Natural Goodness
By PHILIPPA FOOT
Clarendon Press, 2001. x + 126 pp. £17.99

What are we doing when we make moral judgements? Are we expressing attitudes towards a non-moral world, or are we attempting to describe something moral in the world? If the latter, then what, exactly, constitutes something being good, say, and makes our judgements true and false? And, if we have (normative) reasons to act, are the grounds of such reasons based on something about our individual desires and preferences, or something external to such things? In relation to all of these questions we might concern ourselves with asking what the good life is and how this life relates to the types of being we are and how we live now.

In *Natural Goodness* Philippa Foot addresses these and other questions. She wishes to reject both noncognitivism and neo-Humeanism about ethics, the latter being the familiar claim that, roughly, any individual agent has a normative reason to live and act if and only if that agent at bottom desires, in some sense, to live and act in that way. There is nothing external to the agent's desires that constitutes a normative reason and which anything described as 'rationality' could pick out. Her main argument against this position (p. 10) is to suggest, following Warren Quinn, that we would not consider practical rationality so important if "it were rational to seek to fulfil any, even a despicable, desire". (Similar things could be said about the value that actions seemingly have.) Foot wishes to replace neo-Humeanism with a type of neo-Aristotelianism. She aims to locate reasons in the developed characteristics and natural traits that we have as humans at this present point in our evolution. Roughly, we have reason to act in certain ways because this will enable us to flourish and become people who are better exemplars of the types of being we are. She draws an explicit parallel between the "patterns of natural normativity" of plants and animals and those she thinks exist for rational humans, even though, as she admits, we are more complicated beings.

Along the way she also discusses possible types of moral sceptic, specifically those that accept that one can distinguish between good and bad ways of living but maintain that there is no reason for them to live a good life since they don't care about doing so. Foot's answer (pp. 64–65) relies on giving a detailed enough picture of the sorts of life that the sceptics are rejecting so as to convince them that no one could reasonably reject living in, say, a trustworthy fashion. If the sceptics become more radical and ask why they should refrain from performing 'bad actions' (considered under that description), Foot says that we must emphasise the conceptual connection between acting well and acting rationally. If the sceptics want a reason for acting rationally then we can point out that reasons must come to an end somewhere and that it is not clear that they are now asking for something intelligible.

This book is worth reading, but as with most philosophical works it has its bad points along with the good. I shall begin with the good points. First,

Natural Goodness is to be welcomed because, in setting much of the current agenda in ethics, Foot has had the courage to change her ideas and it is good to have a statement of what she presently thinks. Secondly, I applaud her general aim and position. It seems to me right that facts about the sorts of being we are and can be—things we find illuminating and useful, and the ways in which we are compassionate and selfish—should have a bearing on what, in fact, we (all) have reason to do. Thirdly, there are quite a few interesting and suggestive discussions scattered around the book, in particular her comments about happiness, teleology, Nietzsche, and the moral development of children.

However, there are defects. Foot is clearly aiming to state a general position rather than fill in all gaps. But this can be frustrating, particularly when she is considering so many fundamental ethical questions. This defect is heightened by the book's relative shortness leaving her little space in which to give necessary detail and clarification. Here are three examples.

(i) She never clarifies what she means by 'desire'. Does it stand for specific, capricious urges, or our deep-seated, long-standing preferences, or what? (She seems to employ many characterisations.) This makes a big difference, given her rejection of the idea that reasons are based on desires and her acceptance that they are instead based on our natural, normative functioning. How are we to characterise our natural, long-seated 'desire' for friendship and trust, say? What is the difference between a 'desire' and a 'natural pattern'. A clear-cut distinction might be unavailable, but some exploration of this issue is required to bolster and clarify the position.

(ii) Similarly, matters are quite opaque when considering the questions with which I begin. For example, she admits (pp. 17–19) that Hume's practicality requirement is important and glosses it as saying that there is a necessary connection between moral judgement and action, but nothing tighter than that is given. It is clear that she wishes to discuss something like Bernard Williams's type of neo-Humeanism (as given above: roughly, one has a (normative) reason to act if and only if one desires, in some way, to act in that way). But she also seems interested in many other theses about motivation and judgement (for example, internalism about moral motivation) and her discussion slips from one to another with no acknowledgement of the different ideas. And, additionally, she never acknowledges possible subtle answers to the variety of questions I started with above. For example, some noncognitivists might (strictly) deny the existence of a world with moral and reason-giving character yet say that the normative reasons that 'quasi-exist' are based on things external to any *individual* agent.

(iii) Even if one is sympathetic to her ideas, one might feel that more detail is needed when arguing against scepticism. Her idea is clear enough: to argue against sceptics one needs to show that life goes better if, *ceteris paribus*, one keeps promises, say. But what discussions there are of such virtues and institutions fall far short, in my view, of what is required to convince sceptics (or even neutrals).

