IDENTIFYING GOODNESS

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Abstract

The paper reconstructs Moore's Open Question Argument and discusses its rise and fall. There are three basic objections to the OQA: Geach's point, that Moore presupposes that 'good' is a predicative adjective (whereas it is in fact attributive); Lewy's point, that it leads straight to the Paradox of Analysis; and Durrant's point that even if 'good ' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate, goodness might be synthetically identical with a naturalistic property. As against Geach, I argue that 'good' has both predicative and attributive uses and that in moral contexts it is difficult to give a naturalistic account of the attributive 'good'. To deal with Lewy, I reformulate the OQA. But the bulk of the paper is devoted to Durrant's objection. I argue that the post-Moorean program of looking for synthetic identities between moral and naturalistic properties is either redundant or impossible. For it can only be carried through if 'good' expresses an empirical concept, in which case it is redundant since naturalism is true. But 'good' does not express an empirical concept (a point proved by the reformulated OQA). Hence synthetic naturalism is impossible. I discuss direct reference as a possible way out for the synthetic naturalist and conclude that it will not work. The OQA may be a bit battered but it works after a fashion.

Key Words: Open Question Argument, Moore, naturalism, direct reference, Kripke, Putnam. synthetic naturalism, Foot, Geach

l. The Rise and Rise the OQA

Once upon a time (or, to be more precise, in 1903) G.E Moore invented an argument, the Open Question Argument, or the OQA, which was designed to prove that 'good' stands for a simple non-natural property, not identical with any other, and certainly not identical with any natural property such as the property of *being more evolved* or of *being what we desire to desire*. Indeed, he claimed it was a fallacy, the 'naturalistic fallacy' to think otherwise. The argument was a spectacular success. For about fifty years it carried all before it. Even those who rejected the conclusion - such as error theorists and emotivists - accepted a large part of the argument, merely modifying one of the premises to escape

what they saw as a metaphysically unacceptable consequence. For a long time non-naturalism - the view that the truthmakers for moral claims are facts involving non-natural properties and relations - was the reigning orthodoxy amongst English-speaking philosophers. Even the dissenters, the emotivists and the error theorists, agreed with the thesis in a conditional form - *if* the basic claims of morality had truthmakers *then* they would be facts about non-natural properties and relations. It is just that they did not think that they *had* any truthmakers, either because they weren't in the true/false game or because they *were* in the true/false game but were unfortunately false, there being no such things as the non-natural properties and relations that Moore had in mind.

The argument can be formulated thus:

The OQA

1) 'Are X things good?' is a significant or open question for any naturalistic predicate 'X' (whether simple or complex).

(A question is 'open' or 'significant' in this sense if an understanding of the words involved does not suffice for an answer. Thus 'Are all bachelors under forty?' *is* an open question whereas 'Are all bachelors unmarried?' is *not*. If you don't know the answer to a non-open question this indicates that you don't have a common-sense understanding of the words involved, and hence, that you are not a competent speaker.)

2) If two expressions (whether simple or complex) are synonymous this is evident on reflection to every competent speaker.

3) The meaning of a predicate or property word is the property for which it stands. Thus if two predicates or property words have distinct meanings they denote distinct properties.

From 1) and 2) it follows that

4) 'Good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or 'goodness' with any corresponding noun or noun-phrase 'X-ness').

(If 'good' were synonymous with some naturalistic predicate 'X', then by 2) this would be obvious on reflection to every competent speaker, and the question 'Are X things 'good' would not be genuinely open.)

From 3) and 4) it follows that

5) Goodness is not identical with any naturalistic property of X-ness.

(See Pigden [2007a] and Pigden [2007b] for an elaboration of this argument.) Subconclusion 4) suggests the *semantic* autonomy of ethics, at least as regards 'good'. It indicates (if correct) that the moral cannot be *defined* in terms of the non-moral. Conclusion 5) suggests something stronger. It implies that there *is* a property, goodness, which is not identical with any natural property of X-ness. Thus it has much more metaphysical bite than subconclusion 4). It suggests the *ontological* autonomy of ethics - or at least, the ontological autonomy of *part* of ethics - the thesis that *some* moral truths are true in virtue of non-natural properties and relations. (We would need parallel arguments for rightness, wrongness and moral obligation to show that moral truths in general have non-naturalistic truthmakers. But Moore's allies and disciples such as Ross and the younger Ewing were happy to supply such proofs.) The argument appears to be valid. If the premises are true, the conclusion seems to follow. Which is why philosophers who resisted Moore's conclusion felt the need to modify his premises. In effect, the emotivists and the error theorists accepted premises 1) and 2), and the inference to subconclusion 4), but modified premise 3) to avoid conclusion 5):

3') The meaning of a predicate is the property for which it stands, so long as that predicate is a) factually meaningful, and b) a referrring predicate. Thus if

two factually meaningful and genuinely referential predicates have distinct meanings, they denote distinct properties.

