Chapter 1

Chapter 0: Introduction

Thesis

In this dissertation, I shall defend the thesis that: **virtues are excellent character traits that all human beings as practical reasoners need, for virtues partly constitute the realization of our natural human telos.**

The Questions

The main problem of the dissertation is this: What is virtue in relation to practical reason and to our human *telos*? That is a broad way of putting the problem. There are various ways to divide out a set of sub-problems. Below, I tackle the division of these labors into chapters. But my hope is, by the end, to solve the problem of the relation of virtue to practical reason and happiness.

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// For instance, what is virtue and is it really "necessary"? (Is the pursuit of virtue cate
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The Sources

In the course of clarifying and defending these claims, I shall be obliged to take a stance on several active and lively debates among ethicists about virtue, practical reason, and human *telos*. Funda-

mentally, my arguments defend a sort of neo-Aristotelian naturalism. For this reason, I work out my arguments by presenting, comparing, and critiquing the ethical views of three of the most prominent and influential neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists: Philippa Foot, John McDowell, and Alasdair MacIntyre.

The Neo-Aristotelians

I select my themes from the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists. In the next chapter, I shall explain and defend the neo-Aristotelian project in more detail. Here I should only like to introduce a list of who they are in general and who my main authors are. Who are they? Rosalind Hursthouse provides a list: Anscombe,[1] Geach,[2] Foot,[3] McDowell,[4] MacIntyre,[5] Hursthouse,[6] Nussbaum,[Martha Nussbaum;[7] Martha C. Nussbaum;[8] nussbaum1999virtue] Thompson.[9] For my part, I add Annas[10] and Brown[11]. These neo-Aristotelians are a group of contemporary (mostly analytic) philosophers who have written on a set of ethical questions that, in my opinion, represent some of the most significant and interesting work being done in English speaking ethics. There are many other influential philosophers who will remain in the background of my discussions, despite being "big names" in

1. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19; G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Harvard University Press, 1957).

2. Peter T Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1956.

3. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

4. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998); John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

5. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

6. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics and Human Nature," *Hume Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 67–82.

7. "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, ed. J.E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86–131.

8. "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September 1988): 32–53.

9. Michael Thompson, "The Representation of Life," in *Virtues and Reasons*, ed. Lawrence Hursthouse Rosalind and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 247–96.

10. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

11. **???**

virtue ethics from the last 100 years.[12] All of these writers (and their many followers and critics) have contributed to a remarkable movement in analytic ethics. While I do make an effort to engage or at least mention contributions from this broader set, I have limited my primary focus to MacIntyre, Foot, and McDowell. Not only does this limitation keep my scope realistic, but also it allows for a rich discussion of the illuminating comparisons and contrasts between their views.

The Form

Many books and articles have been written on MacIntyre, Foot, and McDowell's views of virtue, practical reason, and *telos* (understood very broadly as 'happiness', 'flourishing' or 'well being').[13] However, not enough has yet been do on the dynamic relation between the three concepts.

These three concepts are, according to Hursthouse, likely to be misunderstood by modern philosophers.[14] And together they constitute a formal schema that many have made central to their theories.[15] One justification for the scheme comes from Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. There, he argues persuasively that necessary conditions of an intelligible moral system include: (a) a conception of human nature – including human rationality – as it is prior to deep self-reflection or

12. They include Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998); Bernard Williams; Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Clarendon Press, 2003); Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 1992); Paul Bloomfield, *Moral Reality* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Robert Adams, Gopal Sreenivasan, Rachana Kamtekar, Talbot Brewer, and R. Scott Smith. One could certainly construct a worthwhile project approaching all of (or a different sub-set of) these authors. Nevertheless, the smaller set of Neo-Aristotelians are my focus. Every project must cut off scope somewhere.

13. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* gives a concise and clear account of all three.

14. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2013. "Three of virtue ethics' central concepts, virtue, practical wisdom and eudaimonia are often misunderstood. Once they are distinguished from related but distinct concepts peculiar to modern philosophy, various objections to virtue ethics can be better assessed."

15. For example, McDowell, Foot, and MacIntyre can be seen using this schema John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50 and John McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics'," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (University of California Press, 1980), 359–76; Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002) and Foot, *Natural Goodness*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) and MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*

moral effort; (b) a conception of some human *telos* or end we ought to realize; and (c) a conception of the qualities or actions that enable a human being to achieve his or her telos. Simply put, a moral theory needs a starting point, an ending point, and (in tandem with those two points) a set of appropriate means that end.

The Centrality of Teleology

The plausible belief seems to be that one cannot leave for vacation without knowing (a) where that destination is, (b) where one is at the moment, and (c) the directions — on foot, by car, or plane, or boat or what have you — to the destination. Similarly, any attempt to construct a moral theory without all three components (human telos, human nature as practical reasoners, and virtue) is bound to stultify.

Arguably, the unifying concept of the schema, arguably, is not virtue but *telos*. If we can't even create a shopping list of groceries we "should" buy without a clear conception of the dinner to be cooked, then *a fortiori* strict moral rules and virtues without any notion of the kind of life that is to be lived are bound to degenerate into a kind of pointless legalism. If natural human telos in particular is central to the project of virtue ethics, it would seem that developing a plausible modern virtue ethical theory would require rehabilitating a notion of natural teleology in general.

The Challenge of Teleology

However, the desire to rehabilitate natural teleology may seem overly optimistic. The idea of teleology has been a major stumbling block for centuries. One the one hand, supernatural teleology is felt by some to be too religious; on the other hand, natural teleology is commonly supposed to be somehow debunked by modern science. Francis Bacon and others intentionally excised "final causation" from natural science since they feared that empirical and theoretical investigation into fi-

nal causes "defiled philosophy."[16] If teleological virtue ethics is somehow distinctive of pre-modern traditions, wouldn't virtue talk be simply outmoded? Wouldn't any attempt to revive such talk be antiquarian and nostalgic? Is there a third alternative to "religious" teleology and natural teleology? Or can one of these disjuncts be rehabilitated in order that teleology may serve its crucial purpose in ethics?

I think that the sort of realism about natural teleology that is needed for a virtue ethics built on human nature is – and can be shown to be – perfectly respectable in our modern era. Natural final causation is no more mysterious or magical than biological life, or consciousness, or rationality. And the pursuit of virtues is no more obsolete than any other human activity, such as farming, or laughing, or studying astronomy.

Nevertheless, the skeptical worries must be taken seriously and addressed in detail. Modernity is not the ancient world. Modern science, philosophy, and culture are not the same as their pre-modern counterparts. It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists pay due respect to what *has* changed. It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists clarify the relationship of their theories to modern science.

Suspending Judgment about God

For this project, I set to one side the possibility of supernatural teleology. I do not wish to deny the possibility nor to assume it at the outset. The first reason for suspending discussion of this possibility is simply considerations of space. The second reason is that there is no consensus among neo-Aristotelians regarding the supernatural; some are atheists, some theists, of which some are

16. Cf. Bacon, New Organon, Book I. XLVIII "Although the most general principles in nature ought to be held merely positive, as they are discovered, and cannot with truth be referred to a cause, nevertheless the human understanding being unable to rest still seeks something prior in the order of nature. And then it is that in struggling toward that which is further off it falls back upon that which is nearer at hand, namely, on final causes, which have relation clearly to the nature of man rather than to the nature of the universe; and from this source have strangely defiled philosophy."

Christian, others a different sort of theist. Despite this variety, they hold a broad consensus about the possibility of *somehow* grounding an ethical theory in human nature.[17] The "somehow" is my goal in this project. Thirdly, the existence of natural ends, if it can be defended, does not *necessitate* but is *compatible with* the possibility of supernatural ends. It is possible that God is directing all natural affairs to his purposes, including guiding human beings by commands; it is possible that the entire orchestral cosmos is organized around God as the *arche* and *telos*, and that (to paraphrase St. Augustine) "our hearts are restless until they rest in him". However, for this project, I wish to see how far one's ethical outlook can go while suspending judgment.

Why it matters

Normative ethical theories purport to provide their adherents with direction on how to live. They describe or evaluate what to do and what not to do. They give reasons for what is worthwhile, what is perhaps neutral but a waste of time, and what is to be carefully avoided.

Unfortunately, much of our modern ethics (with the possible exception of bioethics) has become so barren and impractical that it has lost sight of — let alone connection to — the day to day direction on how to live. Thankfully, a few vociferous critics (such as Elizabeth Anscombe) have shaken us out of our stupor. Bernard Williams has done as much as anyone to remind moral philosophers that questions of how to live are prior, and deeper, than questions of what is wrong. "Character ethics," rather than mere "quandary ethics" is what is really needed in the vast majority of circumstances. That is not to say that moral quandaries are unimportant in life or unimportant in theory; quite the contrary, often times the moral quandary is the exceptional case that can provide a cutting counterexample to a nonsensical view. And moral dilemmas like those encountered in great works of fiction (*Othello*, *War and Peace*, *Gilead*) are real, if blessedly rare, occurrences in a normal human life. But for all this for ninety-nine parts of any given day I encounter very few temptations

17. Historically, a survey of teleological realists would feature theists, atheists, humanists, pantheists, and so on.

to do wrong; day by day and even hour by hour I encounter many competing or conflicting goods that seem worthwhile but cannot all be pursued. Check email or grade papers? Write more or spend more time with my kids? Pursue a teaching job in state or out of state? Invest in this friendship or spend much-needed time alone? A normative ethical theory, if it is not merely an abstract game of conceptual Jenga, ought to guide its adherent in reflecting upon such goods, weighing them in a cool and sober hour, and giving reasons for what to do.

The first reason why this ethical discussion — why any ethical discussion — matters is, of course, that ethics is part of the business of living well. And living well is, perhaps by definition, the only thing worth doing.

However, there are several more mundane and academic reasons this investigation is worthwhile. For example, the ongoing debates in metaethics over moral naturalism concern whether and how far moral properties can be identified with natural properties. My thesis bears obvious relevance to these debates.

Furthermore, although virtue ethics has made a recent comeback, virtue ethicists have not yet come to consensus on a definition of virtue let alone a definition of practical reason or eudaimonia. In my view, part of the cacophony is due to a failure to coordinate the two concepts in complete ethical system.

Much to blame for the barrenness of a lot of modern ethical theorizing is our obsession with individual actions over whole lives.

Taking morality seriously

Another recent thinker who has advanced a thesis with some similarities is Israeli philosopher David Enoch. David Enoch's persuasive argument is that any alternative to objectivist moral realism, whatever its merits, doesn't account for or allow us to take morality sufficiently seriously – as seriously as we already do, or as seriously as we must do — especially for deliberation about what to do. Moral realism of the robust sort gains its plausibility from allowing or explaining why we take morality just

so seriously – as serious as life and death.

I take these claims together to be an explanandum and explanans. There are many ways of trying to convince people to take morality less seriously, by showing it up, by exposing it, deflating it, showing what moral claims "really" amount to, and so on. Peter Railton claims that some people can take morality too seriously even though they are avowed subjectivists. He says:

> Some may be drawn to, or repelled by, moral realism out of a sense that it is the view of ethics that best expresses high moral earnestness. Yet one can be serious about morality, even to a fault, without being a moral realist. Indeed, a possible objection to the sort of moral realism I will defend here is that it may not make morality serious enough. (Railton, "Moral Realism" 164)

An objection Enoch might make (or that I shall make in the same spirit) is that there are two kinds of earnestness. One is an earnestness in doing good. The other is an inevitable earnestness in caring about what we do when we deliberate. Enoch emphasizes the second. Railton's non-reductive but naturalistic morality may account for the fact that people sincerely and eagerly care about doing right but it doesn't account for the way we in fact deliberate.

Enoch summarizes his moral realism in this way:

> I believe that there are irreducibly normative truths and facts, facts such that we should care about our future well-being, that we should not humiliate other people, that we should not reason and form beliefs in ways we know to be unreliable. These are, of course, just examples: even if I am wrong about them, I believe there must be some examples of this sort, examples of normative (and indeed moral) truths that are irreducibly normative, truths that are perfectly objective, universal, absolute. They are independent of us, our desires and our (or anyone else's) will. And our thinking and talking about them amounts not just to an expression of any practical attitudes, but to a representation of these normative truths and facts. These normative truths are truths that, when successful in our normative inquiries, we discover rather than create or construct. They are, in other words, just as respectable as empirical or mathematical truths (at least, that is, according to scientific and mathematical realists).[@?]

Conclusion

As difficult as it is to consider seriously the project of restoring teleology, final causality, natural purposiveness to its proper place, it can be done. And in order to defend an account of virtue as partly constitutive of our natural human *telos*, it *must* be done. Philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition are uniquely situated to do so. That tradition promises the resources with which to construct an ethical system including all three elements of the schema while rehabilitating a form of natural teleology that is not only tenable in light of modern beliefs, but rationally commends itself in light of all we now know.[18]

Chapter Outline

In short, I shall defend my thesis by way of discussing the three mentioned themes in the recent neo-Aristotelians, especially MacIntyre, Foot, and McDowell. Some (though not all) of those defending a teleological conception of nature and ethics have been virtue ethicists. The argument will unfold in the following chapters.

- Chapter 0. The Project of the Neo-Aristotelian Ethical naturalism.
- Chapter 1. Virtues as traits humans need as practical reasoners.
- Chapter 2. Virtues as excellent character traits.
- Chapter 3. Virtue as excellence of practical reason.
- Chapter 4. Virtues as partly constituting the realization of our natural human *telos*.
- Chapter 5. Conclusion.**

18. For Aristotle himself, humans were rational animals with a particular psychology and set of potentialities, including the endowment of divine nous; our species-wide *telos* was happiness or eudaimonia. A life of virtuous activity was the means to eudaimonia, and detailed information about the virtues – both moral and intellectual – were knowable from tradition and ratified or modified by reflecting on the lives of virtuous Athenian citizens. For neo-Aristotelians some aspects of Aristotle's three-fold system are correct as is, some need revising and updating, while others need throwing out.

Apologia

Virtue, practical reason, and *telos* are age-old themes. Treating them adequately is far too grand a task for one dissertation. As Glaucon said to Socrates, "The measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life."[19] Nevertheless, they are significant themes. My hope is that even an unworthy treatment of a worthy topic will attain some value.

19. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997) Republic 450b.

Chapter 2

Chapter 1: The Project of Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism

I. Introduction

The neo-Aristotelians base their ethical theory on human nature. This project may seem, on the face of it, hopeless. For one, the notion of "human nature" seems to some a bit vague and mystical, like the notion of an essence or Platonic universal underlying and uniting all human beings. Perhaps "human nature" is simply an abstraction by which we gesture at the "mess" of humanity, in all its irrational, inconsistent, variable glory. Secondly, (some others say) if there is such thing as human nature, it is simply our biological make up. Our biological make up is, in turn, to be characterized by examining our evolutionary history, genetics, physiology and neurophysiology, our geographical settings, etc., and by drawing connections between these biological facts and our cultural histories, social and anthropological customs, and so on. None of this has anything obviously to do with ethics. Thirdly, we quickly run afoul of Moore's so-called naturalistic fallacy. Even if one the moral facts about good and bad or about virtues and vices could be shown to relate to descriptions something like "human nature", we would face the insurmountable barrier of deriving normative conclusions from descriptive propositions. The relation between human nature and ethics would, in the end, support a general non-cognitivist expressivism about moral talk: we approve of things that are

survival-inducing, say, or disapprove of things that dissolve social bonds.[1]

These objections are formidable, but responses can be made. They either rest on misunderstandings of the neo-Aristotelian project or rest on legitimate limitations of philosophical ethics *tout court*. In the former case, all we need is to clarify the project. In the latter case, we need to accept the limitation and work within it, showing how much (or how little) philosophical ethics may hope for.

In providing preliminary responses to the promise or to the very possibility of an ethics grounded in human nature, I shall explain more of the neo-Aristotelian project. Several pieces of the argument that here receive an initial treatment will receive a more thorough (and hopefully adequate) treatment in later chapters.

II. Grounding ethics

Very roughly speaking, a non-philosopher might derive what ethical thoughts he has in his religion or social tradition. A reflective philosopher might try to ground ethics in the form of the Good, in one's sentiments and natural sympathies, in human reason, in human contracts, in pleasure and pain, and so on. What hope is there for defending human nature as a superior starting point?

Methodological question: How much evaluative truth can one learn (about virtues and vices, practical wisdom, etc.) by examining human nature, including our rationality and possibly our natural teleology?

1. A fourth objection from a quite different quarter is the worry that human nature is corrupted by sin and ancestral guilt. On this objection, even though human nature exists and even though a good person would be an exemplary human being as such, none of us actual human beings are situated appropriately to identify what is good or to become good. Our moral efforts, our natural inclinations, and even the very intellect by which we engage in moral reflection are co-opted by a deep brokenness of the heart – a depravity of spirit. All our natural inclinations and best efforts to arise above them are doomed from the start, which renders our moral efforts in need of outside assistance if they are to make any progress. This objection is a real one, but I must defer it, for two reasons: (1) Those readers of different theological positions or no theological position at all will not have this worry; (2) I hope to treat the relation of virtue ethics to religion in general in a later work which make this objection its main theme.

If we can infer some evaluative truths from some natural facts, then a case needs to be made for that general point. The facts of *the way we are* supply excellent (indeed, very often overriding) reason for *the way we ought to be*. And I shall argue that some evaluative judgments – such as that 'virtues are beneficial for humans' and that 'wisdom is a virtue' – true and can be known to be true by examining human nature, which is practical, rational animals.

III. Human nature is a mess?

The first worry is that human nature is really a mess. Bernard Williams expresses the worry that human nature is an "ill-sorted bricolage of powers and instincts":

> The second and more general reason lies not in the particular ways in which human beings may have evolved, but simply in the fact that they have evolved, and by natural selection. The idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is still to be found in Aristotle's philosophy, a philosophy according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave. On that view it must be the deepest desire—need?—purpose?—satisfaction?—of human beings to live in the way that is in this objective sense appropriate to them (the fact that modern words break up into these alternatives expresses the modern break-up of Aristotle's view). Other naturalistic views, Marxist and some which indeed call themselves 'evolutionary', have often proclaimed themselves free from any such picture, but it is basically very hard for them to avoid some appeal to an implicit teleology, an order in relation to which there could be an existence which would satisfy all the most basic human needs at once. The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way into ethical thought.[2]

The response of Hursthouse, Foot, Brown, and Nagel, is that natural teleology is indeed compatible with Darwinism and does indeed provide a "an appropriate way to behave" (or we might add, *ways*) that is "inherent in each natural kind of thing." Natural teleology is only incompatible with a teleological nihilism distinctive of (certain brands) of metaphysical reductionism. Strictly speaking, Darwinian evolutionary theory may be summarized in six theses that describe (in painstaking detail)

2. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Taylor & Francis, 2011), 44.

terrestrial biological processes of genetic mutation, reproduction, preservation, and proliferation. Strictly speaking, about teleology, it says absolutely nothing.[3] As for those brands of metaphysical reductionism that are incompatible with natural teleology, if our knowledge of natural teleology is well-grounded enough then so much the worse for metaphysical reductionism.

