Chapter 1

Humans and Natural Goodness

- *"Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."* (Mark Perlman, "The Modern Resurrection of Teleology in Biology", 151)
- *"Man alone of the animals possesses speech."* (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1253a)

Rosalind Hursthouse argues that although ethical evaluations of human beings are "disanalogous to non-ethical ones in various ways, both depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question."[1] The notion that natural, descriptive facts can serve as premises in arguments with normative conclusions is central to ethical naturalism. Likewise central is the notion that some natural facts just are moral facts. If normative evaluations can be grounded in factual descriptions of the identity and characteristics of a species, this would be momentous: "is" statements would underwrite "ought" statements. But is this right?

The "is-ought" gap seems to render hopeless the thought, articulated by Hursthouse, that we can evaluate things on the basis of what they are.[2] Simply put, the is-ought gap is the intuitive notion

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

2. The major problem I shall address has various names, but the name I prefer is "the is-ought gap". G. E. Moore had a different name for this problem, but his name would just muddy the waters. If absolutely necessary, I shall only call Moore's version "The Fallacy That Shall Not Be Named."

that one cannot learn anything about *what ought to be* simply by examining *what is*.[3] 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 unless we supply an additional, brutely normative premise such as that *He ought to wear whatever most people wear*. And *that* premise is not one we learned from observation. More broadly, one cannot deduce from anthropological facts (say, that all humans in all cultures wear some type of clothing) any normative conclusions (that humans *ought* to wear clothing. We cannot settle a controversy among nudists by citing statistical generalities.)

Likewise, in ethics, the is-ought gap seems devastating. Even supposing we gathered a whole collection of reliable scientific truths about humans – from anthropology, psychology, sociology, and also biology, chemstry, physics – we 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.[4] Such findings might be interesting, but the is-ought gap reminds us that they are a far cry from *ethical* insights.

3. 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).

4. "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.

The is-ought gap poses a serious challenge to the neo-Aristotelian strategy Hursthouse and others are pursuing. (While the other challenges are formidable, the is-ought gap is the central challenge of this chapter.) The solution I shall defend is natural normativity in the form of natural teleological facts. Hursthouse, Philippa Foot, John McDowell, MacIntyre, and Stephen Brown aim to overcome (or rather to pre-emptively undercut) the is-ought gap by the identification of some formal or teleological concept that can license normative judgments – whether that is Hursthouse's "characteristic", or a "life-form"[5] or "form of life"[6], or "human nature", or a human telos. Rather than "overcoming" the gap (which assumes the gap Is still in place), these theorists' strategy is to uncover a kind of formal or teleological fact that defies the strict separation between 'is' and 'ought.' As Stephen Brown puts it, "Human beings are a species of social animal for which there is a characteristic way of life. An individual human being may be evaluated as good or bad according to how well that individual realizes the human way of life."[7] The concept of a "human way of life", in Brown's argument, is unapologetically both descriptive and normative, both formal and teleological.

For the sake of simplicity, let us call the kind of formal facts such neo-Aristotelians use as a ground for their ethical theory 'natural normativity.' 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 ethical naturalism.

There are, of course, other problems for ethical naturalism in general: the "Open Question" argument is a major one. Even supposing we discovered some characteristic of a species – say, that it pursues its own survival. It is in order to query whether it *ought* to pursue its own survival? Natural

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

6. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 339.

7. R. Stephen Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature: A Defense of Ethical Naturalism* (Continuum, 2008), 1.

I. Natural Norms or Social Norms?

Forms and Teloi in Nature, Empirical Naturalism or Excellence Naturalism, Strict Naturalism or Liberal Naturalism, First or Second Nature?

There are two competing strategies to be found among the neo-Aristotelians for pre-emptively undercutting the is-ought gap via natural normativity.[8] One strategy is to defend the view that something about humanity (say, our rational capacity) is naturally and inherently teleological. For example, perhaps one of the functions of being a practically rational creature is that humans construct for themselves goals and attempt to achieve them by various means.[9] 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 "Social Teleology."[10] This kind of social or rational teleology is the safer of the two strategies, and is followed by McDowell, Hursthouse, and the early MacIntyre. 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 and animals act to survive and perform whatever instinctual actions are necessary for them to grow and develop into the state of species-specific maturity. At least some natural entities – living organisms – have ineliminable, irreducible, normative properties.[11] Call this Natural Teleology. Natural Teleology is the preferred strategy of Foot, Thompson, and the later MacIntyre,

8. John McDowell, in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, vol. 167 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics, Old and New," ed. Stephen Gardiner (Cornell University Press, 2005).

