

The good and the powers

Michele Paolini Paoletti 

University of Macerata (Italy), Macerata, Italy

Correspondence

Michele Paolini Paoletti, University of Macerata (Italy), Via Garibaldi 20, 62100 Macerata, Italy.

Email: m.paolinipaoletti@unimc.it

Abstract

Neo-Aristotelian views of goodness hold that the goodness of something is strictly connected with its goal(s). In this article, I shall present a power-based, Neo-Aristotelian view of goodness. I shall claim that there are certain powers (i.e., Goodness-Confering Powers, or GC-powers in short) that confer goodness upon their bearers and upon the resulting actions. And I shall suggest that GC-powers are strongly teleological tendencies. In Section 1, I shall present the kernel of Neo-Aristotelian conceptions of goodness. In Section 2, I shall introduce strongly teleological powers and tendencies. In Section 3, GC-powers will be characterized. I shall also examine a number of options with regard to their number and features and how to single out their goodness value. In Section 4, I shall focus on good agents and on three distinct ways in which they may be good: tendential goodness, actual goodness, and purely actual goodness. Relatedly, among the actions connected with a certain GC-power, I shall also distinguish between primary and secondary actions and between pure and impure actions. In Section 5, good actions will be examined. Actions may be good in three distinct ways. Indeed, actions may be endowed with primary goodness, secondary goodness and preventative goodness. In Section 6, I shall face the remaining problems.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2023 The Authors. *Analytic Philosophy* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Neo-Aristotelian conceptions of goodness hold that the goodness of something (i.e., of an agent or of an action) is strictly connected with the goal(s) of that thing. For example, Socrates' goodness as a human being is strictly connected with the goal(s) he has *qua* human being. Roughly, the more Socrates fulfills—or is disposed toward fulfilling—that goal (or those goals), the better Socrates is *qua* human being. Goodness is qualified with respect to a certain kind (e.g., human beings). This reflects the commitment of most Neo-Aristotelians to an attributive view of goodness.¹ But this commitment does not rule out that one can also specify what it is for something to be good *simpliciter*.

Some authors have recently explored the possibility of interpreting Neo-Aristotelian conceptions of goodness (or Neo-Aristotelian goodness, in short) within the framework of the metaphysics of powers.² In this article, I aim at offering my own contribution. More precisely, I shall draw on my own works on teleological powers and tendencies³ in order to characterize the goodness of powers, agents, and actions. I shall also show how all the *desiderata* had by a Neo-Aristotelian theory of goodness can be satisfied. And how most problems that are taken to affect Neo-Aristotelian goodness can be solved.

In Section 1, I shall present a number of features of Neo-Aristotelian goodness, as well as the *desiderata* and problems I shall deal with. I shall also briefly introduce the power-based approach toward Neo-Aristotelian goodness presented by Page (2020) and I shall raise two worries. In Section 2, I shall recall the notions of strongly teleological powers and tendencies that I have discussed elsewhere. In Section 3, I shall characterize goodness-conferring powers, that is, powers that confer goodness upon the entities bearing them and/or upon the actions resulting from them. In a nutshell, goodness-conferring powers will be taken to be strongly teleological tendencies. Four options with regard to these powers will be explored. And I shall also briefly show how their goodness values can be established.

In Section 4, I shall characterize good agents. It is possible to characterize good agents on the basis of three distinct notions of goodness: tendential goodness, actual goodness, and purely actual goodness. In Section 5, I shall consider good actions. To characterize them, I shall introduce three notions of goodness: primary goodness, contributory goodness, and preventative goodness. Finally, in Section 6, I shall explicitly show how my theory can solve the remaining problems and satisfy the remaining *desiderata* presented at the outset.

1 | NEO-ARISTOTELIAN GOODNESS AND POWERS

Neo-Aristotelian theories of goodness claim that, in order for something/someone to be a good member of its kind *K*, it must fulfill (or be disposed toward fulfilling) its essential goal(s).⁴ Essential goals are taken to be relative to kinds. Thus, Socrates, in order to be a good human

¹See Geach (1956). Moreover, on these views, moral goodness and natural goodness turn out to be strictly connected—if not identical.

²See Oderberg (2020) and Page (2020).

³See Paolini Paoletti (2021, 2022).

⁴See Stump and Kretzmann (1990), Hursthouse (1999), Foot (2001), Oderberg (2014, 2015, 2020), Page (2020). On Aristotle's teleological account of goodness, see for example Pakaluk (2005). On Aristotle's view of powers, see for example Beere (2009) and Marmodoro (2018). Some authors develop this view in connection with virtue ethics. On virtue ethics, see for example van Zyl (2019).

being, must fulfill (or be disposed towards fulfilling) his essential goal(s), that is, the goals that are essentially tied to human beings.

It is worth pointing to three aspects of these theories. First, not all the goals had by an entity are essential to that entity. Socrates may pursue the goal of building a big house. But fulfilling this goal (or being disposed toward fulfilling this goal) does *not* make him a good human being. On the contrary, if living according to reason is an essential goal of Socrates, then Socrates' fulfilling (or being disposed towards fulfilling) this goal contributes to making him a good human being.

Secondly, I assumed that the essential goals of an entity are relative to the kind to which that entity belongs. Yet, this does *not* rule out that an entity may also have non-kind-relative yet essential goals. For example, Socrates may have essential and individual goals that no other entity has. Even if I shall maintain here that all goals are essential and relative to kinds, my account is compatible with the possibility of non-kind-relative yet essential goals.

Third, it is one thing to fulfill one's own goals. And it is another thing to be *disposed toward* fulfilling one's own goals. It is one thing for Socrates to live according to reason. And it is another thing to be *disposed* toward living according to reason. Of course, if Socrates is *strongly* disposed toward living according to reason, then it is highly probable that he *actually* lives according to reason. However, actually fulfilling one's own goals and being (strongly) disposed toward fulfilling them are separate issues. And such issues may be tied to distinct notions of goodness, as we shall see.

Neo-Aristotelian goodness is primarily attached to agents such as Socrates. Moreover, it is obviously grounded in the essence of such agents.

A number of *desiderata* should be satisfied by an Aristotelian theory of goodness.

Desideratum 1 (further entities): It should be shown how further entities besides agents (i.e., actions and behaviors) may be qualified as good.

Desideratum 2 (normativity): It should be shown how value judgments and normativity in general follow from Neo-Aristotelian goodness.

Desideratum 3 (primary-derivative): The theory must be able to draw the distinction between primary goodness and derivative goodness. Socrates' living according to reason is primarily good for Socrates. On the contrary, studying philosophy may be only derivatively good for him. Indeed, Socrates' studying philosophy owes its goodness only to the contribution it makes toward fulfilling Socrates' goal of living according to reason.⁵

Desideratum 4 (number and types): The theory must examine in detail the number of essential goals that are connected with goodness. And *which* essential goals are connected with goodness. Given an entity belonging to a certain kind K, does that entity have only one essential goal? Or multiple essential goals? Moreover, are all the essential goals of that entity connected with goodness?

Different views can be elaborated when one tries to answer these questions. And different problems arise as well. For example, assume that an entity has multiple essential goals, but only some of such goals are connected with goodness. Does the pursuit of the other essential goals turn out to be indifferent with respect to goodness? Assume that an entity has multiple essential goals and that multiple essential goals (i.e., all of them or at least two of them) are connected with goodness. Assume also that distinct essential and goodness-conferring goals point into distinct

⁵Page (2020) also talks of relational goodness, that is, of what is good for a certain entity. But relational goodness seems to be already included in the attributive view of goodness considered above. On the concept of goodness and further issues in metaethics and value theory, see for example Orsi (2015), van Roojen (2015), Chrisman (2017), and McPherson and Plunkett (2018).

directions. How can that entity manage the conflicts between such goals? Of course, and at least in principle, different answers may be provided for different kinds of entities—and for distinct entities within the same kind as well.

Desideratum 5 (extension): It is necessary to answer questions such as: are all the entities that are endowed with essential goals also characterized by goodness? Are there good entities that are *not* endowed with essential goals?

Desideratum 6 (better-worse): It should also be shown how an entity can be better than another entity. And how an entity can be worse than another entity. And the same should be shown with respect to actions and behaviors.

Desideratum 7 (actually-disposed): The distinction between actually fulfilling one's own essential goals and being (strongly) disposed toward fulfilling them should be drawn out and justified.

In sum, we should show: how further entities besides agents can be good (*further entities desideratum 1*); how normativity (*normativity desideratum 2*) and the distinction between primary and derivative goodness (*primary-derivative desideratum 3*) follow from Neo-Aristotelian goodness; how many and which essential goals are connected with goodness (*number and types desideratum 4*) and with respect to what entities (*extension desideratum 5*); how an entity can be better/worse than another entity (*better-worse desideratum 6*) and how actually fulfilling and being (strongly) disposed toward fulfilling essential goals are distinguished (*actually-disposed desideratum 7*).

These *desiderata* will be satisfied in due course in the forthcoming sections.

There are further *desiderata* that arise from additional claims, such as the convertibility of goodness and being.⁶ Moreover, a Neo-Aristotelian theory of goodness should also account for further notions, such as the notions of evil, badness, virtue, vice, duty, and so on. I will not be able to satisfy all these additional *desiderata* here. But my view may be invoked in order to ground satisfactory solutions even in these respects.

Then come the troubles.

Problem 1. (*normativity*): Silverstein (2016) points out that normativity does *not* (only) flow from an entity's being endowed with a certain goal. For example, normative judgments about good and bad knives do not (only) flow from the functions and goals of such knives. They flow from the needs of their users.

Turning to further problems, some apparent counterexamples have been put forward against the following equivalence: As a matter of metaphysical necessity, an entity is good *simpliciter* (and not just a good member of its kind) if and only if it actually fulfills its essential goals and/or it is (strongly) disposed toward fulfilling them. This equivalence improves on the attributive view of goodness by introducing something akin to goodness *simpliciter*. Goodness *simpliciter* may derive from attributive goodness: roughly, if something is a good member of its kind, then it is good *simpliciter*.

Problem 2. (*extension*): Against the left-to-right reading of the equivalence, one may point out that not all the entities that are good need to have essential goals. I shall set aside this objection here, as it would involve a more general defense of the Neo-Aristotelian view of goodness.

There are more counterexamples to the right-to-left reading of the equivalence.

⁶On this thesis, see Oderberg (2014, 2020).

Problem 3. (*missile*): A well-functioning missile seems not to be a good entity, since it produces death and destruction.

Problem 4. (*neutrality*): Moreover, an entity may actually fulfill or be disposed towards fulfilling neutral essential goals. *Prima facie*, that entity would *not* turn out to be good.

Problem 5. (*goodness-existence*): Finally, there can also be entities that always fulfill their essential goals insofar as they exist. Such entities cannot but be good insofar as they exist. Their goodness turns out to coincide with their own existence. But this may sound strange or at least counterintuitive.

