

## GEACH ON 'GOOD'

By

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Is it then possible that while a carpenter and a shoemaker have their proper functions....man has none...? Should we not assume that just as the eye, the hand and the foot....has its own proper function, so man too has some function over and above the function of his parts?

Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b

### 1. *Introduction*

In his celebrated 'Good and Evil' (1956) Professor Geach fights a war on two fronts. On the one hand, he wants to establish, as against the non-naturalists, that the predicative 'good', as used by Moore, is *senseless*. 'Good' when properly used is *attributive*. '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*'. (GE, page 65) The predicative 'good' is a philosopher's word and we cannot be 'asked to take it for granted from the outset that a peculiarly philosophical use of words means anything at all!' (GE, page 67.) Attempts to define this phantom have foundered for the simple reason that there is *really* no such use to be defined. The search for a property for which 'good' stands - a 'way out of the Naturalistic Fallacy' - is a vain one. The idea that 'it' stands for a non-natural property is thus a pseudo-solution to a pseudo-problem. (GE, pages 66-67.) On the other hand, Geach insists, as against non-cognitivists, that good-judgements are entirely 'descriptive'. By a consideration of what it is to be an A, we can determine what it is to be a *good* A.

These battles are fought on behalf of naturalism, indeed, of an up-to-date Aristotelianism. Geach plans to 'pass' from the 'purely descriptive' *man* to good/bad man, and from *human act* to good/bad human act. (GE, page 70.) He hopes for a naturalistic specification of human goodness. Why then should we be good? Geach dismisses as superstitious any appeal to a 'sense of duty'. Instead, he invokes a semi-analytic connection between goodness and choice. It is part of the *ratio* of 'good' that when choosing among A-s, we generally choose good A-s or ones we think good. We cannot avoid choosing to be men

(or women) nor the choice between human acts. The *ratio* of 'good' compels us to be, or choose, good ones. This answer apparently 'touches the agent's desires'. It appeals to 'what the questioner wants'. Much of this remains controversial. But on one issue Geach is widely regarded as having proved his point. 'Good', it seems, *is* attributive. (See Williams (1972) p. 32-52.) Indeed this is so well-established a result that it can be used to score knock-out polemical victories. Blackburn (1985) p. 15 argues that since 'good' (like other moral adjectives) is attributive, goodness can't be a secondary property; Wong (1984) p. 101 uses the same argument to despatch 'Moore's Platonism'; and Foot (1985), arguing against Utilitarianism, appeals to Geach to discredit 'good event'.<sup>1</sup> The issue is thus of current concern. What's more, at least two meta-ethical programs (moral properties as secondary qualities and Moore's Platonism), both, in my view, intellectually respectable<sup>2</sup>, have a vested interest in proving Geach wrong.

So too do I. For I am an *error-theorist*; a follower (more or less) of J. L. Mackie. (The more and the less need not detain us here.) Like Mackie, (1977) *Ethics*, I think that moral predicates purport to refer to non-natural properties and relations; that there *are* no such properties and relations; and hence that moral judgements are (mostly) false. This is not to say that morality should be given up. (A point on which Blackburn is needlessly perplexed, *op cit* p.2) A fiction can be useful, even indispensable, but still a fiction. On the whole, when not doing meta-ethics, I 'live talk and act like other people in the common affairs of [the moral] life'. But I digress.

Now, the threat posed by Geach to my own programme is obvious. I accept that the Moorean 'good' cannot be given a naturalistic analysis. My argument for error theory (and Mackie's too) rests partly on the need for a (non-existent) non-natural property of goodness, if an important range of good-judgements are to be true. If there is no such notion (except in the empty vapourings of philosophers) the non-existence of non-natural goodness is no bar to the truth of morality. Even if the predicative good in its Moorean variant *is* conceptually legitimate, a coherent but an empty concept, the error theory is not out of the woods. After all, a word which stands for a non-natural quality is one morality had better do without. If a naturalistic ethic can be constructed with the aid of the attributive 'good', we can dispense with its predicative side-kick (at least in its intrinsic Moorean incarnation). Despite Moore, we might have moral truths without other-worldly moral facts.

So I need to show (1) that the predicative 'good' *does* have a genuine sense, and (2) that the attributive 'good' cannot be used to generate a naturalistic ethic. But though I argue as an error-theorist, much of what I say should be acceptable to intuitionists, and non-Aristotelian naturalists. Opponents of Geach can steer clear of the sceptical abyss.

## 2. Geach's Arguments

Nobody would deny that there *is* an attributive 'good'. Indeed Ross, one of the objectivists satirized by Geach, is quite explicit about this. He even uses the terms 'predicative' and 'attributive'. (Ross (1930) *The Right and the Good* p. 65.) What *is* debatable is whether 'good' (and 'bad') are *only* used attributively. Especially, as one of the most obvious arguments for the attributive 'good', presupposes the predicative use. We tend to think that a thing can be a good X (a good ICBM, say) without being *good* or a good *thing*. Indeed, a thing can be a good X and *bad*, if X is a bad thing to be. So what is wrong with linguistic pluralism? Why not a peaceful coexistence between the two uses?

Geach has three main arguments plus a difficulty. (He cannot *understand* the predicative 'good' at least in its Moorean variant.) The arguments are as follows:

1. It is 'clear' that 'bad' is attributive because it is 'something like' an *alienans* adjective. ('Putative' in 'putative father' is *alienans*, since a 'putative father' is not both a father and putative. Indeed the point of the 'putative' is that he may not be a father at all.) 'Bad' is only *something like* an *alienans* adjective, since bad food is still food. But bad food need not have the characteristics we usually associate with food. For instance, we cannot infer that because food *usually* sustains life, bad food will sustain life. Now since *alienans* and quasi-*alienans* adjectives are attributive, and since 'bad' is quasi-*alienans*, it follows that 'bad' is attributive.

You may feel that the premise of this argument is a little too close to the conclusion to convince a sceptic. Besides, it is false. 'Bad' may be *alienans* in its attributive use. But it has a non-*alienans* and apparently predicative use as well. Reverting to my (nuclear-armed) ICBM, I may think it bad (indeed evil in the highest degree) without believing that it falls short *as* an ICBM or lacks the

characteristics one associates with ICBM's. It is both bad and an honest-to-goodness full-blown ICBM. Hence the 'bad' is not *alienans* or quasi-*alienans*. Of course, the 'bad' is not being used attributively here (or at least it does not seem to be) since the missile need not be a bad ICBM (indeed, it may be a very good one). But this merely confirms the existence of the predicative 'bad' - the very point at issue. I suppose Geach might reply that the 'bad' here is really attributive since it leans on some other substantive such as 'Artifact'. ('Artifact' and 'weapon' seem to be the only interesting substantives which unequivocally apply to ICBM's). But either 'Artifact' is like 'event', 'too empty a word' to convey standards of goodness and badness (*GE*, p.71), or the standards are to be understood in terms of efficiency - in which case the ICBM is good after all. But the thought that (nuclear-armed) ICBM's, however efficient, are just plain evil is surely an intelligible one, and certainly a sentiment that is widely shared. Hence 'bad' is sometimes predicative.

2. Geach argues that with a predicative adjective such as 'red' you can pool the information that something is red and a car to derive the proposition that it is a red car. Not so with 'good' and 'bad'. You cannot combine the knowledge that something is good and that it is a car to derive the information that it is a good car. Indeed, unless you first determine what something *is* you cannot tell whether it is good or not.

