

ABSTRACT

The Good and Other Values: In Defense of Neo-Platonic Ethical Non-Naturalism

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For over a century, mainstream philosophy in the English-speaking world has given a secondary role to values. This trend comes as a result of the perceived failure of G. E. Moore's arguments about intrinsic goodness. Value so understood is thought to be too inflexible to account for the subjective range of value responses and normative reasons agents have. These arguments, however, trade on a novel conception of what values are. On that view, values are denuded of any internal relationship to descriptive facts. Retrieval of a broadly Platonic theory supports a different conception, according to which values are finite ways of being good that are aimed at the transcendent Good itself. The neo-Platonic view avoids the objections faced by other value-based moral philosophies, and it also provides the conceptual machinery to explain the range of evaluative thinking better than competing theories.

The Good and Other Values: In Defense of Neo-Platonic Ethical Non-Naturalism

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DEDICATION

To my children, who give me much to contemplate
And to Carol Anne, whose love shows me how
Soli deo gloria

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One of the main insights of George Orwell's *1984* is that the destruction of words incapacitates thinking. The less we can articulate, the less we can think about things that matter. This goal is desirable for the tyrannical state of Orwell's dystopian nightmare. Without the ability to think about what matters, resistance is impossible. Orwell expresses this tendency in a form of a monologue by a state linguist, one character named Syme.

It's a beautiful thing, the Destruction of words. Of course the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well. It isn't only the synonyms; there are also the antonyms. After all, what justification is there for a word, which is simply the opposite of some other word? A word contains its opposite in itself. Take "good," for instance. If you have a word like 'good,' what need is there for a word like "bad"? "Ungood" will do just as well—better, because it's an exact opposite, which the other is not. Or again, if you want a stronger version of 'good,' what sense is there in having a whole string of vague useless words like 'excellent' and 'splendid' and all the rest of them? "Plusgood" covers the meaning or "doubleplusgood" if you want something stronger still. Of course we use those forms already, but in the final version of Newspeak there'll be nothing else. In the end the whole notion of goodness and badness will be covered by only six words—in reality, only one word. (1992, 54)

Doubtless Syme speaks for Orwell in every way except for his loyalty. What the fictional character paraded as a final victory for Big Brother, the non-fictional novelist bemoaned as the final defeat of mankind. While Orwell's point applied to language in general, it is perhaps no accident that he used evaluative language to exhibit it. It is difficult to resist the reduction of evaluative language, which has been thought by some to be defined by its apparently unique contestability. We seem capable of rational disagreement about

what is “good” and “bad” to a degree that is not possible in other inquiries. Emphasis on this contestability is positively correlated with emphasis on generic positivity and negativity of evaluative terms and concepts. More specific evaluations are simply the positive evaluation about more specific set of facts or state of affairs. Still, something is lost all the same, at least according to Orwell, when we are unable to distinguish between the “excellent” and the “splendid.”

This dissertation is about *what* is lost, that is, what it is that we would be incapable of thinking about, should Orwell’s fears come to pass, and moral language were reduced to “only one word.” Accordingly, this dissertation is about the nature of value. Philosophers have attended to various phenomena; first principles and causes, then essences, then psychic phenomena, and only recently into the nature of value itself (Fronzizi 1979, 5). The contemporary study of value itself is sometimes thought to have begun with G.E. Moore’s question, what is it to be good? (1903a, §24). For Moore, the answer is the unitary and unanalyzable property of intrinsic value. This dissertation gives an answer like Moore’s, in that I argue that goodness is irreducible and in large part mysterious. However, unlike Moore, I deny that goodness functions in normativity by forming a unitary property univocally shared by all things that have it.

In contemporary terms, I want to defend a view that can be called “Neo-Platonic Ethical Non-Naturalism.” The view is non-naturalistic because it sees an irreducible role given to values. Though I am not committed to any particular instance of this distinction, Orwell’s example summarizes the point well. The *excellent* and the *splendid* are different in inherently evaluative ways. Unlike the most common forms of non-naturalism that go back to thinkers like G. E. Moore, however, the view is neo-Platonic insofar as it

understands the Good as transcending the particular values that instantiate it. The emerging picture, then, is that good things are good in virtue of the Good, but their goodness is not reducible to it in such a way that would entail a single property across all instances of its instantiation.

As a neo-Platonic view, my picture has two main components. First, the Good is the central object of practical thinking. Second, other values are defined in terms of their relation to the Good, specifically in terms of their teleological relations to it. As such, I assume a cognitivist view of moral language and realist view of moral properties or facts. While these metaethical debates are still alive and well, this project considers the possibilities that open up to us when we come down on one side. Moral values are real and “out there” to be discovered. But precisely *what is it* that is out there? And are there general characteristics to these realities? There are enough moral realists out there to warrant these questions.

Like a defense of most any position, my overall argument has positive and negative parts. The positive case is that values display a range of phenomena best explained by accounts that do not reduce them to normative facts about practical responses to them. The significant role values play in practical thinking is not played by facts of the form *I ought to do this or that*. The negative case is that the main objection to value-based views—that they imply some version of consequentialism—is unsound. Values give a point to practical behavior, and that point is not always aptly an intention to *promote* something.

Metaethicists have made much of the difference between ethical terms, concepts, and properties. The importance of these distinctions is itself a result of what one thinks

about the questions I attempt to address in this dissertation, as I hope will become clear in chapter three. Still, I have tried to follow standard practice by indicating the difference. Words are referred to with quotation marks, concepts in all caps, and properties with italics. In a more comprehensive work of ethics, the relationships between “good,” GOOD, and *being good* would be clearer than they are here.

In chapter two, I attempt to retrieve an evaluative outlook from Plato and Boethius. Value theory in contemporary analytic philosophy has largely, and unjustly, ignored perspectives on value prior to Henry Sidgwick. There are many figures one could look to. I look at Plato and his great early medieval intellectual successor, Boethius. Specifically, I argue that both Plato and Boethius put forward a “two-tiered” value system. Two levels of value exist, and neither is reducible to the other. At bottom, they thought, there turns out to be one value, the Good. This Good is diffused in various modes in finite reality, and these modes mediate rational pursuit of the Good. Importantly, this mediation does not resemble merely instrumental (*viz.* causal) relations.

Chapter three looks at the school of contemporary moral philosophy that most closely resembles the Platonic thesis. Philosophers in the last half century have argued for the importance of so-called “thick” evaluative concepts, such as the *noble* or the *lovely*, over “thin” ones, such as the *good* or the *right*. I argue that the arguments for this priority are sound, and indeed, should extend beyond concepts and language to evaluative properties, which are irreducible to thin evaluative properties or any conjunction of thin and non-normative properties. While philosophers have given a great deal of thought to the question whether values are thick, which is alleged to have implications for moral philosophy, those implications have not been fully explored by the mainstream. I attempt

to rectify that by arguing that existing thick moral properties are related to the good, which is itself thick.

In chapter four, I argue that deontic-based accounts of values cannot participate in the retrieval project begun in chapters one and two. Some philosophers argue that to have a value is to be object of some normative response. For instance, on some theories, to be good just is to be the fitting object of a pro-attitude. That is, *pleasure is good* in reality turns out to be nothing more than the fact that *pleasure is the fitting object of a pro-attitude*. I argue that practical thinking presents certain considerations as *important* over and above other considerations that are merely *relevant* to practical reasons. This importance manifests in multiple ways such as by being the source of a variety of reasons or simply in having an elevated status in an explanation among the set of phenomena that provide an explanation for a normative reason.

Chapter five looks at the most famous argument against value-based moral philosophies, namely that they fail to provide an adequate theory of normative reasons. More specifically, critics object that value-based reasons are teleological, and thus there is no way to ground practical reasons in values that does not contradict widely held and plausible moral beliefs. In response, I argue that value-based reasons are not in general teleological. In fact, there is no general theory of reasons that would specify a universal act-type to be given by a thick-values-first moral philosophy. Hence, values are not in general reasons to promote anything.

Finally, chapter six looks at the existence of finite and creaturely value, given the identification of the Good with God. I argue that if God is indeed the Good, then this imposes strong explanatory requirements on any adequate value theory. These

requirements, in turn, pushes us toward an account of finite/creaturely value that is similar to the one advanced in earlier chapters. More specifically, creaturely value consists of movement or orientation toward the Good. I call this last claim the God-directedness thesis. Consequently, at least one way finite goods participate in divine goodness is by being ordered toward it. I survey competing theistic accounts of value creaturely value and argue that the God-directedness thesis has advantages over each of them in satisfying desiderata imposed by theism and the evaluative phenomena to be explained. This chapter considers the relationship between the theses of the previous chapters and theism. As such, it need not be thought of as an implication of the previous chapters, and the preceding project does not depend on the success of its arguments or the truth of its conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

Retrieving the Good

2.1 A Tale of Two Principia

Perhaps no figure has exerted more influence over modern value theory than G. E. Moore. He called for an overhauling of moral philosophy in his *Principia Ethica*. The following passage briefly states the rationale for this shift and also his proposed way forward.

Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good. But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these other properties were simply not ‘other,’ but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call the “naturalistic fallacy.” (1903a, §10)¹

Moral philosophers, Moore thought, had not sufficiently defined their subject matter.

Ethics is not ultimately about pleasure, or the satisfaction of desire, or any other thing that might be thought of as good. Rather, ethics is ultimately about what has the property of being intrinsically valuable. Moreover, we can’t say with further specification what this property is except apophatically—it is not *being desirable*, nor *being pleasurable*, etc.—and perhaps that it is what is responsible for what we ought to do (1903a, §90).

Thus, for Moore, proper moral thinking concerns what and under what conditions something has this property.

On the aforementioned picture, the whole of ethics consists in the singular inquiry into what has this property, and the degree to which something has it relative to other

¹ For a curation of similar passages in Moore, see Feldman (2019).

things. Aesthetic experiences, companionship and camaraderie, and many other things have intrinsic value. This thinking also considers whether something has intrinsic value necessarily or if its possession is conditioned. Perhaps pleasure is good, but not if it is directed toward someone's pain, unless it is a mild degree of pain and they deserve it, and so on. The reasoning left to one, after one has grasped these fundamental principles, concerns decidedly non-moral concepts employing the use of theoretical reason. In this way, Moore sought to construct the groundwork for a "scientific" moral philosophy based in a fundamental set of principles from which one could construct a full system of ethics. (1903a, xix).

I begin with Moore to provide a contrast with a strikingly different perspective offered in Plato's *Republic*, as well as other dialogues, and the tradition of thinking that spawned from it. The difference is remarkable because Plato's and Moore's outlooks share several similarities. Like Moore, Plato thought ethical thinking ultimately concerns value, even intrinsic value. Like Moore, Plato thought that goodness is to some extent indefinable, although whether he thought this is true in principle or due to the cognitive limitations of certain rational beings is disputed.² These similarities notwithstanding, Plato draws very different lessons from his reflections on intrinsic value.

About halfway through the *Republic*, Socrates asks what ethical thinking is ultimately about. Up until that point, the question between Socrates and his interlocutors concerned why one ought to follow the demands of justice. The specific discussion led them to reflect on the just ruler. The just rulers will themselves be ruled by reason, taking care to study important things relevant to their office. They will of course study many

² See White (2006).

things related to the peculiarities of their realm. A just ruler must know about the realm's history, who is trustworthy for delegation, and so on. What makes the philosopher-kings just, however, is their ultimate devotion to the study of the Good (ἀγαθοῦ).

You see, you have often heard it said that the form of the good is the most important thing to learn about, and that it is by their relation to it that just things and the others become useful and beneficial. And now you must be pretty certain that that is what I am going to say, and, in addition, that we have no adequate knowledge of it. And if we do not know it, you know that even the fullest possible knowledge of other things is of no benefit to us, any more than if we acquire any possession without the good. Or do you think there is any benefit in possessing everything but the good? Or to know everything without knowing the good, thereby knowing nothing fine or good? (2004, VI.505a-b)

So, a dialogue ostensibly about justice endorses habits of thought that are ultimately about the Good. The Good is fundamental to the study of ethics.³ It is the basic explanation for the value of all other things that matter.

What gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower is the form of the good. And as the cause of knowledge and truth, you must think of it as an object of knowledge. Both knowledge and truth are beautiful things. But if you are to think correctly, you must think of the good as other and more beautiful than they. In the visible realm, light and sight are rightly thought to be sunlike, but wrongly thought to be the sun. So, here it is right to think of knowledge and truth as goodlike, but wrong to think that either of them is the good—for the state of the good is yet more honored. (2004, VI.508e)

If we interpret Socrates as representing Plato's opinion, or a broadly "Platonic" opinion, then these passages report that Plato also sought for a principle of practical reason. Like Moore, he locates this principle in the *good itself*. Plato, however, did not think that a moral system falls out of the good in any straightforward sense. For there is a moral nature to the things built upon it that must be addressed on their own terms. Perhaps if we understood its principle perfectly, we would not need to learn about them. However, they

³ Indeed, it is fundamental to the study of *anything*, according to Socrates. I leave the metaphysical aspects of Plato's doctrine to the side.

possess distinctive moral dimensions, and so present the opportunity to teach us something about their source. They nonetheless wholly depend on the Good.

That, then, is what every soul pursues, and for its sake does everything. The soul has a hunch that the good is something, but it is puzzled and cannot adequately grasp just what it is or acquire the sort of stable belief about it that it has about other things, and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give. (2004, VI.505e)

The disagreements between Plato and our modern commentators on goodness are deeper than one might expect. It is not simply that figures such as Plato and Moore differ over what sorts of things can be good and what role goodness plays in practical thinking. They do diverge on these fronts, but these disagreements are a symptom of a deeper divergence between these thinkers. For here we have two radically different conceptions of what role “good” plays in one’s moral philosophy. For Moore, the main task of ethics is asking what has the property *being intrinsically good*; for Plato, the task is rather seeing things in light of the good, including the ways those things imitate and pursue the good.

Over one hundred years later, many metaethicists take issue with Moore’s claims. Some present allegedly successful analyses of “good.” Others argue that even if no successful analysis is possible, successful “real definitions” are nonetheless possible. Still others argue that definitions aside, the referent of “good” has a nature and this nature would yield factual description in a language that could express it. In the development of the debates on the nature of value, the Platonic picture sketched above has not returned to the mainstream. One has the sense reading these thinkers that they have something in common with Moore that they don’t share with Plato. For the rest of this chapter, I will try to bring to light features of the Platonic tradition on value that are neglected today.

My point here is not to emphasize the well-documented difference between the first-order normative theories of Plato and Moore. My purpose is to emphasize the differences in the perspectives on value between the Platonic and Moorean schools. Moore thought that intrinsic value was a univocal property shared by all things that have it. Clearly, Plato does not think of value this way. I will not further reflect on Plato's doctrine of the good. Instead, I will look at one of his early medieval followers, Boethius. The doctrine of the good in Boethius' *De hebdomadibus* and *Consolatio* reinforce and develop the two-tiered conception of value I have been ascribing to Plato.

2.2 Boethius on Goodness

Plato's ideas on goodness enjoyed a revival in later antiquity. One important figure in this tradition is Boethius. Here I want to look at the value theory that emerges upon close examination of his value theory specifically. Retrievals can come in many forms, and some may prefer breadth over depth. Such a strategy has the advantage of establishing that the proposal of the author is indeed found to have widespread allegiance in certain periods of the history of philosophy. Boethius is not typically considered an important figure in the history of moral philosophy and is usually ignored altogether with one or two exceptions (Bourke 1968, 65-66). As one of the great figures of the Neoplatonic tradition, however, he represents a formidable proponent of the two-tiered value theory briefly described above. Thus, one looking to see how well contemporary value theorists measure up to past thinking on their subject matter would do well to acquaint themselves with his ideas.

In its broadest form, the Boethian picture of value presents several features similar to the Platonic view. First, there is the distinction between first and second goods.

First goods are primary and ultimate, while second goods are subordinate and incomplete. The second feature is the dependence of second goods on the first, which is the Good itself. The relevance second goods have in practical thinking is always tied up with the relevance of the first good. This picture is articulated in two texts. The first is a short and understudied treatise called the *De hebdomadibus* (DH).⁴ The DH is mainly concerned to establish the existence of second goods and thus genuine plurality of values. The second text, of course, consists of the relevant passages of the *Consolatio Philosophiae*, and in particular books III.9-12. This passage is mainly concerned to establish the dependence of second goods on the first. Each of these texts illustrate the difference between first and second goods in their own way. The former concerns how second goods come from the first good, and the latter concerns how they return back to it.

It is in part the purpose of these texts to clarify what this distinction amounts to. In neither case does the distinction map on to a straightforward one between instrumental and non-instrumental ends. Second goods are not merely useful or valuable for the effects they cause. If the distinction between first and second goods amounted to no more than the instrumental/non-instrumental distinction, then there would be no interesting problem for either text to solve. Instead, the alleged problem of first and second goods only arises when we think of creatures as bearing non-instrumental value. For then, there is some difficulty explaining their existence. But if creatures are merely instrumentally valuable, then the question these texts attempt to answer would not arise in the first place. It would have been based on the crudest of equivocations, the answer to which would have been

⁴ Otherwise known as Boethius' third theological tractate, or *Opuscula sacra* III (OSIII). All translations of OSIII and the *Consolatio Philosophiae* (*Consolatio*) are original and are taken from the 1973 re-issue of the Loeb Classical Library edition of Boethius' *Theological Tractates and Consolation of Philosophy*.

simply to point out that second goods are not like first goods. Means-ends relations do not invite that sort of confusion.

So, the distinction between first and second goods will be underwritten by some non-instrumental dependence relation. Both first and second goods give a point to action. When one cites a second good as an explanation for some course of action, it does not explain merely in reference to a further end without contributing anything of its own to the point of the action. This is because the good cited itself makes sense of the course of action as something desirable to pursue. However, it does so in a way that depends on the first good. This is a more difficult distinction to make sense of than the one between instrumental and non-instrumental goods.

2.2.1 *Value in the De hebdomadibus*

The DH addresses a potential problem that results from a set of propositions or “axioms” that Boethius was known for teaching. These axioms concerned various principles of property attribution. Boethius introduces a normative principle as his final axiom, which states that like ought to seek like. Axiom XI reads as follows.

All diversity is discordant, but likeness is to be sought. That which seeks another is demonstrated to be naturally the same kind as the very thing which it seeks.
(OSIII 49-52)

There is a thorny issue here concerning the relationship between natural and non-natural facts. The first sentence states an explicit normative principle—like *ought* to pursue like—while the second sentence appears to state a principle about the actual behavior of things, that whatever a thing pursues is its like. Setting this question aside, Boethius at least seems committed to the principle that for any two things, x and y, x ought to pursue

y if and only if x is naturally similar to y. So, if x is naturally similar to y, then it ought to seek y, and if x ought to seek y, then it is naturally similar to y.

Two things are naturally similar if they share natures. They are similar in virtue of having the same natural properties. So x and y are naturally similar if x has F only if y has F. Additionally, Boethius accepts the standard line on goodness found in Plato and Aristotle that all things seek the good (OSIII.56-60). From these commitments, an apparent problem arises. The problem is that Boethius' theistic commitments preclude him from saying that things are good the way that God is good. There is only one substantial good. It seems, then, that ordinary finite substances cannot be good at all. In other words, Boethius' commitments apparently commit him to the following inconsistent triad.⁵

- Every second good tends toward the first good. (Aristotelean assumption)
- Things only tend toward that which they are naturally like. (Axiom IX)
- No second good is naturally like the first good. (Theistic/Platonic commitments)

Second goods have to be both naturally like and unlike the first good. Only the first good is substantial goodness, he thinks, meaning that only the first good is good by its nature such that it is a contradiction to deny it. If finite things were good, they would pursue the first good, and so be substantial goods. But they are not substantial goods because they are not similar to God in this respect. Thus, the task of the DH is to explain "in what way can substances be good in that they are but are not substantial goods."

Boethius' solution is to deny that natural similarity entails that the shared features are had in the same way. It is not the case that x is F per se if and only if F cannot be denied of x without contradiction. In other words, he argues that while finite beings are

⁵ I give a more thorough interpretation of this argument in Kemp (2023).

good in virtue of their existence, the two are not conceptually inseparable. Boethius carves a third category of propositions between substantial and accidental predication. The former occurs when some predicate is attributed to the subject by definition. Some x can be F in itself though it is conceivably not F. It turns out that substantial predication is not the same as per se predication.

Accidental Predication:	x is F by participation.
<i>Per se</i> Predication:	x is F in that it is.
Substantial Predication:	x is F by definition in that F is conceptually inseparable from F. “X is F” cannot be denied without contradiction.

Given the distinction between per se and substantial predication, we must now ask whether Axiom IX requires uniformity between the seeker and sought. That is, if x is naturally similar to y in being good, must they both be substantially good or per se good or could they be different in this respect? It is difficult to proceed with this question. One might be satisfied, however, as Boethius seems to be satisfied, that second things are good by nature, even though they are conceivably not good. They have goodness by nature. This should be sufficient to satisfy the normative principle that a thing ought to pursue only what it is *naturally* like.

Unfortunately, this logical point does not fully resolve the central puzzle of the DH. Boethius’ solution is that creatures are good in virtue of their being but not (unlike God) by definition. And so creatures are conceivably not good, but God isn’t. But this is to assert that God and creatures are good in different ways. This may well be true, but only if something makes it true. It is not a brute fact. Without an explanation, Boethius opens himself to the objection that he merely helps himself to the distinction that saves his Axioms. This problem extends beyond the general metaphysical problem of

accounting for the natures of things. Boethius' modal solution would not apply to them since, for instance, it is not conceivable that a triangle is not an enclosed plane with three sides, or a human is not a rational animal. The task applies more narrowly to the property of goodness, which can be denied of creatures without contradiction. Thus, we are owed some account of finite goodness that allows him to say that they are weakly, but not strongly, similar to the first good. Such an account will reveal the reason creatures are conceivably not good. The logical distinction between conceivability and possibility only pushes the problem to this level of explanation.

Some have interpreted Boethius as assuming what I call a "relational" account of value. On these interpretations, the goodness of finite things is a relation either to the first good or to kind-based standards of goodness. I argue that better than these interpretations is one that sees second goodness as a monadic property of creatures (2023). Underwriting Boethius' solution in the DH is a view of second goods as simultaneously borrowing their goodness from the Good and possessing it themselves. That is, underwriting the solution in the DH is a two-tiered value theory on which the goodness of second goods is like, but not identical to, the goodness of the first good. This reading is supported by considering the *Consolatio*.

2.2.2 Value in the *Consolatio*

I am not the first to claim that one should look to the discussion of divine and creaturely goodness book III of the *Consolation of Philosophy* for a better grasp of Boethius' solution in the DH (Stewart 1974, 138). The *Consolation* does not use the terms "first" and "second" goods. This is because Boethius there argues for the distinction by starting with ordinary values and then showing that they require a

transcendent Good. In *Consolatio* III.9 the discussion concerns the distinction between true and false ideas about happiness. One way common opinion about happiness goes wrong is that happiness is often confused with one of its aspects. People desire power, self-sufficiency, fame, respect, or pleasure as if these are individually sufficient for happiness, when in fact none of them are. But it would be just as false to deny that they are not necessary for happiness. Boethius, in the voice of Lady Philosophy, argues that these are one and the same.

And so it is necessary through the same arguments that self-sufficiency, power, fame, honor, and pleasure are different names but their substance differs in no way. (III.9.41-44)

Take the example of power. Power, it turns out, is also self-sufficient, famous, honored, and pleasurable (III.9.10-25). One cannot truly attain it without attaining the others. However, power can't mean the same as these things, since then one could not pursue it to the neglect of the others. It can therefore be aimed at apart from aiming at the others. But since happiness is the complete good, it lacks nothing to be desired. What results from aiming at, say, power without self-sufficiency leaves much to be desired. Lady Philosophy concludes from this,

Happiness is not to be sought in any mode of things which are believed to satisfy by themselves the ones desiring. (III.9.71-73)

The point here is that there is a normative relationship between the true and perfect happiness, and the aspects under which it is grasped and pursued by finite and error-prone humans. Power is not bad, or neutral. It is rather an intimation of complete happiness. It is a limited, unsatisfying *good*.

These things appear to give mortals either images of the true good or certain imperfect goods, but they cannot compare to the true and perfect good. (III.9.91-94)

Secondary goods are fragmentary intimations of the perfect Good they imitate. They possess a genuine kind of value and are eligible as genuine objects of interest and appreciation in practical thinking. Consider again what it means to be a value. It provides a point to practical options, typically actions, in the light of which they are intelligible. To say that distinct finite values have different “names,” then, is not to say that they have merely different labels. If “honor” and “pleasure” share a single referent, as Boethius thinks, they do not do so in the way that the English “pleasure” and the Latin “*voluptas*” mean the same thing. In the first case, the two words indicate distinct considerations that would afford different responses and yield different actions. To say, then, that they amount to the same thing, the Good, which has *all* values within it, is to commit to a certain version of a two-tiered value theory according to which the plurality of values are unified by a transcendent Good.

One might object to the interpretation I have been developing on the ground of Boethius’ answer to Lady Philosophy’s question whether “everything that is good is good through participation in the Good” (III.11.22-23). He answers in the affirmative, which might indicate that finite things are said to attain merely participatory goodness extrinsic to their natures. Thus, this passage seems to contradict my claim above that Boethius in the DH does not think that second goods are good through participation.

Boethius uses “participation” differently in the two texts. In the DH, Boethius is thinking of participation as the metaphysical basis for acquiring an accidental property. A ball is red through participation in redness. The ball takes part in redness because it does not have redness in virtue of its own nature. Creaturely things do have goodness *per se*, however, even if they do not have it substantially. That is, they have it naturally even

though it is no contradiction to deny that they have it. It is a contradiction, by contrast, to deny that the Good is good. Even in the *Consolation*, however, Boethius does not indicate that second goods are good accidentally. In fact, the opposite is suggested by the line of argument of this passage of the book. Consider again the concrete examples of second goods presented in the text. Security is not possessed without the other aspects of good. But also, when it is possessed with those aspects, it has unity and unity is identical to the Good. When unity is lost, the various aspects are separated from each other and destroyed. The second good of security, it follows, only exists when the conditions for its goodness obtain. So then it turns out that second goods are *necessarily* good (though not by definition) in the *Consolation* as well as in the DH.

A more difficult passage to reconcile with my interpretation reads as follows.

The main cause all things are sought is rightly believed to be goodness. What is most desired seems to be the purpose for what is sought. For example, if somebody wanted to ride a horse for the purpose of health, he does not desire the motion of the riding as much as the health that results. Thus, since all things are aimed at for the sake of the good, they are not desired by all as much as the good itself. (III.10.128-135)

This passage is a straightforward commitment to the mere dependent value of what is not the Good itself. For it is all sought for the sake of the Good, and no more.

We must be careful not to read too much into the quoted passage. The kind of value Boethius ascribes to second goods need not be instrumental in the way we think of instrumental value now—the kind of value that is entirely parasitic on the value of what something causes in some way. Boethius here is not saying that the relationship between second and first goods like the relationship between a knife and bread slices or a hammer and a birdhouse. Nor is he saying that the value of creaturely things is merely derivative,

the way that the wall Raphael's *School of Athens* is painted on is valuable. The point that second goods make in practical reason is not merely in virtue of their causal properties.

The main point of the quoted passage is to assert the dependence of second goods on the Good. In this way, the relationship between first and second goods is analogous to the relationship between instrumental and non-instrumental ends. The analogy to mere instrumental relations is apt to highlight the asymmetry. If health is the end of horseback riding, then it explains the value of the latter, and just in that respect, the value of the former is *not* explained by the latter. The influence that second goods have in proper practical reasoning is never independent of the first good.

2.2.3 *Qualified Absolute Goodness*

If we interpret the Consolation as making the same distinction underlying the main question of the DH, then the conclusion Boethius arrives at in the former text sheds some light on what that distinction amounts to. The main argument of the Consolation in these passages is that security, honors, pleasures, and so on, are not to be confused for happiness itself. They are not happiness because they are not ultimately satisfying, and they fail in this respect not merely because they cannot be attained on their own, but also because they leave something to be desired. They are fragmentary and fragile glimpses of the Good, which is happiness. They tell us something about what it is and what it is like. But these images are not themselves identical to each other in every respect. To continue with Boethius' particular examples, the point in pursuing security is not like the point in pursuing honor. The main difference between first and second goods, then, amounts to what is complete and what is not. Something is a "First Good" because it has the following feature.

Unqualified Absolute Goodness (UAG): x has UAG if and only if (1) x is absolutely good and (2) there is no possible y that is absolutely good in some way that x isn't.

Similarly, something is a "second good" because it has the following feature.

Aspectual Absolute Goodness (AAG): x has AAG if and only if (1) x is absolutely good and (2) there is at least one possible y that is absolutely good in some way that x isn't.

The difference between first and second goodness amounts to the difference between UAG and AAG. The difference is not that God really possesses goodness and creatures do not really possess it. Creatures are in full possession of a kind of value that is a mode of the Good. They do so in their own distinct ways, striving toward the Good by exemplifying and acting according to their own distinctives.

This absolutist explanation of Boethius' modal distinction satisfies the requirements of a successful interpretation. First, it not only maintains, but explains, the privileged status of the First Good over second goods. The First Good has UAG while second goods only have AAG. Both types of goodness are absolute insofar as they are inseparable from their bearers. UAG denotes a maximal evaluative state. What has that kind of goodness is desirable in every possible way something can be desirable. It is itself the proper aim of action and attaining is ultimately satisfying. Alternatively, the latter is finite and therefore fails to satisfy all desire for the valuable. Attaining it, however, is not ultimately satisfying.

