

University of Missouri, St. Louis

IRL @ UMSL

---

Theses

UMSL Graduate Works

---

4-12-2011

## On Thomson's Normativity

Michael James Vossen

*University of Missouri-St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://irl.umsl.edu/thesis>

---

### Recommended Citation

Vossen, Michael James, "On Thomson's Normativity" (2011). *Theses*. 237.

<https://irl.umsl.edu/thesis/237>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the UMSL Graduate Works at IRL @ UMSL. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of IRL @ UMSL. For more information, please contact [marvinh@umsl.edu](mailto:marvinh@umsl.edu).

On Thomson's *Normativity*

Michael James Vossen

M.A., Philosophy, University of Missouri - St. Louis, 2011

B.A., Philosophy, Reed College, 2007

A Thesis Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri - St. Louis in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Philosophy

May 2011

Advisory Committee

Jon McGinnis, Ph.D.  
Chairperson

Eric Wiland, Ph.D.

John Brunero, Ph.D.

## Abstract

Are non-attributive uses of 'good' meaningful? Judith Jarvis Thomson, in her book, *Normativity*, argues that such uses are not. I argue that Thomson is mistaken, but in a way which improves on her basic account of the evaluative and directive judgments central to normative thought. Relations among kinds, and not just relations between kinds and individuals, can be understood as ethically relevant. Such kind-kind relations can provide a semantic basis for non-attributive uses of good.

Accounting for such non-attributive uses allows Thomson to address three significant problems with her account. First, this account allows Thomson to make a more nuanced and charitable discussion of ethical realism and anti-realism. Second, this account provides a place in Thomson's framework for ethically relevant distinctions such as intrinsic/extrinsic goodness, and moral/non-moral evaluation. Finally, this account provides Thomson the basis for resolving issues in her account of directives.

Thomson account of directives such as 'ought' is defective in that the 'ought' of a more general kind eliminates that of a less general kind in cases of conflicting oughts. I demonstrate how such an account generates counter intuitive results and in fact undermines other parts of Thomson's analysis. The kind-kind relations used in the account of non-attributive uses of good also can be used by Thomson as the basis of a non-eliminative account of directives. Such relations account for why some 'oughts' have more weight than others.

Michael Vossen

Philosophy 5495: Thesis

March 28, 2011

### On Thomson's *Normativity*

Judith Jarvis Thomson, in her book *Normativity*, extensively analyzes the evaluative judgments and directive judgments that the study of normativity consists in.<sup>1</sup> Thomson defends the thesis that 'good' is attributive, and never predicative. In defending this thesis, Thomson follows Peter Geach, who in "Good and Evil" distinguishes between attributive and predicative terms. 'Big' is an attributive term. Attributive terms' meaning varies by attribution. Predicative terms do not. Bigness in mice is different than bigness in animals. A big mouse is not a big animal. In such ways, the meaning of 'big' varies when attributed to mice and animals. In contrast, 'red' is a predicative term. A red mouse is a red animal. The meaning of 'red' does not vary in the same way 'big' and 'good' do.

This thesis has important consequences for how goodness is conceived. Holding that 'good' is attributive and not predicative is to hold that the meaning of the term 'good' varies depending upon the *kind* of thing goodness is attributed to. There is not some one way in which a good book and a good mouse are good. So, when we say "Tom is good," and we do not mean Tom is a good person, good at crossword puzzles, good to tease, good for a laugh, or other such expressions where Tom's goodness is goodness in respect to some kind, then our utterance is meaningless. As Thomson writes: "In the end then, Geach was right: the philosopher who asks, "Is knowledge, or pleasure good?" is not asking an intelligible question..."<sup>2</sup>

Thomson's analysis suffers in three areas, despite explaining a broad variety of normative thought, avoiding appeal to metaphysically questionable entities others working in Geach's tradition have appealed to, such as 'natural-historical judgments,' 'life-forms', and 'natural teleology,' and providing a plausible basis for ethic's objectivity.<sup>3</sup> First, a variety of ethical realist and anti-realist positions are well-developed and have intuitive appeal, but do not seem to have a place in Thomson's account. Second, some ethicists appeal to distinctions such as intrinsic and extrinsic goodness, or moral and non-moral evaluations. How these distinctions fit into Thomson's account is mysterious. Her account is insufficient insofar as these distinctions are central to ethics. Third and finally, Thomson's account of directives has substantial flaws, conflicts internally with her account of evaluative terms, and even conflicts with some of her own language.

I will argue that these problems can be resolved satisfactorily. I will do this by showing how claims about predicative uses of 'good' can be reduced to claims about rankings of relations among the kinds which account for attributive uses, and thus show how Thomson's analysis can be extended to address problems in these three areas. One need not choose between attributive and predicative accounts of 'good.' The concept of a kind central to Thomson's account, in addition to analyzing attributive uses of good, can also effectively analyze predicative uses of good. As such, Thomson can preserve her basic position, including the claim that there is no first-order property goodness, while also providing a more nuanced discussion of the ethical realism and anti-realism debate, account for important ethical distinctions such as intrinsic/extrinsic and moral/non-moral, and resolve substantial problems in her account of directives.

What is the motivation for providing such an account? Some statements seem to involve both predicative and attributive goodness. In showing how an attributive account of goodness can account for claims about predicative goodness, this account will deal with statements such as “Bessy is a good bomb, but Bessy is not good” better than alternatives. On the one hand, “Bessy is not good” is meaningless on Thomson’s account, when the claim seems coherent. On the other, accounts of predicative goodness have a hard time accounting for attributive goodness. If pleasure is good, are good thumbscrews ones that bring the least amount of suffering? No.<sup>4</sup> In this way, other accounts of goodness are unattractive. This account provides a semantic basis for best understanding propositions involving both attributive and predicative goodness.

Sometimes, a predicative accounts of goodness’ unattractive account of attributive good appears covered up by appeal to a distinction between “moral” and “non-moral” evaluation. This seems to fracture normativity rather than help explain the study. Further, this makes mysterious what evaluation is such that some evaluations are moral and others non-moral. Accounting for the relations between predicative and attributive goodness will help de-mystify such claims, clarify the relation between “moral” and “non-moral” evaluation, and show how both are understood as evaluations.

Finally, one criticism of normative virtue ethics is that such theories do not have a developed meta-ethics. This account helps provides the framework for understanding the meta-ethics of virtue theory by showing how the virtue ethicist’s appeal to human goodness conceptually relates to other normative positions. Likewise, a virtue ethic account benefits

from a clearer understanding of how meta-ethical positions on realism and anti-realism bare on claims about attributive goodness, as will next be discussed.

My argument proceeds as follows. Section I. explains the difference between *relations between* a kind and an individual and *relations among* kinds. Two relations among kinds particularly relevant to ethical thinking are suggested, the “better to be” relation and the “essential” relation. Section II. explains and motivates the “better to be” relation. Section III. explains and motivates the “essential” relation. Section IV. discusses how predicative uses of ‘good’ can be accounted for by these two relations, and how to understand the relationship between attributive and predicative uses of good. This provides Thomson with a more charitable account of predicative goodness, and allows her position to address a larger variety of ethical views.

Section V. considers the ethical and meta-ethical consequences of accounting for predicative uses of good this way by raising three questions regarding the “structure” such ranking of relations among kinds provides. The first question examined is whether this structure is based in reality or not. This question leads into a discussion on what this model of goodness implies about ethical realism and anti-realism. Section VI. explores a second question, what is the measure of such ranking? This brings out this model’s connections with ethical distinctions of intrinsic goodness and moral/non-moral evaluation. Sections V. and VI. provides Thomson with a more robust, nuanced, and charitable understanding of the ethical realism debate, and of the place of the discussed distinctions in ethics.

Sections VII. examines a third question, what implications for evaluatives and directives this ranking has by bringing out problems with Thomson’s account of directives.

Section VIII. shows how such problems can be resolved by appeal to relations among kinds. This provides Thomson with a way to avoid substantial flaws and internal conflict in her account of directives, and provides a different understanding of ethical disagreement than Thomson's. Finally, section IX. summarizes the arguments, and suggests how future research might better address issues raised here.