While Hursthouse is quick to assure the reader that her goal is not the production of a "scientific" ethics, by this she means only that ethical evaluations cannot be made from "outside" the ethical outlook itself: ethics is not to become a branch of biology. She emphatically *does* mean to make evaluations of human beings can be made in a way analogous to the way we evaluate cacti or deer.

> In each case we rely on the notion of natural kinds and their appropriate way of behaving:
>
> in relation to which they are evaluated as good or defective. The evaluations do not—as they might in a post-Darwinian age—evaluate members of species of living things simply as good, or not so good, or downright defective, as replicators of their genes.[4]

Hursthouse's primary response to Williams is that his worry is not actually rooted in the progress of modern science. He himself admits that "many of course have come to that conclusion before" (the conclusion that "human beings are to some degree a mess… for whom no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially.")[5] Rather, Hursthouse points out, his worry is an expression of moral nihilism and despair. He believes human nature is a mess *because* he believes no form of life is completely satisfactory for everyone. That blade cuts the other way. If one has hope that some form of life is or may be at least mostly satisfactory for at least some people, it makes sense to believe human nature is not completely a mess. And Hursthouse movingly praises hope as a virtue.

3. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford University Press, 2011) %% chapter.

4. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 257–8.

5. Ibid., 261, quoting Bernard Williams, in *Making Sense of Humanity: And Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) 44 %%.

> Alternatively (or perhaps as well) we could stick with what we have—those facts about human nature and the way human life goes that support the claim that the virtues on the standard list benefit their possessor, and the reading of human history that ascribes our persisting failure to achieve *eudaimonia* in anything but very small patches to our vices. True, it is not easy to hold on to them sometimes; despair and misanthropy are temptations. But we should.[6]

I should not like to deny that human society and many, many human individuals are "a mess." A selected list of the dark side of our species: War, oppression, disease, genetic defect, injury, hatred, vice, a large and growing list of different kinds of injustice. These, also, are empirical facts of anthropology and psychology. I should not like to deny that *things are bad*. I should only like to make space for the possibility that things *are not all bad*. The universal optimist is obliged unrealistically to deny all the dark side of our existence. But the universal pessimist is obliged unrealistically to deny all the light side: peace and freedom, glowing health, genetic order, beauty that persists into old age, love, virtue, and the halting but admirable efforts toward justice and social harmony.

Below I shall make the case that ethical conclusions can be derived from natural facts about human beings. Here I only wish to make room for the possibility that our data set of such facts cannot with integrity include all light and sweetness nor all dank and dark cynicism.

IV. Human nature is merely a biological concept

As for the second worry, some will say that humans are mere mammals, and that is the end of it. Stephen Brown argues that ethics is a descriptive discipline in the end; even virtue ethics, after being appropriately "naturalized", does not *commend* the virtues so much as *detail* the traits which happen to be adaptive for creatures like us to survive and propogate our genotype.[7] Although the "characteristic form of life" of human beings involves highly rarified neurological and cognitive

6. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 265.

7. R. Stephen Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature: A Defense of Ethical Naturalism* (Continuum, 2008); Stephen Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue," *Ethic@* 4 (2005): 7–22.

processes we do not observe in other animals, nevertheless, nature only reveals one kind of biological concept of nature: a species. And species aim to survive and reproduce.

My reply is that to say that humans are mammals is an empirical assertion; we exhibit quite a sufficient number of tell-tale properties shared by other mammals: a neocortex, hair, mammary glands, and hearts of a particular form and function.

But to say that humans are *merely* mammals is a profoundly anti-empirical assertion. I even would tendentiously label it profoundly *anti-scientific*. For what we observe of ourselves both "from inside" and "from outside" we exhibit a range of properties not shared by other mammals: sex for pleasure, grammar and language, fire-making, abstract reasoning, science, philosophy, religion, mythology, agriculture. Of course, slippery spatial analogies like "inside" and "outside" admit of multiple senses: "inside" can and often does mean what can be known via introspection (e.g., the way I know what it feels like to be slighted or to be praised, the way I remember the color of my grandmother's house) and what can be known from accepting limitations of a first-personal or second-personal human point of view more generally (e.g., it appears that the sun orbits the earth rather than the other way around; and I know when my mother is upset because I just "know" that look). Looking at things from the "outside" might mean what can be known via sensory perception or what can be known – if anything – by pretending to a neutral, objective, third-person, God's eye view.[8] We can posit counterfactuals, as for example when we speculate what intelligent extraterrestrials would think of humans if they observed and studied our species, with fresh eyes, alongside every other. All that matters for my purposes now is that our species exhibits a range of peculiar activities that distinguish us from mammals, from animals more broadly, and from any other known natural entity in the cosmos – and that recognizing as much is an *empirical* matter. To deny our uniqueness is possible, after a long inquiry. But to be blind to our uniqueness from the outset is to be subject, in all likelihood, to philistene reductionism that has no more to do with genuine science

8. Whether we can know anything outside of time and space (such as platonic universals) is of course a large question I don't wish to enter into here.

than does belief in extraterrestrial life.

In a subsequent chapter, I shall attempt to say more about what human nature consists in (spoiler alert: it is our set of rational capacities). My only concern right now is to make space for the plausible notion that the concept of human nature is not easily reduced to the concept of "just another earth-born, carbon-based mammal."

V. Human nature is on one side of the Is-Ought Gap

As for the third concern, the is-ought or fact-value gap can be overcome by discovering natural teleological facts from which we can derive ethical or normative conclusions. As Stephen Brown puts it, "Human beings are a species of social animal for which there is a characteristic way of life. An individual human being may be evaluted as good or bad according to how well that individual realizes the human way of life."[9] To get here, Brown argues simply that "there is teleology in nature." And he is right.

That there is teleology in nature – enough, at least, to ground an ethics of human nature – is the case I shall make for the remainder of this chapter. Before I get to that case, I shall give a bit of historical context for the revival of humanistic ethics.

VI. The revival of virtue ethics

Virtue talk, once a normal part of western cultural and intellectual life, largely faded during (roughly) the last three centuries. Its resurgance in the last 60 years has been well documented. Today, about one fifth of analytic philosophers self-identify as adhering to "virtue ethics."[10] Not everyone is impressed, of course, with the alleged benefits of virtue ethics; not everyone agrees that "virtue ethics" is a valid category anyhow.[Martha C Nussbaum.[11] Nussbaum argues that we should talk less about

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10. David Bourget and David J Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?" *Philosophical Studies* 170, no. 3 (2014): 465–500.

11. "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?" *The Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1999): 163–201.

virtue ethicists and more about neo-Humeans, neo-Kantians, neo-Aristotelians; and talk more still about their substantive views about the role of reason in morality, the role of emotions and desires and other sub-rational psychological phenomena, and their moral views.] Nevertheless, this figure is remarkably high, given the notorious difficulty of achieving ethical and metaethical consensus and given the long dominance, in academic philosophy at least, of Kantian and Utilitarian theories of morality (to say nothing of the various brands of moral skepticism).

Howe are we to explain the resurgance of virtue talk? One interpretation is that something is profoundly wrong with modern moral philosophy. Perhaps it was disastrously wrong for Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers to turn away from tradition, from religion, from the messy realities of human life in an attempt to construct a universal, abstract, Apollonian, rational theory of morality. On this interpretation, the flexibility of Aristotle and the humanism of Confucious provide a refreshing alternative to the stolid rationalism of Kant or Mill.[12]

Rosalind Hursthouse disputes this interpretation. She thinks virtue ethicists presented their views as *rivals* to the dominant moral theories only because, in the early days, it needed to fight for a position at the table. Now that virtue ethics has a respectable place in our taxonomy of philosophical ethics, such rivalry is needlessly combative.

The second interpretation (which Hursthouse seems to favor) is that virtue talk can and does enrich Kantian and Utilitarian or more broadly consequentialist ethical theories. Kant himself had a theory of virtue. Julia Driver, Ben Bradley and others have been working to articulate a theory they call "virtue consequentialism" or "character consequentialism". In contrast to "act" or "rule" utilitarianisms, virtue consequentialism describes virtues as those traits whose possessors tend to bring about the most desirable consequences. Virtue concepts such as temperence and justice are both potent and flexible. They are potent enough to supply resources concepts of duty or pleasure cannot supply on their own; yet they are flexible enough to accommodate varying substantive views

12. This interpretation, of course, is a substantive moral thesis couched in the language of a historical thesis. So it is debatable whether this story is even true *as history*. I shall try to remain neutral about the history and discuss the substantive theory.

of what justice is and why it is morally admirable. Certainly, one useful way of distinguishing (say) the ethical theories of Elizabeth Anscombe and Christine Korsgaard would be to point out that Anscombe makes heavier use of the term 'virtue' while Korsgaard makes heavier use of the term 'duty' or 'imperative'; but their theories can be distinguished in more useful detail by contrasting (say) Anscombe's emphasis on the need for moral psychology and a theory of action with Korsgaard's argument that the need to be moral arises out of our reflective, practical identity.

My own view is that Elizabeth Anscombe, Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, Iris Murdoch and others have indeed corrected certain myopic tendencies of modern morality. Martha Nussbaum argues that "virtue ethics" is a misleading category, but that there are three features of "common ground" between those ethicists who talk about virtue including Kant and Mill and Sidgewick. Her three features are the notions that moral philosophy is (a) about the agent (not just individual choices or actions), (b) about motives, emotions, and settled character traits, and (c) the whole of life.[13] "Even though a concern for motive, intention, character, and the whole course of life was not in principle alien to Kantian and Utilitarian philosophy, it was certainly alien to most British and American Kantians and Utilitarians of the period."[14] Martha Nussbaum argues that the "common ground" between even diverging views is that we cannot construct a complete ethical theory by discussing only "isolated moments of choice"[15]

So Anscombe et. al., have reminded us that the first question of philosophical ethics is "How am I to live?" This question is not an optional one for normal, reflective, adults. This question is not an avoidable one for those who face major problems in life. We need to refocus our arguments in philosophical ethics from looking just at individual choices or actions (viewed from the outside, like a moral critic) to looking at the whole of life (viewed from the inside, like a moral agent).

A second myopic tendency whose correction helps explain the resurgance of virtue talk is the re-introduction of historical consciousness into philosophical ethics. Many of the neo-Aristotelians

13. Ibid., 170.
14. Ibid., 173.
15. Ibid., 174.

studied classics or history in addition to (or prior to) ethics. Long familiarity with cultures, places, and times other than one's own has a salubrious effect of helping one to see one's own culture and time. (I remember, after my first visit to Mongolia, whose capital city has only one department store, coming back to California and marvelling at Wal-Mart.) Likewise, philosophers who have spent long hours conversing with Aristotle or Aquinas are likely to notice more easily the assumptions, biases, strengths, and weaknesses of our own modern context. Jack Weinstein observes that Alasdair Macintyre did for ethics what John Rawls did for political philosophy: where Rawls re-invigorated political philosophy, "inaugurating the dominance of late twentieth-century liberalism"[16], MacIntyre helped to re-invigorate analytic ethical philosophy (especially the ascendancy of late twentieth-century virtue ethics) by freshly examining ethical concepts in light of history.[17] MacIntyre argues that we can only responsibly use and evaluate practical concepts such as self, practice, *telos*, or virtue when we know our own history. Since *we ourselves* inhabit a tradition, we must know ourselves *as* inhabitants of a tradition with a past. We will return to these themes in later chapters.

A third myopic tendency is, as I have suggested above, the tendency to view morality as *either* a set of rules to be followed for their own sake (with no external "point" or purpose) or else a groundless social convention. One could use this disjunction to exhaustively plot many of the moral theories of the last century. Controversies play and re-play the tug-of-war between those who think these moral rules ought to be followed (no matter what!) and those who think these moral rules can be safely ignored. If morality is one piece of a three-part form (mentioned above), then it is possible to see moral rules as neither arbitrary impositions nor bolts of lightning from a clear sky.

Although Aristotle and others viewed morality in this way, that is not to say that the three-part schematic is *anti-modern* or intrinsically *pre-modern*. For Aristotle himself, humans were rational animals with a particular psychology and set of potentialities, including the endowment of divine nous; our species-wide telos was happiness or eudaimonia. A life of virtuous activity was the means

16. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 38.
17. Ibid., chap. 4.

to eudaimonia, and detailed information about the virtues – both moral and intellectual – were knowable from tradition and ratified or modified by reflecting on the lives of virtuous Athenian citizens. But the message of the neo-Aristotelians is that we can pick and choose from Aristotle, discarding the bad but saving the good. And the good worth saving is quite a lot. It is not a foregone conclusion that contemporary virtue ethicist will *reject* widespread modern assumptions. Some, such as Murdoch and MacIntyre, did become staunch opponents of certain aspects of modernity. Others, such as McDowell and Hursthouse, become staunch defenders, even while working to enrich modernity with pre-modern tradition.

To put matters glibly, we might say that modern science was, in many ways, a turn away from the human toward the cosmic and natural. Modern politics and ethics, on the other hand, was a turn toward the human (often to the exclusion of the cosmic and natural!) While each turn had its merits, each was subject to excess. The resurgance of virtue talk can be explained in part, I think, by a desire to correct both of these excesses at once. What would it be like to include the "human sciences" (wissenschaftes) within science and to include the natural and cosmic in our politics and ethics? The neo-Aristotelian answer is that such an ethics would have to begin with an examination of human nature. In this way, it is easy to see why it is included under the metaethical banner of "ethical naturalism".

VII. Is neo-Aristotelian naturalism… naturalistic?

This point of philosophical taxonomy surfaces a problem. It is worthwhile to explain a problem with the neo-Aristotelian project here. To see it, consider the way James Lenman summarizes neo-Aristotelianism as a version of "moral naturalism":

> One important school of thought … [is] work is inspired by that of Aristotle. This view has its roots in the writings of G. E. M. Anscombe, P. T. Geach and the early Philippa Foot among others. Its contemporary representatives include the later Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, Martha Nussbaum and Judith Jarvis Thomson. As this list makes clear, this is very much the official metaethical theory of the main current in

contemporary virtue ethics.[18]

Lenman does not quite know what to do with neo-Aristotelian naturalism. And he is not alone in that.

Two important metaphilosophical confusions lurking behind these innocuous distinctions. The first confusion is the close tie between neo-Aristotelian naturalism and virtue theory, which seems to blur the line between ethics and metaethics. Lenman seems bemused when he says that neo-Aristotelianism "the official metaethical theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics." For when Foot, Hursthouse, McDowell are classified as virtue ethicists (a normative theory) *and* neo-Aristotelians (a metaethical theory), we might object. Aren't these two different projects?

One legacy of G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* has been the tendency to sharply distinguish primary ethical questions (about what things are good) from metaethical questions (about what 'good' as an evaluative predicate *means*). Of course, the questions that concern modern metaethicists were posed and discussed by prior thinkers. However, the *Principia* gave a distinctive form to these questions and suggested a distinctive range of possible answers. Moore argued that all previous ethical philosophers had failed to resolve their disputes for a failure to define their terms. The question of what the word 'good' *means* (and, possibly the same question, what 'good' *refers to*) is distinct from the question *which things are good?* The first question is a conceptual question that aims to define a category. The second question is a substantive or existential question that aims to bring other concepts within that category. Moore argued (or according to some critics, *assumed*) that 'goodness' was indefinable.[19] That is, the good could not be defined in terms of any other property. It is false that 'goodness is pleasure' or 'goodness is whatever is most real'. That we pursue pleasure is a psychological claim, not an ethical one; that we judge something to be real is a metaphysical claim, not an ethical one.

18. James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014. Lenman acknowledges that Thomson might need to be subtracted from this list and that John McDowell might need to be added.

19. William K Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," *Mind*, 1939, 464–77.

If the good is indefinable, then any attempt to define it is going to fail. Any attempt to reduce the concept to a concept of lesser intension, or to translate it it as a concept, commits the "naturalistic fallacy." Moore is clear that the naturalistic fallacy isn't *just* the error of defining the good as a natural property (such as the pleasant) but also the error of defining the good as a metaphysical or supernatural property (such as the Really Real, or the Divinely-Ordained).

The neo-Aristotelians are pretty universally critical of Moore's arguments here. Philippa Foot and others dispute his starting points, as we shall see.[20] So the first reply to Lenman as to whether normative ethics and metaethics are two different projects is that they are not *necessarily* the same project. One's choice of philosophical taxonomy will reflect one's substantive views about ethics. As Alan Gibbard says:

> Moore stressed the distinction in ethics between questions of meaning and questions of substance, and thereby gave rise to a tradition in analytic philosophy of separating the two parts of ethical theory: the metatheory and the substantive, normative part. Some philosophers have rejected the distinction; some Kantians, for instance, think that if you get the metatheory right, substantive ethical conclusions fall out as some kind of consequence, so that metaethics and substantive ethics are not really separate. Then too, anyone who rejects Sidgwick's and Moore's indefinability claim and thinks that ethical terms can be given analytic, naturalistic definitions thinks that the two putative subdivisions are not really separate. Those who reject any systematic distinction between questions of meaning and questions of substance might likewise reject a sharp, separate subject of metaethics.[21]

Furthermore, even those who maintain that ethics and metaethics are "separate" projects betray connections between the two. For example, we might notice the conspicuous connection between supposedly "neutral" metaethics and first-order consequentialism: G.E. Moore, J.L. Mackie, Frank Jackson, Richard Boyd, Peter Railton, Simon Blackburn, and Alan Gibbard all endorse consequentialism. (We might even echo Lenman and call moral naturalism the "official theory of a main current in contemporary consequentialism.") Furthermore, even if a procedural, non-substantive

20. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 1, "A Fresh Start?"

21. Allan Gibbard, "Normative Properties," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2003): 141–57 %%.

approach to metaethics can be made neutral with respect to normative ethics, it is still admirably ambitious to construct a theory that pays attention to both. Darwall agrees. His (2003) essay summarizes the history of analytic ethics since Moore, and persuasively argues "that although metaethics and normative ethics are properly focused on different issues, they need to be brought into dynamic relation with one another in order to produce a systematic and defensible philosophical ethics. This mutual dependence is owing to the fact that issues of normativity are at the center of the concerns of both metaethics and normative ethics."[22]

In sum, the answer to Lenman's first confusion is that the ethical and metaethical dimensions of neo-Aristotelianism are inseparable. My thesis is squarely and ethical argument concerning what character traits are worth pursuing (virtues) and what traits count as virtues (practical wisdom). However, an adequate defense of my thesis requires me to assess more broadly metaethical considerations such as status of human beings as normative creatures who evaluate themselves and others and who reflect upon what they have reason to do or to abstain from doing.