The emotivists denied that 'good' is factually meaningful and the error theorists denied that it genuinely refers, thus blocking the inference to a non-natural property of goodness [Russell 1935, Ayer 1952, Russell 1922, and Mackie 1946]. Nonetheless, until the day of his death in 1958, Moore could reasonably have regarded himself as on the winning side. For moral realists (as they subsequently came to be known), non-naturalism still looked like the only game in town. If moral judgments were to state facts at all, they would have to state non-natural facts. Hence if you did not like non-natural facts (and their constituent non-natural properties) you either had to be a non-cognitivist, denying that moral judgments were fact-stating (at least as regards their distinctively moral contents) or else you had to be an error-theorist, denying that there were any distinctively moral facts to state.

2. The Wheels Fall Off

But about the time that Moore himself died, the wheels began to fall off the non-naturalist bandwagon. The OQA has been subjected to three successive critiques and is now widely regarded as refuted. There are still non-naturalists lurking in the bushes (Huemer [2005], Schafer-Landau [2003] and Stratton-Lake [2002]) but they lack the intellectual confidence of yesteryear. Non-naturalism may still be an option for moral realists but the days of its intellectual dominance are dead.

A) In his 1956, P T. Geach argued, with all the bitterness of a disillusioned disciple, that the OQA is radically misconceived [Geach 1956]. For some years, following his father, the teenage Geach was under Moore's spell. 'I was a convinced Moorean in ethics; while still at school I tried to rewrite parts of [*Principia Ethica*] as a deductive system'. But Moore's spell was broken when Geach had to read Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* for the Litt.Hum at Oxford, and once broken it was 'broken completely and for ever' [Geach 1991: 5]. Why so? Because Moore's argument presupposes that 'good' is a predicative rather

than an attributive adjective (or, as subsequent philosophers have put it, a predicate rather than a predicate modifier) and Aristotle convinced Geach that this was a mistake. Thus the whole project of looking for the property (whether natural or non-natural) that the predicate 'good' stands for is based on a grammatical confusion. 'Good' by itself does not determine a property at all (indeed it does not really make sense when not leaning on a substantive or not modifying a predicate). 'Good' only determines a range of properties in conjunction with some substantive as in 'good bank-clerk' or 'good knife'. Thus the OQA fails at the first fence. Premise 1) is false. The question 'Are X things good?' is *not* a significant or open question for any naturalistic predicate 'X' since it is not a significant question at all - it is not a question that genuinely makes sense.

B) In 1964, Casimir Lewy suggested a criticism which did not become widely accepted until the eighties and the nineties - premise 2) is false since it leads straight to the Paradox of Analysis [Lewy 1964]. The Paradox of Analysis (due to C.H. Langford) is this. The project of philosophical analysis - a project to which Moore devoted a large part of his life - is either uninformative or productive of falsehoods. For suppose that the analysis is correct and the *analysans* (or analyzing phrase) means the same as the *analysandum* (the thing to be analyzed). Then by 2) this will be obvious to every competent speaker and the analysis will tell us nothing new. Suppose, on the other hand that the analysis *does* tell us something new and interesting. Then, again by 2), the analysis will not be correct. For if two words or phrases mean the same thing, this is obvious on reflection to every competent speaker, which means that if it is *not* obvious to every competent speaker, then the words or phrases in question have distinct meanings. The only way to avoid this unwelcome and apparently absurd conclusion is to allow for the possibility of *un*obvious synonymies, words or phrases which mean the same even though this *not* obvious to every competent speaker. But that means abandoning premise 2) of the OQA. Thus if philosophical analysis is to be a viable intellectual project, premise 2) had better be false.

C) In 1970, in a brief article in the AJP, Bob Durrant argued that premise 3) is false, a point made subsequently by several other philosophers, most notably Hilary Putnam [Putnam 1981: 205-211]. 'Of the expressions "the evening star" and "the morning star", we can say [that] they denote the same object, the planet Venus [even though] they differ in

meaning (sense) … We can say of the expressions "yellow" and "of the colour of daffodils in the springtime" [that] they designate one and the same property [even though] they differ in meaning'. Hence from the thesis 'that '"good" is indefinable', [subconclusion 4) in my exposition] it does not follow that 'it denotes a unique property not denoted by any other expression' [Durrant 1970]. Putnam made essentially the same point using 'water' and 'H$_2$O', and 'temperature' and 'mean molecular kinetic energy', his favourite examples of non-synonymous terms with the same referent. So even if we concede premises 1) and 2) and hence the *semantic* autonomy of ethics (at least as regards 'good'), it does not follow that 'good' is *ontologically* autonomous. We don't have to conclude that there is a non-natural property of goodness simply because, 'good' is not susceptible to a naturalistic definition. Naturalism in ethics reappears as a viable option. If temperature really *is* mean molecular kinetic energy, even though 'temperature' and 'mean molecular kinetic energy' are obviously not synonymous, perhaps goodness really *is* identical with some naturalistic property of X-ness even though 'good' is not synonymous with 'X'. Which means that facts involving natural properties could make moral truths true. Good news, if you like the idea of moral truths but dislike the idea of non-natural facts.

