributive adjectives precede the noun they modify (i.e. they take a prenominal position). Some adjectives can only be used as attributives and others are strictly predicatives, but most adjectives may appear in the predicative or attributive position without alteration of meaning. For example, I can say, "My meal is healthy" (predicative) or "I'm eating a healthy meal" (attributive) without any alteration of the meaning of "healthy." It would be a mistake, however, to assume that because "healthy" is in the predicative position that it must refer to some absolute predicate. What "healthy" is predicating is determined relative to its noun or subject, namely my meal.

Geach argues that Moore failed to distinguish between adjectives that are independent predicates of the nouns they modify and those that are not. Consider the example "X is a large mouse." This sentence cannot be split into two statements with two logically independent predicates: "X is large" and "X is a mouse." We would not predicate large *simpliciter* of a mouse, or anything else for that matter. X is large *qua* mouse. Thus "large" is a logically attributive adjective that sometimes appears in the predicative position. For contrast, consider another sentence, "X is a brown mouse." Here we can see that "brown" is predicative because the predicate phrase can be split into two logical predicates of X, namely "X is brown" and "X is a mouse." Geach argues that the logic of our use of "good" and "bad" is exclusively attributive. These terms are analogous to terms such as "healthy" and "large." Good and bad cannot be understood as logically independent predicates even if they can appear in the predicative position in a sentence. To say that

something is good *simpliciter* is as unintelligible as saying that something is large

*simpliciter*. Geach concludes:

Even when 'good' or 'bad' stands by itself as a predicate, and is thus grammatically predicative, some substantive has to be understood; there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so. (If I say that something is a good or bad thing, either 'thing' is a mere proxy for a more descriptive noun to be supplied from the context; or else I am trying to use 'good' or 'bad' predicatively, and its being grammatically attributive is a mere disguise. The latter attempt is, on my thesis, illegitimate.) (Geach 1956, 34).

We understand "the mouse is large" (grammatical predicative) because we take it to mean "the mouse is a large mouse" (logical attributive). In the first statement the substantive noun that limits the meaning of "large" is implied (or "disguised," as Geach says); in the second sentence the substantive noun is made explicit. Similarly, he writes, in the grammatically correct predicative use of "good," such as in purported assertions about good *simpliciter*, does not identify a predicate independent of the noun in the phrase. We can make sense of predicative uses of good because the substantive noun that "good" modifies is implied or supplied by context.

This is most obviously the case when we use proper names to predicate the goodness of something or someone. If I say, "Marilynne Robinson is good," referring to Robinson as a novelist, then that is shorthand for saying "Marilynne Robinson is a good novelist." If I am instead referring to Robinson as a good writing professor, then "Marilynne Robinson is good" is shorthand for "Marilynne Robinson is a good writing professor." What the initial statement means depends on the context of the conversation and with respect to what Robinson is being evaluated. Geach identifies this as the proper name's "nominal essence," which can change depending on the context of the utterance (Geach 1956, 34). He

argues that proper names have implicit common nouns (e.g., novelist, writing professor) that are made known by the context. Thus, Geach concludes, “there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so” (Geach 1956, 34). The case of proper names is a specific example of Geach’s general idea that what is predicated by “good” or “bad” will depend on the essence of the thing (within the context of the utterance) of which “good” or “bad” is predicated.

Geach and Aristotle share concerns about the ways in which philosophers understand predications of the good and even the concept of goodness itself. These concerns motivate their arguments and continue to motivate the arguments of skeptics of SG today. The worry is that we fail to see that “good” is said in many ways, so whatever properties “good” refers to in some instance of its predication will depend on the subject of the predicate. What’s more, this then precludes the possibility that the good could be a logically independent property, much less an absolute one.

#### *Making Sense of the Thing Itself: The Superfluous Good*

Aristotle finds no benefit in conceptualizing the good in the way that Plato has, instead he finds the very idea of “the good itself” to be puzzling. In his attempt to make sense of the Platonic claim that the good is “a thing itself” (autohekaston), Aristotle considers the possibility that Plato has a specific type of goodness in mind when he discusses the goodness of the PFG. Rather than a general conception of the good, the universal for all things called good, Aristotle considers an alternative interpretation in which the PFG is the universal for all things good in the specific way that the PFG is good. But these expressions such as “a thing itself” and “the good itself” require some elucidation,

according to Aristotle, because they seem to lead to conceptual confusion. Aristotle considers what a possible interpretation of “a thing itself” could mean by putting it in the broader context of Plato’s theory of forms:

And one might ask the question, what in the world they *mean* by ‘a thing itself’, if in man himself and in a particular man the account of man is one and the same. For in so far as they are men, they will in no respect differ; and if this is so, neither will there be a difference in so far as they are good. (*EN*1096a35-1096b3)

If “man himself,” i.e. the Platonic form of human, and a particular human share the same nature because they both exemplify the same account of human (i.e. the *logos* of human), which is what Plato seems to say, then the form of man and that particular man are the same insofar as they share that account. If that is how forms relate to their particulars, Aristotle argues, then the good itself (i.e. the PFG) must relate to particular good things in the same way, by sharing the same account. They must share a *singular* account of the good. This being the case, there is no need to maintain that the form of the good itself is distinct from the good things. The account of the good is available to us in the particular good thing, thus rendering the good itself *superfluous* to acquiring an account of the good. The forms, on Aristotle’s view, do not need to be independent entities and, following a similar rationale, he argues that they need not be *eternal* entities either. Aristotle argues, “[whiteness itself] will not be good any the more for being eternal, since that [white object] which lasts long is no whiter than that which perishes in a day” (*EN*1096b3-5). The account is no truer or more accurate whether it is eternal or simply in the particular visible thing at the moment, so there is no benefit to maintaining that an eternal account exists. The Pythagoreans, Aristotle notes, counted the one as among the things that are good, but their account was more plausible because they did not try to identify it with the good itself,



as Plato had (*EN*1096b5-7).<sup>6</sup> In Aristotle's attempt to make sense of Plato's notion of the good itself, he finds that the good itself, as an independent, transcendent entity, brings us no closer to understanding the good or recognizing good things in the world.

The superfluity of the good is a concern shared by contemporary skeptics of SG. Contemporary proponents of SG, particularly moral non-naturalists, share the idea that the good must be a distinct and transcendent entity, and Moore is considered the father of non-naturalism. In an earlier section of this chapter, I explained that moral non-naturalism is a view within contemporary metaethics that maintains that our fundamental value concepts refer to non-natural properties and these properties ground the objectivity of our fundamental value claims. Non-naturalists argue that the good, being a basic normative property, is neither part of the natural, descriptive world, nor reducible to any natural properties. There is an advantage to using this conception of goodness for metaethicists because it is a property of goodness that is absolute. As an absolute property, SG is effectively both transcendent and eternal. If a thing possesses a property of absolute goodness, then its value is mind-independent, transcending the natural world, existing regardless of time, place, or other relations obtaining. According to non-naturalists like Moore, a thing that possesses SG would still be good even if it existed alone in the universe. Some things are just plain good (or plain bad) regardless of any subjective experience of them or our ability to explain how these special properties fit into the natural world. The advantage of having absolute goodness in one's conceptual repertoire is that it seems to

---

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, Commentary, no. 878-88, pp. 38-39 (Lec VII).

eliminate the threat of relativism. This is of particular advantage to moral philosophers wishing to eliminate the threat of moral relativism.

Richard Kraut objects to conceiving of the good as goodness simpliciter (i.e. SG) mainly because it is defined as an absolute value. One of his primary arguments against SG is motivated by the same concern as Aristotle's argument above, namely the concern that SG is a *superfluous* value concept (Kraut 2011, 2013). According to Kraut, there is no significant theoretical or conceptual work for SG to do and so there is no need to posit anything like SG (Kraut 2013, 497). Kraut's argument for this conclusion only occasionally resembles Aristotle's, but there are some interesting parallels. Aristotle argues that the PFG does nothing to help us understand goodness itself or the good in the things in the world. In the same way that we are able to study the nature of human beings by studying particular human beings while ignoring the Platonic form of "man itself," we can study the nature of goodness by studying the visible good things in the world. This follows even on Plato's view, since the PFG and the visible goods share one account of goodness. Kraut argues that SG can give us no direction in coming to know or identify the good. The most fundamental value concept on Kraut's view is what he calls "relative goodness" (contra absolute goodness) and this is expressed via a particular "good for" relation.

Kraut's conception of this "good for" relation is central to this argument. A better term for Kraut's "relative goodness" is "welfare goodness" (WG) because he is referring to what is good for someone or something (i.e. that which contributes to its welfare). Though it is relative to the someone or something under consideration, it is not a gateway to wholesale value relativism. WG is an objective value. I will only cover some of the core

tenets of his view here, but Kraut's full exposition of WG can be found in *Against Absolute Goodness* (2011) and in *What is Good and Why* (2007). Kraut describes WG in terms of flourishing, specifically the flourishing of humans and all living things. "What is good for living things is their flourishing," Kraut claims, "but this is a general concept, the details of which must be specified for each kind of living thing and sometimes further specified to individuals within a kind" (Kraut 2011, 71-72). This shouldn't be conflated with Geach's attributive goodness, though both are types of objective goodness that are relative to some subject. Kraut's view is that "a thing's making a contribution to someone's flourishing and its being good for someone are one and the same relationship" (Kraut 2011, 70). "X makes a contribution to S's flourishing" has the same referent as "X is good for S." These are two ways of describing the same relation (*ibid.*). Similarly, whatever can be said to constitute a thing's flourishing is the same stuff that can be said to constitute its good.

Like Geach (and Thomson) Kraut acknowledges that we have ways talking about goodness that can easily confuse us into thinking we are talking about SG when in fact we are referring to WG. We sometimes say things like "G is good for S." This does not mean "G is good (SG)" and is possessed by S. "G is *good for S*" is a two place predicate. So if G is good for all living things, then we might say "G is good" as shorthand for "G is good for all living things," and our shorthand appears to be a one-place predicate. We are not actually predicating SG of anything, however, we are making a statement about the objective value that G contributes to S's welfare or flourishing.

Kraut argues that we do not need to first be first acquainted with SG in order to know about WG itself or about what possesses WG for any particular subject (2011, 32).

He claims that “the relationship of being good for someone should not be defined, partly or wholly, as consisting in something’s being absolutely good,” but often proponents of SG claim that being absolutely good consists in, partly or wholly, the relationship of being good for someone (Kraut 2011, 30, 37, 66; cf. Orsi 2013, 1497). But if SG is defined as that which is always good for someone or something, then it seems that SG is not absolute. In this case, SG derives its value by being *good for* something. SG is not only dependent upon WG, it is reducible to it. Consider the example of friendship and suppose that friendship possesses SG in virtue of being always *good for* someone; SG supervenes on the WG of friendship. Kraut would say that SG—an additional, supervenient property—adds nothing to our understanding of the value of friendship, nor does it give us a reason to choose friendship as a good. WG is doing the conceptual, epistemic, and normative work here, by providing some understanding of the value of friendship and giving us a reason to choose it. SG, much like the PFG in Aristotle’s argument above, fails to aid us in our philosophical inquiry into the good and thus is rendered superfluous as a value concept.

*Making Sense of the Thing Itself: The Unintelligible Good*

Aristotle concedes that there might be an alternative, more plausible, characterization of Plato’s view that of the form of the good. He goes on to show, however, that even this view is fraught with conceptual confusion. Aristotle presents the alternative view in the following passage:

an objection to what we have said, however may be discerned in the fact that the Platonists have not been speaking about *all* goods, and that the goods that are pursued and loved for themselves are called good by reference to a single Form, while those which tend to produce or to preserve these somehow or to prevent their contraries are called so by reference to these, and in a different sense. Clearly, then,

goods must be spoken of in two ways, and some must be good in themselves, the others by reason of these. (*EN*1096b8-14)

This characterization defines the form of the good as the form exclusively of those goods that are good in themselves, that is, those that are pursued as ends. These are intrinsic goods in that they have their ends in themselves and are pursued for those intrinsic ends. Aristotle draws out a distinction between these intrinsic goods and instrumental goods that are pursued for some end external to them, i.e. some other good that the instrumental goods will produce or preserve. The instrumental goods are only good in virtue of their usefulness for producing intrinsic goods. This distinction leads to problems for Plato's view.

Aristotle draws out the problems that follow from the alternative Platonic view in this passage:

Let us separate, then, things good in themselves from things useful, and consider whether the former are called good by reference to a single Idea. What sort of goods would one call good in themselves? Is it those that are pursued even when isolated from others, such as intelligence, sight, and certain pleasures and honours? Certainly, if we pursue these also for the sake of something else, yet one would place them among things good in themselves. (*EN*1096b15-19)

The primary problem emerges when we move from speaking in abstractions to identifying what things are good in themselves. The examples Aristotle uses are examples of things he classifies as intrinsic goods. Aristotle conceives of sight as an activity that is pursued for its own sake, i.e. it is pursued for an end that is the activity itself. Seeing is what it is to have sight and also the end of the activity of sight. It is a complete activity in itself in the sense that its end just is its active state. Similarly with intelligence, when the intellect grasps the

truth of some thing it is active and that activity is its end. An active intelligence is its own end.

A problem arises because these types of good things may also be pursued for ends external to the activities themselves. Sight is an end in itself but may also be pursued for the sake of navigating a boat, for example. In this case, the goods that are good in themselves are also good for the sake of some end external to them, and therefore not exclusively pursued for their own sakes. Their nature, as goods, seems to be different from that which characterizes the Idea of the Good, namely being exclusively good in itself. For the form of the good to be the cause and paradigm for a class of “good in itself” things, “good in itself” must be predicated identically in all these things. It seems to be predicated differently of the form (which is exclusively good in itself) and those things that are good in themselves and additionally good for what they produce. According to Aristotle there seems to be no contenders for goods that are exclusively good in themselves. The question arises: “is nothing other than the Idea good in itself?” (*EN*1096b19). If this is the case, and Aristotle thinks it is, then the only thing that can be predicated “good in itself” will be the form of the good, and no set of entities that are good in themselves exists. In effect, “the form will be empty,” Aristotle says (*EN*1096b19-20).

This argument on Aquinas’ interpretation takes the form of a dilemma, but it is more accurately described as a trilemma (1964, 40).<sup>7</sup> The first two horns are sketched in this passage below (also quoted above):

Let us separate, then, things good in themselves from things useful, and consider whether the former are called good by reference to a single Idea. What sort of

---

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, Commentary, no. 92, p. 40.

goods would one call good in themselves? Is it those that are pursued even when isolated from others, such as intelligence, sight, and certain pleasures and honours? Certainly, if we pursue these also for the sake of something else, yet one would place them among things good in themselves. (*EN* 1096b15-19)

Given examples of things that are said to be good in themselves, we discover that some (if not all) of the things which are good in themselves are also good for other ends. It is either the case that these things conform to the form of the good, and so the account of the form of the good is not properly characterized as exclusively good in itself, making this characterization of Plato's view inconsistent with the alternative account of the PFG. Or it is the case that the good things do not conform to the form of the good, and (assuming there are no other examples of exclusively intrinsic goods forthcoming) the form of the good is the only thing good in itself, and so this characterization of Plato's view is flawed. Either the form of the good is exclusively good in itself, in which case the form is not predicated of anything, or the form of the good is predicated of things intrinsically and instrumentally good, in which case it isn't exclusively good in itself.

The third horn allows that maybe some things, yet to be identified, are good in themselves and it is these things that share in the form of the good. If that is the case, however, the things of which this goodness is predicated must be good in exactly the same way. A single form will have a single account (*logos*) or internal character, and this account will be true of all things participating in that form. But the things which are called "good" admit of various accounts of goodness. Aristotle explains the problem as follows:

But if the things we have named are also things good in themselves, the account of the good will have to appear as something identical in them all, as that of whiteness is identical in snow and in white lead. But of honour, wisdom, and pleasure, just in respect of their goodness, the accounts are distinct and diverse. The good, therefore, is not something common answering to one Idea. (1096b21-26)

If all things called “good” are good in themselves in the same way, then the sense or definition of goodness should be the same in each thing. Just as whiteness is a property that is instantiated identically in all white things, so good would be the identical property in all good things. Yet we know that things such as honor, wisdom, and pleasure are good in different respects; that is, the goodness of each of these things is defined differently. An identical property (or set of properties) is not instantiated when goodness is predicated of honor, wisdom, and pleasure. What is predicated in each case is distinct, just as the account (*logos*) of good for each of these things is distinct; therefore, the goodness of these things cannot all share in a single form. The forms are not *one-over-many* after all. They do not explain how the good is one, as Plato would have it. The Platonic doctrine is inadequate again here.

