



A Thomistic Critique of Peter Geach's Ethical Naturalism

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This is an unpublished conference paper for the 8th Annual Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues conference at Oriel College, Oxford University, Friday 3rd – Sunday 5th January 2020.

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Peter Geach argued that to be good is always to be good as a member of a species—and nothing more than this. Moreover, for an entity e to be good as a member of a species s is for e to carry out the activities that are characteristic of s well. I will argue that this model of goodness fails to account for various features of human life and agency and, in particular, for moral motivation, moral duties, and moral protections. For the recognition of each of these phenomena requires us to posit that a virtuous human is good not only *qua* human, but also simply speaking. Aquinas’ marriage of Aristotelian and Augustinian-Platonist elements in his moral theory allows him to accommodate Geach’s insight that the goodness pursued by any created thing depends on its nature while also explaining why morals matter.

I. ‘Good’ as an ‘Attributive Adjective’

Geach frames his argument in terms of a distinction between ‘predicative’ and ‘attributive’ adjectives. He explains, “I shall say that in a phrase ‘an A B’ (‘A’ being an adjective and ‘B’ being a noun) ‘A’ is a (logically) predicative adjective if the predication ‘is an A B’ splits up logically into a pair of predications ‘is a B’ and ‘is A’; otherwise I shall say that ‘A’ is a (logically) attributive adjective” (33). Hence, ‘big’, ‘small’, and other adjectives denoting size are attributive—or at least, can be attributive—because, for instance, ‘ x is a big flea’ cannot be broken up logically into the propositions, ‘ x is big’ and ‘ x is a flea’. No one who calls a flea big means to say that it is big *simpliciter*, but rather that it is big *for a flea*. Predicative adjectives, on the other hand, do not depend in this way on the terms they modify for their meaning. For example, ‘ x is a red car’ can generally be split up into two expressions, ‘ x is red’ and ‘ x is a car’. We generally would not have much use for statements of the form ‘ x is red *for a car*’, and it is questionable whether such statements would make any sense to begin with. At any rate, it is easy to see that we can recognize an object as being red independently of recognizing that it is a car.

Geach argues nothing weaker than that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are “*always* attributive, not predicative adjectives” (33, italics added). He thinks that the point is clear in the case of ‘bad’ because it is “something like an *alienans* adjective; we cannot safely predicate of a bad A what we predicate of an A, any more than we can predicate of a forged banknote or a putative father what we predicate of a banknote or a father” (33). Although ‘good’ is not *alienans*, it is also attributive, according to Geach. While it would be possible to learn that a car is red by seeing a red object in the distance and asking a friend with better sight what sort of object it is, it would not be possible to learn that a car is good in the same way—that is, “by pooling independent information that it is good and that it is a car” (34). The best explanation, Geach suggests, is that there is no way to learn that the object is a good one without first realizing what kind of entity it is and determining how well it serves the function characteristic of such entities.

Geach also provides a dilemma for the view that ‘good’ is sometimes a predicative adjective. If ‘good’ denotes a feature shared by all good things, we must be able to explain what this common feature is. This feature is either a natural feature or it is not. Proponents of naturalism (i.e., the view that good is a natural property) according to Geach, commit the (alleged) fallacy that Moore called ‘The Naturalistic Fallacy’. This is the fallacy of introducing some natural property *np* into the very *definition* of goodness, thereby rendering trivial the assertion that something known to be good has that property, *np*. On the contrary, Moore argued, for any natural property *np*, questions of the form “I know entity *e* has *np*, but is *e* good?” always merit non-trivial answers, that is, answers not settled in advance by the definition of goodness. Though it is impossible to prove a negative existential by using examples, Moore rightly observes that that the question “I know *e* produces pleasure but is *e* good?” is not equivalent to the question “I know *e* is good but is *e* good?” (Moore, 62–69). This observation does not appear to reflect a peculiarity of the definition of goodness as pleasure-production but rather a general distinction between the meanings of terms referring to natural properties on the one hand and the meaning of the term ‘goodness’ on the other.

