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NEW DIRECTIONS IN ETHICS: NATURALISMS, REASONS AND VIRTUE

ABSTRACT. This paper discusses three topics in contemporary British ethical philosophy: naturalisms, moral reasons, and virtue. Most contemporary philosophers agree that 'ethics is natural' – in Section 1 I examine the different senses that can be given to this idea, from reductive naturalism to supernaturalism, seeking to show the problems some face and the problems others solve. Drawing on the work of John McDowell in particular, I conclude that an anti-supernatural non-reductive naturalism plausibly sets the limits on what we can do in ethics. Moral reasons are widely discussed – in Section 2 I describe some of the criteria used to distinguish moral practical reasons, and note possibilities and problems. Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Anscombe in particular, I suggest that an inclusive, minimalist account of moral reasons may be most fruitful. There has been a revival of philosophical interest in virtue ethics, which I take to be linked to the emergence of non-reductive naturalisms – in Section 3 I describe three points where virtue ethics has an especially significant contribution to make: learning, motivational self-sufficiency, and the question of whether virtues can be reasons. The naturalism of Section 1 constrains the accounts of moral reasons considered in Section 2, and depends upon an account of virtue as learned second nature, discussed in Section 3.

KEY WORDS: ethics, first nature, moral reasons, naturalism, particularism, practical reason, second nature, situationism, supernaturalism, virtue ethics

INTRODUCTION

The British Society for Ethical Theory met in Durham, England in 1999.[1] This paper emerges from a combination of reflection on that conference, and wider reading in ethics, looking to identify new directions. In surveying the contemporary terrain, I limited my brief in several ways. One was to focus on themes that emerged from BSET 1999. Another was to focus

[1]Thanks to members of BSET for the stimulation that the conference provided for this paper. I am especially grateful to those who presented papers in Durham which provided ample food for thought: Sabina Lovibond, Irwin Goldstein, James Cornwell, Garrett Cullity, Susan Hahn, Anthony Hatzimoysis, Theo van Willigenburg, Philip Stratton-Lake, Peter Railton and Maria Merritt. In addition, I owe thanks to Philippa Foot, Jonathan Dancy and Brad Hooker for making draft material available to me while I was writing. Suggestions from Bert Muschenga, Richard Norman, Stephen Clark, Garrett Cullity, Roger Teichman and Bill Pollard have also been invaluable.

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on distinctively British (rather than, say, American) ethical writing. Another was to avoid the most popular topics, because they are amply discussed elsewhere. Two very popular debates are not discussed here: the ins and outs of forms of consequentialism, and the subtleties of subjectivism vs. cognitivism.

In the end, though, I was guided most strongly by one question: is this topic *fruitful*? That is, will it lead to more interesting work? Does it solve problems, move debate forward? Does it have wider implications? I have searched for 'growth areas', then, and picked what I think might be the top three topics: naturalisms, reasons and virtue. In each section, I describe available positions on the topic, laying out the different criteria used, the questions they raise and the solutions they suggest. My aim is to assist the reader in clarifying their own views, and identifying the best strategies for taking the topic forward.

The three sections of the paper are connected. The upshot of the exploration of naturalisms in Section 1 is that non-reductive naturalism sets the terms for philosophical progress in ethics, putting supernaturalist and reductive analyses out of reach. Some Kantians and contractualists will want to distance themselves from this broad tendency towards consensus about the kind of ethical naturalism we should embrace. But even without supernaturalist or reductive opposition, non-reductive naturalism in ethics cannot stand alone: it relies for its plausibility on the possibility of giving an account of virtue as learned second nature. This is the topic of Section 3. And it has implications for what accounts of moral reasons we can accept. This is the topic of Section 2.

Section 1 explores a contemporary commonplace: 'ethics is natural'. I describe some of the different senses given to this idea. My conclusion is that anti-reductive ethical naturalisms will gain wider acceptance, and that the key concepts they invoke, of human life, upbringing, character, needs and relationship, will increasingly take centre-stage in ethics. Section 2 explores another point of consensus and diversity: 'moral reasons are important for ethics'. But what do moral practical reasons do? What sort of things are they? What makes them moral? I describe some of the options, highlighting the questions I believe must be addressed as philosophical writing on reasons develops. I suspect that moral philosophers will increasingly notice the indispensability of a fully analysed concept of need in furnishing any satisfactory account of moral reasons. Section 3 explores another growth area: the concept of virtue. It is widely accepted now that the notions of character and virtue are important for ethics (although it is questioned by some whether virtue ethics can contribute a distinctive moral theory of its own). The rise of interest in virtue is connected with the rise

of non-reductive ethical naturalism. The concept of virtue as learned second nature is indispensable to completing any non-reductive naturalistic picture of ethics. But the idea of virtue is not without its problems and puzzles, and I describe some of these.

Section 1: The Naturalness of Ethics

If 'nature' is broadly interpreted, it seems no more than a platitude, today, to say that ethics is 'natural'. We – rational human animals – behave ethically; to say that ethical behaviour expresses (part of) our nature adds nothing contentious.[2] But even if everyone agrees that ethics is 'natural', there remains a question: in what sense is it natural? Two distinctions will be useful in clarifying the options here. First, we can distinguish between 'first nature' and 'second nature'. 'First nature' refers to the subject-matter of the natural sciences; so, our first nature includes all the physical facts about ourselves that we are born with, which it is the task of sciences like biology, ecology, physics, chemistry to describe. First nature is what we share with higher animals – a certain kind of body; distinctive vulnerabilities to a particular physical environment.[3] 'Second nature' then refers to all the features that we acquire through human processes like education, socialisation and relationship. Second nature is the set of responses, capacities and habits that are instilled in the course of human socialisation and education. This distinction between first and second nature gives us two ways of thinking of ethics as natural: ethics might be 'natural' in the sense of being part of first nature, the world that science studies; or it might be 'natural' in the sense of being part of human life more richly understood, to include things like affect, goals, socialisation and relationship. We can call these two options 'first nature accounts' and 'second nature accounts' respectively.[4]

[2]It does add some uncontentious content, though: it says that ethical behaviour is not arbitrary (as mad behaviour, and whimsical behaviour, are), and that ethical behaviour is not externally caused (as coerced behaviour is).

