A Moral Realist Perspective on Yves R. Simon's *Interpretation of* Habitus

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Introduction

One of the most notable aspects of recent moral philosophy is a renewed interest in moral realism—the view that moral truths exist independently of ourselves. Prior to the 1980s many moral philosophers in the analytic tradition took as their primary task distinguishing ethical discourse from discourse about the world. Moral truth, it was argued, depends upon the use of language, not the nature of the world. Gradually, though, moral philosophers have begun to realize that this rather sterile conception of moral philosophy cannot do justice to the richness of the moral life. The consequence is a greater willingness to admit the objective existence of moral truth. At first blush this trend appears salutary since "contemporary moral realism" seems to promise an antidote to the moral anti-realism which has been the staple of moral philosophy for most of this century. Closer study, however, reveals that it fails to deliver on this promise. In this paper I will argue that Yves R. Simon's interpretation of the Thomistic concept of *habitus* yields a moral realism that is not only an effective antidote to moral anti-realism but also to the spiritual malaise spawned by misguided moral philosophies.

My discussion will begin with a critique of a version of contemporary moral realism I consider exceptional for its sophistication and originality, namely, that proffered by legal and moral theorist, Michael

Moore.[1] Next I will show how the concept of *habitus*, as interpreted by Simon, enables the moral theorist to resolve the difficulties encountered by contemporary moral realism. Then, I will examine the theory of goodness which, in my view, underwrites the effectiveness of Simon's Thomistic moral realism. I will conclude with some brief remarks on how a Thomistic moral realism might respond to the "present crisis in moral philosophy."

Critique of Contemporary Moral Realism

The crucial problem for the contemporary moral realist is explaining the metaphysical status of moral properties. This problem can be cast in the form of a dilemma. On the one hand, the moral realist can argue that moral properties are simple, non-natural properties which are grasped by a special faculty of moral intuition sometimes referred to as "moral sense."[2] But this horn of the dilemma requires that he adopt an ontology that contains entities "utterly different from anything else in the universe,"[3] as well as an epistemology that countenances mysterious faculties such as intuition. On the other hand, the moral realist can hold that moral properties can be explained naturalistically. This horn of the dilemma, however, proposes a reductionist analysis of moral properties, an alternative which is unacceptable because it identifies certain natural properties with moral properties, resulting in an impoverished understanding of the latter.[4] A viable moral realism, then, will cut through this dilemma, eschewing non-naturalism and naturalism alike. Michael Moore proposes such a moral realism.

Moore's moral realism draws its inspiration from the "realist" theory of meaning formulated by Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam, which

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[1] See Michael Moore, "Moral Reality," *Wisconsin Law Review*, No. 6 (1982), pp. 1061–1156; Moore, "A Natural Law Theory of Interpretation," *Southern California Law Review* 58 (1985), pp. 277–398 and Moore, "Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Legal Theory," *Southern California Law Review* 60 (1987), pp. 453–506. For a discussion of Moore's moral realism as it relates to legal theory, see Graham Walker, *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought: Current Problems, Augustinian Prospects* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 47–57.

[2] A classic defense of this view, which may be considered a form of intuitionism, is found in Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London, 1725).

[3] J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 38.

[4] Some moral realists, however, do defend versions of naturalism. See, for example, Richard Boyd, "How to be a Moral Realist" in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, ed., *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 181–228.

argues that the meanings of terms depend upon the nature of things.[5] Kripke and Putnam see their theory of meaning as an alternative to the traditional "conventionalist" view, which holds that meaning is a matter of linguistic practices. Conventionalist theories of meaning maintain a) that the meaning of a term is the set of descriptions typically associated with it, and b) that the extension of a term is determined by these descriptions. Thus, the meaning of the proper name 'Shakespeare' is the 'the man who wrote *Hamlet*'; 'the man who lived in Stratford-upon-Avon'; etc.[6] But surely it is possible that someone else satisfies these descriptions, perhaps Francis Bacon. Conceivably, the individual referred to by the proper name 'Shakespeare' was a stage-hand at the Globe Theater who allowed his name to be used by the author of the plays we now recognize as "Shakespearean." The point is that the descriptions associated with the proper name 'Shakespeare' may fail to designate the individual to whom it purportedly refers. Coventionalist theories of meaning, it is argued, cannot accommodate such failures of reference.

