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Reconciling Themes in Neo-Aristotelian Meta-ethics

ALLEN THOMPSON
Department of Philosophy and Religion, Clemson University, 126 D Hardin Hall, Clemson, SC 29634, USA; e-mail: athomp6@clemson.edu

1. Morality, Reason, and Human Nature

Reading the whole of Philippa Foot's work reveals that the view advanced in her widely reprinted essay, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," is an exception to her otherwise consistent attempts to defend the universal application of correct moral judgments on the basis of sound practical reasoning. In *Natural Goodness*, Foot returns again to defend the claim that everybody has reason to be moral, yoking together ideas about moral evaluation, practical reason, and natural teleology into her novel and distinct form of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism.[1] While her view has recently received some critical attention, little has been done either in its defense or further development.[2] Indeed, there is a certain irony to the fact that Rosalind Hursthouse, who has done more than anyone toward a systematic development of Foot's recent naturalism, also champions a fundamental objection to the prospect of its success, its promise of providing an account resting on facts of nature as to why everybody has "reason to aim at those things at which a good human being must aim" independently of their self-interest or desires.[3]

Hursthouse's objection rests on the understanding of practical reason she adopts from John McDowell: the facility for reasoning well is an acquired and normatively autonomous second nature.[4] Another prominent neo-Aristotelian, McDowell has articulated his own objections to Foot's recent work, specifically, to the idea that natural facts about species-typical needs play a significant role in accounting for the rational appeal of a life of virtue.[5] Together, McDowell and Hursthouse present serious problems that must be addressed before any defense of morality along the lines Foot has established can be pursued further.

Still, it is well known that Hursthouse is not entirely critical of Foot. It is with significant optimism that she develops Foot's basic model of naturalistic evaluation and concludes that the approach does indeed show

significant promise for picking out a familiar list of virtues. However, she then turns to ask just how suitable the kind of natural facts characteristic of Foot's account look, from within a developed space of reasons, for grounding the rational justification of morality. On her reading, the outlook is not good. But in her attempt to reconcile the apparently incommensurable views of these two neo-Aristotelians, Hursthouse pursues a laudable goal, since success here would contribute significantly to the appeal of their shared perspective. It would be significant to at least provide an outline for the reconciliation of two central Aristotelian themes, the role of human function and the role of a proper moral upbringing, in the rational justification of morality. Thus, it is worthwhile to revisit Hursthouse's endeavor with the aim of determining if her strategy cannot be made more successful than she thinks.

2. Aristotelian Categoricals and Moral Evaluation of a Rational Will

Before focusing on the analyses in McDowell and Hursthouse, we need a reading of Foot's view against which their objections can be weighed. The view consists of two basic parts, a theory of moral evaluation based on norms of nature and an unusual strategy for defending the rational status of morality.

Foot's account of moral judgment is a creative combination of ideas for which she is indebted to others. From Peter Geach she adopts the idea that "good" is an attributive adjective, which means that the criteria for its correct application are derived from a corresponding noun phrase. For example, "good" in "this is a good knife" applies correctly only in light of what it is to be a knife. Most importantly, the point is that this grammatical feature of "good" does not change when evaluative judgments are of moral goodness.[6] Judith Jarvis Thompson also takes this point of departure in setting out her version of a neo-Aristotelian naturalism, as does Thomas Magnell in his account of evaluative assessments.[7] What is characteristic about Foot here is the claim that the moral use of "good" belongs to the same logical class as the use of "good" in particular evaluations already made of other living things. For example, the criteria for the correct application of "good" in "courage is a morally good character trait" belong to the same class as the criteria for "good" in "this oak tree has good roots." Evaluations of this form have nothing to do with the "needs or wants of the members of any other species of living thing."[8] Thus, Foot identifies moral goodness as a specific form of an autonomous or natural goodness, an evaluative property that belongs to an individual living thing in virtue of its natural kind.

The second component of her theory of moral judgment comes from the work of Michael Thompson. Specifically, it is the idea that there are facts of nature corresponding to the various and species-specific forms of life, natural-historical judgments that are expressed in propositions called Aristotelian categoricals, as in "The Black Bear hibernates in the winter."[9] According to Thompson, Aristotelian categoricals are neither universal generalizations nor oblique normative assertions. Instead, they form a "special *form of judgment*, a distinct mode of joining subject and predicate in thought and speech."[10] Foot's focus is on only a sub-set of Aristotelian categoricals that express an essential function in the life characteristic to an animal or plant. "What 'plays a part' in this life," she writes, "is that which is causally and teleologically related to it, as putting out roots is related to obtaining nourishment, and attracting insects is related to reproduction in plants."[11] The form-of-life characteristic of an organism's natural kind determines a type of absolute need for that individual, a species-specific need, for example, what a particular organism needs *qua* American Black Bear.[12] Foot's concept of a species-specific, absolute need is a version of what Elizabeth Anscombe calls an Aristotelian necessity: "the necessity of that on which good hangs" or, put another way, what is necessary to make possible the good that characteristically belongs to an individual to possess, according to its biological kind.[13]

Combining these two ideas, Foot maintains that criteria for the correct ethical evaluation of human beings are derived from natural facts articulated in Aristotelian categoricals, which express species-specific, absolute needs. Moral goodness is a particular form of natural goodness. Even if this were granted, we may still wonder how Aristotelian categoricals are supposed to operate in the rational justification of morality. We may ask what, if any, normative force could a skeptic find teleological facts of nature to have in response to the question, "Why be moral?".

