Research Article

Geach's "Good" and "Bad", Attributive After All

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In "Good and Evil", P.T. Geach analyzes the nature of the adjectives "good" and "bad". This paper examines the objections raised against Geach's claim that "good" and "bad" are always attributive and primarily descriptive in nature and shows that the philosophers whose arguments I review, argue against Geach's claims almost exclusively due to their misinterpretation and misapplication of the examples Geach offers as illustrations of his claims. The paper also examines Geach's logical distinction and demonstrates that the distinction itself, is based on an adjective's modifying behavior and not on an adjective's inferential character. I argue, that once Geach's logical distinction is explained and defended, and not simply outlined as he does, it is evident that "good" and "bad" are adjectives which are logically attributive only, and as such, their functions are primarily descriptive.

G.E. Moore investigates "good" and its nature in his *Principia Ethica*, (PE), and concludes that "good" is indefinable and stands for a non-natural property things good have. Moore does recognize that "it may be granted that 'good' is an adjective", that "that which is 'good,' must therefore be the substantive to which the adjective 'good' will apply", and that "the adjective must always truly apply to it" (Moore, PE, Ch. 1, s. 9) But he never explains what non-natural property is, what it means for an adjective to "apply truly to a substantive", or what function "good" plays.

P.T. Geach, on the other hand, addresses these issues explicitly in his 1956 *Analysis* paper "Good and Evil". He examines what kind of adjectives "good" and "bad" are and concludes that they are logically attributive. Geach also examines the functions of "good" and "bad" as his contention is that they are "primarily" descriptive. He objects to the idea that "good's primary role is to commend the objects it applies to, a position he ascribes to the Oxford Moralists; ethicists and contemporaries of his who argue for "good's commendatory function. However, when one examines arguments against Geach's claims about "good" and "bad", one realizes these philosophers while provisionally accepting Geach's claims, ultimately argue against them, albeit unsuccessfully.

Indeed, many commentators explicitly state their acquiescence with Geach's claims. Hare, for instance, begins his analysis by noting that he is not "...going to attack [Geach's] main thesis that 'good' is an attributive adjective, since I agree with it" (Hare, 1957, p. 103); Duncan-Jones states that he "...accepts Mr. Geach's useful distinction between attributive and predicative applications of adjectives" (Duncan-Jones, 1966, p. 113); and Pigden notes that "...on one issue Geach is widely regarded as having proved his point. "Good', it seems, *is* attributive. (See Williams 1972, pp. 32-52). Indeed, this is so well-established a result that it can be used to score knock-out polemical victories." (Pigden, 1990, p. 130) However, these commentators accept Geach's claims, but always with conditions or purported improvements and the eventual insistence that "good" and "bad's predicative use is if only sometimes permissible, and commendation is a role the terms assume primarily, even if not as their sole role.

This albeit, is what Moore, W.D. Ross, and objectivists in general claim – though "good" is attributive, it also has a predicative use with which Ethics is concerned. MacKay notes as much: "Sir David Ross... held that 'good' had both attributive and predicative uses..." (MacKay, 1970, p. 113), and Pigden acknowledges it too: "Nobody would deny that there is an attributive 'good". Indeed Ross... is quite explicit about this." (Pigden, 1990, p. 131) But it is precisely "good's predicative use Geach objects to.

Moreover, many of the objections to Geach's claim that "good" and "bad" are always logically attributive stem from systematic misinterpretations of Geach's arguments and the examples he offers in defense of them. These misinterpretations often shift the discussion to problems Geach does not intend to address in "Good and Evil". Likewise, the discourse about "good" and "bad's functions is almost always conducted with respect to "good" exclusively. Indeed, "good" and "bad" are both logically attributive, but they are not identical, which calls for at least a consideration of "bad", if not a complete and separate treatment.