The realist theory of meaning, on the other hand, holds that the meaning of a term is its reference. In other words, for the realist, the meaning of a proper name, for instance, is determined, not by any set of descriptions or conventions, but by the individual the proper name designates. So, to employ Kripke's nomenclature, a proper name is a "rigid designator," since it necessarily refers to or rigidly designates the same individual regardless of whether the individual satisfies or fails to satisfy some set of descriptions.[7] Kripke and Putnam then extend their analysis to so-called "natural kind" terms, e.g., 'gold,' 'water,' arguing that a natural kind term necessarily refers to the same substance independently of whatever descriptions the substance may satisfy.[8] So, for example, although properties like yellowness,

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[5]See Saul Kripke, "Naming and Necessity" in Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman, eds., *Semantics of Natural Language* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972), pp. 253–355 and Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'" in Hilary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 215–271.

[6]John Searle's essay "Proper Names" is the classic source for this position. See John Searle, "Proper Names" in P. F. Strawson, ed., *Philosophical Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 89–96. See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, second edition, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), pp. 36–37 (#39).

[7]See Saul Kripke, "Naming and Necessity," p. 269.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 314–331. See also Putnam's "Is Semantics Possible?" in Hilary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 139–152.

friability, etc. are typically associated with gold, the meaning of 'gold' consists in having the atomic number 79, since the best available scientific theory informs us that gold uniquely possesses this quality. Or, as Moore puts it, "The realist theory asserts that the meaning of a word is to be found only by developing a theory about the kind of thing to which the word refers."[9] The upshot is that because science reveals the necessary qualities of natural kinds, statements about natural kinds are empirically established necessary truths, a position which contrasts with the traditional view that all necessary truths are *a priori*. From the perspective of the realist theory of meaning, then, linguistic conventions, formerly the key to meaning, become merely guides to usage.[10]

Following a suggestion of Putnam's, the realist theory of reference has also been extended to moral terms.[11] So Moore argues that moral kind terms refer, not according to conventions or social practices, but rather according to the "best theory" about the nature of such kinds, for "it is the nature of things . . . that determines the extension of a moral word."[12] But Moore, for one, is careful to point out that his moral realism is not committed to providing a naturalist account of moral kinds. As he remarks, the moral realist "need not argue that there is a hidden nature of a physical sort to generosity, courage, or injustice."[13] But if this is so, how can moral kind terms have a realist application? Moore replies:

> To justify the application of a realist theory of meaning to moral words, it is enough to show that they, like the namesof natural kinds, betray our commitment to the necessity of theory. One need only show that moral words have a kind of "semantic depth" akin to that possessed by natural kind words. . . . [14]

By the claim that both moral and natural kind terms have "semantic

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[9]Michael Moore, "Moral Reality," p. 1144.

[10]Putnam makes a distinction between the use of a term and its meaning. Conventions, social practices, etc., may have a role in establishing how a word is used—i.e., in fixing its paradigmatic use or "stereotype"—but meaning is determined by the entity to which it refers. See Hilary Putnam, "Is Semantics Possible?" See also "The Meaning of 'Meaning,' in *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2, pp. 247–252.

[11]Hilary Putnam, "Language and Reality," *Ibid.*, p. 290.

[12]Michael Moore, "Moral Reality," p. 1144.

