ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Ethical naturalism and the meaning of "good"

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Abstract: How to explicate the meaning of "good" is a classic philosophical question, one reason is that "good" has metaphysical properties which are difficult to interpret. The development of ethical naturalism opens a door to answer the "good" question. This theory proposes to view the moral world and the natural world as a continuum, in that the moral world is built on the basis of the natural one. This study aims to introduce a sort of reductive ethical naturalism—end-relational theory—to interpret "good" assertions. According to this theory, most "good" assertions are end-relational and thus "good" can be reduced to "end". By doing so, metaphysical moral meaning can be converted into concretized natural meaning, and then "good" morality will not be high up above anymore.

Keywords: "good"; ethical naturalism; "end"; reductionism

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Received: May 9, 2021; **Accepted:** July 2, 2021; **Available online:** September 3, 2021

Citation: Mei X (2021) Ethical naturalism and the meaning of "good". *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 3(1): 39–51. DOI: 10.18063/fls.v3i1.1248

1. Introduction

In his seminal work *Principia Ethica*, Moore and Baldwin (1993) declare that Ethics is a discipline of arguing what is right or wrong for people to do and explores why statements about personality or morality are true or false. In a variety of ethical or normative disputes, "good" is a word always at the center of the storm. When people make statements about any of the following topics, like "virtue", "vice", "duty", "rightness", "obligation", "justice", explicitly or implicitly, the concept of "good" is present all the time. This is also the reason why pursuing answers to the question of "What is good?" is one of the eternal undertakings of ethicists.

The contemporary debate over the meaning of "good" is a tangled and bewildering web. This is largely due to its semantic peculiarity and the special status of morality in human society. Generally speaking, the purpose of uttering a descriptive sentence, like "The cat is on the table", usually lies in describing a natural fact that *the cat is on the table*. However, when a moral sentence like "Helping people in need is good" is uttered, the speaker is not only describing a moral fact but also encouraging the audience to help others who are in trouble. That is, "good" utterances are often

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used to guide actions, especially actions with positive effects. In order to account for the meaning of "good" (as well as other moral utterances), various philosophical theories have been developed after Moore. For example, non-cognitivists propose that the aim of uttering moral utterances is to express noncognitive mental states (such as desire, attitudes, preference, etc.), and nothing else. While cognitivists assert that moral statements can express cognitive beliefs, and thus they are truth-evaluable because they have truth conditions. Other widely discussed theories for "good" include intuitionism, quasi-realism, realism, expressivism, ethical relativism, ethical contextualism, just name a few.

This article will introduce another important moral theory which enjoys increasing popularity among philosophers in recent years, it is ethical naturalism. According to non-naturalism, moral properties are not identical with or equivalent to natural properties, moral concepts or terms cannot be explained by natural concepts or terms, moral statements cannot be translated into descriptive statements, etc. For non-naturalists, the good is good for it is good in nature, not because it can inspire positive attitudes or bring about good effects or results. In this sense, the meaning of "good" is *sui generis*. Ethical naturalists take an opposite view. They believe that moral properties at least in the loose sense are identical with/ equivalent to natural properties, and moral concepts can be explained by natural concepts. In essence, "ethical naturalism" is more like a philosophical tradition than an ethical doctrine because it is an umbrella term for a series of different sub-theories, such as (non-) analytical naturalism, normative naturalism, and (non-) reductive naturalism. The aim of this essay is to find a reductive, naturalistic interpretation for "good". Before this, the semantic properties of "good" will be analyzed, and the development of reductive naturalism will be introduced.

2. The semantic properties of "good"

2.1. The indefinability of "good"

In daily communication, we are accustomed to using "good" to evaluate one's personality, behavior(s), or event(s), and such evaluations are positive in most cases. For example, people often say something like "Joe is a good husband", "Bullying is not good", and "Helping somebody in need is good" to praise Joe, to condemn the bullying, and to encourage people to help others. Nonetheless, not all uses of "good" are associated with morality. "The chocolate tastes good" and "good weather" are two telling examples. These non-moral "good" expressions are obviously not the object of this study. Owing to the tremendous occurrences and multifarious uses of "good" in moral utterance, to unveil the meaning of "good" is not as easy as child's play. In order to achieve this ultimate goal, to make clear the semantic properties of "good" seems to be more fundamental and more significant. This section will focus on some classic semantic properties of good.

