Chapter 1

Introduction: Virtue, Reason, and Flourishing

"To be precise is to make it as easy as possible for others to prove one wrong." – Timothy Williamson

"It's all very well to talk of clarity, but when it becomes an obsession it is liable to nip living thought in the bud." –Friedrich Waismann, *"How I see Philosophy"*, 16.

Two or Three Sorts of Naturalism

Philippa Foot's type of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism aims to identify evaluative properties (such as goodness or badness) with straightforwardly natural properties of organisms (such as health and disease, and hence to discover that "the status of certain dispositions as virtues should be determined by quite general facts about human beings."[1] Jennifer Frey summarizes the "master thought" of this sort of ethical naturalism:

> The ethical naturalist's master thought is this: man needs the virtues just as much as a bee needs its sting. Such a thought is intriguing insofar as it takes the ethereal and elusive 'moral ought' and brings it back down to earth, by locating it within a wider structure of evaluation we already readily grasp and acknowledge as objectively valid.[2]

1. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 45.
2. Jennifer Ann Frey, "The Will and the Good" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 5.

Mark Murphy calls Foot's hypothesis a type of "secular natural law theory", since it aims to deploy natural normative notions such as 'necessity', 'ought', and 'health' already in use biological and other sciences for distinctively human and moral purposes.

One of the potential attractions of Foot's type of ethical naturalism is that, by ringing the 'moral ought' into closer contact with empirical disciplines, ethicists can more fully avail themselves of the fruits of modern science.[3]

Yet Foot's is not the only kind of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. John McDowell criticizes the attempt to make ethics into an empirical discipline. He objects to a heavily biologized kind of ethical theory as scientism that falls in for the Myth of the Given – roughly, the notion that some concepts are norms can be just given to us, for free, in perceptual experience. By contrast, he argues that values are "secondary qualities" of nature, partially constituted by the mental act of the observer. Virtue is a sort of perceptual sensitivities to "what a situation requires", where we remember that what a "situation requires" is partially constituted by the rationality of the moral agent.[4]

McDowell still calls his view a sort of ethical naturalism, since he thinks values are real but not supernatural or non-natural, even though he denies Foot's goal of discovering values in "primary nature." The alternative is to view values as part of the world of "second nature."[5] "Second nature" is for McDowell our own rational consciousness in so far as it is enculturated by language, custom, evaluation, habit, and a way of seeing the world. McDowell's "second nature" is inherently rational but also social, and depends on our intersubjective "form of life."

3. As Joyce points out: "Key contributions can be made by social and developmental psychologists, experimental economists, neuroscientists, geneticists, primatologists, anthropologists, comparative ethologists, and evolutionary biologists." Richard Joyce, "Ethics and Evolution," *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory, 2nd Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2013)*, 2013, 123–47 1

4. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50.

5. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996). Cf. also Georg W. F. Hegel and Allen W Wood, *Hegel: Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) 195: "The habit of the ethical appears as a second nature which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is all pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence."

While McDowell and Foot both lay claim to the title of 'neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism', they represent very two or three substantially different "sorts of naturalism."[6] These internecine controversies are more than a war of words. One sort emphasizes biology, the physical, the scientific, and the objective; the other sort emphasizes rationality, the cultural, the subjective or intersubjective. For example, Rosalind Hursthouse's landmark monograph, *On Virtue Ethics*, builds on Foot's account in many ways, yet ultimately agrees with McDowell in rejecting the search for an "external", objective, scientific foundation for virtue ethics. Alasdair MacIntyre's early writings align more with McDowell in rejecting "Aristotle's metaphysical biology", but his later writings align more with Foot in a finding that "human identity is primarily, even if not only, bodily and therefore animal identity and it is by reference to that identity that the continuities of our relationships to others are partly defined."[7]

Is there any way to unite the *rational/cultural/intersubjective* aspect of ethics with the *empirical/biological/objective* aspect of the same? Is there any way to unite "second nature" with "primary nature"? Is there any hope for a " third sort" of naturalism that synthesizes the two, or denies the distinction.

Thesis

In this dissertation, I defend the broadly Footian/MacIntyrean project of aiming for a secular, scientific foundation for virtue ethics against various objections, such as the "is-ought gap" and cultural relativism. I attempt to carry the project forward a few steps by arguing that we must develop accounts of nature, virtue, practical reason, and human flourishing all in dynamic relation with the others, and accordingly offering such an account of each.

6. John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 202–21. Both of these articles will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

7. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.

Specifically, I shall defend the following thesis: **virtue is the plurality of acquirable excellent character traits (such as moderation, tolerance, and wisdom) that all practical, rational animals need for virtue partly constitutes natural human flourishing.**

The main components of this thesis are virtue ('acquirable excellent character traits') human nature (our life form as 'practical, rational animals') and human flourishing. In the course of these chapters, I will defend this thesis in parts and as a whole. As Christopher Toner says, this kind of virtue ethics proposes a close tie between one's species or life-form and the flourishing that constitutes "the good life" for creatures like us. Hence, these three concepts are not only individually interesting but interesting in so far as they constitute a single, three-part schema, which (for lack of a better term) I shall call the "virtue triangle."

The Virtue Triangle

Why are the concepts of virtue, humanity, and flourishing *together* greater than the sum of their parts?

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre persuasively argues that there are three necessary "elements" to morality:[8] namely, a goal, a starting point, and the means from the starting point to the goal.

These three elements are necessary features of the performance of any task – however menial or lofty. In a simple project such as, say, cooking a dinner, my goal might be to reproduce what I see in the picture of a tasty meal from a cookbook. The starting point includes the raw materials at my disposal, such as the food in my fridge (and my cooking skills); the means to the end is a recipe, including a list of needed ingredients and instructions that I will enact to bring make a meal hopefully to that pictured in the cookbook. Similarly, one cannot make any mundane journey without a destination, a starting location, and directions (on foot, by car, by plane, or what have you) to the destination. (Even the desire to "explore the countryside" or even to "wander about" involves a set *goal* if not a set destination.)

8. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 54ff.

The point of this astonishingly simple reflection is that we ought to demand that any moral theory supply all three elements. MacIntyre explains that, in morality, the first element is "untutored human nature" (as it is). The second element is the moral human, humanity as it could be and should be. The third element is the set of traits, actions, emotions, habits, etc., needed to move from the first to the second points. Understanding "human-nature-as-it-is"[9] is a task for philosophers, as well as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. This would include a conception of the human species as rational animals as it is *prior* to deep self-reflection or moral effort. Understanding human nature "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos"[10] was "the whole point of ethics." This third conception of some human flourishing or telos we can and *ought* to realize. Moral rules or admirable character traits are the *content* of morality; but the telos of humanity is the *context* of morality. Telos makes morality make sense.

A moral theory cannot simply offer one or two out of the three, and neglect the third. It needs *some* conception of individual or social well-being, *some* conception of what it means to be human (what kind of raw material are we working with?) and *some* conception of how one's moral duties and other obligations or other motivating factors connect humanity as it is with humanity-as-it-could-and-should-be.Morality simply makes no sense without showing how which qualities, actions, attitudes, resources, laws, etc. enable a human being to achieve his or her telos. A moral theory is bound to stultify if it leaves out any one of these three formal elements. The scandel of many modern moral philosophies is that they do just that.

The neo-Aristotelians such as Foot, McDowell, MacIntyre, and Hursthouse attempt to remedy this situation by providing accounts of all three concepts. In doing so, they agree in drawing from pre-modern sources (such as Aristotle and Aquinas) but dispute the proper strategy for updating their ethical theories in our modern context.

All three concepts need updating, for they are liable to misunderstanding in our modern

9. Ibid., 55.
10. Ibid., 55.

context. Hursthouse puts the point this way: "Three of virtue ethics' central concepts, virtue, practical wisdom and eudaimonia are often misunderstood. Once they are distinguished from related but distinct concepts peculiar to modern philosophy, various objections to virtue ethics can be better assessed."[11] Objections fired at neo-Aristotelian ethical theories often hit a bullseye but on the wrong target.[12] A large part of my job is to stake out a conceptual space for virtue, practical reason (including its excellence, which I take to be practical wisdom), and natural human flourishing (which I take to be closely related to eudaimonia). My task is also to defend the trilateral form that relates them in a dynamic schema.

Whether the natural facts or properties in which ethical facts are located is some conception of human biology, the human "life-form", our rational "form of life", the human characteristic way of life, or something else, the common point is clear: human beings need these qualities *because of who and what they are*, including a particular natural kind of flourishing defined by the natural normativity relevant to the species.

Other Disclaimers

One of the wonderful things about philosophical reflection is the license – indeed the imperative – to explore exotic ideas, to elicit plausibility in the most unexpected proposals, and to criticize implausibility in the most cherished of thoughts, and to see interconnections between varying disciplines. While this dissertation begins in a straightforward analysis of virtue ethics, it unabashedly explores some ideas (of varying plausibility) from philosophy of science, philosophy of biology, sociology, psychology, metaphysics, and a bit of epistemology as needed. While these discurses were not expected at the beginning of my research, they came to seem necessary and fitting in the eventual presentation of conclusions, which form a more or less coherent whole. I hope the overall cohesion

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

12. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011) gives a concise and clear account of all three.

is apparent, if not at the beginning, by the end.

Chapter Outline

1. Introduction
2. Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism
3. Normativity of Nature
4. Normativity of Human Nature
5. Virtue
6. Practical Reason
7. Practical Wisdom
8. Flourishing
9. Logos, or Teleology Revisited
10. Conclusions

Chapter % explains the assumptions, and aims of my project, including methodology and source texts. My aim is a secular, scientific, naturalistic, virtue ethics.

Chapter % is the foundation of all the rest, in that it addresses and attempts to resolve the worry that ethical naturalism is impossible. If ethical naturalists cannot derive normative conclusions from merely descriptive premises, then indeed it is impossible. And if there are no fundamental natural norms, one cannot derive normative conclusions. But there are natural norms. A conception of nature wherein nature is inherently normative is shown to be scientific in the form of 'generic' truths about all organic life, including humans.

Chapter % builds on natural normativity and constructs a concept of *normative human nature*. There are many generic truths about human beings, but just about all of them can be synthesized in the two predicates of 'rational' and 'animal': Human nature is to be potentially a practical, rational animals. For practical, rational animals, some traits are excellent and others undesirable given the kind of thing such animals are. We are parts of nature that are aware of nature, including the natural fact that we are part of nature.

Chapter % offers a definition of virtue consonant with the natural normativity already defended. Virtues are acquirable excellent character traits human beings need as practical, rational

animals and which partly constitute natural human flourishing. Examples discussed include moderation, tolerance, and practical wisdom. These represent various kinds of virtues, namely 'self-regarding', 'other-regarding,' and 'object-regarding' virtues – those sensitive to the intrinsic worth of self, others, and objects such as art, truth, beauty, etc. Virtue is, among other things, necessary for the acquisition of more virtue, especially the virtue of practical wisdom.

Chapter % explores practical reason in more depth, since practical reason is supposed to define our human life form and also is supposed to supply a means to block individual and cultural relativism. Practical reason is the capacity for resolving what to do, for "thinking how to live."[13] Practical reason is not a "value neutral" process instrumentally achieving one's ends but also a process of determining which ends are worthwhile. The excellence of practical reason is practical wisdom.

Chapter % explores practical wisdom. This is, among other things, a commitment and skill in acquiring more practical wisdom. Realism about practical reason blocks cultural relativism about virtues, yet allows an acceptable pluralism consonant with tolerance and wisdom. Practical wisdom which is supremely important in that it is both an intellectual and a moral virtue. It is necessary for acheiving other moral virtues and sufficient for achieving some other intellectual virtues. Hence, once a human being has reached a level of practical wisdom certain kinds of well-being are secured.

Chapter % outlines an account of natural human flourishing, placing my virtue account squarely within the eudaimonist tradition but with important modifications. Flourishing for creatures like us is, among other things, the practical wisdom necessary to undergo the process of discovering human flourishing and the achievement of our humanity. We become what we truly are, even if our existence and identity end in death, and even if our species goes extinct. Human misery and failure is not just pain nor death but to fail to fully realize one's humanity.

13. Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press, 2009). I borrow Gibbard's elegant phrase, but I take my view of practical reason in a far more realist direction than he would care to.

Chapter % returns in earnest to the theme of strict, metaphysical naturalism. Several objections on behalf of science and scientifically-minded philosophers need further comment. I address the broader question of whether the kind of neo-Aristotelian naturalism I have defended is compatible with 'naturalism' in any of the typical senses of the word. I argue that it is, and I suggest as a name for my theory Recursive Naturalism, by which I aim to capture the notion that nature recurs within nature, that one part of nature (us) knows nature (the cosmos) including that part of nature that we are. We know nature, where "nature" includes us knowing nature, and so on ad infinitum.[14]

Chapter % draws conclusions and makes suggestions for further reasearch.

14. I do not find this term anywhere in the literature. The only place I can find it is an obscure chapter of an obscure book about democracy: Ali Errishi, in *Problems for Democracy*, vol. 181 (Rodopi, 2006). Errishi's nice little paper uses the term 'recursive naturalism' to mean something quite different than I am do here. He means something like "unquestionable completeness and adequacy", a vicious belief that one no longer need be open to criticism.

Chapter 2

Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism

"Not everything that is last claims to be an end, but only that which is best."
–Aristotle, *Physics* 194a 32–33.

"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" in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, p. 174.

"The concept of purpose, together with the closely related concepts of normativity and agency, stand at the crossroads of three academic disciplines: the philosophy of action, the philosophy of biology, and the nexus of theoretical biology and cognitive science that is concerned with the theory of the "self-organization" of 'autonomous agents.'"
– James Barham, *Teleological Realism in Biology,* 1.

I. Introduction

This dissertation defends the thesis that **virtue is the plurality of acquirable excellent character traits** (**such as moderation, tolerance, and wisdom**) **that all practical, rational**

animals need for virtue partly constitutes natural human flourishing.

My thesis is about virtue and reason and so places this dissertation squarely within contemporary analytic virtue ethics. My overall aim is to "sell" virtue ethics to scientific naturalists who might have various objections to it, and to "sell" to ethical naturalists the notion that science has something to support and contribute to ethics.

That said, there are many strands or branches of analytic virtue ethics.[1] As Martha Nussbaum and others have pointed out, self-styled 'virtue ethicists' can differ as much as any other two ethicists. (Is there a tent big enough to include Plato, St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas, and Benjamin Franklin?) Nussbaum argues that a more helpful taxonomy would distinguish between neo-Humean, neo-Kantian, and neo-Aristotelian theories.[2] While I shall not devote excessive time to comparing my offering to those of other recent virtue ethicists, it is important to state, up front, that I see the best hope in neo-Aristotelian theories.

Neo-Aristotelianism

My thesis attempts to address issues that arise from the recent neo-Aristotelians. Who are the neo-Aristotelians? Rosalind Hursthouse provides an authoritative list: Anscombe,[3] Geach,[4] Foot,[5] Mc-

1. McDowell, Foot, and MacIntyre are each, in their own way, rather idiosyncratic exemplars of the "analytic philosophy".

2. She says it would be even more helpful would be to debate the substantive issues, such as the role of reason in morality as compared to the role of emotions and desires and other sub-rational psychological phenomena. Cf. Martha C Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?" *The Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1999): 163–201

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

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

5. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

Dowell,[6] MacIntyre,[7] Hursthouse,[8] Nussbaum,[9] and Thompson.[10] I would only add the great Julia Annas[11] (who is of course a scholar of ancient philosophy but whose recent work has been largely devoted to contemporary ethics) and some more recent players in the movement such as Christopher Toner[12], Stephen Brown[13], Jennifer Frey[14], James Barham[15], Allison Postell[16], and Arthur Ward[17].

