THE POINT OF VIRTUE: NATURE, PRACTICAL REASON, AND TELEOLOGY IN RECENT NEO-ARISTOTELIANISM

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT: Neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism must give an account of each interlocking concepts that constitute a complete ethics and metaethics: virtue, practical reason, human nature, and human flourishing. It must explain how ethical naturalism is both naturalistic (accurately descriptive of the way things *are*) as well as genuinely ethical and normative (giving guidance on the way things ought to be). This dissertation offers such an account.

KEYWORDS: virtue, practical reason, teleology, neo-Aristotelianism, ethical naturalism

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Dedicated to Lindsay. As Chesterton said: ”Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand?”

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γένοι’ οἷος ἐσσὶ μαθών. – Pindar, *Pythian* 2, line 72.

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Glossary. Lorum ipsum.

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The Virtue Triangle

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—Not everything that is last claims to be an end, but only that which is best, Physics, 194a 32-33.

I. Introduction

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> Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes.
>
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I. Introduction

This chapter argues that there are such things as natural norms. That is, normativity is to be found partly in nature, and not just in human evaluators. Examples of natural organic norms include natural life forms and functions of organisms or species.

The major alternative view to the one I defend is a view according to which nature is purely descriptive and non-normative. McDowell calls this picture of nature "bald nature" (i.e., bald of values, coldly factual, disenchanted from any supernatural esoterica, and so on) but I think a better term would be "Laplacian nature," since it more closely aligns with Pierre-Simon Laplace's mathematical and, I dare say, unscientific picture of nature.

Relying on the picture of bald or Laplacian nature, the major objection to ethical naturalism is the "is-ought gap." The is-ought gap is sometimes taken to be *the* problem for

ethical naturalism. If ethical facts are real, what are they? Where are they? How can they motivate? If ethical facts are non-natural, then are they real or not?

I do think the is-ought gap is a problem for some forms of naturalism. However, I shall argue that there are at least two forms of the is-ought gap. One of them is insoluble but the other can be solved by appeal to natural norms. Ethical naturalists posit a particular relationship between natural facts and moral facts, or facts and values, or nature and normativity. Each does so in their own way. The attempt to show how facts entail norms is, I think, misguided. Instead, I shall attempt to show that some facts just are norms. These are natural norms. In other words, some scientifically respectable natural facts are also real, mundane, normative facts on a level with properties and processes like 'being a penguin' or 'pumping blood.'

The respectable scientific notions I propose are natural kinds (life forms) and natural functions or ends. Though they can be given anti-realist or reductionist interpretations, anti-realism is by no means the default view of working scientists nor the default view of philosophers with a healthy respect for modern science. Polemicists who pretend that anti-realism or reductionism about natural kinds and natural functions are "the" scientific view are propagating their philosophical doctrine; the rhetoric is certainly powerful but the argument is weak.

The upshot of the normativity of nature for ethics is that if we can defend natural norms, it is at least possible that we can identify human natural norms. That is, we can identify a kind of normativity that is binding on human beings as practical rational animals but that is not merely invented by human individuals or human cultures. It would be natural without being crassly biological; it would be both biological and practical or rational in a way that I will explain later.

Outline

The first section distinguishes the two kinds of is-ought gap that have been thought to render ethical naturalism impossible and explains how natural norms make ethical naturalism at least possible. The second section presents a case for natural norms of two types: formal and functional, organisms and their natural teleological processes. The third section considers and rebuts anti-realist or reductionist interpretations of these natural phenomena. If the case for organic normativity is successful, then the neo-Aristotelian might be able to appeal to natural norms with respect to human organisms.

II. Is and Ought

Many have posed a challenge to the very possibility of ethical naturalism. If this challenge cannot be met, then ethical naturalism is futile. Put the first challenge in this form:

1. If ethical naturalism is possibly true, then descriptive statements can serve as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
2. But descriptive statements cannot serve as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
3. Therefore, ethical naturalism is not possibly true.

The first premise sets out a criterion for naturalism as a broad philosophical strategy for grounding ethics. Normative statements such as "You ought to be wise" or "It is good to be tolerant of people with different views" or "It is bad to bring a gun to school and start shooting people" seem to me true and pretty uncontroversial. But why are they true? And how do we know them? The realist non-naturalist has a good explanation: such statements pick out fundamental, non-natural, moral facts. The naturalist anti-realist also has a good explanation: such statements express the speaker's individual and cultural norms. The ethical naturalist's explanation is a bit trickier. He or she must show how such statements relate to the *natural* facts. One way would be to argue that "you ought to be wise" is itself a natural fact, but that way strikes one as rather odd; another way would be to argue that "you ought

to be wise" is a normative truth derivable from some other fact that is natural. Assuming that the natural facts are descriptive facts, the ethical naturalist would have to show how, in general, descriptive propositions can serve as premises with true normative conclusions.

The second premise seems to render hopeless the thought that we can evaluate things on the basis of what they are. But evaluating things on the basis of what they are is central to the kind of neo-Aristotelian naturalism I am pursuing here. Rosalind Hursthouse says that ethical evaluations of humans and non-ethical evaluations of plants and animals "both depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question."[1] In other words, the normative evaluation depends on the descriptive facts of the species: its activities, its life form, and so on. This would be momentous if true. Is the notion that an is statement can underwrite an ought statement even intelligible?

The is-ought gap is an intuitive notion. The problem originated in Hume.

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence."^[(*A Treatise of Human Nature* book III, part I, section I).

Hume is often credited with (or blamed for) insisting that an 'ought' can never be derived from an 'is.' Arnhart and MacIntyre argue that Hume himself allows for a kind of inference from "is" to "ought" in other places.[2] I think Moore is the one to blame (or the one to give the credit).

1. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 10, abstract.

2. Larry Arnhart, "The New Darwinian Naturalism in Political Theory," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 02 (1995): 389–400; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Hume on Is and Ought," *The Philosophical Review*, 1959, 451–68

The point is that when it comes to human evaluations, 'is' statements may be interesting but they seem useless for practical purposes. A few simple examples: Just because "most men wear tuxedos to the Oscars" does not mean that, if I am undecided as to what to wear, "I ought to wear a tux to the Oscars" — at least not without a prior normative premise that "One ought to do whatever most others do." And just because all human cultures have farmers or hunters who gather food doesn't mean I ought to become a farmer or hunter. These are practical examples, not necessarily ethical ones. But the problem can be generalized. Even if all human beings and cultures exemplify a range of common facts or express range of common evaluative attitudes, the result would not necessarily be a normative ethics as much as a "descriptive ethics." Descriptive ethics builds on and adds to evolutionary biology, psychology, sociology, human ethology, and anthropology by empirically studying what such-and-such a person or culture deems worthwhile or worthless and compares it to other persons or cultures or to other generations of the same culture. The results of descriptive ethics might be a detailed and scientific description of human behaviors in their consistency and variation. It would not be a plan for how to live one's life. At least, it would not be a plan *without supplementary interpretation from normative ethics* prescribing that one should comply with the norms one's own culture, or prescribing that one should criticize the norms of one's culture, or prescribing some other response.

I said that the results of descriptive ethics detail the variation of ethical and cultural norms. They also detail consistency. For example, habits and attitudes toward drinking alcohol vary dramatically from culture to culture and generation to generation, but there seems to be a universal (cross-cultural) disapprobation for continual drunkenness, in even cultures (like the Bolivian Camba) that drink regularly and drink heavily. Thus, Anthropologist Dwight Heath says: "It is important to realize that drinking problems are virtually unknown in most of the world's cultures, including many where drinking is commonplace

and occasional drunkenness is accepted."[3] Such insights might be quite interesting. But even for universal evaluative attitudes, their practical significance is not given; they can be put to use in more than one way.

There is more to the is-ought gap, but this is a fairly useful summary with which to begin. My response shall show how the is-ought gap can be undercut by one particular form of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism, even if (as I shall explain in a later chapter) the is-ought gap is fatal to *some* forms of ethical naturalism.

Natural norms

There is a second and more promising path for neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism to take. That is to start with basic, scientifically respectable natural norms. I call this notion "natural normativity", following Philippa Foot. Some features of nature are properties she calls 'natural goodness' or 'natural defect.' About such qualities, she says:

> …we might equally have been thinking in terms of, say, strength and weakness or health and disease, or again about an individual plant or animal being or not being as it should be, or ought to be, in this respect or that. Let us call the conceptual patterns found there, patterns of natural normativity.[4]

Natural normativity is an indeterminate concept. The way that Foot uses it she means that normativity exists wherever organic life is found. Wherever evaluative properties like health and disease appear, there are real instances of natural goodness and natural defect, then some evaluative properties are *primary qualities of nature* just like weight, color, size, relations of time and space, and so on. There is another sense in which 'natural normativity' is used by neo-Aristotelians like John McDowell. The neo-Aristotelians are of two minds about which sense is a more promising foundation for ethics. Where they agree, though, is in thinking that natural norms overcome or rather undercut the is-ought gap.

3. Dwight B Heath, "Sociocultural Variants in Alcoholism," *Encyclopedic Handbook of Alcoholism*, 1982, 426–40.

4. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 38.

1. If ethical naturalism is possibly true, then some natural facts are genuinely both normative and natural – there are natural norms.
2. But there are no facts that are genuinely both normative and natural – there are no natural norms.
3. Therefore, ethical naturalism is not possibly true.

This argument like the first one sets out a criterion that ethical naturalism must satisfy. Namely, ethical naturalism must offer an account of some natural norms that are both real and brutely natural, not derived from other (descriptive) facts. The second premise says that all norms are non-natural and all nature is non-normative. So it seems to be impossible to be an ethical naturalist.

Everything depends on whether or not nature consists of merely non-normative facts. I will grant that nature consists of merely *natural* facts. That nature consists of no non-natural facts is, of course, a tautology. I grant the tautology. I do not grant, without argument, that all such facts are descriptive and not normative; that would be to allow my opponent to beg the question. My opponent might likewise complain that if he or she allows me to stipulate that there *are* natural norms, this stipulation would beg the question in my favor. The only thing for it is for me to *argue* from agreed upon premises that there are such things as natural norms. Having done so, it is fair of me to request an argument to the contrary. If the critic merely insists on reaffirming that all nature is non-normative, that would be mere question-begging.

So our first task is to supply an adequate defense of the existence of natural norms. Even if such a notion can be defended philosophically and scientifically, we should remember that all that logically follows is that ethical naturalism is possibly true. What we need, beyond mere possibility, is to defend in general natural normativity and then to apply patterns of natural normativity and how these form binding ethical normative structures.

III. The Case for Natural, Organic Norms

So far, all that I've said is that the neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalist denies this premise that all of nature is non-normative or purely descriptive. One way to defeat the premise is to provide counterexamples. As it turns out, there are several plausible ones. I'd now like briefly introduce some examples of natural norms that might undercut the is-ought gap.

The two candidates for natural normative facts I shall defend are life forms or natural kinds, and teleological facts or natural function. Although these two kinds of facts are related, it is helpful to distinguish between formal and teleological normativity, between structures and their functions.

Nature is full of kinds; sunflowers are not oxygen; stars are not organisms; lead is not gold; water is not soil; and so on. Kind concepts allow us to both distinguish x from y and to gather together all the x's. Zebras and horses are both Equidae; lead and gold are both elements; ice and the sea and steam are all water. Thinking in kind categories is intuitive and natural.[5] Thinking in categories is probably inevitable, a constitutive feature of thought.

Nature is also full of end-directed activity. Each thing does its own thing: sunflowers grow toward the sun, wolves hunt deer and deer flee wolves; hearts pump blood and eyes see; the sun warms the planet; phytoplankton oxygenates the atmosphere. Such processes are non-intentional end-directed processes. Non-intentional processes are sometimes called 'teleonomic.'[6] Teleonomic phenomena do not have a *director* but they do have a *direction.*

Kinds and their ends can be conceptually distinguished but not very far. Forms and

5. Susan A Gelman and Lawrence A Hirschfeld, "How Biological Is Essentialism," *Folkbiology* 9 (1999): 403–46; Stefan Linquist et al., "Exploring the Folkbiological Conception of Human Nature," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences* 366, no. 1563 (2011): 444–53.

6. Ernst Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 1 (1992): pp. 117–35.

functions, structures and activities, are two aspects of one thing. Is the hip bone shape adaptive for a purpose or is the purpose conducive to the development of such-and-such shape? It is better to allow that the structure and function of natural organisms and at least some of their parts are an inseparable whole. Indeed, Lewens summarizes the folk biological conception of a "kind" by mashing together the concept of a life form or "essence" with the concept of a function or "telos": a kind is a "teleo-essence", a thing with an end.

My initial hypothesis, which will be explicated further, is that formal facts (natural kinds and their natural properties) and teleological facts (natural functions) are both instances of natural norms. We have not yet said anything about human ethical norms, which is our ultimate aim. Human ethical norms, if they can be said to be natural, will turn out to be formal and teleological facts about our life form identifiable as instances of a broader pattern of natural normativity. But the argument must proceed in stages; the goal for now is simply to defend natural normativity.

What are we to make of kinds and their teleonomic behaviors? The explanations may be either realist, reductionist, or anti-realist. Realist explanations argue that kinds and their ends are what they seem to be: fundamental facts of nature. Reductionist or anti-realist explanations argue that kinds and their ends are not what they seem. The nihilist argues that kinds don't exist, there is only one thing; ends don't exist, there is only one mechanical kind of process. The reductionist argues that *some* kinds exist, but they do not correspond to our initial scientific categorization; and *some* end-directed teleonomic processes are real but it is reducible to non-end-directed processes. Before discussing these options in full, let's explore the neo-Aristotelian treatment of natural normativity in more detail.

Foot

Philippa Foot argues that human virtues are instances of a broader class of natural properties: 'natural goodness.'[7] To earn an audience for her argument, her first chapter (which she call a "fresh start") clears away some shaky assumptions inherited from Hume and Moore. Instead of treating human valuations as sui generis, a miraculous new appearance in the cosmos that only appears with the existence of humans, we should expand the scope of our inquiry to examine our status as natural entities. Foot is well aware that her offering is likely to offend the ears of some listeners. Her defense is the thought (drawn from Wittgenstein) that crude beginnings are often a necessary first step on the way to something refined.

Among the "shaky assumptions" she wishes to clear is Moore's assumption that, in philosophical ethics, 'good' was the ultimate predicate under review. By contrast, she argues that statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection. Evaluation of human creatures and evaluation of plants and animals follow *the same logical pattern*. In such evaluations, good is good *for*. 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' has a different logical function. 'Good' is more like 'useful.' The phrase 'The house is useful' *does* need a complement. When we say 'the house is useful' we must specify what it is useful for – *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Likewise, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* 'Good' always needs a complement. If this crude beginning is anywhere near to correct, we can distance ourselves from Moore's starting point and build on another starting point: the life-form of human beings.

In this Foot agrees with Thompson's groundbreaking work.[8] Thompson argues that

7. Foot, *Natural Goodness*; cf. Sanford S Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness," in *Forum Philosophicum*, vol. 14, 1, 2009, 1–15.

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

the concept of "life" is not, as it may seem to some, a property of some beings where *being* is the fundamental concept; rather "life" is a fundamental concept.[9] He says, "Vital description of individual organisms is itself the primitive expression of a conception of things in terms of 'life-form' or 'species', and if we want to understand these categories in philosophy we must bring them back to that form of description."[10] When we observe and examine living things we rightly employ some shared categories and our conclusions rightly share a logical structure. What is that common structure? Thompson reviews and refutes a fvariety of crude definitions of life such as that anything that is alive reproduces, grows, metabolizes, etc. Such properties may be co-extensive with the property of being alive, but they are wildly insufficient for the task of *defining* life because such properties depend on a prior understanding of life. Thompson's alternative is that life is a fundamental concept.

Once we accept the intuitive conclusion that life is a fundamental concept (along with 'being', 'quantity' and others) then the argument gets interesting. For every individual living being is a member of a species or life-form. And living beings are not just *acted upon*; they *act*. Species have characteristic actions. Thompson says "action in this sense is a specific form of *life process*."[11]. Since each particular species engages in its own characteristic activities: beavers build dams, and robins build nests. There are, then, life-form specific *successes* and *failures* to act. Each life-form is subject to its own normative appraisals: something would be wrong with beaver that built a tiny nest or a robin that tried to build a massive dam.

Now, humans are certainly a unique *kind* of living being with a unique life-form – the biggest difference between a human organism and another primate is that the human

96. Thompson works out the arguments of this article more fully in his 2008 monograph.

9. Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Harvard University Press, 2008), chapter 1.
10. Ibid., 57.
11. Ibid., 27.

engages in rational practices and practical reasoning. And we shall examine more what difference the differences make. But for now, the point is to identify the broader class of natural properties to which 'natural goodness' belongs. We ought not assume, at the outset, that 'good' and 'bad' are sui generis evaluative properties "in people's heads" as it were. Foot's analysis of our evaluative language about plants and animals indicates that a more reasonable starting place is to assume that such terms are relative to natural kinds especially life-forms. Foot concludes that this point holds about "goodness and badness, and therefore about evaluation in its most general form."

By introducing the term 'natural normativity', Foot is insisting on a point that is both interesting and controversial. If evaluative properties like health and disease are really instances of natural goodness and natural defect, then some evaluative properties are *primary qualities of nature*. Still, McDowell and others will object to this characterization of natural normativity. They think it "queer" that nature should exhibit such properties, and they find it easier to judge that human beings are the only evaluators.

The response to this worry, in part, is to insist that the natural goodness under discussion is not just a human ascription but seems to be something humans *recognize* in all living things. Certainly, some properties are human ascriptions only. Other properties are in the world and only show up in human ascriptions insofar as we accurately reflect the facts. Foot's point is that *some* instances of natural goodness seem much more plausibly instances of this latter kind. Despite For, there is "no change in the meaning of 'good' between the word as it appears in 'good roots' and as it appears in 'good dispositions of the human will.'[12] The identification of what is *good for* a non-human organism is sometimes identical to the identification of what is *good for* a human being. Foot's theory explains this in the simplest way.

By contrast, McDowell and those who would draw a sharp contrast between "moral"

12. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 39.

and "non-moral" uses of the term must give long and sophisticated explanations for why it makes sense to describe a healthy plant and a moral person both as "doing well." The plant is not just doing well *for my garden* but doing well as itself. It is doing what such plants are supposed to live. The human being is not just living well *for a westerner* or *for a Californian* but doing well as what human beings are supposed to live. Rosalind Hursthouse articulates Foot's basic point in this way:

> The starting point is an idea that she has never lost sight of, and which figures in her early attack on Hare. It is the idea that 'good', like 'small', is an attributive adjective. What that entails is that, although you can evaluate and choose things according to almost any criteria you like, you must select the noun or noun phrase you use to describe the thing you are calling good advisedly, for it determines the criteria of goodness that are appropriate. Hare can call a cactus a good one on the grounds that it is diseased and dying, and choose it for that reason, but what he must not do is describe it as a good cactus, for a cactus is a living thing. He can describe it as a good 'decorative object for my windowsill' or 'present to give my detestable mother□in□law', but not as a good cactus.[13]

There are two qualifications I should make about the scope of my thesis here. First, the 'good' in question here is a good-of-a-kind, the way that typical robins are blue-of-a-kind. The good-of-a-kind analysis works for all organisms and all biological species, which are most plausibly understood as natural kinds, rather than social groups, which are not. Folk ontology does tend to group nationalities and ethnicities as natural kinds along with leopards and bears; but my analysis trades on the concepts used in biology. Secondly, it would be a natural leap to assume that the good-for-us is an instance of the good simpliciter, but this is a different question altogether. Blackman argues that there *is* no good other than goods of kinds.[14] Others would argue that the good-of-a-kind is an instance of the good simpliciter.

13. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 195.

14. Reid D. Blackman, "Meta-Ethical Realism with Good of a Kind," *European Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2015): 273–92. Blackman also disputes the kind of biological foundation of ethics I am trying to defend here. Nevertheless, his article is a good introduction into the sort of "kindism" being discussed.

I wish to remain agnostic on this issue. While my thesis identifies what is good for us as an instance of something *truly good,* it remains agnostic about the broader metaphysical or cosmic significance of the fact. These are both interesting and important questions but they would take us too far afield of the main point.

A Novel Case from Generics

A defense of natural normativity would render ethical naturalism possible. A defense of natural normativity would have to furnish instances of natural norms from widely agreed upon premises from common sense and science. My case for natural normativity depends on two notions: the first is a minimal scientific realism.[15] The second basic notion is a little-utilized feature of language called "generic propositions," which I shall explain below. The case in brief is this:

1. If some generic statements describing natural entities are true, then some facts

15. While scientific realism is not uncontroversial per se, my intended audience are committed scientific realists or sympathetic to realism. By minimal scientific realism, I mean something quite general, such as the belief that most sciences, when successful, describe the world. Thus, Anjan Chakravartty: "Scientific realism is a positive epistemic attitude towards the content of our best theories and models, recommending belief in both observable and unobservable aspects of the world described by the sciences. This epistemic attitude has important metaphysical and semantic dimensions, and these various commitments are contested by a number of rival epistemologies of science, known collectively as forms of scientific antirealism… Metaphysically, realism is committed to the mind-independent existence of the world investigated by the sciences. This idea is best clarified in contrast with positions that deny it. For instance, it is denied by any position that falls under the traditional heading of 'idealism'… Semantically, realism is committed to a literal interpretation of scientific claims about the world. In common parlance, realists take theoretical statements at "face value". According to realism, claims about scientific entities, processes, properties, and relations, whether they be observable or unobservable, should be construed literally as having truth values, whether true or false…Epistemologically, realism is committed to the idea that theoretical claims (interpreted literally as describing a mind-independent reality) constitute knowledge of the world." Cf. Anjan Chakravartty, "Scientific Realism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015. McDowell, as a sort of idealist, will deny this minimal scientific realism in favor of something a bit more idealist, as we shall see.

are both genuinely natural and normative – there are "natural norms."
2. Some generic statements describing natural entities are true.
3. Therefore, some facts are genuinely both natural and normative – there are "natural norms."

The Special Logic of Generics

Michael Thompson is one of the first to work out "the special logic of judgments we make about living things, and then to indicate its application to ethics." Such judgments have a variety of names in the recent neo-Aristotelian literature: the most common are "Aristotelian categoricals"[16] and "natural-historical judgements,"[17]; less common are "norms,"[18] or "bare plurals."[19] I prefer the shorter and less adorned term '*generic.*'[20]

My postulate is this: **some generics about human beings are true.** If this is true then, I shall suggest, we have good hope of cutting up nature at the joints. When combined with a moderate scientific realism, generic truths from sciences such as biology, physics, and anthropology (and perhaps others) support a modest natural normativity which will be

16. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

17. Thompson, "The Representation of Life"; Thompson, *Life and Action*.

18. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19

19. Greg N Carlson, "A Unified Analysis of the English Bare Plural," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1977): 413–57. Carlson's essay is an early attempt to account for a variety of linguistic forms under one concept of reference to kinds

20. Cf. Francis Jeffry Pelletier and Greg N Carlson, *The Generic Book* (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Sarah-Jane Leslie, "Generics: Cognition and Acquisition," *Philosophical Review* 117, no. 1 (2008): 1–47; Andrew M Bailey, "Animalism," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 12 (2015): 867–83 for a discussion of a specific generic: "we are animals" in metaphysics and philosophical anthropology; Andrei Cimpian, Amanda C Brandone, and Susan A Gelman, "Generic Statements Require Little Evidence for Acceptance but Have Powerful Implications," *Cognitive Science* 34, no. 8 (2010): 1452–82 for an experiment in cognitive psychology that seeks to quantify the prevalence levels at which subjects tend to agree to generics, i.e., how many birds have to lay eggs before we agree to the assertion that "birds lay eggs"? Manfred Krifka, "Bare NPs: Kind-Referring, Indefinites, Both, or Neither?" in *Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, vol. 13, 2003, 180–203; Ariel Cohen, "On the Generic Use of Indefinite Singulars," *Journal of Semantics* 18, no. 3 (2001): 183–209.

further articulated (in a later chapter) to indicate which traits are virtues or vices for human beings.

Generics in general: neither universal nor particular

Now, what are generics? "A fine question, but a difficult one," Andrew Bailey says. His recent paper provides a helpful (and humorous) introduction to the topic of generic statements:

> Start with this sentence: 'Buddhists are way into meditation'. This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is it equivalent to 'for every x, if x is a Buddhist, x is way into meditation'? It does not appear to be. For the second sentence might be false (some Buddhists might not be way into meditation) even if the first sentence is, as we have supposed, true. The first sentence could be true, somehow, even if not all Buddhists are way into meditation (similarly, '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.[21]

Thus, generics are statements of the form "S is F" or "S has or does F" where S is not an individual but a class or natural kind. 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. For example, consider the statement "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 rabid wolves hunt alone, and injured, or very old wolves don't hunt at all). Furthermore, it is true but trivial that *some wolves hunt in packs*.

A generic is interesting because it is, or we treat it as, a truth about forms, or species. The subject of the statement is not all S's nor merely some S's, but the "infima species."[22]

21. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.

22. Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 222. "Infima species" is the narrowest cut in a

In this way, generics pick out what we might call formal facts, facts about the life form in question. Thus Sarah Leslie: "It is widely accepted that [definite] generics are singular statements which predicate properties directly of kinds. For example, "tigers are extinct" predicates the property of being extinct directly of the kind Panthera tigris, and would be true just in case Panthera tigris had the property of being extinct."[23]

Generics are not merely statistical regularities. The members of extinct species do not exhibit any properties at all, yet it is still true in some sense that *the species* is extinct. Likewise, all the living members of a species might fail to exemplify its formal attributes. Consider the fact that "California condors can fly for hours without resting."[24] In 1987 there were only 27 known condors alive. One could easily imagine a scenario in which every living member of such an endangered species were too injured, old, or diseased to exemplify this attribute. It would be strictly false of the individual condors that any of them could fly for hours; nevertheless the generic would still be true that "condors" (as a class) *can* fly for hours.

McDowell thinks that such exceptions are a "logical weakness" in deriving ethical conclusions from generics about human beings. He cites the example from Anscombe (and Aristotle) that "humans have 32 teeth", saying "there is a truth we can state in those terms, but from that truth, together with the fact that I am a human being, it does not follow that I have 32 teeth. (In fact it is false)."[25] McDowell accepts that generics are generally true. His objection to their application seems to be that the relation between a normative expectation and reality fails to reach deductive certainty. If this is his objection, it rather misses the point. Aristotelian-categoricals are not half-hearted universal judgments; they are not universes

genus-species tree, or the most determinate determinable.

23. Leslie, "Generics," sec. 1.

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

25. John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 171–2.

with widely-acknowledge counterexamples. They are judgments of a logically different kind. Far from being a logical weakness, generics are what enable us to capture truths about natural kinds that help explain statistical variation and inconsistency.

Prasada says that, "Much of our conceptual knowledge consists of generic knowledge — knowledge about kinds of things and their properties."[26] We can approach generics through a "formal, quantificational" semantics or through "principled connections". Principled connections support formal explanations, normative expectations, and a statistical expectation of prevalence. In other words, we explain that the dog has four legs *because* it is a dog (formal explanation); we expect that Fido should have four legs *unless something is wrong* (normative expectations); and we expect that if we counted up a population of dogs, *most* dogs would in fact turn out to have four legs (statistical expectation). Generic truths, once discovered, set a normative expectation by which we evaluate individual members on how well or badly they exemplify their life form.[27]

There is much to be learned about the linguistic features of generics. For example, the correlation between statistical prevalence and normative identity is unclear; many generic truths describe what is statistically prevalent but not all. What is the difference? Is one reducible to the other? Furthermore, Leslie distinguishes between indefinite generics such as "tigers are striped" which admits of the specification "that tiger over there is striped" and definite generics such as "domestic cats are common" which does not admit of specification, "that domestic cat is common". What is the difference here? Finally, Indefinite generics are trickier: "Ducks lay eggs" is a true generic, while "ducks are female" is false, yet it is only the female ducks who ever lay eggs. "Mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus" is true, and "books are paperbacks" is false, yet less than one percent of mosquitoes carry the

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

27. Ibid., 3.

virus, while over eighty percent of books are paper backs."[28] These unexplored frontiers represent fascinating puzzles but do not render generics unsuitable for use in normative and ethical arguments. Nor should the presence of outstanding questions lead one to believe generic propositions are confusing or confused. Rather, their normal acquisition and usage is a very familiar, and perhaps inevitable.

Generic truths are acquired via a normal scientific means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion.To use a silly example, suppose that someone from a warm and landlocked country has never heard of penguins before. This person visits a zoo and sees penguins for the first time. He notices that these astonishing creatures are called 'penguins', and appear to be birds (for they have beaks, feathers, lay eggs, emit squawks, etc.). He reflects that most – if not all birds – have many of these macro features. Fascinated, he consults encyclopedias, biology or zoology textbooks, and consult zoologist friends. All these sources confirm the categorization. Although I am not aware of when the first penguin was studied by a modern naturalist, we can easily imagine that it was from observations and reflections such as these that penguins long ago earned an entry in the annals of scientific knowledge. The biological community gave them a scientific name ('sphenisciformes') and began to fill in gaps with a detailed description of their evolutionary history, characteristics, genetics, environments, diet, predators, and so on. The scientific conclusion, upon initial observation, bolstered by reflection, underwrites the initial hypothesis: penguins are indeed birds. This familiar scientific process may not be easy or free of dangers, but it is at least *a familiar scientific process*. Scientists are continually correcting formerly established generics (the notion that all mammals give live birth was thrown into crisis by the platypus). Scientists also work to distinguish between the (statistically) normal and (statistically) abnormal traits of a species, and within abnormal traits distinguish good from defective traits.

28. Leslie, "Generics."

This familiar process is certainly revisable. For example, an ethologist who discovers a wolf hunting along may have a "normative expectation" that the wolf is not healthy. But she cannot know certainly in advance that this is so. She must test the hypothesis. A few reasonable interpretations are available: perhaps the lone wolf is unhealthy; perhaps the initial generic that 'wolves hunt in packs' was false; or perhaps this wolf is actually a new species of wolf. As it happens, in the case of wolves, no known species of wolf hunts alone so there is very strong reason to conclude that a lone wolf is rabid. But the point more generally is that generics are acquired and modified by a familiar, if complicated, process of scientific reasoning. Michael Thompson points out that: there is a "general and thoroughgoing reciprocal mutual interdependence of vital description of the individual and natural historical judgment about the form or kind."[29] Put differently, Micah Lott says:

> At each stage of an empirical investigation, our observations are mediated by our current understanding of the life form whose members we are observing. At the same time, our observations of those individual members will in turn improve our understanding of the life form itself, which then makes possible even more accurate and extensive future observations.[30]

Again, the fact that generic truths are revisable is not a weakness but a strength of the case I am building. It may be, for all we know, that penguins can fly (in the air), that some species of penguin can fly, or that all penguins are really just defective birds. But the most reasonable belief thus far is the generic truth that penguins don't fly; that they are excellent swimmers, not defective flyers; and that these truths hold of penguins *as a kind* – a biologist or zoologist who discovered the first flying penguin would become (justifiably) famous because we would all be (justifiably) surprised. The surprise would not originate merely from something out of the ordinary — new and extraordinary creatures, both living

29. Michael Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 54 (2004): 52.

30. Micah Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form," *Social Theory and Practice* 38, no. 3 (2012): 414.

and extinct, are discovered every year. The surprise would originate from the upending of a firmly established scientific fact.

