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BETWEEN GOD AND MAN: COMMUNITY'S PLACE IN VIRTUE, PRACTICAL
REASON, AND TRANSCENDENT GOOD

A thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Philosophy
in the Department of Philosophy
The University of Mississippi

by

JORDAN H. DAVIS

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ABSTRACT

Talbot Brewer's *Retrieval of Ethics* and Robert Adams's *Finite and Infinite Goods* present distinct theories in ethics and metaethics. Brewer begins with the fundamental ethical perspective of the practical deliberator who experiences his practical deliberations as a continuous, unified, and constantly revised activity which begins with inchoate intimations of goodness and proceeds better or worse to understand and pursue the goodness which pervades his evaluative outlook. From this Brewer aims to account for how we achieve excellence in practical deliberation and arrive at a more tenable and self-consistent evaluative outlook which informs our ethical deliberations. Alternately, Adams begins in the linguistic community and the role suggested by our ordinary language which 'good'. From this a deeply metaphysical account is developed of ordinary goods as, in a sense, parasitic on a transcendent and infinite good to which their intelligibility is owed and upon which traditional moral notions of obligation and the like are appealingly based.

This thesis argues that each theory, though similar, has distinct strengths and weaknesses which might complement each other in a synthetic theory strengthened by both. Adams's transcendent Good, while it secures objectivity and maximal sharedness, lacks a criterion for higher and lower order goods. Brewer's epistemology couched in practical reason, while establishing an intriguing picture of the good human life, lacks a firm grounding outside the individual to avoid subjectivism. My solution is to push the two theories together with a dialectical criterion for Adams and a notion of the transcendent community for Brewer.

DEDICATION

For Gloria.

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CHAPTER I

PROBLEMS IN ROBERT ADAMS'S *FINITE AND INFINITE GOODS*

I. Introduction

Finite and Infinite Goods is equal parts metaphysical and ethical. The metaphysics grows from the semantics of goodness to a Platonist/theist theory of transcendent Goodness in God and its explanatory power in ethical thought. The ethics takes the good as primary, but focuses on excellence, understood as Godlikeness, as the ethical concept it sees as essential to a system of ethics. Well-being and human values are constituted by excellence, love for excellence is the best explanation of the ethical ordering of value, and the excellence of social relations grounds morality. The transcendent excellence of God is fully immersed in *Finite's* ethical framework; metaphysics and ethics are never far apart.

The theory could be said to front-load its ethical content into a maximally thick standard of goodness and then unpack its content's place in relevant ethical positions. To put the point structurally, it appears to be a top-down, as opposed to a bottom-up, sort of ethics: the character of the qualitatively highest and quantitatively lowest goods determines the place of the lower goods. The problem with putting it this way is that the place of transcendence expands the standard of the qualitatively highest goods such that 'excellent' and 'good' are nearly contiguous. In this chapter, I first argue that *Finite* has expanded the ordinary notion of excellence by his semantic metaphysics and the application of a transcendent perspective as a

criterion of what is worthy of love. I then demonstrate that this expansion of excellence produces unsatisfactory results in Adams's ethical theory. I conclude that *Finite* is deficient in an account of the rough, but intuitive, distinction between higher and lower excellences and offer a sketch of what features the needed account would possess.

II. Summary

This section gives a summary of *Finite*'s foundational metaphysics of value and the ethical framework built on top of it. Adams's epistemology and political considerations are not included here, because they would add further baggage to an already strained effort and are largely subsidiary and unessential to the ethical theory.

II.1 Metaphysics: supernaturalistic realism and the transcendent Good

Adams begins *Finite* by proposing "a framework for ethics that is organized around a transcendent Good and its relation to the many finite goods of our experience."¹ The finite goods are those we experience as, broadly defined, excellent. The transcendent Good is the infinitely good God. The transcendent Good is introduced as a best fit for the nature of 'good' suggested by the role such a nature must play in semantic use. *Finite*'s metaphysics is an effort to co-opt semantic role naturalistic metaphysics by replacement of naturalism with supernaturalism.

Adams puts his semantic argument: "What is given by the meaning... of the words, is a role that the nature is to play. If there is a single candidate that best fills the role, that will be the nature of the thing."² To avoid anti-realist or emotivist conclusions, Adams curtails his study to good meant as excellent. Realism about the transcendent Good arrives at the semantic level "insofar

¹ Adams (1999), p3

² *Ibid.*, p16

as our actual way of discoursing about the good seems plausible.”³ This semantically founded realism is built from the linguistic treatment of statements involving ‘good’ as applicable to rules of logic and assertions of fact.

Experiences of finite goods (good and excellent will hereon be interchangeable when referring to their place *Finite*) are fragmentary glimpses of the transcendent Good and their excellence is best understood as imaging various transcendentally excellent features of this infinite Good. The one thing which adequately fills the role suggested by the diverse array of ‘good’ predications (whether of airplanes, mountains, or relationships) is a transcendent Good which exemplifies and shares all of the excellent features we pick out among them. The excellence of a particular thing fits the fragmentary phenomenon of our experiences of goods and their seemingly massive disparity of qualities by fragmentarily imaging features of the transcendent Good. Various goods are suitably related without reduction to any apparently shared property, because godlikeness is a metaphysical abstraction from the instances of excellence. In this way, Adams’s transcendence thesis fits usage’s surface suggestion of unity by offering an ordering relation among all genuine goods.

Transcendence is supported by an epistemology of value which places empirical testing and scientific reasoning within the broader “web of commonsense belief and judgment in which science is embedded and on which [they] inescapably depend.”⁴ Evaluative belief formation and an adequate agreement between evaluators in the linguistic community on central cases are inescapable aspects of truth. Adams takes this farther by insisting that a critical stance on ethical beliefs is essential to any mature ethical understanding. The naturalistic realist cannot account

³ *Ibid.*, p18

⁴ *Ibid.*, p73

for this ethical feature because it is forsworn by any imagined identification of value with a property cluster.⁵ Adams asserts that a supernaturalistic realist account of good which can accommodate our epistemic shortcomings and the importance of the critical stance will be a theory of transcendence.

II.2 Ethics: excellence and love for the good

Application of the transcendence thesis shapes an ethical theory which takes excellence and love as its foundational concepts. On Adams's view, a person's well-being is a life characterized by enjoyment of the excellent. He arrives at this view from the perspective of a loved-one, specifically the common-sense perspective of what a parent should judge good for their child; the kind of life for their child which would satisfy their love.⁶ Adams takes it that good parents want their children to live enjoyable, excellent lives. Neither enjoyment nor excellence alone will suffice. Since what is good for a person is a life filled with appreciation of excellences and these excellences connect to facets of the divine nature, a person's well-being is constituted by a life closely tied to transcendence.

The value of persons as persons is secured by their being ontologically sacred. That is, people and their rights must be treated as sacred because of what they *are*. The sacred is explained as an ontological category by dint of the strength of its transcendent resemblance relation. The strongest indicator of this sacredness, outside of love, is our sense of moral horror in the violation of the sacred. This sense of horror expands the scope of the sacred to, e.g., non-human works of art and environments and requires their incorporation to ethical thinking. What

⁵ *Ibid.*, p81

⁶ *Ibid.*, p97

is truly sacred and violative is only vaguely articulable, but the scope is defined by this sense of moral horror.

Adams's ethical framework takes on a more substantive dress in his arguments that it is good to love the good. Love plays double duty in *Finite* both as an essential half of its motivational ideal and in the conceptual delimitation of excellence's purview. Since God's love is the standard of love, what God finds worthy of love is the standard of excellence. Love is both particular and universal and defies self-interest/altruistic bifurcation, though it is always self-regarding in its relational content. The ideal love possesses both Eros, which depends on the desire for an intrinsically valued relation to an excellent thing, and grace, which is unconstrained in its proportion to excellence. Individuals (human and non-human) are loved for their excellence, a universal property, but are loved in themselves and not for the sake of this excellence. God's love is maximally universal and particular in loving all particulars of value in creation. Not only persons, but also human artifacts like art and relationships, impersonal objects like animals and plants, and universals like truth and beauty are fit objects of love and are thus excellent in a fragmentary way.

This is the keystone of love and the definition of excellence, though by human limitations we can only love or find excellent a very limited range of things, which generates the problem of personal ordering. The wide range of values subsumed under excellence allows the defragmentation of value by an ideal of love for excellence as such. This is important to avoid the value-fragmenter's dilemma between the bland domination of aesthetic or intellectual value by moral or political value and the absurdity of irresolvable intrapersonal conflicts between types

of value.⁷ The solution is found in the ideal of a person possessing a general disposition to value good things; it disposes her to recognize goods generally and generates attitudes of loving, liking, or respecting all of those goods of which she is aware because of this recognition.⁸ A person's values become integrated by the highest-order motivational ideal, explicitly or implicitly accepted, of being for, or loving, the good as such.⁹ Because of our human limitations and inescapable helplessness in fortune's wake, the symbolic value (as opposed to consequential value) of our actions and attitudes is essential to this ideal's expression.¹⁰

II.3 Morality: obligations as social requirements and relations with the transcendent Good

Moral value is secured a place in this ordering by its necessarily strong weight, negatively grounded in the concept of idolatry, in the motivational ideal of being for the good. Any love for a finite good which is not compatible with moral obligations is idolatrous because it is competing with this ideal and is integration by a non-transcendent good.¹¹ It is combated by the critical stance (which previously secured transcendence against naturalistic reduction) in its filtering and questioning of commitments and values motivated by the humble recognition that one's idea of the good falls infinitely short of actually understanding transcendence.

Moral obligations are grounded in the value of a social relation with something that has value and can only be understood in a social context.¹² The importance of obligations, their 'oughtness', takes off from a Millian theory of duty indicated by deserts of social or legal

⁷ *Ibid.*, p22,181,182

⁸ *Ibid.*, p188,189

⁹ *Ibid.*, p191

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p224

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p205

¹² *Ibid.*, p232

punishment for actions or inactions.¹³ Obligations are negatively indicated externally by blaming and alienation and internally by feelings of guilt, not shame. Obligatory actions arise from reasons of social requirement in actual, articulated demands and are expressions of the value of the social relations which generate them.¹⁴

Obligations of personal demands often conflict and arise from imperfectly good relations. To solve this issue, Adams posits a divine command theory idealization of social requirement which “covers the whole territory of moral obligations”.¹⁵ Divine commands issue from the transcendent Good which underpins all goodness in the context of a maximally excellent loving relationship between God and individuals. The values of the demander, the demands, and the relationship which generates the demands are maximally excellent, objective, just, and fair. These features, coupled with epistemic access for those who are obliged, support a divine command over divine will formulation, because it leaves room for supererogation¹⁶ and because God will not command acts which fall outside his nature. Abraham’s dilemma and any problem of autonomy are both bypassed because the interpretation of divine commands must be filtered through the critical stance.¹⁷ Thus, God’s nature must be incorporated into any understanding of the commands.

III. The Breadth and Depth of Excellence and Love

The arguments of this chapter depend, as criticisms always do, on their target’s aptness to criticism. In this section I focus on the character of excellence and love as they are developed in

¹³ *Ibid.*, p233, Reference is to Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 5, para. 14

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p244

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p248

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p260

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p273, 290

Finite. When the roles of these concepts and their relations are drawn out, a picture of excellence and love appears which is exceptionally stretched.

III.1 Excellence as highest good, love as highest appreciation

When ‘excellent’ is predicated of a thing, the intuitive meaning of the assertion is that the thing is more than good—it is among highest of goods of its kind. If someone tells me a movie is excellent and I trust their judgment, I expect the movie to be exceptionally good. Excellent scissors are sharp, comfortable, smooth and durable; merely good scissors might only be sharp and durable. This is the meaning of good-as-excellence we bring to the table of *Finite*, because it is the meaning by which we reason and express. Likewise, we mean in saying we love something, if we are not being hyperbolic, that we have our highest appreciation of the thing. We like and respect many things, but we love comparatively few things. Intuitively, we only truly love those things which possess a certain degree of excellence that makes them stand out. At a general level, there are of course many types of loves and excellences, different in degree and importance.

These are the acme of goods and attitudes with which Adams appears to build his ethics. They seem to share, at least linguistically, some common trait that Adams seeks to explain in theistically Platonic fashion by relating them to an exemplar in the ‘Form of excellence’ which is also a lover. *Finite*’s framework appears to be guided by the superlative sense of excellence sketched above; many of the examples are very high goods indeed. Adams, with Plato, takes beauty to be the paradigmatic example of such excellence. It is indicated by its ability to sometimes overwhelm our understanding and emotions, taken as the phenomenological indicator of transcendence. It is that which is worthy of “love or admiration, honor or worship” whose

goodness is exemplified in “a sunset, painting, mathematical proof, or the greatness of a novel”.¹⁸

The place of love seems to share this superlative status by the high standards *Finite* imposes. Love for a good begins by inspiring admiration, but comes to be a desire for relation, often valued for its own sake, to the good which inspires it. Love can be reciprocal or one-sided and can generate in any number of reasons, but is always beyond complete articulation. Love is indicated by both valuing its object as excellent and outstripping this valuing, and negatively by never valuing its object primarily for the sake of another love. Love in the ideal meets Buber’s “I-Thou” relationship, “It fills the firmament—not as if there were nothing else, but everything else lives in *its* light.”¹⁹ The central case of love is for persons, who must be loved as excellent, yet cannot be loved comparatively for, or only for the sake, their excellence. The interpersonal ideal is *Hesed*, which is “extravagantly firm and open-ended, grounded in a non-comparative, unmeasured, but not necessarily uncritical valuing of the person.”²⁰

III.2 A transcendent ideal and the burden of egalitarianism

In light of what has been said so far, one would be inclined to think that Adams uses the ordinary, superlative usage of excellence to create an ethical framework which is as finitely, as infinitely, ‘top-down’. On first impression, *Finite* sketches a metaphysical exemplar and then holds this transcendentally exemplary excellence and love as the theoretical standard to a practical ethical standard which is correspondingly high. This is not where *Finite* arrives. At their extremes, the practical standards of excellence and love are stretched to maximal breadth and minimal depth. Among the more distant in this range of appropriate objects of love and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p83

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p169, Ref. Buber, *I and Thou*, p126

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p172

excellence are: “particular animals, plants, and other natural objects; species and other natural kinds”, light passing through leaves, bad art, cars, meals, breath, and biological diversity.²¹

The causes of *Finite*'s expansionary policy, as I see it, are two: (1) the burden of egalitarianism and (2) standards sculpted by an ideal of transcendence, itself derived from a semantic gloss. The first is relatively minor and will receive a quick treatment, while the second is the more important and will consume the rest of the section. *Finite*'s expansion of excellence can be seen in part as an effort to dilute excellence of its illiberal connotations. Adams notes that ethics of intrinsic excellence were, until recently, viewed with suspicion.²² These suspicions are cited as founded in egalitarian concerns conjured by the *prima facie* exclusivity of excellence. Adams shares these egalitarian pre-theoretical commitments and at several points in *Finite*, is careful to qualify and expand the meaning of excellence to accommodate them. This is his explicit concern in the value of persons as persons, in allowing the excellence of bad art to avoid snobbery, and in denying that economic inequality and excellence are tied together.²³ These points of contact are not structurally essential, but they do offer a glimpse into Adams's larger motivations.

