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Meta-Ethical Realism with Good of a Kind

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Abstract: There is a difference between an object's being good simpliciter and an object's being good of its kind, and the vast majority of philosophers have supposed that it is the former variety of goodness that is relevant to ethics. I argue that one may be a meta-ethical realist while employing the notion of good of a kind to the exclusion of good simpliciter; I call such a view *kindism*. I distinguish between two varieties of kindism, explicate the details of one of those varieties, and defend (that variety of) kindism against possible objections.

> This, then, is our first question: What is good? and What is bad? And to the discussion of this question (or these questions) I give the name of Ethics, since that science must, at all events, include it. (Moore 1903/1993: 55)

Introduction

Two Approaches

Early in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that Plato was looking in the wrong place when he went searching for the Form of the Good. What Plato should have noticed, thought Aristotle, was not that there is one thing that all good things have in common, but rather that there are many different ways of being good. This difference in approach manifests itself most obviously in Aristotle's discussion of the functions of various kinds: a flautist has the end of flute-playing, and so a good flautist is one that plays the flute well; flute-playing is the good of a flautist. More importantly, a human being has the function of being rational, and so a good human being is one who exercises his rational faculty well; exercisings of rational faculties are the goods of human beings (along with certain external goods, like friendship). Goodness is thus primarily attributed to members of a kind, on Aristotle's account, where a member is good of its respective kind just in case the member fulfils its function.

Looking at Aristotle's approach to ethics most generally, we notice two striking features: first, that it includes the idea that the notion of good of a kind is to be used *to the exclusion of* The Form of the Good, and second, that though Aristotle was an anti-realist about The Good, he was nevertheless what contemporary philosophers call a meta-ethical realist, and that is at least partly because he thought ethics and ethical thought could get along quite well—better, in fact—if one employs the notion of good of a kind to the exclusion of The Good.

Call this approach to ethics—one in which good of a kind is used to the exclusion of The Good—a *kindist* approach to ethics.

Plato, of course, was no kindist. While Aristotle was interested in what we now call the attributive sense of good—as when it appears in phrases of the form 'a good x'—Plato was interested in goodness in the predicative sense, or goodness 'full stop' or 'simpliciter', as when it appears in phrases of the form 'x is good' (See Geach 1956; Thomson 2001). Call Plato's approach a *simplicitist* approach to ethics. It is clear that, in contemporary ethics, simplicitism is the dominant approach to ethics, though it was not Plato who set the agenda for contemporary philosophers. G. E. Moore was interested in investigating propositions of the form 'x is good', or 'good' in the predicative sense, and emotivists, error theorists, and naturalists followed suit.

There is a small group of contemporary Aristotelians, most notably Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse and Michael Thompson, who defend a view according to which we ought to evaluate living things by a standard appropriate to its respective kind, and to this extent, they are kindists (see Thompson 1995; 2008, Foot 2001; Hursthouse 1999). But they are interested in defending a particular variety of kindism that I reject, specifically, one that relies heavily on biological kinds, and their defence of kindism as such is identical to their respective defences of their particular variety of kindism. The primary goal of this paper is to explain in outline how one can be an anti-realist about good simpliciter while still embracing meta-ethical realism by endorsing kindism, and the secondary goal is to begin to fill in that outline by articulating and defending a variety of kindism with which the aforementioned kindists would take issue.

Structure

The defence of kindism has two stages. The first consists of an analysis of the notion of good of a kind. The goal is to demonstrate that judgements about the goodness of a member of a kind are expressions of cognitive states and that they are at least sometimes true; we ought to endorse cognitivism and, in some cases at least, realism about goodness of a kind. The second stage consists in demonstrating how we can engage in evaluative thought using good of a kind to the exclusion of good simpliciter. I distinguish between two varieties of kindism, explicate the details of one of those varieties, and defend (that variety of) kindism against possible objections.

Two notes are in order. First—and this is a point Aristotelians have typically failed to make—kindism is logically neutral as regards the nature of practical reason; it is logically possible that we ought to evaluate individuals by a standard appropriate to the kind(s) of which they are members while what counts as a good member does not bear on what the member has reason to do. So, for instance, Aristotelians might be right about judging individuals based on a standard appropriate to the kind of which they are members, while Humeans are right that it is (rational, informed) desires that ground an agent's reasons for

action. The connection between being a good member of one's kind and what one has reason to do is a complex matter and, so far as I can see, is a logically distinct issue from whether kindism accurately portrays what makes individuals objects of evaluation. So the truth or falsity of kindism no more settles the issue of what there is reason to do than the truth or falsity of simplicitism settles the issue of what there is reason to do; the kindism/simplicitism distinction is simply orthogonal to the value-based/desires-based reasons distinction commonly found in the literature on practical reason.

The second note is that I have no knockdown argument against simplicitism, and no proof of kindism. But the issue is not which theory we can prove right, but rather, which provides the fuller understanding of ethical phenomena, most notably perhaps, of morality and the good life. The goal of this paper is to show that kindism as such, and the variety of kindism I defend in particular, is a significant contender in that competition.[1]

Stage One: What Is 'Good of a Kind'?