Lenman's second confusion is an uncertainty with respect to who actually deserves the title of "naturalists". Lenman is not sure who counts, pointing out in a footnote that Thomson probably shouldn't be on this list and that John McDowell probably should. He says "McDowell is certainly pervasively inspired by Aristotle and he describes himself as a naturalist. See especially his 1995. But I suspect many philosophers would find his use of the term 'naturalist' here somewhat Pickwickian."[23] The confusion arises because Lenman and others[24] are not sure that neo-Aristotelian "naturalism" is "really *naturalism*" at all.

22. Stephen Darwall, "How Should Ethics Relate to (the Rest of) Philosophy?: Moore's Legacy," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2003): 1–20.

23. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."

24. William Rehg and Darin Davis, "Conceptual Gerrymandering? The Alignment of Hursthouse's Naturalistic Virtue Ethics with Neo-Kantian Non-Naturalism," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2003): 583–600; John Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" *Ratio* 22, no. 3 (2009): 308–21; John Hacker-Wright, "Human Nature, Personhood, and Ethical Naturalism," *Philosophy* 84, no. 03 (2009): 413–27.

If it is naturalism, does that entail that happiness is simply a natural state, like health or pleasure? And if so, are the means to that end discernible through statistical analysis of causal relations between acts and their consequences? If it is not naturalism, then why talk about the facts human nature at all?

The fault line here separates two contrary ways of understanding what *nature* is. Put differently, the fault line separates two ways of understanding the fact/value dichotomy.[25] The assumption of Lenman (and others) is that nature is purely descriptive, with no "ought". But Aristotle and the broad Aristotelian tradition deny that the fact-value dichotomy is absolute. They conceive of *nature* as including everything that *is and ought to be.*[26] Briefly, for Moore nature as including everything that *is* but not what ought to be – all facts, no values. Moore and those influenced by him, both naturalists and non-naturalists, have agreed with the underlying assumption that "nature" is purely descriptive. But what if this assumption is mistaken? Surely we cannot let a deeply-held assumption stand without scrutiny. For Aristotle, nature is some facts, some values. So norms and prescriptions can be just as natural as facts and descriptions. If normativity (*what ought to be*) is natural too, then it might be possible that *human nature* grounds ethical facts. And this is just what virtue ethics says.

We have to consider the hypothesis: what if metaphysical and biology facts are just as natural as some ethical facts? What if the fact/value dichotomy is not absolute and inviolable? Then there might be a tight fit – perhaps an inextricable tie – between Aristotelian virtue theory and the metaethical view labeled neo-Aristotelian naturalism. And neo-Aristotelian naturalists argue that nature is or can be normative.

Now, those who think the fact/value dichotomy really is most accurate may squirm at this hypothesis. They might just double down and insist that metaethical theory is utterly procedural and not substantive – they might insist that it is utterly neutral with respect to normative ethical

25. Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact / Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

26. As I understand it, the paradoxical notion of "what really is what ought to be" is a good way of summarizing the notion of natural law.

theories. Certainly this is a widespread belief. I shall try to make the case below.

Annas distinguishes two sorts of naturalism, one that emphasizes the biological nature of humanity (at the expense of reason's odd normativity) and another that emphasizes the rational nature of humanity (at the expense of biology's descriptively).[27] Christopher Toner distinguishes between the "biological naturalism" of Thompson and Foot (and Hursthouse) on the one hand from the "second naturalism" or "excellence naturalism" or or 'culturalism' of McDowell and MacIntyre, each of which has its strengths and problems.

For my part, I shall assume that 'nature' or 'natural' refer to familiar objects and properties that exist in the cosmos today: people, stars, trees, penguins, bacteria, and their properties, like 'being an animal', 'bright,' 'green', 'being countershaded for camoflauge,' and so on. I take my thesis that nature is normative to be *naturalistic* in the broad sense: I propose to use only philosophical and scientific methods to observe and explain natural phenomena; I bracket divine revelation or the existence of supernatural beings; and I warmly welcome the unrestricted definition of nature as *all there is*[28] and hence that humans are continuous with nature.[29] By 'normative' I mean what involves statements not only descriptive judgments of what is but judgments about what *ought to be* or *ought not to be*. As Alan Gibbard says:

> [P]art of what's special about morality is that it operates in the 'space of reasons;' it concerns justification and oughts. The term 'normative' is central to much current philosophical discussion. There's no agreement on what this technical term in our discipline is to mean, but it involves, in a phrase drawn from Sellars, being somehow 'fraught with ought.'[30]

27. Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in Stephen Mark Gardiner, *Virtue Ethics, Old and New* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

28. Cf. Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 202–21 for for the best discussion I know of on all the many (many!) varieties of the word "nature" as it occurs in philosophy.

29. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 1–2.

30. Gibbard, "Normative Properties."

VIII. Conclusion and transition

Neo-Aristotelians are one part of the growing revival of virtue ethics. I have tried to show why that revival is so popular (as far as any philosophical movement is popular) and make space for its core assumptions. Now I must proceed to defend the first premise of an ethical theory grounded in human nature: the premise that natural facts can be normative. Not all of nature, of course; I do not wish to defend the notion that "everything has a purpose", including stars and rocks, as if the cosmos were an orchestra being played. But at least some natural entities – especially living organisms – have ineliminable, irreducible, normative properties. For (1) some "generic statements" about natural kinds and their properties are both descriptive and fundamentally normative or teleological (for example, "penguins are birds", or "eyes are adapted for seeing"); and (2) some such statements are true. If these premises are true, then nature is normative, and we can know as much with the same ease by which we know that penguins are birds. My end game, pursued in later chapters, is to use generics as premises in arguments with ethical conclusions. It is, in some real sense, true, even without anthropomorphizing, that eyes ought to see.

IX. Can natural facts be normative?

It is no secret in philosophy that to prove one's thesis one must begin by assuming, on the first page, a premise which necessarily entails one's conclusion. Such reasoning is, in one sense, circular and so may appear vicious: *Why should I grant your first premise?* the reader might ask. But in another sense it is not vicious. For any case intended to establish that *P* must take some point Q or R as a hypothesis. Even if one tries to establish that Q or R, one will do so by assuming S or T, and the problem reiterates. If nothing is granted, nothing can be proved.

The consequence of this reflection is that a great deal depends upon one's choice of starting premises. My starting premise is this: **some generic statements are true.** That is, some of our empirical observations, and our rational reflection upon such observations, and our conclusions in

the form of "generics" (to be explained below) which are scientific conclusions derived upon such reflections and observations, are true.

So for example, I observe that the penguins appear to be birds (they have beaks, feathers, lay eggs, emit squawks, etc.). I reflect that most – if not all birds – have many of these macro features. I consult my encyclopedias, biology or zoology textbooks, or friends who are zoologists, and ask them whether penguins indeed are birds. They all confirm the categorization. From observations and reflections such as these, penguins earned an entry in the annals of scientific knowledge. They get a scientific name ('sphenisciformes'), a somewhat speculative evolutionary history, and increasingly detailed descriptions of their characteristics, genetics, environments, diet, predators, and so on. The scientific conclusion, upon initial observation, bolstered by reflection, is the statement that: penguins are birds.

Another term for what I have called 'scientific generic statements' is generic statements, Aristotelian categoricals[31], natural-historical statements.[32] What are these things? Consider the statement "all wolves hunt in packs." Logically, the proposition expressed in this statement is neither strictly universal nor strictly particular. It is not a strictly true universal judgment (for some wolves hunt alone, and some don't hunt at all). Furthermore, it is true but trivial that *some wolves hunt in packs*. The logical form of "all S's ϕ" does not predicate ϕ-ing to all members of the category S without exception, nor does it simply assert that some S's ϕ, which is true but uninteresting. The statement that "wolves hunt in packs" is only interesting if it is an item of conceptual knowledge about wolves as a *kind*.

Andrew Bailey's recent paper arguing for animalism defines the thesis "we are animals" as a generic. He summarizes generics in the following way:

> What are generics? A fine question, but a difficult one. Start with this sentence: [all ducks lay eggs.] This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is

31. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

32. Thompson, "The Representation of Life"; Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

> it equivalent to 'for every x, if x is a [duck], x [lays eggs]? 'ducks lay eggs' may be true even if not all ducks lay eggs, 'mosquitos carry dengue fever' may be true even if only a very few mosquitos carry that virus, and so on). We are now positioned to observe one curious property of generics: they admit of exceptions.[33]

An exception to a universal judgment proves the judgment false. If a geometrician were to discover an exception to the proposition "All squares have four right angles", then the statement would be simply false. By contrast, exceptions do not disprove Aristotelian Categoricals. But if a biologist discovers an exception to the proposition "All reptiles lay eggs", then either the statement is false or she has discovered a new species of reptile that does not lay eggs. Confining ourselves to particular judgments like "Some reptiles lay eggs" would be radically unambitious science.

Much of our conceptual knowledge consists in generics.[34] Generics are not, strictly speaking, universal statements (since they admit of exceptions without falsification). They are not merely statistical regularities: suppose it is true that California condors can fly for hours without resting.[35] Nevertheless, in 1987 there were only 27 known living condors; one could easily imagine a scenario in which every single remaining member of an endangered species are injured, old, or diseased and so none of them exemplify this attribute. It would be strictly true of the individuals of the species that *none* can fly for hours; nevertheless it would still true conceptually that "condors" can fly for hours.

The first point is that **some generic statements (about natural entities and properties) are true.** For example, "penguins are birds"; "the black and white countershading pattern of penguin feathers helps them hide from predators"; and "penguins can swim up to 4 miles per hour"; "reptiles lay eggs"; "eyes are for seeing", and so on.

How do we discover such generic truths? The same way we develop conceptual knowledge of anything in nature: by observation, reflection, experimentation, induction, etc. I believe germs

33. Andrew M Bailey, "Animalism," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 12 (2015): 869.

34. Sandeep Prasada et al., "Conceptual Distinctions Amongst Generics," *Cognition* 126, no. 3 (2013): 405–22.

35. Jeffrey P. Cohn, "Saving the California Condor," *BioScience* 49, no. 11 (1999): 864–68.

cause disease because experts say so, but I believe penguins are birds and eyeballs enable sight because I have seen such creatures myself and inferred such truths.

Although there certainly remain interesting and important details of generics to be worked out, to deny that generics are true and a significant bulk of our conceptual knowledge renders one unable to say much at all.

Suppose for *reductio* that no generic statements are true. Then eyes are not for seeing, penguins' countershading does not help them avoid predators, and we must deny that normal penguins can swim up to 4 miles per hour. Such denials are, I think, absurdities.[36]

X. Some generics are teleological or functional truths

The notion that **generics are fundamentally normative** needs some arguing. Examples: "a penguin that cannot swim up to 4 miles per hour is either immature, injured, or defective"; "a lone wolf is not a normal wolf"; "eyes that do not see are either not fully developed, or injured, or ill. Since we know that"eyes are for seeing" we know that eyeballs that cannot see are *defective*.

A critic who wants to affirm that some generics are true must, I believe, affirm that some generics are normative. We cannot say that generics are not normative without simply saying all generics are false. But neither can we rationally say that all generics are false. For generics constitute an astonishing percentage of our conceptual knowledge.[37] No sooner have I been told that penguins are birds than I am told "All penguins are countershaded for camouflage – that is, they have black

36. That is not to say that the denial is not worth considering. It might well be true. My point in calling the denial 'absurd' is to say that if it is true, an absurdity is true. If it is true, then the truth is absurd. And reality itself might well be absurd. I don't think it is, but there have been many philosophers who have thought so, and such thoughts cannot be justly dismissed without consideration. The absurdist (let us call her) who thinks all such scientific statements are systematically false would cheerfully deny that "penguins are birds", that "eyes are for seeing" and that "humans are mammals." She would renounce the bizarre belief that the earth orbits the sun or the unconscionable faith that earthquakes are caused by tectonic plate shifts. She is free to deny my thesis.

37. Prasada et al., "Conceptual Distinctions Amongst Generics."

backs and wings with white fronts." Talk of being shaded *for camouflage* is, of course, normative talk. Such talk is, more specifically, teleological talk. Natural teleology makes possible scientific, evaluative statements.

I see two paths forward: denial and acceptance. The first path would be to deny that generics capture the truth about nature and attempt to explain their ubiquity in another way, or to deny that statements about human nature are analogous to generic statements about plants and animals.[38] For instance, John McDowell defends a view that humans partake in morality (and rationality) by their "second nature" rather than primary, bald nature. Alternatively, one could attempt to reduce natural normativity to some other, broader, non-normative category. But McDowell is also far more comfortable than I am in denying that natural facts such as "penguins are birds" are "given" truths of nature available to the human mind without an idealist interpolation.

The second would be to accept that much of our conceptual and scientific knowledge of nature takes the form of generic knowledge: knowledge about kinds, categories, properties, and patterns that are neither universal nor merely statistical regularities. Some take this path. For instance, The small but intrepid group of philosophers currently carrying this banner are *moral naturalists* of the neo-Aristotelian variety, like Peter Geach[39] and Foot[40], and.[41]

XI. Neo-Aristotelian options

For now, I would like to briefly survey the views of our neo-Aristotelians on the normativity of nature.

38. See Ernst Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 1 (1992): pp. 117–35 for an attempt to disambiguate the term "teleology"; see Frank Jackson, "From Metaphysics to Ethics," 1998 for an attempt to render reduction of normative to non-normative facts at least conceivable; see Ruth Garrett Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science*, 1989, 288–302 for an attempt to reduce the kind of teleological functions we seem to "read off" natural entities to an empirical history; and see James Barham, *PhD Dissertation: Teleological Realism in Biology* (Web; University of Notre Dame, 2011) for a counterargument to Millikan.

39. Geach, *The Virtues*.

40. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

41. **???**

Foot on nature

Foot pays strict attention to our status as natural entities. Evaluation of human creatures follows the same logical pattern as evolution of plants and animals. 'Good' as a predicate is not used without complement ('the house is good') the way other predicates like 'beautiful' is used ('the house is beautiful'). 'Good' as a predicate is used with a complement ('the house is good for single mothers') the same way other terms are, such as 'useful'. Good is good *for*.

Foot argues that virtues are instances of 'natural goodness.' This is a powerful thesis that she defends at length in her 2001 monograph.[42] Foot is aware that her offering in *Natural Goodness* is "crude" in that she is aware it will offend the ears of some listeners. Her defense is the thought from Wittgenstein that often crude beginnings are a necessary start to something refined.

Re-thinking the fact/value split

She calls her inquiry a "fresh start." By this she means to do without several shaky assumptions of Moore and Hume. For example, Moore assumed that "good" was the ultimate predicate under review in ethics; but this is false. Statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection.

Contrast 'good' with other predicates like 'red' or 'beautiful.' In a statement such as 'the house is beautiful', the predicate 'beautiful' doesn't need a complement. The house is *beautiful* – full stop. But 'good' (like 'useful') has a different logical function. 'The house is useful' does need a complement – the house is useful *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Similarly, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* 'Good' always needs a complement.

42. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

Life-form specific facts: biology and value

What are the action-guiding facts in the case of natural goodness? Facts about humans and facts about objects in the world and facts about our relation to those objects.

Virtue ethicists like Philippa Foot, and Peter Geach before her, express their thesis in statements like "virtues are necessary for human beings." The kind of necessity invoked here is not a sui generis ethical necessity but an instance of a familiar kind. That is, virtues for humans are like stings for bees, swiftness for deer, solidarity for wolves; there is a fundamental parity between natural goodness in nonhumans and humans. The parity is due to a common (metaphysical) structure shared by all living things as such. When we observe and examine living things we rightly employ some shared categories and our conclusions rightly share a logical structure.

What is the common structure? Every individual living being is a member of a species or life-form. And different life-forms are subject to different normative appraisals.

Thompson's groundbreaking *Representation of Life* argues that "life" is a fundamental concept. "Life" is not, as it may seem to some, a property of some beings where being is the fundamental concept.

Foot's picture of nature is friendly to the Aristotelian picture. Those parts of nature that constitute living organisms are characterized not only by their material origins, material parts, and material organization but also by their functions.

McDowell

McDowell disagrees with Foot here. An evaluative judgment cannot be lifted, without intermediary, from a factual judgment. But then again, factual judgments cannot even be made without intermediation from human consciousness. There is no "Given". Unless consciousness has 'spontaneous' activity already active in its receptivity to empirical experience, there is no empirical experience of things *as* being this way rather than that.

McDowell's picture of nature is radically dualistic. He is allergic to metaphysics in the sense that he doesn't take himself to be attempting to describe the world as it is "given." Rather, he sees humans as occupants of "second nature" — our receptivity to reasons is not "baldly natural." Animals do not have a second nature but only a primary nature. Bald nature, primary nature, is descriptive. It is a Laplacian picture. McDowell is not alone in this criticism.

We might put McDowell's complaint punchily in this way: human rationality is not part and parcel of nature, which is irrational or sub-rational. We cannot naturalize reason (eradicate or reduce it to *mere* bald nature) but neither can we justifiably project onto non-rational nature properties of the human mind.

Richard Bernstein calls John McDowell's naturalism a much needed "novel twist" on the stalemate between those who think naturalism will eventually make good on its promise to naturalize reason and those who are sick of waiting and ready to give up. He quotes Joseph Margolis and Mark Gottlieb as saying that:

> Naturalism in the current analytic sense may well be the dominant programmatic orientation of Anglo-American philosophy. It may be characterized as an informally linked family of doctrines and strategies broadly in accord with 'ancestral' themes of W. V. O. Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized." The original themes feature in Quine include: a preference for physicalism of one sort or another, a strong emphasis on the continuity of science and philosophy, particularly at the explanatory level, and the effective replacement of legitimate inquiries of a typically noncausal sort by causal inquiries centering on belief." (Berstein 58)

The "specter of Kant keeps surfacing in thinkers like Putnam and Habermas who are convinced that reason cannot be naturalized" (Berstein 59). The "novel twist" comes from John McDowell. Berstein says that "at first glance, it seems that McDowell fits right into the tradition of Kantian anti-naturalism — a tradition that runs from Kant right up to Putnam and Habermas" since he thinks "reason can't be naturalized" (Bernstein 62). But his arguments, Berstein thinks, against bald naturalism amount to some sophisticated question-begging via sleight of hand. Even so, when we look at particular "first order claims…""

MacIntyre

MacIntyre's position in *After Virtue* is closer to that of McDowell. For example, he says that his account of virtue (in chapter 15) is "happily not Aristotelian in two ways … First, although this account of the virtues is teleological, it does not require any allegiance to Aristotle's metaphysical biology."[43] Rather, he attempts to ground teleology not in non-human nature but in human nature, specifically our practical, social nature. We do not just act randomly or only according to instinct (that too); we act in groups, on reasons, and in pursuit of ends. Since we act in groups and for reasons, teleology is a real feature of our social nature.