### **I. Two Relations *Among* Kinds**

Kinds play a central role in Thomson's account. A good toaster is a toaster that has all the "virtues" of the kind toaster. Such a toaster is not defective in any way. What defect for members of kind consist in is determined by that kind. Likewise, kinds are what determine what individual's falling under them ought to do. With qualification, Tom ought to  $\Phi$  if Tom is of kind K, and if Tom does not  $\Phi$ , then Tom is a defective K.<sup>5</sup>

Relations between an individual and a kind are used by Thomson in this way to account for numerous normative claims. Generally speaking then, claims regarding attributive goodness are analyzed as inferences from facts about kinds and facts about individuals.<sup>6</sup> Thinking about goodness like this leads to questioning relations among kinds' potential relevance. Here, we are not inquiring about the nature of the relation between individuals and kinds, such as whether the relation in one of instantiation, co-existence, or subsistence. Rather, if terrier is one kind Fido is of, and quiet-dog another, we can wonder whether relations between the kinds terrier and quiet dog are also relevant in evaluating Fido. So, are there any reasons to think that relations among kinds are relevant to the study of normativity?<sup>7</sup>



Yes. Two relations among kinds are particularly appropriate to consider. The first relation is noticed by considering whether there is an important respect in which some kinds are “better” than others. In particular, we will consider if there are reasons to think that it is better to be of certain kinds than to be of others. A notable relation comes from reflecting that, while many kinds may evaluate an individual, some kinds seem to better evaluate that individual than others, or seem to matter more than others in evaluating an individual. Thus, there is reason to think that as relations between kinds and individuals are significant for analyzing normativity, relations among kinds may likewise be significant.<sup>8</sup>

Why focus on such kind-kind relations? Such relations may provide the basis for predicative uses of ‘good.’ Some ethical and meta-ethical claims seem to have no place in Thomson’s account, or turn out to be meaningless. Insofar as these claims can be reduced to claims regarding relations between kinds, Thomson then actually would have the means to address these positions. This is why we will now look at the two relations suggested in more detail, and show how such relations provide the basis for non-attributive uses of ‘good.’

So, having distinguished between two different relationships kinds enter into, relationships between kinds and individuals, and relationships among kinds, we have isolated two at least prima facie ethically relevant relations. We have also seen how these relations contribute to the larger thesis of showing how Thomson’s account can analyze predicative uses of good. These relations will now be examined and motivated in more detail.

## **II. The “Better to be” Relation**

“It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.”

~ John Stuart Mill

One of the two relevant relations among kinds is what could be called the “better to be” relation. Predicative uses of good might be accounted for in terms of such a relation. Naming the relation the “better to be relation” is only meant to capture the sort of ranking among kinds this relation might give, and thus capture the sort of intuitions some ethicists appeal. The question of whether some kinds really are better to be than others is not intended to be settled here. How is this relation to be understood?

First, “better” seems to be a relation in logical form. Some individuals are better than others in some respect. The faster runner is the better racer. Here, individuals can be compared as better in relation to each other in virtue of the kind racer. What about kinds? Is there a relevant respect for which kinds and not individuals are better than others?

In his article “Good Period”, Richard Arneson raises a criticism that in a way draws attention to such a question. Arneson writes:

To claim that pleasure is good simpliciter is to claim that if two possible states of the world are identical in all relevant respects except that in the second, some individual living being experiences some pleasure, then the second state of the world is better than the first. One could put the point by saying that pleasure has intrinsic value.<sup>9</sup>

What is compelling in Arneson’s criticism is that claims about goodness sometime are claims about that in virtue of what one thing is better than another. Further, Arneson’s suggestion that the notion of intrinsic value is connected with this understanding also is highly plausible. What is not compelling is his claim that pleasure is what makes some *states of the world* better than others.

Thomson standard reply to such arguments is to point out that *states of the world* are like the kinds pebble and shade of gray, in that they do not generate standards for evaluation.

Asking whether A is better than B only makes sense if there is some respect in which A is better than B.<sup>10</sup> Is there a respect in which something is a better state of the world than something else? Thomson argues that there is not.

Thomson's standard reply is not entirely convincing. For in this matter, Thomson's account of kinds seems to bias without argument one understanding of kinds against an equally coherent understanding.<sup>11</sup> One instance of this bias is in her discussion of goodness-fixing kinds. Thomson writes:

Isn't anything that consists in being a way the world might be, or being a suitably large state of affairs, as good a specimen of that kind as any other? No less so than any pebble or smudge is as good a specimen of a pebble or a smudge as any other. I therefore invite the conclusion that there are no such properties as being (simply) a good act, event, fact, state of affairs, or possible world.<sup>12</sup>

Here, Thomson suggests that states of the world are not the sort of thing such that one state can be a better than another as a state of the world. Thomson takes this to show that kinds such as this do not generate evaluative standards. This is meant to convince us that there are no good states of affairs.

Thomson's critics are rightly critical of this position. For example, Nicholas Sturgeon writes of problems with Thomson's account "One is why we should agree that neither possible state of affairs nor possible world is a goodness-fixing kind. I find that Thomson's discussion leaves me less clear than I would like to be about how to tell which kinds are the goodness-fixing ones."<sup>13</sup>

To expand on Surgeon's concerns, consider: Why not conclude instead that all states of affairs are good states of affairs? Thomson's discussion lacks a decisive reply. If goodness is conceived of as a lack of defect, and there are no ways for states of affairs to be defective, then any thing which is a state of affairs is a non-defective state of affairs. So, all states of

affairs are good. Thomson almost makes this point when she asks: “Isn’t anything that consists in being a way the world might be, or being a suitably large state of affairs, *as good* a specimen of that kind as any other?”<sup>14</sup> So, why insist then that none are good? If a kind must allow for defective members in order for that kind to allow for non-defective members, then Thomson’s conclusion follows. Yet Thomson does not give us arguments why this is so.

This alternate understanding is significant. Here, all ways the world might be are good. Part of Thomson’s argument against consequentialism is that worlds and states-of-affairs are not the sort of things that can be good or bad. Does the alternate understanding undermine Thomson’s argument? Not in any substantial way. For if there is no way for a state of the world to be a defective or bad state of the world, then all states of the world are good states of the world. So, while on the one hand asking whether one state of the world is better than another makes sense in that states of the world do create evaluative standards, on the other hand, the standards are so thin that anything which is a state of the world is automatically a good state. Thus, asking whether one state of the world is better than another qua state of the world is pointless, since as states of the world they are all equally good.<sup>15</sup>

For such reasons, asking whether one state of the world is better than another seems like the wrong approach for ranking kinds. Part of the reason why is that something’s being better with respects to being a state of affairs seems like the wrong respect. Is there a more appropriate respect? Plausibly yes. Being a member of some kinds is better than being a member of others. As Mill suggests with his famous “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied,” some things are perhaps just better to be.<sup>16</sup> In this way, in addition to looking at kinds an individual

is of that provide standards for evaluation and proper action, we can also directly compare the kinds.

In what way does asking whether kinds are better than each other with respect to being fit into Thomson's account? Does the "better-than" relation even apply to kinds? Thomson's account of the better-than relation seems to allow that the better-than relation can range over kinds, in that Thomson sees some sense in the question "Is Saint Francis better than chocolate?"<sup>17</sup> Here, the "better than" relation ranges over an individual and a kind.

For Thomson rejects the question as meaningless not concerning *kinds being an inappropriate instance of the better than relation*, but rather because the question does not specify some respect in which Saint Francis and chocolate are being compared or evaluated. Does the question "Is being a terrier better than being a quiet dog" share this defect? We might think no, for the relevant respect here is "being of" or "being." Being a terrier could be better with respects to being than being a quiet dog.<sup>18</sup>

Thomson also qualifies that the kind in respects to which an individual is being evaluated as better than another must be a goodness fixing kind. For this reason she writes: "So while there are such relations as being a better toaster, being a better seeing eye dog, and being a better beefsteak tomato, there are no such relations as being a better pebble, or being a better smudge."<sup>19</sup> Two difficulties emerge from this. First, are kinds even the sort of thing that can be of a goodness fixing kind? Second, is being even a goodness fixing kind, or is being like "pebble" or "smudge?"

Thomson does not seem to specify in a sense of being of a kind which makes that kind's evaluative standards applicable. Thomson's examples seem to center on individuals

that are of a kind, things to which a name can refer. This object, Tim, is of the kind toaster. Tim is a toaster in the sense of being a token of the type toaster, or an instance of the kind toaster. Thomson's lack of discussion of the metaphysics of kinds leaves unclear what to think of other examples. For, kinds also seem to be of kinds, in that terriers, dolphins and birds are kinds of mammals. Is the kind terrier of the kind mammal as Tim is of the kind toaster? That is, is the kind terrier an instance of the kind mammal? This seems to be a category mistake, for the kind terrier is not an individual like Tim.

When kinds are of other kinds, are they too evaluated on standards given by good fixing kinds? This book is a sci-fi novel, but sci-fi novels are novels. So, sci-fi novel is a kind which is a sub-species of the kind novel. In the way that an individual book is a good sci-fi novel based on the standards of sci-fi novels, is the kind sci-fi novel a good kind of novel based on the standards of novels? That is, if sci-fi novel is a species of the genus novel, can the species sci-fi novel itself be defective, such that even the best sci-fi novel is a defective novel insofar as it is a sci-fi novel? Some people seem to take positions such as this in discussing literature, so we can at least represent the claim using kinds.

Nothing Thomson argues seems to count against the position that relations obtain among kinds, nor is the position incoherent on the face of it. Distinguishing between how individuals are *of* a kind, and how kinds are *of* kinds might have some uses, but both ways of being *of* a kind allow good. So, these considerations do not seem to count against the "better to be" relation.

Two replies seem relevant regarding the difficulty that being might not be a goodness fixing kind. First, note that Mill's claim, that "it is better to be a human being dissatisfied

than a pig satisfied...” seems to be meaningful in a way that “This smudge is a better smudge than that smudge” is not. Mill seems to be claiming something that could be true or false, whereas the latter seems either false or nonsense.

