

**Discerning Goods: An Exposition
of
the Ethical Theory of
John Anderson**

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Introduction

This essay explores the possibility of a scientific theory of ethics by an examination of the writings of John Anderson. Anderson holds the view that the diversity of theories in ethics is not because there are a large number of subject matters in ethics, but rather that there are a large number of theories attempting to explain one set of ethical phenomena.¹ The ethical field is confused, for the very nature of this field is not adequately grasped. The partiality of the resulting views leads to a search for 'foundations' that aim to prop up what was never properly constructed or realised. Thus Anderson's approach here, as elsewhere, is polemical and critical.

The Object of Ethical Theory

Anderson's writings on ethics do not provide an ethical theory as such, on the contrary his philosophy generally is not of systems that explain everything, rather he contends,

"that philosophy should be systematic. But its systematic character should appear in the form of a single logic, not in the form of "totality", of a pretended *solution of all problems*."²

¹Birchall, B 'Anderson's Positive Ethics', Dialectic, 1969 p 46

²Anderson, J 'The Place of Hegel in the History of Philosophy' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 80

He then goes on to add that;

"It is the business of Dialectic to show that the supposed "indemonstrables" and "indefinables" of the sciences are not indemonstrable or indefinable, but are subject to investigation. Thus all hypotheses implying a division in reality require to be "destroyed" (or removed). What this involves is that there is a single logic that applies to all sciences, a single way of being which all their objects have; we cannot divide reality into higher and lower orders, for the difference and the relation between them would alike be indefinable and indemonstrable."³

Anderson's writings on ethical issues are no exception to this position and most of them have been written in response to other philosophers making assertions about specific issues. So his actual position on various issues is often obscure and has to be read into what is being rebutted, e.g. if he criticises a particular point of view he presumably holds the converse. Despite the lack of an explicit ethical theory this essay attempts to elaborate Anderson's position in relation to ethics based on his writings.

There is, however, a common thread in Anderson's treatment of the confusion that exists in ethical theory and this is the question whether 'good' is a quality or a relation. According to Anderson, if there is to be a science of ethics, it must be a positive science, therefore, as a first step it is necessary to reject

"the explanation of natural events by non-natural "powers", supposed to lie behind these events and occasion them. What

³Anderson, J

'Socrates as an Educator' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 212

is thus rejected is relativism, i.e., the conception of something whose nature it is to have a certain relation...It is necessary for science to reject such conceptions, because if, e.g., we know something only as that which caused an event, then we do not know what it is itself, and therefore we do not know *what* causes the event or even that anything causes it.....Extension of knowledge is possible... if we view things naturalistically and reject all conceptions of mysterious powers, of ultimates and higher realities. This applies as much to ethics as to any other science. If there is to be any ethical science, then ethical ultimates or powers, moral agencies above the historical facts, must be rejected."⁴

The Centrality of Moore

In addressing the issue of whether or not good is a quality or a relation Anderson often refers to the work of G E Moore for as he states Moore,

"has come nearer than any of his predecessors to a positive theory [of ethics], not simply by his insistence on the objectivity of goodness but by his setting forth of propositions in which it is attributed to various "natural" things i.e., by his recognition of *species* of goods."⁵

By a positive theory Anderson means one which is real, in which talk of good and bad is taken for what is intended with descriptions of states of affairs or occurrences that can be tested to see if they are true or false; a theory of ethics that is not imbued with relativism and 'solves' problems with reference to different

⁴Anderson, J '*Realism versus Relativism in Ethics*' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 238 - 9

⁵Anderson, J '*The Nature of Ethics*' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 268

realms of existence and with the re-defining of good in terms of something else. In particular, Anderson has no space (or even tolerance) for what to him seems a pernicious error — of confusing the quality good with the relationship it enters into. This type of thinking leads philosophers and people generally to imagine that saying something is good is really just expressing a feeling; calculating the costs and benefits of a decision; making a recommendation or brooding over the human condition.⁶

The objectivity of goodness is paramount for Anderson, and for its presence to be accounted for as such, it is necessary to distinguish between the *quality* good and any relationships it enters into in the contexts of advocacy, calculation or expressiveness before it is even possible to develop a science of ethics.

These are the issues identified by Anderson in his ethical writings and I will attempt to analyse the arguments he puts forth and assess whether or not they have any relevance for the development of ethical theory today.

The Realist Approach

However, before I start on an analysis of Anderson's ethical writings it is essential to have some outline of his philosophical framework which will clarify his ideas of a positive science of ethics. So the first chapter of this essay will outline the

⁶For example Hobbes states " ..whatsoever is the object of any man's Appetite or Desire; that is, which part he calleth Good; and the object of his Hate, and Aversion, Evil" Leviathan, Everyman ed Pt 1 Ch 6 p 24

aspects of Anderson's philosophical position that impacts on his ethical theory. The main aspects covered will include Anderson's theory of propositional reality and his realism with reference made to his theory of knowledge and empiricism. In the second and third chapters I will outline the position of normative and positive ethical systems in relation to relativism; looking at both what he considers the confusion of qualities with relations and different realms of existence. Then, against this background, I will examine Anderson's ethical writings, in particular '*The Meaning of Good*' which covers his criticism of Moore and the issues of 'relativism'. Finally I will conclude by assessing whether or not the insights of Anderson have anything to offer modern day ethical theory.

Chapter One: Realist Philosophy, the Proposition and the Assertor

Realism, Pluralism and Empiricism

The main features of Anderson's philosophy that impact on his theory of ethics are his theory of propositional reality and his realism that demands such a view. This chapter deals with their main features while later chapters elaborate how these aspects of Anderson's philosophy generate a positive theory of ethics.

Developing a positive theory of ethics may seem an impossible task. At first glance the project seems flawed. How could anyone be so naive as to imagine that ethical predicates describe features in the world like any other statement of facts? It seems quite apparent to anyone that statements expressing ethical views cannot be anything more than the expression of feelings of the person making the utterance; at best they may reflect the shared feelings of a number of persons or the tribe. Nevertheless according to Anderson, from the position of empirical realism a positive theory of ethics is not only feasible, it is obvious, once logical errors have been removed.

Ethics to be a positive science has to have as its focus *facts* or *what is*. Goods must be goods and not other things — even if certain other things have close causal links with goods. This focus is contrary to the position that many moral philosophers take in that they regard ethics as a normative science, i.e., about what one ought to do or what ought to be.

The most outstanding feature of Anderson's philosophy is his empirical realism. For him there is no reality other than the complex, and complexly interacting, objects of everyday experience⁷ which are mind independent. This includes the independence of the known from the knowing of it. To know something, according to Anderson, is to have a relationship with it, however such a relationship in no way constitutes the object that is known.

"[N]o thing or quality of a thing is constituted by the thing's relations,nothing is constituted by knowing and nothing by being known. The notion of "that whose nature it is to know" is expressed in the term "consciousness"; that notion of " that whose nature it is to be known" in the term "idea". Realism is therefore concerned to reject these terms, as involving the attempt to take relations as qualities."⁸

Realists espouse the view that external objects exist independently of minds and although we can 'know' these external objects such knowledge is a relation and while it may provide knowledge of the qualities of an object it does bring into existence those qualities. A relation does not constitute qualities; there is a distinct independence between an object and its being known; being known is a relation and not a quality. Moreover, this 'knowing' relationship may be but one of several transactions between an individual mind and the objects around it.

⁷Passmore, J *'John Anderson and Twentieth-Century Philosophy'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p ix

⁸Anderson, J *'The Knower and the Known'*, Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 29

In a similar manner Anderson rejects the positions of monism especially that of idealism which denies independence to everything but the "Absolute".⁹ For Anderson there are,

"real differences (as opposed to the idealist doctrine of the "merely relative" nature of differences), since otherwise we could not distinguish between affirmative and negative propositions or indeed make statements at all.....[T]o recognise real differences, or, what comes to the same, different real things, is not to say that these things are unrelated. On the contrary, any relation has two terms, or holds between different things; and if these things are not "really" different, then there are not really two terms and there is really no relation."¹⁰

This denial of "constitutive relations" along with idealism allows Anderson to assert the existence of mind independent objects which we can "know" directly. This position is fundamental to his theory of propositional reality. What is known can be stated and propositions are known states of affairs. For Anderson experience is the only guide to 'what is the case'. He rejects the notion of the transcendental and those special modes of existence that require special modes of cognition that ostensibly lead us to an awareness of the transcendental. There are no 'ontological truths' that can hover above, underlie or contextualise mere facts; facts are all there *is*. Facts are states of affairs or occurrences in space and

⁹Anderson, J

'Realism and some of its Critics' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 42

¹⁰ibid p 42

time.¹¹ Knowledge of them is given in propositions. This empiricism of Anderson is expressed in the thesis

"[t]he distinguishing - mark of empiricism as a philosophy is thatit maintains that there is only one way of being. The issue has been confused in the past by reference to knowledge. It was quite naturally maintained, by those who postulated different ways of being, that in relation to them different ways of knowing are required. Hence empiricism has been connected, in the history of philosophy, with the view that there is only one way of knowing, and particularly that way is what was called "sense" in contrast to "reason"; or rather differently, that sense is the only *originator* of knowledge. But fundamentally the issue is logical; the dispute is about ways of being or of truth, not about ways of knowing truths. It is only after it has been assumed that there are other truths than matters of fact, or that there are objects which "transcend" existence, that a special faculty has to be invented to know them."¹²

So, for Anderson there is only one way of being; one kind of truth; and only one way of knowing. If it is assumed that there are other truths different from matters of fact then the philosopher gets caught in the problem of having to create special faculties to 'know' them. We do not have special faculties nor do we have any languages other than the language we use to describe everyday experience, hence such a situation has us talking about what is 'unspeakable'.