9. 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.

10. Compare with Marinus Farreira, "Reasons from Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism," 2011 calls this "excellence naturalism" as opposed.

11. Compare with Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 117. The existence of life can "give rise to beings of the kind that have a good—-beings for which things can be good or bad."

and others.[12] In the spirit of devil-may-care adventure seeking, I shall pursue the more ambitious strategy of defending natural normativity in all living things, not just human beings. However, the notion of human (and only human) normativity remains a fail-safe. For those who find the concept of natural normativity completely unpalettable, I hope to render it at least conceivable. For those who remain unconvinced, I shall hope to convince them that the facts of social teleology are enough to ground the theory of virtue I develop in a later chapter.

I should mention a third – even more ambitious – sort of strategy is to defend the view that *all* of nature is teleological. This is the notion that everything – including stars and rocks – "has a purpose", as if the cosmos were an orchestra being played. Call this Cosmic Teleology. Though such natural normativity in the form of natural teleology has its recent defenders.[13] But even in my spirit of adventure seeking, I do not wish to venture this far. 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.

Each of these two predominant strategies faces its major challenge. For example, even 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. Bernard Williams summarizes the antiquated worldview

12. 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; Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*; Mariska Leunissen, *Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Science of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Mark Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *Philosophy of Biology. An Anthology*, 2009, 149–63; James Barham, *PhD Dissertation: Teleological Realism in Biology* (Web; University of Notre Dame, 2011).

13. Tim Mulgan, *Purpose in the Universe: The Moral and Metaphysical Case for Ananthropocentric Purposivism* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*; Peter Kreeft, *Summa Philosophica* (St. Augustine, 2012).

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.[14]

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.

The second strategy has its own, even bigger, problems. 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. Abandoning the search for natural teleology was a harbinger of modern science; Francis Bacon and others believed that the search for final causes corrupted science. So, if best science tells us that nature is *only* descriptive, natural normativity is dismissed out of court.[15]

And many scientific naturalists do indeed think that the scientific conception of "bald nature" (McDowell's phrase for non-normative nature) is incompatible with the kind of natural normativity found in Foot's brand of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. Evolutionary biology, for instance, tells us that genetically modern humankind is the latest in a series of species. This is prima facie in

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

15. 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."

tension with the notion of 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.[16]

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.[17] 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.

Not all the neo-Aristotelians are optimistic about the strategy of grounding human ethics in natural normativity. Even if natural teleological facts are among those facts that can be hypothesized and confirmed scientifically, there remains one final problem for this strategy. Which teleological facts are we to pick out? 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. Similarly, 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."[18]

And McDowell's worries I will review below. Despite this battery of legitimate worries, I shall defend Foot's strategy of Natural Teleology against McDowell's strategy of Social Teleology. In doing so, I

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

17. 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).

18. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 14.

shall summarize and bolster her arguments, offering a more rigorous argument for the fundamental premise that some natural facts are brutely normative, teleological facts. In the end, I do not think these two notions of normativity are *contradictory*. A "third type" of naturalism would combine and synthesize them.[19]

II. An Initial Argument for Natural Normativity

Let's begin with Philippa Foot. Foot argues that human virtues are instances of a broader class of natural properties: 'natural goodness.'[20] 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 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

19. Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 202–21. The criteria for this third sort of naturalism are sketched brilliantly by Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 220–50. 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.

20. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001); cf. Sanford S Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness," in *Forum Philosophicum*, vol. 14, 1, 2009, 1–15.

– 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.[21] 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."[22] 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 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 retroactively explain *why* we acted or refrained from acting, and help us to evaluate actions or abstentions, in ourselves and others.) Call this the Practicality Requirement. But the Practicality Requirement is not necessarily best met by positing that moral reasons are inextricably tied to conative psychological states. Rather, the action-guiding facts in the case of natural goodness are facts humans, facts about objects in the world, and facts about our relation to those objects. But

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

22. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 57.

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.[23]

Another way of putting this point is that some properties we can call 'goodness' are primary qualities of nature. Obviously, some will worry that this picture of nature is not the scientific picture of nature. McDowell's objection bears some similarities.

III. The Initial Argument for Social Teleology

McDowell's objection is that goodness is one thing and natural facts another. He urges that the is-ought gap is indeed a real distinct between human normativity (on the one side) and natural descriptivitiy (on the other). 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.[24]

23. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.
24. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 167.

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."[25] Farreira calls McDowell-type views "excellence naturalism" and Foot-type views "empirical naturalism".

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…"[26] 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."[27] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie: the "central doctrine of European moral philosophy" is a mistake;[28] 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."[29] This objection McDowell shares with Gibbard and Blackburn.