Now this last point is quite compatible with the existence of a predicative 'good'. If predicative goodness is somehow supervenient (as is widely believed) you will not be able to tell whether something is good without knowing whether it has the properties on which goodness supervenes. This will usually involve knowing what it is. (Not always, however. Suppose I am ship-wrecked on a distant planet and an unknown something supplies me with wholesome food. I can reasonably conclude that from my egocentric point of view, the supplier is good or a good thing. (More of such egocentric 'goods' below §3 and 4.) But I do not know whether it is a human, an alien, an animal or an intelligent cactus.) However, this is not the real answer to Geach's argument. For his main contention is grammatical not epistemic. If 'Y' is predicative and a is Y, this information can be added to a sortal characterisation of a as X, to arrive at the proposition that a is a YX. This is not the case with 'good' and 'bad'. Hence they are not predicative. Now it is true that if a is good or bad and is an X, it does not follow that it is a good or bad X. But again,

this is compatible with a predicative use. First, 'good' and 'bad' are *sometimes* attributive, and when they are coupled with a sortal ('good X', 'bad X') it is the attributive use that is intended (with 'X' as the relevant sortal). Hence if a is an X and bad (in some sense) you cannot always combine the two in the statement that a is a bad X - for as an X it might be quite good. Reverting again to the nuclear-tipped ICBM, I may think it both bad and an ICBM but I would not call it a *bad* ICBM - it may be quite a good one. Now the fact that I can think a missile an ICBM and bad, but *not* a bad ICBM, does not *show* that my 'bad' is predicative. I might conceive of the missile as what it is often alleged to be - a peace-keeping device. It is in *this* capacity that the missile does not measure up and may prove disastrously inefficient. (I should stress that I do not *think* this is what I mean when I say the ICBM is bad). But if my 'bad' *is* predicative, it is obvious why I cannot combine my evaluation of the missile with the fact that it is an ICBM in one breath - it would be misleading, suggesting the attributive use (with ICBM as the relevant sortal). So in so far as Geach's premise is *true* - i.e. that *normally* with a predicative 'Y' and a sortal 'X' we can talk of a YX - it does not dispose of the predicative 'good' and 'bad'. For when Y is both predicative *and* attributive it cannot be put together with an X in this way without giving rise to misunderstandings.

3. Geach's third argument is that if 'good' had both predicative and attributive variants, it would be a word without a *ratio*; it would dissolve into a tangle of homonyms. There would be no binding idea, connecting its disparate uses. And it is indeed true that Ross's otherwise excellent discussion (Ross (1930), Chapter III) does not explain *why* the one word is used in so many different contexts. Geach objects that equivalent words, with much the same range of applications, occur in other languages besides English. This would be very odd if the predicative and attributive 'goods' were mere homonyms like financial 'bank' and river 'bank'. Coincidence does not stretch that far. (GE, pp. 66-67.)

Geach has a point here. But denying one of the uses is an odd way of solving the problem. In effect Geach restores conceptual unity by *ignoring* unruly predicative elements.

So, we need an understanding of 'good' which displays the unity behind the linguistic diversity; and which *allows* for the possibility of a non-natural

property of goodness in morals, without *requiring* one in everyday contexts, even when the 'good' is predicative.

### 3. *The Unity of 'Good'*

But before I put forward my analysis, I had better say what I take philosophical analysis to be and how analyses are to be justified. (Though I have no space to defend this conception here.) Our words and concepts are not transparent to us. The rules they obey, the presuppositions they embody, are not things we are always conscious of. Philosophical analysis consists in bringing to light the rules and structures which govern word-usage and expressing them in English as definitions. A priori intuition plays a part in this enterprise, but empirical and especially hypothetico-deductive methods are also appropriate. (If the word meant what the analysis says it means would people act and talk as they actually do?) Moreover I take analysis to be a *piecemeal* process. There is much to be discovered about the structure of individual words and concepts without bothering how these insights are to be united in a grand 'theory of meaning'. Indeed, excogitating what a theory of meaning *must be* rather than erecting one on the basis of piecemeal analysis, seems to me the wrong way of going about things.

But now to business. I suggest that the attributive 'good' can be roughly defined as follows:

*m* is a good *X* = *df* *m* is, or does, to a high or satisfactory degree  
what *X*-s are supposed, or required, to be or do.

I stress the roughness. The deliberately vague words 'required' or 'supposed' are used to license a very wide range of substituends including 'ought' (*morally* 'ought') and 'should'. The requirements can relate to a role, function or endeavour denoted by 'X'; they can be conventional, egocentric or moral, analytically contained within the concept of 'X', or imported from outside. What constitutes satisfactoriness will be defined in terms of the requirements that are plugged in to deliver a particular variety of goodness.

The sense of the predicative 'good' can be specified along much the same lines:

$m$  is good = df  $m$  is (the kind of thing which is) or does (to a high or satisfactory, degree) what things are required to be or do.

'The kind of thing which' is bracketed because some very singular things which cannot be subsumed under a kind - eg: God - are considered good, indeed, excellent in the highest degree. Generally though, if something is good, (if it ought to be, to use Moore's phrase) it *is* the *kind* of thing which ought to be. (Remember 'ought' is a legitimate substitute for 'required'.) To take an example Geach finds puzzling, 'Pleasure is good' means that pleasurable things - activities, relationships or states of affairs - are (more or less stringently) *required*. These pleasant things are the kinds of things which *ought to be*, and which ought to be in so far as they are pleasant.

There is thus no *conceptual* bar to a property of ought-to-be-ness, a supervenient quality, which demands to be instantiated. Here the requirements would be inherent in the property itself. To know goodness is (usually) to understand that it claims to be realized, along with the properties on which it supervenes. This may be metaphysically odd, but it allows us to make sense of Moorean goodness, subsuming it under the concept 'good'. *Non-intrinsic* goodness, of the type distinguished by Moore, (good as a means) also fits the analysis quite neatly. Something can be good if it (is the kind of thing that) has a tendency to produce intrinsically good things. That is, it is required to be, not for its *own* sake, but for the sake of its effects. A good many egocentric 'goods' also fit the bill. When someone selfishly exclaims 'Good!' on hearing an advantageous piece of news - the assassination of a professional rival, for instance - what they mean is that they are pleased with it - more or less, that it meets *their* requirements. Thus the definition displays the conceptual framework uniting the disparate uses of the predicative 'good'. Predicative goodness consists in something's meeting (contextually specified) requirements.

But perhaps the requirements I have built into the Moorean 'good' are too stringent<sup>3</sup>. For surely there are (or could be) good things that are merely *desirable* rather than *required* (i.e. although they are *good* it is not the case that they *ought-to-be*) If I deny this (as it seems I must), I must also deny the possibility of supererogation - that there could be acts that were right, indeed morally excellent, since they produced good things, even though, the agent was not *obliged* to produce them. This would incorporate into my meta-ethic the

distinctively 'Protestant' claim that there are no meritorious acts 'above and beyond the call of duty' - an undesired and undesirable consequence.