Second, my interpretation explains how creatures are good per se, that is, in virtue of their being: Their very being is an aspect of the First Good. The First Good has UAG, and so lacks nothing to be desired. Further, everything about it is good. But certain aspects of it may be describable apart from the others. Thus, if something is an aspect of

it, then it is itself good but in a partial and incomplete way. Under that description, it lacks the other aspects of the Good, and so it can only attain a finite intimation of it. But far from making it bad or neutral, that aspect is still itself the proper object of desire. Thus, it explains one of the central premises in Boethius' solution, (MR2), which states that whatever emanates from God is good in virtue of its being.

Third, my interpretation explains the modal distinction. Creatures are, in their very being, aspects of the First Good. On the counterpossible hypothesis that there is no first good, however, we have no way to credit them with value in virtue of their very being. They would still be good, however, but not in virtue of their being or essence. They would thus be good by accident. My interpretation therefore explains another premise in Boethius' solution, which says that second goods are conceivably not good in themselves.

Finally, my interpretation also works within the interpretive constraints identified above, giving it an advantage over the relational accounts of second goodness. It maintains the meaningfulness of propositions like "things are good" considered under the counterpossible hypothesis. It also preserves both inside and outside the thought experiment both the operational and the aesthetic elements to value attributions. It retains the same sense of "good" between "x is good per se" and "x is good by participation." In both propositions, what is being communicated is that x does well and is in some way attractive.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to highlight some of the important features of a value theory one should accept if one wishes to retrieve a broadly Platonic view of the Good for

their moral philosophy. The main feature is that value is two-tiered. At one level, there are ordinary values. These are the familiar objects of our interest that grab our attention and demand our response in practical thinking. At another level, however, there is the Good, which exists beyond these. Second, ordinary values depend on the Good by ordering and unifying seemingly fragmented pursuits.

The distinction between “ways” things can be good pulls most of the weight on the retrieved outlook. Unfortunately, Boethius does not tell us what it means for something to be good “in a way” in the DH or in the *Consolatio*. He instead asserts that there are different ways things can be absolutely good, and then points out that this fact preserves God’s privileged kind of goodness. There is no possible “way” to be good that God doesn’t have. What we can say, however, is that we are justified in speaking about the value of finite things in a way that rises above the interest one can take in mere instruments. At the same time, this justification comes with the warning that these second goods must never be understood without reference to the Good, which orders them and gives them sense. In the next chapter, I will develop and argue for these two claims of the two-tiered value theory.

CHAPTER THREE

The Thickest Value

“All have their worth ... and each contributes to the worth of the others.”

—Yavanna of Valinor from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*

3.1 Introduction

The two-tiered picture sketched in the last chapter is not popular in contemporary metaethics and value theory. The view perhaps closest to it is the so-called “non-separationist” theory of thick evaluative concepts. Evaluative concepts can be roughly sorted into two groups. In one group, “thick” concepts like CRUEL, ELEGANT, and COURAGEOUS are substantially descriptive. By contrast, “thin” concepts like GOOD, BAD, RIGHT, and WRONG are typically said to contain no substantial description. One issue related to this distinction is how thick concepts are evaluative, assuming they are evaluative (Kyle 2013; Willemsen and Reuter 2021). One view is that they combine thinly evaluative and non-evaluative content (Elstein and Hurka 2009; Kyle 2020). Others say that they are evaluative in virtue of the thin though they are not reducible to the thin (Dancy 1995; Tappolet 2013, 1793; Harcourt and Thomas 2013). Still others think that they are somehow evaluative in their own right without relying on concepts like GOOD (D. Roberts 2013; Chappell 2013; Kirchin 2017; Cannon 2020). All seem of one mind, however, that if thick values are evaluative in virtue of goodness, then they are evaluative in virtue of the thin.

It should give us pause that this opinion was not shared by some of the most influential intellectual forebears to the notion of thick values. Plato, for instance, is one of the inspirations of the philosophers putting forward the idea that the Good is thick (Murdoch 2014). He seems to have at least employed the notion in the *Gorgias* (Furley 1989; Brüllmann 2019). For Plato, however, no value is free-floating from a unified Good. The broadly Platonic picture of goodness says that the Good contains all other values in some way. In the *Symposium*, the lover of wisdom ascends from beauty of the body, to beauty of the soul, to beauty itself. The crucial point here is that as the philosopher ascends from the particular to the general, each additional step affords more for the philosopher to contemplate rather than less. In other words, the more general values (goodness and beauty) are thicker than the more specific. It is also possible that Aristotle thought this way, if we read him as inheriting some of the major aspects of Plato's doctrine of the Good (Baker 2017). Boethius did as well (Kemp 2023). On the two-tiered picture of value in the last chapter, according to which second or finite goods are aspects of or similarities to the Good, "good" is not "thin" and cannot be characterized without loss in ways common among philosophers in the contemporary literature. For them, the property *being good* is not reducible to *being a fitting recipient of a pro attitude* or any other suitably thin account of goodness.

In this chapter, I attempt to defend the historical position. In doing so, I attempt to contribute to a solid minority of modern philosophers who have wondered at the unity that all good things have without entertaining reductive accounts (Murdoch 2014; Kolnai 1978, 85; Gaita 2004, 190). On my account, the unity is provided by the explanatory function of the Good. It affirms with Robert Adams that "The realm of value is organized

around a transcendent good” (1999, 50). For me, this amounts to a claim about the relationship between two levels of value. At one level, there is irreducible plurality. At another level, however, there is only one value, which is the Good. The values at the first level, moreover, are modes of the Good. They are good in virtue of some relation to it. The resulting picture of the Good is one according to which the Good is the ultimate thick value. This view is pluralistic insofar as it recognizes not just a variety of kinds of things that bear values, but also different kinds of values themselves (Anderson 1993, 8-16). Unlike most pluralist value theories, however, my view sees a unity to the plurality. The functions of these values point to a unifying principle that performs precisely the same role played by the Good.

Of course, I can’t give a filled-out picture of goodness here, so I cannot give a sufficient defense of this thesis. Perhaps there is no complete account of the nature of Plato’s Good that can be given.¹ It is built into my view, however, that no filled-out and substantive concept of *the* Good is necessary to start with. Instead, we can start with a functional concept. The Good is the value that has all the other values somehow contained in it (Sedley 1999). I will sketch one of the primary aspects of the relation between the Good so understood and other thick values and argue that it best accounts for the feature of thick values that allow them to support judgements with contrary valences.

I begin with a discussion of value pluralism and the phenomenon of “thick” concepts and terms. Then I look at some of the reasons to think that such concepts and terms are intrinsically evaluative and, moreover, *inherently* evaluative. After that, I identify a feature of thick properties that I call “evaluative flexibility.” I argue that

¹ Although for an argument to the contrary, see White (2006, 356-357).

flexibility occurs because the logical relations between the values and their valences have a thick shape. I will only give an account of positive thick values, that is, values that are in some way related to goodness. I see no reason to think that the accounts we give of positive and negative values, or positive and negative evaluation, should be symmetrical. In any case, a theory of badness would be too much for me to deal with in this chapter.

3.2 Thick Values

3.2.1 Pluralism

Pluralism in value theory is the view that there are many ways to be good. There are two things this could mean. Consider the simple claim “x is F” where “F” stands for an evaluative property that is possessed by x. When we ask the question, “are there many values or one?” we could be asking two things. First, we could be asking if for all true propositions of that form, “x” represents a single type. At the substantive level of normative theory, we could be asking if, for example, pleasure alone is F, or if knowledge, aesthetic experiences, and rich relationships are also F. At the metaethical level, we could be asking if only states of affairs are F, or properties, or objects, or some combination of these. These questions concern what types of things the bearers of value are. Monists about this question say that only one sort of thing has value such as, for instance, pleasure, well-being, or happiness. Pluralists deny this.

Second, we could be asking whether for all true evaluative propositions, “F” signifies a single property common to all instances of that type. Following Max Scheler (1973, 12), I will refer to the difference as between a pluralism of “goods” versus a

pluralism of “values.” Scheler used the first term to refer to things that *have* the evaluative property, and the second term to the property itself.

Monism about Goods: There is only one type of bearer of good.

Pluralism about Goods: There is more than one type of bearer of good.

Monistic theories of goods say that there is one kind of thing that is good. Pluralist theories of goods reject this. My question is not about the number of the sorts of things that have value. My question is rather into the nature of what is had, or the debate between the following two views.

Monism about Values: There is only one type of value had by bearers.

Pluralism about Values: There is more than one type of value had by bearers.

Given this way of distinguishing the views, there is widespread agreement that “F” does not represent a single type of property. Almost nobody but the most committed Mooreans are monists about values. Moore thinks that there is only one kind of genuine value (Hurka 2021, §2). This value is intrinsic goodness, which is not itself divisible into further sub-types, and which forms the reductive base (along with non-evaluative facts) of all other values. Moore thinks that to be instrumentally valuable is to be productive of intrinsic value (Moore 2005, 130), and he is followed in this by C. I. Lewis (1946, 382-388). Value theorists these days tend to reject this view and give instrumental value its own distinct category. On one leading theory, instrumental value is the value of a thing’s usefulness (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2022, 18).² Another debate concerns the difference between what is *for* someone and what is good *simpliciter*. Some argue that only one or the other exists. Again, however, some, following Sidgwick, are pluralists about absolute and relative value (Sidgwick 1907; Rønnow-Rasmussen 2022).

² I will argue against this view of instrumental value in chapter 6.

Setting this kind of pluralism aside, the second question concerns whether there are many kinds or one kind of excellence; that is, whether excellence exists in intrinsically different ways where the difference is not due to mere formal differences in the structures of their properties nor in virtue of non-evaluative features of the world. Monists about this question say that there is only one evaluative property of this sort, typically *goodness*. Pluralists deny this. Pluralism about values is plausible. *Beauty* and *goodness* are both excellences. They are both loved and admired. They are both objects of pursuit and desire. Someone or something that has them is likely to be praised or congratulated by others. Moreover, *beauty* and *goodness* are not the same. Even if it is difficult to get a grasp on what the precise difference is, we can recognize that there is one. Thus, at least two sorts of intrinsically different excellences exist.

Pluralism about values goes even deeper, however. We should recognize the existence of a wide range of values that resist reduction. If we already recognize a distinction between *beauty* and *goodness* along these lines, then we have a vague sense of what this distinction is like. For there is no reason from the outset to deny that there may be more distinctions between values that should be classed as excellences. Even if one is inclined to think that *beauty* and *goodness* encompass the entirety of positive values, we might think that the sub-classifications of excellences are irreducible to the two groups they fall under. That is, there is no more reason to assume that all good things are good in virtue of a single property than there is to assume that all colored things are colored in virtue of a single property. A more robust pluralism would say that there are different ways to be good and beautiful that are not reducible to *having the property of goodness* or

beauty in an informative way. Instead, attention to these “ways” give greater sense to the meaning of “good” and “beautiful” rather than the other way around.

3.2.2 *Thick Evaluation*

In contemporary philosophy, this more robust kind of pluralism has typically been expressed (for better or for worse) in terms of the “thickness” of values. The notion of a thick value can be introduced by the idea of a thick value term. A thick value term is one that includes information about the world in its content. This contrasts to “thin” value terms, which convey little, if anything at all, concerning the factual circumstances that occasion its use. Examples are easy to come by: “lovely,” “just,” and “funny” are each on the thicker side while “good” is usually thought to be on the thinner side. But if examples come cheap, explanations do not. There is no theoretically neutral way to develop the distinction. Doing so inevitably commits one to metaethically controversial views.

For example, Bernard Williams makes the distinction in terms of “action-guided” (thin) in contrast to “world-guided” (thick) terms or concepts (1985, 140). One problem with this way of making the distinction is that, for moral realists, at least some evaluative terms are “world-guided,” and moral realism is compatible with the existence of only thin values. Some have recently noticed that the term “thick” can be traced to Gilbert Ryle’s notion of “thick description” in the 1968 essay “Thinking of Thoughts” (Kirchin 2013, 5127). Ryle uses the example of the different sorts of wink such as the conspiratorial, the flirtatious, or the parody. The thinnest description is “the eyelid moved,” which applies to each description. The description that applies to the most cases is the least informative. The idea is that one can only understand winking if one appreciates these different sorts of winking. Understood in Ryle’s way, by contrast, the thick/thin distinction is prejudiced

against those accounts that semantically reduce thick concepts to the conjunction of thin evaluation and description.

Rather than begin with a theoretical account of the thin/thick distinction, then, I will start with the phenomenon to motivate the controversial commitments I am assuming in this chapter. My main thesis here is to argue that irreducibly plural values are nonetheless unified by the Good. This assumes that there *is* an irreducible plurality of values, which is controversial. While it is not my main task to defend this plurality, I want to motivate it as a plausible view. I cannot adequately cover this material, and those who are confidently opposed to my assumptions are unlikely to be persuaded. The point is not to persuade so much as to seek permission to move forward.

Some might object that motivating a plurality of values by appeal to ostensibly thick values is a non-starter. This is because, they think, thick value terms are not evaluative at all. Rather, they are *used* to evaluate through presumption or implicature (Blackburn 1992; Väyrynen 2013, ch. 5). This objection is unsuccessful, however (Kyle 2013). Conversational implicatures are cancelable and reinforceable, but attributions of thick terms (generally) are not. For instance, if I call my dad on the phone and say, “Hi Dad, is Mom there?” I also generally mean to ask, “Can I speak to Mom?” The implication can be reinforced without oddity. I can follow up and ask, “Can I speak to her?” It can also be canceled without oddity. I can say, “Ok, don’t give her the phone.” However, sentences that attribute thick concepts to subjects generally can’t be reinforced or canceled without oddity. “Mr. Wither is polite, but he’s not good” is odd, even though it may be correct. This is evidence that thick terms are not evaluative by conversational

implicature. Similar objections are brought against reduction of thick evaluation to conventional and presuppositional pragmatics.

Even if these arguments fail, it need not follow that thick terms and concepts fail to encode evaluation at all. The pragmatic arguments advanced, as Debbie Roberts has shown, only conclude that thick terms and concepts do not encode *thin* evaluation (2013, 85). That is, they are aimed to show that terms like “courageous” and “lovely” and their corresponding concepts do not semantically involve the concepts GOOD or PRAISEWORTHY. That is, they want to show that to call something “lovely” may be to praise it, but not in virtue of the meaning of the term. But so long as the embedded evaluation in question is thin, we need not reject the pragmatist thesis that thick terms do not encode thin content. We only must not further conclude, as the pragmatists do, that thick terms and concepts are not inherently or semantically evaluative. However, this would require committing to the very controversial thesis that not all evaluative terms and concepts are thinly evaluative.

3.2.3 Irreducibly Thick Evaluation

At least some thick terms are evaluative. The next question to ask is how they bear this evaluative load. In other words, what is “thick evaluation?” On the most common view, evaluation has two main forms: positive and negative. Some call this the “orthodox” conception of evaluation (D. Roberts 2013, 78) while others call it “traditional” (Cannon 2020, 652). Roberts says,

Orthodoxy has it that evaluation must be positive or negative; it must have a pro or con flavour. This translates naturally into the thought that any evaluation, to be evaluation, must have a thin evaluative element. If you evaluate something you must, the thought goes, be evaluating it as good in some respect or to some extent,

or bad in some respect or to some extent. According to the orthodoxy then, to be evaluative, thick concepts must have a link to thin evaluation. (2013, 78)

Given the orthodox/traditional view of evaluation, one explanatorily powerful account of thick terms would present them as a combination of thin evaluative content together with non-evaluative, descriptive content. This view is sometimes called “separationism” in contrast to “non-separationism,” which is the view that thick value terms are not dissolvable into evaluative and non-evaluative components. The orthodox/traditional view of evaluation reduces evaluation to the thin, whether that amounts to the ascription of a positive or negative property for cognitivists or the possession of a positive or negative attitude for non-cognitivists. The increasingly “thick” is built up out of increasingly complex relationships between thin evaluations and non-evaluative property descriptions as well as possibly other thin evaluations (Elstein and Hurka 2009). The point is that all evaluation is ultimately rooted in *thin* evaluation: good and bad, pro and con, yay and boo.

By contrast, non-separationists struggle to articulate the distinction between thick and thin concepts. *What* can't the thick concepts be decomposed into? Presumably the answer is not, “into their evaluative and non-evaluative components,” because the concepts don't have such components. To state the distinction this way is to define the thick in terms of the thin, which begs the question against non-separationism. Instead, Jonathan Dancy argues,

The correct picture, I think ... is not that there are two ‘really’ distinct elements which by pseudo chemical reaction somehow become indistinguishable from each other. There are no elements at all, in any normal sense. (1995, 268)

Non-separationists deny that evaluation is reducible to the attribution of *good* or *bad*. So then, what is evaluation? The non-separationist answer to this question comes in several parts. First, thick concepts are used in evaluative explanations. They provide us with a rich vocabulary that allows us to articulate the normative ways we find things to be. These seemings explain states relevant to our agency such as desire (Stampe 1987; Scanlon 1998, 33-55; Brewer 2009, 24-31). “Climbing the mountain was *exhilarating*, but now I shall go to the lakeside for some *peace*.” Thick values also express how we feel about certain things or explain why we like or dislike them. At least some emotions seem to be evaluations (R.C. Roberts 2013) or represent evaluative properties (Ballard 2021). And thick values are the objects of some of those states (Tappolet 2016, 111-113; Milona 2022). So, thick terms give us a way to communicate those states. “That film is *disgusting*” or “The choir was so *lovely*.”

It is widely agreed that cognitivism is entailed by non-separationism. Evaluative concepts and terms ascribe evaluative properties. Moreover, they only do so *directly*. This is to avoid excluding obviously non-evaluative properties that entail evaluative properties from the extension of the definition. I do not predicate an evaluative property if I say, “Jane did not tell the truth to her mother,” even though it is in virtue of not telling the truth that Jane has done something *bad*. Nonetheless, I have not evaluated her action through this proposition. A property is ascribed directly by a concept or term if the essence or real definition of the property is included in the content of the concept or term.

The general structure of these explanations seems to be as follows. Evaluation is a kind of direct property attribution. To say that my business deal was “*nefarious*” is to characterize my deal—the whole act—in some respect. Further, that characterization is

normative. Nefariousness is a bad-making feature of my action, which gives me a reason not to do it. In general, to attribute a thick value to a thing is to directly characterize the whole in some normatively significant way. So, evaluation (1) directly represents some feature of a whole object which (2) gives a reason to regard the whole it characterizes in a normative way.

Of course, the above account is helpful only to the extent that we know what an evaluative property is. Again, monists here have an easier go of things, since they can circumvent the need for explaining what an evaluative property is. For them, to be evaluative is to be either good or bad. This lets them fill in the gaps of what evaluative concepts and terms are: concepts and terms that ascribe *good* or *bad* to something. This is not available to the value pluralist or non-separationist. For us, evaluative properties must not be that tightly unified. It is a hallmark of value pluralism that the distinction of evaluative properties is not primarily due to distinct valences (positive, negative, or neutral). Two values can have the same valence, and yet be distinct.

Roberts proposes “anthropocentricity” as the central feature of evaluative properties (2013, 93).³ Properties are anthropocentric when they are “intrinsically linked to human concerns and purposes” (2013, 94). I will go a slightly different route, which I have not seen in the current literature. Following Dietrich von Hildebrand, a property is evaluative if it makes the property bearer *important*. The property of *importance* is

³ She also lists multiply realizability and possessing the right (“normatively crucial”) making relation (2013, 92-93). The latter property is baked in to my account above, but I do not include the former. Multiply realizability is only necessary if one accepts the shapelessness hypothesis, which is the hypothesis that the extension of thick terms are not unified non-evaluative properties or relations of real similarity. While that hypothesis is often the argument put forward for non-separationism, it is not entailed by non-separationism. Thus, it is not strictly necessary on a non-separationist account of evaluative properties.

understood in contrast to the *neutral* or *indifferent* (1953, 24). For Hildebrand, the *indifferent as indifferent* is not the possible object of an “affective response.”

Many facts and many objects have for us the character of neutrality and indifference; and though this does not hinder them from becoming the object of our knowledge, it definitely does exclude them from becoming the object of our will, our wishing, or of any affective response such as joy, sorrow, enthusiasm, indignation, and so forth. (1953, 24)

The contrast with indifference helps avoid a potential confusion arising from the claim that importance is a general feature of value. The word “important” invites the question “is every value important?” Maybe some values are not important. For instance, assuming *funny* is a value, many think it is not important, and saying it is sounds melodramatic. This objection arises from the conflation of “important” with “very important.” If in fact there are some things that are not very important, but are nonetheless bearers of value, they still invite an affective response from us. These invitations may be easily defeasible, but they prove that the objects of the responses are not *indifferent*. Thus, they possess *importance*, however small.

An evaluative term or concept is evaluative in virtue of ascribing an evaluative property, and evaluative properties are those that directly make it the case that the thing bearing the property is important. But not just anything involved in making the property important is an evaluative property, if by “making” we understand any condition that must obtain for the evaluative proposition to be true. For instance, plausibly, a host of “enabling” conditions are required for any particular evaluative proposition to be true that resemble Dancy’s “contributory reasons” (2004, ch. 1). For instance, the pleasure at a teasing joke is plausibly good only on the condition that it is not motivated by malice or *schadenfreude*, but the condition itself is not an evaluative property. For a property to be

evaluative, it must be important-making in the right way, that is, it must normatively explain the importance of the thing by consisting of what it is important about that thing.

This account of evaluation is compatible with non-separationism or value pluralism. This is because there is nothing about the account that contradicts the claim that the relevant important-making properties are irreducibly plural. Properties such as *lovely* and *honest* could fit this role. Following Aristotle, the properties *fine* and *noble* could as well. In other words, this account of evaluation allows for a large number of irreducible normative concepts and terms.

Non-separationism rejects the clean distinction of thick values into evaluative and non-evaluative components. But it also tells us that there are different ways things can be evaluative, given the kinds of things they are. “Funny” and “lovely” are standard examples of thick value terms. If we accept non-separationism, we should also think that the value of something funny is distinctive to it, that of the lovely distinctive to it, and so on. These are different ways things can be important or contrary to indifference. In short, non-separationism amounts to the position that thick values are normative in their own distinctive ways.

3.2.4 *From Language to Facts*

Thick value facts are not usually discussed in the literature on thick evaluation.⁴ Instead, philosophers tend to reflect on thick evaluation as a psychological act. There is a natural inclination, then, when making a claim about thick value *facts* to limit the domain of that claim to those facts for which we have a more or less well-defined term or

⁴ Morton (2019), D. Roberts (2013), and Brewer (2009) are exceptions.

concept. If value facts are fundamentally thick, however, then we should expect that there are many values that do not correspond neatly to the ordinary lexicon of value terms. We may even be aware of some for which we have no clear concept or single term at all. For instance, we do not refer to the same property when we speak of the “value of a person” or the “value of a courageous act.” On the view considered here, there could be many thick values for which we have no single discrete term.

The sense that many values involved in our practical thinking are non-separable lends some support to the idea that the values themselves, not just the terms and concepts that refer to them, are irreducibly thick. Some ethicists have proposed that thick *facts* are normatively basic (Brewer 2009, 181-89). By “fact” I have in mind simply things as they are in contrast to how they are thought of. In the case at hand, the difference lies in thinking of the world a certain way and the world being a certain way so as to make thinking of it that way true. What makes some evaluation correct is the fact which it is about. Admiration is correct when the thing admired is admirable.

Some value facts are irreducibly thick. The cruelty of the murder is not composed of the badness of the murder together with some independently describable state of affairs. The humor in a joke is not a function of the dual facts that it was, say, ironic and that it was good. The loveliness of a poem is not a function of the pattern of the words together with the independent fact that it is *good* when words are formed that way. That is to say, pluralism about values is true.

3.3 *Thick Values and the Good*

3.3.1 *Irreducible, not Independent*

So far, we have looked at one way of thinking of pluralism about values that enjoys a decent amount of support in contemporary philosophy. We have looked at some of the rationale for thinking that such pluralism is true. Some understand this commitment to contradict, or at least be in tension with, a unified value theory. In general terms, the more we press on the significance of plurality, the more difficult it becomes to preserve unity. Indeed, the advocates for plurality tend to deny that the values are unified. For instance, many think that non-separationists are committed to the following principle.

Independently Evaluative: Thick terms and concepts are evaluative somehow “in their own right,” independently of their relationship to any other evaluations characterizable in independently intelligible terms. (Väyrynen 2013, 209)

The independently evaluative thesis has become a common way to understand non-separationism. After all, denying it commits one to holding that thick terms and concepts are not evaluative “in their own right,” and *do* depend on some relationship to some other evaluation. And it would seem that this further commitment would compel one to explain the evaluation of the thick in terms of the thin. But if non-separationism is true, then the special normativity possessed by thick values is not explained by the thin. More than that, they may not be thinly evaluative at all, as some have argued (Kirchin 2017, 112; Cannon 2020).

The lack of unity among thick values is a potentially very serious problem for pluralism. Thomas Hurka states the objection as follows.

Compare an act of courage such as the Spartans' self-sacrifice at Thermopylae with the foolhardiness of refusing a robber's demand for 'A nickel or your life'. If thick concepts were irreducible, there could be no explanation of the moral difference between these acts; we would have to just 'see' that one is courageous and the other not. (Hurka 2014, 24)

Surely there is an explanation of the difference between the Spartans and the victim, which is that the former was willing to die for something great and the latter for something trivial.⁵ This kind of explanation is easily accommodated on monistic views because of their prior dogma that all properties of excellence are the same. Unity does not come so easily for the pluralist, however.

In other words, there appears to be a tendency among all parties in this debate to think that unity requires partial reduction of the unified to the common factor. If two values V_1 and V_2 are both evaluative in virtue of some master value V_3 , it appears that their value amounts to the same thing. Some single property, such as *being* V_3 is shared by both, and their respective instantiation of *being valuable* amounts to no more than *being* V_3 . That is, their *being valuable* adds nothing (in any respect, metaphysical or normative) to their *being* V_3 . The same obtains for any instance of *being valuable*. Thus, the most straightforward way to establish the unity of value brings us back to monism.

Pluralism about values or non-separationism entails that we reject the above picture. There is no master value that ends up being what all evaluation amounts to. Contrary to Väyrynen and others, however, we need not further conclude that they are totally independent of other values "characterizable in independently intelligible terms." That is, the independence of the thick values from goodness does not directly follow from

⁵ Even if it were successful, this argument only shows that *courage* is reducible to other values. It would not follow from this that all values are. Hurka's point seems to be that similar problems could arise for all or most values salient to practical deliberation.

the claim that the thick values are irreducible to it. The non-separationist is only committed to the claim that at least some thick values do not consist of some combination of *thin plus description*. It does not follow from this that thick values are not interrelated or interdependent. Non-separationism says that what is evaluative about V_1 is not the same type as what is evaluative about V_2 . It does not follow that they do not depend on some other independently characterizable value V_3 . On the contrary, I am going to argue that they do. Thick values are not reducible to goodness, but neither are they independent of it.

Things that are courageous and lovely are, typically, also good in ways that are simultaneously irreducibly distinct. The goodness of loveliness is not separable from the loveliness. Any attempt to conceive of it in the abstract apart from the loveliness itself causes us to lose sight of the goodness itself. If I try to conceive of the goodness of the loveliness but without the latter, I seem to be conceiving of something else. In the *Republic*, Plato compares the Good to the Sun. One central purpose of this metaphor is to point out that, like the sun, the Good is not itself to be looked at. Rather, other things are to be looked at in its light. Similarly, there is no way that the Good *looks* (not at least to our eyes). Its purpose in our normative thinking is not like that. Rather, it makes other things look the way they do, without which nothing would be “seen.” Value experience would be empty.

This picture has three main claims. First, there is the strong pluralism which says that values are irreducibly distinct. I have looked at some reason to think this is true, but for our purposes, I am taking it for granted. Second, there is the existence of a separate value called the Good. Some might be scared off from this because of its reek of

metaphysics. Whether the Good commits us to any controversial ontological claims is not an issue I will get into here. At least it seems true that the view does not directly imply some kind of theism. I will just mention that many of the thinkers from whom I draw inspiration are not theists and do not think their commitment to the Good requires theism (Murdoch 2014; Gaita 2004, 190). Third and finally, there is the explanatory claim that the pluralistic values are explained by the Good without compromising their plurality. This is the claim I want to defend. For those unmoved by the arguments in favor of non-separationism and pluralism, it may be helpful to think of my thesis as exploring the options available to non-separationists.

A summary of the argument is as follows. Thick values enter into relationships with other thick values, and these relationships are normative insofar as that they affect the values themselves. There is some “organizing principle” that superintends their relationships, which is itself evaluative. Thus, the chemistry of ordinary thick values is governed by another value. This role required by the phenomena is best performed by the historical idea of the Good. But since this value affects thick values in evaluative ways, it follows that it is at least partly responsible for the value. Thus, ordinary thick values are evaluative in virtue of the Good without being reducible to it.

3.3.2 Evaluative Flexibility

Some philosophers have noticed that one and the same thick value can be good-making in some contexts and bad-making in others (Kirchin 2017, 49; Morton 2019, 413). This is easily seen in aesthetic cases. For instance, in music, *eroico* commands the performer to be heroic, strong, and dignified. While this is a good-making feature in a parade march, it is a bad-making feature in a romance or eulogy. A number played *con*

desiderio, that is, with desire or longingly, might be good in a romance but bad in a march. One could criticize a performance for sounding heroic when it should have sounded amorous, even though heroic can be the grounds for our praise in other contexts.