On the other hand, according to Geach, proponents of non-naturalism (i.e., the view that goodness is a non-natural property) consistently fail to provide an adequate account of what it means for a property to be non-natural. More precisely, Geach’s argument seems to be that no definition of ‘non-natural’ has been proposed that would explain why non-naturalistic definitions of goodness would circumvent the Naturalistic Fallacy, or a fallacy of the exact same form (35–6). Thus, Geach’s ‘dilemma’ for predicative definitions of goodness turns out, strictly speaking, not to be a dilemma at all; rather, he is worried that all predicative definitions of goodness

fall prey to the Naturalistic Fallacy or a variant of it.

The argument against the so-called ‘Naturalistic Fallacy’ is, however, itself fallacious, as Frege, Kripke, and Putnam have shown. Before the discovery that water is by its very nature made up of the chemical compound H₂O, people were fully capable of recognizing water as water and they used the term ‘water’ (or an equivalent translation) to correctly refer to water in their environment. It follows that the entity *e* to which a term *t* refers may have essential properties not intended by *t*. Naturalists and non-naturalists are providing accounts of the essential natures of goodness, however, not the semantics of the term ‘goodness’. It follows that their accounts may truthfully indicate properties of goodness not picked out by that term. Thus, we need not be detained by Geach’s preoccupation with the Naturalistic Fallacy; it poses no problems for predicative accounts of goodness.

Geach has one more objection to predicative accounts of goodness, though. This is the objection that “we cannot sensibly speak of a good or bad event, a good or bad thing to happen” (41). That is, events are never good or bad full-stop. At most, they are good or bad for certain individuals understood in certain ways. As Geach puts it, “Caesar’s murder was a bad thing to happen to a living organism, a good fate for a man who wanted divine worship for himself, and again a good or bad act on the part of his murderers; to ask whether it was a good or bad event would be senseless” (41).

II. The Legacy of Attributivism

Since the publication of “Good and Evil” in 1956, various philosophers have embraced Geach’s attributivism, notably including JJ Thomson (2008, 1-18), Richard Kraut (2011, 177-183), Philippa Foot (2001, 2-4, 48-50), and (arguably) Rosalind Hursthouse (2001, 195, 206; 2012, 175-8). (Scores of other philosophers have embraced the insight from Geach that *many* uses of good are logically attributive, but I am primarily interested in the stronger assertion that *all* uses of good have that logical structure.) One of the main reasons the view has seemed appealing is that it offers a way of avoiding perennial puzzles in metaethics. For the attributivist denies that the difficult Platonic question, “What do all good things have in common in virtue of which they are good?” meets with an answer. According to her, all good things perform the activities associated with their natures well, but these activities are widely disparate and may have nothing in common. Therefore, the need to postulate a metaphysical source of the goodness in things vanishes.

It is for related reasons that Philippa Foot prefaces her seminal metaethical treatise *Natural Goodness* with an endorsement of attributivism. In her words, “Geach’s insistence that ‘good’ and ‘red’ are logically different is very important

and takes us some of the way in the task of bringing back words ‘from their metaphysical to their everyday use’, as Wittgenstein said was characteristic of his own late philosophy” (Foot, 3). Indeed, Foot views her project as an attempt to clarify “*further* distinctions of logical grammar to be made before we shall have identified the category to which moral evaluation belongs” (3, italics added), suggesting that that project departs from the premise that attributivism is true.

One detects the influence of attributivism at various points throughout this foundational treatise of Neo-Aristotelian naturalism. To be sure, Foot grounds moral prohibitions, such as the one against lying, in their role in protecting various goods associated with human life. She is, however, careful to distance her account from a consequentialist one which “has as its foundation a proposition linking goodness of action in one way or another to the goodness of *states of affairs*” (48-9). Foot insists that, “[T]here is no room for such a foundational proposition in the theory of natural normativity. Where, after all” she asks, “could ‘good states of affairs’ be appealed to in judging the natural goodness or defect in operations of plants and animals? In evaluating the hunting skills of a tiger do I start from the proposition that it is a better state of affairs if the tiger survives than if it does not?” (49). Foot later asserts that, “It would be ludicrous to suppose. . . that it was ‘a good thing’ if plants lived and ‘a bad thing’ if they died!” (50).

