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Reviewed work(s):
Source: *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition,* Vol. 87, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp. 309–332
Published by: Springer
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4320780
Accessed: 29/11/2012 07:43

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OF *GOODNESS* AND *HEALTHINESS*: A VIABLE MORAL ONTOLOGY[1]

Moral realism needs to be brought to Earth. In particular, it must be shown that moral properties are no more ontologically suspect than others we all take for granted. Here, a viable moral ontology will be introduced that is able to solve many of the realist's traditional problems. Realism can be vindicated by showing that the properties *moral goodness* and *physical healthiness* have the same ontological and epistemic status.[2]

Since the fall of intuitionistic non-naturalism and the subsequent rise of expressivism, metaethics has been seen as falling within the province of the philosophy of language; expressivism is a theory of ethical language which regards ethical discourse as, essentially, the expression of attitudes. Since such expressions seemed not to be apt for truth or falsity, metaethical debate seemed to concern the meaning or use of moral language, and in particular, whether or not it is capable of truth or falsity. Philosophy of language has become quite sophisticated, however, and today there is a variety of theories which are bound together by the thought that truth is not a property: calling an utterance or proposition "true" may be no more (and possibly even less) than an indication that one accepts the practice of uttering it. Combining such a position about truth with expressivism about moral discourse leaves the expressivist as able as the realist to talk about the truth or falsity of moral language.

Therefore, metaethical debate must be taken to a different plane. The task of a realistic moral ontologist is not to argue for the "truth-aptness" of moral propositions, but to show that *goodness* can pass the tests of realism. What are these tests? Well, the one philosopher who has been clearest about the need to transcend debates about truth when pursuing debates about realism has been Crispin Wright.

In his book *Truth and Objectivity*,[3] Wright has proposed three tests for realism beyond a discourse's being truth-apt. The strategy of this essay is to sketch how *healthiness* answers to these tests, and then to show how answers for *goodness* can be modeled on those for *healthiness*. Before the initial foray into Wright's work, however, it is necessary to make some preparatory remarks about the ontological status of *healthiness* and its relationship with moral realism.

I. *HEALTHINESS*

Realism is a mixture of modesty and presumption: modest in that we take the world to be independent of our judgements and presumptuous in that we think we have the ability to light onto the world as it really is.[4] Ideally, a moral realist wants to modestly discern what in the world we can be most confident about, and then presumptuously show that we can be equally confident about moral properties.

It is my modest assumption that we are all realists about life; that is, whatever "being a realist" means, we are all realists about the property of *being alive*. I assume that there is nothing that we mortal human beings can be more confident in than the existence of a real difference between life and death.[5] The difference between life and death provides us with an archetype for the kind of distinction that "cuts reality at a joint". I assume that *being alive* is so ontologically secure that any theory entailing the denial of its reality amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* of itself. The most important result of this essay is that giving *healthiness* and *goodness* the same ontological status allows us to have equal confidence in the distinctions between living/dead objects and good/bad people.[6]

To begin to see how being healthy can mediate in this way between being good and being alive, note that life can be placed on, at least, two continuums. One has "highly" evolved creatures on one end and simpler forms of life at the other: mammals at one end and sponges, corals, and viruses at the other. Another continuum of life measures it by degrees along an axis of health and vitality. At one end is infirmity, weakness, sickness, and poor health (where death is just off the scale) and at the other end is vigor, strength, and robust health. Life may languish or flourish, and a languishing life is an unhealthy one: some degree of health is a necessary condition for

being alive. So, we may be as confident in the reality of *healthiness* as we are in the reality of life. To put the point differently, being a realist about the properties of *being alive* and *being dead* entails being a realist about *healthiness* and *unhealthiness*. One might say, with just a bit of hyperbole (and perhaps humor), that to be dead is to be totally unhealthy.[7]

Technical metaphysicians will hasten to ask to what ontological class *healthiness* belongs, or what kind of property it is: primary, secondary, dispositional, modal, supervenient, etc. There is a strong and helpful literature on understanding *healthiness* in terms of proper function, but it says little about the ontological status of the property *per se*.[8] And determining this status is a complicated issue about which much can be said. I think the best way to understand the ontology of *healthiness* is by analogy with the property of *entropy*: a weakly supervenient, emergent property that is instantiated by non-reducible systems. Obviously, the preceding sentence is a tangle of jargon, and I cannot explicate it all here. Nevertheless, the status of *healthiness* falls properly under the jurisdiction of the philosophies of science and biology, and I will assume that this is work that can be done in a way that will satisfy our pre-theoretical commitments to the reality of *healthiness*. The exact ontological status of *healthiness* is not germane: the hypothesis being considered is that whatever status *healthiness* has, *goodness* merits the same.

Some final comments about the language of "healthiness" and "goodness" may prove helpful. Philosophers with a keen ear will note that so far I have only predicated "healthiness" (and, in the same way, "goodness") over people, organisms, or perhaps organs. We also, however, predicate "healthiness" of signs or indications of health, as well as of causes of health. Examples of these are "healthy muscle tone" and "healthy food", respectively. And while Aristotle noted some of the relationships between signs and causes (see for instance, the *Nichomachean Ethics* (1105a18–b12)), it was Aquinas who developed the idea of "analogical predication".[9] His theory is meant to help us understand the attribution of personal properties to God. There are many forms of analogical predication, but here we need only concern ourselves with the form at work in our varied predications of "healthiness" and "goodness".