On the face of it, it is not odd that a thing may sometimes support one evaluation and sometimes support a different evaluation. Lots of things contribute to evaluations only contingently (Dancy 2004, ch. 5). The fact that I ate a meal full of natural fats is bad if I am trying to lose weight but good if I'm trying to gain it. Thick values, however, are supposed to be different. They are supposed to explain our evaluative attitudes toward them or the things they are features of. Seeing the poem as elegant is supposed to form the content of my evaluation. But it turns out that seeing it as elegant might factor into an entirely different evaluation. Assuming thick concepts are evaluative, then, their evaluative flexibility is a strange feature of them.

3.3.3 *The Prima Facie Valences of Thick Values*

Values play an explanatory role in evaluation. And so, if thick values are flexible, then they play the same function in the explanations for disparate outcomes. We can use a chemical example. Combining O_2 and $2H$ results in H_2O , which is digestible by every known living thing. If, instead of O_2 , we combine SO_4 with $2H$, the result is H_2SO_4 or sulfuric acid, which no known living thing can digest.⁶ So, we can say for the one, "The compound is poisonous partly because of the $2H$ molecules," and for the other, "The compound is ingestible partly because of the $2H$ molecules." In both cases, each hydrogen atom is trying to donate one free electron to create a stable elemental molecule.

⁶ Thanks to my dad, Mark Kemp, for this example.

It performs the same explanatory role for each case. The difference in the outcome that $2H$ contributes to is entirely a result of the atoms it combines with.

Evaluative flexibility raises the question of precisely how each instance of a thick value gets its valence. It is not enough to answer, “from the context,” since the context only partly explains the outcome. If thick values are in fact values, then they bring something to the table. Because hydrogen has a plus one atomic charge, it contributes to different outcomes depending on what it combines with. This feature of hydrogen explains its flexibility. What features do thick values have, which, when combined with their contexts contribute to disparate outcomes?

Paradigm examples of thick values are notoriously hard to analyze given the view that they are irreducibly evaluative. It may be that for each one we can give no non-circular definition (D. Roberts 2013, 94). To start with, we can notice that they come with a default or *prima facie* valence, evaluative flexibility notwithstanding. The role each plays in explanations favors one direction over another. Under normal circumstances, calling something “orderly” is a way of praising it and calling something “cynical” is a way of criticizing it. Here are some other examples: PROPER (good), PRIM (bad), CROTCHETY (bad), RUDE (bad), LOVELY (good), GENEROUS (good), SELFISH (bad), and ELEGANT (good). The assertion that this holds in general is a hypothesis, but a plausible one.

Elegance is flexible only if it factors in the reason for a thing being good or bad. Consider how one might explain what is bad about something by appealing to the property *elegance*. We can easily imagine the following exchange between two moviegoers leaving the theater.

“Why did you think the movie was bad?”

“Because it was elegant.”

If the critic’s account stops here, the inquirer will doubtless supply background information that makes sense of her remark. Perhaps the film just viewed conveyed the story of the Rwandan genocide, and its elegance turns it into a morbid display that dishonors those who perished in that event. Whatever the explanation, the background context should communicate that elegance is not appropriate for this occasion. The mismatch between what was the circumstances call for and what is exemplified explains the overall assessment. Sometimes being elegant might not only fail to give, but work against, what is called for.

We need explanations like this to make sense of aberrant evaluations. If we try to understand elegance as an intrinsically bad-making feature, we lose our grip on what could be meant. Philippa Foot argues that the semantic content of the concept GOOD is such that any attribution of it to the act of clasping one’s hands together three times an hour would have to work through contextual factors (2002, 120). She thinks the evaluation makes no sense apart from this background information. Regardless of whether Foot is correct about this, her point applies to the relationship between ELEGANCE and BAD. It is not the case that the fact that a movie was elegant, full stop, can be a reason to hate it. Calling something “elegant” to criticize it is sensible only if we assume that it is short for additional information. Again, this point generalizes to other paradigm examples. In cases where a value explains an overall assessment that departs from the default valence, the fact that the value explains the aberrant evaluation itself needs to be explained.

By contrast, a thick value explains its default valence without any background information. The appeal to elegance as a good-making feature is intelligible by itself. Return to our movie-goers. A little later in the conversation, the critic asks the same question.

“Well, why did you like the movie?”

“I liked it *because* it was elegant!”

This response is intelligible sans any background information. The one who liked the movie cites this feature of it which all by itself contributes to the goodness of the movie. Elegance is not sufficient to make a movie good. Other features are necessary such as coherence, an engaging plot line, and so on. The point here is that we need not explain why elegance contributes to whatever goodness the film has, even if it is never sufficient for a good movie. It is incumbent on the critic to show why the context calls for an inelegant movie. It is not incumbent on the movie lover to explain why the context calls for an elegant movie. This is because elegance full stop is perfectly intelligible as a good-making feature.

The different explanatory functions between a thick value in support of its default valence and a thick value in support of an aberrant evaluation is even clearer in the case of actions. If I told you that I am performing a particular act ϕ because it is the “polite” thing to do, you would understand my reasoning even if you disagreed with it. If I tell you I *won't* ϕ because it is the polite thing to do, then you will only understand my reasoning against a background that makes sense of how *being polite* could count against performing an act.

The explanatory asymmetry of thick values holds even if we suppose, as some do, that they need not be either good-making or bad-making (D. Roberts 2013; Kirchin 2017; Cannon 2020). Perhaps elegance in some cases supports neither positive nor negative evaluations. This departure from the default still requires explanation. For any paradigm thick value, it is not good-making in the same way that it is bad-making (or neutral). It is not the case that what is good about x is, say elegance, and what is bad (or neutral) about y is elegance *full stop*. The aberrant valences require explanation, but the judgment with the default valence does not.

One objection to my claim points to values that do not have a default tendency to make their possessors good or bad. It seems that whether or not a particular thick value is *prima facie* good-making depends on *what* it is attributed to. Of this, examples are many. *Being elegant* is not a good-making feature for a socket-wrench; *being polite* is not a good-making feature of abstract objects; *being lovely* is not a good-making feature of a gruesome battle. It is further supposed that, if valence shifts occur in particular cases, then in the main values at the lower level are not *prima facie* good-making. Something else must perform this role. It is therefore not true that *being polite* is *prima facie* good-making.

As a first pass at a response, a good many of these attributions are not meaningful. Unlike the thin sense of “good,” thick values put non-syntactic constraints on meaningful instances of their attribution. This everyone agrees with and is responsible for the earlier flawed attempts to define thick evaluative terms and concepts as “world-guided.” An abstract object cannot have the property—cannot even be meaningfully said to have the property—*being polite* any more than a person can be meaningfully proud of the sky

(Foot 2002). My claim is that thick values are prima facie good-making for things that have them. Thus, meaningless attributions do not count as a set of counterexamples to the fact that thick values come with default valences.

One might insist that nonetheless thick properties are sometimes instantiated by certain bearers that they share no clear normative relevance to. Consequently, it does not make the bearer good as a default. Here there is a meaningful attribution of the property, but the thing the property is attributed to is such that the property does not make them good. For example, it is meaningful to attribute elegance to the socket-wrench. However, its *elegance* doesn't make it a good wrench.

The sentence "That socket-wrench is elegant" is ambiguous between two possible meanings. First, in calling it that, we could mean to describe something about it as a wrench. That is, we might be saying something about the way this particular wrench exemplifies the characteristic features of a wrench. In this case, this is a peculiar kind of utility in tightening and loosening bolts and nuts. In this sense, we mean to say that the wrench operates or performs its function elegantly. It is difficult for me to say with confidence what this could mean. Antonyms of "elegant" are "guache," "messy," and "awkward." Not all of these are applicable to a wrench. How could a wrench's function be "guache"? By contrast, it could be elegant or messy. Calling it "elegant" can be understood in opposition to these features. Perhaps it is amenable to a stable flow of work without interruption or that it has no unnecessary traits or causes no unnecessary effects. These might clue us in to why someone would think of a hand tool as elegant. In any case, people regularly do describe tools this way. If this is what we mean, then I do not

understand the denial that *being elegant* is a good-making feature of the wrench. For a wrench to function elegantly is one way it can function well.

It is also possible for a thing to be elegant apart from any description of its characteristic function. Perhaps it is elegant to touch or to look at. Perhaps the sound of the turning notches produces a gentle but firm “flicking” rather than a harsh cranking noise. This kind of elegance is compatible with the wrench’s being a bad one. Even further, these features do nothing whatsoever to improve the wrench’s utility, and they might even be bad-making features in that respect. A user of a socket-wrench wants a clear indication of which way the tool is set to turn and which way it is set to release. Crank this way and the bolt will turn, crank that way and nothing will happen. A definite cranking sound and feel communicates this central function of the tool. A gentler and more pleasant noise or feel would mute this communicative function.

Even so, we know what it means to call the wrench elegant in a way unrelated to its function. This is because some non-functional features are nonetheless excellences. These are the features that, for instance, underwrite the distinction between an expert craftsman and a mere expert manufacturer of goods. Raimond Gaita distinguishes the two thusly.

A cabinet-maker who is also a craftsman will, generally, be horrified at the suggestion that he use screws to secure joints even if the objection to using them has little functional relevance, and within limits, even if it is counter-functional. He will think of it as a kind of violation of his materials, for if he is a craftsman he will care for the wood in ways that are not reducible to its functional properties, although his concern cannot be entirely independent of functional considerations either. The concerns, the modes of appreciation, which are internal to craftsmanship will count for nothing if the table collapses. (Gaita 2004, 85)

This non-functional mode of assessment is not at all uncommon. The art of blacksmithing melee weapons, an art that has made a small revival in the 21st century,⁷ requires the smith to give a great deal of attention to details about the sword, dagger, or whatever, that have nothing to do with its lethality. These features are typically aesthetic, but they need not be. Like the case of the cabinet-maker, features are important because of our concern with how the artifact was made.

The features that craftsmen are especially capable of producing are good-making. Thus, I see no reason to deny that non-functional *elegance* could be a *prima facie* good-making feature of the wrench in some respect, even though that feature may not be very important. There are many artifacts where expert craftsmanship requires the ability to produce features that go beyond the immediate function of the item. Thus, some perfectly intelligible evaluations come apart from function.

3.3.4 *The Lesson of Evaluative Flexibility*

An adequate account of thick concepts must not merely explain their evaluative flexibility, but also the asymmetrical way they have their valences. The datum to be explained is not simply that sometimes being polite can be good and sometimes it can be bad. The datum is that paradigm thick values have a much closer connection to one valence than the other.

Some philosophers might try to explain the asymmetry pragmatically. As we have already seen, some philosophers argue that ostensibly thick terms are used in evaluation

⁷ For a somewhat dated story on the return of swordsmithing, read Andrew Liptak's "A beautiful glimpse into the modern world of classic blacksmithing," *The Verge*, November 6, 2016. <https://www.theverge.com/2016/11/6/13534394/man-at-arms-reforged-youtube-blacksmith-baltimore-knife-sword>

by conversational or conventional implicature. Proponents of this view could argue that whether a term is used to praise or criticize follows a set of rules, one of which specifies the function of the term if appealed to without any background conditions. Pragmatic explanations are not available for those who believe that thick concepts are evaluative in virtue of their semantic content. For them, the content of these terms and concepts are inherently evaluative. The noted asymmetry remains to be explained on these terms.

One plausible suggestion is that the values that thick values contribute to are themselves thick. The *good* that elegance is good-making for is not a thin value. Think of the examples we have been using. *Good film* is not enough to specify the sort of thing that would demand *inelegance*. It is unlikely that there is a single standard that applies to all films. But once we have a clearer description of what the film is supposed to accomplish, we can see how elegance contravenes that purpose. For instance, Raoul Peck's intention in filming *Sometimes in April* was in part to show the heart-wrenching and tragic slaughter of nearly one million human beings during the Rwandan genocide and the hopelessness of its aftermath. This description is shot through with evaluative concepts. It also provides a background context that would make sense of the idea that elegance would be a bad-making feature of the film.

To take another familiar example, Aristotle's notions of *eudaimonia* or happiness and friendship are evaluatively thick, but friendship is a component of happiness. Happiness calls for friendship and makes it appropriate, ordering it among other components it shares space with in one's life. It exists among other values such as justice and contemplation, and perhaps other things, to make up a good life, that is, to make up happiness.

This ordering occurs in virtue of the values themselves. Elegance is essentially positive, but its positivity has a certain shape in virtue of its nature. And that shape determines what sort of other thick values it can contribute to. Return to our chemical example. Hydrogen has a nature which allows it to stand alone or enter into relations with other atoms. Similarly, elegance has a nature to it that allows it to mix with others. Making use of the concept of essence, we can say the following. Thick values have a particular evaluative essence (D. Roberts 2013, 87-88).⁸ For each value, it contributes to an evaluative feature of the whole, but in its distinctive way. So, for instance, *elegance* is not good-making in the same way that *heroic* is good-making. The good that elegance gives to the film that has it is elegance itself. There may be no non-circular way to describe this, but that is not a problem in general for essences and real definitions (Wedgewood 2007, 136-139). The point is that thick values have unique characters that are constitutive of what they are. These characters behave in certain ways depending on what is called for or it isn't. Sometimes a value can simply fail to be what is called for. Other times they oppose what is called for, meaning that they somehow impair the exemplification of what is called for.

We can now see how the non-separationist could reply to Hurka's objection above. That argument said that if thick values are irreducible, then "there could be no explanation of the moral difference" between acts that are courageous and acts that are rash, to use his example (Hurka 2014, 24). This inference is too quick, however, since thick values interact with other values, and most importantly, with broader contexts that call for certain parts and not others. The explanation of the moral difference between the

⁸ It is beyond the purview of this paper to account for how "evaluative essences" could be distinguished without non-evaluative *differentia*. See Cannon (2020) for discussion.

courageous and foolish acts is that some circumstances call for courage while others do not, and these circumstances are themselves grasped in an evaluative light. Sometimes acting courageously serves no *point* or at least no point of *importance*. This thought is so familiar that we say that in such circumstance, the very same behavior that would count as courageous under other conditions is in fact *not* courage. The value of courage is inseparable from its evaluative point.

This is a long way from any account of goodness as the maximally thick value. However, we can begin to get a sense of what it would be and how it relates to the others. If there is an absolute Good, it is absolutely perfect. There is nothing missing from it. It somehow contains all other values in it and in their proper relations to each other. The concept of this Good, such as it is, can be built from other values. Ordinary values have a point or a shape by nature. They fit into an order with other values and contexts in order to constitute still other values. Sometimes we describe these broader values with the attributive “good,” such as the good movie, the good city, or the good life. In any case, these objects are evaluatively thick. And so thick values are importantly evaluative in virtue of their relations to other values.

Perhaps there is no such possible thing as the absolutely perfect Good (Murphy 2021b, sect. 4). My purpose here is not to argue that there is such a thing. My goal is rather to articulate and motivate the Platonic view by arguing that thick values are evaluative in virtue of their relations to other thick values. Lower values are in some respect evaluative in virtue of their relationship to the higher values. For any value, it must be in the right context in order to be good-making. Its default may be the right context. If there is a maximally thick value, then it will stand in this relation to every

other value. Thus, if it exists, it is something partly in virtue of which thick values are evaluative.

3.4 Conclusion

Charlotte Mason writes,

What is an idea? we ask, and find ourselves plunged beyond our depth. A live thing of the mind, seems to be the conclusion of our greatest thinkers from Plato to Bacon, from Bacon to Coleridge. We all know how an idea '*strikes,*' '*seizes,*' '*catches hold of,*' '*impresses*' us and at last, if it be big enough, '*possesses*' us; in a word, behaves like an entity. (1923, 105)

The same is true of the goodness that things have, or so I have argued here. To adequately grasp the truth of things, we must know the ways they are important. But their importance has a behavior depending on how it interacts with other things of importance. Most importantly, however, things of importance are parts, and how their valences behave is a function of the whole. These wholes have points and give us purposes, and they call for various things that have default importance. The whole is thicker than the part.

Of course, my remarks here do not settle disputes between monists and pluralists. There are many arguments against this view that I have not addressed. For instance, I have not discussed how this view accounts for alleged thick value concepts that are objectionable (Väyrynen 2013, 55-60). Nor have I shown how there could be a specification relation between GOOD and other value concepts, which some have argued does not obtain (Cannon 2020). I think that my view has interesting things to say in both topics, which commends them over competing accounts. But those arguments will have to wait for another occasion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Normative Reductions of Value

4.1 Introduction

In the previous three chapters, I have tried to retrieve a picture of value that one finds in Plato and Boethius. On that view, the Good is the governing value and is thick because it contains all other values in it. Ordinary values are also thick insofar as they are inherently evaluative. The point they provide in practical thinking has a distinctive shape and character. In this chapter, I want to argue that contemporary value theories cannot participate in this retrieval. These views are often traced to Brentano's lectures on legal realism in 1889 (Brentano 1889; Ewing 1948; Chisholm 1986) and Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics* (1907). Their common feature is that they reduce *goodness* to deontic facts, and so they are called "deontic first theories of value." The goal of the chapter will be to motivate skepticism of these theories if we accept the arguments of earlier chapters and clarify one important point of disagreement if we don't.

Deontic first theories of value face two main objections. The "wrong kind of reasons" objection argues that these theories end up saying that some things are good which in fact aren't. For instance, if *being the right object of value* is sufficient for *being good*, then an evil demon is good if it can create a strong enough reason for you to value it, say through threats and promises (Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004). The second objection argues that deontic first theories of value are circular because the attitudes appealed to in such explanations inevitably make use of evaluative language

(Brewer 2009, 153-161). For instance, such theories see *admirable* as *fitting for admiration*, and admiration is seeing something as admirable. While these arguments should be given due attention, I will offer a different kind of argument.¹

I begin by explaining the views that reduce values to other kinds of normative facts. This debate is typically said to concern the explanatory relations between “evaluative” and “deontic” facts, but surprisingly, this distinction is almost entirely glossed over in the literature. Little has been written on it.² I will attempt to give a more organized and unified account of deontic properties, which together with the account of value in the previous chapters provides a basis for distinguishing the two groups that philosophers have found intuitive but have had a hard time defining (Dancy 2004, 24). The main part of this account is that all deontic first theories appeal to some part of the explanatory structure of all things considered *ought* facts. As I will show, there are multiple levels to an explanation of an ought fact, and the different views see different levels as fundamental. They each, however, treat the ought fact as a paradigm. After this, I develop two arguments against deontic-first approaches to value. The first argues that deontic theories are unable to account for the view set out in earlier chapters. The second is similar but appeals to a less theoretically laden phenomenon that deontic-based views cannot account for.

¹ There are two other objections: the “wrong kind of values” problem and the partiality problem (Howard 2023, §3.2-3.3).

² See Wedgewood (2009), Tappolet (2013 and 2014), Smith (2009, 10-21), and Berker (2022).

4.2 Normative Reductions of Value

4.2.1 Fundamental Normativity

Metaethics in the 20th century began as a study of right action, obligation, and morality. By the start of the 21st century, focus shifted to normativity in general (Scanlon 2014, 1). This development was the result of a deepened appreciation for the fact that morality is one among several normative branches including scientific inquiry, epistemology, and aesthetics (Gert 2012). Further, many of the issues of the earlier period applied to a broader range of inquiry than moral right and wrong or evaluation. For instance, the question about the relationship between facts and values is an instance of the question concerning the relationship between facts and normativity in general. This generalization has even been exploited by some to provide an argument for moral realism, since, it is alleged, arguments for skepticism of moral facts would work just as well for skepticism about these other domains (Shafer-Landau 2003; Cuneo 2007).

Given the extent to which normativity appears to occupy our daily lives, we have a strong interest in developing a general theory. It is surprising, then, that there is no consensus about what this genus is nor how it is divided into the more specific domains listed above. Instead, philosophers typically distinguish between two clusters of concepts (Dancy 2000, 163). On the one hand, there are concepts such as GOOD, BAD, and INDIFFERENT. On the other hand, there are concepts such as RIGHT, OUGHT, FITTING, and REASON (in the sense of “having a reason to such-and-such”). The first cluster is uniformly labeled under the heading of “evaluative” concepts in the literature. Though the second group is sometimes given the unfortunate heading of “normative”

concepts,³ I will refer to them as “deontic” concepts. By “deontic,” we are not referring to normative concepts expressed by modal stopping verbs like “must.” Of course, these terms are deontic, but the category outstrips the subset of modal stoppers. Just because I ought to exercise, it doesn’t follow that I *must* exercise.

One of the main disputes that arises from the distinction between evaluative and deontic concepts concerns their relative priority. Is one set of facts reducible to the other? Normative reduction is the reduction of all ostensibly existing normative properties to some normative bedrock. It is important to distinguish normative reduction from ontological reduction. The latter inquiry addresses questions about the existence of irreducibly normative properties to natural properties or the possibility of natural properties to constitute, give rise to, or simply be identical to the normative properties. That inquiry and the resulting debate is concerned with what is ontologically basic (Maguire 2018). By contrast, normative reduction addresses what is basic at the normative level, not what is basic full stop. One type of normative property A really turns out to be type B. What instances of B turn out to be metaphysically—e.g. irreducibly normative and so *sui generis* or some set of physical facts—is a separate question that I do not address here.

One famous example of normative reduction is G.E. Moore’s early view on the nature of *being right*. Acts have the property of *being right*, Moore thinks, if and only if they also have the property of *being productive of the most good*. In the *Principia Ethica*, Moore argues that this reduction of the right to the good obtains in virtue of the fact that “is right” just means “is productive of the most good” and on this basis concludes that the

³ Wedgewood (2009) and Tappolet (2013 and 2014).

latter corresponding type of property is identical to the former type (1903a, 151).

Moore's argument faces a host of objections, not the least of which is the one given by Ross in *The Right and the Good*, in which he argues that the proposed equivalence rule underwriting the reduction is just as much of an "open question" as those underwriting the reduction of "good" to "is pleasurable" or "is desired," and all the others that drew Moore's ire (2002, 8-11).

Something is fundamental in some domain if it is explained by nothing else in that domain. Reduction is a kind of explanation, but explanations come in many forms: causal, constitutive, and grounding, just to name a few. Thus, reductive explanations are not necessarily required in inquiries into fundamentality (Rosen 2017). To say that all the fundamental facts in some domain are of type N is not to say that everything else in that domain amounts to being nothing more than variations of type N. For example, one plausible reading of certain medieval moral philosophers says that moral rules are universally grounded in goods. There is never a rule without a good that explains it. Yet, these theories do not reduce rules to the goods. Consider, for instance, the following passage from Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

The end which it [a thing] works for is not obtained, unless the work be also fit to obtain it by. For to every end every operation will not serve. That which does assign to each thing the kind, that which does moderate the force and power, that which does appoint the form and measure of working, the same we term a *Law*. So that no certain end could ever be attained, unless the actions whereby it is attained were regular, that is to say, made suitable fit and correspondent to their end, by some canon, rule or law. (2013 I.2.1)

Every law is in the service of some end. Assuming with ancient and medieval thinkers that ends or goals are goods, there is always some apparent good at stake. The good is therefore fundamental. But it does not appear that the laws reduce to the goods on this

view. In fact, for many thinkers in this tradition, deontic facts exist among the set of those that constitute first principles of practical reason, though they depend on evaluative facts (Hemmingsen 2018, 63). Similarly, though arguing for a very different moral philosophy than Hooker, in his later *Ethics*, Moore admits that “right” is not analyzable as “productive of goodness” (2005, 89). He nonetheless maintains that an act is *right* if and only if it *promotes the most good*. Here Moore is admitting that not all normative properties reduce to his previously favored “intrinsic good.” The deontic facts are nonetheless explained by the evaluative facts.

There is an explanatory order to normative facts, and a full account of the relationship between those facts would include a thesis about which type of explanatory relation holds between values and other sorts of facts. Unfortunately, metaethicists are not consistent about defining positions according to a single type of explanatory relation, however. Some think the deontic first theory is a reductive thesis (Chisholm 1986, 52-53; Lemos 1994, 12; Jacobson 2011) and others think it a grounding thesis (Howard 2023, §1.1). What makes them deontic first theories, however, is not *how* members of one property type are explained by members of another property type, but *that* they are explained.

There are three broad camps concerning the relative priority of evaluative and deontic facts.⁴

Value First: Normative facts either are or are explained by facts about values.

Deontic First: Normative facts either are or are explained by deontic facts.

No Priority: Neither set of facts are fully explained by the other.

⁴ It is not universally agreed that the options are exhausted by evaluative and deontic categories. Berker argues that neither REASON nor FITTING are deontic concepts (2022). The general presumption in the literature, however, is that they are (Schroeder 2021a, §3). Given this, a view on which reasons are fundamental would be adequately considered a deontic first theory of normativity

These camps trade on a distinction between evaluative and deontic facts. But so far, that distinction amounts to little more than noticing that the concepts seem to fall into two groups. This can get us into trouble. For instance, Richard Rowland distinguishes “value first” theories of normativity from the broad family of what he calls “normative first” theories (2019, 10). Christine Tappolet wonders how values could be normative at all if we distinguish them from deontic concepts (2014). Indeed, most philosophers contrast “evaluative” concepts with “normative” ones (Wedgewood 2009, 499). Rowland, Tappolet, and Wedgewood here betray an assumption that the true core of normativity is deontic in some way, and that values must fit in this picture. But there is no reason at the outset to assume that “I ought to maximize pleasure,” or, “I have a reason to maximize pleasure,” are any more expressive of the fundamental essence of normativity than, “Pleasure is good.” Contrasting what is evaluative with what is normative stacks the deck in favor of the deontic first position. Thus, the mere ostensive distinction made above is not substantive enough to determine the priority of members of one group to members of the other group. We need to have a clearer picture of what the deontic first position amounts to.

4.2.2 Deontic-Based Theories of Value

Many views are called “deontic.” Each specifies some agential response that is related to some evaluative explanandum by way of some normative property. That is, deontic facts are normative facts about how agents respond to something. There is ample opportunity for a wide variety of views here, since theorists can disagree about the right kind of normativity property, about the right responses the normative property applies to, and about the right objects of the responses. First, they might disagree about what

agential response is picked out. For instance, the response might be an act or an attitude. Second, theories disagree about what evaluative explananda are related to. For instance, the facts in question might be good *simpliciter*, or good *for*, or thick values such as *honorable* or *noble*. Finally, the deontic theories disagree about what normative property relates the response to the value. The most common is the relation of *being fit for*. So, for instance, on one popular view, something is good if and only if (and because) it is the fitting object of a pro-attitude. Others say that it is the *ought* relation. The fact that one *ought* to respond a certain way to something is what its goodness consists of.

There are potentially innumerable deontic-based theories, depending on how many response-types and normative relations we can identify. I will simplify the myriad of options by organizing them according to the paradigm of facts about what ought to be (or ought to be done, felt, and so on). What makes a theory deontic is that basic normative facts directly contribute to what ought to be. Using the *ought* as a paradigm affords three main classes of normative properties, each of which are eligible for a theory to posit as fundamental relative to the others. These three types are best introduced by reflecting on an often-noted feature about duties.

Plato famously pointed out in *The Republic* that many duties are not absolute. If one has promised to return a sword to its owner when asked for, then the borrower has a duty to do so unless the owner expresses a clear intention to murder someone with it (331c). Presumably, many duties are like this. For instance, there is an obligation not to take what is in the possession of another, but not if you have come into town from a trek across the desert which you barely survived. Perhaps some obligations are absolute. These tend to be proposed in the form of a prohibition, such as those against rape,

genocide, or blasphemy. The existence of absolute obligations does not change the fact that it is not a part of being a moral obligation that it be indefeasible. For many of them do not hold under all circumstances.

W. D. Ross calls the duties that can be outweighed “prima facie duties,” which are duties considered apart from any other considerations that could outweigh them (2002, 19). I have a prima facie duty to return the sword to its owner, which is outweighed by considerations forced upon me by his state of mind. Prima facie duties, then, are not actual duties. Neither are they merely apparent duties. The duty may be merely apparent, just like the duty to return the sword to a madman is merely apparent. But this is not all there is to say about prima facie duties. There is still some normative relation that obtains. While it is true that the duty does not obtain, this misses the fact that there is some normative relationship that actually obtains even when the duty doesn’t. Something can count in favor of an act without that act being what one ought to do, and we need some way to characterize this favoring.

Here is how I propose to clarify the difference between prima facie and actual duties. Prima facie duties lack entailment relations possessed by actual duties. In typical circumstances if agent A has an actual duty to ϕ then A also has a duty not to omit ϕ -ing or to perform acts incompatible with ϕ -ing. “A has a duty not to not ϕ ” or “A ought not to fail to ϕ ” follows from the proposition “A has a duty to ϕ ,” assuming the impossibility of genuinely irresolvable moral dilemmas. By contrast, the existence of a prima facie duty does not license such inductive inferences. The point of this second category is that the range of options available in a normative sense to the agent is not determined by the obtaining of one such fact. If I actually ought to ϕ , then it follows that I ought not fail to

φ. If, however, my duty to φ is only prima facie, it does not immediately follow under ordinary circumstances that I do *not* have a prima facie duty not to φ. Omitting to φ might even be the thing I ought to do all things considered.