On this point, Foot takes inspiration from the rhetorical force of a question raised by Warren Quinn.[14] If practical reason were only instrumental, Quinn points out, then it would be indifferent to cruelty, nastiness, "or even disgracefulness in an agent's purposes."[15] If practical rationality is to come up to its presumed status as a master virtue, then it must involve something more than cleverness in achieving ends. It must bear some important relation to moral goodness. Since to act well *qua* human being is to act on the basis of sound practical reasoning, rationality in action must be intimately connected to the moral goodness of the human rational will. But which has explanatory priority? "In my account of the relation between goodness of choice and practical rationality," writes Foot, "it is the former that is primary. I want to say, baldly, that

there is no criterion for practical rationality that is not *derived from* that of goodness of the will."[16] To reason well about action, then, is to do so as a person with an excellent rational will, as a virtuous person, would. At bottom, evaluation of a human rational will is a measure of its natural goodness, a judgment formed on the basis of the relevant Aristotelian categoricals.

It is worth asking what a virtuous person recognizes when she correctly apprehends certain considerations as genuine reason to act. Foot does not offer much on this point, although she follows Wittgenstein by insisting that our attribution to human beings of the ability to apprehend something as an end stands in need of public criteria.[17] However, we can see that her view of practical rationality is broadly Aristotelian. A just person, for example, recognizes the appropriate value that different considerations have in situations where there are concerns about justice, such as situations regarding promises, a right to life, a distribution of property, a development of capabilities, or questions about retribution or forgiveness. The important point is that by hypothesis a just person reasons well, and it follows that whatever a just person understands the relevant reasons for action to be, she is correctly recognizing the reasons that should guide action and she is acting on the basis of the recognition.

Presented in this way, Foot offers a version of externalism about practical reasons, the view that some considerations are practical reasons for everyone, independently of an agent's own pre-deliberative motivational psychology. On this view, in spite of her subjective motivational psychology, a person who does not act for the reasons for which a virtuous person must act is exhibiting a natural defect. If the external reason statements correctly recognized by a virtuous person are moral reasons, then Foot's view is also a version of moral universalism, or the view that the demands of morality apply to all rational human beings.

In summary, inspired by Quinn's arguments against a subjective, desire-directed conception of practical reasons, Foot has returned to defend the claim that moral considerations provide practical reasons for everybody and that nobody ignores morality without a failure of practical reason. Inspired by Thompson's work on the representation of life, she grounds her argument on propositions about the absolute needs characteristic of an organism's form-of-life. The resulting view is a universalist account of morality and an externalist theory of practical reasons. She grounds moral judgments on norms of nature and, on the basis of a conceptual relation between virtue and sound practical reasoning, advances the view that natural norms constrain rationality in action.

There are many challenges facing such a view, including skepticism about non-genetically directed forms of natural teleology, the possibility

of multiple naturally sound types, and questions about the epistemology of Aristotelian categoricals.[18] However, the issues focused on here revolve around doubt about the very possibility that any natural facts can provide a suitable ground for the rational justification of morality.

3. Deductive Impotence and Rational Freedom

We may ask if the power of practical reason implies a kind of freedom from contingent facts of nature, enabling us to question the rational bearing of any particular natural fact. Will a basis in norms of nature threaten the supposed autonomy of reason, or is reason, as Hume seems to have thought, at best instrumental and then only a slave to nature? In ''Two Sorts of Naturalism,'' McDowell raised problems of this sort. Although his objections there predate the publication of Foot's *Natural Goodness*, the essentials of her view were available in the literature and the problems he raised still stand in need of a response.

McDowell begins with an analogy. ''Just how convincing a grounding for the appeal of ethical considerations to reason is available anyway, from the claim that human beings need the virtues if their life is to go well? Would this be like the claim that wolves need a certain sort of co-operativeness if their life is to go well? Suppose some wolves acquire reason.''[19] It is worth considering what the imaginative leap entails. According to McDowell, practical reason is a distinctive development of our capacities for using propositional language to offer reasons in support of our judgments about what to do, including moral judgments. Under this conception of reason, practical deliberation is an operation carried on within the particular ethical outlook a person has come to acquire through maturation, socialization, and habituation. Justifications are provided for our practical judgments by articulating conceptual relations between our conclusions, our values, our perception of what a situation calls for, and other features of an acquired ethical perspective. The acquired ethical outlook can be self-reflective and radically critical, tempered by internal norms such as logical consistency and universality, if such norms are a part of the developed normative orientation.[20] It is important to note that on this conception, the authority of rational justifications are formed on the basis of critical self-reflection on and with the features of a person's particular ethical outlook. More specifically, with this conception of practical reason as developed second nature, there are no practical deliberations that derive their authority from contact with objective facts understood as accessible from a so-called scientific view from nowhere.