3. The Post-Moorean Program: Its Attractions

Of the three criticisms C) is, at first sight, the least damaging since it leaves the OQA intact down to subconclusion 4). It proved to be the most popular, since it suggests a program to scientifically-minded philosophers with a yen for moral truth. The idea is to establish a *synthetic* identity between goodness and some natural property (or combination of properties) X by means of empirical enquiry. That way we get moral truths without metaphysical spooks. Not only that: we discover these non-spooky truths in a non-spooky way - by the same kind of empirical methods (wahever they turn out to be) that we used to discover the now somewhat shop-worn identities between water and H$_2$O or temperature and mean molecular kinetic energy. The moral philosopher ceases to be a dealer in suspect intuitions and is transformed into a respectable moral scientist. I call the search for synthetic identities between moral and natural properties the *Post-Moorean Program*, while *synthetic naturalism* is the belief that such identities are to be had. Given its

moral and metaphysical attractions, it is not surprising that synthetic naturalism has proved to be so popular. It constitutes the core of the meta-ethical research program known as Cornell Realism (as represented by Boyd [1988] and Brink [1989]), which has been big philosophical business for over twenty years.

4. The Post-Moorean Program: Unworkable or Redundant

I shall be arguing in this paper that the Post-Moorean Program is either unworkable or redundant. It is unworkable given *semantic* autonomy, the thesis that 'good', like the other moral words, is not susceptible to a naturalistic analysis. For if *'good'* is not synonymous with a naturalistic *predicate* (a predicate expressing an empirical concept) then it will be difficult, if not impossible, to establish by empirical enquiry that *goodness* is identical with natural *property*. When I say 'difficult, if not impossible' I mean 'impossible so far as I can see', though I can't exclude the possibility that some clever philosopher may find a way around my arguments. And when I say that *establishing* such an identity would be 'difficult if not impossible' I am not making the *metaphysical* claim that, given semantic autonomy, goodness could not *be* identical with some natural property, but the *epistemic* claim that, given semantic autonomy, goodness could not be *shown* to be identical with some naturalistic property by means of a quasi-scientific proof. We won't have the same kind of empirical demonstration that goodness is identical with a natural property X as we do that water is identical with H_2O in its liquid form. In other words, I shall be arguing that it is possible to derive something like conclusion 5) from something like subconclusion 4). The conclusion in question is this:

> 5*) It is difficult, if not impossible, to *show* by empirical enquiry that
> goodness is synthetically identical with some natural property of X-ness.

And the conditional thesis that takes us from 4) to 5*) is this:

> 3*) If 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or
> 'goodness' with any corresponding noun or noun-phrase 'X-ness'), then

it is difficult, if not impossible, to *show* by empirical enquiry that

goodness is synthetically identical with some natural property of X-ness.

Even if subconclusion 4) is hopelessly false - not only false in itself but not even the *neighbor* to some plausible claim such as thesis 4*) below – thesis 3*) is still of some philosophical interest. For it shows, if correct, that the Post-Moorean Program is meta-ethically redundant. Synthetic identities were supposed to be useful because they provide all the benefits of an objective basis for ethics without the ontological costs of non-natural facts. Thus they convert moral philosophy into a metaphysically respectable business. But if my argument is correct, synthetic identities cannot fulfill this role. For if it is epistemically *possible* to establish a synthetic identity between the moral and the natural, it is not meta-ethically *necessary*, since we must already have a naturalistic analysis of the key moral concepts. Conversely if it *is* philosophically *necessary* to establish such an identity - because we *don't* have a naturalistic analysis of the key moral concepts - then it is not epistemically *possible.*

Thus 3*) is of interest even if semantic autonomy is false. For it puts the kibosh on the Post-Moorean Program. But it is obviously a lot *more* interesting if semantic autonomy is *true.* For in that case, we can prove the revised conclusion 5*). We can prove, not that synthetic naturalism is false, but that it cannot be established by empirical research. If there is a true synthetic identity between goodness and some natural property X it must remain a permanent mystery. This is not quite the conclusion that Moore was hoping for, but it is enough to dish synthetic naturalism as anything but an empty speculation. For even if goodness *is* synthetically identical with some naturalistic property X, this is something that we can never know since it is forever beyond the reach of empirical investigation.

But to reach thesis 5*) I need to do two things: I must argue for thesis 3*) and I must vindicate semantic autonomy either by arguing for subconclusion 4) or by arguing for a similar thesis 4*). And that looks like a tall order. For the only argument we have seen for subconclusion 4) relied on premises 1) and 2) both of which have been refuted. Is there any way to reformulate the OQA so as to resist the criticisms of Lewy and Geach?

5. Meaning, Use and Goodness

In the case of Geach reformulation is unnecessary. For as I have argued in a previous paper [Pigden 1990] Geach's central contention is simply false. Sometimes 'good' functions as an attributive adjective and sometimes it functions as a predicative adjective; sometimes it functions as a predicate modifier and sometimes it functions as a predicate. This is obvious from a famous paper by Geach's philosophical admirer, Philippa Foot. In 'Utilitarianism and the Virtues' [1985] she argues, in effect, as follows:

a) 'Consequentialism' is the name of an enormously influential family of moral theories which use 'good' and 'bad' *as if* they were predicative adjectives, applying, in the first instance, to states of affairs.

b) But these theories are defective because 'good' and 'bad' are attributive adjectives and the predicative 'good' is not genuinely meaningful.