One could certainly construct a worthwhile project analyzing all or some subset of authors. I interact regularly with a broader set of virtue ethicists:[18] For example, the early writings of Peter

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

7. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

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

9. Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, ed. J.E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86–131; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September 1988): 32–53; Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics.

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

11. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*; Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford University Press, 1993); Julia Annas, "Morality and Self Interest," ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–21; Julia Annas, "The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory," ed. David Copp (Oxford University Press, 2006), 515–36; Julia Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing," in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 2004, 61–75.

12. Christopher Hugh Toner, "Flourishing and Self-Interest in Virtue Ethics" (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame; Dissertation, 2003).

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

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

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

16. Allison Ann Postell, "What Comes Naturally? The Metaethical Foundations of Virtue Ethics" (PhD thesis, UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS, 2013).

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

18. The broader set includes Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998); Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Clarendon Press, 2003); Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 1992); Paul Bloomfield, *Moral Reality* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Judith Thomson, Richard Kraut, Robert Adams, Gopal Sreenivasan, Rachana Kamtekar, Talbot Brewer, and R. Scott Smith.

Geach, Bernard Williams, and Iris Murdoch are responsible for gathering the kindling and setting the spark, so to speak, on contemporary discussions of virtue.

Nevertheless, my main sources are Philippa Foot, John McDowell, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Alasdair MacIntyre, who each in their own way address all three components of the schema I have called "the virtue triangle."[19] Part of the reason is arbitrary. Every project must cut off somewhere. Another reason is that these three defend views that share enough similarities to illuminate many important themes while contrasting enough to motivate rich discussion.

The recent rise of virtue ethics

It is difficult to read any "old books" without noticing that virtue talk (in a great variety of theories and contexts) was once a normal part of cultural and intellectual life, in the west and beyond.[20] But it is equally difficult not to notice that virtue talk had receded to the background or disappeared from academic discussions for two or three centuries. Its resurgence in the last 60 years has been well documented.[21] Not everyone is impressed by the alleged benefits accruing to 'virtue ethics', of course – Nussbaum is not the only one to find the designation unhelpful. Nevertheless, it would have amazed Elizabeth Anscombe if, more than 60 years ago, she could have known that in 2014 as many professional academic philosophers would identify as 'virtue ethicists' as identify as 'deontologists' –

19. For example, McDowell, Foot, and MacIntyre can be seen using this schema: Cf. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason. and John McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics'," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (University of California Press, 1980), 359–76; Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002) and Foot, *Natural Goodness*; MacIntyre, *After Virtue* and MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*. All three themes are, of course, important to Aristotle as well. But I shall reference historical sources such as Aristotle or Aquinas only occasionally and only for convenience; my primary purpose is not historical.

20. The Google Books Ngram viewer quantifies the use of the term 'Virtue' (with a capital V) and 'virtue' (lowercase v): 'Virtue' peaked in 1750 at 0.01%, meaning that 1 in every 1000 words in books published that year were the word "Virtue". For comparison, "the" is 5% of words, or about 50 in every thousand. "Virtue" fell by 1900 back down to 1600 levels (0.0001%, one in every million). The lowercase "virtue" likewise has dropped steadily since the 1790s.

21. Cf. Roger Crisp, *How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

about 1/5th each.[22] So how might we explain the resurgance of a category of virtue ethics, however loosely defined?

There are a few reasonable options. Considering them will help frame my project. The first interpretation is that something went profoundly wrong in the development of modern moral philosophy. The Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers turned away from tradition and religion in order to venture a universal, abstract, public, rational theory of morality. But perhaps something essential was lost as our ethical thinking had to adjust to advancements in modern science and changes in modern politics. Perhaps, for instance, as science turned toward the natural or the cosmic (to the exclusion of the human), ethics and politics turned inward toward the human (to the exclusion of the natural or cosmic), it was inevitable that some would fall into Nietzschean subjectivism about morality, where no political or religious authority can correct the great individual, while others would fall into Hobbesian legalism, where no great individual can correct the political and religious authorities.

Anscombe takes this first interpretation. She first categorizes all the "English-speaking ethicists" from Sidgwick to "the present day" as consequentialists, and then categorizes all forms consequentialism as morally depraved. She argues that any secular theorist (such as Kantians) who appeal to an absolute, verdictive moral 'ought' are borrowing from a medieval divine law conception of ethics which is incoherent without the corresponding belief in a divine lawgiver. The alterative, she offers, is the Aristotelian 'ought' which critiques vice without blame and commends virtue without 'the moral ought'. In her view, virtue talk allows non-religious moderns to retain evaluative talk without a divine law by making it something closer to aesthetic talk.

McIntyre is another who takes this interpretation. He argues that the fracturing of social and political bonds in modernity derives from the loss of a shared understanding of the good. Though he is often classified as a 'virtue ethicist', McIntyre himself rejects the label for not even modern

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

virtue ethics goes far enough to restore the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition that he advocates.

Regardless of the varying details, this first intrepretation of the rise of virtue talk pits virtue theories against their consequentialist and Kantian alternatives. It finds in the flexibility of Aristotle and the humanism of Confucius a refreshing alternative to the stolid rationalism of Kant or Mill.[23]

Hursthouse and Nussbaum offer a second interpretation, namely, that virtue ethicists in the early to mid 20th century presented their view as a *rival* in order to fight for a position at the table of respectable ethical theories. And it worked. Now that virtue ethics has earned its place as one of the "major moral philosophies" at the table, continuing to present it as a rival to other theories is needlessly combative. Nussbaum elaborates: " 'virtue ethics' so-called does not figure as a normative rival to utilitarian and deontological ethics; rather, its (fairly) recent revival is seen as having served the useful purpose of reminding moral philosophers that the elaboration of a normative theory may fall short of giving a full account of our moral life."[24] On this interpretation, virtue concepts can augment, rather than replace, other theories. After all, Kant himself had a theory of virtue.[25] Some theorists have been working to articulate a theory they call "virtue consequentialism" or "character consequentialism."[26] Even more broadly, philosophers have even found room for virtue talk in Humean[27] and Nietzschean[28] ethics.

In my view, there is some truth to each of these interpretations. While it is true that virtue talk is flexible enough to enhance non-Aristotelian theories, there is an identifiable core of western

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

24. Rosalind Hursthouse, "How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues," ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 1996), 19–33.

25. Anne Margaret Baxley, *Kant's Theory of Virtue: The Value of Autocracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

26. Ben Bradley, "Virtue Consequentialism," *Utilitas* 17, no. 03 (2005): 282–98; Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

27. Michael Slote, "Sentimentalist Virtue and Moral Judgement Outline of a Project," *Metaphilosophy*, 2003, 131–43.

28. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*.

virtue theory. That core is part-and-parcel of a larger Aristotelian tradition that is in tension or competition with Enlightenment tradition. The core I have in mind corresponds roughly to Nussbaums "common ground" underlying a wide variety of "virtue ethicists" – including Kant and Mill and Sidgwick.[29] At the same time, certain features of the modern Enlightenment tradition – especially advances in modern science and changes in modern politics – can correct errors or update contingencies in the Aristotelian tradition.

I would like to say a bit more about these mutal "corrections" (if they are corrections). Elizabeth Anscombe, Bernard Williams, Iris Murdoch and others have done us a valuable service by correcting certain myopic tendencies of modern philosophical ethics.

(a) **The whole action:** The first myopic tendency is that of focussing our attention on individual acts. This is the kind of ethics that only knows how to ask "Is X wrong?" while substituting abortion, or lying, or nuclear proliferation for X. If morality is about individual acts or kinds of action, it seems to be the case that either moral rules are to be followed for their own sake or else they do not matter (for only consequences matter). If, on the other hand, the obligation to be virtuous is only one point on the virtue trinagle, then it is possible to see moral rules as neither arbitrary impositions nor as unaccountable, mere bolts of lightning from a clear sky. The neo-Aristotelians are insistant on this point. Martha Nussbaum argues we cannot construct an ethical theory by discussing only "isolated moments of choice."[30] The correction is to ethically examine *whole actions* – such as cooking a meal, earning a degree, raising up a people group – where whole actions are conceptually united bundles of individual actions. Jennifer Frey argues that "no part of an intentional action is independently intelligible as a part, aside from an exercise of practical knowledge of the action as a whole."[31] MacIntyre scholar Stanley Hauerwas explains the significance of this conclusion: "the central contention in *After Virtue* is his remark that "the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action."[32] He continues:

> This may seem a small philosophical point, but much revolves around it: His understandings of the centrality of practical reason, the significance of the body for agency, why the teleological character of our lives must be displayed through narrative, the character of rationality, the nature of the virtues, why training in a craft is paradigmatic of learning to think as well as live, his understanding of why the Enlightenment

29. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 170.
30. Ibid., 174.
31. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 123.
32. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 209.

> project had to fail, his particular way of being a historicist, and why the plain person is the necessary subject of philosophy.[33]

We shall return to these themes in a later chapter.

(b) **The whole person**: The second myopic tendency is that of focussing on one aspect of moral psychology (such as motive, or emotion, or character traits) to the exclusion of others. She says, "Even though a concern for motive, intention, character, and the whole course of life was not in principle alien to Kantian and Utilitarian philosophy, it was certainly alien to most British and American Kantians and Utilitarians of the period."[34] The correction to this tendency is to include a role for both reason and the "passions", and to specify those roles. However, two groups display very different strategies in including the whole person. For Nussbaum, the first group consists of characteristically "anti-Utilitarians" who want reason to play a much larger role than Mill (or the typical Utilitarian) would wish; the second consists of characteristically "anti-Kantians" and want sub-rational psychological states to play a much larger role than Kant (or the typical Kantian) would wish. The first group defend the plurality of goods, rationality's role in deliberating about which ends to pursue and its role in organizing, ranking, and harmonizing that plurality of goods, the rational character of some emotions, and the need for a rational critique of the broader social and political setting in which "defective passions and judgments" are formed.[35] By this distinction, my theory is much more clearly "anti-utilitarian" than anti-Kantian. The emotions, desires, motivations, passions – the numerous variegated non-rational or sub-rational mental states of normal human psychology – can be made rational and/or can be accommodated within a life of reason. That is, any kind of plant can be part of a garden with a clear, purposeful, and rational blueprint, even if some dead leaves and rotten petals dot the floor.

(c) **The whole life**: A third myopic tendency is that of philosophizing about individual moral situations (especially moral dilemmas!) instead of the whole of life. We need to refocus our arguments in philosophical ethics from looking just at individual choices or actions (viewed from the outside, like a moral critic) to looking at the whole of life (viewed from the inside, like a moral agent). Anscombe and Bernard Williams have done as much as anyone to remind moral philosophers that questions of what is wrong are posterior to, and often less troublesome than, the question "How ought I to live?" Asking this question is not optional for normal, reflective, adults. This question is not avoidable one for those who face major problems in life. "Character ethics," rather than mere "quandary ethics" is what is really needed in the vast majority of circumstances.[36] That is not to say that moral quandaries are unimportant in life or unimportant in theory; quite

33. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, 2007.

34. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 173.

35. Ibid., 180.

36. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552–71; Cf. also Gregory Trianosky, "What Is Virtue Ethics All About?" *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1990, 335–44.

the contrary, often times the moral quandary is the exceptional case that can provide a cutting counterexample to a nonsensical view. And moral dilemmas are real, if blessedly rare – at least the kind of great moral dilemmas encountered in great works of fiction (*Othello*, *War and Peace*, *Gilead*). But for all this, ninety-nine parts of any given day have no great dilemmas or great temptations to do evil. Rather, ninety-nine parts of any given day are filled with habits, long-held goals, and small choices between competing or conflicting goods that all seem worthwhile but cannot all be pursued. (Check email or grade papers? Use a spare hour to write more or read more? Apply to jobs in state near family or out of state near friends? Invest in this friendship or spend much-needed time alone?)

(d) **The whole history**: A fourth myopic tendency that these virtue ethicists have corrected, I think, is an *ahistorical* approach that had become fashionable in analytic ethics during the apex and aftermath of logical positivism. Many had such a passion for mathematically clear, abstract, lucid and timeless articulations of their philosophy such that if an ethical theory could not be so articulated, it could be ignored. Furthermore, such philosophers easily fell for the temptation of regarding the contingencies of the present fashion as unquestionable timeless truths.

The correction to this tendency is to allow that ethical norms are typically bound up with social norms, and so to allow that ethical norms have a history; and that the social and ethical norms of the present day may be little more than fashion. Many neo-Aristotelians and others studied classics or history in addition to ethics, or prior to ethics. Long familiarity with cultures, places, and times other than one's own has a salubrious effect of helping one to see one's own culture and time. (For many people, "culture shock" occurs not when leaving one's home country, but when returning home from a very different foreign country.) Likewise, philosophers who have spent long hours conversing with Aristotle or Aquinas are likely to notice more easily the assumptions, biases, strengths, and weaknesses of our own modern context. Jack Weinstein observes that Alasdair Macintyre did for ethics what John Rawls did for political philosophy: where Rawls re-invigorated political philosophy, "inaugurating the dominance of late twentieth-century liberalism"[37], MacIntyre helped to re-invigorate analytic ethical philosophy (especially the ascendancy of late twentieth-century virtue ethics) by freshly examining ethical concepts in light of history.[38] MacIntyre argues that we can only responsibly use and evaluate practical concepts such as self, practice, telos, or virtue when we

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

know our own history. Since *we ourselves* inhabit a tradition, we must know ourselves *as* inhabitants of a tradition with a past. We will return to these themes in later chapters.

These are corrections that virtue ethics can offer to other modern moral philosophies. But the modern world is not the ancient world. Modern science, philosophy, and culture are not the same as their pre-modern counterparts. It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists pay due respect to what *has* changed. What corrections can modernity offer to virtue ethics? Neo-Aristotelian naturalism of the sort I am defending strives to be ethical, naturalistic, scientific, and secular.[39] To understate the point, this project is difficult. It is attended by difficulties on all sides. I would like to say a bit more about each of these four goals.

II. Four Goals

Ethics and Metaethics

The term 'Neo-Aristotelianism' has been used to describe a complete philosophical ethics. That is, neo-Aristotelians such as Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre write about and defend views that combine normative ethical and metaethical claims. Put differently, their theories have aimed to provide a normative ethics (detailed content about the kind of life one ought to live and the kinds of traits one ought to acquire) as well as a ground of morality in moral metaphysics, moral psychology, moral epistemology, etc. But the taxonomical habit of classifying *both* of these projects under a single heading may be worrisome. James Lenman's summary of neo-Aristotelianism is a good example of this worry:

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

39. By 'secular' I do not mean 'non-religious', but rather not *necessarily* religious. I will explain more below.

> makes clear, this is very much the official metaethical theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics.[40]

Lenman seems bemused with neo-Aristotelian naturalism. When he says that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is "the official metaethical theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics" he seems to betray a lurking metaphilosophical confusion. For when Foot, Hursthouse, McDowell are classified as virtue ethicists (a normative theory) *and* neo-Aristotelians (a metaethical theory), we might object. Aren't these two different projects? The answer in short is: not necessarily. Explaining this answer requires a short discursus.

One legacy of G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* has been the tendency to sharply distinguish primary ethical questions (about what things are good) from metaethical questions (about what 'good' as an evaluative predicate *means*). The first asks about what things are good; the second about the word 'good' itself. The first is a substantive question about which items fall under a category. The second is a conceptual question about how to define that category.

