

Truth, Beauty, and Goodness

When we say: “Every word in language signifies something” we have so far said

nothing whatever

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §13

If we look at things from an ethnological point of view, does that mean we are saying that philosophy is ethnology? No, it only means that we are taking up a position right outside so as to be able to see things *more objectively*

Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 37 (entry for 1940)

I

As someone who has frequently written to blunt or turn or evade Euthyphro’s question, but who is at least equally often accused of giving the wrong answer to it, I have had cause recently to reflect on its prominence. My thesis in this paper is straightforward: it is a lamentable curiosity that philosophers, perhaps including myself in earlier and less cautious moments, express themselves so that the Euthyphro question even arises. Falling foul of a well-conducted Euthyphro test should be regarded as a *disqualification* for any philosophy of value. But the other side of the coin is that it is a *false boast* of any other, rival, philosophy of value that it gets the answer right. It does not display a piece of metaphysical or other philosophically deep understanding, but only, if anything, a sound ethical ear or a moderately good upbringing. In saying this, I do not want entirely to knock the value of false boasting. I certainly do not want to diminish the value of a sound ethical ear or a moderately good upbringing. I do not want to grudge writers their *thrill* as they hymn the awful intransigence of reasons and values and duties; their shining self-sufficiency, their necessity, their indifference to human wishes and desires, as impervious as the stars in the heavens or the rigid commands of logic and mathematics. Kant’s poetical flights in this vein ought to appeal to us, and many people who think of themselves as theorists of ethics or of normativity in general find it necessary, or even sufficient, to assert that he appeals to them.

The Euthyphro question splits those who believe that we discover or detect value from those who believe that we create or confer value: are we Detectors, or Creators? People pull their heroes into one side or another of the fray. It is a *casus belli* between Kantian constructivists, such as Christine Korsgaard, and purer Kantian spirits such as, recently, Rae Langton.¹ Hume and other sentimentalists and expressivists are regularly vilified by those of a more objectivist frame of mind as standing on the wrong side of this issue. Humeans think our sentiments are responsible for our values, say critics, but just think what that implies about cases in which we have different sentiments!² You don’t have to go far out into logical space to find scenarios in which anything goes, and this upsets people. And even when the Euthyphro question is not explicitly in the foreground of writers’ minds, it can be detected in the motivation or rationale for things that are.

¹ Rae Langton, ‘Objective and Unconditioned Value’, *Philosophical Review*, v. 116 no. 2, 2007. p. 157

² I rebut Christopher Peacocke and Samuel Kerstein on this issue, at <http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/~swb24/PAPERS/Sentimentalism.htm>

What fuels the chase after ‘objectivity’ or ‘rational constraint’ except a need to find something there, something to which we are bound to answer, something beyond the self-propelling forces of the will and desire? Indeed, the whole debate between so-called ‘externalists’ in the theory of value, and their ‘internalist’ opponents hinges on Euthyphronic thought experiments and intuition pumps. If, as I shall argue, these are misconducted and useless, a great deal of modern theory of ethics falls with them. Almost all the sacred texts of ‘normativity’ turn out to contain no more than platitudes at their hearts, and the theory of ethics has been drawn into the blindest of alleys.³

In order to proceed, we need to reflect on this vaunted independence. The leading thought experiment in answering the Euthyphro question is Moore’s isolation test. Does beauty lie in the eye of the beholder? Yes, say those who think we create or confer value (pro Euthyphro). No, say those who hold that we detect or respond to it (pro Socrates). Let us think about it carefully, says Moore. Consider then a possible world: a lifeless, formless waste of slag and slime. Since it is lifeless there are no beholders. Now, ask yourself: is this world ugly? If you are honest, you will admit that it is. Yet there is nobody beholding it! Hence ugliness (and by immediate extension, beauty) do not lie in the eye of the beholder. A slight variation of the case might have persons in the world who love slag and slime, and frolic rejoicing in it. They find it beautiful, but is it? Of course not: the whole thing doesn’t bear contemplating. It remains ugly, and they are disgusting, like flies feeding on carrion. So, again, beauty and ugliness do not depend on the eye of the beholder. Detectors win, as Socrates held. As with beauty, so with reasons and norms, values and duties.

You do not have to be very far into philosophy to suspect that there is something fishy here. I do not think it is a particular boast to say that I vividly remember suspecting there was something fishy when I first read *Principia Ethica*, before I had dreamed of doing philosophy as an undergraduate. I would now put it like this: but look, you have just given your own verdict on Moore’s world. You contemplated a heap of slag and slime, and of course, repelled, you pronounced it ugly. But it is your own repulsion that you are voicing. So how could that possibly make the Detector’s case? For all that the case shows the ugliness continues to lie in the eye of the beholder, or in this case the eye of Moore’s reader, the subject imagining the unwitnessed slime and slag.