Second, consider that we saw earlier that Thomson’s view on kinds like pebbles and smudges seemed to presuppose an account of what “being of a kind” is that prejudices without argument an alternative view. Namely, if defect and badness are privations, then kinds like pebble and smudges are just easy kinds to be excellent in. For if there is no way to be a defect pebble, then any pebble whatsoever is a good pebble. Likewise, any being whatsoever could be excellent being.

So, the question “is it better to be evaluated favorably as a K than as a L,” and in general, “is it better to be a K than an L,” seems to be coherent and meaningful. As Arneson notes, there is a connection between pleasure being “intrinsically valuable”, and pleasure being that which makes certain things better than others. As such, Thomson’s account has room to address where certain notions of “intrinsic” value fit. The measure for which some kinds are better to be of than others is what is “intrinsically” valuable. Concern over what is intrinsically valuable is concern about a relation that holds between kinds, rather than the relation between kinds and individuals.

We have now examined the first of the two relations among kinds that may be used to account for predicative uses of ‘good.’ From Arneson’s reply, we have seen how rankings play a role in thinking about goodness. Kinds can be ranked. Some kinds are better to be of than others. In this way, relations among kinds may be reasonably considered relevant to

Thomson's account. Next, another relation among kinds will be examined, the "essential" relation. Then, predicative uses of 'good' will be explained in terms of these relations.

### III. The "Essential" Relation

The second of the two relations among kinds relevant to ethical analysis is what we might call the "essential" relation. As in the previous relation, this relation is here called the "essential" relation because of the relations analogy with certain appeals to essential properties in ethics. While looking at such examples helps see how such a relation functions, there is no argument here for thinking that only essential kinds bear this relation, or that indeed only essential kinds "matter more" in evaluating an individual than other kinds.

The relation discussed in the previous section provided one way in which kinds can be ranked. The relation here will provide another. This understanding will then help in clarifying how predicative uses of good can be accounted for in terms of relations among kinds.

To get at this relation, consider: is a certain relation, a relation among the kinds which an individual is of, required for an evaluation grounded in a kind to be an evaluation of that individual? We can grant Thomson that kinds set standards for evaluation, and still ask *who* those standards evaluate. Just anything that is of the kind? Or are there some kinds that are the right kinds to consider in evaluating *you*?

Here is a reason to think so. Suppose Dan is praised as a good date solely in virtue of his paying for expensive dinners. Does Dan rightly claim "You're not evaluating *me*, you're



just evaluating my pocketbook?” If yes, then how an individual is related to some kind matters in evaluating the individual.

Such examples suggest that evaluating an individual as a good K in virtue of meeting some standards for excellence in Ks *fails* in some circumstances.<sup>20</sup> Those circumstances can be made more explicit. A simple starting point is where an individual is not of a kind K. Suppose Dan is not a pig, nor is Dan a dancer. Do evaluations of Dan as a K still evaluate Dan? One relevant distinction here is whether Dan could possibly be of that kind or not.

For, let the name “Dan” refers rigidly to a particular human. Dan then could not be a pig and still be Dan. Suppose a virtue of pigs is *having a large appetite*. Dan has a large appetite, so is Dan a good pig? No, for Dan is not a pig. Would Dan be a good pig if he were a pig? Not if “Dan” refers rigidly to the particular human, for Dan could not be a pig and still be Dan. Thus, Dan having an attribute virtuous in a kind he could not be of neither makes him a good member of that kind, nor merely a potentially good member of that kind.

In contrast, suppose that Dan is not a dancer, but could be of the kind dancer and still be Dan. Does Dan’s excellent balance and flexibility make him a good dancer, assuming balance and flexibility are virtues of dancers? Such cases are less clear.<sup>21</sup> These circumstances at least make true the claim that Dan could be a good dancer, and so make true the claim that Dan is potentially a good dancer.

We should be careful here though. Being a good dancer is more than potentially being a good dancer. Rather, the capacity to dance well needs to be acted on in order for Dan to be a good dancer. So while kinds that Dan does not belong to can evaluate Dan, the inference from facts about those kinds and facts about Dan is one of potentiality.

While these qualifications clarify, they do not capture what's going in the date example. What is missing is that Dan is of the kind "date", yet the kind does not truly evaluate Dan. If we think individuals can be of a kind, yet truly say that this kind does not evaluate them, then we should say that there is a distinction between when an individual is essentially of a kind, and when an individual not essentially of a kind. The kinds that really evaluate an individual are the kinds an individual is essentially related to, whereas those kinds that an individual is not essentially related to do not really evaluate that individual.

Now, non-essential related kinds can either be understood as not at all evaluating Dan, or as evaluating Dan, but in a way that is lacking compared to evaluations of Dan qua his essential related kind. The evaluations of Dan in terms of non-essentially related kinds are not "true", "authentic", "real", or "genuine" evaluations of Dan. Which way should we understand the example?

The latter interpretation seems superior. While Dan's language suggests that the kind "good date" does not evaluate him at all, we can understand this as exaggeration. Alternatively, such language can be understood as pointing out that, at some degree, evaluations of Dan based on non-essentially related kinds are or are like non-evaluations of Dan.

If we say that non-essential kinds do not evaluate Dan, then we are committed to the strong position that many evaluations which we normally would say are of us actually are not. While Dan is hesitant to say that the kind "good date" evaluates him, he is happy to say that the kind "engineer" evaluate him. If only Dan's essentially related kinds truly evaluate

Dan, then we would also have to say that we are not evaluating Dan when we evaluate the engineer. This is too strong.

So, rather than say that some evaluations are not evaluations of Dan at all, we should hold that some evaluations are better evaluations of Dan than others. Certain evaluations of Dan *matter more* in evaluating Dan than others. Being evaluated as a good payer of meals matters very little in evaluating Dan, yet being evaluated as a good engineer might matter very much.

In this way, the essential relation need not be very strongly committed to the evaluative importance of essential kinds. For the kind engineer is not a kind Dan essentially is, yet being an an engineer may matter more in evaluating Dan the the kind biped, which Dan essentially is. While there may be good reasons to take certain essential kinds as being the most important in evaluating Dan, and this understanding of a kind mattering more than another certainly makes sense of such essentialist intuitions, the important point to take away from these examples is ranking kinds by how well they evaluate an individual makes sense. So, some kind might not be one kind among many that equally well evaluates Dan, but the best kind for evaluating Dan.

We have now seen another way in which relations among kinds are relevant to ethical analysis. The first relation among kinds suggest that certain kinds are simply better to be than others. This second relation connects more closely with a notion of identity. Some kinds capture what Dan is more than others, and so evaluations of Dan based on kinds can be ranked as better or worse evaluations of Dan. These relations will now allow us to account for predicate uses of good, which will then provide Thomson the means to more robustly

address the ethical realism debate, make more sense of certain ethical distinctions place in her account, and finally to resolve serious issues with her account of directives.

#### **IV. Predicative Uses of Good**

Relations among kinds provide the means to rank kinds in two ways. Some kinds are better to be than others, while some kinds better evaluate an individual than others. I will now make good on my thesis by showing that predicative uses of good can also be captured by Thomson's account.

We are now in a position to see why Thomson is mistaken in denying predicative uses of good. There is a sense in which asking whether an individual is good is to ask about the individual's relation to a kind. Another sense is to ask whether a certain relation pertains among kinds. For instance, consider the claim "Bessy is a good bomb, but Bessy is not good." Is such a claim nonsense, or straightforwardly contradictory?

Thomson's semantics for good suggests such a reading. For the second conjunct "Bessy is not good" appears to deny Bessy the property good, which Thomson denies there is.<sup>22</sup> Thomson's critics would be right to insist that the claim is not nonsense nor straightforwardly false. Does this force Thomson to admit goodness as a property? Yes, though not as the sort of first-order property Thomson is most concerned with. In this way, while Thomson is mistaken, she can also rightly claim that her critics are mistaken too.

Distinguishing between between being good as a member of a kind, and kinds being better to be than each other allows for better interpretations of claims involving both attributive and predicative goodness. The claim "Bessy is a good bomb, but Bessy is not

good” can be understood as claiming that Bessy is perfectly attributively good qua bomb, but Bessy is of a kind that is low on the scale of kinds that are better to be. Similarly, the essential relation allows for a sensible reading of the claim that “Dan is a good date, but Dan is not good.” This can be understood as claiming that “date” is not the kind that truly evaluates Dan, and that Dan is actually defective in the appropriate kind despite his goodness as a date. Finally, the claim that “pleasure is good” can be understood as the claim that the capacity to produce pleasure is what makes the kind kitten, for example, better to be of than the kind bomb.<sup>23</sup>

All this depends on there being relations among kinds that are relevant to the evaluations that relations between kinds and individuals give. Kinds bear relations to one another, as well as relations to individuals. Relations among kinds account for non-attributive uses of ‘good.’ The term ‘good’ can be used as a predicate to refer to the best kind. The term ‘good’ can be used as a predicate to refer to the properties in virtue of which some kinds are better than others. The term ‘good’ can be used as a predicate to refer to the kind that really evaluates an individual. These predicative uses of ‘good’ are not merely homonymous, but are grounded in the attributive use. They pick out kinds in virtue of those kinds bearing a certain relationship, or they pick out the property relevant to having this relationship.