[13]*Ibid.*

[14]*Ibid.*

depth," Moore means that they can have no exhaustive explanation.[15] Just as in science, theoretical improvement in our understanding of moral concepts is an ongoing effort, since moral language is continually coming to grips with a world that, given its complexity, often proves quite recalcitrant to our investigative efforts. So, although we may commence our inquiries with a grasp of the truth-conditions for applying these concepts, we will nonetheless remain unable to provide a complete analysis of them because it is characteristic of theories to undergo periodic revision. Consequently, any theoretical explanation of moral as well as of natural kind terms will exhibit semantic depth. For the contemporary moral realist, then, what these terms have in common is not that they refer to similar sorts of qualities but that they share the important feature of semantic depth. So, presumably, the concept of semantic depth enables the contemporary moral realist to provide an account of moral properties that is neither naturalist (since moral kinds are not identified with natural kinds) nor non-naturalist (since moral kinds are, like natural kinds, theoretically explicable and hence not entirely *sui generis*).

Nevertheless, what the contemporary moral realist has to say about the role of semantic depth in determining the reference of moral terms is somewhat unsatisfactory. To begin with, although contemporary moral realism holds that science and morals appeal to the "best theory" to settle questions of reference in their respective domains, reference in the former is resolved by determinate features of the world, namely, natural kinds, while reference in the latter is determined solely through the articulation of the best moral theory. The key claim is that, for Moore, moral concepts are theoretically constructed rather than empirically discovered.[16] Thus, the anti-realist can argue that if the reference of moral terms is established by theoretical considerations only, the moral realist's position collapses into conventionalism, since agreement about the use of terms rather than some feature of the world becomes the ultimate arbiter of meaning. On the other hand, if thé moral realist accepts the position that moral kind terms refer in much the same way that natural kind terms do,

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[15]The concept of semantic depth originates in the moral realism of Mark Platts. See his Ways of Meaning (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), ch. 10.

[16]Stephen Munzer proposes this understanding of Moore in his essay "Realistic Limits on Realist Interpretation," *Southern California Law Review* 58 (1985), p. 465.

i.e., by designating physical natures, then his position becomes indistinguishable from naturalism. Once more the contemporary moral realist's use of the notion of semantic depth is not really helpful because it does not account for the differences between these two sorts of terms. The dilemma faced by the contemporary moral realist unhappily remains, for he is unable to provide an explanation of moral properties that escapes the unacceptable alternatives of naturalism and non-naturalism.

Simon's Thomistic Moral Realism

The failure of contemporary moral realism (as formulated by Moore) to account for the metaphysical status of moral properties suggests that an adequate moral realism has a dual task; that is, it must explain a) the sense in which moral and natural kind terms identify features of the world, as well as b) the sense in which they differ from each other. In Yves R. Simon's interpretation of *habitus* we have the means for addressing these two points. In his book *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, Simon suggests that *habitus* resembles the natures of physical things—indeed, the similarities between the realm of nature and that of morality underwrite his Thomistic moral realism.[17]

But he also recognizes the important differences between the two realms. He claims, for instance, that free choice distinguishes *habitus*. Let us, then, with Simon's guidance take a closer look at the concept of *habitus*.

English editions of St. Thomas's writings usually (and misleadingly) translate *habitus* as "habit."[18] In standard English, of course, 'habit' refers to a disposition to perform certain acts repeatedly and unreflectively. Habits "cause" us, as it were, to act in these ways. So the acts that habits occasion lack the cognitive direction characteristic of genuine human actions. (In Thomistic terms, habits may

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[17]Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, ed. Vukan Kuic (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), pp. 69–79.

[18]Reviewing Anton C. Pegis's edited translation of St. Thomas, *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1945), Simon notes: "After many others, Professor Pegis translates *habitus* by *habit*, thus making the concept of *habitus* unintelligible to those who do not know that *habit*, in his translation, stands for *habitus*. *Habit* simply does not signify the same thing as *habitus*. Science is a *habitus*, it would be ridiculous to say that it is a habit; an infused virtue is a *habitus*, it would be contradictory to say that it is a habit." *The Commonweal*, July 13 (1945), p. 314.

be characterized as so-called "acts of man" [*actiones hominis*].)[19] Because habitual acts have no purpose or end, "The necessity of habit is subjective."[20] But the concept of *habitus*, particularly as it is found in the works of St. Thomas, has a quite different meaning.[21] To put it baldly, *habitus* (unlike habit) exhibits intelligence. Consider the following example. Learning how to play the piano, or learning any other complex skill for that matter, requires the direction of reason. Although the skills of a gifted pianist, like habits, are acquired through a good deal of repetitive practice, they are nonetheless characterized by an *essential* steadiness, that is, "a steadiness which is guaranteed by the necessity in the object,"[22] namely, the requirements of the musical score, rather than by subjective necessity, as in the case of habit.