From Moore and Baldwin (1993), many philosophers (especially Moore's followers) hold that "good" is indefinable. Moore once asserted that "how 'good' is to be defined is the most fundamental question in all Ethics" (1993: 57). But this assertion is not a self-evident axiom, it has to be proved. Therefore, for a long time, the debate over how to define "good" headlined in a large number of philosophical works. Some scholars like Hansson (1990) tried to define "good" by "better", "desire", or "pleasure", because in many circumstances what is "good" is what is better, what is desired, or what is pleasant. However, those philosophers themselves are often caught

in endless and desperate disputes about how to single out an appropriate definien from various alternatives. There is no answer to satisfy all. On the other hand, if "good" is definable, why cannot it be defined as easily as, say, "quadrangle", is defined?

A fairly persuasive viewpoint is that "good" means "desire to desire" because the "good" thing often has the property of being desired, so saying "x is good" amounts to saying that "x is something I desire to desire" (Moore and Baldwin, 1993). Wealth is good because it is something people desire to desire. However, there are bad desires. Imagine a scenario where Joe's sworn enemy was injured severely in a traffic accident, after hearing this news, Joe said that "That's really good news". Although the injury of Joe's sworn enemy is what Joe desires to desire, the morality generally does not allow people to say something meaning that a desire for somebody's being hurt is good. Similarly, what is good is usually what makes people happy, but not vice versa. Still, the injury of Joe's sworn enemy makes Joe happy, but it is not good at all. And sometimes, say, not to tell somebody the truth might be good, but it is hard to judge whether or not it is right. As a result, it seems that neither "desire to desire" nor "pleasure" is the property of "good". Some readers may consider that the common property of all "good" things is "goodness", but "how is 'goodness' to be defined?" is a question as desperate as "How is 'good' to be defined?".

The failure of trying to define "good" with other concepts to some extent seems to show that "good" is indefinable. Moore and Baldwin (1993: 58) claims that "[good] cannot be defined…that propositions about the good are all of them synthetic and never analytic". That is, "good" cannot be defined because it is a simple notion, just like color terms. It is hard by using language to explain what "red" is to someone who never sees anything red before. Similarly, it is difficult by using language to explain what "good" is to a child who never perceives anything good. The best way to explain "good" is showing him/her some good acts in reality.

2.2. The duality of "good" assertions

As stated in Ayer's classic work *The Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), non-cognitivists often suggest that moral assertions (e.g., Murder is wrong) simply voice certain types of sentiment, commitment, or more generally specific types of pro- or con- attitudes, rather than describe moral features of persons, objects, or states of affairs. That is to say, moral assertions are not meaningful in the sense of describing the reality but of expressing the speaker's ethical sentiments and arousing similar feelings in his/her audience. For this reason, many early ethicists claim that moral assertions are not truth-apt because they only express desire-like attitudes but not beliefs. However, with the deepening of the research, more and more philosophers found that the traditional view seems untenable. Syntactically, moral assertions share the same grammatical structures as descriptive assertions. If descriptive assertions are truth-evaluable, why are moral assertions not? Given this, moral assertions theoretically express beliefs because they point to moral facts. In some sense, it is this argument that opens the chapter of moral cognitivism in ethics. Nowadays, more and more philosophers hold that moral assertions can both express moral attitudes and moral beliefs.