Admittedly, Geach does not explain what his logical distinction between attributive and predicative adjectives is based on only how it is recognized and that it is the logical distinction which identifies "good" and "bad" as attributive. According to Geach, attributive adjectives are "inferentially irregular"[1], which makes "good" and "bad" attributive since they sanction "invalid" or "irregular" inferences. But this only explains how we know that "good" and "bad" are attributive, and not why they or any other attributive adjective is such. It is what opens Geach's logical distinction to Rind's and Tillinghast's objection that it does not define an adjective's attributivity adequately as based on *inferential irregularity*.

Geach also has difficulty explaining the descriptive force behind "good" and "bad", but this does not mean that there isn't such a force. In fact, Hare's expressed conviction is that "good" and "bad" do have a descriptive force, but he asks how is it that they do which is fundamentally the same concern Pigden and MacIver express. That notwithstanding, these philosophers face difficulties of their own when defending their arguments that "good" and "bad's functions are primarily commendatory, a claim they ultimately fail to demonstrate conclusively.

With these issues in mind, I show that Geach's logical distinction between attributive and predicative adjectives is not based on the adjectives' inferential behavior but manifested by it for an adjective's inferential behavior itself is based on the logical distinction. Geach also does offer a convincing argument for "good" and "bad's descriptive functions, an argument albeit, independent from the question of how and why we describe things as good or bad. It is why I will examine Geach's logical distinction's foundation and demonstrate that the distinction itself is based on an adjective's modifying behavior. This is to say that once the logical distinction is explained and not simply outlined as Geach does, it is easy to see why "good" and "bad" are always attributive and never predicative – as such, their functions are primarily descriptive. Put otherwise, Moore, Ross, and the objectivists must grant Geach that "good" is attributive, not predicative, though Geach will probably have to return the favor and grant Moore and Ross that "good" does stand for an unnatural property of things good.

But before I turn to Geach's arguments, a house cleaning is in order so to speak, for there are five distinct issues which become immediately apparent. Namely, how are "good" and "bad" defined as ethical terms, what properties do they denote, what is these properties' nature, how are "good" and "bad" defined as elements of language, and what are their natures and functions as such.

Now, Moore focuses his investigation of "good" on the first three questions primarily for he believes that "What is good?" is a question about moral judgments and human conduct: "And this discussion of human conduct is, in fact, that with which the name 'Ethics' is most intimately associated." (PE, Ch. 1, s. 2) But before this question can be answered he cautions, one must consider "...how 'good' is to be defined... an enquiry which belongs only to Ethics... to which most special attention should be directed; since this question, how 'good' is to be defined, is the most fundamental question in all Ethics." (PE, Ch.1, s.5) Moore further explains, that he is not interested in what the meaning of the word "good" and its opposite "bad" is, but what these terms denote or what is the property they stand for: "My business is solely with that object or idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word is generally used to stand for. What I want to discover is the nature of that object or idea..." (PE, Ch. 1, s. 6)

Geach on the other hand, is concerned with the last two questions exclusively, though both philosophers touch on all the questions in their discourses as they are not truly separable. Geach tells us that his "first thesis about good and evil" is that "good' and 'bad' are always attributive, not predicative adjectives". (Geach, 1956, p. 33) He must demonstrate that the predicative use of "good" and "bad" is "illegitimate" as he believes once he has accomplished that, the claim that "good" is indefinable and ascribes a "non-natural attribute" to things good is refuted. Geach is not interested in the question of what properties "good" and "bad" refer to, or what the nature of these properties is. He simply claims that whatever these properties are, they are not different in kind than the properties other logically attributive adjectives denote.

Geach's investigation into the role "good" and "bad" play is also conducted with respect to their functions as adjectives – elements of language that is – as his task is to demonstrate that "good" and "bad" are descriptive in nature. I will follow Geach's lead and concentrate my analysis on "good" and "bad's functions as elements of expressions, rather than consider if they are normative terms belonging to the province of Ethics as fundamental elements of moral judgments. For Geach does not tell us if he analyzes "good" and "bad" as epistemological or ethical terms, though it seems in the end, these qualifications cannot be reasonably distinguished and adequately explained without considering both. I will proceed the same way with respect to "good" and "bad's attributivity and consider the terms in their logical significance as elements of language, rather than enquiring if Geach in fact identifies the properties they refer to.