¹¹Anderson, J *'Empiricism' Studies in Empirical Philosophy*, Angus and Robertson, 1962
p14

¹²ibid pp 3-4

Anti-Representationalism

If there is only one way of being they cannot be degrees of reality. Anderson's realism is what is often referred to as naive or direct realism. He rejects the theory of representational realism that asserts that it is not possible to have direct knowledge of an external object but only an idea or image of it. The problem with representational realism is that if all we have access to is an image of an object not the object itself then it becomes impossible to ascertain whether or not the idea or image is a true representation, therefore it is impossible to access the truth. This Anderson finds untenable and he states,

"[W]ith a representational theory of knowledge it is supposed that "our ideas" correspond to a greater or less degree with the "external reality" which has produced them in our minds...[Thus] [w]e can only know nature and her parts relatively.....[This] copy theory is completely false, as was clearly shown by Berkeley.....[who] argues that, in order to show that "an idea" is a good or bad copy of "an external thing", we should have to know them both and compare them - but, of course, if we can know external things directly, then the whole picture-theory collapses. Actually, this realist line is not the one adopted by Berkeley...[b]ut he has still shown the untenability of a representational theory and the only way out is to admit a direct knowledge of actual things and to reject the whole theory of ideas."¹³

Anderson's position of direct realism allows him to assert that we do have direct knowledge of external objects and they do exist independently of minds and they

¹³Anderson, J

'Marxist Philosophy' Studies in Empirical Philosophy. Angus and Robertson, 1962 pp 299-300

are verifiable; therefore it is possible to access the truth.¹⁴ Of course we can sometimes 'misperceive' or be in error (e.g. the bent oar in the water, the diminishing table etc), nevertheless this position of direct realism allows the assertion that A causes B and this can be shown to be the case or not to be the case. However, the representationalist position does not allow for such verification for what is being stated is merely something being perceived as preceding or succeeding something else; and nothing is being said about causality.¹⁵

In just the same way when talking of 'good' and 'bad' there is the need to identify empirically such 'goods' and 'bads'; and as with anything else that is asserted what is asserted could be false. There are no guaranteed truths. This even applies to arithmetic or geometry, although it is arguably the case that it is easier to make mistakes about some objects rather than others because some objects (such as ethical facts) engage our feelings and distort our beliefs more potently than do other objects.

Propositional Reality

Anderson's logic is a distinctive feature of his philosophy and more particularly his theory of propositional reality. For *what is* has to be asserted otherwise it

¹⁴ Anderson's rejection of representational realism is not, of course, an argument against representationalism per se but rather against the fact that if you are a representationalist it is not possible to talk about things as they *really are* irrespective of how they are actually perceived. For Anderson the position of representationalism prevents him from accessing *what is* and therefore 'the truth'.

¹⁵ Anderson has problems with representationism in relation to causation as well as truth, for if something is merely a representation then the fact that A causes B becomes difficult to validate and all that can be justifiably claimed is that A is followed by B rather than A causes B. This is not unlike Hume's argument against causality in which he argued that we have no justification for believing in causality and that we ascribe a 'necessary connection' to events when all that we are perceiving is 'constant conjunction'.

remains completely unknown; without propositions philosophy becomes no more than competing dogmas, for the proposition is the basis of all issues.¹⁶ No matter what one is arguing for or against, one's view can only ever be in the form of a proposition that allows for agreement or disagreement otherwise there will be no issue.

"Any proposition whatever can be denied, i.e. can be conceived to be false; ...if there is anything about which we are uncertain, what we are uncertain about is whether or not it is a matter of fact; we do not regard it as a matter of "uncertain fact". Experience has shown us that we make mistakes, but it could not show us anything at all unless we sometimes made no mistake. Thus the mere possibility of contradiction, the general consideration that "we may be wrong", could never lead us to give up a particular belief that we held; only a belief that other propositions which disprove it, could do so....[W]hen any belief is true, what is believed (the proposition) is something that has occurred; when a belief is false, it is still, in being believed, *supposed* to have occurred."¹⁷

It must always be possible to say 'that something is the case' or 'that something is not the case', if this cannot be said then there is no proposition or discourse. Propositions *are* states of affairs or actual occurrences stated as such, not statements of these states of affairs. There is no 'duplication' of the real as an additional level of reality. Most people would unreflectingly believe this to be case i.e., its commonsense. On reflection, however, particularly philosophical reflection, it is regarded as naive for a statement to be the actual state of affairs.

¹⁶Birchall, B

'John Anderson and 'The False Proposition', Dialectic, 1972 p 1

¹⁷Anderson, J

'The Truth of Propositions' Studies in Empirical Philosophy,
Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 21

For example, the statement "it is raining in Hobart" is usually regarded, philosophically, as a linguistic occurrence, i.e., different from the state of affairs it states. However, for Anderson it is the state of affairs and on hearing such an utterance, one should be able to "look out the window" and check to see if it is true. What Anderson focuses upon is not the occurrence of the utterance, but the raining itself; and if on looking out the window it turns out that it is not raining, then that too becomes a proposition. Just observing something is not enough to disprove a proposition for as soon as any issue is at stake, i.e., a discussion about what is true, all that there *is* are propositions elaborated in arguments.

The Problem of the False Proposition

Treating propositions as actual occurrences leads immediately to the problem of what to make of propositions that are false. Anderson's view of propositions is not a view widely held by philosophers and was repudiated by Moore mainly because of this problem of the 'false proposition'. The problem of the false proposition is that if you assert, as Anderson does, that a true proposition is not just a representation of a true situation but is the true situation itself, then how do you account for false propositions? A false proposition would be a false state of affairs and this is absurd.

However a direct realist does not encounter this problem because he does not rule out the assertor for he or she is "there" in the situation. The very idea of 'knowing' involves a relationship between the proposition and the assertor which allows for the possibility of error to exist between the assertor and the proposition. Given this position what is stated by the assertor or believer is like a torchlight revealing

something. All eyes, as it were, are directed to where the beam of light lands. Of course other things remain obscure that are not in the direct 'beam of light' (the specific proposition); and argument involves shining the torch (developing the relevant syllogisms) on other relevant objects that may be obscured (and of course the light and the objects being observed can 'play tricks' on the torchbearer). Nevertheless, this position allows the direct realist to claim that not only do you have direct knowledge of objects but also that the object perceived is quite distinct from you, the perceiver, (i.e. the assertor). As long as what is being revealed (stated, brought to light, confirmed) is true, the one doing the asserting remains 'invisible'.

However when a mistake happens, the 'presence' of the assertor is announced and provides a new object of how — given the conjuncture of objects (which include the feelings of the observer) — the mistake occurred. Given this situation it is not possible to exclude the assertor and Anderson does not.

The 'hidden' presence of the Assertor

Anderson argues that the reason other philosophers have problems with the direct realist's concept of propositions (i.e., that a true proposition is not just a representation but the true situation itself) is because they regard propositions as being comprised of only subjects and predicates. Propositions have to be stated. Thus there is always an assertor or believer.¹⁸ Therefore, argues Anderson:

¹⁸Cf Birchall, B

"[t]he question, then, is not of the occurrence of a state of affairs with the attribute "falsity" (any more than of a state of affairs characterisable as "not corresponding to reality"); what is meant by the occurrence of a "false proposition", is explained by reference to the distinction of subject and predicate, as *someone's mistaking* X for Y (taking X to be Y when it is not) - the question of this threefold relationship not being one that the person who is mistaken intends to raise, and not arising when he is *not* mistaken, when his is presenting the single situation X is Y."¹⁹

Propositions, according to Anderson, involve at least a threefold relationship, subject, predicate and the assertor.²⁰ These relationships 'happen' in the medium of time and space; with space providing location to subjects (i.e., things occupying positions in space) and time providing distinction and peculiarity to predicates.

"Thus to say that things exist in Space and Time [according to Anderson] is equivalent to saying that things exist in propositional or situational form which, specified further, is to say that what the copula conveys is existence in infinite Space and Time, while reference to the subject and predicate enables us to understand further the joint but differing, roles of Space and Time as conditions of existence. In this connection Anderson argues that we can regard Space as the form of togetherness of things and Time as the form of their distinctness, so that it is as spacial that things can have location and be propositional subjects and as temporal that they can

¹⁹Anderson, J '*Empiricism and Logic*' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 170

²⁰False propositions occur when what is asserted makes the assertor 'present' by virtue of revealing a 'mis - take' of something for something else. Error always reveals a shadow of the one who has made the 'mis - take'. True propositions make the assertor 'invisible', and so philosophers often forget their presence.

have distinction or peculiarity and be predicates; that Space and Time have these different functions within Space-Time just as the subject and the predicate have different functions occurring together in the proposition."²¹

Although, knowing is a relationship, as long as what is asserted is taken as true, the assertor's location in the space remains in the background. When, however, an error emerges, all three terms of the triad catch our attention; perhaps the wrong part of space is being looked at; perhaps the direction is right but the descriptions are wrong or perhaps the view taken is so located as to allow 'tricks' (of whatever) to be played upon it. Whatever the focus, more propositions are developed until things are back in view correctly. This view of the proposition is part of Anderson's fundamental belief in the notion that everything exists in space and time in a complex and complexly interacting reality.