The basic idea is that our primary predication of "healthy" is to organisms (or organs); the property of *healthiness* is primarily instantiated by organisms (or organs). We may analogically predicate "healthiness" over both signs and causes of health. Thus, muscle tone is healthy insofar as it is a sign of *healthiness* and food is healthy insofar as it causes *healthiness*. Figuring out the exact ontology of signs and causes themselves is quite tricky business, and analogical predication is a complex topic in itself. It will suffice for the present paper to shed some light on *healthiness* and the non-analogical predications of "healthiness".

The point to be made at the moment is that if *goodness* has the same ontological status as *healthiness*, we should expect to find it working the same way linguistically and indeed we do. Deontologists hold that behaving morally entails expressing our respect, acceptance, or perhaps love for the law, or for God, or human rights, or friendship, etc. Each of these kinds of expression are not "for the sake of anything", but are natural expressions, indications, or signs of a person's *goodness*.[10] Consequentialists call an act "good" insofar as it causes or brings about happiness or want satisfaction, typically the greatest amount for the greatest number of people. So, while admitting that discussions are not cast in these terms, we find within mainstream normative ethics much talk of the signs and causes of *goodness*. And this is consistent with the thesis at hand: being modeled on "healthiness", "goodness" is primarily predicated of people (or characters or lives, depending on how our discussions about personal identity go), yet we also predicate it over both signs and causes of *goodness*.

II. WRIGHT'S TESTS, *HEALTHINESS*, AND *GOODNESS*

For one who is weary of the conflation of metaphysics and the philosophy of language, Wright's *Truth and Objectivity* is a welcome relief: his project is to show that there is metaphysics about realism to be investigated beyond answering questions concerning truth. Wright defends an "inflated minimalism" about truth. A discourse is truth-apt if it exhibits the barest of formal marks: the propositions of the discourse must have the grammatical form of an assertion; they must be able to serve as antecedents of conditionals. If a discourse

wears these formal signs, its propositions will be capable of fulfilling certain "platitudes" that (he says) we all hold to be constitutive of truth.

Wright then goes on to discuss further ways to address issues concerning realism and anti-realism: the lion's share of his book is devoted to explicating three "tests" of realism, each of which, when applied to a discourse will help determine its status *vis-à-vis* realism. Regardless of the success or failure of (anyone's) minimalism (or deflationism or prosentatialism) about truth, Wright has given metaphysicians tools beyond the analysis of language. Questions of realism are best seen as discourse specific, and the idea behind *Truth and Objectivity* is to provide tools with which metaphysicians may work upon particular areas of discourse. (Wright's goal is to help these debates along, not end them.) In the current context, moral realists and non-realists can pursue questions about the existence of moral reality without engaging in talk about the truth of moral discourse. In particular, the remainder of this essay will be devoted to showing that the ways in which *healthiness* passes Wright's tests can serve as models for *goodness*.

The requisite caveat is that there has been a trade off of depth for breadth here. Wright's variety of tests (and surely his three do not exhaust the possibilities) show that no one argument or test will settle these difficult issues. Moreover, his explication of three such tests constitutes the large part of a book, so each is more subtle and complex than I can explain here. Hopefully, however, enough substance can be given to the tests for them to be cogently applied, in at least an introductory form, to *healthiness* and *goodness* in turn.

Our questions will be whether moral discourse exhibits a "wide cosmological role", if it demonstrates "cognitive command", and if it falls on the Socratic side of the Euthyphro contrast. These will not be not discussed in the order they are in Wright's book for a reason. The inability to explain how we can have epistemic access to moral reality has been at the center of the some of the strongest arguments against moral realism.[11] Wright calls his variation of this challenge to any form of realism "wide cosmological role". Since these issues have been so prominent in metaethical debate, they deserve prominence

here. The Euthyphro contrast is the least tractable of the tests, and so will be discussed last.

A. *Wide Cosmological Role*

(a) *The test*

Following Wright, the best way to understand what it means to ask if moral discourse exhibits a wide cosmological role is by returning to Gilbert Harman's more familiar objection to moral realism. Harman has famously pointed out that when we witness punks burning a cat and call this "bad", everything can be explained without needing to avail ourselves of the property *badness*. No scientific investigation of the scene will discover this property, and our thinking the punks bad can be explained in terms of the psychological attitude we have as we condemn them. In short, *badness* plays no necessary explanatory role in the scene, and positing its existence seems to be an ontological extravagance. This moral situation can be helpfully contrasted to the positing of subatomic particles: we need to posit particles to explain the vapor trails we witness in bubble chambers, even though the particles are unobservable. *Badness* is also unobservable, but there seems to be no explanatory justification for positing it.

As noted above, this boils down to an epistemic problem for moral realists: even if we assume that moral properties are really "out there" how is it that we learn about them? If positing them is not necessary for the best explanation of our observations, what justification can be given for thinking they exist?

As Wright points out (*Truth and Objectivity*, p. 189), the problem with Harman's test for realism is that by demanding that a property be necessary for the explanation of observable phenomena, it amounts to little more than an insistence on a crude physicalism. Consider the problem of other minds in light of this test; if zombies are possible, then other minds may not be necessary for the best explanation of my observations of other people.[12] Ockham's razor may end up hacking its way to solipsism. While it seems as if Harman's test is tracking something that we think is of metaphysical and epistemic import, his formulation of it seems too strict, and Wright loosens it up.

Instead of asking if positing a property is necessary to explain our observations, Wright asks us to consider "what in general can the citation of such states of affairs [or properties] help to explain" (op.

cit., p. 192). In particular, a moral realist ought to be able to cite how moral properties interact with non-moral properties. If citing moral properties is explanatorily inert insofar as they only feature in the explanations we give for our moral discourse, then this is a reason to be wary of realism about moral properties. If moral discourse does interact substantively with non-moral discourses, then moral discourse exhibits a wide cosmological role and we have a reason for realism. Wright's version of the challenge is still in essence a call for moral realists to cite their epistemic access to moral properties, for only by explaining how *goodness* interacts with epistemically accessible properties can the realist justify its explanatory potency. By what means are moral properties discovered? What is our epistemic route to them and what kind of effect can they have on our lives?