There are a few different ways to describe the weaker normative property. A normative reason favors an option without ruling out its alternative. I have a reason to give the sword back to its owner, but I may also have a reason not to. The mere fact that my reason not to is stronger does not cancel the first reason. Similarly, fittingness can also perform the role, on some accounts of fit.⁵ An act and its contrary can be fitting, such as when it is fitting to go to the party, because it would be fun, and it's also fitting to stay home, because I have to write a dissertation. There are many other potential candidates for this normative relationship.⁶ Their unifying feature is that conflicting norms are possible. When a norm of this type obtains, its obtaining does not entail that there are no conflicting norms of the same type. Just because it is fitting to go to the party does not mean it is not fitting to not go to the party. The same is not true in the case of actual

⁵ “Fitting” is ambiguous between prima facie and all things considered senses. On so-called “alethic” views of fittingness, a response is “fitting” if it accurately represents what it is a response to (Tappolet 2011; Rosen 2015). On that view, responses imply thoughts, and a response is fitting when the thoughts it implies are true and unfitting when the thoughts are false. If it is further supposed that contrary responses imply thoughts contrary to the true ones, then contrary responses are unfitting. Since a response and its contrary could not both be fitting in this sense, the alethic view is a theory of the all things considered normativity of a response and is therefore ineligible as a candidate for the weaker normative relation referred to by “prima facie duty.” Fittingness can also be understood, however, as satisfying a norm. On this more popular view, both a response and its contrary could be fit since they could both satisfy norms. For discussion on this difference, see Howard and Rowland (2022, 13).

⁶ Ewing thinks *justified* is basic (1959, 3), Gibbard *warranted* (1990, 51), Anderson *appropriateness* (1993, 2), and Brentano *correct* (1889). “Correct” admits a similar ambiguity to “fitting” noted in footnote 5. Whether *being correct* bears the stronger or weaker relation depends on if it is interpreted as *being accurate* (strong) or *satisfying a norm* (weak). As a candidate for the all-things-considered relationship that is an alternative to *ought* and *duty*, Chisholm (1986) and Lemos (1994) propose that *required* is fundamental.

duties. If I have a duty to ϕ , then I have a duty not to ψ if ψ -ing is incompatible with ϕ -ing.

The weaker norms are considered deontic because they use the all things considered ought fact as a paradigm. From the claims “ x is a fitting object of a pro-attitude” or “there is reason to have a pro-attitude toward x ” it follows that, *all else being equal*, one all things considered ought to have a pro-attitude toward x . That is, if one is given two options, to have a pro-attitude toward x or not, and there are no other morally relevant differences between those two options, then one *ought* to have such an attitude. Some, as we will see in the next section, say one ought to do it because one has reason to, while others say they have reason to because that contributes to the possible fact that they ought to. From this abstract description of the logic of these statements, however, we can see that reason and fittingness facts are closely related to ought facts.

4.2.3 *The Question of Priority*

Some think that actual duty is basic and that other categories such as value or reasons are reducible to it. Henry Sidgwick gives us a straightforward version of this view when he says that the definition of “good” is “what one ought to aim at” (1907, 381). Prichard appears to think that prima facie duty is reducible to actual duty (2002, 287). Moreover, Thomas Nagel seems to think in *The Possibility of Altruism* that prima facie duty is reducible to actual duty (1970, 49-51). He defines “prima facie reason” as “simply the minimal rational influence of a general reason on the appropriateness of a particular action” (1970, 50). In the same passage, he says that in a total system of ethics, we would not need prima facie reasons because a complete system would yield determinate conclusions about what ought to be done. There is no role for the prima facie

in a complete system of ethics. This would not be true if mere reasons were prior to actual duties, since reasons would have a role: the role of determining which option the balance of reason favors.

More recently, John Broome has argued for a view he calls “ought-fundamentalism” (2013; 2015; 2018, 299), which says that all-things-considered ought facts are normatively basic.⁷ The fact *my promising to go to the party is a reason to go* is reducible to the fact *my promising to go to the party plays some role in explaining why I ought to go* (2018, 311). Similarly, the reduction of value to the ought relation would emphasize the explanatory role of value in a particular ought relation.

By contrast, others argue that normative facts of the weaker kind—facts about mere reasons—are basic. Even prior to what one decisively ought to do is what is fitting to do or what one has reason to do, which explains what one ought to do all things considered. These actual duties are the result of how the weaker norms compare to each other, though how this works is controversial. Perhaps the most common view says reasons have weights and analyzes “actual duty” as what the balance of reasons favor (Tucker 2022). Against this, “non-additive” theories deny that what one has most reason to do can be calculated by tallying up the weight of individual reasons (Nagel 1970, 133-42). Although there is disagreement on this point, the defining feature of so-called “reasons-fundamentalism” is that reasons are normatively prior to actual duties.

⁷ In the chapter cited, Broome states that he is concerned with the sense of “normative” that “excludes the evaluative” (2018, 299). He says, “Whether the good is prior to the right or the right prior to the good is not a question for this chapter” (2018, 299). However, Broome thinks that normativity itself is defined in terms of “ought” (2013,11). Thus, if “good” is normative, then it too amounts to some kind of ought fact.

Reasons-fundamentalism is ambiguous between two claims. Consider what a reason is: something that favors or disfavors some option available to an agent. There are at least two facts involved here. First, there is the fact that something has a consideration favoring or disfavoring it, or as John Broome puts it, there is the “reasoned” fact (2018, 300). For example, *my omitting to go to the party* is fitting or reasoned. This fact does not have as a component any particular consideration to produce it. It presupposes that there is a reason, but it doesn’t include that reason in the fact itself. The fact that there will be dancing explains why my not going to the party is reasoned, but so does the fact that I was not invited, and that it is a single event, and that I have an early morning flight tomorrow. These considerations make distinct contributions to *my not going to the party* being reasoned or fitting, but they are not *parts* of the fact that my not going to the party is reasoned or fitting.

Second, there is the fact that consists of the consideration that is the reason, the fact that counts in favor for or against something. An example of the second fact is *I promised to go to the party*. This is the consideration that counts in favor of something. It explains the other fact that going to the party is fitting/reasoned. They explain because they are considerations that count against or in favor of the relevant practical options. This type of fact is often expressed with non-normative language, such as the example just given, though it need not (Wallace 2002, 446-9). For our purposes, however, we are concerned with the version of the buck-passing that attempts to reduce the evaluative to the reason-giving force of non-normative considerations.

Many reasons-firsters think that facts like *my going to the party is fitting/reasoned* are normatively fundamental. These often go by the name of “fitting attitudes theories” or

“fittingness-first theories.” By contrast, some want to say that the consideration that does the favoring is primary. For them, a fitting act or response is one that an agent has sufficient reason to perform. These are called “buck-passing” theories because they “pass the buck” normatively speaking to the properties that give the reasons. Although these two theories often run together, they should be kept separate.

We have seen three types of facts. First there are all things considered ought facts or norms that rule out their alternatives. Second, there are norms that do not rule out their contraries. Just because it would be fitting to go to the party, it does not follow that it would not be fitting to not go to the party. Finally, there are the facts that are the reasons themselves. These three types of facts give us the following reductions of value.

- Ought-First: x has value if and only if (and because) x ought to be the object of a pro-attitude.
- Fitting-First: x has value if and only if (and because) x is a fitting object of a pro-attitude.
- Buck-Passing: x has value if and only if (and because) x has other properties that make it a fitting object of a pro-attitude.

I have tried to give a brief, albeit crude, summary of the various deontic first theories of value. This breakdown simplifies the available options that have become exceedingly numerous in recent years. It also systematically relates them without running them together. Readers should beware, however, that there are many disagreements concerning the relevant normative property (correct, fitting, justified, warranted, having a reason) and which response the normative property relates to the value-bearer (love, pro-attitude, an intention to promote, and perhaps non-mental states). Nonetheless, these views generally reduce to three main pictures. On the first view, what *actually ought* to be the case is normatively basic; that is, facts that normatively close off all but one practical response. The second main picture says that what is *fitting/reasoned* is normatively basic;

facts that do not rule out alternatives. Finally, there is the view that what *makes* something fitting/reasoned is normatively basic; facts that count in favor for or against some response.

4.3 Against Normative Reduction of Value

4.3.1 Two Sectarian Arguments

Containing values. In my previous two chapters, I argued that paradigm thick evaluative properties such as *elegance* and *splendid* are related to goodness, which is the maximally thick value, by a teleological relation. Elegance is a way of being good in that it is a mode of the Good. It contributes to a thing's goodness, but also exists embedded within an evaluative context that gives a point to being elegant. It is essentially distinct from the goodness possessed by, say, justice. I therefore denied that goodness consists of a single feature shared in common by all things that have it. Rather, to be "good" is to be related to the Good by exemplifying a mode of it. In this section, I want to argue that this kind of relation does not obtain among deontic facts.

To be admirable is to be a mode of the Good. Translated into a fittingness theory, this says to be fitting for admiration is to be a mode of the Good. For the buck-passers, it says to be such that there are properties that give one reasons to admire it is to be a mode of the Good. For the ought-firsters, it says to be such that one ought to admire it is to be a mode of the Good. But in each case, we have only reduced half of the equation. What is "the Good," on such theories? It is normative, so it must be reduced to their respective forms. What those committed to such theories who are not skeptical about the Good must say is that the Good is the thing which picks out *all* of the responses picked out by every

value of the relevant sub-set. To be the Good reduces to the massive conjunctive fact *to be fitting for admiration, to be fitting for love, to be fitting for respect, to be fitting for desire...* and so on. The same goes for the other deontic-first theories. To be Good reduces for the ought-firster to be what *ought to be admired, loved, respected, desired...* and so on. They have no other way to specify the sense of the Good “containing” all other values in it.

The problem with this view is that it sacrifices the transcendence of goodness. Because it reduces the Good to being elegant, and just, and honorable, and noble, and beautiful, and so on, it reverses the order of explanation of the view I have been proposing. On that view, values like elegance are evaluative in virtue of the Good because they are given a point by it. If, however, the Good amounts to a large conjunction of evaluative facts, then it is evaluative in virtue of the elegant (and the rest). This leaves unexplained—indeed, inexplicable—how to articulate the intrinsically “positive shape” the elegant has. For if we say that it is “like the Good,” on this deontic-first proposal, we’ve said nothing more than that they share the feature of, say, being the fitting recipient of the elegant-fitting attitude. This illuminates nothing about the way the elegant (and the rest) are evaluative.

One might object that adherents to deontic-first normative theories in fact have established a connection to goodness. All they have to do is show that the object that the agency or agent-state (or “item”) is normatively related to is “positive.” So, for instance, “x is V” reduces to “x is the fitting recipient of (positive) attitude y.” Goodness, then, is what is positive and divided into various specie. But this will not give us the explanation we need, since secondary thick values do not relate to the Good on a standard genus-

species specification model. Such models require what is higher on the scale to be “thinner” than what is lower. The higher you go, the broader the extension, which requires less content that would limit the extension. But, as I argued in the last chapter, the Good is not thinner than, say, elegance or justice. Indeed, it is the maximally thick value, containing what is distinctive about all the others. It won’t account for this to point out that some of the responses that are fitting or ought to be (or whatever) are generically “positive.” That is to make an altogether different claim.

Agency and the Good. Deontic facts essentially involve agency or states of agency. What is normative is the relation between agency and what it is normatively related to. There is no way to specify the relation of similarity between all instances of this kind of normativity that preserves the facts that thick values are (1) irreducibly evaluative and (2) intrinsically related to goodness. But in the case of thick values, as I argued before, there is a unity in the way that elegance is a value and the way it is related to goodness. But for the deontic firster, the goodness of elegance and its distinctiveness, which separates it from other “goods,” come apart. Being elegant reduces to one normative relation; being good reduces to another. The unity could only obtain in virtue of some part of the deontic relation: the agential item, the normative property, and the thing normatively picked out. So, for instance, “I ought to keep my promises” has the three parts: me, the *ought* relation, and the act-type keeping promises. Again, “Injustice is a fitting object of anger” has three parts: injustice, the fittingness relation, and anger.⁸ For

⁸ Mark Murphy asserts that, at least for the fitting-to- ϕ relation, fittingness is a three-term relation between some act, ϕ -ing, the class of things doing the ϕ -ing, and the thing that makes ϕ -ing fit. He says, “Just as *being a reason for action* is a three-term relation—not just a relation between a fact and an action, but among a fact, an action, and an agent—*fitness-for-response* is a three-term relation—not just a relation between some object and a response (e.g. fit to be feared), but among some object, a response, and a

thick values, the relation to the Good must hold in virtue of these parts in combination or individually.

Thick values cannot be related to the Good in virtue of the normative relations themselves—the *ought*, *fitting*, *being a reason* parts of the normative facts. The reason for this is for the simple fact that these normative relations also accompany negative evaluations. For instance, plausibly, the bad ought to be hated, or that evil is the fitting object of hate. So simply being composed of the ought, fitting, or reason relations is not going to make something related to the Good in the way I've argued thick values are. Some other aspect of the deontic relations would have to do the work. But none of them will. Take humor as an example. Assuming that FUNNY is a normative concept, plausible fittingness-first analysis of it would go something like this. To be funny is to be the fitting object of the relevant attitude, which is specified in terms of certain subjective feeling states. So, the fact that the joke is funny reduces to the fact that it is the fitting object of the specified feeling states. But clearly, it is neither the case that being a joke relates to the Good, since there are bad jokes, nor being laughter or laughing, since they are non-evaluative behavioral traits made appropriate or made the ones that ought to be had, or whatever.

On some accounts, the relationship between the response and the object is overtly circular (McDowell 1998; Wiggins 1987). What I am calling “feeling states” are not just feelings, since they bring some value in view. For example, to resent something is to see

responder (e.g. fit to be feared by humans)” (2021a, 39). I am not confident that this is correct. For one thing, we cannot characterize the normativity involved in God’s creating as a response to an object. “Creating is a fitting activity for God” cannot characterize God’s response to something, since there is nothing for God to respond to sans creation correlating to “creating.” In any case, Murphy’s claim would not contradict my description in the body. For the three parts are still present: the object of fear/fear-making thing, the fittingness relation, and fear.

it as wrong, and wrongness is explicated in terms of fitting resentment (Jacobson 2011, §2.2). The same point applies to positive values. For instance, we might say that to admire something is to see it in a certain way, which is explicated in terms of fitting admiration. Whether this circularity is a problem is controversial,⁹ but it does nothing to establish a link between something being admirable and its consisting of a mode of goodness.

The relation between values and the Good does not obtain in virtue of any individual parts of a deontic fact. Perhaps they do so in virtue of a complex of the parts of the deontic relations. The best candidate here would be the normative item together with the response it picks out. So, if, as I have argued, for x to be admirable is for x to exemplify a certain mode of the Good, then given the deontic first theory, the relation to the Good is achieved in virtue of something being normatively picked out. For example, for the fittingness theorist, this will be *being the fitting recipient of the relevant attitude*. This option has initial plausibility since, presumably, the Good also is the fitting recipient of the relevant attitude involved in admiration. However, this would only establish a similarity between the Good and whatever x is, thereby meriting the claim that the “Good is admirable.” It would not allow the deontic firster to claim that “x is good” without committing an undistributed middle fallacy. Just because the Good and x are both admirable, does not mean that x is Good (or the converse).

The main point is this. Deontic first views reduce value to a *response* being *normatively picked out* by an *object*. “That there will be dancing is a reason for me to go to the party” (Schroeder 2008). “God is the fitting object of my fear” (Murphy 2021a,

⁹ Again, for a critique of deontic-first views on the basis of their alleged circularity, see Brewer (2009, 153-161). For an argument that circularity is unproblematic, see Tappolet (2016, 98-103).

39). But given this machinery alone, there seems to be no coherent way to describe these normative facts as *modes* of some other fact that contains the relevant sub-set of them. I don't see any room in modern, deontic-based theories for retrieving the view I've been developing in the last two chapters. The extent to which we think this teleological relation to the Good is a feature of thick values, then, is the extent to which we should be skeptical of deontic-first theories of value.

4.3.2 *A Slightly Less Sectarian Argument*

The fecundity of practical considerations. Raimond Gaita writes of a scenario in which a beggar asks someone named N for money, belligerently insists on receiving it, and stands in N's way (2000, 30). In response, N shoves the beggar aside, causing him to fall to the ground and die. The act that led to the beggar's death was not excessively violent, nor was it reasonably expected to cause harm. N did not act out of malice but frustration and maybe a little bit of fear. Now N has to live with himself knowing what he has done. He has not committed murder, but he feels not entirely unlike a murderer. His remorse might even drive him to suicidal thoughts. For a time, he feels he cannot live with himself with the knowledge of what he has done. Eventually, he may come to a place of acceptance, but he is never fully recovered.

Stories like this are not foreign to us. On May 21, 2008, five-year-old Maria Sue Chapman was struck and killed by a vehicle driven by her teenaged brother, Will. Several witnesses to the event report that the elder Chapman turned a corner in the family driveway just as his younger sister ran out to meet him. She was invisible to him, making the collision virtually inevitable, but not so unavoidable such that Chapman has been spared from wondering what he could have done different to cause a different outcome.

Chapman is now a member of the musical group Colony House. In one song of remorse, the lyrics tell what it is like to live with what he did.

There must be something in my lungs
That keeps me from breathing
As deep and full as I once could
Now my mind starts repeating
Oh, the pictures in my head
They roll like the movies
I shut my eyes to cut the thread
But my memory shows no mercy

Chapman's lyrics convey a vivid, even involuntary, sense of the meaning of his involvement in his sister's death. He doesn't tell us what is in those "pictures" that "roll like the movies," but the fact that he remembers it this way tells us something about the meaning of his actions. To see what that is, contrast this with what we might expect from the lyrics of a song about death due to an illness or a car accident. They might convey the irony of nature's deadly innocence, the apparent absurdity that something inanimate and uncaring can cause great evil and suffering, and so on. Such memories can be painful, even traumatic, but they have a fundamentally different meaning. Someone condemned to replay the moment of a loved one's death, in this case, would receive it as an intrusive thought. The thoughts would be readily interpreted as pathological, an alien imposition on the victim's perspective on the event, which we do not expect to be a normal response. The survivor has no lingering doubt that he or she deserves to suffer in this way, though survivor's guilt may manifest in other ways. As it happened, however, Chapman's experience is as one under constant judgment constituted by the play-by-play of details that only he knows.

These dramatic examples are shot through with evaluative description. They reveal something about what is in view in evaluative thinking. Evaluative reflection

about what one ought to have done or what was fitting to have been done is not limited to responses to whether it is true that one ought to have done it or that it was fitting to have been done. Reflection from an evaluative perspective brings into view factors independent of the immediate deontic facts bearing on the object of reflection. Gaita's point is that we find the responses of the fictional N and the non-fictional Chapman to be understandable even while we employ extended and costly efforts to overcome them. It makes sense that a young man who caused his sister's death would feel guilt by virtue of his involvement, and it makes sense that one would go through periods of time during which he struggles to live with himself for a minor act of aggression that resulted in a man's death. These responses are perfectly intelligible, even though nobody could reasonably accuse either of being guilty of anything commensurate to what the responses suggest.

We can see a similar phenomenon in less emotionally charged scenarios. Consider an ordinary example of something I would have a duty to do if no other consideration outweighed it. My young daughter, Elsie, is an avid dancer. Come each May, I have an obligation to attend her ballet recital. On my way to the recital, I come across a man lying on a solitary country road, alive but unresponsive. My obligation to help this man outweighs the duty to attend the recital. I do well to render aid at the expense of attending the performance. I do not act against an *actual* duty I am under. It would seem that the initial duty—the fact that I had a special appointment to keep—does not now have any claim on me. It may have *caused* new states of affairs that have a claim on me. Prudence may demand that I be aware of Elsie's disappointment. By itself, however, the duty to see the recital is no longer pressed upon me. When the man is lying there in the street

unconscious, I do not have an actual duty to attend the recital. If it were actual, then I would have done wrong in missing the recital.

Though I no longer am obliged to attend the recital, I now have a different obligation to perform some reparatory act to make it up to Elsie for missing the event. Perhaps I take a day off to spend time with her, or perhaps I give her new dance shoes, or perhaps I indulge in many (many) viewings of a recording of the recital even though the footage is bad. If this case is not intuitive to the reader, the general point can be appreciated. We often incur normative reasons to perform reparatory acts for omitting to perform other prima facie duties, even when those omissions are permissible or right. If I can't reasonably keep a promise to perform a community service, I should help financially; if I can't offer room and board to a family member burdened by extreme misfortune, I should offer companionship and encouragement; if I can't visit my grandmother on her 80th birthday, I should call her on the phone.

These new obligations have something to do with the considerations involved in the prima facie obligations. A host of considerations—the fact that my daughter's performance means something to her, that the office of parenthood confers on one the unique power to certify the worthiness of aspirations and accomplishments, and so on—is an important part of the explanation both of the duty to attend and the duty to make up for not attending. These considerations would show up in the explanation of both duties. The duty is not merely the one a father has to relieve the pain of his aggrieved child or to console her in her disappointment. The duty is rather that *he* makes things up to her because of *his* absence. The two are related.

We can call this feature the “fecundity” of practical considerations. The salient features of practical considerations rarely (if ever) have the potential to give rise to just one normative fact. They rather contain within them the potential for a myriad of normative reasons and duties relevant to practical thinking. Daughters’ dance recitals are things dads should see. But they are also things that dads should be somewhat despondent about missing. This is what allows prima facie duties to have normative force even when they are not actual duties. I take it to be a desideratum of any successful value theory that it adequately explains the fecundity of practical considerations.

A value first picture like that presented in the first two chapters easily explains this fact. Compensatory acts make sense as expressions of remorse for failing to respond to the values in ways they ideally deserve. Implicit in them is the appreciation that something of importance was not given its due because circumstances licensed or even required agents to do otherwise. They acknowledge the meaning of what was done, even though there was no duty to have done otherwise. Such descriptions make free use value concepts in describing the primary objects of consideration. The deontic first theories, however, have a more difficult time accounting for this feature of practical considerations.

The problem with ought-first accounts. Consider again the ought-first theories of value. Basic norms are actual duties or norms that rule out the alternatives. All other normative types—prima facie norms and values—are reducible to them. Other objects of thought, such as non-normative states of affairs or properties, only bear on practical thought insofar as they tell the agent which norms are at play. The fact that my daughter is performing brings me under the duty to attend the performance up until when my

exclusive proximity to the man in his injured state brings me under the duty to attend to him instead. Any consideration involved in my practical thinking is relevant only in terms of what I actually ought to do all things considered.

To explain the fecundity of practical reason, the ought-firster is forced to choose between two options. The first option posits a distinct duty that would obligate the compensatory duty under the relevant circumstances. Making amends would be a way of satisfying a more general norm governing how to act when one cannot fulfill one's duties. Second, the ought-firster could abandon the hope of a normative explanation of this new ought fact. There is the one duty to attend the recital and the other duty to make amends for missing it. The ought-firster, in short, must appeal to a broader principle or else have no normative explanation. Call these options, respectively, the principalist strategy and the bruteness strategy.

For ought-firsters that take up the principalist strategy, it is difficult to specify with precision what the content of the explaining duty could be. The one proposed above—the alleged requirement to make up for justifiably failing to perform a duty—is surely no duty at all. One does not have a general duty to compensate for the fact that one has no duty. For we are all of the time justifiably failing to perform prima facie duties to others. We might tweak the general principle to say that we have a duty to make up for justifiably failing to perform a prima facie duty when that failure results in a harm to the one we had the duty to. But again, arguably, we are doing this all the time. Also, any description of the “harm” done to my daughter for missing her performance could not be articulated without reference to my duty to attend in the first place. The appeal to harm in this case is no explanation at all.

These difficulties may lead one to doubt with Bernard Williams that no separate compensatory duty exists (1985, 176). I make no such contention here. The ought-firster may indeed be able to articulate all the duties we have. Rather, my objection is that there is an oddity that the ought-firster has to accept in cases like these, and any others like them. Consider the bruteness strategy. I ought to attend my daughter's performance, and also to make it up to her when I justifiably fail to attend. The latter is not a way of executing a broader duty. It's simply there. But this view fails to appreciate something important about the second duty. Making it up to my daughter, which I ought to do, is a *response* to the failure that occasioned it, and that underwriting the response is a recognition that the failure *calls for* it. The new fact is not merely activated by the occasion. For the ought-firster, I am now under a distinct obligation to make things up to Elsie.

The point is that the initial duties and the compensatory duties are at least partially explained by the moral dimensions of what they are responses to. My daughter's performance is important (at least to some extent) and this is at least partly why it is both true that I have an obligation to attend the recital in ordinary circumstances and an obligation to make it up to her when I justifiably miss it. Keeping appointments is important, which partly explains why I ought to keep the appointment and to make it up for someone when I justifiably fail to do so. Keeping appointments and making up for missing them are both rational responses to the values involved in this circumstance. If the *importance* of keeping appointments were reducible to the fact that *one ought to keep appointments*, as the ought-firster contends, then a couple things follow. First, it is not important in just those circumstances in which it is not the case one ought to keep his

appointments. Second, it is not the importance that rationalizes the compensatory obligation. As we just noted, the importance amounts to nothing more than that one ought to do it, but “that one ought to ϕ ” does not make sense of the obligation to make up for justifiably omitting to ϕ . In other words, while it may be true that “the fact that I ought to keep my appointments” rationalizes the duty to compensate for missing one, this is not because it is true in general that one ought to compensate for justifiably not doing what in other circumstances he ought to have done. In short, ought-fundamentalism denies an explanatory role to something that seems to have an explanatory role.

If the bruteness strategy is odd because it posits *no* normative explanation when there seems to be one, the principalist strategy is odd because it posits the *wrong* explanation. To explain the compensatory duty, it appeals to a broader moral principle. Explanations like these are common enough. “I ought to go to the party because I promised I would, and I ought to do what I promised.” *That I promised to go* explains why going to the party is a way of fulfilling my general obligation to keep promises (Schroeder 2005, 11). Similarly, *that I missed the performance* explains why making it up to Elsie is a way of fulfilling some general duty. The problem is that such explanations seem to be parodies of themselves when they are applied to situations like N’s killing of the beggar. Gaita says,

N’s sense of the terribleness of what he did depends on the way his remorse focuses on his victim in all his individuality. He is not haunted by the principles he betrayed or by the Moral Law he transgressed; he is haunted by the particular beggar he killed. ‘My God, what have I done? I have transgressed most terribly! I have violated my principles! I have shattered the ancient taboo against killing! I have transgressed against the Moral Law! I have done what would reduce social life to tatters if too many people did it! I have broken the Social Covenant!’ (2000, 32)

These responses are parodies because they do not appreciate the meaning of what is being thought of. These principles neglect what is morally salient in N's autobiography. In the emotively unresponsive state induced by the arm-chair, the idea that the ultimate moral dimension for consideration is this broader duty I have, which right now can only be satisfied in a particular way, can seem plausible. However, when we translate ordinary responses to real moral situations, the suggestion is farcical. It seems clearly wrong that the scope of genuine moral dimensions under consideration is exhausted by the duties one is bound by.

The oddity of ought-fundamentalism is even more striking when we consider that whether and what compensatory duties one has tracks changes in what is in view evaluatively speaking. If, for instance, I justifiably missed my daughter's performance for reasons significantly different than noted before, say because she nearly burned the house down earlier that day as a result of irresponsible and inexcusable behavior for someone of her age. Instead of going to the recital, I must attend to the ensuing labor of cleaning out ruined materials, giving an explanation to the police, filing insurance claims, and so on. The ought-firster can articulate the duties at play here: I have one in the first scenario imagined above to make amends that I don't have in the scenario imagined here. There is a discrepancy between the two scenarios that seems odd unless we are allowed to appeal to the moral dimensions that call for different actions in each case. It seems wrong that the discrepancy in duties is not partially explained by the different evaluative dimensions of these two cases.

The ought-firster might respond that attitudes as responses can be warranted by each duty. For instance, in the first scenario, I have a duty to make it up to my daughter

as a response to my omission. We can have duties to have certain attitudes. The point is that whatever we say should be “in view” with the new duty is specified by the content of the new duty. I don’t merely have a duty *to make it up to Elsie* but a duty *to make it up to her as a response to missing the performance*, where the added clause specifies the correct attitudes to have.

This is an odd duty. It says that what is “in view” is what one appeals to as the *normative reason* to ϕ , rather than the intuitive idea that normative reasons are *explained* by some evaluative consideration. The point is not that ought-fundamentalism can’t account for all actual obligations. It perhaps can do so by simply specifying the right content of the duties. The point rather is that ought-fundamentalism confuses the *reason* for an obligation for the content of the obligation. It is odd to think of the duty to make things up to Elsie as containing within it that I do so in a way that appreciates the fact that my missing out on the performance was regrettable. It is more odd than saying more straightforwardly that my regretful omission makes the subsequent acts fitting.

The problem with fitting-first accounts. We have seen one problem with the view that values can be reduced to all things considered ought facts. Does the view that they can be reduced to the weaker ought facts fare any better? Recall that we identified that the unifying feature of so-called “prima facie duties” is that they are rules with limited entailment relations. If we represent this normative relation with “R,” we cannot conclude “Not- ϕ -ing is not R” on the basis of “ ϕ -ing is R.” Several potential normative properties play this role: fittingness, being reasoned, correct, justified, warranted, and rational. For our foil, we are looking at fittingness since fitting-first views are more popular than the

others. What we say here applies in general to the view that values can be reduced to the R properties.