There is another equivalence that should be discussed within this context: as a matter of metaphysical necessity, something is good for a K (i.e., for a member of a kind K) if and only if it enables that K to actually fulfill its essential goals and/or it strengthens its being disposed toward fulfilling the latter.

Problem 6. (*demon*): Here is a counterexample to the left-to-right reading. What is morally good for a demonic entity does *not* enable that entity to actually fulfill its essential goals and/or to strengthen the relevant disposition. On the contrary, it is morally good for that entity if something *prevents* that entity from fulfilling its essential goals.

Problem 7. (*goodness-goals*): There is one more general concern lurking behind the missile and the demonic entity counterexamples. Indeed, in order for something to be good, it is *not* enough that it fulfills or that it is strongly disposed toward fulfilling (or that it enables something else toward fulfilling) certain essential goals. The relevant goals must already be good ones. Thus, goodness cannot be determined just by the pursuit of essential goals.

Problem 8. (*hand*): Here is a counterexample to the right-to-left reading of the equivalence. A well-functioning hand seems to be endowed with all the features that are needed in order to reach its own goals (e.g., being made of flesh). Yet, that hand may turn out to fall prey to something bad (e.g., burning) *exactly by virtue of* those very features.⁷

Problem 9. (*hierarchy*): When multiple goals are at stake, it is necessary to have a hierarchy of goals based on the goodness they contribute to. For example, an infectious leg may still fulfill some of its essential goals. However, it contributes something bad to the body it is a part of. Namely, it does *not* perform its essential function

⁷The missile objection is stated by Pigden (1990). Oderberg (2020) discusses these problems. He also deals with further problems that mostly affect the convertibility of being and goodness. For example, that an increase in the number of existing entities need *not* imply an increase in goodness; that the nonexistence of something may be required in order to reach the 'greater good' that thing contributes to and/or in order to perform its essential goals. As I shall not defend here the convertibility of being and goodness, I shall not deal with these problems.

within the body. Why is it better to remove the leg, so as to consider the latter function more important than the former essential goals?

Here is another case. Socrates may have his own survival as one of his essential goals. However, he may also have—among his essential goals—the pursuit of a life in accordance with reason. When Crito suggests that he flee from Athens in order to save his life, what is good for Socrates? Is it good for him to pursue his own survival and flee from Athens? Or is it good for him to pursue the latter goal and live in accordance with what is determined by reason (i.e., that repelling the laws and fleeing is always bad and prohibited)?

These problems will be dealt with in Sections 3 and 6.

Let me now turn to the metaphysics of causal powers—or powers, in short. Oderberg (2020) and Page (2020) have recently argued that a Neo-Aristotelian theory of goodness may greatly benefit from embracing powers. Oderberg defends the idea that it is good for an entity to actualize its essential potencies/tendencies. Page points out that, in a sense, all powers are connected with goodness, insofar as they point toward certain goals, that is, their own manifestations, and insofar as they can be activated so as to reach those goals. However, in order to narrow down the powers that are actually and more relevantly connected with goodness, he suggests that one should only consider those powers that primarily ground/unify all the other powers of an entity. Only the manifestations/goals of such powers are goodness-conferring. Thus, only such powers are goodness-conferring powers. I shall follow in Page's footsteps. However, Page does not invoke further entities besides powers (e.g., he does not invoke power bearers such as Socrates). This is meant to make his theory compatible with the possibility of there being only powers in the universe—or, more precisely, of objects entirely consisting of powers. Thus, he does not suggest (as I do) that goodness-conferring powers are essential to their bearers.⁸ At any rate, it is worth pointing out that the purpose of Page's work (at least in Page, 2020) is exploratory: he aims at considering the possibility of accounting for goodness *only* through the metaphysics of powers—even if he does not necessarily embrace this view.

In comparison with Oderberg (2020) and resting on my own account of teleological powers, I shall invoke one specific mechanism through which (at least some of) the essential powers of an entity can work as final causes with respect to the other powers.⁹ Additionally, in comparison with both Oderberg and Page, I shall single out several concepts of goodness, of good agents and actions, as well as several options when it comes to the number and types of essential goals. Finally, I shall deal with some further problems.

Indeed, a power-based approach to Neo-Aristotelian goodness must solve at least two further problems, in addition to the ones presented above.

Problem 10. (*better–worse powers*): This approach should make sense of comparative goodness in terms of powers. Indeed, how can something be better than or worse than something else? How do powers justify such comparative ascriptions of goodness?

⁸My view is also able to cope with Page's 'bearer worry', his 'too restrictive worry' and his 'too permissive worry'. As we shall see below, the primary bearers of goodness are agents, but goodness is conferred to them by GC-powers. However, even actions can be said to be good. This copes with the first two worries. The third worry is coped with in different ways by the four options I shall describe in Section 3.

⁹Further differences between Oderberg's account and my own account of final causes are examined in Paolini Paoletti (2021).

Problem 11. (*single- or multi-track*): Powers may be either single-track or multi-track.¹⁰ A single-track power has only one manifestation. A multi-track power has multiple manifestations in distinct circumstances. Assume that goodness-conferring powers are single track. In this case, their manifestations may be not specific enough. For example, if the relevant manifestation of a goodness-conferring power is living according to reason, then such a manifestation may have distinct “realizations” in distinct circumstances: studying Aristotle; governing one’s own appetites when drinking; and so on. Moreover, how are such specific “realizations” connected with the more generic manifestation? Is studying Aristotle a determinate of living according to reason, which is then a determinable? Is it partially identical with the latter? Finally, if there is a distinction between the former “realizations” and the generic manifestation, then too many entities seem to come into existence. For example, when my friend Tom lives according to reason in a certain circumstance (e.g., when he studies Aristotle), two entities come into existence: Tom’s living according to reason and Tom’s studying Aristotle.

But assume now that goodness-conferring powers are multi-track. For example, that the power of living according to reason has multiple and more specific manifestations in distinct circumstances. What unifies such manifestations, so as for them to count as the manifestations of one and the same power? And what makes it the case that, for example, studying Aristotle and drinking water seem *not* to be manifestations of one and the same power, so that they are *not* unified?

One may suggest that the relevant “unifiers” be nothing but features that multiple and more specific manifestations have in common. And that the former are somehow derivative in comparison with the latter. For example, letting people live in accordance with reason is a feature shared by specific manifestations such as studying Aristotle and governing one’s own appetites when drinking. However, this response seemingly neglects the fact that unifiers often “come first.” Indeed, it is often because one wants to live in accordance with reason that one is also interested in studying Aristotle. Thus, living in accordance with reason cannot just be something that multiple and more specific manifestations have in common and that somehow derive from the latter. Living in accordance with reason somehow contributes to determining the latter manifestations.

2 | STRONGLY TELEOLOGICAL POWERS AND TENDENCIES

In this article, I shall defend the thesis that goodness-conferring powers are a certain type of powers, that is, strongly teleological tendencies (possibly endowed with goodness). Therefore, it will be necessary to briefly introduce strongly teleological powers and tendencies, as they have been described in Paolini Paoletti (2021, 2022).

My account of strongly teleological powers rests on a number of assumptions about powers. I do not claim that all such assumptions are required in order to allow for strongly teleological powers. However, I shall mention them for the sake of accuracy. First, powers are property-like entities that are borne by primary substances such as Socrates, this desk or my

¹⁰For an introduction to the metaphysics of powers and dispositions, see Choi and Fara (2018). On single-track and multi-track powers, see, for example, Mumford (1998), Molnar (2003), Bird (2007), Lowe (2010) and Vetter (2015). This problem is also discussed to some extent by Page (2020).

dog. Second, powers are also individuated by their manifestations. My power to *leave Moscow* is also individuated by its manifestation/end result, that is, my having left Moscow. Third, the possession of a power is distinct from its activation. It is one thing to possess the power to *leave Moscow*. It is another thing to activate that power and produce the relevant manifestation/end result. Fourth, in principle, it is possible to distinguish between the activation of a power (e.g., activating the power to *leave Moscow*, namely, leaving Moscow) and the manifestation/end result of that activation (e.g., my having left Moscow, namely, my not being in Moscow anymore).

Fifth, there are only active powers in the universe, that is, powers to produce/cause something. Passive powers, that is, powers to undergo something/be caused to change, are not needed. Whatever can be explained by appealing to passive powers can be exhaustively explained by appealing to active powers alone—and possibly to properties that are not powers.

Sixth, there are two kinds of powers: basic powers and non-basic ones. Basic powers are not activated in virtue of anything else. They can be just activated or not activated by their bearers—full stop. Non-basic powers are activated in virtue of something else, that is, their activation conditions. The activation conditions of a non-basic power are those conditions that guarantee/are sufficient for its activation. They may consist in the end results of the activation of further powers and/or in the obtaining of certain conditions in the universe.¹¹

Seventh, the activation conditions of non-basic powers are essential to the latter. For example, my power to *move my arm in virtue of deciding it* has certain essential activation conditions, that is, my decision to move my arm. Had it not had such activation conditions, it would have been another power.

I am well aware that some of these assumptions are contentious. And—as I have already claimed—I do not rule out that one can drop some of such assumptions and still accept strongly teleological tendencies.

At any rate, here come strongly teleological powers. I only mention here the characterization of strongly teleological powers that allow for the possibility of there being multiple strongly teleological powers in an entity:

(STP) as a matter of metaphysical necessity, p is a strongly teleological power of a substance s if and only if (i) p is basic, (ii) p is essential to s , and (iii) at least some of the other powers of s depend for their activation (also or only) on p 's activation.

For example, Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason* is a strongly teleological power insofar as: (i) it is basic (i.e., it is not activated in virtue of anything else, though some background conditions may be required for its activation); (ii) it is essential to Socrates (i.e., it is part of what Socrates most fundamentally is—or could be—in all possible circumstances in which he exists); (iii) at least some of the other powers of Socrates depend for their activation (also or only) on the activation of Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason*. For example, that Socrates may inquire into truth depends on the activation of Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason*—alone or together with further activation conditions (e.g., helping his friends to reach the truth and/or reaching a certain social status). Thus, Socrates actually has the non-basic power to *inquire into truth in virtue of living in accordance with reason* or the

¹¹This does not rule out that even basic powers may need certain background conditions in order to be possibly activated by their bearers. Yet, such conditions are necessary though not sufficient for the activation of basic powers. Paolini Paoletti (2021).

non-basic power to *inquire into truth in virtue of living in accordance with reason and helping his friends to reach the truth (and/or reaching a certain social status)*.¹²

As I argue in Paolini Paoletti (2021), clause (i) (i.e., the basicness of strongly teleological powers) and clause (iii) (i.e., their participation in the activation conditions of the other powers of a substance) are required in order to account for the fundamentality of final causes *qua* powers. Indeed, following Aristotelian and Neo-Aristotelian teleology,¹³ not only are final causes equipped with an irreducible causal and explanatory role, but they also play an irreducible role in determining the workings of non-final causes. The first feature of final causes is guaranteed by clause (i). On the contrary, if strongly teleological powers were non-basic, they would depend on something else, so that their causal and explanatory role could be reduced (at least in part) to the role played by their dependees (i.e., the entities upon which they would depend). The second feature of final causes is guaranteed by clause (iii). Strongly teleological powers determine the workings of non-final causes by participating in the activation conditions of (at least some of) the other powers of a substance.¹⁴

In a similar vein, clause (ii) (i.e., the essentiality of strongly teleological powers) is required in order to make sense of the idea that the goals of a substance are essential to that substance. In a nutshell, clauses (i)–(iii) are meant to make sense of some crucial features of Aristotelian (and Neo-Aristotelian) teleology.