Geach’s argument against Moorean goodness described in the previous section bears some similarities to this argument of Aristotle’s as well because much rests on the acknowledgement that “good” seems to be predicated in many ways. Still, Judith Jarvis Thomson’s critique of Moore, which is in many respects a development of Geach’s critique, is a better contemporary analogue because she focuses on the unintelligibility of SG. In the arguments discussed earlier in this section Aristotle is trying to make sense of this conception of the good as *in itself* and *by itself*. Even when Aristotle considers a potentially more charitable Platonic view of the good, namely that the PFG is not the form of all goods but only those goods that are good in themselves (i.e. intrinsic goods) this unintelligibility persists and is even compounded. It is interesting that Aristotle considers this narrower view as an alternative, more plausible, view of the PFG in light of the connections I make



here, because Moore, after *PE*, narrows his own view of the good to be exclusively about intrinsic goods. Moore never recants his work in *PE*, but in later work he continues this discussion in terms of “intrinsic value” and not the seemingly more general “good *simpliciter*.” In the preface to the second edition of *PE*, Moore explains that he failed to make this distinction in the first edition, namely that the good that concerns him is not what is generally good, but that which is good *in itself* and *by itself*.

Thomson’s overall critique of the Moorean view of goodness is based on the claim that we cannot actually make sense of it, especially when it is understood as *intrinsic* goodness. As I said previously, part of Thomson’s critique of SG mirrors Geach’s. She agrees with Geach (and Aristotle) that there is no unique property or concept of goodness that is common to all things called “good.” Thomson borrows Geach’s language to make the distinction between predicative and attributive adjectives, so that she can also argue that “good” is never logically predicative. According to Thomson, inquiring into *the goodness simpliciter of X* is as intelligible as inquiring into *the goodness simpliciter of a melon* (i.e., not its goodness as a melon). Thomson argues that our “good” claims are actually claims about *goodness in some respect*. A “good” claim such as, “this melon is good” is actually saying that “this melon is good in some respect;” specifically it is good *qua* melon (Thomson 2008, 17). According to Thomson, everything that is “good” is *good in some respect* or (equivalently) *good in a way*. In other words, there is no SG; there are instead various ways of being good (Thomson 1992). SG is unintelligible if we take it to be a logically independent predicate.

Thomson argues that SG is unintelligible in a different, but related, way. She acknowledges that some adjectives have both an attributive and a predicative sense, and she considers whether “good” might be one of these adjectives. For example, “famous” is one such adjective. *X* can be *a famous K* (i.e. famous *as a K*) or *simply* famous. If “good” is like “famous,” then perhaps the predicative use of good indicates a different sense of good than when it is used attributively. Thomson argues that this cannot be the case because of the epistemic obscurity of the predicative “good.” We know what it is to be simply famous; it is to be *simply* well-known. Given this common definition of “famous,” we have no reason to doubt the intelligibility of the predicative use (Thomson 2008, 14). SG is problematic because we don’t have a clear idea of what it is to be simply good. Moore’s *unanalyzability thesis* states that there can be no definition of the good, not merely that we do not *yet* have the correct definition, because it is a simple property. Only a complex property, consisting of parts, can have an analysis, according to Moore. If there is no analysis of the good and knowledge of it is supposed to be acquired via intuition, what resources do those like Thomson (and myself) have if our intuitions fail to recognize this property when it is purportedly presented to us. For example, the state of affairs of *having a personal friendship* is one that Moore took to possess SG (referring to SG, at the time, as “intrinsic value”). If all Moore means by “intrinsic value” or SG is that something like friendship is a good in itself and not for what it produces, then perhaps we could agree on this, but Moore’s claim is stronger. It is that friendship has an absolute value apart from anything else that exists. Moore’s *isolation test*, which is supposed to help us judge which things possess SG, would have us imagine some personal friendship existing alone in a vacuum.

Then we are to decide whether this friendship existing, as it is in the void, adds value to the world or not. If it does, then it is *simply* good; if it does not, then it is not. My problem with this sort of thought experiment is that I don't have any particular intuitions of this kind, or more specifically I don't know how to begin to judge what has value in the void apart from anything else existing. I don't intend to go off on a tangent to critique Moore's isolation test, here, instead I only mean to show that one's inability to recognize Moorean goodness does not reflect a defect in their epistemic faculties or moral sensibilities. This is not a thought experiment that we can expect everyone to have intuitions about, and if space permitted I would argue any intuitions that come out of the isolation test should be viewed with suspicion given the obscurity of the very idea.

Thomson doesn't develop a critique of the isolation test either, but I bring it to bear on her position because even a cursory look at it should lend credibility to her argument that Moore's conception of the good is epistemically opaque and so is unintelligible (Thomson 2008, 11). I imagine that when she simply insists that she does not understand what Mooreans mean when they refer to SG that some view this as obstinacy on her part. Perhaps this explains why both those who are sympathetic to and those who are critical of her position on SG often overlook this particular argument, concerning epistemic obscurity. I, however, find it worth discussing because I too have puzzled over the epistemic obscurity of this property. If Thomson (or myself) has difficulty understanding what Moore is referring to when he speaks of SG (i.e. "intrinsic value"), and yet is not able to observe it via the prescribed method, *and* is told that it is an unanalyzable concept, then how can we expect her to affirm that it exists or trust that anyone can reliably identify its presence as a

real property in the world. In short, we have legitimate grounds for arguing that SG is epistemically unintelligible.

Even if the epistemic argument is to be disregarded, Thomson argues that the unintelligibility of the concept of SG emerges in another way. Thomson argues that when SG is understood as an ontologically simple property possessed by a subject in the way that Moore envisions, we are led to absurd or unintelligible results. This argument that has received more attention than the previous perhaps because of its connection to Geach's critique of SG. The example Thomson uses works as a sort of *reductio* to show that Moore's conception of the good is deeply confused. In short, Thomson shows how taking our common attributive uses of good to be expressions of SG (as Moore does) commits us to value claims that are at best counter-intuitive and at worst contradictory. Remember that in *PE* Moore claims that we need to observe all of the good things, if we are to understand the nature of the good expressed in the primary subject of ethics, namely "good conduct."

Thomson's example goes as follows:

- 1) If A is a good tennis player, "A is good simpliciter."
- 2) A is a good tennis player.
- 3) If A is a bad chess player, "A is bad simpliciter."
- 4) A is a bad chess player.
- 5) Therefore, A is both good *and* bad simpliciter. (Thomson 2008, 10)

Thomson argues that if it's possible to be good and bad simpliciter simultaneously, then these must be very strange properties (*ibid.*)<sup>8</sup> But if simple properties are like the

---

<sup>8</sup> Where Geach argued that all predicative uses of good actually refer to attributive goodness, Thomson argues that we need to make more fine-grained distinctions because there are various ways in which a thing can be (attributively) good. Thomson's general position is that all goodness is goodness in a way or "in some respect", however she does specify various goodness properties (2008, 19-33). For example, the property of being a good specimen of its kind that we find in statements such as "Y is good *qua* Y." The property of *being a good Y qua Y* exists only if Y is a goodness-fixing kind. For any thing to be "goodness-fixing" it must have a

property “yellow,” as Moore contends, then we are forced to accept the apparent contradiction in cases such as the one above. Even if this doesn’t generate a proper contradiction, at the very least, it is counter-intuitive to judge the same thing simply bad *and* simply good, full stop. An Aristotelian way out of this tangle is to explain that A is good in one respect and bad in another. This is Thomson’s considered view; all good things are good *in some respect* (Thomson 2008, 19-23, cf. 17). Here, with this example, Thomson demonstrates the absurdity of trying to understand SG as a simple, absolute property. If SG is a logically independent predicate, such as “white” (i.e. Aristotle’s example) or “yellow” (i.e. Moore’s example) then examples of reasoning like Thomson uses above suggest that SG must not be picking out the absolute value property proponents of SG presume to be defending. Moorean goodness, on Moore’s own account, is conceptually unintelligible.

### *Explaining the Connection Among Good Things*

One of the potential advantages of Plato’s theory of the good is that it has an explanation of how all things called “good,” though various, bear some relation to one another—namely, they participate in the same transcendent form. The problem, as we’ve seen, is that the connection Plato makes is too strong. To fully explain Aristotle’s view would require an in-depth explanation of Aristotle’s metaphysics and, admittedly, that

---

nature or function that can designate and determine what it is for a thing to be a good. Tennis player is a goodness-fixing kind; the standards for being a good tennis player are fixed by the nature and function of the tennis player. The goodness property in the statement, “those are good tennis shoes” is not the same property precisely because “tennis shoes” is not a goodness-fixing kind. Not all tennis shoes are meant for playing tennis. “Tennis shoes” refers to a broad category of footwear, too diverse to constitute a single kind. The property (or properties) identified when we speak of “good tennis shoes” is what Thomson calls *good-modified*. A thing is *good-modified* when it is good as/for/at/with something (2008, 30-33). There is not a single nature of tennis shoes that we can rely on to fix the standards of goodness. Those standards will depend on the context in which we refer to those good tennis shoes.

would take us too far afield of the purpose of this chapter. Still, I want to briefly introduce some of Aristotle's thoughts on the connection among good things. Aristotle explains the connection in a way that is rarely discussed in contemporary metaethics.<sup>9</sup> What he proposes is what we can anachronistically categorize as a *middle view* of the ontological and semantic connections among particular things that share the same "name," e.g. being, good, and health. On one end is Platonic univocity (à la Plato and Moore) and reductionist univocity (à la Kraut and all other philosophers who reduce the good to some singular value concept) and on the other end is the fluctuating, unsystematic family of resemblance model (à la Wittgenstein). Aristotle's view, at the very least, illustrates that there is another way in which these concepts might be connected (and, I argue, there are likely more yet to be examined) that mainstream metaethicists and value theorists have failed to give its due consideration. Though Aristotle's metaphysics is generally acknowledged to be problematic and unsustainable within contemporary theory, we have seen, especially within ethics, the fruitful adaption of his work sans a thorough Aristotelian metaphysics. Developing a full account of the good based on Aristotle's view is, perhaps, a promising area for future research. In this chapter, however, I only use it as an example of an alternative way forward, which fits our intuitions about the connections among "good" things while avoiding the overgeneralizing tendencies of universalists.

---

<sup>9</sup> Paul Bloomfield is the exception. In "Of Goodness and Healthiness: A Viable Moral Ontology" (1997), Bloomfield uses Aristotle's examples of multivocity and Aquinas' account of analogy to argue that the ontological structure of the connection among good things is not as vexed or unique as most metaethicists tend to assume.

In *ENI*, 6, Aristotle acknowledges the intuitive connection among all good things and begins to speak to that relationship. First he notes that the good things are not *merely* “things that only chance to have the same name” (1096b27). Here Aristotle refers to his *theory of homonymy*. Things that share the same name are what he calls “homonyms” (*homonumōs/homonumōn*). Some homonyms are “by chance” (*apo tūches*), meaning that the things sharing the same name do so merely incidentally; their shared name does not indicate any deeper relationship among them. A standard example of a homonym by chance is the word “bank” which might refer to the land along a river or to a financial institution. These “names” merely sound and look identical; there is no shared meaning among the name-bearers themselves. Still, according to Aristotle, there are some things that share a name and, while they don’t have the same referent or sense, they are not merely homonymous by chance. Aristotle alludes to this type of homonymy in his earlier argument in *ENI*, 6 on the *multivocity of the good* when he reminds his audience that “being” has multiple senses by claiming that “good” is said in as many ways (*pollachōs legemenon*) as “being” (*EN* 1096a23, cf. *EPI*, 8, 1217b25).

“Being” in Aristotle’s ontology, as described in the *Categories*, refers to a variety of ways entities are said “to be” (i.e. the different ways that “being” is predicated of an entity). There is, however, a primary sense of being that is the core conception of being, and the other predications of being are not identical to it rather they are dependent senses of “being” that can only be understood in relation to the primary sense of being. The primary sense of being, in Aristotle’s ontology, refers to the existence of a particular entity. The primary way of being is what Aristotle scholars refer to as a “primary substance,” i.e. an

individual entity, literally a “this.” Socrates is a primary substance, for example. “Socrates is,” predicates “being” in the primary sense. All of the other predications of “being” are ontologically dependent upon the primary sense, i.e. the existence of the primary substance, and thus are derivative predications of “being.” “Socrates is bearded” predicates an incidental feature of Socrates, and notice that this secondary predication of “to be” is dependent on the primary predication. We must predicate the latter before we can predicate the former. “Good,” it can be argued, is predicated in a similarly ordered way. If there is a primary sense of “good” that all other senses of “good” are dependent upon, but not identical to, then this would be a way of connecting the various senses of “good” without positing a single universal. Perhaps “good,” like “being,” is a *core-dependent homonym*. In *ENI*, 6, Aristotle considers this possibility, among others:

Are goods one, then, by being derived from one good [*aph' henos*] or by all contributing to one good [*pros hen*], or are they rather one by analogy? Certainly as sight is in the body, so is reason in the soul, and so on in other cases. But perhaps these subjects had better be dismissed for the present; for perfect precision about them would be more appropriate to another branch of philosophy. (*EN*1096b27-31)

First, he suggests that all of the goods might be united by being based on or having some causal relationship to one type of good (*aph' henos, pros hen*). The Aristotelian locution “*pros hen*”—meaning roughly, “related to the one” or, as seen above, “contributing to one”—is a direct reference to core-dependent homonymy. Alternatively, Aristotle considers that it is possible that the goods and the good are homonymous by analogy. Because the example that follows is an analogy, it might be tempting to interpret Aristotle as merely arguing that the various senses of “good” are connected by analogy. Aristotle is pointing out an analogous relationship between particular “complete” or intrinsic goods,



i.e. those which have their ends in themselves. Sight is an intrinsic good in the body, and this is analogous to reason as an intrinsic good in the soul. But the stronger connection of core-dependent homonymy is implied when he claims that “good” is said in as many ways (*pollachōs legemenon*) as “being” (*EN*1096a23, cf. *EE*1, 8, 1217b25). This echoes his claims about being and health in *Metaphysics* Gamma 2 (1003a33-1003b4), he explains that being and health are said in many ways (*légetai pollachōs*) but each has a relationship to a single origin (*arché*). The origin or “core” is ontologically and semantically prior to the secondary homonyms, thus the secondary homonyms are *core-dependent*. “Healthy” is always connected to the core idea of “health,” for example. Aristotle explains that “healthy” can refer to that which produces health, preserves health, indicates health, or that which receives health (i.e. the subject that can be made healthy) (*Meta.* 1003b33-1003b4). If the good operates according to a parallel ontological structure, then that which is called “good” might refer to what produces goodness, preserves goodness, indicates goodness, and what receives goodness (i.e. the subject that can be made good). These specific connections of good homonyms do not necessarily follow from what Aristotle claims, but I draw the parallel to show the varieties of relationships that might exist between a core sense of the good and its homonyms. There is solid textual evidence supporting the view that Aristotle understood each of these connections as corresponding to one of the four causal processes (*aitia*) that he identifies, or at least three of them: the efficient, material, and final causes (Ward 2008, 79-87). By examining causal relations, either contributing to (i.e. causing) the core idea or issuing from (i.e. caused by) the core idea, Aristotle has a systematic way of explaining the connections among core-dependent homonyms (and by extension the

connection among “good” things). Given Aristotle’s epistemology, it makes sense that he would identify these connections as causal, because it is through identifying the causes (*aitia*) of things, and ordering of those causes according to their proximity to the core meaning or idea, that we can come to a full understanding of the thing we are studying and defining (Ward 2008, 94-97). An example will help make these ideas clearer. I borrow one from Julie Ward’s book on Aristotle’s theory of homonymy:

I propose to apply [the causal theory of homonymy] to the analysis of the medical previously offered: there are several moving [efficient] causes, including the medical mind, the medical instrument, and the medical operation...we might say that the medical mind, or the doctor, is a moving cause of medicine because he or she is the source of change with regard to the end of medicine, healing; the scalpel is a moving cause insofar as it is designed as a tool for bringing about healing; the operation is a moving cause insofar as it is a procedure used to bring about healing. (Ward 2008, 95)

In Ward’s example of the medical, above, we can see a very specific and systematic ordering of the causes to and from the core idea under analysis. The “moving” causes of the medical such as the medical mind and the medical instrument are producing and preserving the practice of medicine insofar as they produce the final end of medicine which is healing. The medical mind is ranked higher in order than the instrument, meaning the doctor has priority and closer proximity to the core idea of the medical, because it is the primary moving [efficient] cause toward healing.

Applying this causal analysis to various value (“good”) concepts would be a painstaking and complex project, but I suspect something like this would illuminate the connections of the various senses of “good” that philosophers use in “good” claims, especially those regarding moral theory. There is much to work out before something like this could be accomplished, and perhaps a full analysis is not necessary or even helpful in

the end, but what Aristotle's theory illustrates is that there are certain terms and concepts that are not reducible to a single definition or analysis, and this does not threaten the objectivity or reality of the referents of these terms. This brief gloss of Aristotle's theory also illustrates that there are many unexplored points of connection among the various value concepts that metaethicists and value theorists have thus far neglected to study.