At first, it may seem that fitting-first theories can avoid the problem faced by ought-first theories. That problem arose precisely because the ought-firster is unable to identify a continuous feature between the two duties—to attend the performance and to make up for missing it—that paid proper respect to the moral dimensions of those duties. On a fitting-first theory, however, the initial duty is not merely apparent. There is normative force to my attending the performance even when I ought not to all things considered. The fitting-first theorist might claim that this normative force is in play in the reasons going into my duty to make it up to Elsie.¹⁰ Thus, theories on which fittingness is normatively primitive and the reductive basis for value can explain the fecundity.

On closer inspection, it is difficult to think of a plausible point of connection between the two duties in an adequate way if we assume that it has to be a normative fact about our responses. The basic facts will involve a response that is fitting. In this case, let's assume that regret is the operative response in the second case. Regret is an emotion that can be expressed in actions, given my assumption that the *making it up to her* action is meaningful in communicating something. Assume further that regret in certain conditions can be sufficient to provide me with an all-things-considered duty to perform the acts that express it.

¹⁰ I neglect a massive issue here, which is how fitting-first theories move from R facts to all things considered duties. This appears to be a remarkable lacuna in the literature on fittingness. For instance, I was unable to find any discussion in the most recent edited volume dedicated to exploring fitting-first theories (Howard and Rowland 2022). Fitting-first theorists may assume the success of other R-first normative theories, which often analyze or else give a “real definition” of “obligation” as “what one has most reason to do.” In any case, I will not challenge the fitting-first theorist on this point, and I will assume that it could theoretically explain all things considered ought facts in terms of fitness relations.

To establish the connection between the fact that going is fitting and compensating for not going is also fitting, the second fact should include the first fact in it. The compensatory duty should presume the fact that was important in the duty the omission of which the former is compensating for. This is required if fecundity is true: that the first and second facts share a fundamentally common normative core, and that the same moral dimensions are in view for properly reasoning agents considering the options. Regret has to be a fitting response to something that itself involves a normative fact about some response involved in the original duty to attend the performance. Remember, that some response is fitting even though it is not the case that it ought to be done is what was alleged above to give the fitting-first theory the advantage over the ought-first theory.

It is difficult to find the right normative fact about responses that is contained in both the initial fact and the fact about the fittingness of compensation, however. The point of fecundity is that the same moral dimensions exist in *both* duties.

First Attempt: Regret is a fitting response to the dual facts that attending the performance would have been fitting and that I didn't attend.

This proposition is false. It is not true in general that regret is a fitting response when we can't or don't do something fitting. Any number of things of things I could be doing right now are fitting, and the fact that I'm not is only regrettable for some of them. I could be walking over to the dining hall, or doing jumping jacks, or taking a short nap, or talking to an old friend on the phone, or grading my students' final exams, and so on. Each is fitting, but only some are regrettably omitted.

To identify an adequate point of contact between the two facts, both the primary and the embedded fact must be true.

Second Attempt: Regret is a fitting response to the dual facts that not going is unfitting and I didn't go.

This is true, but it implies something false about the first fact, given our assumption that the first fact is contained in the second. We make the proposition true by changing the normative property to *unfitting*. In doing so, however, we imply that the original fact is that *it would be unfitting if I didn't go to my daughter's performance*. Again, it is true that omitting to go is unfitting in some respect, but it is not the main thing in view when I reflect on the first duty from a moral perspective. The deontic-firster has gotten into trouble when he relies on negations as the basic form of the norms governing the way we treat the objects of our deepest love. The most accurate expressions of the duties we have to those we love are not negations.

The problem with buck-passing accounts. The buck-passing account of value has the most resources to avoid the problems in the other theories.¹¹ The buck-passing theory, recall, says that to be valuable is to be in the possession of properties that give reason to value. These other properties that it “passes the buck” to could potentially possess the kind of fecundity needed to produce different reasons in different circumstances. For instance, *the fact that my daughter is performing* is a reason to go to the performance, even though it is decisively outweighed by my reasons not to go to the performance. Importantly, however, this same fact also features in the reason for me to make amends with her. We need not appeal to any distinct principles, because *the fact that my daughter is performing* has the ability to feature in the sets of facts that give several different

¹¹ In fact, Selim Berker has argued that normative reasons in the sense used here are evaluative rather than deontic or some third type of normativity (2023, 52). It makes sense, then, that of all the views considered here it would be the most capable of standing up to the evaluative phenomena.

reasons. It can be a reason to attend the performance and also a reason to regret missing it and to make it up to her.

There is still an oddity in the buck-passing theory that is revealed by reflection on the fecundity of values, and this should shift our default intuition. *That my daughter is performing* is part of the reason to attend the performance and to make it up to her for missing, but almost every theory is going to agree that the fact alone is not sufficient to produce reasons for different responses. Facts that obtain in the second scenario but not the first play a role in explaining why I ought to make amends. However, there is a special role played by the singular fact and what it brings into focus. *That my daughter is performing* plays a role that is apparently more *important* in the explanation for why I ought to make it up to her than the fact *that I could not reasonably attend* does not play. Again, the difference has nothing to do with the modal facts about the relationship between the acts one has reason to perform and the considerations that count as reasons to perform them. Some facts are more important than others in these descriptions. Some of the things we consider are more morally relevant to the compensatory duty than other facts involved in explaining it.

How could we explain the moral salience of some of the considerations without evaluative language? We appeal to evaluative language to illuminate the moral dimensions of these special objects of consideration. As we saw in chapter two, it is values that have the possibility to call for various responses because of their contexts and purposes. The fact that something was *funny* can be a reason to laugh at it and also to blush, depending on the circumstances. Of course, those circumstances yield descriptions that are essential to the explanations of the different responses that are rationalized.

However, it is one consideration among several—that the joke was *funny*—that is the most important. There should be some way to reflect this on any adequate theory.

The buck-passer cannot admit a hierarchy of the importance of facts among the set of necessary conditions for the act to be rationalized. With only the value-denuded facts or properties, we can only operate at one level, that of the conditions that have reason-giving force. These are equally important to the resulting fact that there is a reason to do what those conditions give a reason to do. Value-denuded facts can't explain why some facts are special in the explanation of the reasonability of making amends when a host of other facts are relevant to the discussion, because it says that these facts are normatively basic. If some fact were more important, it would not be among the facts whose reason-giving force count as normatively basic; and among such facts there can be no hierarchy of importance.

Consider a different case, *that I made a promise* can be a reason to keep it; *that I made a promise that circumstances made unreasonable for me to keep* can be a reason to make amends. But the *promising* itself does not play the same role or present any significant considerations in the two acts that are rationalized on the buck-passer theory.

“I made a promise” is not itself a reason for both actions. This seems unintuitive.

Promises are the kinds of things that should be respected or honored.

4.4 Conclusion

I have tried to do two things in this chapter. First, I have tried to give a unified picture of the various normative theories that count as being “deontic first.” On these theories, ought facts are paradigmatic, even though they are not necessarily basic.

Second, I have given two arguments against such theories. The first argument says that

none of the intrinsic properties of the various deontic relations, nor any combination of the intrinsic properties, are linked to the Good. Thick values, on such theories, are not intrinsically dependent on the Good. The second argument appeals to a broader phenomenon in practical considerations, which is that some practical considerations are given an irreducibly evaluative salience. It is likely that almost no one attracted to such theories will be moved by my arguments. Deontic based metanormative theories are famously marked by their departure from the admittedly mysterious nature of the Platonic heritage. Nonetheless, I at least hope to have contributed to our understanding of the nature of that disagreement.

CHAPTER FIVE

Practical Reasons

5.1 Introduction

I now turn to look at the relationship between value and normative reasons. On the view we have been working with, value is normatively fundamental. It is independent and explanatory of other normative categories in what Dancy calls the “deontic family” such as right, wrong, having a reason, and so on (2004, 24). How exactly this explanatory relationship is supposed to work out has been thought by many to be irredeemably fraught with problems. Instead, many think we are better off rejecting the idea of an explanatorily independent set of values. Only members of the deontic family exist at the basic level of normativity.

Value-based theories of reasons face three objections, all three of which aim to show that it is extensionally inadequate. First, it is objected that they lack explanatory power (Rowland 2019, 48-52). Since normativity applies to epistemic and aesthetic relations, it extends beyond practical normativity. Epistemic, aesthetic, and practical norms are explicable in terms of fit and reasons, but not, it is thought, in terms of values. For there seems to be no equivalency rules between what we have reason to believe and what is good or bad or what is valuable to believe. Since a theory capable of explaining all normative phenomena is better just in that respect than a theory that explains only a some of it, the deontic-based theories are better in just this respect than the value-based ones.

Second, it is argued that value-based theories cannot explain the fittingness of emotions. For instance, it is fitting to envy the enviable (Protasi 2022) and be annoyed with the annoying (Rowland 2022, 180). It is not, however, straightforwardly good to feel envy or irritation. At least, it is not good in every circumstance in which it is also fitting. Thus, there appear to be instances in which emotions are fitting but not valuable.

Third, most famously, it is alleged that value-based reasons cannot explain a significant range of practical reasons we have (Scanlon 1998, 79-87). These are sometimes called “deontological reasons” (Nagel 1986, 165) and sometimes called “agent-centered restrictions” (Darwall 1986). These are restrictions, absolute or *prima facie*, against actions that would bring about the best outcome. Deontological reasons “have their full force against your doing something—not just against its happening” (Nagel 1986, 177). What one has most reason to do is not always a matter of what is of most value to do because what one has a reason to do in the first place is not always a matter of what is valuable to do at all. Thus, it is concluded, these reasons are not based in value.

The purpose of this chapter is to respond to the third objection. That response, in brief, is that the third objection ignores value pluralism as defined in previous chapters. For instance, recently, Richard Rowland has taxonomized the different types of value-first theories of fittingness and reasons one could adopt (2022). His taxonomy assumes value monism¹ and switches around the things that are valuable: the thing ϕ -ing brings about might be valuable, or ϕ -ing itself, the object of the attitude of ϕ -ing, or being guided by standards satisfied by ϕ -ing. There is no consideration here of theories that

¹ See chapter 3 for my idiosyncratic definition of “value monism.”

challenge what it is to be a value in the first place; that, for instance, *nobility* is an irreducibly different value from *truthfulness*. Since a value-based theory of practical reason need not be underwritten by a singularly monistic view, it need not posit a unified rationalized act-type on account of the fact that it need not be underwritten by a unified evaluative property. Different values call for different responses.

Given that value monism was the singular impetus for ascribing a teleological conception of reasons to the value-based view, undermining that view undermines the rationale for thinking value-based theories of reasons are teleological in the first place. Still, it is one thing to show that something hasn't been proven; it is another to prove it false. I will, however, avoid the fallacy of denying the antecedent by turning the conditional into a bi-conditional. If the value-based system posits one kind of reason, then it does so *if and only if* there is one kind of value. In other words, there is one kind of reason if and only if there is one kind of value. If there are other kinds of values, there are other kinds of reasons too.

With one objection down, that leaves two to go. I do not engage with the issue of fitting emotions directly. It should become clear, however, that a value-based theory of the normative constraints on or features of emotions can follow a similar response as the above line of thought. The main point of that argument is that different values call for different responses. If one value gives me reason to act in one way, and another in another way, it is not so difficult to imagine that they might give us reason to feel certain ways as well. Thus, value pluralism can in principle explain the range of emotional norms.

Epistemic norms are trickier. Some value-based theorists have attempted such an account (Kvanvig 2014) while most limit the scope of their theories to practical (viz. non-epistemic) normativity. I will leave the question of epistemic normativity aside for another time. I cannot justify this move other than to say that even if value-first theories of epistemic normativity fail, this does not count as a decisive reason to accept deontic-first theories of normativity in general. Considerations of parsimony should enter a dispute only after the data has been accounted for. If there is a well-defined set of facts F , then all else being equal, theory x is better than theory y if the x explains all of F and y explains only a subset of it. But what if y explains that subset better than x ? Then in just that respect, and all else being equal, y 's superiority is evidence that the two subsets have separate explanations. In the last chapter, I argued that there are some phenomena of the subset that are odd on deontic first views (fecundity of considerations). In this chapter, I will argue that the deontic first views do not have an obvious advantage on the value-based views in explaining other phenomena of the subset (deontological reasons). What the value-based theory lacks in scope, it picks up in accuracy. Which theory proves the more explanatorily powerful depends on whether I am right.

I will start by developing the ascendant value-based theory of reasons and argue that it entails that all reasons are reasons to promote. Then I will briefly state the main motivation for holding the view. This view of what the value firster has to say about reasons is often accepted by both critics and proponents of the value-based theory of reasons. After that, I will argue that the ascendant theory fails to predict some reasons we actually have. Fortunately, however, I will argue further that reasons explained by values are not always reasons to *promote* something of value. If we understand values to be

thick, there is no reason to think that they are related in a single way to reasons. The normativity of values is not constrained to a particular form of reason—a reason to promote or bring about—common to all instances. In fact, I argue, there is no single way values are normative.

5.2 *The Ascendant Value-Based Theory of Reasons*

5.2.1 *Introducing the Ascendant Theory*

Broadly speaking, a practical reason is a consideration that favors a practical option.² The fact that I am hungry is a reason to eat lunch. My hunger favors the practical option that I eat lunch. Value-based theories say further that an option is favored due to some value, that some value is the explanation for its being favored. At this point, we are faced with forking paths. The values that form the basis of reasons are themselves either thick or thin. The perspective articulated in the first three chapters of this dissertation would be an example of the former, though other non-separationist perspectives that deny the unity argued for in chapter three would also count. These views, I will argue, offer no general explanation of what normative reasons we have. The more popular value-based theory of reasons, however, states that the relationship is one of *promotion*. An option is favored due to some value being caused or instantiated by that option. Barry Maguire states the ascendant value-based theory of reasons this way.

Ascendant Value-Based Theory: Some fact of the form [ϕ would promote S] is a reason to ϕ if and only if (and because) ϕ would promote S and that S is valuable. (2016, 237)

² For the sake of simplicity, I exclude disfavoring from the discussion.

The *promoting* relation is metaphysical, not normative. It states what actually obtains between the promoter and promoted, not what ought to obtain. What it primarily indicates is that the promoter is instrumental to the promoted in some way. Following Niko Kolodny, the sense of “instrumental” I will use here is that of non-trivial probabilization (2015). A means is not merely a state of affairs relative to the obtaining of which the ends is likely. The relation must be “non-trivial” insofar as “the means must produce or sustain the end or contribute to its production” (Nagel 1970, 52). Something can be non-trivially probabilized in a number of ways. Examples include causing, partly causing, helping to cause, instantiating, constituting, partly constituting, and preventing the prevention of. The common factor here is that normative reasons direct practical agents to making or preserving the world in a way it is alleged for it to be good to be. This is central to the ascendant value-based theory of reasons since it is that which is responsible for its teleological structure.

Many think that if values are explanatorily prior to reasons, then reasons are themselves teleological (Schroeder 2021a, §3.1). Reasons explained by values are only reasons to promote value or bring about their instantiation or existence. This is the ascendant value-based theory of reasons, which many call the “teleological” view of value-first grounded reasons, which is shared by the proponents and critics of the value-first theory.³ Some affirm the antecedent and conclude that normative reasons are teleological, while others deny the consequent and conclude that not all reasons are value-based. The view of the first camp has become unpopular in the last few decades, though some still defend it (Maguire 2016). It is so unpopular, in fact, that many papers

³ One exception is Pettit (1997) who denies the conditional altogether.

and books defending various reasons-first accounts of normativity do not consider or argue against the view that values come first in normative explanations.⁴ Thus, I call it the “ascendant” view not because it is commonly held, but because it is commonly accepted to be true *if any* value-based theory of reasons is true.

The ascendant theory is neutral about first-order judgements of value. Things to be promoted could be any kind of state of affairs. It could be states of pleasure, of friendship, or perhaps of an action having been done. What is important is that the instrumental nature of action is what gives us reason to act. Acting contributes to the obtaining of a state of affairs. It makes changes and brings about a different state of affairs than before, again, even if the difference is merely that a particular action of intrinsic value has been done.

Maguire’s principle has a limited scope. It only identifies the explanation of a fact *of a particular form* being a reason. The fact that going to the store would “promote” hunger relief for my children is a reason to go to the store if and only if (and because) going to the store would have this result and this result is valuable. This principle does not commit to any view about facts of different forms, however. It might be thought, as I will argue later, that not all moral facts are so explained. As it stands, Maguire’s principle does not commit him one way or another to a view on the existence of facts of distinct forms or a view about how they would be explained.

⁴ See Howard (2019), Yetter-Chappell (2012), Orsi (2015, 10), and Mark Schroeder (2021c). These works show that the current debate about fundamental normativity has become a mostly “in-house” controversy among those who agree that so-called “deontic facts” come first.

Nonetheless, the principle is intended to apply across the board for reasons for action. On the ascendant theory, all normative reasons are explained by values. This gives us the following principle.

Some fact F is a reason to ϕ if and only if (and because) F has the form [ϕ would promote S] and S is valuable.

Why the ascendant theory commits to this universal thesis will become clear when I discuss the motivation for it. For now, it is enough to note that without universality, it would be an extreme overstatement to call Maguire's principle a "theory of reasons." It would only be a theory of a particular kind of reason, leaving other kinds unexplained. If we see the ascendant theory as a theory of reasons for action *per se*, then we should add to Maguire's principle that *all* reasons to perform any act, ϕ , are facts of the form ϕ *would promote S*.

5.2.2 Motivating the Ascendant Theory

A defense of the ascendant theory must consist of answers to two questions. First, why think if reasons are explained by values, then all reasons are reasons to promote something of value? In other words, why think value-based reasons are teleological? Second, why think that all reasons are explained by values in the first place? In this section, I will explain how proponents of the ascendant theory have tried to answer the second question. The basic argument provides the groundwork for the additional theses about the relationship between values and reasons that might otherwise appear optional for the value first theorist. Of course, I will end up arguing that such theses are optional, and that they should be rejected by value-firsters.

The argument is simple: explaining reasons in terms of value best accounts for what we have most reason to do (Singer 1972, 231). When deliberating about what to do, we compare factors competing for different responses. This assumes an adequate explanation for how we can weigh these factors against each other, ultimately arriving at an option we have the most reason to take. But what is it we are weighting? The only option seems to be that we are comparing the relative values promoted by the options.

For example, imagine that I made a promise to my son to take him to a movie. On the day of the movie, I am at a meeting of philosophers at my department. The philosophical conversation is stimulating, and I find myself pulled in two directions. I regret that I am put in a position where I have to choose between enjoying the rest of the social event or fulfilling my promise to my son. What should I do? Clearly, I should keep my promise. Of course, this would come at some real cost of missing out on stimulating conversation. However, this cost is outweighed by the fact that doing so would require breaking a promise, hurting my son, depriving him of a good time, a childhood memory, and so on. Compared to these considerations, an hour or two more of good conversation is insignificant. The cumulative weight of these factors surely tilts the deliberation in favor of keeping my promise.

As this case seems to show, what I have reason to do is explained by facts about value. It would be better for me to go to the movie with my son and keep my promise, even if that means missing out on philosophical conversation, than it would be for me to stay and enjoy the conversation. In this case, the weight of the reasons is a function of the degree of value each option has. Option one, which is to stay, has less value than option two, which is to go. We think we should do what we have the most *reason* to do, and

what we have the most reason to do is what is *best*. Unless we put values first, we will have a hard time explaining why values seem to have this comparative weight.

5.2.3 Teleological Reasons

A theory is called “teleological” if on that theory the *explanans* (the explainer) is the fact that a thing aims at some end. A theory of normativity is teleological if on that theory evaluative facts such as *good* or *good for* are normatively fundamental (Schroeder 2021a, §3.1.3). Modern teleological theories of reasons take things a step further. They are also committed to the view that goods are things to be brought about or preserved. (In accord with the current literature, I will henceforth drop the “modern” and refer to these theories as simply “teleological.”) Teleological theories therefore impose a formal structure on the content of all normative reasons. While it may not be the case that one always has reason to perform some particular action-type, every particular action anyone ever does have reason to perform can be redescribed as promoting the existence of something.

Contemporary philosophers have generally agreed with the thought that if value is explanatorily independent of reasons or overall “oughts,” then the reasons they give rise to are always calculated to bring the value about. Here’s a quote from Shelly Kagan.

To speak of the good is in part to use a placeholder: to say that there is a pro tanto reason to promote the good is to say that there is a standing reason to promote those outcomes that best meet the appropriate standards—whatever those standards might be. (1989, 60)

For Kagan, *good* is a “placeholder” for some outcome that there is a reason to promote.

In other words, Kagan is saying that *whatever happens to be good* is what ought to be promoted. If the property of goodness/value were the fundamental explanation of

reasons, then, all reasons would be teleological in the modern sense. All reasons would be reasons to promote.

But why think that value-based reasons must be teleological? The reason for thinking the value-based theory of reasons is teleological is because of the reason for thinking the value-based theory is true in the first place: that what one has most reason to do is a matter of what is best to do.⁵ Consider the proposition that there is a fact of the matter about what is “best to do.” Underwriting this statement is a commitment to several features about value. First, it must be a property of states of affairs. It is what makes the state of affairs desirable or aim-worthy. It is a property because it is common to many instances. States of pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment are valuable in virtue of instantiating the same property.

Second, value must be a *gradable* property of states of affairs (Wolfsdorf 2019, 16). It must be a kind of quantity that allows for comparison. For instance, on this view, we must be able to express statements like that it is better for a small child to survive a flash flood than it is for the cattle to survive.

Finally, value must be a *monadic* gradable property of states of affairs. The property is sufficiently expressed with the simple term “valuable,” without any loss of information. Here things get muddled a bit. For a theory of reasons to be teleological it is technically not necessary that the value property be monadic. For instance, take the

⁵ This motivation for a value-based normativity excludes alternative value-based theories, such as the objective list natural law theory advanced by Murphy (2001). Objective list natural law theorists hold that we ought to respond reasonably to value, but values are incommensurable. Thus, there is no “best” option. My view similarly rejects the modern teleological view. However, the rejection that values are monadic gradable properties does not entail that they are incommensurate. See Scheler (1973, 86-100) and Frondizi (1971, 111-13) for the view that values are intrinsically ranked non-quantitatively. Moreover, thick-value-based moral philosophy differs from a natural law theory in that it sees the explanation for the propriety of diverse responses to values as based in the values themselves, rather than other norms governing reasonable responses to values.

polyadic property of being *good-for* or what is sometimes called being “good-relative-to-X.” One kind of value-based theory advanced by Richard Kraut says that all goodness is polyadic where one placeholder is an agent the goodness is relative to (2007 66-71; 2012). Kraut does not give a theory of reasons,⁶ but for any agent A, A has reason to ϕ if and only if (and because) ϕ -ing promotes S and S is good-relative-to-A. This sort of view is close to the monadic view in one way but far from it in another. It is close insofar as it affirms the principle above with the simple change that “valuable” is elliptical for some relational value property. On the other hand, this view is far from the monadic view insofar as it does not allow straightforward comparisons of value between neutral states of affairs, which is the primary motivation for the thin-value-based theory in the first place.⁷ So for the purposes of this chapter, I am only going to look at the views on which value is monadic and therefore neutral.

It is natural to couple teleological reasons with values so conceived. One thought is that the property “value is to be promoted” is self-evidently true. This line goes back at least as far as Moore’s *Principia Ethica*, although he was concerned with the explanation of “strict facts” like rightness and oughtness rather than reasons generally. At this point in his intellectual development, Moore thought it was true by definition of “right.” To be good is to be something that ought to be preferred to nothing at all, and to be better is to be something that ought to be preferred to the worse. He concluded from this that to promote the best is to be preferred overall and therefore right. This view was challenged by Bertrand Russell (1904) and Moore was eventually convinced that it is not true by

⁶ However, see (2007, 74) for a brief discussion of the relationship between good-for and reasons.

⁷ See also Schroeder (2007) and Rowland (2019, 33-35) for problems with the view that goodness is a relative property.

definition. Nevertheless, in his later *Ethics*, he insisted that its truth is self-evident in a synthetic way (2005 89-94).

Although Moore is mostly concerned with “rightness,” this is not because he thinks that values do not give practical reasons. This line of thought has been applied to reasons more generally. For instance, Maguire calls the ascendant theory about reasons a “definitional thesis” (2016, 240). He says, “The value-based theory of reasons purports to provide an *analysis* of what it is to be a reason” (2016, 237).

The powerful objections to Moore’s theories have been treated as undermining the possibility of a value-first theory *per se*. Indeed, many seem to believe that normative explanations of reasons in terms of values *just is* the teleological view of reasons. Mark Schroeder says value-first theories are teleological “in the sense that they seek to explain what we ought to do in terms of what is good” (2021a, §3.1.3). Michael Zimmerman (2015) only considers teleological views in his treatment of value-based theories of reasons. This association forms the basis of the argument from deontological reasons or “agent-centered constraints.” So, the main argument against the value-based theory is as follows.

1. If reasons are based in value, then they are teleological.
2. If reasons are teleological, then they are not deontological.
3. But some reasons are deontological.
4. Therefore, not all reasons are based in value.

I accept that there are deontic constraints on actions, and therefore deontological reasons. For some act, ϕ , there may be reason to ϕ even when omitting to ϕ would result in many more instances of ϕ -ing. Similarly, for some act, ψ , there may be reason not to ψ even when ψ -ing would result in overall fewer instances of ψ -ing. I also accept that if reasons are teleological, as understood here, then they are not deontological. That is, if reasons

direct agents to promote something, then there are no reasons that would direct an agent to promote less efficiently the very thing aimed at being promoted. To reject the case against the value-based theory of reasons, I will argue against the first premise. In other words, I will argue against the ascendant value-based theory of reasons.

5.3 Against the Ascendant Theory

5.3.1 Reasons to Promote

In the last section, I reviewed the primary motivation for the belief that (a) all practical normative reasons are based in values and (b) all practical reasons based in values are teleological. In this section, I will argue that (b) is false. My main claim is that one need not accept the conception of values underwriting the ascendant theory. Not all values are naturally suited to teleological intentions by rational agents. Indeed, most are not. Most rather yield reasons for a variety of practical options, only one of which is promotion. One need not reject the value-based theory of reasons to recognize this. Though the ascendant theory has some considerations in its favor, as we have seen in the last few chapters, so does value pluralism.

The first step in my argument is to draw out an implication of the ascendant theory that is not always appreciated in the literature, which is that it is not a strict formal thesis about the structure of goodness. It instead has substantial upshot about what we ought to do. The reason it is thought to be a formal thesis is because its substantive commitment is highly abstract. It does not tell us which things have the property of being good and therefore which things are to be promoted (Scanlon 1998, 80; Kagan 1989, 60). Still, the thesis is committed to the *promoting* sort of morality that says all the normative

reasons we have are reasons to promote something or other. One does not have to define which sort of things ought to be promoted to see that the promoting normative picture has certain moral determinate dimensions—dimensions which will be seen to contradict reasons we have that are based in values. If the ascendant value-based theory of reasons is incompatible with “substantial widely held and plausible views in normative ethics” (Rowland 2019, 21) that is because the ascendant theory is itself or entails substantial views in normative ethics.

At a more specific level of description, the ascendant theory takes no particular stand on what agents have reason to do. This is for two reasons. First, the principle per se takes no particular stand on what states of affairs are valuable. Many different types of states of affairs might be valuable such as the obtaining of pleasure, promise-keeping, well-being, use of rational capacities, and so on. Second, even once we are committed to what states of affairs are valuable, we do not know which actions will promote them. Whether some act-type, ϕ , promotes some state of affairs, S, is an empirical matter, as is whether ϕ -ing always promotes S or only sometimes, often or rarely, and so on.

It is clear, however, that all acts that the ascendant theory countenances as reasonable are subsumed under the broader act-type of *promoting some valuable thing S*.⁸ In other words, if the ascendant theory is true, then some agent, A, has reason to ϕ in circumstances C if and only if A's ϕ -ing in C is an instance of A's *promoting some valuable thing S*. Recall the operative sense of “promoting” here. To perform an action that either instantiates, causes, constitutes, or prevents the prevention of a state of affairs

⁸ I am not saying that there is a general reason to promote something (anything!) of value. Rather, the point is, that for some valuable thing S, A has a reason to promote it.

is to (at least partly) cause that state of affairs. And so, the ascendant theory as a universal account of reasons entails that all reasonable actions are instances of *promoting*.

Not only does having a reason to ϕ supervene on having a reason to promote some valuable thing S, but the latter explains the former. In support of this intuition, consider the following familiar case. Ray has a reason to give money to Charity A because supporting A will promote hunger relief, and he thinks hunger relief is valuable. He discovers, however, that Charity A is corrupt, and hardly any of the money given to it goes toward their stated ends. However, Charity B checks out, and B has the same broad mission as A. So, he gives to B. In this case, Ray's reason to *give to A* is defeated. However, the reason to *give to B* is not. Ray automatically has a reason to give to B.

What best explains this fact? There are two options available to the value-first theorist. The first denies that reasons to ϕ are subsumed into a general reason to promote valuable thing S. Rather, Ray has a reason to promote S by giving to A and a different reason to promote S by giving to B. This view has trouble explaining why the reason to give to B is automatically triggered upon the defeat of the first reason. It is mysterious how Ray can automatically have a reason to donate to B after his reason to donate to A is defeated. A second option, however, says that Ray had a reason to give to A in the first place because he had a prior reason to promote hunger relief and giving to A is a way of promoting hunger relief. If donating to B is also a way of promoting hunger relief, then Ray already has the reason to donate to B. When giving to A was no longer a way to perform the desired act, the reasonable thing to do was to find another way.