We may ask what role Aristotelian categoricals could play in the deliberations of a rational wolf. Let us suppose that "Wolves are a carnivorous pack animal that need to hunt co-operatively" is a true and relevant Aristotelian categorical. As the cooperative hunt is about to begin a rational wolf can ask himself why he should do this. This indicates a quest for reasons and, if such questioning is not to be in vain, it implies a freedom requisite to act on the basis of our assessment of the relevant grounds. "Because to hunt cooperatively is what wolves need to do and I am a wolf" seems to McDowell the answer Foot offers. But this response will not be of much use to a rational wolf, because, McDowell claims, while a need to hunt cooperatively may rightly characterize wolves as a natural kind, it does not deductively follow that this or any particular individual wolf absolutely needs to hunt cooperatively.

To further illustrate this supposed deductive impotence, McDowell makes an allusion to Anscombe by considering, "Human beings have thirty-two teeth."[21] Plainly, it does not necessarily follow that McDowell, or any other particular human being, has thirty-two teeth. But the deductive failure of this example is misleading for two reasons. Although Thompson offers "The so and so is such and such" as the canonical form of the Aristotelian categorical, Foot is only interested in a sub-set expressing facts about non-genetically directed teleological needs. Not just any descriptive claim about physiology will do. Furthermore, Foot is interested in teleological facts that could be relevant to the moral evaluation of a human rational will. The thirty-two teeth example fails on both counts. Even if "Human beings have thirty-two teeth" were a teleological Aristotelian categorical, as in "… need thirty-two teeth," it would still not be relevant to moral evaluations, at least not without further argument. The second problem is that the charge of deductive impotence depends on attributing to Aristotelian categoricals the inferential properties of a universal generalization. But Thompson explicitly denies this.[22] Again, without argument as to why this could not be so, Aristotelian categoricals ought to be treated as they are as identified by Thompson, as a separate logical class with a distinct set of inferential relations. Unlike Bill FitzPatrick, McDowell seems ready to accept that indeed there are species-typical, teleological needs, as expressed in Aristotelian categoricals.[23]

Recasting the example in terms of a functional need can lessen the force McDowell's examples of inferential failure seem to have. Let us suppose that someone argued from "Human beings need to eat a varied and balanced diet," and "So and so is a human being" to "So and so needs to eat a varied and balanced diet." Does the expression of a species-typical need encourage us to hear the Aristotelian categorical as

something other than a universal generalization making us less tempted to deny the argument deductive validity? Even if this Aristotelian categorical does not provide deductive validity, it does seem to possess more inferential potency than the thirty-two teeth example. Similarly, there is reason to believe that the rational wolf example possesses more inferential potency than McDowell acknowledges.

But if Aristotelian categoricals can have influence over a rational will and possess some inferential potency, we may ask if practical reasoning is not simply a kind of slave to nature. Perhaps there are cases in which satisfying a natural norm requires that we forgo what there is good reason to think is not immoral, or even forgo something we think we have a good moral reason to do. Let us consider a person who is trying to decide if she should go on a hunger strike, for example, in protest of some particular human rights abuses. We may ask how the knowledge that human beings need to eat a balanced diet weighs with the person as a reason. Should she reason from the fact that human beings need to eat a balanced diet and she is a human being to the conclusion that she should not go on the hunger strike? It may seem that if we were to recognize the consideration about the need to hunt as sufficient for the conclusion that a rational wolf ought to hunt, then the need human beings have to eat a balanced diet should rationally compel a person not to go on a hunger strike.

The consideration about diet is directed at the end of physiological health and grounds reasons for human beings to act, if the only relevant consideration is the production or maintenance of physical well-being. But we need to consider whether it is always, or even most often, the only consideration relevant to what human good requires. Foot's view is broadly Aristotelian: what is rational is directed at what is good and part of what is good for human beings is to be rational. The promotion of physical health through proper nutrition provides important needs of a species-typical sort, but physical health is not the only feature of a well-lived human life.

It is plausible to think that considerations such as solidarity and empathy play a central role in the practical deliberations of a person who protests. Willingness to take non-violent measures of such extremity and willingness to speak out against, say, the oppression of other people at the cost of our own physical health, possibly to the point of death, are character traits that manifest human good in the appropriate circumstances. An Aristotelian categorical like "Human beings need to sometimes stand up to hardship and adversity for the sake of what they believe morality demands" captures a part of human good as much as the need to eat a balanced diet does. The point is that the need human beings have to eat well is often not a sufficient reason for acting one way rather

than another. Living a physically healthy life is just part of living well as a human being.