Geach's arguments about "good" and "bad"

Geach proposes that there is a logical distinction between attributive and predicative adjectives which he fashions after the grammatical distinction between them. Wherefrom, he identifies two kinds of adjectives: *logically attributive* and *logically predicative*. An adjective is *logically predicative* if an expression containing it can be logically split into predications inferred from the expression, otherwise, an adjective is *logically attributive*. "Red" in the expression "*x* is a red book" is logically predicative because the expression can be split into "*x* is red" and "*x* is a book". "Big" in the expression "*x* is a big flea" on the other hand, is logically attributive because the expression cannot be split into the predications "*x* is big" and "*x* is a flea". One can infer that *x* is a flea, but one cannot infer that *x* is big. Geach notes, that a logically attributive adjective is not necessarily grammatically attributive, which is true of predicative adjectives as well. "Red" for instance, is logically predicative but grammatically attributive according to him, but his investigation is concerned with logically attributive and logically predicative adjectives only.

Having identified *logically attributive* and *logically predicative* adjectives, Geach proposes that "good" and "bad" are "always" logically attributive. This Geach tells us, can easily be demonstrated with respect to "bad" for it is an adjective akin to *alienans* adjectives, and *alienans* adjectives are logically attributive. "Putative" in the phrase "putative father" is one such *alienans* adjective to which Geach likens "bad". "Putative" is attributive, because what is predicated of a father as such cannot be predicated of a "putative father", therefore, one cannot split the expression "*x* is a putative father" into "*x* is a father" and "*x* is putative". Analogous to "putative", what is predicated of food cannot be predicated of a "bad food", since "bad food" does not nourish, and food does Geach tells us. It is this feature of "bad" which makes it resemble an *alienans* adjective and consequently logically attributive.

Geach acknowledges, however, that the same cannot be claimed about "good" since "good" is *not* like an *alienans* adjective. Whatever can be predicated of food, can be predicated of "good food" as well for food nourishes and so does "good food". One must explain why the expression "*x* is good food" cannot be split logically into the predications "*x* is food" and "*x* is good".

To explain why, Geach compares the phrases "good car" and "red car" as "red" is a logically predicative adjective. He points out that one can infer that a "thing in the distance is a red car" from the independent facts that "something in the distance is red" and "something in the distance is a car". But one cannot infer that a "thing in the distance is a good car" from the unrelated facts that "something in the distance is a car" and "something in the distance is good" for one must know what the thing in the distance is, in order to know that it is good.

Now, Geach admits that "good" and "bad" can be used as predicates, but explains that such use is "illegitimate" since "good" and "bad" in such uses refer to some substantive supplied by context: "If I say that something is a good or bad *thing*, either 'thing' is a mere proxy for a more descriptive noun to be supplied from the context, or else I am trying to use 'good' or 'bad' predicatively, and its being grammatically attributive is a mere disguise." (Geach, 1956, p. 34) He concedes, however, that "*x* is good" and "*x* is bad" is a legitimate use of the adjectives when *x* is a proper name but notes that, since a proper name always refers to the same individual, one can claim that the name referring to this individual has meaning. And if a name has meaning, one can know what the phrase "*x* is good" refers to. When one utters "Sofie is good" and Sofie is a dog's name, for example, one is indeed saying "Sofie is a good dog", which makes "good" attributive after all. This argument is not unlike the argument that "*x* is good" presupposes some substantive supplied by context to which "good" applies for the proper name Sofie is the context supplying the substantive "dog".