Moore valiantly took it upon himself to indict all previous ethical philosophers for failing to resolve their disputes for a failure to define their terms. (Of course, the questions that concern modern metaethicists were posed and discussed by prior thinkers. However, the *Principia* gave a distinctive form to these questions and suggested a distinctive range of possible answers.) Moore argued (or according to some critics, *assumed*) that 'goodness' was indefinable.[41] That is, the good could not be defined in terms of any other property. It is false that 'goodness is pleasure' for our pursuit pleasure is a psychological fact, not an ethical one; it is false that 'goodness is whatever is most real' for something's reality is a metaphysical fact, not an ethical one.

Now, it is tautologous that if goodness really is indefinable, then any attempt to define it will fail. Any attempt to reduce the concept to a concept of lesser intension, or to translate it, will fail.

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

41. William K Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," *Mind*, 1939, 464–77. Frankena's classic essay makes this point best.

Moore had a preferred name for this error – if it is an error – but mentioning it would just muddy the waters.[42]

The neo-Aristotelians are pretty universally critical of Moore's argument, as we shall see.[43]

Lenman's confusion reflects the widely-held belief that normative ethics and metaethics can "come apart". But this is not *necessarily* true. Alan Gibbard, no opponent of metaethics, explains how one's substantive ethical views largely determine one's view of the relation between questions of substance and those of meaning:

> Moore stressed the distinction in ethics between questions of meaning and questions of substance, and thereby gave rise to a tradition in analytic philosophy of separating the two parts of ethical theory: the metatheory and the substantive, normative part. Some philosophers have rejected the distinction; some Kantians, for instance, think that if you get the metatheory right, substantive ethical conclusions fall out as some kind of consequence, so that metaethics and substantive ethics are not really separate. Then too, anyone who rejects Sidgwick's and Moore's indefinability claim and thinks that ethical terms can be given analytic, naturalistic definitions thinks that the two putative subdivisions are not really separate. Those who reject any systematic distinction between questions of meaning and questions of substance might likewise reject a sharp, separate subject of metaethics.[44]

I think Gibbard is right, here. One's substantive views will affect one's preferred philosophical taxonomy. Kantians and (some kinds of) naturalists will deny the strict separation. To allow the seemingly innocuous separation of formal from material aspects of a topic might just unwittingly beg the question against a range of acceptable views on that topic.

As evidence, notice the conspicuous pattern that advocates of a neutral, procedural, formal metaethics seem to endorse first-order consequentialism. Not only Moore, but theorists as different from each other as J.L. Mackie, Frank Jackson, Richard Boyd, Peter Railton, Simon Blackburn, and Alan Gibbard all endorse some form of consequentialism. To echo Lenman, we can say that the view

42. If absolutely necessary, I shall only call Moore's version "The Fallacy That Shall Not Be Named."

43. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 1, "A Fresh Start?"; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 2, "The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism".

44. Allan Gibbard, "Normative Properties," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2003): 320.

that metaethics is separable from normative ethics is very much the official theory of a main current in contemporary consequentialism. Moore himself, though non-naturalist, was a consequentialist as well, so we ought to expect that he separate the formal metatheory from the substantive moral theory.

This is the first response to Lenman's worry about fusing ethics and metaethics in one theory. Neo-Aristotelianism, like Kantianism, is a view wherein ethics and metaethics cannot and do not "come apart." While the formal and material aspects of neo-Aristotelian ethics might be *distinct*, they are not *separable*.

A second response is possible. Even if a procedural, non-substantive approach to metaethics can be made neutral with respect to normative ethics, it is still admirably ambitious to construct a theory that pays attention to both. Stephen Darwall agrees, arguing that:

> …although metaethics and normative ethics are properly focused on different issues, they need to be brought into dynamic relation with one another in order to produce a systematic and defensible philosophical ethics. This mutual dependence is owing to the fact that issues of normativity are at the center of the concerns of both metaethics and normative ethics.[45]

Hence, my thesis is squarely and ethical argument concerning what character traits are worth pursuing (e.g, moral and intellectual virtues) and what traits count as virtues (e.g., moderation, practical wisdom). However, an adequate defense of this thesis requires assessment of foundational metaethical considerations (e.g., is the human life form a sufficient grounding of moral facts? How do we know what to do?)

Naturalistic

A point of philosophical taxonomy: My thesis is a species of 'ethical naturalism', which is a kind of moral realism that attempts to define moral facts (or more broadly evaluative facts) as natural

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

facts. As James Lemnan says: "there are objective moral facts and properties and that these facts and properties are natural facts and properties."[46]

On this broad definition, neo-Aristotelian is a brand of moral or ethical naturalism that identifies moral facts with natural facts about humans, their needs, their nature, their typical aims, etc. As Hursthouse says, "Virtue ethics, or at least any form of it that takes its inspiration from Aristotle, is usually taken to be a form of ethical naturalism – broadly, the enterprise of basing ethics in some way on consideration of human nature, on what is involved with being good *qua* human being."[47] The hope is that if we can say what a *good human being* is, we shall be well on the way to describing what kinds of actions are right and wrong, or what kind of character traits are admirable or blameworthy. Sociologist Amanda Maull summarizes this sort of ethical naturalism well:

> Drawing upon the works of philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Richard Kraut, and Martha Nussbaum, the claim is made that there are moral properties and facts that are natural (rather than occult or supernatural), which are derived from certain innate dispositions and capacities of living things (i.e., those associated with growth and self-maintenance as opposed to destruction or harm). Human beings have evolved as social creatures with special capacities for speech and reason such that specification of "human flourishing" is more complex and problematic than it is for plants or animals. For the human being, the idea of the "good life" goes beyond biological survival and pertains to potentially ambiguous concepts such as virtue, happiness, and "well-being."[48]

Hursthouse calls neo-Aristotelian an "odd sort" of ethical naturalism?[49] Some critics of neo-Aristotelianism in particular exploit one or more horns of a dilemma,[50] questioning whether it is possible to con-

46. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism." Alternatively, Russ Shafer-Landau's moral realism is not a metaphysical but an epistemological thesis: moral facts *can be known* apart from knowing natural facts. Some moral truths are self-evident. Cf. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4 (Oxford University Press, 2003).

47. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 192.

48. Amanda Maull, "A Deweyan Defense of Ethical Naturalism," *Society* 50, no. 6 (2013): 577.

49. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism," *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2013.

50. Frey, "The Will and the Good" describes the dilemma excellently in chapter 4. Cf. also Bernard Mauser, "The Ontological Foundations for Natural Law Theory and Contemporary Ethi-

struct a neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism that is both (a) genuinely *ethical* (i.e., normative and action-guiding)[51] and (b) genuinely *naturalistic*.[52]

On the former horn, if neo-Aristotelians succeed in naturalizing ethics, then it seems that normative categories such as virtue, vice, flourishing, human goodness, will be reduced to descriptive facts (.eg., virtuous people are statistically likely to flourish, flourishing is psychological health, etc.). But this seems hardly normative at all. On the latter horn, if ethics remains truly normative, then we end up concluding that flourishing is the kind of state we *ought* to pursue whether or not we actually reach it — whether or not, in fact *anyone* has actually reached it. Virtues are those qualities that are acquirable and that we *ought* to acquire, whether or not anyone does or ever has acquired them.

This sounds hardly naturalistic at all. This dilemma, I think, explains the innocent confusion from Lenman and others about who actually deserves the title of "naturalists". Lenman points out in a footnote that Thomson probably shouldn't be on this list and that John McDowell probably should. He says "McDowell is certainly pervasively inspired by Aristotle and he describes himself as a naturalist. See especially his 1995. But I suspect many philosophers would find his use of the

cal Naturalism" (PhD thesis, Marquette University, 2011); and Scott Woodcock, "Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism and the Indeterminacy Objection," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015): 20–41.

51. By 'normativity', I mean 'ought' talk and facts to which 'ought' talk refers. Cf. Peter Schaber, "Normative Facts," *Studies into the Foundations of an Integral Theory of Practice and Cognition*, 2005, 107–22; Gibbard, "Normative Properties. 321: "[Part] of what's special about morality is that it operates in the 'space of reasons;' it concerns justification and oughts. The term 'normative' is central to much current philosophical discussion. There's no agreement on what this technical term in our discipline is to mean, but it involves, in a phrase drawn from Sellars, being somehow 'fraught with ought'." Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue. concludes that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is really naturalistic but is less ethical (i.e., normative) than might be wished.

52. Cf. William Rehg and Darin Davis, "Conceptual Gerrymandering? The Alignment of Hursthouse's Naturalistic Virtue Ethics with Neo-Kantian Non-Naturalism," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2003): 583–600 . Rehg et. al., conclude that neo-Aristotelian naturalism is really ethical but not sufficiently naturalistic. Cf. also John Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" *Ratio* 22, no. 3 (2009): 308–21; John Hacker-Wright, "Human Nature, Personhood, and Ethical Naturalism," *Philosophy* 84, no. 03 (2009): 413–27.

term 'naturalist' here somewhat Pickwickian."[53]

Now, on the one hand, questioning a theory's "naturalism" is pointless without further stipulation, for there are many types of naturalism. The word 'nature' – like its cognates 'natural' and 'naturalism' – is perhaps the most ambiguous, multi-significant word in our language.[54] It seems that the only thing to be done is to stipulate a meaning and move on. On the other hand, though, the question of "naturalism" is tangled up with real, substantive issues.

As I shall explain in a later chapter, the fault line between neo-Aristotelians and their critics (who sometimes include other ethical naturalists) is a real one. Each represents an understanding of the difference between nature and normativity, between "facts and values."[55] The assumption of Lenman (and others) is that nature is purely descriptive, with no "ought". Moore and those influenced by him, both naturalists and non-naturalists, have agreed with the underlying assumption that "nature" is strictly non-normative. "Nature" or "bald nature" is the space of law, while humans inhabit a space of reasons, or "second nature". But what if this assumption is mistaken? Surely we cannot let a deeply-held assumption stand without scrutiny. That is just what we shall do in a later chapter. For now, let me stipulate my sense of 'naturalism.' Mine is an ethical naturalism in at least the following senses:

1. I embrace what Hans Fink calls an "unrestricted conception of nature."[56] This conception expresses the idea, he continues, 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."[57] I shall defend a conception of 'nature' or the 'natural' that includes all familiar objects and properties that exist in the cosmos today: people, stars, trees, penguins, bacteria, and their properties, like 'being an animal', 'bright,' 'green', 'being countershaded for camouflage,' and so on.
2. I shall propose to use only the methods of experience, reason, philosophy, and natural

53. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."

54. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

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

56. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 210.

57. Ibid., 210.

sciences in identifying my initial premises and advancing my claims.

3. I shall defend the notion that such philosophical and scientific methods applied to the world – including to the biological world and to humanity – are sufficient to derive my normative ethical conclusions.

The importance of these stipulations will become clear early on. And those who wish to challenge this stipulation will, I hope, receive a satisfying answer by a later chapter. Responding to this worry is the explicit theme of a later chapter, but is in the background of the whole discussion. Certainly, some critics will insist that normativity is not natural. I ask them to consider the alternative, as I shall consider both, and examine the case I make in a later chapter. We must aim first for clarity before agreement.

Scientific

It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists clarify the relationship of their theories to modern science. This was the thrust of the original "naturalism" that became dominant in America in the early 1900s. As David Papineau summarizes, "The self-proclaimed "naturalists" from that period included John Dewey, Ernest Nagel, Sidney Hook and Roy Wood Sellars. These philosophers aimed to ally philosophy more closely with science. They urged that reality is exhausted by nature, containing nothing "supernatural", and that the scientific method should be used to investigate all areas of reality, including the "human spirit" (Krikorian 1944; Kim 2003)."[58] Quine thought (or claimed he thought) that "naturalistic philosophy is continuous with natural science"[59] but we should not forget that this continuity cuts both ways. It might be taken to mean that philosophy should be or can be more "scientific" (i.e., empirical and material); but it also might be taken to mean that science should be or can be more "philosophical" (i.e., abstract and formal).

More broadly, 'naturalism' has become a kind of banner for a variety of views that are not supernaturalistic and place a high value on natural sciences. Such a broad definition is rightly seen

58. David Papineau, "Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015.

59. (1995a), 256–7, see also 1969, 126–7.

to be almost infinitely inclusive: it does not exclude Spinozistic pantheism or panpsychism.[60]

Without further determination, therefore, the relationship between naturalism and morality is somewhat unclear. For example, some philosophers – such as Michael Ruse and Sharon Street – find in modern evolutionary theory incompatible with moral realism.[61] Ruse's famous expression is that "morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes."[62] Others – such as Wielenberg and Thomas Nagel – find evolutionary theory either irrelevant to morality or a possible source of *vindication* of moral realism.[63] Given this indeterminacy, the attempt to capture all that is good in both the Aristotelian and modern traditions leads me to neo-Aristotelian naturalism. How can neo-Aristotelianism help, if at all, clarify the relationship between science and morality in particular, and (more generally) between facts and values, between 'is' and 'ought'?

The modern "scientific" point of view (if there is *one* such view) is commonly supposed to be monistic or at least non-dualistic. Though not all are so confident,[64] there is a widespread preference – whenever it is possible – for ontological simplicity, epistemological parsimony, and aesthetic elegance. Non-dualism may have an ontological aim, or an epistemological one, or both.

For example, eliminative physicalism is radically monistic but is unsatisfying in that it provides a clean explanation of "everything" only by leaving out some of the most important things (i.e., consciousness). The epistemological naturalism (of, say, John Shook) sees experience, reason, and science (together) as constituting the single method for acquiring knowledge of the world and ourselves. The neo-Aristotelian project takes this corrective to ethics and typically aims to avoid dualisms. It aims, rather, at a holistic picture of nature that includes humans and all living things

60. David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (MIT Press, 2005).

61. Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (2006): 109–66.

62. Michael Ruse, "Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy," 1986, 253.

63. Erik Wielenberg, "On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality," *Ethics* 120, no. 3 (2010): 441–64; Erik Wielenberg, "In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2009): 23–41.

64. John Dupré, "The Miracle of Monism," in *Naturalism in Question*, ed. David De Caro Mario & Macarthur (Harvard University Press, 2004), 36–58.

within the cosmos and includes all parts of a human being (reason, emotion, desire, etc.). Margaret Atkins eloquently summarizes the holistic vision of these thinkers: "Anglo-American moral philosophy [has moved] beyond the limitations not only of A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson, but also of Hume's focus on sentiment, on the one hand, and Kant's focus on reason on the other. Contemporary ethics is about the whole human being, seen as biological, social and cultural, emotional and reflective."[65]

By taking advantage of the expansive definition of scientific naturalism, neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism defends a view of nature as normative, in that it is (at least in some part) teleological.

Though my theory is a form of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, I hope I have set enough now about the components of the "virtue triangle" to frame the project and show the importance of all three components (virtue, human nature, and teleology). And arguably, the unifying concept of the schema is not virtue but telos. If we cannot even perform a menial, intentional action without a goal, then *a fortiori* it would seem we cannot perform our highest moral duties without a goal.

Defining that goal is, of course, the rub. But it seems apparent that strict moral rules without any notion of the kind of life that is to be lived are bound to degenerate into a kind of pointless legalism. If the teleological notion of natural human flourishing in particular is central to the project of virtue ethics, it would seem that developing a plausible modern virtue ethical theory would require rehabilitating a notion of natural teleology in general.

