Chapter 1

Nature: Humanity and Natural Normativity – Virtues as Necessary For Rational Animals

"Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."[1]

"Man alone of the animals possesses speech." (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1253a)

I. Grounding Ethics

Rosalind Hursthouse argues that facts can license evaluative judgments. Though ethical evaluations are "disanalogous to non-ethical ones in various ways", nevertheless, she argues that "both depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question."[2] But is this right? Can knowing what *is* the case license the judgment that something else *ought* to be the case? A basic premise of ethical naturalism is Foot is right. The aim of this chapter is to defend her view. Some natural facts are normative facts; namely, natural facts about natural kinds (life-forms, species, etc.).

1. Mark Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *Philosophy of Biology. An Anthology*, 2009, 151.

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

Is-Ought Objection

To some, this project seems hopeless. The greatest worry we can call the is–ought gap.[3] Simply put, one cannot learn anything about *what ought to be* simply by examining *what is*. One cannot validly leap from descriptive premises (such as "most male celebrities wear black ties to the Oscars") to normative conclusions (such as "males ought to wear a black tie to the Oscars") – at least not without another normative premise (such as "when attending the Oscars, one ought to dress however most people are dressing"). Similarly, it is thought, we cannot infer from the anthropological fact that almost all human beings in almost all cultures wear clothing the moral fact that one ought to wear clothing. In light of this general truth, even if we knew something reliable about human nature, which knowledge is itself perhaps impossible, we would not there by be any closer to knowing anything about human ethics. At best, the neo-Aristotelian could hope to provide a detailed description of how human beings in such-and-such a culture approve of this or that, or pursue this and avoid that, find this worthwhile or admirable and find that worthless or reprehensible.[4]

Thesis

This objection is formidable, but a response can be made. Responding to the Is-Ought objection will occupy us in this chapter.

3. I address two other worries at the end of this chapter.

4. Another objection – from a quite different quarter – is the worry that human nature is corrupted by ancestral sin. On this objection, even though human nature exists and even though a good person would be an exemplary human being as such, none of us actual human beings are situated appropriately to identify what is good or to become good. Our moral efforts, our natural inclinations, and even the very intellect by which we engage in moral reflection are co-opted by a deep brokenness of the heart – a depravity of spirit. All our natural inclinations and best efforts to arise above them are doomed from the start, which renders our moral efforts in need of outside assistance if they are to make any progress. This objection is a real one, but I must defer it, for two reasons: (1) Those readers of different theological positions or no theological position at all will not have this worry; (2) I hope to treat the relation of virtue ethics to religion in general in a later work which make this objection its main theme.

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."[5] The neo-Aristotelian strategy is to somehow derive normative ethical conclusions by first understanding the facts of humans as mammals and primates, as rational creatures, as practical agents, as political animals, as a particular life-form, or what have you.[6] To get here, we need natural norms. We have them in the form of natural teleological facts. Accordingly, Brown's thesis is simply put: "there is teleology in nature." Peter Geach argues the same thing.[7]

The thesis of this chapter, then, is that there is such a thing as natural normativity in the form of brute, natural, teleological facts. Concepts such as natural normativity may seem to be oxymorons, like an "is/ought" or "normative fact" or "prescriptive description." But I shall contend that such concepts are as scientifical respectable as natural kinds and generic truths.

The thesis of this chapter is not that *all* of nature is teleological, of course; I do not wish to defend the notion that everything – including stars and rocks – "has a purpose", as if the cosmos were an orchestra being played, though such natural normativity in the form of natural teleology has received a windfall of recent defenders.[8] There is enough natural normativity to ground a theory of

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

6. In general, I follow Julia Annas in dividing strategies for grounding ethics into roughly three: The first camp bases ethics on religious or metaphysical theories derived from or reflected in religions or social tradition (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes). The second camp grounds ethics on non-natural properties, such as the good, the beautiful, the sublime – (e.g., G. E. Moore, Russ Shafer-Landau, and very differently, Kant). The third camp grounds ethics on theories of some aspect of nature, such as one's sentiments and natural sympathies, or in human reason, or in human contracts, in pleasure and pain, and so on (e.g., a Richard Boyd, Peter Railton, Frank Jackson, or David Hume). Now, one can find virtue theories in each of these three camps. Indeed, some virtue ethical theories are based on religious or metaphysical theories (Christian ethics, Platonic ethics, etc.). Naturalistic neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics tend to ground ethics in human nature, conciously juxtaposing phrases like 'a good human' with 'a good plant' or 'a good deer.'