Simon's point is that *habitus* reveals an "objective necessity" in the sense that it rationally orders or "dis-poses" one's skills, potentialities, and possibilities.[23] This point receives support from John of St. Thomas:

> So wherever a certain multiplicity is to be arranged in some order or reduced in some way, there is need for a disposition. . . . Consequently,

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[19]*ST.*, I-II, Q. 1, a. 1.

[20]Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, p. 78. See also *ibid.*, p. 53: "Brought about by repetition of acts, then, the necessity of habit, despite appearances, remains forever subjective."

[21]See *ibid.*, pp. 57–58. In *ST.*, I-II, Q. 49, a. 3 and in *ST.*, I-II, Q. 54, a. 1, St. Thomas considers two kinds of *habitus*: *habitus* in relation to act (*habitus in ordine ad actum*) and *habitus* in relation to nature (*habitus in ordine ad naturam rei*). This distinction is derived, in turn, from a more fundamental distinction, namely, that repectively between power in reference to act (*potentia ad agere*) and power in reference to being (*potentia ad esse*). See, for example, *ST.*, I-II, Q. 55, a. 2, where St. Thomas says: "Unde, cum duplex sit potentia, scilicit potentia ad esse et potentia ad agere." *Potentia ad esse* provides the subject for entitative *habitus*—in particular, the entitative *habitus* of sanctifying grace, for it is through grace that the *being* of the soul is brought to perfection. *Potentia ad agere*, on the other hand, provides the subject for operative *habitus*, which brings *human acts* to perfection. My concern in this essay is the latter. For a discussion of the distinction between the two kinds of potency, see Vernon Bourke, "The Role of Habitus in the Thomistic Metaphysics of Potency and Act," in *Essays in Thomism*, ed. Robert E. Brennan (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), pp. 103–109. For some historical background on the *habitus* doctrine, see Cary Nederman, "Nature, Ethics, and the Doctrine of 'Habitus': Aristotelian Moral Psychology in the Twelfth Century," *Traditio* 45 (1990), pp. 87–109.

[22]Yves R. Simon, *An Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, trans. Vukan Kuic and Richard J. Thompson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), p. 159.

[23]Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, pp. 79–87.

disposition is called an order among parts, that is, their fitting or correct positioning.[24]

This disposition or ordering constitutes a "dynamic whole,"[25] a structure which has a reality of its own and is therefore irreducible to its constituent parts. The development of piano skills involves integrating knowledge of musical scores, emotional expressiveness, and manual dexterity. The resulting *habitus* is a dynamic whole in which all of these elements are ordered to constitute an effortless, virtuoso performance at the piano keyboard. So, once a person has acquired considerable skills at the piano, he is able to perform by "second nature," so to speak. A gifted pianist, for instance, knows certain scores through and through, so much so that he can "play them in his sleep."

Nevertheless, proficiency in a discipline or art is no guarantee that a person will develop his talents. Our gifted pianist could decline concert engagements, choosing instead to waste his talents playing in seedy saloons. He has the qualifications or abilities but refrains from using them. Much the same can be said about scholars and scientists. A scientist or scholar may be qualitatively ready to practice his discipline but, for one reason or another, may choose not to do so. According to Simon, this sort of readiness—"qualitative" *habitus*, as he terms it— must be carefully distinguished from the readiness of moral *habitus*.[26] The morally virtuous person is not only properly disposed but always prepared to act rightly. As Simon remarks:

> By a man's disposition we mean precisely the unique arrangement of all his moral traits. And when this arrangement makes him totally reliable

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[24]Quoted in Simon, *An Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, p. 69, n. 32. For John of St. Thomas, the objective necessity of *habitus* is founded in principles: "Thus science, so far as its intrinsic principles are concerned, is a habitus, for it proceeds from evident causes, which are firm, and the same holds for virtues, which proceed from practical principles known and directed by the synderesis." *The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas*, ed. and trans. Yves. R. Simon, John J. Glanville, and G. Donald Hollenhorst (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 380.