Generics are teleological

The first kind of natural normativity I am defending is the mere idea of a life-form. Knowing what a thing is, knowing about its species or life-form, is to know something descriptive and something normative about any member of that species. Knowing what a thing is, furthermore, licenses a range of normative expectations. But we can make the case for natural normativity stronger. There is another, related kind of normativity in the natural teleological features of life-forms. Such natural teleology can also be captured in generic propositions.

To see this second kind of natural normativity, begin with the concept of a function. Eyes perform the function (in an organism) of seeing, hemlock trees perform the function (in an ecosystem) of shading rivers, and so on. Thompson, for example, cites the scientific observation that "flowers have blossoms of such-and-such type in order that such-and-such insects should be attracted and spread their pollen about."[31]

Now, Mayr calls such processes "teleonomic" in order to leave open the question of whether they are genuinely teleological.[32] For my purposes, however, even teleonomic processes would count as instances of natural normativity insofar as the development of an organism at one time does not yet fully express the form that it will, under proper conditions, one day express. Barham clarifies the notion of natural teleology in this way:

> 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

31. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 293–94.
32. Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology."

> never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle.[33]

Taken broadly, then, the first point is to realize that talk about functions and ends is just as scientific as talk about life-forms, species, and natural health or disease. As Mark Perlman says:

> Many objects in the world have functions. Some of the objects with functions are organs or parts of living organisms… Hearts are for pumping blood. Eyes are for seeing. Countless works in biology explain the "Form, Function, and Evolution of …" everything from bee dances to elephant tusks to pandas' 'thumbs'. Many scientific explanations, in areas as diverse as psychology, sociology, economics, medical research, and neuroscience, rest on appeals to the function and/or malfunction of things or systems.[34]

Generic propositions usefully capture the functional or teleological properties of natural organisms. As Chris Toner says, "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[35] This kind of combination of generic truths is very familiar. No sooner have I learned the formal facts about a penguin (that it is a bird, that it can swim, that it has a countershaded white belly and dark back etc.) do I learn that *penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.*[36] Since an individual penguin may fail to be countershaded in the way that expresses its form, it would be defective. This defect is not a judgment made by scientists and "imposed" as it were, from the outside, on the penguin. It is rather a normative fact about the penguin. As Hursthouse says, "Wolves

33. James Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology" (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame; Web, 2011), 1.

34. Mark Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *The Monist* 87, no. 1 (2004): 1–4.

35. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.

36. A shark looking up may miss a penguin, because its white belly blends in with the sunlight surface waters; a shark looking down may miss a penguin, because it blends in with the pitch dark waters of the abyss.

hunt in packs; a 'free□rider' wolf that doesn't join in the hunt fails to act well and is thereby defective."[37]

We should add that generics express the formal and functional features of natural entities *when they are mature*. It is a normal – indeed universal – fact of organisms that they grow and develop and mature according to the life process of their particular species. Before maturation, we might say, the formal and functional properties in question exist merely potentially. For example, a wolf that cannot hunt might be injured, ill, or simply young. Similarly, eyes that cannot see might be injured, ill, or simply developing.

Nevertheless, it is true that "eyes see". In discovering and expressing the simple generic truth that "eyes see", we abstract away from the processes of maturation and development to pick out a fact that is true of all eyes that are normal and have had enough time. This is a descriptive, judgment that is also a normative judgment – without changing our meaning we could say that fully developed eyes are *supposed to* see, *ought to* see – or just that *eyes see*.

IV. Three Paths Forward

In my overall argument, generic truths are intended to serve as a counterexample to premise 2 of the **Bald Nature Challenge** above. That challenge asserted that no facts are genuinely both natural and normative. Generics are both genuinely natural and normative: natural, in that a large percentage of scientific knowledge consists of scientists predicating generic truths of natural kinds; normative, in that the life-form in question is one which an individual may or may not "live up" to, and in that *some* generics pick out natural functional or teleological facts about life forms (that penguins are counter-shaded *to avoid* predators, that hearts are *for* pumping blood, etc.). On my view, accepting the straightforward, generic truths delivered by such sciences about forms and functions is quite simply the respectable

37. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 201.

thing to do.

But it seems to me there are three paths forward: reject, reduce, or accept Organic Teleology.

Reject

The first path is to reject generic truths about species and their formal and functional characteristics. Probably, those who are tempted to reject natural teleology believe there are no *ends* (τελοι). Call this view teleological nihilism.[38] Teleological nihilism claims as its evidence "*modern science" as a whole.* Abandoning the search for natural teleology was a harbinger of modern science; Francis Bacon and others believed that the search for final causes corrupted science. So, if best science tells us that nature is *only* descriptive, natural normativity is dismissed out of court.[39] In fact, natural sciences and the experimental, empirical methods that advance them have progressed far more than anyone could have dreamed. In part, this success is the result of giving up magical thinking.[Garten: Isn't a better version of this argument to simply claim that a simpler scientific theory is one which only appeals to efficient causality and doesn't use final causality? They can just say that it's adding in an extra, unparsimonious entity to posit an end for an organism whose total physical description does not require such an end.

I bet there are also arguments based on the predictive failures of teleological thinking (Aristotle was dumb to think that heavenly bodies would move in perfect circles because they were fulfilling a telos of perfect, eternal motion) and the fruitfulness of science in

38. Also called teleological eliminativism.

39. 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."

discovering truths about biology without teleology.]

The proper reply to Bacon is that the teleological nihilism hypothesis has been tried and found wanting. Animals, plants, and all living things exhibit end-directed or teleonomic behavior: eyes see, hemlock trees offer shade to fish, stomachs digest, deer leap to avoid predators. Even when Kant denies natural teleology – the biological theory that the form of an organism causes the parts to grow and relate to each other in a particular way – he admits we *cannot help thinking so*.[40]

Things are even clearer when it comes to natural kinds and generic truths about species. If we accept scientific realism of any form, we cannot deny that some generics are true. It is probably true that if we accept *any* form of conceptual knowledge, we are probably implicitly already committed to the truth of some generics, for much of our conceptual knowledge consists in generics.[41] Animals, plants, and all living things belong to species, and our knowledge of them consists of generic truths about not just individuals but that species. A species involves a defined range of potential attributes that normally come to be actualized over time. An individual hemlock tree may or may not shade any fish in any rivers, but it may in time; or it may never do so, but it is still a scientific insight that that is one thing 'hemlock trees' in general do.[42]

Hence, to reject *all truths* about natural kinds and natural functions, I contend, is untenable. And generics are, it seems, necessarily normative propositions. If we suppose for *reductio* that no generic statements are true, then not only do we reject natural functional talk but natural formal talk. If all generics are false (or only conventionally true) then it is

40. Philippe Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose: From Comparative Anatomy to the 'Adventure of Reason'," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2006): 649–74.

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

42. Compare with Thomas Nagel's point that some "laws of nature would apply directly to the relation between the present and the future." Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford University Press, 2012) 93.

in some important sense false that 'wolves hunt in packs' and false even that 'penguins are birds'. It is false not only that "eyes see" but even that "humans are primates". Such denials are, I think, absurdities.[43] If we accept the truth of at least some generics, then Perlman's surprise is well founded: "It is surprising that analytic philosophers, with their strong focus on science, would reject a notion that is so central to some areas of science, most notably, biology and engineering sciences… Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."[44] One might suppose that Perlman's qualification "or at least in practice does not" leaves open space for the normative anti-realist. I welcome the critic who would try to show that biology *can* eliminate functions; what I have tried to suggest, and what Barham argues in great detail, is that the attempt has been made and has failed. A few failed attempts at reduction does not prove that reduction is impossible. But it does make the more plausible view, teleological realism, a better candidate for the default view. And the great cost of throwing out generics entirely is that we would seem to have to throw out many scientific statements in biology, organic chemistry, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, anatomy, and medicine.

The notion that some of nature is normative – or that some norms are natural – is not only a good logical explanation of the natural phenomena of biology but also a good *scientific* explanation. While natural teleological realism is still controversial, it is not a controversy between science and philosophy but a controversy *within science*. It is a legitimate discussion between scientists of one stripe and scientists of another.

43. 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. Since absurdist philosophers are not my primary audience, I simply lay the issue aside.

44. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 6.

Reduce

The second path is to accept natural teleonomic behavior and even the appearance of natural teleology, natural functions, etc., but to *reduce* these phenomena to less spooky (read: more mechanistic) terms consistent with a conception of bald nature.

Now, arguing for or against teleoreductionism has become a cottage industry.[45] It is impossible to do justice to the complexity of the dialectic here. I will content myself to note, and critique, two popular forms of reduction: the first reduces biological functions to causal contributions to a system and the second reduces teleonomic biological functions to naturally selected effects. A proponent of the first reduction is Donald Davidson. A proponent of the second is Ruth Millikan. For example, Ruth Millikan argues that an organism's proper function simply cannot be "read off" its capacities at present but must be known via empirical history. Her theory entails the unpalatable conclusion that an organ that is otherwise physically identical to, say, a heart, that was magically apparated into existence would not have a "proper function". She bites the bullet on this.

James Barham argues that neither of these forms of reduction is very promising. Neither alternative is coherent, in his view. The problem with the "causal-role" reduction of teleonomic phenomena is that in order to even posit a hypothesis about how some parts of a system contribute to the achievement of its end or purpose, we must identify *in advance* which parts of the organism play a role in bringing about the end or purpose. But if we already know the causal contribution of those parts, what more could we learn by positing the causal-role theory?[46]

As regards the second form, things are no more promising. While Millikan's theory of "proper function" might be ingenious and might be true of the historical or "etiological" history of present-day functional attributes of organisms, it is irrelevant. The question is

45. Cf. ibid., sec. III; and Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," chap. 3.
46. Cf. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., chapter 3.

not "how historically did present-day function X come to be?" but "is present-day X a function?" One cannot go looking for the etiological history of a functioning organism if one does not already know, in advance, that the organism in question is functioning.

Michael Thompson, too, insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past."[47] James Barham points out that the problem with Aristotle's views of biology (say, believing that the seat of perception was not in the brain) was not that he lacked knowledge of evolution, but that he lacked adequate knowledge of physiology.

Accept as is

The third option is to accept that some natural facts are intrinsically normative, irreducible, natural facts. Although the very word 'teleology' is liable to sound quaint to modern ears, Barham has argued that 'teleological realism' is a rationally permissible view to take on biology. Indeed, it is making a come-back. For instance, Arnhart persuasively argues that teleology is assumed in medicine.[48] Zammito clarifies its ongoing relevance in biology, since organisms seem to be intrinsically purposeful.[49] Fitzpatrick says that, "While neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory does soundly reject any appeal to teleology in the process of evolution itself, there is a large literature in contemporary philosophy of biology defending the legitimacy of employing teleological concepts in connection with adaptations."[50]

47. Cf. Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 293. Christopher Toner adds that judgments about natural teleological facts are made true regardless of the origin of the facts, "whether about creation or natural selection.", Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 223. This seems right to me. It does not matter for present purposes *how* the function came to be, just whether or not it really *is* at present.

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

49. 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.

50. William FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2016 (`http://plato.stanford.`

Thomas Nagel has offered one philosophical defense of scientific, Darwinian, natural teleology.[51] Michael Chorost's review of Thomas Nagel's *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."…[52]

Chorost argues that Nagel did not "go wrong" in his thesis but in presenting it philosophically without engaging the support from relevant scientific literature. He continues with a few more examples:

> 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.

My point here is that a respectable subset of scientists and others countenance natural normativity in organic nature. 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 there are normative natural life forms and natural ends.

`edu/archives/spr2016/entries/morality-biology/`, 2016).

51. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*.

52. Michael Chorost, "Where Thomas Nagel Went Wrong," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2013.

V. Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to meet the **Bald Nature Challenge** to Ethical Naturalism stated above. The challenge, recall, was this:

1. If ethical naturalism is possibly true, then some facts are genuinely both natural and normative.
2. But no facts are genuinely both natural and normative.
3. Therefore ethical naturalism is not possibly true.

The conclusion we have drawn is that indeed *some* facts – especially facts about living things – are both natural and irreducibly normative. These are natural formal and functional facts about organic beings and their parts and operations. Such facts are expressed in perfectly respectable scientific judgments we have called "generics" but may also be called "Aristotelian categoricals", "natural-historical judgements", "norms", "bare plurals", etc. Generics like these render it at least *possible* to conclude the the scientific picture of nature includes normativity in the form of natural teleology. If true generics could be stated about human beings, then it is conceivable we can use them as a basis for ethical theory.

A natural norm is not some paradoxical notion of a prescriptive fact or natural 'ought'; these rhetorical phrases render the argument implausible by suggesting that natural norms apply only to human agents capable of understanding prescriptions and either complying or not complying with them. J. L. Mackie exploits the apparent silliness of the notion that "to-be-pursuedness" is built into things. Instead, we should think of other perfectly ordinary natural relations such as causation. A natural norm is not a one-place predicate things but a relation between things. For example, one type of natural norm might be a relation between a living thing and another object, such as food, shade, or a predator. Given the kind of thing snakes are, and the kind of thing mice are, a mouse is to be eaten by the snake and the snake is to be fled by the mouse.

Of course, I have not yet tried to show *which* true generics about humans can serve as the basis for ethical theory. All I have tried to show is that *some* of these generics are true. By denying the consequent, we are not necessarily affirming the antecedent. That affirmation requires another step, namely, to apply the above argument to human beings. Foot is well aware that the imposition of normativity onto brute nature, or the derivation of normativity from brute nature, is likely to seem absurd:

> The idea that any features and operations of humans could be evaluated in the same way as those of plants and animals may provoke instant opposition. For to say that this is possible is to imply that some at least of our judgements of goodness and badness in human beings are given truth or falsity by the conditions of human life. And even if it is allowed that certain evaluations of this kind are possible—-those vaguely thought of perhaps as 'merely biological'—-there is bound to be skepticism about the possibility that 'moral evaluation' could be like this.[53]

Despite such legitimate worries, we have followed Foot in trying to earn a hearing for this notion by arguing that the "meaning of 'good' in so-called 'moral contexts' " does not have a special logic of its own. Rather, 'good' and 'defective' pick out natural properties of living things. The goodness of a cactus is relative to its cactus nature; the goodness of human beings is relative to their human nature. And that human nature is to be or have the potential to become practical, rational animals. Hursthouse continues:

> When we moved from the evaluations of other social animals to ethical evaluations of ourselves, there was an obvious addition to the list of aspects which are evaluated. The other animals act [as opposed to chemicals which are only acted upon]. So do we occasionally, but mostly we act from reason, as they do not, and it is primarily in virtue of our actions from reason that we are ethically good or bad human beings. So that is one difference that our being rational makes.[54]

The task in discovering true generics about human beings is capturing what is common between us and other animals and what is unique about rational animals. The argument that

53. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.
54. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 217.

will help us transition from generics about the biological world in general to generics about human beings and which may provide the basis of normative *ethics* is this:

Human Normativity

1. On ethical naturalism, generics about natural entities are both descriptive and normative (they are natural norms), and hence can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
2. Humans are natural entities, (there are some *human* natural norms).
3. Therefore, generics about humans are both descriptive and normative, and hence can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.

Establishing premise 1 has been our task in this chapter. Establishing premise 2 is the task for the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Practical Primates

> Human nature is normative, such that to be morally good is to fulfill one's nature.
>
> —Chris Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism", 221.

I. Introduction

This chapter argues for the truth of the generic proposition that humans are practical, rational animals. This is "human nature", although I don't insist on the traditional locution, for some reject it on aesthetic grounds.

The last chapter argued that ethical naturalism is at least possible: The is-ought gap is no barrier to a successful theory, so long as we can identify natural norms and show how human norms are examples of natural norms. And I argued that generic propositions do allow us to articulate our scientific knowledge about organisms and the organic normativity of natural life forms and functions. What is needed now is to explain how exactly humans fit into the broader class of natural organisms and inherit the properties belonging to the broader class. If all of organic nature is subject to evaluation according to patterns of natural normativity, and human beings are natural organisms, then the basic idea is that generic

propositions about humans would all us to express scientific knowledge about the natural life form and function of humans. These natural human norms would form a firm basis for ethical evaluations of individual human beings. Rosalind Hursthouse states that ethical evaluations of *human beings* "depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question."[1] The 'characteristic', I take it, is a differentiam determining or defining the human life form, or nature, or archetype.

In brief, the argument in the remainder of this chapter is this:

Normative Human Nature Argument (1) All natural organisms exhibit formal and functional (i.e., teleological) facts which are expressible in generics. (2) Human beings are natural organisms. (3) Human beings exhibit formal and teleological facts which are expressible in generics.

Chapter 2 argued for premise (1). This chapter will argue for (2) and (3).

Natures?

Chris Toner's quotation in the epigraph says that "human nature is normative." I don't instist on the term 'nature'; we could equally say that a genetically modern homo sapiens sapiens is potentially a practical, rational primate. The important thing is not the term 'nature' or 'human nature' but the concept of a nature. What do I mean by a nature or life form?

In the old classificatory schemes, philosophers provided a genus and a differentiam to pick out the unique "nature" of any life form or natural kind. Not every concept of a kind corresponds to a real nature. But when it does, its nature is potentially discernible both by contrasting it with other kinds of things and by comparing it with instances of the same kind. As Hans Fink explains:

> The nature of x is both what is special about this x and what makes this x one of the x's as opposed to the y's. When x is defined per genus et differentiam both the genus and the differentiating characteristic and their combination

1. Ibid., chap. 9 abstract.

> could be taken to express what is the nature of x…. Human nature is what differentiates us from the animals and the plants. By nature we are rational beings. Our human nature, however, is also that in virtue of which we belong to the animal kingdom and to the living organisms. By nature we are mammals. We may thus use the concept of nature to differentiate rather than include, but also to include rather than differentiate. And we may use the concept of nature to express that differentiation and inclusion should not be seen as incompatible."[2]

As Fink points out, the concept of a nature gathers and divides. It gathers up all the members or putative members of a kind and divides the kind from other kinds. With this definition in view, we can see what the point of the old formula was, that man was a rational animal, or a featherless biped. There are many animals, but few (if any) other rational ones. There may even be other rational creatures who are not animals: artificial intelligences, gods, Alpha Centurions, archangels, dryads or what have you. But, so far as we know, we are the only rational animals in the cosmos.

Hence, I think this formula, slightly modified, is still the best way of reflecting on ourselves as members of the organic kingdom, as organisms within the evolutionary tree of life, and as physical objects in the cosmos: a human being is (potentially) a practical, rational primate. This simple, generic proposition is astonishingly rich. I shall argue that it captures the facts of our life form and can be demonstrated to be true from within the human point of view, and from outside it; an alien anthropologist studying human beings from its own non-human point of view could discover that humans are practical, rational primates.

If indeed a neo-Aristotelian account can pinpoint the human life form, then it becomes possible to form a hypothesis as to what kinds of attributes will turn out to be human virtues. And just as we can evaluate an individual wolf by reference to its life form, perhaps we can evaluate individual human characters and abilities, human actions and lives by reference to our life form. Virtues are the qualities belonging to creatures like us. Virtues are the

2. Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 207.

human specific goods-of-a-kind. Relatedly, the acquisition of virtues both causes and constitutes the actualization of our life form as practical rational primates. Truly exemplifying our life form constitutes our species-specific flourishing.

The thought is that virtues are commonly supposed to be excellences of human beings. If virtue is "excellence," relative to what is it excellent? The answer can only be that virtues are excellences relative to our nature or life form. They are the traits or qualities that enable us to actualize our life form, to fully express in a life what we are by nature. If what we are by nature is practical, rational primates, then virtues (we can further predict) will be traits pertaining to practical reason and animality.

Furthermore, if our nature is to be practical, rational primates, then we have some vague notion of our natural "function." I shall not go in for the Aristotelian view that the natural work (ergon) of human beings is contemplative science, an activity by reference to which success and failure may be judged. Rather, I shall be more ecumenical: the telos of every life form is, minimally, to do all the activities that constitute its mature flourishing. So we should predict quite generally that the human telos is to become *fully mature* practical, rational primates. The conceptions of human nature (as practical reasoning animals) must be defined in relation to virtue (the excellences of rational practice and practical reason) and to human nature as it could be, our natural telos (to be excellent and mature practical, rational primates).

As a corollary, any traits that deviate from this life form would be defects. Some "defects" would not be moral defects. For example, human speech consists of such-and-such range of individual sounds, such-and-such variety of pitches and voice, physiological and neurological properties of the tongue and the brain, syntactical and grammatical properties of the natural language, and so on. These generics help us to identify speech disorders such as apraxia, muteness, and stuttering by comparison to a conception of what human speech is like. But some defects would be moral defects. We might be able to identify moral vices

in the same way as we identify disorders, mental illness, injury, and so on – by comparison to a conception of what human virtue is.

Spelling out the details of virtue and vice shall be the task for the next chapter. The task in this chapter is to lay the groundwork by defending a conception of human nature according to which humans fit the larger pattern of natural normativity defended in chapter 2. By comparison to the human life form, evaluations of individual human beings is possible. Our task is to provide a conception of human nature that is seamlessly both normative and descriptive. We must first uncover, if possible, a set of scientific generics about humanity, specifying what kind of natural creature human beings are and what kind of characteristic life they live – what kind of life they live "by nature". Such generics, it is hoped, will give us initial insight into the concept and content of virtue, excellence, wisdom, and flourishing, which are our main themes.

The first section spells out the cluster of concepts entailed in the concept of being an animal and the cluster entailed in 'practical rationality.' It argues that observing human behaviors both from "within" and "without" the human point of view allows us to see what is unique about human beings, their capacities, and ends. The second section discusses a variety of objections. It attempts to sympathetically articulate and provide a response to a series of worries philosophers have about the neo-Aristotelian project of grounding ethical evalutions in some normatively loaded conception of human nature. For example, some think that there are no such things as the sort of "natures" as I have described; others think that there are natures but that there is no human nature; others think that human nature comes with no built in teleological boundaries; others think that human nature comes with a few built in teleological boundaries are the ends of reproduction and survival. Each of these receives an initial rebuttal, though a few of them will require further comment in a later chapter.

II. Animals of a peculiar sort

I said above in proposition (2) that "Human beings are natural organisms." Is this true? On its face, it appears to be an innocent truism. Humans are primates of the chordata phylum who, like every other organism, enjoy a particular evolutionary history, and move about the earth engaging in activities such as reproducing, sleeping, feeding, dying, and so on.

Nevertheless, as it is currently phrased, the proposition can be agreed upon by two very different readers. One sort of reader believes that human beings are *merely* natural; under the guise of merely asserting an innocent truism, this reader would insist that humans are machines made of meat, or "heaps of glorified clockwork"[3] in the same sense that all of Laplacian nature is a heap of glorified clockwork and all its myriad variegated objects are just parts of the heap. This first sort of reader can acknowledge that the human brain exhibits rarefied neurocognitive processes we do not observe anywhere else but would deny that human beings are different in kind. A second sort of reader believes that humans are natural organisms and something more; under the guise of asserting an innocent truism, this reader would insist that human beings are organisms of an altogether different kind. Perhaps human beings are made in the image of God, or have a divine spark, or represent the crest of the wave of evolution. This sort of reader can acknowledge that the human body is a material organism like many others but would insist that the mind is something of a different order – humans are, (in an unforgettable phrase from novelist Walker Percy) "angelic beasts" or "bestial angels".

Rather than pick sides on this issue, I prefer to leave the premise ambiguous. Debating such matters would take us into deep metaphysical waters, while our main goal is to identify, as far as we can, what exactly characterizes our life form only in order to explore whether this examination bears any relevance to the ethics of virtue and vice. My hope is

3. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (Penguin, 2003).

that calculated indeterminacy on this issue will allow for both kinds of readers to participate in the dialectic regardless of their prior metaphysical commitments.

What both readers agree on is that human beings are (at least) primates – material beings, living organisms, mammals of a pecular sort. This agreement is not so trivial as it might seem. To be an animal entails the presence of several other properties, some of which will be seen below to have potential ethical significance. For example, it entails a particular set of relations with respect to other animals and ecosystems.

I will first spell out a few properties that come along with being an primate, and show how these properties might have potentially ethical significance. Then, I will spell out the properties involved in being practical rational primates.

What we have in common with other organisms

To be an animal is to belong to the "tree of life" — and to have a location in the broader story of life on earth. As Michael Mautner explains, all living things (on earth at least) share common ancestors and even share genetic material. He says:

> …phylogenetic trees indicate that all terrestrial life can be traced to a common ancestor. Organisms as different from us as yeasts share half; mice, over 90%, chimpanzees, over 95%, and different human individuals share over 99% of our genome. These scientific insights give a deeper meaning to the unity of all Life. Our complex molecular patterns are common to all organic gene/protein life and distinguish us from any other phenomena of nature.[4]

While we should not make too much of the genetic similarities between all living things, we should not ignore it.

Zoom out for a moment and consider the human's place in the cosmos. Consider in your imagination that the earth was formed about 4.5 billion years ago; that life arose on

4. Michael N Mautner, "Life-Centered Ethics, and the Human Future in Space," *Bioethics* 23, no. 8 (2009): 434–5.

earth 3.5 billion years ago; and that anatomically modern humans arose on the earth about 200,000 years ago or in the "Late Pleistocene of 120,000 years ago."[5] The first among our species lived in Africa. They emigrated from that landmass and settled in various parts of the globe. In contemporary classificatory scheme, we can locate humans within the phylum chordata, the class mammalia, the order of primates, the suborder haplorhini, the familiy hominidae, the genus homo, the species homo sapiens.

What can we say about such creatures? Firstly, being an animal entails that one was produced by sexual reproduction. Unlike prokaryotic organisms (such as bacteria), all mammals come to be through process of fusing dimorphic gametes, such as ova and sperm cells, into a fertilized zygote. New fertilized zygotes, once generated, grow through a process of cell division found only in eukaryotic organisms, such as fungi, plants, mammals. Meiosis, unlike mitosis, is a process of division leading to the creation of four daughter cells that do not contain the same genetic material as the original. However, in all such organisms it is possible that errors occur in meiosis, which results in genetic defects. The ethical implications of genetic defect in humans is profound, since some genetic defects are associated with common mental illnesses.[6] And mental illness is in turn prevalent among prison populations, or people who are unwilling or unable to conform to the minimum legal and ethical standards of their community.[7] Not all inmates are justly imprisoned, and not all are "bad people"; my point is any reproductive technology which increases the chances of errors in meiosis or mitosis might be ipso facto ill-advised.[8]

5. R. Stephen Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature: A Defense of Ethical Naturalism* (Continuum, 2008), 102.

6. Jo C Phelan, "Genetic Bases of Mental Illness–a Cure for Stigma?" *Trends in Neurosciences* 25, no. 8 (2002): 430–31.

7. Pamela M Diamond et al., "The Prevalence of Mental Illness in Prison," *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 29, no. 1 (2001): 21–40.

8. Diana Lucifero, J Richard Chaillet, and Jacquetta M Trasler, "Potential Significance of Genomic Imprinting Defects for Reproduction and Assisted Reproductive Technology," *Human Reproduction Update* 10, no. 1 (2004): 3–18; JOINT SOGC–CFAS GUIDE-

Secondly, being an animal entails mortality. Life is a process with a beginning and an end; an organism begins life as a tiny zygote and progresses through gestation to infancy, maturation, and adulthood, at which point it may reproduce itself before dying. All of these phases we notice in human animals as well. The human life cycle is characterized by various phases, including growth, language acquisition, puberty, physical maturity and characteristic activities, aging, and death. It should not be a difficult or particularly profound inference that human beings are mortal. However, as we shall see, the value of questioning or attempting to subvert this basic condition is one of the live controversies in bioethics. Furthermore, the question of individual death is part and parcel of the larger question of species extinction. To zoom our perspective out a bit further, we can observe that human beings (like other species) not only have a natural history, and a characteristic natural life cycle, but also a natural destiny — such as extinction, or evolution into a new species, or indefinite preservation through sexual reproduction, or something else. I will pick up this theme in a later chapter.

Thirdly, human beings are animals that have a particular pattern of life. At this point in a description of the human species, the difficulty (I should say impossibility) of separating the biological, behavioral, and social conditions of being a human being becomes plain. For example, humans have 23 chromosomes in each somatic cell, with about 22,000 total genes. Genetic defects, however, wreak havoc on the individual human being. Humans have 32 teeth and an extremely diverse diet of carbohydrates, fats, fiber, minerals, proteins, vitamins, and water: they eat vegetables, red meat, fish, nuts, seeds, berries, fruits, mushroom, mollusks, herbs, and more. However, poor tooth care or poor diet can damage a person's health and lead to illnesses and death.

LINE, "Pregnancy Outcomes After Assisted Reproductive Technology," *J Obstet Gynaecol Can* 28, no. 3 (2006): 220–33.

Humans have opposable thumbs, are bipedal, and walk upright, with heights ranging from 4'7" to 6'3" (plus or minus) and weights range from 120-180 pounds (plus or minus). However, these attributes are fragile. Many illnesses or injuries can render humans immoble. Growth disorders such as dwarfism (under 4'10" in human adults) or gigantism can render a person overly large or overly small relative to the healthy levels capture in these generic propositions.

Apparently innocent descriptions of human animals are inseparable from ethological and anthropological descriptions, which can blend into the normative. The property of being an animal encompasses a whole range of biological and neurophysiological facts that obtain in each normal human being. For example, humans have large brains relative to other primates, with a neocortex and prefrontal cortex that correlate with abstract thinking, problem solving, society, and culture. Genetically modern humans don't just hunt and gather like other animals; they farm, store, combine, ferment, and cook food.

Humans don't just suffer phsyiological responses like fear and excitement or arousal, they wilfully seek out such emotions for themselves through art and entertainment and wilfully cause them in others. Presumably, even an alien anthropologist who knew nothing of human language or "what it is like to be a human" would be able to notice, upon examination, that a human's laugh or cry is different from a hyena's laugh or a crocodile's tears.

Part of the alien anthropologist's examination would be to examine the body, brain, and hands of human beings. One of the first things we can imagine they would notice is that humans live in cultures and societies. They are not merely "social animals" like apes; they are language-users, communicating in signs and symbols. Their language is an extremely complex, open-ended system which is both recursive (able to nest propositions within propositions) and productive (able to create sentences by potentially limitless combinations of words). In virtue of language and their opposable thumbs, they are creative; they

don't just live on the ground or under ground, but build houses and shelters, sometimes in new places, such as caves, trees, hills, mountains, etc. Also, they are self-reflective. They establish social relations upon biological grounds (some children growing up with natural parents) and upon normative grounds (some orphans growing up in orphanages created by philanthropists).

What is the point of these reflections? I wish to point out just how much we can know about our form of life by appealing to the "objective" or third-person point of view of scientific exploration, data gathering, inductive generalization. Before we examine the ethical significance of these facts, we must explore the peculiar differentiem of our species: practical rationality.

What is peculiar

Practical reason occupies a place of importance in the theories of many virtue ethicists. My primary sources among the neo-Aristotelians have each thematized practical reason in their own way.[9]

I shall use 'practical rationality' and 'practical reason' as synonymous. Warren Quinn uses 'practical reason' to mean the faculty and 'practical rationality' to mean the excellence use of the faculty. In a later chapter, I will contrast the faculty with 'practical wisdom', which is the excellence thereof.[10] I will also defend a robust account of practical reason in relation to theoretical or speculative reason. For now, I shall only offer an initial exploration of what it means to say that human beings are primates who engage in practical reasoning.

9. Cf. Especially Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chapter 4; John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

10. Cf. Warren Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9, no. 02 (1992): 81–95

Taking a wide view, which activities elicit the label 'rational' or 'reasonable' or 'reason'? As we observe human behavior in context of other animal behavior, the activities that we call 'rational' are as follows: to observe, to perceive as, and reflect; to remember, predict, and categorize; to decide, determine and pursue; to abstract, explain, and infer; to criticize, blame, and praise; to admonish, prohibit, and command; and so on. Is there any way to pare down this list or to generalize these capacities?