[3]See McDowell (1995) for an account of the distinction between first and second nature.

[4]My distinction between first-nature and second-nature accounts of ethics adapts a more familiar distinction between naturalist and non-naturalist forms of realism in ethics. See Margaret Little (1995) for a useful account of how naturalist and non-naturalist realisms, thus labelled, have developed, dividing US 'naturalists' from UK 'non-naturalists'. I prefer 'first nature account' to 'naturalist realism', and 'second nature account' to non-natural-

A second distinction emerges when we ask what is the point of describing ethics as natural in either sense? Some take it that showing how ethics is natural enables us to explain and even justify it. We can call these 'explanatory' approaches. Others take it that showing how ethics is natural simply explicates it – no external explanation, justification or 'grounding' is required; and seeking one involves a misunderstanding. We can call these 'explicatory' approaches.[5]

Reductive first-nature explanatory accounts of ethics are less popular now than they used to be. One strand does survive, to be seen for example in Frank Jackson (1995), and in Jackson and Pettit (1998) and (2000), although the claim that a complete reduction of the ethical to the natural is possible, is progressively weakened. Jackson explores the idea that value in the form of teleology is present in first nature, and that this can ground ethics, to argue for a (non-eliminative) reduction of the evaluative to the descriptive, which exploits the notion of function. But in response it can be argued that while explication is possible, no explanatory reduction can be achieved in this way: either the concept of function is already ethical, or ethics cannot be grounded in it.[6] If this is right, an explanatory reduction is blocked, and explication, with its benign informative circularities, is all that is available. Berys Gaut (1997) argues for something like this: an explicatory first-natural picture which has the teleological notion of function at its core. For him, the evaluative is built into the natural, in the natural concept of flourishing, and the ethically demanding concept of need which is conceptually connected to it.

First-nature explicatory accounts are increasingly popular. Aspects of work from Michael Thompson (1995), Philippa Foot's recent unpublished work, and Alasdair MacIntyre's (1999a and b) fall into this category. Writers explicating ethics in this way take as their core notion the idea of human life. They start, in Aristotelian fashion, with other organisms, and, by describing the lives of those organisms in compelling ways, persuade us

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ist realism', because my terminology brings out the continuities between the two kinds of view, and the important role that a subtle concept of human nature plays in the views otherwise called 'non-naturalist realisms'. What's more, talk of naturalism in my more general sense enables us to see what we might otherwise miss: the way that anti-realist accounts of ethics are often motivated by commitment to a kind of naturalism.

[5]The explanation/explication contrast can be expressed differently, as the external/internal contrast, between those who think that explanation and justification must be in terms external to ethics, and those who think explanation and justification can only be in terms internal to ethics. The disagreement between Williams and McDowell is often put this way.

[6]Hatzimoysis (1999) develops this argument.

to notice two things: the presence of norms in animal lives, and continuities between those lives and human life. Thus Michael Thompson argues that there is a distinct logical category for talk about life, which is characterised by talk of 'the species' having this or that property. Such talk, he argues, reveals a distinct kind of natural norm which he calls the 'Aristotelian categorical'. When we use a phrase like 'wolves hunt in packs', or 'the swallow migrates in winter', we are making a statement that is normative in the sense Thompson has isolated. In such talk, he argues, we are committed to the claim that there is something wrong with the wolf or swallow that doesn't hunt in the pack or migrate – it suffers, in Foot's phrase, from a natural defect. Foot takes this up to argue for a continuity: just as 'good' in talk of animal lives says that their lives are going as they 'should' in Thompson's sense, so 'good' in human life says that human life is going as it 'should'. Possession of the virtues is an Aristotelian categorical for human beings. Privation of virtue, or vice, is a natural defect of human beings, on a par with other natural defects, like short-sightedness or poor co-ordination. There is something wrong with human beings who lack virtue, and something normatively right with those who possess them.

Alasdair MacIntyre (1999a) also emphasises the continuities between the lives of higher social mammals and human life, and asks us to notice how the life of these animals involves recognition of and response to norms. He is especially interested in norms of care for members of the social group who are dependent, that is, unable to care for themselves. The inescapable first-natural facts of vulnerability and dependency, and the implications they have for what our norms can be, have been too little noticed by moral philosophers, who in his view need to update their 'naturalisms' to accommodate these facts.

Some naturalist writers place more emphasis on the differences between the social life of animals and that of human beings. First nature is what we share with higher mammals: so, at least, biology, and being vulnerable to the vagaries of a particular physical environment. Second nature is here conceived as something different, something extra. Writers who highlight differences include David Wiggins (1987), John McDowell (1995), Joseph Raz (1999), Thomas Scanlon (1999), and Peter Railton (2000). The difference between humans and the rest of first nature that all these writers agree is crucial to understanding ethics, is our rationality – our capacity to act in the light of reasons. We are unique in being able to take considerations to be reasons, and in being able to justify our actions to ourselves and each other though socially supported dialogue about reasons. Where MacIntyre (1999a) thinks that unless higher animals took things to be reasons and acted virtuously, there would not be enough in first nature for

rational, moral second nature to develop from, McDowell (1995) thinks that higher animals and human beings are, literally, a world apart: where animals have only an environment, mature human beings have a world, full of meanings and reasons with practical significance.

