Appearing Good: A Reply to Schroeder

I would like to thank Mark Schroeder for such an insightful discussion of my book;[1] he certainly raises many important questions and I am not sure I'll satisfactorily address all of them in this short piece. I would like to start with what I take to be the most important criticism that Schroeder presses against my view. I argue in *Appearances of the Good* that "good" plays in the practical realm a role similar to the role that "true" plays in the theoretical realm, a role that I characterized as being the formal end of inquiry. The "scholastic view," the view I defend in the book, then defines desires, intentions, and other practical attitudes in light of this analogy. For instance, desires are understood to be "appearances," but not appearances of what is the case; rather, as the book title suggests, desires are appearances of the good.[2] But desires are not the only attitudes in the practical realm that are understood in this manner by the scholastic view. For instance, intentions are supposed to be evaluative judgments (cases in which the agent holds something to be good) in the same way that beliefs are states in which an agent holds something to be true. Schroeder points out correctly that these claims could be understood two ways.

Let us take, for instance, a case of perception in which the couch appears green to me. One could understand the claim that desires are appearances of the good as, first, the claim that "good" plays the same role in desire that "green" plays in this case of perception. So on this understanding of desires, it is part of the content of the desire that a certain state-of-affairs, object, or property is good. Just as "green" is part of the content of any perception of X as green, "good" in this view would be part of the content of any desire. However, the claim that desires are appearances of the good can also be understood as the claim that "good" plays the same role for desire as "true" plays in the case of perception.

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[1]Mark Schroeder, "*How* Does the Good Appear To Us?" *Social Theory and* Practice, this issue, pp. 119-30, discussing Sergio Tenenbaum, *Appearances of the Good: An Essay on the Nature of Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[2]It might be worth pointing out that perceptual appearances supply the paradigmatic, but not the only, cases of appearances in the theoretical realm. Someone, for instance, can appear to be guilty, an argument can appear to be valid, and so on.

When one has a perceptual experience of a green couch, even though "true" is not part of the content of one's perceptual experience, it is still correct to say that it appears that this is how things truly are, or even that if the perception were not to be put in doubt by other states, one would hold it to be true that the couch is green (I'll say more in a moment what that means). Schroeder points out that I seem to favor the second interpretation, but he thinks that one can only have a distinctive and interesting view if one takes the first alternative. So he comes to the conclusion that I must mean the first interpretation.

Perhaps unwisely, I will stick to my word and say that the second interpretation is the correct one. The analogy I intended was really to "true," not to something like "green."[3] Schroeder avoids reading me this way because he thinks that this kind of view is one that can be accepted by separatists and scholastics alike. Schroeder thinks that if "good" does not appear in the content of the desire, then to say that "good" is the formal end of practical inquiry only puts a normative demand on desire. Desires that do not aim at the good are somehow defective, rather than impossible. But this is something that the separatist can easily concede. The separatist does not deny that there's something wrong about desiring what is not good; she only wants to say that it happens. Now I agree with Schroeder that the scholastic view would not be too contentious if it simply claimed that desires ought to be for the good or something like that. But I think that this does not commit the scholastic view to the claim that "good" is part of the content of the desire. In particular, Schroeder overlooks the possibility that desire can be an attitude in which *one holds its content to be good* or in which the content appears as good.

Let me explain how to understand this possibility. The scholastic view I defend distinguishes between intentions (which are taken to be a form of evaluative judgments) and desires (which are taken to be evaluative appearances) in terms of what we can call "prima facie" and "all-out attitudes," in terms of the agent's being (cognitively) inclined to form a certain judgment and making the judgment itself. A prima facie attitude is an inclination to take a certain stance in the practical realm; an all-out attitude is the stance the agent actually takes in this realm with regard to a particular issue (or a particular choice situation). Practical cognition requires both kinds of attitudes. The fact that something appears to the agent good in a certain way does not entail that the agent judges it to be

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[3]Schroeder suggests that "appearances of the good" must commit me to "good" being part of the content of the appearance. Perhaps, appearing-good, in analogy with appearing-true, would be better, but obviously awkward for a book title. However, I must confess that to my admittedly foreign ears, the English expression leaves open whether "good" is part of the content, or just specifies a certain case of "appearing" (in this case one in which its formal end is the "good").

good, and one could hardly judge something to be good if some things did not appear to be good in some way. I argue in the book that this distinction in the practical realm dovetails with a similar distinction in the theoretical realm. Perceptual and other kinds of appearances are prima facie *theoretical* attitudes, while beliefs are all-out theoretical attitudes.