7. Peter Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1.

8. Monte Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Mariska Leunissen, *Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Science of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); James

ethics in observations of human nature as practical, rational animals. At least some natural entities – especially living organisms – have ineliminable, irreducible, normative properties.[9]

Since we have good reason to think this is so, the Is-Ought objection ceases to be a problem. It still remains impossible to derive an ought from an is; but we find that nature contains some basic, fundamental, natural 'oughts.' Hence, the facts of *the way we are* supply excellent (indeed, very often overriding) reason for *the way we ought to be*. And I shall argue that some evaluative judgments – such as that 'virtues are beneficial for humans' and that 'wisdom is a virtue' – true and can be known to be true by discovering our identity as practical, rational animals.

In short, the is-ought gap (or fact-value gap) can be overcome by discovering natural teleological facts. Natural teleological facts are normative and thus from them one can derive normative conclusions. Some of these normative conclusions are normative *ethical* conclusions. This is the contention of the recent neo-Aristotelians.

Chapter Outline

To make this case, first, I shall examine our three key neo-Aristotelian for their accounts of 'natural normativity', which will set up the argument in a later chapter that ethics can be grounded in the facts of human nature. Secondly, I shall offer a more rigorous argument for the fundamental premise that we can infer normative conclusions from natural facts since some natural facts are brutely normative facts.

Barham, *PhD Dissertation: Teleological Realism in Biology* (Web; University of Notre Dame, 2011); Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford University Press, 2012); 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; 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; Tim Mulgan, *Purpose in the Universe: The Moral and Metaphysical Case for Ananthropocentric Purposivism* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology."

9. Compare with Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 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."

1. Some generic statements about natural entities are true, then some facts are both genuinely natural and normative – there are "natural norms."
2. Some generic statements about natural entities are true.
3. Therefore, some facts are genuinely both natural and normative – there are "natural norms."
4. If some propositions are genuinely both natural and normative, then ethical naturalism is possible.
5. Generic propositions are genuinely both natural and normative.
6. Therefore, ethical naturalism is possible.
7. On ethical naturalism, all generics can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
8. Some true generics are about humans.
9. So, there are some human natural norms.
10. All natural norms can be used as premises in arguments with normative ethical conclusions.
11. Some true generics about humans are natural norms.
12. Therefore, some true generics about humans can be used as premises in arguments with normative ethical conclusions.

II. Scientific, Empirical Naturalism: Foot on Natural Goodness, Natural Normati

Let's begin with Philippa Foot. Foot argues that human virtues are instances of a broader class of natural properties: 'natural goodness.'[10] 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. For example, Moore assumed that "good" was the ultimate predicate under review in ethics; but statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection. Foot argues, instead, that 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.

Evaluation of human creatures, she argues, follows the same logical pattern as evaluation of plants and animals. In such evaluations, good is good *for*. To see why, contrast 'good' with other

10. 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.

predicates like 'red' or 'beautiful.' In a statement such as 'the house is beautiful', the predicate 'beautiful' doesn't need a complement. The house is *beautiful* – full stop. But 'good' (like 'useful') has a different logical function. 'The house is useful' does need a complement – the house is useful *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Similarly, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* 'Good' always needs a complement. If this crude beginning is anywhere near to correct, we can distance ourselves from Moore's starting point and build on another starting point: the life-form of human beings.

In this Foot agrees with Thompson's groundbreaking *Representation of Life*. There, he argues that the concept of "life" is not, as it may seem to some, a property of some beings where *being* is the fundamental concept; rather "life" is a fundamental concept.[11] 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."[12] 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. For example, 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. Call this the Practicality Requirement. (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.) But the action-guiding feature of morality is not best captured by positing that morality

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

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

is 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. Foot concludes:

> 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.[13]

Another way of putting this point is that some properties we can call 'goodness' are primary qualities of nature.

Fareira, Excellence Naturalism

III. McDowell on Two Natures – second nature, value constructivism

John McDowell's view contrasts sharply with Foot.[14] A quotation from express 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.[15]

As we have seen, Foot finds a kind of normativity in the natural, biological facts themselves. For McDowell, normative facts are not "given". An evaluative judgment cannot be lifted, without

13. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.

14. Allen Thompson, "Reconciling Themes in Neo-Aristotelian Meta-Ethics," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (2007): 245–63; Marinus Farreira, "Reasons from Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism," 2011.

15. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 167.

intermediary, from a factual judgment.

McDowell's metaphysics

The contrast between them, as McDowell suggests, arises from a differing conception of the natural world and its relation to human rationality and culture. For McDowell, not even *facts* are given. Not even propositions intended to describe natural facts (such as that penguins are birds and the sun is a star) can be lifted from nature, free from mediation by human consciousness. In making factual judgments such as that the penguin is black, McDowell argues that *factual judgments themselves* involve human consciousness. Unless consciousness has 'spontaneous' activity already active in its receptivity to empirical experience, there is no empirical experience of things *as* being this way rather than that.[16]

McDowell's ethics

Recall that McDowell's writings on mind, value, and reality have been formed by two main influences: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[17] He follows the later Wittgenstein in doing "therapeutic" philosophy.[18] Philosophy 'leaves everything as it is'[19]. That is, McDowell believes many philosophical puzzles arise not from puzzling reality but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": bad ideas need to be *exorcized*.