Foot believes that there is clearly something wrong with a free-riding wolf and it is fair to think this would carry over, for a rational wolf.[24] By free-riding, a rational wolf would be acting badly, exhibiting a natural defect, a judgment based on the species-typical need of wolves to hunt cooperatively. At the same time, there is no reason to think that any one Aristotelian categorical must provide a sufficient or decisive reason to act, especially when so much more may be at stake. Foot follows Donald Davidson in maintaining that the normative force of practical rationality is connected with the all-things-considered use of "should" and not its use in relation to a single or limited set of considerations.[25] It is no threat to acknowledge that indeed there are functional needs relating to fitness and health, or social status, or survival and reproduction. With the onset of rationality, an animal may reflectively consider and possibly reject any of the norms of nature expressed in Aristotelian categoricals. All of this can be granted to McDowell without doubting that species-typical norms can be relevant to at least some of our moral evaluations and thus all-things-considered judgments about how a person ought to act.

Foot would begin to understand rational wolves by assuming that participating in the cooperative hunt is acting well for a wolf, a wolf virtue. Parallel to her treatment of the human virtue of justice, Foot would insist that the difference between a virtuous wolf who is rational and a non-virtuous wolf who is rational, in this case, would be that a virtuous wolf reasons correctly regarding cooperative hunting while a non-virtuous wolf does not.[26] To act well as a rational animal, whether a human being or an imaginary wolf, is at least in part to reason well about voluntary behavior. A good or virtuous wolf reasons well and, in acting well, acts for the right reasons, the reasons for which rational wolves ought to participate in the cooperative hunt.

While Foot is not committed to the idea that a wolf's reason for cooperating has to be that "wolves need to hunt cooperatively and I am a wolf," it does not follow that this consideration could not be the reason for which the wolf acts. The important point is that rational wolves who hunt cooperatively act well as rational wolves and if a rational wolf has a good rational will, then he reasons well, which includes acting for the right reasons. Therefore, whatever reasons are recognized by the wolf who reasons well are genuine reasons for rational wolves, and this is true independently of contingent factors of a wolf's motivational psychology. If a wolf is defective in that he does not recognize and act on reasons for which a virtuous or good wolf acts, then *ipso facto* he is acting irrationally.[27]

If Aristotelian categoricals do not rob practical reason of normative autonomy, yet can put constraints on the demands of reason, we may ask what sort of normative force they are supposed to have. Let us consider again a rational wolf and suppose that "Wolves need to teach their young to hunt" expresses a species-typical, functional need. A young wolf cub, like a human infant, is a potentially rational animal. If a wolf cub successfully completes the developmental transition from sub-rational cub to rational adult wolf, then by hypothesis, the resulting rational wolf will be able to reason well about how to behave. The supposition here is that "Wolves need to teach their young to hunt" specifies a need that wolf cubs have in regard to their ability to successfully develop into mature, rational wolves and, correspondingly, it specifies a norm by which the behavior of a wolf's parent may be evaluated.

In light of this Aristotelian categorical, two conclusions can be drawn. First, the character dispositions required to successfully teach wolf cubs to hunt are found among the wolf virtues. Wolves who are characteristically disposed to teach young wolves to hunt are, so far, virtuous wolves, meeting a wolf's functional needs. Second, all else being equal, wolf cubs who are the benefactors of their caregiver's virtue are thereby assisted in developing into mature, rational wolves and, in turn, are able to appropriately care for the development of a capacity to reason well in other wolves.

Because of the way wolves hunt, a rational wolf, when he turns his reflective scrutiny to the question of what to do, will find that at least he begins deliberating with considerations such as "remain downwind of the prey," "move slowly and quietly," "move in co-ordination with other wolves, responsively to the movements of the prey, to isolate the weak and slow," and "members of the pack hunt and eat together." Developing under the care and supervision of wolves who possess the virtue of teaching young wolves to hunt will presumably impart this virtue into a rational wolf as he matures. Correspondingly, it seems safe to imagine that a rational wolf will be disposed to teach young wolves to hunt and that this will form part of the background considerations from which a good wolf reasons when considering how to behave.

According to this account, the Aristotelian categorical "wolves need to teach their young to hunt" is not a premise in the practical deliberations of a rational wolf, when trying to decide if he should so teach young wolves. Nor does it entail that deliberating in a certain sort of way is rational for a wolf. It does imply that the wolf who is able to reason well about hunting will begin his reflective deliberations against certain background considerations and values that he possesses due to the fact that wolves who successfully facilitated his development into a mature

rational wolf possessed the virtue of teaching young wolves to hunt. This would seem to import some normative authority to the virtues required for the existence of sound and free practical reasoning. A rational wolf cub receives not only virtuous intellectual instruction but also benefits significantly from strong inter-personal relationships and loving care. Analogously, it seems implausible to deny that it is a natural fact that human beings characteristically raise their young to become brave, just, and sympathetic in appropriate circumstances and in doing so are facilitating the successful development of a capacity to reason well about action.

