

PRESCRIPTIVE REALISM

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1. *Introduction*

In my book *God's Call*¹ I gave an historical account of the debate within twentieth century analytic philosophy between moral realism and expressivism. Moral realism is the view that moral properties like goodness or cruelty exist independently of our making judgements that things have such properties. Such judgements are, on this theory, objectively true when the things referred to have the specified properties and objectively false when they do not. Expressivism is the view that when a person makes a moral judgment, she is expressing emotion or desire or will. I used the term 'orectic' (from the Greek *orexis*) to refer to these mental states, because we do not have in English a sufficiently general term. In *God's Call*, I started with a moral realist whom I called a 'platonist', G. E. Moore, and then I traced the argument through the emotivists, A. J. Ayer and Charles Stevenson, and the prescriptivist, R. M. Hare, and Iris Murdoch, whom I called a 'humble platonist', and J. L. Mackie's 'error theory', and John McDowell, whose theory I call 'disposition theory', and David Brink, the 'new-wave realist', and Allan Gibbard, who calls his own theory 'norm expressivism'. My project was to collect together the concessions that the two sides of the debate have made to each other over the course of this history, and then to construct a position which molds these concessions into a single coherent theory. I called this theory 'prescriptive realism'.

The present article is an attempt to go further into prescriptive realism by a systematic rather than an historical method. Realism in moral philosophy is not in itself incompatible with expressivism, as I have defined the terms. The question of the ontological status of the moral properties is on its face independent of the question whether the person making the moral judgement is or is not expressing some orectic state. But the mere claim that realism and expressivism are compatible, though important if true, is not enough to provide a moral theory. I am trying in the present article to give a more worked-out version of the theory, and to give a theistic model of it. The model is not necessary to the theory, but it helps motivate it.

I have been asked by the editor of the present volume to locate the project of this paper against the background of my work more broadly. My project has been to look at ethical theory in the light of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. I envisage this project in three stages (not surprisingly). My book *The Moral Gap*² was an attempt to look at the difference it makes to ethical theory if one

¹ J. E. Hare, *God's Call: Moral Realism, Divine Commands, and Human Autonomy*. Grand Rapids 2001: Eerdmans.

² J. E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance*, Oxford 1996: Clarendon Press.

believes in the work of God the Second Person of the Trinity in atonement and justification. The present article is the beginning of the second part of the project, which is an attempt to look at the difference it makes to ethical theory if one believes in the work of God the First Person of the Trinity in creation and in giving divine command and call. I have in the mean time finished a book which is a historical introduction to ethical theory, focusing on Aristotle, Scotus, Kant and R. M. Hare, giving in sequence (I claim) an ethics of virtue, a divine command ethics, an ethics of duty and an ethics of consequences. I have been interested in the concept of God (different in each case) that informs these theories, and I have contrasted the main figures with other contemporary thinkers doing the same kind of ethical theory, but without the theological premises. My question has been what the exclusion of God has done to the rest of the theory. Eventually I hope to write a third part of the project, which will be about the work of God the Third Person of the Trinity in sanctification.

The present article has two parts, each with two sections. In the first part, I am going to discuss prescriptive realism, and the two sections are about the expressivist component of the theory and the realist component.³ The second part is a description of a theistic model of the theory, and the two sections are about God's relation to the good and God's relation to the right.

2. *The expressivism of prescriptive realism*

I want to start with an example from virtue ethics, and I will refer back to this example throughout the article. Suppose I see a boy on a school playground beating up a smaller boy at recess. I say, 'He's a bully'. Prescriptive realism is expressivist because it holds that one central function of value judgement is to express some motivational state. The motivational state that is expressed in the judgement is itself standardly complex. In cases where we respond affectively to some situation (we hate the cruelty we see), we can then respond to that response, either by accepting it or by refusing to accept it. Our acceptance can be normed, in the sense that we acknowledge that the initial response is permitted by the norms that we also accept. If a value judgement expresses this kind of normed acceptance, we can call it an 'endorsement'.⁴ If I endorse the hatred of cruelty, I give myself permission to act on it.

³ Two recent attempts to perform a similar synthesis are L. T. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, Cambridge 2004: Cambridge University Press, and D. Copp, 'Realist-Expressivism: A Neglected Option for Moral Realism', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18 (2001) 1-43, especially 38. See also his 'Milk, Honey, and the Good Life on Moral Twin Earth', *Synthese* 124 (2000) 113-137. I have reviewed Zagzebski's book in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, February 2005. My chief difference with Copp is that he wants to deny that he is any kind of internalist except what he calls a 'discourse internalist', which is restricted to what I call 'conventional expression'.

⁴ I mean here to be repeating A. Gibbard's account in *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, Cambridge 1990: Harvard University Press, 6-7. He says that to endorse a feeling is to say that it is 'rational', or 'makes sense', and this means accepting the feeling as permitted by the norms that one accepts. I have discussed some disagreements with Gibbard in *The Moral Gap*, 182-88. The most important disagreement for present purposes is that I do not see that the expressivism I am defending requires the rejection of the kind of realism that Gibbard rejects.