McDowell's theory of ethics

McDowell's objection to Foot comes into view as part of his broader project in metaphysics and ethics to dissolve worries about the mind's relation to the world, specifically those worries that arise

16. Cf. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996) for McDowell's most thorough statement of this way of solving the anxiety-inducing mind-body problem.

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

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

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

from false dualisms. In this case, the false dualism is the apparent disjunction between treating values (or norms) as *either* primary qualities *or* unreal, illusory, and purely subjective. "Values and Secondary Qualities" argues that values are like colors and unlike shapes.[20]

He is not a 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".) So his view is that values are qualities in the world (not just in our heads) but they are not Lockean "primary qualities." They are Lockean secondary qualities.

McDowell argues that values are not primary qualities.

On this (Footian) view, 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…"[21] The reason McDowell can't take naive realism seriously is that he finds one sort of 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."[22] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie: the central doctrine of European moral philosophy is a mistake; it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are. The doctrine of natural normativity runs afoul of the modern doctrine that nature is a manifold of pure fact without any normativity 'built in', and without any internal relation to evaluators like ourselves; but, as I shall argue, the modern doctrine is the mistake.

Thinking of colors as primary qualities is not even coherent. If it were true that colors were qualities adequately conceived apart from their essentially phenomenal subjective aspects, then suddenly the concept of red becomes opaque. If we exclude the phenomenal aspect of redness and

20. 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.

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

22. Ibid., 143.

attempt to define 'red', we are at a loss. So it seems that redness is as a primary quality is not "common sense" and not even coherent. Redness, rather, is an essentially phenomenal concept; its subjectivity is so to speak 'built in.' That is not to say all essentially phenomenal concepts are nonveridical; just that they are not 'thoroughly objective.'[23]

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."[24] Ironically, the view that moral facts are real, objective facts has been both praised as "common sense" and alternately blamed as "platonism."[25]

Why not treat redness and other secondary qualities as purely "projective"? Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[26] 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."[27]

McDowell defends the Lockean distinction against a different sort of schema that would categorize "shape and color" on one side (as objects, in the world, etc.) and "my experiences of shape and my experiences of color" on another side (as taking place in the subject, as phenomenal, experiential, etc.). Certainly there is a phenomenological bit to seeing shape just as there is of seeing color; but shape unlike color can be conceived without reference to the phenomenological bits.

In short, McDowell's view of values is a "sensibility theory". Sensibility theories teach that

23. Ibid., 138, quoting Mackie.

24. Ibid., 137.

25. Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 155: "It might be thought ordinary conceptions of rationality Platonistic or intuitionistic. On the Platonistic Picture coma among the facts of the world are facts of what is rational and what is not. A person of normal mental powers can discern these facts. Judgments of nationality are thus straightforward apprehensions of fact, not through sense perception through a mental faculty analogous to sense perception…".

26. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, *Foundations of Ethics*, 2007, 139.

27. Ibid., 139.

moral properties are like colors. He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[28] Experience of secondary qualities is a (sense) perceptual experience. This a Lockean doctrine. Redness is not *merely* a microscopic texture property (say, the texture that scatters all light waves except red ones) because microscopic textures don't *look red* and things that *look red* appear so to observers with no knowledge of such textures.

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

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

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"[29] 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*.

28. Ibid., 138.
29. Ibid., 142–3.

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.

Despite their differences, McDowell shares with Mackie and Blackburn a radically reductive, disenchanted, Laplacian picture[30] of material nature as a manifold of bald descriptive facts. There is a deeply-held assumption shared by McDowell and his interlocutors that minds are divorced from and must either interface with or remain utterly divided from the world. Treating values as secondary qualities captures the objective bit about color while also capturing the recalcitrant subjective bit. This picture of nature forces McDowell to hastily reject all forms of realism.

The disagreement between Foot and McDowell represents a broader disagreement between what McDowell classifies as "empirical naturalism" on the one hand and his own "relaxed naturalism" on the other. We might also call this divide "empirical naturalism" and "excellence naturalism."[31]

IV. My Argument

What are we to make of the prospects for basing one's ethical theory on natural facts? Must one base the theory on the broadest class of natural facts – facts about biological life forms – or only on facts of human nature, if at all? Who has the upper hand between these three? My view is that the kind of naturalism upon which neo-Aristotelian virtue concepts (such as will be explored in a later chapter) is best supplied by a synthesis of Foot's and McDowell's views. Before I defend the synthesis, however, I need to defend Foot's view against the McDowellian worry that "given" natural facts can be normative and teleological.