It is tempting within philosophy, particularly the philosophy of this century, to make much more out of propositions, for example, their linguistic carriage; the presuppositions of experience that enable space and time to be even thought and used as reference guides; the operation of logical calculi; all complicate matters. Realism has every inclination to explore the complex and criticise simplicities that hide it, however, in the case of propositional reality, the complexities have to be dealt with in such a way as to not stop the very operation of discourse.

²¹Baker, A J

Australian Realism: The Systematic Philosophy of John Anderson, Cambridge University Press, 1986 pp 97 - 8. There is very little published on Anderson's position regarding Space and Time although he was obviously influenced by the work of Samuel Alexander especially his book '*Space, Time and Deity*'. A J Baker has based his comments on Anderson's position on Space and Time on unpublished lecture Alexander.

notes on

Philosophy may indeed eliminate error and restructure our thinking but as with the seafaring boat, only a few planks at a time can be fixed; wholesale restructure sinks the boat. Thus while Anderson's approach to propositional reality might seem stubborn in its refusal to respond to many criticisms, this is in part to be accounted for by a disinclination to engage in any elaboration which posits dualisms, foundations, or guarantees certainty. Such elaborations are 'discourse killing' (ship sinking) activities. The dialectic has to continue unbounded; or to return to the torch metaphor, there is only the one torch and it cannot point everywhere at once.

Implications for Ethical Theory

For Anderson this logic allows him to assert propositions are all that exist and these are states of affairs; if it is not possible for a proposition to be denied then it is not a genuine proposition. However, this is not to say that all states of affairs are propositions even if all propositions are states of affairs. For it is conceivable that some states of affairs will never be propositions, although all states of affairs are potential propositions.

This view that all propositions are states of affairs also includes, for Anderson, states of affairs of an ethical nature. The difference of ethical states of affairs is a material one (subject - predicate) not one of a formal (copula) nature. There are ethical subjects and predicates²² and non-ethical subjects and predicates but not

²²For Anderson any term can be a subject or a predicate i.e. the same term can be a predicate in one proposition and a subject in another proposition.

ethical and non-ethical copulae (this view is consistent with Anderson's view of 'only way of being').²³

Ethical facts are particularly prone to erroneous formulation because their discernment require the assertor to disengage from the very (emotional) 'pull' of the objects being talked about. Modern normative ethical theories tend to make a virtue out of this lack of disengagement and resign themselves, as will be shown, to treating the presence of the assertor as a container of feelings, preferences, and/or anticipations — all at the cost of objectivity.

These central elements of Anderson's philosophy; propositional reality, the triadic nature of propositions and the complexity of relations that interact with the knowledge relation are central to a positive view of ethics.

²³Birchall, B

'Anderson's Positive Ethics', Dialectic, 1969 p 47

Chapter Two: Relativism: Qualities, Relations and 'Missing Terms'

Qualities as fundamental

According to Anderson, the most common logical error made in moral philosophy is to confuse relations with qualities. This Anderson calls 'relativism' but it is distinct from what is usually called ethical relativism. Ethical relativism is the position that there are no universally valid moral principles but rather that all moral principles are valid relative to culture, society or individual choice. Therefore, whether or not it is right for an individual to act in a certain way depends on the society to which they belong.²⁴ Anderson certainly would not subscribe to such a view but what he refers to as relativism is not this, but rather is the confusion or conflation of qualities with relationships.

This confusion arises from the belief that in describing a certain relationship of one object with another object the description provides knowledge of the object or objects. Anderson asserts that this cannot be the case for relationships are not qualities; all that is provided is information about the relationship between two objects the qualities of the objects are not dependent on this relationship, there are no "constitutive relations". For example, in describing someone as a husband all that we know is that the person is male and has a wife because what is being described is a relationship; it gives us no information about the man.

²⁴Pojman, L P

Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong, Wadsworth Inc, 1990. p 20

Relations, however, presuppose qualities, for in any relation there needs to be at least two terms and these terms must be describable. Qualities on the other hand do not necessarily presuppose relationships. Anderson believes that the confusion of relations with qualities is one of the major problems that prevents the development of a science of ethics. In ethics all too often when someone asserts that something is good it is difficult to ascertain whether they are expressing purely a personal preference which would mean it is not possible to refute them; whether they are making a statement of fact which could be refuted or verified; or whether they are exhorting someone to do something which they believe 'ought' to be done; or some combination of these.

This confusion that Anderson has identified works in two ways. Insofar as ethical discourse states something as good, not only is there a confusion of the quality good with the relationship it enters into, but also there is the stating of a line of action for people to follow;

"Ethical realities, then, are concealed, the statement of true ethical propositions is hindered, by the confusion of the assertion of such propositions with the adoption of policy. The confusion works in both directions. When we say that something is good, we are supposed to be stating a programme of action for ourselves or for others; when we adopt a certain line of action, we are supposed to be assuming, or indicating, by example, that the line of action is good. In line with this confusion are to be found such expressions as the desirable, the serviceable, or the justifiable. They are all relativist, in that they imply the existence of that whose goodness consists in our pursuing it, or saying that it is to be pursued."²⁵

²⁵Anderson, J

'Realism versus Relativism in Ethics' Studies in Empirical Philosophy,
Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 239

Anderson argues that such confusions in ethical theory are the result of logical error. By this he does not mean that,

"ethics should be based on logic - if this is taken to mean that an ethical theory is derivable from logic. Logic certainly shows that any theory (ethical or other) which amalgamates a relation and a quality cannot be sound, and must be falsifying the facts which it professes to set forth. In this way logic can be said to open the way to observation of the facts by removing the metaphysical "blindness"; but it does not itself supply the facts which a positive ethics has to consider. Theseare matters of observation."²⁶

Relativism as Relations hiding qualities

The consequence of most ethical systems not having a concept of the quality good means that they have to fall back onto prescribing what is good through the concepts of obligation, duty or ends which, according to Anderson, are relationships not qualities.

"[T]he leading moral theories, up till quite recently, have all had such relativist confusions embedded in them. They all assume certain higher moral powers *whereby* historical events can have moral characteristics in a secondary sense, just as the metaphysician assumes an ultimate reality whereby historical appearances can have a subordinate reality and be graciously permitted to appear. The relativist conceptions to be considered are those of "obligation" and "end". The obligatory

²⁶Anderson, J

'*Logic and Ethics*', Australian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy, 1939
p59

is that which is essentially demanded of us or that whose nature it is to command our obedience. The end is that whose nature it is to be pursued or which is the goal of striving.²⁷

Such concepts as obligation or ends are often difficult to identify as relationships for they appear initially to carry qualities in them, but when examined closely they reveal they are missing a term. The term, according to Anderson, that they are missing is either the fact that they are subscribing to the notion of a higher order of reality - the good - or alternatively they are hiding behind another authority without naming it.

"[T]his position of "ethical relativism" is quite widely accepted. According to it, we may say, "ethical" statements are incomplete; they signify *relations* one term of which has not been stated..... [This] can lead to a great deal of confusion when the term "understood" by one party to a discussion is not the term "understood" by the other.....In this way people may be led to think that they are in agreement when they are not or think they are in agreement when they are not."²⁸

The authority is ostensibly disguised but if the position is examined closely what is being prescribed has to relate back to some empirical demand by someone. Anderson regarded the imperative of obligation as fraudulent as he states,

²⁷Anderson, J '*Realism versus Relativism in Ethics*' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 240

²⁸Anderson, J '*The Meaning of Good*' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 248-9

"we should regard "obligation" as signifying not merely a false theory of ethics, but also evil motives. Moralism, the doctrine of conscience and "moral necessity", exemplifies the natural causality of repressing motives. There *are* acts which are performed under a sense of obligation, but what they exhibit is not communication but compulsion."²⁹

Dualism and Monism

In providing prescriptions on how we ought to live ethical philosophers are basically saying that there are two realms of existence or two realities. The reality of what 'is', of fact, and a super-ordinate reality of 'ought', that which we are required to do. Such a position has the same problems that mind-body dualism has. If you determine that there are two existences then it becomes an impassable barrier to explain how the two interact without conflating one into the other which then logically denies the existence of a dichotomy in the first place.

John Passmore in his article '*The Two-Worlds Argument*'³⁰ develops this argument along familiar dualist lines; that if you have two very distinctive qualities that are completely separate and distinct from one another then there are serious ontological problems to linking them together or attempting to explain how one effects the other given there are so distinct and separate. If there are not so distinct and separate and they can have an effect on one another then the argument that there are so different becomes untenable. Thus, in terms of ethics,

²⁹Anderson, J '*Determinism and Ethics*' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 225

³⁰Passmore, J Philosophical Reasoning, Duckworth, 1973 (reprinted)pp

if the quality good has properties that are so different from the properties of other qualities then how can good have an effect on these other qualities; but if the quality good does have an effect then the quality good must have the same mode of existence as other qualities so there is no special realm of existence.

Normative ethics has to assume two levels of reality: the reality that one should aim for, "the absolute" or the way we *ought* to live; and a subordinate reality, the normal *is* of everyday life. If the ought is what we should do rather than what we do, then when we achieve it, it can no longer be described as the ought but in fact becomes what is. If what we do is *what is* then where does the ought come in?