The General Account

For an object to be good of a kind it must be a member of a kind that is constituted by this: that members of the kind have a function or an end (or multiple functions or ends). A good member performs the function well or pursues the end effectively; the function or end of a thing indicates—or perhaps just is—the standard by which members are to be evaluated as good or bad members of the kind.[2] Familiar examples include kinds that fall under the category 'instrument'; we may call them *instrumental kinds*. A knife has the function of cutting, and so a good knife is one that cuts well. There are also what we may (somewhat misleadingly) call *role kinds*. The kinds I have in mind here include: parent, spouse, friend, philosopher, citizen, samurai, and so on. Role kinds are the sorts of things a person can *be*, and are defined not by a function but by, at least in part, a set of ends, where 'having an end' is not a psychological state of the member of the kind but rather is or indicates the standard by which members are to be judged. To take some familiar examples, a hedonist has the end of experiencing pleasure, a philosopher has the ends of pursuing wisdom and having wisdom (the means to the end is itself an end), and a parent has the end of the welfare of her children. A good x, where 'x' is a role kind, is one that pursues the ends of an x well. A good hedonist is one adept at acquiring pleasure, a good philosopher is one adept at acquiring wisdom, and a good parent is one adept at securing the welfare of her children.

I should note that I intend for the meaning of 'role kind' to be contrasted with both 'instrumental kind' and 'biological kind' (e.g. human being, rabbit, deer, etc.). I do not mean to imply anything particularly substantive about the connection between role kinds and the existence of, say, culture, or of there being 'a culture'; there is no claim that these kinds only exist by virtue of being

recognized or created by a culture, for instance. 'Artificial kind' might be appropriate to use instead of 'role kind', but is easily confused with 'instrumental kind'. What is crucial to understanding my use of the term is that a role kind is i) the kind of thing a person can be, and ii) there are standards for what count as a good member of the kind as such. Thus, if constitutivists like Korsgaard are right and there is something there is to be a good agent as such, then agency counts as a role kind on my use of the term (See Korsgaard 1999; 2009, and note 9, below).

Recognizing the functions or ends of a given instrument or role kind is largely a matter of grasping conceptual truths relating to those kinds; recognizing that the function of a knife is to cut, that the end of a hedonist is pleasure, that the end of a philosopher is wisdom, and that the end of a mother is her child's welfare, is a matter of conceptual competence with 'knife', 'hedonist', 'philosopher', and 'mother', respectively. If one thinks a person adept at dissecting frogs is, ipso facto, a good philosopher, then one does not understand what 'philosopher' means.

A concern and a warning are worth raising here. As for the former, there might be a concern that we sometimes, perhaps often, disagree about what the ends of a given kind are, and I do not mean to imply that there cannot be reasonable disagreement on this issue. But first, it is a well-worn truth that disagreement, not even reasonable disagreement, precludes there from being a truth to the matter. And second, we must share the concept of a given kind to some degree if we are to not talk past each other, but to discuss what the ends of that kind are. There is much to be said about what the ends of, say, a president are, and how those ends rank relative to the other ends, but that should not preclude us from thinking that in discussing these issues we cannot make genuine progress towards understanding more fully what constitutes a good president. At the very least, such a deep scepticism that progress can be made would require an argument, and it is one I cannot give myself.

The warning is this: though I have indicated that kindists are interested in phrases of the form 'a good x', the phrase can mislead us in that it may not indicate goodness of a kind at all. To say, 'This is good weather', is not to make a judgement about this weather being good of the kind 'weather'; weather as such does not have a function or end by which one could evaluate it. One is not evaluating weather *as* weather, but rather as, say, a condition conducive to kite flying.[3] So we should not think that all propositions of the form 'a good x' are propositions in which the kindist is interested.

Cognitivism and Goodness of a Kind

On this account of goodness of a kind, non-cognitivism about utterances of the form 'a good x' is highly unattractive. Non-cognitivism about evaluative judgements is the view that evaluative judgements are not truth evaluable because those judgements are expressions of a judger's non-cognitive states.[4] According

to Gibbard's (1990) norm-expressivism, for instance, an evaluative judgement expresses the speaker's acceptance or endorsement of a norm for judging the object. Accepting or endorsing the norm is, one might say, signing up for the norm, and one might choose not to do so. But in our analysis of good of a kind we saw that the kind of object that some object is determines the standard by which the object is to be judged. There is no room for signing up or accepting a norm for an object, for the evaluative standard appropriate to a given object is determined by the kind of object it is; one's attitude toward that norm is neither here nor there. Further, given the standard by which an object is to be judged, it is plainly an empirical matter, and hence a matter of truth or falsity, whether and to what extent an object meets the criteria of a good (or poor) one of its kind. One may falsely believe that some knife is a good knife, or that a particular philosopher is a good philosopher.

Consider the matter more generally: when one utters, 'She is a good philosopher' or 'that is a good tripod' or 'He was a good samurai', it does not at all seem that one is speaking dynamically, as Stevenson (1944) put it. Instead, one does seem to be describing the world; it is such that it contains a good philosopher, a good tripod, a good samurai, and so on. Those facts might be practically relevant, of course, as when one needs help understanding Plato, or taking a clear picture, or defending the emperor, but uttering those facts is not in itself an attempt to get anyone to do or feel anything at all, including oneself; one may be utterly indifferent to philosophy, photography, and the welfare of the emperor.