These accounts are still naturalistic, so long as they claim that our ethical second nature is *natural* – part of worldly nature, not supernatural. Second nature is the set of features installed in the course of ordinary socialisation and education. But 'education' here is doing a lot of work: it is richly understood, as no less than the creating and shaping of the virtuous person in childhood. Our 'second nature' is our rationality, our character, our skills, and our reactive attitudes. Although it is not thought of as rigid in adulthood, mechanically determining everything we do in the way that first nature is thought by some to determine the behaviour it governs (whether human or animal), second nature is sometimes thought of as pretty robust - it determines what we (can) take to be reasons, and determines what virtues or vices (or neutral habits) our actions express.[7]

Some writers see 'second nature' rather differently. They see it as '*super*-natural', coming from outside the natural world, different in kind from it and not explicable in terms of it. Kant held that kind of view, and modern contractarianism inherits much of it. To the extent that modern contractarians, like John Rawls, David Gauthier and Thomas Scanlon conceive of the ethics-creating contract as something independent of our first-and-second natural history, it seems right to say that they are 'supernaturalists' in McDowell's sense. To the extent that modern Kantians, like Onora O'Neill, Christine Korsgaard and Barbara Herman think of the rational deliberation that goes into ethical action as independent of our animal nature, they, too, propose a form of supernaturalism. But notice that even supernaturalists about ethics are committed to the naturalistic platitude with which this section began: ethical behaviour expresses (part of) our nature. It is just that these writers take our ethical nature to be something beyond the ordinary world of first and second nature.

Another aspect of human second nature has been mentioned in some recent writing: human relationships. It has been suggested, by David McNaughton (1996) and David Wiggins (1998) that W.D. Ross offered the concept of relationship as the key which shows how his list of *pro tanto* moral duties is not arbitrary. Each relationship generates duties. One might see this in a first-natural or second-natural way: kinship duties and shared-environment duties might be held to arise out of our first-natural connec-

[7]This will be important in Section 3 below.

tions; duties of friendship, citizenship, civility and educating the young, arise out of relationships that are part of second nature. The idea that even second-natural relationships may be morally explanatory and fundamental, is only just beginning to be explored, but promises to be fruitful.

I have sketched different forms the claim that ethics is 'natural' can take. But an important part of the starting motivation to say that ethics is natural was a scientistic drive to reduce ethics to first nature, to explain ethics as a matter of atoms swerving in the void, as it were. And an important part of the motivation behind the development of second-natural explicatory accounts, has been to resist that reductive drive. It remains to say something about that debate.

In (1995) and elsewhere McDowell provides a helpful diagnosis of the reductive impulse. He links Wittgenstein's work on rule-following with a reading of Aristotle, suggesting that the crucial insight was already there in Aristotle: explanation and justification are, and can only be, internal to a way of life. But the insight has been forgotten, as a result of the Modern turn in Western philosophy, which inclines us to take experimental science to be the fundamental mode of knowledge, and to measure other discourses against its standards. It stipulates that 'the world' is the world seen from the perspective of completed natural science, containing only entities with 'primary qualities', considered under the aspect of how they would appear 'from nowhere', as in Nagel (1986) or from a God's eye view or Archimedian point, as in Williams (1985). The Modern turn has generated two problems: how can value be constituted by a value-free world? and how can value be expressed in the value-free world as action?

If McDowell is right, two projects in contemporary ethics are bogged down by an error that originates in the 18th Century. Those who offer first nature explanatory accounts are seeking an answer to the first unanswerable question, of how the value-free can constitute value. On a proper conception of 'the world', there is no 'value-free'. And action-theorists, perhaps especially Humeans, are trying to answer the second unanswerable question, of how nature-free value can get into the value-free natural world. That all this results from the same mistake, McDowell suggests, can be seen in Aristotle – but we need to have the insights of Wittgenstein in mind to read him properly. The Modern picture is so powerful that it is almost impossible *not* to read Aristotle as either attempting to 'ground' ethics in the non-ethical, or attempting to 'explain' moral motivation via a strong internalist thesis about moral beliefs.

What is the alternative? To understand ethics in its own terms. This deprives us of explanatory naturalism. We can't without error expect to understand ethics in any terms but ethical. This has seemed to many phi-

losophers to be unduly restrictive, and to threaten relativism.[8] But in fact it does not lead to these difficulties – or, more accurately, it doesn't exacerbate them. The problem of displaying the rationality of ethics in a compelling way is real. But it is also general. It is the same as the problem of displaying the rationality of all the other things we do – playing games, conducting scientific enquiry, writing philosophy papers. We might be able to make connections between activities – using an analogy with another game, say, to illuminate the game of chess for someone. But all we will ever be able to lay our hands on in the activity of explaining, is more of the same: parts of our life. The idea of our being able to use 'the world as it is in itself' to explain any of our activities is practically contradictory. And the idea that rationality – supernature, rather than first nature – can be used to explain ethics in this way, involves a similar error. The way we think – acquire beliefs, deliberate, justify ourselves – is also part of our life. It is as 'fundamental' in that life as ethics is, but no more so – no more knowable 'in itself', as Aristotle, in the grip of a similar error to our own, would have put it, than it is 'to us', here and now, living as we live. So explanatory accounts of ethics, whether they invoke first-nature or supernatural reason, are mistaken. Explicatory naturalism is as far as we can go. And as far as we need to go.

Section 2: Moral Reasons

'I am sure that I do not understand the idea of a reason for acting, and I wonder whether anyone else does either', Philippa Foot confessed in (1978). Yet many philosophers are currently involved in a 'hot' debate about practical reason, which depends for its coherence on some account of what a reason for action is and does. What progress, then, on the nature of practical reasons since Foot first flagged her puzzlement?[9] In what follows I explore three questions about practical reasons which any adequate

[8]See Williams (1995): If we limit ourselves to only ethical stories in explicating ethics, these may be 'optimistic, self-serving, superstitious, vengeful, or otherwise not what they seem to be' (p. 204).

[9]Foot herself stands out as a contributor – but in a peculiar way. She has nowhere directly tackled the question. But she insisted that her editors include a particular paper by Elizabeth Anscombe, in a festschrift for her which came out in 1995. This insistence looks odd – Anscombe's paper first appeared 20 years before the festschrift. It looks a lot less odd when one reads the paper. It may be that in it Anscombe answered many of the questions which make up the contemporary debate on practical reason. The paper should be widely read.

account should answer: a) what does a practical reason do?, b) what sort of thing can do that? And, c) when is a practical reason a *moral* practical reason?

a) What do Practical Reasons Do?