Another problem that Anderson has with the concept of ought is that it suggests that there is a form of conduct that we ought to follow but have no inclination or motive to follow; therefore, we are commanded, obliged or told it is our duty to follow it. If it is the case that we have no inclination to follow this 'conduct' the basis on which we do follow it cannot be in the manner that is required. As Anderson states,

"The spontaneous action of a motive seeking its objective cannot be induced by compulsion. Compulsion can only induce conformity.....It may be said, then, that the appeal addressed to a person in terms of obligation is either unnecessary, since, if he has the appropriate motive it will require no external inducement to seek its objective, or useless,

since, if he has not the motive, the type of action produced must differ from that commanded."³¹

In other words if we do have an inclination to behave in the way required then the notion of ought is redundant; if we do not have the inclination being appealed to by the notion of obligation is not going to achieve the required end either.

Obligation creates two inaccessible realms of existence '*what is*' and '*what ought to be*'. If the only way of accessing the realm of *ought* is through the *is* of existence then surely all we are speaking about is the *is* of existence. If we can talk about the realm of the *ought* without recourse to the realm of *is* then we have collapsed totally into the realm of ought and cannot say anything that is useful about what actually is the case, i.e. *is*. This is the dilemma of normative views of ethics.

Implications for Ethical Theory

The dichotomy of the *ought* and *is* creates logical problems for the realm of *oughts* has to be a different realm from the realm of *is*, however, the realm of *ought* relies on the realm of *is* to be articulated. Anderson, does not accept this notion of oughts and is's, and argues that there are no degrees of truth or reality and no entities or realms that require a different explanation other than that of ordinary truth. This concept of ordinary truth, he believes, also applies also to ethics.

³¹Anderson, J

'*Determinism and Ethics*' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 225

For Anderson, and other realists, ethics is concerned with facts. Ethics is not simply the analysis of ethical predicates, it is an inquiry into ethical facts which may lead us to the conclusion that many conventional ethical judgments are false. Anderson, claims that ethics, or a science of ethics, is not about questions of duty and obligation or about prescribing, praising or condemning, in other words a normative science, but rather a descriptive science which has as its object the study of 'goods'. Goods and evils, according to Anderson, are empirical entities along with apples and chairs and tables.

"If there is to be any ethical science, then ethical ultimates or powers, moral agencies above historical facts, must be rejected. If we are to say significantly that ethics deals with goods, we must be able to exhibit goods as going on, as definitely located activities, just as we exhibit moving bodies or growing plants. This.... may be a difficult undertaking; disinterested inquiry, the exact determination of issues, the consideration of just what goods are and how they operate, may more easily give way to prejudice than in the case of subjects which touch our interests less nearly. But it is still possible, and recognition of relativism as a foe to science advances the possibility"³²

It is because of this dichotomy that Anderson believes ethics not only can be a positive science but it cannot be anything other than a positive science. Ethics is about facts or what is rather than what ought to be. 'Goods', according to Anderson are natural phenomena that possess certain qualities and can be identified as definitively located activities.³³

³²Anderson, J *'Realism versus Relativism in Ethics'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 239

³³Anderson, J *'The Meaning of Good'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 239

Chapter Three: Relativism and Ethical Theories

Normative vs Positive Theories

Positive ethical theories presume that it is possible to identify the qualities that the things that are good possess whereas normative ethical theories are limited to prescribing what should be done. The dominant approaches to ethics in the twentieth century tend to be of a normative nature and for the purposes of this essay emotivism, prescriptivism and intuitionism will be considered to be normative³⁴, along with utilitarianism.

As indicated above Anderson holds the view that the diversity of approaches in ethics are the result of confused apprehensions or illogical treatments of the one, positive ethical subject matter. If the confusion is removed then ethical states of affairs will be revealed as the really are.³⁵

"The vital question, [states Anderson] is whether anything but a qualitative ethics can give us a coherent view of the facts and enable us to see what even confused theories are aiming at. I do not think that there can be a coherent view which does not recognise a qualitative distinction, similar in the various cases, between science and obscurantism, between art and philistinism, between the productive and the consumptive spirit, between love and hate, between freedom and servility"³⁶

³⁴These ethical theories presuppose normative or advocative conceptions of ethics even though theories like emotivism are considered to be meta-theories.

³⁵Birchall, B '*Anderson's Positive Ethics*', *Dialectic*, 1969 p 49

³⁶Anderson, J '*The Nature of Ethics*' *Studies in Empirical Philosophy*, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 276

With this in mind these current normative ethical theories will be examined to see if Anderson's position of the one ethical subject matter can be justified.

Utilitarianism

On the surface utilitarianism appears the type of qualitative ethical theory that Anderson would support in that it seems to have not only a concept of the quality good but also to be objective. Utilitarianism is a relatively simple theory in form and focuses on ends with the central concept being that of 'the greatest utility³⁷ for the greatest number'.

However, the concept of utility is not qualitative in that it becomes whatever is desired or brings happiness or welfare (whatever is the definition at the time) rather than any notion of a descriptive good. Even the most cursory examination of this definition shows that it is circular and does not help identify what things are good; saying that good is what people desire or prefer only gives us information on people's preferences, that is their feelings about certain objects, it does not give us any information about what is good about the object.

It is obviously possible that what people desire or prefer may not be good or even if it is good may not be a 'greater good'. Utilitarianism does not provide any way of distinguishing between goods or allowing for priorities. By advocating

³⁷There are of course numerous interpretations as to what constitutes utility from pleasure to happiness, preference utility, welfare utility, etc and this is part of the problem of utilitarianism; that although it appears to refer to some notion of objective good it is not a specific term and varies not only in the interpretation of the actor but also the theorist.

the greatest good or utility for the greatest number utilitarianism slips almost unnoticeably into relativism. This slip into relativism is the result of the gaze of the utilitarian which is always from somewhere 'above' the marketplace of preferences. For example, the mother about to cut up the cake for the children at the birthday party might well wish to ponder on how to cut the cake; — evenly; or in sizes that suit children's preferences for creamy bits, the icing etc. Quantification is always necessary; any administrator would like to be a good mother, and have happy clients, who can see that 'there are no favourites' — all are treated equally³⁸.

While this might provide a calculus for deliberation and a procedure that encourages the view of fair-mindedness, it ignores the possibility of an administrator free (motherless) arena. Certainly at a birthday party, the children might over-extend themselves, get too emotional, upset each other and generally make it apparent that they need supervision. But with citizens already engaged in a multitude of activities that combine, assist and resist in various combinations, utilitarianism appears redundant, unless such activities have been 'subdued' by say the State or some other mechanism.

From a realist position it is appropriate to ask whether such activities might not survive without such 'overseeing' and re-produce themselves by virtue of their

³⁸One of the most common criticisms lodged against utilitarianism is its lack of fairness or justice in relation to distribution and the fact that despite the many interpretations of utility none appear to address this issue adequately; see Winston Nesbitt's article on '*Utilitarianism and benevolence*' on specifically this issue. Nevertheless, it is usually argued by utilitarians especially when referring to the State that utilitarianism does provide a methodology for distribution given its focus on the greatest utility for the greatest number.

'pull' on participants to 'do their bit' for the cause they represent. This would involve goods being seen as being related to the co-operational capacity of activities to assist each other. Utilitarianism replaces the empirical inquiry into the 'colourful' panorama of productive and reproductive social movements with a 'black and white' freeze-frame of distribution designed to produce maxim utility - however utility may be defined.

Anderson was particularly critical of utilitarianism, as exemplified by the State, for it puts into practice the relativism he saw as so rife in philosophy. The 'levels of reality' become the 'levels of administration'. Vigorous debate and vigorous struggles are replaced by a calculus of utilities and a practice of the public bleating for recognition, as if the State can 'recognise' anything.

"[T]hose persons who expect "sufficiency" to be provided for them, will find themselves worse off in relying on what the State deems sufficient than in making their own organised efforts for the provision of the materials they require; they will soon find (as indeed they could see already if they wanted to) that State provision will be hedged about with all sorts of qualifications and restrictions....[but more importantly] the pursuit of security and sufficiency is itself a low aim, that the maintenance of a high level of culture depends on the existence of a plurality of movements which take their chance in the social struggle, instead of having their place and their resources assigned to them from a supposedly all-embracing point of view."³⁹

³⁹Anderson, J

'The Servile State' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 334-5

Utilitarianism is correct in one respect; ethics is about judgements, but the judgements are about activities not individuals or their specific needs.

Emotivism and the Problem of Feelings

Emotivists assert that the presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to a moral statement's factual content, in fact, they go even further and say that ethical statements cannot be factual statements. For example to say 'you stole the money' is a proposition for it can be verified; but to say 'stealing money is wrong' does not express a 'proposition which can be either true or false'⁴⁰. All that has been indicated is moral disapproval; the best that such statements can do is express emotions in relation to specific behaviours.⁴¹

Anderson completely disagrees with this position asserted by A J Ayer and argues that,

"The suggestion ..that the data of ethics are acts of approval or preferences, and that, while it is possible to deal positively with the conditions under which we come to approve of this or that, there remains the question of the "validity" of our approval, a question that cannot be treated in a positive fashion. But when we consider what is meant by validity...[surely] it simply means the truth of the judgments we pass.....In a moral judgment, as in any other, something is judged or asserted, i.e., some situation is said to have occurred... It would be absurd to say that, although such situations are asserted, ethics cannot

⁴⁰A J Ayer Language, Truth and Logic, Penguin 1971.

