Chapter 1

The Virtue Triangle

"Not everything that is last claims to be an end, but only that which is best." –Aristotle, *Physics* 194a 32–33.

Introduction

In this dissertation, I shall defend the claim that: **virtues are the acquirable excellent character traits (such as moderation, tolerance, and wisdom) that are naturally necessary for practical, rational animals, and which partly constitute human flourishing.**

The main elements of this thesis are virtue ('acquirable excellent character traits') human nature ('practical, rational animals'), human flourishing. All three are rooted in the notion of normativity, including natural necessity and natural human flourishing. Each of these elements will receive further definition.

The approach to ethics I shall defend is naturalistic: it appeals to natural life forms, functions, and "organic teleology" to find out what is good for human beings. That is not to suggest that what is good for human beings is obvious without the help of rational reflection; rather, it is to suggest that rational reflection and human biology have a common root. Being good requires "doing what comes naturally" – with the caveat that one must discover one's own nature, sometimes with great difficulty.

My hope in making these arguments is to offer arguments to both virtue ethicists and metaethical naturalists. That is, I aim to persuade scientific naturalists to consider virtue ethics, and to persuade virtue ethicists to consider that the empirical sciences may have something to contribute to ethics. Hence, I explain three sorts of neo-Aristotelian naturalism in virtue ethics, critique the first two as inadequate by themselves, and defend the third. The first two are best represented, in my view, by Philippa Foot and John McDowell. To simplify things a bit, the Footian view aims provides a biological – even objective and scientific – basis for humanistic ethics; t he McDowellian view aims to provide a rational – intersubjective – basis for humanistic ethics. The third sort is represented by Alasdair MacIntyre, but has received attention recently from Christopher Toner, Micah Lott, Jennifer Frey, and others. This sort of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism promises a naturalistic, even scientific, foundation for normative virtue ethics as well as some detailed normative evaluations that promise to provide ethical guidance in life. As proof of concept, I advance the project a few steps by offering related accounts of virtue, reason, and flourishing.

My argument contributes to several lively and fascinating debates in ethics and metaethics. If what a human being naturally *needs* as a member of the species matches what a human being *ought* rationally to think and to do, then it follows that several ostensively distinct sub-disciplines are fundamentally connected. Positing a union between human needs and human ethics suggests close ties between the concepts of the human life form, flourishing, and moral goodness. Put differently, we might say that this kind of virtue ethics unites form, function, and excellence. Hence, these three concepts are not only individually interesting but interesting in so far as they constitute a single, three-part schema, which (for lack of a better term) I shall call the "virtue triangle."

I. The Virtue Triangle

Why are the concepts of the life form of rational animals, moral virtue, and natural flourishing *together* greater than the sum of their parts? In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre persuasively argues

that there are three necessary "elements" to morality:[1] namely, a goal, a starting point, and the means from the starting point to the goal.

These three elements are necessary features of the performance of any task – however menial or lofty. In a simple project such as, say, cooking a dinner, my goal might be to reproduce what I see in the picture of a tasty meal from a cookbook. The starting point includes the raw materials at my disposal, such as the food in my fridge (and my cooking skills); the means to the end is a recipe, including a list of needed ingredients and instructions that, once enacted, will produce a copy of the meal pictured. Similarly, one cannot make any mundane journey without a destination, a starting location, and directions (on foot, by car, by plane, or what have you) to the destination. (Even the desire to "explore the countryside" or even to "wander about" involves a set *goal* if not a set destination.)

The point of this simple reflection is that we ought to demand that any moral theory supply all three elements. MacIntyre explains that, in morality, the first element is "untutored human nature" (as it is). The second element is the moral human, humanity as it could be and should be. The third element is the set of traits, actions, emotions, habits, etc., needed to move from the first to the second points. Understanding "human-nature-as-it-is"[2] is a task for philosophers, as well as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. This would include a conception of the human species as rational animals as it is *prior* to deep self-reflection or moral effort. Understanding human nature "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos"[3] was "the whole point of ethics." This third conception of some human flourishing or telos we can and *ought* to realize. Moral rules or admirable character traits are the *content* of morality; but the telos of humanity is the *context* of morality. Telos makes morality make sense.

A moral theory cannot simply offer one or two out of the three, and neglect the third. It needs *some* conception of individual or social well-being, *some* conception of what it means to be

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 54 ff.
2. Ibid., 55.
3. Ibid., 55.

human (what kind of raw material are we working with?) and *some* conception of how one's moral duties and other obligations or other motivating factors connect humanity as it is with humanity-as-it-could-and-should-be. Morality simply makes no sense without showing which qualities, actions, attitudes, resources, laws, etc. enable a human being to achieve his or her telos. A moral theory is bound to stultify if it leaves out any one of these three formal elements. The scandel of many modern moral philosophies is that they do just that.

The neo-Aristotelians such as Foot, McDowell, MacIntyre, and Hursthouse attempt to remedy this situation by providing accounts of all three concepts. In doing so, they agree in drawing from pre-modern sources (such as Aristotle and Aquinas) but dispute the proper strategy for updating their ethical theories in our modern context.

All three concepts need additional clarification, for they are liable to misunderstanding in our modern context. Hursthouse puts the point this way: "Three of virtue ethics' central concepts, virtue, practical wisdom and eudaimonia are often misunderstood. Once they are distinguished from related but distinct concepts peculiar to modern philosophy, various objections to virtue ethics can be better assessed."[4] Objections fired at neo-Aristotelian ethical theories often hit a bullseye but on the wrong target.[5] A large part of my job is to stake out a conceptual space for virtue, practical reason (including its excellence, which I take to be practical wisdom), and natural human flourishing (which I take to be closely related to eudaimonia). My task is also to defend the trilateral form that relates them in a dynamic schema.

Realism about Natural Teleology

All three elements of the "virtue triangle" are important. But the unifying concept of the schema is not virtue but telos. If we cannot even perform a menial, intentional action without a goal, then *a*

4. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2013.

5. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011) gives a concise and clear account of all three.

fortiori it would seem we cannot perform our highest moral duties without a telos.

Defining that telos is, of course, the rub. But it seems apparent that strict moral rules without any notion of the kind of life that is to be lived are bound to degenerate into a kind of pointless legalism. If the teleological notion of natural human flourishing in particular is central to the project of virtue ethics, it would seem that developing a plausible modern virtue ethical theory would require rehabilitating a notion of natural teleology in general.

The project of rehabilitating natural teleology may seem overly optimistic.[6] It may be felt, for instance, that teleology has simply been debunked by modern science and therefore has no place in a scientific worldview, that Francis Bacon was right that the search for final causes "defiled philosophy"[7] and so that any attempt to revive teleological virtue talk is antiquarian and nostalgic.