Ethics is the foundation of humanity, and it is the source and meanwhile the end of humans' personal development. The significance of having a right ethical attitude, in this sense, consists in its function of continuously improving the humanness. Pursuing humanness is a need (not a want), and it is the reason why normal people listen to the totality of reality in their mind before they make any ethical decisions, the reason why they sometimes struggle between satisfying the excessive desire

and conforming to codes and rules, and the reason why they sacrifice much in the ongoing pursuit of truth, justice, and perfection. For an individual, having a correct ethical outlook is the groundwork of being a better person. This is determined by what Pink (2004) calls the "voluntariness" of morality, i.e., the morality inside would automatically lead us to behave morally (even do something that may hurt ourselves). For example, if someone sees an evildoer is robbing a woman, he can impassively choose to go away, but his morality might urge him to take some action to help the woman regardless of his own safety.

Although moral attitudes are ubiquitous, they cannot be observed directly but only inferred from agents' self-reports or body language. Theoretically, answering a question of ethical attitudes is a complex interplay of cognitive and communicative systems, in which five processes are usually involved (Schwarz, 2007). First, the addressee has to analyze the question to seek out the attitude object and evaluative dimension the addressor has in mind. Second, the addressee needs to retrieve relevant information from memory, including properties of the attitude object, addressor's emotional response to the object, or the features of the addressor himself. Third, grounded on these messages, the addressee would form an ethical judgment. Bearing this judgment in mind, the addressee then needs to map it onto a series of response alternatives offered by the addressor. Lastly, for one reason or another, the addressee may edit this moral judgment further before he speaks it out to the addressor. None of these processes can function as expected without the intervention of context; hence, the expression of moral attitudes is always context-dependent (Kauppinen, 2014).

Different from moral attitudes, the attempt to unfold moral beliefs is both innovative and full of difficulties. As the pioneers of this field, Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons are the representatives who have worked diligently and fruitfully in this field. According to Horgan and Timmons (2000, 2006a, 2006b), beliefs fall into two types: descriptive beliefs, and non-descriptive beliefs. The former involves an "is-commitment" (in their words), concerning how the actual world is like; while the latter involves an "ought-commitment", concerning what ought to be the case in the world. For non-evaluative and non-moral beliefs, their core descriptive content is the overall content. The proposition that "Grass is green" exhausts the content of the belief that grass is green, so it is descriptive in nature. However, for moral beliefs (and evaluative ones), their content is twofold. Take "Rescuing the drowning is good" as an example. On the one hand, it expresses a descriptive content to the effect that "Pulling the drowning out of water is a good behavior"; on the other hand, it expresses the moral content that "It ought to be the case that someone saves the drowning". But Horgan and Timmons claim that the moral content usually overrides the descriptive one, so the overall content of moral beliefs is still non-descriptive, moral beliefs are thus non-descriptive.

Majors (2008) alleges that the best way to understand beliefs might be to identify the aspects by which they distinguish themselves from other mental states. Bearing this in mind, he very carefully dissects mental states layer by layer. First, he claims that mental states fall into two types: representational mental states, and non-representational ones. The former (e.g., believing, desiring, expecting) has intentional content, representing the world as being a certain way, while the latter (e.g., pain) has qualitative content. Second, representational mental states can be divided into mental states that are conceptual, and those that are non-conceptual. Conceptual mental states, constituted by concepts, are propositional attitudes, playing the role of tying their holders to particular propositions in a certain way. Non-conceptual mental states are of perceptual experience which may be perceived with no relevant concepts. For example, when a person sees chess on the table,

he knows that it is chess, but he may not know how to play it because he does not have the concept of playing chess. Third, conceptual mental states are further split into "thetic" ones and "telic" ones, according to the direction of fit (Tenenbaum, 2006). Thetic mental states (include believing, conjecturing, guessing, etc.) have the mind-to-world direction of fit, aiming to adapt oneself to the real world; but telic mental states (including desiring or intending) have the world-to-mind direction of fit, aiming to change the world in order to make it fit people. Finally, we can also make a distinction between fundamental thetic mental states and non-fundamental thetic mental states. Beliefs are the most fundamental thetic conceptual attitudes for the reason that it is the cornerstone of performing higher level mental activities like making decisions, inferring or conjecturing.

