Divine Motivation theory

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I VALUE CONCEPTS AND THE METAPHYSICS OF VALUE

Let us begin with good and bad. One of the things I will argue in this book is that the ways of having value are not all forms of good and bad, but because good and bad are as close to basic as we are going to get, I begin with them for simplicity. One of the most obvious but also most troublesome features of good and bad is that they apply to things in a variety of metaphysical categories: objects of many kinds, persons and their states and traits, acts, and the outcomes of acts. We also call states of affairs good or bad apart from their status as act outcomes, and we call certain things designated by abstract names good – life, nature, knowledge, art, philosophy, and many others. Some of the things in this last category belong in one of the other categories, but perhaps not all do.

Do the items in these different categories have anything non-trivial in common? One plausible answer is that they are all related to persons. That answer applies to states of persons such as pleasure or happiness, character traits, motives, intentions, acts and

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their outcomes, and states of affairs that are valuable to persons in some way, whether or not they are produced by human acts. But even if human persons did not exist, some of the items of value just mentioned would still exist and would still be valuable – for example, life and nature – so the suggestion that everything good or bad is related to persons is too limiting. But in another way, it may not be limiting enough, since ultimately everything is probably of some concern to persons. Traditional ethics has been much more restrictive. It focuses on the human act and that to which an act is causally connected, either forward or backward.[1] For the most part, I will follow common practice in limiting my subject matter in this way, although I am not convinced that there are especially good reasons for doing so. My focus will be mostly on the states of affairs to which human agents respond when they act, the psychic states and dispositions that produce acts, acts themselves, and the outcomes of acts. Moral philosophers have generally regarded these objects of evaluation as particularly important. They are also thought to be intimately related. It is hardly controversial that a good person generally acts from good motives and forms good intentions to do good acts and, with a bit of luck, produces good outcomes. What is at issue is not the fact that such relations obtain, but the order of priority in these relations.

The question of priority arises in more than one way. One is conceptual: Is there a relation of dependency among the concepts of good person, good motive, good act, and good outcome? If so, what is the shape of that dependency? Is one of these concepts basic and the rest derivative from it? Notice that this is a question not of conceptual analysis but of theory construction. Theories do not describe so much as they create conceptual relations. The theorist is concerned with whether a good person *should* be defined as a person who acts from good motives, or as one who produces good outcomes, or as one who does good acts. Should a good act be understood as an act done by a good person, or as an act

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[1]   The new field of environmental ethics may indicate that contemporary ethics is moving away from a focus on human beings, but even that is unclear, because environmental ethics usually emphasizes the ways the environment is impacted by human acts.

done from a good motive, or as an act that produces good states of affairs? Is a virtue a quality that leads to the performance of good (alternatively, right) acts, or one that leads to good outcomes, or is a virtue more basic than either acts or outcomes? Of course, these are not the only options for the relationships among these concepts, but they are among the simplest.

A related but distinct question is this: Is there a relationship of metaphysical dependency among the different categories of things with value? Are some bearers of value or some moral properties more basic than others? If so, which is the most basic, and how do the things in other categories derive their value from the more basic ones? According to consequentialism, an act gets its moral value (generally called rightness rather than goodness) from the goodness of its outcome or the outcome of acts of the same type. Consequentialism may be intended as an answer to the first question and hence as a conceptual thesis, but it can also be intended as a thesis in the metaphysics of value. If it is the former, it is the proposal that we ought to think of the rightness of acts as determined by the goodness of their consequences; this way of thinking is recommended as preferable to alternatives. If the thesis is the latter, it is the claim that the value of an act actually arises from the value of outcomes. Similarly, the thesis of a certain kind of Kantian ethics can be understood as proposing either a conceptual or a metaphysical priority between the value of an act of will and the value of the end the will aims to bring about. If it is the latter, it is the thesis that the value of the end of an act arises from the value of a property of the will that produces it. Christine Korsgaard expresses this position when she says value "flows into" the world from a rational will.[2] Here, Korsgaard's thesis is one about the source of value, not about how we ought to define the concept of a good end. It is a thesis in moral ontology.