This objection is a serious one, and will receive a reply. For now, I would like to highlight the stakes of the question. The differences between teleological niilism and teleological realism have significant ramifications for morality. For MacIntyre, the hypothesis that we ought to reject telos is the chief error of Enlightenment moralities. He explains why in his discussion of the three elements of morality which I have called "the virtue triangle." It is difficult to understate the importance of this point about the self. Edward Oakes describes the removal of telos from our worldview as "perhaps the greatest category mistake ever made in the history of philosophy."

> That word "teleological" is the key to MacIntyre's solution, the loss of which is the cause of the catastrophe described in his science-fiction parable. Teleology is

6. Arthur Ward's recent dissertation, to be discussed in a later chapter, argues that the sort of teleological naturalism being pursued here is not a good foundation for ethics. Arthur Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory" (PhD thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2013).

7. Cf. Bacon, *New Organon*, Book I. XLVIII "Although the most general principles in nature ought to be held merely positive, as they are discovered, and cannot with truth be referred to a cause, nevertheless the human understanding being unable to rest still seeks something prior in the order of nature. And then it is that in struggling toward that which is further off it falls back upon that which is nearer at hand, namely, on final causes, which have relation clearly to the nature of man rather than to the nature of the universe; and from this source have strangely defiled philosophy."

> the study of final causes, goals, purposes, and aims: a style of explanation that saturates Aristotle's philosophy. After the combined impact of Newton and Darwin, however, this type of explanation seems mostly 'quaint' and once Aristotle's science seemed quaint, his ethics soon followed: when Newton demonstrated how motion can be better explained as resulting from the outcome of mechanical laws, and when Darwin posited natural selection as the "mechanism" for explaining an organ's functionality, the use of teleology in ethics was doomed…Emptying moral discourse of teleological concepts because of the perceived impact of Newton and Darwin has been for MacIntyre the catastrophe of our times.[8]

The problem is not that rejecting telos was unfortunate, or damaging, but that it was *a mistake*. Who are we, if we are not natural creatures? Since we are natural creatures, shifts in our thinking about nature are liable to match shifts in our thinking about ourselves. John Horton and Susan Mendus captures the stakes well:

> Where Aristotle understood man as a creature with a definite function which he might fulfill or deny, modern morality sees man simply as a rational agent who has no true or definable purpose independent of his own will… By appealing to a telos, Aristotle was able to distinguish between the way we actually are and the way we should be. His conception of human beings as having a specific telos brought with it the possibility that we might fall short of the ideal… But with the rejection of Aristotelianism gain the rejection of any such distinction between what we are and what we should be. Post-Enlightenment man is seen as governed, not by a telos external to him, but simply by the dictates of his own inner reason… Thus the abandonment of an Aristotelian conception of the good has not only left us without standards by which to evaluate our moral arguments, it is also cast us adrift in the moral world.[9]

These reflections suggest that at least our conception of ethics needs to be teleological. As we have seen above, there are several ways to achieve this conception. Foot argues that teleology is genuinely natural to all living organisms; McDowell argues that it is not natural to all organisms but that it is to humans. Even MacIntyre's project is not *Aristotelian* but "neo-Aristotelian" in that he contrasts with Aristotle's project on several points.[10]

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

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

10. For instance, MacIntyre denies that Greek virtues are so timeless, abstract, and generi-

A fundamental feature of my thesis is that realism about natural teleology is – and can be shown to be – perfectly respectable, modern, scientific, and naturalistic. As I shall argue in a later chapter, while it is true that some modern sciences focus exclusively on non-teleological causes (material, efficient, and possibly formal causes), methodologically excluding phenomena from study is different from denying such phenomena outright. Furthermore, some modern sciences (such as biology, ecology, medicine, and others) do irreducibly and unavoidably focus on teleological causes. Perhaps, after several centuries, it is time to consider that the search for final causes, – rather than "defiling" science – advances it. Hence, a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics grounded on human nature can be both scientifically informed and action-guiding.

Other Disclaimers

One of the wonderful things about philosophical reflection is the license – indeed the imperative – to examine new ideas and rexamine old ones. Philosophers have a unique vantage point from which to find plausibility in the most exotic or unpopular thoughts, to criticize implausibility in the most cherished of thoughts, and to see interconnections between varying disciplines. While this dissertation begins in a straightforward analysis of virtue ethics, it unabashedly explores some ideas (of varying plausibility) from philosophy of science, philosophy of biology, bioethics, social sciences, and a bit of epistemology as needed. While these discurses were not expected at the beginning of my research, they came to seem necessary and fitting in the eventual presentation of conclusions, which form a coherent whole. I hope the overall cohesion is apparent, if not at the beginning, by the end.

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cally human as Aristotle would make them appear; they are partly indexed to fourth century, upper-class, educated Athenian culture. He also rejects Aristotle's metaphysics of nature. Nevertheless, he argues, the loss of a concept of telos is dramatic.

II. Chapter Outline

The main argument of the dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part defines and defends neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism's conception of human nature and its relation to nature in general. The second part extends this account by defending a particular conception of virtue, reason, and human flourishing.

1. Introduction
2. The Normativity of Nature
3. The Normativity of Human Nature
4. Virtue and Vice for Rational Animals
5. Virtue and Reason in Neo-Aristotelianism
6. Practical Reason
7. Practical Wisdom
8. Flourishing
9. Conclusions

Chapter 2 is the foundation of what follows in that it defends the notion of natural normativity. As such, it addresses the worry that ethical naturalism is a non-starter. If ethical naturalists cannot derive normative conclusions from merely descriptive premises, then indeed it is impossible. And if there are no fundamental natural norms, one cannot derive normative conclusions. But there are natural norms. A conception of nature wherein nature is inherently normative is shown to be scientific in the form of 'generic' truths about all organisms, including humans.

Chapter 3 extends the notion of natural normativity to the concept of *normative human nature*. There are many generic truths about human beings, but just about all of them can be synthesized in the two predicates of 'rational' and 'animal': Human nature is to be potentially a practical, rational animals. For practical, rational animals, some traits are excellent and others undesirable given the kind of thing such animals are. We are that part of nature that is aware of nature. I address the objections that either "natural norms" do not exist for human beings or, if they do, that they are

irrelevant to ethics.

Chapter 4 offers a definition of virtue consonant with the natural normativity already defended. Virtues are acquirable excellent character traits human beings need as practical, rational animals and which partly constitute natural human flourishing. Examples discussed include moderation, tolerance, and practical wisdom, which represent various kinds of virtues, namely 'self-regarding', 'other-regarding,' and 'object-regarding' virtues – those sensitive to the intrinsic worth of self, others, and objects such as art, truth, beauty, etc. Virtue is, among other things, necessary for the acquisition of more virtue, especially the virtue of practical wisdom.