John Horton and Susan Mendus summarize the contrast the two understandings of the self well enough to quote them in full:

> Where Aristotle understood man as a creature with a definite function which he might fulfill or deny, modern morality sees man simply as a rational agent who has no true or definable purpose independent of his own will… By appealing to a telos, Aristotle was able to distinguish between the way we actually are and the way we should be. His conception of human beings as having a specific telos brought with it the possibility that we might fall short of the ideal… But with the rejection of Aristotelianism gain the rejection of any such distinction between what we are and what

65. Margaret Atkins, "Morality Without God?" *The Heythrop Journal* 46, no. 1 (2005): 65–71.

> we should be. Post-Enlightenment man is seen as governed, not by a telos external to him, but simply by the dictates of his own inner reason… Thus the abandonment of an Aristotelian conception of the good has not only left us without standards by which to evaluate our moral arguments, it is also cast us adrift in the moral world. For Aristotle, a conception of the good for man has an essentially societal dimension.[66]

For MacIntyre, the loss of telos is one of the chief if not the chief error of Enlightenment moralities. He explains why in his discussion of the three elements of morality which I have called "the virtue triangle."[67]

It is difficult to understate the importance of this point about the self and its relation to not only virtue theory but ethical theory itself. Edward Oakes describes the removal of telos from our worldview as "perhaps the greatest category mistake ever made in the history of philosophy."

> That word "teleological" is the key to MacIntyre's solution, the loss of which is the cause of the catastrophe described in his science-fiction parable. Teleology is the study of final causes, goals, purposes, and aims: a style of explanation that saturates Aristotle's philosophy. After the combined impact of Newton and Darwin, however, this type of explanation seems mostly 'quaint' and once Aristotle's science seemed quaint, his ethics soon followed: when Newton demonstrated how motion can be better explained as resulting from the outcome of mechanical laws, and when Darwin posited natural selection as the "mechanism" for explaining an organ's functionality, the use of teleology in ethics was doomed…Emptying moral discourse of teleological concepts because of the perceived impact of Newton and Darwin has been for MacIntyre the catastrophe of our times.[68]

Now, MacIntyre's account of virtue is "neo-Aristotelian" in that it borrows from but also contrast with Aristotle's. For instance, MacIntyre denies that Aristotle's virtues are so timeless, abstract, and generically human as Aristotle would make them appear; they are partly indexed to fourth century, upper-class, educated Athenian culture. He also rejects Aristotle's metaphysics of nature. Nevertheless, he argues, the loss of a concept of telos is dramatic.

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66. John Horton and Susan Mendus, "Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Mark Alfano (Routledge, 2015), 6.

67. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 54ff.

68. Edward Oakes, "The Achievement of Alasdair Macintyre," *First Things*, 1996.

The project of rehabilitating natural teleology may seem overly optimistic. The idea of teleology is a major stumbling block for modern thinkers, especially for the kind of naturalist whose worries I tried to allay above.[69] it may be felt, for instance, that teleology has simply been debunked by modern science and therefore has no place in a scientific worldview. After all, Francis Bacon intentionally excised final causation from natural science since he feared that empirical investigation into final causes "defiled philosophy."[70] On this view, teleological ethics is inherently pre-modern and therefore outmoded.[71] On this view, any attempt to revive virtue talk is guilty of being antiquarian and nostalgic until proven innocent.

Nevertheless, I think that the sort of realism about natural teleology requisite for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics grounded on human nature is – and can be shown to be – perfectly respectable, modern, scientific, and naturalistic. I shall present the case for this optimistic conclusion in parts, first in a chapter on ethical naturalism and in a later chapter on telos itself. The conclusion I shall defend is a growing consensus that natural teleology is no more mysterious or magical than biological life, or consciousness, or rationality. And hence, the pursuit of virtues is no more obsolete than any other human activity, such as farming, or laughing, or studying astronomy.[72]

69. Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory."

70. 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."

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

72. Compare with "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing." (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* Section 124).

Methodological Agnosticism

Another reason many scientific naturalists are squeemish about teleology is a guilt by association; they feel that teleology is somehow religious. I shall attempt to calm this worry in a later chapter. For now, I will simply state that my project sets aside discussions about the possibility of the existence of God. Obviously, it would be morally relevant if a divine lawgiver were to reveal the way everyone ought to live. But the conclusion of my arguments is that it is imperative upon all of us to become virtuous, whether or not any particular religious tradition is true. I do not wish to *deny* that a divine mind is organizing the cosmos, but neither do I wish to *assume* it.

As a theist, I am perfectly willing to use the additional resources available to a religious ethicist. For this project, however, I see three good reasons for adopting methodological agnosticism.

1. The first reason is sociological. There seems to be no clear consensus within my source authors regarding the divine or numinous. (There is, however, a semi-established consensus among philosophers more broadly that God is dead.[73]) Some neo-Aristotelians are atheists, some Platonists, others Christians or some other sort of theist.[74] There *is* a consensus that ethics can be grounded, somehow, in human nature. That "somehow" is the focus of my project.
2. The second reason is philosophical. The belief in virtue ethics grounded in natural normativity seems to me just like the belief in electrons, integers, or evolution: each is *compatible* with the existence of a god but it does not *require* or *entail* the existence of a god. One can evaluate and judge the truth or plausibility of the hypothesis with or without a particular religious tradition.[75] This indeterminacy will inevitably seem a weakness to some philosophers, but it seems to me a strength. One of my limiting goals has been to

73. Bourget and Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?"

74. The recent neo-Aristotelians seem to be a representative sample of a broader historical population: a survey of the living and the dead would feature theists, atheists, humanists, pantheists, and so on.

75. Compare with H Tristram Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics* (Oxford University Press, 1996). Engelhardt is a religious philosopher exploring the scope and limits of secular philosophy. While I shall end up agreeing with Engelhardt that secular moral philosophy (in the form of virtue ethics) remains fundamentally — and perhaps dangerously — pluralistic, I am a bit more optimistic than he about how far natural morality can go. Noah was not a Christian or a Jew was nevertheless "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God." (Gen 6:9) Even Abel somehow knew what sacrifice would be acceptable, perhaps because, as Paul says, he was "doing by nature the things contained in the law." Rom 2.14.

construct a theory that allows both possibilities. I aim to allow that a monotheistic God might be directing all affairs to his purposes and guiding human beings by his commands and that, to (paraphrase Augustine), our hearts are restless until they rest in him. But I also aim to allow that human life is a brief and beautiful flash of consciousness in an otherwise cold, pitiless, and dead cosmos, and that even so we ought to pursue all the virtues before we go extinct – whether or not we "go gentle into that good night."

3. The third reason is pragmatic. The dissertation would have become too long. I hope in future to research the relationship between virtue theories and Christianity, or between virtue hand religion in general.[76]

In this way, my project may be seen as building on Philippa Foot's work to advance a kind of secular natural law theory. Mark Murphy says that:

> the paradigmatic natural law view [e.g., Thomistic natural law] holds that (1) the natural law is given by God; (2) it is naturally authoritative over all human beings; and (3) it is naturally knowable by all human beings… Recently there have been nontheistic writers in the natural law tradition, who deny (1): see, for example, the work of Michael Moore (1982, 1996) and Philippa Foot (2001).[77]

This kind of "natural law" may also be seen as a kind of neo-Stoicism. Elizabeth Anscombe says:

> One might be inclined to think that a law conception of ethics could arise only among people who accepted an allegedly divine positive law; that this is not so is shown by the example of the Stoics, who also thought that whatever was involved in conformity to human virtues was required by divine law.[78]

While I shall concede that normative ethics cannot survive some philosophical environments – such as aggressively reductive or eliminative physicalism – I shall for present purposes remain neutral as to whether the natural norms discoverable in nature are divine.

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76. Such as Michael Sherwin, Michael Austin and others. Cf. Michael S Sherwin, *By Knowledge & by Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (CUA Press, 2005); Michael W Austin, *Virtues in Action: New Essays in Applied Virtue Ethics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

77. Mark Murphy, "The Natural 'Law Tradition in Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2011, 2011.

78. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 5.

III. Why neo-Aristotelian matters

Virtue ethics is, on my view, a very useful guide to action,[79] in personal life, political life, bioethics,[80] business,[81] and education.[82] It would be an improvement to almost any area of human life if we were aware of our own vices and worked to expunge them, and if we understood the virtues and pursued them. Yet many obstacles from philosophical and social tradition stand in the way. My dissertation is part of an attempt to remove such obstacles and, in their absence, render not only palatable but desirable a pursuit of virtues.

As difficult as it is to consider seriously the project of restoring natural teleology to its proper place and using it as a basis for ethical theory that is tenable and useful, I am optimistic it can be done. Many are on the project – biologists, cosmologists, philosophers of science, mathematicians – but philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition are uniquely situated to make advances. That tradition promises the resources with which to construct an ethical system including all three elements of MacIntyre's schema while rehabilitating a form of natural teleology that is not only tenable in light of modern beliefs, but rationally commends itself in light of all we now know. The case presented in these chapters aim to show how it might be done, and to begin doing it. Virtue, practical reason, and flourishing are age-old themes. Nevertheless, they are significant themes. Treating them adequately is too much for one dissertation. As Glaucon said to Socrates, "The measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life."[83] But my hope is that even an unworthy treatment of a worthy topic will attain some value.

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79. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 1.

80. Tom Beauchamp and James Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

81. Ron Beadle, in *Handbook of Virtue Ethics in Business and Management* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2015), 1–9.

82. David Carr and Jan Steutel, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (Routledge, 2005).

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

Chapter 3

The Normativity of Nature: Organic and Practical Teleology

"Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."

–Mark Perlman, "The Modern Resurrection of Teleology in Biology", 6.

"Men need virtues as bees need stings."

–Peter Geach, *The Virtues*

Is-Ought Gap

Rosalind Hursthouse argues 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, *normative* evaluations depend on *descriptive* facts about a species. If true, this notion would be momentous: "is" statements would underwrite "ought" statements.

This chapter addresses and challenges the widespread prejudice against scientific teleology. I invoke the help of sciences – especially life sciences such as biology and medicine – which indicate that teleological nihilism and teleoreductionism are by no means "*the* scientific doctrines". Rather, if teleological realism is a scientifically respectable position, then nature is normative. And if nature is normative, it is at least possible that *human nature* is normative, even though humans are a unique

1. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 10, abstract.

kind of animal.

The notion that natural, descriptive propositions can serve as premises in arguments with normative conclusions is central to the project of ethical naturalism. Is this notion even intelligible? Many have posed an obvious challenge to this notion. We can put the challenge in this form:

Is-Ought Gap Challenge

1. If ethical naturalism is possibly true, then "ought" conclusions can be derived from "is" premises.
2. But no "ought" conclusions can be derived from "is" premises.
3. Therefore ethical naturalism is not possibly true.

The second premise seems to render hopeless the thought, articulated by Hursthouse, that we can evaluate things on the basis of what they are. This is the major problem I shall address. This problem goes by many names, but the one I prefer is the "is-ought gap."

Simply put, the is-ought gap is the intuitive notion that one cannot learn anything about *what ought to be* simply by examining *what is*.[2] For example, suppose your friend Jim will be attending his first Oscar ceremony, but doesn't know what to wear. Suppose we observe that *most male celebrities wear black ties to the Oscars.* It simply does not follow from the premise that most men in fact wear black ties that *Jim ought to wear a black tie to the Oscars*. At least, it does not follow without additional, brutely normative premise such as that *He ought to wear whatever most people are wearing*. Even if we supply *that* normative premise, where did it come from? "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" is not something supplied by *observation*.

More broadly, in ethics, the is-ought gap seems devastating. For even supposing we gathered a whole collection of reliable scientific truths about human bodies, cognitive-behavioral patterns and so on – from anthropology, psychology, sociology, and also biology, chemstry, physics – we

2. Thus, 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).

would not be a wit closer to establishing any ethical truths. A detailed and scientific description of human nature could hope to supply a "descriptive ethics" that narrates what such-and-such a culture approves of or finds worthwhile compared to what they find worthless and reprehensible.

At its best, a descriptive ethics might identify universal moral approbations and disapprobations. For example, while habits and attitudes toward drinking alcohol vary dramatically from culture to culture, there seems to be a universal (cross-cultural) disapprobation for continual drunkenness, even among cultures (like the Bolivian Camba) that drink regularly and drink heavily.[3] Such findings might be interesting, but the is-ought gap reminds us that they are a far cry from *ethical* insights.

The is-ought gap objection is fatal to some forms of ethical naturalism, but not to the neo-Aristotelian type Hursthouse and others are pursuing.[4] For there exists a second, and more promising way to underwrite "ought" statements. From basic, fundamental, scientifically respectable *natural norms*. Call this the possibility of natural normativity.[5] We can put the challenge, in the following form:

Bald Nature Challenge

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.

This challenge parallels the first one in that everything depends on the second premise – on whether

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

4. I suspect the is-ought gap has not been adequately overcome by Peter Railton's and Richard Boyd's theories. I do not have space here to explore the suspicision.

5. The concept of 'natural normativity' is indeterminate, which means I run the risk of unclarity; that indeterminacy is necessary for us to discuss these issues without begging the question in favor of the view that all norms are unnatural and all nature is non-normative. If natural norms could be discovered, then it would be *at least possible* that the is-ought gap is not a fatal problem for all types of ethical naturalism.

nature consists of *merely* non-normative facts.[6] If so, then it follows that normativity is either real but *non-natural* (or supernatural) or "naturalistic" but not real (i.e., not mind-independent). There would be no such thing as the paradoxical notion of a "prescriptive fact" or a "natural ought."[7] Hume (and others) assume this. But if the second premise is not true – if some facts are genuinely both natural and normative – then ethical naturalism is at least *possible*. (There will be other challenges to address, of course.)

The candidates for natural normative facts I shall defend are natural formal and functional or teleological properties of organisms. Hursthouse, Philippa Foot, John McDowell, MacIntyre, and Stephen Brown are united in the thought that some natural formal or teleological facts – whether that is Hursthouse's "characteristic", or a "life-form"[8] or "form of life"[9], or "human nature" – are inherently normative. Rather than "bridging" the gap between "is" and "ought", they defy the opposition.

I. Teleology as Solution

Although the neo-Aristotelians are united in the affirmation that some natural norms can serve as a grounding for ethical facts, there are two or three competing strategies as to which "norms" are up to the task. The strategies go under many names.[10]

6. That nature consists of merely "natural" facts is, of course, a tautology. But whether all natural facts are non-normative facts is the question at hand. Simply to *stipulate* that "natural facts are descriptive and not normative!" is to beg the question with an exclamation point. I will pick up this question again in a later chapter.

7. Recall Mackie's beautifully expressed worry about notion of "to-be-pursuedness" built into things.

8. Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 57

9. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 339.

10. Annas distinguishes two sorts of naturalism, one that emphasizes the biological nature of humanity (at the expense of the odd normativity of reason) and another that emphasizes the rational nature of humanity (at the expense of the mundane descriptivity of biology). Christopher Toner distinguishes between the "biological naturalism" of Thompson and Foot (and later MacIntyre) from the "second naturalism" or "excellence naturalism" or 'culturalism' of McDowell and (early) MacIntyre, each of which has its strengths and problems. Cf. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism.;

Biology or Rationality?