It is an account such as this, centrally involving species-specific needs in the development of our human capacity to reason well about action, that roughly indicates how Aristotelian categoricals can operate in the formation of sound practical reasoning without directly implying that certain considerations are necessarily reasons to act or that particular norms are the correct norms of sound practical deliberation. If developed in this way, Foot's view can avoid the concern that the appearance of natural facts must rob any associated theory of practical rationality an adequate and appropriate freedom from the contingencies of natural fact.

4. Natural Goodness from a Developed Ethical Perspective

Hursthouse appreciates Foot's recent turn to metaphysical biology as a brilliant synthesis of her earlier work on the evaluation of living things and the more widely shared efforts in Aristotelian naturalism to "ground ethics, in some way, in considerations of human nature."[28] At the same time, she accepts McDowell's view that the rational justification of morality cannot reduce to a form of natural necessity. Ethics cannot simply import the sense of objectivity commonly associated with the natural sciences. The justification of morality must come from within a developed ethical perspective that is particular, historical, contingent, and culturally influenced. Thus, she assumes the justificatory space provided by McDowell's conception of reason as a second nature.[29] Still sympathetic to Foot, her approach is to consider how natural facts about species-specific needs look from within a developed ethical perspective, in an effort to determine if Foot's form of naturalism could provide the grounds to believe that everyone has reason to be moral, or, in Hursthouse's terms, that it could provide grounds for confidence in our beliefs that certain character traits are, indeed, genuine human virtues.

To this end Hursthouse describes the structure of a "botanical and ethological model of evaluation," which she claims is already in use by a

variety of life scientists.[30] According to Foot's view, evaluation of human rational will should exhibit the same or similar logical grammar as other evaluations of living things, based on facts of their specific form-of-life. The proposed model is meant to demonstrate this logic: various aspects of individual living things are evaluated regarding their functional contribution toward the satisfaction of their natural ends. The standard of functioning properly is identified, in each case, by criteria specific to different natural kinds. For example, the vision of a hawk is evaluated in light of how the eyesight of birds of prey contributes to satisfying their natural ends, such as individual survival. The characteristic way that vision enables hawks to live, by identifying and tracking the appropriate prey with accuracy from a great height, sets the standard for evaluating the eyesight of this particular hawk.

From plants through animals, the model grows in complexity until reaching sophisticated social animals, at which point four aspects of an individual organism, physical parts, operations and reactions, intentional actions, and both emotions and desires, are evaluated in light of four ends: its individual survival, continuance of its species, characteristic enjoyment of pleasures and freedom from pain, and the proper functioning of its social group. Human beings are sophisticated social animals, yet Hursthouse does not think that a satisfactory account of the rationality of our beliefs about the virtues can be provided by use of this naturalistic model of evaluation. She claims that the model breaks down in two ways when an attempt is made to evaluate ethically relevant human actions that are based on reason. First, the model cannot apply because there are no species-specific ways that human beings characteristically meet the four ends of the model. At best, the human way of carrying on is the rational way to act as reason would counsel.[31] But this would import a notion of normativity that is essentially foreign to the model. Second, even if there were characteristically, non-normative ways that human beings met their natural ends, none of the ends specified by the model are suitable for the evaluation of actions undertaken on the basis of reasons.

Before reaching these conclusions, Hursthouse recognizes that some modifications to the model are required in the effort to provide justification for our ethical evaluations. First, we must ignore what is merely physical, dropping evaluation of an organism's parts and physical operations or reactions. Second, whereas other animals may engage in behavior solely on the basis of natural inclination, human action and particularly human ethical action is frequently undertaken on the basis of reasons and reasoning. Thus, an adapted model must include an additional, fifth object of evaluation: actions from reason, a rational will. According to Hursthouse, the model is partially successful in accounting

for ethical evaluations of a rational will in that it picks out aspects that are also contained in the concept of a moral virtue: occasional actions from inclination, emotions and desires, and actions from reason.[32] But it remains to be asked if it will provide the grounds for justifying beliefs that certain character traits indeed are genuine human goods.

It is important to note that the formal features of the model are the same from species to species but that the exact criteria for their application vary according to the species. All animals capable of suffering pain are evaluated in their endowments regarding pain, but each individual is so evaluated in light of its relation to the pains characteristic of, and in many cases unique to, its species. Thus, the third end is stated as characteristic freedom from pain and enjoyment of pleasures. To read Hursthouse charitably, the normative notion in the fourth end, the proper functioning of the group, should also be understood in a more descriptive sense of the species-characteristic mode of functioning as a group. In order to apply the model it must be possible able to identify the ways of carrying on that are characteristic of the particular species that an individual belongs to. Hursthouse claims that it is not possible to do this for human beings. Human behavior is simply too diverse. Her argument stems from a rhetorical question: "Do we have a characteristic way, or ways, of functioning as a social group, as the wolves have theirs, and elephants theirs, and chimpanzees theirs? If so, what is it, or are they?"[33] The implication is that this model of naturalistic evaluation cannot generate ethical evaluations because human beings do not characteristically act to ensure their survival, raise their young, enjoy pleasures or avoid pain, or function as a social group.