The real cause of the expansion of excellence is found in Adams's employment of transcendence as an ethical ideal. The process begins in its gloss of the gargantuan disparities between the senses of love and excellence as they are said or felt of different things. Loves for frogs and pine trees are not really the same kinds of love as loves for spouses or life projects. When I say a scissors is excellent, I do not really mean the same sort of excellence said of my best friend. By assuming a single metaphysical role from the surface structure of such distinct

²¹ *Ibid.*, p147, 194, 101, 187, 30, 116, 348

²² *Ibid.*, p4

²³ *Ibid.*, p117,101,324

linguistic usage, whatever similarities exist between these things eclipses their differences.

Seemingly, the only sense of similarity between an excellent muffin and an excellent husband is that they are higher goods of their kind, but this sense is just the kind thrown out by Adams's metaphysical extrapolation.

It can be granted that the problems with gloss are not insoluble and that Adams's argument moves forward successfully from semantic use to metaphysical nature to his transcendence thesis. After all, the transcendent Good's love and excellence are assembled from those exemplary excellences mentioned in III.2. The extension of excellence could not really come at that stage, because, regardless of glossing, Adams's works with existent practical ideals to a metaphysical ideal which transcends any understanding. It makes sense that from a God's eye view, the value of birds and persons is not as different as we imagine. God might also rightly be said to have a sort of relational love with all of his creation, too. A lizard's consciousness is intelligible to God, though it is unintelligible to us. As a metaphysical thesis taken from the ability of persons to value and dearly appreciate nearly anything, transcendence does not seem to be stretching at all.

So it is not, per se, the metaphysical thesis which is the cause. Rather, it is the move from the transcendent ideal back to ethical theory which generates the extension of excellence. Specifically, it is the transcendent love applied as a criterion of love and value which is the cause. The transcendent Good is "importantly like a person" in that it loves, judges, and commands. Because it is unlimited in its abilities and goodness, its love has a universality that recognizes a certain degree of value in every non-bad portion of its creation. Because this appreciative view of value is the definitive criterion for all loves and all finite excellences are equally infinitely far from the transcendent Good, the concepts of love and excellence are opened

up to maximal scope. The sense of these concepts began in their higher form: love in the closest interpersonal relationships; excellence in the profundity of a favorite novel. They ended in a form quite distant from these, in which species and amoeba are worthy of love. Almost everything is excellent, but what does excellence now mean? The necessary comparison class of the unexcellent has dwindled significantly.

IV. The Problem with Expansion

The stretching of excellence and love described above creates some problems for *Finite*, because the superlative status of excellence and love are important practically and to his own theory's development. In this section, I highlight some of the inarticulacies and contradictions in *Finite* as it stands.

IV.1 Practical vacuity

One of the problems I can now bring to light is that excellence and love have lost their practical efficacy. Internal to *Finite*'s theory, when someone tells me a film is excellent, I will have no idea how to respond. Since both good and bad films are now excellent and contribute to my wellbeing if I enjoy them, my ability to navigate the world, aside from developing a firm disposition to enjoy everything, seems now to be imperiled. Of course, we do not reason this way and Adams can always fall back on taking our commonsense ethical judgments as they stand. Yet Adams also asserts, contra Parfit, that any theory of morality must meet a publicity condition.²⁴ I think it would be tenuous to hold publicity essential of moral but not ethical judgments. Pace *Finite*'s view on moral judgments, part of what it means to say an act or artifact falls short of excellence is to say that it should be publicly discouraged from being regarded as

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p237, Ref. to Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p43

such. Given that part of publicity is livability among persons, Adams is on the hook for his theory's unlivability.

This is a strong statement, but I think it is usually what people mean when they complain about shallow social tendencies or cultural artifacts. When I say that a popular novel is droll, I am at least committed to other people not regarding the novel as beautiful. Sometimes I will hedge my opinion, of course, because I can recognize that my opinion is not entirely developed or that, for whatever reason, I do not care for novels of that type. Yet, and this is taken as part of the semantic foundation of Adams's metaphysics, most such judgments are treated as fact stating. The difference between the hedged opinion and the firm assertion depends on this distinction. One side of practical vacuity, then, is that the ontology of these judgments' truth-makers has exploded.

Another issue with expanding excellence is that expressions and judgments of excellence and love are inherently comparative. Imagine a world in which excellent art is effortless and people do not know how to make bad art. All art in this world would, in a sense, be excellent. For navigation of such a world, the least good would be considered bad and the most good considered excellent. Everyone's a Wordsworth, but Wordsworth is tripe. In this world, no matter what cultural artifact I choose to love, I cannot go far wrong. In another world, truly excellent art is impossible and people cannot produce good art. Mozart can only make muzak. In this world, no matter what cultural artifact I choose to love, I cannot go far right. The problem is that we could never know what world we are in, because our judgments of what is worthy of love are inherently comparative. Adams is not wrong that all art has a sort of excellence, but his theory's generality eclipses the narrow meaning with the broad. In this way, I think his

semantically-based metaphysics is offending against the practical role expressions of excellence play.

IV.2 Problems in ethical and moral theory

The same problem in more concrete form arises in Adams's attempt to prevent the incorporation of base biological drives, like rest, food, sensory stimulation, and sex, into a motivational ideal. Because he has already committed himself to the excellence of our vegetative and animalistic natures, a motivational ideal of love for the good expressed in the satisfaction of these primitive drives is a sticking point.²⁵ The excellence of the gluttonous sloth demonstrates the issue of excellence and love's thinness. A life organized around an ideal of loved eating, sleeping and masturbating while fulfilling all relevant obligations does not seem like a very ethical ordering. As a consequence of excellence's thinness, Adams is reduced to question begging. The first answer he offers is that they do not express interest in the comparative excellences of their satisfaction. Unfortunately this makes them no less excellent and anyway the same could be said of almost any excellence. I desire to read literature, but there's no alternative means to its satisfaction besides reading literature. I can read different types, but then I can sleep on my back or stomach or on a couch or hammock. The second, longer answer is that they are the same across those who do and do not love the good. But this is just what is under discussion: what love for the good entails. Adams cannot appeal to the standard he is in the middle of establishing to delimit that same standard. Worse still, he later says that honoring these natural aspects can be an important expression of love for the good.

Adams's ethical scheme, especially idolatry, may be thought to prevent such parody. I do not think that it does. In the first place, Adams's concern mentioned above is to prevent such

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p192, He here reaffirms the commitment made in his treatment of wellbeing.

base natural drives from having ethical weight at all. That goal is unaccomplished, but I am more concerned to press the larger defect in the ordering of ethical value. *Finite's* theory of agent-based ethics only has real two conditions. One is to form a general disposition to care about goods and integrate your values by a motivational ideal of caring about goods. The disposition can be implicit, taken from your valuing particular goods and at least respecting and liking all goods. The motivational ideal must be "more or less explicit"; you must hold that the ideal which sculpts your disposition is to care about good, and not bad, things. The other is to avoid idolatry of any finite good which prevents a person from being 'in principle' for the good generally. Idolatry is indicated by an attachment or misidentification to a finite good which eclipses your view of goods, in particular as it hinders meeting your obligations. Moreover, caring about any finite good to the exclusion of others, whether you do your duties or not, leaves you falling short of the "universal character of true love for the good".²⁶

These conditions, coupled with excellence's thinness, either let in the excellent gluttonous sloth or they require more of persons than is psychologically feasible— there are weak or strong forms of the conditions. Neither condition in weak form accomplishes much work on the first horn, because the excellent glutton could explicitly endorse his life as motivated by goodness and firmly hold that artistic and relational excellences are great, but not be moved one whit to care about them any more than that. This agent might also meet all of his obligations and efface a certain detachment from his television and popcorn while critically questioning whether he ought to be playing video games or sleeping instead. He would thereby have slipped past Adams's conditions. The strength of this example is its uncontrivance. People can earnestly convince themselves that they are living a good life, even explicitly in God's light,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p200

while they fritter their lives away gorging on junk food and watching ‘reality’ television. Moreover, most of them are not, strictly speaking, immoral people— they meet their obligations and obey all social laws.

Adams’s ethical theory accomplishes too much by the second horn, because the “universal character of true love for the good” coupled with a world filled with value provides a bar no one can meet. Adams notes that our limited attentional capacities mean we will have to care about some goods more than others and that a person can meet his ideal while ignoring whole ranges of excellence. Yet he also holds that a love for a good is idolatrous if it keeps one from caring about other instances or types of good.²⁷ To which we might ask, ‘well, which is it?’ To keep out the gluttonous sloth, it will have to be the emphasis on love-for-the-good’s universal character. Further, it will have to be more than a vague ‘in principle’ caring for all goods, because my counterexample meets that condition. The ‘in principle’ will need to be enacted by caring, at least enough to recognize their value, all those goods with which one comes into contact. But in that case, everyone has fallen almost equally short of this standard, for the experience of a single day is filled to the brim with more excellences than could be appreciated in many lifetimes. Look around yourself for all the individuated excellences picked out by the transcendent standard. Does what you see come from nature or is it the product of human ingenuity? Does it speak of vegetative, animalistic, or humanistic capacities? On this standard, caring about anything long enough to really appreciate it makes everyone an idolater.

The same issue arises in *Finite*’s theory of wellbeing. What is good for oneself is even more apt to repugnant parody than ethical ordering, because it lacks ethical constraints. Bad art is explicitly in, leaving open what art is at all, so a person can do very well for themselves by

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p200, 191

enjoying Nancy Grace and pornography. Doesn't the technical expertise of at least those talented persons who direct and produce and edit these cultural artifacts bespeak an excellence in their product? I think drug and alcohol use are in too. The feeling of drunkenness or ætheric numbness is testament to the brilliance of humanity's ingenuity in their creation. Further, the body's ability to metabolize this pleasurable poison is an excellent physical capacity as much as the body's ability to swim or climb. Through patience and effort, a drunk might work up to astounding heights of intoxication and accomplish an epic, and distinctly human, feat in driving home that is the equivalent of an Everest or English Channel.

A theistic view of man's fallen nature may support either conclusion to the dilemma posed above. After all, everyone falls short of their ideal and no one cares about all of the goods around them as they should. No person is innocent of sin. But in that case, is *Finite* an ethical theory or a theistic condemnation of ethics? Or perhaps *Finite* should only be taken as a metaphysical thesis on value. Of course it *is* an ethical theory, as can be seen in its taking substantive positions on controversial ethical views. Further, we can see in its core approach to excellence, witnessed in III.2, that it looks to root in commonsense examples of exemplary goodness. The problem of the good's practical vacuity and the ethical conclusions it generates only come from stretching excellence too thin. Adams objects to an Aristotelian notion of the virtuous mean, because he sees extravagant, transcendent virtue witnessed in saints as at least equally important. He also takes as absurd the idea of getting a bull's-eye in the messy and complex ethical decisions of life suggest by complete virtue.²⁸ Alternately, the problem with applying a transcendent standard to a human ethical ideal is at least as problematic. Either the target of your actions is so distant and small that the accuracy of your shot is wholly

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p54

indeterminate, or targets surround you near and far such that you can hardly fail to miss if you develop the needed attitude.

V. Higher-order Values and Affections

Given *Finite's* metaphysical theory, I do not think its thin definition of love and excellence is implausible or unworkable. Adams describes loves widely as “more serious, engage more of the self [than tastes], and involve attending with care to better and worse ways of relating to the object.”²⁹ With this expansive notion of love, I think I can agree that all people, and maybe all values, should be treated with at least this thin form of love. If I do not attend carefully, at least implicitly, to relate well to every person I meet, I am failing to respect them as I ought. The theory also makes sense of why some people spend their lives studying things like broccoli or paper. We might not ordinarily be inclined to call them beautiful or fascinating, but their depth of value is attested by the fact that some people of apparent virtue should find a lifetime of rewarding appreciation in them.

So my conclusion from *Finite's* problems of practical reason, ethics, and wellbeing generated by the expansion of excellence argued above is not that its expansion should be rejected, but that it is deficient in an account of higher-order excellence and love. These would be those deeper goods and loves which are necessary conditions to a good life or motivational ideal. By such a condition of necessity, it would limit the burden of idolatry avoidance to a manageable set of excellences to love. In turn, the weak conditions on ethical ordering and wellbeing would be strengthened past a motivational ideal of base biological drives to keep out the slothful glutton as a fitting ideal. The vacuum of practical reason would be likewise filled-in

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p179

by securing the discrimination between higher and lower goods needed for judgments and their expression.

There are important problems with this general formulation, because the appropriate criterion could not be *ad hoc* and would still need to respect the expansion of excellence. That is, it would need to provide a hermeneutic for how so-called lower goods like broccoli could become higher goods in a biological or artistic study. Even the worst ‘art’ like ‘reality’ television seems to show a certain degree of excellence when it is the focus of a sociological or comedic approach. Approaches of this kind are important components of many meaningful, virtuous lives, so the standard would need to account for their plurality created by this personal, attitudinal component. The complexity of these approaches alone, understood along the lines of Rawls’s Aristotelian principle, would not suffice, because mindless sloth can bespeak an admirable sophistication.

Problems for the proposed supplementation go deeper because higher goods are not just parasitic on lower goods; lower goods are also parasitic on higher goods. The achievement of recognizing any excellence as excellent or appreciating anything with the fullness of love is only accomplished by higher goods. A prime example of this is that a person must have a close, loving relationship with another person to really know what love is at all. Actually loving anyone, hence fully appreciating their excellence, even in a thin way, will require such a relationship. Here, Adams fails to devote sufficient attention to the relation between particulars and extended particulars. If I really recognize excellence in gourmet meals, it will be because of extended experience with higher goods like cooking or savoring. In *Finite*’s terms, some goods offer a deeper, more fecund glimpse of transcendence.