We need to distinguish between what I will call ‘conventional expression’ and ‘effusive expression’ (from the Latin *effundo*, ‘I pour out’).⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary gives, as one (rare) sense of ‘effusive’, ‘that has the function of giving outlet to emotion’. The term is not ideal for what I have in mind, both because ‘effusive’ normally carries with it the connotation of *demonstrative* expression and because the kind of expression I am interested in is not always the expression of *emotion*. But I will use the term because I have not found a better one. The difference between the two kinds of expression is best seen in an example. If I apologize to you by saying ‘I am sorry’, I have expressed regret. But if this is conventional expression, I may not have any regret myself. I have still apologized to you, though not whole-heartedly. In this way apologizing is like promising and asserting. If I promise without the relevant intention, or assert without the relevant belief, I have still made the promise or the assertion. Saying ‘I am sorry’ counts as an apology to you because of the conventions accepted within the language community to which you and I belong. But if, when I apologize, this is effusive expression, then I must actually have the regret that I express.

It is tempting to think that effusive expression is the same as sincere expression, but that is not quite right. There are different kinds of case here. An apology can be sincere even if the person making the apology is not at the moment feeling the regret. When I step on someone’s foot in the bus as we shuffle past each other, I may murmur to her, ‘I’m sorry’, and not have any *feeling* of regret at all.⁶ But we would not say that the apology is insincere, though it might be perfunctory.

The kind of expressivism I want to maintain holds that one central function of value judgement is to make effusive and not merely conventional expression of the normed acceptance of one’s initial feeling about some situation. The claim I am making is that one central point of having value judgement is so that people can make an effusive expression of their normed acceptance of their initial feelings. What I mean by ‘acceptance’ I will come to next. Purely conventional expression is parasitic upon effusive expression. Saying ‘I am sorry’ where there is no regret only works to express conventionally an apology because standardly that form of words accomplishes an effusive expression of regret. This is like the case of promising. The conventional expression of a promise only succeeds in making a promise because we have the institution of promise-making. And we only have the institution of promise-making because we want to be able to make believable commitments on the basis of intentions we actually have.

There is a useful set of distinctions made here by R. M. Hare, deriving from a technical device invented by Frege and Russell.⁷ He distinguishes between

⁵ I am influenced in this discussion by R. Joyce, ‘Expressivism and Motivational Internalism’, *Analysis* 62 (2002) 336-344.

⁶ This is similar to a case mentioned by Joyce, in which Fred and Carol have to leave the dinner party unexpectedly, and, as they rush out of the door, dragging on their coats, they call out ‘Thanks!’.

⁷ R. M. Hare, ‘Meaning and Speech Acts’, first published in *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970) 3-24, and republished in *Practical Inferences*, London 1971: Macmillan, 74-99, especially 89-93.

the ‘neustic’ (from the Greek *neuo*, ‘I nod assent’) which is the sign of subscription to an assertion or other speech act, the ‘tropic’ which is the sign of mood and distinguishes, for example, imperative from indicative, and the ‘phrastic’ which is common to sentences with different tropics. So ‘The door is shut’ and ‘Shut the door’ share a phrastic, and not a tropic. But what I am interested in for present purposes is the neustic. It is a convention that when a person gives philosophical examples, as in the two sentences quoted within the previous sentence, he is not subscribing to them. I was not telling you to shut some door, or telling you that some door is shut. By contrast, when a person gives historical examples, the convention is that he is subscribing to the claim that these historical examples occurred. There are various other conventions for neustic withdrawal, like the conventions that enable us to recognize a play on stage. An actor who wants to communicate with the audience that there really is a fire in the theatre has to explicitly cancel these conventions. In the absence of some such special convention, we assume that utterances or written sentences (as in this article) do have neustics attached to them. When I say ‘He’s a bully’, you take me to be expressing endorsement of my hatred of his cruelty. Discerning the tropic in a sentence does not by itself, however, tell us whether the person uttering the sentence has attached a neustic to it. On this view we need to distinguish two questions about the use of a term like ‘good’ in a judgement. One question is about the tropic, whether there is commending going on. The other is about the neustic, whether, if there is commending going on, it is being subscribed to. If there is not commending going on, then there will not be subscription to commending; but there can be commending without subscription. An example (but only one kind of example) where there is not commending going on, even though the word ‘good’ is being used, is the ‘inverted commas use’, where the person using the expression means not to commend, but to report some general commendation that she does not share. For example, ‘She’s a very *good* woman’ (in a sarcastic tone of voice) can mean that she is insufferably self-righteous. An example where there is commending going on, but not a neustic, is where I say to you, ‘He’s very good company’, when in fact I think he is tedious but I want to persuade you to spend time with him so that I can escape.

Value judgement can fail to accomplish effusive expression in these two ways, and in many others. There is a multitude of different kinds of case, of value judgement in the presence of multiple kinds of weakness and self-deception and listlessness and disingenuousness. What they all have in common is that there is something second-rate or defective in them *qua* value judgements, some failure in what I called a central function. Any good moral theory should acknowledge that there is something problematic in these various cases, and it is a merit of expressivist theories that they can do this. They display, for example, what is horrible about the case of a person who can no longer subscribe to the judgements she makes, or cannot endorse her affective responses (in the sense I am going to describe). Such a person is excluded from the human enterprise of sharing with others through our language our deepest commitments about how to respond to what is happening to us.

According to prescriptive realism, a person who makes a value judgement is not accomplishing all the central functions of value judgement unless she accomplishes an effusive expression of her normed acceptance.