⁴¹For a more sophisticated account see C L Stevenson Ethics and Language.

take account of them but must begin with our approval....No one but the most recalcitrant relativist would dream of saying that the data of physics are "physical judgments", instead of physical facts; yet the one view is as reasonable as the other.....If, then, we all pass moral judgments, this means that we all suppose that there are moral facts, which naturally, are that data of ethics."⁴²

If Anderson's logic is applied to emotivism we find that the emotivist gives the centre stage to the subject of the proposition and its assertor. Predicates become merely a backdrop (a staging) for the assertor's feelings to be given the outlet that is appropriate. For example, one might be excited by a lecture, moved by its insights and genuinely experience emotions of wonder at what has been covered. On the emotivist view, one can express this in part by saying "that was a very good lecture". To say instead "I was greatly moved/excited/impressed/ by that lecture" might seem the same. There a difference, even by emotivist standards. The latter formulation is explicitly personal; whereas the former 'ethical' version implies that others might well be expected to have felt some of the same reactions for it was indeed a 'good lecture' for whosoever is capable of discerning it.

However, a realist account of ethics, would start by questioning whether, in regard to the first assertion, that the lecture was indeed 'good'; in the latter formulation whether indeed the person was as moved as was asserted. In both cases mistakes can be made — particularly in this area of ethical discourse. In the case of the former, attention has to be paid to what is a 'good' lecture. This will involve

⁴²Anderson, J

'Determinism and Ethics' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 216

developing a list of qualities that make up good as opposed to bad lectures. In the second case, it involves allowing for the fact that the person so moved may not be fully aware of their own feelings. One leads to an analysis of an activity - lecturing; the other to a psychological inquiry. Thus, while it is not denied that ethical predicates might reveal feelings, the point of the exercise in using ethical predicates as opposed to other sorts of predicates has raised a question that needs addressing regarding activities, not just feelings.

Prescriptivism and the drive to Universalism

Prescriptivism⁴³ also takes a normative view of moral statements and like emotivism focuses on language use and supports the claim that moral statements cannot be proven or falsified. But unlike emotivism, prescriptivism claims that moral statements are also universal prescriptions, i.e., that they are action guiding statements that apply universally and without exception. By asserting that not only are moral statements feelings of approval towards certain things, but also, that they are universalizable and prescriptive, prescriptivism regards moral statements as requiring people to undertake particular courses of action.

According to the prescriptivist, the prescriptive element in moral judgments is divided into two classes, the class of overt imperatives and the class of evaluative words or sentences. Words such as 'ought' and 'you should' are considered to involve imperatives, whereas words such as 'good' and 'desirable' are evaluative.

⁴³Anderson has not written anything specifically on prescriptivism, however, given its similarity to emotivism I am assuming that he would have been critical of it and argued that it displays similar logical confusions to that of emotivism.

Ethical statements that are imperative are considered fundamental to prescriptive language, for if moral judgments are to be action-guiding they must contain at least one imperative.

Prescriptivism explores the compelling nature of some ethical judgements and ethically informed decisions. Insofar as action is to be guided, it is alluring to believe that whatever guide is chosen, it will also apply to anyone else who might be in the same situation. An ethical stance might be subjectively felt but it also is expected to apply to a universal human plane. Personal authenticity appears then to be linked with advocacy. Such links are worth exploring, but from a realist point of view, the issue at hand is the originating quality of the activity or situation that brings forth such a universalising drive. What is it about this situation as opposed to some other that causes such uncompromising advocacy? This redirects attention to 'goods' which, contrary to prescriptivism is not some evaluative 'add-on', but the questioning of the very source for any imperative statement, (for all commands have to be uttered by someone).

Whereas in emotivism the assertor is given 'centre stage' (with the real reduced to a backdrop), with prescriptivism, the assertor becomes hidden or 'dissolved' within the seemingly pure exhortations of categorical imperatives. Raw expressions of emotion can be given the refinement of universal injunctions. Morality finds a home here; such injunctions are not only universal but they become overriding principles of behaviour. While it may appear that the assertor is whomsoever is making the statement there is in fact a missing term because it is

not clear who is prescribing or who is commanding. Is it the assertor and on what basis?

Intuitionism and the Discernment of Good

Intuitionists believe that a special capacity is required for the discernment of good. This however has problems: who possesses these skills and how do you recognise goodness? Furthermore, what are we to say when two person's intuitions conflict? At a naive level, intuitionism refers to the deep seated belief that some ethical ideas are simply self-evident. From this basis various theorists have sought to develop axiologies in which underlying 'universal' intuitions are listed and elaborated.

For example, all societies have prohibitions on murder. There appears to be a universal revulsion to murder. From a realist point of view, there are things to be discerned that concern goods and evils and these are indeed more provocatively available for inspection when dealing with murder. However, just as there is a universal revulsion to murder, there are equally strong elaborations of justified homicide. Consequently, intuitionism, at least at a naive level, leads nowhere for ultimately it is allured by the view that each act is open to ethical scrutiny, but it is unable to provide a rationale for why one person may regard an act of killing as murder and another as justifiable homicide. Whereas for a realist, acts can only be viewed as part of activities and these far exceed acts and actors, for the realist would be concerned with establish^{ing} the facts in relation to all aspects of the 'killing', i.e., the context and not just the persons involved.

Elements of a Realist Account

The concept of good as a purely descriptive quality has no place in normative ethical theories, (even utilitarianism for although it subscribes to the notion of good, good is not a descriptive quality but is socially defined). Such a concept does not exist, any reference to good is considered to be, at least partly, evaluative and is merely recommending that someone act on whatever is being labelled as good. This is because the fundamental position has been given to the "assertor" as a consequence of this there is no possibility of error as this has been foreclosed; if statements as to what is good and what is not good are regarded as evaluative then it is not possible for an assessment as to whether or not they are true to be made; it does not make sense. For, although the assertor is making the statements, these statements are not regarded as propositions and therefore to question the veracity of what is being said is meaningless.

Anderson argues that although normative ethical theories cannot give an account of goods in effect they presuppose the existence of goods insofar as,

"[t]he use of the term "good" even relativistically for what is wanted shows that some recognition was taken to be given to goodness; and the antithesis between good and bad, as contrasted with that between right and wrong, shows that a qualitative distinction was, however vaguely, recognised, and not a mere distinction between relations of support and opposition.."⁴⁴

⁴⁴Anderson, J *'Realism versus Relativism in Ethics'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy,
Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 244

However, although normative ethical theories presuppose the notion of goods they do not have a concept of goods and are reduced to referring only to the relationships that good enters into. This relationship is usually articulated in a prescriptive manner that provides us with a morality of how we ought to live rather than providing the reasons for why we are commanded that we should act in a certain way.

"The most obstinate confusion obstructing the growth of ethical knowledge lies in the assumption that ethics teaches us how to live or what to live for, i.e. it instructs us in our duty or in the approach to the moral end. It may, indeed, be admitted that, having studied ethics, we shall be able to do things that we did not do before. But this applies as much to the study of mathematics or physics as to the study of ethics; it is a consequence of the fact that studying is part of our behaviour and influences other parts of our behaviour. It cannot on that account be said that what is studied is our behaviour, and that mathematics, e.g., instructs us in our mathematical duty and shows us how to reach the mathematical end....Knowing mathematical facts, we can do certain things; knowing ethical facts we can do certain things."⁴⁵

Anderson then goes on to assert that for a positive science of ethics to exist there can be no 'such thing' as normative ethics,

"I hold.... that there is no such thing as a "normative" science, and I [have] endeavoured, in examining the particular views of Moore, to advance considerations that would support that general position. It seems to me that the prevalence of the

⁴⁵ibid p 239

"normative" view is one main reason why ethics as a science has not progressed.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Anderson, J *'The Meaning of Good'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 268

Chapter Four: The Meaning of Good

Moore's Principia Ethica

This confusion or conflating of the quality good with the relationship that good enters into still besets current moral philosophy and it was this confusion that Moore, at the beginning of this century, identified in his major work '*Principia Ethica*' and that Anderson examines in his article '*The Meaning of Good*' when he assesses just how far Moore was able to disentangle the quality good or the meaning of good from the relationship that it enters into. The special importance of Moore's work is that he brings these issues into sharp relief in the field of ethics⁴⁷ by addressing them in '*Principia Ethica*' and by making this distinction.

The position that Moore takes in relation to good is that it must be more than just 'that which is desired'; good must be desired for its own sake. This view reflects the classical view of ethics as illustrated in Plato's '*Euthyphro*' where Socrates argues that good cannot be that which is desired by the Gods because this would be like saying that which is desired is desired. Good has to be desired by the Gods because it is good therefore that which is good cannot be desired in terms of that which is desired (if in fact it is desired this is a relation it enters into). This is an important distinction and it is this distinction that Moore reintroduces when he argues that it is not only possible to speak of goods but to identify them.

⁴⁷Anderson, J

'*The Nature of Ethics*' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 268

Moore in '*Principia Ethica*' examines the very basis of ethical thought and questions the functions of ethical terms and the relation of ethical judgments to non-ethical factual statements. Moore states that the reason why moral philosophy is so 'muddled' is because the right questions have not been asked and these questions are; "*what kinds of things ought to exist for their own sakes?*"; and "*what kind of actions ought we to perform?*"⁴⁸ According to Moore, moral philosophy has continuously confused the question of discovering things that are good with the question of prescribing what people should do to be good.

