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**The Good: An Investigation into the Relationships  
Among the Concepts of the *Good*, the *Highest Good*,  
*Goodness*, *Final Goodness* and *Non-instrumental Goodness***

**Abstract**

*This paper is about The Good and its relation to various kinds of goodness. I will investigate what it means to say that something is a highest good, a final all-inclusive, complete, or greatest good, and I will consider some definitions of 'instrumental' and 'non-instrumental' goodness. I will prove several interesting theorems about The Good and explore some of the essential relationships between various kinds of goodness.*

**Keywords**

the highest good, *Summum Bonum*, goodness, final goodness, non-instrumental goodness, the Good

**1. Introduction**

The topic of The Good is one of the oldest in philosophy. In ancient times, the concept is first and foremost associated with Plato (*Republic*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*; Lodge, 1927, 1927b), Aristotle (*The Nicomachean Ethics*; Aufderheide and Bader, 2015), and various (neo-) Platonists: Plotinus (*The Enneads*; see, especially the ninth tractate), Proclus (*The Elements of Theology*), etc. During the Middle Ages, many philosophers and theologians such as Boethius, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and William Ockham discussed the notions of *goodness* and *the highest good*, or *Summum Bonum* (MacDonald, 1991), concepts that continued to be important for various Enlightenment thinkers. The notion of the highest good, for example, plays an important part in Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy (Kant, 1788, Chapter II; Silber, 1959, 1963; Engstrom, 1992; Aufderheide and Bader, 2015; Höwing, 2016). In this day and age, it is not so common that philosophers speak about The Good, but 'goodness' is, of course, one of the most investigated concepts within the field of philosophy.

This paper is about The Good and its relation to various kinds of goodness. It is not a historical essay. I am not necessarily using various fundamental expressions such as 'The Good' and 'goodness' in the same sense as a Platonist, a scholastic thinker or some other historical figure. The theory of The Good that I will present is to a large extent new, even though it is inspired by what earlier thinkers have said about the notion. I think we can meaningfully speak about The Good and prove things about it in a rigorous way. We do not have to treat The Good as some utterly mysterious object that can only be grasped, if at all, through some kind of mystical experience. In this paper, I am mainly interested in the logic of the expression 'The Good'. What follows from the proposition that 'The Good' is true or that The Good is realised? How is The Good related

to various kinds of goodness, final goodness, non-instrumental goodness, and to the concept of The Highest Good? I am also interested in the metaphysical question about what The Good is. Is The Good an ordinary object, a (monadic) property, a relation or a process, or does The Good belong to some other category? In the concluding chapter, I will suggest that we can think of The Good as a state of affairs or as a set of possible worlds that satisfies certain conditions. Hence, this paper is a logical and metaphysical investigation into the concept of The Good and its relation to various kinds of goodness.

According to Aristotle, “the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim” (the first famous sentence in *The Nicomachean Ethics*). This proposition seems to imply a teleological world-view. However, the results in this paper do not presuppose that everything (even non-living things) aim at The Good. In this sense, the concept of The Good, which I am using in the present paper, is a moral or ethical concept rather than a metaphysical concept. The Good is the aim of rational individuals and the goal of morality. It is not an entity that we introduce to explain various empirical observations. The Good *ought to be* realised, but it is not (logically) necessary that it *is* (or will be) realised; there are (logically) possible worlds in which The Good does not obtain.<sup>1</sup>

According to Kant:

“The concept of the *highest* [in the concept of the highest good] (...) contains an ambiguity that, if not attended to, can occasion needless disputes. The highest can mean either the supreme (*supremum*) or the complete (*consummatum*). The first is that condition which is itself unconditioned, that is, not subordinate to any other (*originarium*); the second is that whole which is not part of a still greater whole of the same kind (*perfectissimum*).” (Kant, 1788, 5:110)

Our concept of The Good in this paper is similar to Kant’s second interpretation of the highest good (*consummatum, perfectissimum*). In Section 5, I will show that The Good is a complete (final, all-inclusive, or greatest) good, that is, I will show that The Good is good and that everything good is a (necessary) means to The Good. There are other similarities between Kant’s ideas about the highest good and the theory of The Good discussed in this paper. For example, according to Kant, we ought to realise the highest good; the highest good is the end of morality; and according to our theory, The Good ought to be realised (see above).

In Chapter VI in *Principia Ethica*, G. E. Moore talks about The Ideal. He thinks there are three meanings of ‘ideal’:

“When we call a state of things ‘ideal’ we may mean three distinct things (...). The first of these meanings of ‘ideal’ is (1) that to which the phrase ‘The Ideal’ is most properly confined. By this is meant the *best* state of things *conceivable*, the Summum Bonum or Absolute Good. It is in this sense that a right conception of Heaven would be a right conception of the Ideal: we mean by the Ideal a state of things which would be absolutely perfect. But this conception may be quite clearly distinguished from a second, namely, (2) that of the best *possible* state of things in this world. This second conception may be identified with that which has frequently figured in philosophy as the ‘Human Good,’ or the *ultimate* end towards which our action should be directed. It is in this sense that Utopias are said to be Ideals. The constructor of an Utopia may suppose many things to be possible, which are in fact impossible; but he always assumes that some things, at least, are rendered impossible by natural laws, and hence his construction differs essentially from one which may disregard *all* natural laws, however certainly established. At all events the question ‘What is the best state of things which we could *possibly* bring about?’ is quite distinct from the question ‘What would be the best state of things conceivable?’ But, thirdly, we may mean by calling a state of things ‘ideal’ merely (3) that it is good in itself in a high degree.” (Moore, 1988, Section 110)

When I speak about ‘The Good’ in this paper, it basically means the same thing as ‘The Ideal’ in Moore’s second sense.