25. He calls it by a variety of other names: 'liberal' naturalism' (John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996) 89, 98); 'acceptable naturalism' (McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* 197). Like Thomas Nagel, he also finds friends in Plato and Aristotle, calling his view 'Greek naturalism' (McDowell, *Mind and World* 174), 'Aristotelian naturalism' (ibid., 196), 'naturalism of second nature' (ibid., 86), or 'naturalized platonism' (ibid., 91). Cf. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism. 204; and Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008)

26. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds., *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 2007), 137.

27. Ibid., 143.

28. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).

29. McDowell, 174.

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 broader project of *dissolving dualisms*. He says he is influenced by two main sources: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[30] 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[31] – philosophy that 'leaves everything as it is'[32]. 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.[33] We might paraphrase this thesis by saying that "natural normativity" is a quality *in the world* (not just in our heads) but it is not Lockean "primary qualities." It is, rather, Lockean secondary qualities.

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

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

32. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* Section 124

33. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds., "Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology" (Blackwell, 2007), 137–145. I shall cite this anthology. The essay is also printed in McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, chapter 7.

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."[34] Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[35] but not in that they are therefore illusory. A secondary quality is not "a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[36]

He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[37] 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

34. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics*, 2007, 137.
35. Ibid., 139.
36. Ibid., 139.
37. Ibid., 138.

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."[38] 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 primary facts into the space of reasons when they weren't there before.

IV. Objection to McDowell: Unrestricted or Restricted 'Nature'?

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

1. The first way of putting my critique is that 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.

38. McDowell, 188 and following.

2. 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"[39] helps explain moral epistemology. There is *something* about red things *themselves* that makes them give us redness experiences; there is something about the dangerous animal itself that gives us fear experiences. That something is not *the form of red* or *the form of danger*, but it is also not *nothing.* The "theory of danger" is intended to capture this "something" with the important notion 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 judge the bear *as dangerous* – he need not apply concepts – for it to be true without projection that the bear is indeed dangerous. When he runs away from a abear, the rabbit is not responding to the bear's size or fur or any other obvious empirical quality; the rabbit is responding to its danger.
3. The third critique is that 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[40] 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.

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 would urge 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

39. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics*, 2007, 142–3.
40. "Three Sorts of Naturalism."

> cannot be reduced by philosophical fiat.[41]

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:

> 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.[42]

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.'[43] 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.*

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41. Ibid., 206.
42. Ibid., 206.
43. @ Roy Wood Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism?" *The Philosophical Review* 36, no. 3 (1927): 216–25.

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."[44] Fink comments on this passage:

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

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."[45] This brings us back around to idealism as naturalism. If soul is the primary sense of nature, then body is

44. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997), *Laws* 891cff.
45. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 215.

"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 body-soul 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."[46] His comment on this passage is:

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

The point of these reflections is that McDowell wants to return to the unrestricted conception 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 unrestricted conception wins the war by overcoming it, by embracing both body and mind, brain and consciousness, matter and form, in a comprehensive view. The cost, however, is that one no longer has the right to exclude opponents on the basis of their positing something real over and above nature (for now one has defined 'real over and above nature' as a contradiction in terms). This cost McDowell does not wish to pay.

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

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

> 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.

McDowell has not allowed himself to pick sides. Yet, instead of embracing 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. I find it odd that McDowell qua hero of anti-dualist has allowed himself merely to *name and claim* an unrestricted conception of nature while fully developing and endorsing a restricted conception of nature.

Compare with Sellars:

> 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.[47]

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.

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

Despite their differences, McDowell shares with Mackie and other subjectivists radically reductive, disenchanted, Laplacian picture[48] 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*.

V. The Case for Natural Normativity from Generics

So, who has the upper hand in this dispute – Foot or McDowell? What is the hope for "identifying what is characteristic of a species" and deriving from such characteristics normative judgments? And are we to think of such features of primary nature known scientifically or secondary qualities perceived only within the point of view of (already) shaped practical reason? I think Foot's view has the advantage over McDowell here.

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"[49], "natural-historical judgements"[50] "norms"[51] "bare plurals"[52]. I prefer the shorter and less adorned term 'generic.[53]

48. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 84.

49. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

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

51. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 14–15. Anscombe is not very optimistic about the project Thompson, Foot, and I are undertaking.

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

53. 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 A Gelman, "Generic Statements Require Little Evidence for Acceptance but Have Powerful Impli-

My case for natural normativity depends on a minimal scientific realism and on a little-utilized feature of language and conceptualization called "generic propositions" – or simply "generics." I shall suggest that, when true, generics cut 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.