But in spite of great diversity, it is doubtful that we are unable to give a unified expression to what is characteristic of the behavior of human beings in regard to such natural ends. Let us focus on the proper human social functioning. It might be thought the fact that human beings need to belong to a well-functioning social group does not show this to be a natural end at all, as Hursthouse claims, since we could understand this simply as a demand of rational self-interest. The challenge here is whether such a need arises out of sound instrumental reasoning or is a natural part of the human form-of-life. Yet to insist on such a need arising out of a sound instrumental reasoning is uncharitable to Foot's aim, which is to establish the criteria of sound practical reasoning on the basis of the conceptual connection of reason with the natural goodness of a human rational will. We cannot begin with a conception of good practical reasoning that is independent of the natural goodness of a rational will without thereby abandoning Foot's basic strategy.[34] Additionally, the purpose of the model is not to explain the origin of a human need for

belonging to a well-functioning society but to use what are characteristically human ends for grounding evaluation of various features of individual human beings, including goodness of a rational will. Finally, given our evolutionary past, human beings certainly were social long before we were rational, thus supporting the idea that our sociality does not depend on our rationality.

Let us consider a proposal that characteristically human, social functioning is to discover and undertake solutions to collective action problems in a way that exhibits respect for each player as a person and to take advantage of the gains made possible by mutually cooperative behavior in mixed motive, non-zero-sum games. The standard example of a non-zero sum game is an economic transaction between a buyer and a seller. The result of such a transaction is that both players are, in their own estimation, better off because of it. Another example is what is well-known as the prisoner's dilemma in which the direct pursuit of self-interest by both players yields an outcome less preferable to each player than another possible outcome obtained by each player not directly pursuing his self-interest. In both examples, the main point is the same. If both players behave cooperatively, then they both stand to gain more for themselves than if they do not both behave cooperatively.

Robert Wright has argued for a teleological conception of the history of biological evolution and human society.[35] Wright claims that a basic core pattern can be discerned in human social history: "New technologies arise that permit and encourage new, richer forms of non-zero sum interaction; then … social structures evolve that realize this rich potential – that convert non-zero-sum situations into positive sums. Thus does social complexity grow in scope and depth."[36] This development progresses through different classes of human social organization, from hunter-gatherer societies bound together in families and bands, through tribes, big-man societies, agricultural societies, chiefdoms, market-economies, city-states, and nation states. In general, human beings, experiment with technologies and forms of social organization in order to gain the pay-offs of non-zero sum situations.

Accepting this will not commit us to denying that many human social relations are more competitive than cooperative. Advances in evolutionary game theory have revealed a structure to our social history that has equipped us with the capacities for both selfish and altruistic motivation and behavior. The claim here is that in the face of such mixed motives, what is characteristic of human social functioning overall is a kind of group thinking and team-playing that makes possible mutual gain. What is a largely egalitarian context of personal interdependence within a tribe was the environment of evolutionary adaptation for the

basic set of our human social skills and dispositions. Empirical studies have revealed that human beings have a deep capacity for empathy and a willingness to trust members of an in-group, as well as cognitive modules to identify, and emotional urges to punish, individuals who violate social rules for private gain.[37] Where some selfishness seems endemic to evolved organisms, human beings do stand out as uniquely fitted for a special kind of cooperative behavior.

Another concern may be that this characterization of human sociality comes normatively loaded by including the notion of respect, perhaps even invoking Kant's formulation of humanity as an end in itself. It is true that there must be some criterion by which to distinguish the kind of cooperation characteristic of properly human social functioning from the kind of cooperation involved in, say, one person dancing while another person demands it by shooting at his feet. Even here there is some sense in which a cooperative surplus is being divided. But what is required to do this could be captured in less avowedly normative terms. The cooperative arrangement characteristic of proper human social functioning must be entered into more or less voluntarily and free of overt exploitation. This is the basic social relation found when human beings treat each other with the humanity we naturally show toward members of our own society. It is what allows a group to constitute an actual society, instead of a mere collection of persons. The claim is that human beings are characteristically, although not universally, humane.