There is a puzzle here. This beginner’s reply surely has some force. There is something fishy about Moore’s isolation test. But can we explain further what it is?

Evidently, it is this. The battle between Creators and Detectors is presented as one about *dependency*. ‘Does value (or normativity—all the points I am about to make apply equally to them both) depend on our conferring it, or on something independent to which we are fortunately receptive?’ And scientifically there is a way to assess dependencies—Mill’s method. You specify, either experimentally or in thought, a scenario in which the elements are varied, and see, either in the experimental set-up, or by imagining the scenario if it is a thought experiment, what comes and goes with them. This is exactly what Moore does. He has us considering the scenario, but remove or vary the spectators.

³ Thomas Nagel 1975, Thomas Scanlon 1998, Jonathan Dancy 2000, Jay Wallace 2006, Russ Schafer Landau 2003, Ralph Wedgwood 2007, Joe Raz 1999, Derek Parfit, public but allegedly forthcoming.

And we are still repulsed. We find the ugliness still there (after all, to find something repulsive we do not normally have to look to see if anyone else is spectating it).

If it were a question of assessing ordinary dependencies, Moore's argument would not be fishy. Mill's method is the correct method to use if we are in the business of assessing dependencies. When it gives a verdict it establishes what I shall call Mill Moore, or MM dependency. But Moore's argument is fishy, and the moral to draw is that we should not here be in the business of urging or denying MM dependencies at all.

We should agree that there is only one way of assessing propositions of the form 'the value of X depends upon Y' and it is, indeed Moore's way or Mill's way. We must contemplate the scenario in which Y is varied and see whether as a result X varies. But as the beginner suspects, we will necessarily be "standing within" as we do this, or in other words, deploying our own evaluative sensibilities. This is in itself a perfectly good thing to do, and it needs stressing that there are perfectly good questions of this kind, for first-order ethicists. Does the wrongness of lying depend upon its consequences? Does the value of cheerfulness lie in the benefit to its possessor, or to those around him? Set up the scenario and rotate the variables, and you may get an answer. Your answer will be a verdict on whether in such-and-such a scenario, X remains valuable, or good or bad or obligatory or whatever it was. Such is the business of the first-order ethicist, trying to chart the standards for things. Well brought-up ethicists say things with which we should agree when they do this. Less lucky ones, or ones with less sensitive imaginations, do not. Hume used a nice earthy test of this kind against Wollaston, who had apparently claimed that the vice of bad actions lay in their tendency to engender false conclusions in persons who are aware of them. Hume points out that if he conducts himself improperly with his neighbour's wife, his action remains just as reprehensible even if he takes the precaution of closing the shutters, so that his lewd behaviour 'perfectly concealed, would have had no tendency to produce any false conclusion'.⁴

But what about the metaethicist, trying to understand the Place of Value in the World as a whole? Can't she use MM dependencies as a guide? She might do so, but she will then have to stand or fall with the isolation test. Korsgaard for instance writes about our autonomous acts of choice or willing 'conferring' value on things. Explicitly citing the Socratic, Moorean response, Langton asks us to think of scenarios in which nobody and no God blesses the spontaneous act of good will. This answers the question, 'Does our autonomous act of blessing things confer value?' and it answers it, Langton rightly asserts, as Kant would, but against Korsgaard. For if you rotate the scenarios, the MM test will give it that the selfless act of duty has its value in a way that has *nothing* to do with anyone autonomously blessing it, just as Hume's imagined behaviour with his neighbour's wife remains off colour, even when nobody could be misled by it. Even in the desert where nobody is there with a blessing, the selfless act of duty still shines like a jewel, all alone, having "full worth in itself".⁵ That's Socrates's verdict, Moore's, Kant's, Langton's, mine, and I hope the reader's as well.

Unfortunately, however, this edifying piece of moralizing does not get us anywhere. For the puzzled beginner is going to insist that there is still something fishy. That is indeed our verdict, as we think about this selfless act of duty. But, in the words

⁴ Hume *Treatise*, III, i, I.

⁵ Langton, p. 185, quoting Kant.

that Nagel found so threatening, perhaps that's just us. We cannot pretend to escape from using our own sensibility as we use it. And we are all at least moderately well brought up, after all.

The situation here is parallel to the dialectic when idealists advance claims of mind dependency, and the common-sense, Moorean, opponent advances scenarios of mind-free prehistorical landscapes with their volcanoes and dinosaurs in occupation, and events and causal happenings. But there is nobody about. So the idealist loses if he tries to import dependencies into the empirical world. The MM test rejects any such dependency. As a result, many people think we can reject any tincture of idealism, and Philonous loses. We are Detectors not Creators. But Berkeley, or Philonous, knowing that this is how we think and how we are going to go on thinking, replies that while indeed this is so, still at some level we must recognize that this is just us.