I'll first state the outline of the argument in syllogistic form, and then work through each piece with more detail. The first syllogism establishes the possibility of ethical naturalism against the is-ought gap objection.

Syllogism 1

1. If some propositions are genuinely both natural and normative, then ethical naturalism is possible.
2. Generic propositions are genuinely both natural and normative.
3. Therefore, ethical naturalism is possible.

The second syllogism makes good on the possibility of this sort of ethical naturalism, positing some actual normative content:

Syllogism 2

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 third syllogism effects a transition from generics about the biological world in general to generics about human beings, which will provide the basis of normative *ethics*.

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cations," *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.

Syllogism 3

1. On ethical naturalism, all generics can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions. 2. Some true generics are about humans. 3. So, there are some human natural norms.

Now, it is no secret that one can prove one's conclusion by assuming, at the outset, a premise which logically entails one's conclusion. This practice is not necessarily vicious. If nothing is postulated, nothing can be proved. Yet it is all to easy to alienate one's readers on the first page, rendering the entire case that follows an empty exercise. All that a philosopher can do is judiciously select starting premises that one's interlocuters can agree to.

My postulate is this: **some generics about human beings are true.** Andrew Bailey's recent paper provides a helpful introduction:

> What are generics? A fine question, but a difficult one. Start with this sentence: [all ducks lay eggs.] This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is 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.[54]

Generics are statements of the form "S is F" or "S has or does F" where S is not an individual but a class. Generics refer not to all members of a category distributively nor about merely *some* but to the category itself; they are statements about natural kinds. 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 but trivial that *some wolves hunt in packs*. The logical form of "all S's ϕ" does not predicate ϕ-ing to all members of the category S without exception, nor does it simply assert that some "S's ϕ", which is true but uninteresting. The statement that "wolves hunt in packs" is only interesting 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

54. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.

of the statement is not all S's nor merely some S's, but the "infama species."[55] 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).

As statements of natural kinds, generics are not merely statistical regularities. For example, it is a true generic that "California condors can fly for hours without resting."[56] But one could easily imagine a scenario in which every living member – in 1987 there were only 27 known condors – of the endangered species are too injured, old, or diseased to exemplify this attribute. It would be strictly true of the individuals of the species that *none* can fly for hours; nevertheless the generic would still be true that "condors" (as a class) *can* fly for hours.

In this way, generics pick out what we might call formal facts. Exceptions (from defect, injury, illness, etc.) do not *invalidate* generics. A wolf that hunts alone is not a new species but a defective wolf.

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

While there is much to be learned, still, about the linguistic and metaphysical implications of generics, their use and acquisition is actually very familiar. For instance, Generic truths are acquired via familiar means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion. One might observe that, say, penguins appear to be birds (they have beaks, feathers, lay eggs, emit squawks, etc.). And we might reflect that most – if not all birds – have many of these macro features. We

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

consult our encyclopedias, biology or zoology textbooks, or consult friends who are zoologists. All these sources confirm the categorization. From observations and reflections such as these, 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, is the statement that: penguins are birds.

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.[57]

Nevertheless, let's suppose for *reductio* that no generic statements are true. Then it is in some important sense really false that wolves hunt in packs, 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. (That is not to say that the denial is not worth considering. It might well be true. My point in calling the denial 'absurd' is to say that if it is true, an absurdity is true. If it is true, then the truth is absurd. And reality itself might well be absurd. I don't think it is, but there have been many philosophers who have thought so, and such thoughts cannot be justly dismissed without consideration.) The point is that a minimal scientific realism such as that McDowell endorses (about primary qualities) is compatible with a high degree of confidence

In this way, generics pick out what we might call formal facts. Exceptions (from defect, injury, illness, etc.) do not *invalidate* generics. A wolf that hunts alone is not a new species but a defective wolf. I hope I have said enough to make it plausible that generics (when true) are genuinely *natural truths* about natural entities such as natural kinds and their members. The notion that generics are

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

genuinely normative needs some arguing. While there is a kind of normativity in the mere idea of a life-form, we can make the case stronger.

Generics also illuminte natural, normative, teleological facts. Generics "admit of combination into teleological judgments"[%] such as *penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.* 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 is thereby defective."[58] A female reptile that cannot lay eggs is defective in being immature, injured, or ill. Eyes that cannot see are similarly defective.

McDowell's mistake

Two paths

There are two paths forward. We can either reject generic truths about species and their formal and functional characteristics, or we can accept them "as is", or we can accept and try to reduce them.