I plead not guilty. First, even if I *did* deny the conceptual possibility of good things which were merely desirable, this would not compel me to reject supererogation. *That* would only follow if there was a straight-forward connection between *ought-to-do* and *ought-to-be*, between individualized requirements binding on agents and requirements 'from the point of view of the universe'<sup>4</sup> as to what it should contain. There is not. For instance, it is quite conceivable that there could be states of affairs which *ought-to-be* but which *cannot be*, at least as things stand at present. So nobody is obliged to bring them into being. Or again (assuming something like the morality of W.D. Ross) there might be things which *ought-to-be* but which cannot be brought about except by violating some other moral requirement. (Indeed, it is the existence of such requirements - other than duties to produce superior goods - that separates Ross from Moore.) It is quite colloquial to suggest that something *ought-to-be* or *ought-to-happen* without suggesting that anyone specific *ought* to bring it about. To use a serious example, I may think that famine *ought* to be abolished but have no idea what people *ought* to do to abolish it, or who the relevant people are. Nor does my definition force me to reject the idea of good things which are desirable rather than obligatory. Such things *ought-to-be* in that the world would be a better place if they obtained. They may even have a *claim* on the moral allegiance of agents so that it is meritorious to bring them about. But if the claim is either weak or *defeasible* (by the claims of self-interest, say) the agent does no wrong in *not* bringing them about. Thus supererogation and my analysis of 'good' are quite compatible.

Returning to the main argument, it is obvious that I have phrased my definition of predicative goodness so as to bring out the analogy with the attributive 'good'. There are other definitions expressing the same general idea. (Mackie's 'such as to satisfy the requirements in question' springs to mind.) Comparing the two analyses, the predicative 'good' can be seen as a degenerate version of its attributive look-alike. 'X', usually a place-holder from some reasonably determinate common noun, is replaced, in the definition of the predicative 'good', by the vacuous 'thing'. Alternatively we can regard the attributive 'good' as a degenerate sortal-relative variant of its predicative cousin. Either way, the words are *not* mere homonyms. We have been able to exhibit a connecting principle, an underlying idea - that of being such as to

satisfy certain requirements - which unites the two. No wonder then, that equivalent words recur in other languages. No need either for an improbable coincidence of homonyms. Geach's main argument collapses.

#### 4. *The Naturalistic Fallacy*

With inspired mischief, Geach presents the naturalistic fallacy as a *difficulty* from which the objectivists sought to escape by the creation of a non-natural quality! (*GE*, pages 66-7.) This is rational reconstruction with a vengeance! The indefinability of the moral (or Moorean) 'good', and the existence of a corresponding non-natural property, were *cornerstones* of objectivist philosophy. They ensured that ethics was an independent discipline, not subject to some other science, whilst guaranteeing that their science had an object - goodness. Still, there is more to Geach's suggestion than a good joke. The argument is that attempts to define the predicative 'good' - and more particularly the Moorean intrinsic 'good' - have failed because there is no such word to be defined. More properly, perhaps, they failed because 'good' does not stand for any property, or range of properties, but - being attributive - determines different properties depending on the substantive on which it leans. Assuming Geach to be right - that there is *only* the attributive 'good' - this is a decent explanation of its 'indefinability'. But in itself this does little to show that Geach is right. Maybe the predicative good, at least in its Moorean form, really *is* (naturalistically) indefinable. Maybe we *do* have to resort to a non-natural property. Geach however holds non-natural properties in abhorrence. 'Nobody has ever given a coherent and understandable account of what it is for an attribute to be non-natural.' For myself, I think I have a fairly firm grasp of the concept, and I think this understanding was induced by reading Moore. To name an author who would find more favour in Geach's eyes, A.N. Prior (1949) pp 5-6, does a fair job of removing any difficulties in the way of an understanding. There is nothing wrong with the *concept* of a non-natural property (just as there is nothing wrong with the *concept* of phlogiston). Whether there *are* any such properties is of course another matter. Still, taking the absurdity of non-natural properties for granted, Geach's argument can be reconstructed as follows:

If good is (sometimes) predicative, it should be definable in naturalistic terms. For there are no properties other than natural ones (the notion of a non-natural property being absurd). But 'such theories of goodness are open

to well-known objections; they are cases of the naturalistic fallacy'. Therefore 'good' is never predicative.

This argument can be faulted at several points. First, it is necessary to distinguish between Moorean intrinsic goodness, and less pretentious predicative 'goods'. Although the predicative good need not be definable by any collection of good-making properties (properties on which goodness supervenes), in many of its uses it *is* susceptible to a naturalistic definition. The framework definition proposed above makes this clear. Predicative goodness is being the (kind of) thing that is required to be - or perhaps being such as to meet the relevant requirements. Plainly *being required to be* is not equivalent semantically to an enumeration of those properties which enable a thing to *meet* those requirements. To say the counter-revolution was a good thing from the financiers' point of view is to say that it satisfied their requirements. It is *not* to say how it did this (eg. by allowing them to amass speculative fortunes, facilitating the arrest of socialist opponents etc. etc.) But so long as the requirements are those of real people e.g. financiers, or at least relate back to such requirements, there is no need for mysterious non-natural properties. Requirements in general do not involve us with metaphysical funnies. These only arise when we transcend the requirements of real or potential persons and talk about what is required *simpliciter*. But since the relevant requirements often *are* natural, many commonplace predicative 'goods' *can* be given a naturalistic definition. Yet such definitions will not commit the naturalistic fallacy, at least as it was usually understood in the fifties. As these 'goods' are not defined in terms of good-making properties they can still be used to *commend* the properties on which they supervene. I suspect Geach of a mistake analagous to one of Hare's. Hare supposed that a naturalistic definition of the (attributive) 'good X' had to consist in a specification of those properties which made for goodness in X-s. 'Good X' would mean *abc X*, where *a*, *b* and *c* stood for good-making properties. Such a definition would make it impossible to *commend* these properties, converting such commendations into tautologies. What could '*abc X-s are good*', *mean* but '*abc X-s are abc*'? Hare concluded that 'good X' could not be given a naturalistic and hence a descriptive reading. (Hare (1952) ch.5). But if 'good X' means roughly 'X which does what X-s are required to do', this argument evaporates. For '*abc X-s are good*' means '*abc X-s do what X-s are required to do*' - a non-tautologous descriptive statement, and a naturalistic one to boot (so long as the requirements can be cashed out in naturalistic terms such as what somebody requires). Furthermore, it is a

statement which will motivate an agent to choose '*abc* X-s at least when he shares the relevant requirements. He wants an X to do what X-s are required to do and *abc* X-s do this to a high or satisfactory degree - that is, they do what he wants. (See below §7.)

*Non-natural* qualities come in with the brand of goodness that interested Moore and Ross. There, the 'ought' in 'ought to be' cannot be construed as 'ought to be in order to achieve end Y', since it is their goodness, in this sense, that *makes* ends worth pursuing. Nor can it be read as 'ought to be so far as society or the agent is concerned'. This is evident to inspection (again, this is clearly not what this kind of predicative good *means*) and because it is conceivable that both society, and the agent can be *wrong* about goodness. The requirements in 'required to be' are not, therefore, the requirements of any particular person or group. They are free-floating metaphysical requirements, inherent in the property of goodness. Conceptually there is nothing absurd about this notion. The problem, if there is one, is metaphysical - there may be no such things. So even if there *are* no properties other than natural ones, this does not mean that there is no Moorean variant of the predicative 'good' - a 'good' not definable in natural terms. But if there is no such property, then nothing really is good (or bad) in this sense. Moore's value-judgements are legitimate but untrue. However a vast range of less exalted good-judgements are *both* naturally definable *and* potential truths. The naturalistic fallacy does not discredit the predicative 'good' even if it calls into question the existence of intrinsic (Moorean) goodness.

##### 5. Geach, 'Good' and Nominal Essences.

It is true, admits Geach, that we sometimes speak of good *things*. But 'thing' is either a substitute for a sortal ('thing' as thingamajig) or 'good' is used predicatively 'and its being grammatically attributive is a mere disguise. The latter attempt is on [his] thesis illegitimate.' (*GE*, page 65. See also Geach (1980) pp 69-70.)