If it remains like this, Berkeley is at one with Wittgenstein, in his philosophy of mathematics.

Does this mean that I have to say that the proposition "12 inches = 1 foot" asserts all those things which give measuring its present point?

No the proposition *is grounded* in a technique. And, if you like, also in the physical and psychological facts that make the technique *possible*. But it doesn't follow that its sense is to express these conditions. The opposite of that proposition "twelve inches = 1 foot" does not say that rulers are not rigid enough or that we don't all count and calculate in the same way.⁶

Or more famously:

"But mathematical truth is independent of whether human beings know it or not!" — Certainly, the propositions "Human beings believe that twice two is four" and "Twice two is four" do not mean the same. The latter is a mathematical proposition; the other, if it makes sense at all, may perhaps mean: human beings have *arrived* at the mathematical proposition. The two propositions have entirely different uses.⁷

The test for MM dependency in the philosophy of mathematics always yields a Socratic verdict, going against Euthyphro. Where p is some arbitrary mathematical truth, the truth that p does not depend on anything within the causal order, anything either human or divine. There is nothing you can vary or alter and watch the truth of p do the same, since p just sails on inviolate, and must do so, since it is necessarily true.

Doesn't this force Platonism or something similar upon us? If it did, it would still be our Platonism: just us. But we should go more slowly. Wittgenstein says that nothing in these MM claims stymies, let alone refutes, the view that the foundation of the language game lies in a 'stream of life', in something that it takes a philosophical anthropology or ethnology to uncover. In the Preface to the *Investigations* he handsomely said that anything of value in the book was due to conversation with the economist Piero Sraffa. And elsewhere what he said he owed was the stress on anthropology, on perspicuously locating the essence of a language game in which things are said in the

⁶ *Remarks*, p. 159, V 1

⁷ *Investigations* pt II, xi, p. 226

form of life of the people using the language.⁸ This was the dimension which had been missing from his early work. It is the dimension that makes him so contemptuous of philosophers content to rest on abstract notions of reference, or representation. It is also the dimension that reopens some space for Philonous, or for our beginner who remains unimpressed by the isolation test.

There is however a wrong way to proceed, which is to invoke an alleged distinction between an ‘internal’ MM dependency claim, and an ‘external’ or ‘transcendental’ one. True, someone may say, when we give verdicts on imagined scenarios, the test goes against Euthyphro. But that is because we confine ourselves to an internal reading. But there is also an *external* reading, and it is here that the philosophy must lie. *Externally* or *transcendentally*, do values depend on Creation, or do we Discover them? Moore can be patronized (here, as in the case of knowledge) as having thought to answer a difficult and deep external question with a trivial internal MM dependency.

But that depends on there being an external question of dependency. However it may be in the general case of idealism, in ethics, how is it to be framed? Suppose we don metaethical clothing, and ask in what we hope to be an upper-case, metathetical tone of voice ‘do Values as such depend on our Sentiments or our Wills as such?’ We still have to answer by considering examples. So, for instance, does the value of the selfless act of benevolence depend on our sentiments, or does the awfulness of unmotivated cruelty depend on our willing to avoid it, or does...? And now the claim is that we can hear these as *other* than requests for an MM dependency test. But we cannot. We can only run the test one more time, and we will again get the Socratic verdict. There is no external question of *dependency*.

We might be tempted to think that there must be one. But this would only be so if expressivism was false. If it were false, we might believe in a normative or evaluative “truth condition”, a fact, or chunky ontologically heavy “truth-maker”, a real law which might indeed have its own strange pattern of comings and goings and its own dependencies, or its own magical immunity to contingent fact. But since evaluation goes on without invoking any such thing, there is no external question of dependency either.⁹

So does this mean that we cannot “stand outside” at all? As the first epigraph shows, Wittgenstein certainly did not think so, contrary to some cavalier interpretations. He thought the deep, ethnological stance does reveal something. It even reveals a claim of dependency, but a benign one. It reveals that *our* valuations depend in their different ways on our form or stream of life, on our activities, on our practices, or, even our feelings. It may tell us, for example, that our practice of arithmetic depends upon such-and-such contingencies in our lives, or answers such-and-such needs, or could have been abandoned or varied under such-and-such circumstances. But that never gives us that ‘had things been otherwise, $2 + 2$ would not have been 4’. This investigation never issues in a false dependency claim. It would only give us—and this is an ordinary enough claim,

⁸ Brian McGuinness. *Wittgenstein in Cambridge: Letters and Documents 1911—1951*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. P..?

⁹ Is it only expressivists who can skip free here? It is certainly much easier for them than for others. You cannot skip free with heads buried in the sand, either.

not a transcendental one—that had things been otherwise, we would not have been talking about numbers at all.