Nowadays, philosophers usually make distinctions between various kinds of goodness. It is widespread to distinguish between instrumental and intrinsic goodness. It is often said that something is intrinsically good if it is good in itself or good in virtue of its intrinsic, non-relational properties, and instrumentally good if it is good as a means to something that is (intrinsically) good. G. E. Moore, for example, speaks about things that are good in themselves and things that are good as means (Moore, 1988, especially sections 15–17). D. Ross (1930, chapters III and IV) distinguishes between instrumental, intrinsic, and ultimate goodness. G. H. von Wright introduces several varieties of goodness: instrumental goodness, technical goodness, medical goodness, utilitarian goodness, the hedonic good, the good of man and moral goodness (von Wright, 1967). C. Korsgaard thinks that two distinctions in goodness are often conflated: the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goodness, and the distinction between final or instrumental goods (Korsgaard, 1983, reprinted in Korsgaard, 1996, Chapter 9). Additionally, there are many other distinctions between various kinds of goodness in the literature. In this paper, I will investigate what it means to say that something (a state of affairs) is *good* (all-things-considered), *a highest good*, *a final*, *all-inclusive*, *complete*, or *greatest good*, and I will consider some definitions of ‘instrumental’ and ‘non-instrumental’ goodness. I will also explore some of the essential relationships between these concepts.<sup>2</sup>

We shall say that something is a highest good iff there is nothing better than it (Definition 3, *D3*). Something is a complete (final, all-inclusive, or greatest) good iff it is good and everything good is a (necessary) means to it (Definition 5, *D5*). *X* is instrumentally good iff *X* is good and there is a distinct good *Y* such that *X* is a (necessary) means to *Y* (Definition 7, *D7*). *X* is non-instrumentally good iff *X* is good, and there is no distinct good *Y* such that *X* is a (necessary) means to *Y* (Definition 8, *D8*).

I will furthermore prove several interesting theorems about The Good. According to the concept of The Good developed in this paper, The Good is good, and it is good that The Good is good. We will see that The Good is not only good, but also a highest good, a final, complete good, and a non-instrumental good. Everything good is either instrumentally or non-instrumentally good; everything that is good is either a final, complete, or a non-final, non-complete good. I will show that everything good is necessarily implied by The Good and that goodness itself can be defined in terms of The Good.

Even though many proofs in this paper are technical, the results in this essay should be not only interesting to (deontic) logicians, but also to moral philosophers, metaethicists and metaphysicians that explore the concept of or the ontological status of The Good.

1

We can, in fact, prove that The Good ought to be realised if we add an ought-operator to the informal semantics that is described in this paper and make some standard assumptions about this operator. However, I will not labor the details in the present paper. For more on ought-operators, see any standard introduction to deontic logic, for example, Gabbay *et al.*, eds. 2013, or Åqvist, 2002.

2

For more on similar distinctions and notions, see, for example, Oldfield, 1977; Conee, 1982; Tolhurst, 1983; O’Neill, 1992; Lemos, 1994; Thomson, 1997; Bernstein, 2001; Bradley, 2002, 2006; Zimmerman, 2001; Rønnow-Rasmussen and Zimmerman, eds. 2005; Wedgwood, 2009; Wiggins, 2009.

## 2. ‘The Good’ and ‘Goodness’

‘Good’ is a word that is used in many different senses and many different types of linguistic constructions. Consider the following examples:

‘ $X$  is good’, ‘It is good to be  $X$ ’, ‘To be  $X$  is good’, ‘It is good to have  $X$ ’, ‘It is good that  $X$ ’, ‘It would be good if  $X$ ’, ‘ $X$  is good for  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  does good to  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  does  $Y$  good’, ‘ $X$  is doing good to  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  will do good to  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  will do  $Y$  good’, ‘ $X$  would do good to  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  would do  $Y$  good’, ‘ $X$  is a good  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X Y$ ’s good’, ‘ $X$  has a good  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  is having a good  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  is, as  $Y$ , good’, ‘ $X$  is good at  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  is good as a  $Y$ ’, ‘ $X$  is the good of  $Y$ ’, ‘The Good is  $X$ ’.

I will focus on three types of expressions in this essay: ‘ $X$  is good’, ‘It is good that  $X$ ’ and ‘The Good is  $X$ ’. I do not mean that the way I use the terms in this paper is the only possible one or the only interesting one. Having said that, I do think the suggested analysis is one of the most interesting.

There is some debate about what kind or kinds of entities are the bearers of goodness or value. Is it concrete objects like things and persons (Rabinowics and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 1999), properties (Butchvarov, 1989, p. 16), concrete states of individual objects (Zimmerman, 2001, Chapter 3), facts (Ross, 1930, p. 113), states of affairs (Feldman, 2000), propositional objects like propositions, states of affairs, “Objective”, “Sachverhalte” (Chisholm, 1982, pp. 81–82), the obtaining and non-obtaining of states of affairs, the exemplification and the non-exemplification of a given universal by a given particular (Lemos, 1991), events or concrete processes (Tännsjö, 2005), many different things such as persons, things, acts, functions, reactions, the basic moral tenor, deeds, success, intentions, feeling-states, terms of relations, forms of relations, relations, collectives, tools, symbols (Scheler, 1973, pp. 100–104), and/or something else? In this paper, ‘It is good that’ is treated as a sentential operator, it takes sentences as arguments and gives sentences as values. If ‘ $A$ ’ is a sentence, then ‘It is good that  $A$ ’ or ‘ $A$  is good’ is a sentence. Hence, goodness can be treated as a property of states of affairs. The Good, however, is not a property in this sense. Syntactically, the linguistic expression ‘The Good’ is treated as a propositional constant. Thus, we can think of The Good (the ‘thing’ that ‘The Good’ ‘refers to’ or ‘designates’) as a kind of object, although a very special kind, namely a state of affairs (in Section 7, I will say more about this).<sup>3</sup>

I will not introduce any formal, symbolic languages and systems in this paper, even though we could in principle do so. My main aim is to prepare the grounds for the development of such systems and to discuss some philosophical questions about The Good and the relationship between The Good and various kinds of goodness. What kind of entity is The Good and what follows if The Good is realised? I will nevertheless give an informal explanation of the semantics that I implicitly use in this paper since we need this background to understand the proofs of the theorems in later sections. It is relatively easy to develop these ideas into a formal semantics and proof-theory.<sup>4</sup>

