

In Defense of the Concept of Intrinsic Value

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Article:

The concept of intrinsic value has enjoyed a long, rich history. From the time of the ancient Greeks to the present day, philosophers have placed it at the foundation of much of their theorizing. This is especially true of G.E. Moore, who made it the cornerstone of his *Principia Ethica*.¹ Yet this venerable concept has recently come under serious, sustained attack. My aim in this paper is to show that this attack has been unsuccessful.

When *Principia Ethica* appeared, its impact on the philosophical community was immediate and profound.² Of course, much of what Moore had to say was, and continues to be, strongly disputed. The view that goodness is a simple nonnatural property has been criticized by many people and in many ways. Some have argued that goodness is an analyzable property.³ Others have argued that it is a natural property (or relation).⁴ Still others have argued, more radically, that goodness is not a property (or relation) at all.⁵ But none of these critics has rejected the very idea of goodness. None of them, that is, has contended that to say of something that it is good (in Moore's sense) is to speak nonsense. Yet just this is the charge of certain recent critics. Peter Geach was one of the first of these critics.⁶ Bernard Williams has endorsed these criticisms.⁷ Philippa Foot has also indicated that she rejects the notion of goodness that consequentialists such as Moore invoke.⁸ Finally, and most recently, Judith Thomson has in a number of places forcefully pressed the view that there is no such thing as the sort of goodness with which Moore is concerned.⁹ What she calls 'Moore's story' about the right and the good (in short: part one — there is such a property as goodness; part two —there is therefore such a relation as betterness; part three — the right is analyzable in terms of the relation of betterness) goes wrong, she claims, right at the start.¹⁰ Whereas most critics of consequentialism have attacked part three of this story, Thomson, like Foot, attacks part one.

It is with Thomson's claims that I shall be particularly concerned in this paper.¹¹ My purpose is not to defend consequentialism, for I agree that there is reason to be suspicious of part three of Moore's story. But part one seems to me beyond reproach, and my aim here is to rebut Thomson's attack against it. Since what follows takes a number of twists and turns, let me now provide an outline as a guide.

Section I: a discussion of Geach's observations about how 'good' operates and of Thomson's elaboration on them. (Thomson does not fully endorse Geach's view but she does build on it.) In this section I present two theses that Thomson claims to be true and that she claims threaten Moore's conception of goodness.

Section II: a brief consideration of a response to Geach's and Thomson's views based on remarks by W.D. Ross.

Section III: two types of goodness distinguished: generic and intrinsic. It is here that Thomson's case against Moore begins to unravel, since it becomes clear that the concept of goodness that she attacks and which she attributes to Moore is that of generic goodness, which is in fact not the concept of goodness (intrinsic goodness) with which Moore is primarily concerned in part one of his 'story.' (In this section I also cast doubt on the success of Thomson's attack against the concept of generic goodness.)

Section IV: a return to Geach's view, in light of the distinction between generic and intrinsic goodness. Given the distinction, the relevance to intrinsic goodness of his observations about how 'good' operates is rendered dubious.

Section V: a discussion of Thomson's distinction between derivative and nonderivative goodness. Here I argue that Thomson is quite right to draw this distinction, which is in fact also drawn by the proponents of intrinsic value. Thomson claims that nonderivative goodness does not constitute a 'way' of being good in the manner that other types of goodness do. I argue that she is once again quite right about this, but that this doesn't threaten the concept of intrinsic goodness, once it is recognized that intrinsic goodness (as traditionally conceived) involves being nonderivatively good in a particular way.

Section VI: brief discussion of a suggested taxonomy of goodness.

The central point that I shall be trying to make is that Thomson's attack on the concept of intrinsic value simply misses its mark. I think it is important to establish this, for two main reasons. First, Thomson is just one of several philosophers who have engaged in this sort of attack and whose prominent status makes the attack one that a proponent of intrinsic value cannot afford to ignore. Second, the misinterpretation of Moore's position upon which the attack is predicated is facilitated by the misleading way in which Moore and others have sometimes expressed this position. My hope is that the discussion that follows will constitute not just a defense of the concept of intrinsic value but the beginnings of a clarification of that concept.

So much for preliminaries. Let us now begin with Geach.

I

We can draw a grammatical distinction between two ways in which adjectives can operate. An illustration will help make the distinction clear. 'Red' operates as a grammatically attributive adjective in the phrase 'a red book' and as a grammatically predicative adjective in the phrase 'this book is red.' Geach employs this same terminology to make a related logical distinction. As he puts it:

I shall say that in a phrase "an A B" ("A" being an adjective and "B" being a noun) "A" is a (logically) predicative adjective if the predication "is an A B" splits up logically into a pair of predications "is a B" and "is A"; otherwise I shall say that "A" is a (logically) attributive adjective.¹²

Thus 'red' is itself said by Geach to be a logically predicative adjective, since

(1) x is a red book

'splits up logically' into

(1a) x is a book

and

(1b) x is red.