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

31. Farreira, "Reasons from Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism."

My postulate builds on a little utilized linguistic and conceptual feature of human thought that, I suggest, cuts up nature at the joints. 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"[32], "natural-historical judgements"[33] "norms"[34] "bare plurals"[35]. I prefer the shorter and less adorned term 'generic'.

My postulate is this: **some generics about human beings are true.**[36] What is a generic? Andrew Bailey's recent paper arguing for animalism defines the thesis "we are animals" as a generic. His summary is this:

> 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.[37]

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. As Leslie says:

32. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

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

34. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 14–15. Anscombe is not very optimistic about the project Thompson, Foot, and I are undertaking.

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

36. 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; cimpian2010generic 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.

37. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.

> 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).

They are not true universals that can be translated rigorously as "for any x, if x is an S, then S is F" nor are they mere existentials that can be translated as "for some x, if x is S, then S is F."

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.

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 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 if it is an item of conceptual knowledge about wolves as a *kind*. Particular or existential statements like the latter are true but uninteresting. A generic is interesting because it is, or we treat it as, a truth about forms, or species. The subject of the statement is not all S's nor merely some S's, but the "infama species."[38]

Generic truths are acquired via familiar means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion. So for example, I observe that the penguins appear to be birds (they have beaks, feathers, lay eggs, emit squawks, etc.). I reflect that most – if not all birds – have many of these macro features. I consult my encyclopedias, biology or zoology textbooks, or friends who are zoologists,

38. Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 222, quoting Thompson.

and ask them whether penguins indeed are birds. They all confirm the categorization. From observations and reflections such as these, penguins earned an entry in the annals of scientific knowledge. The biological community gives them a scientific name ('sphenisciformes'), a more or less speculative evolutionary history is written, and research provides an increasingly detailed descriptions of their 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. Suppose for *reductio* that no generic statements are true. Then eyes are not for seeing, penguins' countershading does not help them avoid predators, and we must deny that normal penguins can swim up to 4 miles per hour. Such denials are, I think, absurdities.[39]

In reality, much of our conceptual knowledge consists in generics.[40] Generics are not, strictly speaking, universal statements (since they admit of exceptions without falsification). They are not merely statistical regularities: suppose it is true that California condors can fly for hours without resting.[41] Nevertheless, in 1987 there were only 27 known living condors; one could easily imagine a scenario in which every single remaining member of an endangered species are injured, old, or diseased and so none of them exemplify this attribute. It would be strictly true of the individuals of the species that *none* can fly for hours; nevertheless it would still true conceptually that "condors" can fly for hours.

39. 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 absurdist (let us call her) who thinks all such scientific statements are systematically false would cheerfully deny that "penguins are birds", that "eyes are for seeing" and that "humans are mammals." She would renounce the bizarre belief that the earth orbits the sun or the unconscionable faith that earthquakes are caused by tectonic plate shifts. She is free to deny my thesis.

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

41. Jeffrey P. Cohn, "Saving the California Condor," *BioScience* 49, no. 11 (1999): 864–68.

The notion that **generics are fundamentally normative** needs some arguing. Examples: "a penguin that cannot swim up to 4 miles per hour is either immature, injured, or defective"; "a lone wolf is not a normal wolf"; "eyes that do not see are either not fully developed, or injured, or ill. Since we know that"eyes are for seeing" we know that eyeballs that cannot see are *defective*.

Such judgments "admit of combination into teleological judgments" such as *penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.* 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").[42] 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."[43]

Two paths

I see two paths forward: denial and acceptance. The first path would be to deny that generics capture the truth about nature and attempt to explain their ubiquity in another way, or to deny that statements about human nature are analogous to generic statements about plants and animals.[44] For instance, John McDowell defends a view that humans partake in morality (and rationality) by their "second nature" rather than primary, bald nature. Alternatively, one could attempt to reduce natural normativity to some other, broader, non-normative category. But McDowell is also far more comfortable than I am in denying that natural facts such as "penguins are birds" are "given" truths

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

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

44. See Ernst Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 1 (1992): pp. 117–35 for an attempt to disambiguate the term "teleology"; see Frank Jackson, "From Metaphysics to Ethics," 1998 for an attempt to render reduction of normative to non-normative facts at least conceivable; see Ruth Garrett Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science*, 1989, 288–302 for an attempt to reduce the kind of teleological functions we seem to "read off" natural entities to an empirical history; and see Barham, *PhD Dissertation* for a counterargument to Millikan.

of nature available to the human mind without an idealist interpolation.