Conceptual order may or may not be isomorphic with ontological order. It would be helpful if it were, but it is also possible that our concepts do not map ontology. In the first part of this book, I will argue for a certain way of conceptualizing morality. I will propose a theory in which good motives are conceptually more

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[2] "Kant's Formula of Humanity," in Korsgaard (1996a), p. 110.

basic than good traits, good acts, and good outcomes of acts and will outline a metaphysical theory to accompany it. In Part II, I will propose a more substantial theory in theistic metaphysics according to which the motives of God are the ontological basis for the value of everything outside of God. The two parts of the book are detachable, but together they outline a moral theory whose conceptual structure is mirrored in the metaphysics of value.

The realm of value is usually considered to be broader than the realm of moral value, since aesthetic value, epistemic value, the values of etiquette, and perhaps the values of health and happiness are nonmoral values. That is possible, but I will have very little to say about the distinction between moral and nonmoral value in this book, both because I have never heard of a way of making the distinction that I found plausible and because I do not think the distinction is very important. Since the theory of this book is structured around the traditional units of moral theory – acts, motives, ends, and outcomes – the values discussed are mainly moral values, but I will sometimes venture beyond the traditional category of the moral without comment.

It is sometimes said that what makes the territory of the moral distinctive is a strong notion of obligation. I see no reason to think that is true, but the relationship between value and obligation has been an important issue in modern moral theory. The categories of the obligatory or required and the wrong or forbidden are distinct from the axiological categories of good and bad. So in addition to sorting out the relationships among the various kinds of things that are good and bad, there is also the problem of specifying the relationship between the good and bad, on the one hand, and the required and forbidden, on the other. Again, this question can be about either conceptual or ontological priority. Value is presumably broader than the required or forbidden, since it is usually thought that the latter applies only to the category of acts and intentions to perform acts.[3] Persons and states of affairs can be good or bad, but they cannnot be required or forbidden. An act can be

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[3] A notable exception is that Christians may say that we are obligated to love. But it is rare in moral philosophy to make an emotion, or any psychic state other than an act of will, a matter of duty or obligation.

good or bad, but it can also be required or forbidden, obligatory or wrong. Presumably there is some connection between the two kinds of evaluation. There are moral philosophers who have maintained that requirement is conceptually more basic than good and have defined good as that which requires a response of a particular kind – for example, the attitude of love.[4] Others have maintained that good is conceptually more basic than requirement and have defined wrong and the obligatory in terms of the attitude or behavior of good (virtuous) persons.[5] Both of these positions are conceptual, not metaphysical. Robert Adams (1999, Chapter 10) has recently argued that the good is ontologically more basic than the obligatory, but that the latter is not derivative from the former. Of course, there are many other options. I will propose an account of the way in which obligation derives from value in Chapter 4.

Moral theorists who ask questions about the priority of one moral concept over another give radically different answers, but they all share the assumption that it is a good thing to attempt to construct a conceptual framework that simplifies our thinking about the moral life. I will go through a series of alternative frameworks in section IV, but as I mentioned in the Preface, some writers doubt the wisdom of any such project on the grounds that theory distorts morality.[6] I have said that I regard theory as a good thing. I do not deny that it distorts the subject to some extent, but in compensation, theory helps us understand more with less effort. I mention this now, not to defend the project of developing conceptual frameworks, but to point out that while it can be debated whether conceptual moral frameworks are a good thing, the same debate does not arise about the metaphysics of morals. The questions of what value is, of where it comes from, and of whether value in one category arises from value in another are all

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[4] See Chisholm (1986), pp. 52ff.
[5] Rosalind Hursthouse does this in several places, most recently in her book *On Virtue Ethics*. I present a similar way of defining a right act in *Virtues of the Mind*, at the end of Part II. I will pursue a version of this approach in Chapter 4 of this book.
[6] There is a substantial literature on anti-theory since Williams (1985), which has been very influential in leading some ethicists to eschew theory. See also the collection by Clarke and Simpson (1989).

important philosophical questions. Of course, we may doubt that we will ever get plausible answers to these questions, but that is not the worry that the anti-theorists have about theory construction. In what follows, I will present both a conceptual theory and a metaphysical theory of value. Objections to the two projects will differ, but my intention is to enhance the plausibility of each by its relation to the other.