An additional complicating factor in extending Aristotle's causal analysis, which is also relevant to the critique of Plato in *ENI*, 6, is that Aristotle makes a significant distinction between the practical good and the theoretical good. And it is not clear if or how these goods might be connected on his view. Aristotle does not bother clarifying his theory of homonymy or any other relevant aspects of his metaphysics in *ENI*, 6 because, he says, it is not within the purview of ethics which deals with the practical, human good:

But perhaps these subjects had better be dismissed for the present; for perfect precision about them would be more appropriate to another branch of philosophy.  
(*EN*1096b30-31)

The theory of homonymy is not only (or even primarily) about words, it is about the basic structure of ontological reality, and thus is more appropriate to the study of first principles (i.e. metaphysics). Metaphysics is a more precise science, and so the methods must be more precise. The human good, however, is subject to many unknowns and requires experience and practice to work out. It may be influenced by more precise "sciences," such as metaphysics, but it is closer to an art or technical skill (*techné*), though it isn't exactly those either. Aristotle blatantly dismisses this more technical, abstract philosophizing in favor of that which is practical, even empirical, when discussing ethics. The stark contrast between practice and theory is not foreign to many (perhaps most) contemporary moral

philosophers, but there is still a sense among contemporary analytic metaethicists and formal value theorists that you must do the work in their areas before a philosopher can have a coherent normative theory or applied ethical argument. The problem I find is that the work that the metaethicists and formal value theorists who specialize on the good are doing is completely irrelevant to normative theory and to practical decision-making generally.

### *Aspirational and Ideal Goodness*

Aristotle seems to bring up a similar worry in his critique of the PFG in *ENI*, 6. He questions the usefulness of the good as a model or ideal to strive toward. He considers the possibility:

Perhaps, however, some one might think it worthwhile to have knowledge of it with a view to the goods that *are* attainable and achievable; for having this as a sort of pattern we shall know better the goods that are good for us, and if we know them shall attain them. (1097a1-3)

The PFG might be worth knowing and pursuing as an aspirational goal, something to aim for when pursuing the goods that *are* achievable or attainable. The contemporary analogue to this would suggest that perhaps SG or various related theories of intrinsic value are worth knowing and understanding, because they help clarify our reasons and arguments and general knowledge of the practical, ethical goods. Aristotle argues, experience suggests otherwise.

This argument has some plausibility, but seems to clash with the procedure of the sciences; for all of these, though they aim at some good and seek to supply the deficiency of it, leave on one side the knowledge of *the* good. Yet that all the exponents of the arts should be ignorant of, and should not even seek, so great an aid is not probable. It is hard, too, to see how a weaver or a carpenter will be benefited in regard to his own craft by knowing this 'good itself', or how the man who has viewed the Idea itself will be a better doctor or general thereby. For a

doctor seems not even to study health in this way, but the health of man, or perhaps rather the health of a particular man; for it is individuals that he is healing. (1097a1-13)

He notes that humans don't need knowledge of *the good* to achieve other kinds of goods, such as the goods of technical skills or the good of some individual human life. We can achieve these goods and knowledge of them without knowing *the good itself*. No craftsman seeks to know the good itself to perfect their craft, and for good reason, namely the perfection of their craft is relative to the specific good of that craft. The good itself is irrelevant.

On my view, Geach, Thomson, and Kraut have all argued to this conclusion in different ways. They have tried to show the irrelevance (and often the unintelligibility) of the good itself for ethics and moral theory. Geach shows that Moore's metaethical claims about the good rested on a confusion and so they could not help us make sense of any actual "good" claims. Moore's theory seems to betray an ignorance of the properties that "good" refers to in the actual world. Thomson, similarly, shows that thinking of the good as a logically independent predicate leads to absurd results. What's more, insisting on the existence of a self-evident property for which no definition can be given is not very compelling evidence for philosophers, such as Thomson and myself, who do not find the independent existence of this property to be at all intuitive. Kraut argues that SG is perhaps intelligible as a concept, but that it is only so because it is reducible to another value concept, namely that which is "good for" someone or something, what I call "welfare goodness."

My argument is for the same conclusion as the prominent skeptics of SG: *the good itself is irrelevant*. I would not dismiss it as having no philosophical relevance, but I see no relevance for it within ethical theory and practical decision-making. There may be areas of metaphysics, philosophy of religion, and formal value theory for which discussions of SG might have some theoretical import; however, the reasons for insisting that moral philosophers ought to concern themselves with SG are too weak to be taken seriously.

I see some similarities between my views and some of Aristotle's arguments in *ENI*, 6, particularly the last two I discuss in this chapter. I argue that areas of inquiry related to the human good (i.e. ethics and moral theory) are best done using the "bottom-up" method in which experience and practice always take priority over theory. Lived experience is the primary standard for limiting and shaping our moral concepts, theories, and normative claims. In other words, moral theory and decision-making must be informed by experience and practice in the actual world. This argument bears some similarities to Aristotle's argument regarding keeping a distinction between the human good and other areas of philosophical study, and more generally between practical philosophy and theoretical philosophy. The last argument of Aristotle's critique of the PFG that I consider here concerns the possibility that the good, i.e. SG, is necessary because it functions as an ideal or an aspirational goal that human beings need in order to produce good things or achieve a good life. I appreciate Aristotle's insight that experience has shown us that this is not true; knowledge of the PFG brings us no closer to practical and human goods. I develop a new argument against SG to show that it is so detached from human interests and the general purpose of ethical theory that it fails advance our moral understanding. Instead, it

leads ethical theory into conceptual confusion, equivocation, and stalled debates. I argue that this idealization is problematic because (1) it feigns universality where none can be had and (2) the “universal” and “objective” good put forward is actually the good of a particular group of dominant philosophers who ignore the realities of marginalized and oppressed voices within philosophy and Western society generally. My arguments, ultimately, are unlike Aristotle’s or any of the prominent neo-Aristotelian critics of SG, but I will show that they are motivated by concerns and methodological commitments that can and should be (given my history of philosophical study) interpreted as neo-Aristotelian.

## CHAPTER 4

### AGAINST SIMPLE GOODNESS: EMPIRICAL ADEQUACY IN ETHICAL THEORY

Where philosophers are uncritically recycling social understandings in moral reflection, and perhaps recycling social understandings that merit critical moral evaluation, it is a task of moral philosophers to adopt reflective methods to identify these blind spots or complacent assumptions, and hence to know enough about the actual structures of social worlds to know where to look and how to test for them. Moral philosophy is indeed a reflective and normative inquiry; it needs to keep track of the positions from which it reflects the social and moral world and the provenance of normative assumptions it finds intuitive or compelling, and to become curious about the link between positions and assumptions.

–Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings*

My critique of simple goodness (SG) is different from those critiques of SG put forward so far in several important respects. While my critique does take some inspiration from Aristotle, and so may appear similar to the prominent critiques, it is primarily influenced by feminist moral philosophy and a range of work in applied ethics. My approach is likely to be viewed as controversial because feminist ethics and applied ethics are not usually brought to bear on debates at the intersection of mainstream metaethics and formal value theory. These four domains of value theory (i.e. feminist philosophy, applied ethics, mainstream metaethics, and formal value theory) are rarely in conversation with one another. In this chapter, however, I argue that this conversation is necessary because the debate about the viability of SG (as a concept or a property invoked in ethical contexts) forces us to ask questions about our standards for legitimate methods of moral justification. These are questions we do not yet seem to have answers for, and so my suggestions for a resolution to the problem of SG are bound to be somewhat unsatisfying. Nonetheless, I introduce some recent work in feminist moral epistemology that is



attempting to articulate standards for moral justification as a promising resolution. I argue that this work could be the basis for developing methods of moral justification that make the inadequacy of appealing to SG in ethical contexts more obvious. In presenting my critique, here, I also hope to show that feminist ethics and applied ethics have the resources to revitalize ethical theory and moral philosophy on the whole.

I was inspired to develop this critique of SG, in part, by the call to reflexive responsibility that Margaret Urban Walker articulates in the epigraph above (Walker 2007, 33-34). Ultimately, on my view, proponents of SG are “uncritically recycling social understandings” of moral norms. The specific worry is that SG has the potential to entrench normative assumptions grounded in little more than the intuitions of a small group of privileged individuals. By stipulating SG is a simple, non-natural metaphysics of goodness, SG can be used to legitimize moral (and evaluative) claims, free from any requirement to provide justification for those claims. This is representative of a widespread problem within normative ethics, namely the tendency to present the assumptions of a privileged few as universal truths applicable to all. Walker argues that moral philosophers have a moral responsibility to bring these shortcomings to light. We must be reflexively critical of our field given that the deliverances of moral philosophy “[tend] to carry the weight of a learned or expert discourse” (Walker 2007, 4). Whether deserved or not, we occupy a position of intellectual authority and our theories, conceptualizations, and ways of talking about morality are granted a degree of legitimacy simply because they come from “moral philosophy.” Moral philosophy should welcome this style of reflexive criticism not merely because philosophy is an inherently self-critical discipline, but because moral philosophy in

particular has lost its way. Ethical theory fails to speak to or make sense of the pressing issues of contemporary life. The current paradigm is misleading and threatens to silence those who are not part of our discipline's rarified conversations.

The distinctive approach to ethical theory that I endorse and defend, here, first began to take shape through my study of the ethics of Aristotle and neo-Aristotelians, such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), Philippa Foot (1978, 1985, 2001), and Elizabeth Anscombe (1958). I found these philosophers' critical perspectives of mainstream ethical theory compelling, and their influence is still evident in my approach. Through the work and guidance of Jennifer Parks (2010) and Diana Meyers (1994, 2011, 2012), I was introduced to the philosophical resources offered by feminist ethics and began to integrate feminist insights into my work and general perspective of philosophical ethics. Finally, the study of other contemporary feminist ethicists and of moral epistemologists, particularly Margaret Urban Walker (2007), Miranda Fricker (2007), Elizabeth Anderson (1993), Onora O'Neill (1996), Alison Jaggar (1989, 2009, 2016) and Martha Nussbaum (1986, 1999), helped to crystallize my views and expand my understanding of how they would best be applied within the current ethical discourse. Thus, ultimately, the feminist ethical perspective has shaped my critique. That is not to say, however, that my arguments and their outcomes are not relevant to mainstream ethical theory. To the contrary, a central point I aim to make here is that my critique of SG is also a critique of contemporary ethical theory.

### *A Feminist Ethical Perspective*

While contemporary feminist ethics cannot be said to endorse a uniform program of ethical theory, there are several generalizable themes that distinguish the feminist

approach from mainstream ethical theory. Feminist philosophers do recognize that mainstream ethical theory is not, itself, a uniform program, however, there is a particular approach to moral philosophy that has historically dominated the field, and contemporary feminist ethicists generally view this dominant approach as in need of critical repair. The common themes of feminist ethics are most easily explained as a response to this approach, so I will provide a sketch of it here. I borrow a helpful distinction from Walker (2007). I have broken down her description to identify six characteristic features of “the regnant type of moral theory in contemporary ethics” (Walker 2007, 58). This approach is characterized by the premium it places on achieving the following objectives:

- (1) Codifiable formulas: It is a “*codifiable* (and usually *compact*) set of moral *formulas* (or procedures for selecting formulas).”
- (2) Highly general rules and principles: “The formulas or procedures (if there are more than one) are typically seen as rules or principles at a high level of generality.”
- (3) Idealized perspectives: “These formulas model what the morally competent agent or ideal moral judge does or should know, however implicitly.”
- (4) Rationalist model of reasoning: “Application of these formulas is typically seen as something like deduction or instantiation.”
- (5) Universal applicability: “The formulas and their applications yield the same [results] for all agents indifferently.”
- (6) Action-Guiding judgments: These results typically take the form of “a justified and determinate *action-guiding* judgment.” (Walker 2007, 58-59)

Notice that (1) – (6) are present in almost all of the traditional systems of normative ethics, namely utilitarianism, Kantian deontological ethics, and contractarianism (virtue ethics being the exception). These features are not merely descriptive, rather, they are rationally required of any “legitimate” moral theory. These standards are derived from what Walker

aply calls the *theoretical-juridical model of morality* (2007). The theoretical-juridical model assumes that there is a “pure theoretical core of moral knowledge,” and the task of moral inquiry is to discover this pure theoretical knowledge (Walker 2007, 58-60). Consequently, moral reasoning on this model is constituted by the rational and impartial application of systematic theoretical principles to the moral choices of all moral agents indifferently. It follows that these moral agents are then conceptualized as fungible “participants in a structured game or institution, or administrators and judges disposing of cases in accord with existing rules and laws” (Walker 2007, 59). Actual moral agents who master this style of moral reasoning are deemed competent, even sophisticated, having successfully mirrored the “ideal moral judge.”

Contemporary feminist ethical theory views this conception of morality, moral agents, and those characteristic features that serve as standards for theoretical adequacy as deeply flawed and exclusionary. Feminist ethicists are effectively working to bring about a paradigm shift within ethical theory. One of the major inspirations for this shift was the publication of Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* (1982). In this book, Gilligan details her experience as a psychologist working with Lawrence Kohlberg on moral development. Gilligan created her research program after realizing that Kohlberg’s model of moral development illegitimately singled out one mode of moral reasoning as the standard of mature, sophisticated moral judgment. This mode, which Gilligan calls an *ethic of justice*, is reflective of the theoretical-juridical approach outlined by Walker. It frames moral reasoning as a practice of reasoning from principles, following law-like rules, and applying them impartially. Gilligan noted how Kohlberg and other psychologists using a similar

model of moral development were finding that women generally did not opt for this justice-centered mode of moral reasoning, and as a result these researchers were concluding that most women do not reach the highest levels of moral development (Gilligan 1982, 10-12). These researchers seemed to realize that women typically did not think this way, and that women were not devoid of moral conscience, and yet they continued to present their results as if they were true of moral development universally. In response, Gilligan decided she would attempt to study the moral development of women and to do so she used a new standard to measure moral maturity, one that could accommodate the social expectations and experiences that, she believed, shaped women's understanding of moral reasoning. Gilligan called it an *ethic of care*. The ethic of care conceptualized morality in terms of caring relationships and avoiding harm to others. Moral agents were not individual lawmakers, rather they understood themselves as fundamentally interdependent and relational, sensitive to the emotional and physical needs and preferences of others, and as having special obligations in virtue of their roles and relationships.

Those who used Kohlberg's model presumed the ideal standard for moral maturity was competency with an ethic of justice, and as a result girls appeared to be less morally sophisticated than boys. Gilligan argued that this result was misleading because the ideal standard was incomplete. By using the ethic of justice as the ideal, Kohlberg's theory was rendering the experience and knowledge of this "feminine" morality invisible. Feminist ethicists recognized that Kohlberg's privileging of a culturally masculine mode of thinking to the exclusion of a culturally feminine mode was one instance of a widespread, systemic

androcentrism inherent to the dominant perspectives of the research in their fields. In the coming years, care ethics became a positive, feminist moral theory in its own right, while the negative critique of the theoretical-juridical mode of ethics, that is easily read into Gilligan's work, has become a mainstay of feminist ethics generally. The goal of the critique is to replace the theoretical-juridical paradigm with one that is inclusive of the experiences and knowledge typically associated with women and members of other social groups rendered invisible by the reigning model.

The story of care ethics shows how the feminist perspective can motivate a powerful and productive reflexive critique of our theoretical starting points. The common themes of feminist ethical theory can be understood as either contributing to or starting from this kind of reflexive critique. Since feminist ethicists are a diverse group comprised of care ethicists, virtue theorists, utilitarians, Kantians, contractarians, pragmatists, anti-theorists, etc., the extent to which they accept or reject the theoretical-juridical paradigm varies, as does the extent to which they take up these themes. The themes that are expressed in my project have already been hinted at, but they will become obvious in the sections that follow.

The first theme of feminist ethical theory is the commitment to a new model of moral reasoning. This model accepts emotion, first personal experience, social and historical context, and empirical data as not merely relevant factors, but as necessary sources of insights for making accurate moral judgments. This is a rejection of the presumption of a rationalist model of moral reasoning, including the presumption that moral reasoning always proceeds from purely theoretical principles. The second theme is a

new conceptualization of the moral agent. The moral agent is no longer theorized as a fungible participant in a structured game, a theoretical *homo economicus*, or “the fiction of a disembedded autonomous male ego” (Benhabib 1992, 3). The moral agent is understood, instead, as a relational, interdependent, socially situated, neither perfectly rational nor perfectly autonomous, embodied subject. The third theme is that feminist ethics is skeptical of claims to knowledge of universal moral truths, recognizing that persons who occupy different social locations will be privy to different bodies of knowledge, and that those who are in a position to make claims to universal moral knowledge (that will be perceived as credible) are generally only able to do so because they occupy a privileged social location. The traditional view that assumes we can access a “God’s eye view” is hubristic and irresponsible. A commitment to the traditional view often results in some privileged perspective being presented as a “discovery” of “universal” truth, while conflicting, complementary, or alternative perspectives are rendered invisible. Fourth, feminist ethical theory aims to reclaim the project of moral theory so that its deliverances are intelligible and applicable to the actual world and to the lived experiences of embodied, human subjects, particularly those who occupy subordinated social positions. Feminist nonideal theory has developed as part of this project. As I note in Chapter 1, the nonideal theorist does not necessarily condemn wholesale the use of ideals and idealizations within moral theory. Idealizing only becomes problematic when it does not assume a “bottom-up” approach. A “bottom-up” approach, in this context, seeks ideals that are compatible with the empirical and practical constraints of the actual world. It effectively reverses the priority of the mainstream approach, which seeks to make the actual world conform to

highly abstract, “universal” ideals.