The basic difference is between those who discover natural normativity in *human nature* – culture, or rationality, or practical agency – and those who hope to find natural normativity more generally in all organic life. As Thomas Nagel puts it, with the existence of life in the cosmos arises the existence of "beings of the kind.. for which things can be good or bad."[11] (The third group defends the view that natural normativity is intrinsic to the whole cosmos.) Let's examine each one a bit more.[12]

Social Teleology: the Normativity of Human Nature

The second option is the normative notion of humanity. On this option, something about humanity is naturally and inherently teleological. For example, perhaps one of the natural functions of rationality is to construct goals for itself and legislate laws for itself.[13] On this view, ethical conclusions are irreducibly based upon human facts such as human rationality, human culture, or human excellence. Since these human facts are contrasted with broader natural facts, call this view "So-

Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism.; Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 220–50; Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in Stephen Mark Gardiner, *Virtue Ethics, Old and New* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

11. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 117.

12. Though I shall not pursue it, I should at least mention the most ambitious and most risky sort of strategy: to defend the view that *all* of nature is teleological. But it is the notion that everything – including stars and rocks – "has a purpose", as if the cosmos were somehow organized and *going somewhere*. Call this Cosmic Teleology. Though such natural normativity in the form of natural teleology has its recent defenders. For atheistic version of cosmic teleology, see ibid., ; for non-human centered versions see John Leslie, *Universes* (Psychology Press, 1996) and Tim Mulgan, *Purpose in the Universe: The Moral and Metaphysical Case for Ananthropocentric Purposivism* (Oxford University Press, 2015). For Thomistic versions, cf. Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld Publications, 2009); and Peter Kreeft, *Summa Philosophica* (St. Augustine, 2012).

13. Compare with Christine M Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Korsgaard's argument about the "Authority of Reflection" builds a case that human autonomy – the ability to be a law to oneself – is the source of normative authority. In other words, my own identity as a rational human agent obligates me to behave morally.

cial" or "Rational" or "Practical Teleology."[14] Pretty clearly, human cognitive and and practical behaviors are inherently end-directed or teleological: John goes to the gym *in order to get fit for his film role*; Jane practices her speech *to win the Iowa primary*. Humans *act on reasons* and in pursuit of ends.[15] This kind of social or rational teleology is certainly the safer of the two strategies, and is followed by McDowell, Hursthouse, and the early MacIntyre.[16]

Alasdair MacIntyre's position on natural normativity has shifted over the decades. I would like to mention both his earlier view (defending social teleology), which is closer to that of McDowell than that of Foot.

In *After Virtue*, he emphasizes "second nature" far more than primary nature. That is, he finds a ground of normativity not in our life-form but in us: in our social identities, our culture, our rationality. For example, he says his account of virtue "happily not Aristotelian" for "although this account of the virtues is teleological, it does not require any allegiance to Aristotle's metaphysical biology."[17] The "metaphysical biology" MacIntyre refers to here is that metaphysically realist view that formal and final causes inhere (and in fact constitute) biological species.[18] That said, Mac-

14. Cf. Marinus Farreira, "Reasons from Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism," 2011. Ferreira calls this "excellence naturalism" as opposed.

15. The teleological nihilism (of say, hardcore determinists) says that not even human practices are teleological. There are no "purposes" or natural ends anywhere in the world *including* in human actions. Even our practices, behaviors, and lives are purposeless, even to ourselves. I discuss teleological nihilism below. Cf. Daniel C Dennett, "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," *The Sciences* 35, no. 3 (1995): 34–40.

16. Hursthouse appears to me to affirm both Foot's sort of naturalism and McDowell's. Jennifer Frey observes this as well: "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." Cf. Frey, "The Will and the Good. 44, footnote 55.

17. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 197.

18. These causes may be understood by metaphysical realists as intelligible forms or universals which the intellect, by virtue of its intelligible powers, can be abstracted. As John Haldane says: content-determining principles of perception are one and the same as the character-determining principles of the objects of perception — the identity of act and object." Intellection, in turn, is a

Intyre does most emphatically argue for a teleological form of ethics based on the normativity of *human* nature. He grounds teleology not in non-human nature but in human nature, specifically our practical, social nature. He calls this notion "social teleology."

The notion of social teleology builds on the apparently obvious truth that *human society is teleological.* That is, we do not just act randomly. We do not only act according to the promptings of instinct (that too). Rather, we act *on reasons,* both individually and in groups. We act to achieve goals. Whether we arise from bed *in order to* give a talk, or drive to work *in order to* do a good job, or pursue a career *for* satisfaction and a profitable retirement, we are directing ourselves toward ends. In groups, too, we pursue shared goals, deliberate about *what is to be done*: Congress aims to pass just and beneficial laws. The school board aims to increase enrollment and balance the budget. Expanding our focus from individual actions or projects, we can put the point more strongly: all of human life is a practice. It can be brought under the concept of either one, unified, whole practice or pluralistic set of practices. Even when Iris Murdoch assumed[19] that human life has "no external point or τελος", she argues that it has a point *from within.* It is impossible, in other words, to bring our own human life under the concept of an *event.* Human life must be brought under the concept of a practice, which is teleological and essentially so.This insight has important implications for ethics, as well as other fields: action theory, sociology, anthropology, philosophy of mind, and so on.[20] But the point here is that, since we act in groups and for reasons, teleology is a real feature of our social nature. They cannot be understood without teleology. So if the critic of natural normativity rejects teleological realism (as did the early MacIntyre), it is enough if she accepts social teleology.

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distinctly human (rational) 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 and brown with a smudge on its nose, does not imply the ability to perceive that thing as a cat. Cf. John Haldane, "On Coming Home to (Metaphysical) Realism," *Philosophy* 71, no. 276 (1996): 287–96

19. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*.

20. Cf. Thompson, *Life and Action*.

Natural Teleology

The second strategy is more ambitious and more risky. It is to defend the view that other parts of nature (such as living creatures) are naturally and inherently teleological. For example, perhaps one of the functions of *being alive at all* is that plants, animals, insects, and microbes perform whatever movements are necessary for them to survive, grow, and develop into the state of species-specific maturity. And not just animals, but all organic life: "Molecular biology shows that all organic cellular life share a common feature, self-reproduction through gene/protein protein cycles."[21]

Hence, at least some natural entities – that is, all living organisms – have ineliminable, irreducible, normative properties. Call this view Natural Teleology. Natural Teleology is the preferred strategy of Foot, Thompson, and the later MacIntyre. It seems to have won over Annas, Brown, and Barham, and a host of other biological scientists.[22]]

Problems for Teleology

Each of these two predominant strategies faces its major challenge. For example, fven if the first strategy of *human* natural normativity could pre-emptively undercut the is-ought gap, the major worry is no such thing as a universal human nature from which we might derive normative conclusions. Even the singular noun phrase "human nature" is liable to sound mystical, like a platonic universal underlying all human beings.

21. Michael N Mautner, "Life-Centered Ethics, and the Human Future in Space," *Bioethics* 23, no. 8 (2009): 433–40.

22. Keith Ward, "Kant's Teleological Ethics," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 85 (1971): 337–51; 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; Monte Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford University Press, 2005); 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; Mariska Leunissen, *Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Science of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a detailed exposition of the full menu of philosophical options, cf.Bill Cosby, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *The Monist* 87, no. 1 (2004): 3–51.

Bernard Williams summarizes the antiquated worldview that many are suspicious of:

> 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.[23]

The problem, of course, is that if human beings are a "mess" (as Williams puts it) then the normative conclusions to be derived would be equally messy. Humans are occasionally irrational and always variable. Human beings posit themselves, create themselves, define their values, chart their destinies, and all in different ways.

Along similar lines, evolutionary biology tells us that genetically modern humankind is the latest in a series of species. This is prima facie in tension with the notion of fixed, stable human nature. Ernst Mayr puts the alleged tension between the flexibility of evolutionary species and a fixed human nature in this way:

> 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.[24]

Like Williams' worry that we can no longer believe in an "appropriate way… to behave" that is "inherent in each natural kind of thing", Mayr's worry is that there may not even be natural kinds.

A second, related, objection is that if there is such thing as "human nature", it is nothing more or less than our biological and physiological makeup. Tim Lewins 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]

23. Cf. Williams, 109.

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

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

On Lewins' view, the only scientific talk about our "nature" is an indetermiante series of complicated stories about our genetics, evolutionary history, and neurophysiology, perhaps even including cultural, geographical, and ecological settings. The problem, of course, 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*. In response to this worry, Rosalind Hursthouse's response is to reassure us that: "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[26] Nevertheless, she *does* endorse the project of grounding ethical evaluations in human nature. If this grounding is not *scientific*, then how is a grounding of ethics going to work?

Bald Nature Objection

I shall return to the problems regarding a normative conception of human nature in a later chapter. Here I must address the objections to the Organic or Natural Teleology strategy. This second strategy has its own, even bigger, problems; not even all the neo-Aristotelians are optimistic about the strategy of grounding human ethics in natural normativity.

Even if natural normativity in the form of teleology in the non-human world *could possibly* underwrite normative conclusions about human ethics, how would we confirm the hypothesis that there is such a thing as natural normativity? Is the hypothesis scientific or not? For many, scientific naturalism just is the commitment to believe all and only the best deliverances of all the sciences.[27] But suffice many scientific naturalists do indeed think that the scientific conception of nature is incompatible with the kind of natural normativity found in Foot's brand of neo-Aristotelian ethical

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

27. Other ethical naturalists like Richard Boyd and Peter Railton would be quick to observe, at this juncture, that natural kinds themselves are part of the vocabulary of natural science. Cf. Richard Boyd, "Realism, Anti-Foundationalism and the Enthusiasm for Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Studies* 61, no. 1 (1991): 127–48; Richard N Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," *Contemporary Materialism*, 1988, 307; Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95, no. 2 (1986). And indeed, part of my strategy for defending the truth and scientific credentials of Footian naturalism is to appeal to generic truths about natural kinds. But this objection is still considerable.

naturalism. They think that the scientific picture of nature is the picture of "bald nature" (McDowell's phrase for non-normative nature) or the "Laplacian" picture.[28] Call "teleological nihilism" the view that there are no natural purposes *except* those in human actions, intentions, and societies, etc. On teleological nihilism, *social teleology* is not instances of a broader category that includes the tendency of an acorn to become an oak and the tendency of deer to survive and reproduce; human purposes are sui generis phenomena that spontaneously emerge out of our brains at a certain level of complexity. Final causation thinking is then projected out onto the world by us; we observe that the beaver gathered wood and that the beaver built a dam and we say "the beaver gathered wood *in order to* build the dam." But really the beaver did no such thing. This is what philosopher of biology Ernst Mayr calls "teleonomic" natural behavior, but not genuinely teleological.[29]

II. An Initial Case for Natural Normativity

So what are we to make of these challenges? I shall respond to the Bald Nature Objection.

On the one hand, I think both strategies (social teleology and natural teleology) would work, and wish to defend them against ethical non-naturalists or ethical naturalists of different sorts.[30] On the other hand, I think natural teleology is the stronger of the two and is less subject to objections from cultural relativism. Hence, in the spirit of devil-may-care adventure seeking, I shall pursue the more ambitious strategy of defending natural normativity in all of organic nature, not just human beings.

However, in a later chapter I will more thoroughly examine the notion human (and only human) teleology is the source of natural normativity. (In the end, I do not think these two notions of

28. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 84. Plantinga explains that the bald, disenchanted picture of nature that excludes all consciousness – both divine and human – should not be pinned on Newton, who was a pious Christian, but fits better with Pierre-Simon Laplace.

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

30. Such as functionalists and the Cornell realists just mentioned.

normativity are *contradictory*. A "third type" of naturalism could even perhaps combine them.)[31] To those for whom the concept of natural teleology might have been completely unpalettable, I hope to render it not only conceivable but plausible. For those who do not find it plausible, human teleology is a kind of fail-safe. The facts of social or practical teleology are enough to ground the theory of virtue I develop in a later chapter. Although I feel confident that social teleology is a sufficient ground for ethics, I shall caution that the cost of rejecting natural teleology is an incorrigible cultural relativism: While objective morality may be realized intersubjectively, intersubjective morality is not objective.

For now, I shall pursue the strategy according to which natural normativity in the form of natural teleology is sufficient to ground a theory of ethics in observations about human nature as practical, rational animals.[32] This is to defend the Foot/Thompson strategy of Natural Teleology as preferable over McDowell's strategy of Social or Practical Teleology. In doing so, I shall summarize and bolster her arguments, offering a more rigorous argument for the fundamental premise that some natural facts are brutely normative, teleological facts.

Foot on Natural Normativity

Let's begin with Philippa Foot. Foot argues that human virtues are instances of a broader class of natural properties: 'natural goodness.'[33] to earn an audience for her argument, her first chapter (which she call a "fresh start") clears 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, hat we should expand our scope to examine our

31. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism.. The criteria for this third sort of naturalism are sketched brilliantly by Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism.. Such third kind of naturalistic theory would be comprehensive. It would provide an anti-dualistic account of first nature and "second nature", of biology and culture, of animality and rationality. But more of these things later.

32. Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics."

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

status as natural entities. She 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 something refined.

The kind of "shaky assumption" she means is this: Moore assumed that "good" was the ultimate ethical 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' (like 'useful') has a different logical function. 'The house is useful' does need a complement – the house is useful *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Similarly, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* 'Good' always needs a complement. 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 *Representation of Life*. There, he argues that 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.[34] Thompson reviews and refutes a variety of biological definitions of life such as reproduction, growth, metabolisis, etc., for these properties depend on a prior understanding of life. 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."[35] 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? Every individual living being is a member of a species or life-form. And different life-forms are subject to different

34. Thompson, "The Representation of Life."
35. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 57.

normative appraisals.

Humans are certainly a unique *kind* of living being with a unique life-form. And we shall examine below what difference the differences make. As a preview, morality is (correctly) thought to be action-guiding. Hume and Moore (correctly) argue that moral principles cannot be merely descriptive; they must motivate us to act or refrain from acting. (Furthermore, moral theories must be able to explain retroactively *why* one acted or refrained from acting). and help us to evaluate actions or abstentions, in ourselves and others.) Call this the Practicality Requirement. But, the argument will be, the position that moral reasons are inextricably tied to conative psychological states is not the best way to meet the Practicality Requirement. Rather, the action-guiding facts in the case of natural goodness are facts humans as practical, rational creatures, and facts about our relation to objects in the world. But more on this below.

Foot concludes that:

> …goodness and badness, and therefore about evaluation in its most general form; but 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.[36]

Another way of putting this point is that some properties we can call 'goodness' are primary qualities of nature. McDowell and others will worry that this picture of nature is not "the scientific picture" of nature, and that even if it were, such a picture is not necessary since social normativity is a sufficient grounding for ethics.

III. A Novel Case for Natural Normativity from Generics

What are the odds that "identifying what is characteristic of a species" can license normative judgments? The odds are quite good, I think. My case for natural normativity depends on a minimal

36. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.

scientific realism and on a little-utilized feature of language and conceptualization called "generic propositions" – or simply "generics." The case in brief is this:

1. If some generic statements describing natural entities are true, then some facts 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." That 'special logic' is variously called "Aristotelian categoricals"[37], "natural-historical judgements"[38] "norms"[Anscombe[39] 14-15. Anscombe is not very optimistic about the project Thompson, Foot, and I are undertaking. She says: "It might remain to look for"norms" in human virtues: just as man has so many teeth, which is certainly not the average number of teeth men have, but is the number of teeth for the species, so perhaps the species man, regarded not just biologically, but from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments of life-powers and faculties and use of things needed- "has" such-and-such virtues: and this "man" with the complete set of virtues is the "norm," as "man" with, e.g., a complete set of teeth is a norm."] "bare plurals"[40]. I prefer the shorter and less adorned term 'generic.[41]

37. Ibid.

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

39. "Modern Moral Philosophy."