But other adjectives do not sanction such 'splitting up' and so must be said to be logically attributive. Geach gives these examples:

(2) x is a big flea;

(3) x is a small elephant;

(4) *x* is a forged banknote;

(5) *x* is the putative father of *y*.

In the course of his remarks, Geach also suggests a second, related test by means of which one can distinguish between logically predicative and attributive adjectives.¹³ Logically predicative adjectives sanction what I shall call 'transposition,' whereas logically attributive adjectives do not. For example, from

(6) *x* is a red bird

and

(7) a bird is an animal

one may infer

(8) *x* is a red animal.

With 'big,' small, 'forged,' and 'putative,' however, no such inference is warranted.

In *Principia Ethica*, Moore likened 'good' to 'yellow,' declaring that both express simple properties, the latter a natural property, the former a nonnatural one.¹⁴ But Geach claims that the analogy is badly flawed because, whereas 'yellow' is, like 'red,' a logically predicative adjective, 'good' is logically attributive; for 'good' sanctions neither splitting up nor transposition. For example,

(9) *x* is a good car

cannot be split up into

(9a) *x* is a car

and

(9b) *x* is good.

Also, from

(10) *x* is a good cricketer

and

(11) a cricketer is a person

one may not infer

(12) *x* is a good person.

Geach concludes:

Even when "good" or "bad" stands by itself as a predicate, and is thus grammatically predicative, some substantive has to be understood; there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so.¹⁵

This seems a significant conclusion. Moore contended that we may sensibly ask of certain things (such as pleasure, beauty, knowledge) whether they are good and sensibly answer that indeed they are good.¹⁶ But Geach claims that nothing can be just good in this way; what is good is always good relative to a certain kind. A good car may be a bad investment, a good cricketer may be a bad person.

Thomson has elaborated considerably on Geach's thesis. She endorses his claim that 'good' is logically attributive, though not his conclusion that whatever is good is good relative to a certain kind. For although 'That's good' may mean 'That's a good *K*,' for some kind *K*, it may not. When we say, for instance, that something is 'good to eat (look at, listen to); or 'good for use in making cheesecake (hammering in nails, Alfred, Alfred's lawn mower),' or that someone is 'good at hanging wallpaper (playing chess, singing),' or 'good in Hamlet (the play),' or 'good as Hamlet (the Prince),' or 'good with children,' and so on, we are not necessarily implying that the thing or person in question is good relative to a certain kind. ('For what *K*,' she asks, 'could it at all plausibly be thought that being good for Alfred is being a good *K*?')¹⁷ Rather, all such uses of 'good plus adjunct' involve what she calls first-order ways of being good,¹⁸ and being good relative to a certain kind is itself reducible to being good in some first-order way. For example, '*x* is a good book' may mean that *x* is good to read, or good for use in teaching logic, or good to look at, etc.; which of these it means will depend on the context of its utterance.

Thomson also identifies what she calls second-order ways of being good.¹⁹ If, for example, one says that a certain act was good, one may but is not likely to mean that it was good in some first-order way (e.g., good to do, or good to look at); rather, one is likely to mean that it was just, or generous, or kind, and so on. Though distinct from first-order ways of being good, these second-order ways of being good, she contends, nonetheless 'rest on' first-order ways of being good. Furthermore, she claims that there are no kinds of ways of being good other than being good in some first-order way or being good in some second-order way.²⁰

Now, distinguishing these (kinds of) ways of being good is not itself anti-Moorean in spirit. But it may well seem so when coupled with the following crucial contention: if something is good, then it is good in some such way. Or, as Thomson puts it (I shall call this Thomson's First Thesis): '[All] goodness is goodness in a way.'²¹ Even though she disagrees with certain aspects of Geach's view, then, Thomson is nonetheless very much in sympathy with its spirit. She firmly embraces the idea that goodness is always to be relativized in some way; it cannot stand alone. And this leads her to say the following: 'In saying "That's good", we are not ascribing a property goodness — indeed there is no such thing.'²² I shall call the thesis that there is no such property as goodness Thomson's Second Thesis.

II

There can be no doubt as to the plausibility of Geach's distinction between logically predicative and attributive adjectives (initial plausibility, at least; I shall express reservations about it in Section IV below); and there can be no doubt as to the plausibility of Thomson's emphasis (reminiscent of Georg von Wright's²³) on the variety of ways in which something can be good. But the conclusion that there is no such thing as the sort of goodness with which Moore is concerned is unwarranted.