*Evaluating the Empirical Adequacy of Simple Goodness*

The work in this chapter is of a piece with the third and fourth themes of feminist ethics I outline above. In my critique, I focus particularly on evaluating the *empirical adequacy* of SG, as a particular conception of goodness. There are at least two ways to evaluate the empirical adequacy of a theory or conceptualization. The first way is to examine the ability of a concept (or theory) to explain or incorporate the empirical facts that are important to the topic at hand. For example, feminist ethicists who conceptualize victims and victimhood rely on empirical studies from psychology, sociology, and law, as well as first person accounts, to develop their theories. Their theories prove inadequate if they cannot make sense of the empirical work available on that topic. We expect our philosophical theories and conceptualizations to adopt this *modest empiricism*. Aristotle’s methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN), parts of which were featured in the last chapter, can be interpreted as incorporating a modest methodological empiricism (cf. Kraut 2008, Nussbaum 1986). Aristotle’s inquiry into the philosophical puzzles of ethics in the *EN* begins with his endoxic method, which involves attempting to understand and evaluate various credible views (*endoxa*) on the topic, and comparing these to experience or to how things appear to be (*phainomena*). He is not necessarily attempting to confirm the accepted wisdom or the appearances, so much as to critically scrutinize them with the hopes of preserving whatever truth they contain. The answers to the puzzles, or the theories that result, will then ultimately be tested by practical experience. A modest empiricism uses the credible, relevant expertise and experience to inform and shape its



theories and conceptualizations. Importantly, it need not always confirm the empirical work, particularly when the work is inconclusive, relies on a faulty methodology, or fails to be credible in some other way. Today, within ethical theory, this might require seeking out a variety of perspectives, listening to those who have firsthand experience of particular social and ethical issues, becoming familiar with relevant empirical studies on morality (in psychology, sociology and so on), *as well as* learning how other philosophers are addressing these problems. By being attentive to experience and practice in our philosophical work, our theories help make sense of the world in a way that is useful beyond academic philosophy. Nonetheless, giving credence to lived experience and empirical studies (i.e. descriptive morality) does not have to result in theories that are purely descriptive or that merely confirm preexisting norms and intuitions.

To the contrary, feminist ethicists expect their theories to produce objective (i.e. non-subjectivist) normative judgments. This is, likewise, accomplished by taking a “bottom-up” approach. First, we foster objectivity by providing context and justification for our starting points and assumptions, which are sometimes widely known moral norms but are even more often assumptions, intuitions, and norms that might otherwise be taken for granted. Feminist ethicists often have an unconventional perspective (compared to the generally more androcentric mainstream), particularly with respect to knowledge and established standards of credibility. And this subversion of the typical philosophical understanding of knowledge-production is not the result of an ideological commitment to diversity or anti-authoritarianism, rather the historical experience of women has taken root within feminist methodology. The social history of women (and other historically

subordinated groups) has demonstrated the ways in which the privileging of one perspective (typically of those with the most social power) excludes the voices and perspectives of whoever does not share in that privilege, maintaining their oppression. This is not merely unjust; it is bad epistemic practice. It results in an incomplete picture of the facts. For this reason, most (if not all) feminist ethicists now try to correct for this by recognizing that knowledge is socially-situated and this affects what we can reasonably claim to know. In matters pertaining to moral and social issues, we argue that those who occupy marginalized or otherwise subordinated social positions tend to have a broader and more accurate picture of structural moral and social realities; consequently, the input of subordinated groups often receives priority in the feminist ethics literature. In the end, the failure to recognize and heed these kinds of feminist insights only harms ethical theory because it leads to incomplete or outright false conclusions. We also foster objectivity by subjecting our theoretical starting points, as well as our considered views, to rational scrutiny. We can reject the rationalist model of moral reasoning endorsed by the traditional paradigm without giving up on discursive reasoning. But we acknowledge that for rational scrutiny to be effective or even possible, we have to also promote transparency. Transparency is a prerequisite of rational scrutiny, because without it the context and justification for our theories and conceptualizations are obscured.

Perhaps even more controversially, we can also take a “bottom-up” approach to normativity. The objection that being committed to his kind of empiricism results in merely descriptive morality is unfounded. While providing a thorough argument for how feminist moral theory can generate properly normative judgments is beyond the scope of this

project, I can gesture toward a response. First, given that feminist ethical theory is comfortable being naturalized in various respects, a naturalist view of moral properties or moral facts is easy to accommodate philosophically. On my own view, we do not need to engage in (purportedly requisite) highly abstract discussions of moral metaphysics because moral language and moral truths or claims are not autonomous, existing in a separate special realm of “the moral.” We can make sense of the normative claims in ethical theory the same way we make sense of normative claims generated in other disciplines. There are two analogies that can help explain how this works and how we already engage in this kind of moral justification all of the time. First, moral knowledge, on my view, is analogous to medical knowledge. Just as a medical researcher or physician uses the natural facts of the human body, external factors that affect the body, plus the particular details of an individual’s mental, physical, and practical life to make normative claims (e.g. you ought to take this medication daily) to restore or maintain a person’s health, so the ethicist can use natural facts about human lived experience, the external factors that affect it, plus particular details of an individual’s mental, physical, and practical life to make normative claims (e.g. you ought to tell the truth to your partner) to restore or maintain a person’s practical well-being. Just as a doctor’s recommendations might be highly individualized, but no less objective, so might be the ethicist’s.

Normative or evaluative properties and claims need not be “peculiar” as Moore and many other philosophers (e.g. nonnaturalists) presume. They just need to be properly grounded in context. The other analogy I use helps to make this point more directly. The normative claims of ethical theory generally need not be understood as substantially

different from the normative claims made within the various fields of professional ethics. We do not question the legitimacy of the normative claims made by someone developing journalistic ethics (for example) simply because they have not disclosed their metaethical position on moral properties or because they do not consistently or competently apply a coherent normative system of ethics to their moral judgments. Rather we have expectations about how the journalistic ethicists will analyze the roles and responsibilities of journalists within society, as well as the conduct required to live out those roles and fulfill those responsibilities, and that the ethicist understands the actual experiences of journalists and the history of journalism, etc. From all of this, we can be reasonably assured that the normative claims made by the journalistic ethicist are sound and properly establish good moral norms for the practice of journalism. Other more general moral norms can be established in the same way. By beginning with our historical and social context, we are not necessarily compelled to reinforce existing moral norms. By reincorporating history and social understanding into our normative theories and ethical theorizing generally, we actually mirror the processes by which we establish many of our normative ethical judgments outside of philosophy. No doubt, I am leaving many objections unanswered, but I cannot defend a full account of moral normativity and motivation here. But I do hope I have shown that there are plausible ways of grounding objective normative judgments while incorporating and being sensitive to insights from descriptive morality.

I have already explained the first way of evaluating empirical adequacy that is relevant to my critique. This involves adopting *modest empiricism*, a “bottom-up” approach to knowledge-production. I argued that we achieve this in part by making the starting

points and assumptions of our moral theories transparent, so that they can be subject to rational scrutiny. I also argued that we have to recognize how social, historical contexts and the positions we occupy within them affect how we acquire knowledge, make moral judgments, and structure our moral theories. I also provided some defense against the objection that naturalizing ethical theory in this way forces us to relinquish the objectivity or normativity of our ethical theories.

*Simple Goodness as Rhetorical Device: Social Context*

In her critique of G.E. Moore's theory of value, Elizabeth Anderson astutely describes Moore's isolation test. The isolation test is the process by which, according to Moore, we come to know what objects possess SG and to what degree. Anderson says, the isolation test "mirrors the norms of appreciation for objects in a museum" by making the "demand that intrinsic goods be valued in isolation from their social context, through undisturbed contemplation (1993, 120). Indeed, Moore claims the paradigmatic bases expressing the property SG are the aesthetic experiences of appreciating beautiful objects and taking pleasure in erudite conversations among friends (Moore 1903, 237). Moore was an influential member of the famous Bloomsbury Group. The group met during the early 20th century in Cambridge and included intellectuals of various stripes, including Virginia Woolf and John Maynard Keynes. Anderson quotes Keynes' memoir in which he explains the "method" used by members of the group to defend and critique their arguments:

Victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility. Moore...was a great master of this method—greeting one's remarks with a gasp of incredulity—Do you *really* think *that*, an expression of face as if to hear such a thing reduced him to a state of wonder verging on imbecility, with his mouth wide open and wagging his head in the negative so violently that his hair shook. "Oh!" he would say, goggling at

you as if either you or he must be mad; and no reply was possible. Strachey's methods were different; grim silence as if such a dreadful observation was beyond comment and the less said about it the better...[Woolf] was better at producing the effect that it was useless to argue with *him* than at crushing *you*...In practice it was a kind of combat in which strength of character was really much more valuable than subtlety of mind. (Keynes 1949, 85, 88)<sup>1</sup>

Discursive reasoning was apparently not a part of this method. Providing reasons for their positions or for their evaluations of the positions of others was secondary or irrelevant to the *performance* of presenting an infallible "truth." Moore's mastery of this method casts his claims concerning the self-evident nature of SG in a new light. "Any proposition is self-evident," Moore claims, "when, in fact, there are no reasons which prove its truth" (1903, 194). And, on Moore's view, no reasons are available to prove the simple nature of goodness, nor to prove that this goodness supervenes on particular objects and not others. To be clear, Moore never claims that these intuitions about the self-evident are infallible or *a priori*, only that they are obvious to those who see correctly.

If Moore's appeals to self-evidence as a way of demonstrating "objective" truths were not suspect before, they certainly are now in light of this socio-historical context. It does not take much imagination to see how Moore's theory of SG could be used to reify the tastes of certain individuals in this group as objective value properties. Importantly, the individuals in the Bloomsbury Group were privileged by class, race, and gender. Given their rhetorical style as well as their intellectual clout, it seems likely they would be taken seriously by those outside the group (even if not by Keynes). And while the social context of its origin does not produce a conclusive argument against supporting Moore's theory of

---

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Anderson (1993), p. 121.

the good, it should, at least, raise suspicions about the theory's continued relevance and its potential dangers.

*Simple Goodness as Rhetorical Device: Applied Ethics*

The social context of Moore's value theory is somehow not surprising. My lack of surprise is not an indictment of Moore's character, rather it speaks to the intuition that something is being left unsaid when SG is invoked. We can imagine a simple interaction between a parent and child. The child asks, "Why do I have to do *that*?" The parent replies, "It's just good! It's the good thing to do. That's why." Here the parent is using the rhetorical force of "good, period" plus their authoritative position to force the child to comply (and we can even assume with good reason, e.g. preempting an argument, sparing the child the complicated "adult" explanation, etc.). I thought it would be worth investigating if SG is used within applied ethics as a rhetorical trick to silence or win practical arguments in a higher stake environment, so I researched several topics in applied ethics that I thought would be most likely to invoke a Moorean sense of intrinsic value. Recall, from Chapter 1, that Moore uses "good simpliciter" and "intrinsic value" synonymously, and how many contemporary moral philosophers follow suit. In applied ethics, "intrinsic value" is used sometimes used to refer to what I am calling SG. I looked specifically for articles that made some effort to define the sense of intrinsic value they were working with. Then I focused only on claims to intrinsic value that invoked the supervenience sense (i.e. its value supervenes exclusively on its intrinsic properties) or the nonderivative sense (i.e. its value is justified in itself, and not by appealing to values outside of itself) of intrinsic value (or both), since these are the problematic senses of intrinsic value associated with SG. (These

senses of intrinsic value are described in more detail in Chapter 1). I discovered that SG, or relevantly similar conceptualizations of intrinsic value, were being used in debates concerning the value of public art, the value of animal life, and the value of the environment.<sup>2</sup> I also discovered the complaints being raised about SG within applied ethics were strikingly similar to my own worries as well as some of the worries expressed by the prominent critics of SG who focus primarily on normative and metaethics.

I also found complaints about other values that are invoked to justify normative or moral claims as if the value concepts themselves were supporting reasons or justification enough. Notably, those complaining generally agree with the moral claim being argued for. In other words, they are not objecting to the use of the use of the value concept because they do not like what it is being used to justify. They agree with the conclusion, and even with attributing this particular value in this context, but what they specifically object to is the lack of moral justification. It seems that the problems I associate with SG are not unique to this value concept. For example, an article by Patrick S. Duggan et al., titled “The moral nature of patient-centeredness: ‘just the right thing to do?’” the authors argue that *patient-centered care* is an ideal that many now consider to be the standard of care, but they worry that students and practitioners are being told to accept this standard simply because it is “the right thing to do.” They argue that “very little has been done to ground these claims, ethically speaking” (Duggan et al., 2006, 272). The authors want the medical community to

---

<sup>2</sup> Regarding discussion of intrinsic value and its lack of normative influence for developing public policy protecting animal welfare see Forsberg (2010) and Kupper and De Cock Buning (2011). Regarding discussion of the value of public art and the public policy that supports it see Feinberg (1994) who defends the SG of the arts, and Carroll (1987) who defends the value of public art by explicitly rejecting appeals to intrinsic value as empty and failing to give reasons in support of their position.



be able to evaluate this ideal for themselves, so they provide several competing justifications for the same ideal, in the hopes that this will help them better understand the standard and to authentically act on their consciences.

Another value discussed in this way in the applied ethics literature is human dignity. Human dignity has even more parallels to SG, and I will address those shortly. The common thread between these other values and those uses of SG within these practical ethical debates seems to be that claims to value that are likely to be disputed or the subject of disagreement, need to be presented with adequate justification. Otherwise, they are perceived as empty claims to moral authority or as rhetorical trump cards. A common complaint is made to others within the same communities (who share these values) that they need to make their justifications for them transparent, or these values are not likely to have the action-guiding effect the community believes they should have. What the accumulation of these complaints show is that using these values without adequate moral justification (or ethical grounding) for these them, leads to breakdowns in communication, a false sense of objectivity, and stalled debates.

### *The Rhetorical Power of Human Dignity*

Bioethicist Scott Rae, in “The Language of Human Dignity in the Abortion Debate,” argues that human dignity has become a problematic value concept within the abortion debate (2013). Rae is neither a nonideal theorist nor a feminist ethicist, and yet he argues that appealing to the value of human dignity can lead to seemingly arbitrary attributions of value and an inability to identify or understand the relevant moral details of the ethical issue at hand. He explains:

it is not always clear how the notion of dignity is grounded philosophically and how competing claims based on dignity are resolved. As a result, it can appear that the application of dignity is either somewhat ambiguous (because it can be appealed to for either side of the abortion debate) or that dignity is being used as a rhetorical device with the expectation that invoking basically ends the debate—that it has something akin to trump-card status in the discussion. It functions to cut off debate rather than facilitate it. (2013, 237)

Rae does not respond to this with the proposal that we abandon the concept of human dignity, rather, he argues that those who would invoke it need to modify the way they use it and that they need to articulate the underlying assumptions and commitments that ground their claims to human dignity. He finds it problematic that those who invoke human dignity are not prepared to explain the “metaphysical and anthropological commitments that form the basis for [it]” (Rae 2013, 237). He says that those who do make their commitments explicit typically “argue from a distinctly religious framework,” but they will need to develop “more publicly accessible reasons if they expect them to be taken seriously as a basis for public policy” (ibid.).

According to Rae, “What it means for a fetus to have dignity depends on whether the claim for its moral status can be sustained” (2013, 237). If someone invokes human dignity in a debate, according to Rae, it is not likely to be dismissed because respect for human dignity is already a widely accepted moral norm (ibid.). Though a claim to human dignity guarantees a certain amount of respect, Rae argues that ethicists involved in the abortion debate do not seem to recognize that “our use of dignity reflects our broader philosophical commitments, which are sometimes smuggled in to the discussion without being explicitly identified” (ibid.). Rae says that appealing to human dignity without the substantive justification is still granted a presumption of objectivity, even of absolute value, within the

context of philosophical debate (much in the way that contemporary appeals to SG are), but it fails to deliver the desired practical effects in public life. Rae writes:

for dignity to be a more helpful concept in this debate, both sides need to recognize that there are legitimate competing claims to dignity. Further, they need to be clear about the process they use to resolve these competing claims. Failure to recognize that there are indeed competing claims here sets the discussion back...Although the respective weighting of these competing claims may seem self-evident to both sides, a lack of clarity on either side often makes the use of the term *dignity* confusing. Again, one runs the risk of smuggling in a highly debatable way of addressing these contrasting claims...appeals to dignity are helpful in this discussion but not without the assumptions underlying the use of the concept being clear. (ibid.)

There are many parallels in Rae's critique of the use of human dignity with my critique of the use of SG. The assumptions underlying claims to SG are obscured. Those who try to make them clear mainly appeal to intuition. But so long as we allow the practice of invoking this type of concept without requiring transparency about one's reasons for making a claim to it (i.e. without requiring adequate justification for the claim) we cannot settle disagreements about what is actually good nor can we be confident that we are consistently applying the concept. Rae assumes that our moral norms have guided us pretty well thus far, and so he affirms the tradition of invoking human dignity within the abortion debate. Nonetheless, we need to acknowledge that it is not merely dangerous to allow ourselves to be unreflectively guided by current moral norms, but doing it in this way, by substituting rhetorical power for intelligible reasons, makes rational argument irrelevant or impossible.