There is a tension between between these two claims, a tension that escalates to an outright contradiction if we add in the Wittgensteinian thesis (which I suspect that Foot believes) that meaning either *is* or *explains* use. For if meaning *is* or *explains* use there is really no daylight between the words 'good' and 'bad' being used *as if* they had a predicative meaning and their *having* a predicative meaning. As a word is used, so must it mean, and the fact that 'good' and 'bad' are widely used by consequentialists *as if* they had a predicative meaning is precisely what Foot is complaining about.

Just because 'good' has a predicative as well as an attributive use, it does not follow (as Geach seems to think) that the two variants of 'good' are mere homonyms. The attributive 'good' can be seen as a kind-relative variant of the predicative 'good', and the 'predicative 'good' as a generalized variant of the attributive 'good', in which the kind in question has been broadened to the category of 'thing'. The following analyses are designed to bring this out. Here's the attributive 'good':

M is a good Y (attributively) = df M is, or does, to a high or satisfactory degree what Y-s are supposed, or required, to be or do.

And here's its predicative variant:

M is good (predicatively) = 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.

In other words M is (predicatively) good if it (is the kind of thing which) *ought to be* - an analysis of the supposedly simple notion of 'good' suggested by Moore himself (*PE*: IV, §69, §70). Note that given these analyses, to say that something is either predicatively good or else a good Y is *often* to say something that can be given a naturalistic analysis. If the contextually specified requirements are either the requirements of some group (farmers in the case of 'what is good for the farming community', gangsters in the case of 'good hitmen') or the requirements necessary to achieve some contextually specified end ('Good! We've got the semtex - now we can blow these bastards up!') then the claim that something is good can be a perfectly naturalistic affair. The problem is that when we speak the language of morals we seem to transcend the requirements of particular groups or persons or the requirements for achieving some presumed *but optional* project. When Moore, (without quite realizing it) defines the moral variant of the predicative 'good' as 'what ought be' this is not what 'ought to be' from some perspective or 'what ought to be' to achieve some optional objective but (in Sidgwick's phrase) what ought to be from 'the point of view of the universe as a whole'. And the rational point behind Foot's polemic is that it is hard to make naturalistic sense of such *oughts*. But the same problem arises with respect to the attributive 'good'. When we talk about a 'good human being' we mean a human being that is or does what human beings are required to be or do. And if we are *not* talking sociologically ('good according to the so-and-sos, 'good for such-and-such a purpose'), it is hard to make naturalistic sense of these requirements. There have been attempts to derive a set of credible requirements from Nature, not least on the part of Foot herself [Foot 2001]. I think such attempts fail but a detailed critique would take me too far

afield. (See, however Pigden {1988] and [1990].) Let us suppose that it is indeed possible to derive a set requirements from Nature and hence to construct a concept of 'natural goodness'. We can still ask whether *naturally* good humans are *morally* good. In other words it is an *open question* whether we ought to meet the requirements of Nature (if indeed there are any such). Indeed I would go further. Given such a set of requirements it will always be *conceivable* that we ought *not* to meet them. (Think of all the self-restrained vampires from *Buffy*'s Angel through to *True Blood*'s Bill Compton who give up the way of life that is natural to vampires – slaughtering people to drink their blood – out of a combination of conscientious scruple and the love of a good woman.)   Thus it is not an analytic but a synthetic claim that a naturally good human being (someone who meets Nature's requirements) is morally good.

What is the upshot? To begin with, the predicative 'good', in its distinctively moral variant is a conceptually legitimate notion. Secondly, *semantic* autonomy - the thesis that the moral cannot be reduced to the natural by means of analytic bridge principles - is at least as plausible in the case of the attributive 'good' as it is in the case of the predicative 'good'.   (Though this only applies when *both* words are being deployed in their distinctively moral uses.). Thus we can return to the Moorean argument secure in the knowledge a) that despite our fondness for predicative goodness we are still talking sense, and b) that it would not profit us philosophically if we conducted the discussion in terms of the attributive 'good'. Geach's criticism A) can be safely dismissed.

6. The OQA revised

Lewy is a bit more of a problem. Since philosophical analysis *is* a viable intellectual enterprise, premise 2) is false. And if premise 2) is false, premise 1) is not going to get us to subconclusion 4). Thus the OQA has to be revised. In an earlier paper [Pigden 2007a] I suggested the following:

1*) For any naturalistic predicate 'X' that we have so far considered, it is
evident to some competent speakers that (so far as our understanding of
the words is concerned) a thing can be X without being good.

2*) If it is evident to *some* competent speakers that two expressions 'X' and 'Y' are *not* synonymous (since it is conceivable that something could be X without being Y), then this is evidence (though not conclusive evidence) that they are not, in fact, synonymous.

4*) Probably 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or 'goodness' with the corresponding noun 'X-ness').

This is a much more tentative thesis than the original subconclusion 4). To discredit a supposed synonymy it is not enough that the synonymy should not be obvious to to every speaker (the original premise 2)). For that would lead us back to the Paradox of Analysis. In order to avoid the Paradox, we must acknowledge that two words or phrases can share the same meaning even though this is *not* obvious to every competent speaker. But though our concepts are not transparent to us they are not completely opaque. Thus if it is conceivable to some competent speakers that something could be *X without* being *Y*, this is evidence, though not conclusive evidence, that '*X*' and '*Y*' have distinct meanings. But if that is what is required to discredit a supposed synonymy, the discrediting has to be done on a case-by-case basis. Nonetheless, given the dismal record of attempts to reduce the moral to the natural by means of conceptual analysis, we have good inductive reasons for accepting thesis 4*). To suppose that the moral variant of the predicative 'good' is secretly synonymous with an undiscovered naturalistic predicate is to suppose that there is a definition that we have somehow failed to think of from which no competent speaker would be inclined to dissent. This, I submit, is not very likely. But what about thesis 3*)?