It is worth noting that the distinction that Geach invokes was discussed more than a quarter of a century earlier by W.D. Ross.²⁴ Ross endorsed this distinction but was nonetheless a firm supporter of the concept of intrinsic value. He recognized that 'good' is frequently used in a logically attributive (or, as he sometimes put it, adjunctive) way, and he claimed that when so used it is relative in two respects: first, it is relative to the kind in question (for a good *x* may be a bad *y* or *z*, as we have already noted); second, it is relative to other members of the kind in question, in that for an *x* to be a good *x* it must (he contended) be better, perhaps considerably better, than most *x*s. (There is obviously some confusion here, for it is perfectly consistent to say, for instance, that most, or even all, knives are good knives.²⁵ Thus the second alleged type of relativization is clearly a fiction. But the first type equally clearly is not.) Ross also claimed, however, that 'good' can be and sometimes is used in a logically predicative way, and that when so used it is not relative in either of these respects. When used as a logical predicative, he said, 'good' expresses either intrinsic goodness (as in 'Pleasure is good') or some related

notion such as instrumental goodness (roughly, that type of goodness which consists in being conducive to something intrinsically good) or ultimate goodness (roughly, that type of goodness which consists in being intrinsically good while having no part that is not intrinsically good).

In light of Ross's discussion of the uses of 'good,' it is initially tempting to respond to the claims of Geach and Thomson as follows. 'You're quite right to say that "good" sometimes operates in the ways you mention. But so what? It would clearly be fallacious to infer from this that "good" never operates in some other way. And in fact it does sometimes operate in the ways that Moore mentions. Thus your observations constitute no indictment of his conception of goodness.' But this response would be facile. After all, Geach (presumably)²⁶ and Thomson (certainly)²⁷ are quite aware of Ross's discussion but nonetheless reject the claim that 'good' sometimes operates in the ways Moore mentions. Why?

III

The reason can, I think, be traced at least in part to a misleading practice of Moore's. Despite his laudable efforts at precision, Moore sometimes writes rather loosely, saying simply 'good' when what he means (or should mean) in particular is 'intrinsically good.' (This is a very common practice.²⁸ I have in fact deliberately engaged in it in this paper, since doing so helps make the case for the opponents of intrinsic value seem stronger than it really is.) At the very beginning of *Principia Ethica* Moore says that the question he will address is the question 'What is good?' (note: not the question 'What is intrinsically good?'), and he goes on to say: 'Books are good' would be an answer to it, though an answer obviously false; for some books are very bad indeed.²⁹ This puzzles Thomson, and understandably so. It doesn't look as if Moore is here concerned with intrinsic goodness, for who has ever been tempted to claim that books in general are intrinsically good? And, since no way of being good is specified, it may seem that Moore is concerned with some generic form of goodness. But this too is 'weird' (as Thomson puts it).³⁰ Who has ever been tempted — indeed, what could it mean to say — that books in general are 'just plain good'?

There is no doubt that Thomson is in large part concerned to deny that there is any generic form of goodness — that there is a property, as she sometimes puts it, of 'pure, unadulterated' goodness.³¹ This, indeed, is what I have called her Second Thesis. Now, it may be that Moore thinks there is such a property. In fact, in *Ethics* he appears to offer a definition of intrinsic goodness in terms of generic goodness when he says:

By saying that a thing is intrinsically good it [that is, the theory, Utilitarianism, that Moore is investigating and which he endorses at least in this respect] means that it would be a good thing that the thing in question should exist, even if it existed quite alone, without any further accompaniments or effects whatever.³²

But whether or not Moore would accept the existence of a property of generic goodness, we should note that it seems perfectly consistent to deny its existence while nonetheless accepting the existence of intrinsic goodness. Moreover, it is perfectly clear that Moore's main concern in part one of his 'story' is (no matter how he may at times express himself) with intrinsic goodness in particular rather than goodness in general. Thus, even if Thomson's skepticism concerning the existence of 'pure, unadulterated' goodness is on target, this would seem to leave the concept of goodness with which Moore is concerned wholly unscathed.

But we should ask: is there indeed no such thing as generic goodness? Thomson appears to believe that her First Thesis (that all goodness is goodness in a way) implies her Second Thesis (that there is no such thing as generic goodness). Does it?

Consider the analogy with shape. (Color would provide another analogy.) It is plausible to say that all shape is shape in a way, that nothing can have 'pure, unadulterated' shape. What does this mean? It seems to mean (at least) that shape is a determinable property; nothing can have a shape without having a particular shape. Yet a determinable property is, of course, a property; it is a property, indeed, which unites otherwise dissimilar things. (Shape is something common to both squares and circles.) Why not take generic goodness to be on a par with

shape in this regard?³³

At one point Thomson entertains the idea that there is a property of goodness after all, namely, that long disjunctive property of being either good in this way or good in that way or....³⁴ Let us call this the property of being good in some way or other. In fact, Thomson says that there doubtless is such a property but then says that, since it's not what anybody ever means in saying 'That's good,' its title to being called 'goodness' is dubious. This is odd. People don't typically say 'That's shaped,' but we can imagine this expression coming into vogue (among car enthusiasts, say, or body-building fans). If it did, it wouldn't be used simply to mean that the thing in question has some shape or other. But this hardly shows that the property of having some shape or other has no title to being called 'shape.'