The truth-conditions for sentences will be defined with respect to possible worlds in models. Every model consists of a set of possible worlds and a dyadic *alethic accessibility* relation between possible worlds in the model. I will take for granted that this relation is an equivalence relation that partitions the class of all possible worlds into a set of equivalence classes. Every model also includes a dyadic *axiological accessibility* relation between possible worlds. This accessibility relation is serial, transitive, and Euclidean (i.e., if  $w'$  is axio-

logically accessible from  $w$  and  $w''$  is axiologically accessible from  $w$ , then  $w''$  is axiologically accessible from  $w'$ ), and it is included in the alethic accessibility relation. So, if a world  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from a world  $w$ , then  $w'$  is alethically accessible from  $w$ . Intuitively, if  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from  $w$ , then  $w'$  is one of the best possible worlds that is alethically accessible from  $w$ . I also assume that if  $w'$  is alethically accessible from  $w$  and  $w''$  is axiologically accessible from  $w'$ , then  $w''$  is axiologically accessible from  $w$ . In addition, every model includes an *optimality function*. This function takes us from possible worlds to non-empty sets of possible worlds in the model. If  $w$  is a possible world in the model, then the optimality function takes us from  $w$  to the set of all worlds that are optimal in  $w$ . I will suppose that in every world in an equivalence class of possible worlds the set of optimal worlds is the same. In every possible world,  $w$ , the set of optimal worlds in  $w$  is a subset of the set of all possible worlds that are alethically accessible from  $w$ . Every model also includes a transitive, complete binary *betterness* relation between possible worlds. I will assume that in every possible world, there is at least one alethically accessible world such that there is no other alethically accessible world that is better than it. Given these assumptions, we can establish the following relationships:

World  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from world  $w$  if and only if (iff)  $w'$  is optimal in world  $w$ , and  $w'$  is optimal in  $w$  iff  $w'$  is alethically accessible from  $w$ , and there is no other possible world  $w''$  that is alethically accessible from  $w$  that is better than  $w'$ .

Every sentence is either true or false (and not both) at a possible world in a model. The truth-conditions for various sentences can now be defined in the usual way. We have, for example:

‘It is (historically) necessary that  $A$ ’ is true in a possible world  $w$  iff ‘ $A$ ’ is true in every possible world that is alethically accessible from  $w$ .<sup>5</sup>  $A$  necessarily implies  $B$  iff it is necessary that  $A$  materially implies  $B$ .  $A$  is necessarily equivalent with  $B$  ( $A$  and  $B$  are necessarily equivalent) iff it is necessary that  $A$  is materially equivalent with  $B$  ( $A$  and  $B$  are necessarily materially equivalent).

The truth-conditions for ‘It is good that  $A$ ’ (or ‘ $A$  is good’) can be defined in three equivalent ways:

- (i) ‘It is good that  $A$ ’ is true in a possible world  $w$  iff ‘ $A$ ’ is true in every possible world that is axiologically accessible from  $w$ .
- (ii) ‘It is good that  $A$ ’ is true in a possible world  $w$  iff ‘ $A$ ’ is true in every possible world that is optimal in  $w$ .
- (iii) ‘It is good that  $A$ ’ is true in a possible world  $w$  iff ‘ $A$ ’ is true in every possible world  $w'$  that is alethically accessible from  $w$  and that is such that there is no other possible world that is alethically accessible from  $w$  that is better than  $w'$ .

3

Note that ‘The Good’ is similar to a definite description, such as ‘the tallest man in the world’. ‘The Good’ can ‘refer’ to different things in different possible world, just as ‘the tallest man in the world’ can refer to different individuals in different possible worlds.

4

The underlying logic is a kind of bimodal logic. For more on systems that include two kinds of modalities, see Rönndal, 2012.

5

Henceforth, when I say that something is necessary, I will mean that it is historically necessary, if not otherwise stated. Furthermore, ‘necessary’ usually means ‘historically necessary’ and ‘necessarily’ usually means ‘historically necessarily’.

When I speak of goodness in this sense, I mean *all-things-considered* goodness. To say that it is good that *A* does not necessarily mean that *A* in itself is good or that *A* is *intrinsically* good (whatever that means). Nonetheless, goodness in this sense is not the same thing as instrumental goodness (in the sense we will define later; see Section 6).

According to our definitions, the goodness of possible worlds is primary. The goodness of a state of affairs is determined by the goodness of possible worlds. This is in principle compatible with the idea that the value of a possible world depends on the values of particular state of affairs in this possible world (see, e.g., Feldman, 2000, for a view of this kind). However, an interesting alternative to this approach is the idea that the only things that have ‘intrinsic value’ or ‘value in itself’ are possible worlds. According to G. E. Moore (1903, Section 112), in order to obtain a correct answer to the question ‘What is good in itself?’ we must consider what value things would have if they existed absolutely by themselves. Yet, it does not seem to make sense to talk about particular states of affairs as existing or obtaining by themselves. The state of affairs that consists in someone feeling pleasure at a certain time, for example, cannot obtain without countless other states of affairs obtaining. The only things that can obtain absolutely by themselves seem to be possible worlds. This would make possible worlds the (primary and perhaps only) bearers of intrinsic value. For our purposes, we do not have to decide exactly how the value of a possible world is determined.<sup>6</sup>

As I have already mentioned, the linguistic expression ‘The Good’ is treated as a propositional constant in this paper. Hence, it is a sentence; it may be true in some possible worlds and false in some. If it is true in a possible world, we shall say that The Good is true in this possible world, and if it is false in a possible world, we shall say that The Good is false in this possible world. We shall also say that The Good is realised in a possible world iff it is true in this possible world. We can now define the truth-conditions for this propositional constant in the following way:

(iv) The Good is true (i.e., ‘The Good’ is true) in a possible world iff this possible world is axiologically accessible from itself, iff this possible world is optimal in this world, iff there is no other alethically accessible world that is better than it.

‘The Good’ and ‘It is good that’ are treated as primitive, undefined concepts in this paper. Nevertheless, we will later see that ‘goodness’ is in principle definable in terms of ‘The Good’ (Section 3, T8) and that ‘The Good’ is in principle definable in terms of ‘goodness’ (Section 3, T11). We can, in other words, find a logically true equivalence of the following kind: ‘The Good is true iff ...’, where ‘...’ includes ‘good’ (‘goodness’, ‘it is good that’) but does not include ‘The Good’; and a logically true equivalence of the following kind: ‘Something is good iff ...’, where ‘...’ includes ‘The Good’ but not ‘good’ (‘goodness’, ‘it is good that’). (From now on, I will usually omit quotation marks around words and sentences, even when I use those expressions to refer to themselves. This way we avoid unnecessary clutter.)