So to speak, beliefs are the most important conceptual mediator for us to understand and represent the reality. As an indispensable sub-class of beliefs, moral beliefs share all the aforementioned properties of ordinary beliefs, that is, they are in nature representational (or descriptive), conceptual, *thetic*, and fundamental.

3. Ethical naturalism

3.1. Varieties of ethical naturalism

The rise of naturalism occurred in the thirties of twentieth century mainly in American, its early representatives are John Dewey, Ernest Nagel, Sidney Hook and Roy Wood Sellars. Unquestionably, since its birth, naturalism has been successful in shaping the philosophical landscape like no other philosophical tradition, especially it has exerted a great impact on analytic philosophy. In this context, ethical naturalism came into being, and many ethicists started devoting themselves to exploring this "new" field. However, perhaps as a result of having faced forceful objections such as (non-cognitive) eliminativism and Moore's Open Question Argument (OQA), ethical naturalism gradually went out of favor. Until the end of twenties century, more and more scholars found that neither eliminativism nor OQA are invulnerable, whereby ethical naturalism got the opportunity to regain its lost territory. What's more, the blossom of philosophy of mind and philosophy of language at that time has also accelerated the recovery of ethical naturalism. Nowadays, the rapid development of science and technology sets off a new wave of naturalistic study in philosophy all over the world.

Then, what is ethical naturalism? Narrowly, ethical naturalism is construed as the conjunction of two core theses: (1) There are moral properties and facts, (2) At least some such properties and facts are natural properties and facts. But for different philosophers, formulations of ethical naturalism are a little bit different. Some classic versions are: "moral properties are identical with natural properties", "moral concepts are identical with natural concepts", "moral terms are definable via natural terms", "moral judgments are nothing but factual judgements", "descriptive statements entail moral statements", "descriptive propositions support moral propositions", etc. In fact, all these versions are the result of philosophers' different understanding of ethical naturalism. Some comprehend it within a realist framework, some favor a relativist gloss, and some focus on the relation between moral properties and natural properties. Therefore, it is possible to divide ethical naturalism into different families.

Philosophers' categorization of naturalistic theories is various. Scott (1980) distinguishes five

types of ethical naturalism: analytical naturalism, reductive naturalism, methodological naturalism, contingent naturalism, and eliminative naturalism. Analytical naturalists claim that (at least) some principles which link ethical with natural predicates are analytic; reductive naturalists hold that ethical properties can be reduced to natural properties; methodological naturalists assert that moral phenomenon can be studied by similar procedures applied in scientific research; contingent naturalists accept the view that some moral rules which connect ethical predicates with natural predicates are at least contingently true; and at last, eliminative naturalists deny the existence of some ethical entities like ethical properties and ethical facts. In fact, the latter two sorts of naturalism are seldom discussed nowadays, but the first three are still hot topics. Different from Scott, Fink (2006) divides ethical naturalism into materialist naturalism, idealist naturalism, and absolute naturalism, based on McDowell's (1998) neo-Humean naturalism (which claims that reality is exhausted by the natural world, in the sense of the world as the natural sciences are capable of showing it to us) and Aristotelian naturalism (which claims that reality might be exhausted by the natural world, but all human potentials are included in it).

In contemporary literature, philosophers intend to read naturalism by considering the research area a research subject belongs to. When the research topic concerns whether moral terms and sentences are semantically equivalent to factual terms and sentences, it is analytical naturalism. If the relevant relationship between the moral and the natural is about properties and facts exclusively, it is in the scope of metaphysical naturalism. What's more, there is epistemological naturalism which shows that all ethical knowledge we human learn is obtainable only or foremost through the application of scientific methods. Also, there is ontological naturalism asserting that all that exists in the ethical world in principle can be studied by natural science. In recent years, more and more philosophers, like Copp (2004, 2012) and Parfit (2011), pay much attention to the study of normativity, this greatly stimulates the generating of a new type of naturalism—normative naturalism. This theory mainly investigates how to analyze or interpret the normative properties of morality in naturalistic ways. Certainly, the taxonomic exploration of ethical naturalism will never stop as long as there are people who are interested in Ethics.