The upshot is that the ascendant theory holds to a general explanation of reasons in terms of a master form of reason. The fact that A's ϕ -ing in C is an instance of A's

promoting some valuable state of affairs S explains why A has a reason to ϕ . Thus, we get the following principle.

Some fact of the form [ϕ would promote S] is a reason to ϕ if and only if (and because) ϕ -ing is an instance of *promoting S* and S is valuable.

It does not follow from this principle that all reasons are reasons to *promote*, since it only follows that all reasons are grounded in reasons to *promote*. Ray has a reason to *donate to B*, which is grounded in, but not the same as, a reason to *promote hunger relief*. However, it does follow from this that all reasonable instances of action can be redescribed as *promoting*. All more specific act-types are reasonable because they are ways of *promoting*. And so ϕ -ing is a way of *promoting*, which explains why ϕ -ing is reasonable.

One might object to this principle that it does not account for deviant cases. One might have a reason to act in ways that by all appearances would promote something of value, when it turns out that, in fact, no value would be promoted by ϕ -ing. I leave this issue aside as a general problem for the ascendant theory, and one that clearly applies to Maguire's principle above. My extension of that theory is no more vulnerable to this objection than his.

On the ascendant theory, then, rational agency is always forward-looking. It is tempting to infer from this that rational agency is always a matter of non-trivially probablizing future value that does not currently exist. This would be wrong. For example, grant the (controversial) belief that human life is good. All humans live human lives, and so all human lives ought to be valued. On the view under consideration, I have a *prima facie* reason to protect the existence of any human life. If something valuable exists at a particular time, and this view tells me to preserve that thing into a later time,

then I have not brought it into existence. Thus, it is not true that the principle tells me to probabilize a non-existing thing, since it already exists.

Nonetheless, it is the instrumental properties of my actions and its relationship to the future that give me a reason to act. The ascendant theory sees the evaluative point of view of rational agents as always and without exception forward-looking. Bob is a human now, which makes him valuable, but it is the fact that he will still be a human in the future that makes him worth our practical efforts. It is not the value that Bob has *right now*, that gives me reason to make sure his existence carries on into the future. It is the fact that my preserving him would contribute to value existing in the future.⁹ In other words, if reasons are instrumental to the instantiation of goodness, practical rationality is not a matter of responding to already instantiated goods but anticipating and weighing the goods to-be instantiated.

5.3.2 *A Thick-Value-Based Theory of Reasons*

For any theory of reasons, there are three stages to the theory. First, there is the explanation of reasons. This theorizing concerns facts about the prima facie relationship between values and reason. The second stage of a theory concerns facts about how reasons compete in practical thinking. Most philosophers would say that this stage theorizes about the “weights” given to different reasons, though the scalar metaphor is now controversial (Tucker 2022). Finally, a complete theory of reasons theorizes about what Barry Maguire calls the “strict facts” of reasons, which are facts about all-things-

⁹ The valuable future states might include facts about the continuity of a thing. For instance, a valuable future state may include the fact that a future painting is the same painting as one that existed in the past. Nonetheless, the future-oriented perspective is a formal feature of a practically rational perspective on value if reasons are teleological. Continuity with the past would have to be included as a part of a state of affairs that is itself valuable.

considered normativity (2016, 234). I will not attempt to address the second and third stages here. I will not address whether reasons should be “weighed” or ranked in some other manner. Nor will I consider how all-things-considered norms emerge from values. These stages of a theory should come after we have decided what values are in the first place and what their internal relations to reasons are. Only once this picture is in place can we then examine how they relate to each other and to actions that one ought to perform all-things-considered.

As critics of the ascendant theory have pointed out, we have reasons for very different act-types than what is predicted by the ascendant value-based theory of reasons. Does this mean that we should reject the view that reasons are explained by values? I will argue that it does not. The ascendant theory assumes that value is a monadic gradable property of states of affairs. This is, to say the least, a controversial set of assumptions. The element of this analysis that I want to take issue with here is that value is *a* property, as in *a single* property. I will do this by appealing to the seemingly irreducible “thickness” of many ordinary values, which supports the idea that value-types are distinguished from each other in virtue of their evaluative content. This value theory predicts that we have reasons to respond in different ways.

Again, the irreducible thickness of values is not uncontroversial. Many philosophers reject it. I do not here intend to persuade those who are already skeptical of the view. The objections to it are powerful, and I cannot deal with them here. Nonetheless, many philosophers accept irreducible thickness, and so it is already a live

option in the philosophical landscape.¹⁰ Moreover, the irreducibility thesis has found various forms of expression in virtue theories of the more radical, Aristotelian stripe.¹¹

Now that we have irreducible thickness of values on the table, we can begin to undermine the easy inference from the view that values are explanatorily fundamental to the ascendant theory. Recall that on the ascendant theory, value is a single monadic gradable property. The irreducible thickness thesis rejects this. It does not reject that values are properties, since one might think “funny” is a property that attaches to the joke. Nor does it deny that values are gradable, since things can be more or less funny, more or less just, and so on. It doesn’t even reject that values are monadic, since one might think, for example, that we can attribute “funny” or “just” to something without needing to specify *for whom* or *what* it is so. I am not claiming that a thick-value-based theory of reasons *must* accept all of these attributes of value. That is up for debate. What I am saying, however, is that there is nothing about the fact that the theory is a *thick* value-based theory that requires rejecting them.

Rather, what the thick-value-based theory rejects is that value is a single property. This is not so, in this view, since values are distinguished from each other in virtue of their evaluative dimensions. To say a thing has “value” is like saying it has “color” or “shape.”¹² While technically correct, it is not very informative, and it does not explain

¹⁰ See Williams (1985, 141ff), McDowell (1981), Dancy (1995), Putnam (2002, 34-43), Chappell (2013), D. Roberts (2013; 2018), Kirchin (2017).

¹¹ Anscombe (1958), Foot (2002), and Murdoch (2014) are widely interpreted to articulate early varieties of the irreducible thickness thesis, although they do not use the term “thick” to describe their position. More recently, Brewer has argued that a plausible virtue-centric normative philosophy should be based on thick concepts (2009, 179-191).

¹² This understanding of the relationship between the thin property value and the thick property, e.g., funny is rejected by Kirchin (2017). Kirchin’s view, however, seems to be the exception among non-separationists, however, who tend to describe the relationship as one of varying generality and specificity.

much. In all three cases, we are interested in more determinate descriptions. In all three cases, things have the determinables only because they have the determinates. In contrast, the ascendant theory sees value itself as the determinate property.

If the irreducible thickness thesis is true, then we have no reason to suppose that all reasons share a general form. For they are not explained by properties of a general form. The value of, say, fulfilling work is essentially different from the value of friendship. Given the irreducible thickness thesis, there is no single property—such as goodness—that makes them both valuable. If this is the case, we should not expect that a single type of reason would arise which comprises the proper relationship between values and agents. On the contrary, it would be very surprising to find a single relationship like this. Instead, distinct values give rise to reasons for distinct responses. The values themselves differ fundamentally, and they produce distinct reasons for the agents confronted with them. Because there is no single property shared by all values, there is no reason prior to consideration of the values themselves to think that they produce a reason for a single action or attitude type such as promotion.

When we look at the values in particular, we find that they do not give rise to reasons for a uniform type of response. Instead, what they give reasons to is determined by what Philippa Foot called the “internal logical relation” between the particular concept under consideration. In her essay “Moral Beliefs,” Foot argues that it is not possible to decouple most attitudes and beliefs from their objects. She considers pride in some object, which has, according to Foot, a logical relation to the belief that the object is one’s own and that it is an achievement (2002, 114). These beliefs are essential to pride,

such that if one “does not hold the right beliefs about it then whatever his attitude is it is not pride” (2002, 114).

Consider, for instance, the suggestion that someone might be proud of the sky or the sea: he looks at them and what he feels is pride, or he puffs out his chest and gestures with pride in their direction. This makes sense only if a special assumption is made about his beliefs, for instance that he is under some crazy delusion and believes that he has saved the sky from falling, or the sea from drying up.

There are limits on the things one can be proud of. One can make sense of pride only by also making sense of the things one is proud of. Crucially, the things that are pride-worthy are partly characterized in terms of what one can be proud of. Foot herself attempted to extend this idea of the “logical relation” to limit what could count as intelligible attitudes toward the good. The extension seems to apply more easily to other thick values, however. There are internal logical relations between values and the reasons that can be intelligibly thought to give rise to. The argument here follows the idea of T. M. Scanlon's famous dictum: to understand a value is to understand how it is to be valued (1998, 99). The same follows from the view that the fundamental object of ethical thinking are thick values. On that view, normativity is not unified by the single act-type *promoting*, and probably not a single act-type at all. The reason to promote may be one general type of reason, but it need not be the only one. To put a spin on Scanlon's dictum, understanding the value of something is partly a matter of knowing what reasons it gives—knowing the range of attitudes and actions it calls for.

5.3.3 Reasons to Participate

The ascendant value-based theory of reason does not merely say that all reasons are explained by values. It makes a substantive commitment, albeit at an extremely

general level, about what we have reason to do. Again, on the ascendant theory, we have reason to *promote* what is valuable, where to “promote” something is to instantiate it, partially or wholly cause it, partially or wholly constitute, prevent the prevention of it, or to make it more probable. Those who accept the account of value given in chapters two and three should reject this view. Thus, everyone—proponents and opponents of the value-based theories alike—should reject that the teleological theory of reasons follows from a commitment to the primacy of values. Instead, they should articulate a general theory compatible with a view that sees no general characterization of reasons that obtain in virtue of the structure of value. It is not true that all reasons based in values are in general reasons to *promote* something or other.

The claim that value-based theories are committed to the universal *reason to promote* is substantive. It is not a matter of conceptual necessity. The value-based theory merely says that reasons are explained by values such that one has a reason to ϕ if and only if (and because) ϕ -ing is related to some value. The theory need not specify from the outset what the nature of this relationship is, much less commit to an abstract form common to all reasons. Merely stating that an explanation of reasons is value-based does not tell us what sorts of values are thought to be doing the explaining.

When we look at the types of acts we have reason to do, we find others that cannot be explained by the reason to promote. The reasons explained by values do not have the abstract structure of promoting a value thought to be valuable in the abstract. That is one abstract characterization of the reasons explained by values. Another abstract characterization, however, is that we *participate* in values. In some cases, this might involve the more concrete action of coming to possess a thing or value. In some other

cases, participation may not result in action at all, but attitudinal states such as appreciation, admiration, and so on.¹³

To make “promotion” the central part of ethics is to see ethics as most concerned with what Iris Murdoch called “metaphors of movement” (2014, 15). It describes ways agents make changes in the world or keep certain things in the world from changing. To see valuable things as things to be promoted is to play into the dominance of the metaphor of motion. To see some values as things to be *participated* in, however, makes use of what Murdoch called “metaphors of vision.” In our attempts to make use of these values to explain action or attitudes, we will appeal to such metaphors as what the agent *sees* in performing the action, and so on.

Many responses to value have little to do with promoting values and are not best understood as such. Instead, we should see these actions as participating in things of value. Consider a graveside visit of a dearly beloved family member who has long-since passed from this life. You have not visited the grave for a good while. You are among the few people living on earth who remember this person. That realization pulls at you. It feels wrong somehow that this person should be forgotten while those who could remember still live. This person’s life mattered, and it mattered to you. So you feel drawn—not out of naked duty or compulsion, but out of the various emotions wrapped up in love—to take a visit to the graveyard and take a few moments of respect to remember the past and perhaps pour one out in its memory.

It is not at all clear what we would have to say to understand this action as promoting something of value. What is being promoted in this action? I think that even if

¹³ I am not the first to argue that values yield a plurality of rationalized response types. This is also argued in Adams (1999) and Murphy (2001). My thanks to Steve Evans for this point.

we could answer this question, it would not rationalize the action in an illuminating way. Surely, the act is not rationalized by some valuable state of affairs that it is merely instrumental to. Perhaps the act itself is to be included as a component of an intrinsically valuable state of affairs. But then, that valuable state of affairs will be at least partly defined as the graveside visit having been done. But surely *that visiting the grave will promote the graveside visit having been done* is not what explains why you have a reason to visit the grave. The explanation is better expressed in more informative phrases such as, “they were close,” or “she was really important to him,” or “they went through a lot together.” These explanations bring to the forefront what one is doing in such an action. What one is doing is remembering, appreciating, or pondering. Even the ordinary description of the act as a “visit” suggests an element of passivity. To visit someone or something is to be in their or its presence for a period of time. It involves an awareness of the other, and also to receive the other in some way. These are all ways of acting that are better expressed with metaphors of seeing than metaphors of motion.

Take another example: the value of humor, the paradigm case of which I take to be a funny joke. We have a reason to laugh at funny jokes. Of course, we do not filter our responses to funny jokes through a discursive process that terminates in laughter. Such a process notoriously obfuscates what was funny about the joke. Nonetheless, we have a reason insofar as we can explain why laughter was the appropriate thing to do in the moment. In response to a perceived prude, it is not out of the ordinary to hear someone say “Oh, come on! *That* was funny, you have to admit.” Remarks like this explain the responses by rationalizing them. Being funny is logically related to a particular sort of response. For instance, “the joke made Meg laugh” does not rationalize the same way as

“the joke made Meg angry.” The latter case requires additional information that explains the response, while the former doesn’t. Perhaps the joke was offensive, or untimely. Or maybe it was Meg’s joke originally, and she is angry that someone is using it without proper attribution. In any case, anger is not the response internally related to humor; laughter is.¹⁴

In the ordinary course of things, the humor of a funny joke does not give us reasons to “promote” it, but rather to laugh at it. This is a kind of participation. Laughter is a way of taking a brief moment to appreciate a bit of humor, and perhaps to communicate to others that one found it humorous. In that brief moment of appreciation, one holds his or her attention on the humor of the joke. Laughter is the ordinary expression of this attention. By attending to the humor in the proper way, one participates in it.

We might have a reason to promote humor, for instance, if we think that it is an important component of a good life that we wish to share with others. We can imagine someone who really values humor starting a pro bono comedy troupe for troubled or orphaned children. This instance of “promotion” is perfectly intelligible to us, but it is not the ordinary response to the value of humor. Reasons to promote humor are not the immediate reasons given by the funniness of the joke itself. It would not be odd in the ordinary course of things if one failed to “promote” a joke she laughed at. But it would be strange indeed if one failed to laugh at a joke she “promoted.”

¹⁴ At least, laughter is a proper response to humor. Nothing I say here rules out the possibility that values of certain kinds possess more than one “internal relation.”

5.4 Conclusion

I have only argued for the possibility of a value-first theory of reasons that does not see all reasons as reasons to promote. “Value” in the thin sense that means “generically positive” by itself is not a sufficiently determinate property to give a reason for anything. It rather describes an abstract similarity between various values that are distinguished in virtue of their evaluative content. This means that, given a thick-value-based theory of reasons, the *explainers* of reasons are of a manifold nature in precisely the respect in which they explain reasons. Thus, the thick-value-based theory of reasons predicts that we would have a variety of irreducibly different types of reasons, which it so happens that we do.

My conclusion in this chapter is consistent with the two-tiered value theory advanced in earlier chapters. On that view, the Good is never pursued *directly*, at least not for agents like us. The Good cannot be comprehended such that it can be desired as a whole by finite agents. It is rather always pursued by means of mediating values that constitute some mode of it.

There are several parts of this debate that I have not addressed. I have not argued that a thick-value first moral philosophy can explain the “strict facts” of moral obligation, what one all things considered ought to do morally. Moreover, a proponent of such a theory must develop how reasons are to be weighed, and if they are not to be weighed, then how else reasons are to be compared. On the view expressed in chapters two and three, the important factor would be the Good, which explains the various comparisons we make about value. Beyond this, I cannot here argue in detail how this would work since it would take us too far afield. Indeed, it would likely amount to an entire moral

philosophy. Instead, my purpose here has been to justify that philosophical project. The normative properties of responses to values on the part of agents is ultimately a function of the relationship between those values and the Good, between those values, the purposes they serve, and what is called for.

CHAPTER SIX

Finite and Infinite Values

“To speak of an ‘objective good’ is to say not merely that it is independent of our interest, but that it is creative of it.”

—Oliver O’Donovan, *Finding and Seeking*

6.1 Introduction

Theists have strong reason to devote their attention to the goodness of God. Of all the divine attributes that could be classified as normative, goodness stands at the center. Holiness, righteousness, self-sufficiency, and beatitude are attributes of God because goodness is. Consequently, the doctrine of the goodness of God has enjoyed a pride-of-place in the major monotheistic religions. In more academic contexts, the attribute has been thought to come to the rescue of a divine command ethics whose radical wing is vulnerable to the charge of arbitrariness or even moral depravity. The sets of commands that God can make or fail to make are constrained by his goodness. That attribute is not a product of a will, or command, or any other fact or feature of God that would warrant the title “voluntarist.” Some normative facts are true in virtue of God’s nature.

Such facts extend to the created realm. We are told that while divine commands may be morally surprising, there are moral limits to the discretion God enjoys concerning what God could command us to do (Evans 2022). God would never command that children be tortured for fun, for example. This depends on facts about what could count as a child’s good. The good of a child is set back by torturing her, and under no conditions could it be otherwise. Clearly, then, the move to shore up divine command

theory by elevating the status of God's goodness requires us to do the same for creatures. But now we have two sets of normative facts—value facts about God and value facts about everything else—that are not explained by God's will, command, wish, desire, or power. How should we think of the relationship between divine goodness and creaturely goodness?

Philosophers and theologians have given various answers to the question. Some deny that anything besides God is good strictly speaking. Others assert that God and creatures are good, and that we can be confident in this apart from any understanding of the relationship. The most popular view says that creaturely goodness consists of resembling God's goodness in some way. Each of these views has formidable support in the tradition of reflection on the question. I shall argue that a view closely related to the overall picture of value I have been defending in this dissertation, and which also enjoys a support in the tradition, compares favorably to these other views. In previous chapters, I have been arguing for a view I call neo-Platonic ethical non-naturalism, which says that finite values are a mode of the Good that are also aimed at it in some respect.

Neo-Platonic ethical non-naturalism is easily accommodated to a theistic framework. Consider the ancient proverb, "*Imitare quem colis*" or "imitate whom you worship." This saying indicates a two-fold aspect of the object. The first is imitation. One is encouraged to be like something. More than that, however, the saying presumes that the hearer will have some object of worship, and it is this that one should seek to become like. Worship is a type of pursuit. To worship a thing is to serve it, though how the proper object of worship can be served at all is a question as old as Plato's *Euthyphro*.¹ The view

¹ See especially 14d to the end.

is that non-instrumental goodness in creatures consists in movement toward the Good. What is desirable about creatures is that they move toward the Good, and they are excellent only when and to the extent they do so.

I begin with some remarks on the nature of goodness in general, and God's goodness in particular. Then I will turn to explanations, and the sort of explanations provided by facts about goodness. I will argue that creaturely goodness is explained by divine goodness in a specific way, namely, in the way that good characteristically explains anything. Moreover, I will argue that God must explain these facts as their end. Then I will look at the major accounts of that explanation, objecting to three and arguing for one, which I call "neo-Platonism."² I give it that name solely because it seems to have been held by Plotinus, and because it comports with the theses argued earlier in this dissertation. Neo-Platonism best satisfies the requirements for a theistic account laid out in the earlier sections.

6.2 A Desideratum for Theistic Views

6.2.1 God's Goodness

Philosophers were at one point in widespread agreement that the good itself was the desirable. To act on that desire was to try and obtain, achieve, or grasp the good. In the *Symposium*, Diotima and Socrates agree that "a lover of good things has a desire," which is "that they become his own" (1989, 204e). Aristotle objects to the metaphysics of Plato's doctrine as he understands it but affirms the underlying normative sense (Baker

² Read: I omit calling this view "Neoplatonism" in order to avoid confusion with the more detailed and rigorous metaphysical commitments of Neoplatonic figures. Instead, the working title signals broad solidarity with the Platonic tradition, the way so-called "neo-Aristotelians" do for Aristotle.

2017). The problem, according to Aristotle, is that Plato's metaphysics "would not be subject to action or capable of being possessed by a human being" (2011, 1096b34-36). But something that is actionable and that can be possessed is "just some such thing that is now being sought." In classical antiquity, Seneca defines "good" as that "which rouses the soul's impulse towards itself in accordance with nature, and is worth seeking only when it begins to be thoroughly worth seeking" (1925, 118.9). This is a completed definition of his earlier failed attempt, "that which attracts and calls the spirit to itself" (1925, 118.8). The latter definition fails because it implies that seductive evils are goods since they "attract and call the spirit." Seneca's correction is to add a necessary connection to the element of attraction: the good attracts on to itself *according to its nature*. His considered opinion does not change that the good is something agents seek to *have*. Plotinus concurs saying the Good is that toward which all souls tend (1964, I.6.1.7).

The aforementioned thinkers disagreed in important ways about the nature of goodness. Nonetheless, a common strand runs throughout their opinions. Something is good if it is an *end*, that is, the proper object of desire when it is not possessed and the proper object of delight when it is. It is something properly desired directly, even if it is also desired through other means. It moves the agent toward it so that the two might exist in some sort of communion.

Theistic philosophers and theologians often claim that God is the Good. However, the details involved in this claim are rarely spelled out. To say that "God is good" is in part to say that God is among the set of things that has the property of *being good*. To say that "God is *the* Good" is to say that he is in the possession of that property in a unique way. A thing can uniquely exemplify a property in a superlative way. To call God "the

Good,” however, goes beyond calling him the most good or the most important good. Sometimes writers in this tradition couple this special property together with *being goodness itself*.³ By analogy, say we did not merely ask about the color of my coffee mug, which is red, but redness itself. Clearly, we are in part asking about what is responsible for the color of the mug. Similarly, when we say that God is *the Good* or *goodness itself*, we are implying that He is responsible for the goodness of other things. Goodness itself, then, exhibits the same feature that it explains in others. It is God’s goodness—rather than some other attribute of him—through which other things are good.

In one respect, God is the end of all things. He is aimed at and desired by all in an ultimate way. Further, he is desirable in every way in which a thing might be desirable. This claim may seem unintuitive, and I will soon present and reply to an objection to it. It nonetheless follows from the claim that God is *goodness itself*. If he were not desirable in every way, then there would be a kind of goodness that God—specifically his goodness—is not responsible for.

The teleological sense of God’s goodness faces two main objections.⁴ First, not all things aim at the Good (Vermigli 2006, 38[33-34]);⁵ and second, some things are desirable in ways that God isn’t (Decosimo 2012, 432-437). In response to the first objection, the good is not that which *is* desired, but what is desired according to its nature.⁶ Thus, to say that God is the Good is to say that he is such that all things that are capable ought to desire him or aim at him. The first objection re-worked for this

³ See for instance Boethius’ DH OSIII.81.

⁴ I leave aside objections against God’s goodness as an agent, such as the problem of evil.

⁵ Vermigli presents this objection in the cited passage as a common one. He does not endorse it.

⁶ This response is given by van Maastricht (2019, 329-330).

clarification must rather deny that all things *ought* to aim at God. I suspect that the force of this objection is felt to the extent that one is moved by the problem of evil. If there is no way to reconcile God's goodness with the existence of evil, then we might doubt that God is desirable by all things or in all ways. Since I have tabled that question, we can stipulate that all things ought to be so aimed. Besides, we are assuming for the sake of this chapter that God is, in fact, the Good.

The second objection is more difficult to deal with, since there seem to be several examples of things that have the property of *being good* specifically because of features that God cannot (or at least does not) possess. For instance, God is not the sort of being that can suffer genuine danger, which is a pre-condition for heroic forms of courage on classical accounts. Thus, God is not courageous. But courage is surely an admirable and desirable trait that we should aim to attain in ourselves and praise in others. Other values require what have them to change through time but not in virtue of any of their parts, such as musical value (Scruton 2014, ch. 7). For instance, a melody has value in virtue of its unique movement, which entirely consists of changes not in the notes themselves but in which notes are played at which times. A C note never changes but remains a C note, the same for a D note, and so on. In other words, there is no substrate persisting through an ordered series of notes that nonetheless produces a unified thing with its own value. So even if God is in time or changes, it is hard to say how he could possess anything like musical value.

I can only give sketch of a response which will (I hope) justify proceeding with the rest of the chapter on plausible footing. It is a Platonic thought that the pursuit of resemblance to God might lead us to perform actions that he wouldn't (Sedley 2017,

322). For instance, the philosopher may utter a noble lie or engage in political life (that is, return to the cave) though (it is presumed) God would not do such things. It does not follow that what is *good* about such acts is not shared by God. Here is an analogy: on a plausible account of shame, the value of shame is grounded in the value of having the right emotions toward one's own character and actions. So, while a completely virtuous person would never feel shame, making it not valuable for *him*, there is a common feature with the imperfect person which explains the value of shame for *him*. Feeling shame when warranted is one way the imperfect agent can aspire to be like the virtuous person. Thus, though certain things are valuable which God could not possess or do, it does not follow that the values of these things are ultimately inexplicable in terms of traits God can have or acts he can perform.

6.2.2 Teleological Explanations

The result of the arguments in the last few sections is that God's goodness is responsible for the goodness of other things. In other words, the explanatory relationship between God and creaturely goodness appeals to an evaluative fact about God. As such, it must follow the structure of goodness explanations in general. How do these explanations work? Sometimes, philosophers identify God's goodness with the fact that he is the end of all things. This raises the question about which kind of end God's goodness consists of. Philosophers have traditionally followed Plato (2004, 337b-c) and Aristotle (2019, 1097a30-35) in identifying three kinds of ends.⁷ Some things are desirable for themselves

⁷ One exception to this Peter Vermigli. To him, *end* is a species in the genus *good*. But there are some goods that are not ends, such as the useful (2006, 25[20]). Jonathan Edwards also departs from the usual classification. While he agrees that *end* is the genus, he divides it into subordinate, ultimate, and chief ends (1765, 1-3). Ultimate and chief ends are both ends sought for their own sakes. Their difference lies in that chief ends are "most valued" (1765, 3). Both types are "ultimate" in the sense that they are

alone. Other things are desirable for the sake of something else, which is desirable for itself alone.⁸ Finally, some things are desirable on both accounts. Call these final ends, instrumental ends, and mixed ends, respectively.

It would clearly be wrong to identify the Good with an instrumental end. For then, it would be an end only insofar as it is conducive to some further end. But then, that further end is the Good. If, however, the Good is to be identified with what is final, then other things can be ends in themselves because they can be mixed ends. The identification of the Good with final ends only entails that no other goods are final ends. If, on the other hand, to be the Good is to have the property of being an end in itself, as some have suggested, then that means that nothing that is not identical to the Good can be an end in itself, whether final or mixed. We get two positions about what kind of goodness the Good is identical to.

Intrinsicalism: To be the Good is to be an end in itself.
Finalism: To be the Good is to be a final end.

The titles “intrinsicalism” and “finalism” should not throw off the reader. They simply suggest in the name what their respective views identify with the Good. “Intrinsicalism” identifies with the Good the property of being an end in itself: anything that is an end in itself is identical with the Good.⁹ By contrast, “finalism” identifies as the Good the

fundamental, bringing an end to a teleological order. Presumably, however, Edwards would affirm the plausible notion of a mixed end. So, his classification scheme should be understood as underscoring the fact that intrinsic ends can be ranked.

⁸ There has been some controversy in contemporary philosophy about the nature and correct analysis of “instrumental value.” I adopt the traditional view, according to which “good” in the instrumental sense is interchangeable with “useful to something good.” I defend this in a later section.

⁹ I set aside the issue whether *being an end in itself* is the same as being *intrinsically valuable*, which in turn is the same as *being valuable in virtue of intrinsic properties*. I do not think anything in the body hangs on these connections since the concept of being desirable for itself is straightforward. I use the title “intrinsicalism” because “end-in-itself-ism” is awkward. See Feldman (2005) for discussion of the difficulty of this topic.

property of being a final end: anything that is a final end is identical with the Good. The former is a much more extreme view than the latter. It says not only that God's goodness is unique in being the only final end, but that is the only thing that is an end in itself at all. If intrinsicism is true, then creatures or creaturely states are at most instrumental ends. If finalism is true, then they are at most mixed ends.

One might try to argue that the more extreme view is not implied by the commitment that God is the universal end. The claim "to be an end itself is to be God" does not follow from the claim that "God is the end of all things." So long as we grant that no creature is merely an end, we need not think it merely a means. We can call this move the Aristotelian loophole because it tries to satisfy theistic requirements on a technicality. There are no things that have the property of being ends in themselves that do not also have the property of being aimed at God. However, this leaves unexplained how those things get the property of intrinsic desirability in the first place. God's goodness is indeed responsible for a portion of creaturely goodness, but not all of it. A successful explanation of creaturely goodness must explain all the goodnesses, so to speak.

6.2.3 No Teleological Frayed Ends

Explanans-driven and explanandum-driven arguments. There is a difference between saying that God is the end of all things and saying that there are no teleological frayed ends. The latter is stronger than the former insofar as it thinks of God as not merely the end of ends, but the end of all teleological orders whatsoever. A teleological order is a specific chain linking one end to another. There can be multiple orders involved with a single end. If I take medicine for a headache before class, I want to reduce the pain

for its own sake. Pain is unpleasant to experience. But I also do it because pain in my head may cause me to be a less effective teacher. This is expressed ordinarily by saying I have two “reasons” to reduce the pain in my head. Now think of the teleological order in general—the sum total of all teleological facts—as a rope made up of all the specific orders. At the end of the rope is metal ball crimping together the threads so that it does not become unwound. My claim is that *all* of the threads must end inside the ball.