Having argued that "good" and "bad" are logically attributive, Geach turns to the terms' functions for as he observes, the Oxford Moralists "would meet with general approval" (Geach, 1956, p. 36) his claim that "good" and "bad" are logically attributive but would also insist that the peculiarity of these terms' use is due to their functions being commendatory and not primarily descriptive. Geach argues to the contrary but admits that there is the issue of a single description subsuming all things good which could be otherwise distinct. More precisely, if different attributes make different things good, then "good" must be an ambiguous term. He also notes that there is the question of what the connection between identifying a thing as good and its commendation is, empirical or analytic.

Geach solves the first problem by noting that even if one were to insist that "good" and "bad" are predicative, it does not follow from this stipulation that if a "good knife means the same as 'knife that is UVW', 'good' means the same as 'UVW". (Geach, 1956, p. 37) Put otherwise, if a "good knife" means a sharp knife, this is not to say that "good" means "sharp".

To illustrate this point, Geach considers the "square of a number" and observes that the meaning of the phrase "square of a number" does not vary depending on the number being squared for one understands what it means, though the number representing the expression "square of a number" varies with the number being squared. "Square of 2" and "square of 3" are expressions which have the same meaning – multiplying a number by itself – even though they are represented by different numbers, 4 and 9 in this case. Analogously, "good" is not an ambiguous term whose meaning varies with the substantive it applies to for "good" in the expression "good knife" has the same meaning "good" has in the expression "good car". And though "good" in each of these predications denotes different properties – those which make knives good and those which make cars good – the meaning of "good" is the same.

The second question – whether commending a thing is logically or empirically connected to its being a good thing – Geach answers by pointing out that if the connection is logical, then "good's function is not descriptive. But if the connection is an empirical one, then calling a thing good is not part of "good's nature. Geach proposes that while said connection is not analytic, it is not a mere generalization of empirical facts either, but "belongs to the *ratio* of 'want', 'choose', 'good', and 'bad'" for as he notes, "a man who wants an *A* will choose... an *A* that he thinks good and will not choose an *A* that he thinks bad." (Geach, 1956, p. 38) That notwithstanding, Geach realizes that if calling a thing good or bad is not necessarily connected to its commendation, it is difficult to explain the "descriptive force" behind these adjectives. How would the description of a thing as good or bad influence one's choice to act or not act if the function of these adjectives is merely to describe things?

One way he gets out of the difficulty is by allowing the description of a thing as good or bad to influence one's choice if one is in fact choosing a thing. Then the fact that a thing is described as good or bad will sway the chooser of it since he or she is desiring it in the first place. Geach admits, however, that it is difficult to see how one moves from describing an act as good or bad to acting or not acting as a result of it. It is quite reasonable to assert that one would choose a good knife, good house, or good thief, to use Geach's examples, when one desires these or is considering them, but it is not apparent that one will donate to charity for instance, merely because donating to charity is described as a good act. The descriptive force of "good and "bad" can be explained according to Geach by referring to the fact that we must and always do choose our conduct. Then if donating to charity in our case, is described as good or virtuous act and one wants to be virtuous, one will be inclined to donate, ergo, the descriptive force of "good" and "bad" as it relates to want, choose, etc.

Geach concludes his analysis of "good" and "bad" by acknowledging that there are other possible issues which could bear on his exposition, but he is convinced that he has demonstrated his claims adequately and sets these issues aside. One will note in this respect, that the authors whose writings I am about to review offer analyses of the three claims I outlined as Geach's main claims only, clearly considering them to be the paper's main theses as well.

Now, these philosophers do not hold monolithic views about the claims made in "Good and Evil", they accept some, but object to others while offering their own illuminations and defense of the claims and arguments they agree with. One identifies three main arguments emerging from the analyses I review: (1) Geach's logical distinction is not adequately demonstrated and defended as proposed; (2) "good" and "bad" are not logically attributive only; (3) the functions of "good" and "bad" depend on whether the terms they apply to are functional or non-functional words which ultimately identifies "good" and "bad's functions as commendatory. I will structure my analysis to reflect these arguments and will begin with Geach's logical distinction as it is fundamental to his other two claims.