I do not think the best way to understand the old formula of "rational animals" is to take "rational" to mean "abstract thought." Practical reasoning is indeed a form of reasoning. And while other members of the animal kingdom "think" in one sense of that term, as far as we know, no other animal constructs theories about the cognitive capacities of the animal kingdom. Nevertheless, abstract thinking is not a sufficient property to distinguish the human life form as a whole. Only a relatively small minority of humans engage in that kind of abstract reflection that characterizes science, theology, mathematics, metaphysics, ethics, and so on, while all people of all cultures and of all intelligence quotients engage in practical reasoning and deliberation. I want to make it indelibly clear that I am not supposing human nature to be rationality per se but practical rationality.

I would like to argue that being a potentially rational animal entails at least four other properties besides the capacity for abstract thought. They are: speech, sociality, rational practice, and creativity. Let's consider each in turn, and show how they interconnect.

First, take speech. Aristotle observed that, "Man alone of the animals possesses speech."[11] Nothing in modern science has superseded or contradicted the observation (obvious to anyone) that human speech is different from other animal noises. Other animals have speech and communication. The difference between non-human and human speech is not obvious to infant humans, who learned by imitation words just as well as they learn tweets barks and growls. Upon reflection, researchers have observed that animals communicate

11. *Politics*, 1.1253a.

with non-grammatical closed systems with a small, finite set of symbols. Communication systems used by other animals such as bees or apes are closed systems that consist of a finite, usually very limited, number of possible ideas that can be expressed. In contrast, human language is open-ended and productive, meaning that it allows humans to produce a vast range of utterances from a finite set of elements, and to create new words and sentences. Our language is unique: it is grammatical, open-ended, recursive, and productive. We are animals who use signs and symbols to communicate self-reflective and abstract thought.[12]

Speech is inseparable from self-reflectivity and sociality. Through our animal senses comes a sensitivity to our surroundings, the ability to see the world, ourselves, the sun and stars, to hear our fellow creatures, and to take the whole cosmos into consciousness. 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.[13]

The second constituitive feature of practical reason is sociality. When Aristotle asserted that "Humans are political animals," he did not mean the facile point that human beings prefer to reside in groups or enjoy "getting involved in politics". We ought to interpret this assertion as a generic truth. Human beings are formally constituted by being animals in political or communal settings. This truth is best viewed in light of our animality and speech: for to be a human being is to be a creature produced by the sexual union of two other human gametes, and to be able to speak is to be enculturated in a particular

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

13. 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."

natural language in a time in human history and a place on the globe. We shall return to the importance of sociality in our discussion of traditions in a later chapter.

The third feature of practical reason is the ability to engage in rational practices. All organisms initiate *action* in the most general sense that they move about and do things. And all higher mammals engage in complex (and often social) practices, such as communal hunting, grooming, and building. Humans exhibit something apparently unique: We do not just act but act on reasons. Micah Lott says: "Human form is characterized by practical reason. This is the capacity to act in light of an awareness of the ground of our actions, to recognize and respond to practical reasons."[14] We set goals. We undertake long, complicated sets of actions in order to achieve those goals. We also reflect on past actions and evalute them to decide whether it is advisable to do the same thing again or try something else. Practical reasoning includes not just deliberating about what to do but weighing the apparent reasons for and against a particular course of action. Hence, as I shall explain more later, it is under the category of 'rational practice' that I will include everything unique about humans having to do with morality.

The fourth feature is rational creation. The concept of 'creativity' is not metaphysically distinct from rational practice, but since it is conceptually distinct, it deserves some mention. Our speech and grammatical systems allow us to create new words, propositions, phrases, and of course to do thing like write philosophy papers or tell stories. Our social identity within a social order allows us to create living spaces, utensils, farming implements, and so on as well as to create new social orders themselves. And one of the forms practical reasoning takes is that we *innovate* — we create and design and plan actions, new behaviors, new games, new languages, new activities, and so on.

The human differentiam of 'practical rationality' entails not only abstract reasoning but speech, sociality, rational practice, and creation. The alien anthropologist, if indeed it

14. Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form."

had enough of its own rationality to be able to have anthropological science, could observe these actions and infer the existence of the property of rationality.

Potential

The point of these reflections has been to bear out the truth of the generic that human beings are practical, rational animals. I must address a few possible misunderstandings.

First, some unwittingly entertain the assumption that "rationality" for Aristotle meant speculative reasoning — that is, *theoria*, abstract thinking, or contemplative science. The capacity for abstract or "theoretical reason" is certainly an important feature of human nature and stands out from the capacities of other organisms. But it is not merely *thought* but *thoughtful action* that I would like to emphasize.

Secondly, "human beings are practical rational animals" might be interpreted to mean that anyone who is not rational is not human. There does exist a monstrous thought that humans who are not fully rational are not *"really"* human. An uncharitable critic might accuse me of insinuating that monstrous thought. If people in comas, or the mentally ill, the genetically defective, are not even human then it would seem to be permissible to do all sorts of inhumanities.

Robert P. George makes this point well:

> Various criteria for where the line should be drawn [between living things it is permissible to use and those it is not permissible to use] have been proposed: sentience, consciousness, self-awareness, rationality, or being a moral agent (the last two come to the same thing). We will argue that the criterion is: having a rational nature, that is, having the natural capacity to reason and make free choices, a capacity it ordinarily takes months, or even years, to actualize, and which various impediments might prevent from being brought to full actualization, at least in this life. Thus, every human being has full moral worth or dignity, for every human being possesses such a rational nature.[15]

15. Adam Schulman, *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics* (Government Printing Office, 2008), chap. 16, "The Na-

On the contrary, one of its strengths of the fact that 'humans are practical rational animals' is a generic is that it blocks this kind of monstrous thought, for it admits of exceptions. Generics describe a life form well only when the sample includes exemplary instances of the species — not young, immature, ill, or injured instances. Especially in the case of young organisms we need to invoke the notion of *potential*. Even single celled organisms have the potential to reproduce and develop.

Anacephalic babies will never exemplify their natural potential for practical reasoning, for they lack the subvenient brain structure necessary for rational consciousness. They are recognizably *human* (they are not opossums), just defectively so. Similarly, we may call humans "bipedal" by nature but recognize that a war veteran is still human even after he or she is no longer bipedal.

Injury, illness, genetic defect, radiation poisoning, coma, mental illness, and any number of other negatives may render a human being sub-rational or non-practical — that is, unable to direct his or her own life. The same point can be applied to those organisms, who by injury or illness, will never reveal the potentials inherit in their life form. Although that individual instance may be imperfectly actuating its species, it is still a member of the species.

Scientists do not judge the characteristics of a newly discovered species by examining its young. If an alien anthropologist were to study 12-year-old humans, they would come to all sorts of conclusions about humanity in general. Their conclusions would be a week since their sample is week. Alien anthropologists would need to look at mature human beings of both sexes, healthy and in the "prime" of life. Younger than this range and humans tend to (but do not always) lack the brain development to fully represent characteristic behaviors; older than this range and humans tend to (but do not always) suffer degenerations of the joints, memory, health, and so on. A similar point can be made with

ture and Basis of Human Dignity".

regard to injury and illness.

Before considering the application of my argument to ethics, I would like to stop and address a few objections.

III. Objections

I would like to consider a couple of possible responses the reader might have at this juncture. These objections are formidable. However, responses are possible, even though some of the responses I will offer now will require further comment in a later chapter. Let's consider each in turn.

No human nature

The first objection is simply that the search for human nature is hopeless because there is no human nature. This objection has three iterations. The first sort of critic might deny that there is any such thing as a human life form because there are no life forms at all. This is an objection to the very concept of a nature. Perhaps, instead of real life forms and natural kinds, we should be nominalist about divisions between various branches of the tree of life. One iteration of this criticism is an alleged tension between the flexibility of species (as represented in evolutionary biology) and a fixed notion of human nature. Ernst Mayr says:

> The concepts of unchanging essences and of complete discontinuities between every *eidos* (type) and all others make genuine evolutionary thinking impossible. I agree with those who claim that the essentialist philosophies of Aristotle and Plato are incompatible with evolutionary thinking.[16]

Arthur Ward is one who agrees with Mayr here. He argues that "naturalists should reject the idea of 'human nature,' and indeed should reject that any organism or its parts or op-

16. Ernst Mayr, *Populations, Species, and Evolution: An Abridgment of Animal Species and Evolution* (Harvard University Press, 1970), 4.

erations has a nature, purpose, proper function, or the like."[17] I have already pointed out that rejecting all organic natures and purposes is not necessarily the only rational, scientific option; indeed, such a rejection seems to me to be motivated by philosophical materialism far more than it is motivated by any respect for actual biological science. Nevertheless, I cannot insist on the other hand that accepting organic natures and purposes is the *only* rational, scientific option. Rather, to the idea that there are no natural kinds, I can only give a general and unsatisfactory response. This dissertation cannot chase down the (justifiably important) conversation about realism and nominalism in natural kinds. However, the arguments of the previous chapter, built on the assumption of a minimal scientific realism, is enough to secure a fairly solid grounding for the notion of natural kinds.

A second sort of critic accepts natural kinds but denies that these kinds have teleological features. This reader would agree with Bernard Williams: "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."[18]

He says elsewhere:

> 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.[19]

This sort of critic thinks that there are natures or natural kinds and stable species with objective properties, but is underwhelmed by the arguments of the previous chapter to the

17. Arthur Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory" (PhD thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2013), 1.

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

19. Cf. Bernard Williams, in *Making Sense of Humanity: And Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 109.

effect that functional or teleological properties feature in purely biological descriptions of organisms.

My response is this: Williams voices a common opinion when he alleges an incompatibility between Darwinism and teleological realism. The response of Hursthouse, Foot, Brown, etc., 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." Such a view is not incompatible with evolutionary theory.

Strictly speaking, evolutionary theory may be summarized in five theses explaining the current multiplicity and shape of terrestrial life: 1. The earth is very old; 2. Life has progressed from relatively simple to relatively complex forms; 3. Through slow and gradual changes, all the modern forms of live have appeared; 4. All of life originated from one original place and species; 5. Some mechanism such as natural selection drives the process of descent with modification.[20] The set of theses together explain biological processes of genetic mutation, reproduction, preservation, and proliferation. Thus, evolutionary theory, strictly speaking says absolutely nothing about teleological causes or properties.[21]

A sixth thesis, often appended to the first five, is that the process of natural selection is unguided by any causes but mechanical ones. But this claim is a philosophical belief, not a biological one. Polemicists will sometimes cite the popularity of the philosophical belief among biologists as proof that it is a "biological" claim. But we do not determine truth by vote. If belief in God was popular among biologists of a certain era, it does not follow that theological claims are strictly biological claims.

Thomas Nagel recently presented a persuasive (and controversial) case for what he calls "Darwinism plus" — that is, naturalistic Darwinian evolution plus natural teleological

20. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 8–9.

21. Cf. ibid., 10.

causation.[22] Teleological laws work impersonally on entities over time at the same moment that physical laws work impersonally on entities at a given time. I do not wish here to defend Nagel's view so much as to point out that teleological realism is compatible with evolutionary theory. Asserting that teleological realism about biology is incompatible with Darwinism does not make it so. Naturalistic teleological realism is certainly incompatible with a teleological nihilism distinctive of (certain brands) of metaphysical reductionism. If our knowledge of natural teleology is well-grounded enough then so much the worse for metaphysical reductionism.

There is another point to make. Williams despairs of finding human nature, including human telos because he thinks such despair is demanded by biological science. But Hursthouse's response to Williams is that his worry is not actually rooted in the progress of modern science. And she is right. Williams himself admits that "many of course have come to that conclusion before… 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."[23] If many have come to that (philosophical) conclusion before, without the benefit of modern science, then it is a non sequitur to cite modern science as evidence for the philosophical conclusion. A condensed caricature of the argument: "modern science is very advanced. Therefore life is absurd."

Instead, Hursthouse points out, we should interpret Williams' worry as an expression of moral nihilism and despair. It may be a rational despair, but the rationality or irrationality cannot simply be read off the biological facts. Indeed, I shall pick up the theme of rational despair in a later chapter. For now I shall only say that Williams believes human nature is a mess *because* he believes no form of life is completely satisfactory for everyone. But cannot the ground and consequent be reversed? Doesn't that blade both ways? If one

22. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*.
23. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 261, quoting from Williams.

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 even at its present state, mid-evolutionary process, is not *completely* a mess. If one looks to exemplary human animals who demonstrate how to live admirable and wise and just lives, even mixed with suffering or tragedy, then perhaps, even if their lives are not *completely* satisfactory, one has a sort of existential evidence that life can be *somewhat* satisfactory. And Hursthouse movingly praises hope as a virtue.

> 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.[24]

For my part, I should not like to deny that human society and many, many human individuals are indeed "a mess" in one sense. Humans are a "mess" in the sense that corruption is a real feature of human life. A selected list of the dark side of our species: War, oppression, disease, genetic defect, injury, hatred, vice, a large (and ever 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. In short, the human race is quite a mixed bag. But this is all too grand and sweeping for present purposes. The only question in this section is whether the universal characteristics of human nature can be hypothesized and confirmed.

24. Ibid., 265.

Below I shall make the case that specific 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.

A third iteration of the "no human nature" objection is that if there is such thing as "human nature", it is nothing more or less than our biological and physiological makeup. Tim Lewens argues that "the only biologically respectable notion of human nature that remains is an extremely permissive one that names the reliable dispositions of the human species as a whole. This conception offers no ethical guidance…"[25]

On Lewens' view, the only talk about our "nature" that would be scientific would be an indeterminate series of complicated stories about our genetics, evolutionary history, and neurophysiology, perhaps even including cultural, geographical, and ecological settings. The problem, as we have seen, is that an empirical "scientific" conception of human nature has nothing to do with *ethics*. All of the complicated stories we could tell – if they are genuinely scientific – would be purely *descriptive*.[26]

Bernard Williams expresses a similar point. He says that nature has bestowed upon us an "ill-sorted bricolage of powers and instincts":

> [the problem] 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… On that [evolutionary] 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).

25. Tim Lewens, "Human Nature: The Very Idea," *Philosophy & Technology* 25, no. 4 (2012): 459–74.

26. Cf. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 10; Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, chap. 5; Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory."

This is also Fitzpatrick's main worry, not that we have evolved poorly, but that we evolved at all.[27] He argues that evolved organisms have a telos to reproduce, not to "flourish". ""If, however, natural functions and ends in living things are structured by special relations established through the process of evolution through natural selection, i.e., non-incidental relations between traits and a special subset of their effects that figured into the selection process, then natural teleology will not ultimately or generally be about the welfare or flourishing of organisms (FitzPatrick 2000)."

Stephen Brown is ambivalent but seems to think that ethics is, in the end, a descriptive discipline; 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 propagate our genotype.[28]

Although the "characteristic form of life" of human beings involves highly rarified neurological and cognitive 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.

This objection is certainly relevant. Lewens, Fitzpatrick, and Brown urge that human nature, if it is anything, is simply to reproduce and propagate one's genotype. We are mammals, after all, and the telos of mammals is to reproduce. But this objection begs the question. We are animals, certainly. That is an empirical assertion, as I have been at pains to show. 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 we are also animals of a peculiar sort. That is, we are rational animals. From what we observe of ourselves both "from inside" and "from outside" we exhibit a range of properties not shared by other mammals: grammar and language, fire-making, cooking, sex for

27. FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology."

28. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*; Stephen Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue," *Ethica* 4 (2005): 7–22.

pleasure, abstract reasoning, science, philosophy, religion, mythology, agriculture. But to say that humans are *merely* mammals is an anti-empirical assertion that requires denying all this. In light of our status as practical, rational animals, it seems obvious to most people that reproduction is not our only natural telos. Reproduction is certainly *one* of our natural ends. "Human beings reproduce" is an instance of a broader natural generic truth, "organisms survive and reproduce." Human reproduction as a generic pattern is compatible with exceptions: The celibate, the pre-pubescent, the single, the infertile couple, the homosexual couple, and others do not reproduce. Nevertheless it may be true that humans reproduce (like every other organism). It may even be true that if, *as a species*, we ceased to reproduce, something would have gone wrong. That individual members of the species do not reproduce is not an automatic sign of defect; that the entire species has ceased (by choice or by injury or illness) to reproduce might be a sign of defect.[29]

I said that classifying reproduction as the end of humanity is obviously a mistake. This may only be "obvious" from within the practical point of view. It is obvious nonetheless. It is even obvious to Lewens, Fitzpatrick, and Brown (although Brown's faith wavers). Their point in bringing up reproduction is that we need something *more* than our natural teleology to capture the distinctively human rational process of deliberately defining teleological goals. That something more is "the practical point of view", the point of view from within human subjectivity, the

The idea that natural teleological facts about human nature can only be known "within" some particular point of view is an important one, and I shall have to address it in a

29. The "Voluntary Human Extinction Movement" is an example of a group who find the reasons for reproduction *as a species* to be on balance outweighed by the reasons for ceasing to reproduce. Two comments: first, on first impression, VHEMT strikes most people as satire. It is a laughable movement. It is not necessarily mistaken, but it is certainly laughable. Secondly, VHEMT acknowledges the prima facie force of the need to reproduce. They argue that that need is outweighed. So in that they think species-wide reproduction is a default natural norm, we agree.

later chapter. For now I shall only say that 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. 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 rationally possible, after a long inquiry. But to be blind to our uniqueness from the outset is to be subject, in all likelihood, to philistine reductionism that has little to do with genuine scientific thinking.

Our nature is unknown

A second objection might come from someone who simply urged that human nature is mysterious. 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 main thesis of this chapter has been that the following generic is true: "human beings are practical, rational primates." This generic, I have argued, is defensible both philosophically and scientifically. It is discoverable both by humans examining our species from "within" the human point of view and by alien anthropologists examining our species

from "outside" the human point of view (so long as they too were intelligent and rational). This generic picks out a property or set of properties we might describe as 'human nature.'

The final objection that our origin and destiny are mysterious is true but misses the point. That humans are practical rational primates is not supposed to provide complete, comprehensive knowledge of our species. It is a minimal starting point of knowledge upon which to build. Knowing that snakes are legless reptiles is not an end to the scientific inquiry, but a beginning. Indeed, one cannot know about snakes unless one knows, roughly, what snakes are. So capturing the genus and differentiam of a kind of organism is in fact necessary for creating a conceptual placeholder *on which to attach new knowledge*. Knowing what human beings are, however roughly, gives us a concept-category within which to fill in the depth and breadth of facts and information.

Knowing from "Inside" Human Point of View

A third objection states that are no objective properties obtaining in each and every human *which can be known from the objective, external, scientific point of view.* Perhaps some universal intersubjective properties, like a desire for belonging, obtain in all human beings who have conscious experiences. Even so, these can only be known "from within" the practical point of view and so would not count as "scientific" in a narrow sense.

Those properties that can be known externally would be irrelevant. If by being practical reasoners we are free of the tyranny of biology, then biology is irrelevant to morality. Hursthouse assumes that knowledge of humanity "from the outside" is useless or futile. She says, "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[30] 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:

30. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* especially chapter 10.

> [I]n 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.[31]

Hursthouse and McDowell's alternative is to base ethical considerations on our nature as rational agents. This is still loosely naturalistic, in that we are talking about "human nature" or "second nature". This objection will be picked up in a later chapter.

IV. Conclusion

I have said that the generic truths about the human life form, if we can pinpoint them, would be of momentous importance for ethics for we could identify some human norms that are universal across every member of our species, regardless of culture and upbringing.

Both "practical rationality" and "primate" entail a cluster of concepts. To be a primate is to be an animal that is alive and so on. This is what we have in common with all of organic nature. Mautner continues: "Life is a process whose outcome is the self-reproduction of complex molecular patterns'. Importantly, Life is then a process that requires a constant flow of information, matter and energy."[32] That process of life on earth has been a continuous one, throughout time, since the first origins of life on the planet. Furthermore, we are not just "living beings" but primates belonging to a wider class of mammals. We come to be in similar ways as other mammals, have similar needs for oxygen, food, society, warmth, exercise, and sleep. And to be a common life form entails that each of us begins life in roughly the same way, need the same range of nutrients to grow and survive, and deserve the same respect.

To be a practical rational primate means that something changes when we examine

31. Ibid., 257–8.
32. Mautner, "Life-Centered Ethics, and the Human Future in Space," 435.

human beings compared to all other animals or all other natural kinds.[33] We are not just animals but practical rational primates. This entails the emergence of a new set of capacities: abstract thought, speech, sociality, rational practice, and creativity. So, we can predict that just as the scientist evaluates members of a species by how well or badly it exemplifies its particular life form, human beings are evaluable by how well or badly they exemplify their particular life form. We continue to evaluate humans on the basis of their species, but we evaluate not just their health and normal developmental stages, and their maturity, but their *actions*.

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.[34]

The good-of-a-kind for our species is not *only* about practical reasoning, but also about animality. For example, starving to death, or being born without limbs, or being unable to reproduce is a bad-of-a-kind for creatures like us (not a moral bad, of course, but a real misfortune). So an exemplary member of our species would have to exemplify a whole range of good properties.

The sort of naturalism(s) represented by Foot, Hursthouse, and McDowell aim to ground evaluations of a member of a species on the life form of that species. The generic that 'a human being is a practical, rational animal' captures the life form of the species in a manner that is accessible to an "alien anthropologist" observing humanity from the "outside", from outside the practical point of view. The presence in humanity of such generi-

33. Katherine Hawley and Alexander Bird, "What Are Natural Kinds?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (2011): 205–21.

34. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 29.

cally animal behaviors such as birthing, reproducing sexually, eating, sleeping, and dying betray a common root and identity with the animal kingdom and with the biological world as a whole; yet other human behaviors, especially language, deliberation, reflection, and intentional action betray a curious difference. As such, those qualities that enable human beings to be practical, rational animals are liable to turn out to be virtues. Those qualities of natural excellence enable the member of the species to actuate the potentials inherent in such a life form. Showing how such qualities as show up on "normal" catalog of virtues, and how perhaps even others, fall under the concept of natural excellence, is the task for the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Rational and Irrational Practice

> Men need virtues as bees need stings.
>
> —Peter Geach, *The Virtues*.

I. Introduction

The last chapter argued that human beings are practical, rational primates. That is, it extended the normative conception of nature from chapter 2 to include a normative conception of human nature according to which human beings have a given life form and (therefore) are not fully actualizing their humanity when they are born, or when they are children, or even when they are adults. If "human" is a normative concept, then the best exemplars of humanity would be fully mature, fully practical and rational primates. All others are in process of fully actuating that life form and liable to the risk of not doing so.

So much is, I hope, clear in outline. What is needed is to fill in the details of the outline. This chapter addresses what traits are admirable and praiseworthy for creatures like us. It argues more precisely that all the human virtues fall under the categories of excellent rational practice and excellent practical reasoning. These are terms of art, and

will be fully explained. Although the two notions are inextricably, I primarily focus on 'rational practices' in this chapter and 'practical reasoning' in the next.

In this chapter, I first argue the formal point that the qualities that enable and partly constitute the actualization of our life form are human virtues. I then argue the material point that such qualities are, for creatures like us, virtues and vices pretty well corresponding to the list of virtues.

II. Requirements for a successful theory

Becoming fully or fully actualized practical rational animals requires the actualization not only of our animal nature (through growth, maturity, reproduction) but our rational potential (through intellectual growth and knowledge, and practical wisdom that sublimates all of one's emotions and bodily desires and physical settings into a good life). In other words: (5) Humans are to become practical, rational animals. Hursthouse points out that we do not just admire those who survive but who exemplify a *human* form of life: "The human virtues make their possessor good qua human being, one who is as ordinarily well fitted as a human being can be in not merely physical respects to live well, to flourish – in a characteristically human way."[1]

As a generic, the proposition that humans are practical, rational primates is both descriptive and normative. If practical rational animals is what we are (by nature), then the pattern of natural normativity would lead us to expect that becoming truly or fully practical rational animals is our natural telos. This thought, I think, explains why Peter Geach says "Men need virtues as bees need stings."[2] Philippa Foot and Alasdair MacIntyre echo this talk of "need" and "necessity" as well. (MacIntyre's most recent monograph is subtitlted,: "why human beings need the virtues."[3] The kind of necessity being predicated here is the

1. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 208.
2. Peter Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 17.
3. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the*

same kind of necessity with which a bee needs a sting or a knife needs to be sharp. It is a formal and teleological necessity.

That humans are practical rational animals is also the natural norm that obliges us to live in particular ways. What are those particular ways? The qualities of excellence for practical rational animals would be the moral and intellectual virtues, including moderation and immoderation, justice and injustice, practical wisdom and foolishness, and so on.

The qualities human being acquire on the way to becoming fully practical, rational animals are virtues. Virtues are those qualities needed by us as members of the human species, each member of which exemplifies the same human nature of being a potentially practical, rational animals. Thus Hursthouse again: "The concept of a virtue is the concept of something that makes its possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as she should. These are commonly accepted truisms."[4]

In outline, the argument is this:

(1) All natural organisms exhibit formal and functional (i.e., teleological) facts which are expressible in generics.
(2) Human beings are natural organisms.
(3) Human beings exhibit formal and teleological facts which are expressible in generics.
(4) For any x, the excellences of x are the qualities that enable and partly constitute its being a fully mature x.
(5) Human beings are practical, rational primates.
(6) The excellences or virtues of human beings are the qualities that enable and partly constitute its becoming a fully practical, rational primates.
(7) Rational practices and practical reasoning enable human the virtues that enable persons and societies to become fully practical, rational primates.

Virtues (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

4. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2013.

III. Traits That Benefit

What we have said so far points in the direction of the hypothesis: virtues must be instances of natural goodness or natural excellence for practical, rational primates like ourselves. Virtues must be a subset of natural goods, or goods-of-a-kind for human beings. Furthermore, they must be recognizably good from the outside and the inside; that is, not only should at least some virtues correspond to the standard list of qualities that are admired universally or near universally, such as courage and justice, but in order to block the charge of subjectivism, they should be plausibly recognizable by an alien anthropologist who could study the human life form and discover which traits actuate it.

More specifically, virtues on my account will turn out to be qualities that enable one to be fully become a primate (and animal and organism more generally): as mortal creatures and animals, our biological life consists of a process of maturation, nutrition, rest, exercise, homeostatic maturity, reproduction, characteristic activities, aging, and death. Many human goods enable this process, from oxygen, food, sleep, and so on. Virtues may not be material things but are likely to relate to such material and emotional parts of a normal human life.

Human virtues would also be those qualities that enable one to perform well characteristically rational activities such as speaking, socializing, thoughtful acting, and creating. By nature, we are inherently self-aware language-users who grow up and live in a language-community with a history and tradition, and who are curious to know what is true about ourselves and our world. We are also extravagantly innovative, creating myriad tools, forms of art, and other products for our use and enjoyment. We are inherently conscious and self-conscious beings who speak, interpret, and create in the context of a linguistic community such as a family, society, and culture. And as *practical* rational animals, we are inherently goal-oriented and self-determining beings who are to some degree able to acquire new traits or lose them, able to achieve our natural ends or fail to achieve them, able to become aware

of the "givenness" of our biology and work with or against it, and are able to treat an entire biological life not only as an event but as a project. Although we are pushed about by our biological instincts and by social pressures, we do not *simply* stumble around through life; at times we also act on *reasons*. That is, we deliberate about future actions, and reflect on past actions, and become puzzled about what is called for in the present. The success of our actions is not guaranteed, and the reasonableness of our reasons is not guaranteed. Rather, we muddle through on the best evidence we have.

When I say "enable" one to be a practical, rational primate, I don't mean that virtues are only instrumentally valuable – that too. Virtues on my account will also turn out to simply constituitive of humanity.

Chapter 6

Practical Reasoning

> There could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live.
>
> —Jennifer Frey, *The Will to Do Good*, 79.

I. Super-Intro

The arguments of the last chapter sought to establish that virtue is the excellence of rational practice and practical reasoning proper to the human life form. Our practical rationality defines our nature, including the key features of speech, sociality, abstract thinking about philosophy, science, mathematics, psychology, and so on, and practical action. We focused on the 'rational action' member of that conjunction. Now we must attend to 'practical reasoning'. If our nature is to be practical, rational animals, we should expect that the virtues are not only morally praiseworthy excellent practices but also a certain kind of excellence with respect to thinking and reasoning. These are the two sides of the same paradox about

our human nature. We are "embodied minds in action"[1] or "psychological animals."[2]

The three themes of this dissertation have been the three points on the "virtue triangle": virtue, practical reason, and natural teleology. I have argued that we must develop an account of virtue in dynamic relation to practical reason and to natural teleology. I must make good on my claim that a satisfying neo-Aristotelian account of virtue cannot be completed without thorough attention to practical reason. This will require several chapters.

The goal of my account of practical reason is ambitious. I shall aim to offer a definition of practical reason that is plausible in its own right and that answers, or renders moot, a cluster of related worries about virtue, moral realism, moral motivation. One of the greatest attractions of the neo-Aristotelian account is that it so impressively solves a host of puzzles in a single, coherent answer. Nevertheless, when undertaking such an ambitious argument, we must not underestimate the possibility of mis-step. I shall be forced to touch on issues that need fuller treatment. The problems surrounding practical reason are the problems of human nature, individually and socially.

1. What is practical reason? Is it knowledge or a practical disposition? It is the capacity for engaging in the process of identifying reasons for action, namely, identifying what is objectively good and bad. It is a form of knowledge. And it does motivate, by definition.

In developing an account of practical reason, the first problem we must address is this: Is practical reason both *practical* and *rational*? This problem has two aspects. First, if practical reason is really practical, then how is it rational? And if it is rational, how is it really practical? In other words, suppose that practical reasoning is by definition a kind of knowledge. Knowledge is theoretical, it aims to grasp what is true. So the first aspect of the problem is that theoretical knowledge cannot (by itself) motivate to action. Alternately, suppose that practical reason is by definition a kind of practical motivation or disposition

1. Robert Hanna and Michelle Maiese, *Embodied Minds in Action* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

2. Bailey, "Animalism."

to act in certain ways rather than others. Such motivations have action-guiding force and would explain why we act the way we do. The second aspect of the problem is that such dispositions are not forms of knowledge. So either practical reasoning is not *practical* (action-guiding) or it is not *reasonable*. In a very real sense, the primary challenge is to *defend the very concept of practical reason*. Even if we can answer these problems, others will surface.

4. Is practical reasoning substantive or procedural? Is it end-directed or only means-directed? It is end-directed by definition. It aims at the good. The natural norm of reason is specific to pursuing the good. For example, practical reasoning is commonly supposed by some philosophers to be a means-oriented activity, not end-oriented. We reason about how to get what we desire or how to achieve our goals, but do not reason our way to our desires and goals themselves. We simply *have* desires and goals.
5. Are moral reasons one type of practical reason? Philosophers are either dualists, monists, or pluralists about practical reason. I defend a pluralistic account.

Another problem is the relation between two commonly recognized sorts of practical reasons: prudential and moral.[3] Are these really distinct? If so, what is the distinction? If not, is one a species of the other or are both species of another genus? In other words, do we help others because it is ultimately in our best interests (egoism) or do we help others because we can genuinely suppress our own interests (altruism)?