Definitional Problems and The Naturalistic Fallacy

In '*Principia Ethica*' Moore begins by arguing that it is not possible to define the term 'good'. Moore maintains that 'good' stands for a simple unanalysable non-natural property or quality which things may have, resembling the concept of the colour yellow. This term good is similar to the term 'yellow' in that one can only learn its meaning by becoming acquainted with the thing it stands for. We cannot have any knowledge of goodness by description.⁴⁹

Attempting to analyse 'good' in terms of characteristics that constantly accompany things that have the property good is fallacious, states Moore, and he calls the fallacy the 'naturalistic fallacy'. Moore then goes on to state that any attempt to define the word good or identify it with the object for which the word good stands

⁴⁸Moore, G E *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge University Press, 1965 p viii

⁴⁹See Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and by description - Problems of Philosophy, Chapter V

is to commit the 'naturalistic fallacy'. Moore's notion of definition is partly the reason why he comes to the conclusion that it is impossible to define good. For Moore, there are 'complex' things which can be defined by enumerating those characteristics that comprise them, and there are 'simple' things which are the final terms themselves and no further descriptions can be given of them. Such 'simples' are known by direct acquaintance and any attempt to define them further is not possible.

The importance of Moore taking this position and the failure of definition that it brings illustrates, for Anderson, precisely the problem that ethics has in defining its subject matter.

"[W]e may argue that one of the main obstacles to the development of ethical science has been the difficulty of getting formal proof of ethical propositions - and perhaps we should add that the difficulty has been increased by acceptance of the doctrine that Moore goes on to uphold, that good is indefinable."⁵⁰

By asserting that good is a simple, unanalysable, non-natural property Moore is making it more difficult to identify the quality good and in fact encourages good to be assessed by its relations rather than its qualities. Moore attempts to overcome this by stating that an understanding of good is based on intuition, that is, that good things are recognisable to everyone who reflects on them. However, as Anderson argues, this does not really address the issue,

⁵⁰Anderson, J

'The Meaning of Good' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p248

"when he [Moore] says of people who explain how the word "good" is used...he is showing that he himself has no clear conception of ethics or of goodness. [This] is connected with his assertion that good is not a "natural" object, and with his consequent description of theories which identify good with some natural object as committing the naturalistic fallacy...For we can take as natural having a certain quality, and we can take as natural being in a certain relation, but we cannot take as natural that in which being in a certain relation and being of a certain quality are merged. But this is not because it is "non-natural";...it is because it is nothing at all. The description of good as non-natural, like the description of it as indefinable, is a way of avoiding the clearing up of ambiguities in Moore's conception of it."⁵¹

Anderson rejects the view that good is indefinable and argues that although there is ambiguity in ethical statements this is because they are often incomplete and signify relations which do not state one of the terms. As a consequence of this, confusion can arise especially if the term "understood" by one person is not the term "understood" by the other.⁵²

"Thus ..if the unstated term in any person's moral judgment is his own feelings, if his attaching a moral predicate to a certain subject means that he has certain feelings in relation to that subject, it would appear that two persons could never pass contradictory moral judgments....[for] they would be dealing with different issues.....And, indeed, one may doubt whether confusion would ever arise if the omitted term were merely the feelings of the speaker."⁵³

⁵¹ibid p 259 - 260

⁵²ibid p 248

⁵³ibid p 249

However, argues Anderson, once it has been established just what the terms are it is then possible to establish *what is* the case. The fact that ethical statements often have unspecified or missing terms means that good tends to be 'elusive' and this is part of the problem that assertors have when using the term for it exposes them to the (emotional) forces that create error. There is more passion in ethics than there is in say, mathematics, and this apparent indefinability of 'good' often leads to an error.

Intrinsic Goods and Goods as Ends

Moore after determining that good is indefinable then proceeds to argue that some things are intrinsically good. However, here again Anderson argues that the concept of intrinsic goodness cannot be logically sustained at a realist level. It would be like saying about something that is red, that

"[i]t is red that this, and this alone, should exist" ..The assertions "This is good" and "It is good that this should exist" are intelligible..only if we take a relational view of goodness - only if they have some such meaning as "This is demanded (or commanded) that this should exist". If, on the other hand, we regard good as a quality, as characteristic of a thing without further reference, then "It is good that this should exist" has no meaning".⁵⁴

⁵⁴ibid p 253

The Positive Nature of Goods

Anderson argues that Moore's failure to recognise good as a quality no different from other qualities leads him into the relativism of perceiving goods as ends. There are inherent problems in regarding goods as ends, argues Anderson, one of them one being the problem of means. For example, if X is perceived to be good and Y is the means of getting there then Y is presumed to be good. This position however cannot be justified. Means cannot be argued as good because an end is considered to be so⁵⁵. There is, however, a more important problem in the very conception of goods as ends. The notion that goods can be ends in themselves presents a static view of the world that is by no means borne out by the complexity of activities in society and the way they complexly interact. As Anderson states,

"Moore, in upholding the *absolutely* desirable or the notion of "good as an end", is running together relational and non-relational notions. He is falling into the sort of confusion that he himself refers to as "the naturalistic fallacy", exemplified in what he takes as Mill's dual use of "desirable" and again in "evolutionary ethics" which at once identifies and distinguishes the good and the product of evolution, maintaining that "good" means neither more nor less than what evolution produces and yet maintaining that the product of evolution is *good*. Certainly, Moore holds that some ends are not good; but he cannot distinguish good and bad ends except by their qualities - in which case their being ends has nothing to do with the matter."⁵⁶

⁵⁵Just because certain ends are perceived to be good it would be fallacious to believe that the means to achieve such 'good' ends would also be good, for it is quite logical to assume that the achievement of 'good' ends could be accomplished by 'evil' means.

⁵⁶ibid p 256-7

Anderson goes on to argue that this relativism of Moore is borne out by his treatment of good as a predicate only, whereas Anderson regards good as being both subject and predicate.⁵⁷ Although, if good is being used relationally, argues Anderson, then it cannot stand as a distinct subject, for if it is not operating as a thing, but as an indicator of how something stands in relation to something else, then it cannot be a subject.⁵⁸

What Moore is actually doing, states Anderson, in perceiving goods as ends is treating them as the ultimate object of demand, as *that for the sake of which anything else is demanded*.⁵⁹

"Moore has *implicitly* defined good as that which is ultimately demanded (or desired), but he cannot make this explicit without exposing himself to criticism on the score of the irreducible multiplicity of demands - and, as already said, he has a sense of good as a quality. In fact, in his notion of good he *amalgamates* quality and relation (this being the procedure which, in my view, is properly described as "relativism") and so cannot give either a relational or a qualitative account of it - hence its "indefinability".⁶⁰

⁵⁷As mentioned earlier for Anderson any term can at different times be both subject and predicate; no terms are exclusive or pure subjects or predicates. Subjects and predicates are defined by their function in a proposition, i.e., the subject is the region in which the occurrence takes place and the predicate is the sort of occurrence it is.

⁵⁸ibid p 258

⁵⁹ibid p 257

⁶⁰ibid p 257

According to Anderson, the consequence of Moore being unable to arrive at a clear distinction between the quality good and the relationship that it enters into means that he has to look elsewhere to support his notion of the good and he does this by falling back on the notion of obligation. This move merely gets Moore into the very relativism that he was ostensibly trying to avoid.

Moore contends that making the assertion "I am morally bound to perform this action" is logically equivalent to saying "this action will produce the greatest possible amount of good in the Universe". But, according to Anderson, such a notion of obligation is a form of relativism because what is occurring is that someone is being exhorted to perform some action without specifying the authority that shelters behind what is being exhorted. This is what Anderson refers to as the missing term. The missing term being that who is commanding that something be done. By attempting to align good with obligation the concept of good is being confused with the concept of ought. This means that instead of good being a descriptive quality it is being misunderstood as an obligation.

Contribution of Moore to a Positive Theory of Ethics

Although Anderson is critical of Moore he nevertheless believes that Moore's ethical position has "*contributed to such progress as is possible in ethical science*"⁶¹ and he goes on to state that it is only in Moore that the problems of not identifying the quality good as a descriptive quality are really highlighted.

⁶¹Anderson, J

'The Nature of Ethics' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 269

"if we take good to *be* a quality, we must regard normative theories , whatever their logical confusions, as having played a most important part in these controversies - as having, in their erection of an "absolute standard", kept alive the sense of an absolute *quality*. Logical confusion will carry with it empirical error, but a real subject will still be adumbrated. Thus though it is only Moore that the tension of the opposing strains approaches bursting-point...,we can find in the generality of moralists, though in varying degrees, traces of a positive and non-mandatory view." ⁶²

This "absolute standard" that Anderson refers to is the concept of ought or obligation and Moore by having such a concept places the quality good outside the world of natural qualities into a different mode of existence, this is further compounded by his insistence that good is indefinable.

The position that good is a special quality outside the usual realm of qualities (an "absolute standard") is not unique to Moore, as Anderson points out, in moral philosophy the concept good is usually regarded as something that is quite different from other qualities that can be observed as occurring in space and time. Such a position, as indicated earlier, presents real problems when you attempt to explain how it is possible to observe such a quality if it has a different mode of existence to other qualities and, more to the point, how it can have an effect on other observable qualities if it occupies a different realm of existence.

⁶²ibid p 270

The other aspect of moral philosophy that Moore highlights, states Anderson, is the possibility of making a distinction between the quality good and exhorting someone to behave in a certain way.

"Progress in ethics and allied studies depends on the rejection of "mandatoriness", which can only arbitrarily be attached to any line of action...."[U]ntil ..the recognition of goodness as a quality of certain human activities is disentangled from the advocacy, discussion will not be materially advanced and ethics will remain a free field for any one who thinks he can tell people what to do."⁶³

Indeed, for Anderson should a 'good' need to be recommended or advocated this is more likely an indication of its lack than its presence. For where motives are provoked by guilt, where sanctions underscore recommendations, where people worry about what others think, in all these cases the quality good is absent or at least diminished. Where instead social activities and groups invigorate participants, where there is spontaneous assistance and the robust expression of feelings is encouraged; and outward looking views are shared and new alliances formed, then in such cases goods are at work.