I earlier remarked that we must not be misled by the phrase 'a good x' because some of those phrases do not indicate goodness of a kind; one's saying, 'This is good weather', is not a judgement of a particular instance of weather being good of its kind. In the context of a discussion of non-cognitivism we may similarly remark that we ought not be misled by some excited utterances, as 'That is a good book!'. Such an utterance may be purely expressive of one's particular (conative) attitudes—e.g., one's liking it—but such utterances are not judgements of what is good of a kind. One may find oneself knowingly liking a bad book and uttering 'That is a good book!' nonetheless; guilty pleasures are instances of that.[5]

Metaphysical/Epistemological Respectability and Good of Kind

Supposing cognitivism about judgements of good of a kind, we might wonder whether this sort of goodness is metaphysically respectable or unacceptably queer, and whether the epistemological account concerning how one comes to know that some object is good of its kind requires an equally queer good of kind-intuiting faculty. But it seems most everyone allows that there are good knives, good scientific theories, good philosophers, good friends, and so on, and that we are not unable to know when a member of a given kind is a good one. And no one, I think, thinks that whatever capacity it is through which we

recognize that something is good of a kind is a queer capacity. Rather, we have the very familiar phenomenon of understanding the standard by which the thing is to be judged and determining whether the object lives up to that standard. One's knowing the standard by which philosophers are to be judged is a matter of being conceptually competent with *philosopher*; nothing metaphysically suspicious about that.[6]

Another reason one need not be worried about the metaphysics of goodness of a kind is that the concept does not have as part of its content the notion of its having an intrinsic connection to the will of a person (as Mackie claimed 'good simpliciter' does). A judgement that something is good of a kind implies neither that one has a non-instrumental reason to pursue (or protect or admire) the object judged good of its kind, nor does it imply a motivation to do something by the judger. One need not think one has reason to pursue or promote—let alone find oneself moved to pursue or promote—good bombs, good concentration camps, good assassins, good stamps, good apples, good tripods, and so on, in order to distinguish between the good ones and the bad ones.

It might still be wondered whether 'good of a kind' refers to a natural or non-natural property. Perhaps we should think that goodness of a kind is a non-natural property, that we ought to be suspicious of non-natural properties, and so we ought to be suspicious of good of a kind. But we have the resources for defusing this alleged difficulty. It is a conceptual truth that what makes a member good of its kind is that it meets the standard for its kind, where that standard is determined by the function or end of the members of the kind. Whether it meets that standard is an empirical matter. But then a) there is no non-natural fact required to be the case, and b) there is not, as we have seen, any epistemological problem; we are merely required to grasp concepts and to make empirical observations. That the epistemology is naturalistically acceptable shows us that there is nothing metaphysically suspect here.[7] Put differently, if the epistemological problem has been solved it does not seem that there can be any deep metaphysical problems, or at least none of the sort that would prompt a general scepticism. If that is right then the (non)naturalism debate that leads some to scepticism about good simpliciter doe not reemerge in discussions of goodness of a kind.

Summary and Transition

I have so far distinguished between two approaches to ethics: kindism and simplicitism. Kindism holds out the possibility of a realist position in ethics, I claimed, because judgements that some object is good of its kind are both cognitive and at least sometimes true. But whether the possibility can be made an actuality crucially depends upon whether we can engage in ethical thought using good of a kind to the exclusion of good simpliciter.

At this point it is necessary to distinguish between two varieties of kindism, where what drives the distinction between them is the different kinds claimed to be of significance to ethics; both varieties are attempts to make due without good

simpliciter. The first variety we may call *biological kindism*, a position according to which human beings are to be evaluated qua human beings, and the lives of human beings to be evaluated qua life of a human being; biological kindists are concerned with the kind 'species'. That variety of kindism was Aristotle's, of course, and it has found new defenders in the work of Foot, Hursthouse and Thompson.[8] I have elsewhere criticized biological kindism and I will not repeat those arguments (see Blackman 2008); suffice it to say I do not find biological kindism plausible. Rather, I think the kindist has a better chance at success if he thinks not about biological kinds, but rather about what I called role kinds. In the next section I demonstrate how the *role kindist* suggests we engage in ethical thought using good of a kind to the exclusion of good simpliciter. In the final section of the paper I respond to various objections to (role) kindism.

Stage Two: Ethical Thought with Good of a Kind (and not good simpliciter)

The Strategy

If the role kindist is going to illustrate how to engage in ethical thought without appeal to good simpliciter, he will have to demonstrate how we are to go about thinking about important ethical issues without it. And there are perhaps no issues more important in ethics than morality and the goodness of a life. If we can make sense of these things within a role kindist framework, much will have been done to demonstrate the viability of the framework. In this section, I explain how the role kindist suggests we think about these things. There will not be normatively substantive claims about what the content of morality is, or what the goodness of a life consists of, of course; those are claims that we make from within the kindist framework, not about it.

The Good Moral Agent

The role kindist thinks that, when we think about morality, our thoughts revolve around the notion of what it is to be a good moral agent. In saying this I should repeat that in saying that the kind 'moral agent' is a 'role kind', I only mean to imply that the kind 'moral agent' is neither an instrumental nor a biological kind. I do not mean to imply that moral agents are essentially the products of culture, or that one is a moral agent by being seen as one by a culture, or anything of the sort. What the role kindist is concerned to assert here is that an analysis of 'good moral agent' results in an understanding of the meanings and the referents of our moral terms, which is precisely what the meta-ethicist is looking for. But let us ease our way into that analysis by way of an analysis of a simpler, more familiar role kind: a good philosopher. The proper analysis of what constitutes a good philosopher, I claim, is structurally identical to the proper analysis of a good moral agent.

A role kind is a) the sort of thing a person can be, e.g., a mother, father, spouse, friend, philosopher, citizen, and so on, and b) is defined by the set of ends appropriate to a member of that kind. The ends of a role kind indicate or constitute the standard by which members of the kind are to be evaluated. Put abstractly, we get the following:

1. An x is defined by a set of ends.
2. A good x is one that has traits causally related to meeting those ends; those traits are good x-making.

We may call at least some of the traits an x has that are causally related to meeting those ends the *virtues* of an x, and some of those traits that are causally related to an x failing to meet the ends of an x the *vices* of an x.