I will confine myself here to listing five features of this kind of acceptance. A typical example of an affective response is an emotion (though not all affective responses are emotions), and for present purposes we can borrow Robert Roberts's account of an emotion as a concern-based construal.⁸ If I hate the bullying on the playground I take my concern for the smaller boy into the construal of the situation as hateful.

1) There are, however, different levels or stages of accepting and endorsing an affective response, and these can be understood as different stages of reflective distance. For example, I can forgive someone while still believing that the anger I felt against her was appropriate to the cruelty of what she did; but I decide that I no longer want to be angry, and I want to seek reconciliation. Or a young surgeon can feel fear at the danger to the patients under his knife, but still be grateful for the gradual numbing of such fear that accompanies extensive professional practice; he refuses to endorse the fear. There are many different types of examples here.

2) Acceptance and the endorsement which expresses it are places where we can properly talk of autonomy. Emotions are characteristically not directly chosen, but experienced as responses to the situation encountered. But endorsement means judging that the response is fitting, or that the situation calls for it or deserves it. The expressivism I am defending allows that there can be an external value property (e.g. cruelty) to which my emotion is a response, and which I autonomously judge to be fittingly responded to in this way. Even though the emotion is not chosen, and the norms by which I judge it appropriate are standardly not created by me, there is still autonomy in my submitting to these norms in my judgement of the appropriateness of the emotion. I have argued in various places that Kant's notion of autonomy is consistent with this kind of submission.⁹

3) Acceptance and endorsement need not be relativistic about value. I may be embedded in a culture, and in the 'thick' value terms used by that culture. For example, I may have grown up using the term 'gentleman', within a whole set of practices and institutions surrounding that term. But I am not constrained in my endorsement by that set of practices and institutions. It may be true that only someone who has grown up within them can understand the whole flavour of the term. But I can decide when I grow up that I reject the British class system, and then I will no longer use the term with the same effusive expression that characterizes its use by people who still accept those norms. There are two types of disentangling here that need to be distinguished. The first is the disentangling of evaluation and description within the emotion (which may not be completely achievable), and the second is the disentangling of emotion (which involves both) and acceptance or endorsement.

⁸ R. C. Roberts, *Emotions*, Cambridge 2003: Cambridge University Press, chapter 2.

⁹ E.g. *God's Call*, 92-97.

Given the first point above about different levels or stages, the ease of this second disentangling will depend on the level of the acceptance and endorsement.

4) Normed acceptance (and so endorsement) is not just a particular response to a particular situation, but requires similar response to similar situations. Beyond this, since rationality aims at consistency, endorsement has a tendency towards a normative system in which different norms for different kinds of response are integrated with each other. We can think about such a system as an attempt to track our values that we hope are themselves coherent. Iris Murdoch talks about a ‘magnetic centre’, which unifies all our fragmentary experiences of value into a whole that transcends us.¹⁰ The expressivism I am defending allows that the norms I use in evaluating my affective responses can make reference to such a magnetic center. In terms of the analogy I will endorse a feeling to the extent that I believe that the magnetic attraction to which it responds is itself transmitting attraction from the magnetic centre. I will give more details about one way to apply this analogy in the second half of the article.

5) Finally, acceptance and endorsement not only allow but require some kind of moral realism. I have given the argument elsewhere both for the case of moral judgement and for the case of prudential judgement.¹¹ Roughly, the point is that if a person is going to endorse an affective response, she must believe that the norms she is accepting are consistent with her own happiness (in the case of prudence) or with the happiness of all (in the case of morality). Kant’s argument in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (and elsewhere) is that in order to sustain such a belief in the case of morality, the agent must postulate a governance of the world in which virtue is consistent with happiness in the long run. Her commitment to morality would otherwise be rationally unstable. But this view of providence is itself a kind of moral realism (though not yet a kind of theism; that would take a further argument). The good that the agent believes is going to prevail in the long run is not a good projected onto the universe by the agent herself. If it were projected in this way, it could not do the job of making her commitment rationally stable in the way the argument requires.

3. *The realism of prescriptive realism*

In the next section of this article I want to talk about the sense in which prescriptive realism is a form of realism. The theory is realist because it holds that when we judge something evaluatively we are picking out a value property that we attribute to the thing, for example ‘cruelty’, which is no less a property than

¹⁰ I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*, New York 1970: Routledge, 100. Murdoch’s guiding image is Plato’s picture of the sun in the *Republic*, but Plato also has the analogy of a magnet attracting a set of iron rings, which transmit the attraction to each other, and eventually to us (the final ring). See Plato, *Ion*, 536a.