Perhaps this form of social behavior is not characteristic of only human beings, but belongs also to other forms of life. Other social animals must also deal with collective action problems. But human beings do not characteristically go about responding to situations of non-zero sum collective action problems as other organisms do. It seems that the behaviors undertaken by other animals are strategies hit upon by chance, through genetic variation, and become descriptively characteristic of the form-of-life because they are evolutionarily stable strategies.[38] The strategic behavior in these situations is not undertaken for reasons but is simply motivated by the appropriate but blind desires that are genetically determined. Hursthouse, like Aristotle, is right to insist that human beings are by contrast characteristically rational animals.[39]

Human beings do not simply respond to situations of collective action but actively seek out opportunities for mutual gain in non-zero sum games. Strategies developed are not hit upon by chance variation but as the result of a reflective deliberation, strategic thinking, and emotional maturity. Contrasted with the other animals, human beings do not only evolve blindly into strategies in response to an environment of collective action problems, although sometimes we do. More characteristically,

human beings actively pursue opportunities, arrangements, and strategies that will permit them to harvest the gains made possible by non-zero sum interactions. Both of these features of how human beings generate and respond to non-zero sum situations exhibit the fact that we possess the capacity for competent practical reasoning.

There is a perspective from which it is simply false to say that rationality is the characteristic way in which human beings solve collective action problems: the dominant theory of rational choice as maximizing subjective expected utility. According to this theory, the only rational choice for each player in the prisoner's dilemma is to defect. But mutual defection leads to an outcome that is sub-optimal from each player's perspective. This seems paradoxical, because if the rational choice is understood as the choice most likely to get us the most of what we want, then defection seems somewhat less than rational. The suggested confluence, then, between human beings as characteristically rational and characteristic human social functioning as identifying and arranging for solutions to non-zero sum interactions stands as a potential criticism of the idea that subjective utility theory provides an exhaustive account of practical reasoning.

Hursthouse articulates an even deeper problem when she rejects the view that nature could be normative for rational beings in an ethically relevant way.[40] To challenge this idea, let us consider what it means to say that nature is normative for non-rational animals. The sense in which nature is normative for non-rational animals will preclude any sense in which nature is apprehended to be authoritative in the process of consciously forming intentions about how to behave or what to believe. Nature determines how non-rational animals should be, but by definition non-rational animals cannot apprehend or respond to this as if it were a demand of reason. The force of natural norms does not require them to be rationally cognized. Nature is the only source of norms for non-rational animals and yet its authority is not diminished by the fact that non-rational animals are normatively blind. We may ask if there is a way that nature can be normative for rational animals in the same sense that it is normative for non-rational animals, without thereby denying the distinct kind of autonomy and freedom associated with the powers of practical reason.

Let us suppose that practical rationality involves the capacity of freedom to do what reason endorses and that this capacity for reason is an acquired, second nature, as McDowell would have it. Human beings do not spring forth, fully formed, with the abilities required to reason well about action. The ability to reason well is the result of a developmental process that constitutes part of human maturation. Part of the characteristic

form-of-life of human beings is to develop out of infancy and into their capacities to be governed by a faculty for practical reasoning as a developed second nature. The process of this development occurs in nature and is characteristic of the species *Homo sapiens*. It is a natural end.

While many of the actions of mature human beings spring from their capacity for practical reasoning and thus with a rational normative authority, the natural fact that human beings pass through a developmental process that culminates in the acquisition of reason as a second nature reveals a sense in which nature is normative for human beings in an ethically relevant way. Just as good lions should develop their capacity to hunt, good human beings should develop their capacity for reason as a second nature. Nature is normative for non-rational animals in the sense that they should be of their kind, and nature is normative in this same sense for rational animals. A person without a developed capacity for practical reason, or with a poorly developed capacity, suffers a natural defect no less than the lioness that never develops her skills for hunting.

In the case of non-rational animals, nature determines that they have a limited range of goods and a correspondingly limited ways of going on. In the case of human beings, nature determines that we have the potential to develop the capacities required to conceive of many alternative goods and consider the normative and conceptual relations binding them together. As a result, it may appear that human beings have very diverse ways of going on, corresponding to so many conceptions of goodness. But the way human beings characteristically behave has unity: to conceive of and pursue alternative objects and actions that are perceived to be good. This is the rational way and it is accomplished by engaging in the process of critical reflection described by McDowell and embraced by Hursthouse. Nature has determined that human beings should develop their capacities to reason well about action.

It is easy to mistake this claim. It is avowedly not to import norms of reason into the naturalistic model of evaluation by specifying the characteristically human way of carrying on as being responsive to reasons. Instead, it is to make the descriptive assertion that the development of a normatively autonomous capacity for practical reason as an acquired second nature is a natural end of our natural kind. This end, a fifth end for Hursthouse's botanical and ethological model, is suitable for grounding the moral evaluation of a human rational will. According to this proposal, a rational will is evaluated as naturally good or bad according to the characteristically human ways that a person contributes to the satisfaction of human natural ends, including proper social functioning and, in particular, the human need to develop our potential to acquire and exercise a capacity for sound practical reasoning.