I find it easier to explain the overlooked alternative by starting from the case of all-out attitudes. It is very difficult to explain the exact relationship between belief and truth, and I am certainly not going to try to give an adequate account of this relation here. But hopefully what I have to say about the relation will serve my purposes without being too controversial. First, Schroeder is right to say that "beliefs are correct if their object is true," at least in some sense of "correct." However, I do not think that this can exhaust the relation between belief and truth. So far we have only a normative relation between belief and truth; at best, it allows us to infer claims of the type: "one ought not to form a belief that p in light of overwhelming evidence that not-p," and so on. But it would be perfectly possible on this view to form a belief that p while at the same time being convinced that p is false, even if one knew in this case that the belief is incorrect. In particular, the claim that beliefs are correct if their object is true does not rule out the possibility of instantiating a modified version of Moore's paradox; if this claim exhausts the relation between belief and truth, I say nothing paradoxical when I say:

(M) "I believe it is raining outside, but it is not true that it is raining outside."

(M) is paradoxical not because truth is a normative standard for belief. In fact, if this normative standard exhausted the relation between truth and belief, I could form beliefs by following various other normative standards that were dearer to my heart in a way that would appall even the most fervent advocate of doxastic voluntarism. For instance, if I were offered a million dollars to believe that $2 + 2 = 5$, I should be able to come to the conclusion that I care more for money than for truth, and form a belief that I know to be false. The impossibility of forming beliefs that blatantly contradict what we take to be true, or of forming beliefs in light of overwhelming evidence to the falsity of their content, suggests[4] that truth is not just a norm of correctness for belief, but that believing p

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[4]"Suggests" is important here, since I do not want to deny that there might be other explanations for this apparent impossibility. I do not want to deny that my view depends on assumptions about the relation between truth and belief that might be challenged. But I do want to say that these are plausible assumptions, and that we can make at least a good prima facie case for accepting these assumptions.

involves holding p to be true.[5] Of course, we would like to spell out more precisely what is meant by "holding true" in this context, and in spelling out this relation, it is hard to avoid simply appealing to the uninformative "holding true in the way that one holds true the content of a belief." However, for the scholastic view, it does not matter too much how one spells out in detail what "holding the content of belief to be true" means. As long as we spell out a relation that is robust enough to rule out the possibility of being in the mental states that satisfy (M), at least in the normal course of events,[6] it will suffice for the purposes of the scholastic view. Any such notion will disarm the objection that if "good" plays in the practical realm the same role that "true" plays in the theoretical realm, it merely imposes a normative requirement on desires and intentions. Still, it is worth trying to say a bit more about the relation between attitudes in the practical and theoretical realms and what I call "the formal end of inquiry."

Let us start with theoretical inquiry or theoretical reasoning. We can think of theoretical inquiry as an activity, just like building a house, even if the outcome of this activity is, inter alia, a mental state, such as belief. Now we can engage in the activity of building a house for various reasons, and we might engage in such an activity even if we do not care at all about whether at the end of our activity, there'll be a good house, or a house at all.[7] However, if one cannot correctly characterize an activity as a goal-oriented activity in which something like "there will be a house around here at a certain time" is the goal of the activity, then the activity

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[5]Here I take myself to be largely in agreement with Nishi Shah and David Velleman when they argue that belief is governed both descriptively and normatively by the standard of truth (see "Doxastic Deliberation," *Philosophical Review* 114 (2005): 497-534, p. 499), although I need not commit myself to the particular way in which they specify how belief is descriptively governed by the standard of truth. Like me, Shah and Velleman think that other theoretical attitudes also bear a necessary relation to truth (or, as they put it, "cognitive attitudes … treat their propositional objects as *satisfied* or *true*" (p. 497)). Again like me, Shah and Velleman also think that something else plays an analogous role to truth in the context of practical attitudes. However, Shah and Velleman think that this something else is not the good, but "to be made true." But I find this part of Shah and Velleman's view highly implausible, since, first, "to be made true" cannot provide an adequate standard of correctness for practical reason, and, as Shah and Velleman recognize, this account cannot be generalized to all practical attitudes.