(STP) does *not* entail that every substance must be endowed with strongly teleological powers. And it is fully compatible with the possibility of there being individual and non-kind-relative strongly teleological powers.¹⁵

In this context, strongly teleological powers are supposed to clarify essential goals. Indeed, for Neo-Aristotelian theories of goodness, in order for something/someone to be a good member of its kind, it must fulfill (or be disposed toward fulfilling) its essential goal(s). And, more generally, for such theories, goodness is strictly connected with essential goals and final causes. Essential goals and final causes can be adequately made sense of by appealing to strongly teleological powers, as shown in Paolini Paoletti (2021). Therefore, strongly teleological powers can be invoked in order to make sense of Neo-Aristotelian goodness.

Another ingredient to build up my Neo-Aristotelian power-based account of goodness is constituted by tendencies. Tendencies are powers that are endowed with degrees of activation higher than 0 and lower than 1. Namely, it is *not* the case that a tendency cannot get activated. And it is *not* the case that a tendency cannot but get activated (possibly, when it meets its activation conditions).

There are both basic and non-basic tendencies. The former are endowed with specific degrees of activation, which make it the case that it is more or less probable that they get activated by their bearers: the higher the degree, the higher the probability. For example, if Socrates' power to

¹²Thus, the dependence of a non-basic power upon its activation conditions is metaphysical. Of course, the non-basic powers of a substance mentioned in clause (iii) are not those that are *trivially* (i.e., merely by logical necessity) activated in virtue of that substance's basic powers (e.g., the power to *be such that $2 + 2 = 4$ in virtue of living in accordance with reason*).

¹³On Aristotle's teleology, see Johnson (2005), Leunissen (2010), and Gotthelf (2012).

¹⁴In Paolini Paoletti (2021), I also motivate the introduction of basic powers in order to avoid an infinite regress and further unpalatable consequences. Basic powers may turn out to make sense of a libertarian conception of free will as well. In this respect, see for example O'Connor (2000, 2009, 2022), Lowe (2008), Clarke (2009), Griffith (2010), and Steward (2012).

¹⁵Additionally, I also talk of weakly teleological powers and explores the possibility of the coincidence between strongly and weakly teleological powers. I shall not dwell on these issues here.

live in accordance with reason were a basic tendency of Socrates, it would be endowed with a certain degree of activation. And such a degree would make it more or less probable that Socrates activates that tendency. Non-basic tendencies are endowed with specific degrees of activation as well. And such degrees make it the case that it is more or less probable that they get activated by their bearers when the relevant activation conditions are met.¹⁶

The degree of activation of a tendency should not be confused with the probability that it gets activated. On the contrary, it is the former that grounds the latter. Moreover, the degree of activation should not be confused with the degree of manifestation of a power, that is, with “how much” of a certain manifestation that power gives rise to.¹⁷

Degrees of activation are features/properties of tendencies. Moreover, they can increase and decrease over time. And they can be caused to increase and decrease over time. Namely, the degree of activation of Socrates' basic tendency to *live in accordance with reason* can increase and decrease over time, thus making it the case that (over time) it gets more probable or less probable that Socrates activates that tendency and lives in accordance with reason. Moreover, the degree of activation of Socrates' basic tendency to *live in accordance with reason* can also be caused to increase and decrease over time by Socrates himself and/or by further substances.

Equipped with strongly teleological powers and tendencies, it is now time to introduce Goodness-Confering powers.

3 | GOODNESS-CONFERRING POWERS

Goodness-Confering powers (from now onwards, GC-powers) are those powers that confer goodness upon their bearers. Or, at least, a certain sort and a certain amount of goodness, as we shall see. Thus, GC-powers make their bearers good agents—at least to a certain extent. Moreover, they also make it the case that certain actions are endowed with specific sorts and specific amounts of goodness.

In this section, I shall present GC-powers. I shall explore four options with regard to their number and their connections with strongly teleological powers. I shall then define the goodness values of the GC-powers possessed by specific entities at specific times. Finally, I shall show how some *desiderata* and problems connected with Neo-Aristotelian goodness can be dealt with. In Section 4, I shall talk of good agents. In Section 5, I shall deal with good actions.

What I suggest here is that GC-powers may be considered strongly teleological tendencies. If Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason* is a GC-power, then it is a strongly teleological tendency. As a strongly teleological power, that power is essential to Socrates, basic and it is such that at least some of the other powers of Socrates depend for their activation (also or only) on its activation. As a tendency, it is endowed with a certain degree of activation. The degree of activation may vary over time. Moreover, when tendencies belonging to different bearers are considered, the degrees of activation of such tendencies may vary across bearers of the same kind and across bearers of different kinds. Socrates' strongly teleological tendency to *live in accordance with reason* may be endowed with a higher degree of activation than Crito's strongly teleological

¹⁶Or, more precisely, the relevant “activation*” conditions—as activation conditions are supposed to guarantee the activation of a non-basic power.

¹⁷Moreover, I also argue that tendencies cannot overdispose in respect of their degrees of activation, i.e., that they cannot have degrees of activation higher than 1.

tendency to *live in accordance with reason*. And Socrates' strongly teleological tendency to *live in accordance with reason* may be endowed with a lower degree of activation than Plato's corresponding tendency.

Three cautionary remarks. First of all, being basic, GC-powers *qua* strongly teleological tendencies seem to imply the rejection of determinism. Indeed, being a basic power, the activation of a GC-power *cannot* be determined by previous states of the universe together with the laws of nature.

The denial of determinism looks counterintuitive, or at least highly contentious. Three responses are available. First response: one may just swallow the idea that the existence of GC-powers (and of basic powers in general) is incompatible with the truth of determinism. Second response: one may hold that determinism only holds for entities that do *not* have GC-powers (or basic powers in general). Third response: one may attenuate the basicness constraint and hold that at least some entities are endowed with GC-powers that are “basic” only improperly. Their being basic only improperly amounts to the fact that such GC-powers *cannot* be activated (also or only) in virtue of further powers and/or conditions of *their bearers*,¹⁸ though they *can* be activated (also or only) in virtue of further powers and/or conditions of *other entities*.¹⁹

At any rate, improperly “basic” GC-powers do *not* necessarily come together with determinism. If determinism were false, such GC-powers could be thought of as non-basic tendencies.²⁰

Second, not all the strongly teleological powers possessed by an entity need also be GC-powers, as we shall see. But all the GC-powers of an entity—I suggest—should be seen as strongly teleological tendencies.

Third, thinking of GC-powers in terms of tendencies allows us to make sense of their being “more” or “less” activated by their bearers, so that their bearers have a higher or a lower amount of goodness, as we shall see. Moreover, tendencies may change over time their degrees of activation. And this may explain why the bearers of GC-powers become better or worse.

It goes without saying that the goals of an entity are the manifestations of its strongly teleological powers. And the goals of an entity that are connected with its goodness are the manifestations of its GC-powers, that is, of its strongly teleological tendencies that are goodness-conferring.

We should now ask ourselves if *all* of the strongly teleological tendencies of an entity are GC-powers. If the answer is positive, we are led to embrace what I call “allism” about GC-powers. If the answer is negative, we are led to embrace “non-allism” about GC-powers. We should also ask ourselves if an entity has *only one* GC-power (and only one goodness-conferring goal) or *more than one* GC-power (and more than one goodness-conferring goal). In the first case, we are led to

¹⁸Or of the *parts* of their bearers, if any—though this addition looks a bit more controversial.

¹⁹The GC-powers of artifacts may be thought of along these lines, even if I shall not dwell here on this suggestion. Of course, if an agent has a basic power and an artifact (e.g., a knife) does *not* have one, when the agent uses the artifact, she is free to do it, insofar as using the artifact results from activating one of her basic powers.

²⁰On the contrary, if determinism were true, improperly “basic” GC-powers could not be considered tendencies. For they could be either activated or unactivated—full stop. Therefore, when evaluating their goodness, one would only take into account certain dimensions and not others. More precisely, deterministic improperly “basic” GC-powers would only contribute to the actual and purely actual goodness of their agents, but not to the tendential goodness of the latter. And their goodness values would only hinge on their weights (if any) and not on their degrees of activation. See below for these notions.

embrace what I call “monism” about GC-powers. In the second case, we are led to embrace what I call “pluralism” about GC-powers.

We now have four options with respect to the GC-powers of an entity: allist monism (i.e., all of its strongly teleological tendencies are GC-powers and it has only one GC-power); allist pluralism (i.e., all of its strongly teleological tendencies are GC-powers and it has more than one GC-power); non-allist monism (i.e., not all of its strongly teleological tendencies are GC-powers and it has only one GC-power); non-allist pluralism (i.e., not all of its strongly teleological tendencies are GC-powers and it has more than one GC-power).

For example, on allist monism, all of the strongly teleological tendencies of Socrates are GC-powers and Socrates has only one GC-power. This obviously entails that Socrates has only one strongly teleological tendency. On allist pluralism, all of the strongly teleological tendencies of Socrates are GC-powers and Socrates has multiple GC-powers. On non-allist monism, not all of the strongly teleological tendencies of Socrates are GC-powers and Socrates has only one GC-power. Finally, on non-allist pluralism, not all of the strongly teleological tendencies of Socrates are GC-powers and Socrates has multiple GC-powers.

Of course, different options may hold for different kinds of entities and—possibly—even for different members of the same kind.²¹

Mutatis mutandis, these options are also open to those who do *not* believe in GC-powers. Indeed, one may accept one of such options and not believe in GC-powers, but in something else replacing GC-powers (and final causes in general). Therefore, by considering these options, I do not aim at providing an argument for GC-powers *qua* strongly teleological tendencies. I only wish to explore the options one has when dealing with *desideratum 4* (*number and types of GC-powers*), *desideratum 5* (*extension of GC-powers*), *problem 2* (*extension*), and *problem 5* (*goodness-goals*). In due course, I shall also evaluate these options and “keep the score,” so to say.

Allist positions have one advantage over non-allist positions. On the former, the goodness conferred by a GC-power may be identified with or reduced to that power’s being a strongly teleological tendency. In a nutshell, goodness turns out to be identical with or reduced to the teleological dimension of strongly teleological tendencies.