Nevertheless, in *Dependent Rational Animals*…. %

XII. Coming to Terms with Natural Teleology

The view I am attempting to defend is closest to Foot's, and may be seen as demanding that reason and nature are unified. Some might describe this unification as the naturalization of reason, but others might describe it as the rationalization (or re-enchantment) of nature. But is enchanted nature naturalistic? I say it is. But others have complained that Foot's neo-Aristotelian "naturalism" does not amount to a naturalistic theory. They object that Foot is not a "naturalist." Allen Thompson concedes the worry:

> The objection I think I understand and want to take seriously starts from the thought that in employing such notions as life and organism and life-form or species we introduce something foreign, in particular something 'biological', or crudely empirical, into the elements of ethical theory. Any such view, one thinks, must involve either a vulgar scientistic dissolution of the ethical, tending maybe toward an 'evolutionary ethics', or else the covert substitution of an outdated metaphysics for what we know to be empirical. Each path leads to its own absurdities. Together they may be thought to betray a yearning to view our practices 'from outside' or 'from sideways on' in hope perhaps of providing them with a foundation or an external grounding.[44]

43. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 197.
44. Thompson, *Life and Action*.

> …we can see that Foot's naturalism offers a fresh approach to objectivism in ethics. Yet, in spite of such attractions, *Natural Goodness* is in the midst of a cool reception. Here, I will argue that this reception is due to the fact that Foot's naturalism draws on a picture of the biological world that is at odds with the view embraced by most contemporary scientists and philosophers. Foot's readers commonly assume that the account of the biological world that she must want to adhere to, and that she nevertheless mistakenly departs from, is the account offered by contemporary neo-Darwinian biological sciences.[45]

Neither of these worries are justified. I will offer one final argument that teleological generics are rationally permissible within our modern context. James Barham's recent work has argued that 'teleological realism' is a rationally permissible view to take on biology.[46] The very word 'teleology' is liable to sound quaint to modern ears. Barham clarifies the range of terms that denote identical or similar concepts:

> "By "teleology," I have in mind such words and concepts as "purpose," "end," "goal," "function," "control," and "regulation," as well as the real- world biological phenomena to which these words and concepts refer. This means that the word "teleology" should always be construed here in its internal or "immanent" sense—purposiveness existing in living beings themselves—and never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle" (Barham 1). For a similar distinction, see Lennox (1992) and Brown (2001).

We can add "purposive" and "goal-directed" to the constellation of concepts in the offing.

Teleological realism in biology is making a come-back. There are those who protest teleological nihilism. Arnhart persuasively argues that teleology is assumed in medicine.[47] Zammito clarifies ongoing relevance in biology, since organisms seem to be intrinsically purposeful.[48] Barham continues:

45. Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" 309.

46. Barham, *PhD Dissertation*.

47. Larry Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics: A Defense of Biological Teleology Against Biological Nihilism [with Commentries]," *Politics and the Life Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1988): pp. 173–229.

48. John Zammito, "Teleology Then and Now: The Question of Kant's Relevance for Contemporary Controversies over Function in Biology," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part* 37, no. 4 (2006): 748–70.

> In a series of important articles and books over the past decade or so, Bedau (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1993), Cameron (2004), Christensen & Bickhard (2002), Jacobs (1986), Manning (1997), Maund (2000), McLaughlin (2001, 2009), Mossio et al. (2009), Mundale & Bechtel (1996), Nanay (2010), Nissen (1997), Perovic (2007), Walsh (2006), and Zammito (2006) have cast grave doubt on the coherence of any reductive analysis of function. Some of these authors (e.g., Jacobs, Maund, Zammito) call explicitly for a reconsideration of the possibility that teleological phenomena in biology might be both objectively real and irreducible.

Thomas Nagel is a third who has followed out the argument for natural teleology from a much broader, cosmic perspective, though he too denies that the cosmos is like an orchestra being played.[49] Though Nagel took a lot of heat for his argument, Michael Chorost's review of *Mind and Cosmos* reminds readers that natural teleology is not so scientifically heretical as it might first seem. He says:

> Natural teleology is unorthodox, but it has a long and honorable history. For example, in 1953 the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley argued that it's in the nature of nature to get more advanced over time. "If we take a snapshot view, improvement eludes us," he wrote. "But as soon as we introduce time, we see trends of improvement."… [the furthermore] paleontologist Simon Conway Morris, at the University of Cambridge, has argued that natural structures such as eyes, neurons, brains, and hands are so beneficial that they will get invented over and over again. They are, in effect, attractors in an abstract biological space that pull life in their direction. Contingency and catastrophe will delay them but cannot stop them. Conway Morris sees this as evidence that not only life but human life, and humanlike minds, will emerge naturally from the cosmos: "If we humans had not evolved, then something more or less identical would have emerged sooner or later."[50]

If scientists can countenance natural normativity via natural teleology as respectable, cannot we philosophers do the same? Certainly natural teleology is out of fashion; but the winds of intellectual fashion blow hither and yon, and we may yet discover that Aristotle was right.[51] Either way,

49. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

50. Michael Chorost, "Where Thomas Nagel Went Wrong," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2013. Chorost argues that Nagel did not "go wrong" in his thesis but in presenting it philosophically without engaging the support from relevant scientific literature.

51. Monte Ransome Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

philosophers of various schools (metaphysicians and ethicists) would do well to dialogue with biologists and cosmologists to come to grips with the possibility that our best evidence suggests that nature is normative.

All I have tried to show is that *some* of these generics are true. To those who disagree about the *nature* of generics, I have tried to urge them to feel free to do so, but to count the cost. The great cost of throwing out generics *as a class* threatens to throw out a huge percentage of scientific statements in biology, organic chemistry, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, anatomy, and medicine.

I have not yet tried to show which true generics about humans can serve as the basis for an ethical theory. The first step to that end would be to apply the above argument to human beings. Human beings are natural entities like anything else. Now, by calling humans 'natural' I do not mean to invoke here all the controversies surrounding the word. For now, calling us 'natural' is an innocent truism. Are we here, in nature? Yes. Are we material – not necessarily *wholly* material, but are we *at least* material at all? Yes. Do we eat food grown on earth, drink water from the earth, are we born from fellow humans and do we die and disintegrate into the earth like every other living thing? Yes. So we are natural. Again, I do not mean to prejudge the question of whether we are *also more than natural*. I simply mean to invoke the obvious that the *we are at least natural*. Since we are (at least) natural entities, and since scientific statements are about natural entities, then it is possible (and indeed quite common) to make scientific statements about us. 'Humans emigrated from Africa about 200,000 years ago' is a statement about a natural species group, namely *homo sapiens sapiens*, the only extant members of the hominin clade. So, for example, 'Humans are language users' is a generic scientific statement. Since some such statements are generic, teleological statements, and since some such statement can be used as the basis of evaluative truths, some such statements about human can be used as the basis of evaluative truths. That shall be the task for the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Chapter 2. Virtues are Traits Humans as Practical Reasoners Need

"Man alone of the animals possesses speech." (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1253a)

I. Introduction

Peter Geach says that virtues are necessary for humans as stings are necessary for bees.[1] Philippa Foot echoes these statements about "need" and "necessity" as well. Alasdair MacIntyre subtitled his most recent monograph: "human beings need the virtues."[2] For *whom* are virtues necessary? The answer is that virtues are needed for human beings as such. Virtues are those qualities needed by us as members of the human species, each exemplifying human nature. But what is human nature? The jumping off point of this inquiry into virtue is simply this: Are virtues necessary for human beings as such? I shall argue that virtues are deontically necessary for the realization of our human *telos*.

1. Geach, *The Virtues*.
2. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

II. Apply Generics to Humans

We saw in the last chapter how, in outline, an ethical theory might ground normative facts in natural, teleological facts. Against the alleged impossibility of deriving an ought from an is, we saw how we can derive an ought from a functional or teleology 'is'. And, we argued, some natural facts are not purely descriptive.

This strategy will be used to ground ethical facts in human nature. Now we must go further and specify what kind of life it is we as human beings live arising from what kind of creatures we are. Of course, the difficulty comes in attempting to move from such vague statements to particular moral statements: 'Human beings make and keep promises.' This will give us initial insight into the concept of virtue, which is our main theme. The subsequent chapters will provide more detail into the nature of virtue.

Michael Thompson summarizes: "we may view this line of thought as beginning with the idea… that will and practical reason are on the face of it just two more faculties or powers a living being may bear, on a level with the powers of sight and hearing an memory. The second crucial thought is that an individual instance of any of the latter powers — sight, hearing, memory — is intuitively to be judged as defective or sound, good or bad, well-working or ill-working, by reference to its bearer's life-form or kind or species."[3]

III. Foot's application to human nature

As Foot says, the major differentia of humans is rational will.

3. **???** %.

Brown, good people

Hursthouse's application

IV. McDowell on second nature and *Bildung*

McDowell argues that humans are different from other (physical) natural objects in that we inhabit "second nature" – the space of reasons. The realm of normativity, for McDowell, is not the realm of "bald nature" but the realm of reason. As I have tried to argue in the previous chapter, the realm of normativity *is* the realm of … McDowell would accuse me of trying to "re-enchant" nature; if I deny anything, I deny the quasi-magical aesthetic of the word "enchant." Normativity is, I have been at pains to insist, scientific; judging that an organism fails to exemplify its life-form well is both a normative and scientific judgment. So the question McDowell and others ought to be asking is not whether the thought that nature is normative is enchanting but whether it is *true*.

John McDowell's famous essay "Values and Secondary Qualities" argues that values are like colors and unlike shapes.[4] That is, values are qualities in the world (not just in our heads) but they are not Lockean "primary qualities." They are Lockean secondary qualities. Making sense of this claim is the goal of the first part of this essay.

McDowell's claim about values fits within his larger project, which follows Kant in defending idealism as a third way between the extremes of naive realism and radical skepticism. McDowell rejects these and labors toward an alternative realist in some respects and skeptical in others. McDowell's project also follows the (later) Wittgenstein in doing "therapeutic" philosophy.[5] That is, McDowell believes most philosophical puzzles arise not from puzzling reality but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": bad ideas need to be *exorcized*.

4. **???** In-text citations in this paper refer to McDowell's "Values and Secondary Qualities" in Shafer-Landau and Cuneo (eds), *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology.* Blackwell, 2007.

5. Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Macdonald, *McDowell and His Critics* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

I shall offer two responses: the first is to critique an assumption common to McDowell and his interlocuters. Despite their differences, McDowell shares with Mackie and Blackburn a radically reductive, disenchanted, Laplacian picture[6] of material nature as a manifold of bald descriptive facts. This picture of nature forces McDowell to hastily reject all forms of realism. His criticisms can guide the would-be realist in sculpting a more plausible account. The second response is to contrast the Laplacian picture with an alternative, hylomorphic account of moral realism. I would suggest that an essentialist, formal-material metaphysics fits McDowell's account of "the fearful" better than he might wish. If the three options he presents are not the *only* options, he owes an account of why hylomorphic realism is not a plausible alternative to the realism he rejects.

V. Sensibility theories

Let's try to articulate McDowell's third way by representing his critique of the realism/anti-realism debate. Since McDowell is running between horns of orthodox disjunction between moral realism and anti-realism, he is often in the awkward position of having to attack a position without thereby supporting its apparent opposite.[7] For example, McDowell sides with Mackie in affirming that moral values are not primary qualities of the world but sides *against* Mackie (and Blackburn) in denying the apparently opposite notion that values are *nothing but* subjective.

With Mackie, against realism

Mackie's error theory gets right the common sense view that "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[8] Ironically, the view that moral facts are real, objective facts has been both praised as "common sense" and alternately blamed as "platonism."[9] But Mackie

6. Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 84.

7. McDowell, *Mind and World*. In this book, he attempts to dissolve the "vascillation" between naive empirical realism and "Rampont Platonism".

8. **???**

9. Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 155: "It might be thought ordinary conceptions of rationality Platonistic or intuition-

presents as exhaustive disjuncts *either* moral realism *or* moral anti-realism. Mackie, of course, thinks we must deny the appearances, must contradict common sense, and so must embrace error theory. But McDowell denies Mackie's disjunction.

The naive realist view that moral values are response-independent McDowell judges "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[10] The reason McDowell can't take naive realism seriously is that he finds one sort of internalism absurd. He points to a "worry about how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[11] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie that the central doctrine of European moral philosophy is a mistake – the belief that some things by virtue of what they are and what we are *merit* certain responses. This doctrine certainly runs afoul of the modern doctrine that nature is a manifold of pure fact without any normativity 'built in', and without any internal relation to evaluators like ourselves; but it might be that the modern doctrine is the mistake. The hylomorphic analysis I sketch below shows an essential (and plausibly metaphysically realist) parity between evaluators and evaluated, between valuers and values, between mind and world.

Mackie thinks that conceiving of colors as primary qualities is a "common sense" notion that is false but at least *coherent*; McDowell questions this. If it were true that colors were qualities adequately conceived apart from their essentially phenomenal subjective aspects, then suddenly the concept of red becomes opaque. If we exclude the phenomenal aspect of redness and attempt to define 'red', we are at a loss. So it seems that redness is as a primary quality is not "common sense" and not even coherent.

Redness, rather, is an essentially phenomenal concept; its subjectivity is so to speak 'built in.' That is not to say all essentially phenomenal concepts are nonveridical; just that they are not

istic. On the Platonistic Picture coma among the facts of the world are facts of what is rational and what is not. A person of normal mental powers can discern these facts. Judgments of nationality are thus straightforward apprehensions of fact, not through sense perception through a mental faculty analogous to sense perception…".

10. **???**
11. **???**

'thoroughly objective.'[12]

Against Mackie, against projectivism

One option available to McDowell is just to affirm error theory. But against Mackie (and Blackburn, and others), he rejects error theory (which he will also call "projectivism"). Why not treat redness and other secondary qualities as purely "projective"? Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[13] but not in that they are therefore illusory. A secondary quality is not "a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[14]

McDowell defends the Lockean distinction against a different sort of schema that would categorize "shape and color" on one side (as objects, in the world, etc.) and "my experiences of shape and my experiences of color" on another side (as taking place in the subject, as phenomenal, experiential, etc.). Certainly there is a phenomenological bit to seeing shape just as there is of seeing color; but shape unlike color can be conceived without reference to the phenomenological bits.

McDowell thinks that Mackie's denial of realism is the denial that moral properties are *primary qualities*. Rather, the objective aspect to values that are *just there* must be a dispositional property, while the evaluable aspect is something we as perceivers or moral evaluators bring to the world. Value is not a Lockean primary quality of reality; value is not utterly unreal. The *via media* is that value is a secondary quality.

Sensibility and Danger

In short, McDowell's view of values is a "sensibility theory". Sensibility theories teach that moral properties are like colors. He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's

12. **???**, quoting Mackie.
13. **???**
14. **???**

disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[15] Experience of secondary qualities is a (sense) perceptual experience. This a Lockean doctrine. Redness is not *merely* a microscopic texture property (say, the texture that scatters all light waves except red ones) because microscopic textures don't *look red* and things that *look red* appear so to observers with no knowledge of such textures.

Colors are response-dependent, while other properties (say, 'squareness') are response-independent. Color-properties must be defined partly by their "objective" or response-independent aspects and partly phenomenologically. Shape-properties, by contrast, can be defined by their objective or mind-independent aspects. It makes no sense to speak of what *redness is* apart from perceptions of red *in perceivers*. Similarly, it makes no sense to speak of "dangerousness" apart from a subject who is potentially vulnerable. So, perhaps, it also makes no sense to speak of "rightness" apart from a subject who potentially judges the value of a thing.

Yet by the same token right and wrong are not *purely* invented. The property of "being such as to look red" may or may not be *have ever been perceived as red* by any observer (if, for example, the appropriate conditions have never obtained). So a Lockean secondary quality may be response-independent in some sense, but it is not *redness as such*. It is the dispositional property that is disposed to present us with a appearance of a particular phenomenal character. So values (like colors) are dispositional properties.

The theory of danger also helps McDowell in his conclusion deny that his view is a variant of "projectivism." The "epistemology of danger" that arises from McDowell's "theory of danger"[16] helps explain moral epistemology. There is *something* about red things *themselves* that makes them give us redness experiences; there is something about the dangerous animal itself that gives us fear experiences. That something is not *the form of red* or *the form of danger*, but it is also not *nothing*.

The "theory of danger" is intended to capture this "something" with the important notion

15. **???**
16. **???**

of *merit*. Red objects *just appear as red* to us under the proper circumstances. They *just do* dispose us to have red experiences. But dangerous objects *merit* appearing fearful and dangerous. They *merit* that we have a fear experience.

VI. Hylomorphism

Now, I shall elucidate a widespread but "disastrous idea" inherent in the Laplacian picture of nature wherein mind and world are inherently divorced, and sketch an alternative hylomorphic picture. My goal in sketching the alternative is not to offer a full-blown defense, but rather (1) to render plausible the suggestion that McDowell's "third way" is not the only alternative to realism or anti-realism, and (2) to challenge McDowell's own account of danger, which I believe tells more in favor of hylomorphic moral realism than he himself would prefer.

The Laplacian Interface

The Laplacian assumption common to Mackie and McDowell is makes it not just false but "impossible to take seriously" an internal, natural, inherent, intrinsic, or necessary connection between our evaluations and the real world. Mackie and McDowell imagine an "evaluation" floating free of any evaluators, which is – I grant – absurd. This is the an "interface" picture of nature, where world is inherently separate from mind. If mind and world are to be connected, they must be joined as plug and socket or else be forever separate.

But perhaps mind and world are distinct the way a higher note is distinct from its lower octave: they share a common structure. McDowell implicitly commends this view with his discussion of danger. Dangerous animals (say, wild Grizzly bears) are not considered dangerous because we project our fear onto them the way arachnophobics project their fear onto the most harmless of spiders. But neither are Grizzlies dangerous because they possess a special property "dangerousness" that they would possess even if humans never evolved or if humans were extinct. Rather, danger or

the fearful is a natural connection between predators and prey who share a common structure as earth-born animals.

There are natural facts about the animal kingdom – facts about the diet and hunting habits of bears and facts about human vulnerability. In this case, danger is an internal relation arising between bears and humans. This gives us a picture of a metaphysical realism that underwrites "danger realism". And this is strikingly akin to a hylomorphic brand of moral realism. In this way, McDowell vascillates between a Laplacian picture of nature and the Aristotelian picture.

Hylomorphic Realism

If "restricted nature"[17] excludes by definition universals, forms, or essences of any kinds, then it excludes a fortiori universals that are necessarily related to our motivations and desires. But I suggest that this picture is inaccurate. The hylomorphic picture of nature can explain both the objectivity and the normativity of moral facts, and can plausibly unite our pre-theoretical view of nature (the manifest image) and our theoretical view of nature (the scientific image).

Briefly, on the hylomorphic account, every natural entity is a matter-form composite. The matter of say, a bird, is the familiar stuff of feathers, bones, skin, organs, and so on; the form is the bird's structure or "configurational state."[18] The form is the arrangement of stuff of which the bird is made, at the cellular level, the genetic level, or what have you.