Foot’s assumption that it is of no consequence whether a tiger or plant lives or dies is revealing. Although she takes this assumption to be obviously true, there are good reasons to deny it, even from within a framework of natural normativity. One might think that other things being equal, tigers and plants play a meaningful role in the universe, and thus, that it matters whether they live or die. In a given situation, we might not want a tiger or a plant to survive, since its survival might pose a threat to a more valuable good; the tiger could kill a human or a plant could obstruct the beauty of a landscape. Nonetheless, the lives of tigers and plants might have *prima facie* value. Indeed, as long as tigers and plants are bearers of any intrinsic value—if, in addition to being potentially good members of their species, they are also good *beings*—then it matters at least somewhat whether they live or die. Moreover, we are left to wonder whether Foot would also say that there is ‘no room in the theory of natural normativity’ for the proposition that it is a good thing if a human being lives and a bad thing if it does not.

So, why does Foot seem to think it is so obvious that tigers and plants lack intrinsic value that she can reject the opposite position without argument? The answer to this question, I believe, is most likely found in Foot’s appropriation of attributivism. Foot thinks that all attributions of goodness are relative to a species. Since, then, being is not a species, it makes no sense to her to speak of good *beings*.

I shall draw out this entailment in more detail in the next section of this essay, but for now suffice it to notice that Foot, one of the authors chiefly responsible for revitalizing Aristotelian approaches to ethics in contemporary philosophy, appears to be deeply influenced by attributivism.

III. Human Life and Agency

Geach is right that we hold members of different species to different standards when evaluating them. The qualities that suffice to make a cat a good member of its species are minimal when compared to the qualities we must exhibit to be good humans. Alas, a human is deemed woefully deficient if all he does is lay around all day until meal times. There is something deeply counterintuitive, however, about Geach's assertion that *all* goodness is understood relative to a species. For, if all goodness is understood relative to a species, there is no way to step back and ask whether it is good to be a good member of a given species in the first place. In other words, while Geach's theory allows us to assess members of a given species *s* qua members of *s*, it does not allow us to assess whether a good member of *s* is also a good being. Hence, we cannot say that a good human is a good thing to be, or that a good thief is a bad thing to be. These sorts of judgments are ruled out, because they imply that there is a species-independent notion of goodness that measures the goodness aspired to by the various species of things.

This hollowing of the notion of goodness produces at least three problematic consequences regarding human life and agency. First, it suggests that it is irrational to make sacrifices to pursue meaningful projects. Such projects might make us better as humans, but there is nothing attractive about being a better human. Yet, it is irrational to make great sacrifices for no good reason. For example, the sacrifices that parents make to raise their children are only redeemed by the great intrinsic value of raising a child well. It would be unreasonable to expend similar amounts of time, energy, and resources to count blades of grass well. On Geach's view, however, the notion that it is better to be a good parent than it is to be a good grass-blade-counter is unintelligible. We can assess whether given individuals are good members of given kinds, but we cannot assess whether it is good, simply speaking, to be a good member of a given kind. While it might be the case that a good parent is a better *human* than a good grass-blade-counter, we have no reason to value parenthood more highly than 'grass-blade-counterhood', i.e., membership in the species of things that count blades of grass. For, we cannot assess whether it is good to be a good human in the first place, much less, *how* good it is to be a good human.

The attributivist might reply by arguing that the comparison to such an artificial species as 'grass-blade-counter' is not licit. Geach's thesis, it would be argued,

is that goodness is a feature of individuals *qua* members of natural kinds, not *qua* members of any contrived category we can drum up. This reply faces three difficulties, however. First, as a matter of exegesis, Geach strongly suggests that a car can be good *qua* car, and ‘carhood’ is not a natural kind (33-4). So, he evidently does not believe that goodness is only a feature of individuals *qua* members of natural kinds. Second, Geach is apparently right to believe that artefacts can be good members of their kinds, and the example of cars serves to demonstrate this point. Third, the whole issue of whether goodness is only a feature of individuals *qua* members of natural kinds, and not also *qua* members of artificial kinds, seems irrelevant. For the point I wish to make is that, on attributivism, good specimens—even of natural kinds—entirely lack species-independent value. If this point is correct, it follows that good specimens of natural kinds have no more species-independent value than good specimens of artificial kinds—even if good specimens of artificial kinds have zero species-independent value, and indeed even if they have zero species-*dependent* value.

Second, Geach’s view renders moral duties unintelligible, for much the same reason that it deflates the value of human endeavors. Failing to fulfill a moral duty might make us a worse human being, but we have no reason to care about being good human beings. Once more, the idea that it could be good, simply speaking, to be a good human being is unintelligible according to attributivism. Thus, a bad parent might be a bad human being, but it does not matter, since there is nothing valuable about being a good human being anyway. The failure to be a good parent is, in this sense, no worse than the failure to be a good thief, according to attributivism. For parenthood, like thievery, lacks any value in the end.