Chapter 5 reviews the accounts of virtue and reason in Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre. Though it highlights differences between them, it shows the commonalities, and explains the relation of their view with my own.

Chapter 6 explores practical reason in more depth. Practical reason in my account defines human nature ('practical, rational animals), but does not yet supply a means to block cultural relativism. Practical reason is the capacity for resolving what to do. To borrow Alan Gibbard's elegant phrase, it is our capacity for "thinking how to live." Practical reason is not a "value neutral" process instrumentally achieving one's ends but also a process of determining which ends are worthwhile. It is argued that the excellence of practical reason is practical wisdom.

Chapter 7 explores practical wisdom, which is, among other things, the know how required to attain more practical wisdom. Realism about practical reason blocks cultural relativism about virtues, yet allows an acceptable pluralism consonant with tolerance and wisdom. Practical wisdom which is supremely important in that it is both an intellectual and a moral virtue. It is necessary for acheiving other moral virtues and sufficient for achieving some other intellectual virtues. Hence, once a human being has reached a level of practical wisdom certain kinds of well-being are secured.

Chapter 8 outlines an account of natural human flourishing in light of questions about individual death or species extinction. Flourishing for creatures like us is, among other things, the practical wisdom necessary to undergo the process of discovering human flourishing and the achieve-

ment of our humanity. We become what we truly are, even if our existence and identity end in death, and even if our species goes extinct. Human misery and failure is not just pain nor death but to fail to fully realize one's humanity.

Chapter 9 draws conclusions and makes suggestions for further reasearch.

Chapter 2

The Normativity of Nature: Life-forms and Organic Teleology

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

–Mark Perlman, "The Modern Resurrection of Teleology in Biology", 6.

I. Introduction

Rosalind Hursthouse argues that ethical evaluations (of humans) and non-ethical evaluations (of plants and animals) "both depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question."[1] The notion that *normative* evaluations depend on *descriptive* facts about a species is a momentous one. If true, then descriptive propositions could serve as premises in arguments with normative conclusions; "is" statements would underwrite "ought" statements. This notion is central to ethical naturalisms of many varieties. But is the notion even intelligible?

This chapter addresses the "is-ought gap". I concede that one variation of the challenge blocks some kinds of ethical naturalism. But I argue that another variation of the challenge can be met and overcome. Namely, I defend natural normativity in the form of natural life-forms and

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

organic teleology. There is a widespread opposition against scientific teleology; some parts of this opposition withstands scrutiny, but some other parts turn out to be mere prejudice. Indeed, I invoke the help of the sciences themselves – especially life sciences such as biology and medicine – which indicate that teleological nihilism and teleoreductionism are by no means "*the* scientific doctrines". Rather, scientific realism about natural life-forms and teleological realism about natural functions is a scientifically respectable position.

The upshot of the existence of natural life-forms and teleology is that *nature is normative*, that there are some *natural norms.*. If nature is normative, it is at least possible that *human nature* is normative, even though humans are a unique kind of animal.

The Is-Ought Gap and Bald Nature

Many have posed a challenge to the very possibility of any sort of ethical naturalism. We can put the challenge in this form:

"No Ought From Is" Challenge

1. If ethical naturalism is possibly true, then "ought" conclusions can be derived from "is" premises.
2. But no "ought" conclusions can be derived from "is" premises.
3. Therefore ethical naturalism is not possibly true.

The second premise seems to render hopeless the thought, articulated by Hursthouse, that we can evaluate things on the basis of what they are. This is the major problem I shall address. This problem goes by many names, but the one I prefer is the "is-ought gap."

Simply put, the is-ought gap is the intuitive notion that one cannot learn anything about *what ought to be* simply by examining *what is*.[2] Even supposing we gathered a whole collection

2. Thus, Hume: "In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence." (*A Treatise of Human Nature* book III, part I, section I).

of reliable scientific truths about human bodies, cognitive-behavioral patterns and so on – from anthropology, psychology, sociology, and also biology, chemstry, physics – we would not seem to be a wit closer to establishing any ethical truths.

A detailed and scientific description of human nature could hope to supply a "descriptive ethics" that narrates what such-and-such a culture approves of or finds worthwhile compared to what they find worthless and reprehensible. At its best, a descriptive ethics might be able to identify universal moral approbations and disapprobations. For example,there seems to be a universal (cross-cultural) disapprobation for continual drunkenness. While habits and attitudes toward drinking alcohol vary dramatically from culture to culture, even among cultures (like the Bolivian Camba) that drink regularly and drink heavily disapprove of continual drunkenness.[3] Such insights might be quite interesting, but the is-ought gap reminds us that they are a far cry from *ethical* insights.

The is-ought gap objection is fatal to forms of ethical naturalism with a conception of "bald nature", but not to the neo-Aristotelian type Hursthouse and others are pursuing.[4] For there exists a second, and more promising way to underwrite "ought" statements. From basic, fundamental, scientifically respectable *natural norms*. Call this the possibility of natural normativity.[5] Of course, the concept of natural norm is just as liable to be challenged as the notion of deriving an "ought"

Hume is often credited (or blamed) for this notion. Arnhart says Hume himself allows for a kind of inference from "is" to "ought" in other places. But I shall not pursue the point here. Larry Arnhart, "The New Darwinian Naturalism in Political Theory," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 02 (1995): 389–400

3. "It is important to realize that drinking problems are virtually unknown in most of the world's cultures, including many where drinking is commonplace and occasional drunkenness is accepted." Dwight B Heath, "Sociocultural Variants in Alcoholism," *Encyclopedic Handbook of Alcoholism*, 1982, 426–40.

4. I suspect the is-ought gap has not been adequately overcome by Peter Railton's and Richard Boyd's consequentialist theories. I do not have space here to explore the suspicision.

5. The concept of 'natural normativity' is indeterminate, which means I run the risk of unclarity; that indeterminacy is necessary for us to discuss these issues without begging the question in favor of the view that all norms are unnatural and all nature is non-normative. If natural norms could be discovered, then it would be *at least possible* that the is-ought gap is not a fatal problem for all types of ethical naturalism.

from an "is".

We can put this updated challenge, in the following form:

"Bald Nature" Challenge

1. If ethical naturalism is possibly true, then some facts are genuinely both natural and normative.
2. But no facts are genuinely both natural and normative.
3. Therefore ethical naturalism is not possibly true.