Human beings are matter-form composites too. One of our formal capacities is intellectual. Aristotle defines the intellect as the cognitive capacity to *think universals* by abstracting them from one or more particulars.

The upshot of this matter-form metaphysics is that the object evaluated and the evaluator are both matter-form entities. Universals are natural in that they inhere in natural kinds and make them what they are. But *thinking* universal thoughts is also natural to humans since our minds are

17. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism."

18. Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas on the Mechanisms of Cognition: Sense and Phantasia," *Medieval Analyses in Language and Cognition, Historisk-Filosofiske Meddelelser* 77 (1999): 382.

part of the world. Our thoughts about universals are one branch of nature, and the universals in things are another branch; but both share one root.

The formal identity of the object and the mental act is the natural union possible between mind and world. That union is simply knowledge. John Haldane summarizes this knowledge-as-identity between knower and known as follows: The "content-determining principles of perception are one and the same as the character-determining principles of the objects of perception — the identity of act and object."[19]. In short, the world is constituted by matter structured according to principles, and the mind is constituted by matter structured according to the same principles.

Although McDowell is inspired by Aristotle, he does not follow through on metaphysical realism or essentialism. But Haldane's comments (made about Hilary Putman) also apply to McDowell: his sensibility theory is "not incompatible with an ancient version of philosophical realism."[20] This realism takes the intentionality relation between mind and world (e.g., thought and content, speech and referent, etc.) to be a primitive phenomenon "in the sense of being an intrinsic and non-derived feature of certain states…"[21] Since this phenomenon is primitive, it is intrinsic to mind itself and world itself.

This means that the world something *we evaluate* but also the world is *intrinsically evaluable;* by the same token, humans are evaluators but are also intrinsically evaluable. Every natural entity's evaluability is a function of that entity's formal-material structure. Since a human-in-the-world and the world itself share a common (metaphysical) structure, internal relations – like the relations between value and motivation McDowell finds so puzzling – also obtain.

19. John Haldane, "On Coming Home to (Metaphysical) Realism," *Philosophy* 71, no. 276 (1996): 296.

20. Ibid., 288.

21. John Haldane, "Putnam on Intentionality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 3 (1992): 675.

VII. Conclusion

In this section, I attempted to summarize McDowell's sensibility theory and his reasons for rejecting realism and projectivism. Values as secondary qualities captures the objective bit about color while also capturing the recalcitrant subjective bit. In response, I tried to uncover a deeply-held assumption shared by McDowell and his interlocutors that minds are divorced from and must either interface with or remain utterly divided from the world. This is the assumption that renders unthinkable the notion that there are necessary relations between the world and our mental or motivational states. At the same time, I tried to show how McDowell's account of danger shows the way to challenge this assumption, since mind and world, the evaluator and the evaluated, can share a common biological history or metaphysical structure that grounds such necessary relations. Much to McDowell's chagrin, I'm sure, I pushed this challenge even further to sketch a hylomorphic account of moral realism.

Perhaps the most ambitious claim I can make is not that McDowell ought to accept hylomorphism, but that I do not see any good reason why he should not.

VIII. MacIntyre on Dependent Rational Animals

IX. My view: Virtues are needed by human beings as practical reasoners

So let us apply the conceptual structure we outlined in the previous chapter to human beings. We first, let us remember, abstract generic truths about the nature of a class of living thing, from which we can evaluate individual members of the class, individual living things.

'Human beings are rational animals' is a generic. Hence it is descriptive and evaluative/normative. Initially, we can conclude that if human beings *really are* rational animals that an *irrational* human is ipso facto defective.[22] I do not here intend to discuss mental illness, disability, birth defect, chromo-

22. To call a human 'defective' sounds like a schoolyard insult; but it is a straightforward, evaluative description of some people.

somal disorders, and other such exceptions to 'normal' functional humans.

Virtues would be those character traits that rational animals *need*, tout court. They need them to *become* fully rational animals. While I will discuss in detail the natural human *telos* in a later chapter, here I only assert that actualizing the potential latent in human nature is necessarily good for us.[23] All of the good things of human life enable the realization of a fully human life. Not all good things are subject to our control. The virtues are among those good things under our control – good dispositions we each choose to cultivate or fail to cultivate. Unlike other goods (say, wealth), virtues become *what we are*.

Human nature is to be a rational animal. In the old classificatory schemes, philosophers provided a genus and a differentia. In contemporary classificatory scheme, we can locate ourselves as animals in the phylum chordata, the class mammalia, the order of primates, the suborder haplorhini, the familiy hominidae, the genus homo, the species homo sapiens. What is our differentia? In a word, reason, or rationality.

What are our rational capacities? First, speech.[24] We are speaking animals. But through speech comes a whole second cosmos of culture. Through speech comes intentionality in all its forms. Through speech comes communication ("pass the salt"), distinct languages and cultures (about 5,000 distinct languages), self-consciousness ("who am I?"), abstraction ("all grass is green"), science, philosophy, religion, mythology, technology and more. Perhaps even art and music arise from the rational capacity to direct our actions to create not only what instinct demands but whatever the imagination can invent.[25]

Rationality is also the capacity to judge true and false, to affirm and deny. This is the view of Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians (among others). Rational capacities are identified by the actions of rational creatures. As Haldane says, quoting the medieval scholastics, "acting follows being" and

23. Paul Bloomfield, "Virtue and Happiness," ed. Rachana Kamtekar, 2012.

24. Terrence W Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (WW Norton & Company, 1998).

25. Gordon H. Orians, "Nature & Human Nature," *Daedalus* 137, no. 2 (2008): 39–48. Orians says that "Americans spend more money on music than on sex or prescription drugs."

"things are specified by their power."[26] We just do deliberate, explain, propose theories, judge truth and falsity, wonder, inquire, and so on. As far as *recorded* history goes (which isn't very far), we have always done these things.

While I shall have to say more about practical rationality in a future chapter, here I need only to specify that our nature as rational animals *includes* the notion that we are practically rational animals. Practical rationality is the capacity to judge what is good or bad, what is to-be-pursued or to-be-avoided. It is still *rationality* since the questions of what is good admit of true and false answers. They often require reflecting on what was is will be might be or must be best. Humean psychology paints human psychology as two non-overlapping magisteria, an entirely non-rational set of passions and an entirely non-passional rationality. Reason is not impractical, it is not merely theoretical. Reason can be and is also practical; thought results in practice. Practical rationality is not merely irrational. Some emotions "make sense" given the situation. John McDowell argues that, for example, danger makes sense to feel in the presence of a wild bear in the woods.[27] Disgust in response to some human bodily functions is apt; awe and wonder in response to viewing the starry heavens is apt.[28] Pain is not only painful but *bad*; pleasure is, in moderation, not only pleasant but *good*.[29] To borrow Gibbard's phrase, practical rationality is a capacity for *thinking what to do*. Motivation, most broadly, is necessarily related to reasons one discovers and endorses, especially reasons that count in favor of an action or attitude, all things considered.

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26. John Haldane, "A Return to Form in the Philosophy of Mind," *Ratio* 11, no. 3 (1998): 262.

27. John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (Routledge, 1985), 110–29.

28. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*.

29. Thomas Nagel, "Ethics as an Autonomous Theoretical Subject," in *Morality as a Biological Phenomenon: The Pre-Suppositions of Sociobiological Research*, ed. Gunther S. (ed.) Stent (University of California Press, 1980), 196–205.

Objection: There is no single human nature

Perhaps there is no single nature shared by all humans. As Brown says, "Human nature is variability itself."[30] The variability of human lives, cultures, and beliefs is due to our freedom from the tyranny of genetics and environment. In other words, the major difference between humans as natural entities and other natural entities is our set of rational capacities. Unlike any other creature in the physical cosmos, we demonstrate the ability to speak, to think, reason, deliberate, judge, set projects, pursue goals, reflect, communicate, form societies, create cultures, and so on.

Objection: There are no "natures" or inherent forms

A powerful (if vague) Darwinian objection from metaphysics that there is no such thing as a biological "nature" anyway.[31] Bertrand Russell playfully jabs this definition thusly: "Man is a rational animal — so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life I have been looked diligently for evidence in favour of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it."[32] Part of the skepticism from analytic philosophers to the neo-Aristotelian project stems, I think, from this worry. Nevertheless, the concept of nature being deployed here is of the appeal of the neo-Aristotelian project is a clear concept of nature that applies to both humans and other animals.

A nature is an abstract property. It is a set of capacities delimiting the range of potentialities of a given object or living being. The concrete blue-footed boobie is not a nature, but exemplifies the nature of blue-footed boobies.

Natures, as we shall see, is an empirically discovered and inductively generalized set of potentialities latent in a species. Human nature is a set of potentialities to realize our animal and intellectual activities, including reproduction, metabolisis, rational choice, abstract reflection, and so on.

30. Donald E. Brown, "Human Nature and History," *History and Theory* 38, no. 4 (1999): 138–57, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2678062.

31. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* chapter %%; **???**

32. Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (2009), p. 45 %%

This is the solution to Russell's playful jab. Not all people — not most, perhaps not even many people — fulfill their rational potential by becoming thoroughly rational people, free of the banes of intellectual life: ignorance, intellectual laziness, illogical inferences, the distractions of irrational psychological factors, attachment to prejudice and bias, informal fallacies, and so on. Rather, overcoming all these banes would exemplify the fulfillment of human nature.

Objection: We don't know our nature

Someone might respond to the question of what is human nature by saying: we don't know. For all we can tell (without the benefit of divine revelation) humanity is an anomaly. Our origin is shrouded in mystery, our destiny undecided. The story we are told in biology and anthropology textbooks is that 200,000 years ago, hominids somehow developed new cognitive abilities sufficient to justify calling one or a set of these creatures "the first humans." Our earliest direct, archaeological evidence of our ancestors is that they were artists: paintings adorn the caves of France.

The evidence of recorded histories from Babylon, China, and Egypt tell a story of humanity already busied with architecture, science, imperial politics, and bustling with trade, culture, language, and art. The student of human nature ought to be a historian. To pursue my theme, we must move on.

If our deep origins are shrouded in mystery, our future destiny is relatively clear. By any account, our species is doomed. The science fiction dream of off-world colonies is most likely just a dream: no livable other planet has been discovered within our solar system or any of the surrounding regions. Even if one were discovered further out, along concentric circles each light years in diameter, the practical limitations on space travel for large numbers across unimaginable distances render off-world colonization virtually impossible. The only possibility left, itself highly impracticable, seems to me that scientific technology advances to a point that we can conceivably *create* an atmosphere on a planet that does not currently have one.

Regardless of these dreams, if our current planet does not go into an ice age, or a dust bowl,

or become a nuclear wasteland, or if a volcanic canopy does not eliminate conditions for organic life, then *eventually* the running down of our sun will condemn our species to the same fate of 99% of all species that have existed up until now: extinction.

Bertrand Russell's famous essay "Free Man's Worship" poetically describes the cold, hard, reality of the natural destiny of the human species:

> That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins–all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

Russell sees two possible structure that can be built on the "firm foundation of unyielding despair." The first is to worship power (which is the choice of slaves) and the second is, even in the face of death and annihilation, to worship ideals of truth and goodness (which is the choice of the free). The freedom and nobility of humanity lies in our cognition, even our recognition that we are slaves. He continues:

> The life of Man, viewed outwardly, is but a small thing in comparison with the forces of Nature. The slave is doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour. But, great as they are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendour, is greater still. And such thought makes us free men… To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things–this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship.

Russell points to the noble impulse to cultivate our rational capacities in the light of our impending doom. I shall return to this theme in a later chapter.

X. Objection: Why is it "necessary" to be virtuous?

So virtues are the acquired traits needed by creatures like us, by social rational animals. There are a couple of objections in this connection I would like to address here. The first is the objection that the acquisition of virtues is morally optional. Not all theorists are virtue theorists; not all moral agents are theorists. But all moral agents (we can here assume) have the obligation to be moral.

This objection, as stated, misses the point. By arguing that virtues – whatever they may turn out to be – are those qualities needed by practical reasoners, we are not arguing about the *concept* of virtue but that *very qualities themselves*. Any culture, business, family, civilization, will thrive insofar as it is virtuous and disintegrate insofar as it fails. Virtue is necessary because it is human. Justice, prudence, and courage are "needed in any human-scale enterprise"[33], from motherhood, to a successful career, to farming.

Put negatively, the thesis of this chapter is that vices necessarily contribute to misery, unhappiness, and human stultification and stagnation. Human nature is the starting point, flourishing is the goal, and the moral and intellectual virtues are the means by which we move from start to goal. Vices are those qualities that partly constitute human misery. Many kinds of living conditions are miserable; excessive cold or heat; starvation; illness; mental handicap; injury; extreme isolation and loneliness, and so on. But these kinds of circumstances are not *always* and *necessarily* miserable. Rather, being a lying, treacherous, scheming, envious, whining, daydreaming moral agent is truly miserable, even such happens to have a comfortable bed to sleep in and enough money to get through life. Such a person is despicable, a worthy specimen of human failure.

Some vices, especially intellectual vices, are especially despicable. Not everyone has equal amounts of intelligence conceived as raw mental horsepower. Some children even at a young age excel at doing "mental math" or memorizing geographical names, while others never acquire the knack for it. However, not all unintelligent people are stupid in the deplorable sense: stubborn, un-

33. **???** .

teachable, slow to learn and resenting every bit, arrogant, smug, self-satisfied, and willfully ignorant. Such persons demonstrate intellectual vices noxious to all their fellows except those equally debased, and especially noxious to those unfortunate enough to be their teachers, parents, or guardians. And such intellectual vices are in a special way exemplary of human failing.

Objection: Beneficial by definition?

The second objection, building on the above response, is about the very definition of virtue as a *beneficial* or "positive" character trait. To see the problem, suppose we define "boldness" as *doing hard things* and "courage" as doing hard things when it is good. Boldness is, so to speak, value neutral. One can be bold in wrongdoing or bold in doing well. If courage is just boldness in doing good, is this a trivial truth? An analytic truth? The affirmation that 'courage (doing hard things when it is good) is good' would appear to amount to the life-altering revelation that 'good things are good'.

This is an important objection but also misses the point. It is a synthetic truth discoverable only by reflection that humans have a nature, a telos, and that some character traits are conducive to the realization of our telos while others are conducive to our stultification. Peter Geach argues that just because an ethical conclusion is virtually un-revisable doesn't mean it is content-less.[34] All truths are true, in part, in virtue of the words used. But not all truths by definition are empty and content-less; rather, the stuff of life from which we derive our conceptual definitions or which we must fit into our conceptual definitions is a contentfull task. Let's consider this objection in another way.

Some ethical propositions are thought to be self-evidently true: it is good to be good. This is a tautology. And most (if not all) tautologies are trivial. Other ethical propositions are not tautologous but are so widely and commonly accepted as to be easily mistaken for tautologies: it is good to be kind; cruelty is bad. Pleasure is good. Wise people make good leaders. I ought to keep my promises.

34. Geach, *The Virtues*, Chapter 1.

A just society is desirable. Fools are ridiculous and the wise are admirable. "Do good and avoid evil" (called the first principles of practical reason). Moderation is good (called the foundation of all ethics). "Drunkenness" or alcoholism are shameful. The Golden Rule (called the only objective rule in both religious and atheistic moralities). Injustice is bad. We ought to care for children and respect elders. Generosity is admirable.

Of course, if we define "kindness" simply as "a good disposition to treat others well" then it appears that "it is good to be kind" amounts to the same tautologous proposition "it is good to be good." But kindness is *not* best defined simply as *something good*. Kindness, it seems to me, and to many others upon reflection, is a special sort of quality we can recognize and name but not ultimately define. Cruelty, likewise, we "know it when we see it." There is more to our recognition of cruelty than the arbitrary application of "a bad disposition to hurt others." We know that children who tortures animals for fun is acting cruelly. We try to help him or her to satisfy curiosity or get parental attention through other means. We help them stop nursing a disposition to cruelty.

These ethical propositions do not seem to me tautologies. Call these non-tautologous but basic ethical propositions Platitudes. Some Platitudes are small, others great. "It is polite to say please" is a Platitude. But "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" is a Great Platitude.

Some philosophers take their task to be to debunk the Great Platitudes. They wish to explain them away, to explain *why* they are false and *how so many people fall in for them*. The platitudes are either *false* ("know your place" taken as a justification of socio-economic or gender inequality is false) or as trivial; *of course* "murder is unjust" is true because, 'murder' is defined as 'unjust killing.'

Other philosophers take their task to be to *underwrite* the great platitudes. They wish to explain them, to explain why they are true and how it is we learn them, preserve them, and (most crucially) live well by taking them as sound practical advice. Both philosophers are sophisticated; but one is sophisticated in attacking and explaining away the Great Platitudes while the other is sophisticated in defending and explaining them.

As examples of the Debunkers, consider J. L. Mackie and Alan Gibbard. Mackie claims to

be running counter to the great tradition of European moral philosophy.[35] Gibbard's metaethical works aim to capture our common sense belief that morality is objective but without the Platonism. He says, "It might be thought ordinary conceptions of rationality Platonistic or intuitionistic. On the Platonistic Picture coma among the facts of the world are facts of what is rational and what is not. A person of normal mental powers can discern these facts. Judgments of nationality are thus straightforward apprehensions of fact, not through sense perception through a mental faculty analogous to sense perception…"[36]

As examples of Defenders, consider G. E. Moore, Robert Adams, and Frank Jackson. Moore's grandiloquent denouncements of moral philosophy are not, as one might expect, the harbingers of a revolutionary transvaluation of values; by the end of *Principia Ethica* he has given a sophisticated 300 page articulation of the yawningly common judgment that beauty, friendship, and knowledge are goods. Robert Adams' metaethical work aims to capture the common sense belief that morality is objective… by providing a systematic defense of Platonism. Plato sees goodness as becoming like god: "Fleeing [evil] is becoming like god so far as one can, and to become like god is to become just and pious with wisdom.[37] And Adams defends this resemblance relation as well. But not all Defenders are non-naturalists. Frank Jackson's influential account of functionalism[38] aims to naturalize "mature folk morality" without necessarily invalidating all of it.

It does no good to object that the Great Platitudes are *evil* or *oppressive*, binding women to social subjugation or condemning the poor to poverty. Rather, the corrections to the errors of European (and more broadly, western) moral philosophy are contained *within the resources* of western moral philosophy. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" tells more powerfully against sexism or classism than any revolutionary ideal.

35. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).
36. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 155.
37. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato Statesman* 176a5-b2; John M Armstrong, "After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming Like God," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2004): 171–83.
38. Jackson, "From Metaphysics to Ethics."

XI. Objection: aren't we social animals?

Another interlocutor might object to the narrowly *rational* description of human nature. Aren't we social animals? Or practical animals? Or symbolic animals? Why not describe human nature as social, practical, symbolic, rational animals?