(b) *How* healthiness *passes*

Now, consider how *healthiness* might pass this test. If we scientifically investigate a healthy person, we will not find *healthiness* with any microscope or tweezer. If we ask an expert in physiology to explain to us everything that is responsible for someone's jogging one mile, the word "healthiness" need never arise: all the explanations may be cast in terms of bone, muscle, nerves, electrical impulses, oxygenation of blood, etc. *Healthiness* does not seem to figure anywhere in the best explanation for the jog. *Healthiness* is unobservable.

Given the previous discussion of our commitment to the property of *healthiness*, regardless of its unobservability, how do we learn to detect it? The answer is that our epistemic route to *healthiness* is through the process of diagnosis. Now, how one makes a diagnosis is not well understood, and its epistemic aspects overlap with the fields of cognitive science and empirical psychology. But there are three facets of diagnosis that are particularly relevant here, and I'll address them in the following order. The first is that often the process by which a diagnosis is made is non-introspectible and has the same phenomenological flavor as an intuition. The second is that we diagnosis how healthy a specimen is based on the observation and assessment of empirically learned signs. And the third concerns the realistic standards of *healthiness* that are used in these assessments.

When learning a new skill or field of knowledge a beginner is often taught by a combination of example, principle, and trial and error: figuring out why a car is not working is done by reading and talking with experts, and experimenting with engines. But as one becomes an expert, the lessons learned and experience garnered becomes inculcated in a way that makes the application of this accumulated knowledge appear, even to the expert, to be automatic. When an experienced doctor, auto-mechanic, or grand master chess player diagnoses a specimen, engine, or chess board very often this is through a non-introspectible process. There is often no conscious deliberation involved in assessing the anemia of a patient or the checkmate on a chess board. These empirically based non-introspectible diagnoses are based on what might be called "*a posteriori* intuitions".[13]

(Needless to say, these are very different intuitions than those discussed by Moore, Prichard, Sidgwick, and Ross and which were supposed to serve as the epistemic access to non-natural moral properties. Also, diagnosis, as discussed here, is distinct from problem solving: we are concerned with the process by which a problem is diagnosed. Solving it is a further process.)

We can say a bit more about the basis for these diagnosis. Namely that what makes an expert an expert is the ability to assess properly or correctly certain observed signs within the state of affairs being diagnosed. The signs that are noted and the standards by which they are assessed may not be consciously considered: an expert will "see right through" these signs to the nature of the underlying condition: the chess expert sees right to the checkmate without having to consciously apply the rules of the game to the board at hand. It is the proficiency of judgement, the ease of the expert, that makes the diagnosis non-introspectible and automatic. There is much more to be said about the nature and phenomenology of expertise, but let us move onto a discussion of the signs and standards involved in judgements about *healthiness*.

We learn about health by learning the signs or indications of *healthiness*: running a marathon is a sign of cardiovascular health. When we diagnose a situation, we look for certain features in it that we have learned indicate the presence of a property like *healthiness*. These features are indications that a system is (or is not) operating

within certain limits, tolerances and specifications, whether or not it is functioning, and if so, if it is functioning properly or well (see note 7, above). We judge how *fit* the system is. We learn that performing within a certain range of specifications indicates the presence of a property to which we are committed and for which we look. There will be a cut-off point, or a vague border, that indicates the difference between having the property and not, just as the boundary between life and death is a bit fuzzy. We learn to diagnose, to look for signs indicating where these directly unobservable joints of reality are.

This is not to imply that all our diagnoses cut reality at a joint. Whether or not they do depends on the nature of the standards and specifications we are using and whether or not they demarcate real differences in the world. There are, of course, purely conventional specifications, such as those involved in table manners. Without engaging any "thick" moral concepts, like that of "rudeness", consider our judgements that someone is impolite. When someone does not operate within certain tolerances at a dinner party, we judge them to be impolite. But not all specifications are conventional in this manner, and those that demarcate life and death, health and ill-health are those that we think describe different states of reality. The difference between conventions and what I'll call "realistic" standards is easy to illustrate: consensus could change someone who is impolite into someone who is not, yet no amount of consensus can make someone in the midst of a heart attack healthy. (Similar comments can be made about the realistic standard of validity.)

So, given our presumption about the reality of *healthiness*, our access to it is through diagnoses that are made based on signs that are observed and assessed against certain empirically learned standards, limits, and tolerances. Despite the fact that *healthiness* is unobservable and need not figure into the best explanation of a physiological process, we can and have learned about it by how its presence is indicated by observable properties and processes. *Healthiness* gains its wide cosmological role by being the object of a fruitful empirical study and by interacting with a variety of the properties and processes by which we learn about it.[14]

(c) *How* goodness *passes*

Goodness has been accused of being explanatorily impotent. When asked to explain why we think the cat-burning-punks bad, we need

not advert to moral properties. Moreover, it is said that *goodnesss* does not pull its cosmological weight, for it does not seem to interact with anything non-moral. *Goodness* is notoriously unobservable, and it is this, as much as anything else, that led Moore et al. to non-naturalism and its extra-sensory intuitionistic epistemology. Our epistemic access to moral properties has always been a sore spot for moral realists.