This challenge parallels the first one. Everything depends on the second premise – on whether nature consists of *merely* non-normative facts. (That nature consists of merely "natural" facts is, of course, a tautology. But whether all natural facts are non-normative facts is the question at hand. Simply to *stipulate* that "natural facts are descriptive and not normative" is to beg the question with an exclamation point.) If there are no natural normative facts, then it follows that normativity is either real but *non-natural* or "naturalistic" but not real (i.e., not mind-independent). There would be no such thing as the paradoxical notion of a "prescriptive fact" or a "natural ought."[6] Hume (and others) assume this. But if the second premise is not true – if some facts are genuinely both natural and normative – then ethical naturalism is at least *possible*. (There will be other challenges to address, of course.)

Of course, if we can deny the second premise, all that logical follows is that ethical naturalism *may* be possibly true. Denying the second premise requires finding a fact (or a kind of fact) that is genuinely both natural and normative. The candidates for natural normative facts I shall defend are natural formal and functional or teleological properties of organisms.[7] Hursthouse, Philippa Foot, John McDowell, MacIntyre, and Stephen Brown are united in the thought that some

6. Recall Mackie's beautifully expressed worry about notion of "to-be-pursuedness" built into things.

7. Cf. 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. Arnhart explains the difference between various kinds of natural functions, including those that are candidates for genuinely *teleological* functionality.

natural formal or teleological facts – whether that is Hursthouse's "characteristic", or a "life-form"[8] or "form of life"[9], or "human nature" – are inherently normative. Rather than "bridging" the gap between "is" and "ought", they defy the opposition. Stephen Brown, for instance, says that "naturalized virtue ethics assumes that living things have ends in reference to which they can be evaluted… a neo-Aristotelian account of teleology is plausible both from the view of common sense and from a more scientific vantage point."[10]

II. Normativity: Social or Organic?

The neo-Aristotelians are united in the affirmation that some natural norms can serve as a grounding for ethical facts. However, as I explained briefly above, there are two or three competing strategies as to which "norms" are up to the task.

The strategies go under many names.[11] The basic difference is whether we aim to discover natural normativity more generally in all organic life, or to discover natural normativity more narrowoly in *human nature* – society, culture, rationality, or practical agency. For example, Julia Annas distinguishes between the sort of naturalism that builds on the *biological* nature of humanity (at the expense of the odd normativity of our rationality) the sort that builds on the *rational* nature of humanity (at the expense of the mundane descriptivity of biology).[12]

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

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

10. R. Stephen Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature: A Defense of Ethical Naturalism* (Continuum, 2008), 20.

11. For example, Christopher Toner distinguishes between the "biological naturalism" of Thompson and Foot (and later MacIntyre) from the "second naturalism" or "excellence naturalism" or 'culturalism' of McDowell and (early) MacIntyre, each of which has its strengths and problems. McDowell explains the two in his "Two Sorts of Naturalism" essay; Fink explains two or three sorts in his Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 202–21; and Chris Toner examines the same two sorts in his essay. Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 220–50. Each of these will be discussed more in a later chapter.

12. Cf. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in Stephen Mark Gardiner, *Virtue Ethics, Old and New* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

My preferred terms two distinguish these two strategies are "Organic" and "Social". Each of these strategies has its attractions and its own challenges. Let's review each.

Social Teleology

On the narrower strategy, something about humanity is naturally and inherently teleological. For example, perhaps one of the natural functions of rationality is to construct goals for itself and legislate laws for itself.[13] On this view, ethical conclusions are irreducibly based upon human facts such as human rationality, human culture, or human excellence. Since these human facts are contrasted with broader natural facts, call this view "Practical" or "Rational" or "Social Teleology". Pretty clearly, human cognitive and and practical behaviors are inherently end-directed or teleological. 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.[14]

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre defends social teleology against its more biological, organic alterative. He emphasizes "second nature" far more than primary nature. That is, he finds a ground

13. Compare with Christine M Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Korsgaard's argument about the "Authority of Reflection" builds a case that human autonomy – the ability to be a law to oneself – is the source of normative authority. In other words, my own identity as a rational human agent obligates me to behave morally.

14. The teleological nihilism (of say, hardcore determinists) says that not even human practices are teleological. There are no "purposes" or natural ends anywhere in the world *including* in human actions. Even our practices, behaviors, and lives are purposeless, even to ourselves. I discuss teleological nihilism below. Cf. Daniel C Dennett, "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," *The Sciences* 35, no. 3 (1995): 34–40.

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."[15] The "metaphysical biology" MacIntyre refers to here is that metaphysically realist view that formal and final causes inhere (and in fact constitute) biological species.[16] 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.")

This kind of social or rational teleology is certainly the safer of the two strategies, and is followed by McDowell, Hursthouse, and the early MacIntyre. Even Iris Murdoch assumed[17] 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.[18] But the point here is that, since we act in groups and for reasons, teleology is a real feature of our social nature.

15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 197.

16. 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

17. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998).

18. Cf. Thompson, *Life and Action*.

Organic Teleology

On the broader strategy, something about organic life as a whole is both descriptive and normative. Call this view Natural Teleology or Organic Teleology. For example, perhaps one of the functions of *being alive at all* is that plants, animals, insects, and microbes perform whatever movements are necessary for them to survive, grow, and develop into the state of species-specific maturity. And not just animals, but all organic life. Chemist Michael Mautner interprets these common features as highly significant, saying "Molecular biology shows that all organic cellular life share a common feature, self-reproduction through gene/protein protein cycles."[19] least some natural entities – that is, all living organisms – have ineliminable, irreducible, normative properties. As Thomas Nagel puts it, with the existence of life in the cosmos arises the existence of beings "for which things can be good or bad."[20] Let's examine each one a bit more.[21]

This is more ambitious and hence more risky. Not even all the neo-Aristotelians are optimistic about the strategy of grounding human ethics in this sort of natural normativity. Organic Teleology is the preferred strategy of Foot, Thompson, and the later MacIntyre. It seems to have won over Annas, Brown, and Barham, and a host of other philosophers and scientists.[22]

19. Michael N Mautner, "Life-Centered Ethics, and the Human Future in Space," *Bioethics* 23, no. 8 (2009): 433–40.

20. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 117.

21. There is a third strategy that is even more risky. Though I shall not pursue it, I should at least mention it. That is to defend the view that *all* of nature is teleological. Call this cosmic teleology. Cosmic teleology is the notion that everything – including stars and rocks – "has a purpose", as if the cosmos were somehow organized and *going somewhere*. Such natural normativity in the form of natural teleology does have its recent defenders. For atheistic version of cosmic teleology, see ibid., ; for non-human centered versions see John Leslie, *Universes* (Psychology Press, 1996) and Tim Mulgan, *Purpose in the Universe: The Moral and Metaphysical Case for Ananthropocentric Purposivism* (Oxford University Press, 2015). For Thomistic versions, see Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld Publications, 2009); and Peter Kreeft, *Summa Philosophica* (St. Augustine, 2012).