Nonetheless, I think we must accept that the property of having a shape is not just the property of having some shape or other. After all, if one construes the notion of property liberally enough, there is presumably a property corresponding to the disjunction of any properties you like. There is, for example, the property of being either a number or a brick. What's strange about this property is that its disjuncts have nothing in common (or nothing interesting: I suppose they share the property of involving an entity, the property of being used in an example by me, and so on). The property of having some shape or other isn't like this, though, for its disjuncts do have something interesting in common: they all involve shape. So shape comes first, as it were; having some shape or other comes after.

Something similar can be said about goodness. This is presumably distinct from being good in some way or other, since the latter presupposes the former. But then the former does exist, after all.³⁵ Indeed, Thomson seems to be uneasily aware of this herself. She says:

[It] is not mere happenstance that the word "good" appears in the expressions "good to look at", "good at hanging wallpaper" ... and so on: its meaning makes a contribution to their meanings.... Intuitively, for a thing X to be good in one of the first-order ways is for X to benefit someone or some thing Y ... in the appropriate way, or to be capable of doing s.³⁶

Of course, she believes that all benefit is benefit in a way; but that doesn't alter the fact that all these ways have something in common, namely, they are all ways of being a benefit. Yet on the very same page Thomson once again declares: '[There] is no such property as goodness.' These statements are difficult to reconcile with one another.

But all this is strictly by the by. For, regardless of whether we agree with Thomson's Second Thesis concerning the existence of some form of generic goodness, the essential point remains this: whether or not there is such a property as intrinsic goodness is an independent issue.

IV

Keeping in mind this emphasis on intrinsic goodness in particular, let us return for a moment to Geach's twin tests. Thomson's First Thesis is that all goodness is goodness in a way. I have not disputed this. In light of this thesis, it is tempting to diagnose the reason for the failure of 'good' to pass Geach's tests as follows: no particular way of being good has been specified. Once a way of being good has been specified, passing the tests seems plain sailing. Consider:

(13) x is an apple that is good to eat

would seem to split up into

(13a) x is an apple

and

(13b) x is good to eat.

Also, (13) and

(14) an apple is a fruit

would seem jointly to imply

(15) x is a fruit that is good to eat.

Similarly,

(16) x is a painting that is good to look at

would seem to split up into

(16a) x is a painting

and

(16b) x is good to look at.

Also, (16) and

(17) a painting is a work of art

would seem jointly to imply

(18) x is a work of art that is good to look at.

Now consider the following:

(19) x (e.g., conscientiousness) is an intrinsically good state of mind.

Doesn't it seem correct to say that this indeed splits up into

(19a) x is a state of mind

and

(19b) x is intrinsically good?

Likewise, doesn't it seem correct to say that (19) and

(20) a state of mind is a state of affairs

jointly imply

(21) x is an intrinsically good state of affairs?

Isn't this evidence that being intrinsically good is just a way of being good, as are being good to eat and being good to look at, constituting at once a confirmation both of Thomson's First Thesis and of the existence of

intrinsic value?

Unfortunately, matters are not quite that simple. First, there is reason to feel uneasy about the claim that being intrinsically good is a way of being good, as being good to eat and being good to look at are (and hence reason to feel uneasy about the relations just alleged between (19), (19a), (19b), (20), and (21)). I will return to this in the next section. Of more immediate concern, though, is that there is reason to doubt the relevance of Geach's tests to the issue at hand, intriguing as they are. Thomson herself expresses such doubts. Concerning Geach's claim that, whereas 'good' is logically attributive, 'red' is logically predicative, she says:

"Red" was not in fact well chosen for Geach's purposes, since "red" is heavily context dependent: what we ascribe to an apple when we say "It's red" is different from what we ascribe to the paint in a certain can when we say "It's red". Better choices would have been "visible" or "happy" ... or ... "sauteed" ... or "poisonous" ... or....³⁷

Now, it seems quite right to say that what's red as far as apples go may not be red as far as paints go. But of course this sort of division can be continued. After all, what's red as far as Macintosh apples go may not be red as far as Red Delicious apples go. And, contrary to what Thomson seems to imply, what's visible or poisonous to x may not be visible or poisonous to y. The fact is, very many properties are determinable (to some extent) rather than (fully) determinate, including all those just mentioned; and, as far as I can tell, every less-than-fully determinate property A is such that we can imagine possible circumstances in which we would balk at inferring 'xis a B and xis A' from 'xis an A B' (although imagining such cases may be harder the more determinate the property is) and possible circumstances in which we would not balk at this (although imagining such cases may be harder the less determinate the property is). Whether or not we do in fact balk at such inferences would seem to depend, then, on contingent circumstances (e.g., that the different ways of being red happen not to be — or, at least, happen not to be taken to be — importantly varied) which have nothing to do with the strict logical propriety of such inferences. This suggests that Geach's tests are simply irrelevant, pointing up no essential differences between the properties expressed by 'red' and 'good' and revealing no important insights into the nature of these properties.³⁸ (It should be noted that, while Thomson endorses Geach's claim that 'good' is logically attributive and elaborates on this, she doesn't dwell on these tests.)