This last point leads to two more. The first is that exemplary goods like a loving relationship are also necessary for any achieved depiction of the transcendent Good, so are necessary for *Finite*'s transcendence thesis. That is, knowing God's nature implicitly or explicitly requires extended experience with higher goods, so my suggested supplementation will also be a required epistemological treatment. The ideal of love for the good, to be meaningful or efficacious, requires it. The second is that the needed criterion would also provide a sufficient condition (outside of God) for wellbeing and an ethical ideal. Higher goods like a mutually loving interpersonal relationship are genuine ethical achievements, and themselves order a person's values in a deep way. If the love is to be more than an infatuation or obsession, the "relating better or worse" to the object will involve self-sculpting of one's values to be worthy of the relationship. Loving experience with one exemplary good will not suffice for such a self-sculpting, because the conditions of efficacious love require a similar understanding of other excellences.³⁰ Thus the criterion would provide a rough rule for a web of higher goods loved as a dynamic whole and in this way be sufficient to avoid idolatry and integrate one's values.

VI. Conclusion

The supplementary criterion of higher excellences I am suggesting will need to carry a heavy load to satisfy *Finite*'s extensive needs. It must mark those more excellent excellences and loves which provide both the necessary and sufficient conditions of wellbeing and an ethical ideal. A treatment of necessary goods would then provide a suitable standard of idolatry and provide needed delimitation of what counts as an ethical and well-lived life. The sufficient condition would have to be met by roughly defining the dynamic interplay between loves by which a person comes to a fuller appreciation of necessary excellences. At the same time, it

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p148. The point is that to really care for a thing's good, it is necessary to understand ancillary goods.

would need to respect the transcendent standard of excellence by stipulating how lower-order goods are transformed into higher-order goods and how the discernment and love, however thin, of lower goods is parasitic on higher goods. The satisfaction of these needs will be taken up in chapter III.

CHAPTER II

PROBLEMS IN TALBOT BREWER'S *THE RETRIEVAL OF ETHICS*

I. Introduction

The Retrieval of Ethics argues a radical theory of dynamic practical reason and epistemology to support its theory of ethics in the good life as pleasant absorption in unimpeded activity. Brewer sees the need for radical revision in the diverse array of assumptions in theories of philosophical psychology and ethics which are wholly foreign to Aristotelian virtues and thereby block their application. I will attempt to focus on its unique theories of epistemology-as-practical-reason and the good. My goal in this chapter is to construct an interpretation of *Retrieval* which announces its radicalism and the deficiencies which this radicalism generates. After an extremely rough sketch of *Retrieval*'s theory as whole, I will focus on the essential thesis of its philosophical psychology. My assertion is that this thesis is best understood as the primacy of the practical perspective and that the epistemology it generates is both attractive and deeply problematic. My conclusion is that *Retrieval* is deficient in a treatment of objectivity and that its psychology of practical reason calls for abatement.

II. Summary

Retrieval's ethical theory is predicated on a metaethical theory of practical reason and the self. The aim is to, by a theory of moral psychology, build normativity into a theory of practical

reason. *Retrieval* offers a theory of the self as equally doer and experiencer in which what is experienced both structures practical reasoning and is structured by practical reasons. The self's evaluative outlook inescapably structures its experience and its experience structures how it will reason to act. This is where his metaethical theory arrives: the perspective of practical reason depends on the objective, external, irreducible, and monistic nature of goods. These are the goods which our evaluative outlooks track and by which we constantly sculpt our evaluative understanding through considered judgments and thereby the actions which surge forth from this understanding. Because a person's evaluative outlook structures the ethically salient features of his circumstances and thereby structures his ethical actions, the achievement of a subtle and self-affirmable evaluative understanding is a person's central ethical achievement. To the extent that a person brings her evaluative seemings (desires and pleasures) into accord with their considered evaluative judgments (reasoning) so that her actions are generally harmonious and pleasant, to that extent the person is a fully formed and autonomous self.

The metaethical and ethical theories turn largely on the importance of dialectical activities and evaluative outlooks. Activities as diverse as baseball, parenting, mathematics, philosophy, chess, and cooking can be considered dialectical. Dialectical activities are those complex and typically rewarding activities in which a running sense of, and appreciative absorption in, their value and constitutive standards are essential to participation. They also offer ever more depth of discernment of their value and how best to act on this value through further experience with the activities— engagement in the activity provides a dialectic of improved appreciation and participation. It is essential to full appreciation and participation in dialectical activities that they be undertaken and valued for their own sake, because instrumental valuing robs them of completion as pleasurable.

At the substantive level, dialectical activities fit our intuitions of intrinsically valuable activities, are represented in our relationships and structured lives, are our primary and most fecund source of pleasure, and defy the frame of productionism. They are the sorts of activities which people devote their lives to and by which almost all people structure their lives. As regards Brewer's ethical theory, they demonstrate by these properties the plausibility of defining the good life as one constituted by unimpeded activity.³¹ Their dependence and sculpture of achieved evaluative understanding and the importance of achieved evaluative understanding to ethical action makes them important sources of ethical value. The virtues become important to the dialectical theory of the good life not as mere moralism or appeal to intuition, but as essential components of the firm evaluative outlook which make dialectical activities possible. In the ideal case the virtues make possible success in the highest dialectical activity of ordering subsidiary activities in a happy and full life.

Goods are external because we do not judge our desires to be tracking themselves, but what is desirable in the world. Goods are objective because we evaluate our desires for goods to discern whether they are real goods such that our actions will not be arbitrary or disastrous. I have a desire to be happy, there is heroin in front of me, and perhaps I desire the heroin to the end of becoming happy. I contemplate and check my desire because I understand that shooting up would not be good. I realize it is objectively bad because I would not judge anyone in my situation to be doing something good, for themselves or otherwise. I would instead say they judged incorrectly in mistaking a counterfeit good to be a real good.

Goods are irreducible because the appropriateness of responses to goods and bads in the world is acutely particularized such that a reduction to reasons-for or natural properties only

³¹ Brewer, p150

obscures rather than clarifies this particularity. Reduction to reasons-for endlessly postpones an explanation of apt responses' particularity, because the appropriate response was caused by the reasons for the appropriate response which was the appropriate response caused by the reasons for, etc. The paradox lies in the fact that when we reason practically we do not reason from reason for response but to reasons for response. Naturalistic reductions will not work because they violate the ontological scruples which are their impetus. If goodness is a non-natural property occasioned by natural properties, as e.g. Moore held, then there are normative non-natural reasons to posit goodness of certain natural properties. The naturalistic reductivist "must see purely natural facts as something other than purely natural facts in order to see reasons aright... the problem is that if natural facts are reasons, their status as reasons seems to be something strictly additional to their status as natural facts."³²

The dualistic view of goods, inherited from Sidgwick and largely assumed among modern perspectives, is that moral value and personal happiness are distinct pursuits.³³ Brewer rejects dualism in favor of a similar rejection he sees in Plato and Aristotle. The good is monistic (just meaning non-dualistic) because the self as a continuous practical reasoner is constituted by its coherence and continuity of pursuits, which must be guided by an equivalently coherent and continuous pursuit of goods. A person is only an agent to the extent that she reasons from a monistic conception of the good, because otherwise her autonomy dissolves into the incoherent and discontinuous pursuit of competing desires after competing goods. Thus a person who does not possess a minimal threshold of impersonally good virtue cannot be attributed personal goods because he is so internally conflicted that he cannot be said to have a self to which we might attribute goods. Moral good is thus not a distinct type of good: it is part

³² *Ibid.*, p165

³³ *Ibid.*, p194, Ref. to Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*

of the monistic good because the value of morality depends on value generally (e.g. people, art, relationships).

This theory of the good is related to the virtues and to the ethical values of decisions and actions through a theory of action which is almost entirely based in evaluation. Virtues are essential for the clarity they give by way of avoidance of counterfeit seemings of goodness. Attainment of the ideal human life is activity towards the highest good of understanding the goods in all of one's activities and ordering them appropriately. Completion of this highest good requires appreciative, pleasurable absorption in those activities and a certain amount of good luck to avoid tragedies like war and famine which might make one's life go badly. It also requires character friendships, valued intrinsically, with other pursuers after virtue, beginning with a decent upbringing. These character friendships are the dialectic mechanism of shared evaluative outlooks, evaluative outlooks which monistically track goods, and evaluative understandings which can order the life-dialectic and the soul.

III. Methodological Interpretation

In this section I dig deeper into Brewer's theory of practical reason and argue that it is more radical than Brewer realizes. I expound on three features which suggest a radical psychological theory: evaluative inescapability, destruction of the practical/theoretical divide, and a phenomenology of practical primacy. Together these features yield a thesis of the primacy of the practical perspective or what I will alternately call practical primacy or the principle of practical primacy. This is a psychological thesis which couches epistemology in a perspectival theory or practical reason, and hence in the perspective of the practical reasoner.

III.1 First feature: Evaluative Inescapability

The constant fundamentality of evaluative outlooks is the most basic point on which the other two hang. As mentioned above, *Retrieval's* ethical theory is founded on the achievement of an evaluative outlook which tracks the objective normative features of one's circumstances. The achieved evaluative outlook is also partly constituted by a pre-reflective and proto-evaluative outlook which structures one's experiences and characteristic judgments. These structuring features are the emotions, desires, and pleasures.³⁴ Evaluative reflection on pre-reflective/reflective cohesion and whether one's desires, pleasures and emotions are felicitous in tracking and acting on goods, can reshape their structure.³⁵ Yet evaluative reflection and the considered judgments which might initiate reflection are in turn dependent on the more primary evaluative outlook.

Evaluative inescapability runs deep as a product of Brewer's rejection of the description/evaluation divide³⁶ which is in turn a product of rejecting the belief/desire divide³⁷ and the division of pre-deliberative/post-deliberative stages of practical reason.³⁸ It is not merely that evaluations are essential to experience such that evaluative judgments always follow experience, but that a person's evaluative judgments are built into experience itself. In this way, the objects and relations of the world are experienced with the marks of practical reason as pre-judgment features of one's circumstances. This opens up the primacy of the practical perspective (I'll call this 'practical primacy') because any experience will contain the structure of practical reason.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p130

³⁵ There are often occasions when one's desires, pleasures and emotions track goods negatively as when it is good to be aghast or sad. Also when one knows one's proto-evaluative outlook might not be tracking goods in experience but there is a permanence of the pre-judged attitudes.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p182

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p26

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p96

Since experience is to be regarded as inherently practical, it will always be fit to the practical reasoner's perspective.

III.2 Second feature: destruction of the practical/theoretical division

The destruction of the practical/theoretical division begins in the demonstration that practical and theoretical reason are so intertwined that there is no objective and purely theoretical perspective from which to doubt the reality of practical reasons. This point goes deeper than the common realist assertion that metaphysical and epistemological theories rely on normative components. An anti-realist might allow that uncontroversial normativity, e.g. of the kind that generates near-unanimous consensus among scientists, is needed to reach the objectivity of ethical anti-realism. She might then hold that the normative standard which produces anti-realism is markedly less subjective and controversial than ethical or aesthetic normativity. Brewer's theory defies this anti-realism because it not only builds the perspective of practical reason into our experience of the world, which might allow theoretical abstraction. It also builds the perspective of practical reason into the contours of theoretical reason itself. Indeed, dialectical activities display the fluency between practical and theoretical reason because our actions in dialectical activities are continually guided by an evolving understanding of the activity and our circumstances. The way the world appears and how we act in it are fundamentally connected; theoretical reason is itself sculpted by practical reason.

It might be objected, however, that the fusion of practical and theoretical reason is only present in rare cases of dialectical absorption. The answer to this objection will turn on an expansion of practical/theoretical fluency to all reasoning. First, this objection fails because while dialectical activities play a special role in shaping experience of practical reason, practical

reasoning never ceases because the evaluative outlook is inescapable. Second, it fails because our lives are inescapable dialectical activities, which means that any action or reasoning may be considered as a non-atomistic part of a dialectical whole. This lends the further thought that there are no deep differences between activities and actions or activity and reason. An action is always a practical activity. A bout of reasoning is always an (mental) action. Third, it fails because theoretical reasoning of the most celebrated and perspicacious type is itself a paradigmatic dialectical activity. Theoretical reasoning is always shaped in its contours and progressions by the internalized evaluative norms which are constitutive of its type.³⁹ By example, the mathematician does not become aware of lines of thought or avenues of progression and then judge them to be worth consideration. This would be a weaker claim of normativity's requirement. Rather, what lines of thought are open for consideration or feel promising will be structured by her achieved evaluative understanding of mathematics.

There is neither purely theoretic experience of the world for reason to theorize from, nor purely theoretical reasoning which might abstract from the practical structure of experience. Brewer consistently describes practical and theoretical reason as intertwined, but if my interpretation is correct then he is downplaying his position—practical and theoretical reason are dual aspects of a single faculty. Practical primacy gains support from this feature because the perspective of practical reason not only permeates the external world of experience, but the internal world of thought and reason.

III.3 Third feature: the phenomenology of practical primacy

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p309

The arguments above suffice to establish practical primacy as the best characterization of Brewer's moral psychology. This characterization also illuminates *Retrieval's* reliance on the phenomenology of the practical perspective. Appeals to phenomenology back up both evaluative inescapability and the theoretical/practical union. Evaluative inescapability as a thesis of the practical shape of experience finds credibility in the phenomenal commonality of experiences which initiate automatic actions. When I take a step into a crosswalk and see a speeding truck closing in on where I will shortly be, the experience of 'get back' is phenomenally indistinguishable from 'speeding truck'.

Evaluative inescapability is observable in the tendency of practices and activities to spread this phenomenal fusion of practical and theoretical features. A seasoned and lifelong practitioner or connoisseur of nearly anything finds that their prior activities sculpt their experience generally.⁴⁰ A seasoned libertarian does not have to be in 'libertarian mode' to see any experience with government as tyrannical or any shortcoming in society as the cause of regulation. The experiences show up with these features attached. The phenomenological backing of practical reasons in theoretical reasoning takes a similar form. Certain lines of thought will appear, while possible others, most of which would be faulty, will not. Further, the promising lines will feel promising and those which promise revelatory connections or a true and nascent originality will feel particularly exciting or captivating.