The possibility of teleological frayed ends is not ruled out by metaphysical considerations. On this front, there is no problem with the view that God causally explains creaturely goodness. For instance, one popular naturalistic view in metaethics says that value properties are real yet metaphysically reducible to “natural” properties, facts, or states (Jackson 1998; Foot 2001; Railton 1986; Boyd 1988). On this account, God could explain the value properties by creating and sustaining the natural properties. Presumably, the point applies to any account of the metaphysics of goodness. Whatever *being endworthy* or *desirable* metaphysically consists in for creatures, God can create it.

Rather, the exclusion of frayed ends is required for normative reasons. The traditional reason why there can be no teleological frayed ends has to do with a controversial claim about the explanations of goodness. The thought is that all good things must be explained through the Good, which explains their goodness precisely in the way that *they* are good. So, the explanation of an end is another end, and God explains ends by being the end of ends. For instance, Anselm infers that since every good thing is good through one thing, it follows that this one thing must be good, indeed supremely good (1995, §1). It is the goodness of the Good that explains the goodness of

finitely good things. Understood teleologically, the Good explains what makes other things ends by being their end.

The preceding line of thought seems to be motivated by the fact that since there are evaluative facts, they must be at least partly explained by facts that are like them. This view has largely been abandoned. There are now several live options concerning how one might try to fully explain a teleological fact that does not appeal to further ends (Schroeder 2005). Naturalistic explanations cannot be ruled out merely due to the existence of goodness in creatures. In any case, there is no easy path from there to my denial of teleological frayed ends without giving up vast swaths of modern metaethics. While such a radical shift may be justified, I won't defend it here.¹⁰

Instead, I will attempt the task with what some have called an “explanans-centered” approach to moral explanations (Murphy 2011, 1-5; Jeffrey 2019, 4). Rather than starting with the thing to be explained (the fact of creaturely goodness) and developing a theory of the explanatory relationship, instead we will start with the explainer, or God's goodness. Given the nature of God's goodness, there can be no teleological frayed ends. This contrasts with the preceding “explanandum-centered” approach like Anselm's, which infers information about the explaining thing (the Good) from the explained phenomena (goods). So, even if Anselm's explanandum-driven argument fails for the nonexistence of frayed ends, there is an explanans-driven argument.

¹⁰ Naturalistic explanations consistent with moral realism require normative supervenience, which is the thesis that normative facts supervene on non-normative or natural facts. For arguments against normative supervenience, see D. Roberts (2018).

The argument from the incomparability of goods. One explanans-driven argument begins with the incomparability of values. Many deny that intrinsic values can be ranked (Boyle 2002; Girgis 2014; Lee 2019, 83–86). On such a view, there are only two ways to order values in an objectively normative way. A thing might be preferable to another in virtue of being its end. If I were (somehow) forced to choose between taking a pain-killer and getting rid of my headache, I’d choose the latter. The reason is that the sole point of taking the pain-killer is to get rid of the headache. Alternatively, a thing might be preferable to another in virtue of its superior ability to satisfy some standard. I judge Aspirin to be better than Advil because it is better at achieving one of my goals without getting in the way of others. Assessments of this type are not always instrumental. Sometimes they are constitutive. Those under Nazi occupation who provided hiding places for Jews were more virtuous, to put it mildly, than their antagonists. The former satisfied the norm of virtue better than the latter. Call this second kind of evaluation “functional,” and the first kind “instrumental.”

With only functional and instrumental forms of evaluation, we are limited in the way we can compare ends. Someone who is a good pianist is better at being a good musician than someone who is a good kazoo player. That is because *being an advanced pianist* satisfies a general musical standard better than *being an expert kazooist*.¹¹ Typographical languages are better at communicating philosophical thoughts than Morse code or smoke signals (Postman 1985, 7). Alternatively, one thing might be preferable in virtue of being the end of another, as mentioned above. With only these two modes of evaluation, however, we are unable to evaluatively compare ends as such. No end is

¹¹ Of course, this assumes that there is such thing as an objective musical standard. See Scruton (1997, ch. 12).

simply *better* than another, but only *better at* achieving what is of interest, whether that is a further goal or satisfying a standard.

Neither the instrumental nor functional supremacy of God makes him preeminent as an intrinsic end among many, however. Something could be best as a means but have no intrinsic value at all. So, because we are comparing non-instrumental ends, instrumental supremacy does not do the trick. What about functional supremacy? God meets every moral standard perfectly and therefore supremely. Assuming further that meeting that standard is intrinsically valuable, it follows that God supremely instantiates something of intrinsic value. But the standard instantiated is not itself superior in any way. If the values of X and Y are incomparable, then so are the values perfect X and an imperfect Y. They are only comparable insofar as one is perfect and the other is not, one perfectly satisfies one standard and the another imperfectly satisfies a different standard. That fact alone does not tell you which is more valuable, however. So, neither will functional evaluation work. If, then, you want to say that God is preeminent in virtue of his intrinsic value, given the incomparability of intrinsic value, you must hold that he is the *only* thing of intrinsic value. Thus, a commitment to both the incomparability of values and the goodness of God (as described above) rules out frayed ends, but at the expense of an extreme view, which have called intrinsicalism.

Against this, one might respond that the incomparability of values can accommodate a mere finalist view of God's goodness with the Aristotelian loophole. After all, the foregoing granted that ends are more important than means. And on this view, God is the only final end and creatures are (at most) mixed ends. Thus, God is more important than creatures. This reply fails, however. It is not the case that in general, if A

is a means to B then B is more important than A because it does not follow that A is *only* a means to B. Jonathan Edwards objects to this principle with the following counter example.

A man may aim at these two things in his going a journey; one may be to visit his friends, and another to receive a great estate, or a large sum of money that lies ready for him, at the place to which he is going. The latter, viz. his receiving the sum of money, may be but a subordinate [instrumental] end: he may not value the silver and gold on their own account, but only for the pleasure, gratifications and honor; that is the ultimate [intrinsic] end, and not the money which is valued only as a means of the other. But yet the obtaining the money, may be what is more valued, and so an higher end of his journey, than the pleasure of seeing his friends; though the latter is what is valued on its own account, and so is an ultimate [intrinsic] end. (1765, 4)

One might object that Edwards's counterexample assumes the comparability of values.

The same result follows, however, even if no assumption is made. Compare two incomparably intrinsic values, A and B, one of which is a means to the other. A and B are intrinsically good, but A is also a means to B while B is a means to nothing. If we cannot compare their intrinsic merits, there does not seem to be a way to get to the conclusion that the final good, B, ought to be preferred. If anything, it seems that A is more valuable, since it gets you something important (itself) and helps you get B, which is also important.¹² It follows that the mere fact that all mixed creaturely goods are also a means to God does not establish his higher status.

I conclude, then, that theists who think that no rankings exist among intrinsic values should agree that there are no frayed ends in order to preserve God's highest goodness. If there are no rankings among intrinsic values, then the only way for God to

¹² Aristotle seems to think that final ends are preferable to mixed ends just in virtue of being final (1097a30). I depart from him on this matter for the reason illustrated by Edwards' example.

be first is if he is the *only* intrinsic value. This entails intrinsicism, which is one way to get rid of the frayed ends.

The argument from no divided loyalties. There is a deeper reason to think that the sort of commitment to God's goodness I have described so far should rule out the existence of frayed ends. This argument appeals to the *jealousy* of God's goodness. This argument is developed by Mark Murphy in a different context (2011, 95-97). The argument as he presents it goes like this. Orthodox theism demands that we are undividedly loyal to God. The only way to structure loyalty to multiple goods is to prefer one to the other. However, preference for one good over another does not avoid divided loyalty between them for reasons I will illustrate below. Therefore, preference for one good over another does not avoid divided loyalty. Therefore, orthodox theism demands that we are not loyal to multiple goods.

Murphy's argument does not show that orthodox theism demands that there *aren't* multiple goods, but that we must not be "loyal" to them. However, I think the argument can be retrofitted to show that there are no teleological frayed ends. Sometimes we can get caught between two things we find an interest in. We might be distracted by the less important thing. Even though this distraction is a mistake, and one we are aware of, it can (at least partly) result from what makes the lesser thing interesting. Consider another humorous (if quaint) example from Edwards.

A man may go a journey to obtain two different benefits or enjoyments, both which may be agreeable to him in themselves considered, and so both may be what he values on their own account and seeks for their own sake; and yet one may be much more agreeable than the other: and so be what he sets his heart chiefly upon, and seeks most after in his going a journey. Thus a man may go a journey partly to obtain the possession and enjoyment of a bride that is very dear to him, and partly to gratify his curiosity in looking in a telescope, or some new-

invented and extraordinary optic glass: both may be ends he seeks in his journey, and the one not properly subordinate or in order to another. One may not depend on another; and therefore both may be ultimate ends: but yet the obtaining his beloved bride may be his chief end, and the benefit of the optic glass, his inferior end. The former may be what he sets his heart vastly most upon, and so be properly the chief end of his journey. (1765, 3-4)

Assuming further that the chief end is objectively better than the lesser end, this is an example of an intelligible distraction from the better thing. It is not difficult to imagine the temptation to be distracted by the value the thing has thereby losing focus of what really matters. The same is possible in the case of a creature that is endworthy in itself as well as endworthy for God's sake. Certainly in cases of distraction, the disordered preferences are in fact disordered. The agent *ought* to order his preferences differently. This deontic fact is beside the point, however, which is that mere finalism implies that the lower goods pursued are satisfying without paying due respect to the highest end. The conclusion of Murphy's argument, however, is that there can be *no* division of loyalties. But if lower goods were satisfying, then such a division would be possible.

One might deny that a disordered pursuit of a lower good could be satisfied while maintaining finalism. The mere modal fact that it is impossible does not imply that intrinsic goods are teleologically ordered to God. For instance, perhaps God does not allow these goods to be attained without proper subordination, and perhaps this act of providence is grounded in God's character such that in no possible world does he allow otherwise (Geach 1969). So perhaps it is necessary in a strictly modal sense that lower goods are unattainable unless properly subordinated to the highest good. Nonetheless, mere finalism implies that it is not an *essential* fact that creaturely goodness does not have a condition that it be subordinated to the highest good. And because it is not an essential fact, there is no theistically motivated reason to deny teleological frayed ends.

Thus, one might think that non-essential subordination produces no problem for the theist so long as it is necessary.

This move would be a mistake for a theist, however. It says that one could in some way satisfy desires for these lower goods were it not for some extrinsic constraint that (somehow) holds in all possible worlds. First, the essentialist explanation is simpler. There is no need to tell a story about where this necessary constraint comes from. Second, and more importantly, if one agrees with the initial point that there can be no division of loyalties, then one should agree with the stronger claim that there *essentially* can be no division of loyalties. The motivation for denying the possibility of divided loyalties in the first place was that it compromises God's status as the highest being. But a being that is sovereign in an essential order of goods is higher than a being that is sovereign in a mere necessary order of goods.

6.2.4 *The Emerging Challenge*

From the aforementioned arguments, a problem arises. If mere finalism is false, does that mean that intrinsicism is true? God is not just *the* Good, but *our* good, and this fact is taken to explain the goodness of other things. Not just that, but God explains our goodness *as its end*. But then, it is hard to see how this leaves room for the non-instrumental goodness of other things. So, it seems that the denial of mere finalism entails intrinsicism. To be the Good is to be an intrinsic end. This view comes at an extreme intuitive cost. It says that God is the only non-instrumentally valuable thing. And while it is consistent with common sense that all creatures are means, it is not consistent with common sense that they are mere means. Surely some creatures or creaturely states are intrinsic ends in some sense. But if they are, then they have to be explained by God's

goodness. So then how could God's goodness explain *this* fact? How can a non-instrumental end be explained by an end as its end?

For the remainder of this chapter, I will look at several responses to this question. I will ultimately argue that the denial of mere finalism—the assertion of no teleological frayed ends—does not entail full-scale intrinsicism. Nonetheless, the three-fold distinction between instrumental ends, final ends, and mixed ends is not sufficient to block the inference. We need an account of what creaturely intrinsic ends would consist of, if they exist at all. If this account respects the conclusions of the arguments I have brought in this section, then it won't say that only God is valuable but that no creaturely value fails to involve God in its essential character. Again, the hope is to advance an explanation that illuminates the dependence of non-instrumental goodness on God without reducing or eliminating it.

6.3 Attempts at Divine Explanations of the Good

6.3.1 The Options

We have looked at a condition for a successful explanation of creaturely goodness. Now we need to look at the particular theories and see how they measure up. This already rules out several possible candidate options. For starters, it rules out views that either say no explanations are necessary or say that they are sufficiently accounted for in non-teleological ways. That is, it rules out both strong forms of realism and voluntarism, both of which deny that all creaturely evaluative facts have *normative* explanations. Forms of realism assert that no explanation of such facts are necessary (Wielenberg 2014). While this is compatible with strong moral realism, most realists take

their view a step further and deny that some creaturely and finite normative facts have normative explanations. By contrast, radical voluntarist accounts explain creaturely value purely in terms of God's causal power (Quinn 1990 and 1999). Views of either type bypass the teleological requirement that God explain the values of things as their end.¹³

All the same, there have been a few schools of thought to arise that are sensitive to the need to avoid frayed ends. Some accept that intrinsicism follows from the argument against mere finalism. God is the only intrinsic value. And thus, the relationship between goodness and the Good is that between means and end. This instrumentalist account that God is the only intrinsic good, and everything is (at most) instrumentally good. To take one example, Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck says God alone "is the good to be enjoyed, while creatures are goods that are to be used" (2004, 212).

Instrumentalism comes at an obvious intuitive cost, and few seem to hold it. The remaining three views deny that intrinsicism follows from the rejection of mere finalism. One does so without offering an account of this fact. Thus, some simply assert that God is the Good, that creatures are intrinsically good, and that all goodness consists of some sort of participation in God, without elaborating how this could be the case or what it amounts to. They do not offer an explanation but rather a "quietism" about the question similar to those one finds in discussions of other seminal Christian doctrines such as the Trinity or the Incarnation of the Word. Quietism refuses to develop the explanation. One might think it natural to be more confident that creatures have intrinsic

¹³ Theism as proposed here is similar to Wielenberg's insofar as it states that fundamental evaluative facts—facts about God's goodness—are normatively irreducible. Whether it is metaphysically primitive is another question, however. As I said in chapter four, this dissertation does not consider the metaphysics of moral properties.

value, and that this value is explained by God in some teleological way, than they are in any theory that reconciles these facts or in any set of claims entailing the contrary.

Still, some account of the relationship between God's goodness and creaturely non-instrumental goodness would be attractive if it were available. There are two main views that attempt to do this that I know of. They each articulate a relationship between God and goodness that would allow us to block the inference from non-finalism to intrinsicism. That is, they would allow us to explain creaturely goodness by appealing to God as our end without concluding that all things are merely instruments to that end. The first of these is by far the most popular. It says that goodness in creatures consists of a resemblance to God. Aquinas says, "Because nothing is good except insofar as it is a likeness and participation of the highest good, the highest good itself is in some way desired in every particular good" (1964, §11). He immediately concludes, "Thus it can be said that the true good is what all desire." For Aquinas, participation is the way an effect resembles its cause (Koterski 1992, 190). Resemblance is doing the work here. Thus, the thought seems to be that resemblance is an intrinsically valuable state by which a creature also aims at God. Thus, in pursuing that resemblance, they also pursue God.

Finally, the remaining position says that goodness consists of an orientation or movement toward God. Some versions of this view appeal to the notion of resemblance. For instance, on one account, Godlikeness allows creatures to move toward God and to achieve a proper unity with God. Other accounts, however, need not rely on resemblance. I call this view "neo-Platonism."

It would be inaccurate to treat the history of thought on the nature of goodness as if thinkers neatly addressed the question raised in this chapter. Many do not concern

themselves with the specific way God explains goodness, so long as it is clear that he does. For example, Franciscus Junius exemplifies the reticence to theorize about the precise nature of the relationship. Writing in the sixteenth century, he says,

God in His account of saving grace has demonstrated by the light of theology the common good and the individual good as consisting in the common good. The common good is God's glory. Truly in this common good, our individual good is located, namely that we are to be made glorious in the glory of God and are to perceive all good as both from His glory and to His glory. (2014, 211)

It is not clear what Junius thinks about the precise explanatory relationship between divine and creaturely goodness, since it is compatible with any one of the views listed above. Creaturely good may be exclusively a means of God's glory. On the other hand, one might think, as Jonathan Edwards thought, that creaturely goodness consists of attitudes towards God's glory (1765). A view like this opens the door to the views that reject instrumentalism. This illustrates that we are not simply looking for whether God is the Good. Every one of the views surveyed here agrees with that. Rather, the question concerns precisely how God's goodness explains the goodness of creatures. On that question, there are roughly four responses in the tradition of thinking about the explanatory relationship between God's goodness and the goodness of creatures.

- Instrumentalism: God is the end of all creaturely goodness because it is a mere means to God.
- Quietism: *That* there is a relationship between God and goodness is true even if we don't know *what* it is.
- Exemplarism: God is the end of all creaturely goodness because it resembles God.
- Neo-Platonism: God is the end of all creaturely goodness because all such value consists of aiming at God in some way.

In the next few sections, I will argue against the first three. Then, I will develop the last option and show some of the advantages it has over the others. Right now, it may not be

very clear how it differs from instrumentalism, or from exemplarism for that matter. I will make the difference clearer below.

6.3.2 Instrumentalist Attempts

Augustine's argument for instrumentalism. Instrumentalism about creaturely goodness does not have many defenders. Those it does have, however, are formidable.¹⁴ Here I will only look at Augustine, since he gives the most sustained argument I have come across for this thesis. Augustine's thought on goodness and value spans several writings. His arguments and conclusions in these various writings are complex enough to warrant pause before presenting a particular view as *the* Augustinian one. Accordingly, I do not claim that Augustine was an instrumentalist, only that he defended it on one occasion, and that the view he espoused was picked up by some later thinkers.

Of course, this is not a comprehensive treatment of instrumentalist arguments given by major figures in the tradition of thinking about how God explains the goodness of creatures. It is enough to show that instrumentalism is a serious view. Indeed, I will argue that it should not be dismissed lightly, since it has at least one feature that gives it *prima facie* advantage over the alternatives, namely, its identification of creaturely goodness as an orientation or movement toward God.

Augustine makes the argument in the first section of *On Christian Doctrine*.

¹⁴ Bavinck interprets Augustine as an instrumentalist (2004, 212). In the sixteenth century, the Reformed Scholastic (and Huguenot martyr) Duke Pierre de la Place would affirm the same.

The more distant and remote the end, the more worthy and excellent it is, until from one end to the other one gradually arrives at the last and final end of all, which alone is to be loved and taken hold of for its own regard and sake, rather than for the sake of others. That is what sets it apart from all the others, since the latter are all loved and desired not for their own sake, but for the sake of the last end to which all others look as the one in which the sovereign good over them all consists. (2021, 3)

It becomes an important question, whether men ought to enjoy, or to use, themselves, or to do both. For we are commanded to love one another: but it is a question whether man is to be loved by man for his own sake, or for the sake of something else. If it is for his own sake, we enjoy him; if it is for the sake of something else, we use him. It seems to me, then, that he is to be loved for the sake of something else. For if a thing is to be loved for its own sake, then in the enjoyment of it consists a happy life, the hope of which at least, if not yet the reality, is our comfort in the present time. But a curse is pronounced on him who places his hope in man [Jer. 17:4]. (1987, I.22.20)

This passage unambiguously argues for an instrumentalist position. Augustine takes the best example of creaturely value, human beings, and asks whether they are to be enjoyed, used, or both. This tripartition recalls the Aristotelian distinction between final ends, instrumental ends, and mixed ends. The difference is that Augustine asks about the normative responses to the ends—how things ought to be treated—rather than the normative properties that constitute their being ends. We should not make too much of this difference, however. Clearly, Augustine is asking if creatures are valuable for their own sakes only, for God’s sake only, or for both.

The argument proceeds from there to deliver a *reductio* against the existence of creaturely non-instrumental value: if you grant creaturely intrinsic value, then the enjoyment of them constitutes happiness; but we should not hope for happiness from creatures. One immediate reply to the argument points out that achieving an end in itself is not sufficient for happiness. It is an old thought that happiness consists not just of achieving things of value but achieving them over a sufficient span of time. Aristotle says in a famous passage, “one day or a short time does not make someone blessed or happy either” (2011, 1098a20). “For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day.” Enjoyment of something of intrinsic value does not constitute happiness if is enjoyed only for a fleeting moment. One could further respond that a single thing of intrinsic

value is insufficient for happiness even if it is possessed for a lifetime. For instance, plausibly, I enjoy a delightful song for its own sake. It does not follow that a life solely organized around listening to that one song would be a happy one.

I think Augustine's argument can get around these objections if tweaked to make it further resemble my version of the divided loyalties argument. That argument pointed out that even if happiness is closed off to the person with disordered preferences and aims, he might still have a rationale for his actions. Recall Edwards' quaint example. Someone who travels to find a spouse might be sidetracked by a fancy new telescope. His desire isn't rational, though it is intelligible. The subordination of goods to God cannot be like this. It is not only inappropriate to suggest that we can find happiness outside of God, but even that we can find anything like happiness either. The idea is that God's goodness is such that it is not even intelligible that one would seek happiness apart from Him. Supplementing Augustine's argument with the no divided loyalties argument strengthens the former by raising the bar.

In sum, the argument for instrumentalism appears to be that it follows from the no divided loyalties argument. We are unable to meet the requirements laid out above unless creaturely value is exclusively instrumental. If, therefore, a non-instrumentalist view can be shown to accommodate these requirements, then the argument for instrumentalism is unsound. Before moving on to such attempts, however, I briefly turn to discuss independent reason why a large group of theists should reject instrumentalism.

An explanans-centered objection to instrumentalism. Most objections to instrumentalism amount to this: It seems to be the case that creaturely things have

intrinsic value (Murphy 2018).¹⁵ The perception of intrinsic value is highly intuitive. While particular instances of it may be defeated, it seems incredible that all such perceptions are erroneous. Thus, if a view can account for it while satisfying the constraints on explanation, then such a view is superior to instrumentalism. In short, we should not believe instrumentalism unless we absolutely have to. Still, for those who resist or do not share the intuition, we can give an argument based in explicitly theistic considerations.

The instrumentalist view raises a problem for one major theistic account of moral obligations. According to that view, moral obligations consist of divine commands (Adams 1999, ch. 11; Evans 2013, ch. 2).¹⁶ I have a moral obligation to ϕ if and only if (and because) God commands me to ϕ . This is because the property *being commanded by God* is one and the same property as *being morally obligated* even though the words and phrases used to refer to the two do not mean the same thing. Just as *water* and *H₂O* are the same thing and yet the words “water” and “H₂O” do not mean the same thing, so is *being commanded by God* identical to *being morally obligated* without the words “being commanded by God” meaning the same as “being morally obligated.”

One reply to divine command theory objects that if moral obligations are identical to divine commands, then certain “horrible acts” could be morally obligated, or at least

¹⁵ There is a terminological wrinkle here. Murphy explicitly denies that creatures have “intrinsic value,” but he affirms that they have “final value” (2018, 351). This is because he adopts Korsgaard’s (1983) distinction between intrinsic and final value. He nonetheless affirms that things can be intrinsic ends as I have defined it above, that is, ends for their own sakes, so long as we do not add “solely in virtue of their intrinsic features.”

¹⁶ Similar views say that they are analyzed as divine commands (Adams 1987; Anscombe 1958 as interpreted by Doyle 2018, ch. 2) or caused by divine commands (Quinn 1979, 1990, and 1999). The argument to follow applies to these views as well. For the sake of simplicity, I will treat the synthetic reductivist view as representative.

that which acts are morally obligated is arbitrary (Cudworth 1996; Hooker 2001; Wielenberg 2005, 41-50; Antony 2009, 71; Sinnott-Armstrong 2009, 106). In response to these objections, most adherents to divine command theory accept constraints on what God could command. These constraints, they argue, are based in God's goodness, which does not depend on divine commands.¹⁷ God, seeking to promote the good, does not command rape, murder, or other horrible acts. This view often goes by the name "restricted" divine command theory, since it does not extend its reduction to all moral facts, but only to moral obligations.

The above simplified account of restricted divine command theory does not work if creatures are merely instrumentally valuable. Instrumentalism undermines the motivation for restricting divine command theory to normative facts of the non-evaluative variety. Though the claim may be contested, there is some motivation for the belief that God would not intentionally command or directly will evil to befall something that has non-instrumental value. It makes no sense, however, to think that there are any such constraints imposed by the existence of mere instrumental value. If I regard something as merely useful, I am not in the least bit constrained by it to respect its well-being. All such constraints are merely based in extrinsic considerations such as scarcity of resources. These constraints do not apply to an omnipotent being. In short, there is no constraint that mere instrumental value of creatures could place on God strong enough to support the proposition that, necessarily, God does not command murder or rape.

I conclude, then, that restricted divine command theorists should not be instrumentalists. Perhaps God's goodness is not a product of his will, but the other way

¹⁷ Callahan (2021) and Morton (forthcoming) have recently argued that God's commands need not be constrained by moral facts to respond to the objection above.

around. But the good will of an omnipotent being is not constrained by merely instrumental properties of creation. Thus, realism about divine goodness would not stop the objections against global voluntarism. When something is merely instrumentally valuable to an end, it does not matter how it brings about that end so long as it does. Most in the tradition recognize that the perfection of creatures is an end in addition to God. It is not just that creatures are to be useful to a further end, God, but that they are to be useful in a particular way. There is something valuable about the way that creatures are useful. I will return to this in a later section.

6.3.3 *Quietist (Non)Attempts*

Discussions of the relationship between creaturely and divine goodness often assert that the latter explain the former without fleshing out how. Here is one passage from Oliver O'Donovan illustrating this tendency.

The good of the creator stands in relation to the good of the creature not as in parallel but in sequence. God's goodness is goodness "itself," or good "supremely," and the application of the epithet "good" to any creature is possible only because that creature has, as such, a relation to God. Created good is a kind of God-relatedness, a reference to an original that lies beyond itself. (2013, 117).

O'Donovan mentions "God-relatedness" as a constitutive explanation of creaturely goodness. This invites the question, related in what way? Other writers mention "participation" as an explanation without a clear position about what participation consists of.¹⁸ This is nothing more than to state the requirements I have argued for so far: God is good, and so are creatures, and creatures are somehow good through the goodness of God. I call this view "quietist" because those who hold to it do not seem to sense the

¹⁸ In Kemp (2023), I argue that Boethius also does this in his *De hebdomadibus*. However, supplementing his argument here with his view from the *Consolatio* provides us with a non-quietist explanation.

need of detailing the explanatory relationship. Quietism is not itself a distinctive position, but rather the dual assertions that creatures have intrinsic value and that God explains it through some sort of participation in his goodness. It is consistent with exemplarism and neo-Platonism. The quietist impulse in the tradition highlights the fact that many are inclined to reject instrumentalism and feel entitled to do so without explaining how it could be true or what this participation consists of. I will look at a few examples.

Quietism thrived among the early Protestants. 17th century Swiss theologian Johann Heidegger writes in his *Concise Marrow of Theology* that “*Goodness* is that through which He [God] communicates His goods to creatures” (2021, §III.XV). The goodness of God is somehow *communicated* to creatures. Presumably, then, it could not consist of mere instrumental value, but we are not told how. Richard Baxter, writing in the same century, is more explicit that God explains goodness as its end. God’s goodness “is communicative love that made all things good and rested in seeing them all good” (2018, 2). He continues, “And as he is the fountain, so the same will, or love, is the measuring rule and the end of all derived good.” God is the end of all “derived” goodness.¹⁹

Some thinkers have more to say about the nature of creaturely goodness but still do not tell us how it can exist. 16th century Danish philosopher Neils Hemmingsen argues for a “threefold end of each thing” (2018, 65-74). To Hemmingsen, each thing aims at its perfected state, its proper acts, and God. It aims at its own perfected state insofar as it aims to possess the highest and most perfect attributes a thing can attain. It aims at its

¹⁹ Girolamo Zanchi (2012, 19-20) is another example of quietism in the tradition.

proper acts insofar as it aims to perform the activities that are proper to a thing. Finally, it aims at God, “the end of goods in general” (2018, 65).

Hemmingsen does not say much about the relationship between these three pursuits other than that God is the “ultimate end” of the other two (2018, 72). Further, he seems to think the other two are intrinsic ends, yet to be subordinated to the third. For the subordination of ends tracks a “multiplicity of degrees of dignity” (2018, 72). Whatever this value consists of, dignity is not a mere instrumental property. It does not make sense to refer to mere instrumental value as exemplifying “dignity.” Nonetheless, the lower things are “ordered” to serve the higher, and ultimately the highest. That is, the value of lower things is essentially ordered to the higher. Hemmingsen leaves us without a clear sense of what this ordering relation consists of.