¹¹ The argument in the case of morality is in *The Moral Gap*, chapter 3, and in the case of prudence it is in *God’s Call*, 40-46. Only the first is explicitly linked with Gibbard.

a descriptive property like 'redness', and the judgement is objectively true when the thing has the property and false when it does not. The main difficulties in explaining this view come with the notions of 'property' and 'objective truth'. I am going to try to show in the second part of the article a way to see the value properties as constituted by relations of various kinds to God, but prescriptive realism does not require this. Very roughly, there are two families of value properties that are involved in ethical evaluation, the family of attraction and repulsion and the family of permission and proscription. There is also a cross-distinction between 'thin' terms, which contain very little descriptive content and 'thick' terms, including most of the virtue terms, which contain a lot. Thus in the attraction and repulsion family there are thin terms like 'good' and thick terms like 'nauseating'. In the family of permission and proscription there are thin terms like 'right' and thick terms like 'bully'. In the present section I will focus on the term 'good' and use an analogy between 'good' and 'water', which has become familiar in recent discussions.¹²

In the previous section I said that value judgement has effusive expression as *one* of its central functions. I am coming now to a second function, namely picking out these properties. The difficulty here is that people differ significantly in what things they call 'good' and in their account of what goodness is. This makes it hard to believe that there is one set of properties being picked out. We can see the difficulty even in the case of the term 'water'. Does the term pick out the property of being H₂O? Webster gives, as the first definition, 'a colorless transparent liquid, etc.' but then goes on to give the chemical definition. Probably millions of people who use the term have 'H₂O' in mind as part of what they mean, and equally probably millions of people do not. Certainly the second part of this is true if we consider the people who used the term 'water' to talk about what they drank and washed in and what filled the rivers and lakes and seas, before our present chemical analysis was discovered. Nonetheless we can say that the use of the term 'water' aimed at picking out the property even if most users of the term did not know what the property was. The same is true with 'good'. Suppose Robert Adams is right that goodness is constituted by resemblance to God.¹³ Many religious believers link God and the two families of evaluative terms so intimately that they include that link in what they mean by the terms.¹⁴ But they share a large number of evaluative practices with people who do not include such a link in the meaning. For example, both groups commend and advise and warn and proscribe. According to the theory outlined in the second part of the article the value properties are constituted by a relation to God of a certain kind. This may not be known to the users of the value terms, who are nonetheless aiming to pick out the value properties, whatever they turn out to be.

I will assume that objectivity is desirable in a value judgement. Some thinkers who want to insist on the embodied character of human life find the notion

¹² See H. Putnam, 'The Meaning of "Meaning"' in K. Gunderson (ed.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 7, Minneapolis 1975: University of Minnesota Press, 131-93.

¹³ R. M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Oxford 1999: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ See R. M. Adams, 'A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness', in *The Virtue of Faith*, New York 1987: Oxford University Press, 97-122.

of objectivity oppressive.¹⁵ This article is already covering too much, however, and I cannot enter into this part of the problem. In the history of the expressivism-realism debate, objectivity was seen to be threatened by emotivism, which seemed to reduce moral judgement to the expression of emotion. R. M. Hare responded by articulating an expressivist account of objectivity along roughly Kantian lines (though Kant should not be considered an opponent of moral realism). The idea is that the person making the moral judgement is required by the logic of the moral words to abstract from any improper partiality towards herself, by eliminating all essential reference to individuals, including herself, from the judgement. This kind of objectivity is what we would want in a Little League umpire, for example, who refuses to discriminate in favour of one team even if her own child is on it. Objectivity in this sense is not an issue between expressivists and realists. But the kind of realism I am defending requires more than this. It requires that the value properties that are judged to hold of something hold of that thing independently of the person making the judgement. To take an example of a realist theory, an action is wrong for a person if God commands her not to do it, and God's proscribing the action does not depend on her making the judgement that the action is wrong.

A qualification needs to be made to this second account of objectivity. A realist does not have to see values as real independently of general human capacities to respond to them in a certain way in appropriate circumstances.¹⁶ There is an analogy between value and colour, though the analogy also fails in a way I am going to mention. An object's being red should be understood as its having the disposition to look red to us in appropriate circumstances. We could correctly call colour, on this view, both subjective and objective. It is subjective in the sense that it is understood relative to the capacities of subjects. It is objective in the sense that its existence does not depend on reception by any particular subject. Values are subjective and objective in the same way. But there is also a disanalogy between value and colour. McDowell insists on the essential contestability of value judgement. We should never be unreflectively content, he says, with the current state of our judgements as an undistorted perception of the relevant value aspect of reality.¹⁷ On the theist account I am going to give, the situation is worse than this. We are not only fallible about value, but we have an in-built tendency to distortion. This means that we cannot, as in the case of colour, say that the property is correlative to our *dispositions* to respond, since our dispositions are (on my theory) radically unreliable. Nonetheless it is true that the value properties are correlative to our *capacities* to discern them (though we still need an account of these capacities).

¹⁵ See E. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness*, Nashville 1995: Abingdon Press.

¹⁶ I am relying here on some distinctions made by J. McDowell in a series of papers, and in *Mind and World*, Cambridge 1994: Harvard University Press.

¹⁷ McDowell, 'Values and Secondary Qualities', in *Morality and Objectivity*, T. Honderich (ed.), London 1985: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 120. I am rejecting here S. Blackburn's claim that the secondary quality analogy simply adds unwarranted complexity: see 'How to be an Ethical Antirealist' in his *Essays on Quasi-Realism*, Oxford 1993: Oxford University Press, 110-11.

