

# Goodness and Commensurability

Good, Bad, Better Worse

# Some Claims Established

\* The FOG is:

\* A Form

\* Necessarily co-extensive with Being

\* Univocal

\* A mind- and language-independent entity which has all of its intrinsic properties essentially:

\* It is beyond or apart from (παρά) sense particulars.

\* Indeed, it is separate from them (χωριστά) (*Met.* 1078b16, 1086a25).

\* A paradigm, in which non-paradigmatic instances can participate (it is μεθεκτή; *Met.* 1040a26-27)

\* Something definitive; it provides (or *is*) the answer to a What-is-F-ness question for Goodness: it provides (or is) an essence-specifying definition (ὁρισμός)

\* Context-invariant

\* One over (ἐπί) many: Universal? Particular? Both? Neither?

\* A (formal) cause (αἴτιον) of the goodness of other good things (*EN* 1095a26-28).

# A Claim Not Established. . .

- \* . . .but assumed moving forward.
- \* The FOG is non-indexed:
- \*  $\phi$  is an *indexed good* if  $\phi$  is essentially:
  - \* (i) personal, as opposed to impersonal;
  - \* or (ii) agent-relative as opposed to agent-neutral;
  - \* or (iii) sortal-dependent vs. sortal-independent;
  - \* or (iv) kind-dependent vs. kind-independent;
  - \* (v) functional vs. non-functional;
  - \* or (vi) attributive vs. predictive.
- \* N.b. Fairly clearly some of these distinctions overlap, in the sense of being at least co-extensive, but they might yet be differently explicated.

# The FOG

- \* The FOG is a simple, univocal, non-natural (?), indefinable, irreducible, non-indexed property.
- \* The FOG is objective goodness *simpliciter*.

# Subjective and Objective Goods

- \* The FOG is an objective good *only if* its goodness is an intrinsic feature wholly independent of the intentional/affective/reactive state of any subject *S*.
- \* The FOG is a subjective good *only if* its goodness is a relational feature partially constituted by some intentional/affective/reactive state of some subject *S*.

# Two Worries

- \* If we assume that  $x$  and  $y$  are commensurably  $\phi$  only if  $x$  and  $y$  are univocally  $\phi$ , then Plato's view seems attractive, in so far as rational choice seems to involve choices among goods which are commensurably goods.
- \* Worry one: is goodness in fact univocal?
- \* If we accept that inference patterns are legitimate only when predicates are predicated univocally, then if attributive uses of 'good' are non-exportable to predicate positions, for any two intrinsic goods we cannot infer from 'x is good' and 'y is good' to 'x and y are good', where goodness is something common ( $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\acute{o}\varsigma$ ).
- \* That is, just as I cannot infer from 'Her singing is sharp' and 'His knife is sharp' to 'There is something common to her singing and his knife.'
- \* So I cannot infer from 'Pleasure is good' and 'Virtue is good' to 'There is something common to virtue and pleasure.'
- \* Worry two: is all goodness ascriptive goodness?

# Geach Thinks So

- \* Predicative vs. Attributive Goods
  - \* Put linguistically: 'x is good' vs. 'x is a good  $\phi$ ' or 'a good  $\phi$  is always  $\psi$ '.
  - \* Put metaphysically: being good vs. being some manner of indexed good
- \* 'There is no such thing as being just good or bad, [that is, no predicative 'good'] there is only being a good or bad so and so.' —Geach (1956, 65)

# Four Geachian Arguments

- \* The words 'good' and 'bad' function like an *alienans* adjective, but an adjective can be *alienans* only if its is attributive.
- \* In predicative cases, one can detach the predicate and deploy it in inference.
  - \* If she has an old red car, then she has a red car.
  - \* If he's a good thief, it does not follow that he's good.
- \* Conversely, one can 'pool' information when the predicative use is in view.
  - \* If her car is red and old, then she has an old red car.
  - \* If he is a thief and good, we cannot infer that he is a good thief.
- \* If 'good' were predicative then it would be hopelessly homonymous. (!)