The semantics above can be relativised to moments in time. The meaning of ‘The Good’ would still always be the same, but what constitutes The Good (the thing that ‘The Good’ ‘refers to’) could then shift from one moment in time to another. Nonetheless, for our purposes in this paper, we do not need to consider any temporal dimension.

A potential problem with a possible world semantics of this kind is that there are perhaps no best possible worlds. If there are infinitely many possible worlds, and among them an unending series of better and better worlds, is the semantics above not unreasonable? Suppose that it would always be better if a world contained one extra happy life. Then for every possible world there would always be another that contained one more happy life that would be better. However, we are not interested in such purely *logically* possible worlds in this paper; in every possible world, we concentrate on the worlds that are *alethically accessible* from this world. It is reasonable to think that there is no such infinite series of better and better worlds in this set. So, we do not have to worry about this problem in the present paper.

### 3. The Good and Goodness

In this section, I will prove some fundamental theorems about The Good and goodness and about the relationships between these concepts. All of the theorems follow with necessity from our assumptions. Accordingly, we must accept the conclusions if we accept the suppositions. Conversely, it is only reasonable to reject some theorem if we reject at least one assumption. These theses, therefore, illustrate that we can prove things about The Good.

*T1.* The Good is good. (It is all-things-considered good that ‘The Good’ is true.)<sup>7</sup>

*Proof.* Suppose that it is not the case that The Good is good in some possible world  $w$ . Then there is a possible world  $w'$  that is axiologically accessible from  $w$  in which The Good is not true. If The Good is not true, then  $w'$  is not axiologically accessible from itself. Yet, since the axiological accessibility relation is Euclidean and  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from  $w$ ,  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from itself. Contradiction. It follows that The Good is good. ■

As an immediate corollary, we can prove the following theorem:

*T2.* It is necessary that The Good is good.<sup>8</sup>

*Proof.* Since we have proved that it is logically true that The Good is good, it immediately follows that it is necessary that The Good is good. For if something is logically true, it is necessarily true. ■

*T3.* The Good is possible. (It is historically possible that ‘The Good’ is true.)

*Proof.* This theorem follows more or less immediately from our assumptions. Suppose that it is not possible that The Good is true in some possible world  $w$ . Then it is not the case that there is some possible world  $w'$  that is alethically

6

As far as I can see, it is possible that there are things that are *all-things-considered* good even if nothing is *intrinsically* good. If this is correct, the theory in this paper is consistent with the claim that nothing has the latter property. But perhaps some things are intrinsically good and perhaps all-things considered goodness in some sense depends on such goodness. Be that as it may, this paper is not about the relationship between these different properties.

7

The proposition that The Good is good and other theorems in this paper follow logically

from our definitions and standard (modal) logical principles. Still, they are not true by definition alone and in some cases the proofs are far from obvious.

8

Note that ‘necessary’ in T2 (and in all other theorems) means ‘historically necessary’. If it is logically necessary that  $A$ , then it is historically necessary that  $A$ , but that it is historically necessary that  $A$  does not entail that it is absolutely or logically necessary that  $A$ .

accessible from  $w$  in which The Good is true. Nevertheless, we have supposed that it is true for every possible world  $w$  that there is a possible world  $w'$  that is alethically accessible from  $w$  and optimal in  $w$ , and in such a world The Good is true. Hence, the theorem cannot be false. It follows that The Good is possible. ■

T4. It is good that The Good is good.

*Proof.* We have proved that The Good is good. Accordingly, it is true that The Good is good in every possible world. Consider some possible world  $w$ . In  $w$ , it is true that The Good is good in every possible world that is axiologically accessible from  $w$ . Hence, it is true that it is good that The Good is good in  $w$ . Since  $w$  was an arbitrary possible world, the same holds for every possible world. It follows that it is logically true that it is good that The Good is good. Note that this kind of argument can be repeated in infinity. Hence, it also follows that it is good that it is good that The Good is good, etc. ■

T5. If something is good, it is necessary that it is good. (If a state of affairs is all-things-considered good, then it is historically necessary that it is all-things-considered good.)

*Proof.* Suppose that this theorem is not true in some possible world  $w$ . Then it is not the case that if it is good that  $X$ , then it is necessary that it is good that  $X$  in  $w$ . Hence,  $X$  is good is true while it is necessary that  $X$  is good is false in  $w$ . Accordingly, there is a possible world  $w'$  that is alethically accessible from  $w$  in which it is false that  $X$  is good. Therefore, there is a possible world  $w''$  that is axiologically accessible from  $w'$  in which  $X$  is false. By assumption,  $w''$  is axiologically accessible from  $w$ . Hence,  $X$  is true in  $w''$ . However, this is absurd. In conclusion, the theorem must be true. ■

T5 does not entail that if something is good, then it is *logically* true that is good. The theorem is a consequence of the fact that we have assumed that the set of optimal worlds does not shift from one world to another in one and the same equivalence class.

T6. Everything that is good is necessarily implied by The Good. (If a state of affairs  $X$  is all-things-considered good, then it is historically necessary that if 'The Good' is true then  $X$  obtains.)

*Proof.* Assume that this is not the case in some possible world  $w$ . Then it is not the case that if it is good that  $X$ , then The Good necessarily implies  $X$  in  $w$ . Hence, it is true that it is good that  $X$  and it is false that it is necessary that The Good implies  $X$  in  $w$ . Accordingly, there is a possible world  $w'$  that is alethically accessible from  $w$  in which The Good does not materially imply  $X$ . In  $w'$ , it is true that The Good is true and that  $X$  is false. Since it is true that  $X$  is good in  $w$ , it follows that it is true that it is necessary that  $X$  is good in  $w$  (by T5). Hence,  $X$  is good in  $w'$ . For  $w'$  is alethically accessible from  $w$ . Since The Good is true in  $w'$ ,  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from itself. Accordingly,  $X$  is true in  $w'$ . For  $X$  is good in  $w'$  and  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from  $w'$ . Contradiction. ■

T7. Everything that is necessarily implied by The Good is good.