So, sometimes the term good is used with regards to whether a kind is of the better kinds to be of, and at other times with regards to whether a kind best evaluates an individual. Either way, the claim that “Bessy is good” or “Bessy is not good” implies nothing about Bessy’s attributive goodness. Bombs could be the best kind to be, or the worst, but whatever makes such claims true is only, at best, accidentally related to whether Bessy is a good bomb

or not. Thus, care needs to be given in arguments using the term ‘good’ to avoid equivocating over the two uses, and from drawing fallacious conclusions about one sense from the other.

How are these uses related? I suggest that some uses of “good” are not attributive, but are non-coincidentally homonyms with the attributive use. An apple does not have the property “is healthy” in addition to its chemical and biological properties, but rather an apple is truly said to be healthy in virtue to the apple’s relationship with human well-being. Similarly, Bessy is a good bomb, which is not good, not because Bessy lacks the property goodness, but because of bombs relation to that which is the best good.

Here is another way to understand this position. The proper predicative use of good is analogous to the proper predicative use of ‘exists.’ Just how we may deny that there is a first-order property existence that all existing things have in addition to their other properties while allowing for a second-order property, the existence quantifier, so likewise we can deny that there is a first-order property goodness while allowing for a second-order property. So, there is both a sense in which Thomson is incorrect, in that the term good does seem to have a predicative uses, and correct, because there is no need for a special first-order goodness property, and because the predicative uses depends on the attributive use. The predicative uses make claims about the structure among kinds, and in doing so makes claims about the way attributive goods are related.<sup>24</sup>

We have now seen how Thomson’s account can be extended to account for predicative uses of good using merely her basic notion of kind, and two relations among those kinds. Thomson now has a strong response to critics who see predicative uses of good, or distinctions built on predicative uses of good, as central to ethics. For Thomson can

assimilate such conceptions into her account, but her critics can less clearly assimilate Thomson's points. We will now look at three areas where this conception of a predicative good improves Thomson's account, the ethical realism debate, distinctions such as "intrinsically good," and her own account of directives.

## **V. Implications of Structured Kinds**

How does our account of goodness improve Thomson's account? We will now show how by focusing on issues the improved account clarifies. The ethical realism debate will be discussed first.

If we allow that some claims about goodness are really claims about the structure kinds have, that is, how kinds are related to one another, then a number of ethical claims can be more charitably understood as claims about this structure. Sometimes when ethicists say "humans are good," they could mean that "the kind human is a best kind to be." Likewise, when the hedonist says "pleasure is good," the hedonist is not talking nonsense, but is better understood as making a claim about that in virtue of which some kinds are better to be of than others. Further, certain ethical skepticism is not skepticism about there being "attributive good", but about "moral good." If the distinction between moral and non-moral good is a distinction between the best kinds to be, and the non-best, then such skepticism can be understood as claiming that there is no "better to be of" structure between kinds. Finally, realist and anti-realist positions in ethics could also be understood as positions on the measure for which some kinds are better to be than others.<sup>25</sup>

For given that kinds can be ranked in respect to one kind's being better to be than another, or with respect to how well the kind evaluates an individual, we may consider three important questions about such rankings:

I. First, are such rankings based on the way the world is or not? That is, in claiming that it is better to be a human than to be a pig, are we making a claim about how the world is, a claim that is true or false based on facts about the world? Or, are such rankings not based in fact.

II. Second, what is the measure for which kinds are ranked better or worse to be of? What specifically makes it true, if true, that it is better to be a human than to be a pig?

III. Third, what do these rankings imply about the account of evaluation and action-directing provided by Thomson? How is the relation between a kind's "rank" and the evaluation and directives stemming from the kind to be understood?

Such questions are the source of much meta-ethical debate. I will not attempt to give definitive answers to such questions here. Rather, I will consider how Thomson's account broadens how we think about such questions. In doing so, Thomson can address more robustly and clearly issues like ethical realism, and distinctions in ethics like intrinsic goodness.

Regarding the first question, we are asking if the structure that the better to be of relation gives to kinds grounded in the world or not? That is, if it is "better to be a human than to be a pig," like Mill might claim, is this because some feature of reality makes one kind better than another? Or is this grounded in personal preference? Or the structure of the human mind? Or a cultural construction? Likewise, we can ask the same of the essential, non-essential relation.

Whether grounded in reality or not, we should recognize that being able to ask such a questions means there are two ways in which an ethicist can be an ethical realist or an anti-



realist. The debate over ethical realism is a debate on whether ethical claims are true or not. If true, what makes ethical claims true? If ethical claims are not true, are they false or meaningless? Distinguishing between attributive and predicative goodness in the way this account does adds another level to the discussion. For we can be an ethical realist or anti-realist about attributive goodness given by kinds, and we can be an ethical realist or anti-realist about predicative goodness given by the structure among kinds.

Ethical anti-realism about kinds may vary depending on the kinds discussed. One could hold that truths about “life-kinds”, such as the kinds snake, rabbit, and frog, may be grounded in features of the world, whereas fictional, artifact, and social kinds such as Hogwarts’s wizards, toasters, and companies are not. Ethical anti-realism about the structure among kinds is skeptical of such structure’s nature. If we hold that being human is better than being a pig, are we right or wrong based on how reality is? Or does this merely express our own preference, or our culture’s preference? Likewise, existentialists can be interpreted as raising doubts to whether we are essentially related to some one kind.

So, while we might agree with Thomson that the facts about kinds that give rise to attributive evaluation are objective, and are the sort of things science might answer, we could disagree on whether the “better to be of” relation is likewise objective. Care is thus needed in considering whether a meta-ethical claim or argument concerns the status of kinds that give rise to attributive goods, or concerns the structure among kinds. If this understanding of goodness is correct, then ethical and meta-ethical debate lacks clarity in ignoring this distinction. “Ethical claims are subjective” can concern the grounds for truths about kinds and the standards of excellence they provide, or what grounds one kind’s being better to be

than another. In clarifying which claim we aim at making, we can be clearer about what we are arguing for.

Consider toasters as an example. Are truths about toasters grounded in the same way truths about cats are? We might think not. Our intentions and use may play a role in determining what the virtues of toasters are, and may not play a role in determining the virtues of cats. While defect is grounded in facts about kinds, what make those facts true may vary between kinds. So, on the level of attributive goods, that is regarding relations between kinds and individuals, some attributive goods might be said to be subjective and others objective.

These claims about the subjectivity or objectivity of ethics are separate from claims regarding relations between kinds. While a toaster's goodness may only be subjective in the sense just discussed, toasters in another sense may be objectively good. For the kind toaster may be the best kind to be, and we could claim that this is based in reality rather than preference. There really are, we may claim, some best kinds, and ranking among kinds is not based on personal preference. In logical space a toaster's goodness may be subjective in that truth's about toasters depended on human's intentions, and objective in that there is a hierarchy of being in reality, and toasters are on top.

This understanding of the ethical anti-realism debate clarifies criticisms of Thomson's view, and brings out ways in which Thomson might reply. For instance, William FitzPatrick notes of anti-realists such as John Mackie that:

“What he and others deny is that any of this helps to establish ethical realism, since they deny that there are any comparable objective and authoritative standards of excellence for human beings or persons as such.”<sup>26</sup>

How should we understand this denial that the kind “human being”, or “persons” gives authoritative standards in the same way that “umbrella” and “toaster” do? Are such anti-realists claiming that a certain proper subject of moral evaluation does not exist, although kinds that otherwise create standards for non-moral evaluation do?

If so, what is it to deny that a “proper subject of moral evaluation” exists? There is an obviously contradictory reading of this claim, namely that there is a kind K under which some evaluation is moral evaluation, and this kind does not exist. Perhaps this should be understood as a counterfactual claim, of the sort Kant may be making in his *Groundworks*. The only kind which is truly and without qualification good is the kind “rational-will,” but whether we are rational-wills is not established. To say then that there is a proper subject of ethics and this kind does not exist is then to deny that we are rational-wills.

This interpretation has two significant problems. First, unless there were strong reasons to claim that evaluations of individuals under this kind matters more than evaluations of individuals under other “non-moral” kinds, then this anti-realist’s position has little bite. In other words, even if there does not exist some kind which we can be evaluated by, the anti-realist has not given a compelling reason to think these “non-moral” evaluations are not under the purview of ethics except in name. So we aren’t rational wills, there are other kinds which can guide our actions.