7. The Experimental Method in Morals

According to Putnam [1970: 311-315] two properties can be empirically identified if the (statement of that) identity is a consequence of a true theory, which has the same observational consequences as an original (true or nearly true) theory, in which the properties to be 'reduced' figure independently. Thus heat can be identified with mean

molecular kinetic energy, because the identity is a component of a physical theory which includes the observational consequences of a (relatively) common sense theory of objects involving such terms as, 'hot' and 'cold'. This looks like a clumsy linguistic detour to define a relation that exists *in re*, but we are concerned not with what identity *is* (identity, of course!) but with how identities are to be *arrived at*. A more serious problem is that the account is couched in terms of a highly idealized hypothetico-deductive model, which even Putnam [l975: 2l3-4] admits seldom fits the facts. Actual scientific reductions, identities and theories are rather more messy. Still, I will stay with the model for the moment.

Now, in order for good to be identified with a naturalistic X within a reducing theory, 'good' must first appear in a (relatively) commonsense theory with observational consequences. Further, goodness must not be empirically redundant. Some of the observational consequences must flow from propositions involving 'good'. There seem to me only three ways that 'good' could figure in such a theory.

(I) 'Good' could itself express an empirical concept. That is, goodness could be *defined* (in part) in terms of its effects; effects which might result in observations. Thus 'good' would name a causal role; it would be *analyzed* (in part) as the cause of what Pargetter calls the 'goodness phenomena'. This would not make it analytic that goodness caused the goodness-phenomena or even *most* of the goodness phenomena, for there might be no genuine occupant of the complex causal role. For example, if the goodness phenomena were defined in terms of *shared* reactions of approval (as with Hume and Hutcheson) and if there *were* no such shared reactions, then there would be no such thing as goodness. What *is* (more or less) analytic on this theory, is that goodness *if it exists* causes (most of) the goodness phenomena - whatever these are supposed to be. Thus the causal powers of goodness (*qua* goodness) are not a matter of empirical discovery. Rather they are arrived at by quasi-analytic postulation. Phenomena are detected and a common cause is postulated (a cause which may itself be the effect of other causes and may interact with other postulated entities). A fragment of theory is packed into the name of this alleged entity and constitutes its sense. (This would typically take the form of a definite description.) It is therefore analytic that *if* there is an entity such as the theory postulates

(that is if the name we have coined is non-empty) it will have the causal powers specified. We can, so to speak, 'read them off' from the meaning of the word. What is *synthetic* is whether or not there is any such entity.

Putnamite or Kripkean readers may object that on this account sense comes first and (in conjunction with the world) either determines or fails to determine the referent. Putnam prefers a theory in which reference comes first. The sense or stereotype conveyed by a word is relatively unimportant, so long as the speakers stand in the right causal relations to the referent. In particular the stereotype can be largely *wrong* - i.e. there may be nothing corresponding to the stereotype - and the word can still refer. It may even be that something *else* corresponds better to the stereotype than the actual referent of the word. (See 'The Meaning of "Meaning"' in Putnam [1975: 215-271].) Now I do not wish to deny that the Putnamite theory works for some words, still less that Putnamite meaning has an important part to play in science. All I wish to maintain is that for *some* words a Fregean theory fits better. Hacking [1983: ch. 6] has some exciting arguments for this bland and irenic thesis. (It's bland because it says that both sides are right some of the time about some things, which is rather too reminiscent of the judicious non-committal fence-sitting that one meets in undergraduate essays.) Hacking cites the case of 'caloric' a theoretical term which was eventually abandoned because nothing complied with its sense. Scientists did not reinterpret it as referring to mean molecular kinetic energy as they might have done if they were Putnamites. Again, the entities dubbed 'mesons' eventually had to be rechristened 'muons', since they did not satisfy the sense that theorists had connected with the name. In other words, when stereotype and reference come apart, scientists (and others) sometimes stick with the stereotype and sometimes stick with the referent. When they stick with the stereotype, the stereotype constitutes a Fregean sense. When they stick with the referent, the stereotype it is just a stereotype, and the term in question can be regarded as meaningful but senseless. Thus Hacking's bland and compromising thesis seems to be correct. When it comes to general terms in science, there is more than one kind of meaning that 'meaning' means.