And to take a concrete example:

3. A philosopher is defined by his pursuit of wisdom.
4. A good philosopher is one that has traits causally related to pursuing wisdom well or effectively.

The virtues of a philosopher—those traits that are good philosopher-making, might include open-mindedness and the ability to think abstractly, while the vices of a philosopher include being closed-minded and an inability to think abstractly.[9] We may add to this that a philosopher, aside from having various traits that make him a good philosopher, does things that make him a good philosopher. He can make various choices and do many things, but his choosing to write on some philosophically interesting topic and his actual writing are also things that make him a good philosopher; his actions can be good philosopher-making.

A philosopher's actions can also be said to be the right actions or wrong actions for him to perform qua philosopher. Let us assume that writing a book can be constitutive of the pursuit of wisdom, and imagine that, just as a particular philosopher is about to finish his book, he reads an article that on first pass seems devastating to the position defended in his book. He is not sure whether it really is, but just to be safe he promptly burns the article and resolves never to mention it again. Such intellectual dishonesty is not morally wrong, but it is the wrong thing to do for a philosopher qua philosopher.

We have before us not just an understanding of what it is to be a good philosopher, but also an analysis of 'philosopher terms'. The meaning of 'philosopher virtue' is, roughly, 'a character trait the possession of which is causally related to attaining the end of a philosopher, viz. wisdom', and the referents of 'philosopher virtue' are those character traits that fit the bill, e.g., open-mindedness and the ability to think abstractly. The meaning of 'philosopher vice' is, 'a character trait the possession of which is causally related to failing to attain the end of a philosopher', and the referents of that term are character traits that fit that bill, e.g., closed-mindedness and an inability to think abstractly. The

meaning of 'philosopher rightness' is 'an action the performance of which is at least partly constitutive of attaining the ends of a philosopher', and the referents are those particular actions, e.g., reading Plato and discussing philosophical issues with good philosophers. Lastly, the meaning of 'philosopher wrongness' is 'an action the performance of which flouts the ends of a philosopher', and the referents are those particular actions, e.g., burning an article that threatens one's own position.

The reader is sure to see what we are driving at: our understanding and analysis of philosopher terms ought to be regarded as structurally identical to our understanding and analysis of moral terms. Instead of substituting 'x' with 'philosopher', as we did above, we may substitute it with 'moral agent' and, as before, we have before us not just an understanding of what it is to be a good moral agent, but also an analysis of moral terms. The meaning of 'moral virtue' is, roughly, 'a character trait the possession of which is causally related to attaining the ends of a moral agent', and the referents of 'moral virtue' are those character traits that fit the bill. The meaning of 'moral vice' is, 'a character trait the possession of which is causally related to failing to attain the ends of a moral agent', and the referents of that term are character traits that fit that bill. The meaning of moral rightness is, 'an action the performance of which is at least partly constitutive of attaining the ends of a moral agent', and the referents are those particular actions. Lastly, the meaning of 'moral wrongness' is 'an action the performance of which flouts the ends of a moral agent', and the referents are those particular actions. As before, it is not just the moral agent's virtues that are good moral agent-making, but also morally right actions.[10]

We will of course ask, in response to this analysis, 'what are the ends of a moral agent?'. But as mentioned, to claim what the ends of a moral agent are is to make a normative claim from within the framework provided. One might claim, for instance, that a moral agent has one end: respecting others. Then, if an act is one that manifests disrespect, it is a morally wrong action. Or perhaps the end of a moral agent is not so much respecting other agents, as it is a matter of respecting an agreement, a social contract, among moral agents. Or perhaps instead the end of a moral agent is to act in such a way that one maximizes the number of people living good lives and minimizes the number of people living bad lives. In short, what the ends of a moral agent are is a matter of great dispute, and I have no intention of entering those disputes here.[11] Which actions are morally right depends, then, upon one's conclusions about what constitutes the ends of a moral agent. That said, everyone seems to agree that, all other things being equal (one is not starving to death, etc.), if A steals from B then A has flouted the ends of a moral agent; the ends of a moral agent include refraining from theft. Role kindism tells us what it means for him to have done something morally wrong (flouting the ends of a moral agent), we have a referent for the term 'morally wrong' (in this case, the act of taking something that belonged to B without B's permission), we understand the act is bad moral-agent making, and we understand that this act may be the product of and/or a cause of a moral vice (selfishness, for instance).

An interesting question arises here, though it is not peculiar to the role kindist: who is to count as a moral agent? Or put even more generally, what are the membership conditions for being a member of any kind at all? There is much to say in response to both questions. What I should like to note here is that I do not think there is any reason for thinking there is one set of membership conditions for all kinds. For some kinds, choice might be necessary, as is arguably the case with becoming a philosopher or lawyer or doctor. For others, one might become a member through choice or through accident, as is the case with being a parent. And there might be some kinds where no choice is involved, as is arguably the case with citizen and moral agent.[12]

Scanlon and Starting Points

Our understanding of the notion of a good moral agent is structurally identical to our understanding of a good philosopher. But it might be thought that there is an important difference: in the case of the philosopher, knowing what the ends of a philosopher are is a conceptual matter, but this seems less plausible in the case of knowing what the ends of a moral agent are. We are not familiar with the ends of a moral agent in the way we are familiar with the ends of a philosopher.

Though there is something right about this line of thought I think the apparent size of the difference between the two is revealed to be smaller upon further analysis. There is much to say about the connection between the concept of a moral agent and the ends of a moral agent, and I cannot do justice to the issue in this paper. Here I highlight T. M. Scanlon's relevant treatment of the issue; I think he starts us down the right path.