But given the metaethic that places *goodness* and *healthiness* in the same ontological class, we can finally make out a legitimate epitsemic access to it, and its interactions with a variety of non-moral properties and processes. The intuitions that back up our moral judgements are not of the Moorean variety, but are empirical and based on the moral training we receive as children and experience we cull as adults.

Consider a situation in which one has to decide quickly whether or not to trust a stranger. In some easy cases, there will be an easily discernible sign that the stranger is not trustworthy, say a crazed look in the eye. But in many cases the signs are far more subtle, and one just gets "a feeling" about the stranger. One need not posit any *a pri-oristic* intuitions about the contents of this stranger's soul, but only that most human adults have empirically learned, to a quite sophisti-cated degree, to read the admittedly defeasible signs of posture and facial expression, among many others, and to judge *trustworthiness* upon these. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that the basis for these judgements are signs of which one is consciously aware.

Of course, sometimes the signs are quite obvious. The *badness* of burning a cat is not observable. But the signs of *badness*, in particular the *badness* of the punks, clearly are. Causing needless suffering is a pretty reliable and quite observable indicator of a person living a morally infirm life, just as being out of breath after walking up a flight or two of stairs is a reliable and observable sign of bad cardiovascular health. The burning-of-the-cat is also bad for the cat, for it casually inhibits the cat's ability to live and flourish. As sketched above in the discussion of analogical predication, the act itself is derivatively "bad" insofar as it is a sign of the punk's *badness* and a cause of the cat's misery. The most important point, however, is that we must empirically learn to detect these signs and causes. We can often be taught at least some lessons, principles, and rules

of thumb that underwrite these judgements, but like engineering, chess, or basketball, we must also learn by experience. The hardest moral lessons, such as those that distinguish what is best for us from mere flattery, or medicine from cookery (to use Plato's terms of the *Gorgias*), are never fully appreciated by most humans. Learning how to live a morally flourishing life is the most sublime of empirical and practical endeavors.

It might seem as if I've drifted far from the Harman/Wright challenge. Their challenge is however, as I've said, epistemic, and so a discussion of our epistemic access to *goodness* is directly to point. To answer more directly to the form of their challenge we must ask if moral properties interact with anything non-moral. Whether or not *goodness* has a wide cosmological role will depend on the ways it interacts with non-moral properties and on how moral discourse dovetails with non-moral discourse.

Well, consider how the proper rearing of children falls clearly within the realm of ethics, yet may also be a matter of evolutionary biology. We can increase the probability of our children surviving and procreating by raising them properly, based on facts about what it takes for children to develop well. (More will be said about child rearing below.) And there are probably many more connections between *goodness* and *psychological healthiness*; specifically, this is the subject matter of moral psychology. Also, if there are any "thick moral concepts", such as "sadism", then it seems clear that at least some moral properties are reactive with non-moral properties. Moreover, being a good or just person may affect non-moral, say economic, aspects of one's life. Making a material sacrifice because it is the right thing to do, cannot help but to influence one's life as a whole. (Dickens gave us "It is a far, far better thing that I do ...") Thinking that moral discourse plays some sequestered and impotent role in human life involves losing an appreciation for the human condition. We must be wary of being dogmatic empiricists, and consider the possibility that skepticism with regard to moral reality is no more tenable than skepticism about the difference between life and death.

Now, one might be (rightly) wary of such grand claims. So, to put the seal on the question of the breadth of morality's cosmological role, all one need do is note that normativity is paradigmatically eth-

ical while also having a currently fashionable place in a wide variety
of philosophical discussions, including discourse about logic, math-
ematics, language, epistemic justification, aesthetics, feminism, etc.
If wide cosmological role demands substantial connections between
ethical and other discourses, easy routes for a dialectic to pass from
one discourse to another, then normativity clearly provides these
connections. Indeed, these connections may be so strong as to blur
the accepted boundaries between discourses: Allan Gibbard, surely
no friend of moral realism, has even gone so far as to say:

[I]f meaning is normative, then a central topic in the philosophy of language
becomes a part of metaethics. Metaethics can turn imperialistic, and grab territory
from the philosophy of language.[15]

As soon as we start talking about what we ought to do we have
engaged questions that can, if we pursue them in this direction,
bring us to ethics. Moral discourse has a substantial cosmological
role, indeed.

B. *Cognitive Command*

(a) Healthiness

According to Wright, (though he does not frame it exactly in this
manner) reality will exert a cognitive command over a discourse if
the following conditions hold true:

It is a priori that differences of opinions formulated within the discourse, unless
excusable as a result of vagueness in a disputed statement, or in the standards
of acceptability, or variation in personal evidence thresholds, so to speak, will
involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming
(p. 144).

The basic idea is that a discourse must somehow be responsive to or
represent reality, so that disagreements within the discourse (except
where otherwise noted) can be chalked up to cognitive mistakes that
one of the disputants is making.[16]

Two quick examples of this test in action. If there are disputes
about what is funny, these cannot always be explained by claim-
ing that one of the disputants is making a cognitive mistake, so
comic discourse fails the test. As Wright acknowledges (p. 146),
cognitive command is precisely the issue between cognitivists and
expressivists in metaethics. If expressivists are correct, and moral

language is expressive and not representational, then moral language fails cognitive command.[17]

Well, it seems fairly clear that discourse about *healthiness* passes the test of cognitive command. For if someone held that an infirm old man were healthier than, say, Arnold Schwarzenegger, we would most probably think that person was rather confused. If by some chance, Mr Schwarzenegger were not actually healthy, but merely bore some of the more obvious signs of *healthiness*, and the infirm man was indeed healthier, then it would be us who had the cognitive shortcoming of not detecting those less obvious but more important signs of *unhealthiness*.[18]

If the idea behind cognitive command is that a discourse must be responsive to reality, then another way of seeing how talk about *healthiness* passes this test is to pick up a thread that ran through the discussion of wide cosmological role. If the standards of a discourse are purely conventional, and do not respond, represent, or reflect anything real, then it would fail cognitive command. Disputes could be chalked up to different conventions and need not be founded on anyone's cognitive shortcoming.