This really won't do. Here is Geach, a purported *analyst* of evaluative talk, in particular talk about 'good'. He is explaining the function of a word; telling us how it works. 'Good', he says, is always used attributively (except in queer philosophic contexts). Here is a counterexample. 'Good' in 'good thing' is sometimes predicative. Geach *assumes* his theory to be true and *therefore* that such uses are illegitimate! But for an *analyst* common usage constitutes hard data. If theory conflicts with linguistic facts, it is the theory that should be ditched. Geach gets out of the difficulty by a piece of blatant monster-barring.

(Lakatos (1976) p. 14.) All *legitimate* uses of good are attributive. But what gives him the right to legislate here? Remember Wittgenstein: 'Philosophy can in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can, in the end, only describe it.' (Wittgenstein (1967) I. 124.) Quite right too - *when* (and only when) 'philosophy' is out to depict the way language functions. But that is what Geach is doing here.

Geach's next argument concerns the 'exception that proves the rule' cases where named individuals are described as 'good' *simpliciter*. ('Locke is good', for instance.) Locke was 'certainly wrong' when he claimed that names have no meaning or 'that there is no nominal essence of individuals'. "The continued use of a proper name 'A' always presupposes a continued reference to an individual as being the same X where 'X' is some common noun; and 'X' expresses the nominal essence of the individual called 'A'." Thus "if 'Seggie' stand for a man 'Seggie is good', said *simpliciter* will mean that Seggie is a good man". (GE, p. 65-6 and Geach (1980) pp 68-69.)

Now, even if Geach is right about nominal essences, and some common noun or sortal is comprehended in every proper name, this does not prove his point. For when the 'good' in 'A is good' is used attributively the substantive it leans on need not be the nominal essence of 'A'. When I say 'John Locke is good' I am more likely to mean he was a good *philosopher* than a good man, (Who cares after all this time?) or even (conflating the man and his works) that he is a good *read*. Geach admits as much. In context 'Seggie is good' might mean that Seggie is a good *stalker*. (GE, page 66.) Very well. But if 'A is good' (*simpliciter*) need not relate to the nominal essence of A, even when the 'good' really is attributive, 'how can we be asked to take it for granted' that this *must* be the case when no substantive seems to be in the offing? At best, Geach shows that a nominal essence *can* supply a common noun for an apparently predicative 'good' to qualify. It does not have to be that way.

*Maybe* this is all that Geach intended to argue. Nominal essences supply a covert sortal for apparently sortal-free 'goods' and 'bads' to lean on. Hence the existence of such 'goods' and 'bads' does not *disprove* his theory. But there are surely 'goods' and 'bads' where no appropriate sortal seems to be around and where the nominal essence (if there is one) couldn't do the job. 'Missile 351 is bad' (or 'Missile 351 is evil') does not imply that it is a bad *missile*, a bad *weapon* or a bad *Artifact*. 'Peace-keeping device' is hardly comprehended in the nominal essence of 'Missile 351' and even if it were, the missile's deficiencies as a peace-keeping device provide reasons for thinking it bad; they are not all that is

*meant* by its badness. So even if there are such things, nominal essences cannot be relied on to rescue Geach from refutation.

Geach's doctrine of nominal essences is rather suspect anyway. It seems to me that I can christen something with only the haziest ideas as to what it is. Of course, I will only have succeeded in naming *something*, if what I christen is one continuant, conveying within itself a criterion of identity. If I label a supposed man 'Gustav', only to discover there was nothing there but billows in the fog, my naming ceremony will have fallen flat. For a baptism not to misfire, there must be a *substance* there, *one* reasonably determinate something with reasonably determinate identity-conditions. But this substance need not be included in the name. For we can baptise something under the impression that it is one kind of thing, when in fact it is another. To adapt an example from Kripke (1980), pp 115-116, we can name an entity 'Dobbin' in the belief that it is a horse, though it subsequently turns out to be a robot or a unicorn with its horn sawn off.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the baptism was a failure. We do not say that there never was a Dobbin after all, as we should if Geach were right. (Geach makes it a kind of analyticity that Dobbin was a horse. No horse, no Dobbin.) In case this example looks a bit far-fetched, a better one can be drawn from the history of science. In his (1957) pp 69-70, Geach describes a befuddled astronomer who christens a supposed new planet 'Vulcan', whereas all he had in his sights were two distinct fixed stars. (It's an example of a naming ceremony that fails.) Now, both the planets and the fixed stars (the more resplendent ones at any rate) have *names*. These names date back to antiquity, certainly to pre-Copernican times. And the heavenly bodies were baptised under the impression that they were 'stars' or 'planets' (or words which are direct ancestors of these). But in the course of the Copernican revolution our ideas about what stars and planets *are* have changed drastically. So much so, that the words 'stars' and 'planet' connote different *substances* from their ancient equivalents. Whatever pre-Copernicans thought stars were, they did not think they were distant suns (as *we* understand 'suns'), nor that the planets were the same kind of thing as the earth. Yet the Copernican revolution did not entail the discovery that 'Venus' and 'Sirius' were empty, and that, after all, there were no such things. If the names *did* include a sortal component, it was not central to their naming function. It could be ditched without inducing a widespread referential collapse.

Geach could still save his hypothesis by resorting to what Kripke (*loc cit*) calls 'cautious' sortals - Dobbin as a horse-like-thing, Venus as wandering light in the sky or a 'quasi-stellar object' etc. But I doubt such sortals would yield

determinate identity-conditions. Nor would Geach want to capitulate to appearances in this way. It would destroy the point of his theory.

Nominal essences then cannot deliver Geach from the predicative 'good'. The exceptions do not prove his rule.

#### 6. *The Predicative 'Good' - A Philosophical Fad?*

Geach's final objection is that the predicative 'good' is a philosophers' word, and as such senseless or unintelligible. ('How can we be asked to take it for granted that a peculiarly philosophical use of words means anything at all?' *GE*, page 67).

But it is *not* just a philosophers' word, and even if it were, this would be no objection. Consider the idioms to which Geach takes exception: 'Pleasure is good', 'Friendship is a good we tend to neglect', 'Economists tend to speak as if maximizing g.d.p. were the sole good'. 'Surely the destruction of the human race by nuclear weapons would be as bad as anything could be'. Are these only to be heard in philosophy departments? On the contrary, they resound from every pulpit; they crop up in self-development seminars, text-books on social work theory, in social and political debates and wherever moral thinking is going on. Geach could reply that this *is* philosophy, though carried on at an amateur level. Maybe it is. Indeed this is the kind of thing that prompts the common saying (common, that is, among philosophers) that there is no choice whether to philosophize or not, but only between good and bad philosophy. But this would give the game away. For if philosophy is something *everyone* is liable to lapse into in their more reflective moments, we cannot draw a distinction between philosophical and non-philosophical language, and say that the one is peculiarly prone to nonsense, whilst the other is (more or less) in order as it stands. It is worth remarking that Moore was one of the last British philosophers to have a wide following among the lay intelligentsia (Bloomsbury and its influence). Unlike Geach, he broke through to a (rather refined) mass-market. This would not have been possible had he spoken a peculiarly philosophic gibberish. His audience had no problems with the predicative 'good'.