[6]We need the qualifier "in the normal course of events" since I might ascribe beliefs to myself from what can be called a "third-person perspective" in which I could unproblematically assert this, as well as the original, version of Moore's paradox. So after consulting my psychoanalyst I might be convinced that I think that my mother hates me despite the overwhelming evidence that she doesn't. It would be natural for me to say then: "I believe that my mother hates me even though it is not true that she does."

[7]Christine Korsgaard uses the analogy with the internal end of building a house to make a different point in her Locke Lectures (http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~korsgaar/#Locke%20Lectures).

is not one of building a house. When I say that "truth" is the formal end of theoretical inquiry, I mean that "truth" functions in determining that an activity counts as theoretical inquiry or theoretical reasoning in a similar way that "house" functions in determining that an activity counts as "building a house." In other words, an activity does not count as theoretical inquiry or theoretical reasoning unless it can be characterized as a goal-directed activity, in which the goal is "to get at the truth." But, of course, the outcome of this activity, unlike in the case of building a house, is not primarily a mind-independent state-of-affairs, but certain mental attitudes. As I said above, the notion of belief picks out our all-out attitude with respect to the theoretical realm. But if this is correct, then belief is, at least in the normal case, the outcome of theoretical inquiry, our final stance about where the truth lies.[8] Now this obviously sketchy and in need of some refinement, but, I hope it will suffice to make it clear how I want to understand the role of "good" in practical reason.

According to the scholastic view, intentional action is, primarily,[9] the outcome of deliberation, that is, of practical reasoning. Now, if "good" is understood to be the formal end of practical reason, then the intention with which one acts will similarly be one's final stance with relation to the good. With this view in mind, we can say that adding "true" or "good" to the content of a belief or an intention is redundant, since having the attitude already is a form of holding the content, respectively, true and good. Of course, "true" and "good" might appear as the content of more complex beliefs and intentions, but this does not challenge the claim that beliefs and intentions already include a commitment to holding the relevant content, respectively, true or good.

We can now make a similar point regarding the relation between prima facie attitudes and the formal end of the inquiry. If we keep with our description of prima facie attitudes as an inclination to form a certain all-out attitude, then having a desire will be inter alia having an inclination to *hold* a certain content good, just as having perceptions or other theoretical appearances will be, inter alia, having an inclination to hold certain contents true. However, I don't think a merely blind disposition fully accounts for these kinds of prima facie attitudes. Rather, it's more plausible to think that the inclination is explained by the way the content

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[8]Of course "theoretical inquiry" needs to be understood quite broadly so that beliefs that are not the outcome of any elaborate process of reasoning or method of inquiry can be included.

[9]I need this qualification since I distinguish three cases of intentional action in *Appearances of the Good*: merely voluntary, merely intentional, and fully deliberated. Strictly speaking, only actions of the last kind are the outcome of deliberation. But since this complication is not relevant to our present purposes, I'll ignore it.

is presented to the agent in these attitudes; that is, in my words, the contents of these attitudes appear good (or true) to the agent.

However, this leaves one of Schroeder's concerns unanswered, namely, that, as he puts it, "a view built on the 'true' model would not be even prima facie subject to the principal separatist objections."[10] If "good" is not assumed to be part of the content of practical attitudes, it seems that we have a much easier answer to many of the purported counterexamples to the scholastic view. In a sense, if Schroeder is correct on this point, it should be easier, rather than more difficult, to make the case for the scholastic view. But it would make three chapters of the book superfluous, and I would hate to admit that I wasted my reader's time. But I don't think I have done so. For, I think that the purported counter-examples do present a serious challenge to the scholastic view. In the theoretical realm, Moore's paradox, or at least our version of it, seems to give some initial plausibility to the thought that believing must involve holding true. But the cases discussed by Stocker and others seem to be exactly cases in which we seem to have, on the scholastic view, a version of Moore's paradox in the practical realm. For instance, the perverse agent intends something that she considers to be bad. But these examples don't seem to have the air of paradox that accompanies the example of someone who sincerely utters the sentence: "It's true that it is raining but I don't believe that it's raining." On the contrary, these seem to be everyday examples of intentions that ordinary agents have. So someone who wants to defend the scholastic view needs to explain why we are still entitled to view these attitudes as ones in which the agent actually holds the object of her intention to be good.