The drawback of allist positions is that all the entities endowed with strongly teleological tendencies turn out to be endowed with goodness—at least in some sense. And all of the goals of such entities connected with such tendencies (possibly including their reproduction, their survival, and so on) turn out to be “good.”

But this is a price that Neo-Aristotelians may wish to pay. Indeed, Neo-Aristotelians are inclined to subsume the moral goodness of an agent under that agent’s natural goodness.²² In the end, moral goodness is a special case of natural goodness. Therefore, Neo-Aristotelians may hold that many substances are endowed with some kind of natural goodness, insofar as they fulfill/are disposed toward fulfilling their essential goals through the activation of their strongly teleological tendencies. And all of such goals are good, in some way or another—even if some goals may be better than others, as we shall see.²³

²¹It is more difficult to figure out how one and the same entity may go through different options at different times, but this possibility is not ruled out by my account.

²²See Hursthouse (1999) and Foot (2001).

²³Please note that this option is fully compatible with the following possibilities: a substance has a strongly teleological power which is *not* a tendency, but that power is not a GC-power, so that that substance is *not* endowed with goodness (at least not as a consequence of having that power); a substance has a strongly teleological power that is improperly “basic” and that power is *not* a GC-power (at least if one does *not* wish to attenuate the basicness constraint on GC-powers), so that substance is not endowed with goodness.

On non-allist positions, on the other hand, goodness does not “come for free,” so to say. That a certain strongly teleological tendency is a goodness-conferring one is an *additional* feature of that tendency. Moreover, not all of the strongly teleological tendencies of an entity need also be goodness-conferring. This implies that one can prevent controversial goals and controversial strongly teleological tendencies (and their bearers) from being good.

The drawback of non-allist positions is that one should then explain how and why the property of *being goodness-conferring* gets attached to certain strongly teleological tendencies and not to others.²⁴

Monist positions are ontologically cheaper. Yet, they reduce the goodness of an entity to only one GC-power. If coupled with non-allism, this entails that the activation of all of the other strongly teleological tendencies that are not GC-powers is “neutral”—neither good nor bad. If coupled with allism, monism entails that everything an entity does and can do ultimately depends on its only one strongly teleological tendency, which is also a GC-power (at least if further strongly teleological powers that are *not* tendencies are ruled out). Thus, everything turns out to be good (or bad) in one single dimension (i.e., that of the relevant GC-power).

Pluralist positions can allow for the presence of multiple goodness-conferring goals. But they should face the threat of solving possible conflicts between such goals and (possibly) of assigning different weights to them. These threats may be faced by invoking “weights” as features/properties of GC-powers (see below).

In the end, I believe that pluralist positions are better equipped than monist positions in order to make sense of our commonsensical intuitions. Indeed, it seems that we are inclined to believe that many entities in the universe—including ourselves—have multiple goals. And that such goals may be in conflict with one another, as shown by Socrates' and Crito's example. Moreover, pluralist positions have wider explanatory breadth. Such positions, by possibly appealing to multiple goals, can explain what agents do (and can do).

Any given GC-power possessed by any given entity at any given time has a certain degree of activation. For example, Socrates' GC-power to *live in accordance with reason* had a high degree of activation in 399 B.C. As far as a certain entity is concerned, the degrees of activation of its GC-powers may change over time or remain stable.

Moreover, the GC-powers possessed by entities at times also have specific “weights,” so to say. The weight of a GC-power may be seen as a feature/property of that GC-power, by analogy with its degree of activation (which is also a feature/property of GC-powers). Crucially enough, the weight of a GC-power cannot be identified with, nor reduced to the amount of goodness that GC-power contributes to. Otherwise, my account would be circular. Namely, it is *not* legitimate to claim that a GC-power is “heavier than” another GC-power insofar as the former contributes a higher amount of goodness in comparison with the latter. The weight of a GC-power should be either considered an irreducible feature/property or one that is determined by factors that do *not* involve goodness. For example, a GC-power (e.g., living in according with reason) may be heavier than another (e.g., survival) insofar as the former is “more specific” to its agent than the latter, that is, it more directly characterizes the species to which the agent belongs (e.g., human beings).

At any rate, as far as a given entity at a given time is concerned, that entity may have (at that time) heavier GC-powers and lighter GC-powers. Or all of the GC-powers of an entity at a certain time may have the same weight. I call the former position “*élitarianism*” about the GC-powers

²⁴Non-allist positions are compatible with a Moorean view of goodness, according to which goodness is a primitive and irreducible property (see Moore, 1903).

of an entity at a given time and the latter position “egalitarianism” about the GC-powers of an entity at a given time.

For example, on élitarianism, in 399 B.C., Socrates' GC-power to *live in accordance with reason* may be heavier than his power to *reproduce*. Or, on egalitarianism, both GC-powers of Socrates (and all of his GC-powers) may have at that time the same weight.

Weights must be taken into account when one tries to establish if a given GC-power (and its goal) is better or worse than another GC-power (and its goal). For example, when one tries to establish if (at a certain time) living in accordance with reason is better or worse for Socrates than reproducing.

In principle, the weights of GC-powers may vary (or remain stable) across different kinds and across different members of the same kind.²⁵ Of course, with monism, there is only one GC-power and it is not crucial to take into account its weight.

We can now determine the goodness value of a given GC-power possessed by a given entity at a given time. For example, the goodness value of Socrates' GC-power to *live in accordance with reason* in 399 B.C. Such a value depends on two factors. First, it depends on the degree of activation of that GC-power possessed by that entity at that time, for example, on the degree of activation in 399 B.C. of Socrates' GC-power to *live in accordance with reason*. Second, it depends on the weight of that GC-power possessed by that entity at that time, for example, on the weight (in 399 B.C.) of Socrates' GC-power to *live in accordance with reason*.

Before introducing good agents, I wish to summarize the conclusions of this section and see how they can satisfy at least some of the *desiderata* presented in Section 1. Further *desiderata* will be dealt with in the next Sections. I suggested that GC-powers are strongly teleological tendencies. I then explored four different options regarding the extension and the number of their GC-powers: allist monism, allist pluralism, non-allist monism, non-allist pluralism. Finally, I suggested that one can determine the goodness value of a GC-power possessed by a given entity at a given time by taking into account the degree of activation and the weight of that GC-power (by that entity at that time).

GC-powers are essential to their bearers, but not all of the GC-powers (and the corresponding goals) need be kind-relative. There may also be individual and non-kind-relative GC-powers (and the corresponding goals). Moreover, in connection with *desideratum 7 (actually-disposed)*, it is one thing to fulfill one's GC-goals (i.e., the goals/manifestations of GC-powers). And it is another thing to be *disposed* toward fulfilling one's GC-goals. This distinction may well be grounded in the metaphysics of powers and tendencies. Indeed, it is one thing to be able to exercise a certain GC-power with a certain degree of activation, that is, with a higher or lower tendency to get activated. It is another thing to activate that GC-power.

In connection with *desideratum 4 (number and types)*, it is possible to single out how many essential goals—and what goals—are connected with goodness. Indeed, as I pointed out, my account is compatible with different options with respect to the GC-powers and GC-goals of an entity at a given time.

My account is also able to answer the following questions connected with *desideratum 5 (extension)*: are all the entities that are endowed with essential goals also characterized by goodness? Are there good entities that are *not* endowed with essential goals?

With respect to the former question, my account is *also* compatible with a negative answer. Not all of the strongly teleological powers in nature need also be GC-powers, at least if one does *not* embrace an unrestricted version of allism. Indeed, if one embraces non-allism

²⁵In principle, they may also vary over time when only one member of a certain kind is taken into account.

or some version of allism restricted to specific kinds of entities, there may well be strongly teleological tendencies that are not GC-powers. However, my preferences go to allist pluralism. Therefore, I believe that all of the strongly teleological tendencies of an entity may well qualify as GC-powers.

With respect to the latter question, I hold that yes, there are good entities not endowed with essential goals. But these are good actions. And their goodness is strictly tied to the goodness of their agents and/or of the corresponding GC-powers, as we shall see.

We can also solve three problems for Neo-Aristotelian theories of goodness.

With *problem 1 (normativity)*, Silverstein (2016) points out that normative judgments about good and bad knives do *not* just flow from the functions and goals of such knives. They flow from the needs of their users. Here, a distinction should be drawn. Presumably, all the manifestations of GC-powers are non-relational states of their bearers, that is, states consisting in the possession of non-relational properties by their bearers. But there may be improperly “basic” powers that are activated in virtue of the powers of other entities. Such powers could still have non-relational manifestations. Yet, in order to reach those manifestations, further powers of further entities must be activated.

Take a GC-power that has a non-relational manifestation and is not improperly “basic,” for example, Socrates’ living in accordance with reason. Performing the relevant function connected with this power coincides with the *need* of its agent. Indeed, performing the relevant function consists in activating the relevant GC-power—and possibly also in doing something else in virtue of such an activation, as we shall see. *In this case*, the agent’s need is nothing but its tendency toward activating that GC-power: the more the agent needs to activate that GC-power (i.e., the more the manifestation of that GC-power is crucial to or looks crucial to the agent), the more the agent tends toward activating that power. And vice versa: the more the agent tends toward activating that power, the more the agent needs to activate it. However, not all needs are connected with GC-powers.

At any rate, knives may have improperly “basic” GC-powers, as suggested above. Such powers should be distinguished from the needs of their users. More precisely, the activation of the improperly “basic” GC-powers of knives may be due to the powers of their users. Thus, in this case, one should look to the powers of users (e.g., the power to cut). It is the powers of their users that account for the well-functioning of knives. But, in this case, the powers of their users coincide with specific *needs* of their users (e.g., someone’s need to cut).²⁶ Namely, the users of knives need to do certain things with knives. Thus, the well-functioning of knives is also due to the needs of their users: knives are well-functioning insofar as they meet the needs of their users, that is, insofar as they subserve the activation of the powers/needs of their users, such as the power/need to cut. Subsequently, the goodness of knives—which derives from their well-functioning—is due to such needs as well.

Please note that, in this latter case, the powers/needs of users that confer goodness to knives need *not* be GC-powers of users. And the former powers need *not* be activated (also or only) in virtue of the GC-powers of users. Roughly, knives may function well (i.e., they may be good knives, thus being disposed toward activating their improperly “basic” GC-powers) even if and when their well-functioning depends on “bad” or “neutral” powers of their users.²⁷

²⁶More precisely, needs may be seen as powers whose activation matters to a certain extent to their bearers. As I shall claim in a few lines, not all of the needs of an entity need also be GC-powers of that entity. However, as I claimed above, activating a GC-power coincides with satisfying one of the needs of the agent. Unfortunately, I shall not be able to provide here a more thorough and general analysis of needs in terms of powers.

²⁷Remember also that introducing improperly basic powers does *not* entail the acceptance of determinism. For improperly “basic” powers may well be non-basic tendencies.