To reject them, I contend, is to reject the best scientific deliverances of our best scientific evidence. "Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."[59]

Reducing them is an option I shall not consider here. I content myself to note that Thompson insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past" (and Toner adds "whether about creation or natural selection").[60]

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

59. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 151. Cf also Barham, *PhD Dissertation*; Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*.

60. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 223. Cf. Thompson, "The Representation of Life. 293).

Thus far, all I have tried to show is that *some* of these generics are true. I have not yet tried to show which true generics about humans can serve as the basis for an ethical theory. The next step will be to apply the above argument to human beings. To those who disagree about the *very notion* of generics, I have tried to urge them to feel free to do so, but to count the cost. The great cost of throwing out generics *as a class* threatens to throw out a huge percentage of scientific statements in biology, organic chemistry, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, anatomy, and medicine.

Human beings are natural entities importantly similar to animals and plants, though importantly different in exhibiting rational activity. 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 are we *at least* material at all? Yes. Do we eat food grown on earth, drink water from the earth, are we born from fellow humans and do we die and disintegrate into the earth like every other living thing? Yes. So we are natural. Again, I do not mean to prejudge the question of whether we are *also more than natural*. I simply mean to invoke the obvious that the *we are at least natural*. Since we are (at least) natural entities, and since scientific statements are about natural entities, then it is possible (and indeed quite common) to make scientific statements about us. 'Humans emigrated from Africa about 200,000 years ago' is a statement about a natural species group, namely *homo sapiens sapiens*, the only extant members of the hominin clade.

So, for example, 'Humans are language users' is a generic scientific statement. Since some such statements are generic, teleological statements, and since some such statement can be used as the basis of evaluative truths, some such statements about human can be used as the basis of evaluative truths.

Two more objections

A second worry is simply that, even if there were a way to overcome the is-ought gap, there 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 and too abstract, like a platonic

universal underlying all human beings. 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.[61]

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. 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.[62]

A third worry is the other side of the second worry. Namely that if there is such thing as human nature, it is nothing more or less than our biological and physiological makeup. On this view, the only way to talk about our "nature" is to tell a series of complicated stories about our genetics, evolutionary history, and neurophysiology, perhaps even including cultural, geographical, and ecological settings. The problem here 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 respons 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."[63] Nevertheless, she *does* endorse the project of grounding

61. Cf. Williams, 109.
62. Mayr, *Populations, Species, and Evolution*, 4.
63. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* especially chapter 10.

ethical evaluations in human nature. If this grounding is not *scientific*, then how is a grounding of ethics going to work?

VI. Applying Generics to Humanity

We saw above that the is-ought gap can be overcome by finding a perfectly respectable, almost ubiquitous, natural normativity. A natural teleological facts, are, if you like, a natural "ought". And teleological facts obtain in many – perhaps all – living things. Generic truths about those living things are genuinely normative, and therefore can be used to derive genuinely normative conclusions.

The success of this endeavor depends on whether we can identify the normative, teleological facts that are true of humans as a species. It will succeed insofar as we can articulate those facts in true generics about humans. If so, it remains to see if this general pattern of normativity can be genuinely *ethical*.

What are some candidates? What can we – by careful observation and inductive generalization – confidently say about humanity? Here are what I take to be a sampling of the kinds of things said about genetically modern humans without much scientific controversy. We are *homo sapiens sapiens*. Our species emigrated from Africa about 200,000 years ago, and are the only extant members of the hominin clade.

Here is a random sampling of deliverances from various sciences. Humans are: rational; language users; they are symbol users, communicating with signs and symbols; bipedal and walk upright; have opposable thumbs; have large brains relative to other primates; have a neocortex, prefrontal cortex that correlate with abstract thinking, problem solving, society, and culture; are creative; self-reflective; 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); are curious and gather knowledge into sciences; don't just hunt and gather but farm, store, combine, ferment, and cook food; eat vegetables, red meat, fish, nuts, seeds,

berries, fruits, mushroom, mollusks, herbs, and more; don't just live on the ground or under ground, but build houses and shleters; don't just Humans don't just build shelters of one particular type; they invent new shelters and structures in new places, such as caves, trees, hills, mountains, etc.; human females go through menopause; have 32 teeth; 4' 7" to 6' 3" tall (plus or minus), and weigh 120-180 pounds (plus or minus); have two sets of 23 chromosomes in each somatic cell, and about 22,000 total genes; reproduce sexually.

Is there anything of potential ethical significance in this collection of commonplaces? I think so.

> 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.[64]

\ include Bernard Williams quote about reproducing sexually

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