One difference between conventional and realistic standards (or specifications) is that the former we create and the latter we must learn about. (This ties cognitive command to the Euthyphro contrast to be discussed next.) Convention arises from the need for coordinated effort.[19] People can coordinate their efforts differently, and this may lead to disputes about the right way of going about things. Such disputes, however, need not be founded on anyone's cognitive shortcoming. On the other hand, no such coordination of effort plays a role in determining what is healthy. True, at various times, doctors have convened and "decided" that some conditions were healthy. But just as often they have later divested themselves of these opinions, and this normally occurred because of the gathering of more empirical data. That this data impacted the discourse, changing it, demonstrates that reality exerts cognitive command over the discourse. *Healthiness* is something we must learn about by empirical investigation, and the outcome of our investigations and experiments are determined by whether or not *healthiness* is present. In this way, discourse about *healthiness* is responsive to reality, and so passes the test of cognitive command.

(Note that although a discourse based on conventinal standards cannot be said to be responsive to anything in reality, it can be said to be representational, for conventions can be represented.)

(b) Goodness

Do ethical disputes always result from the cognitive shortcomings of one of the disputants? No. But cognitive command, as Wright lays it out, allows for vagueness, and a certain degree of individualism in the application of standards by which one arrives at a moral diagnosis. As was already remarked, learning the causes and signs of *goodness* and *badness* is difficult and sublime. Juxtapose these questions with trying to decide which of two fairly average humans is healthier. Making such a decision might well be intractable; forget computing all the information, gathering all of it seems quite far beyond our medical knowledge. Medical prescriptions, the following of which will cause health, often must be tailor made to the individual, and ethical prescriptions may also need individual tailoring. What will cause moral flourishing in one person might be detrimental to another, and distinguishing cases requires a fine touch called wisdom. And most often, the signs of *goodness* will similarly be less swiftly grasped than the signs of *healthiness*. But the difficulty of learning about *goodness*, and its causes and signs, need not impugn the thought that disputes over *healthiness* or *goodness* are intractably made due to anything other than cognitive shortcoming. To give a clear case, if someone were to make the moral claim that women are inferior to men, it would be appropriate to accuse them of a cognitive shortcoming.[20]

The leading idea behind the test of cognitive command is to ask whether or not a discourse is responsive to reality, and as noted above, this can be cast in terms of whether the standards used within a discourse are conventional or realistic. There is obviously much that can be and has been said on this score concerning the standards of ethics. One thing to note is that a moral realist need not argue that every standard used in moral discourse is realistic: one realistic standard would prove the case for a real (in this sense, non-conventional) moral difference in the world. I think it should be readily agreed upon by everyone that certain (perhaps sadistic) forms of parental abuse can permanently disfigure a child's moral character in a way that makes it far harder than normal for the child to flourish morally in

life. Indeed, it seems to be a fact that children of abusive parents tend to become child abusers themselves. There seems to be nothing conventional about this at all.

There might be some conventional elements in the standards which are set for the proper rearing of children. They may not be wholly realistic. Nevertheless, we as humans have developed into the complex creatures we are (at least in part) due to a slowing of development called "neotany".[21] We must care for and love our young for a far longer time than other mammals, and thus there are standards on proper child rearing that are non-conventional. The practices by which we raise our children in part employ realistic standards that are responsive to limits or constraints on human nature, as we find ourselves when we investigate ourselves as objects of study. And these standards are also a proper part of moral discourse. This entails that, at least in part, moral discourse passes the test of cognitive command.

C. *The Euthyphro Contrast*

(a) *The contrast*
The leading thought of this test for realism is found in Plato's *Euthyphro*. Plato sets up two contrasting positions concerning the nature of *piety*. Euthyphro says that what is pious is so because the gods love it; an offering is pious because the gods look favorably upon it and think or judge it pious. The opposing view suggested by Socrates (as usual, he does not explicitly defend or even assert the hypothesis) is that the reason why the gods look favorably upon some offerings but not others is because the gods can detect *piety* (perhaps infallibly). So, for Euthyphro, all there is to be said about *piety* can be cashed out in terms of the judgements or attitudes of the gods. If *piety* is Euthyphronic, its genesis is to be found in the cognitive, evaluative, or emotive judgements of the gods; they somehow (miraculously?) succeed in cognitively projecting *piety* onto the world. For the Socratic position, *piety* is a mind-independent or judgement-independent property, discoverable only by empirical examination of the world.

Wright's discussion of the contrast is somewhat vexed; the Appendix dedicated to it in *Truth and Objectivity* is a series of attempts at concrete and precise formulations describing when a discourse

concerns properties that are Euthyphronic. None however are quite satisfactory. Without going into the detail, I think Wright has diffi- culties because he seems to assume that humans can somehow or to some degree actually succeed in projecting properties onto the world, at least to the degree that it makes sense to say that utterances attributing colors to objects are truth-apt.[22]

Now, one possibility is to agree that there are colors, but that they are completely idealistic. Our merely mortal attempts at projection or at attributing colors to objects may well fall flat in a way that should be unsurprising: we are humans not gods. (And here is the element of modesty coming to play in realism.) Our experiences may be in color, and this can explain why we predicate "redness" of apples. But neither of these facts entails that apples instantiate the property *redness*, or that objects themselves are colored. So, when we attributed colors to non-mental objects in the world, like apples and bananas, we may very well be saying something (literally) untrue. Here, however, we are falling back into the habit of letting our ontological discussions hinge on truth. How can the Euthyphro contrast be formulated so that it does not (immediately) engage the philosophy of language?