To drive this point home, I shall cite a decidedly vulgar context where the predicative 'good' is used - Sellar's and Yeatman's (1930) *1066 and All That*. There is nothing high-falutin or obviously philosophical about the long-dead history teachers satirized in this book. Yet they certainly use the predicative 'good' alongside of its attributive variant. They distinguish between being a Good King and a Good Man. You can be one without being the other. Indeed Good

Kings are quite often Bad Men and *vice versa*. (The idea of these class-room Machiavellis seems to be that the body politic, at least in the Middle Ages, could not get by without a salutary dose of cruelty and injustice, which an amiable exemplar of the private virtues might not be able to administer. Private vices, Public benefits.) But besides Good Men and Good Kings, there are, in *1066 and All That*, Good Things. Good Things can be anything, from persons to acts of Parliament, though often they tend to be *events*. Clearly 'thing' does not stand in for some substantive. If it did, it would be *event* (a person's life as one big event, the *passing* of an Act of Parliament, etc.). But this is a way out barred to Geach. He thinks events are too vague to be qualified by a self-respecting attributive 'good' "'Event' is too empty a word to convey a criterion of identity or a standard of goodness". (*GE*, pages 71-2.) What sort of a 'good' do we have in these Good Thing contexts? More explicitly, what are the requirements made on Things in order to be Good? Given the nit-witted Whiggery that is being made fun of, the requirement is to contribute towards liberty and democracy, and (rather inconsistently) Britain's being Top Nation (themselves, perhaps Good Things in some other sense). Now the reason that *1066 and All That* is so funny is that it is so *accurate*. This really is the way history teachers and text-book writers used to talk. (And certainly the way their pupils used to reply.) The predicative 'good' had a colloquial home. Nor is this an idiom confined to English. The use of the predicative 'good' in political contexts dates back to Homer. Cooper (1981) quotes the *Iliad* II, line 204: 'The rule of many is not a good thing; let there be one ruler'. I take it that Odysseus is not misled by theory into a 'peculiarly philosophical' use of words.

But suppose all this is wrong. Suppose we *grant* Geach's premise (now amply refuted) that the predicative 'good' (especially in its Moorean variant) is 'a peculiarly philosophical use of words'? In that case there is a certain amount of sense in his argument. Anyone, like me, who wants to criticize the truth-claims inherent in morality on the grounds that they involve empty concepts (like 'good') must ensure that these concepts really are in common currency. So too must anyone who wants to *defend* such claims on the basis of a *consensus gentium*. But a Moorean moral realist might simply insist that it is only moral philosophers who have clearly intuited the property of goodness. The vulgar are but dimly aware of this property and the vulgar tongue does not really include a word for it. This may be élitist and epistemically quaint but it is linguistically in order (a point made by MacIntyre (1981) pp.14-19). Geach's tactic of doubting the intelligibility of 'peculiarly philosophical' ['metaphysical' or 'scholastic'] uses of words and demanding that they be made intelligible (to

him) is a common one in philosophy. It dates back at least to Hobbes. Nevertheless, it seems to me both intellectually and morally objectionable - at least to those with liberal sympathies. In effect, the questioner entrenches himself in a canonical language (often a Newspeak but in this case an Oldspeak) which (naturally) embodies a world-view, and refuses to understand anything which cannot be translated into his preferred idiom - that is with which he (deeply) disagrees. This is *intellectually* objectionable, since no Speak, Old or New, can convincingly pose as the sole repository of meaning. A 'theory of meaning' which insists on translatability into a *restricted* Newspeak as the criterion of meaningfulness, (a constructivist Newspeak, for instance) has obviously failed as a theory of meaning - that is, it has not explained what it is about the utterances generally considered meaningful, that *makes* them meaningful. While to reject 'peculiar' uses of words (whether philosophic or other) on the grounds that they are not common within the Oldspeak is to ignore an obvious fact - that natural languages evolve, and that new concepts, often of a technical nature, are introduced. Since the current language of common sense is itself the product of such evolution, it would be absurd to debar further evolutions as unintelligible because they deviate from it. The *moral* objection to this tactic is that it is shared by the tyrants of 1984. They, too, seek to enforce a language in which heretical thoughts cannot be expressed. Philosophers should be embarrassed to be in such company.<sup>6</sup> Of course, much of this has been said before<sup>7</sup>, but it is worth saying again. Even today it would dispose of some influential arguments.<sup>8</sup>

A critic<sup>9</sup> objects that all this is grossly unfair. Geach has no aspirations to linguistic dictatorship! Like Hume, he simply issues a challenge. An idea must be made reasonably clear before he can discuss it. And nobody has managed to clarify the predicative 'good' to Geach's satisfaction. Now, if Geach is emulating Hume this merely confirms my criticism. For Hume's is a paradigm of Orwellian method. He erects a psycho-semantic theory whereby words are to be defined in terms of ideas (concepts) and ideas are copies of dead sensations (or combinations thereof). He then declares that anything that cannot be expressed in such a language is senseless, and refuses to understand it. But as Price points out, the psychological part of the theory is a dogma 'destitute of all proof' (Price (1758) (1974) p.43), and the theory as a whole a manifest failure since it excludes the concepts needed for Newtonian science. Besides, it should not be forgotten that Hume ends *Enquiries I* with a bonfire of his opponents' books. It does Geach no good at all to tar him with the Humean brush.

### 7. *The Attributive 'Good': Geach's Program*

I have vindicated the honour of the predicative 'good'. Whatever the ontological objections to the Moorean vision, it is linguistically in order. The attributive 'good' remains to be dealt with. Can an ontologically purified ethic be generated out of the attributive 'good', together with a consideration of what it is to be human?

Geach relies on two features of the attributive 'good' to get his program going. a) 'Good' when glued to some common noun yields a standard of excellence for things of the specified sort. From 'good' and some substitute for 'X' taken together, we can determine what a good X is. Geach compares 'good X' to 'x<sup>2</sup>': it is a function whose value is determined by its arguments. b) It is part of the *ratio* of 'good' (and 'want' and 'choose') that anyone choosing an X will (normally) choose an X he thinks a good one. Both these alleged features are left completely unexplained though an explanation is obviously called for. *Why*, if we know what X is, can we tell (more or less) what a good X is like? And *why*, when choosing X-s, do we choose good ones? Geach has nothing to offer. To use his own analogy, it is rather as if a pioneer essay on the x<sup>2</sup> function, merely listed a series of facts about it (as that 2<sup>2</sup> = 4 and 5<sup>2</sup> = 25), added that we can always get a determinate result by applying it to an integer, but omitted to mention that its essence consists in multiplying the argument by itself.<sup>10</sup>

This glaring defect leaves Geach wide open to Hare's counterattacks. Hare (1957) notes with glee that when choosing between X-s we normally choose good ones. 'Good' is therefore action-guiding. And (he triumphantly concludes) a word can only be action-guiding if it is in some degree prescriptive. A fair retort, since Geach gives no indication of how descriptive words, and 'good' in particular, can reliably direct actions.