There are also defects of argumentation. I pick out only one here. When arguing against noncognitivism she acknowledges that one of its attractions is the fact that it puts choice centre-stage (p. 21). As she characterises it, the

world does not of itself have value and there aren't reasons external to us, but the world is invested with value and reason, as it were, because we choose to value it in a certain way, we prefer some things to others. In response to this worry (p. 22) she seems merely to restate her position: we should conceive of ourselves as "recognizing" and responding to reasons. Little if any 'cutting' reason is given for thinking this to be true. The best move here, in my view, is to argue with John McDowell that (roughly) modern noncognitivism wishes to say that some activities are better than others so as to account for moral rationality and appear plausible. Presumably what is meant here is '*ethically* better'. But this description is unavailable to noncognitivists since they are attempting to construct such concepts from non-moral, conative elements of like and dislike. There is more to say here on both sides, but a combination of this idea with Foot's neo-Aristotelian teleology would be interesting.

As I have said, there are reasons to read this book. It is useful because it sketches a position that is worth developing, but it is infuriating because one wishes for more development.

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Ideal Code, Real World. A Rule-consequentialist Theory of Morality
By BRAD HOOKER
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In this excellent book Brad Hooker aims to show that the version of rule-consequentialism he favours is attractive and plausible. Two main lines of argument are central to his strategy. The first seeks to show that rule-consequentialism avoids the often desperately counter-intuitive results to which more direct forms of consequentialism notoriously seem committed. The second is that, as he formulates it, rule-consequentialism can evade what are widely believed to be central difficulties of its own.

Hooker begins with an account of what he takes to be the ground rules for normative ethical theorising. In looking for the best moral theory, he urges, we are looking for a theory which starts from attractive general beliefs about morality, which is internally consistent, which coheres with our considered moral judgements in reflective equilibrium, which explains the correctness of our considered judgements by justifying them from an impartial standpoint and which helps us to make progress in thinking about difficult moral problems.

Given these ground rules, the theory Hooker thinks most promising is his own which says (simplifying a bit) that an act is wrong iff it is forbidden by the code of rules whose internalisation by the overwhelming majority of persons would have maximum expected value in terms of well-being. The costs of getting the rules in question internalised by the majority in each new generation are to be factored into our estimates of expected values.

In the light of Hooker's ground-rules, the many counter-intuitive upshots of a more direct consequentialism would leave the latter in some trouble. Most centrally, in Shelly Kagan's terminology, direct consequentialism

undermines the many agent-centred *options* and *constraints* that common sense morality would insist on. To take the case of options, the worry here is one about the demandingness of direct consequentialism. Direct consequentialist morality has imperialistic aspirations, threatening to take over the whole practical domain. For the direct consequentialist's single, massively exigent rule—*Optimise!*—is always in play, forbidding us to do whatever falls short of compliance.

Hooker's rule-consequentialism is certainly demanding also. It demands, he argues, that we should help the needy even at significant cost to ourselves. But, he suggests, following Garrett Cullity, that the demandingness may be reined in by assessing the costs to an agent of aiding others aggregatively, over time, rather than iteratively, taking each new situation separately. Preferring this to a more demanding rule of the sort a more direct consequentialist might favour is motivated by reference to the internalisation costs of such more demanding rules which would most likely, Hooker argues, be astronomical.

Rule-consequentialism had better not be the theory that you should do whatever is demanded by the optimal rules, except where doing something else would be optimal in which case you should do that. For that is just a foolishly round-about way of stating act-consequentialism. But if rule-consequentialism tells us we should, at least sometimes, obey the rules even where this is suboptimal, how can it be consequentialist at all? Here Hooker claims that, for his theory, the second horn of this dilemma is blunted. This second horn would be very sharp for a form of rule-consequentialism that was grounded on the thought that what ought most fundamentally to concern us, practically speaking, is to promote the good. But Hooker does not ground his theory on this thought. He grounds it on the thought that the best moral theory is the theory that scores highest in terms of the ground rules he defends at the outset. It is on that basis, and not in terms of some guiding consequentialist master-intuition, that the theory is recommended as attractive and plausible. Perhaps someone might grant this attractiveness and plausibility but insist that the theory is nonetheless not really consequentialist. Hooker disagrees but stresses, sensibly, that whether the theory is attractive and plausible is very much more important than what we choose to call it.

These are among the most central points Hooker develops, but there is much more of interest in this book. Thus, for example, the suggestive and intriguing Chapter 5 refines the characterisation of his position into what Hooker calls *wary rule-consequentialism*. This allows for considerable modesty with respect to our ability ever to determine with any great accuracy what the consequences in terms of well-being of our internalising any given code of rules would be. It is enough, he suggests, to identify codes the consequences of which are, so far as we can reasonably predict, as good as any other. To have any real bearing on practice, this requires that we are not always *hopelessly* in the dark as to the likely consequences of the various possible codes. Hooker is sanguine that this is far enough from being the case that we can at least narrow down the candidates considerably but concedes that the result is still liable to be a many-way tie. The tie is to be broken by adopting the code that is closest to conventional morality as, given that conventional morality is

what most of those around us remain guided by, this is abundantly warranted by dovetailing considerations of coordination and fairness.

I remain unpersuaded that Hooker's view is the correct one. But he has certainly succeeded in his aim of showing rule-consequentialism to be attractive and plausible enough to be worthy of serious philosophical attention and he has given those who continue to disagree much work to do in constructing a case against him. The book is very well-written, extremely clear and, given its wealth of content, wonderfully concise. It deserves to be very widely read and extensively discussed.

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