Perhaps a clear case of Euthyphronism will help. Consider the sentimental value objects can have for people; e.g. cheap touristic reminders of wonderful vacations. (Those, like Wiggins and McDowell, that wish to liken value to color need to explain the differences between moral and sentimental value if they hope to hold onto their realism.) People can talk and act as if junk is truly valuable to them. Now, it is unclear what the phenomenology is behind an experience of sentimental value. Perhaps memories actu- ally have value, and we project that value onto the objects which trigger those memories. Or perhaps, but less likely, these memo- ries as well as the objects that trigger them have only sentimental value. In any case, we are all pre-philosophically disposed to value objects sentimentally: we experience objects as having sentimental value. Nevertheless, upon consideration, we are all ready to admit that medium sized trinkets made from tin or cloth have no intrinsic, actual, or objective sentimental value; common parlance admits the difference between "I value X" and "X is valuable", and this distinc- tion readily applies to sentimentality. Sentimental value does not bear

up under a modicum of reflective scrutiny, despite our pre-reflective experiences of it, and despite any linguistic facts about when one may truly predicate sentimental value of objects. (The truth of these predications may be wholly dependent upon the tone or hue of our experiences.)

The reason sentimentalism does not bear our scrutiny is that we have learned that we cannot blindly infer from our phenomenological experiences of the world to its contents. We have learned that, as humans, we can be deluded. We cannot assume that the causes of our experiences bear a resemblance to the experiences themselves, regardless of the psychological associations and habits of thought that dispose us to think in this way.[23] Becoming clear about exactly when we are making such mistakes is a difficult task, indeed. Devising a test for detecting the difference between detection and projection is obviously going to be tricky business. Perhaps by definition, it is hard to know when one is fooling oneself. One thing seems clear, however: that which is Socratic in the relevant sense is not dependent upon our responses; that which is Euthyphronic (taking sentimental value as our paradigm) is merely ontological mirage, phenomenologically experienced chimera. So, one access to the Euthyphronic test for realism is to ask whether and to what degree the properties quantified over by a particular discourse are ontologically dependent upon our responses.

Some might think that this dependence can be matter of degree. But to think so is to think that Plato's contrast is actually a vague one, and I would be willing to argue that questions of existence are not vague in this sense. In particular, the line between Euthyphro's and Socrates' positions is as clear as that between cause and effect. Discourse about Euthyphronic properties is discourse about effects, namely our reactions or responses to stimuli. Discourse about Socratic properties concerns the causes of these responses. But regardless of how we answer these questions about the "degree of realism" that we might want to afford Euthyphronic discourse (where questions of realism vs. idealism arise), we may here leave them aside, because it seems clear that discourse about health belongs on the Socratic side of the contrast.

(b) *Socratic* healthiness

Our judgements do not determine what counts as a "healthy organism" as the gods' judgements determined what is pious. The easiest way to see this is to remember that we derive our confidence in the reality of *healthiness* by the way it is derivative (constitutive?) of *being alive*. The judgements we make about the differences between life and death are not based on our responses. A simple genetic argument verifies this: were not such a distinction at play prior to our having evolved the capacity to recognize it, we would not now be capable of these judgements (assuming the dead cannot judge). Similarly, our ability to make the distinction between being healthy and unhealthy is (at least partly) geneticly dependent on there being such a distinction: assuming natural selection, were not our ancestors healthy enough to procreate, we would not now be capable of distinguishing between what is healthy and what is not.

Another way to press the Euthyphro contrast is to ask again whether or not certain judgements are actually conventional. The cognitive activity of detection or investigation was never operative in the formation of the standards and specifications of etiquette, even though such conventions were treated as if they demarcated real distinctions in the world. We can, or ought to be able to, clearly imagine humans (e.g. Victorians) deluding themselves into mistaking projection for detection. We certainly seem to unreflectively believe in the reality of *funniness, politeness*, and sentimental value. But it would be a *non sequitur* (perhaps of numbing grossness) to reactionarily conclude that all detection is actually projection. We are organisms that have evolved to survive in the world, to detect and adapt to changes in our environment. Without adverting to divine or demonic intervention, our existence and survival in the world would become impossible to explain. If only for genetic reasons, global Euthyphronism is incoherent.[24]

If we cast the contrast in terms of conventional vs. realistic standards of evaluation, we again find that discourse about *healthiness* is Socratic. Attempting to deny this backs us up against the same genetic wall. If an object's being alive is fit for the same treatment as etiquette, if the distinction between *being alive* and *dead* is like that between *being polite* and *impolite*, we have not only lost biology, but

we have lost ourselves as living creatures. The idea that *healthiness* is conventional is misguided if we believe both in evolution and in the thought that *healthiness* plays a role in natural selection: we are now only able to make judgements about *healthiness* due to our ancestors being healthy enough to have survived.

Healthiness falls on the Socratic side of the Euthyphro contrast. Because I think *goodness* and *healthiness* are ontologically on par, I prefer the name of "Socratic Moral Realism" for the metaethic defended here.

(c) *Socratic* goodness

Does moral discourse fall onto the Socratic or Euthyphronic side of this test? Well, we saw how discourse about health falls on the Socratic side in two different ways. The first being that *healthiness* is not a response, but something that allows or causes us (via natural selection) to respond or act in certain ways. The second being a discussion of whether the standards used in assaying *healthiness* are realistic or conventional.