The phenomenology of practical primacy is also appealed to in Brewer's account of dialectical activities⁴¹ and his argument for appreciative attention in loving desires.⁴² It is the

⁴⁰ A seasoned herbologist does not have to be in 'herbology mode' to see an esoteric spice at an open air market as a welcome addition to her stock or the hippies complaining of muscle aches a tent over as gullible consumers of this same spice.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p39, 47

⁴² *Ibid.*, p63

foundation of *Retrieval*'s theory of attentional pleasure in activity and passivity⁴³ which demonstrates the necessity of valuing one's doings and the ethical significance of pruning desires. Phenomenological expositions also establish the particularity of values, the value of persons, the danger of evaluative numbness, and the connection between particularized attitudes and value realism.⁴⁴ The phenomenology of the practical perspective completes the picture of practical primacy as the characteristic stance of Brewer's perspectival theory of practical reason.

Practical primacy's pride of place is demonstrated throughout *Retrieval* in its rejections of deflationary views as "reflectively untenable from the perspective of practical reason." It is the basis for Brewer's denials of generalism, anti-realism, subjectivism, internalism, and reductivism. As such, it is the backbone of his value realism and his substantive ethical system which relies on a peculiar and realistic view of goodness that might be otherwise implausible.

As a psychological thesis, practical primacy possesses a radicalism which is difficult to exaggerate. It illicitly a subjective theory of epistemology that provides an integration of value and opens up an extensive phenomenology of ethical action and thought. It simultaneously guarantees the objectivity of this integrative phenomenology. The firm base of its epistemological weight is the elimination of the description/evaluation divide, which I think has a decidedly greater area of effect than any rejection of the fact/value divide. Whether this radicalism proves untenable or untamable is taken up below.

III.4 Practical primacy's problem of narrativity

Brewer appeals to a theory of the self as a narrative entity in numerous and important arguments throughout *Retrieval*. The importance and objectivity of continuity and narrativity is

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p117, p136

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p161, 168, 187

predicated on Brewer's notion of practical primacy, but it is also a distinctly contested feature of the first personal perspective in wider philosophical discussion. As such, a perusal of temporal continuity and narrativity's place in *Retrieval* along with detractors of narrativity will begin to illuminate the shortcomings of practical primacy.

Brewer's argument for the dialectical life leans heavily on the importance of narrative continuity; "The self that pursues an understanding of its own guiding concerns will generally find that these concerns take on a more finely articulated shape as pursuit advances."⁴⁵ This is a solid statement of the relation between dialectical desires and dialectical activities considered from the first-personal perspective over a whole life. Appeal to narrative continuity is also one of the principal arguments for Brewer's theory of dialectical activities and desires. Dialectical desires, and the dialectical activities of which they are a part, can change their form and generate massively disparate actions. Instrumental and calculative theories of action cannot make good sense of this continuity because "what seems from the first-personal standpoint... to be growth is reduced to mere change."⁴⁶ Alternately, what is experienced first-personally or interpreted by a "sympathetic biographer" as "greater clarity, depth, or excellence" is reduced to "a series of unrelated shifts in one's behavior."⁴⁷

Practical thinking is analogous to the author's task of completing his unfinished book's narrative.⁴⁸ Narrative activities are those which bring our lives into a unity in the present and support our intuitions of fortunate and unfortunate lives and deaths.⁴⁹ We also rely on narratives in others' lives to interpret and discern the value and place of our own life projects and to give

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p51

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p52

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p83

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p86

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p126

substance to our obligations based on a shared narrative.⁵⁰ The common thread among these assertions is their alleged derivation from the primacy of the practical perspective. Narrativity is offered as an essential feature of first-personal practical experience for which a theory of action must account to avoid violation of practical primacy.

What, though, of those practical reasoners who feel no sense of narrativity or continuity in their lives? Galend Strawson attests to feel no sense of narrativity and very little of continuity in his life.⁵¹ What is more, he has scoured for non-narratives among historical artists and philosophers and finds similar sentiments among Michel de Montaigne, Henry James, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Bob Dylan, Geronwy Rees, and Sartre. Dan Dennett claims to support narratively structuring lives as common and distinctly human, but also finds that of course they are obviously fictions.⁵²

These first-personal appeals *against* narrativity are particularly troublesome for Brewer because they arise out of the same perspective from which he appeals *for* narrativity. Brewer's theory rests serious weight on narrative continuity to argue his theory of dialectical activity. If Strawson and Dennett's views hold water then this essential feature of Brewer's ethics is in trouble, because the practical perspective could then be turned upon by what Strawson calls 'Episodics' to refute the specialness of dialectical activities. Of particular relevance is that these views cast doubts on practical primacy because they illustrate our human flair for arbitrariness and the imposition of importance. In so illustrating, they show a worry of vacuity in appeals to 'the perspective of practical reason' or 'the first-personal perspective' because it is the nature of these perspectives that there be no 'the' but only 'a' or 'many'.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p166

⁵¹ Strawson, "Against Narrativity" in *The Self?*, p81

⁵² Dennett, 'Why Everyone is a Novelist'

There is also the danger that practical primacy yields a multitude of realisms that it would be better not to yield. Almost no one's life is particularly narrative in its whole or even simply through its important parts, because few people possess the sense of purpose or aptitude for continual self-improvement which is a hallmark of the dialectical life. Alternately, practical primacy may authorize a system of narratives which are nearly entirely false and which roundly contradict each other. Episodes of 'reality television' usually derive from hundreds of hours of tape showing no narrative to a passably narrative forty minutes of heavily chopped and edited video. Brewer's narrative exemplar in St. Augustine as a medieval Newt Gingrich does not quash these issues but only magnifies them. These problems with narrativity point to a larger problem of subjectivism in practical primacy to which I now turn.

IV. Practical Idealism and Transcendence

In this section the interpretive thrust begun above is furthered by drawing out the implications of practical primacy in a fully formed normative epistemology I call 'practical idealism'. Brewer's theory is best understood as practical idealism because it shares informatively analogous features and problems with transcendental idealism. A cursory development of practical idealism leads quickly to a need for supplementation with a transcendental good and associated issues.

IV.1 Practical idealism and transcendental good

The stated thrust of argumentation at several and unrelated points in *Retrieval* is to dispute what is called the "Kantian picture" of practical reason as it has shaped both Kantian and

non-Kantian interpretations of the structure of practical reason.⁵³ The Kantian view separates practical and theoretical reason into temporally and conceptually distinct episodes of thought. One important aspect of the Kantian picture of practical reason is its relation to the Kantian picture of theoretical reason, i.e. transcendental idealism. By rejection of the Kantian picture of practical reason, Brewer also rejects the Kantian picture of epistemology. Transcendental idealism (on the canonical interpretation as epistemological) shares certain interesting methodological similarities with Brewer's epistemology despite its being an abjectly different approach. Both theories turn on psychological theses, employ principles of significance derived from psychology, posit proto-cognitive structural features of human experience, assert an objective and abiding structure of experience, and aim to limit the pretensions of theories which violate the condition of this structure.

In light of their similarities, I suggest that the theory Brewer establishes in transcendental idealism's place is best understood as practical idealism. Practical idealism is an apt title for Brewer's normative epistemology because of the most important shared feature with transcendental idealism: both deny access to the world-as-it-is-in-itself while also securing the objectivity and reality of this world. On practical idealism's formulation, this is the view that the experiencer's experience is shaped by her developed practical outlook such that purely theoretic experience of the world is impossible. Practical idealism treats the problem of access to the world of value as distinct from experience by its own discursivity thesis: experience and reason are discursive of the reality and objectivity of value. This discursivity just is the thesis of practical primacy. Negatively, it is the claim that a philosophical position grounded in experience is not being accurate of that experience if it does not include its practical contours.

⁵³ Brewer, p79, 96. The variety of views on the bifurcation of reasons and whether Kantians or non-Kantians truly accept it is irrelevant to current discussion.

Its recurrent transcendental-style arguments begin from the core supposition of practical primacy—that our experience and reason are essentially practical. Then, those skeptical or reductive theories of the good are shown to violate key features of the good that are necessary conditions of practical reason. Since the good is found necessary for experience and reason, it cannot be intelligibly considered as unreal, internal, or subjective. Such considerations founder by contradiction of the perspective from which they arise. Thus, reductive or subjective theories of value are practically transcendent because they violate practical primacy. The good, understood in abstraction as the class of all particular goods or practical reasons, is the transcendental object of practical idealism. Its reality, objectivity, and externality are not secured by practical primacy *per se*, but by the impossibility (which follows from practical primacy) of thinking otherwise.

But the individual's experience of the good is itself subjectively value-laden because affected by his own personal and unique evaluative scheme. In addition, Brewer's standard of objectivity in evaluative outlooks on the world is structured along coherentist lines as constituted by self-affirmability and a self-consistent conceptual scheme. Coherentism compounds the problem by the typical objection that coherence does not yield correspondence, in this case to the good. This line of thought quickly leads to the concern, broached in the previous section, that practical primacy generates the specter of subjectivism for practical idealism. Epistemic subjectivism, understood from the perspective of practical reason, is the worry that key features of agents' ethical lives which rely on the fundamental sharedness of the experience of value are foregone. One is autonomy, because it relies on the monistically coherent and largely correct identification of the good. Others are the recognition of value of persons and, relatedly, shared

activities and communication, because they rely on trust that others' share "an experience of the world that runs deep".⁵⁴

The issue here turns on Brewer's view that practical reasons not only structure experience and so structure the material by which theoretical and practical reason work, but are also the product of individuals' particular experiences and activities. The practical contours of current experience are heavily influenced by the experiencer's previous experiences. This is shown in the phenomenological distinctness of a single experience among a variety of persons with distinct practical backgrounds. When we consider our experiences "what we will find... are a series of apprehensions that already bear the marks of our practical concerns" and since our practical concerns fill the world and are shaped by our practices, our experiences are irreconcilably distinct. On this point Brewer gives the example of the sound of a motorized saw operated by a carpenter as experienced by carpenter, mechanic and sound artist.⁵⁵ The pre-reflective outlooks of the carpenter whose experience of the sound automatically guides her motions, the mechanic whose experience indicates worn bearings, and the artist whose experience indicates incorporation into an ongoing composition, all shape their various experiences.⁵⁶

From the above described situation, I think a thicker role of the transcendental good can now be seen. It must secure the objectivity of practical reason through grounding these various perspectives in a maximally shared practical structure. The problem is obviously that it is the nature of practical primacy that each should not be able to experience the practical contours of

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p179

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p89

⁵⁶ Entering and exiting the dialectical activities which shape each experiencer's approach will hardly be a suitable save for objectivity. It would offer a balkanization of activities and perspectives which is phenomenally untenable on Brewer's theory. The experienced doctor cannot help for seeing the signs of a stroke in a person, whether he is practicing in the office or vacationing on a beach. The practical shape of experience is surely unlocalizable.

the others. The mechanic is likely to guffaw at the sound artist's claim to hear beauty in a buzz saw. In the mundane occurrence described above, not much is lost by this incommensurability. Yet, when such an event is one of the frequent high-stakes ethical occurrences involving two people of widely different experiential backgrounds, the problems of communication and understanding can be quite grave. To begin the answer to this problem, I think that practical idealism only requires objectivity defined as maximal intersubjectivity between practical reasoners. Why should intersubjectivity be the standard? First, because it is the only standard of objectivity open to practical idealism, because practical primacy establishes as many experienced realities as there are practical reasoners. Second, because by practical primacy, if this is the only standard of objectivity open to practical idealism and it is necessary for practical reason, then there is no other intelligible form of objectivity.

Given objectivity-as-intersubjectivity, still, this just delays the answer to the worry of subjectivism. For, what is this transcendental good such that it would secure intersubjectivity among practical reasoners? The standards this good must meet become even more stringent when the characteristics of the good's role in *Retrieval* are considered. The good is asserted to be fundamentally mysterious and ineffable at the first order perspective—it transcends capture or full articulation.⁵⁷ Yet its mystery goes deeper, because on *Retrieval*'s fluid theory of practical reason an agent engaged in dialectical activity is primarily attentive to the “nature and point of what [she] is doing” and not her circumstances.⁵⁸ This is because it is not just that goods must be external, but that they are only discernible internally to the activity.⁵⁹ Dialectical activities drive Brewer's theory of practical reason because to be the temporally extended actions

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p164

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p85

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p39,46, 86

we take them to be, the internal good which drives our participation by a continually refined appreciation must be already wholly present. We struggle for a good already intimated, but imperfectly realized. The blues singer who struggles to perfect her performance of a song struggles, on Brewer's theory, to understand and bring about a good (the performance she is attempting) which is already the basis of her activity.⁶⁰ The good is externally real but only discernible internally and also both wholly present and non-actualized.

The role of the transcendental good must also be the underpinning of goods found by practical reason to be both plural and monistic. Plural because there are a wide array of goods internal to different dialectical activities and to the infinite variety of orderings which might constitute a good life which is distinctly one's own. Monistic because there is no deep distinction between personal and impersonal goods, and because the goods pursued in dialectical activities share a commonality in constituting dialectical activities. The good as plural and monistic further suggests that the transcendental good must ground an ordering relation among practical goods. There must be this ordering relation in *Retrieval* because the value of dialectical activities (which Brewer sees as representing our most valuable and personal doings) is constituted by both internal experience and their place in ordering a good human life.⁶¹ Because this ordering is itself *the* unshirkable dialectical activity of a lived life and so must have its own constitutive good that drives the ordering; there must be a highest good by which the values of the others are ordered. That is, the transcendental good must also secure the objectivity of the eudaimon life.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p47, 86

⁶¹ The point is shown for Brewer by considering someone who devotes all their time to sensory pleasure. By not ordering their time for other pursuits, they thereby show they do not understand the value of sensory pleasure. p41

A further constraint on this transcendental good is that it cannot be metaphysical or part of a supersensible reality, as Kant's transcendental object is canonically taken to be. This is because *Retrieval* requires of the good that it be real by its practical efficacy, not a "bald intuition" of the good's ontological reality.⁶² Practical primacy reveals value's "non-absurd realism" by its necessary place to understand "the nature and point of human life" as we live it. Because philosophy is a valuable activity internal to the lived life, it has no external base from which to curtail the fundamental needs of human moral psychology. So, the transcendental good must be conceived as a fit object by which to reason practically. The solution can, once again, be understood by analogy to transcendental idealism, but this time from a non-canonical perspective. Henry Allison has argued persuasively (to my mind) that the transcendental object, to escape the problem of Jacobian affectation, be conceived as a purely epistemic thesis.⁶³ Along the same lines, the transcendental good would offer a common epistemic structuring of practical reason to which practical reasoners might appeal.