This means that idealists, or sympathizers with Euthyphro, must be careful how to express themselves. In earlier works I used to talk of the ‘projection’ of sentiments, although realizing that this, too, can raise suspicion that it falls foul of an MM test. I always took care to say that it did not because, as described above, when it is a question of valuation any MM test merely shows us contouring our first-order ethics, and projectivists have no problem with our contouring our first-order ethics as well brought-up persons should. We project our sentiments by valuing things in the way we do in the words we do. But we do not indulge a first-order ethics in which the disvalue, say, of wanton cruelty depends on someone devaluing it. It only depends on the things that make cruelty abhorrent, which is primarily the distress to its victims, and sometimes, secondarily, the perpetrator’s pleasure in that distress. But I now think the precaution was not strong enough, and the only right course may be to avoid talk of projecting, just as Kantian constructivists may do better to avoid talk of conferring (or constructing) values. For me, this leaves us with enough to say, although I must leave it to Kantian constructivists to work out how much it leaves them. It is quite hard to interpret, but it is possible, I believe, that Korsgaard intends the conferral of value to live *within* the first-order justification of things, in which case the MM test will clearly show her to be at odds with Kant, and at odds with Socrates, Moore, Langton, and myself. Her constructivism would not remain at the level of an explanation of our evaluating and moralizing propensities, but would seep through into a very un-Kantian doctrine about justification. The casual notion of the ‘source of normativity’ itself encourages this confusion, and other writers including Samuel Kerstein and Christopher Peacocke have fallen headlong into it.¹⁰

So I now believe that the only right course is to say what needs to be said about the expressions to which we are led, and to avoid the dangerous metaphors. Here on the one hand, we are with likes and dislikes, sources of joy and pain, set in a social world, with limited but real sympathies, and limited but real needs to cooperate with each other. Here on the other hand is our language of valuation. Is it intelligible that beings of the kind we sketch should develop language of the kind we have? Do we have to invoke divine sparks, skyhooks, faculties of intuition, cognitive powers beyond anything given by the five senses and general intelligence, to close the gap? Or can we make the evolution intelligible just by thinking of what we had to do, and therefore did? My hope, following Hume, is that we can do the latter. And what is quite certain is that nothing mysterious arrived with the Euthyphronic phenomena. The MM test shows only how and why we value things, not what it is to do so, why we do so, or what is required to understand our doing so. Metaethics must entirely avoid it.

If we are to avoid talk of construction and projection, how should we pursue the Humean project? Partly it depends on where the shoe pinches. If, for instance, we think that a puzzling “normativity” arises with very basic psychological phenomena, such as a capacity for intentional thought or intentional behaviour, we will have to start a long way back indeed. If we are happy with those, and think that their cousinship with anything seriously normative is sufficiently slight—for after all, animals perceive and act—we can

¹⁰ See footnote 2.

start by taking those capacities for granted (this is what Hume does). My own contribution to the project is to allow us at least elementary psychological capacities, and then to ask: ‘what would we miss out if, for instance, we had only a simple language of commands, or a simple language of overt ejaculations or expressions of like or dislike, or desire or aversion?’ And the Wittgensteinian, or expressivist, promise is that we can close the gap, that we have taken only what we need, and nothing mysterious remains.

Does Berkeley gain a parallel space in which to operate, or is he tied to a ‘transcendental’ method, of doubtful value? His problem is to find a compelling starting point, without situating his agents, even considered purely in respect of their conscious lives, in a common-sense external world from the beginning. It is only if he can motivate us to start with a stream of ‘ideas’, thought of as self-standing mental possessions, and then imagining ourselves being faced with the task of bringing order and control into the shifting kaleidoscope, that anything like his idealism can emerge. But this starting point is not compelling, and many would say it is entirely fanciful. To have the stream of ideas, presented as temporally ordered, the agent must be already fully placed in an external world. That, at least is how the majority of contemporary philosophers see it.

But ethics is less ambitious, and more hospitable to stripped-down, basic starting points (hence the possibility of “evolutionary” stories about ethics, whereas evolutionary stories about perception, if they can be given at all, must start much further back down the tree of life). One advantage of thinking of it this way, is that there is no necessary competition with other thinkers finding other building blocks important, and other aspects of the phenomena puzzling. We should not aspire to a complete story all in one small compass, but to one “perspicuous representation” amongst others, a small contribution to smoothing the path, and removing any residual bewilderment that we end up doing what we do. In the rest of this paper I shall suggest one small building block that may assist this project.

II

Following Quine, deflationists and disquotationalists about truth like to say that the truth predicate is a “device of generalization”. Nobody, so far as I know, has explicitly followed up the corresponding suggestion about the goodness predicate, although experimentally I floated the comparison some time back.¹¹ Yet as I shall show, the parallels are striking.

