Chapter 1

Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism

"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-Aristotelian virtue theorists? Rosalind Hursthouse provides an authoritative list: Anscombe,[3]

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).

Geach,[4] Foot,[5] McDowell,[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

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

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

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

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

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. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011); 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. Jennifer Ann Frey, "The Will and the Good" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012).

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

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

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); Richard Kraut, Robert Adams, Gopal Sreenivasan, Rachana Kamtekar, Talbot Brewer, and R. Scott Smith. Also, in Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Normativity* (Open Court, 2008), Thomson provides a neo-Aristotelian account of normativity.

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

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' – 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

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

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

'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.

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

Regardless of the varying details, this first intrepretation 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

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,

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 virtue theory. That core is part-and-parcel of a larger Aristotelian tradition that is in tension or competition with the 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).[30] Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, Bernard Williams, Iris Murdoch and others have done philosophical ethics a valuable service by correcting certain myopic tendencies.

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 triangle, 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."[31] The correction is to ethically examine *whole actions*

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*.

29. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 170.

30. I shall attempt to justify some of these assertions in a later chapter.

31. Ibid., 174.

– 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."[32] 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."[33] We shall return to these themes in a later chapter.

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

32. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 123.

33. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 209. Hauerwas continues: This may seem a small philosophical point, but much revolves around it: His understandings of the centrality of practical reason, the significance of the body for agency, why the teleological character of our lives must be displayed through narrative, the character of rationality, the nature of the virtues, why training in a craft is paradigmatic of learning to think as well as live, his understanding of why the Enlightenment project had to fail, his particular way of being a historicist, and why the plain person is the necessary subject of philosophy." Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, 2007.

34. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 173.

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.

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 one every person who comes to major crossroads in life must ask. "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 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?)

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 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 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

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

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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 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

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.

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

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.

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

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. 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. 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

(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.

(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."[53] 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 term 'naturalist' here somewhat Pickwickian."[54] Such confusion arises from 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. 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:

2. My thesis is naturalistic in that I propose to use only the methods of experience, reason, philosophy, and natural sciences in identifying my initial premises and advancing my claims.
3. It is naturalistic in that I argue 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.
4. It is naturalistic according to what Hans Fink calls an "unrestricted conception of nature."[55] 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."[56]

The importance of these stipulations will become clear in a later chapter. And those who wish to

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

54. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."

55. Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 210.

56. Ibid., 210.

challenge this stipulation will, I hope, receive a satisfying answer. For example, I shall defend a conception of 'nature' or the 'natural' in the following two chapters. 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)."[57] Quine thought (or claimed he thought) that "naturalistic philosophy is continuous with natural science"[58] 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 to be almost infinitely inclusive: it does not exclude Spinozistic pantheism or panpsychism.[59]

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.[60] Ruse's famous expression is

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

58. (1995a), 256–7, see also 1969, 126–7.

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

60. Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies*

that "morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes."[61] Others – such as Wielenberg and Thomas Nagel – find evolutionary theory either irrelevant to morality or a possible source of *vindication* of moral realism.[62] 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,[63] 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 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

127, no. 1 (2006): 109–66.

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

62. 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.

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

and reflective."[64]

By taking advantage of the expansive definitio scientific naturalism, neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism defends a view of nature as normative, in that it is (at least in s e 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 me 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 atural teleology in general.

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.[65] 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."[66] On this view, teleological ethics is inherently pre-modern and therefore outmoded.[67] On this view, any attempt to revive virtue talk is guilty of being anti-

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

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

66. 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."

67. I shall discuss in a later chapter an instance of this type of skepticism from Bernard Williams: "The idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best

quarian and nostalgic until proven innocent.

While it is true that some modern sciences focus exclusively on non-teleological causes (material, efficient, and possibly formal causes), methodologically excluding phenomena from study is different from denying such phenomena outright. Furthermore, some modern sciences (such as biology, ecology, medicine, and others) do irreducibly and unavoidably focus on teleological causes, as we shall see.

The differences between teleological niilism and teleological realism have significant ramifications for humanistic ethics, as MacIntyre has argued. John Horton and Susan Mendus summarize the contrast between 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 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.[68]

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."[69] 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

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.

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

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

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.[70]

Now, MacIntyre's account of virtue is not Aristotelian but "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.

A governing condition of my project is the optimism 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.[71]

---

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

71. 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; 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.[72]) Some neo-Aristotelians are atheists, some Platonists, others Christians or some other sort of theist.[73] 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.[74] 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

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

73. 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.

74. 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 and religion in general.[75]

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).[76]

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.[77]

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 have a further, divine origin.

---

75. 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)

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

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

My suggested name for this type of relaxed or liberal naturalism is Recursive Naturalism.[78] By this epithet, I aim to capture several facts. First, though human beings are natural and continuous with the rest of nature, human beings can hold nature in consciousness. With human beings comes into the cosmos intentionality or "aboutness." And one of the things that human beings can be conscious about is themselves, or all of the cosmos including themselves. Just as Droste Effect[79] the human mind can know even that part of nature that is *the human mind consciously thinking about nature*. Nature recurs within nature, that one part of nature (us) knows nature (the cosmos) including that part of nature that we are. Secondly, my definition of virtue is recursive, since virtues are defined (in part) as those qualities that enable a moral agent to acquire more virtues. Thirdly, my definition of practical wisdom is recursive, since practical wisdom is defined (in part) as that the know-how one needs to acquire more wisdom. Fourthly, my definition of human flourishing is recursive, since flourishing is defined (in part) as the state in which a human being is becoming more virtuous, becoming more practically wise, and discovering more detail about the definition of human flourishing.

III. Why neo-Aristotelian matters

Virtue ethics is, on my view, a very useful guide to action,[80] in personal life, political life, bioethics,[81] business,[82] and education.[83] It would be an improvement to almost any area of human life if we

78. 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.

79. Which is a painting on a box of cocoa of the dutch girl holding a box of cocoa (which shows a painting of a dutch girl holding a box of cocoa, etc.)

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

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

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

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

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 the pursuit and acquisition 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 [illegible]ight 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. [illegible]Glaucon said to Socrates, "The measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life."[84] But my hope is that even an unworthy treatment of a worthy topic will attain some value.

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