Third, attributivism makes it impossible to see why humans are protected by moral norms. Intuitively, humans are protected by moral norms because we are bearers of value in virtue of being humans. Yet, Geach’s view forces us to deny that our membership in the human species confers value upon us. For, species are not the sorts of things that are subject to evaluation. We can evaluate individuals *qua* members of a given species, but we cannot step back and evaluate these species themselves. To be sure, we might be able to say that human individuals tend to be better at some activity than other species of living things. For example, we might be better at surviving than other species of living things, and, if so, it might be said that we are better exemplars of the (admittedly contrived) species ‘surviving things’ than other living things are. This sort of superiority to other living things could not be adduced to explain our superior moral status, however. For, attributivism commits us to saying that there is nothing valuable about being good *qua* member of the species ‘surviving things’ in the first place, for the simple reason that, according to

attributivism, there is nothing valuable about being good *qua* member of any species at all in the final analysis.

Foot appears to be sensitive to the first two of these objections, at least. She writes, “Suppose that human beings are defective as human beings unless they do what is needed for human good, including such things as refraining from murder and keeping promises. The sceptic will surely ask ‘But what if I do not care about being a good human being?’” (52). It seems to me, however, that Foot loses track of the dialectic when she formulates her response to this ‘skeptical’ question. Her response to the question takes the form of a critique of a Humean view, where practical rationality constrains the means we use to our chosen ends but leaves open which ends we may rationally pursue. She follows Warren Quinn in pointing out the inconsistency of regarding prudence, conceived in this way, as a master virtue, given that one might not choose to make it one of his ends (62-3). As interesting of a critique of the Humean model as this may be, it fails to address the issue at hand. For the most compelling reason to doubt that we have reason to be good human beings on an attributivist model does not come from controversial Humean assumptions at all. Rather, it derives from the impossibility of successfully attributing ‘absolute’ value—that is, species-independent goodness—to good humans on an attributive model.

Alternatively, the attributivist might respond to the first two of my three objections by arguing that the reason it is incumbent upon human beings to perfect ourselves *qua* human beings is that we cannot choose whether or not we are humans. We can, on the other hand, opt out of being grass-blade-counters and thieves. Thus, when a father fails to play his part in raising his children, he fails to fulfill a role that he cannot help but occupy; not only does he fail to fulfill his role as a father, but he also fails to carry out the duties associated with his role as a human. Not so with roles we occupy incidentally, such as thievery or grass-blade-counting. When we fail to be good thieves or grass-blade-counters, we do not fail to fulfill any duties associated with our role as a human, or indeed with any role that we occupy essentially.

This is the strategy that Matthew Boyle and Douglas Lavin adopt in their essay, “Goodness and Desire”. Speaking of forms in the Aristotelian sense—that is, as the natures that determine the species of things—they write,

To represent an individual as the bearer of a form. . . is to represent that individual as the sort of thing that as such pursues certain ends. . . To the extent that such a thing achieves those ends, it succeeds in pursuits that belong to it as such. And by the same token, to the extent that it fails, it fails in pursuits that belong to it as such. Inasmuch as the form in

question is essential to the individuals that bear it, these pursuits belong inalienably to those individuals: They cannot cease to be pursuers of these ends without ceasing to be (184).

Thus, in response to the objection that the inference from “is” to “ought”—e.g., from human nature to moral duty—is invalid within an attributivist framework, Boyle and Lavin reply, “we are not sure we understand the charge” (185). To them, it seems obvious that if we cannot but pursue x , we ought to pursue x well.

Whatever the merits of this reply for naturalists in general, I do not think it is available to the attributivist. The reason is that it implies that it is bad simply speaking to omit to fulfill any duties associated with roles we occupy essentially. Without this premise, the reply fails to show that there is any difference between failing to be a good human and failing to be a good thief or grass-blade-counter. According to attributivism, however, the idea of an omission being bad simply speaking is explicitly ruled out. An omission may be bad *qua* human action, but questions about whether bad human actions are bad simply speaking are characteristically misguided according to attributivism. For, according to attributivism, it is always meaningless to assert that anything is good or bad simply speaking. Everything that is good or bad is only good or bad relative to a species.