*Proof.* Suppose that this theorem is not true in some possible world  $w$ . Then it is not the case that if The Good necessarily implies  $X$ , then it is good that  $X$  in  $w$ . Hence, it is true in  $w$  that it is necessary that The Good implies  $X$ , and it is false in  $w$  that it is good that  $X$ . Therefore, there is a possible world  $w'$  that is axiologically accessible from  $w$  in which  $X$  is false. Since the axiological accessibility relation is included in the alethic accessibility relation,  $w'$  is



alethically accessible from  $w$ . Accordingly, The Good materially implies  $X$  in  $w'$ . Hence, it is either the case that The Good is false in  $w'$  or that  $X$  is true in  $w'$ . However, the latter cannot be the case. So, The Good must be false in  $w'$ . It follows that  $w'$  is not axiologically accessible from  $w'$ . Nevertheless,  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from  $w$  and the axiological accessibility relation is Euclidean. Hence,  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from itself, and this is absurd. Hence, the theorem must be true. ■

*T8.* Something is good iff it is necessarily implied by The Good.

*Proof.* T8 follows immediately from T6 and T7. ■

T8 shows that goodness is, in principle, definable in terms of The Good. Every sentence that includes ‘is good’ (in the relevant sense) is equivalent with a sentence without this expression. What then does it mean to say that something is good? It means that it is necessarily implied by The Good. This can be expressed in many other ways too. It is necessary that  $A$  implies  $B$  iff  $B$  is a necessary means to  $A$ . Hence, everything that is good is a necessary means to The Good, and everything that is a necessary means to The Good is good. In other words, something is good iff it is a (necessary) means to The Good.  $X$  is good just in case The Good can be realised only if  $X$  is true.

*T9.* If The Good is true, then everything that is good is true. (If ‘The Good’ is true, then every state of affairs that is all-things considered good obtains.)<sup>9</sup>

*Proof.* Suppose that this theorem is not true in some possible world  $w$ . Then The Good is true in  $w$  while the proposition that everything that is good is true is false in  $w$ . Hence, it is not the case that if it is good that  $X$ , then  $X$  is true in  $w$ . Consequently, it is true that  $X$  is good and false that  $X$  is true in  $w$ . Since The Good is true in  $w$ ,  $w$  is axiologically accessible from itself. It follows that  $X$  is true in  $w$ , which is a contradiction. Hence, the theorem must hold. ■

*T10.* If everything that is good is true, then The Good is true.<sup>10</sup>

*Proof.* Assume that this theorem is false in some possible world  $w$ . Then it is true in  $w$  that everything that is good is true and it is false in  $w$  that The Good is true. Since everything that is good is true in  $w$ , it follows that if The Good is good then The Good is true in  $w$ . Yet, The Good is good (by T1). Hence, The Good is true in  $w$ . Contradiction. In conclusion, it must be the case that if everything that is good is true, then The Good is true. ■

*T11.* The Good is true iff everything that is good is true.

*Proof.* T11 follows immediately from T9 and T10.

T11 shows that The Good, in principle, can be defined in terms of goodness. Every sentence that includes ‘The Good’ (in the relevant sense) is equivalent with a sentence without this expression. What then does it mean for The Good to be true in a possible world? It means that everything that is (all-things-considered) good is true in this possible world. The Good is the sum total of everything that is good; it is the totality of all good things. ■

*T12.* The Good is true iff everything that is a necessary means to The Good is true.

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The expression ‘everything’ in this and similar theorems in this paper should be interpreted as a kind of propositional quantifier; it does not vary over individuals. For more on propositional quantifiers, see Rönnedal, 2019.

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Recall that ‘The Good is true’ strictly means ‘The Good’ is true’ or ‘The Good is realised’.

*Proof.* The Good is true iff everything that is good is true (by T11). Something is good iff it is necessarily implied by The Good (T8). Furthermore, something is necessarily implied by The Good iff it is a necessary means to The Good. From this it immediately follows that The Good is true iff everything that is a necessary means to The Good is true. ■

Theorem 12 can equivalently be stated in the following way: The Good is true iff everything is such that if it is necessarily implied by The Good, then it is true. This concludes our discussion of some basic properties of The Good and goodness and their relationships. I will now turn to the question of how The Good is related to some different kinds of goodness.

#### 4. Highest Goodness and The Good

The concept of a *highest good* can be interpreted in many different ways. ‘A highest good’ can mean the same as ‘a supreme, unconditional good’ and it can mean the same as ‘a complete good’ (see Section 5). In this section, however, I will treat this notion as a notion that is defined in terms of some comparative value relation. There are at least three definitions of ‘a highest good’ in this sense:

D1. Something is a highest good iff it is better than everything else.

D2. Something is a highest good iff it is at least as good as everything else.

D3. Something is a highest good iff there is nothing that is better than it.

D2 and D3 are equivalent if it is true that it is not the case that  $Y$  is better than  $X$  iff  $X$  is at least as good as  $Y$ . In many (perhaps all) contexts, it is plausible to assume this equivalence. If we reject the idea that states of affairs are always comparable, D2 and D3 are not necessarily equivalent. D1 assumes that there is just *one* highest good; D2 and D3 allow that there might be several (non-equivalent) highest goods. If  $X$  and  $Y$  are non-equivalent and  $X$  is at least as good as everything else, and there is nothing that is better than  $X$ , and similarly for  $Y$ , then  $X$  is a highest good according to definition 2 and 3 but not according to definition 1, and similarly for  $Y$ . If nothing is better than  $X$  and nothing is better than  $Y$ , but it is not the case that  $X$  is at least as good as  $Y$  and it is not the case that  $Y$  is at least as good as  $X$ , then  $X$ (and  $Y$ ) is a highest good according to definition 3 but not according to definition 2.

I will use definition 3 in this paper. Furthermore, I will define the truth-conditions for the *betterness* relation in the following way:

D4.  $A$  is better than  $B$  in the possible world  $w$  iff it is possible that  $A$  or  $B$  in  $w$  and in all the best possible worlds that are alethically accessible from  $w$  in which  $A$  or  $B$  is true,  $A$  is true and  $B$  false.<sup>11</sup>

This is not the only possible definition of the betterness relation, but I think it is one interesting explication of the notion. In any case, it is clearly worth exploring what consequences it has for our concept of a highest good. This does not mean that it might not be interesting to investigate other definitions too. Given definition D4, we can prove the following theorem:

T13. If something is good, then there is nothing that is better than it. (If a state of affairs is all-things-considered good, then there is no state of affairs that is all-things-considered better than this state of affairs.)