3.2. Reductive ethical naturalism

In this part, a specific naturalistic view—reductive ethical naturalism—will be elaborated. This is also the version which will be tentatively used to interpret the meaning of "good" utterances.

Generally, reductive naturalism makes the claim that there are moral facts/properties which are reducible to natural facts/properties about the world (Lutz and Lenman, 2018). Being a form of realism, reductive naturalism takes moral facts as something "real", that we are justified in accepting them as facts about what the actual world is like. Traditionally, moral facts are often defined as the facts about what is right or wrong to do, or what one ought to do or not to do according to some widely accepted moral principles in a community. Accordingly, moral properties are the properties of moral acts or events. The basic premise of reductive naturalism is that, if an act has a moral property, it has it in virtue of some non-moral properties which it has. These non-moral properties are usually the reasons why this act has the very moral properties. For instance, the act "rescuing the drowning" has the property of goodness, but it is the result of combining a series of non-moral properties (e.g., the killing power of water and the significance of oxygen to human). Different from non-moral properties, moral properties are often normative. "Normativity" is a new word being

accepted quickly and widely in ethics. It is the property distinguishing *value* from *fact*, *ought* from *is*, and *the descriptive* from *the ethical*. In this sense, normativity is the distinctive feature of moral phenomenon.

Certainly, natural properties are different from moral ones. There are four fundamental approaches to define natural properties. First, a property is natural if it is of the sort exemplified by paradigmatically natural objects, such as "mattress, grass, table, etc." (Jackson, 1998: 7). This is dubbed ostensive method. But this method doesn't exclude the possibility that some instantiations of moral properties (like goodness or wrongness) are natural. Second, natural properties are understood as the facts observed or discovered by natural science. This is called deferential method. Strictly, natural science can be classified into two types: hard science and soft science. Typical examples of hard science are Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, and some examples of soft science are Psychology, Management, and Ethology. But most naturalists do not make such a strict distinction when natural facts or properties are considered. The drawback of this method is that ethical properties might also be among the properties natural scientists will one day in fact posit. If so, the boundary between ethical properties and natural properties will get blurred. The third way to elucidate natural properties is termed as metaphysical account, which proposes that natural properties are descriptive or factual properties (Moore, 1922), or natural properties are properties with causal powers (Gibbard, 1990: 9). The deficiency of the descriptive account is that it conflicts with ethical dualism to the effect that moral utterances are both descriptive and normative. The problem of the causal account is that causality isn't exclusive to natural properties, non-natural properties sometimes have causal powers as well. Relatively, the last approach—epistemological account—for natural properties seem more convincing. This account concedes that natural property is the sort of property posited by natural sciences, but our knowledge of its instantiations is empirical (Copp, 2003: 189). This study will confirm to the epistemological account of natural property.

How to understand the term "reduction" is another important issue. In fact, the precise nature of reduction is controversial. Many philosophers hold that, if A is reducible to B, then A is B, or A is "nothing over and above" B, i.e., A is identical with B (Dowell, 2013). However, this is not the only way to construe "reduction". It can be read variously in terms of scientific domains of study (e.g., chemistry can reduce to physics), or particular scientific theories (e.g., thermodynamics can reduce to statistical mechanics), or individual properties or property types (e.g., "the mental" can reduce to "the physical"), or substantial kinds (e.g., "the mind" can reduce to "the brain"), etc. Additionally, the reduction relation itself has also been understood in different ways. When A-sentences/principles can be translated into B-sentences/principles, these two types of sentences/principles stand in the reduction relation. When A-related particular items are identical with B-related items, or A-facts entail B-facts, then the reduction relation is built as well. This study will take reductive naturalism as a thesis of property reduction, i.e., moral properties are reducible to natural properties, and take reduction relation as an entailment instead of identity.