In this scenario, I distinguished between the improperly “basic” powers of artifacts and the powers of their users. I also assumed that the latter are needs of their users and that they can also be “bad” or “neutral.” Thus, not all the needs turn out to be good: Some of them are “bad” or “neutral.” An alternative scenario is one in which not all the relevant powers of users (i.e., the ones that activate the improperly “basic” powers of artifacts) are needs. Some of such powers may well be “bad” or “neutral.” Yet, this does *not* imply that there are “bad” or “neutral” needs. All needs may turn out to be good.

By assigning different weights to GC-powers and GC-goals, we can also resolve possible conflicts between goals, that is, *problem 9 (hierarchy)*. There may be different reasons as to why some GC-powers and GC-goals are more important than others. For example, maybe those that are more specific to the members of a certain species (e.g., the GC-power to *live in accordance with reason*) are more important than those that are more generic (e.g., the GC-power to *reproduce*).²⁸ I shall return to *problem 9 (hierarchy)* and the case of the infectious leg in Section 6.

Finally, it is possible to reply in different ways to the following concern: in order for something to be good, its relevant goals must already be good ones. This is *problem 7 (goodness-goals)*. Actually, on allism, all strongly teleological tendencies are GC-powers, so that they are all tied to goodness. Thus, one may claim that their goodness (and the goodness of their goals) is identical with or reduces to their teleological dimension. *Problem 7 (goodness-goals)* does *not* arise for allism, even if allism should still be able to cope with the demon and the missile counterexamples (see Section 6). The problem only arises for non-allism, insofar as one needs to single out the strongly teleological tendencies that are also GC-powers. I shall not discuss this position here. Maybe a non-allist may surmise that there is some irreducible property of *being goodness-conferring* that is only had by certain strongly teleological tendencies, and not others. And there is no further explanation for this. At any rate, what matters now is that the problem at stake does *not* affect every position described in this Section. And I have already expressed my own preference for allist positions, at least from a Neo-Aristotelian perspective.

4 | GOOD AGENTS

Good agents are the bearers of GC-powers. In the end, they owe their goodness to the relevant GC-powers and to how they are exercised. However, in this section, I shall distinguish between three different notions of goodness that may attach to good agents.²⁹ These are tendential goodness, actual goodness, and purely actual goodness. To define actual and purely actual goodness, it will be necessary to single out the actions that are connected with specific GC-powers. Among the latter, I shall also distinguish between primary and secondary actions and pure and impure actions.

First of all, there is *tendential goodness*. Tendential goodness consists in how much and to what extent an agent is disposed toward doing something good by activating its GC-powers. Thus, the tendential goodness of Socrates at a given time with respect to one of its GC-powers

²⁸In this respect, see Stump and Kretzmann (1990) and the discussion in Hurka (1993).

²⁹In order to allow for possibly widespread natural goodness, I do *not* assume that agents must have intentionality and/or be endowed with any specific mental feature. Indeed, if it is possible to talk of good or bad artifacts, even inanimate beings may count as good or bad agents.

amounts to the goodness value at that time of that GC-power possessed by Socrates. In turn, the goodness value at that time of that GC-power possessed by Socrates depends on its degree of activation (i.e., on how much Socrates tends toward activating it) and on its weight at that time. Thus, the tendential goodness of Socrates at a given time with respect to one of its GC-powers amounts to the degree of activation and the weight of that GC-power (possessed by Socrates) at that time. For example, the tendential goodness of Socrates in 399 B.C. with respect to Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason* amounts to the degree of activation (i.e., to how much Socrates tends toward living in accordance with reason) and to the weight of that power as it is possessed by Socrates in 399 B.C.

We can then determine the *overall tendential goodness value* of an agent at a given time by putting together all of the goodness values of its GC-powers at that time. Accordingly, we can then claim that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, an agent is tendentially better than another agent at a given time if and only if the overall tendential goodness value of the former agent at that time is higher than the overall tendential goodness value of the latter agent at that very time. For example, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, Socrates is tendentially better than Crito in 399 B.C. if and only if the overall tendential goodness value of Socrates in 399 B.C. is higher than the overall tendential goodness value of Crito in 399 B.C.

Finally, we can claim that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, an agent is tendentially good at a given time if and only if the overall tendential goodness value of that agent at that time is above a certain threshold.

Of course, it is not easy to implement the calculation of such values. Moreover, here and with respect to actual and purely actual goodness, the relevant functions may be distinct from and more complex than sum and multiplication. I leave this issue open. What I wished to show here is that, in principle, it is possible to invoke GC-powers for the sake of constructing and calculating a certain notion of goodness (i.e., tendential goodness) and of comparing the tendential goodness of different agents.

The tendential goodness of an agent may change over time. Namely, it can increase or decrease. It may also be caused to change over time, that is, to increase or decrease.

At any rate, it is one thing to be endowed with a certain amount of tendential goodness at a time. And it is quite another thing to be *actually* good at that time. Socrates may be endowed with a huge amount of tendential goodness in 399 B.C. But in 399 B.C., or up to 399 B.C., or during a certain time interval including the year 399 B.C., he may perform few good actions or no good action at all (at least in principle). For strongly tending toward goodness does *not* guarantee that one actually and inevitably does something good. It only increases to a certain extent the probability of the latter phenomenon.

Before introducing two different ways of being actually good for agents, it is necessary to talk of actions. I take actions to be the activations of specific powers by agents at certain times or over certain time intervals. Socrates' listening to Crito at a certain time or over a certain time interval is nothing but the activation of Socrates' power to *listen to Crito* at that time or over that time interval.

We can now specify the actions of an agent that are connected with a given GC-power. They include the activations of that GC-power by that agent (at certain times/over certain time intervals) and the activations of further powers by that agent (at certain times/over certain time intervals) that take place also or only in virtue of the activation of that GC-power by that agent.

Among the actions of an agent that are connected with a given GC-power, there are *primary actions* and *secondary actions*. Primary actions are all and only the activations of the relevant

GC-power by the agent at certain times/over certain time intervals. For example, Socrates' activating in 399 B.C. his power to *live in accordance with reason*.

Secondary actions are all and only the activations of further powers by the agent (at certain times/over certain time intervals) that take place also or only in virtue of the activation(s) of the relevant GC-power(s) by that agent. For example, Socrates' activating at some time in 400 B.C. his power to *talk with Plato in virtue of activating his power to live in accordance with reason* (or, more precisely, in virtue of the end result of the activation of the latter power, e.g., Socrates being guided by reason). The secondary action at stake is not that of talking with Plato, but that of talking with Plato in virtue of activating Socrates' power of living in accordance with reason. This secondary action depends—through the activation condition of the relevant power—upon Socrates' primary action of living in accordance with reason.

Among the actions of an agent that are connected with a given GC-power, we can also distinguish between *pure* and *impure actions*. Pure actions are all and only (i) the primary actions connected with that GC-power and (ii) the secondary actions connected with that GC-power that are performed by the agent *only* in virtue of the activation of the relevant GC-power. For example, Socrates' living in accordance with reason in 399 B.C. and Socrates' talking with Plato in virtue of living in accordance with reason at some time in 400 B.C. are pure actions of Socrates that are connected with Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason*.

Impure actions are all and only the secondary actions connected with the relevant GC-power that are performed by the agent in virtue of the activation of the relevant GC-power *and* in virtue of something else that is *not* the activation of a GC-power (either the same GC-power or another GC-power). For example, Socrates' talking with Plato (at some time in 400 B.C.) in virtue of living in accordance with reason and in virtue of Plato's being funny is an impure action of Socrates connected with Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason*—as Plato's being funny clearly is not one of the GC-powers of Socrates.³⁰

Intuitively and *ceteris paribus*, pure actions are better than impure ones. For they are only performed in light of the goals of the relevant GC-powers, that is, in light of the good to be pursued.

We can now define the *actual goodness* of an agent at a given time/up to a given time/over a given time interval with respect to a given GC-power. Its value depends on the number and the goodness values of the (primary and the secondary, pure and impure) actions connected with that GC-power that are/have been performed by the agent at that time/up to that time/over that time interval. For example, Socrates' actual goodness in 399 B.C./up to 399 B.C./between 400 B.C. and 399 B.C. with respect to Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason* has a certain value. That value depends on the number and the goodness values of actions that are/have been performed by Socrates in 399 B.C./up to 399 B.C./between 400 B.C. and 399 B.C. and that are connected with Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason*.³¹ The goodness values of actions will be considered in Section 5.

We can then determine the *overall actual goodness value* of an agent at a given time/up to a given time/over a given time interval by putting together all of the actual goodness values with respect to all of its GC-powers at that time/up to that time/over that time interval. Accordingly, we can then claim that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, an agent is actually better than

³⁰What about those secondary actions that are performed *only* in virtue of the activation of *multiple* GC-powers?

Intuitively, they should count as pure actions. Yet, this would imply a slight revision of the criterion stated above. I shall omit this point for the sake of simplicity.

³¹Since there are also secondary actions that are connected with multiple GC-powers (see note 30), we should not count such actions and their goodness values more than once.

another agent at a given time/up to a certain time/over a certain time interval if and only if the overall actual goodness value of the former agent at that time/up to that time/over that time interval is higher than the overall actual goodness value of the latter agent at that very time/up to that very time/over that very time interval.

Finally, we can claim that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, an agent is actually good at a given time/up to a given time/over a given time interval if and only if the overall actual goodness value of that agent at that time/up to that time/over that time interval is above a certain threshold.

In a similar vein, we can also determine the *pure actual goodness* of an agent at a given time/up to a given time/over a given time interval with respect to a certain GC-power. Its value depends on the number and the goodness values of the *pure* actions connected with that GC-power that are/have been performed by the agent at that time/up to that time/over that time interval.

The *overall pure actual goodness value* of an agent at a given time/up to a given time/over a given time interval can be then determined by putting together all of the pure actual goodness values with respect to all of its GC-powers at that time/up to that time/over that time interval. In a similar vein, it is then possible to determine whether an agent is purely and actually better than another agent at a given time/up to a given time/over a given time interval. And whether an agent is purely and actually good at a given time/up to a given time/over a given time interval.

Finally, the *overall goodness value* of an agent at a given time/up to a given time/over a given time interval can be determined by putting together its tendential goodness value at that time (or the mean value of its tendential goodness up to that time/over that time interval³²) *plus* its actual goodness value *plus* its pure and actual goodness value at that time/up to that time/over that time interval. It is then possible to determine if an agent is overall better or overall worse than another agent. And if an agent is overall good at a certain time/up to a certain time/over a certain time interval.³³

In response to the problems and *desiderata* of Section 1, I have drawn a framework through which we can determine if an agent is better than another agent and if it is good *simpliciter*. Again: It is *not* easy to implement this method. But Neo-Aristotelian goodness theorists can invoke this method and GC-powers in order to show that they can distinguish between different sorts of goodness and compare the goodness of agents. This satisfies *desideratum 6 (better-worse)* and solves *problem 10 (better-worse powers)*, at least with respect to agents.