Contemporary writers are concerned with two things: reasons must explain the action (say *what made* the agent do it); and reasons must rationalise the action (say why it was *rational* for the agent to do it). The 'explaining' requirement has been thought to impose various constraints on what can be a reason. One suggested constraint is that, to explain an action, a reason has to *cause* the action, in the scientific sense. This was first proposed by Davidson, and there has been mush fine-grained analysis of his proposal since.[10] A second proposed constraint is that a reason has to be the kind of thing that the agent can avow – can recognise, and affirm as their reason. A third constraint, connected to avowability, and much discussed since Williams (1981), is internalism. Internalism claims that for something to be an agent's reason, it has to connect to their 'existing motivational set' – habits of belief, affect and action. If adopted, the internalist criterion obliges us to say that where our moral reasons are alien to an agent's motivational set, they are not (and cannot be) reasons for him at all. So, to explain actions reasons may have to a) cause actions, b) be avowable, and c) be related to the agent's existing motivational set.

The 'rationalising' requirement might impose constraints, too. The first is that of meeting some general standard of rationality. This is usually socially defined: to rationalise my actions, my reasons must be the sort of thing that other rational agents (within my community) can recognise. This constraint can be widely or narrowly read. Widely read, it requires that a reason has to be the kind of thing that a member of the community of rational souls will recognise (see Kant, or, more recently, Christine Korsgaard, Barbara Herman, Elizabeth Anderson), or the community of members of species with lives like ours (see Hume, or, more recently, Alasdair MacIntyre).[11] Narrowly read, it means that a reason has to be the kind of

[10]Anscombe (1995) argues against Davidson's claim that actions, just like other events, need causes. 'The solution lacks acumen.', she says on p. 2, going on to offer a sharp analysis. No-one would dare say that about Davidson today, although perhaps they should.

[11]See Wiggins (1995), where he argues that Hume's 'speculative anthropology' of human morality, which grounds it in some kind of solidarity of weakly benevolent socialised human nature, has much more than is generally noticed in common with Kant's efforts to ground morality in another solidarity, that of person's as members of the community of rational wills.

thing that a member of *this* community will recognise, where the particularities of the community include not just a specific kind of mind or body, but a specific environment, history, set of relationships, customs and goals.[12]

The second is that of being arrived at in the right kind of way – being a product of the right kind of process. For example, if a thought just pops into my head, and I act on it, we will not want to say that the thought that popped into my head can rationalise my action. It may motivate (and so, explain) what I did, but, because it is the result of the wrong kind of process, it cannot rationalise. What, then, is the right kind of process? The Kantian offers the process of rational deliberation – taking account of all the facts, applying the best maxim, concluding in favour of the best action (ultimately grounded in the pure, transcendental principles of rationality). But there is an older paradigm, there in Aristotle, which makes room for the idea that *un*deliberated action may yet be action for good reasons. What is the notion of 'right process' in the Aristotelian picture? It is something like: correct (because well-trained) appreciation of the situation and its possibilities, plus a virtuous disposition (i.e., a disposition to seek the good in one's actions). It still seems right to call this picture of getting to reasons a process: one has to look at the situation, and express the virtues in one's actions. Contemporary writers like McDowell (1978), Wiggins (1991), Dancy (1993), and Raz (1998) have explored the appreciational part of the Aristotelian picture of practical reasons; others have explored the disposition-expressive part of the process, for example Christine Swanton (1997).

A third possible constraint is that a rationalising reason must refer to the right kind of object. This shows a different aspect of the Aristotelian picture: the right process is one of appreciation and expression; the object that is appreciated is a reason. The right kind of object for the Aristotelian is, or is appropriately connected with, the objective human good, flourishing in accordance with human nature.[13] On other theories, it will be a moral reason to the extent that it aims at the maximisation of well-being.

[12]We might see internalism as the narrowest possible case of this constraint: to be a reason, a feature has to be something that I, as I am here and now, would recognise as a reason.

[13]Cullity and Gaut (1997, Introduction) present the Kantian process-constraint and the Aristotelian recognition-constraint as alternatives. But this doesn't seem right to me, at least for Aristotle. Virtue ethics uses the fact that here we have a good person appreciating things in a certain way, and expressing certain goods in their action, as a – on some readings, the ultimate – criterion of whether or not a reason is a good one. Perhaps a similar point can be made about Kant. Every account of practical reasons surely needs to give an account of both a distinctive process and its distinctive objects.

How this constraint is interpreted, will affect the answer to our third question, of what makes a reason a moral reason.

There is a fourth constraint, which also has implications for answers to our third question. This is that to be a rationalising reason, a reason has to be binding to some extent. It has to show how the action it informs is appropriate – follows, at least second-naturally, from it. Cullity and Gaut describe this axis of variation as the categorical/hypothetical axis. Some (Kantians, again) think that the only genuinely rationalising reasons are absolutely unconditional, binding on any agent, regardless of facts about them or about the world in which they inhabit. Others make a distinction between rationalising reasons and a subcategory of them, morally justifying reasons. Thus, reasons to do with etiquette, or games, or other conventional activities, are rationalising: they show how an action is rational in the sense of 'appropriate', but they are not (yet) moral reasons. The interesting thing about reasons like this, is that they do not depend on facts about the agent, such as their self-interest or desires (i.e., they are not 'hypothetical'). Hypothetical reasons, which show how an action is connected to self-interest or desire, also rationalise action, without yet showing it to be moral. It is commonly held, now, that reasons can rationalise without justifying: reasons which refer to non-well-being-related practices, and reasons which refer to self-interest or desire, fall into this category.[14] Below I will discuss some of the different ways it is proposed we should distinguish moral reasons from non-moral ones using this criterion.

b) What Sorts of Things can be Practical Reasons?