V

Even if the relevance of Geach's tests is suspect, though, they did suggest that being intrinsically good is just one way of being good. Why not, then, declare the existence of intrinsic value to be perfectly compatible not only, as I argued in Section III, with Thomson's Second Thesis (that there is no such thing as generic goodness) but also with her First Thesis (that all goodness is goodness in a way)?

I take it that Thomson would resist this. I think that she would say that she has in mind a particular kind of way of being good, and that something's being intrinsically good (were this possible) would not be a case of its being good in this particular kind of way. Let us now look into this.

Thomson is perfectly happy to acknowledge a certain distinction on which proponents of intrinsic value rely, the distinction between (as she puts it) nonderivative and derivative goodness. (Proponents of intrinsic value often talk in terms of 'intrinsic' goodness being distinct from 'extrinsic' goodness.) This distinction, she says, cuts across ways of being good.³⁹ Something is derivatively good in some way if it inherits its goodness from something else; otherwise, its goodness is nonderivative. It may be, for instance, that drinking lemonade is good for Alfred because it quenches his thirst and his thirst's being quenched is good for him, in which case his drinking lemonade is derivatively good for him. It may also be, of course, that his thirst's being quenched is good for him only derivatively. (Whether this is so will depend on just what nonderivative goodness-for-persons consists in, a difficult question that we needn't address here.) Likewise, it may be that lubrication is good for Alfred's lawn mower; if so, it would seem that it is so only derivatively. Of course, lubrication wouldn't be good for Alfred, and the application of lemonade wouldn't be good for his lawn mower; goodness-for-persons consists in something different from what goodness-for-artifacts consists in. This leads Thomson to an

important observation: since the distinction between nonderivative and derivative goodness cuts across ways of being good, it cannot itself denote ways of being good (in the sense of 'way' at issue). As she puts it:

[Derivative] goodness is not itself a way of being good. A derivatively good thing is a thing that inherits goodness from something, and what it inherits is not derivative goodness, but rather goodness in way W, for the appropriate W. What it inherits might be goodness for this or that person, or [some other way of being good].... Since derivative goodness is not a way of being good, neither is nonderivative goodness.⁴⁰

I believe it is absolutely correct both to distinguish between nonderivative and derivative goodness and to deny that they constitute ways of being good, in the sense of 'way' at issue. (Thus, if 'nonderivatively' were substituted for 'intrinsically' in (19), we should clearly deny that (19) sanctions splitting up and transposition in the manner discussed in the last section.) It is also correct to observe that proponents of intrinsic value rely on this distinction when contrasting intrinsic value with extrinsic value. But of course this would show that being intrinsically good is not (or, better, does not involve) a way of being good, in the sense of 'way' at issue, only if proponents of intrinsic value claimed that being intrinsically good just is being nonderivatively good; and it is clear that, although someone is of course free to use the term 'intrinsically good' to mean simply what Thomson means by 'nonderivatively good,' this is not how the proponents of intrinsic value typically use the term (as Thomson herself acknowledges).⁴¹ Rather, they take being intrinsically good to be a particular way in which something can be nonderivatively good; being extrinsically good involves being derivatively good in that same way. (Given this, the claim that (19) sanctions splitting up and transposition does indeed seem no more problematic than the other cases mentioned in the last section.)

The key question then is: what way of being good does being intrinsically good involve? Here we will probably meet with some disagreement. It is certainly true that proponents of intrinsic value have not traditionally concerned themselves with specifying in any great detail the way of being good that being intrinsically good involves. Indeed, they may seem at times positively hostile to the suggestion that there is some such way. (Recall Ross's insistence on the nonrelativity of 'good' when used in a logically predicative way. Consider also Moore's use of the term 'good absolutely' to express the idea of intrinsic goodness.)⁴² Yet it is perfectly clear that the proponents of intrinsic value have often been at pains to distinguish the various senses of 'good' and to insist that 'intrinsically good' expresses only one of these senses.⁴³ And if 'intrinsically good' doesn't reduce to 'nonderivatively good,' it would seem legitimate to attribute to the proponents of intrinsic value the view that being intrinsically good is (or involves) just one way of being good (in Thomson's sense of 'way'). But again, what way is this?

The answer is: ethical goodness. When it is said that pleasure, or knowledge, or beauty, or virtue is intrinsically good and that, for example, activities that promote such states are extrinsically good, what is meant is that all these things are ethically good. Now, I hasten to add that not all of these goods are moral goods, as this term is usually understood. Virtue is plausibly thought of as a moral good, but pleasure, knowledge, and beauty surely are not. What then can it mean to say that these nonmoral goods are nonetheless ethically good? This division of terms is admittedly awkward, since I wish to draw no distinction between ethics and morality. But the point is that even those intrinsic goods such as pleasure, knowledge, and beauty (assuming they are such), which are not normally thought of as moral goods, nonetheless have an intimate tie to morality, in that there is a moral requirement to favor them (welcome them, admire them, take satisfaction in them, and so on) for their own sakes. That which is intrinsically good is preferable to that which is not, the '-able' here expressing moral worthiness.