The idea behind saying that the truth predicate is such a device is well-known. We start with the transparency of truth: the Frege-Ramsey idea that there is a direct, logical, equivalence between asserting a proposition, and asserting that the proposition is true. We might add, with Paul Horwich, that the disposition to assent to any example of the schema ‘it is true that p iff p ’, or perhaps more cautiously, to any non-pathological instance of it, is the core of our understanding of truth. In other words, corresponding to the schema, there is such a disposition. If you have this disposition, then you can qualify as a fully-fledged user of the truth predicate.

Familiarly, however, this foundation stone of the theory of truth needs to be built upon. By itself the foundational schema leaves it mysterious why we talk in terms of truth at all. Why have such a predicate, if we can say what we want without it? Why is it not

¹¹ Simon Blackburn *Ruling Passions* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 75 – 6.

redundant, as the old name for deflationism implied? The well-known answer, according to deflationists is that the truth predicate enables us to generalize, or slightly more accurately, enables us to quantify and to refer indirectly. So consider:

John said something true at breakfast
Nothing Bush said is true.

If our repertoire is finite, then we can approximate to each of these with simple lists. Suppose p_1, \dots, p_n exhaust the things that we can say, then we can offer:

(At breakfast John said p_1 & p_1) $\vee \dots \vee$ (At breakfast John said p_n & p_n)
If Bush said (p_1 then $\neg p_1$) & \dots & (if Bush said p_n then $\neg p_n$)

These have the right implications. If John said something true at breakfast and the only thing he said was p_j then we can deduce that p_j , or equivalently, that p_j is true. And they are implied as they should be: if p_j and John said p_j at breakfast, then the disjunction follows: John said something true.

More impressive generalizations such as ‘Whenever p is true and *if p then q is true, q is true*’, can be treated the same way, conjoining all the finite number of instances of the form. Even in the finite world, these disjunctions and conjunctions are only approximations, of course, since they do not offer a closure condition. But that too makes no use of the truth predicate: it only needs to tell us that $p_1 \dots p_n$ are all the propositions (in the domain or relevant context) that there are, all the things that can be said or thought.

If we move to the real world with its indefinite or infinite number of things to say, direct paraphrase in terms of a list is not possible. But the right inferential dispositions can still exist. Given the first statement, that John said something true at breakfast, then we become ready, given a list of what John actually said at breakfast, to infer the disjunction of those propositions. And given the second, then we become ready, on learning a list of what Bush said to infer a conjunction of their negations. Our firm assent to ‘Whenever p is true and *if p then q is true, q is true*’ corresponds to an inferential disposition in just the same way. Our actual state is a little more complex than this suggests, for assent to the premise that John said something true, or Bush said nothing true, is itself likely to be defeasible. We might be “given” the second, for example, but on learning that Bush said that Canada is a country to the north of the United States not be inclined to infer the negation of that, but to backtrack on what we were “given”. But that is familiar territory: our readiness ties us to the tree of alternatives, either to accept that Canada is not a country to the north of the United States, or to reject what we were initially given. And that is a dispositional state.

Other contexts in which we use the truth predicate are given essentially the same treatment. Consider for example norms and injunctions: ‘Find out what is true before opening your mouth about an issue’, or, slightly more stiffly, ‘aim to believe only what is true’. These generalize over schemata such as ‘find out whether p before asserting whether p ’, or ‘aim to believe p only if p ’ — and both of these are schemata for many excellent pieces of advice. We can detect whether someone is successfully following such advice by being on the alert for particular instances: he may have asserted that

Cedric has fallen out with Sally before finding out whether Cedric had fallen out with Sally; or recklessly convinced himself that his money was safe when it was not. The more he avoids being like that the better he is following the advice. Some people are better at this than others.

The idea smoothly accounts for the appearance of truth in explanation. Why are we successful in computing trajectories in accordance with Newton's laws of motion? Because those laws are (near enough) true. We might accept this without knowing what Newton's laws of motion say. But the acceptance gives us a disposition, such that when we learn that one of them says that force is mass times acceleration, to suppose that we are successful in computing trajectories on the supposition that force is mass times acceleration because (near enough) it is. And conversely, if we accept explanations having this form often enough, we become disposed to wrap them up in the generalization, that we are more often successful in acting on scientific assertions when they are (near enough) true.

Although it is standard to sum all this up, in deflationist writing, by saying that the truth predicate is a device of generalization, we might more accurately express the result by saying that the truth predicate together with the correlated notion of a proposition, make up devices of generalization and indirect reference. It is one thing to accept or reject particular sayings one by one, but another thing to be able to generate these states of readiness, generalizing or referring indirectly in a domain of things that are said and thought. We want to generalize and to refer indirectly, and we need both the notion of a proposition and the notion of truth to do so. My own view is that this should blunt the metaphysical barbs aimed at the notion of a proposition, just as it blunts the barbs aimed by doubters and deniers at the notion of truth. But this is not an axe I need to grind for what follows.¹² Nor do I want to take sides on whether Horwich's version of deflationism is less or more preferable than, for instance, a prosentential version, locating the truth predicate as a kind of anaphoric device.¹³ It should not be described as an anaphoric device of *back* reference to an expressed assertion or sentence, since we can be told that John said three true things without the things having been previously located. But if we think in terms of deferred reference, we get a similar theory. The person is, as it were, put into a waiting state by the information, a state that would only be completed when the proposition or propositions in question come to light. And it is this similarity to Horwich's view that is needed for what follows.