In his 'The Fear of Relativism', Scanlon discusses the connection between principles of morality—those with normative content—and the concept of morality, and he takes as his launching point Foot's claim that the concept of morality has certain 'definitional starting-points' (Scanlon 1995: 225). In exploring the connection between normative principles and the concept of morality, then, one is, according to Foot and Scanlon, exploring the connection between the definitional starting-points of morality and those principles.

Definitional starting-points are just that: they indicate, roughly and in outline, what one must be talking about for it to be truly said that one is talking about morality. To take an obvious case, if one is discussing the health of the economy, one is not talking about morality. But, if one is discussing how to treat someone else, or what someone is owed, then of course we are talking about morality. But definitional starting points do not directly imply the content of morality; there is much debate to be had about whether someone is owed something and, if so, what makes it the case that they are so owed. Still, though, there is something that ties the possible answers to the definitional starting points. Scanlon brings this out well in his discussion of disagreement among utilitarians and contractualists.

> The moral status of contingent principles might depend not on their logical ties to 'definitional criteria', understood as fixed points in the content of morality, but rather on their connection with different conceptions of the nature of morality and its authority . . . [For example], [l]ike some contractualists, some utilitarians may locate the ground [the definitional starting-point] of morality in what Mill called the desire to be in unity with one's fellow creatures . . . but beyond this point they may disagree about the content of morality, the utilitarian allowing . . . greater sacrifice to be imposed on individuals for the sake of the common good. To a utilitarian, a contractualist's interpretation of the 'desire for unity' may seem to be narrow and ungenerous and to fail to recognize the full force of this basic moral impulse. Someone might be a convinced utilitarian for this reason, and such a person would hold utilitarian contingent principles for the same reason: not because they follow from the definitional starting-points but because they are supported by the best account of the moral force of those starting-points . . .
>
> And contractualists have their own objections to utilitarian principles. Indeed, these reasons may be, from their point of view, more exigent, since they may see utilitarian principles as licensing actions that at least come very near to violating definitional starting-points if, for example, they allow medical treatment to be withheld from people who refuse to participate in medical experiments. (Blackman 2008)

The upshot is that, along with the concept 'morality', there comes a question of how best to interpret or extrapolate from the starting-point provided by that concept, and thus the need for normative ethics. Notice, though, that we could have put the discussion in very slightly different terms: as an analysis of the concept of a moral agent. For it might be a definitional starting-point that a moral agent as such has as her end 'being in union with her fellow creatures'. We have, then, roughly and in outline, what the end of a moral agent is, though there is further reasonable discussion to be had about what constitutes fulfilment of that end; there is room for doing normative ethics.

Summary and Transition

The first stage of the explication of kindism consisted in exploring the notion of good of a kind; I argued that judgements that some object is good of its kind are truth evaluable and at least sometimes true; we ought to be realists about good knives, good philosophers, good mothers, and so on. The second stage of the defence is an attempt to demonstrate how we can engage in evaluative thought using good of a kind to the exclusion of good simpliciter. That demonstration has two parts. The first is to illustrate how the kindist conceives of moral thought. I argued that by focusing on the notion of a good moral agent, the kindist offers a clear account of the meanings and referents of moral terms. We turn now to

the second part of the demonstration. It is an illustration of the way in which the role kindist conceives of the goodness of a life. If the role kindist can provide a plausible analysis of both morality and the goodness of a life, the thought goes, he has done much to show how we can engage in evaluative thought using good of a kind to the exclusion of good simpliciter.

Kinds of Lives

One kindist proposal for understanding the notion of the goodness of a life is to treat 'life' in just the way we treat 'philosopher': knowing what life is entails knowing what a good life is. This is not too far off from the proposal of biological kindists like Foot and Thompson. But this is not the role kindist's view; according to the role kindist, 'life' is like 'weather': just as there is nothing it is for an instance of weather to be good qua weather, there is nothing it is for a life to be good qua life. The role kindist thus has a more complex picture than the biological kindist.

There are not just parents and good parents, philosophers and good philosophers, but also the life of a parent and the good life of a parent, the life of a philosopher and the good life of a philosopher, the life of the artist and the good life of an artist, and so on. The notion of the good life of an x, where 'x' is a role kind, deserves an analysis similar to the analysis given of a good x:

1. An x's life is defined by the ends of an x.
2. The ends of an x are e's.
3. A good life of an x is one in which e's are met; meetings of e's make an x's life a good one of its kind.

Substituting again with 'philosopher':

1. A philosopher's life is defined by the ends of a philosopher.
2. The ends of a philosopher are a) the pursuit of wisdom, and b) (having) wisdom.
3. A good life of a philosopher is one in which the ends 'pursuing wisdom' and '(having) wisdom' are met; 'pursuing wisdom' and 'having wisdom' make a philosopher's life good of its kind.[13]

If one is a philosopher and nothing but a philosopher, one's life goes well to the extent that the ends of a philosopher are met. But of course no one is just a philosopher and nothing else; one is also a parent, friend, citizen, moral agent, and so on. One's life goes well, then, to the extent that the ends of the role kinds of which one is a member are met. We may say that each person lives a *kind of life*, and we may indicate the particular kind of life one lives by placing subscripted variables after 'kind of life'. Thus, one person lives the particular kind of life 'kind of life$_{x,y,z}$', while another lives the particular kind of life 'kind

of life$_{y,z,a}$'. It follows from this that there are as many kinds of lives are there are role kinds.