A full, interesting exploration of this question is to be found in Jonathan Dancy's new book, *Practical Reality* (2000). Dancy develops a unified account of normative ('rationalising', as I expressed it above) and motivating ('explanatory', above) reasons, in which to count as a reason in the normative sense, a consideration has to be apt to count as a reason in the other sense as well, and *vice versa*. First he argues that no psychological state is apt to be a normative reason; then he argues that, although beliefs

[14]Foot now thinks she was mistaken when she argued that all moral reasons are hypothetical imperatives in 1978. At the time, she saw rationality in the Humean way, as serving self-interest or desire. Taking her cue from Quinn (1991), her view of practical rationality now is of a virtue that informs all our activities, and serves our overarching end of well-being. So moral reasons do not need to refer to self-interest or desire to be genuinely normative; they just have to refer to the goods of good human activities (and for her, this doesn't ask much: all an action needs, to be good, is not to be bad).

are the best candidates among the psychological states to be motivating reasons, in fact we shouldn't think of motivating reasons as psychological states at all. He develops and defends an picture of practical reasons, which must be apt to be both normative and motivating, as features of the world – concrete unique particular states of affairs – and not features of the agent at all.

It has been common since Davidson to think that our actions must be caused by our reasons, and that our reasons are psychological states. In Dancy's view, both ideas are wrong. Causalism is wrong because reason-explanations for action are not 'factive' (i.e., they work whether or not things are as the agent takes them to be), so the physical process of efficient causation can't be what drives them. Psychologism is wrong because psychological states aren't the right kinds of thing to be reasons. We are tempted to think that our practical reasons must be psychological states - desires, or beliefs, or some combination – because often we act in the light of our beliefs although the world is not as we believe it to be. The world can't be our reason, if our beliefs about it are false, so we are led to a 'highest common factor' view, which says that the mediating psychological state must be the reason in successful cases as well as unsuccessful ones. But desires can't be reasons for action, on Dancy's view, because for him a desire is the psychological state of being motivated, of taking something to be a reason for action – not some additional reality which acts on the agent's belief to produce action, as in the more familiar Davidsonian picture. And beliefs cannot be reasons either, for several reasons. Dancy follows Arthur Collins (1987) in arguing that beliefs are not first–person avowable in the way reasons must be. Nor, as such, do they meet the constraint of being the sort of thing other agents would recognise as reasons. Nor, again, as such, do they meet the constraint of being arrived at by the right kind of process, of referring to the right kind of object, or being rationally binding.

What is the alternative to psychologism in the theory of reasons? Dancy proposes that reasons, far from being psychological states, are states of affairs. They are solid particulars which present themselves to us – in reality, as the contexts to which we respond, or in imagination, as the states of affairs we aim to realise. The view that reasons are motivating right-makers which are substantial particular states of affairs contrasts with psychologism. But it also contrasts with the view that reasons are propositions, which suggests the difference between a reason and a non-reason might be more than a matter of meeting formal, functional constraints given above. It might involve meeting certain metaphysical constraints as well. Dancy offers us an intriguing constraint: a good reason has to be *substantial* enough to be among 'the realities that call for action from us' (2000, p. 115).

There are many contemporary philosophers who think that abstract entities like propositions can be reasons. Dancy discusses Thomas Scanlon (1999, e.g. at p. 57), and protests that 'propositions are too thin and insubstantial' (p. 115). Dancy seeks a metaphysical middle ground for reasons, where they are not quite facts (to deal with the fact that people act for reasons that don't involve the facts as they are), but nor are they yet so abstract as to be capable only of being true (as propositions are) – in addition, they must be 'capable of being the case', and states of affairs fit the bill for him.[15] This argument from substantiality could be developed in at least two ways: one, which Dancy develops, is to reject proposition accounts of reasons; the other would be to reject generalism. How might this be argued? Apart from the proposition, another abstract entity could be argued to fail the substantiality constraint: the general rule or moral principle or code. Dancy has hitherto concentrated on arguing for particularism from holism in the theory of reasons – from the fact that considerations change their moral valency from case to case, to the conclusion that their value is 'uncodifiable' (1993 and more recent papers). But an argument from how substantial reasons have to be, might work just as well. Instead of arguing that reasons can't be general, we might use the substantiality requirement to argue for particularism in reverse, as it were: generalities cannot be reasons.

Any positive thesis about what a reason is, implies a negative thesis about what cannot be reasons. We have seen how some hold with Dancy that psychological states can't be reasons, and, just now, how particularists think that general truths can't be reasons (either because no moral-rational generalisations are possible, or because generalisations aren't substantial enough); generalists return the compliment, arguing that particular situations can't be reasons. Some writers think that the character of the agent can't be among the reasons for their action. Joseph Raz (2000), discussing Peter Winch's Billy Budd example, argues that the kind of facts about an agent's history which determine their moral 'take' on a situation, aren't among the reasons they can cite as making their action wrong or right. Anscombe (1995) makes a distinction between the reason for an action and 'what the agent is after' – we display the reason in the practical syllogism, but the agent's wants, intentions and goals external to the logical inference which describes their action. Thus, I might take your letter to the post office because you need me to. My reason is your good of

[15]Dancy draws on Plantinga to make the intuitive distinction he wants. A proposition can be made true by a possible world; a state of affairs *is* a possible world, and is made the case in the actual world.

getting the letter posted. But what I am after might be any number of things: money, sexual favours, esteem, a quiet life, say. Cullity (1999) makes a related distinction between the goal of the action and the reason for it - for him the aim is the end-result of acting (having the letter posted, say) and the potential reasons seem to include things like virtues, feelings, judgements of rightness (pp. 7–8). Anscombe thus limits reasons to those considerations which can feature in a logical inference displaying the rationality of the action; Cullity seems to want a more contentful distinction, limiting the kind of entities that can be included in the latter group, distinguishing non-formally between ends which can't be, and the judgments, feelings, virtues, etc., which can be, reasons.

Most writers agree that feelings cannot count among the reasons for an action: my feelings are not my reasons, though they may accompany them, and explain why I am so very determined (or reluctant) to act on those reasons. In contemporary Humeanism only a belief/desire pair can be a reason; in 'pure cognitivism', only what is believed is needed. There is a interesting ongoing discussion between Dancy and other particularists, about which features of the situation an agent appreciates can be among their reasons for action. Raz (2000) argues that Dancy, to support his uncodifiability thesis, has to claim, implausibly, that certain features of the situation which make a difference to the moral weight of the reason, are not themselves part of the reason – otherwise it would have a general value, so that ethics would after all be codifiable.

c) What Makes a Reason Moral?