Second, what is it to deny that a *kind* exists? Denying that a kind exists is not merely to say that there are no present members of that kind. There are no Tyrannosaurus Rexes anymore, yet we can still know of the kind Tyrannosaurus Rex that they are carnivorous, sharp toothed, and two legged. While there are none now, we know the conditions for a

science-fiction genetic experiment to be successful in producing a non-defective specimen. Likewise, while “Nothing can be, as tablecloths go, good at doing crossword puzzles.” the fact that nothing could possess such an odd compound property is not for Thomson a reason to deny that there are such properties.<sup>27</sup> As such, we might anticipate a similar reply regarding kinds from Thomson.

So, again, the anti-realist’s claim should not be interpreted as there being a kind whose standards are the proper ones for moral evaluation, yet there is not this kind. Is such an anti-realist claiming that, like how Dan cannot be evaluated as a pig because he could not be one, that we cannot be evaluated under this proper kind because we cannot be of it? Yet this reply too is unsatisfactory, for in what sense is this kind then the proper kind for evaluating us?

A more charitable reading understands the ethical anti-realist as in the position of denying the essential relation among kinds. Since this ethical anti-realist allows for non-moral evaluation, the anti-realist must allow that some kinds do evaluate an individual. Rather than argue whether, say the kind human or the kind rational-will is the kind that best evaluates us, such an anti-realist would hold that no kind best evaluates us. So, whether we prefer positive evaluations as humans or as dates is merely a matter of preference.

This understanding of ethical anti-realist is of great interest. For this sort of ethical anti-realist is not necessarily saying anything *incompatible* with Thomson’s account. All claims about which kind *best evaluates* an individual may be false, yet numerous kinds may still *evaluate* the individual, just with no evaluation being a best one. Thomson’s account of

*Normativity* focuses on the way in which relations between kinds and individuals provides the basis for the latter sort of evaluation.

So here again, we have seen how relations among kinds, the relation of best evaluating an individual, provides a standard for ranking the evaluations given by kinds. Ethicist's criticisms may sometimes be best understood as criticisms of this second standard, a standard which is significant in virtue of its relation to the primary standards given by kinds.

Further, as we have seen, ethical anti-realism regarding the good predicates does not entail anti-realism about the attributive goods. The ranking of attributive goods might be based entirely on personal preference, or is just an expression of emotion. Even if a ranking of the kinds that have implications for member's attributive goods is merely an expression of an individual's emotions, there can still be a relation between such kind and members that makes true a member being a good member of that kind. So, while "Tom is a good assassin, but Tom is not good" in part could express the utter's emotion, namely the conjunct "Tom is not good", this is compatible with the conjunct "Tom is a good assassin" having a truth value. In these ways, if there is a distinction between the attributive uses of good and the predicative uses of good in the way suggested, then attention needs to be paid to the distinction in order to make clearer claims in ethics.

We have now seen how this new account of predicative goodness provides Thomson with the means to make a more nuanced discussion of ethical topics. Particularly ethical realism. Next, we will look at how this account deals with intrinsic goodness, and the distinction between moral and non-moral evaluation.

## VI. The Measure of Rankings

Another way this account of goodness improves Thomson's account is by clarifying what to say about certain distinctions in ethics that some take as central to ethical practice. For some do not see a clear role for the notion of intrinsic goodness to fit into Thomson's account, and in virtue of taking this notion to be central to ethics, would reject Thomson's account for such a lack. We will now see how Thomson might respond better to such critics.

Our second question regarding the "structure" of rankings of kinds was "what is the measure for which kinds are ranked better or worse to be of?" If it is better to be a human than to be a pig, what makes this the case? Likewise, what would make it the case that the kind human, and not the kind Kantian rational-will is what best evaluates an individual? Some distinctions about goodness can be said to be distinctions between these such properties, properties in virtue of which some kinds are better to be than others. For instance, there are a number of ways in which the claim that something is intrinsically good can be understood. Likewise, relations among kinds account for how the moral/non-moral evaluation distinction can be understood.

First, the claim that some property or properties are intrinsically good could be the claim that these properties are the properties in virtue of which some kinds are better than others. Kinds can be compared as better or worse in virtue of other properties, but those properties only make kinds better or worse to be in relation to the intrinsic properties.

A second notion of intrinsic goodness is determined by the standards for excellence a kind sets. For things which are not *of* that kind can contribute an individual of the kind meeting the standards, and so be good *for*  $\Phi$ -ing, where  $\Phi$ -ing is a virtue in the kind that the

thing is good for. Thus, some things are extrinsically, or not intrinsically good. So a certain conception of intrinsic and extrinsic goodness is built into Thomson's account, and each kind is in a sense "intrinsically good", in that each kind sets standards for which things can be intrinsically or extrinsically good.

For example, a campfire is external to a human, in that the campfire is not a human, nor part of a human. The warmth of the campfire contributes to the good of the human, in that the human's good consist in having a certain internal temperature, which under certain circumstances the human could not reach without the fire's assistance. This contrasts with the beating of a human heart, which causes blood to flow, for which the good of a human consists in. The heart's beating is not extrinsically good for the human, but intrinsically is in part what goodness in humans consist in, or is at least, a requisite for human goodness.

Similarly, the distinction some draw between moral and non-moral evaluation could be based on whether a kind has an "intrinsically good" property that makes the kind a better or best kind to be. If the distinction is drawn in this way though, then moral and non-moral evaluations are not then different in kind, such that to study moral evaluation is to study something fundamentally different from non-moral evaluation. For the content of moral and non-moral evaluation alike will be determined in the same way, by features of the kinds.

This provides Thomson with a response to critics who suggest that Thomson ignores an important aspect of normativity in leaving mysterious as how distinctions such as "moral" and "non-moral" good, and "intrinsic" good fit into her account. Such mystery is what prompts critics such as William FitzPatrick to write:

Such thoughts are not shown to be unintelligible (or in need of reduction to something else) by noting that 'good' and 'bad' work as attributive adjectives when evaluating things as being excellent or defective of their kind. Thomson says a bit more here to support her claims,

but still gives short shrift to her opponents, broaching the topic of intrinsic goodness in a single footnote (16) and ultimately falling back on her claim already to have established that there is no such property as goodness (and hence no viable candidate for any proposed property that makes it the case that the things that possess it ought to be promoted). Again, major points seem to go by too quickly here to have force against real opponents.<sup>28</sup>

While we can agree with Thomson's critics that showing how such distinctions fit into her account would be an improvement, we should not easily conclude that such distinctions have no place.<sup>29</sup> For as we have now seen, there is room in Thomson's account such distinctions, namely, as distinctions regarding relations between evaluative kinds.

Distinguishing between arguments about the second-order predicate good, and the more fundamental attributive good also clarifies two kinds of ethical debates. Consider a substance dualist, and a materialist. The substance dualist says that what we really are is immaterial, whereas the materialist denies this. The debate between the dualist and the materialist can unfold in two ways. First, these two ethicists could be comparing two proposed kinds, and asking which kind really evaluates us. Here, the debate is over which kind best evaluates us, and so is a debate about the predication good. The materialist accepts the dualist's understanding of a kind, say, the immaterial intellect, and the dualist accepts the materialist's understanding of a kind, say, the human organism. The question here is "What kind are we, what kind best evaluates us?"

This can be contrasted with another kind of debate. Here, these two ethicists agree that a certain kind, human, best evaluates us, but disagree about what is true of that kind. The materialist thinks humans are organic bodies, whereas the dualist thinks humans are immaterial intellects. The debate here is over what the virtues and defects of humans are. The dualist might hold that losing an arm is not really a defect of humans, that the most important defects are those of ignorance and unrestrained emotion, and so think that human wellbeing



is actually immune in important ways to chance and fortune. The materialist might take a broader view of what human defect consists in.

Distinguishing between these two kinds of ethical debates is important. For there could be reasons to think one debate is more substantial than the other. On the one hand, we might think that the latter debate is merely a verbal dispute, in that what the ethicists are really arguing about is what the term 'human' should mean. If the dualist accepted the materialist's criteria for defect as one definition of the kind human, and the materialist accepted the dualist's criteria as another definition, then what seemed to be perhaps an epistemological problem how to know what human defect truly is transforms into the first sort of debate, which of these kinds best evaluates us.

On the other hand, how we know some kind's attributes could be a substantial question. Some kind's attributes may be discovered by empirical process, as when the biologist makes discoveries about new species. Is this new species carnivorous or not? Is the behavior exhibited by a specimen normal, or are outside influences affecting the specimen's behavior? Thus, in this way too, ethical debate can be clarified give our distinction between attributive and predicative uses of good.

In the ways just discussed, Thomson can make use of our account of predicative goodness to show how some ethical distinctions can fit into her account. This provides Thomson with a good reply to critics. In our last sections we will turn to Thomson's account of directives, show how her account faces significant problems, and finally show how those problems can be resolved.

## VII. Oughts in Virtue of a Kind

Our account of predicative goodness provided Thomson with the means to address ethical topics more broadly, clearly, and convincingly. We will now consider what this conception of predicative goodness implies about directives.

We asked earlier, if there is such a structure between kinds and between kinds and individuals, what does this imply about evaluatives and directives? Regarding evaluation, we have seen how an essential non-essential relation between kinds and an individual implies that some kinds best evaluate an individual, and other kinds only poorly evaluate an individual. The lack of such a relation need not be understood as implying that non-essential evaluations do not even evaluate.