This is not an original point. Many philosophers have made it." The title of Moore's masterpiece is, after all, 'Principia Ethica.' And, despite his insistence that 'good,' when used in a logically predicative way, is not relative in the ways in which it is relative when used in a logically attributive way, Ross understands this point perfectly well. He puts it nicely in the opening paragraph to his chapter on moral goodness in *Foundations of Ethics*:

I have suggested that things that are good in the predicative as opposed to the adjunctive sense fall into two classes: (1) those that are good in the sense of being worthy objects of admiration, and (2) those that are good in the sense of being worthy objects of satisfaction. Both of these come, from one point of view, within the scope of ethics; for a thing's being good in either of these ways brings into being a *prima facie* [moral] obligation to produce that thing.... But goods of the second type are not themselves, as such, morally good. Nor, again, are all goods of the first type themselves as such morally good; excellent scientific or artistic activity is good but not morally good.⁴⁵

It is an interesting question, of course, what distinguishes those intrinsic goods that are moral goods from those that are not. We need not pursue this question here, however." The important point is that it seems that what is intrinsically good is good in a certain way — it is what I have called ethically good — and thus that accepting Thomson's First Thesis provides no reason to reject the concept of intrinsic value.

It is interesting to note that this account of intrinsic value would appear to be perfectly in keeping with the observations of Philippa Foot, who expresses some doubts about the concept. Foot is a critic of consequentialism, claiming that 'we go wrong in accepting the idea that there are better or worse states of affairs in the sense that consequentialism requires.'⁴⁷ She says this because she thinks that consequentialism requires a sense of 'good' that is divorced from morality, in terms of which 'morally right' may be given an account, and no such sense can be found (although she believes that 'good' can be given a sense 'within morality,' as she puts it.)⁴⁸ But this misconstrues consequentialism, I think (a misconstrual of which consequentialists may themselves frequently have been guilty). For although it is accurate to say that consequentialists seek to account for 'morally right' (in the sense that concerns them: overall, rather than merely *prima facie*, moral rightness) in terms of 'good,' it is nonetheless the case (I contend) that the sense of 'good' at issue is what I have called ethical goodness. Foot herself would in fact seem perfectly receptive to this idea. While finding fault with both consequentialism and the idea that some states of affairs are good or bad 'from a moral point of view,' she nonetheless confesses that it 'seems preposterous to deny that there are some things that a moral person must want and aim at in so far as he is a moral person and that he will count it "a good thing" when these things happen.'⁴⁹ But this is all that is at issue when something is intrinsically good.

Whether or not Foot would in the end agree with me, however, Thomson would presumably continue to disagree. At one point she entertains the idea that moral goodness is a way of being good, and that that is the way (or one way) in which compassion is good.⁵⁰ But she drifts away from this idea, neither pursuing it nor decisively refuting it. She appears to doubt the possibility of anyone's giving a clear account of what moral goodness consists in, and then moves on. But this hardly settles the matter. Whether she has in mind (as I think she does) 'morally good' in the sense in which virtue is often said to be morally good but pleasure not, or the broader sense that I have invoked in which both virtue and pleasure may (with some plausibility, at least) be said to be ethically good, Thomson's inability to come up with a clear account of what such goodness consists in of course does not imply that there is no such account to be given. And even if there is no such account to be given, this hardly shows that the goodness in question doesn't exist. It may be that the reason is, rather, that the type of goodness in question is unanalyzable, so that to the question, 'What is it that moral goods have in common?' one can give only the unenlightening answer, 'They're all morally good.' (Compare the question, 'What is it that red things have in common?')

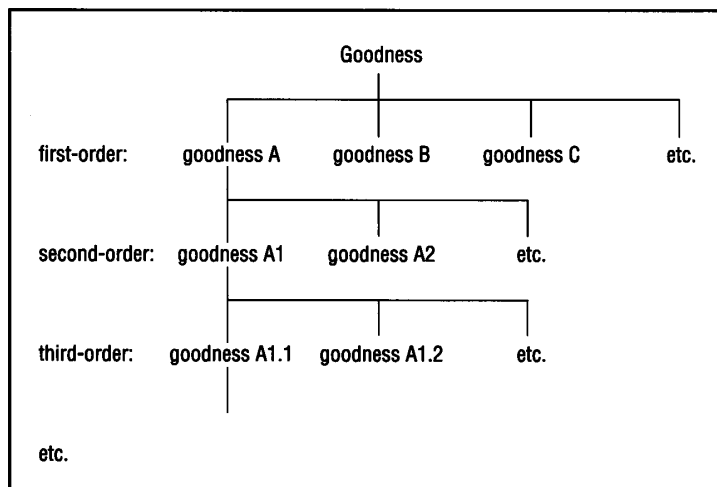
Thomson might still demur. Recall her contention that, for something to be good in one of the first-order ways, it must benefit someone or something, or be capable of doing so. Goodness, she is thereby claiming, is always relative to some category of object. But to what category of object is the alleged way of being good that I have called ethical goodness relative? If there is none, then there is no such way of being good after all.