[25]Concerning *habitus* as a "dynamic whole," Simon states: "I would like to designate [the disposition of a person] as 'dynamic.' Perhaps we could also call it a functional whole with functional parts, but dynamic is better: the 'psychological totality' which represents a person's moral character is a dynamic whole with dynamic parts." Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, p. 81. Robert Nozick's account of value in his book *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 416, parallels Simon's. Nozick explains intrinsic value as expressing "organic unity," that is, "unity in diversity."

[26]Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, p. 71.

and dependable in human affairs, we call both the man and his disposition [morally] virtuous.[27]

His readiness to act virtuously is thus "existential," since it betokens a propensity "to do the right thing at the right time."[28] So scientific and artistic *habitus* exhibit just qualitative readiness, but moral *habitus* exhibits both qualitative and existential readiness, for the morally virtuous person not only possesses virtue but also practices it. Interestingly enough, Simon contends that some of the clearest examples of "existential readiness" occur within nature, particularly in the "finality" of organisms.[29] Of course, many natural scientists are reluctant to employ the notion of finality to explain natural regularities, since teleological explanations rely upon unverifiable concepts like 'goal' and 'purpose'. Yet in many instances the teleological character of natural events is undeniable. In his book *The Cosmic Blueprint*, cosmologist Paul Davies maintains that "the steady unfolding of organized complexity in the universe is a fundamental property of nature."[30] While Davies rules out the existence of vitalistic principles such as "entelechies," he notes that the sort of complexity and novelty found in the natural realm cannot be explained in reductionist terms. Thus, he holds that in nature there is "the possibility of *self-organization*, in which [natural] systems suddenly and spontaneously leap into more elaborate forms."[31] Indeed, the evidence for such processes is abundant:

> Research in areas as diverse as fluid turbulence, crystal growth and neural networks is revealing the extraordinary propensity for physical systems to generate newer states or order spontaneously. It is clear that there exists *self-organizing* processes in every branch of science.[32]

The "propensity" for self-organization to which Davies refers in the passage above captures, I believe, what Simon means by "existential readiness." There is, as Simon suggests, a tendency, an existential readiness, in things to combine and "self-organize" into more complex

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[27]*Ibid.*, p. 84.

[28]*Ibid.*, p. 71.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 72.

[30]Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature's Creative Ability to Order the Universe* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 142.

[31]*Ibid.*, p. 198.

[32]*Ibid.*, p. 1, Preface.

structures. These newly emergent structures are (to borrow a term from the discussion of *habitus*) "dynamic wholes" which cannot be reduced to their constituent parts. Their irreducibility originates in the fact that each is ordered in a determinate way, exhibiting a "finality" specific to the kind of thing that it is. In this rather Aristotelian sense, each of these structures exhibits existential readiness. So, to use Simon's own example,[33] the elements silver and chlorine manifest an existential readiness to form the molecular structure silver chloride, a compound whose complexity and behavior cannot be explained simply in terms of its constituent elements, silver and chlorine. It is a new dynamic whole which manifests an existential readiness of its own, that is, a finality specific to its nature as silver chloride.

The implications of the preceding are far-reaching, particularly with respect to the relation between science and morals. Simon aptly notes that, prior to the seventeenth century, the term 'virtue' was used to refer to the presence of existential readiness in natural things.[34] He then goes on to assert that existential readiness is found in morality as well as in science. Thus:

> there is a continuity between the laws of nature and the laws of morality, and the 'virtue' of a physical thing is so-called because of perceived resemblance to moral virtue. They are both seen as instances of existential readiness, which makes for trust, confidence, dependability, reliability, and indeed predictability.[35]

As Simon suggests in this passage, the natures of physical things resemble moral kinds. For just as existential readiness is exhibited by a natural kind, so it is likewise to be found in moral virtue, which, as *habitus*, is a sort of "second nature."[36] The importance of this analogy is paramount. In a mechanistic universe, say that described in Lucretius's Epicurean poem *De Rerum Natura*, "things including man, have no ends and have, therefore, to be assigned 'values' from the outside."[37] The upshot is that "In a world devoid of finality, all values

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[33]Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, p. 73.