When reductive naturalism is discussed, a central argument is unavoidable. That is, moral properties always supervene on natural properties. Moral supervenience is reductive for the reason that it warrants that moral properties and disjunctive sets of natural properties are mutual entailing. In order to explain this claim, we must first clarify what supervenience is. Supervenience is "a non-symmetric relation of necessary co-variance between families of related properties, according

to which changes with respect to the supervenient properties are dependent upon changes with respect to the subvenient base properties" (Klocksiem, 2019: 1995). Specifically, the moral properties supervene on the natural properties if and only if in any two possible worlds that are indistinguishable regarding to the natural properties must also be indistinguishable regarding to the moral properties. In other words, the value of a world relies on its natural properties.

4. A reductionistic interpretation of "good"

4.1. Good and end

In many cases, the purpose of uttering moral assertions is to realize certain ends. For example, the end of saying "murder is wrong" is to discourage listeners from killing the innocents. In this sense, ethical goodness is reducible to natural "end". The "end" here is defined as "a term of art for any proposition conceived as a potential outcome" (Finlay, 2014: 32). The implicit end of uttering, say, that "Facing danger bravely is good", might be telling the audience how to protect themselves in danger. What is noteworthy is that the concern of end-relational theory is agents' end(s), the individuals who are involved in the states of affairs depicted by the normative utterances. In daily communication, though the role of agents is often played by speakers, there are many situations in which agents are not identical to speakers. When this kind of situations arises, agents' ends and speakers' ends must be differentiated prudentially.

In effect, many philosophers have realized that the meanings of normative sentences are end-relational.[1] As early as 1967, Paul Ziff concluded that all assertions about goodness are related to ends or purposes, attributive 'good' and 'good for' sentences are two important syntactic patterns to explicate these ends or purposes. To say that "Chocolate is good for Mary" makes the end, e.g., to bring Mary enormous gustatory enjoyment, explicit, and to say that "X is a good anchor" makes the end of fastening a boat securely (say) explicit. Schroeder (2007) invents a similar concept named "baseline", and claims that an action counts as promoting a proposition p only if it increases the likelihood of p based on certain context determined baseline. In the process of exploring the issue of "Is rationality normative?", Broome (2008) finds that rationality is essential for agents to realize their ends. Other researchers, like Wallace (2001) and Evers (2014), who are interested in instrumental normative conditionals, cannot bypass the means-end relation as well. Terminologically, philosophers and linguists probably use different words or phrases, like a proposition "promotes", "serves", "answers to", "satisfies", or "is conducive to" an end, but their motives are alike, that is, to show that ethical sentences are end-relational.

Undeniably, reducing "good" to "end" provides a possible way to interpret "good" assertions from the perspective of philosophy of language. In fact, many "philosophical disputes over (inter alia) the nature of normative facts and properties are due to 'a confusion of tongues' in the different sense of a failure to understand our own use of normative language" (Finlay, 2014: 1). If some philosophical puzzles result from the confusion of the uses of normative language, then they can

1. In metaethics and ethics, the definition of normative utterances varies from philosopher to philosopher, most of them agree that standard normative utterances are those constituted by normative terms including "good", "bad", "wrong" (normative adjectives), "ought", "should", "must", "can" (normative verbs), and "reason" (normative noun). Although some uses of these normative terms are non-normative, they are still called "normative terms" for convenience. Take "ought" as an example, in the sentence that "The storm ought to arrive at this island tonight", "ought" is used non-normatively, but in "You ought to rescue the drowning", it is normative.

be resolved by studying normative language. Similarly, many disputes over "good" assertions are caused by diverse, confusing uses of "good". Familiarly, there are "good at", "good for", "good to", "good with", "good as", etc. If "good" assertions are end-relational, then most uses of "good" can be explained through one concept "end". This move will greatly simplify the convoluted processes of interpreting multiform occurrences of "good" in different assertions (see more detail in the next section). Significantly, the end-relational theory successfully converts the meaning of abstract, illusory 'good' assertions into a meaning complex constituted by substantial, non-ethical concepts.