V. Retrieval's mechanisms of securing objectivity

In a way, the concern of subjectivism I am pressing is just the other side of Brewer's particularist ethical view in its collapse of the distinction between epistemology and value theory. Though my own interpretation of *Retrieval* endeavors to illuminate the problem from an interpretive perspective, it is certainly anticipated by Brewer. His mechanisms for securing evaluative objectivity among persons given the particularity of ethical judgments are three: character friendship, thick evaluative concepts, and the virtues. The character virtues are epistemically important for the evaluative clarity they offer. Here I will consider just character

⁶² *Ibid.*, p274

⁶³ Allison, *Transcendental Idealism* p68-73

friendship and thick evaluative concepts, as the virtue and vice terms are themselves part of the set of thick evaluative concepts. I argue in this section that they are ultimately insufficient to dispel the shadow of subjectivism.

V.1 Morality in character friendships

The right's treatment in *Retrieval* is dependent on a social theory that involves character friendship and a background stock of virtues and thick evaluative concepts.⁶⁴ In *Retrieval*, character friendship is a necessary component to a mature and subtle evaluative outlook. Character friendships act as the mechanism by which we hone our evaluative clarity in an effort to track objective goods. At the same time that it makes possible the ordering of the good life, there is a sense in which it is able to do so by its intrinsic and transcendental value. Transcendental, because in its importance and moral capacity it might be considered the orderer of all value and that for which the individual orders his dialectics.

We must value the friendship for its own intrinsic value to reap the benefits of virtue and the expansion of our evaluative outlook which produces intersubjective self-affirmability and approaches universal self-affirmability in the ideal case.⁶⁵ This is the introduction of specifically moral content into *Retrieval*'s ethical system, because when coupled with monism, good character friendships yield a telos of evaluative outlooks that can affirm their view of the good across a full range of instantiations in others. Since to evaluate an action as good is to possess a reason for performing it, ethical actions are not universalizable but instead spring from a universalizable evaluative outlook. The particularism of evaluations and universalism of

⁶⁴ Brewer, p270

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p250

morality are united; the intersubjectivity of evaluative outlooks among distinct reasoners is secured.

V.2 Why character friendship fails

The tests of intersubjective and universal self-affirmability go astray as attempts to introduce intersubjectivity or moral reasoning into *Retrieval's* evaluation-based ethnics. Universal self-affirmability fails because it violates the practical scruples which motivate the particularist stance. The universally self-affirmable outlook is an impossibility no matter how ideally a character friendship proceeds. It requires an agent to affirm his own outlook across all counterfactual instantiations in any agent.⁶⁶ The blacksmith who attains such a state must be able to affirm his evaluations in a President negotiating at Camp David, an astronaut repairing a space station, or a mother dealing with the complicated task of bartering her children. We simply do not have access to such a possibility of considerations for the same reason ethics is uncodifiable as an endeavor of generalization: people do not have the mental capacity or experiential content to arrive at such broad conclusions. Thick evaluative terms are not a merely useful hermeneutic. They are an essential feature of a confusing and intricate world of messy ethical decisions which we often second-guess in hindsight.

Intersubjective self-affirmability seems like it might do better, but fails because character friendship can too easily become an echo chamber of vicious outlooks. Character friendships are, after all, how so many of the most pernicious and deep seated prejudices and flaws of evaluative understanding remain present in our ethical community. Those with common evaluative understandings tend to group and reinforce, finding character friendship more natural.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p250

This is particularly the case when they feel their evaluative understandings to be socially diminished or even conspired against. The phenomenon is often ethically innocuous or even valuable in the formation of most subcultures around shared deviances and stigmas which are themselves ill-founded. An enthusiasm for steampunk or death metal are hardly distortions of the kind I mean and are likely valuable to the broader culture in broadening its evaluative clarity and providing a hub of strong character friendship.

The serious problem for Brewer's view is the formation of religious and secular subcultures around grossly distorted values such as protesting the funerals of gay veterans or plotting against the illusory threat of a global Zionist conspiracy. More influential and pervasive than these are mainstream evaluative prejudices against races, sexualities, classes, etc. Racists and sexists can find intersubjective self-affirmability in one another without problem. Across indexicals, they can wholeheartedly affirm that were they a certain race or sex, or possessed the characteristics they see in another demographic, they would be objectively lesser.⁶⁷ Or worse, a subjugated group can internalize a standard of inferiority that they feel is true and come to intersubjectively affirm their self-abasement. What this shows is that grounding correctness or sharedness of evaluative understanding in character friendship is necessary but insufficiently strong.

Evaluations cannot come close to an objective standard of the world or value by character friendship considered in isolation, because as regards these shared evaluative blind spots it is as likely to reinforce vicious outlooks on the world and the good as virtuous ones. To put the point epistemically, it is as likely to encourage a skewed structure of experience as a balanced, truth-

⁶⁷ Such is the case in Dave Chappelle's famous parody of the black and blind white supremacist. Once finding out he is black, he divorces his white wife for loving a black man.

tracking one. An atomistic theory of character friendship simply cannot secure objectivity of experience or practical evaluation, because the sound artist and carpenter could become the closest of friends yet experience the same sounds as wholly different. The subjectivity of experience poses particular problems for shared accounts of ethical events between two strangers who have disparate character friendships. Atomistic character friendships simply cannot secure the sharedness and maximal intersubjectivity of experience for the same reason they cannot secure morality.

V.3 Thick Evaluative Concepts

Thick evaluative concepts are important tools to guide our evaluative judgments as we discern and act in a world infused with normativity. They are concepts that defy the evaluative/descriptive divide like: tactful, courageous, cruel, bold, lazy, selfish, and vain. The sorting of thick evaluative concepts is, aside from character friendship, Brewer's other major effort to head off this worry of practical subjectivism. Thick evaluative concepts are essential to Brewer's theory because they backup his particularism in acting as universals of particularized application and correspond with the virtues and vices. Thick evaluative concepts also have a social aspect in being culturally received from one's linguistic community and in Brewer's test of decomposition by socio-historical considerations. Brewer suggests a test of decomposition into descriptive and evaluative components which genuine thick evaluative concepts resist. The nature of the test is to consider the thick evaluative concept's socio-historical background such that its decomposition can be accounted for by its generation in a historically unjust evaluative outlook. By example, the ladylike can be decomposed by accounting for its tendency to "bolster

a dominant social role for males, flatter the male ego, and gratify male sexual fantasies.”⁶⁸ It purports to track a genuine evaluative property which is in fact non-evaluative.

There are at least two problems with this test as it stands. The first is that we can reasonably turn a cynical eye on most thick evaluative concepts considered in isolation, because of the historical tendency towards their corruption to exploit human moral psychology. We might consider the courageous as an evaluative concept which puts an unjust thumb on the scales when a community is deliberating on war or that it has been historically employed by the old and the powerful to deceive passionate youths into killing each other. The generous or charitable might be debunked by the Nietzschean claim that they are inventions of the weak to enslave the strong. Even the most straightforward cases like the honest could be regarded as a tool of powerful and dishonest aristocrats to keep out competition from the lower classes by inculcating self-defeating values.

The second is that the self-aware perspective of those groups of people who are wrongly maligned by false evaluative concepts will be the basis of their correction. An individual’s efforts to sort concepts in isolation or with a friend has not been the historical driver of evaluative progress. Taking Brewer’s examples of the uppity or the ladylike, these terms would enjoy significantly more cultural currency today without the women’s and civil rights movements. The brunt of the corrective process of the most misguided thick evaluative concepts is achieved through social awareness. Often their revision is expressed in the cultural artifacts, like music and literature, of groups which are unfairly maligned.⁶⁹ The sorting of thick evaluative concepts is not enough on its own to secure intersubjectivity, because it is the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p190

⁶⁹ I have in mind such works as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *What’s Going On*, *A Room of One’s Own*, or *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

recognition of another, or one's own, group's mistreatment by the concept that is the crucial step. It is such a recognition which is at stake in the problem of intersubjectivity.

VI. Conclusion

The problem with practical primacy began in the aptness of narrative life-structure to gross distortions indicating subjective, constructed imposition. Concerns of subjectivity gained full expression in my interpretation of *Retrieval* as based on a theory of practical idealism and the problem of shared experience. The cause of concern is that practical idealism seems to generate a paradox between: (1) what the first-personal practical perspective demands by practical primacy for sharedness of value and experience (e.g. shared activities, character friendship, evaluative concept sorting, and recognition of human value) and (2) the experiential and subjective structure of that same perspective created by practical primacy (especially the dialectical shaping of practical reason, the destruction of theoretical/practical divide, and their combination in the practical structure of experience). Though atomistic character friendship and thick evaluative concepts offer what can be accepted as necessary conditions for objectivity, they were found insufficient on their own.

Their consideration does, however, contribute a certain character to the problem of intersubjectivity. The problem is that practical idealism seems to occlude truly shared experiences, meaningful communication, and character friendship between two people with a disparate evaluative outlook generated by their distinct practical experiences. Indeed, even though they share a common culture and live eudaimonistic lives. A shared source of evaluative outlooks on the good in thick evaluative concepts would need to be the epistemic feature of the transcendental good discussed in section IV. The transcendental good would open up, at the

least, the possibility of shared views and communication on the ordering of thick evaluative concepts and character friendship. That is, it will need to somehow incorporate the particularist mechanisms of thick evaluative concepts and character friendships into its structure.

CHAPTER III

ADAMS AND BREWER REPAIR EACH OTHER

I. Introduction

The two previous sections depicted two distinct approaches to ethics with distinct problems. In this section, I will argue a compelling complementation between the two views—that each might correct the deficiency I have urged in the other. Brewer’s largely Aristotelian theory of the good life in dialectical activities and character friendships solves Adams’s need for a criterion of higher goods. Adams’s loosely Platonic theory of the transcendent Good and its relational ordering of value solve Brewer’s need for a shared source of value among practical reasoners. The shape of this section, then, will be a narrow synthesis of the two views. I call it a narrow synthesis because while I think they line up along the dimensions I discuss, I will not argue any wide-ranging synthesis of interlocking positions in the two theories. The burden of my proposed synthesis is much lighter than that. All I aim to accomplish here is the demonstration that the weaknesses I have pointed to in each theory can be largely remedied by features of the other.

I begin this synthesis by demonstration of Brewer’s account of dialectical activities as a necessary and sufficient criterion for Adams’s ethical theory. I then turn to Brewer’s theory, beginning with an interpretation of the thinly transcendent good as already present and the

possibility that Adams's thick transcendence would offer the needed element of objectivity. From there, I develop a sketch of a social and epistemic transformation of transcendence from God to community. I conclude the section by way of a synthesized view of morality taken from the practical perspective's incorporation of the community.

II. A dialectical standard for *Finite*

In this subsection, I argue the fitness of Brewer's theory of dialectical activities as *Finite*'s needed criterion of higher-order excellences.

II.1 A statement of the problem and the character of dialectical activities

At the end of section A, I offered a very general formulation of the criterion of higher excellences *Finite* requires to resolve the problems generated by its expansion of excellence. I stated there that the criterion of higher goods would need to meet some strict guidelines to offer the support *Finite* needs while also respecting *Finite*'s larger theoretical aims. The three main problems with *Finite* that the criterion needs to solve are practical vacuity, the indeterminacy of its ethical theory, and an unsavory looseness in its theory of wellbeing. My proposal must meet a standard of necessary features of those higher-order excellences that can constrain the needs of practical judgments and expression, the formation of an integrative ethical ideal and the goods which contribute to wellbeing. It must also account for what are intuitively considered goods improper to love, like bacteria or a chair, could become higher goods, worthy of love, by certain approaches or attitudes. As well, I stated that the standard would need to give an account of the achievement of coming to love or recognize excellences at all. Lastly, I offered the more vague suggestion that the criterion might account for the sufficient conditions of a person's ethical ordering of value and epistemic access to the features of transcendence.

Brewer's practical epistemology enumerated in his theory of dialectical activities, character friendship, and the good life provide precisely these needs. The criterion of higher-order excellences *Finite* requires is, I suggest, a criterion of dialectical activities and character friendships seen as constitutive of the good human life (friendship and life themselves both being dialectical activities). I will first give a quick summation of dialectical activities and then fill in the theory by arguing its fit within *Finite*. Dialectical activities and the goods picked out by dialectical activities are the kind which would be reasonable to love and which give the needed superlative sense to the excellences they involve. Dialectical activities are those complex, temporally extended activities which we "throw ourselves into" on an intimation of their intrinsic value and, once engaged, struggle to better understand their constitutive standards and the source of their value. Examples of those goods we engage in dialectical activities are philosophy, the creation or appreciation of music, parenting, loving friendships and romantic relationships, athletics, meaningful conversation, the creation or appreciation of artwork, scientific inquiry, and mathematics.

What is common among this wide array of excellent activities is that their engagement cannot be fully articulated and none of their goods can really be explained to those that have not experienced them internally (a common experience for philosophers in particular). Further, full participation in any of these activities requires attentional absorption and a running sense of their value for a person to really be participating in them. If one does not see any point to what one is doing or one's mind drifts free of one's doings, then one ceases to fully participate in the activity. A lack of full participation yields a corresponding lack of growth or enjoyment. They all provide a depth of engagement which requires active participation to discern how to answer better and worse to the standards which constitute that engagement. In a constant and fluid

process, as one comes through participation to better understand how to better engage in a dialectical activity, this is reflected in one's participation and a further round of discernment through activity begins. The deeper one's appreciation of the activity, the better one comes to answer to this appreciation. They also all involve constitutive standards which determine the character of engagement and whether a person engages in them at all. Engaging in a conversation requires that I listen to my partner and respond aptly to what they say. If I endeavor to engage in a conversation with a person, but ignore their expressions and fail to respond appropriately to what they say, then I have begun to engage in something besides conversation.⁷⁰

II.2 A dialectical standard as necessary condition

I suggest that dialectical activities, by their temporal extension, intrinsic value, and epistemic component, carve up excellences into those of higher and lower orders. The lower excellences are those which lie outside of dialectical activities, the higher excellences are those which can be engaged dialectically. Further, it is a part of the nature of dialectical activities that the intelligibility, importance, and meaning of instantiations of the activity depend on the larger activity. An instrumental jam session is not possible for a person independently of their temporally extended activity of playing the instrument. A first kiss which evolves into a loving, lifelong relationship gains the depth of its beauty and meaning from this longer dialectic. So, there is also a distinction between the higher excellence of the extended activity and the higher excellence of the fragmentary instance of the activity. Dialectical activities are not the highest excellence though, for they are themselves dependent on the higher excellence of what is engaged. The dialectical activity of a loving relationship with another person depends on the

⁷⁰ Brewer, p40

deep value of that person such that an ever more discerning understanding of their value and how to best respond to that value are possible.