6. Is practical reasoning valuable, important, and objective? It is valuable, indispensable. And objective. It aims not at "values" but at practical reasons, goods that are to be pursued. A related problem is the status of practical reasons within (a broadly-construed) naturalism. Are such reasons objects in the world or objects, so to speak, "in our heads"? When I take it as a reason to buy my friend lunch because he just lost his job, how are we to understand the proposition "My friend just lost his job"? It is clearly descriptive fact or state of affairs, but it also seems to become something else when I take it as a reason for buying him lunch.
7. Does practical reasoning make natural norms irrelevant — since reflecting on natural norms makes them mere data in the rational reflective process, not determinate, binding norms. Another problem is the "irrelevance objection" to neo-

3. Timothy Chappell, "Kalou Heneka," in *Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*, vol. 21 (Routledge, 2013), 158–76.

Aristotelian ethical naturalism. Briefly, this objection states that "natural norms" specific to the human species may push us in a particular direction but that they cannot justify an action as moral because ethical reflection allows us to step back from such natural norms and decide against them.

8. Is practical reason naturalistic? Yes, on an unrestricted conception of how to live. Or are reasons only "in here" in us, psychological and rational, in which case humans are not natural? Or are reasons for acting "out there" in the world, not physical and not natural, in which case nature is normative? If so, is this naturalism? Is this view objective idealism? Is practical reason natural?
9. Is practical reasoning intersubjective only, or also objective? It is intersubjective and objective. Is it like logic, response-independent, or like etiquette, response dependent? We reason within a tradition but traditions can be, as a whole, true or false, good or bad.

   The final set of problems pertains to practical reasoning in social groups or "traditions." It is an empirical datum that human beings develop their capacity to recognize practical reasons within a family and society with its own idiosyncratic political, religious, and philosophical worldview. So, quite plausibly, our initial de facto set of beliefs, desires, and dispositions reflect the substantive commitments of our group. But even if practical reasons are not easily reducible to response-dependent features of each individual reasoner, we still have to ask whether they are response-dependent features of practical-rationality-traditions or whether they answer to response-independent normative facts.

In other words, although there is one human nature, expressed variously in different cultures, languages, customs, and thoughts – are we forced to give up on the idea of *one human rationality*, albeit expressed variously? Is there, at bottom, a plurality of *rationalities*? Is practical reason intersubjective, like etiquette? My case for this very difficult conclusion rests on the belief, virtually incorrigible, that practical reason is *important*. It is of unquestionable intrinsic value to human beings. Furthermore, insofar as virtue is relative to rationality, rationality itself must be fixed to preserve moral realism. A practical reason can and does motivate one, all by itself; in conjunction with or absent other immediate inclinations or desires. Practical reason, furthermore, motivates when one judges that a course of action or an outcome is good in itself, that it is *desirable* in the sense that it is to be desired whether one presently desires it or not.

II. Introduction to this chapter

In developing an account of practical reason, there are two related problems we must address. Is practical reason both *practical* and *rational*? If practical reason is really practical, then how is it rational? And if it is rational, how is it really practical? In other words, suppose that practical reasoning is by definition a kind of knowledge. Knowledge is theoretical, it aims to grasp what is true. So the first problem is that theoretical knowledge cannot (by itself) motivate to action. Alternately, suppose that practical reason is by definition a kind of practical motivation or disposition to act in certain ways rather than others. Such motivations have action-guiding force and would explain why we act the way we do. The second problem is that such dispositions are not forms of knowledge. So either practical reasoning is not *practical* (action-guiding) or it is not *reasonable*. In a very real sense, the primary challenge is to *defend the very concept of practical reason*. Even if we can answer these problems, others will surface. I will summarize and address each new problem as it arises.

III. Practical Reason and knowledge

We can set up the discussion in this way: how should one live? McDowell says that the whole "point of engaging in ethical reflection… lies in the interest of the question 'How should one live'?"[4] No mature adult can avoid asking this question. The answer or answers to the "how to live?" question(s) will be a *practical* answer or set of answers. It will be an item of knowledge and also a plan or guide to living in the way specified by that knowledge.

As a first pass, we use Jay Wallace's definition as a starting point: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[5] We engage in such practical reasoning about quite general matters ("how

4. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.

5. R. Jay Wallace, "Practical Reason," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014.

should one live?") and about more specific circumstances ("should I stay or should I go?") and everything in between. Practical reasoning taken broadly includes a variety of related deliberative processes, including considering future actions to be done, reflecting on past actions already done, evaluating events and objects as desirable or undesirable. What all these have in common is the the attempt to identify (or create) *practical reasons* – that is, reasons to φ or not to φ.

Practical reasoning is thus like theoretical reasoning in at least one important respect: it is normative. Theoretical reasoning is a process by which I aim to determine *what to believe*. When I assess evidence for and against some proposition P, I am looking for *reasons* to believe P is true or false. The successful conclusion of a rational argument is the judgment that P or that not-P. (Or I may not have enough evidence to judge either way, in which case I may withhold judgment.) Similarly, when I consider a scientific hypothesis, I suppose that P and then conduct an experiment that will reveal reasons that confirm or disconfirm the supposition. To fail to believe P upon coming to know good evidence for it, or to believe P in spite of good evidence against it, is to make an intellectual error. If Q entails P and I already know and affirm that Q, then I *ought* to affirm that P. Similarly, if some reason to π entails a reason to φ, and I already know and am committed to π, then I ought to φ.

My contention is that the linguistic parity between π-type reasons and Q-type reasons is not accidental. Both are a species of *reasons*, though they differ. Philippa Foot says that reasons of type (A) are "Reasons for acting, which we may call practical reasons" and type (B) are "Reasons for believing, which we may call evidential or demonstrative reasons." She continues: □ >As philosophers, and therefore theoreticians, our job is of course to give the second type of reason, arguing for or against the truth of a variety of propositions that seem to involve special problems—like those, for instance, about personal identity or the existence of an external world. But among these many 'philosophical' subjects we find that of the nature of practical reasons, and in this special case we shall have to give reasons

of type B for theses about reasons of type A.[6].

The difference between the two kinds of reasons is not obliterated by noticing their essential parity. Practical reasoning is essentially practical. We must be careful with our words; both theoretical and practical reasoning are *active* in the sense that both require work and both light up the brain on an MRI scan. But where theoretical reasoning results in belief, judgment, speculation, and so on, practical reasoning *results in action*. And, I would suggest, this distinction must be built in to our definition of practical reasoning. (This point needs some defending, but for now I am only aiming to articulate it.)

One does not practically reason about what to do *and then decide* to do it; there is no gap between the conclusion of a deliberation and a decision. To borrow Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, practical reasoning is "thinking how to live."[7] To be a reasoner is to be responsive to Sellars' "space of reasons", including both practical and theoretical reasons. The difference, as Jennifer Frey points out, is this that theoretical reasons give us good reason to believe what is true or false while practical reasons give us good reason to act or not act. She says: "The practical order is not essentially the order of reality and truth, but the order of action and the good. It is not the order of the explanation of form, but the order of the exemplification or realization of form."[8]

Considering practical reason as a whole in this way helps us to understand the neo-Aristotelians. Jack Weinstein says: 'The term practical rationality is derived from Aristotle's *phronesis*. It is to be distinguished from *sophia*, a more technical form of reasoning. Practical rationality leads to more approximate conclusions; it takes context and relative facts into account, and it usually leads to moral or political conclusions."[9]

6. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 64–65.

7. Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

8. Jennifer Ann Frey, "The Will and the Good" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 2.

9. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 60–61.

McDowell practical reasoning as knowledge

With these basics in hand, let us turn to John McDowell's argument for the old Socratic thesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge.

The virtuous person, McDowell argues, knows what to do. Hence, virtue is a kind of practical knowledge. For in many cases, the answer to "how?" questions is an item of knowledge. "How do I unscrew a light bulb?" is a request for an instruction ("twist left") or set of instructions, ("first, grip the light bulb; then twist left until it comes loose."). So McDowell argues that the virtues are various "sensitivities" to the salient facts about how to live. Virtue is a kind of knowledge, namely *practical knowledge* (a "disposition to act well"). The answer to the question of how to live will be not just a proposition but a plan.

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."[10] The kind person *knows* what is called for, is intentional about avoiding cruel or indifferent behavior, and so on.

One inadequacy with this view is that there are a variety of reasons for action. Rather obviously, the question of what to do is in many cases not simply a question of what is kind, or fair, or just. McDowell has supported the notion that this kind of knowledge ("sensitivity

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

to reasons") is necessary for virtue, but not that it is sufficient. For it might be that one is sensitive to what another would feel but still fail to act rightly. He gives the example of an overindulgent parent who is far *too* sensitive to the feelings of the child, or rather *not sensitive enough* to other considerations, like the considerations of fairness or child's health. How does the moral knowledge that is virtue combine with other forms of knowledge or other motivations?

He gives two answers: the first is that the when a virtuous person is sensitive to the "requirement imposed by the situation" that requirement must exhaust his reason for acting as he does."[11] 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.[12]

In other words, 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.

11. Ibid., 332.
12. Ibid., 333.

IV. Is practical knowledge practical?

This thesis that virtue as the sensitivity or set of sensitivities to requirements for action is not liable to persuade some. An objection familiarly attributed to Hume says that practical reasons by themselves cannot motivate, at least not by themselves. If this were so, moral reasons could not satisfy the "practical requirement". Expressivists are among the chief contemporary proponents of this objection. Expressivism is motivated in large part by the attempt to satisfy the *practical* dimension of practical reason (at the cost of the "rational" part).

> Expressivism in this form suggests a naturalistic interpretation of practical reason, one that may seem appropriate to the enlightened commitments of the modern scientific world view. It is naturalistic metaphysically, insofar as it makes no commitment to the objective existence in the world of such allegedly questionable entities as values, norms, or reasons for action.[13]

On this familiar view, "cognition and volition are distinct." Practical reasoners do not simply enjoy a "single complex sensitivity" to what a situation requires; they also need the presence of a conative mental state (such as a desire) as well. 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. For suppose that 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.

McDowell's criticism of this objection is this: in order to even notice the salient facts (that one's friend is in trouble) one must already be sensitive to a particular range of

13. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

requirements for action. 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. The morally calloused chauvinist does not notice the fact that his or her actions are causing others pain. Better, the calloused person does not notice it *as morally salient* fact.

This response from McDowell is not conclusive, but it is a good start. For it highlights the deep fault line between the Humean and the Aristotelian camps. It is true that if two people are identically sensitive to a morally salient fact but act differently that virtue cannot simply be that sensitivity. But one person's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens.* So 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.[14]

Is there anyway to bridge the divide without begging the question in either direction? 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."[15] 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 interfere. What interference? McDowell mentions desires and also a "distortion in one's appreciation" of the relevant reasons.[16]

This reply from McDowell is *an* answer but it too is not conclusive. For Donald Davidson argues to the effect that a person might fail to perform the resultant right action *even without such interfering factors.*McDowell responds that the point is true, but it is not an objection. Aristotle's account of continence details that continence is not a virtue. Continence is better than incontinence, but not as good as virtue. The continent person is able to perform the right action because he recognizes it as right, *despite* countervailing

14. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 333.
15. Ibid., 334.
16. Ibid., 334.

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.[17] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently and instantly *acts* on the best reason.

So McDowell's thesis is that virtue is a kind of knowledge, namely, a perceptual sensitivity to a range of facts that are conceptually defined as reasons for action. The hypothetical counterexample presented by his Humean critic is one wherein two agents are "sensitive to" or "notice" identical reasons for action but do not actually *act* identically. McDowell's response is that while noticing a requirement for action is necessarily motivating *to some extent*, other psychological factors may interfere with the resulting correct action. Nevertheless, the case is not yet settled.

V. A second pass at knowledge

Making the case more plausible requires a second, deeper look at reasoning in general. Before I offer my response, I need to take this second look. The paradigmatic case of knowledge is theoretical knowledge, knowledge that P. But theoretical knowledge is deductive, categorical, and propositional. Deductive logic examines and codifies the necessary relations that obtain between such propositions. So one objection states that if virtue is knowledge, and the paradigmatic kind of knowledge codifiable, then it would seem to be necessary

17. Ibid., 335.

that virtue knowledge is codifiable. However, practical knowledge or 'knowing-what-to-do' is not codifiable. Therefore, virtue must not be knowledge. (The non-cognitivist critic also assumes this deductive model of practical reasoning.)

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."[18] This common belief McDowell wishes to refute. MacIntyre, similarly, 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.[19]

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,

18. Ibid., 337.

19. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513.

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 an inference analogous to that whereby one might hypothesize a physical structure underlying the observable motions of some inanimate object."[20] 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."[21] 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.

Although McDowell argues that virtue is not codifiable, still it is a kind of knowledge. But 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,

20. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 337.
21. Ibid., 339.

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. 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."[22] 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."[23] 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…"[24] 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.)

22. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
23. Ibid., 343.
24. Ibid., 343.

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."[25] 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 external standpoint."[26]

VI. Why do we do anything?

This discussion from McDowell is helpful but leaves much to be desired. McDowell argued that the virtuous person is not only sensitive to one kind of requirement (say, kindness) but sensitive to a wide range of reasons that must be ranked, ordered, and weighed before he or she can act on the practical conclusion. It is necessary to broaden the notion of perceptual sensitivity. However, he also assumed that "moral reasons" is a name for the overriding sort of practical reasons. I wish to argue that this is a subtle mistake.

In order to supply some of what is missing, what is required is a step back to examine the natural of practical reasons themselves and how they relate to practical reasoning in general. I would like to argue that there is one genus of reasons for action: practical reasons. There are many species of practical reason, but proper distinction is not between "moral" and "non-moral" but between various kinds of moral reasons.

The familiar way of framing the "how should one live?" question is this: There are two sorts of motives that drive everyone: prudential reasons and moral reasons. Prudential

25. Ibid., 342. Verbatim, he says: "The explanations, so far treated as explanations of judgments about what to do, are equally explanations of actions."

26. Ibid., 346.

reasons incline one to look out for oneself. One is naturally, selfishly inclined to pursue one's own happiness or well-being. On the other hand, moral reasons drive one to look out for others. One is morally constrained to do one's duty, sometimes in accord with, but often against one's inclinations. Kant (or the stereotypical figure in the literature whom people call "Kant") presents morality as a particular set of reasons (all deriving from the moral law) that obligate one to do what is right, whether or not it is prudential. Otherwise, so long as one is doing one's duty, one can answer the "how should one live?" question with a list of prudential considerations: get a good job, save for retirement, eat healthy foods, exercise, make friends, and so on.

The familiar frame invokes a pair of reasons: prudential and moral reasons. It also sometimes associates one of the pair with emotion and the other with reason. Hume, for example, might associate morality with emotions and sentiments and associate prudence with rationality. It is "rational" for me to cheat you out of your cash, but my sentiments of guilt and brotherly affection don't let me. Kant, as an another example, might associate morality with rationality and prudence with emotion and self-love. The prudential movements arise from emotional, non-rational aspects of our psychology. Hursthouse explains this aspect of Kant's moral theory:

> And there is indeed much in Kant to suggest that, although he shares with Aristotle the view that we have not just one, but two principles of movement, in other respects his philosophical psychology is Humean. He seems committed to the view that our emotions or inclinations are no part of our rationality. They come from the non□rational, animal side of our nature; if they happen to prompt us to act in accordance with the judgements of reason about what ought to be done we are lucky; if they incline us against them we find life difficult, but their prompting us in the right direction is no mark or indication of their rationality. The emotions are not rational in any way.[27]

Within this familiar frame, morality becomes especially pressing at the moment of moral dilemmas. Edmund Pincoffs distinguishes two broad conceptions of philosophical ethics

27. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 109.

he calls "Quandary Ethics" and "Character Ethics." Quandary ethics is focused on the short-term resolution of immediate moral problems, either by dissolving moral perplexity or giving some (hopefully rational) basis for a particular decision or course of action. The Quandary ethicists are those Pincoffs quotes at the beginning of his article (such as Hare, Toulon, Brandt). They think that:

> The business of ethics is to clarify and solve "problems", i.e. situations in which it is difficult to know what one should do; that the ultimate beneficiary of ethical analysis is the person who, in one of these situations, seeks rational ground for the decision he must make; that ethics is therefore primarily concerned to find such grounds, often conceived of as moral rules and the principles from which they can be derived; and that meta-ethics consists in the analysis of the terms, claims, and arguments which come into play in moral disputation, deliberation, and justification in problematic contexts.[28]

Like the Quandary ethicist, McDowell represents the view of moral reasons as special, perhaps overriding, kinds of reasons pertaining to the rights, obligations, or duties of one individual in relation to others. Even in asking the "how do I live?" question, a Quandary ethicist is likely assuming that the answer will include a set of moral reasons weighed against or in opposition to non-moral reasons (such as prudential reasons).

But are moral reasons are *one type* of practical reason, or does any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed)?[29] Suppose a greeting card or an internet meme recommends that you "live well, love hard, and laugh often." Is this platitude aiming to provide you with a moral reason, a practical reason, a prudential reason, an aesthetic reason, or something else?

By contrast, character ethics is focused on the long-term goal of living well by ex-

28. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552. Cf. MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?.

29. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002), chap. 13, "Are Moral Reasons Overriding?"; Cf. also John McDowell and IG McFetridge, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 52 (1978): 13–42.

ecuting worthwhile goals in every day life. Aristotle is an example of a Character Ethicist. Aristotle:

> …thought of ethics as a branch of politics, which in turn he thought of as a very wide-ranging subject having to do generally with the planning of human life so that it could be lived as well as possible. Moral problems are given their due but are by no means stage-centre. The question is not so much how we should resolve perplexities as how we should live.[30]

As Martha Nussbaum points out, a Quandary ethicist might ask "how do specifically moral ends and commitments figure among the ends that [a moral agent] pursues?" Nussbaum clarifies:

> This question is posed in a characteristically modern way, presupposing a distinction between the moral and the non-moral that is not drawn, as such, by the Greek thinkers. But if one objects to that characterization, one can rephrase it: for example, What role does concern for others for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[31]

McDowell is trying to straddle the line between the two ways the Quandary and the Character ethicist thinks about practical reasons. What is needed is distinguish our sense of 'moral' from the older sense. Foot makes a similar point:

> Many if not most moral philosophers in modern times see their subject as having to do exclusively with relations between individuals or between an individual and society, and so with such things as obligations, duties, and charitable acts… 'moral' and 'prudential' considerations [are] contrasted in a way that was alien to Plato or Aristotle.[32]

Certainly considerations about myself are conceptually distinct from considerations about my family, my friend, my society, or my species. And certainly there is a powerful social

30. Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," 553–4.

31. Martha C Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?" *The Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1999): 174.

32. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

and psychological force to the distinction between moral and prudential, other-regarding and self-regarding,[33] altruistic and egoistic[34], benevolent and selfish, conscience and self-love.[35] But getting the distinction right is crucial to understanding the kind of knowledge that virtue is.

MacIntyre's earliest ethical work distinguished the significance of moral judgments compared to other kinds of judgments. In a careful critique of both intuitionists such as Moore and emotivists such as Stevenson, MacIntyre concluded that both (mistakenly) assume that moral judgments and moral terms have significance only in their referential meaning. The intuitionists, of course, concluded that moral terms refer to a non-natural property, while the emotivists concluded that moral terms do not refer to such a property and so do not refer at all. (Naturalists, later in the 20th century, argue that moral terms refer to natural properties.) MacIntyre's alternative denies the assumption entirely; moral judgments "have their own kind of logic" and their significance, like other kinds of judgments, comes from "exhibiting the logic of their usage."[36] The significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action." Solving problems of evaluation (we might say) and action is their place in "a pattern of language and action…" He continues:

> Above all they arise out of the way in which we see the world and the way in which our language allows us to see the world. We cannot sufficiently emphasize the direction given to our appraisals by the language which happens

33. Michael Slote, "Agent-Based Virtue Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (1995): 83–101.

34. Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton University Press, 1978).

35. Julia Annas, "Morality and Self Interest," ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–21; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Egoism and Altruism," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York, Macmillan, 1967), 462; Paul Bloomfield, "Virtue and Happiness," ed. Rachana Kamtekar, 2012; Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2010): 651–92.

36. Mark C. Murphy, in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 118, quoting p. 73 of MacIntyre's master's thesis *The Significance of Moral Judgments*.

> to be available for our descriptions. It is as we see the facts that we judge the world.

MacIntyre's point is that moral judgments are not *simply* useful in moral dilemmas or quandaries. They appear, at the earliest stages of childhood development, in a pattern of usage that is inextricable from the human activities of reasoning, acting, and appraising. Evaluative judgments appear in the widest imaginable spread of human activities, from politics to playgrounds, from sociology to social life, from the practices of law and medicine to the professions of journalism and psychology, from the sciences to the arts. Even if this point be granted, moral dilemmas are not *unreal*. Moral dilemmas are a special version of our general "problems of appraisal and action." They may be particularly vexing, but they are no different from the general problems of how to live, how to be happy, what kinds of public policies to pursue, what apparently meaningful types of life are really meaningful.

History of error

To make this case, it is helpful to examine how historically we came to make the familiar, but faulty, distinction between moral and non-moral reasons. Foot cites Mill as an early proponent of the distinction:

> J. S. Mill, for instance, expresses this modern point of view quite explicitly, saying in his essay *On Liberty* that 'A person who shows rashness, obstinacy, self□conceit . . . who cannot restrain himself from harmful indulgences' shows faults (Mill calls them 'self□regarding faults') which 'are not properly immoralities' and while they 'may be proofs of any amount of folly . . . are only a subject of moral reprobation when they involve a breach of duty to others, for whose sake the individual is bound to have care for himself.'[37]

Mill distinguishes folly from immorality, where folly is failure to provide goods for oneself. As Elizabeth Anscombe had observed in 1958, the distinction between moral and non-moral

37. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

reasons shows up in a similar distinction between two different kinds of 'ought' or 'should', or 'need':

> The terms "should" or "ought" or "needs" relate to good and bad: e.g. machinery needs oil, or should or ought to be oiled, in that running without oil is bad for it, or it runs badly without oil. According to this conception, of course, "should" and "ought" are not used in a special "moral" sense when one says that a man should not bilk. (In Aristotle's sense of the term "moral" [ήθικός], they are being used in connection with a moral subject□matter: namely that of human passions and [non□technical] actions.) But they have now acquired a special so□called "moral" sense-□i.e. a sense in which they imply some absolute verdict (like one of guilty/not guilty on a man) on what is described in the "ought" sentences used in certain types of context: not merely the contexts that Aristotle would call "moral"□-passions and actions□-but also some of the contexts that he would call "intellectual."[38]

The peculiarly *moral* 'ought' means came to mean a final, verdictive ought – like the kind of "thou shalt" language used in the Ten Commandments. But *this* kind of ought, Anscombe thinks, only makes sense in the mouth of a believer in divine law.

This conceptual history illuminates that moral and non-moral reasons each exemplify, in their own ways, a broader conceptual structure of practicality. We identify *reasons to act*. MacIntyre further summarizes the conceptual roots of the terms 'moral' and 'ethical'.

> 'Moral' is the etymological descendant of 'moralis'. But 'moralis', like its Greek predecessor *ethikos* – Cicero invented 'moralis' to translate the Greek word in the *De Fato* – means 'pertaining to character' where a man's character is nothing other than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead on particular kind of life… The early uses of 'moral' did not contrast with " 'prudential' or 'self interested' " nor with " 'legal or 'religious'… The word to which it is closest in meaning is perhaps most simply 'practical'."[39]

MacIntyre came to the same conclusion, partially through his study of ethics. As a young philosopher, he was troubled about emotivism in particular and modern metaethics in gen-

38. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."
39. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 38.

eral. Emotivists, intuitionists, naturalists, and error theorists all seemed to assume that moral terms are *referential.* If moral terms within moral judgments are supposed to pick out a property in the world, then either we must identify that property or (if we cannot) conclude that moral terms are literally meaningless. He argued that this assumption is a mistake. Instead, he concluded that the significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action."[40] Instead of referring (or failing to refer) to a special 'moral property', all evaluative reasoning is practical reasoning. We employ moral judgments when we must evaluate something or when we must reason about what to do. Moral reasoning is not a special, mystical discipline divorced from prudential, instrumental, and other kinds of practical reasoning. Hence, there can be no adequate theory of ethics apart from a theory of (practical) rationality.

The point about this tangled relationship between practical reasons and moral reasons is not merely of historical or etymological interest (though of course, the narrow sense of the word 'moral' in discourse today is clear enough). The point is that qualities such as benevolence and generosity we tend to call human "moral goodness" are of a type with a *broader category of goodness*. Foot explains: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[41]

The upshot: Practical reason as substantive process willing the good

Let us return to McDowell's response to the Humean critic who is not satisfied that moral reasons are intrinsically motivating. McDowell admitted that the virtuous person is not just sensitive to one or two sorts of requirement for action as final verdicts; the virtuous person

40. Murphy, 118, quoting MacIntyre's master's thesis *The Significance of Moral Judgments* p. 73.

41. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

is sensitive to the broad range of often competing reasons that must be ranked and weighed before a final verdict is reached about what is to be done. This move was correct, in my view. What was incorrect was the persistence in labeling the broader sensitivity as "virtue", which suggests that one is only considering "moral reasons" in the narrower sense of that term. This subtle mistake leaves McDowell's case open to the hypothetical counterexample that an immoral person might be sensitive to a wide range of reasons, including narrowly "moral" reasons (read as one's duty to others), while doing the wrong thing or doing nothing at all.

How can we fill in the gaps in his account? The alternative that is needed is to recapture the holistic view of practical reasoning as the activity that defines human life form. Gladly, this account of practical reason is plausible in its own right and reinforces what we have argued above about the generics that describe all organisms and human beings. For help, I will turn to Jennifer Frey's recent discussions of Anscombe and Aquinas. In short, I shall defend the Aristotelian-Thomistic account in which practical reasoning is an end-oriented activity that aims at the perceived good of one's form of life. As Frey stated in the epigram above, "There could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live."

The first point in this case is that all organisms act toward ends, albeit unreflectively. Frey summarizes Aquinas in this way:

> all living things are a self-sustaining system of powers that functions to bring the living thing into being and to sustain its being. The movement of any part of a living thing, at any particular moment, is necessarily explained by reference to the movement of the whole thing towards a single end: the coming to be, maintenance, or reproduction of that very form of life.[42]

We have argued above that the growth into maturity of an organism is growth into the exemplification of its form of life. This form of life is what Aquinas calls a thing's nature. Hence,

42. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 68.

a wolf hunts in packs by nature, trees extend roots into the ground by nature, reptiles warm themselves in the sun by nature, and so on.

In plants and animals, the "natural inclination" toward their good is not reflective or intentional, and Aquinas did not make this mistake. Frey says:

"Aquinas would agree with us that it is a category mistake to say that a sunflower wants to grow towards the light, if by this we mean that the flower somehow registers a positive feeling or has an inner impression towards the light, which "causes" it to move toward the light. The plant does not apprehend or desire anything; thus Aquinas is very careful to say that it does not have a power of appetite. In fact, Aquinas is at pains to note that a plant has no window onto the world at all—it just has conditions in which it characteristically comes into being, maintains, and reproduces itself.[43]

Plants merely grow and reproduce; while animals grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences, such as sensory perceptions of material objects and of their own hungers, thirsts, pains, and so on. When it comes to human beings, however, we observe a difference. Human beings grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences like other animals but human beings also *know* that they do so. To quote John Haldane again, "things are specified by their power."[44] And we observe our "power" or capacity to engage in cognitive and deliberative activities. Simply put, we are able to reason, to reason theoretically and practically.

Reasoning is a distinctly human activity. While animals can not only sense but *perceive*, humans have the capacity of "intellection," the power of abstracting the forms themselves from percepts. An animal can *sense* an informed, organized object; an animal can be affected by the object. But the human animal can *acquire information* from the organized object. The ability to perceive something *as*, or even to perceive something big

43. Ibid., 69–70.

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

and brown with a smudge on its nose, does not imply the ability to perceive that thing as a cat.[45]

When it comes to inclination or "appetite", animals pursue and avoid objects. The antelope pursues healthy grass and flees a lion. The animal can only experience what is good or bad for it as a particular object. Animals incline toward their own good. They also have sensory perception of beings. But animals do not perceive beings *as* falling under universal categories.

By contrast, a human being can recognize universals and hence can take up its natural inclinations to pursue or flee as reasons in a deliberative act. The natural inclinations may be underwritten or overridden. Confronted with a bit of healthy food on someone else's plat, I may choose not to eat it, for I recognize it as *not mine*. Confronted with a lion in a zoo, I may choose not to flee, for I recognize it as *not dangerous*.

Frey summarizes: >Rational animals, like any animal, have a natural inclination towards their good as a whole, and like lower animals this power is actualized through their apprehension of things in the world. But Aquinas argues that a rational animal relates to the world through the application of universal concepts, and thus it is inclined to pursue or avoid things under an intellectual, universal apprehension of them. Thus, Aquinas says that the will is inclined towards its objects under the formality of the "universal good," rather than the particular good.[46] ### How to live

We have been speaking of the human capacity for recognizing and pursuing particular ends as good. We need to expand our scope to include the whole of life, the conception of our human good that constitutes the answer to the question "how should one live?" McDowell gets this part right — every rational practice is undertaking in pursuit of some particular end *in context* of a total conception of what is good in general. Frey says:

45. John Haldane, "On Coming Home to (Metaphysical) Realism," *Philosophy* 71, no. 276 (1996): 287–96.

46. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 75.

> Consequently, we can say that rational animals have an understanding of different levels of ends, and at least a vague sense of how they are supposed to hang together as a whole. This conception of how it all hangs together is what Aquinas calls the ultimate end—a rational animal's general, conceptual understanding of how to live or go on. Aquinas thinks that any sane, mature adult will necessarily have cobbled together some such conception. Aquinas calls this conception "the universal good", and he argues that it is the will's proper object. Everything that is willed is willed under this rational aspect of good, as to be pursued because *in accord with my general conception of the good.* In fact, Aquinas thinks there could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live.[47]

Again:

>no human action is intelligible without attributing to the agent herself some conception of this end, no matter how inarticulate, unsystematic, or unreflective it might be. Aquinas takes it for granted that in coming to be a human being—i.e., being raised in a community of other human beings, coming into the possession of concepts, a language, and coming to have a world—one comes into some such conception, and thus comes to act voluntarily.[48]

Substantive and procedural

Some philosophers object to this "substantive" conception of practical reason. They think that practical reasoning is "procedural."[49] This objection misses the point. What we are presenting is the intelligible structure that the procedure must necessarily have. The "substance" I am defended is not a specific good or set of goods. It is highly general. The point is that without a sufficiently general starting point such as "good is to be done and evil avoided", no other procedural reasoning can get off the ground.

47. Ibid., 78–79, italics in original.
48. Ibid., 87.
49. For a discussion of this distinction, see: Brad Hooker and Bart Streumer, "Procedural and Substantive Practical Rationality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 57–74.

Foot is persuaded that we must assume a definition of practical reasoning that is substantive, rather than merely procedural. Practical reasoning does not just aim at means to ends, nor does it merely aim at "ends"; it aims at *the apparent good*.

> This now seems to me to be the correct way of meeting the challenge that I myself issued in 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' and at that time despaired of meeting: namely, to show the rationality of acting, even against desire and self□interest, on a demand of morality. The argument depends on the change of direction that Quinn suggested: seeing goodness as setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part□determinant of the thing itself. Nor is this a quite unfamiliar way of arguing. Many of us are willing to reject a 'present desire' theory of reasons for action because we think that someone who knowingly puts his future health at risk for a trivial pleasure is behaving foolishly, and therefore not well. Seeing his will as defective, we therefore say that he is doing what he has reason not to do. Being unable to fit the supposed 'reason' into some preconceived present□desire□based theory of reasons for action, we do not query whether it really is a foolish way to behave, but rather hang on to the evaluation and shape our theory of reasons accordingly. And it is exactly a generalization of this presumption about the direction of the argument on which I am now insisting. For what, we may ask, is so special about prudence that it alone among the virtues should be reasonably thought to relate to practical rationality in such a way?[50]

If goodness is a "necessary condition of practical rationality" then we are already committed to a substantive view of practical reason, rather than a merely procedural neo-Humean view.