The special status of human dignity combined with its intuitive associations gives it a rhetorical power that steers the debate in a counterproductive direction. Those who play the "human dignity card" seem to believe they are introducing a self-evident fact that is

going to secure their “win” in the debate. But because the abortion debate has to adjudicate between competing claims for human dignity (i.e. between the mother’s versus the fetus’), whoever plays the card first wins. Playing the game this way, introduces ambiguity and arbitrary judgments into the discussion, making it more difficult to identify or focus on the morally relevant details of the cases at hand and potentially stifles understanding of what is actually at stake. Using human dignity in this way stalls the debate. According to Rae, even if ethicists are willing to accept implicit appeals to moral norms and intuitions alone as justification for their claims to human dignity, the courts are not. Rae, an abortion opponent, notes that the main consequence for not having a robust justification for appealing to human dignity is that the courts are only willing to recognize the *symbolic* human dignity of the fetus (Rae 2013, 236). Mere appeals to human dignity are not enough to secure the normative authority of whatever possesses it, when there are competing appeals to human dignity.

### *Simple Goodness in Environmental Ethics*

Environmental ethics is a particularly interesting test case because of the field’s long history of invoking the intrinsic value of the natural environment as a safeguard against anthropocentric, instrumental values, such as economic value and use value. Interestingly, as a result of those debates and a growing dissatisfaction with defenses from intrinsic value, there has been a turn toward value pluralism and pragmatism in environmental ethics. In 1992, one of the most widely known environmental ethicists Tom Regan published, “Does Environmental Ethics Rest on a Mistake?” One of Regan’s main arguments in the article is that intrinsic value of the Moorean kind cannot provide an adequate

justification for an environmental ethic. He writes,

“[Moorean] intrinsic value cannot illuminate, account for or ground respect for nature. To make this clearer, suppose we follow Moore and accept the idea that beauty, whether in nature or in art, is intrinsically valuable. Even if we make this controversial assumption, it will not help. And it will not help because beauty is an inappropriate basis of respect.” (Regan 1992, 169)

“[Moorean] intrinsic value cannot illuminate, account for or ground duties to nature. It would take a prodigious argument indeed that managed to limit the intrinsic value of states of affairs to one and only one such value.” (Regan 1992, 170)

Regan’s concerns are telling. He’s looking for justification or explanations for moral claims concerning nature that are rationally grounded and illuminating to actual people. In the first quotation, he is dissatisfied with the way the Moorean view permits a controversial assumption to be presented as objective fact and as something that will have moral authority. In the second quotation, he is implying that intrinsic value is invoked without argument and without any careful consideration of the ways in which actual people value nature. Regan evaluates several theories of intrinsic nature in addition to Moore’s and he finds all of them inadequate. In the end, he recommends that environmental ethicists abandon intrinsic value altogether (Regan 1992, 181).

Proponents of intrinsic value, particularly J. Baird Callicot (1985) and Holmes Rolston III (1994), continued to defend appealing to intrinsic value, but by and large it seems that environmental ethicists have an awareness of how fraught a Moorean conception of intrinsic value is. In a recent, well-researched article, “For goodness sake! What is intrinsic value and why should we care?” biological conservationists Chelsea Batavia and Michael Paul Nelson trace some of the history of the use of intrinsic value within the environmental ethics debate. They ultimately endorse some appeals to intrinsic

value, but they reject and warn against relying on a value simpliciter account.

[This] Anthropocene epoch (perhaps more demurely named) ought to be characterized not by even further distending human hubris, but by humility and respect. In this vein, as an intellectual community and as members of a global citizenry, conservationists cannot ignore the weight of the arguments that provide compelling reason to believe that at least some parts of nonhuman nature have [intrinsic value], and therefore deserve direct moral consideration. *But at this juncture it no longer suffices to say “nature has intrinsic value,” or “we should protect nature for nature’s sake.” Instead, we suggest conservationists need to turn this generalized sentiment into a clearer statement about what is good, what is worth protecting, and what this means about how humans ought to interact with the world around them.* Our hope is that this review has provided a more thorough account of the concept of [intrinsic value] and nonhuman [intrinsic value], equipping conservationists with the conceptual clarity and the motivation to continue articulating, debating, and defending the [intrinsic value] of nonhuman nature. (emphasis mine; Batavia and Nelson 2017, 374)

Their experience *also* seems to be that these value claims are being used as substitutes for more substantive, illuminating grounding for defenses of biological conservationism. A similar concessionary stance is taken by Graham Smith in *Deliberative Democracy and the Environment* (2003). Smith writes:

[According] to many intrinsic value theorists, in contemporary societies we typically consider only the direct use value of nature. But this is *a highly inaccurate picture of the broader values that are associated with the non-human world and does a disservice to human sensibilities and perceptions of nature.* The dichotomy between instrumental use value and intrinsic value is unhelpful and leads to a false dilemma, *unnecessarily limiting consideration of the full range of interactions between humanity and nature.* This can only lead to misrepresentation and impoverished understanding of human experience and well-being. (emphasis mine; Smith 2003, 14)

Smith also welcomes some appeal to intrinsic value, but not intrinsic value of the Moorean type or even the classic account of intrinsic value as *final value* (i.e. a good/end in itself). Smith suggests welcoming appeals to diverse values in the hope of accurately capturing “human sensibilities and perceptions of nature.” It is these justifications that come out of

lived experience (i.e., “the full range of interactions between humanity and nature”) that will be the most authentic and consequently powerful.

Similarly, Lori Gruen, in “Refocusing environmental ethics: from intrinsic value to endorsable valuations,” argues for “endorsable valuations” of nonhuman nature. She argues that “the preoccupation with intrinsic value forecloses the opportunity of exploring the ways that we value” (Gruen 2002, 162). If intrinsic value is presented as the absolute value that trumps all others, then that is an easy sell for many people who already have the intuition that nature has a special value that should be self-evident. But that cannot be the end goal if you want the as yet unconvinced to endorse your values, as Gruen points out:

I would suggest that environmental ethics be reconceived not to be a project whose primary goal is to establish the intrinsic value of nature, but rather one that seeks to develop coherent principles or guidelines for regulating human action and valuation towards the non-human world. (Gruen 2002, 162)

There is a consistent pattern among all of these authors who have misgivings about intrinsic value. It is not that they disagree about what deserves value, even perhaps a supreme value, rather they worry that claims to that value are essentially empty, unprincipled, and at times incoherent. They do not want to see lofty-sounding claims to absolute value, since in fact such claims often ring hollow. There seems to be a shared belief that more can be said to accurately capture what it is that justifies their moral claims, specifically their claims to the value and moral status of nonhuman nature.

One of the main conclusions that I want to draw from the environmental ethics literature and from the other work in applied ethics concerning intrinsic value (as SG) is that the philosophers engaging in practical debates find this conceptualization of goodness inadequate. Even if SG has some rhetorical power, that power cannot hold up against

formidable disagreement. It is also noteworthy that many of these philosophers worry that by substituting some *de facto* value for actual moral justification or grounding, the substantive content that could be a part of the justification for their position (i.e. a moral position they share) is being overlooked, hidden, or erased from the discussion. Using the values in this way is potentially worse than not having one at all, because they are fooling themselves into thinking that the hard work of justification has been done. And if that hard work is done, if they no longer need to defend their position because they are already assured of having absolute value on their side, then the debate is over. There is no reason to listen to the other side, if the matter has been so summarily settled.

### *Nonideal Theory and Moral Justification*

Having provided evidence for the inadequacies that accompany the use of SG within practical debate and deliberation, I now turn to turn my argument from nonideal theory. I introduced nonideal theory in Chapter 1, and in this chapter I want to explain the role of SG in perpetuating and legitimizing problematic idealizations.<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 1, I explain that nonideal theory is not generally applied within mainstream ethical theory, but it is often invoked as a feminist critique of Rawls' Kantian contractarianism. As I mentioned previously, nonideal theory does not call for a wholesale rejection of the use of ideals, abstractions, or generalizations. Substantive ideals, whether they are specific or universal, are necessary elements of normative ethical theory. For example, feminist nonideal theorists can endorse specific substantive ideals such as being a "good friend," and they can

---

<sup>3</sup> Note that there are various theories that go by the name "nonideal theory," and they are not necessarily developed as part of a feminist project. The nonideal theory that I outline in Chapter 1, and that I return to here, is associated with the work of Onora O'Neill (1996) and Charles Mills (2005).



also endorse universal substantive ideals such as “human interdependence.”

In Chapter 1, I made a distinction between abstractions and ideals. An abstraction of thing T (e.g. a flower) removes or simplifies the features specific to T (e.g. the flower’s species), typically for the purpose of thinking or speaking of it more generically. The concern of nonideal theorists is not with abstractions, per se, though abstractions can be problematic as part of an idealization. The idealization of thing T (e.g. a mother) requires adding optimal features to T (e.g. the features of an ideal mother). Both the abstraction and the enhancement processes of idealization will be informed by the values, expectations, and background knowledge of whoever is doing the idealizing. Obviously, there are many ways the abstraction and idealization processes can go wrong. The feminist nonideal perspective is particularly focused on critiquing ideals that do not accurately model their subject, or those that merely reinforce prejudices and the erasure of members of subordinated social groups.

The feminist critique of John Rawls’ famous method of moral justification, the “original position,” from his landmark book *A Theory of Justice* (1971), provides a clear example of how this kind of critique works. One thing to note is that the original position is a paradigmatic example of a deliberative ideal. A deliberative ideal is a type of thought experiment that specifies ideal conditions for deliberating about and arriving at evaluative conclusions. They are typically thought to have been designed in such a way that engaging in these thought experiments will produce objective, rational judgments because they are designed to eliminate all substantive evaluative commitments and subjective perspectives. The original position, for example, is an idealization of the necessary conditions for arriving

at fair principles of justice. Rawls presents this as the ideal environment for setting the moral terms of the social contract, an “Archimedean point” from which to arrive at impartial judgments (Rawls 1971, 261). The persons negotiating their terms within the original position are prevented from knowing their evaluative commitments and their subjective perspectives by remaining under the cover of the “veil of ignorance.” The veil ensures their judgments are fair, impartial, and autonomous.

Susan Moller Okin (1989), a feminist ethicist sympathetic to Rawls’ project, critiques his conceptualization of persons within the original position. Okin is not a nonideal theorist, rather she objects to the androcentrism of this thought experiment. She argues that persons entering the original position must be made aware that their sex is also hidden behind the veil, and that the moral terms of family and marriage (not typically viewed as matters of justice on a liberal picture) also be brought into the original position (1989, 105-109). Alison Jaggar (1993) also criticizes Rawl’s method of moral justification, but as a feminist nonideal theorist she rejects the original position as an unreliable thought experiment that is insufficiently grounded in the particular, empirical realities of real people. It, at times, seems to present the process of moral reasoning in a way that suggests there will be input from various disinterested parties, when Rawls actually imagines that anyone capable of such sophisticated reasoning will accomplish the task on his own, from the comfort of his armchair. This solitary, privileged individual would get to pass his judgment off as objective, while Rawls’ complicated theoretical apparatus would allow him to obscure this fact.

I argue that Moore’s isolation test, like Rawls’ original position, is a deliberative

ideal that is meant to serve as a method of moral justification. I briefly explain Moore's method in Chapter 1, but I quote Moore again, here. Moore describes the isolation test as follows:

The method which I employed in order to shew (*sic*) [the SG of X], was that of considering what value we should attach to [X], if it existed in absolute isolation, stripped of all its usual accompaniments. And this is, in fact, the only method that can be safely used, when we wish to discover what degree of value a thing has in itself. (Moore 1903, 142, cf. 144-147, 236)

This is the method whereby we, purportedly, come to know what possesses the property of SG and to what degree. By imagining X existing alone in the universe, we can judge whether X itself adds value to the universe (Moore 1903, 197). And if the isolation test results in the intuition that something is of "value in itself," then that is proof it has the property of SG. Much like Rawls, Moore has designed his thought experiment to approximate an Archimedean point from which to objectively arrive at his evaluative judgments. The test prescribes the specific conditions under which we can arrive at rational, objective conclusions about the good. SG is self-evident, as Moore has told us, so no justification can be offered in defense of claims of the form "X is good (SG)." They are either self-evidently true or not. But the method does provide justification for moral claims because, on Moore's view, being "morally bound" to perform some action just means that action brings about the most SG (Moore 1903, 197).

I should acknowledge that Moore considered himself a utilitarian. He seems to make the case (repeatedly) that his theory of the good is well-suited to utilitarianism. He defines what is "right" with "cause of a good result" (Moore 1903, 196). Then he defines duties and moral obligations along the same lines:

When, therefore, Ethics presumes to assert that certain ways of acting are duties it presumes to assert that to act in those ways will always produce the greatest possible sum of good. If we are told that to do no murder is a duty, we are told that the action, whatever it may be, which is called murder, will under no circumstances cause so much good to exist in the Universe as its avoidance. (Moore 1903, 198)

On account of this, it may seem absurd that I would argue the isolation test is a method of moral justification for Moore. It seems more likely that Moore's method of moral justification is the standard utilitarian line that he's been touting all along. A person is morally obligated to perform action A, if action A produces the most good. The problem is that this does not actually get Moore off the hook, because he still relies on the isolation test to determine the "intrinsic value or vileness of the effects which [an] action may produce" (1903, 211).

The resources available to other utilitarians are not available to Moore. Claims to SG are not made true or justified by argument or by empirical data, rather they are "discovered" via thought experiment. If I attempt Moore's thought experiment, I do not have any intuitions whatsoever about what has value in this context. Should I conclude that I have "good-blindness"? This seems to leave me in an extremely unfortunate position. Yet those who claim they observe SG as self-evident will be warranted in holding their intuitions to be objective, according to Moore. If Moore can judge what is good this way, but I cannot, how are we to handle this disagreement? Moore makes none of this clear. It appears that we are simply at an impasse. Moore has intuitions about SG, and I do not. This is a problem that continually reemerges wherever SG is used. The isolation test is little more than a rhetorical device intended to give the air of legitimacy to the assumptions of whoever appeals to it. It is a problematic idealization precisely because it gives the

impression that we have done some philosophical work by imagining we are in this idealized position. It makes the philosopher appealing to it feel warranted in making the evaluative judgments the test helped them “discover.”

Contemporary proponents of SG do not typically appeal to the isolation test, but they do invoke similar thought experiments in defense of SG. They defend SG against critics (most often Kraut and Thomson) who argue for its abandonment by claiming, against the critics, that SG is an important concept for moral theory. The general objection is that we cannot dispense with SG because it is necessary to make sense of particular important value judgments. In the next section, I dispute the importance of these value judgments, and I argue that they rely on thought experiments and idealizations that are problematic much in the same way as Rawls’ original position and Moore’s isolation test. I show how despite the purported impartiality and universality of these conceptions of moral justification, they are in fact self-serving and circular because they rationalize the views of the philosopher who invokes them, while silencing dissenting voices. I now turn to the views of those proponents of SG.

### *The Value of Worlds*

In Chapter 2, I promised that I would eventually address some of Kraut’s critics. I chose to address them separately because their defenses of SG help me make my own argument against using SG within the context of ethical theory. The other uses for SG that friends of SG argue are legitimate or necessary for ethical theory are interrelated. They all rely on the idealizing assumption that particular minds are capable of *cosmic valuing*, and it is through this kind of valuing that we can legitimize judgments about SG, i.e. absolute

value judgments. They do this by appealing to the comparative value of worlds or to value judgments about certain actions and agents *from the perspective of the universe*. The phrase “the perspective of the universe” is associated with the work of Henry Sidgwick who argues that “the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other” (Sidgwick 1907, 382). On the face of it, this appears to be a utilitarian platitude akin to Jeremy Bentham’s famous dictum “everybody to count for one, and none for more than one.” But the message concerning impartiality has been interpreted as characterizing *the moral point of view*, a perspective that is not restricted to utilitarians. Tom Scanlon, for example, reads Sidgwick as making a distinction between what is good for a person and what is good from the point of view of the world (Scanlon 1998, 79). If we disregard all particular points of view, no one’s personal good is being considered. The ideal of impartiality achieved, we can focus on the impersonal, absolute good—SG. In other words, if X is good from the point of view of the universe, then X has the property of SG. And our judgments about SG are legitimized via this cosmic perspective. In *PE*, Moore often refers to Sidgwick, and was influenced by his work, and so it is not surprising that this idea of the cosmic perspective seems to be at the center of Moore’s isolation test.

In addressing these uses of SG, my aim is to focus on the various ways that SG is known through and supported by problematic idealizations. I argue that the “Archimedean points” invoked in these examples make their claims to objectivity appear credible, while masking the absence of justification for their value claims. With the need for justification obscured, none is supplied. Without justification, their claims cannot be subject to rational

scrutiny, making debate concerning the legitimacy of these claims impossible.