Another way for the attributivist to reply would be to bite the bullet and deny that it is better to be a good human than to be a good thief or grass-blade-counter in the final analysis. As humans, Geach could have argued, we necessarily desire to be good humans (though our individual interpretations of what it means to be a good human may differ), but nothing follows from this about the value of being a good human. It is mysterious, however, why we would necessarily will any end if we could understand that it ultimately lacked value. At any rate, based on this proposal, we would be forced to conclude that being a good parent is ultimately meaningless, and this result is unpalatable for the reasons I have provided; other things being equal, we should reject it.

In response to my third objection, the attributivist could argue that the moral protections of humans derive, not from our inherent value, but from the social community we have with each other. Yet, in order to defend this view, the attributivist would have to say, at a minimum, that beings who have society with one another have obligations to one another. And, I have already argued that the attributivist cannot make sense of moral obligations—at least if, as is exceedingly plausible, obligations are grounded even partially in the value of being a good human being.

On the other hand, the attributivist could adopt a social contract theory where our duties to respect other people have psychological, but not normative force. On this view, prohibitions against harming others are part of a contract we make with

others to ensure that we ourselves will not be harmed. Moreover, the contract, and thus, the prohibitions it entails, are important to us psychologically for the simple reason that we tend to dislike being harmed. This deflationary account of the moral obligations we have to one another is, however, deeply unsatisfying. It cannot explain why Hume’s sensible knave, who knows how to get away with vicious behavior whenever it benefits him, acts wrongly. Indeed, it cannot explain why anyone acts wrongly, even an *insensible* knave. While transgressing the rights of others might make us liable to having our own rights transgressed, it does not matter from a moral point of view if we ourselves lack moral status. And I have argued that we lack moral status according to attributivism.

IV. Critiquing Geach’s arguments for attributivism

Recall Geach’s first argument for attributivism, namely, the argument from ‘independent pooling’. The argument is that whenever we learn something is a good member of its species, we always do so by learning its species and considering how well it performs the activities characteristic of that species. We do not independently learn that x is good and that x belongs to species s and then pool this information together. This suggests that the goodness of anything is indexed to the species to which it belongs.

I concede the premise of this argument. It would be impossible to understand that x was engaged in an act of moral virtue without first understanding—or at least simultaneously understanding—that x is a rational agent, and hence, the kind of agent capable of moral virtue. It does not follow, however, that *all* uses of the term ‘good’ are attributive. There is nothing inconsistent between the claims that (1) only rational beings are capable of moral virtue and that (2) moral virtue is good *simpliciter*. All that follows from the conjunction of these claims is that there are some types of action, such as moral action, that are good, simply speaking, even though one must have certain faculties, including rational faculties, in order to be able to engage in them. And there is nothing implausible about this result.

Geach’s second argument is that there is no such thing as a good or bad event simply speaking; events can only be good or bad *for* a subject. According to Geach, this suggests that goodness and badness may not be spoken of simply, but only attributively. The premise of this argument is apparently false, however. When an infant dies, something tragic has happened. The event is bad, simply speaking. This is why the event merits from us a response of mourning. We do not mourn meaninglessly; our emotions disclose to us the value of what has been lost. Yet, even a theist who wishes to say that the loss is not ultimately bad because it accords with God’s plan for bringing about a greater good should also reject the premise of

Geach's argument. For, the upshot of this theistic argument is that the child's death is good in the final analysis, and thus, good simply speaking. Moreover, a beautiful sunset is apparently good simply speaking. Otherwise, we would not have the sense that it merits a response of wonder from us. The attributivist needs to explain away this appearance.

V. An Augustinian Aristotelianism

Kant is famous for asserting, in the *Second Critique*, that "ought implies can." Much less often discussed is the view he expresses in the same work that the reverse conditional is also true, namely that "can implies ought" (Kant, 5:19–30). There are obvious counterexamples to this claim if it is interpreted too broadly; an adult's ability to win a boxing match against a toddler is no reason for him to take a 4-year-old to the ring. On the other hand, when the action that the agent is capable of is good, his ability to engage in it gives him at least a *prima facie* reason to carry it out. For example, imagine that J.S. Bach had been accepted into an academy for painting despite having mediocre talent for the medium. We would think he had overwhelming reason to decline the offer and pursue music, given his profound musical ability. Indeed, we would think it a profound disappointment if Bach failed to pursue his musical calling, simply because of the beauty he could have created if he had pursued it.