This is an excellent objection. However, sociality and practicality are subsumed under the concept of rationality. To think is to think in words learned from one's parents or guardians. To think is also, in some respects and at some times, to think how to live. To think and even to imagine is to think in symbols and words derived from our culture and our family. So we do not need to multiply words; we simply need to properly define rationality.

XII. Two corollaries: Our rationality depends upon our education; If human natu

There are two corollaries to this initial, formal definition of virtues as those traits human beings as practical reasoners need. The first corollary is the importance of moral and intellectual education.

The beginning of human life, like the beginning of any organic life, is the foundation for all that follows. When a mother drinks heavily or uses cocaine while pregnant, the child is going to suffer the negative consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is abused – emotionally, verbally, physically, or sexually – by her parents, the psychological cost is meted out across the entire life and across generations. By the same token, when a mother eats healthily and takes her vitamins while pregnant, the child is going to reap the positive consquences for the remainder of his life. When a child is given love, approval, empowerment, discipline, by her parents, the psychological gains are meted out across the entire life and across generations. The original source of most people's life maxims are not their ethics professors, favorite novels, Holy Bibles, or therapists, but their parents or other guardians.

39. W. Jay Wood, "Prudence," in *Virtues and Their Vices*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Craig A Boyd (Oxford University Press, 2014).

This fact is obvious but we must never forget it. It is important to the argument because we should never give into the temptation to think that the cultivation of virtue is simply a business for adults (least of all adult professional academics) to argue for and against. It is the business of societies and families to do or fail to do every day.

The second corollary is a partial solution to the conundrum about the unity of virtues. Are there many virtues or just one? And if there are many, are they unified or a fundamental plurality? We should expect, on the basis of our nature as rational animals, that all virtues will be united in our rationality, and that our various concepts of virtue will be united in an appropriate concept of rationality. This is just what we will defend in a future chapter.

XIII. Conclusion %%

Chapter 4

Chapter 3. Virtues as Excellent Character Traits

"[Wisdom] teaches temperance and prudence, justice, and courage." Wisdom 8:7.

Contents

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I offer an account of human virtue per se. I begin by summarizing and discussion the three accounts from Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre, before attempting to point out the discrepencies, harmonize the commanalities, and synthesize what is good in each. I defend the resulting novel neo-Aristotelian account against various objections.

II. Virtues as human traits needed by practical reasoners like us

Before we talk about the four cardinal virtues in the recent neo-Aristotelians, we need to step back and do some of the formal work applying the premises of the argument from the previous chapters to the present topic: excellence.

The Greek word often translated as 'virtue' is *αρετή*, and means 'excellence'. We must beware a misunderstanding here. Not all excellence is *moral* excellence. Foot, for one, recommends examining Aristotle and Aquinas (and others) for their view on virtue, but cautions against terminological misunderstandings. Firstly, *Arete* for them refers "also to arts, and even to excellences of the speculative intellect whose domain is theory rather than practice"[1]. Secondly, *arete ethikai* (or *virtues morales*) do not correspond to our moral virtues. For those of us who take the traditional list seriously, there are four moral virtues: courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice; for them, wisdom or *phronesis/prudentia* is an intellectual virtue. Thirdly, not all the qualities we moderns might call "moral qualities" (e.g., unselfishness) can be attached to a genuine virtue. Instead of simply assuming that the terms 'excellence' or even 'moral excellence' can provide us a short-cut to understanding the concept of virtue, we must do the work ourselves with attentiveness.

The moral virtues or vices, as we have argued, are those excellent qualities a person can acquire that both enable and partly constitute the realization of our human telos or enable and partly constitute its opposite.

Even so, 'excellence' is a relative concept; an excellent knife is one that *cuts well* where an excellent guard dog is one that barks loudly, is hostile to strangers, and so on. Excellence is, then, relative to a given object's function. Of course, the objects just mentioned (knife and guard dog) have artifical functions assigned to them by human users. But as we have argued above, natural objects perform functions as well that can be 'read off' the object's activity. If one knows the natural function of an entity, evaluations as to its excellence or defect are not purely subjective impositions

1. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 2.

of the evaluator's preferences or opinions, nor are they "facts" given by the situation. Rather, the evaluator must judge the function of the thing and judge how well its performance matches up or fails to match up to that function.

Now, it is very arguable whether humans qua humans have a function. I shall discuss this in a bit more detail in a later chapter. It is also arguable, even if we do, whether we have one definite function (e.g., to think) or a an unlimited set of functions (e.g., to do and become whatever we want, whatever that might be) or some definite plurality (e.g., to survive, to reproduce, to enjoy ourselves, and to reason).

Excellence is relative to generic truths about the nature and potential of natural kinds. We have argued that human beings, too, have a nature and have argued that it is our nature to be rational animals. Even in extreme cases when a person's set of potentialites for rational activity such as speech and abstract thought is not realized because of genetic disorder, injury, or mental or physical illness, they are *a human being* by virtue of having a *human nature*, tragically unrealized or unrealizable.

Human being as rational *animals* by nature need to breathe, eat, sleep, and stay warm, deal with the urgings of our sexual nature, and so on. Human beings as *rational* animals need to live and make decisions. We need to plan, think, deliberate, reflect, assume identities, pursue projects, and so on. It is undeniable that we *act* and we sometimes *act for an end*. Unlike animals who *act* and even *pursue* objects like food and safety, we pursue ends *as ends*. So, we may tentatively hypothesize that the qualities that enable us to pursue our ends *well* would be excellent qualities. The practical, rational agents who consistently succeed at pursuing and achieving their ends would be models of virtue. I shall have much more to say below about what ends people *have* or *ought to have* and about the indeterminate concept of a human *telos*.[2]

The virtues, on this account, admit of an initial, formal definition: virtues are those disposi-

2. Eudaimonists believe our telos to be human flourishing or happiness. Others believe it is something else, such as genetic proliferation, the creation of the self, or what have you. We shall return to this in a later chapter

tions to act well in the universal projects of human life and to react well to the universal challenges of human life.

What detail can we give to this formal definition? Let's begin by working through the virtue accounts of Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre.

III. Philippa Foot: Excellence of the Rational Will

Foot argues that virtue is excellence of the rational will. I have hitherto avoided the word 'will' because it is not a cross-cultural concept.[3] Even Foot will expand her concept of will beyond its typical meaning to include intentions (see below). Since now is not the place to distinguish the two concepts, I shall herein treat her 'rational will' as identical to my 'practical rationality'.

We saw above that virtues are, for Foot, examples of 'natural goodness.' This phrase that so puzzles many of Foot's contemporaries (and our own contemporaries) indicates that the concept of goodness being deployed in appelates such as a 'good person' is structurally the same as the concept of goodness in 'a good oak' or 'a good wolf.' A good person exemplifies those good-making features shared by all exemplary members of a natural species. What exactly can we say about such good-making features of rational animals?

Foot's account of virtue unfolds across four key propositions. (1) Virtues are beneficial, to self and others, while vices are bad for self and others; (2) virtues are distinct from skills (such as strength, keen eyesight, reliable memory, etc.) because such excellences are not excellence of will or practical reason; (3) virtues are corrective of some tempting vice; and (4) virtues are only operative toward good ends. Let's examine each of these propositions in turn.

3. Cf.David Bradshaw, "The Mind and the Heart in the Christian East and West," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 5 (2009): 576–98. There Bradshaw distinguishes the cluster of concepts such as heart, mind, and will, and shows that for the Hebrews and for Aristotle they did not have a concept of a 'will' as a sub-rational faculty for choosing.

Virtue is beneficial

She begins with necessary conditions: A virtue is beneficial. She says, "Human beings do not get on well without them. Nobody can get on well if he lacks courage, and does not have some measure of temperance and wisdom, while communities where justice and charity re lacking are apt to be wretched places to live, as Russia was under the Stalinist terror."[4] But whom is benefited? Does a person possessing a virtue benefit the virtuous person or the society in which the virtuous person lives? For some virtues, the answer is more clearly "both": temperance benefits oneself and one's family or community. For other virtues, such as justice or charity, the answer is less clear. She says, "It is a reasonable opinion that on the whole a man is better off for being charitable and just, but this is not to say that circumstances may not arise in which he will have to sacrifice everything for charity or justice."[5]

Foot finds the alleged paradox between what we might wish to call "selfish" and "altruistic" virtues overblown. The cases in which virtuous deeds necessitate the loss of other goods are not so devastating as they might appear. It might be that, on occasion, it is better (say) for my family that I sacrifice my health in working hard to earn higher wages; while on other occasions it is better for my family that I sacrifice higher wages keep myself healthy. Geach similarly downplays this alleged emnity between my "inclinations" and the moral law, pointing out that oftentimes my inclinations lead me to obey the law.

She recommends "leaving unsolved problems behind us:"

> Let us say then… that virtues are in general beneficial characteristics, and indeed ones that a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows. This will not, however, take us far towards a definition of a virtue, since there are many other qualities of a man that may be similarly beneficial, as for instance bodily characteristics such as health and physical strength, and mental powers such as those of memory and concentration.[6]

4. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 2–3.
5. Ibid., 3.
6. Ibid., 4.

Virtue is more than strength

The more interesting question is how to distinguish moral virtue from a great memory, keen eyesight, or other admirable qualities we do not intuitively classify as virtuous.

What, for example, distinguishes virtue from strength? At first glance, the answer seems to be something about the *will*; Foot thinks virtues are revealed not only by a person's abilities but by his or her *intentions*. But what are intentions? Foot argues that the 'will' must be understood in its broadest sense, "to cover what is wished for as well as what is sought."[7] Intentions are not the *only* thing we judge, for a well-intentioned nincompoop who always harms when "helping" is rightly judged as deficient in virtue. Neither do we only judge the result of a person's action, for we sometimes exculpate a failing performance in part because the person *meant well*, though it also perhaps it the exculpation is called for because circumstances were not favorable, chances of success were low, etc.

Foot attempts to capture the point that we admire someone who not only does the right thing but who has conditioned himself to do the right thing fluently and almost instantly. She quotes from John Hersey's novel *A Single Pebble* in which the narrator relates watching a man save a boy from drowning:

> It was the head tracker's marvelous swift response that captured my admiration at first, his split second solicitousness when he heard a cry of pain, his finding in mid-air, as it were, the only way to save the injured boy. But there was more to it than that. His action, which could not have been mulled over in his mind, showed a deep, instinctive love of life, a compassion, an optimism, which made me feel very good.

Foot's comment on this passage is this:

> What this suggests is that a man's virtue may be judged by his innermost desires as well as by his intentions; and this fits with our idea that a virtue such as generosity lies as much in someone's attitudes as in his actions. Pleasure in the good fortune

7. Ibid., 5.

> of others is, one thinks, the sign of a generous spirit; and small reactions of pleasure and displeasure often the surest signs of a man's moral disposition.[8]

In other words, the outward behavior (the swift response) discloses not only the man's intentions and attitudes, but something even deeper; settled dispositions that can be betrayed in the smallest facial expressions or the most "instinctive" gut reactions. Robert Adams's concept of 'being for' is helpful in this connection. We intuitively (and correctly) judge that one must *be for* the good in the most general sense of orienting oneself – in thoughts, deeds, words, intentions, and wishes – toward the good.

If virtuous dispositions are "multi-track,"[9] is it necessary that good intentions and attitudes be effective in good action? If so, it seems that virtues become skills. But as we saw comparing virtue with strength, there seems to be something flat about calling the virtuous person *merely* skillful.[10] The worry here is that we don't want to call skills morally valuable when they do not seem to have any moral import. Is a contracter who excels at hammering 16d nails into wooden frames to be admired for his *virtue*? Is the quarterback who can make accurate throws under pressure virtuous? This seems to us moderns to smack too much of the "Homeric" sense of virtue as *any* admirable quality.

What, if anything, differentiates virtues from skills? Foot's solution is an interpretation of the line from Aristotle that "in the matter of arts and skills… voluntary error is preferable to involuntary error, while in the matter of virtues… it is the reverse."[11] While this might be a bit baffling, the thought seems to be that deliberately erring in an art or skill is compatible with mastery; the teacher can err on purpose in order to instruct students. By contrast, deliberately erring in morality is still an error. One ought not steal to demonstrate to children that stealing is wrong.

8. Ibid., 5.

9. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.

10. Julia Annas's argument that virtues are skills of a particular type takes advantage of the intuitive similarity between virtue and skill. Cf. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*.

11. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 7.

Corrective

Foot also argues that virtues are "corrective". That is, each one stands "at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or deficiency of motivation to be made good."[12] In this discussion, she is illuminating a statement of Aristotle that "virtues are about what is difficult for men" and also objecting to a statement of Kant that *only* "actions done out of a sense of duty" have moral worth. In this connection, she discusses Kant's problem of the happy philanthropist. This problem is the troubling and dissonant conclusion that if a very generous philanthropist gets great pleasure out of helping others then such actions display no moral worth. Surely a commonsense moral judgment would accord moral worth to the very fact that the philanthropist *enjoys* doing what is good (which Aristotle builds into the definition of a virtuous person); he doesn't just grit his teeth and do good (which Aristotle would call mere *continence*).

Kant's error, according to Foot, is in failing to distinguish that which is "in accord" with virtue from that which is *virtuous* full stop. It may be, for example, that a novice tennis player makes an expert shot while remaining merely a novice. The hit is in accord with excellence but is not, in this case, an instance of excellence – only beginner's luck. In her self-love example, Foot points out that there is no virtue required to eat one's breakfast and avoid life-threatening danger, but there may sometimes be cases where self-love is a duty – even a difficult, painful duty. She says, "sometimes it is what is owed to others that should keep a man from destroying himself, and then he may act out of a sense of duty."[13] So the solution to the happy philanthropist problem is that if he really does have such a character as to be delighted helping others, he is morally praiseworthy *because he has worked to achieve that character*. As she says:

> For charity is, as we said, a virtue of attachment as well as action, and the sympathy that makes it easier to act with charity is part of the virtue. The man who acts charitably out of a sense of duty is not to be undervalued, but it is the other who most shows virtue and therefore to the other that most moral worth is attributed.[foot2002virtues

12. Ibid., 8.
13. Ibid., 13.

14]

Since charity is a "virtue of attachment" (I should say "affection"), the feelings of the philanthropist count in favor of proving the presence of a virtue.

Of course, commonsense judges that a philanthropist who persists in virtue even when he does not enjoy giving is also praiseworthy. Foot explains this too. She allows that it may take greater virtue for a man to *persist* in his philanthropy *even when* it brings him no delight.

> Only a detail of Kant's presentation of the case of the dutiful philanthropist tells on the other side. For what he actually said was that this man felt no sympathy and took no pleasure in the good of others because 'his mind was clouded by some sorrow of his own', and this is the kind of circumstance that increases the virtue that is needed if a man is to act well.

For someone who has acquired a kind of immunity to some kinds of temptation is through sustained effort and in many small victories is, ipso facto, especially admirable. Virtues are indeed corrective of tempting vices and tempting moral errors. However, the presence of temptation is not a necessary condition for the presence of a virtue.

Virtues are operative toward good ends

Can virtue enable the more efficient achievement of ignoble aims? On the one hand, examples are easy to furnish: a murderer displays courage; a prude displays temperance. It seems commonsensical that whatever attributes we designate as courageous can be found in agents pursuing bad ends. On the other hand, the Aristotelian line excludes such a possibility by definition. Jonathan Sanford's recent monograph, *Before Virtue*, argues that Aristotle's doctrine is "ethics insists it is impossible to exercise any virtue, with the exception of technical skill, wrongly."[14] Foot attempts to do justice to both these concerns. The analogy is to poisons or solvents:

14. Jonathan Sanford, *Before Virtue:Assessing Contemporary Virtue Ethics* (The Catholic University of American Press, 2015), 163.

> It is quite natural to say on occasion 'P does not act as a poison here' though P is a poison and it is P that is acting here. Similarly courage is not operating as a virtue when the murderer turns his courage, which is a virtue, to bad ends. Not surprisingly the resistance that some of us registered was not to the expression 'the courage of the murderer' or to the assertion that what he did 'took courage' but rather to the description of that action as an act of courage or a courageous act. It is not that the action could not be so described, but that the fact that courage does not here have its characteristic operation is a reason for finding the description strange.[15]

An agent's commission of an otherwise virtuous action may be a mistake *for that agent* at that time. This may seem ad hoc, but we must remember that Foot is attempting to make space for the "commonsense" observation that some good traits operate to bad ends *within* the philosophically rigorous definition of virtue as beneficial.

One objection Foot responds to is the worry some might have that she is saying *only* those who are completely virtuous are virtuous at all. She has two responses: wisdom always operates as a virtue. While it might make some sense to speak of "foolish courage" (recklessness) or "foolish moderation" (prudishness) it makes no sense to speak of 'foolish wisdom'. Since wisdom always operates as a virtue, we admire wisdom perhaps most of all. As we shall see in John McDowell's discussion of the virtuous person's perceptual capacities, it might be that when we admire a person's courage or moderation,we are often admiring the *wisdom in* the courage and the moderation.

A second response, though, is that we do admire some who have only a subset of all the virtues:

> There are some people who do possess all these virtues and who are loved and admired by all the world, as Pope John XXIII was loved and admired. Yet the fact is that many of us look up to some people whose chaotic lives contain rather little of wisdom or temperance, rather than to some others who possess these virtues. And while it may be that this is just romantic nonsense I suspect that it is not.[16]

Even those whose overall life is a mishmash of virtues and vices are admirable. My interpretation of this sentiment is that such are admirable insofar as they demonstrate some excellent qualities.

15. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 16.
16. Ibid., 17.

Transitioning from Foot to McDowell

For Foot, virtues are those beneficial qualities that we need qua human beings in order to safely navigate the normal human temptations to corrupt oneself and others. These qualities are what Hursthouse calls multi-track, embroiling our whole psychology as it is directed by what might call the 'will' or 'practical rationality', including intentions, attitudes, deliberative choices, and habits. Virtuous traits are only 'operative' toward good ends, and so even once acquired they stand in need of the governance of practical wisdom.

IV. John McDowell: The Moral Outlook on How to Live

A disastrous idea … has haunted Western philosophy since the seventeenth century… that perception involves an interface between the mind and the 'external' objects we perceive. (Hilary Putnam, "Sense, Nonsense and the Senses," *Journal of Philosophy*, 465.)

McDowell's writings on virtue and value have been formed by two main influences: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[17] As we briefly saw above, his concern has been to dissolve worries about the mind's relation to the world, specifically those worries that arise from false dualisms. The Greeks had a world-view within which such dualisms did not arise; so perhaps some of their conceptions can help us for whom such dualisms arise as a matter of course in many philosophical contexts.