The main form of cosmic valuing invoked by friends of SG is a style of thought experiment I call a “comparative world judgment” (CWJ). It is a process through which we can purportedly legitimize or judge the comparative value of worlds, certain actions, or agents. The most familiar examples of CWJs are, not surprisingly, consequentialist judgments. When a consequentialist wants to decide on the right course of action, she might try to judge the values of the various worlds that her potential courses of action could bring about. The world with the most SG is the best world and the one right action is the one that brings this world about. One can, of course, reject this way of valuing and still be a consequentialist, so this isn’t an argument against consequentialism generally, but it does have implications for a specific type of consequentialist. Essentially, CWJs are supposed to be judgments of relative quantities of SG. CWJs are made by “observing” some difference between at least two (otherwise identical) worlds and comparing them to decide which one is best (i.e. which one possesses the most SG or value *simpliciter*). The world we deem “best” or “better” is *not* better in some respect, rather it is *simply* better than its counterpart, or “better overall.”<sup>4</sup> According to proponents of SG, we need SG to facilitate this kind of *ceteris paribus* judging. If X is the best state of the world, all things considered, then X has the property of SG.

Arneson, Moore, and W.D. Ross all make explicit references to CWJs in their defenses of SG. Arneson actually defines SG using a CWJ:

To claim that pleasure is good simpliciter is to claim that if two possible states of the world are identical in all relevant respects except that in the second, some

---

<sup>4</sup> Graham Oddie (2010) refers to these as “bare difference arguments.”

individual living being experiences some pleasure, then the second state of the world is better than the first. One could put the point by saying that pleasure has intrinsic value. (Arneson 2009, 733)

Arneson shares the assumption, with Ross and Moore, that the world deemed better *simpliciter* is the world with the most “intrinsic value,” or SG. When some state of affairs, state of the world, or some element of that state of affairs, possesses more SG, the world instantiating it is *simply* better. Another, more often quoted example of this kind of judgment is found in W.D. Ross’ defense of value (*simpliciter*) pluralism:

It seems clear that we regard all such actions and dispositions as having value in themselves apart from any consequence. And if anyone is inclined to doubt this and to think that, say, pleasure alone is intrinsically good, it seems to me enough to ask the question whether, of two states of the universe holding equal amounts of pleasure, we should really think no better of one in which the actions and dispositions of all the persons in it were thoroughly virtuous than of one in which they were highly vicious (Ross 1930, 134).

This CWJ is thought to be evidence of value *simpliciter* pluralism because the thought experiment is supposed to result in the intuition that virtue and pleasure both possess SG. Using these idealized thought experiments, Arneson and Ross expect our intuitions about the value of pleasure and virtue to match their own. We judge, along with them, that the world with the most SG is (intuitively) better.<sup>5</sup> Ross is trying to argue that the mere existence of virtue in the world would make it better, and that this is not a result of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Ross claims intrinsic goodness is picked out by the predicative sense of “good.” In this passage, the synonymy of intrinsic value and SG is clear:

Often when we say 'x is good' we mean that it is a good so-and-so, and the universe of discourse makes it clear what noun is to be understood. What I wish to call attention to now is the cases in which there is no such implication, as when it is said that 'courage is good' or 'pleasure is good'. In such a usage, 'good' is not relative in either of the senses just pointed out. We do not mean that courage or pleasure is a successful or useful instance of a species, or species of a genus, nor do we mean that it is merely comparatively good, rising above the average of its kind. In both these respects 'good' in this usage is an absolute term (1930, 68).



consequences of virtue but because of its “intrinsic goodness.” But this is not the only rational conclusion to draw. Even if we think better of a just world in which “the thoroughly virtuous,” as opposed to “the highly vicious,” experience pleasure, judging it better does not necessarily indicate that virtue has absolute value. It might indicate a number of other things instead. The one thing it certainly confirms is that we would prefer that the virtuous experience pleasure over the vicious. Another possibility is that it indicates that we prefer *to witness* the virtuous experience pleasure rather than the vicious. Or perhaps we generally prefer virtue over vice. In any case, judging virtue as better than vice does not entail its being absolutely valuable. If this CWJ can teach us anything about value in the world, its significance for value simpliciter is indeterminate.

CWJs cannot stand up to scrutiny. If CWJs are about SG, then disagreements about any judgments made by appealing to them will inevitably devolve into intuitive judgments. And, as we have seen, we cannot settle a disagreement about conflicting intuitions of value by appealing to idealized thought experiments. Intuitions have a place in philosophical argument, but we cannot expect our arguments to hang on them.

Perhaps it could be argued that I am not being charitable. These thought experiments and ways of speaking, after all, do seem to make sense to us. We even seem to make cosmic value judgments with ease. Perhaps the critics of SG ought to consider that SG *is* required for at least this way of thinking about goodness—SG explains why we can make sense of CWJs. This is, after all, a common line of argument. Sarah Stroud argues, against Kraut, that the concept of SG is required for judging things to be “good overall” or “better overall” or “good on balance” (Stroud 2013, 463). Arneson makes a similar argument,

against Thomson, that some things are simply bad, and this just means that they are “bad overall” or “bad all things considered” (Arneson 2009, 3). Arneson uses the example of Hurricane Katrina to argue that we can make sense of claims such as “Katrina was simply bad,” even if the speaker also claims that this is not “shorthand for any claim that Katrina was bad in a way or bad in some respect” (Arneson 2009, 3). And Roger Crisp advances a similar argument to Arneson’s and Stroud’s. Crisp argues that Kraut cannot account for the fact that it is possible for someone to make “the world a better place by causing to exist within it something that is simply good” (Crisp 2013, 479). Crisp asks Kraut to imagine that Fra Angelico has just painted a beautiful altarpiece, and, upon completion, the painter makes one of two claims: (1) “This is beautiful, so the world is a better place now that it is finished,” or (2) “This is good, so the world is a better place now it is finished” (Crisp 2013, 476). Crisp argues that we can make sense of (1) and (2) given ordinary usage of English. Kraut is simply refusing to acknowledge this ordinary sense of good. Crisp claims that he and Kraut are simply at an impasse; nothing more can be said (2013, 479).

These objections, however, are simply different ways of making CWJs. It is stipulated that these examples are supposed to be about SG—a *sui generis*, nonnatural property, valuable apart from welfare goodness or goodness in some respect, the existence of which adds value to the world. If we make a judgment about what is “better overall” then we are allegedly judging that his world has more SG in it, than a world which does not. Therefore, a world in which Hurricane Katrina occurs will instantiate less SG than one in which it does not. And a world in which Fra Angelico’s altarpiece exists will possess more SG than one in which it does not. These kinds of judgments are intelligible, but it is difficult

to see how they might be contributing to any significant philosophical conversation, let alone to our understanding of the actual value that exists in the world. Even leaving that worry aside, those who make these kinds of judgment have no resources for handling disagreement. They ultimately rely on the assumption that their truth will go unquestioned or that their truth is undeniable. Yet this seems to be plainly false.

The question that friends of SG need to be able to answer is whether or not these sorts of judgments are actually measures of SG. Arneson and Crisp both suggest that they are trying to defend ordinary ways of talking that include references to SG. Setting aside that SG very likely a distinctly philosophical use of “good,” this would mean that ordinary expressions such as “makes the world a better place” refer to that most general sense of goodness that excludes what is good for any person or good in any respect. Moore would likely agree with Crisp in judging Fra Angelico’s art as something simply good, i.e. something that makes the world a better place by increasing its value simpliciter. Yet, to my mind, this excludes ordinary usage, but I think we have to admit that to continue arguing this point is a fool’s errand. We are again at the impasse—the point at which we are forced to accept our conflicting intuitions. We could go in search of some empirical verification of *the* ordinary meaning, but even this seems implausible. Perhaps some people do mean to refer to something like SG, but there will be others who do not. If this is all we have to go on, we seem to have found ourselves back to trying to argue over our incompatible intuitions. This is particularly frustrating because, if we were not simply engaging in this exercise of trying to make sense of these claims in terms of SG, then we likely could have a meaningful conversation about whether or not Fra Angelico’s paintings make the world

better or not, and this would likely require us to get clear on the sense in which such artwork makes the world better. This is certainly not the moral sense.

It seems that there is a preliminary question about CWJs that the proponents of SG feel has already been answered. This is the question of whether or not CWJs are even valid methods for making value judgments. It is simply assumed that because we seem to have intuitions about these cases, they must be communicating something philosophically significant. Or, as is the case for Ross, we simply trust that philosophers (and other rational, morally good people) have accurate basic intuitions about value, particularly moral value. Ross clearly believes that there are certain basic moral truths and norms that we know to be true because the “best people” endorse them:

The existing body of moral convictions of the best people is the cumulative product of the moral reflection of many generations, which has developed an extremely delicate power of appreciation of moral distinctions; and this the theorist cannot afford to treat with anything other than the greatest respect. The verdicts of the moral consciousness of the best people are the foundation on which he must build; though he must first compare them with one another and eliminate any contradictions they may contain. (Ross 1930, 41)

Yet such a claim about the best judges of value raises alarms for feminist ethicists, given the historical pattern of excluding women from such categories, and it should raise alarms for anyone aware of today’s social and political climate. That two of “the best people” can come to opposing conclusions about CWJs suggests that we are not capable of intuiting absolute value in the way these thought experiments assume that we can. If it were possible to view the world from the perspective of the universe, we wouldn’t have conflicting value judgments. Our judgments would agree. But even when our judgments do agree, we still need some sort of justification to help us understand if and how our moral claims have

authority over us. Accepting the deliverances of these thought experiments, and on the basis of idealized assumptions about our ability to make accurate judgments from a God's eye perspective, requires a general faith in intuitions that we should find unsettling. It leaves open the opportunity for subjective or arbitrary judgments to be interpreted as "cosmic," giving them the power of absolute and universal values or truths.

Cosmic valuing hints at another use for SG that none of its proponents have decided to defend explicitly, but it may be its most important use in practice. SG is used as an easy fix for extremely difficult and nuanced problems within ethical theory. The problem is that we have certain intuitive values that we want to be able to designate and uphold as objectively valuable and in some cases supremely valuable. We want to be able to make value judgments that have *moral authority*, even if other people cannot be convinced of that value in a particular case. But can appeals to SG provide legitimate justification for such claims? Should appeals to SG command such authority? These are questions I have tried to address, to an extent, using a critique from nonideal theory. In the next section I address these questions more broadly through the lens of pragmatic efficiency.

*Pragmatic Efficiency: What Good is Simple Goodness?*

We can determine the pragmatic efficiency of our moral theories and conceptualizations by evaluating their success in achieving the goals and purposes for which they are invoked or created. This is the basis of the second part of my analysis of SG in this chapter. Modest empiricism and pragmatic efficiency are often part of the same process. They can be understood as two standards for evaluating the empirical adequacy of our theories and conceptualizations. The development of care ethics is a good example of

how evaluating for modest empiricism and pragmatic efficiency can aid in the construction and reform of normative theories. Gilligan realized that Kohlberg's ideal standards for moral development hindered their goal of studying the actual moral development of children (recognizing a failure of pragmatic efficiency). To produce accurate results, she argued, they would need to revise their ideal standard to reflect the lived experience of the subjects proficient in the ethic of care (complying with modest empiricism). By examining the way theories and their elements are used and to what end, we can evaluate and reform our concepts to best suit those ends. In addition, we also reflexively evaluate the ends of our theoretical practice and our ways of theorizing, to ensure these are well-defined and well-grounded.

"It is not simply that feminists are interested in something else," Sally Haslanger writes, "but that they have principled reasons for *not* engaging the issues as standardly framed" (1999, 459). Feminist philosophers are engaging "the issues" as well as the tremendous additional, supplemental work on gender that needs doing. The latter must inform the former, though not in ways that are immediately obvious to those unfamiliar with feminist theory. Unlike the prominent critics of SG, I take a broad view of the problem. I critically evaluate SG in the context of the project(s) in which it is intended to play a role. In the end, I show how the insights and methodology of feminist ethicists and epistemologists provide the tools and perspective necessary for accomplishing this. In the argument that follows, I show how the ways philosophers have undertaken to provide an analysis of SG results in problems that suggest an alternative approach to this analysis would be a helpful corrective.

As mentioned previously, a common strategy in recent defenses of SG, particularly in response to Kraut's work, has been to explain that there is important work that will be left undone if we abandon SG as a value concept. I have already argued that some of these objections rely on problematic idealizations. Now I will examine several other objections by inquiring into their pragmatic efficiency. I begin this part of my analysis by examining the purposes some proponents of SG have set out for the concept. Of each purpose, I attempt to answer the question: *Does SG serve its purpose well?* I aim to show how SG fails to serve the purposes for which it is invoked (i.e. its internal ends) and ultimately how it fails to serve the purposes of normative ethical theory generally (i.e. its external ends). All of the views of proponents of SG that I consider here were articulated in response to the views of Geach, Thomson, or Kraut.

#### *A Prima Facie Special Value*

Richard Rowland, in an article titled "In defence of good *simpliciter*," offers what he calls a "*prima facie* case against good *simpliciter* skepticism" (2016, 1373). Rowland makes his case in two parts. In the first part, he argues that there is unique work that SG alone can accomplish within normative ethical and political theory (2016, 1374). In the second part, he argues that SG is an intelligible concept (i.e. "conceptually possible"), and given that people speak as if it were referring to an independent property, the burden of proof is on the skeptics of SG to prove that these uses of SG fail to refer (2016, 1374-1375). I won't consider the second part here because it seems to willfully ignore or misconstrue the work of prominent skeptics of SG. Geach and Thomson have already done a thorough job of explaining how English grammar allows us to speak "as if" many attributives are

independent properties. I think the question of who has burden of proof in this debate is worth considering, but I cannot settle it here. In any case, there should be some burden on those who are positing an independent predicate in these instances to provide a justification for doing so that goes beyond an appeal to the way we ordinarily speak. As for the first part, however, Rowland raises a concern I often hear when discussing with other philosophers the prospect of abandoning SG.

The general concern raised in Rowland's *prima facie* case for SG is that there is *prima facie* some special value that exceeds the welfare value and the instrumental value that needs to be considered when making normative judgments about what one ought to do or how one ought to judge a particular action or state of affairs. Those who argue that SG doesn't exist, either as a concept ("conceptual skeptics") or as a property ("metaphysical skeptics"), render debates about intuitive values within normative ethical theory and political philosophy impossible or in error. He writes,

If conceptual good *simpliciter* skeptics are right, these debates and disagreements about whether democracy, freedom, equality, friendship, and punishment have a value over and above the benefits that they bring are impossible. Those who hold that democracy, freedom, equality, friendship or punishment have a value beyond that identical with the benefits that they bring and the purposes that they bring and the purposes they serve are not just mistaken but are either saying something that is meaningless or are not in fact disagreeing with those with whom they believe they are disagreeing. According to conceptual good *simpliciter* skepticism, these debates are pseudo-debates. And if we accept metaphysical goodness *simpliciter* skepticism with out being given any reason to accept this view, we will accept the arbitrary settling of these debates about the value of democracy, freedom, equality, friendship, and punishment. (Rowland 2016, 1375)

Rowland is arguing that certain intuitive values, such as freedom and friendship, are valuable independently of whether they are good for some person (i.e. welfare value) or good for some additional outcome (i.e. instrumental value), and he suggests that SG



skeptics cannot account for this fact. Conceptual skeptics accuse philosophers who debate the value of freedom, friendship, etc. (hereafter, “intuitive values”), of using unintelligible terms or of equivocating on the meaning of “goodness.” Metaphysical skeptics arbitrarily declare that value “over and above” instrumental value and welfare value doesn't exist, according to Rowland.

The claim that proponents of SG are not being “given any reason to accept” metaphysical SG skepticism is difficult to take seriously. Every prominent opponent of SG gives reasons to accept metaphysical skepticism, though their reasons are typically based on conceptual problems they find with the concept (cf. Foot 1985, Geach 1953, Kraut 2011, Thomson 2008, Ziff 1960). Finding problems with a given concept cannot prove whatever it is meant to refer to does not exist; this is undeniable. Still, the metaphysical skeptics can hardly be said to be making arbitrary judgments.

It is not clear if that additional value Rowland claims is “over and above” instrumental and welfare value is supposed to be superior in some way to them, as many understand SG to be superior to all other types of value, or if it is simply existing “beyond,” as in independent from, these other types of value. In any case, SG skepticism alone doesn't preclude *all* additional attributions of value. SG skeptics take issue with the specific attribution of the simple, unanalyzable property called “goodness.” It's not that we don't feel the intuitive pull of assenting to a claim such as “freedom is good, period,” but we're skeptical that this way of talking about goodness can stand up to critical scrutiny, much less provide reasons or justification for action. It seems likely that Rowland frames his argument this way because he is addressing Kraut's critique of SG or one like it. On Kraut's

view, all attributions of SG are reducible to attributions of welfare value. If SG is rightly understood as an indication of something's welfare value, then the independent property or concept of SG doesn't actually give us a reason to act. It doesn't factor into our deliberative process at all. Thus, Kraut argues, it is superfluous and can be abandoned.