This is apparently what Aristotle has in mind when he says, in the *Nic. Ethics*, that the life of pleasure does not befit man because it does not make use of the most divine part of us, namely, reason (1095b, 15–25), and when he says later in the same work that we are perfected through contemplation on the basis of the same considerations (1177a, 10–20). John McDowell's worry for Aristotelian naturalism, that rational abilities allow us to transcend nature, thereby sapping nature of normative guidance for us (McDowell, 151–5), is misguided because the Aristotelian need not suppose that natures set an upper-limit on human actions, telling us that our actions should not exceed a certain level of goodness. Hence, Aristotle writes, "We ought not to listen to those who warn us that 'man should think the thoughts of man', or 'mortal thoughts fit mortal minds'; but we ought, so far as in us lies, to put on immortality, and do all that we can to live in conformity with the highest that is in us" (1177b, 30—1178a, 5). Rather, natures set a lower-limit on actions by making us capable of achieving goods. Just as Bach's ability to create beautiful music gave him reason to create beautiful music—reason that would not have been had by someone incapable of creating beautiful music—our ability to pursue various rational goods gives us reason to pursue them.

This view of the relation between creaturely natures and goodness finds clear

expression in the Augustinian-Platonist Aristotelianism of St. Thomas Aquinas, who argues that, “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” (ST, I, Q6, A4, *Respondeo*). Thomas unequivocally endorses the Aristotelian thesis adopted by Geach that the goodness aspired to by a given creature depends on its “form”, i.e., on its nature. Yet, according to Aquinas, creatures are not just good *qua* members of their species. By carrying out their “proper operations”—the activities that characterize their species—they imitate the divine goodness. Hence, they gain a limited share of God’s absolute goodness.

Hence, the moral and intellectual virtues correspond to perfections that exist *in God* before they exist in us. Yet, God completely transcends membership in any genus or species. Thus, at the first moment of their existence, the virtues are good in a completely unqualified way. A clearer negation of attributivism could hardly be imagined. God is not a member of any genus or species, but he is still good—indeed, he is supremely good—so there exists at least one thing whose goodness not indexed to any species at all. Moreover, Thomas asserts that the unqualified goodness of God grounds the goodness of all created things as a final cause. So, we cannot explain the goodness of *anything* without appealing to the goodness that exists unqualifiedly—and hence, predicatively—in God.

In summary, according to Aquinas’ metaphysical vision, the virtues—moral and intellectual—are not good because they are pursued by humans. Rather, the virtues are pursued by humans because they correspond to the divine attributes, and hence, because they are good, ‘predicatively’ speaking. Thus, for instance, *pace* attributivism, justice is not merely good for humans. Rather, justice is good in its own right, and it is a sign of our elevated value that our human nature makes us capable of justice (along with the other virtues), which is good in God before it is good in us.

A puzzle arises immediately from this presentation. For, justice can hold value only if humans *already* possess moral dignity. If humans lacked dignity, there would be no reason to treat each other according to the principles of justice. It follows that our ability to be just cannot explain our dignity. The correct order of explanation is the other way around; the possibility of justice, considered as a moral virtue, is explained by our dignity. Yet, I have argued that moral dignity is grounded in our capacity to become like God in respect of some divine attribute or another. If this divine attribute is not the divine justice, what might it be?

According to Aquinas, our moral dignity derives ultimately from our ability to imitate God in respect of his wisdom, i.e., in respect of his knowledge of himself

(ST, I, Art. 1-2). By contemplating God's truth, we engage in an activity that God himself eternally engages in (SCG, Bk 3, Chap 25, Paragraph 1). In its unadulterated form, this activity possesses infinite value because of the infinite value of its object, God himself (SCG, Bk 3, Chap 25, Paragraphs 4-5). Although we are not capable of knowing God in an unadulterated way in this life, Aquinas believes that we are capable of knowing him in this way in the afterlife. Moreover, Aquinas follows Aristotle in arguing that when someone knows something, his intellect takes on the form of the thing it knows. Hence, when we know God, we are assimilated to God in a profound way (SCG, Bk 3, Chap 25, Para 2). Against this background, it is no surprise that Aquinas would detect in our ability to know God a profound source of worth.