II THREE PUZZLES TO SOLVE

There are three sets of puzzles that drive the project I am describing in this book. One of my purposes is to propose a theory that solves, or at least makes it easier to solve, these three sets of puzzles. The first set of puzzles is in moral psychology. The second is in the metaphysics of value. The third is in natural theology. Each of these puzzles has a large literature, and my purpose in this section is not to discuss them in any detail but rather to call attention to them and to the way the need to resolve them constrains what is desirable in an ethical theory.

1 A puzzle in moral psychology: cognitivism versus noncognitivism

One of the most enduring legacies of David Hume is his claim in the *Treatise of Human Nature* that cognitive and affective states are distinct and independent states. The former is representational, the latter is not (Book II, section 3, p. 415). The latter motivates, the former does not (p. 414). The terminology for describing psychic states has changed since Hume, but the moral commonly drawn from Hume's arguments is essentially this: No representational state (perceptual or cognitive) has the most significant property of affective states, the capacity to motivate. An affective state must be added to any cognitive state in order to motivate action, and the motivating state and the cognitive state are always separable; they are related, at best, causally.

This position immediately conflicts with the intuition that moral judgments are both cognitive and motivating. Moral judgments seem to be cognitive because they are often propositional in form, have a truth value (and are not always false), and when

a person makes a moral judgment, he asserts that proposition and others may deny it. On the other hand, we typically expect moral judgments to be motivating. A simple way to see that is to consider our practices of moral persuasion. If we want to convince someone to act in a certain way for moral reasons, we direct our efforts toward convincing her to make the relevant moral judgment herself. If we can get her to do that, we normally think that she will thereby be motivated to act on it. Of course, we know that she may not be sufficiently motivated to act on it, because she may also have contrary motives, but the point is that we think that we have succeeded in getting her to feel a motive to act on a moral judgment as soon as we get her to make the judgment. If the Humean view is correct, however, a moral judgment can motivate only if it is affective – that is, noncognitive. The Humean view therefore compels us to choose between the position that a moral judgment is cognitive and the position that it is motivating. The problem is that we expect it to be both.

The phenomena of moral strength and weakness highlight some of the problems with the Humean psychology. It often happens that a moral agent struggles before acting when he makes a moral judgment. Sometimes he acts in accordance with his judgment and sometimes he does not, but the fact that he struggles indicates that a motive to act on the judgment accompanies the judgment. When he is morally strong, a motive sufficient for action accompanies his judgment; when he is morally weak, a motive insufficient for action accompanies his judgment. Either way, we think that a motive in some degree accompanies the judgment. But if the making of a moral judgment is a purely cognitive state, and if cognitive and motivating states are essentially distinct, the motive must come from something other than the judgment, something that is not an intrinsic component of it. Moral strength and weakness therefore pose a problem for cognitivism.

It may also happen that the agent acts on a moral judgment without struggle, but that case does not help the cognitivist, because we tend to think that when struggle is unnecessary, the reason is that the moral judgment carries with it a motive sufficiently strong to cause the agent to act without struggle. So whether or

not there is struggle, and whether or not the agent acts in accordance with her judgment, there is a strong inclination to expect moral judgments to be motivating.

Among those who accept a Humean psychology, the noncognitivists are better placed than the cognitivists to explain moral strength and weakness, since the former see moral judgment as intrinsically motivating. But noncognitivists face a related problem, the problem of moral apathy.[7] The morally apathetic person makes a moral judgment while completely lacking any motive to act on it. Given what has already been said, we would expect this phenomenon to be rare, but it probably does exist, and it is a problem for both cognitivism and noncognitivism. Given that the cognitivist maintains that a moral judgment is a purely cognitive state, he has the problem of explaining why we find moral apathy surprising. But the noncognitivist cannot explain why it exists at all. There should be no such thing as apathy, according to noncognitivism, insofar as noncognitivism takes the motivational force of a moral judgment to be an essential feature of each such judgment.