1. The logical distinction between "good" and "bad"

Stevenson is a commentator who defends Geach's claim without qualifications but defends it in passing. As he explains in answer to Donnelly's objection to Geach's logical distinction, the deriving of a true conclusion from true premises does not guarantee the validity of a given inference form. While this is correct, Geach argues for more than that. Namely, that logically attributive adjectives *never* sanction valid inferences. The problem, however, is not so much with Stevenson's laconic defense, but with Donnelly's poor interpretation and representation of Geach's argument.

What Geach argues for is, that one cannot infer from the expression "*x* is a small cub-scout" – an example Donnelly offers – that "*x* is small". Stipulating that all cub-scouts are boys and then inferring that a "small cub-scout" is also a "small boy" is a different valid argument to which Geach needn't object. In fact, one can easily convert Geach's flea example to resemble Donnelly's cub-scout example by stipulating that all fleas are males and then infer that a "small flea" is also a "small male". This doesn't refute Geach's distinction in the least for his contention is that "good" like "small" is attributive because it does not sanction the inference "*x* is good" from the expression "*x* is a good book" the same way "*x* is small" cannot be inferred from the expression "*x* is a small flea". Donnelly's example does not show this *not* to be the case.

Rind and Tillinghast on the other hand, do not dispute Geach's logical distinction and acknowledge that there is merit to it for it "... has become part of the technical apparatus of philosophers" (Rind and Tillinghast, 2008, p.77) They note, however, that a logically attributive adjective is not adequately explained and defined by it and argue that the *inferentially irregular behavior* logically attributive adjective sanctions, does not sufficiently define this adjective which would be better defined as substa*ntive-dependent*. Rind and Tillinghast argue that the adjectives in Geach's examples are not always *inferentially irregular*, like the argument about one knowing that "something in the distance is a good car" for "it is good" and "it is a car". According to them, "that distant object is good" is "logically well-formed", i.e., the inference form is valid, but it must be *invalid* if an *irregular inference* is to account for an adjective's attributivity.

Geach albeit, does not argue that the expression "that distant object is good" is not logically well-formed, but that it is meaningless considered independently from the fact identifying what the object is. Pigden acknowledges this point: "...unless you first determine what something *is*, you cannot tell whether it is good or not" (Pigden, 1990, p. 132) but concludes that this is not "the real answer" to Geach's claim for it would turn the argument epistemic rather than logical.

Additionally, Rind and Tillinghast believe that demonstrating "bad's attributivity is even more problematic than "good's is. Not unlike MacKay, they note that "bad" being "something like *alienans* adjective" does not show that it is attributive, unless "bad's likeness to *alienans* adjective is possessing the particular feature which makes *alienans* adjectives attributive. Rind and Tillinghast acknowledge that what Geach probably has in mind in the example about "bad food" is, that once "bad" is applied to an object, the predications which were made of that object prior to its conjunction with "bad" can no longer be made. This, however, according to them doesn't demonstrate that "bad" is attributive even if showing that it is like *alienans* adjectives.

The issue at hand is according to them, that the statement "food supports life" needs to be clarified as it is not clear whether this statement refers to all food, or to most food.

Perhaps, but this shifts the argument from whether *inferential irregularity* founds sufficiently an adjective's attributivity, to whether what the object of a noun is does affect an adjective's kind – an issue irrelevant to Geach's claim. For even if all "food" supports life, one cannot predicate of "bad food" what one can predicate of "food" for "bad food" presumably does not support life and this makes "bad" attributive. But if only "most food" supports life and not all, then Rind and Tillinghast need to tell us what "food" does, and "bad food" would be precluded from doing it, making "bad" like *alienans* adjective again and attributive still.