What does all of this talk of wisdom have to do with *morality*, though? Might it be possible for us to participate in the divine wisdom while living a life of selfishness and injustice? Indeed, couldn't one learn more about God by going to the library and stealing all of the theology books he cannot afford? I don't think so, and neither did Aquinas, who wrote, "Also required [for the contemplation of God] are freedom from the disturbances of the passions—this is achieved through the moral virtues and prudence—and freedom from external disorders, to which the whole program of government in civil life is directed. And so, if they are rightly considered, all human functions may be seen to subserve the contemplation of truth" (SCG, Bk 3, Chap 37).

In response to this worry about the relevance of moral virtue to wisdom, it also helps to note that Aquinas followed Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine in embracing the thesis that all human action is pursued *sub specie boni*. According to Thomas, we cannot pursue an end without believing that it is good. Hence, if we seek evil, we believe that evil is good. Now, plausibly, one cannot simultaneously believe that evil is good and also believe that God is good. At least, to the extent that one believes that evil is good, he does not believe that God is good. So, his intellect is divided; it is not totally assured of the goodness of God. In this way, vicious activity appears to thwart our ability to know God. Moreover, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus recounts, "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5: 8). So, Christians have a scriptural reason to believe that wisdom implies moral virtue.

This account of the sources of morality admirably explains the phenomena that confound the attributivist. The reason we can rationally make sacrifices to pursue projects like parenting is that, by undertaking these projects, we participate in the divine goodness, and the divine goodness is not merely good for humans but also good *simpliciter*. Moreover, we should avoid thievery because it is a contravention of justice, and justice is valuable, not only for those species who happen to seek it, but

also absolutely, insofar as it is a precondition of participation in the divine wisdom. And finally, we should respect other human beings because, by virtue of our elevated ability to imitate the divine wisdom, each of us bears a touch of the dignity that exists supremely within God. *Pace* Geach, we can evaluate not only how well an individual instantiates the features characteristic of its species, but also the value of belonging to a given species in the first place.

Although Mark Murphy is sympathetic to this view of goodness-as-Godlikeness, he argues that it is subject to counterexamples unless it is suitably developed. He has us imagine the scenario in which he comes down with a rare disease. The symptoms, he says, include “my muscles taking on the taste and consistency of a piece of deep-fried tenderized round steak, my epidermis becoming crisp, like buttermilk-and-egg-saturated flour dipped into hot oil, and my pores oozing a whitish substance that is peppery and creamy. *I begin to share the properties that make a properly-prepared chicken fried steak good*” (155). Murphy notes that these developments would not make him better “in the least or in any way” (156).

The problem arising from this zesty scenario is this: if goodness is Godlikeness, and pepperiness and creaminess make a chicken fried steak good, then those qualities make the chicken fried steak resemble God. Yet, if pepperiness and creaminess make the chicken fried steak resemble God then, apparently, there is some attribute in God that corresponds to pepperiness and creaminess. So, anything that becomes peppery and creamy comes to resemble God. Therefore, if goodness is Godlikeness, anything that becomes peppery and creamy becomes better. The consequent here is false, though; Murphy does not become better by becoming peppery and creamy.

So, concludes Murphy, goodness can’t *reduce to* Godlikeness; there must be further constraints on what it means to be good. Murphy, responding to Robert M. Adams’ view of goodness-as-Godlikeness, plumps for the following: “It is, I think, an improvement on Adams’s axiology to hold that no created thing is simply good; it is always X-ly good (or bad), where the X is filled in by the kind to which the thing belongs” (159). This is to say that, “A theistic account of the humanly good, then, should appeal both to human goods’ being ways in which humans are made like to God and its belonging to our kind to be like God in these ways” (161).

I do not see how Murphy’s proposed solution amounts to anything more than a restatement of the problem. The question was how the goodness of a thing can depend both on (i) the extent to which it resembles God and also on (ii) the extent to which it carries out the activities, or exhibits the properties, characteristic of its nature. Murphy does not seem to offer a response to this question—rather, he just insists that the goodness of a thing depends on how well it does both (i) and (ii). He seems to anticipate this reply in a footnote where he argues, “I don’t mean that this

theistic Aristotelian view will be merely a conjunction; . . . it is more plausible that it belongs to a thing's kind to resemble God in particular ways" (154). This formulation simply raises the further question of why the kind to which a thing belongs constrains the manner in which it ought to imitate God. If this question is any different than the original question—of how the goodness of a thing can depend on how well it does both (i) and (ii)—I cannot see that this difference is very significant.