The Humean view on the essential distinctness of cognitive and motivating states forces us to give up something in our ordinary ways of thinking about moral judgment, yet I believe that that view is less plausible than what it forces us to give up. Nonetheless, the phenomena of moral strength, weakness, and apathy suggest that what we intuitively expect is complicated. It should turn out that a moral judgment is both cognitive and intrinsically motivating in enough central cases that we can see why we find the phenomena of strength, weakness, and apathy surprising. These phenomena indicate that the strength of the motivational force of a judgment varies, and that it is possible for the motive to disappear entirely. In what follows, I will aim for an account of moral judgment according to which there is a primary class of moral judgments that express states that are both cognitive and intrinsically motivating. I will later give an account of the "thinning" of moral

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[7]   Alfred Mele (1996) calls this problem "moral listlessness." See also Michael Stocker (1979).

judgment that permits the motivational force of a moral judgment to be detachable from it in such a way that moral strength, weakness, and apathy may occur.

2 *Some puzzles in the metaphysics of value*

Philosophers often find evaluative properties more problematic than descriptive properties. The reason for the worry is unclear, but perhaps we do not need reasons to find something peculiar. Peculiarity is only one of the problems, however. Even if there is nothing especially odd about value, valuable objects, or evaluative properties, there *is* something in need of explanation if some things (properties) are evaluative and some are not. At a minimum, we want to figure out where value comes from and how it relates to the natural or descriptive – or to whatever value is contrasted with. If the evaluative differs from the nonevaluative in some significant way, that may mean that we come to know it in a different way. The issue of the way we come to make value judgments is therefore related to the issue of the nature of the objects of such judgments. Difficulties in finding a plausible account of moral judgment are closely connected with difficulties in finding a plausible account of what those judgments are about. The problem in moral psychology of choosing between cognitivism and noncognitivism therefore leads us into the problem in metaphysics of choosing between value realism and value antirealism.[8]

Value realism is the position that value properties exist in a world independent of the human mind. I assume that value realism is the default position for the same reason that realism about sensory properties is the default position: Objects outside the mind plainly appear to have (some) evaluative properties just as much as they appear to have (some) nonevaluative properties. If I see someone taking advantage of a weaker subordinate, it may be just as apparent to me that there is badness in the act as that the act

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[8]   Realism about value is commonly called "moral realism," but the issue is more general than the nature of moral value.

causes distress. The judgment "That act is bad" is on a par with the judgment "That act causes distress" in the clarity of its meaning and the conviction of its truth. There is allegedly a puzzle about the grounds for the truth value of the first judgment that does not arise about the second, but I am not much taken by this worry. I do not see anything more mysterious about the reality of value than about the reality of causes. What does sound mysterious is the intuitionism that usually accompanies value realism, for we plainly don't have an account of how we come to make value judgments to anything like the extent to which we have an account of how we come to make descriptive judgments, particularly the subset of descriptive judgments that are perceptual. For this reason, I think that a theory that explains our ability to detect value without referring to unanalyzed intuition has an advantage, and in what follows I will attempt to begin identifying the capacities and processes through which we form moral judgments.

The more serious problem for value realism is that evaluative and nonevaluative properties appear to differ in a way that needs explanation. Nonetheless, the distinction is not clear-cut. Consider the following list of properties: *square, salty, yellow, smooth, reliable, brutal, honorable, contemptible, pitiful, offensive, funny, exciting, nauseating*. Which properties on this list are evaluative and which are descriptive? Most of them appear to be both, which raises the further question of how the two aspects come to be combined in so many properties if they differ in some metaphysically fundamental way. But they do seem to differ, and it is commonly thought that they differ in that some exist in a world independent of the mind, but most do not. Furthermore, it is also commonly thought that their degree of independence of the mind is related to their degree of perceiver variability. Allegedly, the less variation there is among observers in the perception of a property, the more independent of human minds the property is, and hence the more real it is in some pre-theoretic sense of the real. Usually, this view is thought to have the consequence that *square* is more real than any of the other properties on the list, that *yellow* is less so, that *pitiful* is even less so, and that *nauseating* is least of all. It is surprising that this conclusion is so common, since it depends upon at least two disputable theses: (1) that perceptual variability is inversely

proportional to degree of existence in a mind-independent world (apparently there are degrees of reality), and (2) that *square* is less perceptually relative than the other properties on the list.