I have also drawn a distinction between being disposed toward doing something good and actually (and purely) doing something good with respect to agents, in connection with *desideratum 7 (actually disposed)*. It is now time to show how one can determine the goodness values of actions. Such values must be taken into account when determining the actual goodness values and the pure and actual goodness values of agents at/up to times or over time intervals. To this task I now turn.

5 | GOOD ACTIONS

Recall that, in my view, actions are the activations of specific powers by agents at a certain time or over a certain time interval. Among the actions of an agent that are connected with a

³²Indeed, there is no tendential goodness of an agent up to a certain time or over a certain time interval. The tendential goodness of an agent may change from time to time.

³³It is also possible to assign different weights to tendential goodness, actual goodness, and pure and actual goodness. Intuitively, pure and actual goodness seems to matter more than the actual goodness and tendential goodness. And actual goodness seems to matter more than tendential goodness. But I shall not delve into this issue here.

certain GC-power, primary actions are all and only the activations of the relevant GC-power by the agent at certain times/over certain time intervals. Secondary actions are all and only the activations of further powers by the agent (at certain times/over certain time intervals) that take place also or only in virtue of the activation(s) of the relevant GC-power(s) by that agent.

We can also distinguish between pure and impure actions connected with a GC-power. Pure actions are all and only (i) the primary actions connected with that GC-power and (ii) the secondary actions connected with that GC-power that are performed by the agent only in virtue of the activation of the relevant GC-power. Impure actions are all and only the secondary actions connected with the relevant GC-power that are performed by the agent in virtue of the activation of the relevant GC-power and in virtue of something else that is *not* the activation of a GC-power (either the same GC-power or another GC-power).

For the sake of simplicity, I assume that each action to be taken into account in this Section (be it primary or secondary) is connected with at least and at most one GC-power. However, it is also possible that certain actions are connected with multiple GC-powers (and GC-goals). In this case, to determine the goodness values of such actions, it is necessary to sum the weights of all the GC-powers.³⁴

There are three kinds of goodness that are attached to actions: primary goodness, contributory goodness, and preventative goodness.

Primary goodness only characterizes primary actions, that is, activations of GC-powers by agents. The value of primary goodness of a given primary action at a given time (or over a given time interval) depends on three factors. First, it depends on the weights of the relevant GC-powers/GC-goals. For example, Socrates' living in accordance with reason over a given time interval may be endowed with a higher weight in comparison with Socrates' reproducing over a given time interval.

Second, it depends on the duration of the action. *Ceteris paribus*, two primary actions performed by the same agents with the same GC-goals over different time intervals are such that the longer action has a higher primary goodness value than the shorter action. Namely, Socrates' living in accordance with reason for 2 years is endowed with a higher goodness value than Socrates' living in accordance with reason for only 1 year.

Third, the primary goodness value also seems to hinge on the intentionality of the action. *Ceteris paribus*, it seems that a primary action intentionally performed by an agent at a time/over a time interval for the sake of reaching its GC-goal has a higher primary goodness value than a primary action with the same features but without the intention to reach its GC-goal.

Four clarifications are in order. First, I assume here that all of the factors that determine the primary goodness value of actions have the same weight. But one may also suggest that such factors are actually endowed with different weights. For example, the weight of the relevant GC-power may matter more than the duration and the intentionality of the action. And the intentionality of the action may matter more than its duration. But I shall set aside this complication here. I also make the same assumption for the secondary goodness value and the preventative goodness value (see below).

Second, I claimed in Section 4 that, in order to determine the tendential goodness of an agent in connection with a GC-power at a time/over a time interval, one should take into account both the weight of the GC-power and its degree of activation. But the degree of activation of the

³⁴See also notes 30 and 31.

GC-power seems *not* to be required in order to evaluate the primary goodness value of a primary action resulting from the exercise of that GC-power by that agent (at a time/over a time interval). Indeed, take two primary actions with the same GC-goals, duration, and intentionality/non-intentionality. And assume that such actions are performed by two distinct agents endowed with distinct degrees of activation of the relevant GC-power at that time/over that time interval. For example, by Socrates and Crito. And Socrates has a higher degree of activation of his GC-power to *live in accordance with reason*. It seems to me that such primary actions are endowed with the same primary goodness value. What changes is only the tendential goodness of Socrates and that of Crito with respect to that GC-power. Thus, degrees of activation will *not* be taken into account when determining the primary goodness values—and the secondary and preventative goodness values—of actions.

Third and relatedly, one further factor may be suggested for both primary and secondary actions: the number and goodness values of the actions incompatible with the primary or secondary actions performed. Suppose that Socrates performs a certain primary or secondary action with a certain goodness value. That action is incompatible with his performing further actions. Thus, the former action somehow eliminates the goodness values of the latter actions. *Ceteris paribus*, it seems that the less the former action eliminates the goodness values of further actions incompatible with it, the better it is. And the more the former action eliminates the goodness values of further actions incompatible with it, the worse it is. When determining the goodness value of the former action, it seems that we should take into account this factor as well.

Let me call this factor the “incompatibility factor.” I suggest that the incompatibility factor is relevant only in certain circumstances. Assume that two actions are incompatible with the same number of actions. In this case, when determining the goodness values of such actions, the incompatibility factor is irrelevant. For it is only necessary to look at the weights of their GC-goals, their duration and their intentionality/non-intentionality. Our two actions rule out the same actions, so that there is no difference between them in this respect. And they rule out each other. Yet, it is already obvious that it is better to perform the action that has the highest goodness value (in respect of the other factors).

Things change when two actions are incompatible with different numbers of actions. In this case, it may be necessary to take into account the incompatibility factor. Indeed, when determining the goodness values of both actions, it is also necessary to look at the number and goodness values of the actions that are ruled out by the former actions.

At any rate, it is very difficult to calculate the incompatibility factor. And it is not clear to what extent it should be taken into account when determining the goodness value of an action. Assume that Socrates' living in accordance with reason for his whole life rules out that he has 100 children, that is, that he reproduces 100 times. And assume that Socrates' having 100 children rules out that he lives in accordance with reason for his entire life. It seems that, *ceteris paribus*, Socrates' living in accordance with reason for his entire life rules out those 100 actions (i.e., reproducing 100 times). True: The latter actions may be endowed with lower weights as far as the relevant GC-powers are concerned. And they may have shorter duration and lower intentionality. But still: they are 100 actions in comparison with one single action. In this case, if we also take into account the incompatibility factor, what action(s) turn(s) out to be favored? Socrates' living in accordance with reason for his whole life or Socrates' reproducing 100 times? It is far from clear. Thus, I shall set aside the incompatibility factor here and stick to the other factors that determine the goodness values of actions.

Fourth, I am well aware that actions such as living in accordance with reason over a certain time interval “consist” in multiple actions: reading a certain book, thinking upon a certain subject, and so on. But, as I shall clarify in Section 6, I hold that the latter actions do *not* “compose” and are *not* (partly) identical with the action of living in accordance with reason over a certain time interval. Such actions are performed (also or only) in virtue of someone’s living in accordance with reason over a certain time interval. And the latter action is a distinct and *bona fide* action, though strongly connected with the more specific actions mentioned above. Roughly, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, the more specific actions are performed (also or only) in virtue of the agent’s living in accordance with reason over a certain time interval.

To summarize, the primary goodness value of primary actions depends on three factors: the weights of the relevant GC-powers/GC-goals; their duration; their intentionality (or lack thereof). The degrees of activation of the corresponding GC-powers should not be taken into account. In certain circumstances, it may be necessary—though very difficult—to take into account the incompatibility factor. Such clarifications also hold (*mutatis mutandis*) for secondary actions.

Let me now take into account secondary actions, such as Socrates’ talking with Plato in virtue of living in accordance with reason at some time in 400 B.C., which is a secondary and pure action. And Socrates talking with Plato in virtue of living in accordance with reason and in virtue of Plato’s being funny at some time in 400 B.C., which is a secondary and impure action.

Secondary actions are endowed with *secondary goodness*. Roughly, they mostly owe their goodness to the goodness of the GC-powers connected with them. Secondary actions seem to “realize” and “implement” GC-powers in specific ways. However, such a “realization” and “implementation” should be interpreted by assigning some kind of ontological priority to GC-powers, as I shall clarify in Section 6.

The value of secondary goodness of a certain secondary action at a given time (or over a given time interval) depends on five factors. First, it depends on the weight of the GC-powers/GC-goals connected with it. Second, it depends on its duration. Third, it depends on the presence or the lack of intentionality. *Ceteris paribus*, performing a secondary action with the intention of pursuing the relevant GC-goal is better than performing it without such an intention.

Fourth, *ceteris paribus*, pure actions seem to be better than impure ones. Namely, it seems that, *ceteris paribus*, Socrates’ talking with Plato in virtue of living in accordance with reason at some time in 400 B.C. is better than Socrates’ talking with Plato in virtue of living in accordance with reason *and* in virtue of Plato’s being funny at some time in 400 B.C. Remember that the activation conditions of impure actions include at least one thing that is *not* the activation of a GC-power.

Fifth and finally, secondary actions may result from the activation of multiple GC-powers (in the activation conditions). *Ceteris paribus*, the higher the number of such GC-powers is, the better the secondary action is.

It is worth pointing out that some secondary actions may consist in the activations of non-basic tendencies. Non-basic tendencies are endowed with a certain degree of activation. Namely, given the activation conditions, there is a higher or lower probability—determined by the degree of activation—that the manifestations of those tendencies actually come up. But this does not affect the secondary goodness values of the resulting actions—or so it seems to me. When an action is in place, it is irrelevant if the action is easily or hardly brought about by the agent. At best, this may help to evaluate the *effort* of the agent and its goodness. The harder it was for the agent to bring about an already good secondary action, the better the agent seems to be.

Finally, there is *preventative goodness*. The preventative goodness of a primary or secondary action consists in how much the performance of that action prevents or contributes to preventing

something else that may in turn result in preventing further actions endowed with primary or secondary goodness. Call “preventing action” the first action, that is, the primary or secondary action that prevents something else and that is thus endowed with preventative goodness. Call “prevented item” whatever is prevented. The prevented item may be one further action or the obtaining of some condition in the universe. Then call “preserved actions” the actions endowed with primary or secondary goodness that are preserved and rescued from the prevented items.

The value of preventative goodness of an action depends on six factors. First, one should take into account the number and goodness values of the preserved actions. Second, *ceteris paribus*, preserving primary goodness seems to matter more than preserving secondary goodness. This happens because the primary goodness of an action is more directly tied to the GC-powers of its agent, that is, to the source of goodness. On the contrary, the secondary goodness of an action derives (also) from the primary goodness of some further action.

Third, *ceteris paribus*, one should take into account how much the preventing action is successful in preventing the prevented items. The more successful the preventing action is, the better it is. Fourth, one should take into account the number of prevented items and their badness value. I shall not explore here the concept of badness. But, intuitively, the badness of a prevented item is (also or only) directly proportional to the goodness of the preserved action. The better the preserved action is, the worse the prevented item is. And vice versa. However and unfortunately, in this fourth respect, we may run into the same troubles we encountered with the incompatibility factor (see above).