# On the contrary

- \* If 'good' were always attributive, it would be hopelessly homonymous.
- \* That is, if for every intrinsic good  $\phi$ , the account of 'good' in ' $\phi$  is good', or ' $x$  is a good  $\phi$ ' were "different and divergent, precisely in the way in which they are good things (ἕτεροι καὶ διαφέροντες οἱ λόγοι ταύτη ἢ ἀγαθά), then no two good things would have the same account (λόγος) in respect of their goodness.
- \* Suppose that were false: then there would be a single account (λόγος) for various good things.
- \* One could then infer from:
  - \* ' $x$  is a good  $\phi$ ' and ' $y$  is a good  $\psi$ '
  - \* that ' $x$  is good' and ' $y$  is good' and thence to
  - \* ' $x$  and  $y$  are good'.
- \* In such a case, the inference would be licensed only if the account (λόγος) of 'good' were the same in both instances.

# A Plausible Dubious Hypothesis

\* The Comparability Claim (CC):

\*  $x$  and  $y$  are comparable in respect of value property  $\phi$  *iff*: (i)  $x$  and  $y$  are both  $\phi$  and  $\phi$  is applied univocally to  $x$  and  $y$ ; or (ii) (a)  $x$  is  $\phi^*$  and  $y$  is  $\phi^{**}$  and there is some further value property  $\psi$  superordinate to  $\phi^*$  and  $\phi^{**}$ , and (b)  $\psi$  is applied univocally to  $\phi^*$  and  $\phi^{**}$ .

# Some Clarifications

- \* 'Comparable' is used here in the sense of being *ordinally rankable*.
  - \* After all, everything is comparable to everything else in some respect.
- \* A predicate  $\phi$  is univocal as applied to  $x$  and  $y =_{df}$  (i)  $x$  is  $\phi$  and  $y$  is  $\phi$ , and (ii) there exists a single, non-disjunctive, essence-specifying account of  $\phi$ , as applied to  $x$  and  $y$ .
  - \* Note, then, that univocity is both predicate-relative and predication-instance relative.
    - \* Predicate-relative:  $x$  and  $y$  can be univocally  $\phi$  but non-univocally  $\psi$ .
      - \* A statue of Pericles and Pericles can be univocally *magnitudes* but non-univocally *men*.
    - \* Predication-instance relative:  $x$  and  $y$  can be both univocally and non-univocally  $\phi$ .
      - \* Maria and Marcus can be both univocally and non-univocally *flush*, because both are blushing, and non-univocally *flush*, because she has plenty of cash and he is blushing.

# Some Explications and Illustrations I

- \* The first clause of the *definiens*: (i)  $x$  and  $y$  are both  $\phi$  and  $\phi$  is applied univocally to  $x$  and  $y$ 
  - \* Illustrated with a non-value predicate:
    - \* We can easily say, rightly or wrongly, that Matisse's *Nu Bleu IV* is bluer than the background of Della Robbia's *Madonna and Child*
    - \* We can say not at all or only with difficulty or analogically that Matisse's 's *Nu Bleu IV* is bluer than Camus
  - \* Illustrated with a value predicate:
    - \* We can easily say, rightly or wrongly, that supporting one's comrades in a dangerous battle is more honourable than deserting them in the same circumstances.
    - \* We can say not at all or only with difficulty or analogically that supporting one's comrades in battle is more honourable than being the son of a Marquis or a maid of honour.

# Some Explications and Illustrations II

- \* The second clause of the *definiens*: (a)  $x$  is  $\phi^*$  and  $y$  is  $\phi^{**}$  and there is some further value property  $\psi$  superordinate to  $\phi^*$  and  $\phi^{**}$ , and (b)  $\psi$  is applied univocally to  $\phi^*$  and  $\phi^{**}$ 
  - \* Illustrated with a non-value predicate:
    - \* We can easily say, rightly or wrongly, that Rubik's cube is *more complex* than this puzzle in decision theory, because there are 43 quintillion permutations to the cube, and one needs at least twenty moves employing some 120 algorithms to solve it optimally, whereas the decision theory puzzle requires only six moves to be solved optimally.
    - \* We can say not at all or only with difficulty or analogically that Rubik's Cube is *more complex* than the Mandy's situation with her ex.
  - \* Illustrated with a value predicate:
    - \* We can easily say, rightly or wrongly, that it is better to be a superb violinist than a mediocre advertising executive, since there is a superordinate value, namely (*ceteris paribus*) *succeeding in one's chosen profession*.
    - \* We can say not at all or only with difficulty or analogically that it is better to be a superb violinist a good bread knife.