[34]*Ibid.*, p. 74.

[35]*Ibid.*, p. 75.

[36]On *habitus* as a "second nature," see *ST.*, I-II, 53, 1 ad 1; *ST.*, I-II, 56, a. 5; *ST.*, I-II, Q. 58, a. 1; and *ST.*, I-II, Q. 60, a. 4 ad 2. On *habitus* as a "sort of nature," see St. Thomas's *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, II, lec. 3, no. 265.

[37]Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, p. 107.

must of necessity be both subjective and artificial; and when these 'values' collapse, despair is all that is left."[38] The finalism of Simon's Thomistic realism presents a stark contrast to the preceding, since "in a world of natures, values reside in the nature of things. Thus if man has a nature, he also has a destiny, and we can relate what is right and wrong for him to do to his nature and to his end objectively."[39]

Simon's universe, as we see, is one in which values are *in rerum natura* rather than merely being projections of human attitudes, as in the moral philosophies of those modern epigones of Epicurus, the anti-realists. Thus, the meanings of moral kind words like 'courage' and 'temperance' are based upon clearly objective, identifiable features of human nature, to wit, moral virtues such as courage and temperance. Reality, rather than the best available moral theory, becomes the benchmark of meaning. Indeed, for Simon, moral virtue can be the object of scientific inquiry, for "any moral philosopher should be able to handle scientifically questions pertaining to moral essence and tell you what is right and what is wrong in general."[40] This point is reinforced by the fact that moral *habitus* or moral essence exhibits an existential readiness toward "self-organization," just as natural systems do. The practice of moral virtue, which involves doing the right thing at the right time, requires that the various potentialities and abilities which go into a person's character be rightly ordered or disposed. Moral virtue is a "dynamic whole" which emerges from the integration or self-organization of the elements that constitute a person's character. The study of how this integration occurs, moreover, yields knowledge that is just as legitimate as that acquired in the investigation of nature.

But if *habitus* resembles natural processes, how are we to explain the freedom and voluntariness that characterize virtuous action? To begin with, Simon contends that free choice is oftentimes associated with indeterminism, most notably in the philosophy of Epicurus. Epicureanism "places the principle of all free choice in an act of contingency boldly conceived apart from any cause, any nature, and any intelligible ground."[41] In Simon's thought, contrastingly, free

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[38]*Ibid.*

[39]*Ibid.*

[40]*Ibid.*, p. 101.

[41]Yves R. Simon, *Freedom of Choice*, ed. Peter Wolff (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), p. 11.

choice has its source in the integration of character occasioned by the acquisition of moral virtue, for it is through moral virtue that a person achieves mastery over himself. Free choice is thus a matter of "superdetermination" rather than "indetermination."[42] Simon intimates, moreover, that free choice is revealed most eminently in the self-mastery and directiveness that is found when one acts with a purpose. Hence, freedom does not proceed, as many believe, from indeterminism, irrationality, formlessness, and the like. Quite the contrary, it proceeds "from a particular excellence in power, from a plentitude of being and an abundance of determination, from an ability to achieve mastery over diverse possibilities, from a strength of constitution which makes it possible to attain one's end in a variety of ways."[43]

In Simon's thought, then, the very same features which enable us to identify *habitus* also explain the sense in which morally virtuous actions are free and voluntary. Indeed, it is Simon's contention that the existential readiness of moral virtue finds its expression in free choice. So, while freedom and voluntariness distinguish the moral virtues from other aspects of reality, their nature as *habitus* explains why the moral virtues should be considered, not as theoretical constructions (à la Moore), but as determinate features of reality. Accordingly, Simon's Thomistic moral realism explains how moral kinds are identifiable features of the world, as well as how they differ from natural kinds, thus yielding an account of the metaphysical status of moral properties that escapes the dilemma encountered by contemporary moral realism.