Anderson argues that exhorting people to act in a certain way is not the same as identifying the quality good. One is advocacy, the other is a matter of objective fact and he goes on to say that,

⁶³Anderson, J

'The Meaning of Good' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 263

"It is in fact a standing obstacle to the acceptance of ethics as a positive science that people simply will not be persuaded that, when we say "X is good", we are not urging them to promote X or to exhibit activities of the character X - that there is no more advocacy in our statement than in the statement "X is red". When they demand proof of such a statement, what they really want us to give them is a reason for supporting X - a reason which, of course, could be given only by connecting X with something (no matter what its nature might be) which they actually support, and thus a reason having nothing to do with the qualitative characterisation of things." ⁶⁴

Normative systems of ethics, however, not only confuse description with desire but they also tend to be authoritarian and use such concepts as duty or moral sense to avoid specifying the authority that they are invoking.

⁶⁴ibid p 263

Chapter Five: Goods as Activities

Good Objects Support Activities

For Anderson, good does not require a special mode of existence and hence any special mode of knowledge; good does not exist as an end nor is good something that exists at some sublime level that we are all meant to strive for. After arguing against these positions and discussing Moore's inability to define good, we would expect Anderson to give us his own definition of 'good'. However, he does not do so, but rather argues that good is an activity that is complex, natural, definitely located ⁶⁵ and can be known through observation.

"Goods, we may say, are those mental activities, or those social activities, which are "free" or enterprising, which exhibit the spirit of enterprise.....ethics penetrates both the psychological and the sociological field, but is nevertheless a distinct and positive inquiry. And the recognition of a class of things to be inquired into is more immediately important than a formal definition of good." ⁶⁶

These definite activities include such things as love, affection, risk, courage, freedom, love of beauty, love of truth. However, Anderson has not just plucked these 'goods' from the air he has identified them as goods because they possess the

⁶⁵Anderson, J *'Realism versus Relativism in Ethics'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 239

⁶⁶Anderson, J *'The Meaning of Good'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 267

type of characteristics that he believes all goods possess. For, Anderson whatever is good is a form of enterprise and manifests itself in a way that makes it identifiable. Goods assist and illuminate whereas what is evil or bad resists, thwarts, obscures, opposes, suppresses and represses. On the other hand that which is good is productive and capable of being developed in special ways by means of communication, co-operation, inquiry and participation. As Anderson states,

"goods support or assist one another, but this is a question not of policy (choice) but of causality. The activity of inquiry in one mind or group causes the continuance of that activity (or some other good activity) in another; by its natural operation it removes hindrances and provides materials. It might even be said to cause the activity to spring up in another mind or group"⁶⁷

Productive Ethics

In addition to regarding goods as assisting each other Anderson believes goods are also productive. In forming this view he is influenced by Sorel's⁶⁸ theory of productivity and the related distinction between productive or ethical goods and economic or goods of consumption. Goods of consumption, according to Sorel treat all goods as wants and all actions as interested (as opposed to disinterested). Goods of productivity, however, according to Sorel, rely on enterprising, self-help activities. The influence of Sorel on Anderson is apparent in his ethical writings where he sees good activities requiring "commitment, co-operations and initiative"

⁶⁷Anderson, J *'Ethics and Advocacy' Studies in Empirical Philosophy*, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 285

⁶⁸Sorel, G *Reflections on Violence*, Collier Books, 1974

compared with being "acquisitive, servile and reliant on superiors".⁶⁹ For Anderson the concept of productive or ethical goods

"leads to the view that production is itself a good; it fulfils the conditions [required]..for investigation, and it also assists and is assisted by investigation. Indeed, we find investigation flourishing where production is developing, and the assistance given by science to production is equally well marked. Similar considerations apply to aesthetic creation and appreciation"⁷⁰

Therefore, for Anderson goods are observable activities that are productive and assisting in that they encourage the production of other goods through communication and spontaneity and they thwart that which is bad; this is distinct from bads, which Anderson believes, not only thwart goods but also other bads. An obvious example of how bads thwart other bads is that of a power struggle; essentially power struggles are bad insofar as in their very nature they attempt to disenfranchise other people. But irrespective of the purposes of the power struggles they can be only one winner so bads thwart each other.

This view of goods that Anderson is promoting is precisely what Moore would describe as the 'naturalistic fallacy', for Anderson is defining good by identifying the characteristics of what is associated with good i.e., communication, spontaneity, assistance etc.

⁶⁹Baker, A J Anderson's Social Philosophy: The Social Thought and Political Life of Professor John Anderson, Angus & Robertson, 1979 p 67

⁷⁰Anderson, J *'Realism versus Relativism in Ethics'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 245

For example, you could say to someone looking for a specific car in a street what its qualities are like colour, make, or registration number. Some of these qualities or the intersection of qualities can delimit which car is being marked out. But if the term 'good' is added, it does not help someone find the car. This aspect makes good appear as non-natural. For the point is that it always seems sensible to ask 'Is X which has characteristics a, b, c, really good?' Hence, its goodness cannot be equated with its having characteristics a, b, c.

On reflection, however, it is not unrelated to such qualities. For to say that a car is 'good' (or a watch, a parliamentary system, or bank) is to say that the specific case being described has many of the qualities that make up what is the generality. To take the example of a car, at a definitional level, it might be expected to have *at least* wheels, a method of propulsion, passenger carrying capacity, driving controls and a chassis. A car missing any of these, might provoke the genuine question as to whether it really is a car after all. When the term good is applied to a car, it raises horizons to something higher, not to the minimal requirements but to the rounding out of what makes a car more than those minimal requirements: comfort, feel, spaciousness, economy, manoeuvrability, etc.

To talk in this way of an object might appear to be collapsing into some type of dualism. However, this is not the case rather it is necessary to make the distinction between what is perceived as ordinary properties of a car, i.e., the fact that it has four wheels and a chassis from attributes that are a consequence of these properties, such as comfort, manoeuvrability etc. In much the same way Peter

Geach when discussing the difference of good from other qualities distinguishes between the notion of an attributive adjective and a predictive adjective. He states,

"There are familiar examples of what I call attributive adjectives. 'Big' and 'small' are attributive; 'x is a big flea' does not split up into 'x is a flea' and 'x is big' nor 'x is a small elephant' into 'x is an elephant' and 'x is small'; for if these analyses were legitimate, a simple argument would show that a big flea is a big animal and a small elephant is a small animal....On the other hand, in the phrase 'a red book' 'red' is a predictive adjective in my sense, although not grammatically so, for 'is a red book' logically splits up into 'is a book' and 'is red'.⁷¹

For Geach good is an attributive adjective and has a 'descriptive force' despite its apparent ambiguity. He argues,

"there is no one description to which all things called 'good so-and-so's' answer; but it does not follow either that 'good' is a very ambiguous expression or that calling a thing good is something different from describing it; and given the descriptive force of 'A', the descriptive force of 'a good A' does not depend on people's tastes.⁷²

For Geach when we use the term good we are actually describing something, however, because this description varies from one state of affairs to another we

⁷¹Geach, P

'Good and Evil', Theories of Ethics, ed Philippa Foot, Oxford University Press, 1967 p64

⁷²ibid p 69

have presumed that it is meaningless and merely expressing a feeling. What Moore perceived as the non-natural quality of 'goodness' could be taken as the attributive nature of the term good which in this context is a shorthand for what is in excess of the minimum standard or normal expectations of a particular state of affairs; it refers to excellence. Furthermore, such an attribute can be 'intuited' by someone who is highly experienced in the field (a motoring editor, an experienced owner of many cars, a racing driver etc). A novice might not have the necessary judgement.

Usually we know when we are in a field in which we are novices and these instances we are particularly attuned to judgements, given by other people, about what is good in these contexts. For example, in the area of the performing arts I have very little knowledge of the field and therefore I am limited in assessing performances, so I take particular note when someone who is experienced in this area makes judgements, especially if I respect their judgement. In these contexts, it may well be the case that good is shorthand for a complex constellation of qualities which in certain combinations fulfil what is required by the concept of an object. Knowing 'good' in this sense helps cultivate judgement.

Discerning Goods

One indication that something is awry within the modern descriptions of ethics is the view that anyone can make ethical judgements. The idea of competence in this area is not well developed. It is understood that children have to develop ethical ideas whereby simple notions of good and bad, approval and blame are

generalised beyond the orbit of familial dynamics. However beyond that little else is suggested by way of development.

If the mind is an object among objects, its relations with its surrounds will be manifold. In particular it will be 'transacting' with those surrounds in ways that might be unconscious and full of feeling. Should these feelings be compelling our use of the objects around us they may not engender wider supportive activities. For example, driving a car in anger can produce a very bad driving experience all the more poignant if the car in question could have offered such comfort, composure and reflection. Various human activities teach their participants how to handle issues despite underlying feelings. Indeed with appropriate handling the object can help release feeling without being distorted or undermined by feelings. Such a view relates to Anderson's view of character, that individuals need to learn to get 'out of the way' when describing the objects around them, i.e., they have to become invisible as assertors because they love seeking truth.