How can all this be applied to the good predicate?

Suppose we had only the simple language discussed in *Spreading the Word*, reflecting the underlying practical role of ethical assertion. The language has an expressive device with which to voice endorsement or approval (hooray!) and one with which to voice rejection (boo!). And to simplify let us suppose that the things we endorse or reject are all of them doings: actions performed or omitted by agents. When we hooray a doing, we must be given a reference to what was done, and the operator attaches to that:

¹² My exposition of deflationism closely follows Paul Horwich's classic discussion in *Truth*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

¹³ Grover, D., Camp, J., and Belnap, N. 'A Prosentential Theory of Truth', *Philosophical Studies*, 27, 1975. The benefits of a prosentential version in this connection have been urged upon me by Geoff Sayre-McCord.

hooray for Cedric helping Annie to find her book; boo to Johnny pulling Katie's hair. In this simple model, nuances in our actual ethical attitudes are ignored, but they could easily be added. For instance, the difference between rejecting what John did as not altogether admirable, and rejecting it as out and out wrong, is not registered. The difference between approving of something selfishly, and approving of it from the common point of view is not there yet. Similarly, there is as yet no room for the attributive use of the term, as when we talk about 'good tennis match' or 'good from the farmer's point of view'. But once we have endorsement and rejection, and comparisons in terms of value, we can also expect valuations within a dimension, and evaluations qua one thing or another. These and other refinements can be added, as we imagine the difference, for instance, between regretting it that someone does something, and actually being disposed to forbid it, or to set in place emotional or social sanctions against it. In any case, we could do a great deal with this primitive language, just as a great deal of ethics can be shown in practice, and voiced in simple injunctions and ejaculations.

But we would be limited, in the way that without the notions of a proposition and a truth predicate, we would be limited. Without those notions, in the truth case, I can say:

At breakfast John said that pigs fly, but pigs do not fly

But not:

John said something untrue at breakfast

So in the ethical case, I could say:

At breakfast John hit Katie, and boo! to that.

But not:

John did something bad at breakfast.

This last sentence does not mean 'John did something at breakfast, and boo! to that'. We are not saying that John was at fault for acting at all, but rather, there is something in particular he did fit to excite condemnation. A good way of seeing this point is to imagine not a language with explicit 'boo!' and 'hooray!' devices but that achieves the same effect through intonation. 'At breakfast, John hit Katie' could be said in a particularly grave or falling tone of voice, indicating condemnation or rejection. But if we were confined to saying 'John did something at breakfast' with the same tone, we would be construed, again, as simply condemning John for acting at all.¹⁴

But with a device for deferred indirect reference to hand, we can extend our repertoire, and we will be understood in exactly the parallel way to the way we are when we deploy the truth predicate. So, instead of saying 'John did such-and-such, and hooray! for that & John did thus-and-so, and hooray! for that, and... and that's all John did', we can sum it up by saying that everything John did was good. Instead of listing (John hit Kay & boo! to that) v (John stole Katie's apple & boo! to that)... which requires being

¹⁴ I am grateful to Jamie Dreier for this way of putting the point. I discuss intonation and prosody in connection with so-called 'thick' concepts, in 'Through Thick and Thin,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 66 (1992): 285-99

able to enumerate all John's possible doings, we say that John did something bad. Once more, this does not mean that John did something and it was bad to do so. It puts us in the same waiting state or state of readiness: if John's doings come to light, we expect to reject at least one of them, just as with the truth predicate, if we have been told that John said something true, then if John's sayings come to light we expect to be able to assent to at least one of them (or reject what we have been told).

So the arrival of quantification, in this case over doings, and the use of the good predicate (and of course the bad predicate) together expand our repertoire just as the arrival of propositions, as a class over which we can quantify, and the truth predicate, together expand our repertoire.

The case of the truth predicate is aided by two things. There is a canonical presentation of a proposition, in the use of a sentence expressing it. There is no similar canonical presentation of an action, although we are familiar with more or less helpful descriptions of what was done. And then there is the syntactic similarity between the semantically basic p and the equivalent ' p is true'. That is, where the sentence expressing p stands in a sentence frame, so will the equivalent. So, in the truth case we can simply use the basic schema ' p is true iff p ' to introduce the relevant dispositions. In the case of ethical expression, it is not quite so simple, as the famous Frege-Geach problem reminds us. In the ethics case we cannot use ' d is good iff hooray! for d ', as a basic schema, since 'hooray! for d ' cannot generally be substituted by sayings that will stand on one side of a conditional.