The analysis of the attributive 'good' developed above enables us to repair this defect. We can see how good-judgements guide choices even though 'good' is entirely descriptive. *m* is a good X, means, more or less, that *m* is, or does, what X-s are required to be or do. When 'X' is a *functional* word (a word for a tool or something like one)<sup>11</sup> it delivers a partial specification of what those requirements are. Functional words connote some purpose or range of purposes. (Thus a fly-spray must kill flies efficiently without hurting humans.) Functional objects are *good* if they have got what it takes to fulfill the purpose. (Thus a good fly-spray must be harmless for humans but curtains for bugs.) Similarly to know what a farmer is, is to know what farmers are supposed to

do. 'Farmer' carries with it a range of conventional requirements. A good farmer then, is one who meets those requirements.<sup>12</sup> As for bodily organs their role or purpose is a matter of biological discovery (though the 'discoveries' may be too ancient or obvious - as with eyes and ears - to merit the name). Once we know what an organ is supposed to do, what purpose it serves in terms of the total system, we can determine what being a good one consists in. The requirements, however, are not usually wrapped up in the meaning of the corresponding noun. Nevertheless, given the background of biological knowledge we can determine what a good pancreas (say) must be like.

When the relevant requirements on an X are clear (either from the context, from an understanding of 'X', or from a background of knowledge or belief about X-s) and *uncontroversial* we can tell what it is to satisfy these requirements.

But this will not be the case when the relevant requirements are unclear, when different kinds of requirements clash or when competing requirements cannot be given a proper ordering. Most importantly, it will not be the case if the requirements in question are, or are thought to be, *invalid*. The most obvious case is where the requirements are *moral*, in fact a collection of Oughts. Cecil Rhodes thinks Captain Jamieson a good man because of his ruthless zeal for the British Empire. Imperialistic fervour (at least where the Empire is worthy of such devotion) is one of the requirements inherent in Rhodes' conception of human goodness. But if I *disagree* with this requirement (because I don't think it right that the dominion of Europe, and Britain in particular, be extended over the entire earth) then I will not agree Jamieson is good. (Unless he has *other* virtues corresponding to *my* conception of human excellence.) And if I am right about this and it is *not* a Good Thing that the British Empire be extended by fair means or foul, then it will not be *true* that Jamieson is a good man. Of course, we can talk of goodness-according to Rhodes and say that Jamieson was a Rhodes-good man. But such hyphenated or subjective brands of goodness ('inverted commas' goodness) are not what we are after in ethics.

Turning to b) we can see why on my definition, when after an X, we usually choose one we believe to be good. Taking Artifacts first, we usually choose them to fulfill their standard purposes (because they are ill-fitted to any others) that is, we require a thing to do what X-s are conventionally required to do. Since our requirements coincide with the conventional ones, we usually have good reason to choose an X which satisfies those requirements. (Not always however. We may require something which does what X-s are supposed to do, but at minimal cost. A bad but cheap X might meet this

expanded set of requirements better than a good but costly one. Again we need not choose a good X when we have a non-standard purpose in mind - a bad breadknife might make a better murder-weapon, a bad teacher might be of use in corrupting the intellect of my ward. (See Foot (1961) p. 145 on wicked uncles.) Artifacts are (usually) built to do a job, to meet certain requirements. They would not exist unless there were enough people *with* the relevant requirements to command a market. Thus, their very existence presupposes a standard of goodness and a population disposed to choose good ones. It is, as Marxists used to say 'no accident', or in Geach's phrase 'not a mere rough empirical generalization' but 'part of the *ratio*' of the relevant concepts, that in the main we go for the good.

As to organs, the option of *choice* is not usually open to us. Rather, we may *prefer* the organs we have to be good rather than bad, and act on that preference by diet, exercise, and the occasional resort to medicine. *Must* we prefer good organs to bad? Here I think the connection is less close. Obviously a healthy, properly functioning, human body is a precondition for a wide range of human purposes. There is also the consideration that an imperfect organ often leads to pain, which is something we tend to avoid. Often then, we will prefer good organs to bad, and will act on that preference. But not always. We may allow our organs to be damaged in the pursuit of pleasure, especially if the damage is minimal. With every drink I take another brain-cell bites the dust. I do not abandon alcohol on that account. Still, we can see why we have a general, if overridable, preference for good organs. The requirements in terms of which an organ must excel are hypothetical - what it must do to contribute to the smooth functioning of the total system. Since we are both the proprietors of, and dependent on these systems, we have reason to prefer that our organs are in good order. Again, this is 'no accident'. No creature without a strong sentiment of self-regard would be likely to survive. And in a *rational* animal, this will be partly conceptualized as a concern for the goodness of its organs.

Finally *roles*. Generally when choosing among potential role or job-fillers, society or its deputies will go for a good one. As with (other) Artifacts, the reason these roles exist is that society, or some section of it, has certain requirements. The choice of a good X is again basic rationality, ensuring that these requirements are met. Why the role-players themselves (often) strive for professional goodness is a more complex matter. But material incentives play a major part. Bad X-s tend not to be employed as X-s for very long. Again, no accident.

We can now see why a) it is that for many substitutions of 'X' we can determine in a general way what a good X is like. And despite their essentially descriptive (and often purely naturalistic) content, we can see why b) judgements of attributive goodness guide choice. But this can only be relied upon when the chooser *shares (or subscribes to)* the relevant requirements. Only then will an appeal to the goodness of X-s 'touch the agent's desires'. This is not always the case. And it need not be the case with *human* goodness.<sup>13</sup>

#### 8. *Aristotles Redux?*

Geach's project is Aristotelian. From a consideration of what it is to be a man, he wants to derive a notion of a *good* man. And this must be something that rational men will want to be. Given our analysis of 'good' then, Geach must extract some set of natural requirements either from the concept 'man' or from human nature itself. It wouldn't do if the requirements defining human goodness were *non-natural*, a collection of ontologically autonomous Oughts. The very possibility of human goodness would be mortgaged to a dodgy metaphysics! Indeed, it wouldn't do if the requirements were simply *moral*. That way, a naturalistic analysis of 'ought' would be needed to vindicate the naturalistic 'good'. But Geach's original resort to 'good' looked like an attempt to side-step this problem. Further the requirements must be binding on rational men; requirements they can be expected to *share*. (Otherwise the argument that something would be a 'good human act' won't 'touch the agents desires'.) What are the prospects for this program? In my opinion they are dim. But before going on to argue the point, I want to get clear about what I am doing. I am *not* attempting a critique of Aristotle. That would be beside the point and beyond the scope of this essay. Recent Aristotle scholarship indicates that his thought is mired in a complex of assumptions - psychological, metaphysical, biological and social - that to us are simply incredible. (See Clark (1975) and Rorty (1980).) The real question is not 'Was Aristotle right?' but 'Can Aristotle's ideas be revived in the context of modern assumptions?' Of course, in arguing that they cannot, I must contradict some of Aristotle's *dicta*. But these are theses that contemporary Aristotelians will wish to make use of. My focus is on the latter-day disciples rather than the antique master.

If we *are* to extract a set of requirements from the *concept* 'man', the word 'man' must be like 'cobbler' - it must carry with it a corona of (conventional?) requirements. To understand 'cobbler' you must know what cobblers are supposed to do (i.e. mend shoes etc.) So too, to understand 'man' you would have to know what *men* are supposed to do. Now it seems to me that 'man' is

just not that kind of a concept. You can understand what 'men' are without understanding that they are *supposed to do* anything. In this sense (*pace* Aristotle)<sup>14</sup> carpenters shoemakers and pruning-hooks *do* have a function, but men do not. 'Man' is the name of a natural not an artifactual or socio-legal kind. (See Devitt and Sterelny (1987).) Even if 'man' did convey a range of conventional requirements they might fail to move us. A rational but unconventional agent could reject society's demands.