It might be objected that this makes our lives appear more fragmented than they really are. A person's life is a whole, not a set of discreet parts. But nothing has been said to deny this. We may certainly allow—indeed we may insist upon—that the so-called 'part' of a person's life are not discreet but instead mutually influence and blend into each other to ultimately create a complex and unique whole. In fact, it is worth noting a somewhat existentialist strand of thought here, for a person's kind of life is created, in part, by the role kinds of which one chooses to be a member (e.g., philosopher, doctor, parent, priest, and so on). As a person lives and makes choices he plays an active role in creating his kind of life (and ruling out certain other kinds of lives), and hence in determining the standards by which his life is to be judged.[14] That said, there are also some very significant places of overlap among people's lives. Suppose, for example, what seems quite plausible: that one becomes a member of the kind 'moral agent' through no choice of one's own, and that most everyone (with the exception, perhaps, of psychopaths and the severely mentally challenged) is a moral agent. Everyone who is a member of this kind thus lives a life that is partly evaluable by the extent to which the ends of a moral agent are met. (One might be a moral agent and not care about being a good one, of course, but that just means that one's life is not good in some respect and one does not care (one is not saddened by it, say), not that it is not good in that respect. Whether one ought to care is another matter, of course).

So what it means to live a good life is, roughly, to live a life in which the ends of the kinds of which one is a member are met. This may sound cold or overly-technical, but note that if one is, say, a philosopher, a business owner, a flying trapeze instructor, and a moral agent, then it is the extensional equivalent of saying that one's life is good on the condition that one achieves wisdom, earns a profit, has well-trained students, and treats others respectfully, which, I think, is just the result we want.

It is reasonable to wonder, though, whether and how we can compute the overall goodness of a person's life. The general answer is that the overall goodness of a particular person's life is determined by the extent to which he meets the ends that are constitutive of his kind of life. But there remains the important question of how we ought to weigh the goodness of various parts of a person's life when evaluating his life taken as a whole. Supposing I do well as a philosopher but horribly as a parent, how do we balance this accomplishment with this failure?

I do not have an answer to this question, and a proper response requires answers to questions far beyond the scope of this paper. We are faced with issues not just about what parts of a person's life are, relative to other parts of that life, important or trivial, and what makes them so, but also those concerning the organicity of value, e.g., whether there are organic wholes and, if there are, how we ought to compute their value. These are disputes that exist not just between kindists and simplicitists, but also among kindists themselves.

Summary and Transition

We have now seen how the role kindist proposes we conceive of the goodness of a life. In conjunction with the proposal for how we ought to conceive of the good moral agent, role kindism is beginning to look like a plausible position according to which evaluative thought is engaged in using good of a kind to the exclusion of good simpliciter. But I do not pretend that (role) kindism does not face any difficulties. In the next section I raise and respond to several objections.

Objections to (Role) Kindism

Consequentialist Thought

Though role kindism sheds light on many aspects of moral inquiry it does not allow things to stand just as they were. In particular, the following consequentialist argument cannot be countenanced within a kindist framework.

(i) We morally ought to maximize what is good simpliciter.
(ii) X is good simpliciter.
(iii) Thus, we morally ought to maximize x.

Such an argument might then be used to support premise (3) in the following argument.

1. If a meta-ethical framework rules out a substantive normative position then it is a bad meta-ethical framework.
2. Consequentialism is a substantive normative position.
3. Role Kindism rules out consequentialism.
4. Therefore, role kindism is a bad meta-ethical framework.

But if the first argument is meant to support (3), then the second argument fails, for it does not follow from kindism's inability to countenance the first argument that it is unable to countenance consequentialist thought more generally. A philosopher attracted to consequentialist thought may argue that moral agents have as their end the maximizing of the quality of people's lives (and, of course, the role kindist has given a way of conceiving of the goodness of people's lives). Other philosophers may assess the arguments for that claim and find it persuasive or wanting, and may offer their own claims about what ought to be maximized (or that the ends of moral agents have nothing to do with maximization at all). What seems ruled out by kindism is thus not consequentialist thought, but only one way of arguing that some particular object is the thing that moral agents ought to maximize.

Getting Goodness Elsewhere

Consider an objection specific to the analysis of a good life offered above. As that view has it, the goodness of a person's life comes from meeting the ends that are constitutive of his kind of life. It might be claimed, however, that a) while much of what one thinks, does, feels, etc. one does in one's capacity as a member of a role kind, b) one may think, feel, and do things that are not neatly placed within the kind of life one lives, and c) goodness might accrue to a life by virtue of these latter thoughts, feelings, and/or actions. Granting (a) and (b), for the sake of argument, at least, our question is whether goodness can accrue to a life from something other than meeting the ends that constitute one's kind of life.

The role kindist cannot answer in the affirmative. For if there is some good-making feature in a life that does not come from a kind of life, the good-making feature is not making the kind of goodness with which the kindist is concerned: good of a kind. Rather, the feature must be good simpliciter-making. Thus, the question—'can goodness accrue to a life from a feature that is not the meeting of an end of one's kind of life?'—is not so much a question as a potential objection to kindism in general. The structure of the argument is simple.

1. If there is goodness that accrues to a life from a feature that is not the meeting of one of the ends of one's kind of life, then we cannot be kindists.
2. There is such goodness that accrues.
3. Thus, we cannot be kindists.

The difficulty is in defending (2). First, we need a candidate feature, second we need to be sure it really is not a feature of one's life that falls within the domain of one's kind of life, and third, we need a way of determining whether it really is good-making when it is not the meeting of an end that constitutes one's kind of life; that is, we need a way of knowing that its presence in a life makes that life better (more good simpliciter), all other things being equal. Inasmuch as role kindism is a new position, there are no arguments out there that perform these three tasks, and so it is difficult to respond. In the presence of that absence we could simply defend a general scepticism about good simpliciter, as non-cognitivists, error-theorists, and fictionalists have done. Barring a defence via a general scepticism, however, we can either wait and hope to strike down attempted counterexamples (provided one has no argument to rule out the very possibility of the thing, which I do not), or suggest a candidate ourselves.