I suppose that some might seek to respond to this by proposing some category of object to which ethical goodness is relative. The obvious category here would be persons. (Of course, somehow the distinction between being intrinsically good and being good-for-persons would have to be preserved, so that what is intrinsically good is good relative to persons in a way different from that in which Alfred's well-being is good-for-Alfred.)

Indeed, person-oriented accounts of morality are extremely common (social contract theories being a prominent example). If some such account of ethical goodness is correct, then clearly the existence of intrinsic value is consistent with its being true that all first-order ways of being good involve benefit. However, I find Thomson's contention dubious, and in the absence of any argument for it (Thomson simply relies on her intuition)⁵¹ there is no need to endorse any such account here. But what, then, might be said to unite the ways of being good, making them ways of being good, if it's not the idea of benefit? My answer would be this: the idea of valuableness. I grant that such an answer may not seem particularly illuminating, but Thomson's answer seems to me no more illuminating; and, as just noted, it may be a mistake to seek an enlightening answer to such a question anyway.

VI

What of the orders of ways of being good? Thomson distinguishes two. I'm not sure just what should be said here. The intuitive picture is this:



But where in this picture we should place a particular way of being good is not clear; some serious theorizing is called for. My inclination is to call ethical (both intrinsic and extrinsic) goodness a first-order way of being good, for I don't know what could be said to mediate between it and generic goodness. I am inclined to call moral goodness (of the sort exemplified by virtue but not by pleasure) a second-order way of being good (for it is to be subsumed, I believe, under ethical goodness), and certain particular goods (such as those ways of being good that Thomson calls second-order: being just, generous, kind, and so on) third-order ways of being good (for they are to be subsumed, I believe, under moral goodness. Thomson's account of what makes these ways of being good non-first-order ways of being good is of course different.)⁵² But I shall not attempt here to argue for what I am inclined to say in this regard; for, while there are obvious problems to be resolved (Might not an A-type goodness also be subsumable under B? Might it not even be subsumable at a different level under B than under A? Etc.), my contention that being intrinsically good involves a way of being good can be accepted even in the absence of an account of what order of way of being good this is.

But should this contention be accepted? I acknowledge that I haven't argued for it here. Indeed, I don't know how to do so. I have argued that certain critics of the concept of intrinsic value have been unsuccessful, but that of course is not tantamount to a positive argument in favor of the concept. I can only resort to the following plea: isn't it clear, on reflection, that a morally sensitive person will favor certain things, but not others, for their own sakes? If so, that's basically all you need to accept that some things have intrinsic value. But to give you a further nudge towards acceptance of this, let me end by asking you to reflect on a pithy comment by Panayot Butchvarov, who says, when discussing Geach's claim that 'x is good' requires completion by means of a statement of the form 'x is a good F':

Nevertheless, millions have thought they understood Genesis 1:31: "And God saw every thing he had made, and behold, it was very good."⁵³

Notes:

- 1 G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1903)
- 2 See Tom Regan, *Bloomsbury's Prophet* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1986), xii-xiii, 16 ff.
- 3 E.g., A.C. Ewing, *The Definition of Good* (New York: Macmillan 1947).
- 4 E.g., R.B. Perry, *General Theory of Value* (New York: Longman, Green 1918).
- 5 E.g., noncognitivists such as A.J. Ayer, Charles Stevenson, and R.M. Hare.
- 6 Peter Geach, 'Good and Evil,' *Analysis* 17 (1956) 33-42
- 7 Bernard Williams, *Morality* (New York: Harper & Row 1972), 41 ff.
- 8 Philippa Foot, 'Utilitarianism and the Virtues,' *Mind* 94 (1985) 196-209
- 9 Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'On Some Ways in Which a Thing Can Be Good,' *Social and Political Philosophy* 9 (1992) 96-117; 'Goodness and Utilitarianism,' *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 67 (1994) 7-21; 'Moral Objectivity,' in *Moral Realism and Moral Objectivity*, by Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson (Oxford: Blackwell 1996) 67-154; and 'The Right and the Good,' *Journal of Philosophy* 94 (1997) 273-98.
- 10 Thomson, 'Right,' 273-5
- 11 I shall focus on 'Right,' her latest presentation of these claims; but I shall also draw on the other works cited in n. 9, especially 'On Some Ways.'
- 12 Geach, 'Good,' 33
- 13 Williams discusses this test explicitly in *Morality*, 41-2.
- 14 Moore, *Principia*, 7 ff.
- 15 Geach, 'Good,' 34
- 16 This is only a very rough summary of his view. See Moore, *Principia*, Ch. 6.
- 17 Thomson, 'Right,' 278
- 18 *Ibid.*, 276 ff.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 279 ff.
- 20 Thomson, 'Goodness,' 11
- 21 Thomson, 'Right,' 276
- 22 *Ibid.*, 275
- 23 See Georg Henrik von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1963), to which Thomson frequently expresses her indebtedness.
- 24 See Ch. 3 of W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1930).
- 25 See Thomson, 'Goodness,' 12. Perhaps it is somewhat more plausible to contend that a good knife must be (considerably) better than the average possible knife, but I am not at all sure how one is supposed to count such things.
- 26 See Geach, 'Good,' 42, n. 1, where Geach refers to another chapter of Ross's *Right*.
- 27 See Thomson, 'Goodness,' 18, n. 4.
- 28 Ross sometimes engages in it; see, e.g., *Right*, Ch. 5 (but here Ross is careful to ensure that the reader doesn't forget that it is intrinsic goodness in particular with which he is concerned). Many others do, too. See, e.g., Panayot Butchvarov, *Skepticism in Ethics* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1989), Chs. 3, 4.
- 29 Moore, *Principia*, 3
- 30 Thomson, 'Right,' 276
- 31 Thomson, 'Objectivity,' 129-30
- 32 G.E. Moore, *Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1912), 27. Compare Roderick M. Chisholm, 'Objectives and Intrinsic Value,' in *Jenseits vom Sein und Nichtsein*, R. Haller, ed. (Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt 1972), 262. Moore would deny that such a 'definition' constitutes an 'analysis,' since he declares intrinsic goodness unanalyzable. We needn't, however, bother with this issue here.
- 33 The analogy may be flawed (as all analogies are in one way or another) in the following respect. It seems natural to say that something can have only one shape (or color) at once, whereas something might be good in several ways at once. But this is difficult. Something can have only one 'overall' shape at once, but its parts can be variously shaped. Perhaps we can also say that something can have only one 'overall' value at once, thereby preserving the analogy. Also, abstracting from shape (and color), we can clearly say that something can have more than one visual quality at once, thereby perhaps preserving the analogy in a different way. But whether or