In our discussion of *healthiness* it was noted that the pre-existing condition of being healthy allowed us eventually to make fine discriminations about the nature of health. And here, we find a similar genetic argument. Whether or not an agent is a good person cannot merely be a matter of how we respond that agent, as would be the case if *goodness* were Euthyphronic. Each of us is capable of moral judgement, and in particular, judgement about the moral character of others. But the content of these judgements is contingent upon the character, the moral character, of the judge. Any agent's moral character cannot merely be constituted by our responses to that person (as it would if *goodness* were Euthyphronic), for our own responses, our own moral judgements are determined by our own moral characters. It is the moral character of people that allows them to, and determines how, they morally respond to others.

Morally good people are often able to have insights into *goodness* that others do not. (The same can be said of those who are wise.) When Socrates counsels us to guard against flattery or the Buddha urges us toward a "middle path", we think that it is their own *goodness* which has allowed them to learn these sublime moral lessons. It is the *goodness* of people that allows them to recognize what is good. (And, to pick up threads from above, allows them to recognize signs

or causes of *goodness*.) Moreover, remember that it was those that were healthy that allowed them to survive and develop physically into heartier and more robust organisms. Similarly, it is those that are good who are able to develop into those that have a more refined sense of morality.[25]

Now the same thing cannot be said about *funniness*, for those who are themselves not funny can nevertheless respond to, or laugh at, a funny joke. But while *goodness* can be successfully contrasted here to *funniness*, it cannot be so contrasted to *politeness*, for it does seem to be the case that those who are most polite are best able to tell if others are polite: "It takes a gentleman to spot a gentleman".[26]

So, once again, we are back to comparing realistic to conventional standards. And the fact that this issue has so often surfaced is evidence that it is deeply at the root of the entire debate between moral realists and non-realists. In *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, Allan Gibbard goes to some great lengths trying to explain how moral standards arise conventionally; how they are worked out in public, social gatherings often based on discussions of hypothetical situations.[27]

Keeping in mind, as mentioned above, that one realistic standard will suffice to vindicate moral realism, how presumptuous is it to think that we have actually detected realistic moral standards in nature? Have we empirically learned anything at all about morality, or are the standards we employ invented conventionally and then projected with hubris onto the world with so much Euthyphronic or perhaps Humean figment? Well, I think that we have learned empirically that children ought not to be abused, that women (along with everyone else) ought not to be treated as chattel, and that belonging to another race does not justify considering a person inferior or barbaric. The "we" in this last sentence refers, not to any of us individuals living our particular lives, but to humanity as a whole, to the species that has slowly learned over thousands of generations that slavery and torture are, at the very least, to be avoided whenever possible and may perhaps be categorically prohibited as being bad for everyone involved.

So, does the moral difference between Mother Theresa and Hitler cut reality at a joint? Did we truly learn something about what makes for a good human life when we realized that loving our children is

better for them than neglect or abuse? Phillipa Foot's argument concerning our inability to morally commend a man who clasps his hands thrice a day shows us that we are not free to determine what may count as a moral consideration.[28] Neither are we free to determine what counts as a flourishing life. There are constraints placed upon us by our human nature, and cut our reality as living organisms at the joint, just as the difference between life and death cuts reality at a joint. The standards by which we diagnose *goodness*, the signs by which it is detected, and the causes which produce it, are being slowly and painfully discovered and not invented.

III. CONCLUSION

It is obvious that there is far more work to do. Hopefully, by introducing the aptness giving *goodness* and *healthiness* the same ontological status, I have succeeded in showing that there are viable moral ontologies that may live up to all reasonable expectations of realism. If realism is a mixture of modesty and presumption, I hope that I have maintained my modesty by acknowledging that studying ethics is an extraordinarily difficult endeavor, while being presumptions enough to recognize that we are slowly learning about what makes for a good human life.

NOTES

[1] My thanks go to William Alston, Jose Benardete, Michael Lynch, Maryanne McWilliams, John O'Leary-Hawthorne, and espacially Mark Lance for their help and encouragement with earlier drafts of the paper. I am also indebted to Michael Stocker and Laurence Thomas. I am most grateful here to Crispin Wright, for his philosophy, his pedagogy, and his support.

[2] For convenience sake, I will refer throughout the paper to the properties of *goodness* and *healthiness, simpliciter*. A further qualification would be that I am only talking about *human moral goodness*, and not the moral goodness of any possible creatures. For more on this qualification see Laurence Thomas' "Evil and the Concept of a Human Person" (forthcoming, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 20).

[3] Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

[4] For an eloquent discussion of this thought see the Introduction to Crispin Wright's *Realism, Meaning, and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[5] Since I take our knowledge of life to be pre-theoretical and pre-philosophical, and revisionary conceptions of it are proportionally inappropriate, giving the common

definition of "Life" is more apt than normal in essays such as this. The *OED* begins
its definition (which, in the sense relevant to our purposes, is four columns long)
as follows:

> I. The condition or attribute of living or being alive; animate existence. Opposed
> to *death*.
>> 1a. Primarily the condition, quality, or fact of being a living person or animal.
>> b. In a wider sense: The property which constitutes the essential difference
>> between a living animal or plant, or a living portion of organic tissue, and
>> dead or non-living matter; the assemblage of the functional activities by
>> which the presence of this property is manifested . . .

[6] The prescient reader will see that whether or not something is "good for us" or
is a "good thing to do" will be a derivative matter. This will be discussed more
below within the discussion of Aquinas' theory of analogical predication.