(II) The alternative is to regard the propositions in the initial theory which link goodness with its characteristic effects as *synthetic* - or, at least, at the synthetic end of the

spectrum. Most synthetic naturalists look askance at the synthetic a priori. So the synthetic propositions linking goodness with its effects had better be empirical, or at least subject to an empirical test. That is we must be able to show, by means of empirical enquiry, that when something is good it tends to have the effects specified. To do this we must be able to tell - at least in principle - when something is good. And we must be able to do this without recourse to the effects under discussion, the goodness-phenomena of our initial theory. Thus we must be able to detect goodness by *other* means; that is through a *different* range of effects. Call these the goodness-phenomena$_2$. Now, is goodness *defined* as the cause of the goodness-phenomena$_2$? If so, 'good' expresses an empirical concept as in (I) though it is a different set of effects which do the defining. Or are the propositions linking the goodness-phenomena with the goodness phenomena$_2$ to be understood as synthetic? In which case, unless goodness is defined as the cause of the goodness-phenomena$_3$ we are condemned to a vicious regress.

(III) Perhaps we can stop the regress if we suppose that the word 'good' carries no informational content, but refers directly to some property or range of properties without the aid of a mediating sense. On this account 'good' functions like a Kripkean proper name or a Putnamite general term. Its meaning is exhausted by its referent (the property or range of properties in question). When we use the word 'good' our intention is to refer to whatever the members of our speech community are talking about when *they* use the word 'good'. Statements in the original theory can have empirical consequences because 'good' *refers* to an empirical property even though the word itself is devoid of empirical content (because is devoid of *any* content). Thus the sentence 'Guy Pigden is tall' has empirical consequences (for instance, that unless you yourself are tall, you are likely to be looking up if you happen to talk to him) because 'Guy Pigden' is the name of an empirically detectable item, namely my son. But the name 'Guy Pigden' has no sense and you will only be able to know whether a given observation (say a particular act of looking up) confirms 'Guy Pigden is tall' if you are able to identify the referent of 'Guy Pigden'. Perhaps it is the same with the Moorean 'good'. 'Good' let suppose, is the senseless name of a property or range of properties, 'baptized' as such in the dim and distant past. 'The friendship of Keynes and Strachey was good' is true (Strachey and Keynes being famous

disciples of Moore) if that friendship possessed some among the range of natural properties originally designated by 'good'. We can tell whether 'Guy Pigden is tall' is true if we are sufficiently *au fait* with the linguistic practices of our speech community to identify Guy Pigden and if we also possess the epistemic wherewithal to assess his height. We can tell whether 'The friendship of Keynes and Strachey was good' is true if we are sufficiently *au fait* both with Keynes and Strachey's friendship and with the linguistic practices of our speech community to determine whether Keynes and Strachey's friendship possessed some of the properties originally baptized as 'good'.

8. Direct Reference to the Rescue?

I want to argue that plausible as this story may be, both for proper names and for *some* general terms, it is utterly incredible as regards 'good'. Thus we can only establish that goodness is identical with a natural property if 'good' expresses an empirical concept.

1#) On the direct reference theory, the 'good' in 'Friendship is good' is more like 'Guy Pigden' in 'Guy Pigden is tall' than it is like 'tall'. This is not a credible thesis. With the name 'Guy Pigden' there is nothing much to understand except who 'Guy Pigden' stands for. Not so with 'tall', not so with 'good'. You don't really understand 'tall' unless you are at least dimly aware that (generally speaking) if A is taller than B and B is taller than C then A is taller than C. You don't really understand 'tall' unless you are at least dimly aware that although pygmies are human beings if Christopher is a tall pygmy it does not follow automatically that Christopher is a tall human being. You don't really understand 'good' unless you are at least dimly aware that (generally speaking) if A is better than B and B is better than C, then A is better than C. You don't really understand 'good' unless you are at least dimly aware that although hitmen are human beings if Alexei is a good hitman it does not follow automatically that Alexei is a good human being, still less that Alexei a good thing 'from the point of view of the universe'. Any plausible account of how Moore's predicative 'good' functions would have to portray it as a variant of a word with a wide array of uses, predicative and attributive, moral and non-moral, and since words with a similar array of uses recur in other languages, there must be some shared

element of meaning binding them all together, a meaning moreover which plays an important part in human life (hence the eternal recurrence).   I rather hope that my analysis of is correct (see above §5) but whether it is or not, we have to postulate *something* along these lines to account for the diverse uses. Since the word 'good' is susceptible to analysis, the predicative 'good' is susceptible to analysis. If such an analysis does not constitute a sense, it will do until the real thing comes along.

2#) On the direct reference theory, it is difficult, if not inconceivable for our ancestors to have been wrong about which natural properties are identical to, or constitutive of, goodness.   But this is not inconceivable. Ergo the direct reference theory is wrong as regards 'good'.   Why is it next to inconceivable on the direct reference theory that our ancestors got it wrong about goodness? Because it is their referential intentions (plus subsequent intentions to co-refer) that determine what we are talking about.   Recall Kripke's key example of Jonah. Pretty much everything that the Bible says about Jonah is false, except a) that he was a Hebrew prophet and b) that he was the son of Amittai. Hence the name 'Jonah' is not an abbreviation for a cluster of definite descriptions ('the guy who did most of the Jonah stuff in the Bible') because if it were, it would not apply to anyone, whereas in fact we can use it to make spectacularly false claims *about Jonah*. But the reason that we can be so spectacularly wrong about Jonah whilst still managing to talk about him is that, way back when, *somebody* (presumably Amittai) got something automatically right. The reason that 'Jonah' refers to Jonah is that Jonah's parents decided to call him 'Jonah' (or more properly a Hebrew name from which the modern name 'Jonah' is descended). They could not be wrong about whether 'Jonah' referred to Jonah since their decisions made it so. We can talk about Jonah in virtue of historical links to ancient Israel and our referential intention, when using the word 'Jonah', to refer to whoever our speech community refers to when talking about Jonah. Now if 'good' refers in the same kind way, the people who dubbed certain natural properties or combinations of properties 'good' could not be wrong about which properties 'good' referred to, since their decisions made it so. But it is surely at least conceivable that our ancestors were wrong about which properties are constitutive of goodness (otherwise moral progress

would be impossible).   But if this is correct, the direct reference theory is false as regards 'good'.