Theories of Goodness

The success of Simon's Thomistic moral realism is due in large measure to its implicit rejection of an assumption which underlies most of contemporary moral philosophy, namely, that goodness cannot be present in the natural order. Of course, there are exceptions to this generalization;[44] nevertheless most moral philosophers—contemporary moral realists included—restrict the use of the concept of

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[42]*Ibid.*, p. 152.

[43]*Ibid.*, p. 153.

[44]One thinks, perhaps, of A. N. Whitehead for whom "Goodness is a qualification belonging to the constitution of reality . . . Good and evil lie in depths and distances below and beyond appearance. They solely concern inter-relations within the real world." *Adventures in Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1961), p. 268; see also his essay, "Mathematics and the Good," *The*

goodness to human actions, traits, choices, and desires. The suggestion, of course, is that there is a hiatus between the moral and the natural order, since nothing in nature can rightly be called "good." Accordingly, if the concept of goodness is confined to the moral realm, it becomes difficult to explain how moral kind terms can have a realist application, since their semantical function will diverge widely from that of natural kind terms. Rather, it becomes more plausible to say that natural kind terms *refer* to entities in the world, while moral terms *express* our desires, choices, or perhaps our agreements. Simon, however, rejects the assumption that value cannot be present in the natural order; to the contrary, he holds that natural systems and structures can exhibit goodness, a position not to be confused with naturalism which *identifies* goodness with natural properties. Simon's contention is that the concept of goodness has many senses, some of which are non-moral. The doctrine of *habitus*, as we will see presently, illustrates this analogical understanding of goodness.

The moral philosophy of Simon presupposes a non-reductionist view of reality, a philosophical perspective that puts his thought at odds with the prevailing tenor of contemporary philosophy. If one were to canvass contemporary philosophical opinion, one would probably discover that the dominant view is a reductionist naturalism. For the naturalist, values, and things of the spirit generally, are "nothing but" desires and interests. Ironically, however, naturalism has its origins, not in the materialism of Epicurus and Lucretius, but in the "spiritualism" of Descartes. In his book *The Great Dialogue of Nature and Space*, Simon points out that Descartes sought to mathematicize nature by ridding it of unquantifiable entities such as natural kinds.[45] So, instead of comprising a multiplicity of natures, reality, for Descartes, is just geometrical space configured by vortical motion. The Cartesian conception of reality, evidently, is reductionist, in the sense that material things are understood as "nothing but" specific configurations of geometrical space. Consequently, the world of Descartes has no place

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Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed. (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1951), pp. 666–668.

[45] Yves R. Simon, *The Great Dialogue of Nature and Space* (Albany, New York: Magi Books, 1970), p. 10. For a discussion of how Cartesianism expunged finality from the natural order, see also Yves R. Simon, *Practical Knowledge*, ed. Robert J. Mulvaney (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), p. 122.

for finality. But, as Simon notes, where finality is ruled-out, there can be no goodness, for the notion of finality embodies that of something being ordered to another, of each thing being in the right place, indeed of a "good state of affairs."[46]

Descartes's reduction of physical reality to a single plane of intelligibility devoid of value and goodness, namely, geometrical space, set the foundation for a similar reduction in ethics. After Descartes values are to be found, not in the world, but rather in the passions, specifically in what human beings desire. In the words of an English philosopher who was profoundly influenced by Descartes:

> But whatever is the object of any man's Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*; And the object of his Hate and Aversion, *Evil.* . . . [47]

It is easy to see, then, why the *habitus* doctrine dropped out of sight in the seventeenth-century. The Cartesian emphasis on the univocity of being (and the concomitant denial of the Thomistic analogy of being) ineluctably led to the naturalistic doctrine that goodness and desire are one and the same. So goodness no longer consisted in order within nature or order within the human soul, but simply in what human beings desire. To be sure, many post-Cartesian philosophers denied naturalism, and yet they typically concurred with the central Cartesian claim, to wit, values are not part of the world. Such is the legacy Descartes's "spiritualism" has bequeathed to modern moral philosophy.