That notwithstanding, I would like to defend Rind and Tillinghast's objection which though somewhat misplaced, is not baseless. They recognize that Geach does not explain what it means for an expression to split logically, and neither does he explain why logically attributive adjectives do not sanction the split he outlines. Only that they do not, leading one to conclude that it is what makes an adjective attributive. Rind and Tillinghast take Geach to mean that an adjective's inferential behavior is what identifies it as attributive – a reasonable conclusion given Geach's exposition of the logical distinction. However, they go farther than that and conclude that an adjective's inferential behavior founds its attributivity, which I do not believe is Geach's contention here, or a contention supported by the text. The most one can conclude is, that the logical distinction between attributive and predicative adjectives is recognized by an adjective's inferential behavior. But what the logical distinction itself is based on, is a different issue, an issue Geach does not address. If Rind and Tillinghast want to argue that Geach does not explain his logical distinction but simply outlines it, one can grant them that. But if the question is whether there is such a distinction, Geach has answered it satisfactorily.

2. "Good" and "bad" as "always" logically attributive

Are "good" and "bad" always logically attributive? MacKay and Pigden do not think they are. MacKay asks what makes "bad" like an *alienans* adjective and whether the similarity confers attributivity to "bad" by extension. Fair enough, but MacKay seems to commit the same mistake he means to expose when analyzing the expression "Smith is a nuclear scientist" for it is "like" the expression "Smith is a putative father" – the similarity is not a relevant one. While "putative" is an *alienans* adjective, "nuclear" is not. When "nuclear" is applied to a noun it does not negate that noun. Indeed, "nuclear" is an adjective akin to "good" for what is predicated of a nuclear scientist can be predicated of a scientist, something "bad" does not allow.

MacKay's objection, however, raises a relevant question about *alienans* adjectives' nature. Better yet, is "putative" an *alienans* adjective at all? Geach thinks it is. But according to Merriam-Webster dictionary, *alienans* adjective negates, denies, or casts doubt on the applicability of its modificand. This means that "putative" is not a true *alienans* adjective for it does not negate or deny the applicability of father, but rather qualifies the fatherhood of *x* to being ostensive, supposed, etc. None of these have the negating power ascribed to *alienans* adjectives.

Geach could answer here that simply because "putative" is not a true *alienans* adjective, this does not mean that "bad" is not akin to one. "Forged" for instance, is another *alienans* adjective Geach considers which does negate the noun it applies to in the expression "forged banknote" - a banknote which is forged is not a banknote – and one can liken "bad" to it safely.

That said, MacKay raises another important issue. According to him "bad things" while bad are still things. I take him to mean that if an *alienans* adjective negates the applicability of the noun it modifies, then this noun's referent no longer is, but "bad" does not have the same effect on the referent of its modificand. I do not believe this is the correct interpretation of what *alienans* adjectives do. Rather they negate or deny the meaning of the nouns they modify by replacing these nouns' referents in the process. Going back to "forged banknote", one will note that "forged" negates the meaning of banknote by casting doubt on its referent's authenticity and legitimacy by destroying or annihilating it. "Forged" in effect creates a new referent by denying the meaning of its modificand "banknote" since "forged banknote" no longer refers to a promissory note, but a counterfeit one. The same can be said of "bad" when applied to "food", it denies "food's meaning by casting doubt on its referent's nourishing capacity by replacing it with another, rather than annihilating "food's referent.

Pigden also questions "bad's attributivity as grounded in "bad's likeness to *alienans* adjectives, but the point he makes is that "good" and "bad's attributive and predicative uses can be united, instead of dismissing one of them. He argues that "ICBM is bad" – an example illustrating his objection – could mean that ICBM is *evil* for its function is to destroy, or ICBM could be a *good* peacekeeper. ICBM could also be inefficient as either missile or peacekeeper, hence, both uses are present. However, if one is to apply Geach's form *A* is *XY* correctly to Pigden's example, it should state "ICBM is a bad weapon" or "ICBM is a good peacekeeper". This makes both "bad" and "good", logically attributive since one can neither infer that "*x* is bad" from the first expression, nor that "*x* is good" from the second. It is entirely beside the point whether one thinks of ICBM as a weapon or a peacekeeper for one is claiming that "ICBM is a 'good' or 'bad' *x*".