By far the most common way to distinguish moral reasons from other kinds of normative reason has been to invoke the categorial/hypothetical axis. The familiar thought is that moral reasons are those that are (felt to be) especially binding, or *categorical* (see, e.g., Dancy (1993); Cullity and Gaut (1997)). A first stab at this was to say that moral reasons were those which didn't depend on features of the agent, self-interest and desire. They rest, as Dancy puts it (1993, p. 47), on 'an underived ought'. This led Humeans to argue that in that case they couldn't be *reasons* at all – since for Hume, by definition, reason serves self-interest and desire. Debate on that question continues. Philippa Foot pointed out in 1978 that moral reasons weren't the only categorical ones. If that is right, categoricalness can't after all be the mark of the moral. Anscombe had earlier protested that the idea that moral reasons are categorical proposes 'a mysterious mesmeric force' for them, which makes no sense in the absence of commitment to the idea of an actual law-giver.

If categoricalness cannot be distinguishing mark of moral reasons, what can be? Elizabeth Anscombe's (1974/95) concludes with an Aristotelian account of moral reasons, which emerges from a discussion of the nature of practical inference. For Anscombe, the connection between the premises and conclusion of a practical syllogism *qua practical* can be neither logical necessitation, as von Wright argued (a physical happening like an action cannot be logically necessitated) nor causation, as Davidson proposed (of any causal connection, it will always be possible to ask: 'but was the act done for the sake of the end and in view of the thing believed?' (p. 2)). On Anscombe's account, there is only one kind of inference, which has the usual logical relations. How, then, do practical and theoretical reason differ? They are different *uses* of logical inference (there are other uses: explaining things, or commanding things, p. 22). They arrange the propositions in different ways, starting with different things and heading for different things – but the relations between 'steps' within the inference are those of ordinary logic. This common ground between theoretical and practical Anscombe calls 'the great Aristotelian parallel' (p. 33).

Nevertheless, there are differences: theoretical inference aims at good in the category of belief (i.e., truth); practical inference aims at good in the category of action. This gives a powerful analogical argument against those who claim that goodness is external to practical reasoning. This – Humean – claim makes it puzzling why anyone 'should' aim at good ends, rather than (say) self-interested or desire-fulfilling or perverse ends. Anscombe's response is to point out that goodness is 'as external, but no *more* external' (p. 33) to practical inference than truth is to theoretical. In theoretical inference belief is not compelled (and truth not guaranteed); just so in practical inference action is not compelled (and goodness not guaranteed) (p. 19). But to be rational with respect to theoretical reasoning, is precisely to seek truth. Just so, in practical reflection, to be rational is to seek good ends.

In neither case is it sufficient for rationality to ensure that the process of inference is valid – in practical reasoning, in addition the input must be good, i.e., the premises must either directly involve or indirectly support genuine goods. An inclusive, minimalist account of moral reasons follows: a moral reason is anything that can feature in an inference displaying the rationality of an action. Reasons are related to the objective human good in the right way: they mention an end that is good to pursue, either in itself (by definition, as 'happiness' is, or 'physical health') or for the sake of some end (as 'accumulating wealth' might be where it sought an intrinsically good end). A moral reason is any consideration which does not con-

flict with the overarching good of human life, against which other ends are measured.

One further promising route to capturing the distinctiveness of moral reasons might be to explore their connection with the concept of need. Hints that this might be important have appeared in various places (e.g. Williams (1971), pp. 24–25), Gaut (1997), Cullity (1999), and MacIntyre (1999a), p. 109)), where a connection is made, or assumed, between the ability to recognise needs as reasons, and possession of the most basic skills of moral agency. The concept of need has received some attention in political philosophy, for example in the debate between libertarians and egalitarians (see e.g. Wiggins (1987), Braybrooke (1992), and Brock (1994)) – it will be interesting to see if the significance of this concept for the ethics of individual agency rewards further exploration.

Section 3: Virtue

In this section I say something about how virtue ethics' concern with character and virtue is related to the themes of the previous two sections. Three issues stand out: a) a need to develop the claim that virtue is learned second nature, to support the non-reductive naturalistic picture of ethics developed in Section 1; b) the question of how robust virtue can or should be; and c) the question of how the concept of virtue is related to the concept of a moral reason.

Moral character and virtue are now widely thought to be central in moral philosophy. What has motivated this resurgence of interest? Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (1997, Introduction) trace the interest in character back to Anscombe's challenge in (1958). Anscombe argued that the notion of moral obligation, shorn of the idea of an agent who imposes that obligation (God, or a law-maker) makes no sense, and that a return to a pre-Christian plural, complex story of human goodness, via an exploration of first psychology and then the virtues, is the only way forward for ethics. Martha Nussbaum, in (1999) sees the interest in character and the virtues as emerging from two distinct dissatisfactions with contemporary utilitarian and deontological ethical theory. Utilitarianism fails to acknowledge the plurality of value, and the way that what gives us utility can be socially cultivated and modified. Deontology focuses excessively on reason, and gives insufficient weight to feeling, habit and custom in our ethical lives. My own view is that an account of virtue is required in order to develop and defend any non-reductive naturalistic picture of ethics, and that this underlies the interests of a great many writers on virtue.

a) Virtue as Second Nature

The centrality of virtue ethics emerges clearly in relation to the themes of the previous two sections. With the first theme, the naturalness of ethics, virtue ethics leads the field in making available a second-natural explicatory account of ethics. A virtue just is a capacity, learnable by beings with our biological nature, which both manifests the flourishing nature of the agent and seeks the flourishing of that to which it responds. With the second theme, of practical reasons, things are less straightforward. It is not obvious that the virtues are our moral reasons for acting, although we cannot explain what the good agent does without reference to their virtues. I explore this question further below.