In the 20th century, C.S. Lewis develops a quietist view. It is, as far as I can tell, unique to him. On Lewis’s view, higher intrinsic goods condition the lower intrinsic goods. He says, “Every preference of a small good to a great, or a partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good for which the sacrifice was made” (2017, 310). Since God is the highest among goods, he conditions all the others. This view satisfies the constraint on explanations I argued for above, namely, that God’s goodness explains creaturely goodness in the characteristically forward looking way goodness explains things. It states that creaturely ends depend on treating God as the ultimately privileged end. Yet regardless of the merits, the Law does not quite bring us to the point of an explanation. It states *that* such a relationship exists while leaving unanswered the question *why* these goods are so ordered.

These examples are not supposed to be exhaustive or even representative. I only review them to suggest that many in the tradition seem pulled in different directions. On the one hand, they want to say that creaturely things have intrinsic value, and that this value is somehow explained by God as its end. On the other hand, they are reluctant to speculate how God as an end could explain its value. It may be that they trust that some theory in the tradition would succeed, or that one would be forthcoming.

6.3.4 Exemplarist Attempts

The Godlikeness Thesis. The defining feature of exemplarism is the claim that goodness consists of a resemblance to the Good. Aquinas stands out as a major proponent of exemplarism.²⁰ He seems to have thought that creatures aim at God by seeking to resemble him. He says, “everything can be called good and a being, inasmuch as it participates in it by way of a certain assimilation which is far removed and defective” (1948, I, q. 6, a.4). He goes on to confirm my reading in a notoriously mysterious passage.

Everything is therefore called good from the divine goodness, as from the first exemplary effective and final principle of goodness. Nevertheless, everything is called good by reason of the similitude of the divine goodness belonging to it, which is formally its own goodness, whereby it is denominated good. And so of all things there is one goodness, and yet many goodnesses.

For each thing, its goodness “formally” consists of its similarity to the divine goodness. Similarly, Petrus van Mastricht understands creaturely goodness as “God’s extrinsic goodness” because it consists of a resemblance to God. God is the exemplary cause of our intrinsic goodness “insofar as he expresses himself and represents his own infinite

²⁰ Other proponents of exemplarism include Matthew Hale (2015, 108-110) and Peter Vermigli (2006, 135-172).

perfection as if by parts, such that all irrational beings bear some vestige of it, and all rational beings bear an image of it” (2019, 332).

Robert Merrihew Adams has picked up exemplarism in contemporary debates in value theory. He argues that the goodness of ordinary things consists of a resemblance to the transcendent Good, which is God. The central thesis of Adams’s *Finite and Infinite Goods* is the following.

Godlikeness Thesis: Some created thing x is intrinsically good if and only if (and because) x resembles God in a way that gives God reason to love x.

Adams notes that his thesis does not apply to every sense of “good.” It does not, for instance, apply to the quantitative sense of “good” in “The movie was a good two hours long” (Wolfsdorf 2019, 11). Nor does it apply to the operational sense of “good” used in the sentence “These batteries are still good” when one wants to communicate that the batteries have a “good deal” of juice left. The sense of “good” in the Godlikeness Thesis is evaluative, meaning that it is used to say that something has value. But even still, it does not apply to every sense of the evaluative “good.” It does not apply to instrumental goods, for instance. Adams’ thesis is limited to the sense of “good” used to say that something is worthy of love or admiration (Adams 1999, 14). Adams uses “excellence” to refer to this particular sense of “good.” I will follow him in this.

Adams’s argument for his thesis is that it identifies an independently existing property that best satisfies the various roles determined by the meaning of “excellent.” Any adequate candidate for the referent of “excellent” must satisfy these roles. Some candidate is better to the extent that it satisfies more of these roles in accord with the familiar theoretical virtues (consistency with well-supported hypotheses or theories,

parsimony, explanatory power, falsifiability, and so on) and worse to the extent that it satisfies less of them or in a way that is less theoretically virtuous.

The meaning of the term “excellent” determines several roles that any candidate must satisfy. Whatever goodness consists of must be objective, knowable, reason-giving, and supervenient on natural (i.e. non-evaluative) features. These properties of goodness are familiar enough, but Adams says that what goodness consists of must also be transcendent (Murphy 2011, 151). There appears to be a transcendent role determined by “excellence.” We typically do not take ourselves to have discovered what *the* good is when we call something “good.” The finite goods we are capable of attaining are, at best, intimations of the perfect and complete Good, which always lies beyond our best articulations of the direct objects of our immediate desires (Adams 1999, 28). This claim about the transcendence of goodness is controversial and has been contested (Wolf 2002). Even if it fails as a general account of goodness that should be accessible to theists and non-theists alike, there is good reason to think that theists should accept it (Murphy 2011, 151-154). In any case, I have also argued that creaturely goodness is transcendent insofar as it pulls what bears it toward the Good, which is beyond it.

This view has become popular among theists. In this section, I argue that it faces two major challenges. First, the Godlikeness thesis fails to satisfy the requirement that a theory allow no teleological frayed ends. To whatever extent this view holds that intrinsic goods *pursue* God, exemplarists hold that this pursuing consists of increased resemblance. Second, and less importantly, the view either falsely implies certain evaluative distinctions or it attributes value to the wrong bearers. This dilemma emerges for Adams’s view because the resemblances that constitute values supervene on shared or

similar non-evaluative features of *relata* that stand in the relation. I argue that those sympathetic to Adams's thesis can hold a closely related position, according to which some kinds of values resemble the Good but are not themselves resemblance relations between non-evaluative *relata*.

The insufficiency of resemblance. Oliver O'Donovan critiques Adams's version of the Godlikeness Thesis in the following passage.

There is a risk that in stressing independence [of goodness] we conceive of our relation to the good as *disinterested*. Either we think that we have no interest in the good we admire, or we think that the good has no interest in being admired. Adams's otherwise admirable treatment of the theme avoids the first of these two false conclusions ... But it does not avoid the second ... God appreciates excellent things inasmuch as they imitate him. And that seems to be the only thing that is said about God's relation to what is less excellent than he. What is missing is a notion of *self-communication* on the part of the excellent-good, which is one reason why the relation between God and not-God in Adams's account never achieves the clear contours of creation. When things are good, they are so not by communication from above, but by imitation from below. (2014, 71)

O'Donovan objects that the Godlikeness Thesis is not alone adequate to explain the gratuitousness of God's love. If something is excellent if and only if God has a reason to love it, then it is difficult to explain how God can love something that is not excellent. Indeed, it is a common thought in the Christian tradition that the love of God *makes* things lovable and excellent (Lewis 1960).

I will not press this objection further here. I want to reconsider the first "false conclusion" O'Donovan lists above, which is that "we have no interest in the good we admire." Contra O'Donovan, I do not think that Adams's view succeeds in avoid this false claim. Thus, the Godlikeness Thesis fails to establish a sufficient interest in God. The main problem with the Godlikeness Thesis is that it struggles to satisfy the requirement that there are no teleological frayed ends. That requirement says that

whatever creaturely value consists of, it must at least partly consist of being directed to God. Admittedly, exemplarism states that creaturely goodness makes essential reference to God insofar as what they pursue is *de re* Godlike. Consider again a passage from Aquinas, who says “Because nothing is good except insofar as it is a likeness and participation of the highest good, the highest good itself is in some way desired in every particular good” (1964, §11). The principle is that if I aim at x, and x resembles y, then I aim at y.

To see why the Godlikeness Thesis fails on the teleological front, we should get a few of the conditions for *aiming at a thing as an end* on the table. First, the aimer must aim at the thing’s good. Godlikeness achieves this insofar as it is because of God’s goodness that we seek to resemble him. Similarly, swimmers with aspirations of greatness may want to resemble Michael Phelps because of his excellence as a swimmer. This is not enough for *aiming at* the thing resembled, however. It can be true that an Olympic swimmer is excellent only to the extent he or she resembles Michael Phelps without being teleologically ordered to Phelps himself in any way. Maybe they want to beat Phelps. In the athletic wrestling community there is an urban legend that Olympic gold medalist and freestyle wrestler Brandon Slay used to wake up in the middle of the night for impulsive push-up sessions. When asked why he did this, he said that he could not stand to think that his Soviet competitor was training at a point in time when he was not. While he respected his opponent as a wrestler, it was not his opponent’s good *qua* wrestler that he was aiming at.

The aforementioned suggests a second condition of aiming at a thing. It is not enough to simply have its goodness in view. The agent must also aim at the goodness of

the thing *for its own sake*. The activities constituting the aim must be in service to the good of the thing aimed at. But the Godlikeness Thesis does not meet this condition. It is not the case that mere desire to resemble a thing requires doing so *for the thing's sake*. On the contrary, the desire to resemble something is typically motivated by a desire to bring about some end for the one *doing the resembling* not the *one resembled*. This is not to say that our pursuit of God must be purely disinterested since we are looking for an account of finite goodness, the kind of goodness that finite beings have. The argument is rather, briefly, that to make a thing an end, one must do more than aim to become like it.

It should not be surprising that a theistic value theory could face problems by straying too close to Platonist and Neoplatonic distinctives on the theme of resemblance. After all, for Plato, at least in the *Republic*, the Good is not an existing object that is directly pursued, but rather something that is “beyond being” (2004, 509b8–10). It is not something that we should strive to behold directly, but rather that by which other things are illuminated. This is not so given the kind of theism that posits God as an existing independent being with whom creatures can enter into a more or less direct relationship. In this way, the greatest feature of the Godlikeness Thesis becomes its greatest obstacle. It was able to avoid instrumentalism and preserve the intrinsic value of creatures by reducing it to resemblance to God. In doing so, however, it raises the additional challenge concerning how this reduction satisfies theistic teleological demands that there be no frayed ends, a challenge it does not seem capable of meeting. The Godlikeness Thesis therefore does not posit the right relationship between the Good and goods.

Godlikeness and thick values. I now turn to show that the Godlikeness Thesis has trouble on a different front. It implies an implausible reductivism about thick values. I

will focus on Adams, who appears to think that the Godlikeness Thesis accommodates non-separationism (1999, 40). On the contrary, I argue here, the Godlikeness Thesis has the most trouble with these kinds of values. The point overall point of this section is to argue that theists need a two-tiered value theory that distinguishes between aforementioned thick values and *goodness*. The picture I want to motivate says that thick values are intrinsic states of creatures and goodness is the orientation or movement towards God.

Adams worries that his account is vulnerable to the objection that it cannot make distinctions where a successful theory ought to. There are different types of intrinsic values. Beauty is not like virtue. The objection states, roughly, that these values are irreducibly distinct, and so their differences cannot be grounded in the singular Good. In response, he does not attempt to derive the many from the one by grounding all goodness in the Good alone. Rather, descriptive features of things perform this role by partly grounding their distinct resemblances to the Good. I want to argue that the success of this response, such as it is, works too well. Grounding diversity of values in non-evaluative resemblance makers either implies evaluative distinctions where there aren't any or it attributes value to the wrong bearers.

To begin with, Godlikeness Thesis distinguishes types of values with the different ways things can resemble God. A beautiful thing resembles God in one way, while an honest act or state of character resembles God in another. There are, in other words, different resemblance types. These types track the different kinds of excellence, since they are what these kinds consist in. So, to get different types of values, we need to get different types of resemblances.

Resemblance types are conventionally distinguished in virtue of different resemblance makers. Two objects, *a* and *b*, resemble each other in virtue of sharing a property or having exactly resembling tropes.²¹ For Adams, resemblance consists of overlapping properties *of importance* (Adams 1999, 33). Resemblance is nonetheless grounded in the properties that stand in a relation. So, Adams does not reject the conventional view of resemblance relations.

Resemblances are fully grounded in the properties of their *relata*.²² In every possible world where *x* is F and *y* is F, *x* and *y* resemble each other in respect F. David Armstrong calls this property of resemblance the “internal nature” (1989, 43). He has this to say in defense of the internality of resemblance.

Given that two objects each have a certain nature, then their resemblance and its degrees are fixed. There is no possible world in which the objects remain unaltered but in which their degree of resemblance changes. Contrast this with distance. There is a possible world in which the objects remain unaltered but their distance from each other is changed. (1989, 44)

The main argument is fairly straightforward. If resemblances are grounded in their *relata*, then any change in the resemblance should require a change in the *relata* as well; and any relevant change in the *relata* should result in a change in the resemblance. If *x* and *y* resemble each other in exemplifying F, then, if *x* loses F, it no longer resembles *y* in respect F. And if *x* gains G, and *y* has G, then *x* resembles *y* in respect G. Moreover, resembling something in respect F is not the same as resembling it in respect G.

Resemblance types, then, are distinguished by the properties of their *relata*. Change

²¹ In what follows, I will intentionally use expressions biased toward realism about properties for the sake of simplicity. The arguments of this paper can be redescribed in terms of tropes. In that case, we wouldn't be looking for an explanation of distinct resemblance types, but resemblances of resemblances. Like Adams, however, nothing I say should be taken to imply or presuppose a theory of properties (1999, 14).

²² Again, for Adams, the properties that stand in this relation are the “important” ones (1999, 32).

them, and you change the resemblance; change the resemblance, and you change the excellence.

For the Godlikeness Thesis, whatever resembles God is the bearer of value (Adams 1999, 17). If value is a resemblance relation, there must ultimately be something that grounds the relation, which is not itself a value, otherwise there is a vicious regress. Perhaps honesty is beautiful in a way. But since honesty and beauty are both excellences, and so both resemblance relations (because all excellences are resemblance relations), this fact consists of one resemblance *itself* resembling God in a way. To repeat, given the Godlikeness Thesis, the fact *honesty is beautiful* consists of a resemblance relation resembling God. But since honesty is an excellence, and so a relation, it also has to be grounded in its *relatum*. Perhaps this entity is itself an excellence, but then *that* excellence consists of a resemblance relation that is grounded in the properties of its *relata*, and so on until we reach some ground that is not itself a resemblance. So, all values are eventually grounded in a resemblance that things have to God in virtue of some non-evaluative set of features.

The upshot is this: the same resemblance type obtains if and only if the same resemblance makers obtain. This thesis is different from the supervenience thesis, which says if two possible states of affairs are the same in every non-moral respect, then they are the same in every moral respect also. The conclusion I draw is rather that the Godlikeness Thesis together with the assumption that resemblance is an internal relation entail that each resemblance relation is ultimately grounded in non-evaluative features unified by a relation of real similarity to each other. Supervenience, by contrast, does not entail that if two possible states of affairs are different in some non-moral respect, then

they are different in any moral respect. For the Godlikeness Thesis, whether they be properties or tropes, the grounds must be ultimately non-evaluative. Putting this together with the internality of resemblance, it follows that the resemblance that excellence consists of is necessarily grounded in the non-evaluative properties of the thing that stands in the relation such that if something changes in these properties, then the resemblance changes. The change may be from one type of resemblance to another, but it won't be the same type.

The foregoing presents a problem for the Godlikeness Thesis. Earlier in this dissertation, I defended a controversial position about thick evaluative concepts and properties. That thesis involved the claim that some evaluative properties are not decomposable into purely evaluative and non-evaluative components. It is virtually a universal belief, however, that “evaluation drives extension” (Blackburn 1992). That is, it is denied that for any thick evaluative concept or term, its extension can be picked out by purely non-evaluative description. This thesis is called Descriptive Equivalence, which is defined by Pekka Väyrynen as follows.

Descriptive Equivalence: For every thick term or concept, someone has or could acquire an independently intelligible purely non-evaluative description with the same extension. (2013, 12)

Descriptive Equivalence is endorsed by J. L. Mackie (1977, 16-17) and R. M. Hare (1981, 74-75).²³ It has largely been discredited in contemporary philosophy. The main argument against it is that it seems incredible that an “outsider” to some moral

²³ Descriptive equivalence is different from the so-called “shapelessness” hypothesis, which is the view that values are not unified by a set of non-evaluative properties common to all cases. See D. Roberts (2011). The Shapelessness Hypothesis is attributed to McDowell (1981). It was introduced initially as a linguistic phenomenon that directly falsifies non-cognitivism in metaethics. For a response that shapelessness is compatible with non-cognitivism see Miller (2003, 250-56). In any case, I am not concerned with that debate here, since my dissertation assumes cognitivism.

community could come to reliably anticipate applications of a thick evaluative judgment T, not because the outsider has come to endorse the evaluative perspective presupposed by T, but because the outsider has learned that T is made every time and only when non-evaluative description F is judged to obtain (Williams 1985, 141-42). One who discovers what this set of properties is could reliably employ that thick term without taking on the evaluative perspective it presupposes. Indeed, it seems, one wonders what is left over required to understand the perspective from the inside.

For instance, suppose a twentieth century English academic finds himself on a different planet amidst a non-human civilization (Lewis 1943). One thing he discovers is that this society is highly concerned with noble deeds and the honors bestowed by them. The elite in this community possess the title of *hnaprapunt*, which is an honorific given to one who successfully hunts an aggressive and predatory shark-like creature called *hnapkra* by the planet's inhabitants. The outsider thinks he has a reliable grasp of the concept HNAKRAPUNT. Over time, however, he learns that there is more involved in being *hnaprapunt*. For instance, those who act dishonorably are not *hnaprapunt*, and those unable to put the story of their hunt into a great poem are given the title only with reluctance.²⁴ There may be many more nuances to the application of the concept, and the outsider could not anticipate these simply by tallying up which non-evaluative features correspond to each instance of its use. Absent an evaluative perspective, he could not predict that being such would also call for skills in narration and poetry, though these are secondary to the killing itself. The perspective must be adopted to see the evaluative point.

²⁴ These are not Lewis' examples. They are, however, in the spirit of the Hrossan culture.

As I have already shown, the Godlikeness Thesis requires that for every type of value, there is a corresponding unique set of non-evaluative properties grounding the resemblance relation that constitutes that unique value. Imagine a perfect community that makes all and only the right evaluative judgments; or at least it never makes an error. It has all the right evaluative concepts corresponding to the genuine values that really exist. All their evaluative concepts and terms are truth-tracking. An outsider to this community could reliably come to anticipate and predict these judgments, but without endorsing them, by learning which properties are involved in the resemblance relations. In fact, this person need not even learn that the properties themselves ground a resemblance relation, since the non-evaluative properties are enough to determine the extension. Thus, if Godlikeness is true, then so is Descriptive Equivalence.

The Godlikeness Thesis, then, seems to entail a widely rejected thesis about thick values. Of course, the proponent of Godlikeness could embrace this consequence. But then, he should not deny, as Adams seems to, that a “purely descriptive” component of thick values can be identified to make judgments about the values that “are not judgments of excellence” (1999, 40). That is, the proponent of Godlikeness should not think that an evaluative perspective is required to reliably judge correctly about thick values.

6.4 A Neo-Platonist Attempt

6.4.1 The God-directedness Thesis

The Godlikeness Thesis is laudable for its attempt to explain how creaturely non-instrumental goodness can exist in a way explained by God’s goodness. However, it struggles on both explanans- and explanandum-driven considerations. With respect to the

former, it struggles to avoid teleological frayed ends because, simply, aiming to become like something is not the same thing as making it an end. With respect to the latter, Godlikeness struggles to account for thick values and implausibly reduces them to separate evaluative and non-evaluative ingredients. For the remainder of this chapter, I want to gesture at a way forward. Specifically, I want to commend a view that seems to have been held by at least Plotinus and picked up later by Phillip Melanchthon, Jonathan Edwards, Iris Murdoch, as well as possibly others. Its central claim is that goodness in creatures consists in movement or an orientation toward the Good. This disjunctive framing of the principle does not mean that goodness is a disjunctive property. Really, the important point is that goodness consists of being God-directed or God-aimed. This property can be possessed by either actions or dispositions.

One of the clearer statements of this view comes from Plotinus writing in the third century.

No eye that has not become like unto the sun will ever look upon the sun; nor will any that is not beautiful look upon the beautiful. Let each one therefore become godlike and beautiful who would contemplate the divine and beautiful. (1964, §I.6.1.9)

Admittedly, the word “good” does not show up in this quote. The reference to the sun is a hint that Plotinus means to include goodness within the scope of the principle, and the passage cited earlier in this chapter confirms it. “Therefore must we ascend once more towards the Good, towards there where tend all souls” (1964, §I.6.1.7). We do not just become like the divine but tend toward it. Plotinus does not appeal merely to Godlikeness. Rather, Godlikeness is necessary in order to pursue God.

Jonathan Edwards argues that knowing and valuing of the works of God are the two primary things of intrinsic value in creation (1765, 25-26). This, he thinks, is enough

to establish that there are no teleological frayed ends; that all value is essentially ordered to God.

Thus it is easy to conceive, how God should seek the good of the creature, consisting in the creature's knowledge and holiness, and even his happiness, from a supreme regard to himself; as his happiness arises from that which is an image and participation of God's own beauty: and consists in the creature's exercising a supreme regard to God, and complacence in him; in beholding God's glory, in esteeming and loving it, and rejoicing in it, and in his exercising and testifying love and supreme respect to God: which is the same thing, with the creature's exalting God as his chief good, and making him his supreme end ... God's respect to the creature's good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with himself. The creature is no further happy with this happiness which God makes his ultimate end, than he becomes one with God. The more happiness the greater union; when the happiness is perfect, the union is perfect. And as the happiness will be increasing to eternity, the union will become more and more strict and perfect. (1765, 112-113)

Edwards here advances Plotinus' view. Creaturely goodness consists of aiming at and union with the Good. However, Edwards' view is more specific than Plotinus' more general thesis. For Edwards, it is specifically the acts of valuing and knowing God's glory that is intrinsically valuable, which makes intrinsic value properly directed to God. Here is the claim in its general form.

God-directedness Thesis: Some created thing x is intrinsically good if and only if (and because) x is directed to God.

God is the aim of this movement, but not in such a way that instrumentalizes it.

Movement toward the Good is itself good. Each phase of developing goodness is itself something of final worth that also invites us deeper into another phase that is like it though beyond it. These features allow it to satisfy the requirements for theistic explanations of ethics whilst preserving creaturely intrinsic value. On the one hand the value is intrinsic. Moving toward the Good is not merely instrumentally valuable, but something we desire for its own sake. On the other hand, this definition rules out the

possibility of teleological frayed ends. If all creaturely goodness consists in being God directed, then there is no goodness that does not have God as its aim.

The potential for common ground with instrumentalism and exemplarism depends on what account is given of the “movement” toward God. What does “movement” or an “orientation” toward God consist of? After all, the position as I have stated it relies on a metaphor. What is important to the view is that the pursuit of God is fundamental, and other things depend on it rather than the other way around. The affinities with instrumentalism here are obvious, though they should not be pressed too far. *Pursuing* or *moving toward* something need not require *being useful to* it in any way. Alternatively, the view leaves room for an important role given to resemblance. One might think, with Plotinus, that movement toward the Good requires becoming like it. But that need not be the case.

For instance, sixteenth century Lutheran theologian Philip Melanchthon divides goodness into uncreated, which is “God himself” who is “the cause of good,” and created, which is “the created agreement in creatures with the divine mind” (2011, 525). The latter is divided into useful, pleasant, and honorable or moral created goods (2011, 526). Thus, Melanchthon affirms the existence of creaturely intrinsic goodness (as I have defined it), and also that God explains that goodness through an “agreement” (*convenientia*) between the two. But agreement need not constitute resemblance. The three musical notes that make a chord are in “agreement” in some way, but not in virtue of their resemblance to each other. Rather, the fit seems irreducibly relational. The one, three, and five notes *just go together* in a way that the one, two, and three notes do not.

The struggle for this view is to account for “agreement” while maintaining its distinctives. Agreement, like fittingness or worthiness, is a normative relation. And in this case, it is normative in a moral sense. But that is precisely the sort of thing we are trying to explain. One virtue that exemplarism and instrumentalism have over this position is that they give us an account of normativity that does not leave any bit of it out. To meet this, Melancthon’s fittingness account may end up appealing to resemblance or usefulness.

In short, there are a range of options available to the neo-Platonist so long as one’s commitments do not exclude the primacy of the driving metaphor. The most important thing on this account is that creaturely goodness consists of a movement or orientation toward God. Like exemplarism, this view allows for no teleological frayed ends. For what it is to be intrinsically good, according to this view, is to be aimed at God. Unlike instrumentalism, this view allows for the intrinsic value of creaturely states.

6.4.2 The Intrinsic Value of Instrumental Value

As I said before, the claim that intrinsic value in creatures consists of God-directedness does not entail that all value is instrumental. The two claims are compatible, however. It is possible to cash out God-directedness in terms of usefulness, and then say that this usefulness is intrinsically valuable. On this view, what intrinsic value consists of is left open, but that which bears it is always an instrumental state with God as the end. So, in fact, for every true proposition of the form “x is intrinsically valuable,” the placeholder “x” always stands for some instrumental fact with God as the end. This claim rejects instrumentalism, since it grants the existence of creaturely intrinsic value. It nonetheless avoids teleological frayed ends if we further grant that this is an essential fact

about creaturely intrinsic value. For then, there would be no creaturely value that is not essentially ordered to God in every way that it has value. The possibility of “divided loyalties” would be ruled out as an essential matter.

This view trades on the plausible idea that at least some instances of usefulness are intrinsically valuable. We often think of something as worthy of admiration, praise, glory—and whatever else is a fitting response to intrinsic value—when it performs its instrumental function well in a reliable way. We often call tools that fit this description “trusty” or “faithful,” suggesting that we attribute to them some value that transcends their mere instrumental properties. My claim is that the classical view is correct. Sometimes a thing is intrinsically valuable *because* of its instrumental value, such as a sturdy pocket knife or a trustworthy baseball bat.

As a side note, if I am right that some instances of instrumental value are intrinsically valuable, then the currently ascendant theory of instrumental value is mistaken. Traditionally, to be instrumentally valuable was to be useful to a valuable end (Moore 1903a, 24). Recently, however, many value theorists have rather opted for an analysis that says to be instrumentally valuable is to be valuable as a means, that is, the type of value distinguished only by the fact that it is carried by means, causes, or instruments (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2002, 24; 2011, 51-53; 2022, 18). The debate exists between those who think *being instrumentally valuable is being a means to value* and those who think it is *being valuable as a means*.

- Classical View: Something x is instrumentally valuable if and only if (and because) x is productive of something y that is valuable, and y is not x.
- Standard View: Something x is instrumentally valuable if and only if x is an instrument that is valuable.

The difference between the classical and standard views may seem negligible until it is recognized that the latter does not allow for a distinction between instruments of intrinsic and non-intrinsic value. But it seems plausible to say that there are some instances of being an instrument or useful in ways that is itself worthy of praise, and there are some instances in which it is not. In any case, a view on which creaturely intrinsic value is solely possessed by instrumental states of a certain sort is one way to satisfy the conditions laid out in this chapter, though it may fail for other reasons. My point here is only to show that there are a variety of ways one might flesh out the God-directedness Thesis.

6.4.3 *Thick Values*

I want to end this dissertation where I began. If we accept the God-directedness Thesis, then we can avail ourselves of the points about thick values that I have made in various chapters including the present one. The point is a Boethian one: thick values are not essentially values at all, in the sense of excellences. They are only so when they are properly directed to God. What makes them *positive* is that they move—or make the things that have them move—toward the good.

The right course for the Platonist is suggested by Socrates himself in his discussion of the Good in *Republic* VI. He says,

You see, you have often heard it said that the form of the good is the most important thing to learn about, and that it is *by their* [the other virtues] *relation to it* that just things and the others become useful and beneficial. (2004, 505a, emphasis added)

Socrates says here that the relation to the Good makes justice and “these virtues” worthwhile. There are things that are not the Good that are desirable, which we can call

values. Socrates says that these things *stand in relation to* the Good; not that they *consist of being a relation* to it. If the modern Platonist takes his cue from Socrates, then some excellences are things *that* resemble the Good rather than consisting of the resemblance to the Good.

This view satisfies Adams's transcendental requirement for the "excellent." The goodness of finite goods points beyond themselves. This is not because standing in a relation of resemblance to something entails "pointing beyond itself to something else." Rather, the "pointing" is a result of the fact that the finite value inevitably lacks something desirable. We acquire some excellence or other and recognize its limited ability to satisfy. The Good itself, by contrast, is something complete that leaves nothing to be desired. The Good transcends excellences because for any excellence that is attained, there is always the fact that something lies beyond. Iris Murdoch indicates the way finite goods point to the transcendent Good.

Good is a concept about which, and not only in philosophical language, we naturally use a Platonic terminology, when we speak about seeking the Good, or loving the Good. We may also speak seriously of ordinary things, people, works, of art, as being good, although we are also well aware of their imperfections. Good lives as it were on both sides of the barrier and we can combine the aspiration to complete goodness with a realistic sense of achievement within our limitations. For all our frailty the command "be perfect" has sense for us. (2014, 90)

Finite excellences or goods point in a direction. They are imperfect resemblances of the Good, which "is still somewhere beyond" them (Murdoch 2014, 91). The Good, by contrast, is perfect and complete in itself, lacking in nothing. Finite excellences, in contrast, are not capable of bestowing complete happiness on those who possess them. They leave something to be desired. And so, while it's true that *a*'s resembling *b* does not

entail that *a* “points beyond itself” to *b*, in this case, it does. Excellence *a* points to a greater, more complete Good.

6.5 Conclusion

Any satisfactory theist account of creaturely goodness should not allow for teleological frayed ends. All ends ultimately terminate in God. Both Exemplarism and neo-Platonism provide us a way to meet these requirements while maintaining that creatures have intrinsic value. I have raised two objections to exemplarism and commended neo-Platonism as a better alternative. It may turn out that these objections can be overcome, and that my view faces more serious problems. If I have achieved anything in this chapter, I hope it reveals the need for more attention to be given to what it is for God’s goodness to be communicated to creatures. We need a clearer account of how exactly God explains creaturely goodness.

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