*Proof.* Suppose that this theorem is not true in some possible world  $w$ . Then  $X$  is good in  $w$  and  $Y$  is better than  $X$  in  $w$ . Therefore,  $X$  is true in one of the

optimal worlds, say  $w'$ , in  $w$  in which *Verum* (=  $A$  or not- $A$ ) is true. For *Verum* is true in every possible world and we have assumed that there is always one alethically optimal world accessible in every possible world. Hence,  $Y$  or  $X$  is true in  $w'$ . Accordingly,  $w'$  is also one of the optimal worlds in  $w$  in which  $Y$  or  $X$  is true. Since  $Y$  is better than  $X$  in  $w$ ,  $Y$  is true and  $X$  false in  $w'$ . However, this is absurd. Hence, the theorem must be true. ■

This theorem can now be used to prove that The Good is a highest good, but first we will establish another interesting proposition.

*T14.* There is nothing that is better than The Good. (There is no state of affairs that is all-things-considered better than the good state of affairs.)

*Proof.* If something is good then there is nothing that is better than it (T13). Hence, if The Good is good, there is nothing that is better than it. Still, The Good is good (T1). Consequently, there is nothing that is better than The Good. ■

*T15.* The Good is a highest good.

*Proof.* Something is a highest good iff there is nothing that is better than it (D3). Hence, The Good is a highest good iff there is nothing that is better than it. Yet, there is nothing that is better than The Good (T14). It follows that The Good is a highest good. ■

Our definition of a highest good does not exclude that there are several non-equivalent things that are a highest good. In fact, we can prove that if there is something contingent that is good, then there are at least two things that are good that are not necessarily equivalent. If something is good, there is nothing that is better than it, and hence it is also a highest good. So, if something contingent is good, there must be at least two non-equivalent highest goods (good things). In this sense, our concept of a highest good in this paper is different from the concept of a complete good (Section 5). Let us now turn to this kind of goodness.

## 5. Complete Goodness and The Good

In this section, I will define the concept of a *complete good*. I will also speak about a *final*, *all-inclusive good* or a *greatest good*; I use all of these phrases as synonyms. Sometimes the expression ‘a highest good’ seems to be employed in the same sense as ‘a greatest, final, all-inclusive, complete good’. In this paper, I do not treat these expressions as synonymous. Here is our official definition:

*D5.* Something is a complete (final, all-inclusive, or greatest) good iff it is good and everything that is good is a (necessary) means to it.

This definition can be equivalently stated in the following way: Something is a complete good iff it is good and everything that is good is necessarily

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When I say that  $A$  is better than  $B$ , I mean that  $A$  is *all-things-considered* better than  $B$ . The claim is not equivalent with the proposition that  $A$  is better than  $B$  *in every respect*, or that  $A$  *in itself* is better than  $B$  *in itself*, that is, that  $A$  is *intrinsically* better than  $B$ , or that we should choose  $A$  if we have to choose between

$A$  and  $B$ . For more on various value relations and preference relations, see, e.g., Chisholm and Sosa, 1966; Åqvist, 1968; Hansson, 2001, 2001b. Several deontic logicians have suggested equivalent or similar definitions of ‘better than’. See, for example, van Fraassen, 1972. See also, Rönnedal, 2009.

implied by it. Then it immediately follows that everything that is a final good is good. Let us express this as a theorem.

*T16.* Everything that is a complete good is good. (Every state of affairs that is a complete good is all-things-considered good.)

The proof is obvious. It should be noted that the converse does not hold. It is possible that not everything that is good is a final good, or—in other words—that there is something that is good that is not a final good.  $X$  is a non-final, non-complete good iff  $X$  is good but it is not the case that everything that is good is necessarily implied by  $X$ . Given this definition, we can prove that if something is good, it is a non-final good iff it is not the case that it is a final good, and that something is good iff it is a non-complete or a complete good.

*T17.* The Good is a complete (final, all-inclusive, greatest) good.

*Proof.* Suppose that this theorem is not true in some possible world  $w$ . Then it is not the case that The Good is good and that everything that is good is a necessary means to the good in  $w$ . Hence, it is either the case that The Good is not good in  $w$  or that it is not the case that everything that is good is a necessary means to The Good. Anyhow, The Good is good in  $w$  (by T1), and everything that is good is a necessary means to The Good in  $w$  (i.e., everything that is good is necessarily implied by The Good in  $w$ ) (by T6). This is clearly absurd. It follows that the theorem must hold. ■

So, The Good is not only good, it is also a highest good and a final, all-inclusive, greatest, complete good. In Section 6, I will prove that The Good is also a non-instrumental good. From theorem 17 our next theorem follows immediately.

*T18.* There is a complete (final, all-inclusive, greatest) good.

In Section 4, we observed that it is possible that there are several non-equivalent highest goods. Can there also be two (or more) non-equivalent final, greatest, complete goods (good things, states of affairs)? Our next theorem proves that this is not possible.

*T19.* There are no two non-equivalent things (states of affairs) that are complete goods. More precisely, it is not the case that there is an  $X$  and a  $Y$  such that it is not the case that  $X$  and  $Y$  are necessarily equivalent and both  $X$  and  $Y$  are complete goods.