Fifth, intentionality matters. *Ceteris paribus*, if the preventing action is performed by the agent (also or only) with the intention of preventing the prevented item and thus preserving the preserved action, the preventing action is better. Without such an intention, it seems to be worse.

Sixth and finally, purity of intentions matters as well. *Ceteris paribus*, if the preventing action is performed by the agent *only* with the intention of preventing the prevented item and thus preserving the preserved action, the preventing action is better. If such an intention comes together with something else which has nothing to do with preserving the goodness of the preserved action or goodness in general, it seems to be worse.

We can now determine the *overall goodness value* of an action. The overall goodness value of a primary action is given by its primary goodness value together with its preventative goodness value (if any). The overall goodness value of a secondary action is given by its secondary goodness value together with its preventative goodness value (if any).

I have already argued that primary goodness matters more than secondary goodness. Thus, primary goodness seemingly weighs more than secondary goodness. Additionally, my intuition is that both primary goodness and secondary goodness matter more than preventative goodness. Thus, they weigh more than preventative goodness. Such weights should be taken into account when determining the overall goodness values of actions.

As a matter of metaphysical necessity, an action is better than another action if and only if the overall goodness value of the former action is higher than the overall goodness value of the latter action. And, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, an action is good if and only if its overall goodness value is above a certain threshold.

In this section, I have satisfied three further *desiderata*. Indeed, in connection with *desideratum 1 (further entities)*, I have shown how one can extend goodness to actions and behaviors (which may be seen as collections of actions or as structured complexes of actions or as actions performed over longer time intervals) and how one can determine the goodness values of actions and behaviors. In this way, grounds are provided for normativity, value judgments, and comparisons between different actions and behaviors, in connection with *desideratum 2 (normativity)*.

Moreover, I have also shown how one can draw the distinction between primary and derivative (in my account, secondary) goodness and how one can derive the latter (also) from the former. This is in connection with *desideratum 3* (*primary-derivative*).

6 | FURTHER PROBLEMS

It is now time to face the remaining problems presented in Section 1.

As concerns agents, I am committed to the following equivalence: as a matter of metaphysical necessity, an entity is a good agent if and only if it is an actually good agent and/or a purely actually good agent and/or a tendentially good agent. In turn, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, an entity is an actually/purely actually/tendentially good agent if and only if the related goodness value(s) is/are above a certain threshold.

Against the left-to-right reading, it can be pointed out that not all the agents that are good need to have essential goals. This is *problem 2* (*extension*). I shall not discuss this counterexample here, as it involves a more general defense of the Neo-Aristotelian view of goodness. At any rate, if allism and a reductionist view of the goodness of agents are accepted, this possibility should be ruled out. For the goodness of agents reduces to the pursuit of their essential goals.

Against the right-to-left reading of the equivalence, I have introduced three different sorts of counterexamples: well-functioning missiles (i.e., “good” missiles with bad essential goals); neutral entities that still fulfill and/or are strongly disposed toward fulfilling their essential goals; entities that always fulfill their essential goals insofar as they exist.

With respect to *problem 3* (*missile*), I concede that well-functioning missiles are good agents *qua* missiles. But, first, being artifacts, they may have improperly “basic” GC-powers. Secondly, the activation of such improperly “basic” GC-powers may be due to the powers of their users. And, third, the latter powers need not be good ones, that is, they may not be GC-powers or powers activated in virtue of GC-powers. On the contrary, they may be “bad” powers.³⁵ This latter possibility does *not* affect the goodness of missiles *qua* missiles. For the relevant badness is in the powers of users.

With respect to the neutral entities in *problem 4* (*neutral*), not all the entities that possess strongly teleological tendencies need also be good or bad agents, at least if one embraces non-allism. Only those strongly teleological tendencies that are also GC-powers confer the latter status. Thus, it is possible to be endowed with strongly teleological tendencies without turning out to be good or bad agents. Moreover, there may be neutral artifacts endowed with improperly “basic” GC-powers. Such neutral artifacts would be good *qua* well-functioning artifacts with respect to the latter powers. However, the activation of the latter powers may be due (in turn) to neutral powers of their users. Thus, in a certain respect, neutral artifacts also turn out to be improperly neutral—even if only the powers of users are actually neutral.

Nevertheless, non-allism is rather troublesome, as I pointed out in Section 3. Therefore, if one wishes to embrace allism, one should develop further options. First, one may maintain that neutral entities have improperly “basic” GC-powers but such powers are activated in virtue of neutral powers of their users. Secondly, allists may claim that neutral entities do *not* have strongly teleological powers or that they have strongly teleological powers that are *not* tendencies. Therefore,

³⁵Additionally, even the possession of the improperly “basic” GC-powers of missiles may be due to the “bad” powers of their creators.

they do *not* have GC-powers and they are neutral. Third, allists may concede that neutral entities do have GC-powers, but the degrees of activation of the latter are very low. For there is something else in their essences that systematically prevents the activation of their GC-powers. Fourth and finally, allists may just deny that there can be neutral entities. At any rate, in all these cases, allists should *not* take neutral entities “at face value,” that is, as entities that are endowed with strongly teleological tendencies even if they are neutral.

Finally, in connection with *problem 5 (goodness-existence)*, in order to allow for entities that always fulfill their essential goals insofar as they exist, a non-allist may point out that *not all* of the strongly teleological tendencies possessed by an entity are GC-powers. Thus, an entity may continue to exist by exercising some of its strongly teleological tendencies. But its continued existence would not be good as such. Second, not all of the strongly teleological tendencies possessed by an entity (be they GC-powers or not) imply that, without the activation of such tendencies, that entity stops existing. However, it is reasonable to hold that an entity endowed with strongly teleological tendencies stops existing whenever no strongly teleological tendency or no strongly teleological power of that entity that is *not* a tendency gets activated. Indeed, that entity stops doing anything.³⁶

This second option is also open to allists. Indeed, allists may concede that there are essential and existence-preserving goals resulting from the activation of strongly teleological powers that are *not* tendencies. Such goals are *not* connected with goodness. And they guarantee the continued existence of an entity. Alternatively, allists may just bite the bullet and concede that goodness and existence are strictly connected. But this option implies further discussion and the justification and defense of further claims.

I am *not* committed to the following equivalence: as a matter of metaphysical necessity, something is good for a K if and only it enables that K to actually fulfill its essential goals and/or it strengthens its being disposed toward fulfilling the latter. First of all, the only good things are agents and their actions. On the contrary, the enabling conditions of good actions and good agents need not be good as such. Thus, in connection with *problem 8 (hand)*, it is good for my hand to function in a certain way. And the well-functioning of my hand may also be due to its being made of flesh. But being made of flesh need not be good as such for my hand. Thus, being made of flesh may also allow for “bad” consequences (e.g., burning).

Consider now demonic entities, that is, entities endowed with bad essential goals, in connection with *problem 6 (demon)*. To deal with them, on non-allism, it may be suggested that demonic entities are not endowed (or not only endowed) with GC-powers. Yet, they *may* be endowed with strongly teleological tendencies that point in “bad” directions.

If one does *not* wish to embrace widespread non-allism, one may first point out that non-allism with respect to demonic entities is fully compatible with allism with respect to further sorts of entities. Allists have further options, similar to the ones explored for neutral entities. They may maintain that demonic entities have improperly “basic” GC-powers and such powers are activated in virtue of bad powers of their users. Therefore, a demon may be good *qua* demon and “used” in a bad way by its user. Second and more plausibly, allists may claim that demonic entities do *not* have strongly teleological powers or that they have strongly (and bad) teleological powers that are *not* tendencies. Third, allists may concede that demonic entities do have GC-powers, but the degrees of activation of the latter are very low. For there is something else in their essences that systematically prevents the activation of their GC-powers. Additionally, demonic entities

³⁶Or that entity turns out to be only endowed with basic and essential powers that do not lead to the activation of any other power of that entity.

are endowed with bad essential powers that are *not* strongly teleological tendencies. Fourth and finally, allists may just deny that there can be demonic entities. In all these cases, allists should *not* take demonic entities “at face value.”

Also with respect to demonic entities I reject the following troublesome equivalence: as a matter of metaphysical necessity, something is good for a K (i.e., for a member of a kind K) if and only if it enables that K to actually fulfill its essential goals and/or it strengthens its being disposed toward fulfilling the latter.

In connection with *problem 9 (hierarchy)*, I allow for hierarchies of goals—at least if one embraces pluralism and non-egalitarianism about the GC-powers of an entity. Namely, an entity may have multiple GC-powers endowed with different weights. Thus, Socrates' survival turns out to be less important than Socrates living a life in accordance with reason. And the continued existence of an infectious leg is less important than the essential function it performs within the body.³⁷

One final worry concerns the single-track or multi-track status of GC-powers, in connection with *problem 11 (single- or multi-track)*. In my view, GC-powers are single track. Indeed, Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason* has a certain manifestation, that is, Socrates being guided by reason, being wise or something akin to this. Moreover, also or only by virtue of the activation of Socrates' power to *live in accordance with reason* (and its reaching the relevant end result³⁸), Socrates turns out to do some of the things he does: talking with Plato, abiding by the laws, governing his appetites when drinking and so on. Namely, Socrates turns out to activate further non-basic powers. And the activation conditions of the latter include that Socrates activates his power to *live in accordance with reason*.

True: the manifestation of the relevant GC-power (e.g., Socrates' being guided by reason) is not very specific. But this is exactly the reason why the manifestation is in place in distinct and apparently dissimilar circumstances (e.g., when Socrates talks with Plato, when he abides by the laws, and so on). Indeed, in my scenario, the generic manifestation of a GC-power is one thing. The manifestations of the non-basic powers activated (also or only) in virtue of the activation of the GC-power at stake are another thing. For example, Socrates' being guided by reason is one thing. Socrates' talking with Plato—as a result of activating his non-basic power to *talk with Plato in virtue of activating the power to live in accordance with reason* (and possibly of something else)—is another thing. Moreover, the latter (i.e., the manifestation of the non-basic power) also or only depends on the former (i.e., the manifestation of the basic power).

I think that drawing this distinction is crucial for the sake of preserving the primacy of goals *qua* final causes with respect to the secondary actions that are performed in light of pursuing such goals. Goals need to be distinct from the latter. And goals need to “come first” with respect to the latter. Namely, the secondary actions that are performed in light of pursuing goals depend on goals themselves (or on the primary actions that reach goals as their end results). It is also or only by virtue of having a certain goal that one performs a secondary action that allows her to pursue that goal. Thus, the latter actions cannot be identical with goals. And goals cannot be

³⁷Additionally, one may just deny that legs have goals. For they are not substances, but parts of substances (i.e., they are parts of bodies). At best, legs may be endowed with powers whose activation is due to the activation of the powers of bodies.