not either of these moves is acceptable, it certainly seems reasonable to think that shape (or color) and goodness are analogous at least in respect of being determinable properties.

34 Thomson, 'Right,' 277

35 This is not to say that the sort of definition of intrinsic goodness in terms of generic goodness apparently proposed by Moore in the passage in *Ethics*, quoted above, is acceptable. I find it unacceptable, for reasons that cannot be adequately discussed here.

36 Thomson, 'Right,' 289

37 Thomson, 'Right,' 277, n. 5

38 The tests, we might say, have been a red herring — though neither red nor herring.

39 Thomson, 'On Some Ways,' 99 ff.

40 *Ibid.*, 103

41 *Ibid.*, 106-7

42 Moore, *Principia*, 99

43 This is true, I think, even though the term 'intrinsic value' is sometimes used to refer to more than one kind of value. On page 260 of his *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1922), Moore says that to say that a kind of value is intrinsic is to say that its possession depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing that possesses it, and he goes on to declare that both goodness and beauty are kinds of intrinsic value. But notice that even then he restricts the term 'intrinsically good' to just one kind of intrinsic value. Unlike Moore here, but like many others, in this paper I am restricting my use of 'intrinsic value' to refer to intrinsic goodness, neutrality, and badness; even if beauty depends solely on the intrinsic nature of that which possesses it (something that seems to me quite dubious), I am not referring to it when I talk of intrinsic value. (Nonetheless, it may of course be that beauty is itself intrinsically good.)

44 See, among others: Franz Brentano, *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1969); Moore, Ross, Ewing, and Chisholm, in several works, including those cited above; Noah Lemos, *Intrinsic Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994); and Robert Audi, 'Intrinsic Value and Moral Obligation,' *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 35 (1997) 135-54.

45 W.D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1939), 290. It may be that the penchant of some writers, such as Moore, to use 'good' without qualification or 'good absolutely' to express intrinsic goodness in particular, is to be explained by their holding the view (I don't know whether this is true of Moore) that ethical or moral values somehow take precedence over other values. Far from this implying that being intrinsically good is not a way of being good, it presupposes that it is — a dominant way.

46 Ross suggests one answer in *Foundations*. I suggest another in 'The Moral Aspect of Nonmoral Goods and Evils,' *Utilitas* 11 (1999) 1-15.

47 Foot, 'Utilitarianism,' 199

48 *Ibid.*, 205-6

49 *Ibid.*, 204

50 Thomson, 'On Some Ways,' 102

51 Thomson, 'Right,' 289

52 *Ibid.*, 281-6

53 Butchvarov, *Skepticism*, 17. I would ask you also to consider the following observation, blatantly *ad feminam* though it may be. At one point Thomson asks: 'Is it plausible to think that what has intrinsic goodness just is what a person (all people?) would value for its own sake if he or she were fully informed, free of neuroses, and assessing the matter in a cool hour?' To which she responds: 'No, unless we can show that people really would not love the nasty under this constraint.' ('On Some Ways,' 108) This response appears to betray the fact that Thomson understands perfectly well what the proponents of intrinsic value take intrinsic value to be, and that she herself believes that some things have such value. For what else is 'the nasty' supposed to refer to here, if not to that which is intrinsically bad?