A virtue is a free disposition to act in certain ways under certain conditions. Virtue ethics claims that what is to count as a good action or what is a good outcome is conceptually dependent on claims about the virtue of an agent. How is this dependence supposed to work? Where those after an explanatory account seek a conceptual connection with something like a normative 'in itself', virtue ethicists instead explore the concrete dependence of moral activity on the possibility of learning from already virtuous agents. They hold that the key to moral rationality is found in moral education. Ethics begins with the apprentice moral agent – the child, or the foreigner, or the damaged person in rehabilitation are all examples. These beginner-agents learn from the experienced, wise moral agent by copying – by mimicking in their actions the actions of the virtuous agent. This mimicking, or 'going on in the same way', does not presuppose that the learner agent acquires any representations of how the world is (i.e., beliefs), nor that they acquire the ability to report on or provide justifications for what they do. Virtue is learned by cottoning on to virtuous ways of doing things, going on to do the same, then going on to do the same in new ways, once they have mastered the skill.[16] The way virtue and character is supposed to be basic here is simply displayed in the analogy: there is – and can be – nothing 'behind' the expertise of the *phronimos* which can explain or justify it (any more than there is anything 'behind' the expertise of the doctor or the navigator, to use Aristotle's examples at *NE* 1104b7-11). Of course, plenty more can be said about it, and shortcuts can be found to aid the learning of those who have already mastered other skills (so competent rule-followers can learn from being given rules, just as competent grammarians can learn a new language from the grammar). But we should not confuse what it is possible to say about the skill of being moral, with what constitutes it.

[16]Myles Burnyeat (1980) gives a useful exposition of the view.

The burden of proof now rests with those who want to resist the idea that ethics is, at bottom, a way of doing things (specifically, living a good human life), and want to find a more fundamental notion than the practical skill that the virtuous person has. We approach this problem after Wittgenstein: he argued that 'rules' or 'interpretations' cannot be fundamental in our rationality, but that an actual way of going on comes first.[17] McDowell (1979) first applied this insight to moral philosophy; its import has yet fully to be appreciated.

b) Just How Natural?

This central virtue-ethical claim, that virtue is learned second nature, and that it is one manifestation of the excellence of rational animals like us, is highly plausible. Peter Geach first expressed it thus: 'We need the virtues like the bees need stings.'; Foot often quotes this with approval.[18] But a debate is emerging in virtue ethics about a question which it is natural to raise next: just *how* natural are the virtues supposed to be, in the sense of automatic and inevitable? This debate hinges on the extent to which virtues are 'motivationally self-sufficient' – how strongly virtues determine what the agent does.

I begin with a very rigorous conception. Sabina Lovibond (1997), and more recently when discussing material for her forthcoming book, explores a possible understanding of the Socratic thesis that once virtue is mastered, it determines the virtuous person's actions completely. On this view, *akrasia* is not a puzzle, but an impossibility. She argues that if we exploit recent developments in continental philosophy of the subject, and draw on the notions of authorship and the essential alterity of language, we can see the plausibility of the Socratic thesis more clearly: to be virtuous is to be the full author of our moral expressions. For this, the virtuous person has to have 'made them her own' – to have mastered them in upbringing, and to see the world in the light of them. But the alterity of language presents a problem for this. Language has a history independent of the agent, a use wider than any she can grasp, and effects beyond what she can control. In that sense, Lovibond suggests, the ideal of character that is the full author-

[17]See *Philosophical Investigations* § 201.

[18]We can still keep hold of the insight if we lose some of the Catholic masochism that informs it, I think. Bees, of course, don't learn to have stings. And they usually die when they use them. A better analogy might be: we need the virtues like swallows need the skill of navigation by the stars. That natural virtue has the virtue of being both learned and (usually, at least) non-fatal.

ship of moral expressions may actually be unattainable – the 'uncanny figure' of Aristotle's *phronimos* may never be instantiated. This gives grounds for both optimism and pessimism about virtue – optimism because, once achieved, properly inculcated virtue silences other considerations and is invulnerable to the 'depressions' which prevent action in less complete cases; pessimism because virtue is so great an achievement and so rarely completed.

Virtues seen in this way are fully motivationally self-sufficient – they will reliably motivate agents to act in contexts where they are relevant. But this idea that virtues are motivationally self-sufficient has come under attack from empirical psychology. Psychological experiments appear to show that there is no such thing as virtue thus understood – situational factors most strongly predict behaviour, and no evidence for stable character traits transcending situational variables has yet been found. How can virtue ethicists respond? Maria Merritt (this volume) evaluates the situationist challenge to virtue ethics. Merritt accepts situationist evidence, but argues that it threatens only a very demanding conception of virtue, which she follows others in associating with Aristotle. A more modest, more socially integrated model of virtue is available, which comes from Hume, and is not vulnerable to refutation by situationist evidence. Where this version of the Aristotelian conception implies that a good upbringing plus an accumulation of practical experience will be sufficient to secure motivational self-sufficiency, the Humean conception recognises that the virtuous agent needs in addition the ongoing support of the right kind of social circumstances. This may look at first like a pessimistic recognition of the vulnerability of virtue to moral luck - but it needn't be read that way. Merritt suggests that we see it as a supplement to what we already know about the virtuous person: they have to (try to) express the virtues in their actions; but they have also to act so as to nurture the motivational self-sufficiency of those virtues. This implies an opportunity for a further, reflexive virtue: that of seeking out and supporting the kinds of relationship and community that make virtue possible. This virtue is to be discharged by virtuous people not just in their training of the not-yet-virtuous, as in the Aristotelian picture; but also in care for themselves, and care for the moral agency of others.

This conception of virtue as dynamic, fragile and socially dependent has much to recommend it, as accurate theory as well as good politics. One very common complaint about Aristotelian virtue ethics has been that it seems to recommend complacent, uncritical acceptance of the status quo.[19]

[19]Williams' (1995) criticisms of McDowell make this point especially forcefully.