The second would be to accept that much of our conceptual and scientific knowledge of nature takes the form of generic knowledge: knowledge about kinds, categories, properties, and patterns that are neither universal nor merely statistical regularities. Some take this path. For instance, the small but intrepid group of philosophers currently carrying this banner are *moral naturalists* of the neo-Aristotelian variety, like Geach[45] and Foot[46], and Stephen Brown[47]. Their work is so momentous because their ethical conclusions demand the maintenance of metaphysical premises, or at any rate because their metaphysical doctrines virtually emit ethical significance.

The reader who is following the argument thus far and sees where it is heading may have more or less strenuous objections. In order to do some justice to these readers, I shall be obliged to return to the subject of natural teleology in a later chapter. But for now, I must proceed to explain how the normativity of nature can and ought to serve as an ethical basis by showing how human beings, too, have a normative nature.

Does our knowledge of generics already embroil constructive conceptual capacities?

Conclusion

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.

45. Geach, *The Virtues*.
46. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.
47. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*.

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. That shall be the task in a later chapter.

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.[48]

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.[49]

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."[50] Nevertheless, she *does* endorse the project of grounding ethical evaluations in human nature. If this grounding is not *scientific*, then how is a grounding of ethics going to work?

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

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

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

V. 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.

What remains is to see if this general pattern of natural normative he applies to human beings or not. And if so whether the normativity is genuinely *ethical*. Furthermore, we must return to an answer the other two objections mention above. (Namely, the objection that there is no such thing as "human nature"; and the objection that, if there is, "human nature" is nothing over and above a complex set of biological, physiological, and perhaps sociological descriptions.)

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.

Generic Truths about Humans in General

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.

- Humans are rational
- Humans are language users.
- They are bipedal, walk upright, and have opposable thumbs.

- They have large brains.
- Their brains include a neocortex, prefrontal cortex etc. that corrleate with abstract thinking, problem solving, society, and culture.
- Humans are symbol users.
- In groups, humans communicate with signs and symbols.
- Humans are creative.
- Humans are self-reflective; they wonder who they are, tell stories about who they are, and disagree about who they are.
- Humans establish social relations not only upon biological grounds (children often grow up in homes with their biological parents) but upon normative grounds (some orphans grow up in orphanages created by philanthropists).
- Humans are curious.
- Humans gather knowledge into sciences.
- Humans don't just hunt and gather but farm, store, combine, ferment, and cook food.
- Humans don't just live on the ground, under the ground, or under trees, but build houses and shelters.
- 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.
- Humans have 32 teeth, are 4' 7" to 6' 3" tall (plus or minus), and weigh 120-180 pounds (plus or minus).
- Humans have two sets of 23 chromosomes in each somatic cell, and about 22,000 total genes.

- Humans reproduce sexually.
- Humans eat vegetables, red meat, fish, nuts, seeds, berries, fruits, mushroom, mollusks.
- Humans do not eat other humans.

Suppose that the earth was formed about 4.5 billion years ago and that life arose on earth 3.5 billion years ago. Suppose that anatomically modern humans arose about 200,000 years ago.

What defines us? What characterizes us? The old formulation of human nature was that humans are rational, featherless, bipedal, animals. I argue that this is still the best, emprically verifiable, scientific, and philosophical formulation of human nature. That we are animals is plain to anyone who wishes to examine the facts. Clearly, something changes when we examine human beings compared to all other animals or all other natural kinds.[51] We continue to evaluate humans on the basis of their species, but we evaluate not just their health and normal developmental stages, and their maturity, but their *actions*. The fact that our being potentially rational differentiates us from whales and chimps and cauliflower is just as plain. I do not wish to assume that all species have *only one* differentium. (There may be a thousand other rational animals out in the cosmos somewhere else.) I only urge the point that we happen to be the only ones on earth.

So the attempt to characterize human nature, however broadly, must not only cite our *physicality* – our relation to the physical world – but our animality – our relation to the living world as a whole. What property or set of properties differentiates humans from any other animal, or any other physical object? So the property of being an animal encompasses a whole range of biological and neurophysiological facts that obtain in each normal human being. And the property of being potentially rational encompasses a range of psychological, intellectual, and cultural facts that obtain in each normal human being.

Our language is unique. Other animals that communicate use non-grammatical closed systems with a small, finite set of symbols.ˆ[Communication systems used by other animals such as

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

bees or apes are closed systems that consist of a finite, usually very limited, number of possible ideas that can be expressed. In contrast, human language is open-ended and productive, meaning that it allows humans to produce a vast range of utterances from a finite set of elements, and to create new words and sentences."

I would add to this formulation that we are *practical*, rational animals. That is, we do not just act but act on reasons. We set goals and act in order to achieve goals. In the unity of reason between theoretical and practical that I shall ground both moral and intellectual virtue. All the acts of reason (whether theoretical or practical) are acts of *reason.* (I shall pick up the theme of practical rationality in a later chapter.)