In all this, it might seem that an ethical theory involves looking for elitist orderings within activities that demand the best of people. This is how it might seem to a non-realist onlooker. For a realist, there is no overall 'outside view', ethics itself is part of one's activity. One can, however, have a special relationship with goods; one can promote them and also know them. Consequently it becomes possible to investigate not only the goods themselves, but also the relationships they develop with other goods or bads. For instance, feminism, the green movement, consumerism, economic rationalism are not simply rhetoric, they are embodied in a range of activities that given them content, thrust and the prospects

of accomplishment, failure, error and collapse. While the 'ideals' might seem gloriously exciting in each of their movements, it is an empirical question whether they remain goods. They may have 'gone bad' — through an inwardness of view that encourages an appeal to 'intuit' the self-evident obviousness of their cause; an encouragement of emotive experiences rather than social accomplishments; detailed prescriptions that others (non-believers) cannot understand or find onerous; utility and political calculations that allow for compromise but also enable the believer to be less energetic now that they have an 'outside supporter'. In all these tendencies there is an ironic alliance between ethical theories and what, on a realist and empirical account, are 'bads'.

Criticisms of Anderson's Ethics

Anderson, after writing the article "*The Meaning of Good*", was accused by A N Prior of falling it to the same traps of relativism that he accuses others of doing; that Anderson, by specifying certain activities as being good, was in fact guilty of a disguised form of prescriptivism. Prior states that Anderson although he is arguing for a descriptive good,

"the descriptive predicates which..[Anderson] make[s] synonymous with "good" are precisely those predicates which happen to be "demanded" in the morality which..[he] espouse[s]"⁷³

Prior believes that Anderson is merely promoting his own values rather than identifying descriptive goods and that what Anderson himself calls good is just a variation in usage of the word good.

⁷³Prior A N

'The Meaning of Good' Australian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy,
December 1944 p 171

What Prior fails to appreciate (or he may regard it as nonsense) is that when Anderson asserts that something is good he believes that this can be verified empirically; and he points out, in a rebuttal to Prior, that it is not a matter of language use,

"Linguistic, of course, is one of the main sources of contemporary confusion, operating, as it does, as a substitute at once for philosophy and for a real theory of language."⁷⁴

Anderson does not regard propositions as language use; for him propositions are descriptions of *what is* the case and this can be verified. So when he asserts that 'X is good' he is describing a state of affairs which is open to discussion - either it is or it is not (or was not, or will no longer be, or whatever). It may as well express his feelings about X but only because in part X warrants them.⁷⁵ Anderson then goes on to argue that when he says X is good he is not making a recommendation although he does appreciate that that is how most people would treat it. For example, in asserting that human affection is good, Anderson is not asserting that human affection ought to be pursued or that it is obligatory to bring it about. On the contrary, Anderson argues, that the goods he identifies are not the sort of things that we can be obliged to exhort to pursue so he is not prescribing them. Good activities, according to Anderson, are not by nature ends therefore they are not the sort of thing that can ordinarily be achieved by being pursued; 'one does not come to love, or to be courageous, or to develop a spirit of inquiry, by taking

⁷⁴Anderson, J *'Ethics and Advocacy'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 279

⁷⁵Anderson's theory of propositional reality.

these activities as one's objectives, but rather by 'catching them in the course of one's membership of social groups'.⁷⁶

It is apparent that there is ambiguity here which some critics⁷⁷ have sought to clarify. If by describing someone or some thing as good is using a shorthand for excellence; and if participation in social activities is as much an emotional as cognitive accomplishment; then it appears that some form of striving is implied by calling something good. Participants, when talking to themselves as it were, will refer colloquially to goods and evils but when they are talking to others about the same objects, this discourse appears to be a form of advocacy.

If such a distinction is difficult, i.e., if some individuals have weak ethical sensibilities, it becomes much easier to talk 'on behalf' of a good than it is to investigate it. Consequently, ethical predicates might be seen as attracting people keen to moralise and in so doing obscure the very processes being moralised about (and their own lack of sensibility). The situation might be akin to the rigour of mathematics being continually threatened because numerologists kept inundating any mathematical discovery with 'elaborations' which might get an individual involved in mathematics but in such a way that they are not only 'out of their depth' but a social hindrance to the further development of mathematics. Mathematics, however, unlike ethics, has long accomplished a separation between

⁷⁶op cit p 287

⁷⁷A D Hope also had a problem with this which he identifies in this article 'The Meaning of Good' Australian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy, June 1943

feelings and numbers. Ironically, a positive ethics will tend to be anti-thetical to the discourse of moralisms.

A D Hope also criticises Anderson's analysis of Moore and argues against some of the assertions made about Moore. However, he regards Anderson's analysis of Moore as *a* possible interpretation and does not appear to realise that what Anderson is proposing rejects a relational view of ethics. As a consequence, Hope's criticism does not attack the core of what Anderson is saying, for it presupposes that it is still possible to have a relational view of ethics and that all Anderson is doing is offering an alternative. But as Anderson states in reply to Hope,

"The essential point is that normative theories amalgamate different subjects, but the ruling out of one of them is not a solution. And it seems to me that Hope's argument depends on the simple *assumption* of the truth of a relational view. It do not think it is true, at any rate, that I gave no reason for rejecting such a view of goodness. What sort of reason *can* be given except by pointing to a quality, which is the quality in question? And how can one prove that it is the quality in question except by showing that it is one of the things that recognised moralists have talked about? Of course the critic can say that he can detect no such quality, and in that case discussion comes to an end, unless one can show that various things he says imply that he does recognise such a quality."⁷⁸

⁷⁸Anderson, J

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'The Nature of Ethics' Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 270

Conclusion

When individuals think that goods exist in the same way as all other things exist the usual response is scepticism. For if this were the case then there appears no need for ethical decision making. A listing of what is good, perhaps compiled by the most discerning of ethically astute minds, could produce a catalogue of activities that are worthwhile - akin to the way wine connoisseurs provide information for a wine club catalogue. This seems absurd because there is such a compelling sense of personal decision when it comes to ethics. Whether to ignore that someone offered a bribe; whether to denounce a government policy; whether to let a smear campaign assist in an election, these and a multitude of other dilemmas require decisions by the actors involved. There is something pathetic about someone who just followed the rules and something strange if the person so doing then says the rules are not rules but empirical assessments of what is good.

In contemporary society we know we have to make decisions about many things that were taken for granted in earlier, less critical epochs. However, this type of thinking inevitably encourages the view that there are indeed values to choose between and values to choose by. A positive ethics appears to deny scope for moral elaboration, personal drama and personal responsibility.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It is because there are goods and evils in the world that ethical elaborations occur within society and by individuals. The individual might well experience such activities as an inner dialogue. However, the very seriousness of ethical deliberation is itself a sign that it is not to be settled

by whim. Real forces are fighting for allegiances. Real decisions rather than on-looker deliberations, are being called for.

Anderson's notion of good does not allow for a common good, for such a notion presupposes a homogeneous society which Anderson dismisses. Society, for Anderson, is composed of social movements fighting for allegiances in which individuals participate and produce goods (or evils).

"These various goods, moreover, are natural occurrences, along with activities or forces opposed to them. Whether goods flourish in particular persons or in societies at large depends, not on the prescriptions of moralists (which are in any case mostly inimical to goodness) but on the interplay of various historical forces;"⁷⁹

A positive theory of ethics may imply that a catalogue of goods is possible, but it also implies that the contents of that list will be continually changing — for goods happen in, or make history; and will vary by situation — the local 'field' will affect the operation of goods and evils alike. In practical terms, this means that each issue has to be dealt with by investigation rather than deliberation, engagement rather than escape, communication with others rather than monologues with one's self.

⁷⁹Baker, A J

Anderson's Social Philosophy: The Social Thought and Political Life of Professor John Anderson, Angus & Robertson, 1979 p 35

The causal determinism of the forces involved in goods and the weave of intersecting forces results in a myriad of possibilities that requires investigation which is empirical, focussed, situational, and resolute.

"[the] community is a historical force or set of activities....there are relations of support and opposition between any activity whatever and others surrounding it;...in any society, good and bad activities are going on, they will be supported and opposed by other existing activities...The question for ethics is to ...exhibit the working forces of a specific kind, not to call for approval or support for them."⁸⁰

One of the ways goods are kept from being 'exhibited' is that we feel their 'pull' and relativist ethics allows us to rework the issues in terms of choices based on principles rather than getting on with the striving that is required by the good in question.

Anderson is aware that many will find his view of ethics unacceptable; at the end of his article 'The Meaning of Good' he writes,

"That many people would be unconvinced, by the above outline of a view, of the existence of a natural quality, good, is obvious; but others may see it as something with which they have long being acquainted. It may be seen, too, that certain popular "moral" conceptions can be accounted for as approaches to what I have taken to be ethical facts - 'that "happiness", e.g., may be understood not as the receiving of what we want, so that we want no more, but as the continuance of an activity, securing its

⁸⁰Anderson, J

'Realism versus Relativism in Ethics' Studies in Empirical Philosophy,
Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 243

materials as it goes along; that "freedom" may be taken not in the metaphysical sense of release from causation but as a power of devoting oneself to what transcends oneself (a social movement or "cause"); that even "duty" may be considered as expressing the fact that individuals may fall away from movements and be painfully brought back. The vital point is the rejection of "good as end", of the notion that goods come about by being wanted. This the individualistic or "consumer's" view, is the main obstacle to the development of a positive science (i.e., a science) of ethics."⁸¹

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⁸¹Anderson, J *'The Meaning of Good'* Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Angus and Robertson, 1962 p 267

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