40. Greg N Carlson, "A Unified Analysis of the English Bare Plural," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1977): 413–57.

41. Cf. ibid., . Carlson's essay is an early attempt to account for a variety of linguistic forms under one concept of reference to kinds; 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

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

Generics are neither universal nor particular

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

> Start with this sentence: [all ducks lay eggs.] This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is it equivalent to 'for every x, if x is a [duck], x [lays eggs]? 'ducks lay eggs' may be true even if not all ducks lay eggs, 'mosquitos carry dengue fever' may be true even if only a very few mosquitos carry that virus, and so on). We are now positioned to observe one curious property of generics: they admit of exceptions.[42]

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.

Consider the statement "all wolves hunt in packs." Logically, the proposition expressed in this statement is neither strictly universal nor strictly particular. It is not a strictly true universal judgment (for some actual wolves hunt alone, and some don't hunt at all). Furthermore, it is true

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.

42. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.

but trivial that *some wolves hunt in packs*. Confining ourselves to particular judgments like "Some reptiles lay eggs" would be radically unambitious science. We want to know – and can know – what is true of the class as a whole. If a biologist discovers an exception to the proposition "All reptiles lay eggs", then either it turns out that not all reptiles lay eggs *or* she has discovered a new species of reptile that does not lay eggs.

Generics refer to natural kinds

Generics do not refer *distributively to all* members of a category nor merely to *some* but to the category itself; they are statements about natural kinds. In this way, generics pick out what we might call formal facts, facts about the life form in question.

The statement that "wolves hunt in packs" is only interesting to scientists if it is an item of conceptual knowledge about wolves as a *kind*. 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 "infama species."[43] As Leslie says:

> 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 (Krifka et al. 1995).

Generics are not statistical

As Leslie's point shows, 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."[44] In 1987 there were only 27 known condors alive. One could easily imagine a scenario in which every living member of such an

43. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222, quoting Thompson.
44. Jeffrey P. Cohn, "Saving the California Condor," *BioScience* 49, no. 11 (1999): 864–68.

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 calls this a "logical weakness" of generics, as if Aristotelian-categoricals were aiming for deductive certainty but falling short. 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)."[45] McDowell rather misses the point. Generics are not half-hearted universal judgments; they are judgments of a logically different kind. That we do not know deductively whether any particular wolf hunts in a pack is rather a strength than a weakness; the generic truth that wolves hunt in packs sets in us a normative expectation we then bring to any particular wolf and by which we can judge whether it is exemplifying its life form.[46] Similarly, while anthropological generics such as "human beings wear clothes" admit of exceptions, they might, if true, set normative expectations.

Generics are familiar

While there is much to be learned about the linguistic features of generics,[47] still, their use and acquisition is actually very familiar. Michael Thompson points out that: there is a "general and thoroughgoing reciprocal mutual interdependence of vital description of the individual and natural

45. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 171–2.

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

47. 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". 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 virus, while over eighty percent of books are paper backs." Leslie, "Generics.

historical judgment about the form or kind."[48] Micah Lott's comment on this same point is that:

> 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.[49]

Generic truths are acquired via a normal scientific means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion.[50] 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) and working to distinguish between the normal and defective traits of a species.

Generics are teleological

While there is a kind of normativity in the mere idea of a life-form, we can make the case stronger. There is a related kind of normativity in the idea of the natural teleology of life-forms. And generics also illuminate natural, normative, teleological facts. I shall take the idea of a real, natural function to be roughly synonymous with a real, natural teleology. As Perlman says:

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

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

50. 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.

> 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.[51]

Barham clarifies the range of terms that denote identical or similar concepts:

> "By "teleology," I have in mind such words and concepts as "purpose," "end," "goal," "function," "control," and "regulation," as well as the real-world biological phenomena to which these words and concepts refer. This means that the word "teleology" should always be construed here in its internal or "immanent" sense—purposiveness existing in living beings themselves—and never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle"[52]

With these concepts in hand, we can see why Chris Toner says that "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[53] 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."[54]

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.* 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. 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; but a normative fact about the penguin. As Hursthouse says, "Wolves hunt in packs; a 'free-rider' wolf that doesn't join in the hunt fails to act well and

51. Cosby, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 1–4.
52. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 1.
53. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.
54. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 293–94.

is thereby defective."[55] We might add that some formal features *of a normal, mature* animal exist merely potentially before full maturation. For example, a female reptile that cannot lay eggs might be injured, ill, or simply young. Eyes that cannot see might be injured, ill, or simply developing. Eyes that have had enough time to develop *should* see, are *supposed to* see, *ought to* see. Hearts do not just "pump blood" but hearts are *for* pumping blood.

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. Recall, 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 thing to do. But it seems to me there are three paths forward: reject, reduce, or accept Natural 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.[56] 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

55. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 201.
56. Also called teleological eliminativism.

nature is *only* descriptive, natural normativity is dismissed out of court.[57] 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.

Reply to Teleological Nihilism

Nevertheless, let's suppose for *reductio* that no generic statements are true. Then it would be false in some important sense false that 'wolves hunt in packs', and false that 'condors can fly for hours', false even that 'penguins are birds'. It is false, furthermore, that eyes see and humans are mammals. But such denials are, I think, absurdities.[58]

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*.[59]

By all means, let us be scientific. But let us be careful not to become anti-scientific in the *name* of preserving the purity of science. 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 philosohpy but a controversy *within science*. It is a legitimate

57. 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."

58. 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.

59. Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose."

discussion between scientists of one stripe and scientists of another.

An analogy might help: suppose a marine biologist studying dolphin behavior came to believe dolphin's have language. One could imagine other biologists accusing her of "projecting" an exclusively human phenomenon – communication by language – on non-human nature. They could ridicule her "magical thinking" but they would miss a fascinating repository of scientific insight. "Listening to science" does not mean listening to materialist philosophers who haven't studied biology since their undergraduate days; "listening to science" *just means* listening to actual scientists, such as biologists and others who tell us that teleological functions are real and who treat them as if they were irreducible. Branding "heretics" and demoting their research as "anti-scientific" is a behavior more appropriate to the zealous defense of ideological materialism than it is to advancing the genuine researches of ground-breaking scientists.

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. (Even more strongly, 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.[60]) 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. Compare with Thomas Nagel's point that some "laws of nature would apply directly to the relation between the present and the future."[61]

Hence, to reject *all truths* about natural kinds, I contend, is to reject the best scientific deliverances of our best scientific evidence. As Perlman says, "It is surprising that analytic philosophers,

60. Prasada et al., "Conceptual Distinctions Amongst Generics."
61. @ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 93.

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."[62] The great cost of throwing out generics *as a class* threatens to throw out a huge percentage of scientific statements in biology, organic chemistry, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, anatomy, and medicine.[63]

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 intimidating, mechanical, Laplacian terms.

Arguing for or against teleoreductionism has become a cottage industry.[64] 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.

Reply

James Barham argues that neither of these forms of reduction is very promising: "In a nutshell, the problem is that neither theory can explain the normative character of biological processes

62. Cosby, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 6.

63. We must not forget that the term 'science' is an abstraction. The only real thing is scientists and their statements. Scientists disagree, and some of their statements are proven false by the research of other scientists.

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

in a coherent manner."[65] 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? James Barham elaborates:

> With respect to the "causal-role" theory, there is no way to distinguish between functional and non-functional parts of a biological system without presupposing the normative character of the overall system as a whole – which begs the question at issue.

As regards the second form, Thompson insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past."[66] Barham agrees. He says:

> With respect to the "selected-effects" theory, the problem is that selection history is conceptually irrelevant to the identification of function. True, it has a role to play in explaining how present-day functions have come to exist. But selection history cannot possibly explain what it is about a biological process that constitutes it as a function… The reason is that our concept of function in no way depends on evolutionary history. If it did, then biologists like Aristotle, Galen, Harvey, and innumerable others who lived long before Darwin would not have had the means to identify the functions of organs, which they of course did. Sometimes, they got it wrong, as when Aristotle placed the seat of perception and thought in the heart, instead of the brain (though some of his predecessors got it right). But Aristotle's mistake was due to his inadequate knowledge of physiology, not to his ignorance of evolution.

If neither forms of 'teleoreduction' are likely to account for the normativity of the biological function in question, then it is a fundamental truth not only that hearts cause blood to be pumped but that hearts *are for* pumping blood – that is their natural function. And that is just the hypothesis Barham argues is the most likely:

65. James Barham, "Confessions of an Atheist Darwin-Doubter" (Web; Evolution News, 2012), `http://www.evolutionnews.org/2012/05/confessions_of059861.html`.

66. Cf. Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 293. 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.

> In a series of important articles and books over the past decade or so [many authors] have cast grave doubt on the coherence of any reductive analysis of function. Some of these authors (e.g., Jacobs, Maund, Zammito) call explicitly for a reconsideration of the possibility that teleological phenomena in biology might be both objectively real and irreducible.[67]

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.[68] Teleological realism in biology is making a come-back. For instance, Arnhart persuasively argues that teleology is assumed in medicine.[69] Zammito clarifies ongoing relevance in biology, since organisms seem to be intrinsically purposeful.[70]

Thomas Nagel is a third who has followed out the argument for natural teleology from a much broader, cosmic perspective, though he too denies that the cosmos is like an orchestra being played.[71] Though Nagel took a lot of heat for his argument, Michael Chorost's review of *Mind and Cosmos* reminds readers that natural teleology is not so scientifically heretical as it might first seem. He says:

> Natural teleology is unorthodox, but it has a long and honorable history. For example, in 1953 the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley argued that it's in the nature of nature to get more advanced over time. "If we take a snapshot view, improvement

67. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 10. Barham cites: Bedau (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1993), Cameron (2004), Christensen & Bickhard (2002), Jacobs (1986), Manning (1997), Maund (2000), McLaughlin (2001, 2009), Mossio et al. (2009), Mundale & Bechtel (1996), Nanay (2010), Nissen (1997), Perovic (2007), Walsh (2006).

68. Ibid.

69. Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics."

70. 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.

71. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*.

> eludes us," he wrote. "But as soon as we introduce time, we see trends of improvement."… [the furthermore] paleontologist Simon Conway Morris, at the University of Cambridge, has argued that natural structures such as eyes, neurons, brains, and hands are so beneficial that they will get invented over and over again. They are, in effect, attractors in an abstract biological space that pull life in their direction. Contingency and catastrophe will delay them but cannot stop them. Conway Morris sees this as evidence that not only life but human life, and humanlike minds, will emerge naturally from the cosmos: "If we humans had not evolved, then something more or less identical would have emerged sooner or later."[72]

If scientists can countenance natural normativity via natural teleology as respectable, we philosophers not do the same? Certainly natural teleology is out of fashion; but the winds of intellectual fashion blow hither and yon, and we may yet discover that Aristotle was right.[73] Either way, philosophers of various schools (metaphysicians and ethicists) would do well to dialogue with biologists and cosmologists to come to grips with the possibility that our best evidence suggests that nature is normative.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to meet the **Bald Nature Challenge to Ethical Naturalism** stated above, and to clear away the **Scientific Facts** and **Teleological Nihilism** objections. 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 irredicubily normative. These are natural formal and functional or teleological facts about natural kinds and about living beings. Such facts are expressed in perfectly respectable

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

73. Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*.

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.

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. The argument that 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, all generics can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
2. Some true generics are about humans (there are some human natural norms).
3. Therefore, some true generics about humans 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.

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 scepticism about the possibility that 'moral evaluation' could be like this.[74]

74. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.

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, as she insists, "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.'[75] 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.[76]

The point here is that 'goodness' is not a sui-generis, non-natural property projected by human beings out onto the world; 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. 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.[77]

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.

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75. Ibid., 39.
76. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 195.
77. Ibid., 217.

Chapter 4

Normativity of Human Nature: Philestine Scientism versus the Practical Point of View

"Human nature is normative, such that to be morally good is to fulfill one's nature."

– Chris Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism", 221.

"The human alone of the animals possesses speech."

– Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1253a.

"It was not man who made the myths but the myths, or the archetypal substance they reveal, which made man. We shall have to come, I am sure, to think of the archetypal element in myth in terms of the wind that breathed through the harp-strings of individual brains and nerves and fluids, rather as the blood still today pervades and sustains them."

–Owen Barfield, "The Harp and the Camera," in *The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays*.

I. Human Generics

Recall Hursthouse's earlier statement that ethical evaluations of *human beings* "depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question." It is clear that success of our endeavor depends on finding true generic propositions about 'the human being' qua natural kind. Is this a

hopeful search?

It is. We reasonably assume that humans are natural entities importantly similar to animals, plants, and other living organisms, even though they are also importantly different in exhibiting features like language and society.[1] As natural entities, and since scientific statements are about natural entities, then it is possible (and indeed quite common) to make scientific statements about us, even though we exhibit differences from other natural entities.

Identifying those "differences" between humans and other natural entities is part of task. The desired generics cannot be *merely* descriptions of our genes, organ systems, 30 billion brain neurons, and so on. They must also capture what is ethical or potentially ethical about human beings as rational creatures. Hursthouse explains:

> 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. 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.[2]

As an example, "humans are language-using primates" is the kind of generic we must defend as *both* "objective" and scientific *and* practical and ethical. The task of this chapter is to provide a conception of human nature that is both accurately descriptive and normative. We must first uncover, if possible, a set of scientific generics about humanity, specifying what kind of a creature human beings are and what kind of life they live by nature. Such generics, it is hoped, will give us initial insight into the concept of virtue and practical reason, which are our main themes. The subsequent chapters will provide more detail into the concept and content of virtue.

1. By calling humans 'natural' here I only wish to present an innocent truism: we are here, in nature. We are material. Not necessarily *wholly* material, but we are *at least* material; we eat food grown on earth, drink water from the earth, are we born from fellow humans and do we die and disintegrate into the earth like every other living thing.

2. Ibid., 217.

Obstacles

The obstacles to this task are from two quite different quarters. The first obstacle is from those critics (such as Bernard Williams and Lewins) who are underwhelmed by the arguments of the previous chapter and remain pessimistic about the prospects of teleological ethics.

This first sort of critic might object there are no objective properties of humanity, accessible from the objective, external, scientific point of view or that such objective properties are value-neutral and hence (as per the is-ought gap) useless for normative purposes.

The second obstacle is from those critics (such as McDowell and Hursthouse) who are optimistic about the prospects for teleological ethics, but share with the first sort of critic a skepticism about appeal to biology. This second sort of critic urges us to look no further than human rationality. Our rational nature is enough to ground teleological ethics. These objections, and response to them, will occupy us for this chapter.

Let's state them in a bit more detail.

No Human Nature Objection

The first objection is simply that there is no human nature and hence there can be no true generics about humanity. We can recall Williams' suspicion above that Darwinism has dispensed with the teleological outlook, and Mayr's belief that somehow modern science (especially Darwinism) has dispensed even with the essentialist notion of species.[3] Likewise, Arthur Ward argues that "naturalists should reject the idea of "human nature," and indeed should reject that any organism or its parts or operations has a nature, purpose, proper function, or the like."[4]

3. Cf. ibid., chap. 10; Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, chap. 5; Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory."

4. Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory," 1.