Now, "bad" in "ICBM is bad" could be used predicatively, but "bad" must refer to some substantive supplied by context. Put otherwise, if ICBM is a weapon, this information must be supplied by context, or "bad" is used "illegitimately" as a predicate. The same applies if ICBM is a peacekeeper. Either way, it is not clear what "ICBM is bad" means unless context supplies a substantive.

Here, Pigden argues that the substantive-dependency requirement is blocked because weapon is too empty of a term to represent a standard for *badness*. Therefore, "bad" is not an attributive adjective used predicatively. But isn't this precisely the point, Pigden must allow the abbreviation ICBM to be a "proper name" for either weapon or a peacekeeper which would allow him to "say *simpliciter*" "ICBM is bad" or "ICBM is good". Short of this, "ICBM is bad" is a meaningless expression and one would not know what to make of it.

Clearly, Geach's claim that "good" and "bad" are "always" logically attributive resists and withstands the objections I've considered, at least as he outlines his claim.

3. "Good" and "bad's functions as "primarily" descriptive

Hare, MacIver, and Pigden agree that "good" and "bad's roles are descriptive, but not primarily. If a word does not contain a standard for *goodness* within itself according to them, "good" and "bad" cannot be describing the referent of such a word, which makes their functions commendatory. To that end, Hare divides the terms to which "good" and "bad" apply into functional and non-functional. Functional terms explain what the objects they refer to do or are for, hence, one knows what the standard for *goodness* is. In this respect, "good" can be said to have a descriptive function as it describes an object which functions properly. But this cannot be claimed about an object of a "non-functional" word. The problem is not that the meaning of "good" is different when preceding non-functional words, but that the standard for goodness is not contained in a non-functional word. Therefore, when "good" is used with non-functional words it doesn't have a descriptive function, and if not descriptive, then "good" must have a commendatory function.

MacIver raises the same issue about an object's standard for goodness and points out that the description of what a thing is for or does cannot explain a thing's *goodness* because things are sometimes "made for sale, and for other reasons, which have no functions" (MacIver, 1957, p. 8) That is, one would not know what a thing's *goodness* is if that thing has no function. He notes that the move from *good* man to *good* human action is even more problematic for one would be hard-pressed to explain how "a morally good man" can be described as a "man who can effectively perform the functions of a man as such (whatever those may be)" and it is even less clear how "a morally *good* human action" can be described as one which "performs the function of human action as such". (MacIver, 1957, p. 9)

Pigden, not unlike Hare and MacIver, notes that it is not clear what the standard for man's goodness is. He agrees that generally choosing a good *x* is more or less related to desire for *x*, but "human goodness" is different in this respect. To know what a "good man" is, one must know the requirements which will make a man good, or how to derive them from the concept of man. Pigden concludes that deriving a set of requirements the satisfaction of which leads to "human goodness" from human nature is not feasible for we cannot know what "human goodness" is by simply examining what we as "human beings" are.

Here, I suppose Geach could concede the division of terms proposed, but this division simply posits the question of what the standard for evaluating human action's goodness is – again, a question Geach does not consider. All he claims is, that once a man or human action is described as good or bad, this description has a force. How or why we evaluate things as good or bad is a separate question Geach needn't answer in order to demonstrate his claim that "good" and "bad's functions are descriptive.[2]

Certainly, MacIver can accept this explanation of the descriptive force behind "good" and "bad" since he notes that "...for Plato and Aristotle it was a *question* whether the sort of man who commits adultery is *happy*" (MacIver, 1957, p. 11) and Geach can agree that such a man is neither happy, nor good. But if adultery is described as bad, a "good man" would be incentivized to abstain from it for it can hinder his happiness, wherefrom, the descriptive force of "good" and "bad" as related to desire.