Perhaps this needs a little elaboration. Foot (1961) 'Goodness and Choice' argues that 'father' does not simply mean 'male parent' but 'determines criteria of goodness' - in effect a set of requirements. (She seems to be softening us up for the further claim that a set of requirements can be extracted from 'man', 'woman' etc.) Her argument is that if a language contained a word ('rehtaf' say) which referred to male parents but did *not* determine that a good rehtaf cares for his children as best he can, it could not be translated as 'father'. If someone is celebrated as a good rehtaf for his alacrity in sacrificing his offspring to Moloch, she claims, 'rehtaf' could not mean 'father' but 'provider for the state' or something of the sort. Now as a matter of conceptual fact this seems to be false. We translate the Latin 'pater' as 'father', though a people who allowed fathers to execute their children, or sell them into slavery, must have had a very different idea of paternal duties from us. (See Gibbon, **Decline and Fall** ch. XLIV.) Moreover dogs (and other animals) can be fathers though it would be absurd to call them *bad* fathers because of their neglect of their puppies. Actually 'father' names both a biological relation *and* a social role. (Hence: 'My father was no father to me.') However, the social role is determined by what we think a *biological* (human) father *ought to do*. Thus it is not the word or the concept that generates a set of requirements and hence criteria for goodness - rather it is a well-understood set of requirements that generates the (moral or social) *concept*. Still, we can concede that *in some people's mouths* 'father' conveys roughly 'male parent who is required to look after his offspring', though this will fall short of a full analyticity. Now an obvious question arises as to the nature of these requirements - are they conventional, social or other? If they were social this would convert such remarks as 'He is a good father' (in the right contexts) into statements of sociological fact: 'He is a male parent who fulfills the requirements made on male parents by society eg....' And this seems to be Foot's view. 'Of course, it will depend on the structure of a particular society .... as to just what is expected of daughters, and to this extent at least what counts as being a good daughter can vary from place to place.' (p. 137.) However, Foot combines relativism and ethnocentricity in an ingenious

manner. 'Father' means to her something like 'male parent who is required by *his* society to look after his children as best he can'. Thus, on the one hand, the requirements are relativised to the society he inhabits. On the other, by specifying (implicitly) the general nature of the requirements inherent in 'father', Foot ensures that these requirements do not diverge *too* far from those current in her own (rather restricted) *milieu*. Societies which make other demands on male parents are strangely lacking in fathers.

Subtleties aside, if the requirements (and hence the 'good') inherent in 'father' are understood in a sociologicistic sense, the truth of good-father-judgements can be guaranteed. But only at the cost of their motivating power. A good father meets society's requirements to care for his children. Fine. But suppose I don't care for society and its requirements? Being a male parent and even a father (if my society does indeed make such demands) why should I bother to be a good one? Obviously if I am spectacularly neglectful or malevolent I will be subject to sanctions. (It would be unwise for *me* to sacrifice my children to Molloch!) But I can be a pretty bad father without running into serious trouble.

Besides this sociologicistic reading of the requirements is clearly wrong. For we can without contradiction, deny that fathers, considered good by society, really are good. Indeed the requirements which generate the moral or social concept of fatherhood look embarrassingly like *moral* requirements; the unreduced and apparently irreducible moral duties that Geach has been trying to avoid. Of course we can *convert* these into sociologicistic requirements by adding such prefixes as 'according to the Aussies' or 'according to the Azande'. Thus I do not deny that there are sociologicistic brands of goodness or good fatherhood. We can say that Samuel is a good *Azande* father in that he meets the paternal requirements of the Azande. But both *our* requirements and those (I suspect) of the Azande are not arbitrary (what we happen to prefer) but are grounded in beliefs about *what fathers ought to do*.

Turning to the words 'man' 'woman' 'human' etc., it is clear that a biological reading of these is available which involves no requirements of any kind. Indeed it may be that these words express no concepts at all but are rigid designators senselessly referring to natural kinds, or doing so only with the aid of causal groundings. (See Devitt and Sterelny (1987) pp 67-86.) It might be objected that you do not understand 'human' until you know that humans are social animals. But apart from the fact that this looks like knowledge of humans rather than knowledge of 'human', this tells you what humans *do* do,

not what they *should* do. They are likewise prone to aggressive wars and oppressive class-structures.

Again I concede that 'man' *can* be used to convey a range of requirements. (Sometimes these are clownishly macho such as a capacity to withstand strong drink: 'Be a man! Have another whiskey.' This indicates that the use of 'man' to refer to both men and women, which out of laziness I have gone along with, is not as innocent of sexism as some suppose.) However, the requirements conveyed will vary from person to person and from group to group. And this is because people have different ideas about what *biological* men ought to do. Of course we can sociologize these requirements too, together with their associated conceptions of human goodness by adding in the appropriate suffixes and prefixes. Thus Vyascheslav is a good man (according to Stalinists) because he is or does what (according to Stalinists) men ought to do or be. But this gives us no conception of human goodness *period*. I am not arguing (now) that there can be no such thing as un-suffixed human goodness. What I *am* arguing is that someone who aspires to provide such a conception has to do so on the basis of some rationally grounded requirements which transcend (though they may have the same content as) the dictates of tribal law. Such requirements are not to be gathered by interrogating the concepts of the tribe (however civilized and sophisticated the tribe may be). Thus anyone who asks us to consult 'the' concept 'man' for 'criteria of human goodness', is just smuggling in their own requirements - indeed their own moral intuitions - under the cloak of conceptual analysis.

Could a set of requirements be extracted from human *nature*? Perhaps - if men were analagous to organs, *essentially* parts of a larger structure. A spleen has a clearly defined role in terms of the total system, and if it were conscious it would continue to fulfill that function (i.e.: be a good spleen) since its own survival would be dependent on that of the larger body. Maybe (*maybe*) this is the idea behind Aristotle's metaphysical biology (not to mention his political collectivism).<sup>15</sup> But Aristotle's biology is false. Men (unlike spleens) are not components of organic wholes. So again *pace* Aristotle, we should *not* assume that because the eye and hand have a function, man must have a function too.

If men were in fact manufactured or purpose-built articles then we could resort to the purposes of The Manufacturer. This was the opinion of Maimonides and Aquinas<sup>16</sup> and, in our own day, of Geach and Anscombe though it is not one they push in all their writings.<sup>17</sup> Man has both a function and a last end to which he is directed (like a guided missile, in Anscombe's gruesome simile). The requirements are those necessary to achieve this end.

Moreover, they are requirements a rational man can be expected to share given the nature of the pay-off. But in the absence of a Creator designing man to his own specifications, it is difficult to see how this conception of human goodness can be got going. And (if I may stick my atheistical neck out) I do not think there is one.

Can natural selection fill in for the vanished God? Can we resort to the 'designs' of the Blind Watchmaker? In nature, most mutants, indeed, most creatures that deviate too far from the modal phenotype, are monsters, creatures which do not fit the ecological niche which their species inhabits. Accordingly they perish. A monstrous X is perhaps a bad X (bad for itself too). Maybe some forms of human behaviour are similarly monstrous, dooming their practitioners to an unpleasant life or an early death? Obviously a man who *bit* everyone he met would be unlikely to do well. There are ways of carrying on which are suicidal or suicidally anti-social. But avoiding behaviour which is monstrous in *this* sense (mad dog behaviour, as it were) is a rather weak requirement on action. If this is the *only* kind of direction to be had from human nature (or the human condition) it is not enough for ethics, and certainly not enough to deliver a clear and determinate picture of the good man. Even Stalin complied with this.