The simplest form of value realism is the position that value properties are like *square*. This is highly implausible, but not because it is obvious that value properties are not as much a part of an independent world as is *square*, nor because the thesis that value properties are like *square* must reject at least one of the assumptions just mentioned. Simple value realism is implausible because it attempts to maintain the reality of value properties by ignoring the differences between evaluative and descriptive properties. The properties on the list differ from *square* and from each other in a number of ways. Some are more observer-variable than *square*. More importantly, many of them are not detectable through sensory powers alone. To say that *contemptible* is like *square* does not explain what value is, and more importantly, it does not explain the fact that whatever value is, it is contrasted with something that is not value. It seems to me, then, that the project of defending the place of value properties in a mind-independent world should not depend upon the view that there are no significant differences between value properties and nonvalue properties.

For this reason, the situation is no better if we go the other way and claim that value properties are like *nauseating* or *exciting* in that they are not part of an independent world. This is often associated with the further position that value properties express or project properties of the observer. Again, this is highly implausible, not because it is obvious that these properties *are* part of an independent world, but because this position does not explain the fact that the properties on the list are not all the same. They are not all detectable through the same faculties, and we need an explanation for this difference. This seems to me to be a more serious problem than the objection commonly given to antirealism about value, namely, that it makes value trivial. If value properties are nothing but properties expressing a response in or an attitude of the observer, then, the objection goes, there is no more reason to be interested in them than there is to be interested in what is nauseating or exciting. My interest does not extend beyond what is nauseating, exciting, good, or bad *to me*. I find this objection

unconvincing. It seems to me that the position that value properties are projections or expressions of observer responses in fact guarantees that these properties are of interest to us, the observers. Of course, it follows on the antirealist position that value properties are not of interest from Sidgwick's "point of view of the universe," since they are not in a mind-independent world. But it is not obvious that we should care about that more than we care about what is nauseating, exciting, boring (etc.) to ourselves. I am not denying that an argument can be given that we *should* care about that, but it does take an argument. And whether or not one can be satisfactorily given, the fact that the properties on the list are not all on a par remains a puzzle in need of explanation.

Many moral theorists aim at a position somewhere between realism and antirealism. This seems sensible if we take the conservative approach of accepting both the thesis that degree of reality in an independent world is inversely proportional to degree of perceiver variation, and the view that the evaluative properties on the list are somewhere between *square* and *nauseating* in their degree of perceiver variation. I have already said that I find both assumptions questionable, but what makes this task particularly daunting is that it is very hard to see how there can be any such position. The reason is that realism is usually associated with cognitivism, and antirealism with noncognitivism. Granted, there is no necessary connection between the metaphysical thesis and the thesis in moral psychology, but suppose that we accept the Humean position that cognitive and affective states are necessarily distinct, and suppose also that we assume that the objects of cognitive states are necessarily distinct from the objects of affective states, if the latter have objects at all. Suppose also that according to value realism, moral properties are the objects of cognitive states, and that according to value antirealism, moral properties are the objects of, or are constructed out of, affective states. It follows that we have to choose between realism and antirealism for the same reason that we have to choose between cognitivism and noncognitivism.

This argument also has disputable assumptions, but one way to avoid the conclusion is to begin with the desideratum I identified from the first puzzle. If I am right that there are moral judgments

expressing states that combine the cognitive and the affective in a way that is not simply causal, the objects of such states may also differ from the objects of purely cognitive or purely affective states. If so, this would give us hope of getting a theory that is genuinely distinct from both realism and antirealism. One of my purposes in this book is to propose a way to think about value and the detection of value that leaves intact the pre-theoretic intuition that evaluative properties are properties in an independent world, but that also explains the difference between descriptive and evaluative properties.