Let us consider a candidate that seems plausible: pleasure. One might think that pleasure is a good-making feature of a life (or more conservatively, that the presence of pleasures not derived from immoral sources is a good-making feature of a life), and one may doubt that experiencing pleasure falls within the domain of the kind of life one lives. But I do not think it does, and I shall explain why.

If the role kindist is to find a place in his conception of a good life in which the having of pleasure is a good-making feature, he must find a role kind in which the end of a member of that role kind is pleasure; experiences of pleasure would then

be good-making features of that kind of life. And there is an obvious role kind that we may invoke: a pleasure-seeker. Pleasure-seekers are, of course, those with pleasure as their end. A good pleasure-seeker's life is one in which pleasure is had; experiences of pleasure are good-making features of a life of that kind. This does not imply that the pleasure is only good-making if the pleasure is actively sought. If, luckily, one always has pleasures falling in one's lap, one can live a good life of a pleasure-seeker with little or no effort at all; indeed, one might be a bad pleasure-seeker but nevertheless manage to live a good life of a pleasure-seeker.

It might be objected that appeal to 'pleasure-seeker' is ad hoc; it is not *really* a role kind.[15] But I think there is such a role kind, and this is made apparent in light of two considerations. First, we should readily allow that there are people who are thrill-seekers, or as we sometimes call them, adrenaline junkies; they have excitement as their end. But if we allow that 'thrill-seeker' is a role kind, it seems arbitrary to disallow that 'pleasure-seeker' is a role kind. Second, being a pleasure seeker is, though very common, a substantive thing to be; one could be otherwise. For we do not automatically pursue pleasure; to think that is to endorse psychological egoism, which I think we ought to reject for reasons independent of the current project. Nor is everyone a pleasure-seeker. Some people—certain monks, for example—are not at all pleasure-seekers. For such a monk, pleasure is not to be sought because, say, it interferes with meditation (or one's spiritual path, or whatever else the end of a monk is). Someone's being a pleasure-seeker, someone's being the kind of person who is on the lookout for pleasure and fun, and who is happy when it falls in his lap, is thus to be a member of a role kind. Most people, of course, belong to this role kind, and there are good explanations for that: our physiological constitution is such that we enjoy pleasure and, on reflection, we decide to go after that which we enjoy. But, as we have seen, not all people are pleasure-seekers. Indeed, not even sub-rational creatures are pleasure-seekers, inasmuch as psychological egoism is false regarding them as well.

Perhaps there are other candidates for good-making features of a life that are not meetings of ends of a kind of life. Not knowing what those other candidates might be, I move on to the next objection.

Evaluating Kinds of Lives

We have seen an account of how the role kindist accounts for the goodness of a person's life. But a question and potential objection might arise here. 'Suppose I am comparing two different kinds of life,' the questioner asks of us. 'Is there a way of judging one kind of life *better* than another? That is, is one more good simpliciter than another?'.

The kindist must answer, of course, that no, one is not better simpliciter than another. But now our questioner becomes an objector. 'Surely some kinds of lives are better simpliciter than another', he claims. 'If kindism cannot account for that, role kindism is (perhaps deeply) flawed.'

Why might one think this a flaw of kindism? The objector probably has at least one of two things in mind. From one direction there are moral concerns: there are some role kinds—e.g., the assassin and the good life of the assassin—that are morally bad. We want a way of capturing that thought. But we have already seen how to capture the thought that some kinds of lives are morally bad, for we have seen how to assess actions as morally bad. If a kind of life is (partly) constituted by living the life of a kind that requires morally wrong acts, as the assassin's life does, then we may conclude that that kind of life is morally bad. We have no difficulty, then, in capturing the thought that some kinds of lives are morally bad kinds of lives.

From the other direction are concerns about triviality: living a good grass-counter's life is to live a trivial life, while the artist's life is an interesting and engaging kind of life. We want a way of capturing that thought as well. But why should the thought that some lives are trivial disturb the kindist? Nothing said above precludes one from judging some kinds of lives as trivial, boring, uninteresting, neurotic, etc.[16]

Our objector might want to add something, however: a kind of life's being trivial entails that it ipso facto has a bad simpliciter-making feature. Similarly, a kind of life's being important has a good simpliciter-making feature of it, viz. that it is important. Thus, some kinds of lives are better than others.

This line of thought does not move me, but I suspect I know what motivates the objector. He is concerned to say that some kinds of lives should be chosen and others avoided, some are proper objects of admiration and emulation, others of pity or disdain. In short, he is concerned to say something about the reasons a person has for choosing one life over another, or for admiring one life and not another. And he may complain that kindism does not tell us *what to do*.

I agree with our objector that some kinds of lives are proper objects of choice and admiration while others are proper objects of avoidance and disdain. And the issue he raises is an important one: what grounds an agent's reasons for desire, emotion, and action? We want to know what makes it the case that I have a reason for preferring this kind of life, and reason to discourage and/or disdain people who live that kind of life. But as explained at the outset, kindism is not a position about the nature of practical reason any more than any simplicitist position is;[17] how we ought to understand the nature of practical reason is a debate to be had among kindists and simplicitists alike. One might think one's desires ground such reasons, or what a morally perfect agent would do, or what an idealized version of oneself would recommend, and so on, and each of these positions is logically distinct from kindism.