One account of objective truth makes use of the notion of a property: a judgement about a thing is true when the thing has the property that the judgement attributes to it.¹⁸ I said that according to prescriptive realism the property picked out in a value judgement is no less a property than a descriptive property like 'red'. To explain this we can use Putnam's thought experiment of another earth very like this one, including the use on both planets of the term 'water', except that on twin-earth the stuff in which people wash, and what they drink, and what is in their rivers and lakes and seas, is constituted chemically not by H₂O but by XYZ. He says that we should conclude that when we disagree with the inhabitants of twin-earth about whether something is water, we are talking past each other. There are simply two different properties, and 'water' rigidly designates one of them on earth and the other on twin-earth. But now suppose we imagine a moral twin-earth¹⁹ very much like this one, including the use on both planets of the term 'good', except that on earth (let us say) the property that people pick out when they commend and advise and warn and proscribe is constituted by some relation between actions or human lives and God, and on moral twin-earth it is constituted (let us say) by some utilitarian relation between actions or lives and the general happiness. The question is whether when we disagree with the inhabitants of moral twin-earth we are talking past each other in the same way as in Putnam's thought experiment we were talking past each other when we talked with the inhabitants of twin-earth about water.

It seems clear that we should *not* say this. If we are talking about bullying in some situation, for example, we can have a genuine disagreement about how wrong it is, or whether the particular case is really bullying or just boys being boys. The disagreement seems genuine because value judgement has the same role for both communities in carrying out the central function of the effusive expression of normed acceptance. This role is independent of the question of what constitutes the properties ascribed to things when both groups commend and advise and warn and proscribe. But does this show that the realist analysis of the value property is wrong? I think it does not. This is because there is a second kind of overlap between the two earths. The second overlap is between what actions or lives are actually commended or proscribed etc. by the two groups. God, on the theory we are supposing true on earth, cares about human happiness, and when God attracts us by a quasi-magnetic attraction through intermediate rings (to use Plato's picture), we are being attracted by things that will make us happy. Since God cares for humans equally, this attraction will be to things that are consistent with every human's welfare. There will still be differences between the value judgements of the two groups, since on earth the lives of its inhabitants continue (on the theist theory) past physical death

¹⁸ See G. Sayre-McCord's extended introduction to *Essays on Moral Realism*, Ithaca 1988: Cornell University Press, 1-23.

¹⁹ The thought experiment was suggested by T. Horgan and M. Timmons, 'New-Wave Moral Realism Meets Moral Twin Earth', in *Rationality, Morality and Self-Interest*, J. Heil (ed.), Savage, MD, 1993: Rowman & Littlefield, 115-33. See also M. Timmons, 'On the Epistemic Status of Considered Moral Judgements,' *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 29, Spindel Conference Supplement (1990) 97-129.

and on moral twin-earth, let us assume, they do not, and this will affect what kinds of sacrifices it is rational for each group to make during this life.²⁰ There will also be values on earth, such as gratitude for divine revelation, which will not be values on moral twin-earth. But the second kind of overlap means that both groups are trying to pick out the value properties that explain why roughly the same class of actions and lives are evaluated in roughly the same way. This second kind of overlap makes the thought experiment about moral twin-earth quite different from the thought experiment about twin-earth. For once the difference between H2O and XYZ is understood, the groups will realize that they are talking about different stuff. But the inhabitants of earth and moral twin-earth will realize (after the differences are revealed) that they are talking about by-and-large the *same* 'stuff', though their analysis of this 'stuff' is different.²¹

The second kind of overlap is not a product simply of the example I have chosen of the moral theory on moral twin-earth.²² Suppose that on moral twin-earth the prevailing theory is not consequentialist but deontological or a virtue theory. Still there will be the same kind of overlap, because the rules that the deontologist proposes or the character traits proposed by the virtue theorist as normative will most probably be rules or traits that God prescribes to us. There is no accident in this. These various moral theories all start historically from theism. They can all be seen as abstractions in two stages. The first stage is to abstract one part of God's relation to us as especially important for morality. The second stage (historically within the last two centuries) is to remove that part of God's role in the theory as well.²³ This is why the second kind of overlap between the theist ethics I am proposing and consequentialism or deontology or virtue theory is greater than the overlap between the three offshoots. A theory can focus on God's commandments, and use them to structure the moral life, or it can focus on God's love, transcending the commandments, and on our freedom to respond to this love, or it can focus on the character that God wants us to have and the virtues that constitute that character. When the theist premises in each of the original versions of the various types of theory get dropped, this has effects on the rest of the theory (though different effects on the different theories). The non-theist versions end up more different from each other than any one of them is different from the original theism. But I think the overlap is still sufficient to legitimate the same reply about moral

²⁰ In order to make this thought-experiment work, we have to assume that it is possible for God to create a world in which God does not want its inhabitants to be attracted to or to be obedient to God, and this assumption is problematic from a theist point of view.

²¹ I have put 'stuff' in inverted commas because of the disanalogy between the cases. 'Water' is a stuff term, and 'Good' is not.

²² Horgan and Timmons, in their original thought-experiment, proposed a deontological theory and a teleological theory as the two competitors.

²³ I have argued this in detail in a book that is more or less complete, and should be out next year. The argument requires sustained investigation of a number of founding texts, and I cannot do this here. In the book I compare a theist and a non-theist example of each of what I take to be the four main types of ethical theory in Western thought.

twin-earth.²⁴ The deontologist and the consequentialist and the virtue theorist are talking about roughly the same class of endorsed lives and actions, though there will be some important differences, whereas the classes of stuff-tokens referred to as ‘water’ on earth and twin-earth are totally different (and necessarily different).