However, the difference is superficial from the present perspective, since we can introduce the relevant basic dispositions just as easily. The understanding of the truth predicate, deflationists say, is fundamentally possession of the disposition to assent to every non-pathological instance of the schema. Similarly the understanding of the goodness predicate is fundamentally possession of the disposition to assent to any instance of the form ' d is good' when and only when you are disposed to endorse d , and to any instance of the form ' d is bad' when and only when you are disposed to reject d . Notice that this does not introduce the basic disposition that identifies understanding as the disposition to obey the injunction: 'hooray d if and only if d is good!'. For people may understand the good predicate well enough although, unhappily, they are not too disposed to follow *that* injunction. This will be so wherever they have defective standards. This is parallel to the fact that the basic disposition that corresponds to understanding the truth predicate is not that you are disposed to assert p whenever p is true. For people who are largely and widely mistaken may still have grasped the notion of truth. The disposition ties assent to the proposition in terms of good when you are disposed to hooray things, regardless of whether you do both just when you should or not, and in this parallels the disposition which gives understanding of the truth predicate.

Deflationism gives us an understanding of the norms associated with truth. And as with the norms surrounding truth, so with those surrounding goodness. 'Do d only if d is good' is no doubt excellent advice, and we will suppose an agent to be acting in accord with it, if whenever he does d we are disposed to endorse d . Similarly with 'admire only

what is good', or 'do not even feel tempted to what is bad', and the other golden mantras of the moralist.

Explanation follows on as well. Compare 'John turned out intelligent because his parents told him many true things' with 'John turned out honest because his parents brought him up well'. As a first approximation, the first is said by one who thinks that there are various things $p_1 \dots p_n$ which his parents told him, and is disposed (mostly) to think that $p_1 \dots p_n$, and also think that John turned out intelligent because he was told $p_1 \dots p_n$. In the same way, the second is said by one who believes there to be various things $d_1 \dots d_n$ his parents did, and who is disposed to endorse a sufficient number of these things, and finally who supposes that because of those John turned out honest. However these are only first approximations. In the truth case, there is the lurking problem of someone who is sure that John turned out intelligent because his parents told him many true things, but who has no idea what these may have been (the deferential peasant applauding the young lord's Oxford career, perhaps). So instead of 'thinks that there are various things $p_1 \dots p_n$ which his parents told him', we can substitute 'thinks that there must have been various things $p_1 \dots p_n$ which his parents told him and supposes that they were true, whatever they were' and do justice to the lord and the peasant; the same remedy applies to the rare, morally modest, commentator on the obscure forces behind John's goodness, who would not himself essay a view about which things his parents are likely to have done to bring about the happy result, but supposes that whatever they were, they were good.

In the more common case, where one has a range of instances in mind, each case, of course, shares the same risk, that the audience misunderstands which intended range of propositions, or range of actions it is. You may say the first, having in mind the science that Cedric's parents taught him, but be heard by someone who casts around for religious doctrines they must have been inculcating. And similarly you may say the second, having in mind the examples of honesty and kindness his parents illustrated, but be heard by someone who casts around for frivolous observances they must have followed. That is why it is usually better to descend to specifics. Instead of saying that Cedric turned out honest because his parents brought him up well, we go into detail: his parents brought him up with respect and love, and a firm tendency to steer him back onto the straight and narrow if he ever said that p when he apparently did not believe it. Hooray for doing those things! We descend from the generalization when his parents' specific goodness comes into question. It was not because of their obsessive religious observances—which other people unfortunately call good—that Cedric turned out well.

The parallel has another set of interesting consequences. Having devoted a book to the property of Goodness, Moore was left with almost nothing to say about it: it was known only by the theological *via negativa*—unanalyzable, only known by intuition, bearing a mysterious and *sui generis* relationship of supervenience to other properties, magnetically connected with the will, and so on. We can now see that Moore's ear for the phenomena was perfect, but the error, into which he is followed by contemporary intuitionists, lay in pitching the whole inquiry in a misleading metaphysical key. As a device of generalization, the good predicate will indeed resist analysis, resist any account

of empirical or causal access, and bear a relation of supervenience to other properties. It will consort with necessity, but not with a priority. Expressivists who follow the quasi-realist route of explaining the phenomena of ethics have noticed these properties before. But it is nice to be able to pull them together. The magnetic property of Goodness, that so excited and repelled John Mackie, becomes no more than the fact that you do not call things good unless you are also disposed to endorse them. Supervenience becomes the requirement that you endorse things in the light of their other properties: one of the very few, and perhaps the only, constitutive requirement on the practices of evaluation. Any fundamental principle or standard connecting the properties of things to their being good will, if acceptable to me, be deemed necessary by me, because I will apply the same standards to any possible scenario. It will not be a priori, because however lovable it may be, it will be intelligibly deniable. Goodness resists analysis, because no empirical predicate can serve the same logical function. And there is no question of empirical or causal access to goodness, because there is no robust or thick substantive property there to access. As with truth, we can *say* that there is a property there, if properties are just the semantic projection of predicates. But there is no topic there, no residual mystery, therefore, about how we get our hooks into it nor why we should want to do so.