By preliminary example, the fragmentary higher excellence of a gourmet meal⁷¹ is not really appreciated as excellent unless the extended higher excellence of cooking or savoring have been extensively engaged. The depth of the meal's value is only discernible within this yet deeper good. This means that any particular excellence, to be really loved as excellent, requires extensive engagement with relevantly similar particulars. It is the possibility of this extended engagement which picks out the higher excellences. A young child could, of course, enjoy an excellent meal. Yet they would hardly enjoy it as excellent, except in a shallow and infirm sense. This is why they would usually prefer chicken nuggets. The higher temporally extended excellences necessarily pick out higher fragmentary excellences, because their temporal extension relies on a certain depth in their objects. So, the standard I suggest picks out the higher, temporally extended goods and these in turn pick out higher from lower fragmentary goods.

The asymmetry here is important, because fried chicken paste does not really allow of the dialectical activities of savoring or cooking. Once one has eaten or microwaved frozen chicken nuggets a few times, the depth of their value has run out. This is how dialectical activities disbar base biological drives from contributing to wellbeing or fitting as a motivational ideal. Those goods which are not fit objects of dialectical engagement are the lower excellences which persons who do not make an effort to appreciate excellence would not only appreciate, but cling to. In more direct terms from *Finite*, those who do not love the good would be picked out by their lack of dialectical participation with higher-order goods.

⁷¹ Adams (1999), p30. It is an early example of the pervasiveness of Godlikeness.

The dialectical standard can now be related back to the problem of practical vacuity argued in A.IV.1. When we get advice from friends and family or consult an authority on an issue, we seek those with wisdom in the area of our concern. The dialectical criterion makes good sense of this phenomenon, because dialectical engagement produces wisdom or understanding. It rescues *Finite* from practical vacuity by establishing the superlative sense of excellence in relativizing an individual's predication of excellence to the dialectical wisdom of that individual. A friend's assertion of a movie's excellence would be indexed to my knowledge of her extensive engagement with the dialectical activity of appreciating movies. This makes sense of why I do not see the same value in a similar assertion from a neophyte and why my practical reasoning from each will be different. An assertion of a lover's beauty will have this same indexing, because it is the extended experience between both which makes sense of the expressive potency of the claim. A person's internal practical reasoning from judgments of love and excellence will have this same mark, because it is only by the temporally extended experience with relevantly similar particulars that we can make such a judgment or trust our judgments of love or excellence as reliable to our practical reason.

It may be objected that lower excellences like chicken nuggets or base biological drives can become part of larger dialectical activities. The biological drive for sex could be part of the dialectical activity of intimate sex with one's spouse or junk food could be made gourmet or approached from the scientific perspective of a laboratory nutritionist. Far from an objection, this is just dialectical activities respecting *Finite*'s expansion of excellence by providing a criterion which is largely dependent on personal approach. Recall that in section A, I highlighted Adams's struggle to define the excellences of natural vitality as open to placement in a motivational ideal, while biological drives as such do not fit. A dialectical criterion parses out

this distinction perfectly, because anything we might consider intuitively to be a lower good can be made higher. The turning of base biological drives into important contributors to the well-lived life or an integrative motivational ideal is merely a matter of dialectical engagement. Even such a typically distrusted biological drive as the human tendency to violence can be made excellent in the activities of jujitsu or boxing. The dialectical criterion vindicates Adams's assertion of the natural excellence of our vitality.⁷² There is a perspectival aspect to dialectical activities which depends on both the possibility of dialectical engagement, and that the activity is intrinsically valued. Thus, it is only those goods approached through dialectical activities which are integrative into a motivational ideal and which contribute to wellbeing.

II.3 Dialectical standard as sufficient condition

This perspectival aspect has an epistemic feature which also makes sense of why Adams's standard of 'enjoyment of excellence' alone was so ripe for repugnant parody. I suggest that excellences must be enjoyed as excellent to contribute to wellbeing or a personal ethical scheme. Moreover, dialectical activities are the only available route to the achievement of really seeing an excellence as excellent. My assertions here turns on the difference between an ill-formed hint that a thing is worthy of love and a more fully formed understanding. A person might get a hint of poetry's beauty in the first poem they read, but the depth of poetry does not allow of such quick access to its inner value; the value is only found internally within the extended activity of reading poetry. So, that a good should be made into a higher-order good is the burden of understanding a thing as excellent and loving its excellence. I think this is what we would expect, if Adams's transcendence thesis is correct and the world is diffused with Godlikeness.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p192

The recognition of aspects of transcendence would not jump out at children and those who lack experience with particulars, for the same reason there are no ethical prodigies. An Augustine or Nygren could not have gained their theistic insights, from which Adams pulls, as youths.⁷³ Insights into goodness and thereby into God require comprehensive, dialectical engagement with goods. Adams cites agreement and disagreement with Nygren at several points on the nature of God's love. But neither of them could have a robust notion of love about which to argue, without having themselves engaged in lengthy loving relationships. Their knowledge of love, what it means to love someone or something, would not be possible otherwise. One reason transcendence is ill-suited to serve as an ethical standard without a standard of higher goods, is because of the dependence of any personal idea of transcendence on developed, higher goods.

At the same time, a real appreciation of poetry's excellence will require the absorptive appreciation in the activity which just is enjoyment of its excellence. Under normal conditions, knowing the goodness of a thing and enjoying its goodness often appear in tandem. This is Brewer's Aristotelian standard of pleasure: that full absorption as time seems to flow by is the phenomenological marker of engagement with a vivid awareness of value.⁷⁴ The achievement of knowledge of the good is not limited to elitist goods like poetry, but all goods. The mindless consumption of junk culture and junk food does not fit the standard of wellbeing or an integrative motivational ideal, because mindless consumption only fits the illusion of enjoyment. This is not Millian deck-stacking against lower pleasures, but a denial that those 'pleasures' fit any real standard of enjoyment at all.⁷⁵ There is no vivid awareness of value or wanting nothing

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p151, 193

⁷⁴ Brewer, p117

⁷⁵ Adams, p92, ref. to Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 2, para. 7

more than to continue the doing. It turns out that Brewer's theory of dialectical interaction vindicates Adams's own effort to limit his motivational ideal of love for the good by love as enjoyment.⁷⁶ What *Finite* required was a standard of the achievement of understanding goodness which stresses a more active, not passive, experience with goods and the attendant pleasure in excellence.

In stressing the epistemic and pleasurable aspect of dialectical activities, I am closing in on my claim of Brewer's theory of dialectical activities as sufficient for ethical ordering and wellbeing. Not only are dialectical activities sufficient for knowledge and enjoyment of what is worthy of love, I suggest that they are also sufficient for a proper ordering of value and for wellbeing. In this, the further insight is gained that living well and doing well are not properly separable. *Retrieval's* theory of dialectical activities will need to be more fully developed to demonstrate this sufficiency. Two closely related aspects will show this point: the burden of autonomy and the role of character friendships. Before setting into their elucidation, it should be noted that all dialectical activities require "propitious conditions" in opportunities, personal ability, etc., so the need for a certain degree of luck is built-in.⁷⁷

First, the theory of dialectical engagement is constrained by a distinctly moral conception of autonomy and the achievement of self-directed activities. For a person to engage in a dialectical activity, he must at least approximate a fully-formed self who reasons coherently from a sense of non-dualistic goodness. Without the necessary coherence, the person dissolves into a disordered multiplicity that can only be superficially regarded as a self, because it lacks the

⁷⁶ Adams, p193

⁷⁷ Brewer, p38

inner-agreement necessary for autonomous self-direction.⁷⁸ Second, this coherence is not possible for humans in isolation from one another, but can only be achieved through character friendships. Without character friendships, a person would be adrift in their efforts to achieve the coherent evaluative outlook required for self-direction. Engagement in the dialectic of a loving relationship is not just a prime example of dialectical activity; it is a necessary activity for the autonomy which is required for real engagement in any activity.

This rough sketch of the fully-formed theory of the dialectical criterion shows its sufficiency for wellbeing and an ethical motivational ideal by its standard of values which demands relational ordering and the development of the achievement of love. By the burden of autonomy, it raises the stakes for the development of an integrative motivational ideal such that a rough fitting of this proper relation carries more weight. Adams allows that the consequence of a person's not possessing an ordered scheme of values hates an aspect of themselves in an internal war of motivations.⁷⁹ This turns out to be underselling integration by love for the good, because what is at stake is the formation of the self and the capacity for love at all.

The importance of a developed capacity for love is carried further by the importance of character friendship. Part of the ideal of character friendship is coming to an intersubjectively self-affirmable evaluative outlook which is indicative of autonomous coherence. Through mutual love and admiration with a character friend, we come by dialectical engagement to hold an evaluative outlook which is completely affirmed as intersubjectively coherent in the eyes of another.⁸⁰ The mutual love between such ideal friends brings them into closer evaluative coherence with one another as each struggles to possess the virtue which will make them worthy

⁷⁸ Brewer, p205

⁷⁹ Adams, p182

⁸⁰ Brewer, p249

of the other's love. By this process, the achievement of autonomy and an outlook which approaches affirmability across all relevant social perspectives, arrive simultaneously. In a deep way, the capacity for subsidiary loves is parasitic on this primary love. The ethical burden of such a character friendship is great, but by its integrative ordering of value and generation of the capacity to love, its practical and epistemic criterion of excellence is thus a sufficient condition for *Finite*'s motivational ideal and wellbeing.

Yet wouldn't such a finite standard of excellence involve the flaw of idolatry by its misidentification of human love as the highest ethical ideal? Not at all, if character friendship is incorporated as the best route to love for the good. In the first place, the mutual pruning of evaluative outlooks could partly go by way of the critical stance which Adams sees as a vital ethical mechanism.⁸¹ Indeed, such a mechanism of criticality could be part of character friends' view to self-affirmability, such that they never fully achieve an outlook they feel comfortable regarding with fully intersubjective or universal self-affirmation. All the dialectical criterion requires is the supplementary constraint that their evaluations of self-affirmability should consider God's perspective as the most important relevant social perspective. Second, the dialectical standard does not generate idolatry because the achieved understanding of love, as stated above, is necessary for an achieved ideal of God's love. So, the love between the ideal character friends would not eclipse God, but make possible a deep love for the transcendent Good. It seems like this is supported by wide religious emphasis on the sacrament of marriage, though of course romantic love is not the only form of character friendship.

The dialectical criterion seems to work hand in glove with *Finite*. It provides both necessary and sufficient conditions for its ethical theory and prevents practical vacuity. There

⁸¹ Adams, p211, in this thesis see I.II.3

may be a worry that it offends against *Finite*'s concern for egalitarianism. Dialectical activities do require some luck of circumstance and ability, might be taken to be inaccessible to most people, and may offend against *Finite*'s view of the value of persons as persons. The requirement of luck and ability is not, though, overly burdensome, just that a person needs a passable upbringing and the good fortune not to be blighted in life. Adams has already brought a fair amount of luck into the equation of wellbeing by the condition of enjoyment and any ethical theory will require that an ethical valuing only be possible for an ethical person. Also, dialectical activities are distinct and important, but ultimately attainable to most people in most circumstances if they cultivate a suitable disposition. Friendship and parenting are not goods of the economically elite. Last, the dialectical criterion does not offend against the value of persons as persons, because the ontological status of the sacred and what is good for the sacred could hardly be said to conflict.

III. Thin transcendence in *Retrieval*

With the argument for dialectical excellence in *Finite* out of the way, the remainder of this section is devoted to the *Retrieval* side of the synthetic project. Whereas the theory of dialectical activities seemed almost ready-made to work as *Finite*'s criterion of excellence, the effort to read transcendence into *Retrieval* will be more of a process. The first step in the process is to show that a thin version of transcendence is already at work in *Retrieval* and that a thicker version transcendence, like Adams's, would eliminate the problem of subjectivism.

III.1 *Retrieval*'s employment of thin transcendence

I hold that *Retrieval*'s deployment of value already possesses the characteristics of transcendence, but without the metaphysical thickness of *Finite*'s transcendence thesis. That

Retrieval relies on an implicit theory of transcendence is shown in three points: (1) goodness transcends human understanding, (2) value permeates the world of experience, but is not projected or constructed, and (3) there is a highest good by which subordinate goods are ordered and understood. As these three features are listed, they represent more to less interpretive aspects of the good in *Retrieval*. I will now work through them piecemeal in demonstration of their accuracy.

First, the role of the good in *Retrieval* transcends our understanding because it is ineffable and beyond reduction. The good is real and external, but its source and nature is mysterious. We reason from goods as if they are objective and external, but their nature precludes reduction or precision. The intrinsic values which guide our thoughts and actions cannot be reduced to natural properties or propositionally reduced at all. Even when we come close to understanding the particular goodness of a good engaged in dialectical activity, the goodness defies any personal completion. It is the nature of dialectical activities that the good which you inchoately intimate and which drives you to “throw yourself” into them recedes as your understanding progresses.⁸² Desires for goods engaged dialectically are fugitive in content and grasp, because dialectics do not allow of perfection. Persons or philosophy or music cannot be grasped completely or with finality, because their depth makes the assertion of such attainment an empty boast. Indeed, it would be a hollow claim indicative of the claimer’s obvious lack of the stated attainment. A claim to understand philosophy in its entirety would be nearly unintelligible— intrinsic goods are not that kind of thing.

Second, though the first-personal evaluative outlook on the good is guided by the subjective personal experiences which sculpt that outlook, value cannot be anything like a

⁸² *Ibid.*, p38

projection or Kantian-style category of goodness. It must be externally real by demand of practical primacy. It is a recurrently important step in *Retrieval's* arguments to denounce constructivist or internalist theories of practical reason and value. Yet, the example of the distinctness of the practical contours of experience on B-15 would, on its face, suggest precisely this conclusion. This is another part of the importance of the analogy with transcendental idealism given in section B, where it may have appeared strained or superfluous: practical idealism cannot utilize anything like the discursivity of transcendental idealism. Though the practical dimension of any experience is shaped by the distinctness of the experiencing perspective, the values distinct perspectives track must non-naturally permeate the world of experience. Evaluative outlooks are not projections, but carvings from an inexhaustible world of value.