4. *God's relation to the good*

In the second part of this article I want to describe one way of relating prescriptive realism to theism. I am not attempting here to persuade non-theists of the merits of theism, but simply to lay out a coherent possibility. Non-theists, even if they find it coherent, will no doubt find it preposterous. I said that there were very roughly two families of value properties that are involved in ethical evaluation, the family of attraction and repulsion (including ‘good’ and ‘bad’) and the family of permission and constraint (including ‘right’ and ‘wrong’). I will take the first family first, and I will talk about the relation between the two families later.

Robert Adams has an account of ‘good’ that I have already referred to, according to which God is the Good itself, or the transcendent good, and everything else that is good is good by imitating or resembling God. The structure of this account is Platonic, with God replacing the Form of the Good in Plato’s theory. I want to mention two hesitations I have about this account. The first is with the notion of imitation. I am repeating Aristotle’s objection that the things that are good are too different from each other for an account to be helpful which gives a single exemplar which is imitated by all of them. How does a good cup of tea or a good game of basketball imitate God? Aristotle’s own answer was to point to a similar relation that all good things have to the type they belong to, so that a good cup of tea does well what cups of tea are *for*, and a good game of basketball does well what games of basketball are *for*, even though there may be no non-relational descriptive characteristic that the good cup of tea and the good game of basketball have in common that makes each one of them good. Aristotle may be right about artifacts, but I doubt that his account works for everything we call good. Beauty is good, for example, and pleasure is good, but it is hard to see that either of them is good because it fulfils the function of some type to which it belongs. Adams replies that excellence in cooking can resemble God, even though God does not cook, because it resembles God’s creativity, and that a gourmet dinner can resemble God, because the Psalmist says ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good’.²⁵ But the problem is that what makes the cooking and the dinner good ought to be something more specific than general creativity and less metaphorical than the good ‘flavour’ of God in religious experience.

²⁴ I am influenced here by D. Merli, ‘Return to Moral Twin Earth’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 32 (2002) 207-40.

²⁵ Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 30. He adds that we can think about dinners as sacramental.

The second difficulty is that Adams's account seems too static. I think our experience of goodness is an experience of being drawn towards God, not simply of seeing a resemblance to God. This sense of motion is not inconsistent with what Adams says, since he makes use also of Plato's account of *eros*. But the emphasis is different if we think of the good as primarily what draws us rather than as what resembles some exemplar, and I will try to show that this emphasis will enable us to overcome the difficulty mentioned in the previous paragraph.

The good, then, is what draws us and what deserves to so draw us. We need to add the second clause, unless we are willing to take the alternative position that everything that draws us is good. This alternative is a possible line to take, even about examples like sadistic pleasure, if we can sort out the good in each case that is drawing us but is ranked wrongly (ranking our own pleasure greater than the other's pain). But it is not the line I am going to take, and instead I will add the second clause. If we say that what deserves to draw us is finally God, we are not escaping the feature that such a judgement, if it fulfills all the central functions of value judgement, is an effusive expression of some motivational state. For the term 'deserve' is evaluative, and so the judgement is expressive. But the realist character of prescriptive realism is also manifested in the analysis of what is good as what draws us to God. To explain what I mean by 'drawing us to God', I will appeal to three features of what I take to be the ethical theory of John Duns Scotus.²⁶

Scotus prefers, as his term for our moral status, the term 'pilgrims'. We are, as Peter Singer puts it, journeying on life's uncertain voyage.²⁷ The journey we are on is a journey towards our final good, which Scotus takes to be that we become 'co-lovers' of God, entering into the love that the three persons of the Trinity have for each other. The chief condition for our reaching this good is that we achieve the right ranking of two affections, the affection for justice and the affection for advantage.²⁸ The second of these is a love of what is good for *us* (especially our own happiness and perfection), with essential reference to us, and the first of these is a love of what is good in itself, independently of its relation to us. The primary object of the affection for justice is God. We cannot achieve the right ranking of these two affections without God's assistance.

All of this is highly abstract. To explain what it means that the good is what draws us to God, I will give four examples of different kinds of things that draw us in different ways. The first kind of thing is what resembles God, and this kind of thing fits Adams's account well. For example, if we see a person who is faithful to her covenant relations with other people, we can see that she resembles God's faithfulness to us and the unchanging love that the persons of the Trinity have for each other. This is the character of God's love into which we enter by becoming co-lovers. I think it is a common experience that when we meet a person like this, we experience a sense of being drawn to something

²⁶ I have given a fuller account of this theory in the second section of *God's Call*, which is a version of 'Duns Scotus on Morality and Nature,' *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9 (2000) 15-38.

²⁷ P. Singer, "Life's Uncertain Voyage", in P. Pettit, R. Sylvan, and J. Norman (eds.), *Metaphysics and Morality*, Oxford 1987: Basil Blackwell, 154-72.

²⁸ Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, dist. 6, q. 2.

larger than just that person. A non-theist can say that we are being drawn to some abstract value like faithfulness. But a theist will say that we are being drawn to God who is faithful, and she will suppose that God uses and is delighted by human exemplars of divine virtues in this way. Similarly the cruelty of the bully is something that is at odds with God's characteristic relation to us.