³⁸I assume that, if the power does *not* reach the end result, it is not activated. For it does *not* meet at least one of its effect-background conditions, that is, the necessary conditions that must be met in order for the power to be activated that concern the effect/end result of the power.

“realized” by such actions either. Otherwise, goals would depend in turn on their “realizing” secondary actions, on pain of circular dependence.

Yet, if one wishes to maintain that dependence runs in both directions (i.e., that secondary actions depend on the pursuit of goals and goals must be “realized” by secondary actions), one may introduce two distinct and asymmetrical dependence relations between goals and secondary actions. Indeed, secondary actions depend for their occurrence on goals. And goals do *not* depend for their occurrence on secondary actions. Yet, goals may “instrumentally” depend (at least in some circumstances) on secondary actions. Indeed, in some circumstances, goals need to “use” certain secondary actions and lead to the activation of the relevant powers. For example, Socrates’ reaching his survival leads to instrumentally activating his heart’s power of *beating in virtue of Socrates’ activating his power to survive*.³⁹

One concern may arise here if one places goals “after” the relevant secondary actions. Indeed, if goals were states to be reached “after” performing the relevant secondary actions, goals would *not* be able to contribute to the latter actions. Otherwise, they would imply some troublesome form of backward causation and they would also imply that a non-occurrent state (i.e., the goal that still needs to be reached) can causally influence something that occurs now (i.e., the secondary action).

It is also troublesome to place goals “before” the relevant secondary actions. Indeed, how could secondary actions contribute to “realizing” their goals, if goals were already in place before performing those actions? And why would secondary actions be needed?

However, I hold that goals are reached *at the same time* when the relevant secondary actions are performed. Therefore, my account avoids both sorts of troubles.⁴⁰

True: by invoking both goals and the manifestations of secondary actions (e.g., Socrates’ being guided by reason and Socrates’ talking with Plato), I invoke two distinct manifestations rather than only one. This move is less parsimonious from an ontological standpoint. However, the lack of parsimony is well justified. Again, the distinction between the relevant manifestations and the primacy of one of such manifestations (e.g., Socrates’ being guided by reason) over the other (e.g., Socrates’ talking with Plato) are required if one seriously wishes to embrace the primacy of goals *qua* final causes.

³⁹Additionally, at least some GC-powers may depend on secondary actions when it comes to increasing or decreasing their degrees of activation. For example, by performing multiple secondary actions connected with doing philosophy, the degree of activation of Socrates’ GC-power to *live in accordance with reason* may get higher.

⁴⁰Two objections may be now put forward. First objection: If goals are reached at the same time when the relevant secondary actions are performed, this seems to imply that only one secondary action may be enough in order to instrumentally realize the relevant goal. I allow for this possibility. Yet, this is fully compatible with the fact that the GC-power at stake has a low degree of activation. Therefore, only one secondary action is *not* enough in order to make the agent *good* with respect to the relevant GC-power. Second objection: Suppose that Jim and John live very short lives. Suppose that Jim has a very low degree of activation of his GC-powers but he happens to perform a good action and then he dies. On the contrary, John has a high degree of activation of his GC-powers but he happens to perform no good action and then he dies. Is Jim better than John or vice versa? With respect to their overall tendential goodness values, John is better than Jim. With respect to their overall actual goodness values, Jim is better than John. With respect to their overall goodness values, everything hinges on the weights we assign to tendential goodness and actual goodness in the relevant circumstances. *Ceteris paribus*, I would hold that actual goodness matters more than tendential goodness. But in this specific case the overall actual goodness value of Jim may be very low. Indeed, the duration of the relevant action may be short. More importantly, the relevant action may have been performed by Jim without the intention of doing anything good. By luck, Jim may have unintentionally performed an otherwise highly improbable action. This may make the goodness value of that action rather low. Subsequently, it may make Jim’s overall actual goodness value rather low. And Jim’s overall goodness value may then turn out to be lower than John’s overall goodness value.

	allism + monism	allism + pluralism	non-allism + monism	non-allism + pluralism
<i>desideratum 1</i> (further entities)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 5)
<i>desideratum 2</i> (normativity)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 5)
<i>desideratum 3</i> (primary-derivative)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 5)	yes (Section 3)
<i>desideratum 4</i> (number and types)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)
<i>desideratum 5</i> (extension)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)
<i>desideratum 6</i> (better-worse)	yes (Section 4, 5)	yes (Section 4, 5)	yes (Section 4, 5)	yes (Section 4, 5)
<i>desideratum 7</i> (actually-disposed)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)
problem 1 (normativity)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)
problem 2 (extension)	ruled out (Section 6)	ruled out (Section 6)	//	//
problem 3 (missile)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)
problem 4 (neutrality)	yes, not at face value (Section 6)	yes, not at face value (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)
problem 5 (goodness-existence)	yes, but... (Section 6)	yes, but... (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)
problem 6 (demon)	yes, not at face value (Section 6)	yes, not at face value (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)
problem 7 (goodness-goals)	yes (Section 3)	yes (Section 3)	yes, but... (Section 3)	yes, but... (Section 3)
problem 8 (hand)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)
problem 9 (hierarchy)	ruled out (Section 3)	yes (Section 3, 6)	ruled out (Section 3)	yes (Section 3, 6)
problem 10 (better-worse powers)	yes (Section 4, 5)	yes (Section 4, 5)	yes (Section 4, 5)	yes (Section 4, 5)
problem 11 (single- or multi-track)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)	yes (Section 6)
further problems	all entities endowed with strongly teleological tendencies are good > controversial goals (allism); everything turns out to be either good (or bad) along one single dimension (monism)	all entities endowed with strongly teleological tendencies are good > controversial goals (allism); conflicts between goals (pluralism)	property of being goodness-conferring (why and how attached to certain strongly teleological tendencies?) (non-allism); neutral strongly teleological tendencies (monism)	property of being goodness-conferring (why and how attached to certain strongly teleological tendencies?) (non-allism); conflicts between goals (pluralism)
other virtues	goodness identified/reduced to goals (allism); ontologically cheaper (monism)	goodness identified/reduced to goals (allism); more in line with common sense and wider explanatory breadth (pluralism)	no controversial goals (non-allism); ontologically cheaper (monism)	no controversial goals (non-allism); more in line with common sense and wider explanatory breadth (pluralism)

FIGURE 1 Allist/non-allist, monist/pluralist views of GC-powers in the face of desiderata and problems.

In conclusion, I add one table (see [Figure 1](#)) in which I summarize all the *desiderata* and problems that I have tried to face in this article. I show how the four views of GC-powers examined in Section 3 cope with them. As I clarified, I prefer allist pluralism and I do think that its virtues outweigh both its (possible) defects and the virtues of the other views. The (possible) defects of allist pluralism seem to be less serious than the defects of the other views.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that he/she has no conflict of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author.

ORCID

Michele Paolini Paoletti  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7278-2281>

REFERENCES

- Beere, J. (2009). *Doing and being. An interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics theta*. Oxford University Press.
- Bird, A. (2007). *Nature's metaphysics*. Clarendon.
- Choi, S., & Fara, M. (2018). Dispositions. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dispositions/>)—last visited on November 8th, 2023)
- Chrisman, M. (2017). *What is this thing called metaethics?* Routledge.
- Clarke, R. (2009). Dispositions, abilities to act, and free will: The new Dispositionalism. *Mind*, 118, 323–351.
- Foot, P. (2001). *Natural goodness*. Oxford University Press.
- Geach, P. (1956). Good and evil. *Analysis*, 17, 33–42.
- Gotthelf, A. (2012). *Teleology, first principles, and scientific method in Aristotle's biology*. Oxford University Press.
- Griffith, M. (2010). Why agent-caused actions are not lucky. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 47, 43–56.
- Hurka, T. (1993). *Perfectionism*. Oxford University Press.
- Hursthouse, R. (1999). *On virtue ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, M. R. (2005). *Aristotle on teleology*. Oxford University Press.
- Leunissen, M. (2010). *Explanation and teleology in Aristotle's science of nature*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lowe, E. J. (2008). *Personal agency. The metaphysics of mind and action*. Oxford University Press.
- Lowe, E. J. (2010). On the individuation of powers. In A. Marmodoro (Ed.), *The metaphysics of powers. Their grounding and their manifestations* (pp. 8–26). Routledge.
- Marmodoro, A. (2018). Potentiality in Aristotle's metaphysics. In K. Engelhard & M. Quante (Eds.), *Handbook of potentiality* (pp. 15–43). Springer.
- McPherson, T., & Plunkett, D. (Eds.). (2018). *The Routledge handbook of metaethics*. Routledge.
- Molnar, G. (2003). *Powers. A study in metaphysics*. Oxford University Press.
- Moore, G. E. (1903). *Principia ethica*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mumford, S. D. (1998). *Dispositions*. Clarendon.
- O'Connor, T. (2000). *Persons and causes: The metaphysics of free will*. Oxford University Press.
- O'Connor, T. (2009). Agent-Causal Power. In T. Handfield (Ed.), *Dispositions and causes* (pp. 189–214). Clarendon.
- O'Connor, T. (2022). Free will in a network of interacting causes. In W. M. R. Simpson, R. C. Koons, & J. Orr (Eds.), *Neo-Aristotelian metaphysics and the theology of nature* (pp. 151–168). Routledge.
- Oderberg, D. S. (2014). Being and Goodness. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 51, 345–356.
- Oderberg, D. S. (2015). All for the good. *Philosophical Investigations*, 38, 72–95.
- Oderberg, D. S. (2020). *The metaphysics of good and evil*. Routledge.
- Orsi, F. (2015). *Value theory*. Bloomsbury.
- Page, B. (2020). Power-ing up neo-aristotelian natural goodness. *Philosophical Studies*, 178, 3755–3775.
- Pakaluk, M. (2005). *Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics. An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

- Paolini Paoletti, M. (2021). Teleological powers. *Analytic Philosophy*, 62, 336–358.
- Paolini Paoletti, M. (2022). Powers, probabilities, and tendencies. *Philosophia*, 50, 2035–2067.
- Pigden, C. R. (1990). Geach on 'good'. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 40, 129–154.
- Silverstein, M. (2016). Teleology and normativity. *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 11, 214–240.
- Steward, H. (2012). *A metaphysics for freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Stump, E., & Kretzmann, N. (1990). Being and Goodness. In S. MacDonald (Ed.), *Being and goodness. The concept of the good in metaphysics and philosophical theology* (pp. 98–128). Cornell University Press.
- van Roojen, M. (2015). *Metaethics. A contemporary introduction*. Routledge.
- van Zyl, L. (2019). *Virtue ethics. A contemporary introduction*. Routledge.
- Vetter, B. (2015). *Potentiality*. Oxford University Press.

How to cite this article: Paolini Paoletti, M. (2025). The good and the powers. *Analytic Philosophy*, 66, 402–431. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phib.12326>