One criticism of McDowell is that he is not a realist but merely an "anti-anti-realist". I think this criticism misses the mark. His goal is not to *defend* an Aristotelian sort of realism in the place of subjectivism but (like Wittgenstein) to attack subjectivism and then cease to talk about the issue. Failing adequately to defend realism criticizes McDowell for missing the bullseye on a target he was not aiming at. Another criticism of McDowell is that he posits a dualism of his own: the dualism between (primary) nature and "second nature". Primary nature is the bald, disenchanted world of

17. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*.

mindless matter and energy. Second nature is the partially re-enchanted human world of rationality, value, intentionality, social life, culture, and education. This criticism cuts more deeply since, if it can be made to stick, it accuses McDowell of failing to hit the bullseye on the target he explicitly wishes to hit.

Virtue as knowledge

McDowell's theses are:

1. "The point of engaging in ethical reflection… lies in the interest of the question 'How should one live?' "[18]
2. Virtues are kinds of knowledge and *virtue* is a kind of knowledge.
3. The question of how to live must be approached from "within" a moral outlook and approached "*via* the notion of a virtuous person."[19]

Let's examine each of these in turn to uncover McDowell's account of virtue.

The first point is that ethical reflection aims at answering the ever relevant question "How should one live?"[20] We notice that ethical reflection is *reflection* about *practice*. It seems to me that this obvious truth is almost too close to be seen, like one's nose. It is far too often overlooked. We do not *merely* act (like a deer or a dog) nor do we *merely* calculate (like a computer or an angel); we reflect upon what we ought to do, how we ought to live. Such reflection only makes sense concerning issues within my control. Insofar as one cannot but sleep sometimes, the question of whether or not to sleep at all is not an ethical question; it is not in my control. Insofar as one can either stay or go, pursue or avoid, harm or help, such decisions are ethical decisions and the question of how to live is an ethical question. One must decide which larger, longer-term projects to pursue and which objects are worthwhile to obtain; and one must, along the way of these long-term pursuits, decide rather extemporaneously how to react to the vicissitudes of circumstance. Each of us must decide how to react to the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."[21]

18. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.
19. Ibid., 331.
20. Ibid., 331.
21. *Hamlet* III.1

As for the thesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge, McDowell argues that morality is *practical knowledge* (a "disposition to act well"). Such practical knowledge (and this is the third point) seems to demand "a moral outlook" to act well.[22] To see why it makes sense to conceive of virtue as practical knowledge, suppose that some platitudinous value (say, kindness) is really a virtue. The kind person is reliably kind and is kind *on purpose*. A person who merely happens to be kind or who commits acts of kindness resulting from blind instinct does not seem to merit the ascription of a virtue. A person who is kind once, or even every now and then, likewise does not seem to merit the ascription of a virtue. Rather, a kind person is one who is regularly sensitive to a range of reasons for behaving in a particular way. The kind person, McDowell adduces, "has a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behavior" and such "deliverances of a reliable sensitivity are cases of knowledge."[23] The kind person *knows* what is called for, is intentional about avoiding cruel or indifferent behavior, and so on.

If kindness is "a sort of perceptual capacity", "specialized sensitivity" to a particular range of reasons for action (say, the feelings of others), then perhaps the same holds true for other virtues.[24] In fact, McDowell suggests, the notion that virtues are specialized sensitivities — each a kind of knowledge — helps us understand the Socratic notion of the unity of virtue.

These reflections support the notion that this kind of knowledge ("sensitivity to reasons") is necessary for the virtue but not sufficient. For it might be that one is sensitive to what another would feel but still fail to act rightly. Why? Perhaps, like the overindulgent parent, one is *too* sensitive to the feelings of the child or *not sensitive enough* to other considerations, like the child's health or (McDowell's example) fairness. The virtuous person is sensitive to a whole range of reasons; since reason A and reason B might commend different acts, part of virtue must be the meta-cognitive capacity to reflect upon all those reasons available to one, to rank and order them.

22. Ibid., 331.
23. Ibid., 332.
24. Ibid., 332.

McDowell's "preliminary case" that virtue is knowledge is that the "requirement imposed by the situation… must exhaust his reason for acting as he does."[25] It would disqualify the act as a candidate for an example of kindness if the agent performed it *because* it was kind *and because good repute was likely to follow*. If we run the same calculus on each particular virtue, we can hypothesize that virtuous agents' behavior in each case is explained by their sensitivity to those particular kinds of reasons. In turn, their behavior in general (when virtuous) is explained by their sensitivity in general. He concludes, "thus the particular virtues are not a batch of Independent sensitivities. Rather, we use the concepts of the particular virtues to mark similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a single sensitivity which is what virtue, in general, is: an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one's behavior. It is a single complex sensitivity of the sort which we are aiming to instill when we aim to inculcate a moral outlook."[26]

Objection: An objection to the view that virtue is a "single complex sensitivity" to requirements upon one's behavior arises from considerations of the internalism/externalism debate regarding moral motivation. Suppose two persons in the same situation are equipped with identical perceptual capacities and so sensitive to the same range of reasons for action, but only one of them does the right thing. If such a supposed situation were to obtain, it would disconfirm McDowell's conclusion. But, McDowell points out, one man's *modus ponens* is another man's *modus tollens.* If virtue is to be identified with a single complex sensitivity, then a supposed situation in which two persons perceive a situation and its practical requirements identically but act differently cannot obtain.[27] Socrates took this line. But McDowell suggests we look to Aristotle. Aristotle allowed that "appreciation of what [a virtuous person] observes is clouded, or unfocused, by the impact of a desire to do otherwise."[28] The point of such an allowances is that the break between the sensitivity to reasons (which is virtue) and a resultant wrong action occurs when other psychological factors inter-

25. Ibid., 332.
26. Ibid., 333.
27. Ibid., 333.
28. Ibid., 334.

fere. What interference? McDowell mentions desires and also a "distortion in one's appreciation" of the relevant reasons.[29]

Objection: McDowell cites Donald Davidson who argues to the effect that a person might fail to perform the resultant right action even without such interfering factors. The reply is that the point is true, but it is not an objection. Aristotle's account of continence details that continence is not a virtue. The continent person is able to perform the right action because he recognizes it as right, *despite* countervailing pressures (from desires, say) to do the wrong action. Since a fully developed virtue definitionally includes having the proper motivation as well, continence is only needed in the absence of a fully developed virtue. Furthermore, the virtuous person is not always one who "balances" reasons for X against countervailing reasons for Y. The virtuous person is the one for whom simply identifying a reason ("in this situation, courage requires that I run into danger") silences countervailing reasons. The virtuous persons sees the danger (and perhaps feels rightly apprehensive) but also sees that courage in the face of this danger is required; the latter perception, according to McDowell, "silences" other pressures.[30] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently and instantly *acts* on the best reason.

Objection: Is virtue-knowledge *codifiable*? McDowell considers the objection that if virtue is knowledge, 'knowing-what-to-do' must be codifiable in propositional form. But 'knowing-what-to-do' is not codifiable, so virtue must not be knowledge. On this objection, the virtuous person enjoys knowledge of one or a few universal ethical precepts and reliably calculates the application of those principles to individual occasions. The virtuous person's ethical arguments "take the form of a 'practical syllogism' " wherein the universal proposition is the major premise and the "relevant particular knowledge" is a minor premise, while the issuing conclusion is the judgment of "what is to be done."[31] Furthermore, on this objection, the defender of Humean moral psychology can keep the identification of relevant particular knowledge with a "minor premise" but substitute the

29. Ibid., 334.
30. Ibid., 335.
31. Ibid., 336.

proposed major premise (a proposition such as "It is always good to be courageous") with a non-cognitive desire or commitment (such as "*I want* to be courageous" or "Be courageous!"). Now, they can explain how a virtuous person and non-virtuous person can both perceive a situation identically but fail to perform the same action with reference to their different desires or commitments.

The problem with this objection, McDowell thinks, is not so much a problem with our moral theory but a problem with our conception of rationality. The problem stems from a "deep-rooted prejudice" that rationality is a rule-following procedure. If rationality is a rule-following procedure, then it follows that *either* practical rationality and morality are likewise rule-following procedures *or* that practical rationality and morality is not, ultimately, sufficiently *rational*. Some philosophers (often followers of Hume but not necessarily Hume himself) think that morality is a not rational domain but a domain of sentiments, desires, commitments, approvals, and so on. Other philosophers (often followers of Kant) think that morality is a rational domain and hence must be a matter of identifying first principles and "applying" them to particular situations. But what they share in common is a belief that "rationality must be explicable in terms of being guided by a formulable universal principle."[32] This common belief McDowell wishes to refute.[33]

McDowell's discussion here (drawing on Wittgenstein and others) is hard to follow. The point seems to be that even apparently obvious cases where the rational thing to do is to follow an objective rule (say, by extending a series of numbers) turn out to be cases of a much messier process in which there is no such objective rule by appeal to which we can explain rational thoughts or behaviors. If Bob instructs Charlie to "add 2" to a number and continue applying the rule indefinitely, we tend to be confident Charlie will produce "2, 4, 6, 8," etc., which will "churn out the appropriate behavior with the sort of reliability which a physical mechanism, say a piece of clockwork, might have." We postulate a "psychological mechanism, underlying his behavior, by

32. Ibid., 337.

33. In Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513. MacIntyre argues a similar point. In this essay, he denies the assumption that normative ethical rules can be derived from universal ethical principles the way we "apply" universal logical truths to particular logical conclusions via a middle term.

an inference analogous to that whereby one might hypothesize a physical structure underlying the observable motions of some inanimate object."[34] The "ground and nature of our confidence" that we will reliably apply rules is not but a common form of life. The 'form of life' is a term of art here from Wittgenstein (and quoted with approval from Stanley Cavell) that refers to that difficult-to-define process by which we learn how reliably to use words in our native language, how to make exclamations like a pained "ow!" or an excited "ooh!", when to laugh at jokes, and when to cry in pity. Our shared rationality, McDowell suggests, is not grounded in "external" objective rules but in a shared form of life or what he calls a "congruence of subjectivities."[35] McDowell admits this is a disconcerting hypothesis; it induces "vertigo." But, our response to such vertigo should not be to embrace a "consoling myth". That myth he says is the two notions that (a) rule-following is a psychological mechanism that — absent mistakes — guarantees consistency, and that there exist objective facts of the matter over and above the congruence of subjectivities. If we abandon these two notions and embrace the model of deductive rationality as grounded only in our intersubjective form of life, then the corresponding model of practical rationality will become tenable.

3. The question of how to live must be approached from "within" a moral outlook and approached "*via* the notion of a virtuous person"[36]

McDowell's solution to the problem of the vertigo we feel when contemplating the dependence of our rational concept-application on nothing more than our shared form of life is to simply accept that we cannot think from a third-person, detached, "sideways on" point of view; we can only think from within our point of view. His main opponent, of course, is the notion that morality can be adduced from an objective third-person sort of view. He says, "The cure for the vertigo, then, is to give up on the idea that philosophical thought, about the sorts of practice in question, should be undertaken at some external standpoint, outside our immersion in our familiar forms of life."[37]

34. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 337.
35. Ibid., 339.
36. Ibid., 331.
37. Ibid., 341.

This is part of the movement toward his thesis that that virtues are ethical qualities that only make sense 'from within', that they lend a certain kind of perceptive ability to their bearers.

McDowell points out the familiar case of a discussion or disagreement that end at loggerheads, with both parties asking "But don't you see?" Although it is tempting to want to resolve such loggerheads by appeal to a third-personal point of view standing outside either of our forms of life, McDowell thinks it must be resolved, if at all, from firmly within our form of life. That is not to say that persuasion is not possible. He reassures us that the "Don't you see?" question "can often be supplemented with words aimed at persuasion."[38] Rather, persuasion will consist in "bring[ing] someone to see it as one wants", in one or both parties appreciating reasons they may not have seen before. It sometimes takes efforts to make someone see (to make oneself or others see) "the right way to handle a given situation."[39]

Now, if virtue knowledge is not codifiable then how is it *consistent*? What guarantees that the moral person's behavior is intelligibly the same from case to case? On the one hand, if moral knowledge is rational then it is consistent from case to case and situation to situation; but if, as McDowell has been arguing, both deductive reasoning and practical reasoning are not merely consistent by being like a rule-following machine or computer, how do we explain the virtuous person's reliably correct behavior? Section 5 of the article answers this question by way of Aristotle's practical syllogisms.

The 'practical syllogism' takes the following shape:

1. X is good to do, desirable, worthwhile, etc. (E.g., it is good to instantiate justice in the classroom).
2. Z would be X. (E.g., giving everyone a chance to re-take a quiz that was unavailable due to technical problems would be instantiate justice in my classroom.)
3. Therefore, Z would be good to do, desirable, worthwhile, etc.

On the strictly deductive logical model, the role of the major premise is to provide rock solid universal ethical principles from which to derive particular moral duties. But McDowell resists this model.

38. Ibid., 342.
39. Ibid., 342.

On the strictly non-cognitivist model, without universal ethical principles we are left with universal psychological states (consistent desires, plans, values, or norms). McDowell also resists this. On the non-codifiable model, what does the major premise do? Its role, he says, is to state a "certain conception of how to live… [namely] the *virtuous person's conception* of the sort of life a human being should lead."[40] It is clear upon reflection that this account is a sort of circular reasoning. For the virtuous person's conception of how to live is itself conditioned by what he called earlier 'the moral outlook'. That conception of how to live, in turn, conditions what particular saliences are noticed (what minor premises) and generates practical conclusions about what is to be done. What kind of life should a human being lead? The answer "cannot be definitively written down."[41] Furthermore, "Any attempt to capture it in words will recapitulate the character of the teaching whereby it might be instilled: generalizations will be approximate at best…"[42] The upshot of the combination of non-codifiability with a practical syllogistic form is that the virtuous person takes for a rule of life some conception of how to live but that this conception is part of what it means to be a virtuous person. (Hence the vertigo.)

We might wonder why we are bothering about formal syllogistic reasoning at this point. But this way of understanding the practical syllogism *does* do good job of providing a plausible explanation of moral motivation (reasons one might act in some way) and moral behavior (reasons one acted that way). To paraphrase McDowell: "Explanations of judgments about what to do are explanations of actions."[43] I can explain your behavior by understanding that you were concerned for your friend's welfare and reached out to help. Likewise, you can explain your decision to help by assuring me that you are concerned for your friend's welfare. For McDowell, the general structure of the practical syllogism is useful. He says "the rationality of virtue… is not demonstrable from an

40. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
41. Ibid., 343.
42. Ibid., 343.
43. Ibid., 342. Verbatim, he says: "The explanations, so far treated as explanations of judgments about what to do, are equally explanations of actions."

external standpoint."[44]

Objection: McDowell cites a common objection, familiarly attributed to Hume, that practical reasons by themselves cannot motivate — that they need the presence of a conative mental state (such as a desire) as well. "Cognition and volition are distinct." Surely the virtuous person's behavior is conditioned both by knowledge and their non-cognitive psychological states. In McDowell's example, one is aware that one's friend is in trouble and that the friend is able to be comforted (the cognitive bit) and a desire (or motivation or inclination or settled passion) for helping one's friends (the non-cognitive bit). Surely these two *together* and neither in isolation explains the behavior.

The problem with this objection is that, as McDowell has plausibly argued, an essential component of the awareness that one's friend is in trouble is the very sensitivity that is virtue. The difference between the vicious and virtuous person lies not just in their desires and reactions to what they notice about the world but in the noticing itself. Furthermore, McDowell points out, this non-cognitivist makes use of the deductive model of practical reasoning he has been at pains to deflate.

Objection: To be rational, a genuine reason must be verifiable from an external, "neutral standpoint" open to any rational observer whatsoever. Surely *something*, such as scientific or deductive logical beliefs, are objective in the sense that they look the same to any rational being whatsoever.

Even here, McDowell undermines the objection as based partly in "vertigo". It is a "craving for a kind of rationality independently demonstrable as such."[mcdowell1979virtue 346] He admits that the intelligibility and consistency of the virtuous person's way of life are an "orectic state" but not that it is a straightforward desire as much as "a conception of how to live."

Although McDowell sees another more "subtle non-cognitivism" arising from the ashes, he does not fully develop it. Rather, he says he suspects "that its origin is a philistine scientism, probably based on the misleading idea that the right of scientific method to rational acceptance is

44. Ibid., 346.

discernible from a more objective standpoint than that from which we seem to perceive the saliences. A scientistic conception of reality is eminently open to dispute. When we ask the metaphysical question whether reality is what science can find out about, we cannot, without begging the question, restrict the materials for an answer to those which science can countenance."[45]

Summary

McDowell argues that rational virtue is a kind of knowledge — a kind of sensitivity — against the objection that rational virtue is either a type of universalizable, objective, deductive logic or else non-cognitive. His rebuttal is to deny that deductive reasoning is so objective. Rather, deductive reasoning is not rule-following, except in that we follow a vague collection of rules associated by our common forms of life. We only know deduction, too, from within. So moral reasoning, he avers, we also know from within, by doing it, while doing it, because of our common forms of life. He does not much advance a view of virtue beyond the Aristotelian notion that virtues are qualities of reliable good-choosing, good-acting. He does however limit Aristotle's optimism about the metaphysical realist assumptions underlying an understanding of deductive reason and practical reason.

V. Alasdair MacIntyre: Rational Tradition

Let's consider MacIntyre's widely influential view, that the great moral confusion of our time is due, in part, to the fracturing of social and political bonds deriving from a shared understanding of and pursuit of the good.[46]

45. Ibid., 346.

46. Though he is classified as a "virtue ethicist", MacIntyre rejects the label insofar as it does not necessitate a real restoration of the Aristotelian tradition of virtue. Nevertheless, he has contributed to virtue ethics, as well as a surprising number of other fields: the history of philosophy, political science, epistemology, the philosophy of education, sociology, and more.

Initial account

MacIntyre's concept of virtue is derived from (but not limited to) a careful study of the history of the concept within the broader western tradition. In order to capture all of the (sometimes opposing) features of virtue from Homer to Jane Austen, MacIntyre unfolds three stages: the first is virtues relative to "practices." The second is virtues relative to the whole of an integrated human life. The third phase is virtue related to tradition and rationality.[47]

The first stage is that virtues are "acquired human qualities that enable their possessor to achieve those goods which are internal to practices."[48] This is perhaps a puzzling definition. Let's examine it a bit more closely.

First, he says virtues are acquired *human* qualities. Presumably, human qualities are opposed to analogous qualities of non-human animals. The flexible flagellum of a bacterium, the swiftness of a deer – formal or functional biological features that enable an animal to survive and thrive – are excluded from the class of virtues by definition. MacIntyre's later *Dependent Rational Animals* retracts the assumed divide between human and non-human animals. But here, virtues do not arise from nor depend on biology. In this, MacIntyre's initial formulation disagrees with Foot but agrees with McDowell, as we shall see.