I must hasten to add that "humans are practical, rational animals" is a generic. It admits of exceptions. Anacephalic babies are not even potentially rational, for they lack the subvenient brain structure necessary for rational consciousness, yet they are recognizably *human* (they are not opossums), just defectively so. (A war veterans is still human even if he or she is no longer bipedal!) Injury, illness, genetic defect, radiation poisoning, and any number of other negative factors may render a human being sub-rational. Coma, mental illness, and other factors may render a human being non-practical (unable to direct his or her own life to a normal degree). The point of the argument above was that generic truths about humans inform us about the lifeform of the species.

From Nature to Virtue

What does all of this have to do with virtue? Peter Geach says "Men need virtues as bees need stings."[52] Philippa Foot echoes Geach's statement about "need" and "necessity" as well. Alasdair MacIntyre subtitled his most recent monograph: "human beings need the virtues."[53] The kind of necessity being predicated here is the same kind of necessity with which a bee needs a sting. It is a formal and teleological necessity. Virtues are those qualities needed by us as members of the human

52. Geach, *The Virtues*, 17.

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

species, each member of which exemplifies the same human nature of being a potentially practical, rational animals.

Here is one: 'Human beings are practical, rational animals'. This is a generic, hence it is both descriptive and normative; it is a "thick" term. Initially, we can conclude that if human beings *really are* rational animals that an *irrational* human is ipso facto defective.[54] Again, I do not here intend to discuss mental illness, disability, birth defect, chromosomal disorders, and other such exceptions to 'normal' functional humans.

Now we must go further and specify what kind of life it is we as human beings live arising from what kind of creatures we are. Of course, the difficulty comes in attempting to move from such vague statements to particular moral statements: 'Human beings make and keep promises.' This will give us initial insight into the concept of virtue, which is our main theme. The subsequent chapters will provide more detail into the nature of virtue.

VI. Neo-Aristotelians on Human Nature

Foot on Applying Generics to Human Nature

Foot is well aware that the imposition of normativity onto brute nature, or the derivation of normativity from brute nature, is likely to seem absurd:

> The idea that any features and operations of humans could be evaluated in the same way as those of plants and animals may provoke instant opposition. For to say that this is possible is to imply that some at least of our judgements of goodness and badness in human beings are given truth or falsity by the conditions of human life. And even if it is allowed that certain evaluations of this kind are possible—those vaguely thought of perhaps as 'merely biological'—there is bound to be scepticism about the possibility that 'moral evaluation' could be like this.[55]

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

55. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.

However, she has tried to earn a hearing for this notion by arguing that the "meaning of 'good' in so-called 'moral contexts' " does not have a special logic of its own. Rather, as she insists, "no change in the meaning of 'good' between the word as it appears in 'good roots' and as it appears in 'good dispositions of the human will.'[56] Hursthouse articulates Foot's basic point in this way:

> The starting point is an idea that she has never lost sight of, and which figures in her early attack on Hare. It is the idea that 'good', like 'small', is an attributive adjective. What that entails is that, although you can evaluate and choose things according to almost any criteria you like, you must select the noun or noun phrase you use to describe the thing you are calling good advisedly, for it determines the criteria of goodness that are appropriate. Hare can call a cactus a good one on the grounds that it is diseased and dying, and choose it for that reason, but what he must not do is describe it as a good cactus, for a cactus is a living thing. He can describe it as a good 'decorative object for my windowsill' or 'present to give my detestable mother-in-law', but not as a good cactus.[57]

The point here is that 'goodness' is not a sui-generis, non-natural property projected by human beings out onto the world; rather, 'good' and 'defective' pick out natural properties of living things. The goodness of a cactus is relative to its cactus nature; the goodness of human beings is relative to their human nature. And that human nature is to be or have the potential to become practical, rational animals. Hursthouse continues:

> When we moved from the evaluations of other social animals to ethical evaluations of ourselves, there was an obvious addition to the list of aspects which are evaluated. The other animals act. So do we occasionally, but mostly we act from reason, as they do not, and it is primarily in virtue of our actions from reason that we are ethically good or bad human beings. So that is one difference that our being rational makes.[58]

A major objection that may arise to this equation of "rationality" with "human nature" is the response that rationality (in us) is just too different from any other kind of value or evauluability in animals and plants. Animals are not rational and so seem to belong to the realm of bald nature, pure descriptivity; humans are potentially rational and so they seem not to belong to the realm of

56. Ibid., 39.
57. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 195.
58. Ibid., 217.

bald nature, but live in the space of reasons. Culture, language, science, rationality, philosophy are all in the space of reasons. Hursthouse summarizes this worry as follows:

> This is a major part of the genuinely transforming effect the fact of our rationality has on the basic naturalistic structure. But has it transformed the structure beyond recognition? I said that ethical naturalism looks to be doomed to failure if it depends on identifying what is characteristic of human beings as a species, in the way their pleasures and pains and ways of going on are characteristic of the other species. By and large we can't identify what is characteristic of human beings as a species in this way—there is too much variety. boy are you I'm curling like she's very eat meatAnd even if we could, it looks as though we would not allow anything we identified to carry any normative weight if we thought it was something we could change. So is ethical naturalism, after all, a non-starter?[59]

McDowell is the major proponent of this worry.