A second kind of case is where we are drawn by something that does not resemble God, or at least resembles God too generally for the resemblance to be a good account of the goodness of what is drawing us. For example, we see firefighters go up into a burning skyscraper, and we admire their bravery. But it does not make sense to say that God is brave, because God is not in our situation in the relevant respects. It does not make much sense, either, to say that bravery is a virtue that God would have if God were in our situation.²⁹ The bravery is, to be sure, a form of benevolence, since the firefighters intend the benefit of the people they rescue; and it does make sense to talk of God's benevolence. But the bravery is good more specifically, not merely good *qua* benevolence or love. It is better to say that bravery is a *human* virtue, and that humans who are brave are (whether they know it or not) preparing themselves in this specific way for the relation of being co-lovers of God. It takes courage for pilgrims to relate themselves in this life to God, because of the disproportion between God's holiness and our impurity. Moses was told he could not see the face of God without being destroyed. Bravery is something that prepares us for union with God.

A third case is what we might call 'created integrity', and things that have this character appropriately draw us to God because we are grateful to God for them.³⁰ We can see in some things the goodness of how they were created to be, and we see in them God's creative act. This is not the same as admiring something because it resembles God. It is not in general true that we admire an artist for her work because it resembles her. Perhaps we admire, in a good cup of tea, the essence of tea, and we are drawn in gratitude to God not because the tea resembles God but because God made it. As far as I can see, gratitude to the creator for created integrity is not affected significantly by believing in evolution, for theistic evolutionists see evolution as God's vehicle and instrument.³¹

A fourth case is where we are drawn by our own happiness. The first three cases have all involved what Scotus calls the affection for justice. The fourth case is what he calls the affection for advantage. Putting it this way shows the overlap with a non-theist consequentialist account or a virtue account, like Aristotle's, that ties virtue to happiness. Aquinas revises Aristotle by distinguishing between two kinds of happiness, one in this life (where he thinks Aristotle's account is approximately right), which is only a preparation for the one in the next life (which is the beatific vision). But Scotus objects to the eudaimonism

²⁹ This is a difficulty for Zagzebski's position in *Divine Motivation Theory*, 226. She thinks that appealing to the Incarnation helps, but on most views of the Incarnation this tells us what a truly good *human* fears, not what God would fear if God were human.

³⁰ Gratitude is not the only emotion relevant to created integrity. Awe and reverence are different, and different from each other. See Roberts, 268-70.

³¹ See R. Swinburne, 'The Argument from Design', *Philosophy* 43 (1968) 199-212.

that is still implicit in the Thomist account.³² Our final happiness draws us in a way that ranks the affection for advantage above the affection for justice, as long as we love God for the sake of our happiness and not for God's own sake. This distinction is made most vivid by a counterfactual thought experiment, which is repeated by Jonathan Edwards and by generations of Presbyterian ministers at their ordination services, who said that they would be willing to be damned for the sake of the glory of God.³³ There is nothing wrong in itself, as Scotus sees it, with the affection for advantage, as long as it is ranked rightly. But if the ranking is wrong, as it was for Lucifer, the desire for our happiness no longer draws us towards God but away from God. If the ranking is right, our happiness and pleasure in this life are a foretaste of the happiness involved in being co-lovers with God. I think it is true to experience, at least to the experience of religious believers, that the sense of happiness here is always incomplete, and pointing beyond itself to something better but, so to speak, in the same direction.

5. *God's relation to the right*

We can see the relation of the second family of properties to God in terms of what God commands and forbids. The question of priority between the two families of properties is complicated by the different kinds of priority that might be involved in answering the question. One way to take the question, for example, is to ask, 'Is one set of concepts the source of the other, so that the second needs to be tied to the first in any final explanation?' A different way to take the question is to ask, 'Does one set have veto over the other, so that the second is, so to speak, trumped by the first?' An example of this trumping relation would be the principle stated in the Hippocratic Oath, 'The first thing is not to harm'. This does not mean that refraining from harm is the source of every medical good, or that every medical good must be explained finally in terms of refraining from harm. Rather, the principle prescribes that where different medical goods are in competition, not harming takes precedence (as diamonds might win over hearts in a game of Whist, if diamonds are trumps). Obligation has this second kind of priority, but not, in my view, the first.

This priority that it has is not alien to the attractive power of the good. Rather, the right is determined by whether some particular good fits with the good of the whole, seen in terms of the equal and unique value of each person. In Kant's terms, the moral law tells us what the king of the kingdom of ends prescribes or forbids, and we have to recognize our duties as God's commands.³⁴ In the *Groundwork* Kant distinguishes between ordinary members of the kingdom of ends, who are all legislators of the moral law and also subject to it, and the sovereign of the kingdom, who is the unique legislator not

³² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 1, art. 5.

³³ Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, dist. 6, q. 2. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, III, x. See Exodus 32:32, and Romans 9:3, where Moses and Paul say they would be willing to be blotted out of the book of life, or to become a curse.