Secondly, virtues are *acquired* human qualities. This is an important point and relates to the first, for natural biological features are inborn. Virtues, rather, are acquired. This is no small matter. In the first line of Plato's *Meno*, Meno asks Socrates a question that moral philosophers have continued to try to answer for the last 2,400 years. He asks "whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?"[49] MacIntyre's answer is not that virtue is a gift of the gods, but that it is *acquired.* A

47. Now, for MacIntyre "tradition" is almost synonymous to rationality. He calls it "tradition-constituted rationality". We will examine that notion in the next chapter.

48. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

49. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato*, *Meno* 70a.

recent volume edited by Mark Alfano[50] discusses the range of which positive traits count as virtues. MacIntyre, it would seem, sides with those who limit the range to exclude inborn or genetically determined qualities like a good memory or excellent eyesight from being considered virtues. That is not to say that virtues are *not natural*. In one sense of the word 'natural', virtues are proper to human beings without being, so to speak, "automatic." In this, he agrees with Aristotle that virtue is *in accordance with* nature but not *by nature*. Rather, virtuous traits are a "normal" psychological outgrowth of cultivating excellence within particular human practices.

Thirdly, virtues enable their possessor to achieve particular *goods*. This clause assumes that virtues are beneficial. A virtuous trait *cannot* be directed at achieving ills. This assumption will bring some trouble for MacIntyre's initial definition in *After Virtue*. Can't overall wicked people have particular virtues? Can't the thief be courageous, the dictator magnanimous, the glutton affable? It certainly seems that the answer is yes. Even indexing virtues to practices does not solve the problem; can practices be wicked? I shall discuss this problem in next sub-sections.

Fourthly, since virtues "enable their possessor to achieve … goods", it may seem that virtue are mere *instruments* to goods, not goods themselves. A grave misunderstanding lurks in the vicinity. Virtues *are* instrumental for MacIntyre, but they are not *merely* instrumental. They are both instrumental (to the achievement of certain goods) and also *partly constitutive of those goods*. Virtues are both means to an end and also ends in themselves.[51] Now, this conflation of means and ends is liable to worry some critics. The worry is not trivial; however, for the sake of completing my presentation of virtue, I must set it aside for now.

MacIntyre's philosophical methodology is exemplified in how he defines 'virtue'. He begins with Homeric virtues (roughly, the performance of one's social role) and works through the implicit or explicit definitions of virtue in Plato, Aristotle, the Greek tragic poets, the New Testament, Aquinas, Jane Austen, and Benjamin Franklin. While respecting the different definitions and

50. Mark Alfano, *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Mark Alfano (Routledge, 2015).

51. *Phronesis* or practical wisdom, for example, enables agents to make good decisions that result in human flourishing but having *phronesis just is part of what it means* to flourish qua human.

examples, he creatively abstracts an account that unifies them all. His definition is historical but not restricted to history; it aims to be universal but does not pretend to be purely abstract. His concept of virtue is, rather, *traditional*. Furthermore, as we shall see, MacIntyre's view of 'tradition' is not conservative but progressive, not oriented toward the past but the future.

First Stage: Practice

What are "*practices*"? Practice is a key term of art; to misunderstand it would be to misunderstand MacIntyre. A practice is a social activity aimed at defined ends. (We commonly speak of "practicing" medicine in this sense.) MacIntyre mentions farming, chess, and political activity, among other examples. A practice is not merely a reflexive action (like scratching an itch) nor merely a single, discrete, intelligible action (like pulling a weed); it is an intelligible set of actions. The farmer is engaged in a series of activities, from tilling, sowing, watering, protecting, harvesting, storing, etc., all of which are embedded within a social context and organized around a particular goal. Each practice has a history, a set of practitioners, a common set of standards, and a common goal. And virtues are those qualities that enable their possessor to excel in practices.

For example, secondary school education is a social activity that teachers undertake in order to give children the basic knowledge and skills they need to transition to functional adults in society, whether by getting a job, starting a business, or advancing to higher stages of education.[52] Secondary education in the U.S. is a practice with a history (or a set of histories) from the present time back to when Americans completing high school (rather than beginning work on a farm or in town by the age of 16) was the exception rather than the rule. It has standards, both legal standards and "best practices" passed from mentor to student teacher. It pretty obviously has standards of excellence

52. Secondary education has other (perhaps de facto) purposes, like to socialize young people in a community of peers and authorities, and to afford them opportunities for recreation, art, clubs, to give parents a break, and so on. For the sake of simplicity, I shall focus on what seems to me the primary goal of education, which is education (in knowledge) and training (in skills) needed for becoming a legal adult.

according to which most educators are average, some poor, and some excellent. An educator who wants to join that profession will be enculturated with that history, taught those standards, and given a chance (usually by trial and error) to become a good teacher.

Leading MacIntyre scholar, Christopher Lutz, highlights four aspects of MacIntyre's famous definition of practice. A practice is:

> [1] a complex social activity that [2] enables participants to gain goods internal to the practice. [3] Participants achieve excellence in practices by gaining the internal goods. When participants achieve excellence, [4] the social understandings of excellence in the practice, of the goods of the practice, and of the possibility of achieving excellence in the practice are systematically extended.[53]

I believe my example of high school education illustrates Lutz' explication of MacIntyre's definition of 'practice.' [1] Practices are inherently complex *social* activities in that teachers cannot be teachers without students, and (usually) do not teach in isolation but in community with colleagues and administrators and parents. [2] Secondary education qua practice enables teachers to gain the goods "internal to the practice", namely students who are educated enough to be ready for legal adulthood – for a job or college. [3] Good teachers are those that demonstrate the ability reliably to produce, against all odds, educated students. And [4] good schools and good teachers usually have a *history* and social context that is being "extended" across generations. Good schools recruit and train good teachers, good teachers train the next generation of good teachers, and so on.

Also, he defines virtues with reference to goods *"internal to"* practices. What is the internal/external relation doing? MacIntyre later refashions the contrast between 'internal' and 'external' goods into one between 'goods of excellence' and 'goods of effectiveness.' I prefer the latter terminology. But the point is, I think, clear. The goods of excellence just are those that necessarily contribute to success within a given practice as such. In secondary education, success is defined by graduate rates, student retention of information, high test scores, high acceptance rates to top

53. Christopher Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre" (Web; Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015).

colleges, low drug use, low teenage pregnancy, and so on. The profession-specific virtues needed include understanding (to stay patient with struggling students), affability (to keep rapport), articulateness (to present material effectively), and so on. More general virtues needed include honesty, integrity, courage, faithfulness, and so on. Without these, *teaching* may be possible but *teaching well* is impossible.

By contrast, goods of effectiveness are those that might fit with the practice but are not *necessary* for achieving the end of that practice: high pay, an excellent teacher lounge, a short commute to work, and so on. Mere efficiency in attaining such external goods does not entail the presence of a virtue. In fact, the desire to pursue such goods *instead of* the goods of excellence is not a neutral desire — it is a *temptation.* Virtues are needed to overcome those temptations and to succeed according to the standards of the practice itself.[54]

Second Stage: Whole Life

The second stage depends on the notions of a complete human life, the sum of all the practices of one's life.[55] He says that "without an overriding conception of the *telos* of a whole human life, conceived as a unity, our conception of certain individual virtues has to remain partial and incomplete."[56] The example given shows how justice demands an ordering of the various goods of excellence within each practice. MacIntyre undermines the notion that the virtues which enable success in practices can be sufficient for an account of virtue in general. He argues that we need to "envisage each human life as a whole, as a unity, whose character provides the virutes with an adequate *telos*."[57]

54. To illustrate the temptation goods of effectiveness might pose, we need only think about political activity. Some (I suppose) become politicians *in order to bring about* the survival, security, and prosperity of the *polis*; others engage in order merely to satisfy their own ambition or achieve fame. Often we see American politicians running for office only one apparent aim: book sales.

55. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 15.

56. Ibid., 202.

57. Ibid., 204.

Despite the obstacles to such a vision, it is possible. The obstacles MacIntyre cites are both "social and philosophical." The social obstacle is the fragmentation of modern life: "work is divided from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal. So both childhood and old age have been wrenched away from the rest of human life and made over into distinct realms."[58] Just as the temporal segments of life are fragmented into bits (one thinks of the inherently patronizing talk of "senior citizens" compared from the older, inherently reverent talk of "elders"), so also the various projects and pursuits of life are partitioned, labelled, and cordoned off. On this fragmented view of life, the self's social roles are so many conventions masking the "true" underlying nature of the self. This presents a puzzle: how could virtues arise to the level of excellent dispositions for *humans as such*? They would have to be dispositions applicable in personal, private, business, spheres, in young and middle and old age, etc.

The second and philosophical obstacle is the tendency to atomize "complex actions… in terms of simple components."[59] MacIntyre's argument here is highly significant. He begins by analyzing the way we might answer a simple question such as: "what is he doing?"

> One and the same segment of human behavior may be correctly characterized in a number of different ways. To the question 'What is he doing?' the answers may with equal truth and appropriateness be 'Digging', 'Gardening', 'Taking exercise', 'Preparing for winter' or 'Pleasing his wife.'[60]

The first fact to notice is that each of these answers picks out different aspects of the agent's action: intentions, intended consequences, unintended consequences, etc. And, importantly, each of these answers places the simple atomic action within a narrative history: situated in an "annual cycle of domestic activity", in a hobby, in a marriage, and so on – each with its own history and "setting." The second fact to notice is that the answers to a similarly simple question "Why is he writing a sentence?" might be situated in different time horizons: immediately, he is writing to finish his book;

58. Ibid., 204.
59. Ibid., 204.
60. Ibid., 206.

but also he is contributing to a philosophical debate; but also he is trying to get tenure.[61] The upshot of these reflections is that individual actions, abstracted from their context are only intelligible if they are "ordered both causally and temporally… the correct identification of the agent's beliefs will be an essential constituent of this task."[62] MacIntyre's astonishing conclusion from these innocuous premises is that "there is no such thing as 'behavior', to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs and settings… Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions."[63]

This argument builds to a conclusion that Stanley Hauerwas asserts is "the central contention in After Virtue is his remark that "the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action."[64]

Hauerwas continues: > This may seem a small philosophical point, but much revolves around it: His understandings of the centrality of practical reason, the significance of the body for agency, why the teleological character of our lives must be displayed through narrative, the character of rationality, the nature of the virtues, why training in a craft is paradigmatic of learning to think as well as live, his understanding of why the Enlightenment project had to fail, his particular way of being a historicist, and why the plain person is the necessary subject of philosophy.[65]

Actions such as practicioners perform in practices find their intelligibility not only in practices but in the narrative of a whole human life. The same is true for verbal contributions to a conversation. Each turn people take in speaking to each other contributes to an unfolding narrative with a history and a *telos*, without which statements are random and unintelligible. MacIntyre continues:

> But if this is true of conversations, it is true also mutatis mutandis of bat- tles, chess games, courtships, philosophy seminars, families at the dinner table, businessmen

61. Ibid., 207.
62. Ibid., 208.
63. Ibid., 208.
64. Ibid., 209.
65. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, 2007.

> negotiating contracts- that is, of human transactions in general. For conversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general. Conversational behavior is not a special sort or aspect of human behavior, even though the forms of language-using and of human life are such that the deeds of others speak for them as much as do their words. For that is possible only because they are the deeds of those who have words.[66]

MacIntyre's discussion of narrative is highly interesting but can be left aside.[67] For we have arrived at a the supports needed for building the second stage of his account of virtue: the unity of many practices into a single whole. He says: "The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest."[68]

Naturally, to be on a quest is to strive for a goal, even if one fails to reach the goal. The goal, he says, is to quest for "*the* good" (as one understands it at the beginning of the quest). But the conception of *the* good can grow or morph along the way. How do the virtues relate to this quest?

> "The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices. but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good. by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalogue of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good."[69]

Virtues "sustain" practices from normal temptations; but virtues also help us to coordinate various practices and pursuits into a coherent quest to live our lives well. Virtues also sustain the relationships with friends, family, fellow citizens, and strangers within which we pursue our goal.

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66. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 211.

67. Consider such fascinating statements as: "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' "

68. Ibid., 219.

69. Ibid., 220.

Third stage: Tradition

MacIntyre's third stage of his virtue account situates what has come before in a broader social and historical context. That context he simply calls 'tradition.' In MacIntyre's account, we must be careful not to import our various connotations and prejudices for or against 'tradition'.

> We are apt to be misled here by the ideological uses to which the concept of a tradition has been put by conservative political theorists. Characteristically such theorists have followed Burke in contrasting tradition with reason and the stability of tradition with conflict. Both contrasts obfuscate.[70]

Rather, a tradition is a something like a culture: "A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument".

> Lack of justice, lack of truthfulness. lack of courage. lack of the relevant intellectual virtues–these corrupt traditions, just as they do those institutions and practices which derive their life from the traditions of which they are the contemporary embodiments.

While we shall pick up MacIntyre's highly contentious concept of tradition in a later chapter, here it will be worth underscoring a few key points.

Tradition is not a panacea against political tension and turmoil. Quite the contrary: political tensions of a particular character and expression are instrinsic to MacIntyre tradition. As he defines tradition, the internal conflict is a necessary feature: "A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[71]

Nor is tradition a rival to reason and critical reflection. Rather, one learns to reason – to critically reflect – within a MacIntyrean tradition. It is a truism that one learns language within a culture. It is equally true that one learns facts and methods of reasoning within a tradition, conceived as a community of thinkers who share not only a common tongue but common concepts

70. Ibid., 222.
71. Ibid., 222.

and a repertoire of facts, beliefs, customs, etc. So, rather than tradition being opposed to reason, tradition is the first source of our reasoning. And rather than tradition being opposed to critical reflection, tradition is the first source of the habit of critically reflecting. The very ability to expand the repertoire of facts or modify the methods of thinking depends upon the awareness that one inhabits a tradition. This awareness MacIntyre even elevates to the level of a virtue, saying it is "one whose importance is perhaps most obvious when it is least present." What is that virtue?

> the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one. This virtue is not to be confused with any form of conservative antiquarianism; I am not praising those who choose the conventional conservative role of *laudator temporis act*;. It is rather the case that an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present. Living traditions, just because they continue a not-yet-completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past.[72]

This is all we shall say about tradition here. But we must return to it in a later chapter. For MacIntyre, rationality itself is tradition-constituted. So insofar as practical rationality is the differentium of human nature, and insofar as virtues all depend for their effective operation on the coordinating management of practical reason, tradition will again become an essential concept.

Virtues are qualities that enable the health and persistence of traditions. A tradition is an extended argument, in part about the goods that constitute that tradition and the terms of that argument. Virtues as related to practices are individual but not individualistic, since practices themselves are social activities. Virtues as related to the whole of life are cultural but not culturally relativistic, for every culture ought to provide for its members some minimal goods.

VI. Compare, Contrast, Synthesize

What MacIntyre is missing is a full account of humanity as not just a social being but a biological being. We are animals. We are rational animals but animals just the same. Similarly, McDow-

72. Ibid., 223.

ell is missing a clear accounting of the relation between second nature and nature. (Rationality will be the main theme in a later chapter.) By locating the activity of evaluating solely in human nature's inhabitation of the space of reasons, he has divorced humanity from the world. As Julia Annas summarizes, non-reductive naturalisms risk trivializing moral or normative facts by implausibly cordoning them within humans:"Non-naturalistic accounts of ethical terms assume that their function, prominently their normativity, is something that arises with humans, or is produced by humans, in a way which owes nothing to the nature which we share with other living things."[73]

That link is supplied by Foot (and Thompson et. al.) As Julia Annas says:

> What is so helpful for ethics from this kind of biological naturalism is that we find that the normativity of our ethical discourse is not something which emerges mysteriously with humans and can only be projected back, in an anthropomorphic way, onto trees and their roots. Rather, we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already. It is part of the great merit of the work of Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse to have stressed this point. Like many important philosophical points, it is obvious once pointed out…[74]

By arguing (rightly I think) that the moral outlook can only be ratified from *within the moral outlook*, McDowell has cut off a range of reasonable supports to the moral outlook that can be drawn from "outside." We *can* draw from other natural objects (via generics or Aristotelian categoricals) notions such as "health" and "sickness", "exemplary" and "defective".

At the same time, Foot's account is lacking in some respects that McDowell and MacIntyre can supply. What Foot is missing is an account of human virtue and rationality in society and tradition. The virtues are not just beneficial to human beings tout court, unmediated by tradition. The human experience unmediated by tradition does not exist. To be a human being is, as McDowell rightly says, to participate in *Bildung*, a process of formation in which a person with language, thoughts, beliefs, desires, evaluative judgments, etc. are (at least initially) the product.

73. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics, Old and New," ed. Stephen Gardiner (Cornell University Press, 2005), 12.

74. Ibid.

I would now like to turn to some remaining puzzles or objections about virtue that might make this account of virtue less plausible.

VII. Which dispositions are virtues?

Virtues are those excellent traits that humans as practical reasoners need to realize our natural telos. And, we have argued, human nature is an intelligibly determinate concept: rational animals. Still, we might wonder how many virtues there are? It seems that our neo-Aristotelian writers vary widely on this point, from one, to a limited set, to a virtually unlimited set.

Foot (and Geach) takes for examples the four "cardinal" virtues which are delivered by tradition. (Hursthouse also defends the "theological virtue" of hope and Geach defends even a kind of faith as non-theological virtues. Nevertheless, Geach argues that love can only be a religious virtue.)[75]

McDowell's account makes it seem like there is only one virtue (knowledge). Each individual virtue is "a sort of perceptual capacity", a "specialized sensitivity" to a particular range of reasons for action (say, the feelings of others), and all virtue is sensitivity to reasons. There is only one "moral outlook."[76]

MacIntyre, by contrast, not only includes in his broad historical list the virtues of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, the Greek tragic poets, the New Testament, Aquinas, Jane Austen, Benjamin Franklin, and Jane Austin, but he adds (apparently ad lib) new virtues like "integrity or constancy"[77] and "an adequate sense of tradition"[78]

Is there any sense to be made here? If human nature is stable, yet human reason is flexible enough to admit of variation (both progressive and regressive), then we ought to expect a stable set

75. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 11; Geach, *The Virtues*, chap. 4.

76. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 332.

77. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 203. "There is at least one virtue recognized by the [Aristotelian] tradition which cannot be specified at all except with reference to the wholeness of a human life – the virtue of integrity or constancy."

78. Ibid., 223.

of qualities that count as virtues that is flexible enough to admit of variation.

The four cardinal virtues are not only "delivered by tradition" but can be most easily ratified by anyone willing to do the critical analysis. Courage

What are the virtues? The 'cardinal' or classical virtues to which tradition gives preeminent place are courage, justice, moderation, and practical wisdom. Roughly, justice is every member of the community doing their business and each person giving and receiving his due. Since every human being exists in society, the presence or absence of justice in the members of the community will sustain or destroy that community.

Courage is the proper boldness in doing the right thing despite opposition. Courage is not simply a military virtue appropriate to police officers, firefighters, telephone wire repairmen, etc.

Moderation is pursuing pleasure in the right way at the right time; practical wisdom is excellence in knowing what to do in a given situation.)