David Brink, one of the champions of he direct reference theory, worries about this problem in a paper of 2001. His solution, in so far as I understand it, is this. The property baptized as 'good' by our long-forgotten ancestors, was some such property as *what we would approve of and be able to justify to others after some idealized process of debate.* (They were, so to speak, devotees of Habermas *avant la lettre*.) If this is indeed the property (or the kind of property) that our rude ancestors dubbed as 'good', they could be automatically right about the fact that 'good' refers to this property (since their decisions made it so) whilst massively wrong about which things possessed the property. So although they could not be wrong about what goodness *was* or the *properties* picked out by 'good', they could be massively wrong about which *things* were good. Hence moral progress and moral enquiry of a non-historical kind are both real possibilities. Thus we can make sense of moral error on the part of our rude ancestors but only by supposing that the property they dubbed as 'good' was a prodigiously complex and dispositional affair, mortgaged to some future process of approval, justification and debate.

It seems to me that without really realizing it, Brink has abandoned the direct reference theory in favor of a dispositional *analysis* of value, absurdly transmuted into an historical fairy-tale about the long-forgotten dubbings of our long-dead ancestors. So far as Brink is concerned, it is not really initial acts of baptism performed by stone-age moralists that constrain the reference of 'good' - it is the justificatory practices of refined philosophers such as himself. To be good is to be kind of thing that conscientious moral philosophers would eventually approve of after some complicated process of interpersonal enquiry. And the real reason for this has nothing to do with initial acts of baptism, now lost in the mists of antiquity, and everything to do with our current procedural intuitions. 'Good' has a sense - it expresses some complex causal role - and we arrive at a synthetic identity by role-occupant reduction.

But if we take the narrative seriously as a historical conjecture rather than a disguised conceptual analysis, it seems to me incredible. It beggars belief to suppose that our ancestors managed to latch on to a property as complex and dispositional as the ones

that Brink has in mind when they first started calling things 'good' and 'bad'. An uncontroversial paradigm case and a paradigm case which would enable the learner to 'go on' and apply the term correctly on the basis of an ostensive definition is not to be had.

Even if we set aside the implausibilities of this story, the basic problem remains. Jonah's parents could not have been wrong about which baby was Jonah, since it was because of their decisions that that baby became Jonah. . Brink's stone-age moralists could have been wrong about which properties were identical to or constitutive of goodness since the properties that they approved of did not become good simply because of their say-so. Hence the word 'good' is not like the word 'Jonah' and for *this* word at least, the direct reference theory is false.

9. The Experimental Method Resumed

Thus (II) and (III) are not a genuine possibilities which means that goodness can only be identified with a naturalistic X, if 'good' expresses an empirical concept i.e.: if goodness is *defined* as the characteristic cause of certain detectable effects.

This sorts well with a more intuitive conception of the empirical proof of an identity. Consider the identification of heat with mean molecular kinetic energy. (See Roller [1970].) A range of effects is observed - feelings of hotness and coldness, thermometer readings, meltings and evaporations etc. - and a common cause is postulated: a variable magnitude that inheres in objects in different degrees and determines these various effects in virtue of its quantity. 'Heat' means whatever it is that does all this; it is the name for the occupant of a complex causal role (the actual occupant that is). (Notice that this is already a scientific rather than a folk-theoretic conception of heat.) The characteristic effects constitute a mode of presentation of the referent. The scientific task is to find out what that is. It was once identified with *caloric* a subtle and almost weightless fluid. Rumford did not care for this '*sui generis*'' substance, apparently because it did not sit well with a corpuscular physics. He preferred heat as a mode of motion. Eventually he was vindicated. Mean molecular kinetic energy *is* the responsible agent (at least in an important range of cases). The referent is presented in a theoretical

mode that of molecular *physics*. An odd magnitude is deprived of its mystery and fitted in to a mechanistic science by being identified with the motion of molecules.

In a similar manner, the sui generis property of goodness is to be deprived of its mystery and fitted into a naturalistic world-view by being identified with a natural property. To naturalize goodness is to neutralize it; to make the world safe for a world-view more impoverished than Moore's. But for this an *analysis* of 'good' is required, and an analysis which casts goodness in a causal role. Otherwise an synthetic identity cannot be established.

The conclusion then is this. Since the direct reference theory is false as regards 'good', it is impossible by an empirical enquiry to prove a synthetic identity between goodness and a naturalistic property unless 'good' expresses an empirical concept of some kind, as it would if it connoted a causal role. In other words, if we want to prove a synthetic identity between goodness and some natural property, we need a naturalistic analysis of 'good'. So if 'good' cannot be given a naturalistic analysis, it is impossible to establish by empirical enquiry that goodness is identical to some naturalistic property of X-ness - which is tantamount to thesis 3*). But since 'good' cannot be given a naturalistic analysis, it is impossible to prove by empirical methods that goodness is identical to some naturalistic property of X-ness.