Hursthouse's strategy for reconciling Foot's appeal to natural function with McDowell's emphasis on the role of a developed ethical perspective requires both a non-normative account of characteristically human behavior and identification of a natural end suitable for grounding evaluations of a human rational will. Along lines only outlined here, a suitably developed version of Foot's view might satisfy both these requirements. Something along similar lines has recently been pursued by Alisdair MacIntyre, yet another prominent neo-Aristotelian.

In *Dependent Rational Animals* MacIntyre considers the conditions of how human beings mature into competent practical reasoners and what they need to do so successfully.[41] His view is that in order for a human infant to fully develop into a flourishing adult human person, which includes competent and mature practical reasoning, the particular people who care for her must possess some moral virtues and, as a result, the individual herself may come to adopt these virtues. Thus, particular character traits are linked instrumentally by natural necessity to the developed skill of good reasoning while at the same time the normative force of good practical reasoning is informed by the moral content of human moral virtues. The route to becoming a sound and independent practical reasoner is fraught with dangers and human beings need particular other individuals to care for them. We are dependent rational animals, and not accidentally, because of the animal nature of our embodied existence.

On both MacIntyre's view and Foot's view as it has been developed here, it appears that from within the developed perspective appreciating the role that particular character traits play in meeting our species-specific needs, especially the particular kind of needs we have because of our embodied existence, to develop our natural capacity for reason, provides the material for constructing a rational justification for some of our moral beliefs including beliefs about the virtues. Our species-specific, absolute needs for the successful development of reason as a second nature are natural teleological facts articulated in precisely those Aristotelian categoricals relevant to evaluating the human rational will on the naturalistic model of moral evaluation and the strategy for the rational justification of morality considered herein.[42]

Notes

1. See Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," in *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 157–173. *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

2. See Chrisoula Andreou, ''Getting On In a Varied World,'' *Social Theory and Practice* Vol. 32, 2006 and Candace Volger, ''Modern Moral Philosophy Again: Isolating the Promulgation Problem,'' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 2006. See also Ron Sandler, ''What Makes a Character Trait a Virtue?'', *Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol. 39, Nos. 3–4 (2005).
3. Foot, op. cit., pp. 53 & 63. Also see Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
4. See ibid., p. 166 ff.
5. See John McDowell, ''Two Sorts of Naturalism,'' in Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn, eds., *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
6. See Peter Geach, ''Good and Evil,'' in *Analysis* 17, 1956, and Foot, op. cit., p. 2.
7. See Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Goodness and Advice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 17–19 and Thomas Magnell, ''Evaluations as Assessments, Part II: Classifying Adjectives, Distinguishing Assertions, and Instancing Good of a Kind,'' *Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1993, pp. 151–155.
8. Foot, op. cit., p. 26.
9. See Michael Thompson, ''The Representation of Life,'' in Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn eds., op. cit.
10. Ibid., p. 268.
11. Foot, op. cit., p. 31.
12. See David Wiggins, ''Claims of Need,'' in *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). See also Foot, op. cit., p. 209.
13. G.E. Anscombe, ''On Promising and its Justice,'' *Critica* Vol. 3.Nos, 7–8, 1969, p. 18, also in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 10–21. See also Foot, op. cit., pp. 15 & 46.
14. See Warren Quinn, ''Putting Rationality in its Place,'' in Hursthouse, Lawrence, and Quinn, eds., op. cit.
15. Foot, op. cit., p. 62.
16. Ibid., p. 11.
17. Ibid., p. 55.
18. See William FitzPatrick, *Teleology and the Norms of Nature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); Chrisoula Andreou, op. cit. and Michael Thompson, ''Apprehending the Human Form'' in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. O'Hear. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
19. McDowell, op. cit., p. 151.
20. See ibid., pp. 151 and 171.
21. Elizabeth Anscombe, ''Modern Moral Philosophy'' in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), Vol. III, p. 38.
22. See Thompson, op. cit., p. 284.
23. See FitzPartick, op.cit.
24. See Foot, op. cit., p. 16.
25. See ibid., p. 57.
26. See ibid., p. 206 ff.
27. See ibid., p. 59.
28. Hursthouse, op. cit., p. 196.
29. See ibid., p. 166 and McDowell, op. cit., p. 169.
30. Hursthouse, op. cit., p. 197. See also Sandler, op. cit.

31. See ibid., p. 223.
32. See ibid., p. 208.
33. Ibid., p. 219.
34. See Foot, op. cit., pp. 10 & 11.
35. See Robert Wright, *Non-Zero: The Logic of Human Destiny* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000).
36. Ibid., p. 6.
37. See Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, eds., *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Robert Frank, *Passions Within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions* (W.W. Norton, 1988).
38. See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (Basic Books, 1984) and Brian Skyrms *Evolution of the Social Contract* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
39. Hursthouse, op. cit., p. 206. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), Book I, Sec. 7.
40. See Hursthouse, op. cit., p. 220.
41. See Alasdair MacIntyre, Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).
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