Another advantage of conceiving of the relation between good and the practical attitudes the way I have been suggesting is that it gives us a relatively simple way to answer what Schroeder calls "the fundamental problem for the scholastic view," namely, what kind of theory of content would make "good" the content of every single desire. Since "good" is not part of the content of the attitude, the scholastic view has no need to explain how this happens. However, this kind of answer might seem to raise other similar questions that might be worth addressing. First, one might think that this move simply postpones the problem. What makes it the case that we hook on to the good as the formal end of these practical attitudes? But here there is no mystery: we do it by engaging in practical inquiry. By trying to figure what we should do, we try to get things right in the realm of practical reason. By trying to get things right in the realm of practical reason, we aim at the good. Of course, one might be left with some epistemological questions. The scholastic view is certainly incom-

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[10]Schroeder, "*How* Does the Good Appear To Us?" p. 122.

patible with certain forms of value irrealism, and one needs to be able to provide an epistemology of value that is compatible with the modest realist assumptions that the scholastic view makes (such as, for instance, that the good is not fully determined by one's psychological states). But these are questions that I do address in chapter four of the book, and I try to show there that the scholastic view is compatible with a plausible epistemology of value.

Finally, I would like to explain briefly why I don't think that subjectivism can appropriate the virtues of the scholastic view as easily as Schroeder suggests. Schroeder says that a subjectivist view could explain the relation between desire and good, by defining the good "as what anyone would desire in reflective equilibrium in the presence of full information." According to Schroeder, subjectivists advancing such a view can explain why desires "represent their objects as good," while the scholastic merely postulates that this is the case. As I said above, if the sense of "represent as good" here means that "good" is part of the content of desire, the scholastic view makes no such claim, and thus has no need to explain it. But of course, it still could be an advantage for the subjectivist view if it could claim a relation between desire and the good that is similar to the relation posited in the scholastic view, and it could provide some kind of explanation for it that is unavailable to the scholastic view.

However, this kind of explanation comes at a very heavy cost. To go back to our discussion of the analogy between truth and good, it seems that, minimally, one would want the notion of good to represent some kind of normative standard for desire and practical reasoning. Defining a notion of good out of desires is a fine activity, but somewhat pointless if one can't explain why the objects of our desires or intentions are, in some sense, correct only if they are good. The subjectivist view makes this normative standard into an utterly mysterious one. Talk about reflective equilibrium and ideal information might mislead us into thinking that we must be talking about something that has normative significance, but the subjectivist gives us no reason to think that desires formed in this manner should be privileged in any way. Again, the analogy of theoretical reason might be helpful. It makes sense to try to subject our belief to criticism in light of new information, or engage in other processes of belief revision such as reflective equilibrium *because we take these processes to be truth-conducive.*[11] Were truth not an antecedent standard of correctness, there would be no more reason to revise beliefs in this way

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[11]In fact, in the theoretical realm there is debate about whether reflective equilibrium is an epistemologically acceptable procedure, exactly because it is unclear whether reflective equilibrium is truth-conducive.

than by using one's favorite informal fallacies. These processes inherit their normative significance from the normative significance of getting things right in theoretical reason (that is, forming true beliefs), not the other way around.

Similarly, it is unclear what the normative significance of forming desires and intentions under reflective equilibrium or ideal information could be without an antecedent conception of getting things right. How can a subjectivist privilege forming desires and intentions in this manner over, say, forming them unreflectively on the spur of the moment?[12] In fact, I think one of the main advantages of the scholastic view is that it can explain how "good" could have both a descriptive and a normative relation to desire and intention.[13]

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[12]Of course, similar points are familiar from the literature. See, for instance, Arthur Ripstein, "Preference," in Christopher W. Morris and Arthur Ripstein (eds.), *Practical Rationality and Preference: Essays for David Gauthier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 37-55; and, more recently, Richard Kraut, *What is Good and Why?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), esp. pp. 94-115.

[13]I would like to thank Jennifer Nagel for extremely helpful comments on a draft of this paper. This paper has also benefited immensely from discussions with Phil Clark and Fred Schueler on these issues.