Analyzing normative "good" in terms of natural "end" brings in another two benefits. Primarily, this strategy creates opportunity for experimental ethics. Through many decades, philosophical study has been mocked by some experimental scientists as "armchair theorizing" (Ingold, 2007: 82). But the rise of experimental philosophy opens up new frontier for philosophy. If the content of 'good' assertions (as well as other normative claims) can be disintegrated into naturalistic parts, the experimental methods which are adopted in scientific research are equally applicable to analyzing "good" assertions. The consequent result is that philosophical reflection will no longer be taken as the only leading way of philosophy study. Besides, relativizing 'good' to "end" directly demonstrates the relation between "good" utterance and motivation. To judge whether a person has an uncle is to verify whether his/her parents have a brother, but to judge whether an action is good depends on whether the agent is, to achieve his aim, motivated to perform the action.

Reducing normative "good" to naturalistic "end" offers many advantages, but the trouble is how to maintain the attitudinal content of "good" assertions. As is well-known, the distinctive feature of all moral assertions is the function of expressing attitudes, which separates them from ordinary descriptive assertions. Any theory that deletes this feature is not worth the candle. Then, how can this feature be preserved? This study suggests viewing the attitudes expressed by "good" assertions as a kind of implicature. Again take "Facing danger bravely is good" as an example, its explicit meaning is that "Facing danger bravely is good to protect yourself", but its attitudinal meaning might be that "The speaker is expressing his positive attitude towards the behavior of facing danger bravely". Sometimes the explicit meaning is salient in context, and sometimes it is the attitudinal meaning that is salient.

4.2. The end-relationality of "good" assertions

The main attraction of employing "end" to explain "good" assertions is that it provides a unifying semantics to analyze different uses of "good". The purpose of this section is to show how such a unifying semantics, i.e., end-relational theory, works. Syntactically, "good" is relativized in disconcertingly manifold ways. Generally speaking, "good" occurs in at least nine syntactic forms as illustrated in (a)-(i) ('φ' is for verb phrases, '*s*' and '*n*' for noun phrases standing for individuals and objects respectively, '*K*' for predicates, and '*p*' for sentences) (Finlay, 2014: 22):

(a) good to φ

(b) good for *s*

(c) good for φ-ing

(d) good with *n*/ good with *K*s

(e) good at φ-ing

(f) good as a *K*

In addition, "good" takes different kinds of objects, such as:

(g) *n* is good/ *K*s are good

(h) good that *p*

(i) good *K*

For the cause of constructing a unifying semantics for "good", the primary task is to uncover the possible implicit arguments of different kinds of "good" assertions, and then inspect whether making them explicit completes or alters the propositions expressed by the original sentences. Some philosophers (e.g., Suikkanen, 2008) found that the uses of "good" in (a)-(f) are relativized to *action-types* which can be explicated by adding proper infinitive phrases. For instance, to say that "The knife is good" is to say that "The knife is good *to kill (somebody or something)*", and to say that "The plan is good" is to say that "The plan is good *to follow*". Nonetheless, it seems that the resulting sentences remain incomplete, because people will still ask, "*For whom* or *what*, *n* is good to φ ?". Consequently, a more complete logical form for "*n* is good" is:

G1: *n* is good for *s* to φ.

To avoid ambiguity, the subject *s* splits itself further into two categories: the agent s_a; and the patient or beneficiary s_p. An assertion, say, "Torment is good", involves two types of subjects, that is, "Torment is good [for murderers], [for victims] to suffer." Therefore, G1 is augmented to:

G2: *n* is good for s_p, for s_a to φ.

That's to say, the simplest sentential pattern that "*n* is good" is usually used as an ellipsis of the pattern that "*n* is good for s_p, for s_a to φ." According to the principle of subject movement, G2 can be transformed into:

G3: It is good for s_p, for s_a to φn.

without altering the proposition it expresses (Grodzinsky, 1986). Therefore, saying that "Milk is good for one to drink" amounts to saying that "It is good for one to drink milk" (here, s_a is identical with s_p). In this way, G3 can be taken as the full-fledged form of the prepositional uses of "good" as in (a) and (b).