A philosopher who comes close to arguing for a synthetic identity between a moral property and a natural property is David Hume, and it is perhaps worth pointing out that his empirical 'proof' presupposes a naturalistic analysis of the corresponding moral concept. The central thesis of Hume's *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* is that virtues are traits which are useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others even though *to say* that a trait is a virtue is not *to say* that it is useful or agreeable. The argument he suggests is an empirical one. 'The hypothesis which we embrace is plain. It maintains that morality is determined by sentiment. It defines virtue to be *whatever mental action or quality gives to* [an informed and disinterested human] *spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation*; and vice the contrary. We then proceed to examine a plain matter of fact, to wit, what actions have this influence.' [Hume 1975: 261]. The actions that have this influence turn out to be those that are useful or agreeable. Is Hume arguing for a synthetic

identity between *being a virtue* and *being a useful or agreeable trait*? That's not quite clear since virtues are defined as the traits which would arouse approbation in suitably qualified human spectators and we might have been wired up to approve of different things. We will only get an identity between *being a virtue* and *being useful or agreeable* if we suppose that Hume's definition of a virtue is rigidified in some way so that a virtue is a trait we would approve of given our *actual* dispositions to approve and disapprove. But even if Hume is only arguing that the virtues are *in fact* useful or agreeable traits (not that they *must* be which is what would be needed for an identity) the empirical proof for this 'plain matter of fact' requires Hume to 'define' the virtues in terms of their causal role. A trait is a virtue if it tends to cause the virtue-phenomena, namely sentiments of approbation in suitably qualified spectators (perhaps given their *actual* dispositions). Given this definition, it is possible to prove by a survey of our reactions that the traits of which we approve (at our informed and disinterested best) are all and only the useful and agreeable ones. Thus Hume's naturalistic *theory* of the virtues as useful or agreeable traits presupposes a naturalistic *analysis* of the virtues as traits which would arouse approbation. The analysis, I take it, is false and the empirical argument defective, but the point is that his enterprise could not even get off the ground without the prior definition of a virtue as *a mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation*. The synthetic conclusion requires an analytic premise.

I have already argued (§ 5) that it does not make much difference whether we employ the predicative or the attributive 'good'. To prove the point it is perhaps worth going over the argument once again, this time in the attributive mode. What the attributive naturalist wants to show is that there is nothing particularly spooky about *human* goodness, i.e. that *being a good human being* is equivalent to possessing a complex range of natural properties, preferably a range of properties that benefits the possessor. If she is a scientifically minded philosopher she will want to establish this by means of empirical enquiry. Thus she thinks she can show by an empirical or quasi-scientific proof that *being a good human being* is identical with some complex naturalistic property X. Is the claim that 'Good human beings have the naturalistic property X' analytic or synthetic? If it is conceivable that good human beings might *not* have this property, then the claim is not

analytic. So it has to be synthetic. If we reject the synthetic a priori, then in order to establish this claim we must be able to show by empirical methods that things with the property of *being good human beings* ALSO possess the naturalistic property X. But we cannot do this unless we have an empirical method of detecting which human beings are good or which things possess the property of *being good human beings*. This might be possible if it were analytic that 'Good human beings have the naturalistic [and empirically detectable] property Y'. But we are operating under the assumption that no such claims are analytic since for any such claim it is conceivable that it is false. Thus if we reject analytic bridge principles connecting human goodness with empirically detectable properties, we will not be able to show by empirical methods that human goodness is synthetically identical with a natural property or range of properties.

Cut the cake whichever way you like, whether we stick with predicative goodness or go with the attributive adjective, if semantic naturalism is false then synthetic naturalism is in trouble, forever beyond the reach of empirical proof.

10. The OQA Restored

Thus the OQA is restored. Like the girl with the far-away eyes in the Rolling Stones record, it is a little bleary and a little the worse for wear and tear, but it still manages to suggest some important conclusions. It can be formulated thus:

1*) For any naturalistic predicate 'X' that we have so far considered, it is evident to some competent speakers that (so far as our understanding of the words is concerned) a thing can be X without being good.

2*) If it is evident to *some* competent speakers that two expressions 'X' and 'Y' are *not* synonymous (since it is conceivable that something could be X without being Y), then this is evidence (though not conclusive evidence) that they are not, in fact, synonymous.

3*) If 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or 'goodness' with any corresponding noun or noun-phrase 'X-ness'), then it is difficult, if not impossible, to *show* by empirical enquiry that goodness is synthetically identical with some natural property of X-ness

4*) Probably 'good' is not synonymous with any naturalistic predicate 'X' (or 'goodness' with the corresponding noun 'X-ness'). [From 1*) and 2*)]

5*) It is probably impossible to *show* by empirical enquiry that goodness is synthetically identical with some natural property of X-ness. [From 3* and 4*].

This is not quite a QED, but it leaves the OQA looking a lot better than it did in 1970.

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