Conclusion

Kindism, and role kindism in particular, are of interest because they hold out the possibility of being an anti-realist about good simpliciter but not about ethical thought in general. And, if my analysis of good of a kind is accurate, it will

perhaps please many that ethical thought requires no metaphysically suspect truths; kindism is not just cognitivist, but naturalist-friendly as well. If kindism is to be made plausible, however, we need to continue to determine whether we can engage in ethical thought using good of a kind to the exclusion of good simpliciter. I have attempted to rebut some objections, and at this point can only wait to hear additional objections, or objections to the attempted replies.[18]

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NOTES

[1] There is another contender in the competition, and that is the position according to which 'good for' is the fundamental evaluative property; see Kraut 2007 and Thomson 2001. Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to discuss that interesting position.

[2] This is perhaps too strong; it might be that some kinds have members that are good of that kind but that is not because they fulfil a function or pursue an end well. An innovative work of art, for example, may be judged a good one, though it defies the current criteria by which an artwork is judged; such works of art force us to rethink our criteria. I am open to discovering that there are more than functions and ends that provide standards of evaluation for a kind; that helps far more than hinders the point I am driving at here.

[3] It is easy, especially when considering instrumental kinds, to confuse the notion of instrumental value with the notion of good of a kind. To see that this is confusion, consider the distinction between X being a good K and X being as good as a K, where 'X' is some particular object and 'K' is a kind of object. We may have a knife that is a good knife, or more specifically we may assume a specialty knife, a good *puncturing-knife*. But we may have another object that is not a puncturing-knife that is nonetheless as good as a puncturing-knife; a sharp screwdriver, for instance. Now suppose the knife and the screwdriver puncture equally effectively; they have equal instrumental value. But though they have equal instrumental value they are not both good knives, for one is not even a knife at all. Being a good knife is not, then, simply a matter of having instrumental value pertaining to the puncturing (or cutting or whatever else) of things. Rather, to be a good knife is to be an instrument that is a) useful in the bringing about of certain ends, e.g. something punctured, cut, etc., and b) a member of a kind that has associated with it a characteristic function, e.g. puncturing, cutting, etc. (This leaves out certain complications: to be a knife may require, for instance, that it have certain morphological characteristics, or that it was produced by someone with an intention to produce a knife).

[4] This characterization is somewhat controversial inasmuch as some non-cognitivists, most notably Simon Blackburn, endorse a minimalist conception of truth and with it the position that at least some utterances of conative attitudes are truth evaluable. As some have complained, this leaves unclear the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism (see Blackburn 1998).

[5] For further arguments in support of cognitivism about judgements of goodness of a kind see Foot 1961, Urmson 1950, and Mackie 1977: 25–7.

[6] Though again, this is not meant to imply that there cannot be reasonable disagreement and progress towards a fuller understanding of what constitutes a good philosopher, or any other role kind.

[7] I owe this point to Jonathan Dancy.

[8] They do not, however, seem to notice that their particular approaches to ethics are only one variety of a kind of approach to ethics, an approach I have dubbed *kindism*. In fact, not only do these Aristotelians count as kindists, but so do the constitutivist views of Christine Korsgaard 1999, 2009, who thinks there are standards for good agents and good actions as such.

[9] I doubt that all traits causally related to pursuing the ends of a philosopher (or some other role kind) are virtues of the philosopher qua philosopher. Having a deep, loving relationship may give one insight into a variety of phenomena that enables one to think clearer or deeper about a philosophical issue—the nature of love, for instance—but being in a loving relationship is not a virtue of a philosopher qua philosopher.

[10] A person is not only a philosopher or only a parent or only a moral agent; he is all of these things. Often, the virtues of one are the virtues of another. Good philosophers, good mothers, and good moral agents all have character traits of the following sort: patience, respect for other people's views, courage (of thought, in the case of the philosopher), and so on. Other times, however, the virtues of being a member of one role kind conflict with the virtues of being a member of another kind. It is possible, for example, that the ability to be utterly disconnected from the pain of another is a) a virtue that a torturer must develop if he is to be a good torturer, but b) development of that capacity impedes the development of the capacity to empathize, which is a virtue in a parent and in a moral agent. Striving to be a good member of one role kind, then, may either aid or hinder one's striving to be a good member of some other role kinds.

[11] It might be objected that the end of a moral agent is to maximize that which is good simpliciter, in which case the kindist has failed to account for evaluative thought without the use of good simpliciter. I take up this objection later.

[12] For recent work on the membership conditions for moral agent, see Shoemaker 2007.

[13] The notion of a good x and the notion of a good life of an x are logically distinct. One might manage to be a good x but live a bad life of an x, or be a bad x but live a good life of an x, or be a good/bad x and live the life of a good/bad x.

[14] I hasten to add that this is very different from saying that he creates the goodness itself, as some existentialists, like Sartre, are prone to saying.

[15] One might deny 'pleasure-seeker' is a role kind because one puts more weight on the meaning of 'role' in 'role kind' than I intend. This has been discussed in earlier footnotes.

[16] Perhaps we may devise a theory of the trivial or the boring to aid us in such judgements, though I am sceptical of such a project. I suspect such judgements will have to come on a case-by-case basis.

[17] A notable exception here are those who give a buck-passing account of goodness in terms of practical reasons. See Scanlon 1998.

[18] This paper comes from the core of my dissertation. I am grateful to Jonathan Dancy and John Deigh for their years of comments, criticisms, and overall thoughtful guidance during my attempts to formulate the view I articulate and defend here. I was also helped a great deal by Robert Kane, Gary Watson, Richard Kraut, Eric Vogelstein, Chris Raymond, David Palmer, Brad Cokelet, and the philosophy department at Colgate University.

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