Alasdair MacIntyre's recent discussion of virtue in (1999b), gives some content to the social requirements whose formal features Merritt describes. He explores the responsibility for self that the virtuous person has, and concludes that even in a completed moral outlook, the requirements of the virtues of constancy and integrity ensure that the virtuous agent cannot simply be seen as a perfect mechanism linking reasons to action via virtue. The virtuous agent has integrity and constancy, and so must reflect critically upon what they are taught. They must also integrate their different roles, and resist the compartmentalisation which the fragmentation of modern society encourages. A person who makes no connection between the requirements of good parenthood and those of good citizenship, cannot be virtuous on this view. Responsibility for self is thus established, and a requirement on a virtuous society for sustaining the conditions for virtue is as clearly mandated.

Theo van Willigenburg (this volume) explores a related problem for the rigorous conception of virtue. For van Willigenburg, the virtue of integrity consists in identity-conferring deep commitments relating to universal moral concerns. The problem is, how can we maintain integrity, and sometimes compromise, as good social life requires us to? Virtuous compromise is possible, van Willigenburg argues, on several grounds: first, the order of priority of the values to which we have identity-conferring moral commitments is indeterminate, both ontologically and epistemically, and a virtuous person will recognise this. Second, we are morally required to respect other sincere seekers for moral truth, and third, we are bound to recognise that certain of our values are subject-relative. He concludes that so long as all parties in a community recognise the indeterminacies, and respect each other, they have a deep moral reason to compromise, which will express and sustain rather than undermine their identity as moral agents with integrity.

All virtue ethicists agree, then, that the constitution of a virtuous agent requires the inculcation of virtue through education in childhood. They diverge on what more is required after that. Some think this will be enough for motivational self-sufficiency – that virtue is like riding a bicycle, as it were. Others think that much more is required, from the agent and from the society around them. From the agent, we need constancy and integrity; from the society around them, we need an ongoing effort to encourage people to integrate their different roles, to stand back and reflectively criticise both themselves and the social order that shapes them. (To the extent that these conditions are not met, both modern society and modern individuals are deeply culpable, in MacIntyre's rather sombre view.)

c) Virtues and Reasons

Can a virtue be my good reason for acting? Comment on this question in the literature is tantalisingly brief and oblique. Virtue ethicists of course agree that a conception of the virtues is required to explain what the good person does; but it is less obvious that the virtues of the virtuous can function as their reasons. A comparison may be useful: my skill at tennis surely explains my brilliant serve last Tuesday morning. But just as surely, my skill is not my reason for serving as I did, in the sense of 'consideration in the light of which I decided to do it'.

If we look at the list of constraints in the previous section, how do virtues, understood as more or less self-sufficient dispositions to act in specified ways under specified conditions, fare? First, can virtues be explanatory reasons? The constraints on offer there were: explanatoriness (most strongly, causation), avowability, and link to existing motivational set. It is easy to say that virtues can motivate action – indeed, they are defined to do so. But are they avowable? Virtues may fail the avowability test. If I say that I am acting *for the reason that* this action will express a virtue, I am showing a 'pharisaic concern for the wrong objects' (Cullity (1999)). It is this interpretation that has led to the criticism that virtue ethics is self-centred. A virtue can be an motivating reason, then: it is quite possible for me to *be* primarily concerned with showing off my skills. But it seems that my virtue cannot be advanced as a consideration that displays the moral rationality of my action without changing the moral value of that action.

Can virtues be normative practical reasons? The question fragments into several others: Are they the sort of thing members of the community will recognise? Are they derived in the right way? Do they recognise the right objects? Are they categorical? Are they the right kinds of thing, metaphysically speaking? When we press these questions, we start to feel just how awkwardly they fit with the concept of virtue as we use it. Of course, virtues are the sort of thing that members of the community will recognise – but as explainers. Not as first-person avowed *reasons* for acting as they did. Of course, in a sense, virtues are 'derived in the right way' – process of education, assiduous self-correction and imitation of good others. But it would be much more natural to say that a virtue furnishes the agent with an ability to discern and act on good reasons, than to say that it can constitute those reasons. Of course, in a sense, virtues recognise the right objects – that is their job! But again, it seems more natural to say that the objects are the reasons, not the virtue. Are virtues categorical? We discussed the question of the extent to which virtues compel action above. There seems to be an explanatory confusion in the question: a virtue is a dispo-

sition to act in certain ways – to, we might say, take certain considerations as compelling. To ask if the-taking-of-considerations-as-compelling is itself compelling, is to invite a kind of moral double counting.

Are virtues the right sort of things, metaphysically speaking, to be reasons? For Dancy, reasons have to be substantial enough to call for action from us. Virtues probably are pretty substantial things: capacities are more substantial than propositions. So the problem with them may not be with their being the wrong kind of thing, but with their being in the wrong place, so to speak. The virtue is in the agent, we might say, where we need the reason to be in the world on which they act, calling for action from them. There is a danger that this question shades off into merely verbal dispute. If I act benevolently, does it really make any difference whether I cite as my reason the capacity which makes it possible, or the good end which it seeks, or the need which it meets? Perhaps not – but there seem to be intuitions in the literature that there are substantive answers to these questions. The intuition is most powerful in response to a first-personal avowal of one's virtue as one's reason. That seems inappropriate - either mistaken, or morally inferior. Intuitions are more hazy on the question of whether the end can be the reason. If my goal is to live well, and I offer food to a hungry stranger, both the end and the need which is in front of me are available for use in the rational reconstruction of my thinking in a pattern of inferences.

Aristotle's terminology on explanation may help at this point. The 'teleological conception' of moral reasons just described contrasts with what we might call the 'efficient conception', the idea that the reason has to be something substantial, that comes before the action and 'calls for it'. It is this intuition that lies behind the definition of a virtue as a capacity to recognise reasons; and behind the substantiality requirement. If states of the world are our reasons, then virtues cannot be, on pain of overdetermination. But even if we exclude virtues from the category of moral practical reasons, this does not mean we have to say that they play no essential role in understanding ethics. They are the kinds of things that make ethical activity possible. But they are not the kinds of things in the light of which an agent can decide and act. Whether this undermines or bolsters the claims of virtue ethics to offer a complete theory of the moral life, I leave it for others to decide.

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