Everything said about the good can be said about reason. We talk about reason in the abstract simply as a way of thinking about what is good in the way of movements of the mind and movements of the will. It would often be good that people's minds and wills should move in various ways even if they are too ignorant to be able so to move, or too limited in other ways to feel any inclination to do so. Someone seeking reasons for a conclusion or an action is looking for facts in the light of which it would be good to move to the conclusion or the action. Some fail to find reasons that are there; others fail to be moved by them as they should. It would often be good if people were better, in this respect as in others. That is all the admired and much discussed 'externalism' of reason amounts to, and again it cannot act as any kind of pivot on which substantial philosophical issues rise or fall.¹⁵

The view will differ from naturalism of the Cornell variety, since the understanding of ethics is not fundamentally an ability to identify one or another natural property or cluster of natural properties. It is the ability to endorse or reject various courses of action. If the Cornell realists have hit upon the right natural properties to privilege or endorse, then good ethicists will have their attention focused on those. Others will not, since some people have woeful standards. But they do not thereby forfeit their status in the game, as they ought to if reference to the Cornell cluster of natural properties were the semantic entry ticket. People with misguided standards commend and reject, love and hate, like the rest of us. That is why it is so important to convert or combat them.

The parallel theory works elegantly and harmoniously in aesthetics, not only vindicating Austin's recommendation that philosophers should think less about the good

¹⁵ I fear that Bernard Williams made this difficult for people to understand. See also my *Ruling Passions*, pp. 264—6.

and the beautiful, and more about the dainty and the dumpy, but also helping us to interpret Kant's dark views about judgment (and perhaps doing something to unify the two senses of judgment as on the one hand assent to the truth, and on the other appreciation of the beautiful). Kant held that there was no rule or concept determining the beautiful, for otherwise free creative activity would be merely mechanical. But there are individual objects of disinterested sensory pleasure, stimulated by the harmonious free play of our imaginative powers, which we may expect (Kant says, demand) that everyone shares. So, how is it that if we are told in advance that John made two beautiful sketches before breakfast, we will have been told something in spite of there being no rule or concept in play delineating the *kind* of thing that John did? Accepting what we are told, we will expect a free play of our cognitive and imaginative powers to bring us disinterested pleasure, on contemplating his two sketches. If it does not, we may worry about our own sensibilities on this occasion, or backtrack on the judgment. If we hold that beauty is important, we hold that such occasions are worth seeking out and cherishing. We will suppose that someone takes pleasure in what is beautiful insofar as we do share his sensibility. Beauty is magnetic because pleasure is.

Many writers think there is a difficulty lurking within the dominant deflationist approach to the truth predicate. This is that the notion of a proposition or assertion, or the notion of the *use* made of an inscription type or phonetic type, remains invisible to science. It is itself on the mysterious cognitive side of a divide between concrete stuff, like alphabetical inscriptions or sound waves, and the mysterious stuff of thought. This is why it is standard to supplement deflationism with something like a use theory of meaning (Horwich) or an inferential role semantics or game-theoretic semantics (Field, Brandom). Some might suppose that a similar difficulty infects my modest proposal. It would not in this case be the bare notion of a doing—the subject of these predications and generalizations—that itself conceals ethical judgments. It would rather be that if they are to launch the Wittgensteinian genealogy, endorsing and rejecting, hooraying and booing, must be complex things to do. And then the fear arises that they are the prerogative only of animals with normative repertoires, so that the whole story is idle.

The right response is to admit that of course admiration, rejection, and the rest are indeed coeval with normative repertoires. But that just gives us an opportunity to look once more at the stream of life within which normative activity takes place. We can see, clearly enough, what is involved in loving and choosing, admiring and rejecting, insisting and forbidding, erecting and policing boundaries to behaviour, encouraging and discouraging. We see it without doing metaphysics and without opening the door to anything deserving the name. We thereby gain what Wittgenstein wanted, a 'perspicuous representation' of what we are doing when we voice these things. In the beginning was the deed, and it is these deeds that give us the substance of all our normative repertoires. We can call the overall package pragmatism, or expressivism, or non-descriptive functionalism, or just Wittgensteinianism if we like. In any event, it is the path to conquering those three majestic and magnetic philosophical summits: truth, beauty, and goodness.

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