Midgley (1978) *Beast and Man*, has a rather vaguer notion of a natural pattern of human behaviour. There is a way of life (or range of ways of life) for which mankind is emotionally and intellectually fitted, and which people find fulfilling. The requirements out of which a determinate conception of human goodness can be constructed are hypothetical; what is needed to lead that kind of life. The touchstone of naturalness would be fulfillment, the satisfaction inherent in a Truly Human existence.

The problem here is that any plausible attempt to depict a natural life either lets in things many of us would like to exclude, or excludes things we would like to put in. Is the life of a tyrant, or a conqueror unnatural? Not if we adopt the touchstone of fulfillment. Such people often enjoy life, as Plato's Polus very properly points out. (*Gorgias* 471.) Suppose we somehow tighten up the bounds of naturalness to exclude this sort of thing? Then we are liable to lapse into a rather silly conservatism, or more properly *primitivism*, typified by Midgley, who at the end of her chapter on facts and values bursts out into a tirade against space travel. 'We do not live in the sky ... it would kill us!' she declares inaccurately (page 199). If this is what respecting my inborn telos amounts to, then I for one am not interested.

Thus the project of spinning a set of plausible moral requirements out of human nature seems to be unviable. And this is unsurprising in a creature which can redefine its ecological niche (there is hope for monsters yet!) and whose most remarkable characteristic is adaptability. Besides, as Midgley herself makes plain, violence and aggression come as easily to human beings as love, justice and cooperation (pp 51-85). None of these is more natural than the others. We cannot extract human goodness from an investigation into what we are.

An Aristotelian friend criticized these closing paragraphs on human nature as 'too swift'. And this I do not deny. The problem is that it is hard for criticisms of an almost non-existent position to be anything *but* swift. For the neo-Aristotelian program since its inception thirty-odd years ago has conspicuously failed to deliver. Its adherents have either lapsed into theology (Geach), provided nothing concrete (Midgley) or left us with promissory notes (Anscombe and Foot). S.R.L. Clark after a bold effort to integrate Aristotle's ethics and politics with his metaphysics and biology (1975) went on to contend that the best *modern* ethology might do is rule out some ways of life as doing violence to our mammalian natures whilst ruling in others as collectively congenial. (Clark (1980) and (1984) ch. 10-11.) And even this burkes the question of whether I, as an individual, might flourish better in a social set-up that is suboptimal for other people, or whether some groups flourish best at the expense of others. Moreover there might be reason to rebel against a (corrupt?) nature especially as, to a Darwinian, human nature is something that can eventually be remodeled. I think Clark is right about this, and hence that the neo-Aristotelian project is a non-starter. But anybody who is *serious* about proving me wrong, and building an Aristotelian ethic on the basis of modern biology, must first determine the relation between Aristotle's ethics and his biological beliefs, and then find out whether the necessary bits of biology can be reinstated within a Darwinian framework (no easy task if Sober (1985) pp 154-68, is to be believed). Alternatively they could use *current* biological theory to do what Aristotle's biology did for him. Either way the project remains the same - to generate a set of biologically based requirements out of human nature. These must be a) reasonably specific; b) rationally binding or at least highly persuasive; and c) morally credible. When this has been *done* - when the promissory notes have been cashed in - *then* Aristotelianism will deserve a slow and careful refutation. Until that time, this will have to do.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

1. This seems to rest on a misunderstanding however. Geach argues against 'good event' on the grounds that a) 'good' is attributive, and b) the words it qualifies must not be 'too empty'. But Foot herself endorses such phrases as 'good outcome' where the 'good' is either predicative or qualifies a substantive at least as 'empty' as 'event'.

2. The idea that moral properties might be secondary properties is very much a going concern. See Wiggins (1987) Essay V and Wright (1988) for recent sympathetic discussions. But I don't think Moore's Platonism should be too rapidly dismissed either - not until Mathematical Platonism has been decisively refuted or mathematical entities have been shown to be relevantly unlike moral properties.

3. Neil Cooper, private communication.

4. Sidgwick (1981) (1907) p.382.

5. Kripke wouldn't care for this adaptation given his views on unicorns.

6. For further intemperate ranting on this theme see my (1987). Speculation: Orwell was acquainted with Ayer at about the time he was working out the ideas for 1984. See Ayer (1977) pp 286-7. Couldn't the linguistic policies of The Party be based on what Ayer told him of Wittgenstein and the logical positivists?

7. See, for instance Popper (1972), ch. 11, where Carnap's successive attempts to reduce his metaphysical foes to spouters of gibberish are criticized.

8. See, for instance, Foot (1985) 'Utilitarianism and the Virtues'. Foot argues that the idea of a state-of affairs or an outcome being 'good' ('better' or 'best') makes no sense outside the context of a virtue-based morality. She has little to back this up with besides her refusal to understand moral concepts other than her own. She cannot deny, given the prevalence of utilitarianism, that the words have an established *use*. In fact it is virtue-based morality that is no longer rooted in common speech, and which a partisan of Nowspeak might plausibly affect not to understand. ('Justice is rendering to each one what he owes? But you don't just mean financial debts or even legal obligations do you? Then what do you mean?...etc., etc.') This is the reason for the relative neglect of the virtues so often lamented by virtue buffs.

9. An anonymous referee.

10. A similar criticism can be levelled against Foot (1961) 'Goodness and Choice'. She argues convincingly that a disposition to choose an X is neither necessary nor sufficient for sensibly calling it good, although she would agree with most of the socio-linguistic facts about goodness and choice cited below. However, since she lacks an *analysis* of 'good' these facts are left unexplained.

11. Functional words are the names of 'artifactual kinds' (pencil) and socio-legal kinds (pediatrician), ranges of objects (or persons) selected in terms of same set of (human?) purposes. Ardent fans of the pure or causal theory of reference may object to my endowing such words with sense (See Putnam (1975) pp 242-5 on both pediatricians and pencils). However, Devitt and Sterelny (1987) two stout

champions of the causal theory, argue convincingly that to extend it to functional words would be pushing intellectual imperialism too far. They also establish that something need not be manufactured (an artifact) to be a member of an artefactual kind. The same goes for members of socio-legal kinds. Pediatricians are not purpose-built.

12. Actually things aren't quite this simple since farming is an activity in which controversial moral choices must be made. The requirements of conservationists, commercial farmers and neighboring rustics are likely to diverge. Moreover, the account sketched here would have to be elaborated to deal with anti-social roles (hit-man, embezzler). (Sectional interests will usually determine the relevant requirements.) Endeavor-words ('pot-holer') are also a problem, but none of these difficulties are insoluble.

13. Here I think my analysis of 'good' scores over Hare's. Prescriptivism has trouble explaining how I can sincerely (and without 'inverted commas') believe something to be a good X but not be disposed to choose it.

14. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b. See the epigraph to this paper.

15. Clark (1975) *Aristotle's Man*, sometimes seems to suggest this.

16. See Maimonides (1956) chs. 26-49 and Aquinas *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, Chs. 25-37 and III-130.

17. See Geach (1969) and (1977a) and (1977b) and Anscombe (1981) - the overtly Catholic essays. However in some of their writings (*GE*, Anscombe (1958a) and (1958b)), Geach and Anscombe, along with the younger Foot, develop a *secular* Aristotelian ethic. This is presumably designed as a fall-back position for those who reject their theistic assumptions. It is offered in a spirit of charity. (If you don't believe in God, Aristotle will at least preserve you from the grosser sins.) For criticisms of this project, particularly their arguments that we *need* the virtues see my (1988).

18. I would like to thank Grant Gillett, Paul Griffiths, Neil Cooper, and an anonymous referee for useful comments.

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