Irrelevance

The other side of the same coin is Lewins' objection that if there is such a thing as human nature it is "an extremely permissive one" which "offers no ethical guidance". Even if "natural norms" such as those argued for in the previous chapter existed, this objection says, they would be irrelevant from the practical point of view.[5] For if objective norms may be known from an external, scientific point of view, even so, they are impractical; human rationality allows us to reflect upon them and decide whether or not to allow them to count as reasons for action. Alternately, if norms of practical reason are knowable from within the practical (subjective, internal, non-scientific) point of view, then they the objective facts of our nature are irrelevant. Hursthouse says, "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[6]

Hursthouse puts the irrelevance objection this way:

> I shall assume, without argument, that McDowell is right … [that] the pretensions of an Aristotelian naturalism are not, in any ordinary understanding of the terms, either 'scientific' or 'foundational'. It does not seek to establish its conclusions from 'a neutral point of view'. Hence it does not expect what it says to convince anyone whose ethical outlook or perspective is largely different from the ethical outlook from within which the naturalistic conclusions are argued for.[7]

> This is a major part of the genuinely transforming effect the fact of our rationality has on the basic naturalistic structure. But has it transformed the structure beyond recognition? I said that ethical naturalism looks to be doomed to failure if it depends on identifying what is characteristic of human beings as a species, in the way their pleasures and pains and ways of going on are characteristic of the other species. By and large we can't identify what is characteristic of human beings as a species in this way—there is too much variety. And even if we could, it looks as though we would not allow anything we identified to carry any normative weight if we thought it was something we could change. So is ethical naturalism, after all, a non-starter?[8]

5. Frey, "The Will and the Good." Her dissertation is a full-scale rebuttal of this objection. I shall review her arguments in a later chapter.

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

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 222.

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". However, it grounds ethical norms in the intrinsic ends that belong to practical reasoning creatures.

On this objection, the only "nature" common to all humans is rationality – but rationality involves self-determination and is therefore variable. Perhaps Stephen Brown's paradox is true: "Human nature is variability itself."[9] The variability of human lives, cultures, and beliefs is due to our freedom from the tyranny of genetics and environment. In other words, the major difference between humans as natural entities and other natural entities is our set of rational capacities. Unlike any other creature in the physical cosmos, we demonstrate the ability to speak, to think, reason, deliberate, judge, set projects, pursue goals, reflect, communicate, form societies, create cultures, and so on. But, if by being practical reasoners we are free of the tyranny of biology, then biology is irrelevant to morality.

Polyanna Objection

A third and final objection Lott calls the "Polyanna Problem" in that virtue ethicists are liable to be naively optimistic about what such a search through nature might discover.[10] To see this problem, supposing that the other two objections have been overcome: human norms are discoverable and demonstrable both practical and relevant. Still are such norms merely "protonormative"[11] or fully *ethical*? Are we obligated to fulfill all such norms? Just some? How are they to be distinguished from unethical, vile behaviors also statistically common among human behaviors? Empirically, some acorns become fully grown, mature oaks, but other acorns become stulted, sickly specimens. Most acorns never become anything other than acorns before they disintegrate into dust in the soil. So

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

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

11. Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory," chap. 2.

statistical majorities will not do the trick. Likewise, norms can be discovered for both good and evil: Some animals protect their young while other animals abandon or even consume their young. Some humans are kind and gentle while others are vicious and cruel. 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.[12]

Can we move from vague statements such as "human beings are language users" to particular moral statements: 'Human beings make and keep promises'?

II. Human Nature: Generic Truths about Humans

These three objections can be overcome, but they are important tools for framing this project. Overcoming them will occupy us for this chapter. To overcome them, let's first assemble a sample of scientific generics about humanity. What can we – by careful observation and inductive generalization – confidently say about genetically modern humans without much scientific controversy? Examining ourselves "from the outside" as it were, from an external, objective, cool, scientific view point, what is a *homo sapiens sapiens*? In contemporary classificatory scheme, we can locate ourselves as animals in the phylum chordata, the class mammalia, the order of primates, the suborder haplorhini, the familiy hominidae, the genus homo, the species homo sapiens.

Suppose that the earth was formed about 4.5 billion years ago and that life arose on earth 3.5 billion years ago. Suppose that anatomically modern humans arose on the earth about 200,000 years ago or in the "Late Pleistocene of 120,000 years ago."[13] The first among our species lived in Africa. They emigrated from that landmass and settled in various parts of the globe. Humans' heights range from 4'7" to 6'3" (plus or minus) and weights range from 120-180 pounds (plus or

12. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 14.
13. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 102.

minus). They have 23 chromosomes in each somatic cell, with about 22,000 total genes. They are mammals that reproduce sexually, gestate in utero, and give live birth. Unlike other mammals, females go through menopause. They tend to thrive best in climates averaging between 42-80 degrees farenheit[14], but can survive in extreme cold. 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. Genetically modern humans don't just hunt and gather but farm, store, combine, ferment, and cook food. They have opposable thumbs, are bipedal, and walk upright. They have large brains relative to other primates, with a neocortex and prefrontal cortex that correlate with abstract thinking, problem solving, society, and culture. And indeed, humans live in cultures and societies. 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 and moral. 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).

Is there anything of potential ethical significance in this collection of commonplaces? I think so. Indeed, this collection admits of patterns. If we had to gather up the individual features into categories, we could capture most of them under two categories: animal (of a particular sort) and rational. Even the upright posture, opposable thumbs, and large neocortex of genetically modern humans are intimately tied to our language use, symbol use, creativity, science, and sociality. Without the hands that we have, we could not create nearly as much as we do. Without the brains that

14. Yuming Guo et al., "Global Variation in the Effects of Ambient Temperature on Mortality: A Systematic Evaluation," *Epidemiology (Cambridge, Mass.)* 25, no. 6 (2014): 781.

we have, we could not think, speak, organize into language-groups and create culture.

Physical, Alive, Animal, Rational, Practical

The concept of an 'animal', as I argued in the previous chapter, entails the presence of certain natural teleological and formal facts.

> Further, 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.[15]

This also entails the notion of *potential*. Even single celled organisms have the potential to reproduce and develop. As 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 onstant flow of information, matter and energy.[16]

Mammals begin life as tiny cells and progress through gestation to infancy, maturation, and adulthood, at which point they typically reproduce themselves before dying. All of these phases we notice in human animals as well. Attempts to characterize human nature, however broadly, must not only cite our *physicality* – our relation to the physical world – but our *animality* – our relation to the living world as a whole. What property or set of properties differentiates humans from any other animal, or any other physical object? So the property of being an animal encompasses a whole range of biological and neurophysiological facts that obtain in each normal human being.

However, the concept of 'rationality' is new. We use terms like 'reason' and ratio as abstractions to describe a set of capacities we notice in ourselves. For example, activities that get called

15. Mautner, "Life-Centered Ethics, and the Human Future in Space," 434–5.
16. Ibid., 435.

'rational' are activities such as to observe, perceive as, create, reflect, decide, determine, abstract, infer, explain, deduce, remember, predict, criticize, praise, blame, admonish, and so on.

What are our rational capacities? First, speech.[17] Aristotle observed that, "Man alone of the animals possesses speech." Though other animals have speech and communication, nothing in modern science has superceded or contradicted the observation (obvious to anyone) that human speech is different. Other animals that communicate use non-grammatical closed systems with a small, finite set of symbols.[18] Our language is unique: it is grammatical, open-ended, recursive, and productive.

We are animals who speak. Through our animality comes a sensitivity to our surroundings, the ability to see the sun and moon which are millions (or hundreds of thousands) of miles away, to hear our fellow creatures, and to "take in" the whole cosmos into consciousness. 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.[19]

Rational capacities are identified by the actions of rational creatures. As Haldane says, quoting the medieval scholastics, "acting follows being" and "things are specified by their power."[20] We just do deliberate, explain, propose theories, judge truth and falsity, wonder, inquire, and so on.

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

18. 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.

19. 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."

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

Rationality is also the capacity to judge true and false, to affirm and deny. This is the view of Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians (among others).

While I shall have to say more about practical rationality in a later chapter, here I need only to specify that our nature as rational animals *includes* the notion that we are *practical* rational animals. That is, 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."[21] We set goals and act in order to achieve goals. In the unity of reason between theoretical and practical that I shall ground both moral and intellectual virtue. All the acts of reason (whether theoretical or practical) are acts of *reason.* (I shall pick up the theme of practical rationality in a later chapter.)

And the property of being potentially rational encompasses a range of psychological, intellectual, and cultural facts that obtain in each normal human being.

More specifically, all of these activities are (a) actions or practices consciously performed or conducted by an agent, that (b) aim to know what is true, what the world is like, and what to do about it, and (c) are essential social activities in that they are essentially linguistic and language is acquired only with a social context (such as family or culture).

Hypothesis

The generic we were looking for at the beginning needed to be *relevant*, *ethical* (or potentially ethical), and needed to go beyond its legitimate rival – the McDowellian objection that rational, social teleology is all that is needed for a grounding of virtue.

The hypothesis we have discovered is simply this: 'human beings are practical, rational animals'. There is, it seems, a great deal of truth to the old formula, that to be human is to be a rational animal. Or, if you prefer to dress up the matter in more detailed and scientific termi-

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

nology, we might say that our species is an intentional primate, the only language-using semiotic, self-concious, intentional, primates.

If human beings *really are* rational animals, we may initially hypothesize that that an *irrational* human is ipso facto defective.[22] (As above, I do not here intend to discuss mental illness, disability, birth defect, chromosomal disorders, and other such exceptions to 'normal' functional humans.) Initially, then, we should expect that the qualities that count as virtues for practical rational animals are those that enable us to actualize our life form and fulill our natural functions.

Hans Fink agrees with my hypothesis:

> 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 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.[23]

In the old classificatory schemes, philosophers provided a genus and a differentia.

Potential

I must hasten to add that "humans are practical, rational animals" is a generic. It admits of exceptions. Anacephalic babies are not even potentially rational, for they lack the subvenient brain structure necessary for rational consciousness, yet they are recognizably *human* (they are not opossums), just defectively so. (A war veterans is still human even if he or she is no longer bipedal!) Injury, illness, genetic defect, radiation poisoning, and any number of other negative factors may render a human being sub-rational. Coma, mental illness, and other factors may render a human being

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

23. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 207.

non-practical (unable to direct his or her own life to a normal degree). The point of the argument above was that generic truths about humans inform us about the lifeform of the species.

This helps to rebut a playful jab from Bertrand Russell, who says: "Man is a rational animal —- so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life I have been looked diligently for evidence in favour of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it."[24] Part of the skepticism from analytic philosophers to the neo-Aristotelian project stems, I think, from this worry. Nevertheless, the concept of nature being deployed here is of the appeal of the neo-Aristotelian project is a clear concept of nature that applies to both humans and other animals.

A nature is an abstract property. It is a set of capacities delimiting the range of potentialities of a given object or living being. Natures are in this sense empirically discovered and inductively generalized set of potentialities latent in a species, captured in generics. Accordingly, human nature is a set of potentialities to realize our animal and intellectual activities, including reproduction, metabolisis, rational choice, abstract reflection, and so on. This is the solution to Russell's playful jab. Not all people — not most, perhaps not even many people — fulfill their rational potential by becoming thoroughly rational people, free of the banes of intellectual life: ignorance, intellectual laziness, illogical inferences, the distractions of irrational psychological factors, attachment to prejudice and bias, informal fallacies, and so on. Rather, overcoming all these banes would exemplify the fulfillment of human nature.

Generics as a Basis for Virtue

Someone might be wondering: What does all of this have to do with virtue? Peter Geach says "Men need virtues as bees need stings."[25] Philippa Foot echoes Geach's statement about "need" and "necessity" as well. Alasdair MacIntyre subtitled his most recent monograph: "human beings need the virtues."[26] The kind of necessity being predicated here is the same kind of necessity with

24. Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (2009), p. 45 %%%
25. Geach, *The Virtues*, 17.
26. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

which a bee needs a sting. It is a formal and teleological necessity. 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.

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."[27]

Something changes when we examine human beings compared to all other animals or all other natural kinds.[28] 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*.

And this is how virtues appear, in general. Rosalind Hursthouse says that: "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."[29] These truisms encompass our everyday moral judgments about who is admirable much more broadly than our judgments about who is morally upstanding or who avoids being morally despicable. There is more to being an admirable person than *avoiding* transgressions. Nicholas Gier's memorable image of the "couch potato" illustrates this point. The Couch Potato works a mindless job which he is able adequately to perform while watching television (and today we can add, checking his Facebook and Twitter feeds); he rarely rises except to receive himself and microwave his dinners; he is even religious, watching his favorite preachers on Sunday morning television and tithing regularly. Yet the couch potato is by my standards living a wasted life and pitiable life. (I am counting on your similar intuition.) We do not want to imprison him for being

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

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

29. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics."

such a failure; but we certainly do not admire how he lives. By contrast, admirable people command our respect for being morally upstanding, and so much more. We admire them for their brains, their guts, their strength, their rare talents, their outstanding achievements, their unimaginable creativity, their wit and eloquence. Some people are remarkable for *what they are given* (great beauty, great intelligence, and so on). But the admirable person is remarkable not just for good fortune. In fact, admirable people are often admirable for overcoming extraordinarily bad fortune. We truly admire *what they do* with *what they are given*. In a word, we admire how they live.

> So, summing up, a good social animal (of one of the more sophisticated species) is one that is well fitted or endowed with respect to (i) its parts, (ii) its operations, (iii) its actions, and (iv) its desires and emotions; whether it is thus well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve (1) its individual survival, (2) the continuance of its species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, and (4) the good functioning of its social group—in the ways characteristic of the species.[30]

III. Objections

No Human Nature Objection

One worry mentioned above is that human nature is a mess. For all we can tell (without the benefit of divine revelation) humanity is an anomaly. Our origin is shrouded in mystery, our destiny undecided. Our evolutionary history has bestowed upon us what Bernard Williams calls "ill-sorted bricolage of powers and instincts":

> The second and more general reason lies not in the particular ways in which human beings may have evolved, but simply in the fact that they have evolved, and by natural selection… 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). Other naturalistic views, Marxist and some which indeed call themselves 'evolutionary', have often proclaimed themselves free from any such picture, but it is basically very hard for them

30. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 202.

> to avoid some appeal to an implicit teleology, an order in relation to which there could be an existence which would satisfy all the most basic human needs at once. The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way into ethical thought.[31]

Response

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."This is Fitzpatrick's main worry, not that we have evolved poorly, but that we evolved at all.[32] He argues that evolved organisms have a telos to reproduce, not to "flourish".

That said, natural teleology is certainly incompatible with a teleological nihilism distinctive of (certain brands) of metaphysical reductionism. But it is not incompatabile with evolution.

Strictly speaking, evolutionary theory may be summarized in five theses explaining the current multiplicity and shape of terrestrial life.[Cf. Plantinga[33] 8-9. 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.] Each separately and all together they explain biological processes of genetic mutation, reproduction, preservation, and proliferation. A sixth, not *necessarily* related Strictly speaking, about teleology, it says absolutely nothing.[34] As for those brands of metaphysical reductionism

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

32. William FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2016 (`http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/morality-biology/`, 2016).

33. *Where the Conflict Really Lies*.

34. Cf. ibid., 8–10. A sixth thesis, often appended to the first five, is that the process of natural selection is unguided. But regardless of its popularity among biologists this is, strictly speaking, a philosophical claim, not a biological one.

that are incompatible with natural teleology, if our knowledge of natural teleology is well-grounded enough then so much the worse for metaphysical reductionism.