As to the uses of "good" in (c)-(f), some additional modifications are required. For Finlay, the phrase "for φ-ing" in "good for φ-ing" relates to an *end*, so the utterance that "Milk is good to drink" on numerous occasions implies that "It is good for supplementing calcium, for one to drink milk." Clearly, drinking milk is the *means* to reach the *end* of supplementing calcium. As a result, a fuller form for sentences containing "for φ-ing" is (the subscript *e* stands for *end*, and *m* stands for *means*):

G4: It is good for s_p's φ_e-ing, for s_a to φ_m *n*.

In the same way, (d) "good with *K*s" can be completed as "good [for *e*, for *s* to φ_m] with *K*s".

Accordingly, "good with kids" means that "for an agent *s*, it is good for some end *e* (e.g., to amuse kids) by means of φ (like to play or stay with them)". And (e) "good at φ-ing" can be completed as "good [for *e*, for *s* to be the person engaged] at φ-ing" (Finlay, 2014: 35). "Mary is good at swimming" means "Being good for *e* (e.g., to rescue the life of a drowning people), for Mary to be the person engaged in the rescuing activity".

With respect to (f) "good as a *K*" and (i) "good *K*", similar tactic is employable. First, sentences in the form of "*n* is a good *K*" can be viewed as an ellipsis of "*n* is a *K* such that it is good for *e*, for *s* to φ it". Hence, to say that "*n* is a good intercontinental missile" is to say that "*n* is a intercontinental missile such that it is good for destroying some place, for someone to detonate it" (Finlay, 2014: 37). The elucidation of "*n* is good as a *K*" is a little bit complex. On the one hand, the structure "*n* is good as a *K*" often specifies the function of *K*s, that is, directing towards some particular end e_K. Therefore, "being good as a *K*" entails "being good for e_K". Then, "It is good as a poison" entails that "It is good [for killing some living beings, for one to use it] as a poison". On the other hand, if "good as a *K*" is not used functionally, then it equals "good *K*s" in semantics and in deep logical form. In terms of the above elaboration, the full-fledged structures of the prepositional uses of 'good' from (a) to (i) can be represented as in **Table 1**.

Table 1. The full-fledged forms of various prepositional uses of "good"

good to φ	It is good for s_p, for s_a to φn.
good for *s*	
good for φ-ing	It is good for s_p's φ_e-ing, for s_a to φ_m *n*.
good with *n*/good with *K*s	It is good for *e*, for *s* to φ_m with *K*s.
good at φ-ing	It is good for *e*, for *s* to be the person engaged at φ-ing.
good as a *K*	1. It is good for e_K, for s_a to φ_m *n* as a *K*. (functional use)
	2. *n* is a *K* such that it is good for *e*, for *s* to φ it. (nonfunctional use)
good *K*	*n* is a *K* such that it is good for *e*, for *s* to φ it.

In a nutshell, almost all simple predicative uses of "good" can be taken as variants of the form G4. This practice passes the test of answering to the very question of "What is it good for?" on the one hand, and echoes philosophers' observation that all uses of "good" are *patient-relative* on the other. In many cases, concealing agents is tolerable for us to understand the majority of moral sentences, while deleting patients usually damages or even distorts the meaning of the whole sentence. "Torment is good for murderers to suffer" is acceptable, but "Torment is good for victims to suffer" is odd and even cruel.

5. Conclusion

A successful reductive naturalism will be ontologically unifying, so that it unifies what might seem to be different ontological categories. A successful reductive naturalism will also be

explanatorily powerful, so that it unveils the explanations of seemingly coarse and mysterious features of the reduced category in terms of the reducing category. What's more, a successful reductive naturalism will be metaphysically simplifying, so that it simplifies a complicated or multifarious phenomenon to plainer or more basic elements. Given these, reducing moral "good" to natural "end" can be counted as a successful maneuver, because it not only offers a unifying explanation for different uses of "good" but also decodes the metaphorical and ethical gene innated in "goodness" in virtue of naturalistic "end(s)".

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Acknowledgements

This work is supported by the Social Science Foundation of Ministry of Education of China (Grant number: 20YJC720014).

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