Evil?

Some will object to the notion that practical reason is definitionally the knowledge of ends as good. Doesn't this just define away immoral acts, immoral motives, and immoral ends? Not at all. But the objection calls for an important clarification.

To be practically rational is to judge the good, just as to be rational is to judge true and false. But the process must start somewhere. Aquinas points out that the first thing

50. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

rational beings apprehend is simply "existence" or "being." Infants perceive beings and, eventually, naturally come to perceive objects *as* objects, as individual objects.

Likewise, the first thing practical rational animals like us apprehend is "good." We are not here defining "good" as a special moral property but simply as the general property of desirableness. Aquinas says:

> Now as "being" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so "good" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that "good is that which all things seek after." Hence this is the first precept of practical reason, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided."[51]

The use of 'good' here, it bears repeating, not a special moral sense of good. Rather, it is the conception of an object of inclination, that which is to be pursued. Without such a general principle, practical reasoning and rational practice are unintelligible.

Given this basic and abstract formulation of the structure of practical reasoning, we can further specify good ends. Just as the basic structure of reasoning begins with the apprehension of being in general and then on to particular beings, concepts, and categories, practical reason begins with the apprehension of good in general and then determines particular goods.

> Practical reason is the movement of thought towards, rather than away from, material particulars…. practical reasoning is a movement from general knowledge of what is good and how to live, towards the production of the kind of life that is essentially characterized by such knowledge. When it is done well, what is understood is the same as what is produced: human form or human life.[52]

Such basic goods are apprehended as contributing to a distinctively human life form.

51. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1200 IIa. Q.94. Art. 2.
52. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 2.

> For practical reason, the starting points are the most primitive human goods that the will is naturally inclined to seek: life, knowledge, family, friendship, play, political community, and so on. These are the ends that all human beings want for their own sake, as intrinsically valuable to them. And they want these things in a rational way—viz., because they have a conceptual apprehension that they are constitutive of their general good.[53]

Immoral acts, on this view, are rational mistakes. The immoral person is pursuing *something* and so in this sense is practically rational, since to be practical rational necessarily means to pursue something *as good*, as desirable. But the immoral person fails in their practical reasoning to correctly rank and order specific goods. The imprudent person, for example, judges that it would be better to eat, drink, and be merry today rather than plan to avoid future ills. The cruel person judges that it would be better to cause suffering than to be kind.

Remedying McDowell's account

The upshot of these reflections is this: If a person does anything at all, then that person is engaging in practical reasoning. The "final verdict" and the verdictive ought is simply what Foot calls the thing to do "all things considered."[54] Apparent counterexamples that one might furnish to disprove the point actually serve, with sufficient clarification, to reinforce it. For example, someone might say, "It's ridiculous to think that I always pursue the good, because I sometimes do wrong." Sometimes we do the wrong thing. The proper response is that we perceive the bad as the good. Someone might say, "But sometimes I perceive the bad *as bad* and pursue it anyway." The response is that we sometimes take a bad or dismotivating reason into an overall reason to do something, all things considered.

What motivational internalism gets right is the affirmation that one necessarily acts on what one judges is the thing to do. The motivational internalist urges that any practical

53. Ibid., 88.
54. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.

reasons "out there" that are practical reasons *for me* necessarily connect up with my motivational structure.[55] Defined widely enough, I can agree to this way of stating things. If by "my motivational structure" we simply mean my overall disposition toward the good. I am oriented to pursue good things, and avoid bad things. Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description of 'good' I will, ipso facto, be oriented toward (whether I pursue it or merely approve of it and admire it). Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description 'bad' I will, ipso facto, oriented away from it (whether I avoid it or merely disapprove of it).

What motivational externalism gets right, that there are reasons "out there" that *would* motivate one if one knew about them. There might be reasons to φ that I am not aware of and thus am not motivated by. For example, perhaps it is true that one ought to save for retirement, but I may fail to do so because I am unaware of that reason or am ignoring it in my attention to other reasons.

It seems to me that a good deal of the internalism/externalism literature is consumed in disambiguating these unhelpful labels. The mare's nest, as I have shown above, is due to the fatal ambiguity of the phrase 'moral reasons'. In the Quandary ethicist's sense, moral reasons (i.e., facts about what is good for others) are simply one type of practical reason; but in the proper sense sense, *any* practical reason (i.e., objective normative and evaluative facts about what is worth pursuing and worth avoiding) can be seen as a "moral reason". To avoid this mess, a safer and clearer strategy is simply to recapture the insight that the concept of a practical reason is the concept of *what to do* all things considered. The thing to do all things considered has its "practical" or motivational component "built-in" so to speak. While it often happens that one's practical reasons conflict or are indeterminate, nevertheless, a set of practical reasons can constitute the *overriding* practical reason: *the*

55. Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, 2007, 292–98.

thing to do, all things considered. So, the final or verdictive ought belongs only to the ought that is the conclusion of the total process of practical reasoning.

Seen in this light, it is obvious that practical reasons can and do motivate us. Or rather, practical reasons *are the only thing that motivate*. Practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of the term 'motive'. Other psychological states such as hungers, thirsts, loves, fears, *move* me to action the same way that such states move non-rational organisms. For rational animals, only reasons *motivate* me to act, since motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state. Aquinas distinguishes between the "actions of a human" and "human actions." The action of a human is any motion, such as mumbling in your sleep, scratching an itch, or idly tapping a foot. But a human action is by definition an action in pursuit of a goal which is perceived as a good. A human being without any practical reasons would not do immoral deeds; he or she would not do anything at all. Like Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener, the person who does not engage in practical reasoning or identify any practical reasons would simply waste away and die.[56]

Reasoning about ends

Reasoning about ends may be a difficult and messy business. But we do it. It is an empirical fact that we reason – indeed, disagree and debate – about ultimate ends. Suppose Betty says to her friend, "I'm concerned about you. You haven't returned my calls. I heard you lost your job and your spouse left. Now I see you're gaining weight. What's wrong?" It would be no consolation for her friend to respond, "Nothing's wrong. Yes, yes, all that is true: I'm destitute, alone, and unhealthy. But that's what I was *aiming* for." Betty would rightly think, "Well, then… you are a fool." Betty would rightly wonder "what is wrong such that you have taken as your aims such unhealthy and ridiculous goals?"

56. Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (Best Classic Books, 1966).

Jay Wallace rebuts the charge that if reasoning about ends is not a mathematically-precise procedure, then it must not really be rational:

> Practical deliberation about ends is not an easy or well-defined activity. There are no straightforward criteria for success in this kind of reflection, and it is often unclear when it has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. These considerations encourage the Humean assumption—especially widespread in the social sciences—that there is no reasoning about final ends. On the other hand, how is one supposed to clarify one's largest and most important ends, if not by reasoning about them in some way? Rather than exclude such reflection because it does not conform to a narrowly scientific paradigm of reason, perhaps we should expand our conception of practical reason to make room for clarificatory reflection about the ends of action.[57]

Warren Quinn, likewise argues that we reason about goods:

> Practical thought, like any other thought, requires a subject matter. And for human beings the subject matter that distinguishes thought as practical is, in the first instance, human ends and action insofar as they are good or bad in themselves […] practical thought deploys a master set of non-instrumental evaluative notions: that of a good or bad human act, a good or bad human life, a good or bad human agent, and a good or bad human action. Practical reason is, on this view, the faculty that applies these fundamental evaluative concepts.[58]

There are many reasons for action. But the concept of a reason for action is the concept of pursuing what is good or what is best, all things considered. Practical reason runs into quandaries because there are so many reasons for action, and they sometimes conflict. Some have to do with what is best for me, what is best for others, what is best for me and what is best for me later, what is permissible and what is required, etc. Although we may want to reserve the word 'moral' for other-regarding reasons, it is important to keep in mind that our goal of living well demands sensitivity to a whole range of reasons, regarding self, other, world, and so on.

57. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 6.
58. **???** sure which 223. Maybe 1993 or 1992.

Although this process is messy, it is fundamentally so. Any attempt to configure the process by subjecting to a set of ready-made rules or criteria will make it easier to understand only at the cost of losing grasp of the process. Wiggins suggests that there are psychological, not philosophical, reasons behind the attempt to reduce the process of practical reasoning to something mathematical and formal:

> I entertain the unfriendly suspicion that those who feel they *must* seek more than [the Aristotelian view of practical reason] provides want a scientific theory of rationality not so much for a passion for science, even where there can be no science, but because they hope and desire, by some conceptual alchemy, to turn such a theory into a regulative or normative discipline, or into a system of rules by which to spare themselves some of the agony of thinking and all the torment of feeling and understanding that is actually involved in reasoned deliberation.[59]

Virtue as skill

Julia Annas' presentation of virtue as as a skill illuminates this same point, I think, beautifully. She says, "I should develop an account of virtue in which I show have central to the idea that the practical reasoning of the virtuous person is analogous in important ways… to the practical reasoning of someone who's exercising a practical skill."[60] What she calls the "skill analogy" might be taken as problematic since it drains the peculiarly *moral* quality out of virtue. The opposite is true: The skill analogy fills the project of living daily life with the potential for virtue. The virtuous person is *good at* and not just *good* — good at helping others, good at thinking ahead, good at human life. The vicious person, by contrast, is not just bad but *bad at* the essential elements of human life. Of course, being born with a paucity of natural talents is not a matter of immorality or is being born with an abundance of natural talents a matter of moral worth. Rather, the admirable person makes *good use*

59. David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76 (1975): 29–51.

60. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

of his or her fortune, and the despicable person makes bad use of it. The admirable person is all the more admirable when he or she proves skillful of making good use even of very bad fortune; and the miserable person is all the more pitiable when he or she wastes even of very good fortune.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to secure a definition of practical reason which captures both the *practicality* and *rationality* of our human capacity to resolve what to do and how to live. I argued, with McDowell, that the virtuous person is sensitive to practical reasons, i.e., the salient facts of what is required in a given situation. I argued, against McDowell, that so resolving the "how should one live?" question is not just what virtuous people do, but what all mature, functional adults do. Everyone undertakes a complex process of adjudicating between all the available goods known to one, sorting them, ranking them, and forming them into a complete life plan. Practical reasons are intrinsically capable of motivating. Nevertheless, there are many practical reasons calling for action, and they sometimes conflict. So success in identifying how to live and what to do requires care, wisdom, attention, and education. Success or failure in this project is defined according to how successfully one "maps the landscape of value."[@] Success is defined as practical knowledge of what to do; failure is defined as practical error — or perhaps ignorance — of what to do.

The mere capacity to reflect on our natural inclinations is a "natural power" of human nature. We are practical rational animals by definition. Or rather, we have the potential to become such with time (no infants have this capacity). The first principle of practical reason, that good is to be done and pursued while evil is to be avoided, is known by all functioning human adults. And some more particular practical reasons are obvious enough to be known by all or almost all. My account leaves room for the commonsense insight that our potential to become successful practical reasoners is greatly helped by education.

While there is much more to be said to fully defend this account against reasonable objections, I believe I have provided the outlines of a theory of practical rationality that can potential form a satisfying account.

A select list of what "more" there is to say includes addressing the practical reason subjectivist who would argue that the Frey's "practical order" is not really an order "out there" in the world but an order "in here" in the human minds and human psychology. That is the task for the next chapter.

VII. Subjectivism about practical reason

One item on the list of "more to be said" includes addressing the practical reason subjectivist who would argue that the Frey's "practical order" is not really an order "out there" in the world but an order "in here" in the human minds and human psychology. This is the problem of the status of practical reasons within (a broadly-construed) naturalism.

As Simon Blackburn summarizes, naturalism asks:

> … No more of the world than we already know is there—the ordinary features of things on the basis of which we make decisions about them, like or dislike them, fear them and avoid them, desire them and seek them out. It asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it.[61]

Consider an example: When I take it as a reason to buy my friend lunch because he just lost his job, how are we to understand the proposition "My friend just lost his job"? It is clearly descriptive fact or state of affairs, but it also seems to become something else when I take it as a reason for buying him lunch.

Subjectivism broadly construed comes in a variety of forms: non-cognitivist subjectivism, cognitivist subjectivism, constructivism, and so on. One currently popular approach is expressivism:

61. Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

> Expressivism in this form suggests a naturalistic interpretation of practical reason, one that may seem appropriate to the enlightened commitments of the modern scientific world view. It is naturalistic metaphysically, insofar as it makes no commitment to the objective existence in the world of such allegedly questionable entities as values, norms, or reasons for action.[62]

What each of these quite disparate views share in common is a denial of robust realism. Jay Wallace explains such realism as follows:

> The basic commitment of realism in this domain is the idea that there are facts of the matter about what we have reason to do that are prior to and independent of our deliberations, to which those deliberations are ultimately answerable. Realists picture practical reason as a capacity for reflection about an objective body of normative truths regarding action (Parfit 2011, Scanlon 2014).[63]

Moral realism, by contrast, is sometimes taken to be a substantive ethical position.[64] Moral realism is the default view that some things really and truly *matter*. Mackie insightfully points out that a loss of belief in objective value causes or corresponds with an empty feeling that nothing really matters. There is some clue here in that rational action is conceptually constituted by value judgments or evaluative attitudes.

Along these lines, Foot identifies an argument for the importance of practical rationality on the basis that *we cannot help but value it*. Foot follows Quinn's lead in criticizing a view of reason that makes the goal "the maximal satisfaction of an agent's desires and preferences, suitably corrected for the effects of misinformation, wishful thinking, and the like."[65] The trouble, Foot says, is that we *cannot consistently believe this view.*

> He pointed out that by this account, practical reason, which would concern only the relation of means to ends, would therefore be indifferent to nastiness

62. Wallace, "Practical Reason."
63. Ibid., sec. 2.
64. Matthew H Kramer, *Moral Realism as a Moral Doctrine*, vol. 3 (John Wiley & Sons, 2009).
65. Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good."

> or even disgracefulness in an agent's purposes. And Quinn asked, in the crucial sentence of the article, *what then would be so important about practical rationality?* In effect he is pointing to our taken-for-granted, barely noticed assumption that practical rationality has the status of a kind of master virtue, in order to show that we cannot in consistency with ourselves think that the Humean account of it is true.[66]

Relatedly, David Enoch's recent volume *Taking Morality Seriously* builds a case for moral realism on the basis that moral realism is the best explanation for the moral earnestness which most of us *cannot but help feel*.[67]

Subjective values

For Nagel, subjectivism would then include the straightforward projectivism of Mackie for whom moral values seem objective only because we "project" our deepest feelings and valuings onto the world but also the subtle social constructivism of McDowell for whom the moral law is real only because we legislate it, binding because we bind ourselves to it.

John Mackie's classic essay argues that "there are no objective values" (13).[68] Mackie admits that "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" accepts objective moral values. He admits that moral thought and language assumes it: the notion of objective value has "a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even in the meanings of moral terms" (16). Appearances suggest that values are indeed part of the "fabric of the world"; that they are categorically obligating and motivating; and that being a moral person in part is constituted by the recognition and proper response to such values.

66. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 62.

67. David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

68. All page citations in this paper refer to Mackie's essay "The Subjectivity of Values" in Shafer-Landau and Cuneo (eds). *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology.* Blackwell, 2007. The original essay appears in John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).

He admits that the objectivity of (some) moral values is, in short, a "defeasible presumption." In spite of all this, Mackie thinks it is possible and needful to debunk objective morality and to show that values are subjective.

His two arguments aim to bear the burden of proof on subjectivism. Values like goodness, rightness, wrongness, and also beauty or ugliness are "not part of the fabric of the world" (13). This claim has two parts. The ontological part is that objective values simply do not exist. Put differently, there is no "categorically imperative element" to moral oughts (15). There are no entities in the world such that I ought to do X or not do Y regardless of my desires, contingent wants and needs.

The argument from relativity or disagreement is this: moral codes vary between societies at a time and within a society across time. (For example, one society endorses polygamy, another condemns it; one society endorses human sacrifice, another condemns it; one endorses revenge killing, another condemns it.) An explanation of the wide variation and instability of these endorsements and condemnations, as well as the accompanying attitudes of approval, disgust, honor, is that there are no objective values at work. The moral code of a society is not a map of what is "really" morally lawful, but a map of that societies attitudes, endorsements, and condemnations. I will summarize Mackie's own discussion of the argument from relativity below.

Mackie provides one reply to the argument from relativity or disagreement: Perhaps varying moral codes "express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values" (18). People and societies vary on evaluative matters in the same way and for the same reason that people and societies vary on scientific, historical, legal, and other matters. Perhaps the disagreements between people and societies — the varieties of moral codes — are similar to scientific or historical disagreements. Scientific disagreements arise between people offering different "speculative inferences or explanatory hypotheses based on inadequate evidence" (18). I think Mackie is suggesting that two

people might dispute a particular point (is Pluto a planet?) because neither of them has fully accurate knowledge and both are doing the best they can with the available evidence, though future evidence may be forthcoming.

But the Distorted Moral Perception reply is, Mackie thinks, false. He denies that objective values are the kinds of entities about which more evidence may be forthcoming. The analogy to scientific or historical disagreements, then, does not hold.

Mackie is seriously misguided here. The argument from disagreement has been so often deployed and so widely misunderstood it is hard to know where to start.[69] There are two possible challenges, and I think both are justified.[70] The first is to deny that disagreement is so widespread as to be a massive problem for moral realism. The second is that even if there *were* widespread variation in moral codes between people and societies, that we should not necessarily take that as reason to be skeptical about moral values.

Let's take each of these challenges in turn. First, moral disagreement is not good reason to be skeptical about the objectivity moral values because such disagreement is saliently identical to scientific and philosophical disagreement; and scientific and philosophical disagreements are not good reason to be skeptical about scientific and philosophical realities. Therefore moral disagreement is not a good reason to be skeptical about moral realities. Let's call this the Scientific/Philosophical Disagreement Reply.

Mackie's reply is that scientific disputes are the result of speculation and (unlike moral ones) are subject to further empirical evidence. But this is not always true. Some scientific disputes will probably never be resolved with reference to new empirical data:

69. David Enoch, "How Is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?" *The Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2009): 15–50. Enoch summarizes no less than ten possible interpretations of the inference from disagreement to moral anti-realism. Most of them are non-sequitors, some beg the question against realism, and some offer real challenges that can and have been met.

70. Richard Joyce, "Moral Anti-Realism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015.

what happened seconds before the Big Bang? What is the necessary and sufficient condition for a discipline to be considered a science?

The case of philosophical disagreement is even more clear. Some philosophical disputes certainly will never be resolved by adequate empirical evidence: Is idealism or empiricism or platonism true, or something else? The persistance of adherents to all three schools of thought for the last 2000 years (at least) shows that such disputes are ongoing and not likely to be resolved. The dilemma is that if ideological disagreement is evidence that there is no fact of the matter — no objective truth — then perhaps Mackie can use moral disagreement as evidence that there is no objective value. But if he allows, say, that platonism is false and empiricism true (despite the enduring existence of platonists), then he has to allow that (say) societies that endorse slavery are morally mistaken while those who reject it are accurately assessing the relevant objective values.

A further buttress to this reply is that moral disagreement is evidence that some values are objective. People don't argue over what is truly subjective and known to be so ("I feel sick." "No, you feel don't, you feel quite well!").[71] People only argue over what is objective and difficult to answer (like is the center of the earth liquid or solid?)

Second, moral disagreement is not as widespread as often assumed, Mackie himself offers an objection to the argument from relativity: perhaps some very broad moral principles *are* universally recognized. For example, isn't it universally recognized that (say) it is good to promote the general happiness? Perhaps these broad moral principles are agreed upon in a way that renders moral disagreement less puzzling and the existence of objective values more plausible. Call this the Moral Agreement reply.

I think the Moral Agreement reply is a serious problem for the would-be subjectivist. But Mackie's reasons for rejecting it are puzzling. First, he complains that arguing

71. I borrow this cheeky example from Peter Kreeft. Cf. Peter Kreeft, *Summa Philosophica* (St. Augustine, 2012) Question 7, Article 1

that broad, elevated moral principles are objective entails that specific, practical moral principles are contingent. He says, "if things had been otherwise, quite different sorts of actions would have been right" (19). What is the substance of this reply? It is eminently true that "if things had been otherwise, quite different sorts of actions would have been right" — if for instance humans could breath underwater, then waterboarding would not be wrong because it would not be torturous and therefore cruel. If Bob's society was communist then amassing capital for his own personal use would be selfish and illegal and therefore antisocial. These counterfactuals are just what we would predict if general moral principles reflected universal, objective values.

Second, Mackie suggests that most people's moral lives and moral judgments do not actually operate by specifying "general principles." Rather, people seem to make moral judgments and live their moral lives according to certain "immediate responses" and "basic moral judgments".

Thankfully, Mackie does not spend too much time elaborating on this paper thin reply. We can concede the point. It is true that we make immediate responses more often than thoughtful moral judgments. What is that supposed to prove? For example, perhaps we hear a news story about a woman beating, scalding, suffocating, and finally murdering her children before storing their corpses in a freezer.[^3] That immediately strikes us as cruel, sick, degraded, disgusting, and wrong. Whether this response is the logical extension of a moral principle I reflectively endorse (such as "parents should care for their children") or merely a pre-reflectively, visceral attitude is irrelevant to whether the moral judgment accurately reflects the objective value of parental love.

A third point that makes the Moral Agreement Reply even stronger: Some moral codes (both general and specific) are well-nigh universal. For instance, the universal prohibition on incestuous relationships, the universal censure on immoderation (drunkenness or alcoholism are condemned in every society in the world), the universal approbation of

justice and compassion, specifically caring for the poor, the abandoned, the orphans, and many more.[72] These moral laws are not general but rather specific; they are not parochial but appear in dramatically different cultures at all known historical periods. The best explanation for such widespread, profound moral agreement is that all parties are apprised of the same objective values.

Mackie's epistemological thesis is that, even if objective values did exist, our epistemic access to them would require the existence of a *sui generis* mysterious faculty of moral perception. Since no such faculty exists, we are justified in rejection the existence of objective values. Furthermore, disagreement about objective value and "queerness" of putatively objective values renders their existence less likely. It is more likely that *we* "objectify" our valuings onto the world by our thought and language. Hence, right and wrong are invented.

The famed argument from queerness Mackie calls "even more important… and certainly more generally applicable" than the argument from disagreement. I do not think it fares any better.

The argument from queerness builds on the sense that "if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (19). Objective values would be esoterica, akin to non-natural qualities, Plato's transcendent Form of Good. They would be (like divine commands from heaven) authoritatively prescriptive yet empirically unverifiable. (Mackie is as poetic as possible in making the descriptive seem mundane and the prescriptive seem mystical.) What's more, their power of categorical commendation, of obligating us to act in certain ways irrespective of our desires, is utterly unique. The reasoning seems to be that

72. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: How Education Develops Man's Sense of Morality* (Macmillan, 1947), "Appendix I: Illustrations of the Tao." Lewis, a literary scholar, compiles a list of agreeing moral codes from a variety of ancient, medieval, and modern codes.

we assume the world is a unified whole, and we know a lot about spatio-temporal, physical entities, include evolved animals like ourselves who are language-users, concept-users, and evaluators. We know that we are motivated by our desires, preferences, by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. So it seems more reasonable "To ask no more of the world than we already know is there—the ordinary features of things on the basis of which we make decisions about them, like or dislike them, fear them and avoid them, desire them and seek them out. It asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it."[73] It does not seem necessary to posit abstract, non-physical entities that have no intrinsic relation to our other psychological states such as our desires and approvals.

The first reply to the argument from queerness that Mackie considers is this: perhaps objective values are not so strange (in that they are like essences, numbers, substances, necessity and possibility, causation, etc.) even though they are *are* unlike descriptive facts. (Call this the Partners in Crime reply.)

But Mackie thinks the Partners in Crime reply would be ultimately impotent if we could show that we can "on empiricist foundations…we construct an account of the ideas and beliefs and knowledge that we have of all these matters" (19). He does not try here to construct such an account. But even if an empiricist foundation could *not* be given, he doubles down: that failure would tell *against* the existence of essences, numbers, and so on.

The success of the objection that objective values are not saliently different from other unobjectionable abstract entities or concepts like necessity or causation depends on the details. Russ Shafer-Landau[74], Terence Cuneo[75], David Enoch[76] have each recently provided these details and shown (though I shall not try to show it here) that indeed objective

73. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*.

74. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4 (Oxford University Press, 2003).

75. Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

76. Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*.

values are not any more objectionable than other kinds of abstract objects. For example, Cuneo argues that whatever "objectionable features" moral norms display are also displayed *inter alia* by epistemic norms. If Mackie is an 'epistemic skeptic' then he must deny the intrinsic, categorical, reason-giving force of such epistemic value judgments as *you ought to believe whatever proposition is supported by the best evidence.* But to deny such epistemic reasons is absurd.

The epistemological part of the argument from queerness is that objective values, if they existed, would be known through an utterly unique and correspondingly queer faculty (19). He doesn't just mean they would be unverifiable empirically (that too). He means that it is difficult to imagine how something like Plato's Form of the Good could be such that "knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it… the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it" (20). But, Mackie thinks, Hume has successfully argued that reasons (instances of knowing that p) cannot be "reasons" (instances of motivating to act). The notion that values and disvalues intrinsically influence the will to pursue and avoid them postulates "value-features of quite a different order from anything else with which we are acquainted, and of a corresponding faculty with which to detect them" (20).

To further underscore the weirdness of objective value, Mackie poses the question of how we are to suppose moral qualities relate to natural facts. Even if we argue that the moral quality of wrongness "supervenes" on or "is entailed by" the natural facts (say, on the fact that the children are lighting the cat on fire), we deserve an account of the alleged supervenient or entailed quality. More likely than that we are able to "just see" the "wrongness" in the natural state of affairs, it seems more likely to Mackie that we are recognizing ordinary qualities such as that the action is socially condemned, and that we disprove.

The argument from queerness does not tell much — if at all — against the existence of objective moral standards. Mackie's argument has been called, and rightly so, an fallacy of the appeal to personal incredulity. The argument from personal incredulity has something of the form of "If on my assumptions or background beliefs p is hard for me to believe, then p is false."

Christine Korsgaard offers a different substantive reply to the argument from queerness. She concedes that categorically-obligating entities are *different* from other entities, but denies the suggestion that they therefore do not exist. She says: "It's true that they are queer sorts of entities and that knowing them isn't like anything else. But that doesn't mean that they don't exist.… For it is the most familiar fact of human life that the world contains entities that can tell us what to do and make us do it. They are people, and the other animals."[77] This reply seems to me right.

Finally, Mark Timmons has clarified one part of Mackie's argument to be the worry that the supervenience of moral properties on non-moral properties (such as biological or psychological ones) is somehow mysterious.[78] In response, Russ Shafer-Landau has offered compelling arguments that such supervenience is no more or less objectionable than the supervenience of higher-order natural properties (like life) on lower-order natural properties (like certain cellular or molecular structures).[79] (Shafer-Landau also critiques the Humean theory of psychology that underlies part of Mackie's worry about queerness.[80])

In short, though the argument from queerness raises interesting and important questions, these questions do not amount to objections to the existence of objective value but rather they are invitations to investigate questions in metaphysics, psychology, and episte-

77. Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166.

78. Mark Timmons, *Morality Without Foundations: A Defense of Ethical Contextualism* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

79. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, chap. 4.

80. ibid., , chapter 5.

mology surrounding objective value.

Response

The case for the objectivity of practical reason is one Nagel has been polishing for decades. It begins by observing that moral realism is our default view. Pre-reflectively, most of us have no objection to the seeming fact that some reasons for acting are good reasons, and others bad. Some primary normative facts, such as that is wrong torture animals have a very strong, "quasi-analytic" force to them. If moral realism is a "defeasible presumption"[81] then the burden of proof lies with its opponents.

According to Nagel, subjectivism derives what plausibility it has from two contentions, neither of which is enough to render it more plausible than realism: first, subjectivists contend that value judgments with objective purport are *really* just masks for subjective psychological states. Nagel concedes that some "pockets of… subjectivity" seem objective but can be "unmasked", such as grammar and etiquette.[82] However, we cannot justifiably explain these unmaskings by assuming that *all* seemingly objective judgments are *really* subjective. Instead, such unmaskings ought to be accommodated within an overall view of objectivity.

Second, subjectivists observe that our motives, attitudes, desires, approvals, and rationalizations are all simply features of our psychology. Nagel concedes that the psychological states are the *starting* point of practical reasoning. However, it is always in order to ask (a variation of Moore's Open Question): *Ought I be motivated by these psychological states?* Ethics begins with psychological states but then subjects these states "to examination, codification, questioning, criticism, and so on."

While Nagel allows that he has not *refuted* skepticism, nevertheless, the defeasi-

81. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 143.
82. Ibid., 155.

ble presumption of moral objectivity has not been dislodged. In a closing diatribe I find persuasive, he says:

> I remain convinced that pain is really bad, and not just something we hate, and that pleasure is really good, and not just something we like. That is just how they glaringly seem to me, however hard I try to imagine the contrary, and I suspect the same is true of most people… the scientific credentials of Darwinism… are not enough to dislodge the immediate conviction that objectivity is not an illusion with respect to basic judgments of value.[83]

Another point about disagreement

The question of how to live, and of how to resolve pressing moral disputes and dramatic moral conundrums, is not easy. There are various answers. People disagree.

Anyone who has long engaged in dialectical disputes over the various answer to the normative question of how to live well eventually comes to ask a secondary question: is there even any truth to be found? Are there any 'right answers' in ethics? Is there anything to all this discussion besides gas? Some worry that ethics has no 'right answers' because it is all just intuition-pumping. Some people view ethics as too easy because it is only a discussion of one's opinion.

We must admit that normative ethical conclusions — whatever conclusions satisfy us at the end of a long philosophical discussion about what is good and right — are different from conclusions in paleontology, medicine, or calculus. What does the difference amount to? Why is ethics *as a discipline* so different from, say, natural sciences?

There are two sorts of interpretations of ethics as a discipline in light of the diversity of answers to the question about how to live well. The first is Hume's answer, that ethics is "easy" (while metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and philosophical anthropology are presumably difficult).

83. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 110.

The second is Aristotle's, that ethics is *a different sort of science* because it has a *different subject matter* to which it must correspond. He says, "For a well schooled man is wanting searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits: is obviously just as foolish to accept arguments of probability from a mathematician has to demand strict demonstrations from an orator."[84]

By the traditional classification, ethics is a form of philosophy. Russ Shafer-Landau persuasively argues this simple equation in defense of moral realism[85] but the point has broader import. If ethics is *not* a species of philosophy, it is something else entirely. Perhaps it is a species of psychology, politics, or evolutionary anthrpology. Such a categorization assumes, at the outset, that power prevails over truth. But to concede that there are no right answers in ethics, that ethical philosophers have no hope of finding any ethical truth is to give up on ethics as a discipline.

So suppose ethics is a species of philosophy. The indirect answer is another question: Are there 'right answers' in philosophy? Isn't the relation of philosophy in general to ethics in particular the relation of genus to species? This is the relation Russ Shafer-Landau argues for.[86] So the fate of ethical claims or ethical theories hangs on the fate of philosophical claims and theories as a whole. If we are philosophical optimists at all — if we are not total skeptics or nihilists — then we can be ethical optimists.