Furthermore, neither Hare, nor MacIver, address "bad" in this respect. If one commends an object when one calls it good, does one withhold a commendation when one calls it bad? And if one does withhold commendation, what is it exactly one does if anything?

However, if Hare, MacIver, and Pigden still insist on a standard for goodness identifying man as good, or what the requirements man must satisfy to be called good are, Geach could answer that "good man" is one who conducts his affairs morally. This explanation makes "man" a functional word, and, according to these commentators, one can derive a standard for "goodness" from functional words.

Of course, they could ask, what the moral standard according to which man is identified as conducting his affairs morally is. Fair enough, the three major ethical theories do not agree on what this moral standard is, but this is a different problem than the one Geach intends to solve. Geach's expressed

task is to show that "good" and "bad" have primarily descriptive roles, a task I believe, he has accomplished successfully.

Conclusion

As I showed, commentators offer interesting arguments some of which raise important ethical questions needing to be answered, but the analyses do not offer sustainable refutations of Geach's claims as he outlines them. Once Geach's logical distinction is acknowledged and accepted, it is difficult to claim that "good" and "bad" have both attributive and predicative uses for the distinction identifies predicative and attributive adjectives as different in kind. That is, "good" and "bad" must be either attributive or predicative, but they cannot be both. The commentators must grant Geach, that "good" and "bad" are "always" attributive and that their functions are primarily descriptive or deny his logical distinction. Indeed, if a good man or a good action are predicatively so there is no room for moral deliberation, for being good or bad predicatively means that one is such essentially, and evaluating man or human action becomes an exercise in futility.

However, there is one question Geach does not answer, though, in his defense, the commentators do not ask of it. Namely, why don't logically attributive adjectives sanction the inferences logically predicative adjectives sanction? Why doesn't the expression "*x* is a small flea" allow the inference "*x* is small"? We can find the answer by examining logically attributive adjectives' modifying behavior. The inference adjectives sanction seems entirely dependent on an adjective's modificand. "Red" in the expression "*x* is red car" for instance, modifies *x*, therefore, it could be inferred that "*x* is red" and "*x* is a car". "Good" in the expression "*x* is good book" however, modifies "book", wherefrom, one cannot infer that "*x* is good", only that "*x* is a book".

Now, it is not immediately apparent what an adjective modifies, which seems to be at the root of the problem. To illustrate this point, I'll consider the expressions "John is an American athlete" and "John is a good athlete". "American" in the first expression modifies John for one must be an American person and an athlete in order to be an "American athlete", therefore, one can infer "John is American" and "John is an athlete". It follows, that an adjective denotes a property predicable of the object. John in the second expression, however, needn't be a "good person" in order to be a "good athlete"[3], which means that "good" modifies athlete, not John. It is why, one cannot infer "John is good" but only "John is an athlete" making "good" attributive. Thus, the *inferential irregularity* adjectives sanction is not the basis for attributivity as Rind and Tillinghast interpret it to be, but attributivity's manifestation. An adjective's kind, on the other hand, is determined by an adjective's modificand. Thusly defined, Geach's distinction identifies "good" and "bad" as always attributive and never predicative.

More importantly, Geach's logical distinction allows for the possibility that the same man is sometimes good and sometimes bad, for being attributively good or bad means one is never good or bad by definition, or essentially. In turn, if one is predicatively good or bad, the possibility of redemption is precluded forsaking us to a world where redemption is unavailable and likely impossible. For identifying the world as one in which, if one is described as essentially bad, there isn't anything one can do to improve one's lot. Moreover, would not we rather be called good for we are good, and not because we are commended? God knows, we often commend people and actions not because they are good, but because they serve a purpose. A purpose itself, not always commendable.

Footnotes

[1] Rind's and Tillinghast's phrase.

[2] Though one could argue, it is a question more important than what "good" and "bad" are.

[3] Though it does seem, that the two go hand in hand more often than not.

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Declarations