22. Keith Ward, "Kant's Teleological Ethics," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 85 (1971): 337–51; Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics"; Monte Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Philippe Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose: From Comparative Anatomy to the 'Adventure of Reason'," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in*

Initial Challenges

Each of these options faces its challenges. For example, if *human* natural normativity could preemptively undercut the is-ought gap, it is not obvious that there is such thing as a universal human nature from which we might derive normative conclusions.[23] In the next chapter, I shall return to the Social Teleology strategy and explain why it is not false but inadequate, if taken by itself.[24] Organic Teleology is not enough either; but since the two types of teleology are not *contradictory*, it is possible to concieve of a "third type" of naturalism that combines them.[25]

On the other hand, even if organic teleology in non-human nature *could possibly* underwrite normative conclusions about human ethics, how would we know these natural norms? Is belief in them scientific or not? For many, scientific naturalism just is the commitment to believe all and only the best deliverances of all the sciences.[26] And they think that the scientific picture of nature

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History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences 37, no. 4 (2006): 649–74; Mariska Leunissen, *Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Science of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a detailed exposition of the full menu of philosophical options, cf.Mark Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *The Monist* 87, no. 1 (2004): 3–51.

23. Hursthouse's attitude toward the two strategies I am discussing appears to me ambivalent. Jennifer Frey also observes this: "On this issue, Hursthouse seems to be speaking out of both sides of her mouth. She wants to acknowledge to Aristotelian critics like John McDowell that naturalistic considerations do not convince anyone to change their basic moral beliefs or motivate them to action. But at the same time, she thinks that she can approach the Humean or the Kantian and argue for "the rational credentials" of our moral beliefs based upon a "scientific" and "objective" naturalistic account. It is unclear how she is supposed to satisfy both parties at once, and the tension remains unresolved in her own work." Cf. Jennifer Ann Frey, "The Will and the Good" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012) 44, footnote 55.

24. As a preview, I shall argue that Social Teleology has two major theoretical costs: accepting an irreducible human/world dualism and accepting incorrigible cultural relativism.

25. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism.. The criteria for this third sort of naturalism are sketched brilliantly by Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism.. Such third kind of naturalistic theory would be comprehensive. It would provide an anti-dualistic account of first nature and "second nature", of biology and culture, of animality and rationality.

26. Other ethical naturalists like Richard Boyd and Peter Railton would be quick to observe, at this juncture, that natural kinds themselves are part of the vocabulary of natural science. Cf. Richard Boyd, "Realism, Anti-Foundationalism and the Enthusiasm for Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Studies* 61, no. 1 (1991): 127–48; Richard N Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," *Contemporary Materialism*, 1988, 307; Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95, no. 2

is the picture of "bald nature" (McDowell's phrase for non-normative nature) or the "Laplacian" picture.[27]

III. An Initial Case for Natural Normativity

What are we to make of these two options? On the one hand, I think both Social and Organic strategies would work as groundings for ethical naturalism, and so wish to defend the pair against non-naturalism and rival naturalisms. On the other hand, Organic Teleology makes a stronger case, despite the additional theoretical risks. So, in the spirit of devil-may-care adventure seeking, I shall pursue the more ambitious strategy of defending natural normativity in all of organic nature, not just human beings. The primary objection to overcome is the **Bald Nature Challenge** on behalf of an allegedly scientific conception of nature that excludes teleology and other normativity from nature.

Since Foot and Thompson take this strategy, I will summarize and bolster their arguments, offering a more rigorous argument for the fundamental premise that some formal and teleological facts are brutely normative natural facts.

Foot on Natural Normativity

Let's begin with Philippa Foot. Foot argues that human virtues are instances of a broader class of natural properties: 'natural goodness.'[28] To earn an audience for her argument, her first chapter (which she call a "fresh start") clears away some shaky assumptions inherited from Hume and

(1986). And indeed, part of my strategy for defending the truth and scientific credentials of Footian naturalism is to appeal to generic truths about natural kinds. But this objection is still considerable.

27. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 84. Plantinga explains that the bald, disenchanted picture of nature that excludes all consciousness – both divine and human – should not be pinned on Newton, who was a pious Christian, but fits better with Pierre-Simon Laplace.

28. 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.

Moore. Instead of treating human valuations as sui generis, a miraculous new appearance in the cosmos that only appears with the existence of humans, 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 to something refined.

The kind of "shaky assumption" she means is this: Moore assumed that "good" was the ultimate ethical predicate under review. By contrast, she argues that statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection. Evaluation of human creatures and evaluation of plants and animals follow *the same logical pattern*. In such evaluations, good is good *for*. Contrast 'good' with other predicates like 'red' or 'beautiful.' In a statement such as 'the house is beautiful', the predicate 'beautiful' doesn't need a complement. The house is *beautiful* – full stop. But 'good' has a different logical function. 'Good' is more like 'useful.' The phrase 'The house is useful' *does* need a complement. When we say 'the house is useful' we must specify what it is useful for – *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Likewise, '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 work.[29] Thompson 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.[30] 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."[31] When we observe and examine living things we rightly employ

29. Michael Thompson, "The Representation of Life," in *Virtues and Reasons*, ed. Lawrence Hursthouse Rosalind and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 247–96. Thompson works out the arguments of this article more fully in his 2008 monograph.

30. Thompson, *Life and Action*, chapter 1.

31. Ibid., 57.

some shared categories and our conclusions rightly share a logical structure. What is that common structure? Thompson reviews and refutes a variety of crude definitions of life such as that anything that is alive reproduces, grows, metabolizes, etc. Such properties may be co-extensive with the property of being alive, but they are wildly insufficient for the task of *defining* life because such properties depend on a prior understanding of life. Thompson's alternative is that life is a fundamental concept.

Once we accept the intuitive conclusion that life is a fundamental concept (along with 'being', 'quantity' and others) then the argument gets interesting. For every individual living being is a member of a species or life-form. And living beings are not just *acted upon*; they *act*. Species have characteristic actions. Thompson says "action in this sense is a specific form of *life process*."[32]. Since a particular species engage in particular activities, there are life-form specific *failures* to act. Different life-forms are subject to different normative appraisals.

Now, humans are certainly a unique *kind* of living being with a unique life-form – the biggest difference is that we engage in rational practice. And we shall examine more what difference the differences make. But for now, the point is identify the broader class of natural properties to which 'natural goodness' belongs. We ought not assume, at the outset, that 'good' and 'bad' are sui generis evaluative properties "in people's heads" as it were; a more reasonable starting place is to assume that such terms are relative to natural kinds especially life-forms. Foot concludes that this point hold about "goodness and badness, and therefore about evaluation in its most general form." She continues:

> …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.[33]

By introducing the term 'natural normativity', Foot is insisting on a point that is both interesting

32. Ibid., 27.
33. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.

and controversial – controversial because it is interesting. If health and disease, natural good and natural defect, are really instances of natural goodness, then some evaluative properties are *primary qualities of nature*. The 'good' in question here is not a trascendent platonic form of good. It is rather the good-of-a-kind.[34] Still, McDowell and others will object this characterization of natural normativity, in part because they think it "queer" that nature should exhibit such properties, and partly because they think it more comfortable to assume that human beings are the only evaluators.