*Proof.* Suppose that the theorem is false in some possible world  $w$ . Hence, it is not the case that  $Z$  and  $W$  are necessarily equivalent even though both  $Z$  and  $W$  are final goods in  $w$ . Accordingly,  $Z$  is good and everything that is good is necessarily implied by  $Z$ , and  $W$  is good and everything that is good is necessarily implied by  $W$  in  $w$ . Since everything that is good is necessarily implied by  $Z$  in  $w$ , it follows that if  $W$  is good then  $W$  is necessarily implied by  $Z$  in  $w$ . But  $W$  is good in  $w$ . Hence,  $Z$  necessarily implies  $W$  in  $w$ . Since everything that is good is necessarily implied by  $W$ , it follows that if  $Z$  is good then  $Z$  is necessarily implied by  $W$  in  $w$ . Yet,  $Z$  is good in  $w$ . Hence,  $W$  necessarily implies  $Z$  in  $w$ . Since  $Z$  necessarily implies  $W$  in  $w$ , and  $W$  necessarily implies  $Z$  in  $w$ , it follows that  $Z$  and  $W$  are necessarily equivalent in  $w$ . However, this is absurd. Hence, our theorem must be true. ■

Theorem 19 is equivalent with the following proposition: if  $X$  is a final good and  $Y$  is a final good, then  $X$  and  $Y$  are necessarily equivalent. We are now in a position to establish the following interesting theorem:

*T20.* Something is a complete (final, all-inclusive, greatest) good iff it is (necessarily equivalent with) The Good.

*Proof.* T20 follows more or less immediately from T17 and T19. Even so, let us consider an alternative proof. Suppose  $X$  is a final good. Then  $X$  is good (by T16). Hence, it is necessary that The Good implies  $X$  (by T6). This proves one direction. Suppose now that  $X$  is a final good but that it is not the case that  $X$  necessarily implies The Good. Since  $X$  is a final good,  $X$  is good and everything that is good is necessarily implied by  $X$ . Since everything that is good is necessarily implied by  $X$ , it follows that if The Good is good, then The Good is necessarily implied by  $X$ . Yet, the Good is good (by T1). Hence, it is necessary that  $X$  implies The Good. Contradiction. This proves the other direction. ■

Theorem 20 tells us something about the difference between goodness and complete goodness. Something is good iff it is necessarily *implied* by The Good, but something is a complete good iff it is necessarily *equivalent* with The Good. It is not necessarily the case that everything that is good implies The Good, and it is not necessary that everything that is good is a complete good. But every final good necessarily implies The Good; in fact, every final good is necessarily equivalent with The Good, as we have seen.

## 6. Non-instrumental Goodness and The Good

So far, we have considered two kinds of goodness: highest goodness and complete goodness. In this section, I will introduce the notion of a *non-instrumental (instrumental) goodness*. The concept of a *non-instrumental (instrumental) good* can be defined in various ways. Intuitively, to say that something is instrumentally good is to say that it is good as a means to something that is good. As a first attempt, then, we could try to define the expression ‘instrumentally good’ in the following way:

D6.  $X$  is instrumentally good iff there is a good  $Y$  such that  $X$  is a (necessary) means to  $Y$ .

Nevertheless, this definition is problematic since we can prove that something is instrumentally good iff it is good in our system given this definition; the distinction between instrumental goodness and goodness collapses. Therefore, we will instead use the following definitions:

D7.  $X$  is instrumentally good iff  $X$  is good and there is a distinct good  $Y$  such that  $X$  is a (necessary) means to  $Y$ .

D8.  $X$  is non-instrumentally good iff  $X$  is good and there is no distinct good  $Y$  such that  $X$  is a (necessary) means to  $Y$ .

Note that D7 is equivalent with the following definition:  $X$  is instrumentally good iff there is a distinct good  $Y$  such that  $X$  is a (necessary) means to  $Y$ . For if  $Y$  is good and  $X$  is a necessary means to  $Y$ , then  $X$  is good (this is easy to prove in our system). I have included the phrase ‘ $X$  is good’ in the right member of the equivalence since I want to emphasise that everything that is instrumentally good is (all-things-considered) good. With the help of these definitions we can now prove some interesting theorems.

T21. If something is good, then it is non-instrumentally good iff it is not instrumentally good.

T22. Something is good iff it is instrumentally or non-instrumentally good.

*Proof.* If  $X$  is instrumentally good, then  $X$  is good (by D7). If  $X$  is non-instrumentally good, then  $X$  is good (by D8). Hence, if  $X$  is instrumentally or non-instrumentally good, then  $X$  is good. This proves one direction. Suppose

that it is not the case that if  $X$  is good then  $X$  is instrumentally or non-instrumentally good in some possible world  $w$ . Then  $X$  is good in  $w$ , and it is not the case that  $X$  is instrumentally or non-instrumentally good in  $w$ . Hence,  $X$  is not instrumentally good in  $w$ , and  $X$  is not non-instrumentally good in  $w$ . Let us use ‘ $X$  is a means to something good’ as an abbreviation of ‘there is a distinct good  $Y$  such that  $X$  is a (necessary) means to  $Y$ ’. It follows that it is not the case that  $X$  is good and a means to something good and that it is not the case that  $X$  is good and not a means to something good in  $w$ . Since  $X$  is good in  $w$ , it follows that  $X$  both is and is not a means to something good in  $w$ . This is clearly absurd. Hence,  $X$  is good only if  $X$  is instrumentally or non-instrumentally good. This proves the other direction. ■

T23. If something is a final good, then it is non-instrumentally good.

*Proof.* Suppose that this theorem is not true in some possible world  $w$ . Then  $X$  is a final good but not a non-instrumental good in  $w$ . Hence,  $X$  is good and everything that is good is necessarily implied by  $X$  in  $w$ . Moreover, it is false in  $w$  that  $X$  is good and that it is not the case that there is something that is not necessarily equivalent with  $X$  that is good and necessarily implies  $X$ . Since  $X$  is good in  $w$ , it follows that there is something that is not necessarily equivalent with  $X$  that is good and necessarily implies  $X$  in  $w$ . Consequently, it is true in  $w$  that it is not the case that  $X$  is necessarily equivalent with  $W$ , that  $W$  is good, and that  $W$  necessarily implies  $X$ . Since everything that is good in  $w$  is necessarily implied by  $X$  in  $w$ , it follows that if  $W$  is good then  $X$  necessarily implies  $W$  in  $w$ . But  $W$  is good in  $w$ . Hence, it is necessary that  $X$  implies  $W$  in  $w$ . Accordingly,  $X$  is necessarily equivalent with  $W$  in  $w$ . For  $W$  necessarily implies  $X$  in  $w$ , and  $X$  necessarily implies  $W$  in  $w$ . Yet, this is absurd. Consequently, our theorem is established. ■

T24. The Good is non-instrumentally good.