We have also seen how the better-to-be relation can be thought of as ranking evaluations. If kind A is better to be than kind B, then being a good A is better to be than being a good B. What of directives such as ought, should and must? Does the good predicate have any implications for those?

I will argue that there are implications, but that understanding the oughts generated by the best kinds to be of as *eliminative* of the oughts of the less best kinds is incompatible with understanding oughts as being generated from features of kinds. This recommends a *non-eliminative* understanding of oughts. The *non-eliminative* understanding can say why the oughts of one kind have more weight over us than another, but not that such weight creates a non-relative ought.

A significant problem arises in Thomson's discussion of directives, statements about what an individual ought, must, or should do. While Thomson in some ways recognizes this problem her account of kinds generates, her solution is unsatisfactory in a number of ways.

Thomson's account of directives is related to her account of kinds in the following way: When an individual ought to  $\Phi$  what makes this true is that the individual is of a kind  $K$  such that not  $\Phi$ -ing is a defect in  $K$ 's.<sup>30</sup> What creates issues for this account is how to understand directives when the same individual is of multiple kinds. For this introduces the possibility that the same individual possibly both ought to  $\Phi$ , in virtue of one kind, and ought not to  $\Phi$ , in virtue of another kind.

Thomson explicitly considers such a scenario in her Fido example. Fido is a terrier advertised by a pet shop as a "quiet dog," a dog whose vocal cords have been cut as to make the dog unable to bark. So, Fido is of two kinds, terrier and quiet dog.

If a quiet dog is able to bark, then that dog is a defective quiet dog. So, Fido ought to be unable to bark. Likewise, if a terrier is unable to bark, then that dog is a defective terrier. So, Fido ought to be able to bark. Thomson claims that an obviously untrue claim is that Fido both ought to be able to bark, and ought to be unable to bark.<sup>31</sup> This problem motivates Thomson to introduce condition "gamma" for her account of directives.

Is this really obviously untrue though? Since goodness is sensitive to what kind an individual is, why not oughts as well? Specifically, since these seemingly contradictory directives for Fido have different kinds as their sources, we ought to distinguish between what Fido ought to do qua quiet dog, and what Fido ought to do qua terrier.

For, if Fido is able to bark when he ought not be able to bark, in virtue of being a quiet dog, Fido is not then defective as a terrier, but as a quiet dog. Likewise, if Fido is not able to bark when he ought to be able to bark, in virtue of being a terrier, Fido is not then defective as a quiet dog. So, a more nuanced position then would distinguish between what Fido ought, in virtue of being a terrier, to do, and what Fido ought, in virtue of being a quiet dog, to do. What is obviously false is that Fido ought, in virtue of being a terrier, to both be able and not be able to bark.

Thomson's account of kinds prevents her from making this sort of response. For, as we will see, Thomson argues that oughts generated by a sub-kind are 'trumped' by the oughts generated by a more general kind in cases of conflict. For Thomson approaches the problem of conflicting oughts that is generated for an individual of different kinds in a somewhat unsatisfactory manner. Rather than distinguishing between what Fido ought to do qua terrier versus qua quiet dog, Thomson seems to think that there is a genuine contradiction, and that the contradiction arises because the weight of the ought given by the sub-kind quiet dog is treated as equal to the weight of the more general kind terrier. Thomson suggests that the weight of a more general ought overrides that of a particular ought in cases of conflict.<sup>32</sup>

Why is this? Thomson writes:

When we reason about what a thing ought to do, we look for generalizations, and we take what issues from the more general to have more weight than what issues from the less general if what issues from the more general conflicts with what issues from the less general.<sup>33</sup>

This motivates Thomson to add the condition "There is no directive kind  $K^+$  such that  $K$  is a sub-kind of  $K^+$ , and such that if a  $K^+$  does  $V$ , then it is a defective  $K^+$ ."<sup>34</sup>

While Thomson may ultimately be correct in that a principle is required for deciding what to do when an individual is of multiple kinds which generate conflicting directives, Thomson's gamma condition is too hasty. Always appealing to the more general kind in cases of conflict leads to implausible results.

For consider something like a "Cambridge" kind. Take the Cambridge kind 'existents that do not bark' and call them "Borks." Since Fido had his vocal cords cut, he does not bark, and so is a "Bork." Bork is more general than the kind terrier, so by Thomson's own gamma condition, Fido ought not bark after all. So, this ought has more weight in directing Fido than oughts given by the kind terrier. Virtually all kinds can be trumped by some more general Cambridge kind.

The kind Bork is clearly too sparse for guiding Fido on how to have a full life. What should Fido eat, should Fido chase cats, and should Fido have a tail or not? Nothing about the kind Bork meaningfully answers these questions. Appeals to more general kinds thus are not always appropriate for determining what an individual ought to do in cases of conflict.

Now, while the kind "Bork" is in a sense artificial, in that the kind does not carve reality up into classes we think reality is carved into, this artificiality should be no restriction on whether "Bork" is an evaluative kind or not. For Thomson places no emphasis on kinds found in nature being the only kinds which give real evaluative standards, since toasters equally create standards for goodness in toasters. So, if the artificiality of the example strikes us as counting against it, then this is symptomatic of Thomson's account which is itself promiscuous about what counts as a kind, and not merely a bad counterexample.

Further, the general problem of kinds generating conflicting oughts for an individual arises because the same individual can be of multiple kinds. However, when an individual is of multiple kinds, the relation between the kinds is not necessarily that between kind and sub-kind. At least, Thomson has given us no reason to think that kind-subkind relations exhausts how individuals are of multiple kinds.

Here is a way an individual might be of multiple kinds, while the kinds are not sub-kinds. Call the object before me Pup. Pup seems to be of the kind paperweight and of the kind cup. Paperweights are not sub-kinds of cups, nor cups a sub-kind of paperweight. So Pup can be evaluated as defective qua paperweight, or defective qua cup, and so the oughts of both cups and paperweights apply to Pup. Here, no kind-subkind relation is involved, and yet the oughts of such different kinds potentially make it such that the same individual ought to both Q and not Q.<sup>35</sup>

Have these arguments shown that Thomson should consider oughts as kind-related in the same way defect and virtue is? Not entirely. For, depending on the questions we take ethics to be able to answer, such a position seems unable satisfactorily to answer ethical questions. We might rightly expect ethics to explain why we ought not murder. One kind of explanation we might expect ethics to give then is an explanation of why Dexter ought to act how a human ought to act rather than how a murderer ought to act. But if our argument's against gamma are successful, then we might wonder if Thomson's account has the resources to give such an explanation.

Why? Either oughts are kind-related, such that possibly the same individual ought to  $\Phi$  in virtue of being a K, and ought not  $\Phi$  in virtue of being a L, or oughts are not. Suppose

that they are ought-related. Thomson holds that what would make the statement “Dexter ought to murder” true is that Dexter is of a kind where not murdering is a defect. Suppose not murdering is a defect in the kind murderer, and murdering is a defect in the kind human. Then, Dexter in virtue of being a murderer, ought to murder, and, in virtue of being a human, ought not to murder.

So, we can in one sense explain why Dexter ought not murder, in that we can explain why, in virtue of being human, he ought not to murder. Such an explanation does not explain why, in virtue of being a murderer, he ought not to murder. Further, given that Dexter cannot both murder and not murder, we may be tempted to reply “I see that he ought to murder qua murderer, and ought not to murder qua human, but what ought he do!?” Such a question can be understood as a question of *what to be*. Ought I be a human, and be sensitive to the standards generated by the human kind, or ought I be a murderer, and be sensitive to the standards of the murderer kind?

If this question is meaningful and has an answer, then there are true ‘ought’ statements settled not by an appeal to the standards for defect given by kinds.<sup>36</sup> For it is not by the standards of the kinds murderer and human that Dexter ought to be a human, but rather in virtue of something like Thomson’s gamma condition.

So, then should something gamma-like be adopted? By no means. For any position where the ought’s generated by one kind eliminate the oughts of another kind will create a serious problem for Thomson’s view that kinds are what provide the standards for goodness and defect. For suppose oughts are not kind-related. That is, if an individual is of two kinds,

then the oughts are not merely in virtue of the kind. This position is incompatible with the view that kinds are what provide standards for defect.

To see how, consider the following. Suppose that Tom is a human and an assassin, and further for the sake of argument grant that assassin is a sub-kind of human. Now, in virtue of facts about humans, let us say that it is false that Tom ought to kill stealthily. By Thomson's criteria we seem committed to the view that killing stealthily is not a defect in assassins! For if it is not the case that Tom ought to kill stealthily, then either Tom is not an assassin, or it is not the case that if an assassin does not kill stealthily, then the assassin is defective. Since Tom is an assassin, we are left with the latter. So, from the fact that it is not the case that Tom ought to kill stealthily, and that Tom is an assassin, we can conclude that not killing stealthily is not, in fact, a defect in assassins!<sup>37</sup>

Anytime an individual is of multiple kinds, and the oughts of one kind eliminate the oughts of another, a simple application of modus tollens will provide the conclusion that the supposed conflict of oughts is illusory. What we think is a defect in the kind whose ought is eliminated will turn out not to be a defect.<sup>38</sup>

Further, the motivation for introducing conditions like Gamma in the first place was that they provided an answer to what an individual ought to do in cases of conflict between different oughts. Such conditions as a solution goes against the very motivation for introducing them, for based on the truth of such conditions, we should deny that there even was a conflict of oughts.