So what species of philosophy is ethics? If philosophy is its genus, what is its differentia? As I have been arguing, ethics is the discipline of practical reason. There are 'right answers' in ethics since there are right ways to live one's life, there are wells to live well and ways to live poorly; things can go well or badly for us. One of the fundamental governing assumptions of this work is that there is no special domain of the moral. Value

84. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2014) Book I.3.
85. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds. (Blackwell, 2007) ethics.
86. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

theory is a whole package. There is at bottom no intelligible distinction between morality and prudence.

Moral Awe

Another solution to the problem of moral relativism. I call this phenomenon moral awe. Moral awe is the feeling that arises upon witnessing someone exhibiting heroic virtue. It is something beyond moral approval or admiration, which one may feel even for "small victories" such as, say, when a child decides (against all odds) to share a toy on their on volition. Moral approval is not, on the whole, a destabilizing emotion. One can experience moral approvals and disapprovals by the dozens throughout a day without being "shaken up." Moral awe leaves one feeling "shaken up". Watching a documentary about Mother Theresa's activities in Calcultta, how she held and touched and kissed young children who were so sick – and so disgusting – that not even nurses had touched them for months, may be deeply affecting. Witnessing a father bow before his wife and children in order to ask for their forgiveness may be deeply affecting.

Moral awe can "break through" one's conventional beliefs. It can shock and amaze one, almost in spite of oneself.

VIII. Conclusion

"Finally, there's the fear of nihilism—the fear that biology strips life of meaning and purpose. It says that love, beauty, morality, and all that we hold precious are just figments of a brain pursuing selfish evolutionary strategies. For most people who ask the question "Why am I here?" the answer "To pass on your genes" is less than comforting."^ke[Steven Pinker, little handout]

Chapter 7

Natural Reasoning

> The most striking occurrence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science.
>
> —John McDowell, ”Two Sorts of Naturalism”, 174.

I. Introduction

Thus far, I have argued that practical reason aims at real practical reasons and goods “out there” in the world. Those goods are goods for humankind, goods for creatures like us, such as food, friendship, and knowledge. I have argued that virtues are “merely” human, but also argued that that human nature is normative; therefore, the proposition that virtues are normative is deduced from the major premise. There are still problems to be solved; specifically the relation between reason and nature.

We want to understand the process of practical reasoning in light of our animal nature and our place in the biological and physical order. The relation between reason and nature is an almost intractable problem not only for philosophers but also for natural scientists, social scientists, and others. Every major philosophical tradition, from Platonic

rationalism, to Humean empiricism, to Hegelian objective idealism, has an important and sophisticated stance on this relation. A coherent neo-Aristotelian account is not likely to win over committed adherents of other views. Our goal, rather, is to develop a plausible account that accrues sufficient plausibility points to be a respectable item on the menu of options.

In the sort of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism I have defended thus far, the general problem is this: Are humans just another instance of biological organisms, like chimpanzees and dolphins, subject to evaluation by the same patterns of normativity? Or are humans a different, even sui generis, type of organism? Or rather, even if humanity is quite different from other species on account of exemplifying (apparently sui generis) powers of rational practice and practical reasoning, how are we to analyze that difference? If we say that the difference is only a matter of degree, we run afoul of the claims defended earlier, that human beings are distinctively practical rational animals. If we say that this difference is a difference in kind, we seem to leave some sorts of naturalism behind. Is there a third way? A third way might somehow reconcile these apparently mutually exclusive options, or break down the dilemma. For example, objective idealism or neutral monism are attempts to do this. But it is not clear how the third way would work.

Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists I am reviewing each choose one or the other of these three responses to this general problem. Recall the two sorts of naturalism laid out above: organic naturalism and social naturalism. Organic naturalism admits a fundamental distinction in kind between living beings and non-living stuff. It argues that there is a clear biological basis of natural normativity. (The whole cosmos including all matter and energy is not teleological, but the whole of the organic realm is). By contrast, social naturalism admits a fundamental distinction in kind between rational, social agents and everything else, whether living or non-living. It argues that normativity is exclusively located in the rational capacities of human individuals and social groups.

This internecine controversy presents us with two different ways of thinking about teleology in particular and normativity in general. The ethical naturalists are split as to "how we can reconcile two seemingly opposed forms of teleology—that of life, on the one hand, and that of rational choice on the other."[1] In a word, where is the space of reasons? The organic naturalist says that the space of reasons is the whole space of natural organisms; the social naturalist says that the space of reasons what Allen Thompson calls "an acquired and normatively autonomous second nature"[2] belonging to human beings alone.

The fault line is clear. But one further expression of the differences between these two sorts of naturalism deserves comment. Namely, the disagreement also extends to two conceptions of how broadly to conceive of scientific inquiry. The organic naturalist thinks that natural norms can be discovered and articulated (by scientists and philosophers) as part of the normal scientific enterprise. The social naturalist thinks that natural norms cannot be so discovered; they can only be known "from within"; that is, natural norms are inherently tied to the very scientific enterprise which is undertaken by scientists and philosophers.

The task now is to explore the internecine controversy between these two sorts of naturalism. Now, 'naturalism' is a word of many meanings. The root of its extreme ambiguity lies in the ambiguity in the word 'nature'. To square our account of virtue as practical reasoning and rational practice with ethical naturalism requires that we thematize the concept of nature in its own right. I shall articulate two broad conception of nature: the restricted and unrestricted conceptions. I shall argue that an unrestricted conception of nature is the more plausible of the two. And also, happily, the unrestricted conception allows the organic naturalist to preserve the insights of the social naturalist without thereby falling into crass scientism.

1. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 14.

2. Allen Thompson, "Reconciling Themes in Neo-Aristotelian Meta-Ethics," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (2007): 245.

II. Biology and rationality

Irrelevance

We can break ground on this tough topic presenting two problems that philosophers have had with neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. The challenge is to overcome both of these while preserving the ethical import of practical reason we have established thus far. The first problem is called the "irrelevance" objection and the second is "pollyanna problem". Let's state each problem in a bit more detail.

The irrelevance objection states that the natural norms are ethically irrelevant. Jennifer Frey places this objection in context of the is-ought gap: "The irrelevancy objection is a more sophisticated presentation of the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy.' But rather than crudely rejecting any move from 'is' to 'ought', it merely blocks the inference at one crucial juncture—the inference from the 'is' of the species, to the 'ought' that governs the rational will."[3] McDowell is one philosopher who articulates the irrelevance objection. For McDowell, the 'is-ought' gap is a real problem insofar as biology seems irrelevant to particular moral obligation. McDowell concedes, if only hypothetically, the existence of the sort of natural norms posited by the organic naturalist. Each organism pursues its own species specific goods, such as food, shelter, comfort, survival, and reproduction. But when it comes to rational animals, such norms are not binding upon us. As animals, people find themselves subject to hunger, thirst. These merely biological urges are morally neutral with respect to the question of whether I should eat or not. Morality impinges on me to eat certain things at certain times and in ways. A vegetarian might feel an ethical obligation not to eat meat even if the look and smell of it is appetizing; a glutton might feel an ethical obligation not to snack between meals even if he or she feels hungry. His discussion of the "rational wolf" illustrates this point. A wolf is "supposed to" hunt in packs because that is a formal property

3. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 14.

of its life form or nature. But a rational wolf, a wolf endowed with *logos*, would be just as free as human beings are to step back from such natural norms and either endorse or reject them.

The organic naturalist's attempt to collapse genuinely normative obligations into natural norms seems to him a commitment to "philistine scientism", that is, an over-zealous application of empirical methods to ethical matters. He would strenuously object to sentiments like that expressed by E.O. Wilson: "the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologicized" (Wilson 1975, 562). Instead of such crass scientism, what McDowell thinks is needed is the kind of self-reflection discussed above. We must understand the good of human life, commit to pursuing it, and resist temptations to deviate from that pursuit. This self-reflective practical reasoning may not stay within the lines of orthodox "empiricism" but, McDowell would say, so much the worse for empiricism.

Pollyanna

A related objection has been leveled against Foot's and Michael Thompson's sort of organic naturalism by Chrisoula Andrea, Elijah Milligram, and Scott Woodcock.[4] The objection states that an empirical assessment of human natural norms would have to include norms that are rather obviously vicious.

When I built my inductive case for the generic that "the human being" is a practical rational animal, perhaps I was winking at the dark side of human nature. After all, human beings lie, murder, cheat, steal, rape, wage unjust war, and so on. Parents abandon or abuse their children. If we gather a robust sample of such behaviors and count them all as natural

4. Chrisoula Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," *Social Theory and Practice* 32, no. 1 (2006): 61–73; Elijah Millgram, "Reasonably Virtuous," *Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as a Foundation for Moral Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)*, 2005, 133–67; Scott Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles' Heel," *Dialogue* 45, no. 03 (2006): 445–68.

norms. Are we obligated to fulfill all such norms? Just some? Anscombe anticipates this worry when she says:

> The search for "norms" might lead someone to look for laws of nature, as if the universe were a legislator; but in the present day this is not likely to lead to good results: it might lead one to eat the weaker according to the laws of nature, but would hardly lead anyone nowadays to notions of justice.[5]

Expanding the scope of observation to include plants and non-human animals makes matters even worse: Empirically, some acorns become fully grown, mature oaks, but other acorns become stultified, sickly specimens. Most acorns never become anything other than acorns before they disintegrate into dust in the soil. Some animals protect their young while other animals abandon or even consume their young.

On the one hand, to ignore all instances of human vileness could only reflect a prior bias in favor of the light and sweet and sympathetic side of humanity. And where would this bias come from? It could only come from prior *ethical* beliefs, beliefs that are already normatively loaded. I presented the search for generics as "scientific" and objective and open to all the evidence. On the other hand, to include these phenomena in the inductive sample of "human" behaviors leads to a deeper problem. Selfish traits such as cruelty and deception sometimes secure good outcomes for their possessors: the unjust person may "play a crucial role in human survival and reproduction."[6] So some traits that are clearly vices from an ethical standpoint would turn out to be instances of natural goodness. After all, my presentation of human nature was supposed to provide an objective basis for showing how instances of natural goodness are virtues. If some putative vices are instances of natural goodness, then, absurdly, they too would be virtues.

These objections together constitute pincer problem. The teleology of life (organic teleology) seems to force us to categorize injustice as a virtue or else to appeal to the prac-

5. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 14.
6. Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," 71.

tical, evaluative point of view; but the teleology of rational choice (social teleology) seems to force us to abandon the relevance of the teleology of life. Caught in this pincer, neo-Aristotelians must either bite the bullet and abandon organic naturalism, or embrace the absurd (or patently immoral) conclusion that some vices are good for us. Is there any way to escape the dilemma, or reconcile it?

The attempt to reconcile the two can twist one into knots: Rosalind Hursthouse seems to vacillate between the two. She explicitly endorse's Foot's naturalism (of first nature) but also seems to endorse McDowell's "naturalism of second nature." She says, "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[7] She claims that her account is, like McDowell's, still loosely naturalistic. She still bases ethical considerations on our nature as rational agents, i.e., "human nature" or "second nature". But then hasn't she thereby rejected Foot's view? Jennifer Frey also observes:

> On this issue, Hursthouse seems to be speaking out of both sides of her mouth. She wants to acknowledge to Aristotelian critics like John McDowell that naturalistic considerations do not convince anyone to change their basic moral beliefs or motivate them to action. But at the same time, she thinks that she can approach the Humean or the Kantian and argue for "the rational credentials" of our moral beliefs based upon a "scientific" and "objective" naturalistic account. It is unclear how she is supposed to satisfy both parties at once, and the tension remains unresolved in her own work.[8]

Julia Annas says, of Foot's view:

> 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

7. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* especially chapter 10.
8. Cf. Frey, "The Will and the Good. 44, footnote 55.

> stressed this point. Like many important philosophical points, it is obvious once pointed out…" (Annas 1996).

It seems that the pincer forces us to give up what is "so helpful for ethics" about Foot's naturalism and either take recourse to McDowell's sort or else give up on naturalism altogether.

III. The solution in brief

There is no consensus as to *the* neo-Aristotelian solution to these problems. Nevertheless, some recent work from Micah Lott, Jennifer Frey, and Christopher Toner has revealed *a* potentially satisfying solution.

First, I will lay out four requirements for a successful answer. Second, I will criticize McDowell's alternative as inconsistent in that he denies dualism at one moment but affirms it at another. Third, I will argue for an alternative solution that escapes the pincer.

The solution consists of two interrelated claims, one about what "natures" are and another about how such natures can be discerned. The first claim is that nature refers in an unrestricted way to anything that is, rather than in a restricted way to only a subset of things that are (such as spatiotemporal material things). The second claim is that we can discern the very same formal nature of a thing in two complementary ways; both from "within" the practical point of view of rational reflection and from "outside" such a view, in a more external, objective sense. Both kinds of knowledge lay hold of identical facts. And both kinds of knowledge are broadly scientific, unless we employ an unjustly narrow concept of science that excludes formal disciplines such as mathematics, logic, computer science, and so on.

Let us try to substantiate these claims.

IV. Requirements for a successful theory

Begin with Chris Toner's excellent (2008) article "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory.[9] In this article, Toner argues that (what I have called) organic naturalism a la Foot, Thompson, etc. has not yet adequately responded to McDowell's criticism. To do so would require satisfying four criteria. These four criteria set out in advance the shape that "naturalism must deliver if it is to support a revived Aristotelian virtue ethics…"[10] Gladly, our account thus far has satisfied three of the four. Let us list the four criteria for a successful neo-Aristotelian naturalism and comment on each one.

1. *Natural norms must be intrinsically able to motivate the bearer of the nature.* The "natural norm" must be intrinsically able to motivate. The natural human norms pertaining to our nature are examples of practical reasons. And I have already presented an argument above that practical reasons are, by definition, able to motivate us. The process of practical reasoning (about practical reasons) is the process of adjudicating between various norms, desires, inclinations, urges, and so on.
2. *Natural norms must be intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of the nature.* The natural norm must be something that justifies itself, either to all rational agents as such or to all moral agents. The norm need not, Toner admits, automatically persuade a Callicles to repent of his wickedness. However, it must be able to motivate. He says:

> This is why I say "intrinsically able to motivate or justify" rather than "intrinsically motivating or justifying": the natural norm is such that it can motivate or convince persons, provided they are not in too dysfunctional a state. In the same way a rose is such as to be intrinsically able to convince us of its being red. Its failure actually to do so in my case because I am color-blind or jaundiced does not impugn this intrinsic ability. Natural norms can motivate and convince because they are neither "mere facts" about the way a given species does go on nor "brute desires" a given species happens to have as a result of its evolutionary history.[11]

9. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism."
10. Ibid., 222.
11. Ibid., 235.

We have argued above that virtues are intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of a practical rational nature. Toner mentions that "The requirements of the virtues can be articulated into what Hursthouse calls "v-rules" (do what is just, what is courageous, and so forth)."[12]

3. *Natural norms must be anchored in and express universal human nature.* In chapter 3 I defended a definition of "universal human nature," that we are practical rational animals. And I argued that the natural norm that one ought to become a fully mature practical rational animal (whatever that turns out to mean) is an example of a norm "anchored in" and expressing this nature. More specifically, all the virtues of rational practice and practical reasoning are examples of such norms. For, as Toner says:

"the possession and exercise of the virtues is essential to human flourishing as dependent rational animals. Thus natural norms or the requirements of the virtues, in articulating what we need (to have, to be, to do) to flourish, are anchored in and express universal human nature."[toner2008sorts 242]

4. *First and second nature must be related so that the second is a natural outgrowth of the first, and so that that in our given makeup is (first) natural which does tend toward an ethically mature second nature.*

This fourth criterion is the aim here. Even though McDowell is critical of Foot's biological or organic naturalism, he does not wish to fall into a dualism between biology and rationality. Rather, he believes that it is possible to "formulate a conception of reason that is, in one sense, naturalistic: a formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside."[13] Note that he links the epistemological point with the metaphysical one: the dictates of practical reason come from "inside" one's rational point of view; yet reason is "naturalistic" in the sense that it expresses one's nature.

The problem with McDowell's view is not just that it fails to be "naturalistic", as some have alleged. Rather, the problem is that McDowell vacillates between two contradic-

12. Ibid., 242.
13. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

tory concepts of 'nature': an unrestricted monistic one and a restricted dualistic one. Both concepts of nature have their conceptual costs; both have their defenders; and both are certainly defensible. Nevertheless, one must choose on or the other. McDowell, instead, defends the restricted, dualistic view of nature while insisting that his concept of nature is the unrestricted, monistic one. The resulting concept of nature is incoherent. A second problem corresponds to the first: McDowell's concept of science is too restrictive; although he disputes the "philistine scientism" of his opponents, he seems to me to endorse just enough philistine scientism to deserve his own criticism. He is a scientific realist on one page and anti-realist on another. A third problem is that, even by McDowell's lights, there *do* seem to be primary qualities of nature such as "danger" and "safe" that are relational and actionable like moral qualities such as good and bad.

Summary of McDowell

First, I will summarize McDowell's view of the relation between reason and nature and explain it in context of his broader project in *Mind and World*. Then, I will flesh out how his view applies to metaethics.

V. McDowell on first and second nature

In this section, I must try to get a clear handle on McDowell's paradoxical view of nature, practical reason, and the scientific picture of the world. On the one hand, he shares an opinion with non-naturalist realists, naturalistic subjectivists, and moral anti-realists that practical reasons, norms, or instances of natural goodness are not "out there" in the objective world. On the other hand, as we shall see, he shares with Foot an opinion that practical reasons are not supernatural nor merely subjective.

An initial quotation from McDowell expresses his precise objection to Foot's organic naturalism:

> Philippa Foot has long urged the attractions of ethical naturalism. I applaud the negative part of her point, which is to reject various sorts of subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism. But I doubt whether we can understand a positive naturalism in the right way without first rectifying a constriction that the concept of nature is liable to undergo in our thinking. Without such preliminaries, what we make of ethical naturalism will not be the radical and satisfying alternative to Mrs Foot's targets that naturalism can be. Mrs Foot's writings do not pay much attention to the concept of nature in its own right, and this leaves a risk that her naturalism may seem to belong to this less satisfying variety. I hope an attempt to explain this will be an appropriate token of friendship and admiration.[14]

As this quotation makes clear, McDowell shares Foot's rejection of "subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism". The key point is that he disputes her "concept of nature". McDowell's classifies his own view as a "sort of naturalism" – namely "relaxed naturalism."[15] McDowell invokes Aristotle's notion of ethics, by which he hopes to rethink our conception of human nature and nature as a whole. He says, "the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[16] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

For McDowell, nature consists of Lockean primary qualities, which are response-independent as well as dispositional properties which are response-dependent. "Values" are the latter sort. There is no such thing as "to-be-pursuedness" existing as a Lockean primary quality in first nature. Whereas Foot thinks that normative facts are response-independent features of (first) nature, McDowell finds this view impossible to entertain. He says that

14. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 167.

15. This distinction is by now familiar. For the sake of completeness, I will mention a few of McDowell's other names for his view: 'liberal' naturalism' (John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996) 89, 98); 'acceptable naturalism' (McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* 197). Like Thomas Nagel, he also finds friends in Plato and Aristotle, calling his view 'Greek naturalism' (McDowell, *Mind and World* 174), 'Aristotelian naturalism' (ibid., 196), 'naturalism of second nature' (ibid., 86), or 'naturalized platonism' (ibid., 91). Cf. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism. 204; and Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008).

16. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.

naive realism about value is "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[17] The first reason McDowell can't take naive realism seriously is the impossibility of explaining "how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[18] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie: the "central doctrine of European moral philosophy" is a mistake;[19] it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are. A second worry is that the doctrine of objective value, where normative facts are primary qualities of nature, has been discredited or outmoded by modern science. The modern scientific picture of nature is "disenchanted" from such intrinsic values as meaning and morality. He says, "The most striking occurrence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science."[20]

McDowell's alternative

If McDowell is right that the modern scientific worldview prohibits believing that values are objective primary qualities, a natural move would be to embrace a form of error theory or expressivism or subjectivism. Subjectivists of the sort discussed above (such as Mackie, Alan Gibbard, and Simon Blackburn) believe that normativity is "projected" by philosophers and scientists onto the natural facts. But McDowell resists this move. He says that Mackie's error theory gets right the common sense view that "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[21] Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[22] but not in that they are therefore illusory. A secondary quality is not "a mere figment of the

17. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 137.
18. Ibid., 143.
19. Mackie, *Ethics*.
20. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 174.
21. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 137.
22. Ibid., 139.

subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[23]

What is the alternative to the apparently exhaustive dualism of seeing values (or norms) as *either* facts of nature like primary qualities *or* unreal, illusory, and purely subjective. His answer is that values are "secondary qualities" or "dispositional properties" of nature. His essay "Values and Secondary Qualities" argues that values are like colors and unlike shapes.[24] We might paraphrase this thesis by saying that natural norms are qualities *in the world* (not just in our heads) but they are not Lockean "primary qualities." They are, rather, Lockean secondary qualities. Knowledge of such qualities is intersubjective, grounded in a form of life, grounded in our communal rationality itself. He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[25] Experience of secondary qualities is a (sense) perceptual experience. This is 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.

23. Ibid., 139.

24. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds., "Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology" (Blackwell, 2007), 137–45. I shall cite this anthology. The essay is also printed in McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, chapter 7.

25. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 138.

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.

Goodness, badness, and other values are therefore grounded in "second nature."[26] The space of reasons in which our rational capacities operate makes us sensible to those dispositional properties of primary nature which become, for us, values such as goodness and badness. We will explore McDowell's view of second nature a bit more in a later chapter. Suffice it for now that "second nature" is a distinctly human phenomenon. We partially re-enchant nature by bringing primary facts into the space of reasons when they weren't there before.

Discursus on McDowell's project

McDowell's anti-dualist position here (as elsewhere!) is liable to puzzle or frustrate some philosophers. He is not a realist; but he is not an anti-realist.

To make his view here more comprehensible, it is advisable to briefly give some context on McDowell's metaphilosophy. McDowell is a proponent of "therapeutic philosophy." He says he is influenced by two main sources: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[27] From the Socratic tradition he draws a way of thinking in which dualisms do not even arise. And from the later Wittgenstein he draws a way of doing "therapeutic" philosophy[28] – philosophy that 'leaves everything as it is'[29]. That is, McDowell believes many philosophical

26. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 188 and following.

27. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, preface.

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

29. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* Section 124.

puzzles arise not from puzzling reality but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": dualisms need to be *exorcized*. He is an "anti-anti-realist". He is always fighting on two fronts, attacking a position without thereby supporting its apparent opposite.

With this in mind, we can more readily see how his objection to Foot and his quasi-subjectivist alternative is consistent with his solution to the mind-body problem. In *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism and "Rampant Platonism" by arguing that even primary qualities are not given to us in experience without the involvement of spontaneous conceptual capacities. He wants to accept the modern scientific picture of nature as "bald nature", a mechanical "realm of law", disenchanted from values, teloi, and other esoterica. But he does not want to accept that human rationality is likewise mechanical. Instead, he argues that humanity exists in a space of reasons where we recognize reasons for belief and reasons for action.

McDowell here invokes Aristotle's notion of ethics, by which he hopes to rethink our conception of human nature and nature as a whole. He says, "the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[30] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing by *Bildung* — that is, by education, formation, or cultivation.[31] Practical wisdom is one example of a virtue that the young human being does not have but that may be developed by formation. At first, the ethical demands of practical wisdom are not even perceptible to the young. They have the natural potential to become aware of, and answerable to, the demands of practical wisdom. Slowly, that potential is actualized or inculcated and a moral outlook is attained. Human beings are initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing (Bildung) which instills the appropriate shape in their lives.

So initiated, practically wise behavior is not just a new kind of behavior but the

30. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.
31. Bildung=formation, education; bild=form, image.

maturation and development of a new kind of faculty in the human animal. That moral outlook may be later examined, but only from within the moral outlook. The circularity of this inculcation and new second natural faculty is not accidental: Since practical wisdom is responsive to reasons, it becomes a prototype "for the…faculty that enables us to recognize and create … intelligibility."[32] "[The ethical demands of reason] are essentially within reach of human beings. So practical wisdom is second nature to its possessors."[33]

As in *Mind and World*, so in his discussion of secondary values or dispositional properties. I think McDowell's position is comprehensible. Indeed, we should expect that he would dispute both Foot's brand of moral realism and also its apparent opposite, subjectivism and anti-realism. But it is vulnerable to a couple of criticisms.

VI. Objections to McDowell's solution

The problem is not idealism

Some have objected to McDowell's view of mind and world as being insufficiently naturalistic. James Lenman is one example: "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."[34] I think McDowell's ingenious alternative to "strict naturalism" is flawed, but the flaw is not an idiosyncratic definition of naturalism. The flaw is a contradiction by sleight of hand. This section attempts to demonstrate that the problems with McDowell's ingenious alternative to empirical naturalism is not that it ends up being a form of non-naturalistic idealism but that it incoherently both affirms and denies empirical naturalism. Fink[35] expertly

32. Ibid., 79.
33. Ibid., 84.
34. James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014.
35. "Three Sorts of Naturalism."

exposes McDowell's sleight of hand here, so this section will trace his argument in some detail.

To see the dilemma McDowell faces, consider that there are at least two kinds of conceptions of nature: (1) "Restricted nature" picks out some subset of all things that are natural, leaving everything else 'non-natural', unnatural, or supernatural. Fink provides a list of eight different intuitive ways of contrasting (a restricted conception of) nature with what is non-natural. For instance, 'nature' could mean the world unaffected by intelligent intervention (e.g., the arrangement of trees in the Yukon is natural where the rows of trees in the Huntington Library is not) or "the empirical world as opposed to the intelligible world of the abstract, logical, or mathematical" (natural sciences of physics and biology are natural where formal sciences such as calculus and geometry are not).

Fink's ninth conception of nature is the unrestricted conception. All the other eight contrast a concept of nature where 'nature', by definition, leaves nothing out. Is just a multisyllabic synonym for "all." As Fink says:

> It would express the idea that there is one world only, and that that world is the realm of nature, which is taken to include the cultural, artificial, mental, abstract and whatever else there may prove to be. There are no realms above or beyond nature. To be is to be in nature and to be in continuity with everything else in nature. Even the greatest and deepest differences are differences within nature rather than differences between nature and something else.[36]

The question for McDowell is whether nature is best understood as some subset of reality or reality itself. Now, 'nature' is ambiguous and some will insist that we can clear up this mare's nest by stipulation. But Fink disagrees:

> This is a terminological issue, but it is not easy to resolve simply by choosing one's definition of 'nature' and then sticking to it. No account of naturalism should forget the fact that 'nature' is, as Raymond Williams puts it, 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (Williams 1981: 184), or as

36. Ibid., 206.

> Hume puts it, a word 'than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal' (THN: III.I.II.). In this section I shall try to give a somewhat systematic overview of some of this complexity that simply cannot be reduced by philosophical fiat…Indeed, it is a deep root of ambiguity that we can talk about the nature of art, law, language, culture, morality, normativity, history, civilization, spirit, mind, God, or nothingness even if we otherwise regard these as non-natural, that is, as not belonging to nature as a realm. There is no contradiction in talking about the nature of the unnatural, the super-natural, or the non-natural, just as it is an open question what the nature of the natural is.[37]

Both idealism and empiricism are forms of restricted naturalism. Calling idealism a form of naturalism may sound outrageous to the more empirically minded. But the argument is sound. Fink first derives Plato's *Laws* a Greek trichotomy from between events that come about by nature (*physis*), chance, and art. 'Nature' and 'chance' explain why plants grow, why the sun moves, and so on. 'Art' explains why houses have roofs, why humans wear clothes, and anything else that we do and that nature and chance could *not* have done. The "natural" pair in this trichotomy consists of the first two: that which comes about, so to speak, on its own, *prior to* and *independent of* intelligent intervention from humans or gods. This conception of nature excludes not only the supernatural but also the cultural, the fictional or imaginative, and so on. The Athenian does not accept this "dangerous" conception of nature. Rather, he argues that "soul is necessarily prior in origin to things which belong to body, seeing that soul is older than body."[38] Fink comments on this passage:

> The Athenian doesn't just leave the concept physis to the 'men of science'. He does not first accept their conception of nature and then confront them with the claim that there is something extra-natural—the soul or the gods—which they have disregarded and which is in fact prior to nature. No. Like McDowell the Athenian is eager to have nature on his side. He therefore challenges the scientists' right to restrict the term 'nature' to the soulless, partly necessary and partly accidental combinations of the elements.

37. Ibid., 206.
38. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997), *Laws* 891cff.

It is highly interesting that the Athenian stranger rejects this definition of nature. He tries to prove that soul is "older than" and prior to body – by first defining 'soul' as self-movement, and the cause of motion in other things. Material bodies either do not move at all or they are moved by something else. Since all material things are either moved (by another moving thing) or unmoved, material things cannot be the first principles of motion. But since soul *is self-motion*, it is the first principle of motion. Or rather, the first *ensouled* body is able to move itself, and therefore to move other material things. Regardless of the merits of this argument, Fink's point is that both sides are grabbing for the rights to the conception of nature. He says: "This, I take it, is pretty rampant Platonism but clearly presented as an account of the soul as natural because primary in existence… mind is prior to world."[39] If soul is the primary sense of nature, then body is "second nature". Mind is the primary thing, the first thing, the paradigmatic thing, against which mere body is contrasted.

As Fink points out, Aristotle confirms that the issue between materialists and idealists is a disagreement about nature. Aristotle says: "Some identify the nature or substance of a natural object with the immediate constituent… e.g., wood is the 'nature' of the bed… [others] that 'nature' is the shape or form."[40] Fink's comment is:

> Like in Plato, we find here both a definition of the word 'nature' (an inner source or cause of being moved and being at rest) and two competing conceptions of what that source is, namely matter and form (the material and the formal cause in Aristotle's sense). Aristotle himself finds it most satisfying to regard the formal (and the teleological or final) cause as the nature of x.[41]

We can now see the crucial point about a term like 'naturalism.' Whatever one claims is the "inner source or cause" of a thing, the immediate constituent matter or the shape, one can be a 'naturalist.' These are two competing sense of naturalism, but both are naturalism.

39. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 215.
40. Ibid., 216, quoting from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Physics*: 2, 1 (192b7ff).
41. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 216.

Classical materialism is one paradigmatic form of 'naturalism.'[42] By Fink's lights, classical materialism is a form a restricted naturalism for it affirms that whatever is material is part of nature, and so that the label 'not-natural' applies to whatever is not material (or not obviously material, such as ghosts, souls, and fairies). But *the idealist, too, can rightly lay claim to the title of naturalism* – and not in a "Pickwickian" sense. Idealism and materialism turn out to be *identical* in one respect: they offer a "restricted conception of nature" and relegate to a "secondary" status everything that is not "natural" in the privileged sense. Idealism and materialism of course *contrast* – indeed, *compete* – in that they fight each other for the right to call *their* preferred side of the matter-form divide the *first* and *natural* side. No single philosophical view has automatic copyright on the terms 'nature' and 'naturalism.' Indeed, the age-old ideological struggle between materialism and idealism is a struggle over such a copyright.

The struggle cannot be settled by presumption. But it seems that the temptation is overwhelming, on both sides, to presume their own view and hence to accuse the other side 'non-naturalism'. Some restricted naturalists beg the question by defining nature as material, spatiotemporal, causal system studied by (natural) science. The materialist presumption is what McDowell calls "philistine scientism."[43] Fink says, "McDowell has convincingly shown that what Bernard Williams calls the absolute conception of reality is merely restricted, bald naturalism ideologically presented as absolute (MVR: 112–31, esp. sect. 5)."[44] Wilfred Sellars provides a pure specimen of such question-begging: "I mean that naturalism takes nature in a definite way as identical with reality, as self-sufficient and as the whole of reality. And by nature is meant the space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed."[45] Note that the first sentence explicitly

42. Roy Wood Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism?" *The Philosophical Review* 36, no. 3 (1927): 216–25.

43. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 346.

44. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 219.

45. Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism?" 217.

endorses an unrestricted conception of nature while the next sentence secretly slides the ball into the other cup, explicitly endorsing an incompatible restricted conception of nature. The second sentence merely *assumes* that the "space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed" is "identical with reality". But that is the question at hand. One cannot assert one's answer with exclamation points ("nature is the space-time-causal-system!") and pretend to have delivered an argument. Or rather, one cannot assert an answer that, so phrased, idealists and supernaturalists would accept just as easily. No one disputes that unrestricted nature is all there is; but some do dispute the implicit assumption that the space-time-causal-system is all there is.

Other restricted naturalists beg the question by defining nature as the formal, immaterial, ideal world. My point here is not to criticize one or the other view. My point is that the only remaining route is to return to the unrestricted conception of nature.

As Fink puts it, "Nothing less than a naturalism that deserves to be presented as absolute could help break the spell of bald naturalism without merely replacing one restricted sort of naturalism with another and thus keeping the oscillations going."[46] Culture, art, rationality, intelligent intervention, and so on are part of the all. Fink quotes Dewey to make this point:

> Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations. It is the business of those who are concerned with the theory of the earth, geographers and geologists, to make this fact evident, in its various implications. The theorist who would deal philosophically with fine art has a like task to accomplish. (Dewey 1958: 3–4, italics in original)

Fink's comment is this:

> On this conception the aesthetical (and the ethical) are not independent of nature, but they are not somehow based on nature or supervening on it either; rather, they simply are nature in some of its manifest operations. To think

46. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 219.

> otherwise is both to mystify the aesthetical (and ethical) and to trivialize nature. The man- made, the artificial, the cultural, the historical, the ethical, the normative, the mental, the logical, the abstract, the mysterious, the extraordinary, are all examples of ways of being natural rather than examples of ways of being non- natural. Nature is never *mere* nature. That which is *more* than *mere* is nature, too.[47]

Where the materialist and idealist are fighting over the definition of primary nature, the unrestricted conception refuses to fight. Instead, it embraces both body and mind, brain and consciousness, matter and form, as existing on a single continuum. That continuum is, ex hypothesis, neither material nor formal, neither mental nor physical. Unrestricted naturalism has this great attraction, that one can bow out of the materialist/idealist struggle over the conception of nature. Unrestricted naturalism has a great cost: one can no longer use "non-naturalism" talk as a weapon against one's opponents. While such triumphalist rhetoric makes sense within philistine materialism, it will not do when we have expanded our conceptions of nature and science to mean all of knowledge about all that is real. It makes no sense to criticize opponents for positing something real "over and above" nature when we have defined "natural" as "real" and hence "non-natural" as unreal by definition.

McDowell does reject the restricted conceptions of nature offered him by the philistine scientism and by Kantian idealism.[48] He even rejects the equation of this picture with "science", allowing that the practical point of view of humans in the space of reasons can and does feature in the scientific worldview. Therefore, it seems he has chosen the unrestricted definition of nature by default. Nevertheless, he is of two minds. Like the materialist, he still wants to wield "supernaturalism" as a rhetorical weapon against some opponents; like the idealist, he wants to wield "philistine scientism" as a rhetorical weapon against others. McDowelleian relaxed naturalism is compatible with agnosticism or with theism, but not with dogmatic atheism.

47. Ibid., 217.
48. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*.

Instead of explicitly admitting that he embraces the unrestricted conception without qualification, he puts the ball in one cup and then moves it around to the other side, pretending the ball was in the other cup all along. He keeps his conception of nature restricted (anti-supernatural) while *calling* in unrestricted (neither idealist nor physicalist). McDowell as a hero of anti-dualism has allowed himself merely to *claim* he is using an unrestricted conception of nature while fully endorsing a restricted conception of nature. He has not earned the conceptual rights to his definition of nature. McDowellian nature is both restricted and unrestricted. It is, in a word, incoherent.

Perhaps I am being too hard on McDowell, when what he wants to do is show the inadequacies of each view and not replace them. Perhaps he means, in a sense, that 'nature' is an indefinable mystery. Nature is like an enormous box and we don't know its contents. Even then, we cannot exclude *in advance* any hypotheses about what will or will not appear in the box.

Practical reasons as primary qualities

The second problem facing McDowell's alternative is that even by McDowell's lights, there *do* seem to be primary qualities of nature such as "danger" and "safe" that are relational and actionable like natural goodness and natural defect.

McDowell summarizes a common worry as to how "something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility." But is this really so hard to imagine? For the rabbit, the brutely *there* presence of a wolf with sharp teeth and fast feet stands in an internal relation to an exercise of its rabbit sensibility. It had better run.

Indeed, McDowell himself supplies this example. Elsewhere in his article, he playfully presents an "epistemology of danger" or a "theory of danger."[49] This moral epistemol-

49. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 142–3.

ogy helps explain why his view is not a variant of "projectivism."

His theory of "danger" is this: Just as there is *something* about red things *themselves* that makes them give us redness experiences, likewise there is something about the dangerous animal itself that gives us fear experiences. That quality may not be *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 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. To describe a bear (say) as "dangerous" to rabbits is to say something about bears and about rabbits in their context on planet earth. The rabbit need not engage in concept-use or perceptual judgment – seeing the bear *as dangerous* – rather the rabbit merely needs the instincts and perceptual capacities to see the bear. His response is not reducible to a response to the bear's size or fur or any other obvious empirical quality; the rabbit is responding to the danger. Likewise, when we see certain kinds of food as "disgusting" (rotten banana peels, say) we need not assume that we are projecting disgust onto the food; it is more plausible, by McDowell's own lights, that we are coming to discover an internal relation that certain kinds of decaying substances stand in to animals like us.

This is McDowell's own example but he does not seem to notice that it can be used against his thesis. If "danger" is a Lockean primary quality, then "desirable" might be as well. Practical reasons for human beings include facts such as human natural norms and also relational facts obtaining.

Science as knowledge of primary and secondary qualities

A third problem corresponds to the first; McDowell's concept of science is too restrictive. Or rather, it is inconsistent. Call the two conceptions of science "restricted" and "unrestricted". Restricted science is what McDowell calls "philistine scientism", an overzealous

attachment to the empirical methods of inquiry that ignores or denies the formal methods (logical, mathematically, computational, etc.).

McDowell wants to denigrate one kind of scientific realism (say, realism about evaluative judgments of health and sickness) while endorsing another kind of scientific realism (about shapes, sizes, weights, and other primary qualities.) That is, he denigrates the desire to find goodness in (primary) nature as a kind of neurosis or anxiety arising from the philosophical vertigo we experience upon becoming inculcated with "the scientific worldview."

I would suggest that "the scientific worldview" is capacious, including the best deliverances of our best sciences, including the deliverances of biology, logic, and so on. It is hard to be asked to reject "science" (scientific knowledge from biology) on behalf of "science" (scientific knowledge from physics). One begins to suspect, as John Dupre argues, that the request is that we reject genuinely scientific hypothesis from biology on behalf of philosophical materialism. Just because such materialism "dresses itself in the mantle of science" does not mean that a restricted conception of science can enjoy, undisputed, trademark on the concept.

James Barham captures the dualism into which McDowell unwittingly falls:

> the philosophical literature tends to work with a scientifically outdated image of living things as rigid "machines." This results in a picture in which only human beings (or at most the higher animals) can be properly ascribed purposes and agency in the full normative sense. From this perspective, we appear to be faced with an unappealing choice between eliminating teleology and normativity from our picture of nature altogether and understanding these phenomena as they are manifested in our own human form of life as floating free from any grounding in the natural world.[50]

Neither of these unappealing choices should be taken. Rather, we should take Foot's lead in allowing normativity into our picture of nature at the organic level as a whole, with human beings included as natural organisms.

50. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 1.

VII. The solution to the Irrelevance and Polyanna problems

We have thematized the concepts of nature and science and defended an unrestricted conception of both. It remains to address the irrelevance and pollyanna objections.

Recall that "Irrelevance" states that natural norms exist but do not matter for practical rational animals because we are free to reflect upon them and either endorse or reject them according to moral norms, which would not be natural norms. Relatedly, Pollyanna states that a total set of natural norms includes both good and bad norms. So either we have to accept that some natural defects are also virtues, or we stand in need of specifically moral normativity to sift out vices, which again raises the problem of the irrelevance of natural norms.

Frey puts the dilemma succinctly: "The problem our dilemma poses is how we can reconcile what on the surface appear to be quite different sorts of teleology: natural and practical."[51] The solution, in brief, relies on the account of practical reason defended above. Practical reasoning allows us to apprehend one and the same identical object apprehended in two different ways. That is, our natural human life form as practical rational animals, including the natural norms binding on us, can be apprehended both "externally" by the alien anthropologist who does not bear that life form and "internally" by human beings who do bear that life form.

If both forms of knowledge grasp the same object, then the dilemma between reason and nature is solved. The knowledge of natural norms is not irrelevant to ethics, and the special sifting process whereby we classify some behaviors as accidental to or contrary to our human good is a natural process.

Frey provides a summary:

51. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 63.

> the ethical naturalist must be able to show how these two seemingly opposed teleologies (the natural teleology of life and the practical teleology of action) and these two seemingly different senses of good (the good we can derive from an account of what simply is and the good as practical goal) can be unified into one and the same account. That is, we need an account of natural normativity that will show us how the relation between a general judgment articulating some fact about a life form (a judgment about a fact that is potentially known from the outside) and a judgment concerning a particular bearer of that form in a particular situation, can take the form of a practical inference whose conclusion is an action that exemplifies that very same form of life.[52]

Natural norms are relevant

I argued above that practical reasoning is not one of many ways of being motivated but is the very capacity to be motivated by reasons. Plants and animals are inclined or motivated to their good by instinct or irrational appetite. They cannot pause to reflect on whether they should follow through on the instinctual flight from predators or pursuit of food and shelter. Humans are inclined by their good *both* by instinct (and emotion, desire, etc.) *and* by reason.

I also argued above that the object of human practical reasoning is a quite general conception of what is good. By 'good' we don't mean a non-natural property apprehended theoretically but the something intrinsically practical: the choiceworthy, the desirable, the to-be-pursued. As Frey clarifies:

> Although natural inclinations depend upon conceptual apprehension, we should not be tempted to think that they are objects of contemplation. These goods, as first principles of practical reason, are apprehended as ends—as objects of pursuit rather than as objects of contemplative knowledge.[53]

What is good in this sense for human beings is specific to our species. The primary good of a kind for us is the human life form. The derivative goods for us are any and all things

52. Ibid., 65.
53. Ibid., 88.

necessarily related to the human life form. In virtue of what we are, it is good for us to achieve humanity, to become fully human. We aim to become what we are. That is, we aim to become in actuality what we we already are potentially. Some of these goods are basic human goods toward which we are naturally inclined: food, shelter, companionship, knowledge, etc. They are starting points without which human beings would not be motivated to do anything at all.

Their status as basic goods is not to be interpreted as unrevisable. The normal process of practical reasoning about what to do can and sometimes does overrule the basic inclination toward a basic good in pursuit of some alternative good. The point is that this overruling judgment is not something over-and-above the practical pursuit toward the good but another expression of the same pursuit. For example, some people overrule their inclination toward the basic good of human companship by becoming a solitary monastic but they only do so in pursuit of *other* goods judged to be *better*.

As Frey says:

> all practical reasoning is ultimately reasoning for the sake of attaining or maintaining these ends. Consequently, all practical reasoning is ultimately for the sake of living the sort of life that pertains to man. Indeed for Aquinas, there could be no practical teleology without natural teleology, since there would be nothing to reason towards if the will were not by nature inclined towards the exemplification of human form.[54]

Practical reasoning is the process whereby we determine the "sort of life that pertains" to creatures like us, then all particular practical reasonings about what to do in a given situation come to light as parts of this whole. This fits with the account of virtue defended above. There we saw that excellence in practical reasoning and rational practice aims at doing well with one's whole life. In other words, every short-term choice fits into a broader context of life projects such as what career to pursue, whether or not to marry, what friendships to

54. Ibid., 66.

maintain, and so on. And every long-term project fits into a broader context of one's answer to the maximally general question "how should one live?"

The possibility of vice

The natural inclination toward the good in general and a few basic goods does not guarantee success or exclude the possibility of mistakenly pursuing bad things. For we do not *know* a priori what we are by nature. The human life form must be discovered; basic goods for human beings must be discovered – and they usually are at some point in the course of a normal life. More particular or less basic goods must be discovered with great effort. Mistakes are possible. However, correction of such mistakes is also possible. Once we have a well-supported hypothesis about our form of life, we can begin to sift through many available natural objects, traits, states of affair, and so on to see which, if any, actuate it.

I said that mistakes are *possible*. It is better to say that the possibility of mistaking something bad for humans as good is essential to a correct neo-Aristotelian account of practical rational animals. Two sorts of error would exclude the possibility: First, we might make the mistake of concluding that whatever human beings happen to do, whatever behaviors can be empirically observed, are characteristic "human" behaviors. Second, we might make the mistake of concluding that nothing human beings do is characteristic human behavior; wearing clothes, building houses, working for social justice, and educating young people would all be rendered accidental to human nature.

To put the point differently, if we hypothesize that all people automatically have detailed knowledge of what is good for them, it becomes impossible to explain why many of us have vices, are ignorant of how to live, and sometimes wilfully create for ourselves truly miserable lives. On the other hand, if we hypothesize that no one has any knowledge of any goods, even a general conception of how to live, then it becomes impossible to explain why some people are so intuitively judged to be virtuous.

An adequate account must allow for Hesiod's insight: "Vice in abundance is easy to get; / The road is smooth and begins beside you, / But the gods have put sweat between us and virtue."[55] Many people are irrational. Many people are not virtuous. But that is just to say that many people are imperfectly human, and not just by bad luck or misfortune; they are imperfectly actuating the human life form by making bad choices, being ill-informed, being lazy, being greedy.

Rationally sifting between apparent norms is natural

The first part of my solution to the Irrelevance problem showed how natural human norms function for us as practical norms. Now I must reaffirm how practical norms are naturalistic, according to the conception of nature already defended.

McDowell aims for this conception of practical reason when he says it is possible to "formulate a conception of reason that is, in one sense, naturalistic: a formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside."[56] But, as I have argued, that he does not quite succeed in achieving it. The reason is that McDowell shares with non-cognitivists an implicit nature/human dualism whereby human rationality (in the space of reasons) is entirely of a different order than organic and inorganic nature (in the realm of law). The alternative I have been defending dissolves this dualism.

Toner says: "the virtues are seen as acquired traits that fit human beings for the exercise of practical rationality toward which their shared nature directs them (thereby rejecting McDowell's sharp separation of first and second natures)."[57] This view is more adequate because, as Toner explains:

55. *Works and Days* 287-9, quoted in *Republic* II, 364c.
56. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
57. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 243.

> The acquisition of the virtues not only prevents emotions from interfering with practical reasoning but also, in McDowellian terms, "opens our eyes" to new sorts of reasons for action, not visible to the immature, that make the good of others part of our good. So… MacIntyre links first and second natures much more closely than does McDowell.[toner2008sorts 243]

Human beings are *animals* after all, with animal sensations and emotions and urges, the "sharp separation" between biology and rationality not only cuts humans apart from the rest of the cosmos, but cuts human beings down the middle. McDowell's concept of human nature is not that we are practical rational animals; his unwitting concept of human nature is we are *practical reasoners* full stop. This error infects his definition of virtue as well. He believes that all virtues pertain to practical reasoning (or "sensitivity") where I argued that some virtues pertaining to practical *reasoning* while others pertain to rational *practice.*

This form of ethical naturalism is satisfyingly adequate to the task. It captures the normativity of ethical reasons and aligns these reasons with the facts of nature.

If my view needs a name, I should like to call it Recursive Naturalism. It is recursive in two ways: first, the normativity of human rationality is both an *instance* of nature and is *about* nature, including about itself. Second, the object of practical reason is both to discover *the thing to do* and, recursively, to become more practically reasonable. Practical reasoning, when successful, sifts between excellent and defective expressions of our life form and correctly judges the kind of person one ought to become.

VIII. Corollaries and transition

A two corollaries of this solution to the irrelevance problem is that the early stages of human life are especially important for creating the conditions in which eventual human success is possible and even likely. The evidence we already have from tradition and social science confirms this corollary. Just as health leads to more health (a healthy organism can eat, digest, and exercise better than its sick counterpart), virtue leads to more virtue, vice leads

to more vice. A diligent person is liable to develop patience and moderation; a lazy young person is liable to become impatient and immoderate. We ought to take care, at the earliest ages, to diligantly cultivate virtues in ourselves and others. The earlier we invest in virtue, the greater leverage we have in reaping maximal dividends across a whole lifetime and even across generations.

This corollary provides the transition to the next chapter. The cultivation of virtue is a social and communal exercise, not merely an individual one. Introducing the social or group dimension to our account will bring to the surface new problems. As Christopher Toner says:

> whether the MacIntyrean sort of naturalism is acceptable ultimately depends on answers to some rather large questions involving the nature of rationality (for example, whether it is tradition-constituted in something like the way MacIntyre says).[58]

To that task we must now turn.

58. Ibid., 248.

Chapter 8

Traditional Reasoning

> If such a one should go down again and take his old place would he not get his eyes full of darkness…? And if it were possible to lay hands on and to kill the man who tried to release them and lead them up, would they not kill him?
>
> —Plato, *Republic* 517a.

I. Introduction

My account of virtue, thus far, argued that virtue is excellence in rational practice and practical reasoning. Insofar as virtue is necessarily related to practical rationality, an account of practical reason was needed. I argued that practical reasoning is the capacity for identifying and acting on practical reasons. As practical reasoners, we observe some facts as practical reasons. I briefly argued that "practical reasons" are simply facts viewed by practical reasoners as desirable or undesirable, as good or bad. Just as speculative reason is by definition the faculty for judging true and false, practical reason by definition judges worth or its absence. A practical reason can and does motivate one, all by itself; in conjunction with or absent other immediate inclinations or desires. Practical reason, furthermore, mo-

tivates when one judges that a course of action or an outcome is good in itself, that it is *desirable* in the sense that it is to be desired whether one presently desires it or not.

I also, briefly argued that this capacity *really* gets at worth, at what some "objective value." (While I do not think this term expresses my view charitably, it is a common term.) A better way of phrasing it would be to ask whether there is any reason to do anything at all. Put this way, it is more clear that every sufficiently matured human organism naturally has reasons to do some things, to pursue some ends, and reasons not to do some things, to avoid other ends. I also defended the defeasible presumption that practical reason is *important*. It is of unquestionable intrinsic value to human beings.

Reasoning in tradition

My account of the relation between reason and nature aimed to solve the problem of irrelevance by showing that practical reasoning is *about* natural norms intrinsic to the form of human life. This process of deciding what to do and how to live is just as messy and non-codifiable as the process of deciding what to believe and what is true. But this brought to the surface a new problem about practical reasoning in social groups or "traditions."

It is an empirical datum that human beings develop their capacity to recognize practical reasons within a family and society with its own idiosyncratic political, religious, and philosophical worldview. So, quite plausibly, our initial de facto set of beliefs, desires, and dispositions reflect the substantive commitments of our group. But even if practical reasons are not easily reducible to response-dependent features of each individual reasoner, we still have to ask whether they are response-dependent features of practical-rationality-traditions or whether they answer to response-independent normative facts.

In this chapter, I must address a broader concern. Is practical reasoning intersubjective and objective or merely intersubjective? We defended McDowell's argument to the effect that that practical reasoning is a legitimate form of reasoning. Practical rationality is

rational. So the objectivity of one stands or falls with the objectivity of the other.

Pretty clearly, some normative systems are constructed by the societies that endorse them. Etiquette is the typical example. Other examples include (some of) the rules of grammar, the rules of spelling and typography (Nagel). Is practical rationality a system like this? If so, then it would seem that a plurality of practical rationalities are incorrigible. There are many etiquettes and many systems of spelling. Likewise, there would be not one human nature and human rationality but a plurality of human natures and *rationalities*? On the other hand, if practical reason is universal and objective like logic, then it can be universal across cultures and traditions, but it might seem to be bound to conservatism, parochialism, and intolerance. So the question to be addressed is how our account can preserve the notion that reason is objective but satisfy the need for a liberal pluralism.

Arguments

My thesis is that there is one human nature, expressed variously in different cultures, languages, customs, and thoughts – and there is only one practical rationality, albeit expressed variously and perhaps imperfectly in various cultures. My answer arises from an examination of McDowell and MacIntyre's concept of tradition.

McDowell's account provides an excellent starting point but needs supplementation. He argues that reason is *at least* intersubjective and depends on a shared form of life. Furthermore, he imputes a psychological resistance or "vertigo" to those who would search for response-independent objectivity. As a consequence, his account wallows in relativism, to which his only counsel is quiet acceptance. MacIntyre, by contrast, gives a robust account of how the intersubjectivity of practical reason does not necessarily exclude objectivity. Response-independent objectivity is essential to the ability to make progress within a tradition, to criticize one's own tradition and to assess the relative merits of rival traditions.

Any discussion of practical reason in traditions is bound to be notoriously difficult.

The explanation of that difficulty, I argue, is that we can only think *about* rationality *with* rationality. We can only reflection upon our thinking process by observing rationality *from outside* from *within* rationality. The matter is so complicated because any argument is self-referential or iterative. These complications should lead us to predict that conceptions of rationality will differ more than other difficult concepts. If two parties share an identical conception of rationality, then a long and arduous debate is not necessary; if two parties enjoy differing conceptions that differ in a sufficient number of respects, a long and arduous debate is not likely to resolve the difference. As the Greek proverb asks, "if we choke on food, we drink water to wash it down. If water chokes us, what shall we drink?" My aim is not to provide a knock-down argument for my view of communal practical reasoning. It is merely to provide a recursive theory of communal practical reasoning adequate (or almost adequate) to the task of both capturing what is common in differing conceptions of rationality. The hope is that this would enhance the possibility of criticizing rivals, rationally resolving disagreements with others, and making progress within one's own group.

II. McDowell on intersubjective practical reasoning

We begin with McDowell's account of practical knowledge. He argued that identifying acting well demands "a moral outlook."[1] McDowell therefore thinks such knowledge is not "objective" in the sense that we can check our moral outlook against an independent order of normative facts. When confronted with the notion that the external stance is impossible, we feel a "vertigo". We feel anxious that nothing keeps our thinking "on the rails." We must 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. Instead of searching for an independent normative order of objective practical reasons that *ought* to motivate one, he offers a different "cure": "The cure for the vertigo, then, is to give up on the idea that

1. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.

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."[2] 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. Though he acknowledges that we *desire* an external, scientific, sideways on, third-person, "objective" stance from which to identify the rules of rational thinking, but denies that such a stance is possible.

One might object to McDowell's cure on the basis that it makes fruitful moral disagreement impossible. Suppose two practical reasoners, Jane and Joan, start out a discussion with two incompatible moral outlooks. Jane criticizes Joan's actions by criticizing her conception of the good life relative to Jane's own conception. But Joan criticizes Jane's actions and her conception of the good life relative to Joan's. Neither can "fact check" the other's conception against the moral facts. So, unless they already implicitly share an underlying conception, adjudication would not seem to be possible.

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."[3] 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."[4]

2. Ibid., 341.
3. Ibid., 342.
4. Ibid., 342.

McDowell's position is a form of constructivism. Jay Wallace explains the distinct approach of constructivism about practical reason:

> [The constructivist] approach denies that practical reason is a capacity for reflection about an objective domain of independent normative facts; but it equally rejects the expressivist's naturalistic suspicion of normativity. According to the constructivist, practical reason is governed by genuine normative constraints, but what makes these constraints normative is precisely their relation to the will of the agents whose decisions they govern. The principles of practical reason are constitutive principles of rational agency, binding on us insofar as we necessarily commit ourselves to complying with them in willing anything at all. The realm of the normative, on this approach, is not pictured as a body of truths or facts that are prior to and independent of the will; rather, it is taken to be 'constructed' by agents through their own volitional activity.[5]

MacIntyre on Tradition

Let us turn to MacIntyre. MacIntyre is most known for his defense of virtue. But the dominant theme of MacIntyre's writings over the decades has actually been practical rationality.[6] *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* treat rationality as the ground of ethical reasoning, while *After Virtue* and *Dependent Rational Animals* treat ethical reasoning as practical reasoning. As we have seen above, MacIntyre and other neo-Aristotelians such as McDowell, Foot, Hursthouse, and Bernard Williams[7] "morality" should not be seen as a special domain of practical life but the whole practical domain.

One of MacIntyre's enduring themes is that we all inhabit a "tradition." We briefly discussed his definition of a tradition above: "A living tradition . . . is an historically extended, socially embodied argument…"[8]. The content of a tradition is partly self-reflexive:

5. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 2.
6. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 60.
7. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* Chapter 1.
8. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

it is "… an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."

Nevertheless, the concept is liable to fatal misunderstanding. I should be cutting off the Hydra's immortal head if I were to explain it well here. What does it mean to assert that "we all inhabit a tradition"? Most trivially, it means each of us are embodied, live in a time, place, and social setting, and speak a given language. More interestingly, it means that one's 'rationality' is something we which is constituted by one's tradition. Each of us (intellectuals at least) owe our conceptual resources to a tradition. As MacIntyre says, "We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of enquiry, extending the history of that enquiry into the present …"[9] The tradition of enquiry we inhabit gives us not only abstract standards of reasoning but also facts, connections, concepts, and the very language we speak. Rationality, for MacIntyre, is inclusive of all the resources by which we judge true and false. Rationality itself as tradition-constituted and tradition-constituting. The resources I receive from my tradition are resources I may prune, discard, modify, or add to. What tradition we are a part of makes a great deal of difference to how we conduct moral inquiry.

Tradition and rationality are bound up together. He invoked the concept of tradition-constituted rationality to explain why practices can vary between people and traditions that both claim to be rational and believe the rival to be not just mistaken but irrational. This is why *practical rationality* is so important for MacIntyre's theory of *virtue.* For MacIntyre, virtues are relative to practices; practices are relative to traditions; traditions are relative to conceptions of rationality.

By presenting rationality and tradition as almost the same concept, MacIntyre both elevates the concept of tradition and threatens the concept of rationality. Since traditions vary, is there any way to avoid the conclusion that rationalities vary – and do so without

9. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 401.

hope of reconciliation? His answer to this worry is, I believe, the crux of his whole theory of ethics.

MacIntyre's answer is that we can rationally adjudicate between traditions (from within a tradition). We can justify or "switch" from our primary tradition. The means we have of "switching" traditions are these: first, one undergoes an epistemological crisis in which one identifies the inadequacies of a primary tradition; and secondly, to "exercise… a capacity for philosophical imagination"[10] and identify the resources of a rival tradition. We must empathetically engage with our rivals as if we are learning a "second first language." He says:

> For each of us, therefore, the question now is: To what issues does that particular history bring us in contemporary debate? What resources does our particular tradition afford in this situation? Can we by means of those resources understand the achievements and successes, and the failures and sterilities, of rival traditions more adequately than their own adherents can? More adequately by our own standards? More adequately also by theirs? It is insofar as the histories narrated in this book lead on to answers to these questions that they also hold promise of answering the questions: Whose justice? Which rationality?"[11]

Three rival versions

MacIntyre picks up the theme of tradition-constituted rationality. His most thorough treatment of the theme of rival traditions is the (1990) Gifford Lectures.[12] There he presents 'genealogy,' 'encyclopedia', and a third version he simply calls 'tradition' but I will call 'Thomism.' These three rivals are defined by their respective attitudes toward the past. Genealogists (such as Nietzsche and Foucault) use the past to subvert and "debunk" the

10. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* .

11. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 402.

12. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

present. Stephen Lutz summarizes the three uses the "Nietzschean research program" has for history:

> (1) to reduce academic history to a projection of the concerns of modern historians, (2) to dissipate the identity of the historian into a collection of inherited cultural influences, and (3) to undermine the notion of "progress towards truth and reason" (3RV, pp. 49-50). In short, genealogy denies the teleology of human enquiry by denying (1) that historical enquiry has been fruitful, (2) that the enquiring person has a real identity, and (3) that enquiry has a real goal. MacIntyre finds this mode of enquiry incoherent.[13]

By contrast, encyclopedists use the present to denigrate and "debunk" the past. The encyclopedist par excellence is the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, about which one reviewer said:

> The *Britannica* represents the idea of an impersonal, universal, tradition-free conception of rational enquiry into morals, telling a story of the progress of reason in philosophy and the sciences through an appeal to timeless, universal principles of rationality. The encyclopedic tradition holds moral enquiry to be about an autonomous, distinct realm of human life, which can and must be understood solely in its own terms.

Genealogists think, in advance, that no one in the future will use the present as a foundation.Encyclopedists think, in advance, that no one in the future will ever be able to transcend the present; they think we have *arrived*. Now, modernity is an encyclopedic tradition. It was the tradition MacIntyre was raised in. It is the tradition I was raised in, as (I presume) were my readers. So, by MacIntyre's lights, we are "encyclopedists." Our source texts are Hume, Kant, Newton, Locke, and others. Ours is an argument extended through time and socially embedded in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and parts of western Europe.[14]

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

14. Modernity has political, scientific, religious, and philosophical aspects; it is indeed *encyclopedic*. The intellectual tradition of modernity arises alongside the rise of

MacIntyre followed his own advice. As a member of the modern tradition, he reflected on it. He gradually discovered its inadequacies and searched for resources from his rivals. His attempt to trace the root of the mistake about moral judgments lead him to a mistake at the heart of Enlightenment modernity. As a social, political, and moral project, the Enlightenment has been, MacIntyre argues, a failure by its own standards. Not only is moral discourse largely devoted to moral disagreement, but it is largely soaked in despair of ever reaching agreement. Moral discourse with its interminable moral disagreement retains the rhetorical *trappings* of rationality and objectivity while denying rationality and objectivity. Neither side wants to give up the *appearance* of having a dialectical case for its value theory.

One of his most memorable and oft-cited images compares modern moral discourse to the hypothetical state of scientific discourse in a post-apocalyptic catastrophe where decaying fragments of intelligible moral discourse survive. It is worth quoting in full:

> Imagine that the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe…Widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all that they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance… all these fragments are reembodied in a set of practices which go under the revived names of physics, chemistry and biology. Adults argue with each other about the respective merits of relativity theory, evolutionary theory and phlogiston theory, although they possess only a very partial knowledge of each. Children learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid. Nobody, or almost nobody, realizes that what they are doing is not natural

the modern state. We do well to remember that almost all the luminaries of Enlightenment philosophy also wrote on politics: Mill's ethical writings are almost always written with an eye to reforming civil law; Kant wrote the three *Critiques* but also the *Perpetual Peace*; John Locke wrote about perception and understanding but also treatises on government.

science in any proper sense at all."[15]

The picture here captures the state of moral discourse. But an obvious symptom of the decay of moral discourse and social unity is interminable ethical disagreement.[16] An explanation of this disagreement is that we are trying to get by using the scraps of a previous and whole moral tradition. MacIntyre thinks this version of rational enquiry, like genealogy, incoherent by its own standards. Nevertheless "it still exercises an extraordinary influence on contemporary thought and on university curricula."[17] The problem with modernity is not merely academic. The social and political fabric is woven from the thread of morality, so many of the ills of modern life can be traced to our inability to share a substantive conception of the good and the good life.