The response to this worry, in part, is to remember Foot's point: "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.'[35] McDowell and those who would draw a sharp contrast between"moral" and "non-moral" uses of the term must explain why it makes sense to describe a healthy plant as "doing well." Not doing well *for my garden* but just doing well – living the way such plants are supposed to live. 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.[36]

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34. Blackman argues that there *is* no good other than goods of kinds. I shall not be discussing the good per se, but only the good-for-us. Obviously, it is sensible to assume that the good-for-us is an instance of the good per se, and so the metaethical question of whether anything is good-per-se is important. My thesis focusses on the good for us. While my thesis identifies what is good for us as an instance of something *truly good,* it remains agnostic about the broader metaphysical or cosmic significance of the fact. Blackman also disputes the kind of biological foundation of ethics I am trying to defend here. Nevertheless, his article is a good introduction into the sort of "kindism" being discussed. Reid D Blackman, "Meta-Ethical Realism with Good of a Kind," *European Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2015): 273–92.

35. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 39.

36. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 195.

IV. A Novel Case for Natural Normativity from Generics

What are the odds that "identifying what is characteristic of a species" can license normative judgments? The odds are quite good, I think. My case for natural normativity depends on two notions: the first is a minimal scientific realism.[37] The second basic notion is a little-utilized feature of language called "generic propositions," which I shall explain below. The case in brief is this:

1. If some generic statements describing natural entities are true, then some facts are both genuinely natural and normative – there are "natural norms."
2. Some generic statements describing natural entities are true.
3. Therefore, some facts are genuinely both natural and normative – there are "natural norms."

The Special Logic of Generics

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

37. While scientific realism is not uncontroversial per se, my intended audience are committed scientific realists or sympathetic to realism. By minimal scientific realism, I mean something helpfully vague, such as the belief that most sciences, when successful, describe the world. Thus, Anjan Chakravartty: "Scientific realism is a positive epistemic attitude towards the content of our best theories and models, recommending belief in both observable and unobservable aspects of the world described by the sciences. This epistemic attitude has important metaphysical and semantic dimensions, and these various commitments are contested by a number of rival epistemologies of science, known collectively as forms of scientific antirealism… Metaphysically, realism is committed to the mind-independent existence of the world investigated by the sciences. This idea is best clarified in contrast with positions that deny it. For instance, it is denied by any position that falls under the traditional heading of 'idealism'… Semantically, realism is committed to a literal interpretation of scientific claims about the world. In common parlance, realists take theoretical statements at "face value". According to realism, claims about scientific entities, processes, properties, and relations, whether they be observable or unobservable, should be construed literally as having truth values, whether true or false…Epistemologically, realism is committed to the idea that theoretical claims (interpreted literally as describing a mind-independent reality) constitute knowledge of the world." Cf. Anjan Chakravartty, "Scientific Realism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015. McDowell, as a sort of idealist, will deny this minimal scientific realism in favor of something a bit more idealist, as we shall see.

"Aristotelian categoricals"[38], "natural-historical judgements,"[39] "norms,"[40] "bare plurals."[41] I prefer the shorter and less adorned term 'generic.[42]

My postulate is this: **some generics about human beings are true.** If this is true then, I shall suggest, we have good hope of cutting up nature at the joints. When combined with a moderate scientific realism, generic truths from sciences such as biology, physics, and anthropology (and perhaps others) support a modest natural normativity which will be further articulated (in a later chapter) to indicate which traits are virtues or vices for human beings.

Generics in general: neither universal nor particular

Now, what are generics? "A fine question, but a difficult one," Andrew Bailey says. His recent paper provides a helpful (and humorous) introduction to the topic of generic statements:

38. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

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

40. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19 14-15. Anscombe is not very optimistic about the project Thompson, Foot, and I are undertaking. She says: "It might remain to look for 'norms' in human virtues: just as man has so many teeth, which is certainly not the average number of teeth men have, but is the number of teeth for the species, so perhaps the species man, regarded not just biologically, but from the point of view of the activity of thought and choice in regard to the various departments of life-powers and faculties and use of things needed-"has" such-and-such virtues: and this "man" with the complete set of virtues is the "norm," as "man" with, e.g., a complete set of teeth is a norm."

41. Greg N Carlson, "A Unified Analysis of the English Bare Plural," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1977): 413–57. Carlson's essay is an early attempt to account for a variety of linguistic forms under one concept of reference to kinds

42. Cf. Francis Jeffry Pelletier and Greg N Carlson, *The Generic Book* (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Sarah-Jane Leslie, "Generics: Cognition and Acquisition," *Philosophical Review* 117, no. 1 (2008): 1–47; Andrew M Bailey, "Animalism," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 12 (2015): 867–83 for a discussion of a specific generic: "we are animals" in metaphysics and philosophical anthropology; Andrei Cimpian, Amanda C Brandone, and Susan A Gelman, "Generic Statements Require Little Evidence for Acceptance but Have Powerful Implications," *Cognitive Science* 34, no. 8 (2010): 1452–82 for an experiment in cognitive psychology that seeks to quantify the prevalence levels at which subjects tend to agree to generics, i.e., how many birds have to lay eggs before we agree to the assertion that "birds lay eggs"? Manfred Krifka, "Bare NPs: Kind-Referring, Indefinites, Both, or Neither?" in *Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, vol. 13, 2003, 180–203; Ariel Cohen, "On the Generic Use of Indefinite Singulars," *Journal of Semantics* 18, no. 3 (2001): 183–209.

> Start with this sentence: 'Buddhists are way into meditation'. This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is it equivalent to 'for every x, if x is a Buddhist, x is way into meditation'? It does not appear to be. For the second sentence might be false (some Buddhists might not be way into meditation) even if the first sentence is, as we have supposed, true. The first sentence could be true, somehow, even if not all Buddhists are way into meditation (similarly, '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.[43]

Thus, generics are statements of the form "S is F" or "S has or does F" where S is not an individual but a class or natural kind. 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. For example, 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 rabid wolves hunt alone, and injured, or very old wolves don't hunt at all). Furthermore, it is true but trivial that *some wolves hunt in packs*.