Likewise, if it were true that "Dexter ought to be a human rather than a murderer", we still might think that even though Dexter is wrong to be a murderer, the kind murderer still



provides criteria for what excellent murdering consists in. “I don’t care that I ought not be a murderer, given that I am a murderer, how do I do it well?” We can still recognize what excellence and deficiency in a despicable kind is, even though no one would recommend pursuing such excellence.

So, we have now seen how Thomson’s account of directives faces serious problems. Gamma has counter intuitive results, and internally conflicts with Thomson’s account of evaluatives because a less general, eliminated kind’s defects are made non-defects by her conditions. We will now see how such problems can be resolved using the account of predicative goodness I argue for.

### **VIII. Against Eliminative Oughts**

We have seen how relations among kind are significant to ethical thought. We will now see how in particular these relations are relevant to judgments about what we ought to do. This understanding of how relations are relevant provides Thomson the means to avoid the problems drawn out in the previous section.

Let us return to the reply: “I see that he ought to murder qua murderer, and ought not to murder qua human, but what ought he do” and ask, is this question meaningful? Thomson denies that statements using good as a property are meaningful. So, why not deny that there are such ‘oughts’ as asked for in the question, by insisting that oughts only get meaning in virtue of kinds?<sup>39</sup>

A reason for hesitating is that, while the question of what he ‘ought to do,’ where the ought is not in virtue of some kind, is illformed, perhaps this is just a poorly phrased version

of a different meaningful question. For surely there is some relation between being a murderer and being a human that counts in favor of being a human.

We have seen that the notion of ‘trumping’ oughts, where trumping involves the *elimination* of the trumped ought, generates the unsatisfactory conclusion that non-stealthy killing is not in fact a defect of assassins, because it is false that a human who is an assassin ought to kill stealthily. Yet there could still be a *non-eliminative* relation between the oughts that counts in favor of human oughts.

A meaningful question in the spirit of the first is “why is it better to be a human than to be a murderer?” For, being evaluated positively as a human may matter more than being evaluated positively as a murderer. Further, Thomson writes:

When we reason about what a thing ought to do, we look for generalizations, and we take what issues from the more general to have more weight than what issues from the less general if what issues from the more general conflicts with what issues from the less general.<sup>40</sup>

Here, Thomson speaks of “weight.” In weighing though, the two-pound weight is not eliminated, does not count for nothing, because the four-pound weight is greater. If this statement speaks closer to Thomson’s motivation for Gamma, then Thomson should embrace the non-eliminative interpretation.

For such reasons, this understanding of the relation between kinds and directives seems superior to the understanding presented by Thomson, and is possibly a better way of presenting Thomson’s own view. Further, we already have a good way to understand such “weight.” Relations between kinds can explain different senses in which some “oughts” are more weighty than others. One reason why the “oughts” of humans seem like the oughts Dexter should care about could be because the oughts of humans are what really evaluates

Dexter. The evaluations of Dexter as a human have more weight in evaluating Dexter than others. Another reason could be because being a human is better than being a murderer. So, being a good human is better than being a good murderer, and “weighs” more in deliberation of what to do.

Now, such weights should be approached carefully. For if being a god is better than being human, what, if anything, does this imply about how humans are evaluated and advised to act? Knowing what is best to be does not necessarily speak to how we imperfect beings ought to live, which may more appropriately answered by facts about a more imperfect kind.

Similarly, if the answer to the question “why prefer the better to the worse?” is because you are defective in some way by preferring the worse, then that defect is presumably grounded in the truth about some kind. Then again, what you ought to do is again ultimately grounded in the kind you are. Because I am a human, and a defect in humans is to be irrational, I should follow the best kind’s oughts? If that is ultimately the way facts about what kinds are better apply to action, then we see again that the good of attribution is more fundamental than the good of betterness in being.

## **IX. Conclusion**

Are non-attributive uses of ‘good’ meaningful? Judith Jarvis Thomson, in her book, *Normativity*, argues that such uses are not. I have argued that Thomson is mistaken, but in a way which improves on her basic account of the evaluative and directive judgments central to normative thought. Relations among kinds, and not just relations between kinds and

individuals, are ethically relevant. Such kind-kind relations provide a semantic basis for non-attributive uses of good.

Accounting for such non-attributive uses allows Thomson to address three significant problems with her account. First, this account allows Thomson to make a more nuanced and charitable discussion of ethical realism and anti-realism. Second, this account provides a place in Thomson's framework for ethically relevant distinctions such as intrinsic/extrinsic goodness, and moral/non-moral evaluation. Finally, this account provides Thomson the basis for resolving issues with her account of directives.

Thomson account of directives such as 'ought' is defective in that the 'ought' of a more general kind eliminates that of a less general kind in cases of conflicting oughts. I demonstrated how such an account generates counter intuitive results and in fact undermines other parts of Thomson's analysis. The kind-kind relations used in the account of non-attributive uses of good can be used by Thomson as the basis of a non-eliminative account of directives. Such relations account for why some 'oughts' have more weight than others.

This account raises some interesting areas for future research. Given this understanding of the relation between predicative and attributive goods, we might check if critical issues in ethics make faulty inferences from one meaning of good to another. I have explained how truths about life, artifact, fictional, and social kinds may be made true in different ways, and in this area too an account of kinds can be further developed.<sup>41</sup> The content of a kind relevant to us needs to be argued for, as well as which understanding of the better to be and essential relations is correct. Finally, I have for the most part avoided

discussing Thomson's views on rationality, but some account of the connections between ethics and rationality should be developed.

### Works Cited

- Arneson, Richard J. "Good, Period". *Analysis*, supp. vol. October, 2010. Electronic.
- Bird, Alexander and Tobin, Emma, "Natural Kinds", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/natural-kinds/>>.
- Chalmers, David. "Ontological Anti-Realism." *Metametaphysics* David J. Chalmers, David Maley & Ryan Wasserman eds. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Fine, Kit. "The Question of Ontology." *Metametaphysics* David J. Chalmers, David Maley & Ryan Wasserman eds. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- FitzPatrick, William J. Reviewed work(s): Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Normativity*. Chicago: Open Court, 2008. Electronic.
- Foot, Philippa. *Natural Goodness*. Clarendon Press, 2001.
- Ford, Anton. "Action and Generality". <http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/faculty/ford.html>, 2010.
- Geach, Peter. "Good and Evil," *Analysis*, 1956.
- Hintikka, Jaakko and Vilkkio, Risto. "Existence and Predication from Aristotle to Frege." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol.LXXIII, No. 2, September 2006. Electronic.
- Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity*. Harvard University Press, 1972.
- McDaniel, Kris. "Ways of Being." *Metametaphysics* David J. Chalmers, David Maley & Ryan Wasserman eds. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Schaffer, Jonathon. "On What Grounds What." *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Edited by David Chalmers, Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Smith, Michael. "On Normativity." *Analysis*, supp. vol. October, 2010. Electronic.
- Sturgeon, Nicholas L. "Normativity." *Analysis*, supp. vol. October, 2010. Electronic.
- Thompson, Michael. *Life and Action*. Harvard University Press, 2008.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. *Normativity*. Chicago: Open Court, 2008.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "Reply to Critics." *Analysis*, supp. vol. October, 2010. Electronic.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Evaluatives cover claims such as “Fido is a good dog,” whereas directives cover claims such as “Fido ought to bark.”

<sup>2</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 17

<sup>3</sup> See Phillipa Foot’s *Natural Goodness*, and Michael Thompson’s *Life and Action*.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that thumbscrews are good, but to note that a standard for excellence in the kind thumbscrew is pain-production. Good thumbscrews are painful. As will be made more clear, there is still room to coherently hold that “if pain is bad, then good thumbscrews are bad.”

Likewise, there is room to coherently hold “bad movies are good.” These claims involve an ascription of predicative goodness or non-goodness to attributive good or not good. These should not be confused with the contradictory “bad movies are good movies” and “good thumbscrews are bad thumbscrews.”

<sup>5</sup> *Normativity*, pgs.19, 21, 28, 60, 71, 207-213.

<sup>6</sup> See *Life and Action*, pgs. 80-81

<sup>7</sup> In fact, Thomson’s Gamma condition can be understood as claiming that the “more general” relation between kinds matters for determining what directives apply to an individual who is of multiple kinds. See *Normativity*, pgs. 207-213

<sup>8</sup> I will refer to relations between kinds and kinds as kind-kind relations for brevity when appropriate.