Fortunately, I do not think that Adams' account needs to be emended in order to accommodate our intuitions about Murphy's skin taking on the qualities of a good chicken fried steak. As human beings, we are capable of imitating God *to a much greater extent* than even the best chicken fried steak, namely by knowing God. For the reasons I have put forth, however, the knowledge of God requires moral virtue. And, our ability to carry out the actions associated with moral virtue would be significantly impeded if our skin was juicy and creamy, our muscles tender, and our bodies, delicious. If our skin oozed, we would lose blood and other bodily fluids we need to survive, let alone to perform acts of virtue. And, having creamy skin would (in addition to being disgusting) be extremely inconvenient. Ostensibly, it would require us to frequently change our clothes, distracting us from more valuable tasks. Moreover, if our muscles were tender, they would be easily torn, leaving us highly prone to injury. And finally, if we were delicious, hungry people and animals would be tempted to eat us (and, if our bodies were tender, they could successfully act on this temptation). So, there is good reason to believe that it would be deleterious for Murphy to take on the qualities of a good chicken fried steak if Godlikeness is the source of all value in created things.

Nicholas Wolterstorff has offered another objection to the view that moral dignity derives from the way in which we resemble God in view of our natures. As I understand it, the objection is based on the idea that to have a human nature is to be made according to a certain blueprint. But being made according to a blueprint—even an excellent blueprint—cannot confer value on a thing. For example, Wolterstorff argues, we have no special reason to admire a Mercedes-Benz with a broken engine even if it was *meant to be* a high-performance vehicle. Its owner would do no wrong in disposing it if repairing it would come to him as a significant burden. Wolterstorff argues that, "it is no different for human beings. Yes, a human being in whom human nature is functioning properly is of great worth, truly admirable. But why would one think that a being in whom human nature is seriously malfunctioning is still of great worth just because it has that nature?" (351).

The analogy of the malfunctioning Mercedes-Benz strikes me as deeply problematic, however. To have a nature is not just to be made according to a blueprint, or to be made in order to perform certain activities. In fact, according to a classical

understanding, artefacts like cars do not even have natures. Hence, Aristotle writes that each thing with a nature “has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness (in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration). On the other hand, a bed and a coat and anything else of that sort, *qua* receiving these designations i.e. in so far as they are products of art—have no innate impulse to change” (Phys., Book II, Part 1). What Aristotle is pointing out here is that natural things develop according to a blueprint simply because of the kinds of things they are. Thus, if nothing interferes, a child eventually develops reasoning abilities simply because it is a human being. By contrast, Aristotle notes, artefacts operate according to a blueprint only to the extent that a certain order is imposed upon them from without, and in particular, by a human being.

The consequences of this distinction cannot be overestimated. What it suggests is that as long as something retains its nature, it strives towards certain ends. Thus, human beings, as long as they remain human, strive for the knowledge of God. Their natural developments are constrained by this end whether they like it or not. By contrast, a car might reach a point where it no longer strives to achieve the ends for which it was made, in any way. This cessation of characteristic functioning occurs at the very moment when the car is no longer being used for its intended purpose by any human being. Thus, to destroy a human being is necessarily to destroy a pursuer of wisdom. On the other hand, to destroy a car is not necessarily to destroy a pursuer of speed or transportation. For the reason that the car “pursues” these ends is not intrinsic to the car but imposed upon it by human beings.

VI. Conclusion

If all goodness is relative to a species, as Geach argued, there is no way to evaluate species themselves, or the ends to which they constitutively aspire. This conclusion makes it impossible to see why we should care about being good exemplars of the human species. Aquinas’ Augustinian view of the relationship between the natures of created things and the goods they aspire to avoids this worry. For, on Aquinas’ view, species are ranked accordingly as they participate more or less in the unqualified good, i.e., God. It is my hope that the advantages of the Thomistic outlook will lead some philosophers—especially those otherwise attracted to attributivism—to reconsider the possibility that ethics requires a theistic foundation.

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