Scientists do not just gather existential or particular judgments about *many* members of a species – they make inductive inferences about *the species*. The statement that "wolves hunt in packs" is only interesting to scientists if it is an item of conceptual knowledge about wolves as a *kind*. Thus Sarah Leslie:

> 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.[44]

The point may be a bit obvious but, at the risk of tedium, it bears further explication. It would be radically unambitious science to confine ourselves to particular judgments like "Some reptiles lay eggs". We want to know – and can know – what is true of the class as a whole. And generics express these inductive inferences. Generics do not refer *distributively to all* members of a category

43. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.
44. Leslie, "Generics," sec. 1.

nor merely to *some* but to the category itself. 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."[45] In this way, generics pick out what we might call formal facts, facts about the life form in question.

Generics are not merely statistical regularities. The members of extinct species do not exhibit any properties at all, yet it is still true in some sense that *the species* is extinct. Likewise, all the living members of a species might fail to exemplify its formal attributes. Consider the fact that "California condors can fly for hours without resting."[46] In 1987 there were only 27 known condors alive. One could easily imagine a scenario in which every living member of such an endangered species were too injured, old, or diseased to exemplify this attribute. It would be strictly false of the individual condors that any of them could fly for hours; nevertheless the generic would still be true that "condors" (as a class) *can* fly for hours.

McDowell mistakes the admission of exceptions for a "logical weakness" of generics. He cites the example from Anscombe (and Aristotle) that "humans have 32 teeth", saying "there is a truth we can state in those terms, but from that truth, together with the fact that I am a human being, it does not follow that I have 32 teeth. (In fact it is false)."[47] But McDowell rather misses the point. Aristotelian-categoricals are not trying and failing to reach deductive certainty; they are not half-hearted universal judgments. They are judgments of a logically different kind. Far from being a logical weakness, generics are what enable us to capture truths about natural kinds that help explain statistical variation and inconsistency. Prasada et. al., say that generic truths, once discovered, set "normative expectation" by which we evaluate individual members on how well or

45. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222. "Infima species" is the narrowest cut in a genus-species tree, or the most determinate determinable.

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

47. John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 171–2.

badly they exemplify their life form.[48]

While there is much to be learned about the linguistic features of generics,[49] still, their use and acquisition is actually very familiar. Generic truths are acquired via a normal scientific means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion.[50] This familiar scientific process may not be easy or free of dangers, but it is at least *a familiar scientific process*. Scientists are continually correcting formerly established generics (the notion that all mammals give live birth was thrown into crisis by the platypus) and working to distinguish between the normal and defective traits of a species.

This familiar process is certainly revisable. For example, an ethologist who discovers a wolf hunting along may have a "normative expectation" that the wolf is not healthy. But she cannot know certainly in advance that this is so. She must test the hypothesis. A few reasonable interpretations are available: perhaps the lone wolf is unhealthy; perhaps the initial generic that 'wolves hunt in packs' was false; or perhaps this wolf is actually a new species of wolf. As it happens, in the

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

49. Leslie distinguishes between indefinite generics such as "tigers are striped" which admits of the specification "that tiger over there is striped" and definite generics such as "domestic cats are common" which does not admit of specification, "that domestic cat is common". Indefinite generics are trickier: "Ducks lay eggs" is a true generic," while "ducks are female" is false, yet it is only the female ducks who ever lay eggs. "Mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus" is true, and "books are paperbacks" is false, yet less than one percent of mosquitoes carry the virus, while over eighty percent of books are paper backs." Leslie, "Generics.

50. To use a silly example, suppose that someone from a warm and landlocked country has never heard of penguins before. This person visits a zoo and sees penguins for the first time. He notices that these astonishing creatures are called 'penguins', and appear to be birds (for they have beaks, feathers, lay eggs, emit squawks, etc.). He reflects that most – if not all birds – have many of these macro features. Fascinated, he consults encyclopedias, biology or zoology textbooks, and consult zoologist friends. All these sources confirm the categorization. Although I am not aware of when the first penguin was studied by a modern naturalist, we can easily imagine that it was from observations and reflections such as these that penguins long ago earned an entry in the annals of scientific knowledge. The biological community gave them a scientific name ('sphenisciformes') and began to fill in gaps with a detailed description of their evolutionary history, characteristics, genetics, environments, diet, predators, and so on. The scientific conclusion, upon initial observation, bolstered by reflection, underwrites the initial hypothesis: penguins are indeed birds.

case of wolves, no known species of wolf hunts alone so there is very strong reason to conclude that a lone wolf is rabid. But the point more generally is that generics are acquired and modified by a familiar, if complicated, process of scientific reasoning. Michael Thompson points out that: there is a "general and thoroughgoing reciprocal mutual interdependence of vital description of the individual and natural historical judgment about the form or kind."[51] Put differently, Micah Lott says:

> At each stage of an empirical investigation, our observations are mediated by our current understanding of the life form whose members we are observing. At the same time, our observations of those individual members will in turn improve our understanding of the life form itself, which then makes possible even more accurate and extensive future observations.[52]

Again, the fact that generic truths are revisable is not a weakness but a strength of the case I am building. It may be, for all we know, that penguins can fly (in the air), that some species of penguin can fly, or that all penguins are really just defective birds. But the most reasonable belief thus far is the generic truth that penguins don't fly; that they are excellent swimmers, not defective flyers; and that these truths hold of penguins *as a kind* – a biologist or zoologist who discovered the first flying penguin would become (justifiably) famous because we would all be (justifiably) surprised.

Generics are teleological

The first kind of natural normativity I am defending is the mere idea of a life-form. Knowing what a thing is, knowing about its species or life-form, is to know something descriptive and something normative about any member of that species. Knowing what a thing is, furthermore, licenses a range of normative expectations. But we can make the case for natural normativity stronger. There

51. Michael Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 54 (2004): 52.

52. Micah Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form," *Social Theory and Practice* 38, no. 3 (2012): 414.

is another, related kind of normativity in the natural teleological features of life-forms. Such natural teleology is also capture in generic propositions.

To see this second kind of natural normativity, begin with the concept of a function. Eyes perform the function (in an organism) of seeing, hemlock trees perform the function (in an ecosystem) of shading rivers, and so on. Thompson, for example, cites the scientific observation that "flowers have blossoms of such-and-such type in order that such-and-such insects should be attracted and spread their pollen about."[53] Now, Mayr calls such processes "teleonomic" in order to leave open the question of whether whether they are genuinely teleological.[54] For my purposes, however, even teleonomic processes would count as instances of natural normativity. Barham clarifies the notion of natural teleology in this way:

> By "teleology," I have in mind such words and concepts as "purpose," "end," "goal," "function," "control," and "regulation," as well as the real-world biological phenomena to which these words and concepts refer. This means that the word "teleology" should always be construed here in its internal or "immanent" sense—purposiveness existing in living beings themselves—and never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle.[55]

Taken broadly, then, the first point is to realize that talk about functions and ends is just as scientific as talk about life-forms, species, and natural health or disease. As Mark Perlman says:

> Many objects in the world have functions. Some of the objects with functions are organs or parts of living organisms… Hearts are for pumping blood. Eyes are for seeing. Countless works in biology explain the "Form, Function, and Evolution of …" everything from bee dances to elephant tusks to pandas' 'thumbs'. Many scientific explanations, in areas as diverse as psychology, sociology, economics, medical research, and neuroscience, rest on appeals to the function and/or malfunction of things or systems.[56]

53. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 293–94.