<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Arneson, “Good period”

<sup>10</sup> *Normativity*, pgs. 59-60

<sup>11</sup> Here is another instance where an alternate understanding of kinds may be equally appropriate to Thomson’s. Thomson argues that “being a k” is not a virtue of K’s, writing:

What I have in mind is that accepting it commits us to the conclusion that being a carving knife is a virtue in a carving knife. For (i) the kind carving knife is a goodness-fixing kind, and (ii) a carving knife is a good carving knife only if it has being a carving knife. But that conclusion can hardly be right.

Two replies come to mind. First, the feature “being a K” is one virtue any K, no matter how else defective, has. Any K has some worth insofar as the individual is a K. This reply would help connect Thomson’s account of goodness with elements of the Kantian tradition. Merely being human makes any human, no matter how flawed, good in some way. So, any act respectful to the human good cannot ignore a human’s humanity. The feature of “being a K” then is not unimportant in that the feature accounts for any K’s minimal worth.

Second, why can’t “being a K” be understood a sort of “master virtue”, or the whole of virtue in K’s that other features are merely a part of, or aim towards? What is the relation between the virtues “having four legs”, “eating grain”, and “having a mane?” The are all part of what it is to “be a horse.”, and each feature specifies more specifically what such being consists in.

Understanding “being a K” as the whole for which features like “having four legs” and “eating grain” are parts of, there is then a sense in which an individual K can fail to “be a K.” An individual’s defects are failings to fully “be a K.” If “being a horse” consists partially in “having four legs”, then a three-legged horse fails to fully “be a horse.” This way of speaking is in line with how we talk. For of tyrannical and merciless acts, we say that the man committing them “is not human.” By this we are saying that the man lacks virtue. So, here again Thomson seems to be making claims with important ethical import and based in an understanding of what kinds and their features are without fully considering alternate understandings of kinds.

<sup>12</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 26



<sup>13</sup> “Normativity”, article by Nicholas Sturgeon, pg 748.

<sup>14</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 26, my emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Although not equally good for, but this is no problem, since good for uses another kind than state of the world as the standard for evaluation.

<sup>16</sup> Socrates could not be a pig and be Socrates. Socrates is essentially a human. So, how is it better to be Socrates than to be a pig? One reply to this worry is that we might rely on some “measure” for betterness in being. For instance, we could hold that kinds that have a greater capacity for pleasure are better to be than kinds with a lesser capacity for pleasure. In this way, although Socrates could not be a pig, in virtue of a human’s capacity for pleasure we could still make sense of Socrates being better to be than a pig.

Regarding my discussion of attributive and predicative goodness, some defects in humans may also affect a human’s capacity for pleasure. In that case, there is a question of whether its better to be a bad human than to be say a good pig. Does merely having a greater capacity make one being more good than another, or does that capacity need to be realized? In this way, change in one’s attributive goodness might sometimes also change one’s predicative goodness.

<sup>17</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 59-60

<sup>18</sup> How to understand being is a tricky metaphysical question. If being is understood thinly, in the sense that things either exist or they do not, then rank of kinds based on which is better to be will be likewise thin. All real kinds are of equal rank. This does not pose a particular problem for the semantics of the predicate good I suggest, for then the predicative term ‘good’ still has some meaning, just not a meaning that would get us far in understanding conflicts of attributive goods.

On the other hand, the history of philosophy is full of theorists who have special views on how to understand being, existence, and realness. The ‘better to be’ relation helps capture how these views could bare on ethical thought, and helps explain the connection between our understanding of being and our understanding of goodness.

<sup>19</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 60

<sup>20</sup> Where K is some kind.

<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, Dan is a good dancer but just does not know it?

<sup>22</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 17

<sup>23</sup> This does appear to require treating ethicist’s claims that “pleasure is good” as holding something like, “the capacity to produce pleasure” or “the capacity to experience pleasure.” This account thus may not entirely capture the position of ethicist’s who think pleasure is simply good. Whether this shows that my account is limited to a certain variety of ethical claims, fails to capture an essential feature of ethics, or shows that thought that pleasure is simply good is confused is a matter that would need to be worked out in more detail.

<sup>24</sup> This also is useful in dealing with error theorists such as Mackie, who are concerned with the “weirdness” of ethical properties. In holding the predicative goodness is properly speaking a second-order property, some criticism about goodness as a property can be side-stepped.

<sup>25</sup> And likewise for claims on what kind best evaluates an individual.

<sup>26</sup> See William FitzPatrick’s book review.

<sup>27</sup> Thomson writes: “Nothing can be good at doing crossword puzzles for a tablecloth-- nothing can be, as tablecloths go, good at doing crossword puzzles...Similarly for the others on the list. But that isn’t a good reason for rejecting them. For there are such properties as being a tablecloth and being good at doing crossword puzzles. As I said in the preceding section, if being F and being G are properties, then there is a compound property being both F and G.” *Normativity*, pg. 29

Also, Thomson seems neutral in general about how metaphysically we should understand kinds. But this may be an area where more robust accounts of the nature of kinds differ in reply. Saul Kripke, for instance, would likely deny that there is a kind unicorn, while those working more in the Russelian tradition might not. (See pg. 157 of *Naming and Necessity*) What does Thomson think about unicorns? Is a kind needed as a prerequisite for either denying or confirming the existence of entities of that kind? How to think of a kind’s existence and non-existence is not entirely clear.

<sup>28</sup> See William FitzPatrick’s book review.

<sup>29</sup> See William FitzPatrick’s book review.

<sup>30</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 207-208

<sup>31</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 211-212

<sup>32</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 210-212

Thomson writes: “I take K to be a sub-kind of K+ just in case necessarily, every K is a K+”

Thomson claims that the fact that an individual is of a more particular sub-kind guarantees that the individual is in some way defective, whereas the individual being of a more general kind does not. Perhaps the concern here is that, for some kinds, an individual would necessarily be defective.

If Thomson’s metaphysics of kinds is generous with what kinds there are, then surely there will be some kinds an individual is of that an individual can’t help but be defective in. M’s live on earth and have green eyes, N’s live on earth and have blue eyes, and O’s live on earth and have brown eyes. Now, any human can’t help but be a defective M, N, or O. We only have so many eyes. So, there is some kind M, N, or O of which we are defective. Where Thomson’s concern seems accurate is on the weight such kinds have on evaluating us and guiding our actions.

Must there always be a way to act such that one can avoid defect? Goodness might be fragile. Getting into conflicts in which defect in some kind can’t be avoided is easy, and reality requires us to make sacrifices which undermine living perfectly as some kind.

<sup>33</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 212. Roughly, the fact that an individual is of a more particular sub-kind guarantees that the individual is in some way defective, whereas the individual being of a more general kind does not.

<sup>34</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 212

<sup>35</sup> Another way to describe the Pup example is to say that there is no kind that is essentially what Pup is. Consider now Tom, who is a human and an assassin. Now, assassin does not appear to be a sub-kind of human, for martians could equally well be assassins. So conflict between oughts generated from being of different kinds arises equally well in the case where an individual could be said to be essentially of one kind, and not essentially of the other.

Perhaps something of a response can be made to the Pup example by denying that Pup is of the kind paperweight and the kind cup in the same way. Perhaps Pup’s creators intentions make it such that Pup is of the kind cup, even though Pup can be used for the purposes of paperweights. Holding such is to hold that certain conditions make it such that an individual is of one kind and not another. Such conditions might very well vary between kinds of kinds. A creator’s intentions might very well be what makes Pup primarily a cup, and yet a creator’s intentions needn’t make James of the kind pianist rather than the kind game-designer. Saying clearly what these conditions are, and what grounds these conditions is a way Thomson and working in her framework could bolster her account of kinds as to better deal with such problem cases.

<sup>36</sup> Now, the ought could just be understood as generated by the kind human. In that case though, what we seem to be saying is that “A ought, in virtue of being a human, be a good human rather than a good assassin.” This is compatible with “A ought, in virtue of being an assassin, be a good assassin rather than be a good human.” though. Being a good assassin gets in the way of being a good human, and vice versa, so insofar as you are a human or an assassin, you should abandon the other.

<sup>37</sup> I.e.:

A: Tom is a K

B: If K's not L, then defective K. (equivalently: K is L or defective K)

C: Tom ought to L

A&B-->C, and C is false because C is trumped by a more general kind. So by Modus Tollens, not A or not B. Consider not A. Tom is a K by default, by the way the example is set up, so not not A. Therefore, not B. So, not the case that if K's are not L, then defective K.

<sup>38</sup> Likewise, while deriving an ‘oughts’ from an ‘is’ is only debatably a fallacy, surely no one thinks ‘is’ is derivable from ‘ought.’ Yet from the negation of an ought, we can derive that an attribute is not a defect of a kind.

<sup>39</sup> As we noted earlier, the questions seems to be a question of what someone should be. Do oughts really apply to being in addition to action? A reason for holding the question meaningless then is that oughts range over action and kind-states, and that to extend oughts further .. is a category mistake?

<sup>40</sup> *Normativity*, pg. 220

<sup>41</sup> The works of Phillipa Foot and Michael Thompson can perhaps be read as developing such an account for life-kinds.