[7] In discussion, the place people have most frequently balked has been here, at
the assumption of the reality of *healthiness*. Given the fact that different cultures
have, at different times, presented very different models for what is the paradigm
of health, the balking is somewhat understandable. But the variability here does not
mitigate against the overwhelming facts driving the consensus behind what counts
as "unhealthy". It is as difficult to be an intractable irrealist about *healthiness* as
it is to be one about *poisonousness*. (Let the irrealist beware.) Irrealism about
healthiness ought to quickly dissolve upon reflecting upon one's past illnesses.
Is the difference between the healthy you and the sick you a difference wholly
indifferent to reality? If doubts still persist here, visit a hospital to gain empirical
data concerning the very real differences between *healthiness* and *unhealthiness*.

[8] See a series of articles by Christopher Boorse: "On the Distinction Between
Disease and Illness", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Fall, 1975),
pp. 49–68; "What a Theory of Mental Health Should Be", *Journal of The Theory
of Social Behavior*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 61–84; and "Health as a Theoretical Concept",
Philosophy of Science, vol. 44 (1977), pp. 542–573. See also, Ruth Macklin,
"Mental Health and Mental Illness", *Philosophy of Science*, vol. 39, no. 3 (1972),
pp. 341–365; and Normal Daniels, *Just Health Care* (New York: Cambridge
University Press, 1985).

[9] In Aristotle, see the *Nichomachean Ethics* 1005a28–b1, for a discussion of
becoming skilled in an art and becoming virtuous. See especially 1105a28–b1,
and 1105b5–11. While no explicit mention of signs or causes is made, Aristotle
is focusing in on the fact a person may act in a way that makes the person appear
virtuous, yet this act is only a sign of virtue if it proceeds from the right causes.

The best discussion of analogical predication is William Alston's "Aquinas on
Theological Predication", in Eleanor Stump (ed.) *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca: Cornell
University Press, 1993), pp. 145–174.

[10] See Michael Stocker's, "Values and Purposes: The Limits of Teleology and the
Ends of Friendship", *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 78, pp. 747–764. Stocker
refrains from the ontological commitments implicit in the text above.

[11] See in particular Gilbert Harman's selection in G. Sayre-McCord's, *Essays in
Moral Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[12] Of course, zombies may not be possible. See Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness
Explained* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1991), pp. 72–73.

[13] This revisionist view of intuitions and expertise has gained some acceptance

in psychology. For an overview of research see Robert Trotter, "The Mystery of Mastery", *Psychology Today*, July 1986; Beryl Lieff Benderly, "Everyday Intuition", *Psychology Today*, September 1989.

[14] The inclusion of the word "fruitful" here is not innocent. It implies that there is an interaction of experiment and subject matter that is itself a test for realism. See the discussion of "Cognitive Command" below.

[15] See the first page of the first lecture of Gibbard's 1992 Hempel lectures, entitled "Normative and Explanatory Meaning".

[16] It has been pointed out to me in private correspondence with Mark Lance that this formulation of Cognitive Command denies the underdetermination of data. Wright attempts to deal with related problems with this test in his discussion of the "theory-ladenness of observation" (pp. 157–168). He admits that these are real and difficult problems, and that is unclear whether they can be solved satisfactorily.

Still, it does seem clear that the test Wright is trying formulate is tracking some issues relevant to debates about realism. In order to get some work out of the test here, I focus my discussion on the nature of the standards used to evaluate data or observations. This, I think, allows (at least a partial) bypass around the difficult problems raised by the underdetermination of data and the theory ladenness of observation.

[17] Wright's position on truth, that a discourse is truth-apt if its propositions take the grammatical form of assertions, forces him to rule out non-cognitivism about moral language. If a discourse looks (bears the signs of being) representational, then for Wright it is representational.

While I have sympathy for Wright's respect of signs, I have thought that one of the primary lessons that philosophers have learned this century is that we cannot tell merely from the surface grammar of a discourse the ways we may put those words to use. Then again, as Wright pointed out at the 1995 Central Division APA meeting, the non-cognitivist is left having to explain how a discourse that is essentially expressivistic can develop all the marks of one that is representational. If this can be taken as a genetic (developmental) problem, as opposed to asking merely whether we could reconstruct (*post facto*) an expressive discourse with syntax usually reserved for representing, it may be decisive.

[18] Mr. Arnold Schwarzenegger underwent open heart surgery in the Winter of 1997. To see cognitive command in action: our theories of *healthiness* must be responsive to this empirical fact.

[19] David Lewis, *Convention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

[20] This is similar to a discussion by Laurence Thomas involving slaveowners who denied that slaves were human beings while having children by female slaves. See his *Living Morally* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 12.

[21] Steven Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb* (New York: Norton, 1980).

[22] See Paul Boghossian and David Velleman, "Colors as Secondary Properties", *Mind*, vol. 98 (1989), pp. 81–103.

[23] Hume wrote:

Philosophy scarce ever advances a greater paradox in the eyes of the people than when it affirms that snow is neither cold nor white: fire hot nor red. (Letter to Hugh Blair of 4 July 1762, printed in *Mind*, October 1986.)

For Hume, of all people, the "eyes of the people" must have little weight, for those same eyes detect a necessary connection between cause and effect.

[24] For associated problems with global projectivism, see Simon Blackburn's "Filling in Space", *Analysis*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 62–65.

[25] These remarks come from thinking about Aristotle's discussion of becoming a grammarian. See *The Nichomachean Ethics*, 1105a18–b12.

[26] Here I am obliged to anonymous referee.

[27] Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

[28] "Moral Beliefs", *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 59, pp. 83–104.

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