Third, the good is not only transcendent and immanent in the world, but also hierarchical. This last point falls on Brewer's grounding value claims in a theory of the good human life. The theory of dialectics which structure our lives and experience by their place in the process of coming to see and live by the good, is itself grounded in common features of the good human life. An essential part of what it means to understand the value of an activity is to properly value its place relative to other values in a "full and flourishing human life." An understanding of an activity's value is not a separable, surd quality which might be fully achieved in isolation from any other considerations, because a person who pursues a value when it is inappropriate shows himself to misunderstand that value.⁸³ Given my limited resources and capacities, an important feature of my life is figuring out when an action would be ill-suited, particularly for living a good life. Part of what figuring out what a good life will mean for me is finding which actions are

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p41

conducive to it. Brewer thinks it is only through experience with a diverse array of dialectics that I can ever achieve this needed perspective. So, the proper ordering of intrinsically valuable activities against one another and against instrumental values, is the “master activity of making use of our capacity for practical thinking in the unshirkable task of leading a life.”⁸⁴

The ideal ordering, plus luck, is the eudaimon life of unimpeded, pleasurable activity in accordance with virtue. But eudaimonia cannot be the highest good in light of which the master task of ordering the pursuit of lesser values is guided, because the proper ordering just is eudaimonia. To hold eudaimonia as both the proper ordering and the good which guides the proper ordering would create incoherence with Brewer’s larger theory. Since the highest good would then be the internal organization of lesser goods guiding itself, this would generate internalism about the highest good which flatly contradicts Brewer’s realism. Further, given the plurality of flourishing lives, there must be some shared highest good which informs their distinct eudaimon dialectic. I conclude that the hierarchical picture of lesser transcendent goods intimately related to a highest transcendent good is thus a crucial element of Brewer’s theory.

III.2 Transcendental good as thickly transcendent good

It seems to me that the best way to understand these three features of the good is that Brewer already implicitly uses a thin version of the transcendence thesis which, in its thicker form, explicitly guides Adams. Since *Retrieval*’s use of the good already possesses the features of transcendent, ineffable values which permeate reality and are closely related to a highest good, the good is thinly transcendent. The thick transcendence thesis in *Finite* is of goods as unified around and parasitic on an infinite and transcendent good which is the exemplar of intrinsic

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p275

value. The transcendent Good provides a robust unification of goods and an ideal of love for the transcendent Good as a common motivational ideal. Pertinent to present concerns, the sharedness of this metaphysical source of value also secures objectivity among perspectives on value judgments. In a way, tracking and appreciating transcendence is the shared task of all persons.

I suggest that the thinness of Brewer's theory of transcendent value is causing the illness of subjectivism and that thicker transcendence is its cure. His value realism already relies on a thin conception of transcendent goodness. A thicker definition would provide the objective sharedness required for the practical perspective. At least two paths lie open in the task of employing thick transcendence to ground objectivity between practical reasoners. One would be a direct application of *Finite's* theistic metaphysics of value. Interesting avenues of support lay open here. Adams offers a brief cosmological argument for transcendence that the beauty of a truth should be taken for the cause of its truth. I think what I have interpreted as the 'principle of practical primacy' could very well support such an appeal to beauty as a truth-maker for the adoption of a theistic metaphysics.

However, this metaphysical route also conflicts with *Retrieval's* method of ontological avoidance, as I noted on B-17. Brewer clarifies his realism: "The task of practical thinking is not to ascertain the mere *existence* of entities that happen to be normative. The task is to come to an understanding of how best to live and to live in the light of that understanding."⁸⁵ To cater to the practical perspective, I suggested in the previous section that the objectivizing source needed for practical idealism, its transcendental good, be conceived along purely epistemic lines. The second path in employment of Adams's transcendence thesis, the one I propose, is to re-ground

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p274

transcendence along these practically epistemic constraints. This can be done by reconceiving the transcendent Good as an exemplar of evaluative outlook, rather than an exemplar of all value. It will be the perspective of the transcendent Good as an intentional being, which will be primary in the transformed account. The face I will argue this transformation should take is that of a normative definition of community.

IV. Community as Transcendent and Transcendental Good

There is an objective and subjective perspective on the sense of community I have in mind. The subjective perspective is the place of community in practical reasoning. The objective looks to what the community must be like to fit thick transcendence. This subsection provides a rough sketch of what a community must look like to fit Adams's constraints and Brewer's needs in establishing the needed synthesis by transcendence. I begin with considerations specifically related to the prevention of subjectivism in practical idealism. These are *Retrieval's* requirements of the community in eunoia for character friendships and the screening of thick evaluative concepts. I then move to a sketch of the ideal of community which is to reground Adams's transcendent Good and thereby act as the transcendental object of Brewer's practical idealism. These are intentionality arising from evaluative coherence and transcendent judgment arising from collective efforts at evaluative clarity

IV.1 Retrieval's need for transcendent community as transcendental good

There were a few features of *Retrieval* which needed the transcendental good and suggested its social grounding. The first is that practical idealism seems to occlude truly shared experiences, meaningful communication, and character friendship between two people with a disparate evaluative outlook generated by their distinct practical experiences, yet, importantly,

who share a common culture and live decidedly eudaimonistic lives. A shared source of the good between these two opens up at least the possibility of shared views and communication on important shared social or political issues and perhaps even the possibility of character friendship. The second is a specific aspect of the first issue that practical idealism dooms an individual's efforts to sort the thick evaluative concepts by which they interpret and interact with the world to a stilted and subjective standard. Because practical idealism prevents the possibility of truly, dialectically meaningful communication, much less friendship, between disparate but equally excellent lifestyles, one's possible character friends will necessarily possess serious limitations on the differences of their evaluative outlook from one's own. Yet inter-social dialogue is essential to the achievement of a nuanced evaluative ordering which might offer the sort of objective outlook on the world of value which establishes autonomy and allows full involvement in character friendship.

So, interestingly, Brewer is right in holding that autonomy and character friendships possess a decidedly moral content that makes one's achievement of both in tandem an ideal which is compossible for all, but wrong that this compossibility is accessible for atomistic character friends. Considerations of character friendship's political and cultural setting are as important to the self's possibility of autonomy or character friendship, because for the sort of unbiased value-tracking outlook which makes possible true virtue, and the same of true autonomy and friendship, a society must be either extremely homogenous or more socially dynamic in its pluralism than Brewer allows.

IV.2 The community's burden of eunoia and evaluative conceptual coherence

The sense of community I look to employ is of groups of people who loosely share an evaluative understanding displayed by their shared set of values, particularly thick evaluative concepts. Communities are comprised of subcommunities which have characteristics close to the community which they comprise, but in their focus lack the completeness offered by the transcendent community. Particular regional communities like cities and more dispersed communities like scientific, artistic, or ethnic communities are the sort of subcommunities I mean. Whether it is a maximal, global community or the political community of a modern nation or a particular city, the scope of what is a community or subcommunity will depend entirely on the needs of the practical perspective. The only real limitation on scope, for reasons apparent below, is that the community should itself be comprised of a diverse range of subcommunities.

This grounding in community must provide the background conditions such that the eunoia necessary for character friendship is a broad social possibility. Brewer states that eunoia is the foundational affection from which character friendship springs and is therefore necessary for its possibility between two people.⁸⁶ For the shared evaluative understanding which must be derived from a network of character friendship (both for the sake of individual and communal correctness of evaluation) to be achieved, a widespread and mutual eunoia among citizens must be present. This may seem to generate the threat of a vicious circle, because the sense of community which just is general social eunoia is necessary for the establishment of such a community as might generate such eunoia. Yet, I think that this just is Brewer's assertion that those who have never had a sense of human value could not be instructed by argument as to its

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p241

worth⁸⁷, applied to the community scale in eunoia. By parity of reasoning, while eunoia will be brutally necessary to begin the process of community formation, the theory of community presented here will need to involve eunoia in holding it together.

In section B, I argued that Brewer's position on thick evaluative concepts and its mechanism for providing objectivity were flawed because his test of socio-historical decomposition could be misapplied and because it does not capture the larger social process as it occurs. The standard I suggest to supplement *Retrieval's* method is the transcendently good community's considered evaluative outlook when it incorporates, by the efforts of its subcommunities, the sorting of evaluative concepts by its members in a coherent set.

On the ground, when the testing of thick evaluative concepts against each other goes well, it already takes this form. If I find a faulty evaluative concept maligns me unfairly, I am likely to discuss it with others like me to discern whether they feel the same. Often, though not always, I will be communicating with a subcommunity and will hope to push, as a subcommunity, for the broader community to renounce the concept. If I am earnest in my sorting of evaluative concepts for faulty concepts which do not affect me, I will require both the testament of those persons whom they do affect expressed as the considered conviction of their subcommunity and the larger community's position on this view. If I am at pains to mine my positive thick evaluative concepts for those which deserve special prominence or for new evaluative concepts which track new goods and virtues, then I will often rely on communally shared views of exemplars of those concepts. By way of my character friends, I will both express and encourage my outlook on evaluative concepts and gain from their own considered views.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p153

This, anyway, is more or less how I think we have arrived at the current ‘politically correct’ general set of shared evaluative concepts. It is the social process of a pluralistic society at work in what might meaningfully be called its own edification. Often the process has yielded massive conceptual improvement, though quite commonly false value concepts weasel in and true value concepts fall out of favor. Yet always the assortment and ordering which is to represent my distinct and unique outlook falls in the final view on me. Since by practical idealism’s lights these very concepts will order my experience and activity in the world and constitute with whom I am character friends, my personal set is, in a significant sense, who I am. Practical primacy is represented in this process by the virtues’ constitution of the autonomous self⁸⁸, the undelegability of moral thinking⁸⁹, and the necessity of character friends.

So far I have stressed social relations, the historical community, and communication between sub-communities, but *Retrieval* itself makes reference to socially inherited doxastic beliefs⁹⁰ and the sorting process of socio-historical indexing and decomposition mentioned above. Thick transcendence enters the picture in a degree of dynamism between the larger community and the communities which comprise it. This is possible if the larger community strives for its telos manifest in a disposition of being ‘for the good’ of its members. At the same time, this sorting will just be the community’s striving for the inner coherence which is constitutive of its agency and of its ideal as a community. By sorting through thick evaluative concepts, the community shows itself to be for the good of each member within it by impressing good-tracking evaluative concepts onto their evaluative sensibilities. A true community gives

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p 201

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p 104

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p270

individuals the conceptual resources to achieve the virtues necessary for their autonomy and the growth of character friendship which is in turn necessary for the community's existence.

IV.3 Requirements of Transcendence in the Community

What the community needs to do, as evaluative exemplar, is support a shared structure of practical reason among its members. The community will be approached from both a top-down and bottom-up perspectives, with the top-down perspective explored first. The bottom-up perspective, elaborated in the next subsection, will be the role of community in the first-personal view of practical reason. The top-down perspective will be the wider view of transcendent characteristics the community must possess to fill its role. I will take up this wider perspective first, making some assumptions on these details of the community, and look to justify these assumptions later.

The community must possess an evaluative outlook that structures distinct and distant practical perspectives to meet the role of securing objectivity among practical reasoners. For simplicity, I will use Brewer's example of different perspectives on the same buzzsaw referenced in the previous section to demonstrate this point. It should be kept in mind that the ethical stakes are higher than this suggests, because the practical perspectives they represent are structural features of important types of lives and outlooks on value. The sound artist, mechanic, and carpenter, though they cannot directly affirm each other's outlooks on value, must each find affirmation from the larger perspective of the community they comprise. The way I see this working is that the subcommunities of likeminded individuals of which they are a part, of artists or mechanics or carpenters, must affirm the practical structure which informs these individual practical perspectives. Whereas the practical contours of the carpenter and artist may not allow

of effective communication or understanding between the two, fellow artists and carpenters would not possess this same limitation. Their experiences will be comparatively very close; they could more naturally become character friends. The issue which the community must alleviate is bridging this gap between subcommunities, rather than the individuals themselves. While each practical perspective will be distinct, the problem of subjectivism would not arise if a large homogeneity of practical structure obtained between individuals.

In the case of a pluralistic (broadly defined) society, the community must play a role of containing these subcommunities in a way that their perspectives are unified in its perspective. To fill this role, the community must have an evaluative outlook which is comprised of the diverse range of the practical perspectives of its members. So, the community, to fit the characteristics of transcendence, must be importantly like a person such that it might reasonably be ascribed an evaluative outlook and this evaluative outlook must contain the conceptual resources of its subcommunities. To speak loosely, this evaluative outlook will hang on the shared thick evaluative concepts on offer to its members such that they can form a unified network of character friendships. By unified, I do not mean that any astronaut or farmer needs to be capable of character friendship. Rather, it is only that their subcommunities possess ties through character friendships with each other. The burden of the network of character friendships appears twofold at this juncture. First, divergent outlooks on value between members of the same community should not preclude character friendship between two persons living excellent lives. Such a coherent network of character friendships would also depend on both widespread and shared *eunoia* among members for members *qua* members and a shared stock of thick evaluative concepts, including the virtues and vices. Otherwise, the problem of subjectivism, argued in the previous section, in atomistic character friendships and the sorting of

thick evaluative concepts arises. Second, subcommunities which offer specialized evaluative concepts that do occlude ties in its network of friendship should be actively discouraged by the larger community.

The idealized set of coherently shared evaluative understandings among this network of character friendships would be the community's evaluative outlook. Brewer's account of autonomy (coherence in reasoning on the good) mapped on to the community can be employed to render the needed degree of coherence for intentionality. This coherent evaluative outlook secures the community's agency and intentionality by the unity among subcommunities it makes possible through the fairness of its thick evaluative concepts. Intentionality is important for a transcendent Good because it must be 'for the good' of its members by willing that they possess direction towards the good in their received evaluative concepts. It also must be capable of relationship with each of its members by their relationship with one another proceeding by way of its outlook expressed in their evaluative concepts. The coherence of evaluative outlook is made possible by unity of membership and the collective judgments of members in arriving at a shared set of evaluative concepts.

Further, it must judge excellence as excellent for its members. Community support for excellence backs up practical idealism by its being the ideal judge of value in conjunction with its judgments being for the good of its members. This feature helps establish the maximal intersubjectivity which secures the objectivity of distinct outlooks on practical reason, because the community's larger perspective can recognize the values of the subcommunities. The community's place as an ideal judge of excellence is taken from the collective efforts of the network of character friends to arrive at tenable, good-tracking sets of thick evaluative concepts. In a sense, this just will be the eunoia of the community's members striving for fair and just

evaluative outlooks which do not unfairly disadvantage any subcommunity that supports . Because the effort is collective, judgments of excellence at the community level will possess a degree of nuance and objectivity which no individual could ever possess. Its outlook and judgments on value are transcendent. Because the community is external and evaluatively hegemonic, it prevents practical subjectivity by grounding our individual judgments of practical reasons in a community of practical reasoners conceived as a practically reasoning community.