Kraut argues that SG is subject to Ockham's razor; proponents of SG *multiply entities beyond what is necessary*. Rowland's point here is that a view like Kraut's fails to explain the phenomena, namely the intuitive sense that something like freedom has a value that is "above and beyond" the benefits it can bring. Rowland, however, appears to be presenting his reader with a false dichotomy. He implies that if we cannot use SG to account for the additional, independent value had by these types of intuitive values, then we cannot account for it at all. Yet there are other types of value that are not problematic in the way that SG is, and they can be used to account for the special value of intuitive values such as freedom, friendship, etc. For example, final value, i.e. the value possessed by that which is an end in itself, is usually understood to be a superior value. SG skepticism, of any variety, can maintain that freedom, friendship, etc. are of final value, and thus of superior value. It is not uncommon to conflate SG and final value, and it is possible that this is how Rowland went wrong here.

In any case, SG is not needed to account for any other independent values, superior or not, as Rowland claims it is. Debates about the value of freedom, for example, would not be rendered pseudo-debates if moral philosophers decided that the claim "Freedom is good, period" is meaningless or that it always results in equivocation. Instead the claim simply wouldn't hold any weight in the debate. But what significance can claims of this kind

have in debates currently? If my opponent in a debate about the value of freedom believes that claim is true or, equivalently, that freedom has the property of SG, and I believe the claim is false, are we not at an impasse? Contemporary defenders of SG claim that SG often (Orsi 2013) or always (Arneson 2009) supervenes on whatever is *always* good for someone (i.e. always has welfare value). Yet, they argue, SG is not reducible to welfare value. If X possesses SG, then it is absolutely good (i.e. it is good independent of context and any benefit it does or does not have for anyone or anything). If you want to convince me of the special value of freedom, then you will have to make your justification for that claim transparent. You would have to return to a discussion of welfare value and explain how freedom is one of these things that always has welfare value and consequently is simply good. But this is what proponents of SG were supposed to be able to avoid—appealing to welfare value. If one of the purposes of using the concept of SG is to make sense of the intuition that some things have a value that is superior to welfare value, then SG is not serving its purpose well.

But I should consider some of the examples that are given by proponents of SG that purportedly illustrate this special type of value that is not reducible to welfare value. The goodness instantiated in these examples is supposedly so divorced from human welfare and self-interest that it can only be understood as goodness *simpliciter*. The first example comes from Rowland. He claims that “the Nazis losing” is classic candidate for instantiating SG (Rowland 2016, 1375). Thus, this is a state of affairs that is not good in any of the relative senses of good. Rowland explains that claiming “the Nazis losing is good” doesn’t mean that it was good for anyone or that it was good as a particular type of event. It is

*simply good*. Another example, as told by Michael Campbell in his article, “Absolute Goodness: In Defence of the Useless and Immoral,” is borrowed from Holocaust survivor Primo Levi (2015, 106-109). In this example, Levi witnesses an “exhausted and emaciated” Charles, a prisoner in a concentration camp, helping his bunkmate Lakmaker, who is writhing in pain on the floor and laying in his feces—undoubtedly soon to die of dysentery, by cleaning Lakmaker’s body and bed for him, and helping him to find some semblance of comfort (2015, 106). Campbell explains the special value of Charles’ actions:

When we try to describe the distinctive value of Charles’ response, we naturally reach for the language of absolute goodness. We recognize a value in his action, even though in the circumstances in which he found himself he lacked the ability to contribute in any meaningful way to Lakmaker’s flourishing. (2015, 109)

Setting aside the questions raised by these examples about the significance of what a particular philosopher takes his utterance to mean or the language another philosopher naturally reaches for, do these examples present us with unique conceptual work for SG? It seems patently false that SG is uniquely fit to account for the goodness in these examples.

A curious thing about using SG to ascribe value to events related to the Holocaust is that the chief purpose of SG is to identify a value that remains even when divorced from appeals to human welfare value, yet the most popular way of invoking concern for human welfare in the Western world is by drawing connections to the Holocaust. Examples from the Holocaust are standardly used to defend basic human rights and other claims to supporting human welfare. In the above examples, it should be uncontroversial then to argue that the Nazis losing is *good for* the future of human society, and Charles helping Lakmaker is *good for* both Charles and Lakmaker (and Levi who witnessed it). Does speaking in absolute as opposed to relative terms somehow more accurately depict the

goodness in these examples? How is SG or “absolute goodness” supposed to improve on appeals to welfare value? Perhaps “absolute goodness” is supposed to connote an irrefutable goodness. But it is my intuitions against theirs at this point, and this is presumably what we hope to adjudicate as moral philosophers—the comparative validity of conflicting intuitions. One methodological point relative goodness has in its favor is that we can infer the truth conditions for a statement such as “Charles’ actions are *good for* Lakmaker.” Charles’ actions plainly benefitted Lakmaker, even if he cannot be said to have any hope of flourishing in his circumstances. The epistemic obscurity of statements about SG are evident if we try to discern what would make it true that “Charles’ actions are *simply good*,” or equivalently, “Charles’ actions instantiate absolute goodness.” It’s not that the task is impossible, rather, it is that the possibilities seem endless. Even if Rowland and Campbell insist that we need to recognize the intuitively special value that these things possess, attributing absolute goodness or SG to them without supplying more context doesn’t seem to add anything substantive. Surely the horrors in the historical background are what make these examples of such stunning goodness. But we can disagree about our intuitions on this matter indefinitely. A final suggestion I want to make here, however, is that insisting on attributing SG to these examples distracts from the actual values at play here.

Though my arguments thus far do not conclusively forbid any conceivable use of SG, I have tried to show that the *prima facie* case against abandoning SG is not compelling. What’s more, this use of SG relies so heavily on intuition that it fails to serve its own ends or the ends of normative ethical theory. Rowland and others have tried to argue that there

is a special type of value that exists “above and beyond” welfare value that only SG can account for, but I have shown that SG does not do a very good job of accounting for it. In the face of disagreement and conflicting intuitions, SG and its proponents have not given us any reason to select that particular conception of value over another. If we are relying on intuitions about the type of value perceived in these examples, it seems that welfare value has the advantage of being (at least partially) empirically verifiable. Whether or not something is good for someone or something can be determined through investigation and we may quibble about what we are looking for exactly, but there is certainly more to go on when investigating whether something is good for someone as opposed to good, period.

*Empirically Adequate Justification*

In this chapter, I have developed several arguments to defend the position that SG is a conceptualization of goodness that should have no place within ethical theory. I argued that SG is a product of the theoretical-judicial paradigm of ethical theory, and that it is representative of the form of problematic idealizations that issue from that paradigm. I tried to show that feminist ethics and nonideal theory have the resources necessary to reform the current paradigm of ethical theory so that it will be relevant to and beneficial for ordinary people trying to become better moral deliberators and more morally sensitive individuals. An essential part of this reform is engaging in reflexive critique of our theories, conceptualizations, and the field of moral philosophy as a whole. I argued that one element of this critique requires us to evaluate our theories and conceptualizations for empirical adequacy. I proposed two ways of doing this: seeking a modest empiricism and testing for pragmatic efficiency. Then I used these as standards for evaluating SG and its purposes

within moral contexts, and I showed that it fails on both counts. I argue that SG fails to fulfill the purposes its defenders set out for it, and that it ultimately fails to serve the purposes of ethical theory.

In this final section, I provide some suggestions for amending ethical theory, and the value concepts relevant to it, in light of my critique of SG. First, ethical theory needs to abandon its commitments to problematically idealized thought experiments. Instead of using these idealized methods that offer the pretense of objective truth, we should be trying to provide empirically adequate justification for our value judgments and our normative ethical claims. Philosophers who rely on problematic idealizations illicitly assume a position of epistemic privilege that affords them *de facto* moral justification. Assuming that position is not only unwarranted it is irresponsible. It prepares the way for exclusionary understandings of our moral realities and the persistence of oppressive moral norms.

The language associated with SG and with cosmic value judgments has an intuitive appeal that easily fools us into thinking the justificatory work has been done, when in fact we have very little to go on if we are faced with disagreement. While proponents of SG try to argue that eliminating it from our conceptual repertoire could result in moral nihilism, the reverse is true. By insisting on using SG as the justification for maintaining our basic value judgments, proponents of SG prevent us from taking up the difficult, but important, work of establishing the empirically adequate grounds for our valuing. Some work currently being done in feminist moral epistemology is seeking to establish what I call *empirically adequate moral justification*. Empirically adequate justification is a method of

moral justification that is committed to maintaining modest empiricism and pragmatic efficiency. It is precisely what the critiques of intrinsic value (and of human dignity, and patient-centered care) within applied ethics are asking for.

Discarding SG will reveal many new areas for applying empirically adequate justification. The value of those objects and states of affairs that traditionally have been deemed good simpliciter must be reevaluated. I expect that most (if not all) of our basic values will be validated by an empirically adequate model of justification. To be clear, I am not insisting that expressions such as “good, period” and “simply good” must be eliminated from discussions within ethical theory. Rather I am insisting that we place an explanatory demand on those who use those expressions, and we remove SG from the list of acceptable responses. By doing this, we compel one another to do the hard work of articulating intelligible justificatory reasons for judging these things valuable. This would have the obvious effect of making the justification for our moral claims less mysterious than they once were, but this kind of transparency also fosters more productive deliberation and debate. By making our reasons for valuing known to one another, we make it possible to submit our moral beliefs to rational scrutiny. This benefits practical ethical reasoning in the actual world because it helps us to navigate disagreements on evaluative and moral judgments.

It should not be controversial to require that our reasons for holding moral beliefs be made transparent, especially in the face of disagreement. Many social and political philosophers accept that the justification of these kinds of normative claims must be a social, that is to say an intersubjective, enterprise. Even Rawls seems to understand



justification in this way:

[J]ustification is argument addressed to those who disagree with us, or to ourselves when we are of two minds. It presumes a clash of views between persons or within one person, and seeks to convince others, or ourselves, of the reasonableness of the principles upon which our claims and judgments are founded... A proof simply displays logical relations between propositions. But proofs become justification *once the starting points are mutually recognized*, or the conclusions so *comprehensive and compelling* as to persuade us of the soundness of the conception expressed by their premises. (emphasis mine; 1971, 508)

The processes of arriving at mutual recognition and of generating comprehensive and compelling conclusions requires, at a minimum, extensive discussion and inclusivity. It requires us to make our positions mutually intelligible.<sup>6</sup> To accomplish this mutual intelligibility we need to move beyond the theoretical-judicial paradigm.

In their most recent work, Alison Jaggar and Theresa Tobin (2013, 2015) argue that practical reasoning and moral justification should be naturalized. They are not advocating for the naturalized epistemology in the spirit of W.V.O. Quine, rather they argue for a “bottom up” approach to moral justification. Jaggar and Tobin critique discourse ethics for being dependent on idealized standards for evaluating practical rationality and moral justification. They are reviving a line of critique pursued in recent decades by Elizabeth Anderson (1993, 2010), Onora O’Neill (1996), and Charles Mills (2005), among others. Jaggar and Tobin argue that we need to develop a nonideal method of moral justification (i.e., a practical method or model for justifying our moral claims). They offer several criteria any method of practical reasoning, including methods for moral justification, must meet in order to be considered adequately rational. They write:

---

<sup>6</sup> “Mutual intelligibility” is a term coined by Margaret Urban Walker (2007) and since adopted by many feminist and narrative ethicists.

a reasoning model or practice that fails any of these conditions when used in a particular context cannot, in this or similar contexts, confer moral authority on the substantive claims that it is intended to support (Jaggar and Tobin 2013, 388).

The criteria require the method to be 1) plausible to those using it; 2) accessible (“usable”) by those it is intended for; 3) not dependent on an abuse of power and/or the vulnerability of those using it; and 4) practically feasible (Jaggar and Tobin 2013, 387-389). The criteria set out by Jaggar and Tobin are meant to serve as a guide for developing methods of moral justification. This is the sort of preliminary work that must be done to develop an empirically adequate method of moral justification.

## CONCLUSION

I was drawn to the debate surrounding simple goodness (SG) after reading Richard Kraut's 2011 book, *Against Absolute Goodness*. I am sympathetic to the views of Kraut and the other prominent critics of SG largely because they successfully identify many of the inadequacies inherent to Moore's theory, especially its seeming inability to make sense of ordinary claims to goodness. Together, these critics help build a compelling case against accepting SG as fundamental (or even relevant) to ethical theory. For this reason, Aristotle's critique of the Platonic form of the good can be interpreted as a precursor to the contemporary debate about SG. The good that is absolute and globally universal is not compatible with the contingent and plural forms of the good that are necessary for illuminating the human good.

Still, I argue that the prominent critiques of SG fail to capture what is so pernicious about the use of Moorean view of goodness within contemporary ethical theory, e.g. within applied ethics, objective list theories of wellbeing, and Moorean versions of metaethical nonnaturalism. My critique has implications for these contemporary views because it focuses on the ways in which SG obfuscates the need for substantive justification of moral and evaluative claims.

Articulating a critique of Moore's value theory is complicated by the fact that he identifies goodness simpliciter with intrinsic value, and each of these concepts is targeted

by critics for independent conceptual difficulties. However, conceptual distinctions within intrinsic value theory have given us some language to better specify the problematic aspects of Moore's conceptualization of goodness. These distinctions provide me with a way to explain how ethics can reject SG without rejecting all forms of intrinsic value. I argue that Moore's SG is intrinsic in a final sense, a nonderivative sense, and in a supervenience sense. Of these senses, the latter two lead to problems for Moore's account (and for relevantly similar accounts of intrinsic value). SG has its value solely in virtue of its intrinsic properties (supervenience sense) and its value is justified in solely in virtue of what it is, itself (nonderivative sense). The advantage of such a theory is that whatever is good in this way is absolutely good, and this precludes moral and value relativism. Moore intended to develop a theory that could establish this kind of objectivity. However, I argue that this "objectivity" is a delusion, because combining a non-relational, nonderivative sense of goodness with the claim that it has a simple nature, in fact, nullifies the claim to objectivity.

In sum, the simple nature of SG is an ontological thesis with troubling epistemic consequences. On Moore's view, whatever is simply good is what is absolutely valuable. This merely describes the value of whatever has SG and does not define it. It cannot constitute a definition because the nature of SG is unanalyzable. We come to know SG (or, alternatively, self-evident *moral* goodness) as a self-evident value recognizable in absolute isolation from anything else. Moore says that we intuitively recognize this property when it is expressed, and we can employ the isolation test if there is ever any doubt. The epistemic problem arises because what Moore holds as self-evident is to others (Judith Jarvis

Thomson and myself, for example) opaque. Any disagreement about what expresses SG will inevitably come to an epistemic impasse such as this one. Thus, we might reject Moore's theory on these grounds: it leads inevitably to intractable disagreement. Yet, I argue there is a more serious, practical problem inherent to Moore's theory of SG. Kraut seems to come close to identifying this problem with his ethical objection to SG. With this argument, he shifts his focus to the unethical consequences of incorporating SG into our practical reasoning processes. Here Kraut uses a thought experiment about a mother who attempts to produce more SG in the world by producing mathematical knowledge in her son, without considering how this affects his wellbeing. By focusing exclusively on SG, and not considering her son's wellbeing, she seems to be unethical and failing in her role as a mother.

Unlike Kraut, my worry is not that focusing on SG to the exclusion of other goods will result in unethical judgments, but it is related to the ethical consequences of incorporating SG into our practical reasoning. I argue that by applying a feminist ethical perspective we can begin to see the problem aright. I appeal to feminist ethical theory to explain the need for evaluating our theories and conceptualizations for their empirical adequacy. I use work in applied ethics and a nonideal theory to show how SG fails to provide substantive justification for moral claims. Given the nature of SG, it can be used to justify moral claims without adequate justification. I argue that the social context in which SG was first used and the historical use of similar conceptions of intrinsic value within applied ethics demonstrate the credibility of this worry.

The critique from nonideal theory explains how and why the use of SG is particularly worrisome. SG is purportedly an impersonal goodness, recognized as good “from the point of view of the universe.” I argue that, much like Moore’s isolation test, this idealization is problematic. This thought experiment gives the impression that one has engaged in some philosophically significant analysis to arrive at an objective truth, when in fact they have merely consulted their own intuitions. Admittedly, these intuitions may not seem problematic so long as they are compatible with widely held moral norms. However, I argue that we should be critical of these idealizing devices within ethical theory. They give those with intellectual authority and social power the ability to reinforce oppressive moral norms by asserting their privileged perspective as universal truth. I continue this line of critique by showing how proponents of SG appeal to the necessary role it plays in (problematic) idealizations that presume a cosmic perspective, such as comparative world value judgments.

To further demonstrate the empirical inadequacy of SG, I show that it fails to be pragmatically efficient as an ethical concept. Defenders of SG argue that it is the value that makes sense of the objectivity of important, basic values (e.g. freedom and friendship). I argue, however, that SG is not necessary or useful for either explaining or accounting for these value judgments. I go on to show that these explanatory failures, the concerns that emerge from the applied ethics literature, and the worries revealed by the nonideal critique together suggest that SG, on the whole, does not serve the purposes of ethical theory. Instead, it frustrates them.