There are many modern philosophers who have gone into similar crises and become distrustful thought, language, and rationality itself; they join the "masters of suspicion." The term comes, I believe, from Ricoeur, who said: "Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud."[18]

Rather than join the school of suspicion, MacIntyre took a surprising course. Moved by Thomas Kuhn's influential work on the structure of revolution between various paradigms in the natural sciences[19] he speculated that a similar structure might obtain in moral revolutions?[20] This in turn lead MacIntyre to recover the tradition of virtues. But virtues are not

15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1.

16. Ibid., 6.

17. Terry Pinkard, "Review of Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry, by Alasdair MacIntyre," *Ethics* 102, no. 1 (1991): 162–64.

18. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. D (Savage (Yale University Press, 1970).

19. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1975).

20. His 1977 essay on epistemological crises was his own version of Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – we might call this essay MacIntyre's "Structure of Ethical Revolutions". Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist*, 1977, 453–72

free-floating moral concepts; they are embedded in a specific, living, moral tradition – the Aristotelian tradition. And the Aristotelian tradition includes a particular notion of practical rationality.

Clarity

What constitutes a tradition? MacIntyre's account is not clear. John Haldane (among others) questions MacIntyre's ability coherently to identify what a tradition is. What is tradition A? How do we differentiate it from B? Are two traditions separate and hence identifiable only if they are *incommensurable*? How much difference constitutes separation? MacIntyre's examples sometimes lead us to believe that a tradition can be anything from a religion (Judaism) to a discipline (moral inquiry) to a philosophical school (Thomism). But even so, how much overlap is compatible with difference? Jewish and Christian traditions share a common origin and bear considerable overlap in authorities, scriptures, and doctrines.

MacIntyre's definition makes answering these questions difficult. He characterizes a tradition as "separate and unified when its members or texts have a core set of shared commitments to beliefs, when the tradition is situated in a particular context in a particular set of institutions and when the tradition has an identifiable linguistic difference when compared to other traditions."[21] But is there any universal procedure for identifying such linguistic and institutional differences?

The right response to this call for clarification, I think, comes from Weinstein. We should not expect, by MacIntyre's lights, that there is an automatically objective, view-from-nowhere by which we can define tradition itself. Rather, MacIntyre concludes that "the concept of a tradition, together with the criteria for its use and application, is itself one developed from within one particular tradition-based standpoint. This does not preclude

21. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 83.

its application to the very tradition within which it was developed."[22] MacIntyre grants that his self-definition of his own tradition arises, in part, from his criteria of that tradition. Traditions change over time. They progress (according to their own unchanging standards) toward unchanging goals or else they abandon old standards. This is liable to frustrate some readers. But the alternative is worse. The alternative is a denial of pluralism that liberalism holds dear. For it is intellectual imperialism to assume that I have the *real* scoop on every other tradition. It assumes I have the right to define and critique all other traditions *in my own terms.* Even though MacIntyre thinks his own tradition correct, and others incorrect, this is not imperialistic. For he is willing to reflect on his own tradition, examine its resources and inadequacies, and engage through philosophical imagination with rivals.

In short, by MacIntyre's lights he does not need a definition of tradition that is any more cut and dry than it is. Forcefully to disagree with this conclusion requires his interlocutor to produce an alternative theory of practical rationality. But that alternative will either aim to be *not* tradition-constituted but universal (which is the encyclopedic tradition) or it will admit is tradition-constituted but the "best so far" (which is MacIntyre's own view).

We can think of this worry about MacIntyre's theory more generally as a problem of thinking about thinking. MacIntyre is a theorist of virtue and practical rationality. Hence rationally to assess his theory requires thinking through our own theory of rationality. The errors we make in *thinking things through* are not likely to be solved by *thinking them through*. The Greek proverb is: "If water chokes us, what shall we drink?" The Latin proverb (from a very different context) is "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" — who will guard the guards themselves? I believe the answer to the rhetorical question is *no one at all* can guard the guards; if water chokes us, there is *nothing at all we can drink to wash it down*. Likewise, if something is deeply wrong with the way we think, how can theorizing

22. John Horton and Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 295.

about rationality right the wrong?

Some of the errors MacIntyre diagnoses in thinkers who belong to encyclopedic tradition will be invisible to those thinkers unless they themselves earnestly examine the problems of the tradition. Even if MacIntyre's diagnosis is *correct* – especially if it is correct – the readers who especially need to hear it will find the diagnosis unintelligible, even irrational. Insofar as the "patient" finds any parts of his theory intelligible, they will seem radical, disastrous in their social implications, and destructive of the very nature and purpose of education. The reason these appearances will be insuperable to MacIntyre's patient is because the patient is, by his lights, self-deceived. He or she simply denies being part of a tradition, and hence denies having a particular (rather than universal) tradition-bound conception of rationality, and hence denies having a particular, tradition-bound conception of the good (perhaps the good is unbounded freedom to follow the moral law, or to pursue happiness,, and justice unfettered equality). Modernity is the "tradition-less tradition" and hence *must* deny tradition to be consistent with itself.

The solution to this paradox is not to browbeat people into admitting that they inhabit a tradition. Rather, he directs the arguments (of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) and others at interlocutors who are already undergoing epistemological crisis. This "patient" comes to MacIntyre with manifesting symptoms. MacIntyre offers one possible diagnosis, and the patient's job is to investigate further. The patient needs philosophical imagination to even *consider* the possibility of another truth. The patient needs patience, intellectual courage, and self-reflection. The patient needs to sit in front of the proverbial mirror and mouth the words, (a) "I am part of a tradition" and (b) "my tradition might be inadequate," and (c) "that other tradition might have the resources more adequately to address the intellectual and practical problems that I now see are insuperable to my tradition." The critic who would escape the battery is more likely to flee rather than engage; but the critic who would escape by engaging and overcoming is liable to meet her match.

"Traditionalism"

MacIntyre argues that we should "return" to the Aristotelian tradition of virtue and practical reason because it is more adequate than its rivals. We must beware one misunderstanding. Any talk of "returning" is liable to sound nostalgic. MacIntyre is emphatically not defending "traditionalism" per se.

At the risk of sounding paradoxical, we might put it this way: MacIntyre's positive ethical positions are *traditional* but not *nostalgic.* In fact, his definition of tradition is *progressive*. Tradition is an ongoing, socially-embedded argument over time, which necessarily entails that moral enquiry is dynamic – even *modern*. To be traditional is not to be past-oriented; to be traditional is to be staunchly future-oriented, since the business of life is not only the pursuit of our telos but the transmission of everything valuable and precious to the next generation.

One critic who misunderstands MacIntyre along these lines is Martha Nussbaum.[23] She begins her review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* with an age-old dilemma between the social stability afforded by tradition (with its danger of hidebound error) and the social volatility endemic to critical reflection (with its opportunity of progress toward truth). She alludes to this dilemma as articulated by Aristotle:

> In the second book of the Politics, Aristotle asks whether it is a good thing to encourage changes in society. Should people be offered rewards for inventing some change in the traditional laws? No, he writes, because this would lead to instability and unnecessary tampering with what is working well. Should we, on the other hand, listen to those who wish to keep ancestral traditions fixed and immune from criticism? No again—for if we reason well we can make progress in lawmaking, just as we do in other arts and sciences.[24]

Aristotle's solution is that it should be *hard but not impossible* to change societal structures.

23. Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason," *The New York Review of Books* 36, no. 19 (1989): 36–41.

24. Ibid.

Of course, we don't have to pick just one or the other. But one necessary feature of every society is a particular level of difficulty in making social changes. Should one err on the side of difficulty or ease?

Putting it starkly, of the two it is better to gamble for progress toward truth at the risk of instability than to gamble for stability at the risk of hidebound error.

Secondly, tradition is not 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 one's first language within a culture. But 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 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.[25]

Strangely, Nussbaum takes MacIntyre to be reversing Aristotle's balance. She thinks MacIntyre is urging for betting on social stability even if it means sticking closer to existing

25. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.

tradition (and hence surpassing or intentionally avoiding critical reflection) than is compatible with unfettered progress.

This is not an objection to MacIntyre — it is a misreading. MacIntyre explicitly rejects any kind of conservative traditionalism that amounts to fideistic belief in the rightness of one's own tradition. Indeed, he anticipates this misreading of his theory. He says:

> 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.[26]

In short, tradition cannot be a name for the impulse to resist change or to fear political tension and turmoil. Quite the contrary: political tensions of a particular character and expression are intrinsic to MacIntyre tradition. As he defines tradition, the internal conflict about the "goods which constitute that tradition" is a necessary feature.

A more plausible interpretation of MacIntyre is to side with Aristotle that the risk of complacent error is greater than the risk of instability. For hidebound error is likely to perpetuate itself across generations, while the instability arising from a cacophony of disagreement is likely to be short-lived.

Nussbaum does not see that MacIntyre's proposed solution is not a sort of *anti-progressive* longing for the past. It is radically progressive. His solution is not to reverse progress but to replace the Enlightenment's standard of progress with a more tenable alternative. Ironically, it appears to me that Nussbaum is too conservative in her defense of the Enlightenment's standard of progress; MacIntyre is the progressive here. Rather than accusing MacIntyre of being too conservative, Nussbaum should focus on his critique of the Enlightenment. MacIntyre's critique may be wrong, but it is with that critique that she should take issue. She should not accuse him of failing to "make progress… [in] arts and

26. Ibid., 222.

sciences" but of "tampering with what is working well." MacIntyre's theory of rationality may be wrong, but it is not wrong along the lines that Nussbaum attacks.

Criticizing 'tradition' or defending 'tradition' is almost always ill-advised for the simple reason that 'tradition' says different things. While Enlightenment thinkers used 'tradition' as a catch-all word for people who disagreed with them, the Enlightenment tradition itself represents a commitment to experimentation, thinking for oneself, natural science, and so on. The practice of using experiment to test the theories of physical science is a tradition of scientists and "natural philosophers", dating back at least to the 13th century: "From this objection — should you care to try / You can be set free by experiment / Which is the source for the rivers of your arts."[27]

III. Discussion

On the account I have developed in this dissertation, virtue is human excellence in rational practice and practical reasoning. While I have offered a defense of a neo-Aristotelian view of practical reason, there are many rivals to such a view. MacIntyre's concept of tradition was supposed to explain not only *why* rival views exist but to criticize them. MacIntyre would have us believe that 'rationality' is not a disembodied set of timeless and universal procedures of thinking. My rationality includes whatever standards of reasoning I accept, and all the other resources (facts, authorities, memories) I use to judge true and false.

Let us now assess what has been said so far in light of a few objections. We can only mentions few of the many objections to MacIntyre's concept of tradition.

Relativism

Once the concept of tradition is clarified as far as possible by MacIntyre's own lights, how can he avoid the charge of relativism at this level? According to MacIntyre's account, mem-

27. Dante, *Paradiso* Canto II, lines 94-96

bers of traditions can leave their primary tradition after undergoing an epistemological crisis. Remember that varying traditions can disagree about a proposition P. Perhaps tradition A finds P true and B finds it false, on best evidence and sufficient reflection. But incommensurable traditions disagree about the standards (say, S1 and S2) by which to judge the truth and even the rationality of other traditions. So A finds P true and rational (by S1) while B finds P false and irrational (by S2). They genuinely disagree. And A judges B to be irrational (since they deny that P) while B returns the favor (since A affirms that P).

Let's put these abstractions into an example. Consider Annabelle. Annabelle is a member of tradition A. Suppose that by A's standards of rationality, S1 contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense. And suppose that A teaches that P. Finally, suppose that P entails both (Q and ~Q). Annabelle discovers a problem with her tradition. She cannot deny P nor can she affirm the contradiction. After some searching about, she concludes she cannot solve the problem and cannot even discover the rational resources with which to solve them. Being passingly familiar with tradition B, she becomes curious why her friends who belong to that tradition deny P and exercises her philosophical imagination to begin to see B "from within." Tradition B is compelling, since it denies that P. She "converts" traditions. However, there is a problem with tradition B, and that is that the standard of rationality of B (S2) allows its adherents to affirm a contradiction. So now, even though Annabelle left A to avoid having to affirm a contradiction (by her standard of rationality S1) now that she has joined B she no longer sees it as irrational to affirm the contradiction (by her new standard of rationality S2). This is surely an odd conclusion.

A second variation on the same problem is this: how would a born-and-raised member of tradition B, affirming S2, ever come to epistemological crisis? Discontentment with contradictions is not available to B members *ex hypothesi*. They do not see affirming a contradiction as irrational. Their tradition can bear a hundred instances of (Q and ~Q).

The odd conclusion of this thought experiment is a dilemma: either such nonsense

is possible, or embracing the law of non-contradiction is a universal standard of rationality in every tradition. The latter option seems to indicate that traditions A and B are *not* actually incommensurable, since they share one rather substantial presupposition. The flow of members from one to the other is intelligible. The former option allows A and B to be incommensurable, but seems to freeze members in their own tradition. Members of A would have no (rational) justification for joining B, while members of B would have no (rational) justification for leaving B. So either all traditions are the same (in which case MacIntyre's definition is unclear) or some people are in principle locked in their own tradition (in which case one kind of relativism is final).

While "tradition" and "tradition-constituted rationality" were supposed to solve the conundrums MacIntyre faced, the cure may have been worse than the disease.

MacIntyre's denial of relativism boils down to two claims: the first is that even enquirers situated within a tradition can achieve *truth*, because truth is distinct from *rationality*; the second claim, which is related, is that enquirers can overcome the rational limitations of their tradition.

MacIntyre accepts – indeed, argues for – a certain truth within relativism. That truth is that every enquirer seeks the conclusion of the enquiry at a particular time and place, within a particular social setting, within a language, and within a tradition. Following Lutz, we can say that MacIntyre accepts "relativity". Relativity (a term borrowed from Michael Krausz[28]) is a thesis about *the condition of enquiry.* It is not a thesis about the *conclusion of enquiry.* Lutz approves of Mark Colby's statement that "argumentative situatedness is inescapable."[29] However such relative situatedness is compatible with objective or absolute or mind-independent or tradition-independent *truth*.

28. Michael Krausz, "Relativism and Foundationalism: Some Distinctions and Strategies," *The Monist*, 1984, 395–404.

29. Christopher Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Lexington Books, 2004), 89.

Returning to Rorty's claim, we can say that MacIntyre agrees that "nothing can be said about… rationality" except what is taken as rational in a given society and tradition; where he disagrees is in equating rationality with *truth.* From the historically- and socially-situated position of enquiry, a philosopher (he argues) may indeed find truth. It is impossible to achieve objective or absolute or tradition-independent *rationality* but it is possible – indeed, it is the hope and telos of enquiry – to achieve objective *truth.* This may seem a paradox.

The primary kind of truth we seek in enquiry is "the adequation of the mind to reality."[30] This is the understanding of truth inherent in the Aristotelian tradition.[31] Aristotle says, "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."[32] Aquinas calls this the adequation of the intellect to the object.

However, 'truth' is ambiguous across at least two senses: a metaphysical, substantive sense and an epistemological, logical sense. The metaphysical sense of truth is simply reality. "Truth" is being itself. The logical sense of truth (which MacIntyre alludes to here) is the adequation of the intellect to those beings. Logical "truth" is knowing the (metaphysical) truth.[33]

30. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Q.16 and *De Veritate* Q.1, A.1-3. "Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus."

31. On the correspondence theory of truth, Marian David says: "The main positive argument given by advocates of the correspondence theory of truth is its obviousness. Descartes: 'I have never had any doubts about truth, because it seems a notion so transcendentally clear that nobody can be ignorant of it…the word "truth", in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object' (1639, AT II 597). Even philosophers whose overall views may well lead one to expect otherwise tend to agree. Kant: 'The nominal definition of truth, that it is the agreement of [a cognition] with its object, is assumed as granted' (1787, B82). William James: 'Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their "agreement", as falsity means their disagreement, with "reality" ' (1907, p. 96). Indeed, The Oxford English Dictionary tells us:"Truth, n. Conformity with fact; agreement with reality'".

32. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Metaphysics* 1011b25.

33. The third semantic sense of 'truth' would, naturally, be the accurate relation

If we understand MacIntyre to be arguing or assuming that (logical) truth is adequation of mind to reality, we can make sense of his endorsement of "relativity". Rationality is something more pragmatic than truth, something more like "warranted assertability."[34] That is, the theories we rationally construct are, for us, the "best theory so far."[35] It is no contradiction or paradox to assert that our rationality is the best thus far but that others in the future (or the past, or in rival traditions) might be *closer* to the truth.

The second point is that enquirers from within various traditions can (and often do) come to realize that their tradition is incoherent by its own standards and from this epistemological crisis come to find the resources of a rival tradition superior to their own; Aristotelian (and specifically Thomist) moral enquiry is, he argues, more rationally justified than encyclopedic or genealogical enquiry *by their standards* and *by its own standards*.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes (one iteration) of the charge of relativism. The truth can be known from within the confines of our tradition and perspective.

Evil practices

One of the worries that arose in chapter 4 was the worry about whether virtues can go bad. I offered one brief response there. I also briefly discussed the problem in regard to practical reason where I argued that even though practical reason by definition aims at the good, it can err. This, more adequate response, depends on the unity of virtues under prudence or practical wisdom.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre explicitly retracts his earlier belief that virtues exist without a unity under prudence.[36] The consequences of this retraction,

between the content of one's assertions and the beings about which one is making assertions. Semantic "truth" would be veridical statements about the metaphysical truth.

34. John Dewey, "Propositions, Warranted Assertibility, and Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1941, 169.

35. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

36. Ibid. preface, p. x.

Christopher Lutz argues, are crucial to refuting the charge of relativism. If virtues are unified, then even though virtues exist only in the context of practices, "no genuine practice can be inherently evil."[37] Rather, practical reason can judge *apparent goods* as genuine goods. The qualities needed for achieving the spurious goods internal to that "practice" would not be virtues but only *apparent virtues*.

Now, such a definition certainly seems ad hoc. But Lutz provides a persuasive illustration: eugenics. Eugenics certainly seems to bear the markings of a genuine practice. Its apparent good is the purification of the gene pool for future generations. However, genuine virtues militate *against* the achievement of that goal. For example, Lutz cites a story of a doctor who had the virtue of compassion found himself unable to pursue the program of euthanizing mentally-disabled children.[38] We might also recall Huck Finn's internal struggle with his "conscience" in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck decides to turn Jim in to the slave owners. He writes a letter outing Jim, and says: "I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now." Yet for all that, after vividly confronting Jim's humanity and goodness, he feels the loyalty of their friendship and wavers:

> It was a difficult situation. I picked up the letter, and held it in my hand. I was trembling, because I knew had to make a choice between two things, and the outcome of my decision would last forever. I thought about it a minute while I held my breath. And then I said to myself: "All right, then, I'll GO to hell"—and tore it up.[39]

The humor of this passage arises, in large part, because of the tension between the *apparent good* of treating Jim as legal property and the *actual good* of treating Jim as an end in himself, as a free man just like any other. Huck's virtue (in this case, loyalty or friendship)

37. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 102.

38. Léon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate: The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe* (Schocken Books, 1979), 186–7.

39. Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Lathifa, 2014), Chapter 31.

cannot be put to use in the service of a corrupting practice like slave-trading. Just as vice subverts institutions and their worthy practices, virtue "subverts" vicious institutions and unworthy practices. Virtue marks the difference between the coward who disobeys his commanding officer's orders because the obedience would put him at risk of painful death and the courageous person who disobeys his commanding officer's order because obedience would require wrongdoing. Without prudence to discriminate between the two cases, we lack any resources by which to discriminate courage and cowardice, between a virtuous resistance and vicious resistance.

Some might worry that the distinction between apparent goods and actual goods brings with it more problems than it solves. It is certainly a distinction that leaves many questions unanswered. My first reply is that such a distinction is inevitable and necessary in our practical reasoning. Assume for a reductio that "there is no real distinction between apparent and real goods." Then either *nothing* is "actually good" (everything that appears good is just an apparent good) or that *nothing* is "actually bad though it appears good" (everything that appears good is a real good). But I take it as axiomatic and irrefutable that some things are actually good (life, pleasure, happiness, friendship). And some things that appear good are not good: obeying unjust laws, enjoying the misfortune of an enemy, etc. Therefore there is a real distinction between apparent and real goods.

A second reply, however, requires conceding that MacIntyre's theory leaves us unsatisfied. That is, it might be that the unsatisfying aspects of his theory track those aspects of morality that are unsatisfying. The admitted indeterminacy of MacIntyre's account reflects the real indeterminacy of our moral lives. Consider two phenomena: some individuals and cultures persist in behaviors (that I believe) are wicked and unjustifiable – slavery, child prostitution, ritual human sacrifice, or what have you. It needs to be explained, from within my tradition, how it could be that otherwise decent and normal human beings could persist in such vileness. The other phenomena is this: some individuals and cultures repent and

change (what I believe are) their wicked ways. Some make moral progress. The paradox is that while we cannot expect magical linear moral progression from wicked to good everywhere, neither can we despair of any person or culture making moral progress. It just seems a brute datum of observation that some are stubbornly stuck in their wicked ways, and some are admirably firm in their benevolent resolve. How do we explain this paradoxical phenomenon?

MacIntyre's account offers an explanation of why vices sometimes persist within pseudo-practices, institutions, and traditions from generation to generation; on the other hand, it explains why practice-enabling virtues sometimes emerge to disrupt a pseudo-practice, a wicked institution, and a corrupt or at least incomplete tradition. The fact is that "many kinds of activities can be, and in fact are considered to be, practices. Some of these may conflict radically, owing to errors and insufficiencies in rationality."[40] Errors in rationality explain errors in traditions and hence false ascriptions of the title 'virtue.' Rationality answers to truth, to the world as it is, not merely to the pragmatic truth to "dialectical success."[41] Hence, virtues answer to *what is really good*. They do not merely answer to "what-counts-as-good-for-us", which property is relative to each tradition.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes this iteration of the charge of relativism, while still explaining why rival traditions differ – and sometimes radically differ – in their evaluations and opinions. Incomplete traditions can, and do, undergo crisis. Particular persons within that tradition discover and asseverate on inadequacies within the tradition, leading to an epistemological crisis. In response, others within the same tradition may become willing to examine the resources of rival traditions and either quit their primary tradition or re-fashion it, re-make it, update it, and make real moral and intellectual progress.

40. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 103.
41. Ibid., 104.

Why be moral?

A third reply is in order here. D'andrea[42] points out a critique Philippa Foot has leveled against MacIntyre: after all the informative and wide-ranging historical analysis, MacIntyre's account does not solve the "problem posed by Plato, and never solved … that of showing the rationality, for any man, of a thorough-going acceptance of the restraints of justice."[43] The challenge of a Nietzsche or Callicles or Thrasymachus lies in their acceptance that the good life for humans *requires* some virtues or requires virtue in some sense but their rejection of the "robust concept of justice with its corresponding constraints on action."[44]

One response is this: the question "why be moral?" is never asked in the abstract. For example, in describing the "self of the heroic age" MacIntyre says, "In heroic society there is no 'outside' except that of the stranger. A man who tried to withdraw himself from his given position in heroic society would be engaged in the enterprise of trying to make himself disappear."[45] Even though virtues in twenty-first century North America are not what the same as Homer's day, there is a parallel to be drawn.

Philosophers often ask "why be moral?" hypothetically. They ask it *as if* speaking on the skeptic's behalf, or as if *they* were skeptics. But hypothetical moral skeptics will not do. We must consider a concrete character, real or fictional. Once we look for a real or fictional skeptic, a problem arises. By MacIntyre's lights, sincere "why be moral?" skeptics are political or social outcasts. For millions of people who are full-fledged members of their tradition, the "why be moral?" question will not usually arise. Parents, teachers, religious

42. Thomas D D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006).

43. Philippa Foot, "Review of After Virtue," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1981, 1 097. This is the "problem of immoralism" she tries to address in the final chapter of her *Natural Goodness*.

44. D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*, 430.

45. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 126.

leaders, politicians, businesses, and non-profit organizations all have a hand in giving each member of the community the tradition out of which the community arises and within which abstract philosophical or pseudo-philosophical worries such as "What does it all mean?" do not arise because they are satisfactorily answered.

By contrast, the emergence of the doubt as to whether one should be moral, and the crystallization of the doubt into an articulate challenge, is *a political failure*. The *polis* to which the moral skeptic belongs has failed him. The moral skeptic, likewise, has failed the *polis* which belongs to him or her. So MacIntyre's theory makes room for people who are not actually skeptical (to whom an answer to Foot's challenge is not required) and people who are actually skeptical but do not belong to their society (to whom an answer to Foot's challenge would be meaningless).

MacIntyre's theory makes room for one more group: moral skeptics *are* members of their own tradition but are seeing the problems within their own tradition and who are troubled by a "border tradition". This type of skeptic sees the resources of a rival tradition and compares such favorably with the resources of his own tradition. The skeptic is, in a word, entering epistemological crisis.

Specifically, it might be that the moral skeptic has been raised outside of the Aristotelian tradition and is noticing the inadequacies of his or her own tradition, and is entering epistemological crisis. MacIntyre's response is to invite him or her to do the hard work of resolving that crisis by examining, from within the context of a primary tradition *and* a "second first" tradition, the problems at hand and the available solutions, working toward an ever greater understanding of the truth.

In short, MacIntyre's theory gives an account of two contradictory phenomena. It explains how a moral skeptic might arise within a community and how that skeptic might be moved to a more adequate grasp of the truth; and it explains why, in healthy, unified, moral societies, *so few people become moral skeptics*.

Concluding remarks

It should not surprise us that rival traditions disagree, and that even among virtue ethicists rival lists of virtues arise. Aristotle and Nietzsche (despite their other differences) both seem to agree in finding magnanimity a virtue and humility or meekness a vice where St. Paul and Aquinas agree in finding humility or meekness a great virtue. Nevertheless, practical reasoning can find out which of these ought, on balance, to accept. The fact is that people can and do sometimes identify inconsistencies with their own tradition, identify the resources of rival traditions, and switch traditions. Some of these switches have to be explained as errors; while others have to be explained as improvements.

Reasoning about basic goods is a starting point. Human beings need oxygen and food by nature. These are biological necessities. Biologically, we are animals evolved from simpler animals.[46]

But we are also social and practical-reasoning animals by nature. Our advanced practical reasoning sets us apart. We have the burden and responsibility to set the course for our own lives, and to care for the dependent among us who are not yet practical reasoners, who are temporarily disabled, or who are permanently infirm. Any tradition that does not do justice to these realities will be defective. Any practices that militate against our distinctively human life are bad practices. Whatever virtues are included on the list had better not exclude virtues that make human life possible; it had better not exclude (as Aristotle did) women and manual workers from the very possibility of developing virtues. Tradition and rationality are not ultimately at the mercy of perspective but can be rationally adjudicated.

Even after clarifying MacIntyre's optimism about the possibility of ethical truth, his answer to relativism is sufficient but still somehow indeterminate. The indeterminacy is

46. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* x.

partly due, as I have suggested, to his appeal to practical rationality. While this appeal seems to me to solve some problems, there is one lingering problem it does not solve. From my perspective (or my tradition), *every legitimate tradition* affirms the law of non-contradiction. But that is just to say that if Walt Whitman or Nagarjuna denies the law of non contradiction, then I will necessarily judge them to be irrational.[47]

Perhaps a qualified acceptance of MacIntyre's claim about tradition-constituted rationality is that when a tradition does not *seem* share this standard of rationality (the value of logical consistency) I should not be too quick to judge that I have really understood their meaning. Perhaps when I ask them if they affirm (S is P and S is not P) they have a slightly different concept in mind for "not" or for "and." Or perhaps they are speaking of an entity instantiating a property and not instantiating that same property at the same time but in ever so slightly different respects. Walt Whitman may be saying he contradicts himself in ever so slightly different respects in order to grasp apparently paradoxical truths that can be predicated of a transcendental modern man. Or perhaps they are denying both P and not P in favor of some other, different articulation of the predicates a given subject instantiates. In the case of any of these alternatives, the principle of charity recommends I extend my interlocutor the benefit of the doubt before concluding that the appearance of irrationality reflects real irrationality.

MacIntyre thinks that "human beings need the virtues" because they are intrinsically good and useful for transforming communities and persons.[48] He began by defining virtue in reference to practice. But moral enquiry itself is a practice that takes place within a

47. Laurence R. Horn, "Contradiction," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2014, 2014. "Do I contradict myself? / Very well, then, I contradict myself. / (I am large, I contain multitudes.) (Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself');"Everything is real and not real. / Both real and not real. / Neither real nor not real. / That is Lord Buddha's teaching." (Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā 18:8), quoted in Garfield (1995: 102).

48. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

tradition. At the practical level of daily life, a small community (such as a family or town or university) does well to organize themselves around a common vision of what is good and a common conception of what qualities will help everyone to attain that good. It can and should be undertaken by regular folk, not just specialists in philosophy. And the goal of such enquiry is discovering what is really admirable and pursuing it, becoming more admirable moral agents through the acquisition of virtues. Virtues are acquired traits that enable the achievement of goods internal to the practices, those traits that sustain traditions, and those traits by which we overcome perennial temptations to lead lives that are divided, deviant, or contrary to our true nature. Furthermore, at the theoretical level of philosophical ethics, the concepts of virtue, practical wisdom, and happiness supply for moral theory what many modern moralities have not: a clear, coherent, useful, and justifiable theory that grounds a rational pursuit of the good life and resolvable moral disagreements.

Wisdom

The final chapter must pick up the concept of wisdom. Wisdom crowns my account, for its possession allows the virtuous person to identify rational practices, and to solve the problems of practical reasoning in tradition by adjudicating between rival traditions. To that task we now turn.

The problem with going against tradition is that the "default" view is plausible to most people. It would not be default if it were completely absurd to most people. Although there are perhaps always a minority who see the epistemological problems of the consensus view.

It is idle to speak of tradition or anti-tradition. "Tradition" says contradictory things. People group A passes along belief P from generation to generation. If A is false, then rational reflection will turn one into an anti-traditionalist; but if successful one will persuade people group A to believe Q instead and Q will be passed along from one generation to the

next. So then one will become a traditionalist. These labels are about as helpful as someone saying that he is a "newspaperist" because he believes what is written "in the newspaper." The only question one could ask such a person would be "which one?" Traditions, like newspapers, are a medium, not a message. The only thing to do, then, is to examine the message — the content of the tradition.

The only sense in speaking of being for or against tradition is that the critic who stands back from the default view of a particular culture or subculture is likely to be resisted by the majority. Individuals dislike change and groups positively hate it. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the phenomenon of resistance to critics is likely to appear in a tradition regardless of whether the tradition or the critic is right.

Chapter 9

Wisdom

> What use would it be if a man had the wisdom of Nestor and wanted the necessaries of life, food and drink and clothes and the like? Where would be the advantage of wisdom then?
>
> —Eryxias (attributed to Plato).

Is not the love of Wisdom a practice of death?' (Ancient Greek. Plato, Phaedo, 81 A)

Nature (1) All natural organisms exhibit formal and functional (i.e., teleological) facts which are expressible in generics. (2) Human beings are natural organisms. (3) Human beings exhibit formal and teleological facts which are expressible in generics.

Human nature (4) For any x, the excellences of x are the qualities that enable and partly constitute its being a fully mature x. (5) Human beings are practical, rational primates. (6) The excellences or virtues of human beings are the beneficial qualities that enable and partly constitute its becoming a fully practical, rational primates.

Virtue

(7) Rational practices and practical reasoning enable human the virtues that enable persons and societies to become fully practical, rational primates.

Flourishing (8) For any natural life form x, the natural telos of x is to become a fully mature x. (9) Human beings are practical, rational primates. (10) Hence, the natural telos of human beings is to become fully practical, rational animals.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

The measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life. — Plato, *Republic* 450b.

> Men need virtues as bees need stings.
>
> —Peter Geach, *The Virtues*.