McDowell

McDowell, recall, thinks that values are secondary qualities of the world but not primary. This belief is consistent with his solution to the mind-body problem that even primary qualities are not given to us in experience without the involvement of spontaneous conceptual capacities. He assumes that nature – primary nature – is bald nature, disenchanted from values, teloi, and other esoterica. Yet to posit humanity, especially human rationality, as merely mechanical would be to tonight our rationality. So he posits the space of reasons. Humanity exists in a space of reasons where we recognize reasons for belief and reasons for action. We are initiated into a Space of reasons by education, formation, cultivation (or *Bildung*).[60]

McDowell here invokes Aristotle's notion of ethics, by which he hopes to rethink our conception of human nature and nature as a whole. He says, "the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[61] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

59. Ibid., 222.
60. Bildung=formation, education; bild=form, image.
61. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.

> On this view of the virtues and vices everything is seen to depend on what human nature is like, and the traditional catalogue of the two kinds of dispositions is not hard to understand. Nevertheless it may be defective, and anyone who accepts the thesis that I am putting forward will feel free to ask himself where the temptations and deficiencies that need correcting are really to be found. It is possible, for example, that the theory of human nature lying behind the traditional list of the virtues and vices puts too much emphasis on hedonistic and sensual impulses, and does not sufficiently take account of less straightforward inclinations such as the desire to be put upon and dissatisfied, or the unwillingness to accept good things as they come along.

MacIntyre: Social Teleology

Alasdair MacIntyre's position on natural normativity is closer to McDowell's in most ways. That said, has shifted over the decades. I would like to mention both his earlier view and later view.

MacIntyre's earlier view — in *After Virtue* — is closer to that of McDowell than that of Foot. There, he emphasizes "second nature" far more than primary nature. That is, he finds a ground of normativity not in our life-form but in us: in our social identities, our culture, our rationality. For example, he says his account of virtue "happily not Aristotelian" for "although this account of the virtues is teleological, it does not require any allegiance to Aristotle's metaphysical biology."[62] The "metaphysical biology" MacIntyre refers to here is that metaphysically realist view that formal and final causes inhere (and in fact constitute) biological species.[63]

62. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 197.

63. These causes may be understood by metaphysical realists as intelligible forms or universals which the intellect, by virtue of its intelligible powers, can be abstracted. As John Haldane says: content-determining principles of perception are one and the same as the character-determining principles of the objects of perception — the identity of act and object." Intellection, in turn, is a distinctly human (rational) activity. While animals can not only sense but *perceive*, humans have the capacity of intellection, the power of abstracting the forms themselves from percepts. An animal can sense an informed, organized object; an animal can be affected by the object. But the human animal can *acquire information* from the organized object. The ability to perceive something *as*, or even to perceive something big and brown with a smudge on its nose, does not imply the ability to perceive that thing as a cat. Cf. John Haldane, "On Coming Home to (Metaphysical) Realism," *Philosophy* 71, no. 276 (1996): 287–96

That said, MacIntyre does most emphatically argue for a teleological form of ethics based on the normativity of *human* nature. He grounds teleology not in non-human nature but in human nature, specifically our practical, social nature. He calls this notion "social teleology." The notion of social teleology builds on the apparently obvious truth that *human society is teleological.* That is, we do not just act randomly. We do not only act according to the promptings of instinct (that too). Rather, we act *on reasons,* both individually and in groups. We act to achieve goals. Whether we arise from bed *in order to* give a talk, or drive to work *in order to* do a good job, or pursue a career *for* satisfaction and a profitable retirement, we are directing ourselves toward ends. In groups, too, we pursue shared goals, deliberate about *what is to be done*: Congress aims to pass just and beneficial laws. The school board aims to increase enrollment and balance the budget. Expanding our focus from individual actions or projects, we can put the point more strongly: all of human life is a practice. It can be brought under the concept of either one, unified, whole practice or pluralistic set of practices. Even when Iris Murdoch assumed[64] that human life has "no external point or τελος", she argues that it has a point *from within.* It is impossible, in other words, to bring our own human life under the concept of an *event.* Human life must be brought under the concept of a practice, which is teleological and essentially so.This insight has important implications for ethics, as well as other fields: action theory, sociology, anthropology, philosophy of mind, and so on.[65] But the point here is that, since we act in groups and for reasons, teleology is a real feature of our social nature. They cannot be understood without teleology. So if the critic of natural normativity rejects teleological realism (as did the early MacIntyre), it is enough if she accepts social teleology.