# Moorean Non-naturalism

- \* It may be true that all things which are good are also something else, just as it is true that all things which are yellow produce a certain kind of vibration in the light. And it is a fact, that 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 properties, in fact, were simply not "other," but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. (*Principia Ethica*, § 10, 3)

# Conditional Care

- \* Perhaps we accept the following conditional as necessary:
  - \* ( $\alpha$ ) Nec. (if  $x$  is the absolute good, then for some (possible)  $y$ , it is good *for*  $y$  to associate with  $x$ )
  - \* From ( $\alpha$ ) it does not follow that there is no absolute goodness.
    - \* It merely follows that if there is some absolute goodness, that necessarily, drawing near it would be good for some (possible) something or other
    - \* So, possibly, ( $\alpha$ ) could be true even though indexed goods do not exhaust all goods.

# Restating CC

- \* The Comparability Claim (CC):
  - \*  $x$  and  $y$  are comparable in respect of value property  $\phi$  *iff*: (i)  $x$  and  $y$  are both  $\phi$  and  $\phi$  is applied univocally to  $x$  and  $y$ ; or (ii) (a)  $x$  is  $\phi^*$  and  $y$  is  $\phi^{**}$  and there is some further value property  $\psi$  superordinate to  $\phi^*$  and  $\phi^{**}$ , and (b)  $\psi$  is applied univocally to  $\phi^*$  and  $\phi^{**}$ .

# Incommensurability and Incomparability for Value-bearers

- \* Incommensurability:

- \*  $x$  and  $y$  are incommensurable with respect to value property  $\phi$  *iff* only if there exists no common cardinal measure providing a value scale along which  $x$  and  $y$  can be measured in respect of being- $\phi$ .

- \* Incomparability

- \*  $x$  and  $y$  are incomparable with respect to value property  $\phi$  *iff*  $x$  and  $y$  cannot be put into ordinal rankings with respect to  $\phi$ .

# Incommensurability and Incomparability for Values

- \* Incommensurability:

- \*  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  are incommensurable value properties *iff* there exists no superordinate value property  $\omega$  providing a common cardinal value in terms of which  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  can be measured in respect of being- $\omega$ .

- \* Incomparability

- \*  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  are incomparable value properties *iff* there exists no superordinate value property  $\omega$  providing a common value in terms of which  $\phi$  and  $\psi$  can be ordinary ranked.

# CC as a Plausible Hypothesis

1. Nothing is better or worse or the same in value as anything else *simpliciter*; there is always some univocal  $\phi$  in terms of which one thing is better than another.
2. If (1), then CC.
3. So, CC.

# CC as a Dubious Hypothesis

- \* Accept for now the Trichotomy Thesis (TT), viz. that if  $x$  and  $y$  are comparable in respect of being  $\phi$ , then  $x$  is either:  
(i) more- $\phi$  than  $y$  (better than  $y$ ); (ii) less- $\phi$  than  $y$  (worse than  $y$ ); or (iii) as- $\phi$  as  $y$  (equal to  $y$  in respect of being  $\phi$ ).
- \* Two Arguments:
  - \* An Argument from the Diversity of Values
  - \* An Argument from Small Improvements

# The Diversity of Values

- \* An (alleged) observation: values belong to irreducibly distinct types or genres. So, e.g., the value of a good novel is not all like the value of keeping a promise, which in turn is not at all like the value of a freshly baked loaf of bread. This is Value Pluralism (VP)
  1. If CC, then, on the assumption of TT, every value (or value-bearer) can be judged better, worse, or the same as one another.
  2. If VP, then, again on the assumption of TT, not CC.
  3. VP.
  4. So, not CC.

# TT as a Dubious Hypothesis

- \* Suppose two exemplary value bearers in different genres (e.g. Beethoven and Shakespeare, or Jussi Bjoerling and the Learned Hand) are equally great.
  1. If TT, then if we enhance the value of one state of affairs by even a little, then the one whose value is enhanced must come to be judged to be better than the other.
  2. That's implausible.
  3. So, not TT.

# CC and/or TT worth saving?

- \* Rational choice might be thought to require some version of CC.
- \* Yet, a denial of TT might offer latitude here: perhaps a fourth value—(rough) parity—might give us room to manoeuvre.
- \* Supposing, though, TT: we seem either to be in an awkward situation if we deny CC.

# Returning to the Academy

- \* You wish to live well, to live the best life you can lead.
- \* You seek, that is, *eudaimonia*.
- \* Here are three lives commended to you by their practitioners: the life of pleasure, the life of honour, the life of the mind.
- \* Can these lives be ordinally ranked?
  - \* In general, without CC, can we judge one of these forms of life superior to the others?