The contemporary moral realist's claim that moral properties are part of the world may be considered an attempt to escape this unfortunate Cartesian legacy, albeit an attempt which, as I have argued, ultimately fails. Significantly, the assumption upon which this failure rests—that goodness and value cannot be present in the natural order—has its roots in Cartesian reductionism, for it suggests that the concept of goodness has a single, determinate meaning, i.e., the good is what people desire or want. Eliminate this assumption, as Simon does, and an entirely different conception of goodness comes to the fore, namely, one that is analogical. Viewing goodness analogically enables the moral theorist to hold that, just as the goodness of a natural kind

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[46]Yves R. Simon, *The Great Dialogue of Nature and Space*, p. 9.
[47]Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co.), p. 41.

consists in having a specific finality, so likewise the goodness of *habitus* consists in the purposiveness of free choice. Thus, in its own way, each kind of goodness, whether moral or natural, encapsulates what is essential to the concept of goodness, namely, the integral unity and the consequent perfection of the subject of goodness.

The Present Crisis in Moral Philosophy

For the contemporary person, goodness is, perhaps, the most elusive of concepts. Of course, our sophisticates inform us quite authoritatively that goodness really consists in what we, either individually or collectively, rationally desire. The masses take the "wise" at their word, with the result that the common understanding of goodness becomes whatever a person happens to prefer.[48] After all, who among us is in a position to determine what is rationally desirable for others? Morality, thus, becomes a purely subjective affair. But the social and psychological consequences of this reduction of goodness to preference are enormous because one loses sight of the fact that genuine happiness is achieved, not by dispersing one's psychic energies into the pursuit of fleeting satisfactions, but by integrating the elements of one's personality into an ordered unity. Unfortunately, the intellectual marketplace is crowded with hucksters of all persuasions promising "wholeness," "self-respect," and other kinds of ersatz salvation—provided one is able to pay the price, financial as well as psychological. Yet what is being offered, is a spurious form of happiness. The tragedy, however, is that it is not recognized as such. The explanation for this ready embrace of falsehood lies in a failure to recognize what is essential to moral goodness, that, in the words of George Mora, "the law governing the human personality is to integrate all its constituent parts with reason, so as to achieve unity of action and intent."

It is to the understanding of goodness embodied in the concept of *habitus* that we must turn in order to confront the present crisis in moral philosophy. As interpreted by Simon, *habitus* expresses within

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[48]What Manzoni said about seventeenth-century Milan is probably applicable today: "From the inventions of the ignorant, the educated took whatever they could fit into their own ideas; from the inventions of the educated, the ignorant took whatever they could understand; and the result of both was a vast and confused mass of public folly." Allesandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun (London: The Reprint Society, 1952), p. 444.

the human personality a dynamic wholeness that has its analogues throughout nature. So, rather than being separate from nature, the moral order is continuous with it. The foundation for the unity of the natural and the moral orders is the independent reality of created things. We do not create or construct our reality (as idealism maintains); instead reality is already present for us to behold. Accordingly, moral judgments, far from being expressions of attitude or prescriptions, are, in fact, judgments about reality itself. Contemporary moral thought, however, is blind to the important insights that a realist metaphysics can provide moral inquiry. The result is that, for many moral thinkers and their disciples, "so-called value-judgments are not supposed to express what things are: they spring from within [oneself]." Eventually, all that remains is the "existentialistic despair" that accompanies every effort to create values. The way out of this despair, Simon suggests, is to embrace a metaphysics that discovers goodness in the order of being. From the perspective of the moral realist, then, the achievement of Simon's interpretation of *habitus* is its recognition that moral reality is a genuine part of the order of being. For this accomplishment, all of us, philosophers and non-philosophers alike, remain indebted to the moral thought of Yves R. Simon.