MacIntyre's later view is a bit more ambitious. While he does not go in for Foot's putative realism about "metaphysical biology", he does allow that the facts of our biological nature provide limits on what actions are ethical and what qualities count as virtues.

The project of *Dependent Rational Animals* is to insist that even if we are animals of a particular

64. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998).
65. Cf. Thompson, *Life and Action*.

and unusual sort human beings are animals. This basic truth has significant implications. As animals, our dependence and vulnerability are as morally significant as our independence, autonomy, or self-sufficiency. Virtues of independence are, in the writings of Aristotle and others, related to our powers of rational reflection; we can rise above our animal nature, command, direct, and manage our bodies, our farms, our cities, and so on. But since we are *both* animals and *rational*, there are virtues of both autonomy *and* dependence. The book also contends that certain social arrangements are conducive to the transmission and sustenance of both kinds of virtue.

Let's consider a key quotation on each of these themes. Regarding the notion that we are unusual animals, MacIntyre argues at length that the human differentia (be it language, reason, practical reason, self-consciousness, or what have you) does not eradicate the commonalities between us and other animals. He says:

> I shall contend that although our differences from all other species are certainly of crucial importance, it is also important that both initially in our earliest childhood activities and to some extent thereafter we comport ourselves towards the world in much the same way as other intelligent animals. Indeed our ability to transcend those limitations depends in part upon certain of those animal characteristics among them the nature of our identity.[66]

The point, I take it, is that rational animals is *what we are*. If we cannot escape our identity as animals who are (potentially) practically rational, then we cannot escape our need for certain virtues. Furthermore, some activities will militate against our growing up achieve full practical rationality; these are vices.

What *kind* of animal are we? We are by nature practical reasoners. As I argued above, social teleology is an essential element of practical reasoning. We can imagine any scenario of humans gathering and doing what comes naturally, and it will involve group deliberation about what to do: High school students debating about where to sit at lunch; couples arguing over the budget; political leaders proposing new laws; philosophy department meetings making hiring and

66. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8.

admissions decisions. It is impossible (for fully functioning adults) to live life even for a full day without engaging in such reasoning.

A second point MacIntyre makes is that human life is not one continuous phase of adulthood; it begins with youth and ends with old age. So MacIntyre breaks important new ground in explaining the relation between virtues of independence and "virtues of acknowledged dependence." He argues that the vulnerability, fragility, and affliction characteristic especially of early childhood and old age are highly morally significant. As he says:

> Virtues of independent rational agency need for their adequate exercise to be accompanied by what I shall call the virtues of acknowledge dependence and that a failure to understand this is apt to secure some features of rational agency. Moreover both sets of virtues are needed in order to actualize the distinctive potentialities that are specific to the human rational animal. Identifying how and why they are needed is a prerequisite for understanding their central place in the kind of human life through which human flourishing can be achieved.[67]

Many others in the Aristotelian tradition have noticed the significance that we have the potential to be rational, and the potential to be independent reasoners. Fewer, until recently, have noticed the significance of dependence. But the virtues of acknowledge dependence are not identical to the virtues (such as the empathy or patience) *of a care-giver*. Rather, they are virtues that arise in *relation* between the dependent and the care-giver.[68] Dependence is, after all, as close to any of use as sickness, injury, or misfortune. The dependent needs certain virtues (gratitude is perhaps a good example) that the care-giver does not need, or needs differently. Independent rationality is rather the exception than the rule. So it is simply wrong-headed to magnify the virtues of independence out of proportion of those that are needed, in individuals and in a community, at the beginning and end of life, and also any disabling portion of life.

67. Ibid., 8.

68. There is an obvious – and I think exciting – connection here with some feminist ethics and with the ethics of care, and MacIntyre acknowledges his debt. Cf Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

The third point pertains to the social arrangements needed to inculcate and consistently exercise such virtues. To achieve the communal goal of producing independent reasoners requires a systemic web of virtues across the entire communal association. MacIntyre argues that "neither the modern state nor the modern family can supply that kind of political and social association that is needed."[69] Not only individual human beings, but entire communities, institutions, and nations need virtues to keep their integrity and to produce the next generation of independent, virtuous, rational animals.

We can see how this renewed attention to our animal nature has implications for the normativity of nature. Certain social arrangements (features of "second nature") are liable to turn out to be conducive to the health and flourishing of creatures like us.

69. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 9.