³⁴ This view is pervasive in Kant, e.g. *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 6: 154.

subject to the will of any other. The position of sovereign here requires that 'he is a completely independent being without needs and with unlimited power adequate to his will.'³⁵ We can elaborate the role of the sovereign by pointing out that we should prescribe in a way that is consistent with sharing (making our own) the morally permitted ends of all the parties affected by our decisions.³⁶ Achieving this consistency is helped by willing in accordance with the prescription of the sovereign, for three reasons.³⁷ Because 'the dear self' is always discoverable in our own willing, we have to worry about our tendency to prefer our own interests to those of others and the distortion this produces in how we perceive the situation; only an independent and holy being is reliable as a source. Moreover, even if we were not partial to our own interests in this way, we would not know the ends of all the affected parties, and only the sovereign who 'sees our hearts' is reliable as a guide. Moreover, even if we did know all these ends, and could will then impartially, we would not be able (because of our limited power) to coordinate the achievement of these ends in such a way as to make them consistent with each other. For these reasons, the commands of the sovereign take precedence over the attraction we feel from other non-commanded goods, and this attraction has to be constrained by our checking whether it is consistent with these commands. This does not mean that a virtuous person needs to be constantly anxious about whether she is meeting her obligations, but she will want to check her obligations, rather as a good driver checks the rear-view mirror of her car to make sure that the direction she wants to go and the speed she wants to go are consistent with the intentions of the other drivers on the road.

I have been talking in Kant's terms about obligation, but I need to return for a moment to Scotus. A divine command theorist will want to deny, as Scotus does, that our obligations are deducible from human nature. If we could deduce the laws about how we ought to live from our nature, then even God would be bound to command those laws to creatures with our nature (if we hold, as we should, that deduction requires broadly logical necessity, and this necessity applies to God). Scotus distinguishes between the first table of the ten commandments (which has to do with our relation to God) and which he thinks is strictly necessary (so that even God has to command it) and the second table (which has to do with our relations to each other) and which he thinks is contingent.³⁸ This means that God can command differently with respect to the second table, and Scotus thinks God sometimes does give 'dispensations', though we are not allowed to argue for such a dispensation on our own authority. To take the case of the prohibition on theft, for example,

³⁵ *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4: 434. Kant uses gendered language for God, but we do not have to follow him in this, and the term 'sovereign' is not gendered.

³⁶ This is the way Kant explains the 'formula of the end-in-itself' in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4: 430.

³⁷ I am influenced here by T. Carson, *Value and the Good Life*, South Bend, 2000: University of Notre Dame Press. See my *Why Bother Being Good?*, Downers Grove, IL, 2002: InterVarsity Press, chapter 8.

³⁸ Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, suppl., dist. 37. The exception in the first table is the instruction about the 'seventh day', which Scotus does not think is necessary, though regular periodicity may be.

Scotus holds that human beings are not essentially propertied, so that the prohibition on theft is also not essential. Before the Fall, at Pentecost, in Heaven, (and even, he might have added, in certain long-lasting human societies) there is no institution of private property. Moreover, at the Exodus God commanded the ‘despoiling of the Egyptians’, and Scotus does not find it necessary (as Aquinas does) to argue that God transferred ownership of the gold to the Israelites first, so that it was not really theft.

There is one more topic I want to take up briefly, again with reference to Scotus. Are the commands that God gives general, for all human beings, or are they unique to each individual? Or are they both? Scotus has the notion of an individual essence possessed by each substance, and he holds that this essence is a perfection of the common essence possessed by each member of the species.³⁹ To love a human being is thus to love the individual essence which is unique to her, but not in such a way as to fail to love her humanity which she holds in common with all human beings. Scotus also holds that the natural inclination of the will is towards something particular and not something universal, and so towards a particular happiness rather than happiness in general.⁴⁰ Since our happiness consists in becoming co-lovers of God, the particular happiness must be in the different relation between each of us individually and the God whom we all love. Scotus does not say this, but it is consistent with his view to hold that God, besides giving common commands to all human beings, gives commands to the individual that are a route to that individual (unique) way of loving God. In my terms we can make a distinction between the two families of value properties I have been talking about. There will be different good things that are salient to different individuals, in the way that one person can be indifferent to a good cup of tea and another can be indifferent to a good game of basketball. But there will also be different obligations, deriving from the individual’s unique character and circumstances.

6. Conclusion

It is time to sum up. The article has had two main parts, each of which is divided itself into two sections. The first part was an account of prescriptive realism, which is a theory that contains no essential reference to God, but which aims to combine the merits of both expressivism and realism. I tried to explain in what sense the theory is expressivist (discussing especially the notions of ‘expression’ and ‘acceptance’) and in what sense it is realist (discussing especially the notion of ‘objective truth’ and the thought experiment of moral twin-earth). The second part of the article was an account of a theist version of

³⁹ Scotus, *Lectura* II, d.3, qq. 1-6. See A. B. Wolter, *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus*, Ithaca 1990: Cornell University Press, 68-97.

⁴⁰ Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, suppl., dist 49, qq. 9-10. There is a biblical picture (Revelation 2:17) of this in the individual name given to each of us in heaven on a white stone, which tells us who we are in God’s eyes (like ‘Peter’, meaning ‘rock’, the name which Jesus gave to Cephas, Matthew 16:18).

prescriptive realism, and I tried to explain how this version accounts for the different relations to God of the two main families of value terms, one including 'good' and 'bad', and the other including 'right' and 'wrong'. My intention was that the two parts of the article would be roughly independent, so that it would be possible (for a non-theist, for example) to accept the first and reject the second. However, the second is intended to be a coherent model for how endorsement might work given a particular normative theory about how to determine what is 'good' and 'right'. I have tried to show how God's drawing us by means of the good is different from God's selecting the requirements for the route by which, as Scotus would say, pilgrims are to become co-lovers.