In *Finite*'s terms, the community so constituted can ground the needed relational ordering among goods by its degree of transcendent value such that any good can be understood as relational to aspects of the community. Translated to *Retrieval*'s needs, this value and its ordering relation establish the shared practical outlook on the good which secures practical idealism. Security in the practical is bound to intersubjectivity and the rectifications of conceptual sorting and the possibility of diverse character friendships. Coherence of evaluative outlook, unity among members, and the collective sorting of evaluative concepts are all necessary for one another. Their reciprocity is reflected in their mutual support for the community's intentionality of being 'for the good' and its status as an ideal judge of excellences. This mutuality has interesting connections with both *Retrieval* and *Finite* because the community's transcendent perspective depends on a completion of its virtues in which no aspect could be possessed without the others. This connects with Adams's insistence that the transcendent Good, as the metaphysical ground of value, possess and actualize a completeness of excellence which no person could ever achieve.⁹¹ It connects with Brewer's Aristotelian

⁹¹ Adams, p55

intuition that the virtues are “unified in the sense that it is impossible to have one virtue in the fullest degree if one lacks any other.”⁹²

V. The place of the transcendent community from the practical perspective

Given the place of thick evaluative concepts in particularized ethical navigation, there is a strong connection between ethics and community. In this subsection, I argue a more specific role for the community in *Retrieval* in morality by way of synthesis with *Finite*'s theory of morality. I begin the task of this subsection with a social theory of the right from the perspective of the practical reasoner. I then endeavor to incorporate Adams's divine command theory, suitably transformed, into this larger perspective. I end by placing a community-affirmability restriction on the right.

V.1 A Social Theory of the Right and the Practical Perspective

To begin I need to square the distinctness considerations of the right with the theory's commitment to monistic goodness in which moral value is not a realm of value distinct from non-moral value. In addition, the transcendental good must be incorporated. My solution is an account of shifting self/other valences in discernment of goods and the community's evaluative outlook. A valence shifting treatment of the derived from Brewer's arguments against goodness dualism can offer a suitable basis for distinguishing between practical considerations of good and right. Good actions involving others have a primacy of relation to self, while right actions have a primacy of relation to other. In both there is a self-other relation in our practical considerations, but by putting more weight on one or the other, we can incorporate a distinction between the right and the good which does not offend against monism. An explanation of this point will require a social theory that provides a more subtle cutting between the distinctness of persons.

⁹² Brewer, p266

In acting from considerations of what is right or what is owed, we deliberate from a perspective which shrinks the gulf of distinctness between persons. We are inescapably constrained by our first personal perspective and self-directed action depends on reasoning from our relation to goodness. Yet we can stretch our understanding to consider reasons from a wider perspective in communities which encompasses a richer, more objective outlook than our own. In the limiting case, it is a community of two. This allows us to override our own proto-evaluative seemings of goodness (desires, emotions, pleasures) to recognize what it would be good to do despite our having no desire to do it. Brewer describes this doing what we have no desire to do as accomplished through strained concentration. My suggestion is that, at least in the case of right action, it is a strained concentration to consider things from an evaluative perspective which is not an impersonal fiction, but a collective and agential outlook.

The view on offer avoids offending goodness monism by a subjectivism of the right. When we reason practically from considerations of right, we are not considering a special and overriding realm of value. Rather, we are stretching our evaluative outlook so as to reason from an evaluative perspective which is almost always more trustworthy and socially judicious. Such stretching is an instance of reason correcting desire, for we can hope that through habituation we will come to see the right as good. What is now considered right will then become incorporated into our evaluative outlook as good and desiring what is now right will be conferred. Though sometimes doing what is right should never come to be *felt* as good, one can hope that it was good from the larger social perspective.

My view here is illustrated in Brewer's example of cleaning a communal bathroom as a paradigmatic case of forcing myself to do what I have no desire to do. Take it that I would ideally be acting from virtue out of a sense of obligation and not, for example, pragmatism. I

might be fulfilling this obligation because I value my relations with the other toilet users, but I may not be on good terms with them and still value the community. I would recognize, by stretching my understanding, the value of the group's evaluative outlook and its propriety in sorting my personal good such that it aligns with the group good. I would then have reasoned from the right to discern the good.

On the present theory, the right as an efficacious distinction will depend upon an evaluative outlook which is only ever partially realized in fragmentary considerations, but always present. At the highest level of abstraction it will be the transcendent outlook of the transcendent good—the community which contains all subcommunities. This is the perspectival aspect of the transcendental good securing morality at the practical level in the same way it secures objectivity at the metaphysical or metaepistemological level. The adjudication between how high considerations of communal perspective must go and the scope of such considerations will be situationally dependent. Usually the task will take its most concrete form and fall on a shared perspective between a self and an other. When this shared perspective is absent or claims of requirement are faulty, a perspective which is shared might be found in a wider scope.

My synthesized theory allows a weak cultural relativity while denying a strong relativity. It allows a weak cultural relativism for the good because such goods as dialectical activities, the structure of character friends' interactions, the possibility and structure of symbolic value, and thick evaluative concepts are indexed to the practical reasoner's background culture. In the present case of the right, it is that the evaluative outlook of the community which we stretch to appreciate when we do not naturally understand the good from its perspective, is indexed to the actual community's idealized perspective which we are employing. If we care to take the time we can consider the larger communities in which the community we are considering nests and at

the level of highest abstraction the maximal community in which all of our community memberships arise. Such stretch of evaluative understanding will be difficult, narrow and likely impossible for any one person and so must usually be undertaken as a group at the subcommunity level. This is part of the importance of social leveraging in the sorting of thick evaluative concepts. It denies a strong cultural relativism because such considerations will still be checked at the individual level against standards of coherence and consistency to prevent an idolatry associated with a lack of critical stance.

Considerations of rightness, then, are an important part of the phenomenological evidence for the practical equivalent of the transcendental good. They represent a fragmentary glimpse of a value which we can never understand in immediacy, but which practical reason rests upon in insistence of its existence.

V.2 Initial problems for the practical theory of the right

The practical theory of the right depends on an evaluative parasitism which may suggest certain unsavory consequences. The most problematic would be that a theory which indexes outlooks on value to a transcendent community generates conflicts with practical primacy's rejection of reductionism. At the practical level, the value of persons is felt to be brute and mysterious, but that the capacity for recognizing and acting from value should be so parasitic can (1) seem to devalue autonomy and (2) suggest that our loves and actions must always be rubberstamped by the community's affirmation.

The first worry is easily dealt with by noting that the community's evaluative outlook is a product of individuals' and that groups of practical reasoners develop nuanced and particularized distinctions which no individual could achieve. The evaluative insight of a group of people,

particularly at the community level, is simply degrees of magnitude more perspicacious than an individuals'. It transcends any effort of individual discernment. In particular along the lines of sorting thick evaluative concepts discussed above. What is more, the modern antagonistic paradigm of individual-versus-community disappates with the fall of the personal/impersonal goodness division. It turns on an utter misconception of the nature of value and autonomy and on an unhealthy modern obsession with individuality.

The second worry, that we would lose the intimate relation between our loves and actions and ourselves by indexing them to the community's perspective, can be dispelled by allowance of two points. One is that the community's perspective is generally valid in that its considered standards can show when our loves are unhealthy or deeply problematic (as in a one-sided or abusive relationship or an obsessive activity). The other is that love's particularity indicates that it is only the community's received standards of what love is and how to love that our personal loves are dependent on from the practical perspective.

This brings up an important question of how we are to interact with communities such that transcendence can be communally grounded. By conceiving of the community which is reasonably flourishing as a network of character friendship, our actual character friends become conduits of interaction with the community and thereby its achieved evaluative outlook. Given the transcendent status of the community, it would be a classic category mistake to say, "I talked with my neighbor and spouse and senator, but I never talked with the community". When we discuss and publicly deliberate through action and speech on values and the way the world is and bring our evaluative perspective into greater social atunement, we just are interacting with a community. In the ideal for our self and others, this will be the shared political community.

V.3 Finishing the synthesis with Adams's moral theory

I can now bring considerations back to Adams by the place of the right and moral obligations. *Finite's* moral theory can be placed within the evaluative outlook theory of monistic goodness and the practical account of the right which I have offered so far, by adopting his semantic description of obligation, guilt, and blame as a phenomenological taxonomy. *Finite's* practical realignment can thereby allow that those with whom we are socially related are the foundation of obligations and that the objectivity and imperatival form of obligations is grounded in our relationship with the transcendent community. On this synthesized view the phenomenological markers of guilt and blame are strong indicators of the right in their capacity to push our deliberations into a valence-shifted perspective. Such emotional content is important input for our practical perspective. We reason from these inputs to deliberation and actions from the attitudes which they generate.

Finite's moral theory is pulled deeper still by the muddled nature of the obligatory/supererogatory distinction. It is so muddled because the difference between obligatory and supererogatory actions is typically lost on the virtuous; it is only in struggles to discern and meet her obligations that such a distinction comes to light. It is the phenomenological markers of this evaluative struggle, when the right and the good do not seem to line up, that provides the impetus for this valence shift. My assertion is that when judging what others ask of us by this shift we do more than 'put ourselves in their shoes'. Counter to Adams's position that obligations must arise from actual requests, we attempt to judge obligations from what relations could or should ask of us by creatively imagining our shared perspective. The first-personal perspective only allows us to creatively imagine their perspective through our own, but even if we could accomplish the task of 'unselfing' we would still be regarding a perspective which, if it is worthy of obligation,

considers our own. It would be a perspective which reciprocally seeks to share an evaluative outlook with our own in this situation common to each in the relation. In *Retrieval's* terms, it would need to at least approximate the character friends' shared process of reflective evaluative equilibrium, otherwise disagreement on the existence and content of obligation will be insoluble. On the synthesized view, this is the transcendent community actively seeking to incorporate our perspective in its own by way of its thick evaluative outlook.

The takeaway here is that shame, guilt, and blame do not explicitly enter our considerations until we are engaged in the sort of valence-shifting struggle to deepen our grasp of the situation. When we do so struggle, we are likely to consider the other's view of the relationship and our view in tandem with our perspective taken together as a shared, proto-communal perspective. When this perspective fails our needs, we find recourse in a broader community's perspective. We might solicit our friends and family for advice, imaginatively consider the external perspective of a real or fictional exemplar or dwell on a parable or colloquial rule of thumb. By our efforts to 'get outside ourselves' in all of these cases we are tapping into a collective perspective which transcends our own limited experience to bring to bear an outlook which establishes practical objectivity through its transcendent judgment and grounded sharedness with others. Adams's divine command theory, suitably transformed, begins to find a place here. If our considerations fall on broadly accepted and roughly firm social principles, whether negative or positive, then we will have followed something closer to explicit commands from the community of which we are a part.

The moral treatment on offer corresponds with both Brewer's commitment to a reverse-Hegelian history of philosophical progress and criticism of opposing views as expressive of cultural calamity. By rejection of the utter separability of individual and community, I hope to

extend the monistic view of the good which Brewer offers by way of recognition that the selves which are the other half of the self/other collapse in goodness are an essential aspect of thought as conceptually important distinctions in practical reason. Indeed, this just is recognition that Brewer's views of "actualizing the self", unselfing in loving desires, rejection of dualistic good, and primacy of the practical perspective are ill at ease together, because considerations of self/other are essential to the practical perspective.

Everyone checks their selfishness by consideration of others in their moral reasoning and if the conceptual distinction is efficacious then its reality is unquestionable by Brewer's own position. So, when there is a rejection of personal/impersonal divide in goodness, it cannot be a total rejection of the conceptual efficacy of the divide because it is an important aspect of practical reason. On the one hand, as much as monism is essential to autonomy, reasoning from the self and other as distinct is also obviously necessary. Actualization of one's good is not just a mere byproduct of the first-personal perspective. It is one's only perspective on the monistic good and, as such, recognition of the self/other distinction in goods is as essential to the sort of unique and good human life which displays autonomy as monistic reasoning. On the other, reasoning from the good as monistic does not arise spontaneously, but requires shaping by the evaluative concepts of altruism and selfishness.

To suggest that all persons strive for an ethical ideal which produces evaluative compossibility is to suggest a bland and stilted ethical ideal which is ill-suited to the practical perspective and the uniqueness of persons' lives. My assertion is that by placing this conception of morality and evaluative coherence arising out of character friendships in the broader habitat of a transcendentally excellent community, the substantive shortcomings of Brewer's position are alleviated and without damage or distortion to *Retrieval's* ethical theory as it stands. Indexing

atomistic character friendships to the molecules of subcommunities that make up the composite community gives character friendships a constitutive ideal which limits the faults to which they are prone. If an evaluative outlook cannot be affirmed from the community perspective when that community meets the threshold of its ideal, then that character is deficient regardless of its coherence. Further, the relationship which produced it does not meet the communal-affirmability condition, hence is not a true character friendship.

The individual's evaluative outlook must meet both the condition of "self-affirmability that is intersubjective, unreserved, and unconditional"⁹³ and the condition of communal-affirmability which I have created. How, though, will the individual have access to such an abstract condition of affirmation? The individual must take part in the larger endeavor of sorting thick evaluative concepts by taking part either directly or indirectly in subsidiary character friendships so that her primary "perfect character friendship" can approximate its ideal of universal self-affirmability. By so taking part, the character friends' evaluative outlooks will secure their objectivity by prevention of the unmooring which plagues the pre-synthetic formulation. In this way my supplemented character friendship theory establishes the compossibility condition among members by limitation of their core outlook to one which is necessarily compossible. Thus morality finds its place in the narrow phenomenological perspective illustrated above and in the broader perspective of individuals' taking their part through character friendships in the highest dialectic of sculpting a community which is transcendently valuable.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p245

VI. Conclusion

The synthesis of *Retrieval* and *Finite* is complete in the emendation of each by essential theories of each. *Retrieval*'s theory dialectical activities fit nearly perfectly with the needs of *Finite*. Alternately, reading Adams's transcendent Good into the role of Brewer's transcendental good was more of a squeeze. The transcendent Good was first transformed into a transcendent community constituted by the dynamic interplay of subcommunities which unify the community in a network of character friendships. The evaluative outlook of this community both connects with the practical perspective and is expressed in its thick evaluative concepts as they are socially sorted for better and worse ethical guidance. A further connection was then made of the subjective place of the right in practical deliberation and the role the transcendent community might play in backing up morality.

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