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

> In each case we rely on the notion of natural kinds and their appropriate way of behaving:
>
> > [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.[35]

Hursthouse's primary response to Williams is that his worry is not actually rooted in the progress of modern science. He himself admits that "many of course have come to that conclusion before" (the conclusion that "human beings are to some degree a mess… for whom no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially.")[36] Rather, Hursthouse points out, his worry is an expression of moral nihilism and despair.[37] Williams believes human nature is a mess *because* he believes no form of life is completely satisfactory for everyone. But that blade cuts the other way. If one has hope that some form of life is or may be at least mostly satisfactory for at least some people, it makes sense to believe human nature is not completely a mess. And Hursthouse movingly praises hope as a virtue.

> > 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

35. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 257–8.
36. Ibid., 261, quoting from Williams.
37. I shall take up the topic of rational despair again in a later chapter.

> patches to our vices. True, it is not easy to hold on to them sometimes; despair and misanthropy are temptations. But we should.[38]

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

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

As for the second worry, some will say that humans are mere mammals, and that is the end of it. As Andrew Bailey says, "we are animals."[39] Stephen Brown argues that ethics is a descriptive discipline in the end; even virtue ethics, after being appropriately "naturalized", does not *commend* the virtues so much as *detail* the traits which happen to be adaptive for creatures like us to survive and propagate our genotype.[40] 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.

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38. Ibid., 265.
39. Bailey, "Animalism."
40. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*; Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue."

Response 2

My reply is that to say that humans are mammals is an empirical assertion; we exhibit quite a sufficient number of tell-tale properties shared by other mammals: a neocortex, hair, mammary glands, and hearts of a particular form and function. But to say that humans are *merely* mammals is a profoundly anti-empirical assertion. I even would tendentiously label it profoundly *anti-scientific*. For what we observe of ourselves both "from inside" and "from outside" we exhibit a range of properties not shared by other mammals: grammar and language, fire-making, cooking, sex for pleasure, abstract reasoning, science, philosophy, religion, mythology, agriculture. Of course, slippery spatial analogies like "inside" and "outside" admit of multiple senses: "inside" can and often does mean what can be known via introspection (e.g., the way I know what it feels like to be slighted or to be praised, the way I remember the color of my grandmother's house) and what can be known from accepting limitations of a first-personal or second-personal human point of view more generally (e.g., it appears that the sun orbits the earth rather than the other way around; and I know when my mother is upset because I just "know" that look). Looking at things from the "outside" might mean what can be known via sensory perception or what can be known – if anything – by pretending to a neutral, objective, third-person, God's eye view.[41] We can posit counterfactuals, as for example when we speculate what intelligent extraterrestrials would think of humans if they observed and studied our species, with fresh eyes, alongside every other. All that matters for my purposes now is that our species exhibits a range of peculiar activities that distinguish us from mammals, from animals more broadly, and from any other known natural entity in the cosmos – and that recognizing as much is an *empirical* matter. To deny our uniqueness is possible, after a long inquiry. But to be blind to our uniqueness from the outset is to be subject, in all likelihood, to philistine reductionism that has no more to do with genuine science than does belief in extraterrestrial life.

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

Irrelevance Objection

We need to turn now to the second major objection. McDowell urges that the is-ought gap is indeed a real problem, in so far as the "is" side of the gap (the biological side) is irrelevant to morality. He objects to the over-zealous application of empirical methods to ethics.

This objection he shares with non-naturalist realists, subjectivists, and moral anti-realists. On the other hand, he does not think that goodness is *purely* subjective, originating in moral evaluators and projected outward by them onto the world. I will try, in this section, to get a clear handle on this paradoxical view. An initial quotation from McDowell expresses his relation to Foot:

> 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.[42]

As this quotation makes clear, McDowell shares Foot's rejection of "subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism" but he disputes her "concept of nature". McDowell's classifies his own view as a "sort of naturalism" – namely "relaxed naturalism."[43] Farreira calls McDowell-type views "excellence naturalism" and Foot-type views "empirical naturalism". 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,

42. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 167.

43. He calls it by a variety of other names: 'liberal' naturalism' (McDowell, *Mind and World* 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).

"the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[44] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

What is his objection to Foot's view? She thinks that normative facts are response-independent features of nature. He says that the naive realist view (that moral values are response-independent) is "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[45] The first reason McDowell can't "take naive realism seriously" is that he finds one sort of motivational internalism absurd. He points to a "worry about how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[46] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie: the "central doctrine of European moral philosophy" is a mistake;[47] it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are. (McDowell's worry is akin to Mackie's bewilderment over the notion that "to-be-pursuedness" is built into things.) 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 instrinsic values as meaning and morality. He says, "The most striking occurence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science."[48] This objection McDowell shares with Gibbard and Blackburn.

Yet McDowell does not conclude (as many do), that therefore values are merely subjective; he does not conclude that there is no such thing as natural normativity. McDowell's anti-dualist position here (as elswhere!) is liable to puzzle or frustrate some philosophers. He is not a realist; but he is not an anti-realist. He is an "anti-anti-realist". McDowell is always fighting on two fronts, attacking a position without thereby supporting its apparent opposite. (Similarly, in *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism and "Rampont Platonism".) It may be worthwhile to make the contextual observation that McDowell's position here reflects his

44. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.
45. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds. (Blackwell, 2007), 137.
46. Ibid., 143.
47. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).
48. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 174.

broader project of *dissolving dualisms*. He says he is influenced by two main sources: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[49] 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[50] – philosophy that 'leaves everything as it is'[51]. That is, McDowell believes many philosophical puzzles arise not from puzzling reality but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": dualisms need to be *exorcized*.

It makes sense that McDowell disputes both Foot's brand of moral realism and also its apparent opposite, subjectivism and anti-realism. But 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.[52] We might paraphrase this thesis by saying that "natural normativities" are qualities *in the world* (not just in our heads) but they are not Lockean "primary qualities." They are, rather, Lockean secondary qualities.

Yet McDowell also disagrees with the opposite extreme of Foot's view, as represented by those (such as J.L. Mackie, Alan Gibbard, and Simon Blackburn) who believe that normativity is "projected" by philosophers and scientists onto the natural facts. Mackie's error theory gets right the common sense view that "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[53] Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[54] but not in that they are therefore illusory. A secondary quality

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

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

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

52. 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.

53. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 137.

54. Ibid., 139.

is not "a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[55]

He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[56] Experience of secondary qualities is a (sense) perceptual experience. This a Lockean doctrine. Redness is not *merely* a microscopic texture property (say, the texture that scatters all light waves except red ones) because microscopic textures don't *look red* and things that *look red* appear so to observers with no knowledge of such textures.

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

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

Goodness, badness, and other values are therefore grounded in "second nature."[57] The space of reasons in which our rational capacities operate makes us sensibile 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

55. Ibid., 139.
56. Ibid., 138.
57. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 188 and following.

primary facts into the space of reasons when they weren't there before.

McDowell, recall, thinks that values are secondary qualities of the world but not primary. This belief is consistent with his solution to the mind-body problem that even primary qualities are not given to us in experience without the involvement of spontaneous conceptual capacities. He assumes that nature – primary nature – is bald nature, disenchanted from values, teloi, and other esoterica. Yet to posit humanity, especially human rationality, as merely mechanical would be to deny our rationality. So he posits the space of reasons. Humanity exists in a space of reasons where we recognize reasons for belief and reasons for action. We are initiated into a Space of reasons by education, formation, cultivation (or *Bildung*).[58]

McDowell's fundamental solution to the mind-body problem in general is that the world given in experience is engaging both receptive and spontaneous capacities. We have to wonder about the implications of the "new interpretation of human experience"—and the location of the rational being within nature. McDowell does wonder about this, introducing the concept of second nature. Nature (we presume) is disenchanted. Human beings are natural—they exist within the disenchanted space of law. Yet, ex hypothesi the human being has (simultaneously) the capacity for spontaneous answerability to rational relations, which exist in a sui generis space of reason. These seem irreconcilable. 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."[59] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

Practical wisdom is a virtue that the young human being does not have, and the ethical demands of practical wisdom are not even perceptible to her. But she has the potential (within her nature) to develop the answerability to them. And ethical thinking is inculcated in a young person, and then later examined, but only examined from within ethical thinking. Human beings

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

are intelligibly 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 maturation and development of a new kind of faculty in the human animal. 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."[60] "[The ethical demands of reason] are essentially within reach of human beings. So practical wisdom is second nature to its possessors."[61]

Response

Both McDowell and Foot reject subjectivism; morality is not merely invented. So their disagreements, while serious, must be seen as an internecine disagreement.

Nevertheless, I think McDowell's ingenious alternative to "empirical naturalism" or "strict naturalism" is flawed. So, before I defend my own version of Footian realism, I would like to point out two or three aspects of the inadequacy of McDowell's constructivist alternative.

Dilemma Unrestricted or Restricted 'nature'?

McDowell faces a dilemma. He must choose between two incompatible definitions of nature, and he wants both. On the one hand, he wants the term 'nature' to analytically exclude anything falling under the description of 'supernatural'; on the other hand, he most emphatically does *not* want to exclude "second nature" of human thought and experience in the space of reasons. But he can't have what he wants, at least, not without further argumentation. He has merely asserted (but not earned the conceptual rights) to his conception of nature. Fink[62] expertly exposes McDowell's sleight of hand on this issue. To draw out the critique of McDowell that Fink and I share in common, I will have to present the details of his article.

60. Ibid., 79.
61. Ibid., 84.
62. "Three Sorts of Naturalism."

The first point, from Fink, picks up McDowell's statement that "Mrs Foot's writings do not pay much attention to the concept of nature in its own right". The conversations about 'two sorts of naturalism' or different kinds of 'ethical naturalism' are, after all, conversations about nature. What is 'nature?' Some might be impatient with such digressions, insisting that we can resolve this sticky business 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 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.[63]

And Fink is right. If the error of Foot's critics lies in a deeply-held, barely articulated belief that some concept "nature" cannot include any normative content, then the only thing for it is to thematize the concept of nature, make such beliefs explicit, and subject them to scrutiny.

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 human intervention (e.g., the arrangement of trees in the Yukon is natural) or "the empirical world as opposed to the intelligible world of the abstract, logical, or mathematical" (e.g., formal sciences contrast with sciences of nature.) All of these eight contrast with the (2) unrestricted nature. "Unrestricted nature" is just a multisyllabic synonym for "all." It leaves nothing out. This is the ninth option Fink summarizes as follows:

63. Ibid., 206.

> Such a ninth conception of nature would be an unrestricted conception. 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.[64]

With these distinctions in hand, we can observe a crucial point that no one philosophical view has copyright on the term 'naturalism.' For example, classical materialism is perhaps a paradigmatic form of 'naturalism.'[65] 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 classical materialism is not the *only* form of restricted nature. Rather, *the idealist, too, can rightly lay claim to the title of naturalism* – and not in a "Pickwickian" sense.

To see why idealism is a form of restricted naturalism, Fink takes a highly informative detour to analyze Plato's *Laws*. There he finds a Greek trichotomy 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 intervenion 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."[66] 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

64. Ibid., 206.

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

66. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato*, *Laws* 891cff.

> 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.

The Athenian proves his desired point – 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.

Fink's comment is that "This, I take it, is pretty rampant Platonism but clearly presented as an account of the soul as natural becaus eprimary in existence… mind is prior to world."[67] This brings us back around to idealism as naturalism. 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.

We can now see the crucial point about 'naturalism.' 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. Fink bolsters this point with a quotation from Aristotle showing that Aristotle is aware of the competition between the matter-form divide. "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."[68] His comment on this passage is:

67. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 215.

68. Ibid., 216, quoting from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2014) *Physics*: 2, 1 (192b7ff).

> 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.

The point of these reflections is that McDowell has argued persuasively that we must return return to the unrestricted conception of nature.

Neither restricted sort of nature

The restricted conceptions of nature (materialism and idealism) are in ideological battle; some philosophers are willing to pick a side and battle it out with the other side. The idealist can be guilty of presenting the spiritual or conceptual version of nature as absolute. McDowell sees the same question-begging in what he calls "philistine scientism."[69] As Fink summarizes:

> 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).[70]

Not unrestricted

Nevertheless, McDowell is of two minds. He rejects the restricted conceptions of nature offered him by the philistine scientism and by Kantian idealism. The only remaining route is an unrestricted conception of nature. Fink continues:

> 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.[ibid.[71] 219}

Culture, art, human intervention, rationality, and so on are part of the all. Fink quotes Dewey to make this point:

69. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 346.
70. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 219.
71.

> 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) 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 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.

Where the materialist and idealist are fighting over the definition of primary nature, the unrestricted conception refuses to fight, instead embracing both body and mind, brain and consciousness, matter and form, in a comprehensive view. While this has its attractions, the cost, however, is that one no longer has the right to criticize opponents on the basis of their positing something real over and above nature – such a criticism is meaningless once we have defined 'real over and above nature' as a contradiction in terms. This cost McDowell does not wish to pay.

McDowell must pick sides, but he has not allowed himself to pick sides. He rejects one sort of idealism[72] and rejects one sort of empiricism. Therefore, by default, it is a necessary consequence that he embraces the unrestricted conception of nature.

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 *name and claim* an unrestricted conception of nature while fully developing and endorsing a restricted conception of nature.

72. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*. He wants to dissolve the prejudice that we must be either Kantian transcendental idealists or reductive empiricists.

Sellars Example

To make the point even more clear, compare McDowell's refusal to pick sides with Sellars' example of the same. Sellars provides a specimen of such doublespeak in almost platonic purity:

> 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.[73]

The first sentence explicitly endorses an unrestricted conception of nature. The second sentence invisibly and secretly slides the ball into the other cup, explictly 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". The second sentence asserts: "Nature is all there is!" with an exclamation point and a loud voice. But nobody (not idealists or supernaturalists) dispute that "Nature (unrestricted nature) is all there is"; they only dispute the implicit assumption, that the space-time-causal-system is all there is.

Conclusion

I conclude that, despite their differences, McDowell shares with Mackie and other subjectivists radically reductive, disenchanted, Laplacian picture of material nature as a manifold of bald descriptive facts. The richer – and more scientific – unrestricted conception of nature is the one Foot (and MacIntyre) can help us to recover. McDowell merely asserts, without additional argument, the common prejudice that "modern science" somehow disenchants nature, when in fact the "partial re-enchantment" he himself endeavors to recover is already present *within modern science*.

James Barham captures the dualism into which McDowell unwitting 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

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

> 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.[74]

Values as primary qualities

A second critique is that McDowell himself *does* allow that "values" can be primary qualities in nature. The theory of danger also helps McDowell in his conclusion deny that his view is a variant of "projectivism." The "epistemology of danger" that arises from McDowell's "theory of danger"[75] helps explain moral epistemology. 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. His theory of "danger" is this: Just as there is *something* about red things *themselves* that makes them give us redness experiences, likwise 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 perceptial 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 to assume that we are projecting disgust onto the food; it is more plausible, by McDowell's

74. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 1.
75. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 142–3.

own lights, that we are being sensitive to what such foods *merit*, given the kind of foods they are and the kind of animals we are.

Scientific realism?

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." But if there is such a thing as "the scientific worldview" – the best thinking about the best deliverances of our best sciences – then it includes the deliverances of biology. 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 that the request is that we reject genuienly scientific knowledge from biology on behalf of philosphical materialism, which wields the word 'science' as a bludgeon with which to beat its ideological opponents. McDowell acknowledges that his critics will criticize him for failing to live up to "philistene scientism" and yet criticizes the Footian picture for philistene scientism.

Polyanna Objection