Finally, I argue that investigating the problem of SG has revealed that we have not established empirically adequate methods of moral justification. SG is invoked as a means to justify evaluative and moral claims, but the process by which it is done is not meaningfully different than making these claims by fiat. The applied ethics literature is instructive precisely because it confirms this practice. It demonstrates how SG and other similar concepts are invoked for their rhetorical power, largely relying on the shared moral intuitions of their interlocutors to maintain their credibility. The ethicists who object to the use of value concepts, like SG, argue that there are more informative and compelling ways of justifying these claims, but the need for this substantive justificatory work has been obscured by bald stipulations of value. In response, I briefly introduce some recent work in feminist moral epistemology that aims to develop methods of moral justification that would produce the kind of empirically adequate, substantive moral justification that applied ethicists are calling for (Jaggar and Tobin 2013, 2015). The work I have done in my dissertation is the foundation for developing a model of empirically adequate moral justification that would be of a piece with this new direction in feminist moral epistemology.

More immediately, I hope to develop a nonideal theoretical critique of some contemporary theories within metaethics and meta-normative ethics that explicitly or implicitly appeal to a Moorean value theory. While Moore's theory of goodness seemed to have fallen into disrepute for many years, it is enjoying increased popularity today. Many defenses of SG have emerged as a reaction to recent work by Thomson (2008) and Kraut (2011), but it is also defended in light of its connections to contemporary objective list

theorists of wellbeing (Arneson 2009) and metaethical nonnaturalism (Shafer-Landau 2003, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau 2014). The research I have done so far suggests that these contemporary views would be susceptible to a nonideal critique very similar to the one employed here against Moore.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alcoff, Linda Martín and Eva Kittay. 2007. "Defining Feminist Philosophy." In *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eva Kittay, 1-13. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Almotahari, Mahrad, and Adam Hosein. 2015. "Is Anything Just Plain Good?" *Philosophical Studies* 172 (6): 485-508.
- Anderson, Elizabeth. 1995. "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense." *Hypatia* 10 (3): 50-84.
- 2010. *The Imperative of Integration*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. 1958. "Modern Moral Philosophy." *Philosophy*, 33(124): 1-19.
- 1981. *Ethics, Religion and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Arneson, Richard. 2010. "Good, Period." *Analysis* 70 (4): 731-44.
- Audi, Robert. 2004. *The Good in the Right*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Batavia Chelsea, and Michael Paul Nelson. 2017. "For goodness sake! What is intrinsic value and why should we care?" *Biological Conservation* 209: 366-376.
- Benhabib, Seyla. 1992. *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. New York: Routledge.
- Bloomfield, Paul. 1997. "Of Goodness and Healthiness: A Viable Moral Ontology." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 87 (3): 309-332.
- 2001. *Moral Reality*. Oxford; New York : Oxford University Press.
- 2003. "Rules of 'Goodness': An Essay in Moral Semantics." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (3): 197-213.
- 2013. "Error Theory and the Concept of Morality." *Metaphilosophy* 44 (4). 451-469.

- Bradley, Ben. 2006. "Two Concepts of Intrinsic Value." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9 (2):111-130.
- Callicott, J. Baird. 1985. "Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory, and Environmental Ethics." *Environmental Ethics* 7: 257-275.
- Campbell, Michael. 2015. "Absolute Goodness: In Defence of the Useless and Immoral." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 49 (1-2):95-112.
- Carroll, Noël. 1987. "Can Government Funding of the Arts be Justified Theoretically?" *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 21 (1): 21-50.
- Callicott, J. Baird. 1985. "Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory, and Environmental Ethics." *Environmental Ethics* 7 (3):257-275.
- Carson, Tom. 2000. *Value and the Good Life*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Crisp, Roger. 2005. "Value, Reasons and the Structure of Justification: How to Avoid Passing the Buck." *Analysis*. 65 (1): 80-85.
- 2008. "Goodness and Reasons: Accentuating the Negative." *Mind*. 117 (466): 257-265.
- 2013. "In Defence of Absolute Goodness." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 87 (2): 476-482.
- Cuneo, Terence & Shafer-Landau, Russ. 2014. "The Moral Fixed Points: new directions for moral nonnaturalism." *Philosophical Studies* 171 (3):399-443.
- Dancy, Jonathan. 2004. *Ethics Without Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Dorsey, Dale. 2013. "Desire-satisfaction and Welfare as Temporal." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (1): 151-171.
- Duggan, Patrick S., Gail Geller, Lisa A. Cooper, and Mary Catherine Beach. 2006. "The moral nature of patient-centeredness: Is it "just the right thing to do"?" *Patient Education and Counseling* 62 (2): 271-276.
- Enoch, David. 2009. "How is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?" *The Journal of Ethics*, 13(1), 15-50.
- 2011. *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*. Oxford University Press.
- Ewing, A. C. 1979. *The Definition of Good*. Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press.

- Feinberg, Joel. 1994. "Not with My Tax Money the Problem of Justifying Government Subsidies for the Arts." *Public Affairs Quarterly* 8 (2): 101-123.
- Fletcher, Guy. 2008. "Mill, Moore, and Intrinsic Value." *Social Theory and Practice* 34: 517-32.
- 2009. "Review of Richard Kraut's *What Is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being*." *Analysis* 69: 576-78.
- 2012. "The Locative Analysis of Good For Formulated and Defended." *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy (JESP)* 6 (1): 1-26.
- 2012. "Resisting Buck-Passing Accounts of Prudential Value." *Philosophical Studies* 157: 77-91.
- Fine, Kit. 2002. "Varieties of Necessity." In *Conceivability and Possibility*, ed. John Hawthorne & Tamar Szabo Gendler, 253–282. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- FitzPatrick, William. 2008. "Robust Ethical Realism, Non-Naturalism, and Normativity." In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 3*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, 159–206. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2011. "Ethical Non-Naturalism and Normative Properties." In *New Waves in Metaethics*, ed. Michael Brady, 7–35. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Foot, Philippa. 1985. "Utilitarianism and the Virtues." *Mind*. XCIV (374): 196-209.
- 1985a. "Morality, Action, and Outcome." In *Morality and Objectivity: a tribute to J.L. Mackie*, ed. Ted Honderich, 23-38. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- 1997. "Virtues and Vices." In *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 163–177.
- 2010. *Natural goodness*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Forsberg, Ellen-Marie. 2011. "Inspiring Respect for Animals Through the Law? Current Development in the Norwegian Animal Welfare Legislation." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*. 24 (4): 351-366.
- Fricker, Miranda. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Geach, Peter. 1956. "Good and Evil." *Analysis* 17 (2): 33-42.

- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Gruen, Lori. 2002. "Refocusing environmental ethics: From intrinsic value to endorsable valuations." *Philosophy & Geography* 5 (2): 153-164.
- Hamlin, Alan and Zofia Stemplowska. 2012. "Theory, Ideal Theory and the Theory of Ideals. Political Studies Review." *Political Studies Review* 10 (1): 48-62. 10.1111/j.1478-9302.2011.00244.x. (accessed January 10, 2017).
- Hampton, Jean E. 1998. *The Authority of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haslanger, Sally Anne. 1999. "What Knowledge is and What it Ought to be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology." *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (13): 459-480.
- Hare, R. M. 1952. *The Language of Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1956. "Geach: Good and Evil." *Analysis* 17 (5):103 - 111.
- Heathwood, Chris. 2015. "Monism and Pluralism about Value." In *Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*, ed. Iwao Hirose & Jonas Olson, 136-157. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hirose Iwao, & Olson Jonas, eds. 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press USA.
- Horgan, Terry, & Timmons, Mark. 2006. *Metaethics After Moore*. Oxford: New York; Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press.
- Hurka, Thomas. 1987. "'Good' and 'Good For'." *Mind*. 96 (381): 71-73.
- 1994. *Principles: Short Essays on Ethics*. Toronto, Canada: Harcourt Brace.
- Jaggar, Alison M. 1989. "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology." *Inquiry* 32 (2): 151-176.
- 1993. "Taking Consent Seriously: Feminist Practical Ethics and Actual Moral Dialogue." In *Applied Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Earl R. Winkler and Jerrold R. Coombs, 67-86. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 2000. "Feminism in Ethics: Moral Justification." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. Miranda Fricker & J. Cambridge Hornsby, 225-244. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- 2009. “Transnational Cycles of Gendered Vulnerability: A Prologue to a Theory of Global Gender Justice.” *Philosophical Topics* 37 (2):33-52.
- 2013. “Situating Moral Justification: Rethinking the Mission of Moral Epistemology.” *Metaphilosophy* 44 (4): 383-408.
- 2013a. Naturalizing Moral Justification: Rethinking the Method of Moral Epistemology. *Metaphilosophy* 44 (4): 409-439.
- 2015 “Ideal and Nonideal Reasoning in Educational Theory.” *Educational Theory* 65 (2): 111-126.
- Kagan, Shelly. 1989. *The Limits of Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1998, “Rethinking Intrinsic Value.” *Journal of Ethics* 2: 277-97.
- Kraut, Richard. 2011. *Against Absolute Goodness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 2013. “Replies to Stroud, Thomson, and Crisp.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 87 (2): 483-501.
- 2006. “How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method.” In *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Richard Kraut, 76-95. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- 2007. *What is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Kincaid, Harold, John Dupré, & Alison Wylie, eds. 2007. *Value-Free Science?: Ideals and Illusions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. 1983. “Two Distinctions in Goodness.” *Philosophical Review* 92 (2):169-195.
- 2013. “The Relational Nature of the Good.” In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 8*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, 405-429. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kupper, Frank, and Tjard de Cock Buning. 2011. “Deliberating Animal Values: a Pragmatic Pluralistic Approach to Animal Ethics.” *Journal of Agricultural Environmental Ethics* 24 (5): 431-450.
- Langton, R. 2007. “Objective and Unconditioned Value.” *The Philosophical Review*, 116 (2): 157-185.

- Lemos, Noah. *Intrinsic Value: Concept and Warrant*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- McDaniel, Kris. 2014. "A Moorean View of the Value of Lives A Moorean View of the Value of Lives." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*. 95 (1): 23-46.
- Meyers, Diana T. 1994. *Subjection and Subjectivity: Psychoanalytic Feminism, and Moral Philosophy*. Thinking Gender Series. New York: Routledge.
- 2011. "Two Victim Paradigms and the Problem of 'Impure' Victims." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 2 (2): 255-275.
- 2012. "Psychocorporeal Selfhood, Practical Intelligence, and Adaptive Autonomy." In *Autonomy and the Self*, ed. Michael Kühler and Nadja Jelinek, 141-153. Dordrecht: Springer.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair C. 2012. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mackie, J. L. 1977. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. London: Penguin.
- McPherson, Tristram. 2009. "Moorean Arguments and Moral Revisionism." *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 3: 1-25.
- 2012. "Unifying Moral Methodology." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (4):523-549.
- 2012. "Ethical Non-naturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience." In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 3*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, 207-245. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2013. "What is at Stake in Debates Between Normative Realists?" *Nous*, doi:10.1111/nous. 12055.
- 2015. The Methodological Irrelevance of Reflective Equilibrium. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Philosophical Methods*, ed. Chris Daly, 652-674. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mills, Charles W. 2005. "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology." *Hypatia* 20 (3):165-184.
- Moore, G. E., and Thomas Baldwin. 1993 (1903). *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge, Engl.: Cambridge University Press.
- Moore, G. E. 1912. *Ethics*. London: Williams & Norgate.

- 1922. “The Conception of Intrinsic Value.” In *Philosophical Studies*. Reprinted in Baldwin, 1993: 280-98.
- 1942. “A Reply to My Critics.” In *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, ed. P. A. Schilpp, 535-677. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1986. *The View From Nowhere*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Norton, Bryan G. 1992. “Epistemology and Environmental Values.” *The Monist*, 75(2): 208-226.
- Nussbaum, Martha Craven. 1986. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1999. “Women and Equality: The Capabilities Approach.” *International Labour Review*, 138(3), 227-245.
- Oddie, Graham. 1997. “Killing and Letting-Die: Bare differences and clear differences.” *Philosophical Studies* 88 (3):267-287.
- Okin, Susan Moller. 2007. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books—Perseus Books Group.
- Olson, Jonas. 2006. “G. E. Moore on Goodness and Reasons.” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 84 (4): 525-534.
- 2009. “Reasons and the New Non-Naturalism.” In *Spheres of Reason*, ed. Simon Robertson, 164-182. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- O’Neill, Onora. 1987. “Abstraction, Idealization and Ideology in Ethics.” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture Series* 22: 55-69. doi:10.1017/S0957042X00003667
- 1996. *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning*. Cambridge, Engl.: Cambridge University Press.
- Orsi, Francesco. 2013. “How to Be a Friend of Absolute Goodness.” *Philosophia* 41 (4): 1237-1251.
- Parfit, Derek. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2001. “Rationality and Reasons.” In *Exploring Practical Philosophy*, ed. Dan Egonsson, *et al.*, 17-39. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- 2011. *On What Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Parks, Jennifer A. 2010. "Care Ethics and the Global Practice of Commercial Surrogacy." *Bioethics*, 24(7): 333-340.
- Rabinowicz, W. and Rønnow-Rasmussen, T. 2000. "A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for its Own Sake." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100: 33–51.
- 2015. "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value." In *Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*, ed. Iwao Hirose & Jonas Olson, 29-43. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rae, Scott 2012. "The Language of Human Dignity in the Abortion Debate." *Human Dignity in Bioethics: From Worldviews to the Public Square*, ed. In Stephen Dilley & Nathan J. Palpant, 219-238. New York: Routledge.
- Rawls, John. 1999 (1971). *A Theory of Justice—Revised Edition*, 1999. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Regan, Tom. 1992. "Does Environmental Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist*. 75 (2): 161-182.
- Rønnow-Rasmussen, T. 2002. "Instrumental Values: Strong and Weak." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 5(1): 23-43.
- Rønnow-Rasmussen, T., & Zimmerman, M., eds. 2005. *Recent Work on Intrinsic Value*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Rolston III, Holmes. 1994. *Conserving Natural Value*. Columbia University Press.
- Rosati, Connie S. 1998. "Ideals." doi:10.4324/9780415249126-L038-1. In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Oxford: Taylor and Francis.  
<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/ideals/v-1>.
- Ross, W. D. 1930. *The Right and the Good*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1939. *Foundations of Ethics: the Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Aberdeen, 1935-6*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- Rowland, Richard. 2016. "In Defence of Good Simpliciter." *Philosophical Studies* 173 (5):1371-1391.
- Scanlon, Thomas. 1998. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ. 2003. *Moral Realism: A Defence*. New York: Oxford University Press.



- 2006. "Ethics as philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Nonnaturalism." In *Metaethics after Moore*, ed. Terry Horgan & Mark Timmons, 209–232. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sidgwick, Henry. 1996. *The Methods of Ethics*. Bristol, U.K.: Thoemmes Press.
- Smith, Graham. 2003. *Deliberative Democracy and the Environment*. London: Routledge.
- Stroud, Sarah. 2013. "'Good For' supra 'Good.'" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 87 (2): 459-466.
- Taurek, John M. 1977. "Should the Numbers Count?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs*. 6 (4): 293-316.
- Thomson, Judith Jarvis. 1997. "The Right and the Good." *Journal of Philosophy* 94 (6): 273-298.
- 2006. "The Legacy of Principia." In *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Terry Horgan & Mark Timmons, 62-82. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2008. *Normativity*. Chicago: Open Court.
- 2013. "GOODNESS." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 87 (2): 467-475.
- Tobin, Theresa Weynand. 2011. "The Relevance of Trust for Moral Justification". *Social Theory and Practice*. 37 (4): 599-628.
- Valentini, Laura. 2012. "Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map." *Philosophy Compass* 7 (9):654-664.
- von Wright, G. H. 1963. *The Varieties of Goodness*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Walker, Margaret Urban. 2007. *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wedgwood, Ralph. 2007. *The Nature of Normativity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Bernard Arthur Owen. 1993. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Wylie, Alison. 2003. "Why Standpoint Matters." In *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, ed. Robert Figueroa & Sandra G. Harding, 26-48. Routledge.

Ziff, Paul. 1960. *Semantic Analysis*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

#### TRANSLATIONS & COMMENTARIES

Aquinas, Thomas

Litzinger, L.I. Ed, trans. 1964. *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics by St. Thomas Aquinas*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company.

Aristotle

Cooke, H., & Tredennick, H. (1938). *Categories On interpretation ; Prior analytics* (Loeb Classical Library ; 325). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ostwald, M. (1999). *Nicomachean ethics*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rackham, H. (1926). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Rev. ed., Loeb Classical Library (73). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Kant, Immanuel

Paton, H.J., trans. 1964. *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. New York: Harper & Row.

Ellington, James W., trans. 1994. *Ethical Philosophy: the Complete Texts of Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, and Metaphysical Principles of Virtue, Part II of The Metaphysics of Morals*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

Plato

Cooper, John M. 2005. *Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

## VITA

Sarah Marie Babbitt completed a double major in English and American Studies as an undergraduate, receiving her bachelor's degree from California State University, Fullerton in 2004. She later received a master's degree in Philosophy from Biola University in 2009, and she continued to take graduate-level courses in the Philosophy M.A. program at California State University, Los Angeles for part of the year in 2011. Later that year, she began her doctoral work at Loyola University Chicago, where she received her doctorate in 2018.