3 Some puzzles in natural theology

The first two sets of puzzles are problems with the property of goodness and related properties. The third set of puzzles are problems with the property of perfect goodness. The idea of perfect goodness has a long history in Christian philosophy, one with strong Platonic roots. Usually, but controversially, perfect goodness is thought to entail the maximal degree of goodness. In addition, perfect goodness has traditionally been thought to entail impeccability, the property of being unable to do anything bad. But impeccability appears to conflict with the attributes of omnipotence and freedom. If God is impeccable, there are things he cannot do, namely, acts that are evil or that express evil traits. But for the same reason that perfect goodness is thought to entail the maximal degree of goodness, omnipotence is thought to entail the maximal degree of power. There are many different accounts of what maximal power consists in, but it has often been understood as something close to the power to do anything possible.[9] But since doing evil is a possible thing to do, if a perfectly good being lacks the power to do evil, such a being lacks the power to do something possible, and hence is not omnipotent. This puzzle was brought into the contemporary literature

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[9] This assumption has been challenged by many writers on omnipotence, but it is important to see that it is an assumption that is given up only because of logical puzzles. The starting point is the assumption that omnipotence entails the ability to do anything possible.

by Nelson Pike (1969), but it was discussed in the Middle Ages, and Aquinas's way out is well known (ST I, a. 3, q. 25, obj. 2 and reply).

The reasoning behind the alleged incompatibility of perfect goodness and omnipotence leads to a second puzzle. Under the assumption that a perfectly good being is incapable of doing evil or of willing anything but good, the will of such a being does not appear to be free in any morally significant sense. On a standard interpretation of the conditions for moral praise and blame in the human case, persons are morally praised because they choose the good when they could have chosen evil, and they are morally blamed because they choose evil when they could have chosen good. Of course, the understanding of moral praise and blame as conditioned upon the ability to do otherwise is a modern idea, and the idea that the ability to do otherwise is morally meaningless unless it includes the ability to choose something with the contrary value is open to dispute, but both of these assumptions are ones that many philosophers accept. But if perfect goodness involves the inability to choose evil, a perfectly good being is not free in the morally significant sense. Further, it follows that a perfectly good being cannot be praised in the moral sense of praise and hence cannot be good in the moral sense of good. This leads to a third problem. If the concept of perfect goodness is meant to include moral goodness, and yet the concept of perfect goodness is inconsistent with the concept of moral goodness, as allegedly demonstrated by the foregoing argument, it apparently follows that the concept of perfect goodness is self-inconsistent.

An even harder problem for the attribute of perfect goodness is the apparent incompatibility between perfect goodness and omnipotence, on the one hand, and the existence of evil, on the other. Not only is the problem of evil the single most difficult problem in natural theology, it also poses a serious challenge to the religious belief of ordinary people. The logical form of the problem is the putative conceptual inconsistency among the following propositions:

(1) A perfectly good being would be motivated to eliminate all evil.

(2) An omnipotent being would be able to eliminate all evil.
(3) There is a being who is both perfectly good and omnipotent.
(4) Evil exists.

It is now widely held that these propositions are not logically in-consistent, and in recent years greater attention has been focused on the problem that these propositions seem to be jointly improb-able. They therefore pose a problem for the rationality or justifica-tion of religious belief even if they are not logically inconsistent.[10]

The apparent inconsistency or joint improbability of (1)–(4) needs to be resolved. There have been many attempts to show that (1)–(4) are not jointly improbable or that it can be rational to believe them. I find some of these arguments plausible, and I would not find it surprising if there is more than one way to show the rationality of a given set of beliefs, even a set as apparently threatening as (1)–(4). But as I see it, the problem of evil is serious enough that the more central to the theory of value a given solu-tion is, the better. It is important that the rationality of believing (1)–(4) not be an ad hoc solution invented to fix the problem, but rather that it follow naturally from the theory itself. I will aim for an approach of that kind.

The same point applies to the problem that perfect goodness appears to be incompatible with omnipotence and divine freedom, and that the concept of perfect moral goodness appears to be self-inconsistent. If the metaphysics of value in conjunction with an account of the divine attributes generates a puzzle that can be solved by amending something either in value theory or in natural theology, that may be acceptable; but it would be preferable if, given the metaphysics of value and natural theology, the problem did not arise. I will aim for a theory on the nature and origin of value from which the puzzles do not arise, or do not arise in their most threatening form. This will be the task for Chapters 7 and 8.

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[10] This has been recognized from the beginning of the contemporary dis-cussion stemming from J. L. Mackie's famous paper (1955). More recent examples appear in Howard-Snyder (1996); see especially the paper by Richard Gale in that volume.