*Proof.* T24 follows from T17 and T23. The Good is a final good (T17). If The Good is a final good, then The Good is non-instrumentally good (by T23). Hence, The Good is non-instrumentally good. Despite that, let us verify this result by a more direct proof. Suppose that The Good is not non-instrumentally good in some possible world  $w$ . Then it is not the case that The Good is good and that it is false that there is something that is not necessarily equivalent with The Good that is good and that necessarily implies The Good in  $w$ . Hence, it is either the case that The Good is not good or that there is something that is not necessarily equivalent with The Good that is good and that necessarily implies The Good in  $w$ . Still, The Good is good (by T1). Accordingly, there is something that is not necessarily equivalent with The Good that is good and that necessarily implies The Good in  $w$ . Therefore, it is true in  $w$  that it is not the case that  $W$  is necessarily equivalent with The Good, that  $W$  is good, and that  $W$  necessarily implies The Good. Since it is false that  $W$  is necessarily equivalent with The Good in  $w$ , there is a possible world  $w'$  that is alethically accessible from  $w$  in which  $W$  is not materially equivalent with The Good. Since  $W$  necessarily implies The Good in  $w$ ,  $W$  materially implies The Good in  $w'$ . It follows that The Good does not materially imply  $W$  in  $w'$ . Hence, The Good is true and  $W$  is false in  $w'$ . Since  $W$  is good in  $w$ , it is necessary that  $W$  is good in  $w$  (by T5). Therefore,  $W$  is good in  $w'$ . For  $w'$  is alethically accessible from  $w$ . Since The Good is true in  $w'$ , it follows that  $w'$  is axiologically accessible from itself. So,  $W$  is true in  $w'$ . But this is absurd. We conclude that the theorem must be true. ■

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated The Good and various kinds of goodness. I have proved that The Good is good, that something is good iff it is a necessary means to The Good, that The Good is a highest, complete and non-instrumental good, and many other interesting theorems. We do not have to call The Good ‘The Good’; we can give it other names: *The Ideal*, *The Summum Bonum*, *The Absolute Good*, *The Highest Good*, *Utopia*, *The Complete Good*, *The Greatest Good*, *The Kingdom of Ends*, *Heaven*. Let me close with another kind of question: What *is* The Good? To what *category* does it belong?

I suggest that we can conceive of The Good as a kind of object. We can have attitudes directed towards The Good. We can want The Good, accept The Good, desire The Good, long for The Good, love The Good. Nonetheless, it is not an ordinary object like a chair or a hammer or a stone; it is not a concrete thing. Syntactically, the linguistic expression ‘The Good’ is treated as a propositional constant, and a propositional constant is usually taken to refer to a proposition, where a proposition can be identified with the class of possible worlds in which it is true. Then The Good is a class of possible worlds. In every possible world, it is the class of optimal worlds in this world, the class of all the best possible worlds in this world, the class of ideal worlds in this world. Let us say that a state of affairs is a set of possible worlds and that a state of affairs obtains in a possible world iff this world is a member of this set. Then The Good is a state of affairs. In every possible world, The Good is the optimal state of affairs in this world, it is the best state of affairs that can be realised, it is the state of affairs that is ideal, the state of affairs in which everything that is good is true, i.e., in which every state of affairs that is all-things-considered good obtains. This state of affairs obtains in a possible world iff this world is a member of the set of all optimal or ideal or best possible worlds in this world. In other words, The Good is realised in a possible world just in case The Ideal and The Real, The Good and The Actual, Heaven and Earth coincide, or – with a less poetical language – just in case the world in question is as good as it possibly can be all-things-considered.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank three anonymous reviewers of *Synthesis Philosophica* for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. Thanks also to all other people who have commented on the text since the first version was finished.

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**Daniel Rönnedal**

**Dobro: istraživanje veze među pojmovima *Dobro*,  
najviše dobro, dobrotā, konačno dobro i neinstrumentno dobro**

**Sažetak**

*Rad se bavi Dobrim i njegovom vezom s različitim vrstama dobrote. Istražit ću što znači reći da je nešto najviše dobro, sveukupno, potpuno ili najveće dobro, te ću razmotriti neke definicije 'instrumentne' i 'neinstrumentne' dobrote. Dokazat ću nekoliko zanimljivih teorema o Dobru i istražiti neke bitne veze među različitim vrstama dobrote.*

**Ključne riječi**

najviše dobro, *Summum Bonum*, dobrotā, konačno dobro, neinstrumentna dobrotā, Dobro

**Daniel Rönnedal**

**Gut: Untersuchung des Zusammenhangs zwischen den Begriffen  
Gut, höchstes Gut, Güte, Endgut und nicht instrumentelles Gut**

**Zusammenfassung**

*Das Paper befasst sich mit dem Guten und dessen Verknüpfung mit verschiedenen Arten von Güte. Ich werde ergründen, was es bedeutet zu sagen, dass etwas höchstes Gut, Gesamtgut, vollständiges Gut oder größtes Gut ist, und hiermit einige Definitionen von „instrumenteller“ und „nicht instrumenteller“ Güte in Augenschein nehmen. Ich werde für einige interessante Theoreme über das Gute Beweis erbringen und darüber hinaus etliche wesentliche Zusammenhänge zwischen unterschiedlichen Arten von Güte untersuchen.*

**Schlüsselwörter**

höchstes Gut, *Summum Bonum*, Güte, Endgut, nicht instrumentelle Güte, Gut

**Daniel Rönnedal**

**Le Bien : la recherche d'un lien parmi les concepts du *Bien*,  
du plus grand bien, de la bonté, du bien final et du bien non instrumental**

**Résumé**

*Ce travail porte sur le Bien et sur le lien qu'il entretient avec les différentes formes bonté. Je rechercherai quelle est la signification selon laquelle quelque chose constitue le bien suprême, général, total ou le plus grand bien, et j'examinerai quelques définitions de la bonté « instrumentale » et « non instrumentale ». Je démontrerai un nombre de théorèmes intéressants sur le Bien et rechercherai certains liens essentiels parmi les différentes formes de bonté.*

**Mots-clés**

le plus grand bien, *Summum Bonum*, bonté, bien final, bonté non instrumentale, Bien