54. Ernst Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 1 (1992): pp. 117–35.

55. James Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology" (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame; Web, 2011), 1.

56. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 1–4.

Generic propositions usefully capture the functional or teleological properties of natural organisms. As Chris Toner says, "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[57] This kind of combination of generic truths is very familiar. No sooner have I learned the formal facts about a penguin (that it is a bird, that it can swim, that it has a countershaded white belly and dark back etc.) do I learn that *penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.*[58] 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."[59]

We should add that generics express the formal and functional features of natural entities *when they are mature*. It is a normal – indeed universal – fact of organisms that they grow and develop and mature according to the life process of their particular species. Before maturation, we might say, the formal and functional properties in question exist merely potentially. For example, a wolf that cannot hunt might be injured, ill, or simply young. Similarly, eyes that cannot see might be injured, ill, or simply developing.

Nevertheless, it is true that "eyes see". In discovering and expressing the simple generic truth that "eyes see", we abstract away from the processes of maturation and development to pick out a fact that is true of all eyes that are normal and have had enough time. This is a descriptive, judgment that is also a normative judgment – without changing our meaning we could say that fully developed eyes are *supposed to* see, *ought to* see – or just that *eyes see*.

57. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.

58. A shark looking up may miss a penguin, because its white belly blends in with the sunlight surface waters; a shark looking down may miss a penguin, because it blends in with the pitch dark waters of the abyss.

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

V. Three Paths Forward

In my overall argument, generic truths are intended to serve as a counterexample to premise 2 of the **Bald Nature Challenge** above. That challenge asserted that no facts are genuinely both natural and normative. Generics are both genuinely natural and normative: natural, in that a large percentage of scientific knowledge consists of scientists predicating generic truths of natural kinds; normative, in that the life-form in question is one which an individual may or may not "live up" to, and in that *some* generics pick out natural functional or teleological facts about life forms (that penguins are counter-shaded *to avoid* predators, that hearts are *for* pumping blood, etc.). On my view, accepting the straightforward, generic truths delivered by such sciences about forms and functions is quite simply the respectable thing to do.

But it seems to me there are three paths forward: reject, reduce, or accept Organic Teleology.

Reject

The first path is to reject generic truths about species and their formal and functional characteristics. Probably, those who are tempted to reject natural teleology believe there are no *ends* (τελοι). Call this view teleological nihilism.[60] Teleological nihilism claims as its evidence "*modern science" as a whole.* Abandoning the search for natural teleology was a harbinger of modern science; Francis Bacon and others believed that the search for final causes corrupted science. So, if best science tells us that nature is *only* descriptive, natural normativity is dismissed out of court.[61] In fact, natural

60. Also called teleological eliminativism.

61. Cf. Bacon, *New Organon*, Book I. XLVIII "Although the most general principles in nature ought to be held merely positive, as they are discovered, and cannot with truth be referred to a cause, nevertheless the human understanding being unable to rest still seeks something prior in the order of nature. And then it is that in struggling toward that which is further off it falls back upon that which is nearer at hand, namely, on final causes, which have relation clearly to the nature of man rather than to the nature of the universe; and from this source have strangely defiled philosophy."

sciences and the experimental, empirical methods that advance them have progressed far more than anyone could have dreamed. In part, this success is the result of giving up magical thinking.

The proper reply to Bacon is that the teleological nihilism hypothesis has been tried and found wanting. Animals, plants, and all living things exhibit end-directed or teleonomic behavior: eyes see, hemlock trees offer shade to fish, stomachs digest, deer leap to avoid predators. Even when Kant denies natural teleology – the biological theory that the form of an organism causes the parts to grow and relate to each other in a particular way – he admits we *cannot help thinking so*.[62]

Things are even clearer when it comes to natural kinds and generic truths about species. If we accept scientific realism of any form, we cannot deny that some generics are true. It is probably true that if we accept *any* form of conceptual knowledge, we are probably implicitly already committed to the truth of some generics, for much of our conceptual knowledge consists in generics.[63]) Animals, plants, and all living things belong to species, and our knowledge of them consists of generic truths about not just individuals but that species. A species involves a defined range of potential attributes that normally come to be actualized over time. An individual hemlock tree may or may not shade any fish in any rivers, but it may in time; or it may never do so, but it is still a scientific insight that that is one thing 'hemlock trees' in general do.[64]

Hence, to reject *all truths* about natural kinds and natural functions, I contend, is untenable. If we suppose for *reductio* that no generic statements are true, then not only do we reject natural functional talk but natural formal talk. If all generics are false (or only conventionally true) then it is in some important sense false that 'wolves hunt in packs' and false even that 'penguins are birds'. It is false not only that "eyes see" but even that "humans are primates". Such denials are, I think, absurdities.[65] If we accept the truth of at least some generics, then Perlman's surprise is

62. Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose."

63. Prasada et al., "Conceptual Distinctions Amongst Generics."

64. Compare with Thomas Nagel's point that some "laws of nature would apply directly to the relation between the present and the future." Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* 93.

65. 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

well founded: "It is surprising that analytic philosophers, with their strong focus on science, would reject a notion that is so central to some areas of science, most notably, biology and engineering sciences… Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."[66] The great cost of throwing out generics *as a class* is that we would seem to have to throw out many scientific statements in biology, organic chemistry, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, anatomy, and medicine.

By all means, let us be scientific. But let us be careful not to become anti-scientific in the *name* of science. An analogy might help: suppose a marine biologist studying dolphin behavior came to believe dolphin's have language. One could imagine other biologists accusing her of "projecting" an exclusively human phenomenon – communication by language – on non-human nature. They could ridicule her "magical thinking" but they would miss a fascinating repository of scientific insight. "Listening to science" does not mean as some would have it listening to the preferred interpretations of philosophers with a view to defend. If it means anything, "listening to science" *just means* listening to actual scientists, such as biologists and others who tell us that teleological functions are real and who treat them as if they were irreducible.

The notion that some of nature is normative – or that some norms are natural – is not only a good logical explanation of the natural phenomena of biology but also a good *scientific* explanation. While natural teleological realism is still controversial, it is not a controversy between science and philosohpy but a controversy *within science*. It is a legitimate discussion between scientists of one stripe and scientists of another.

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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. Since absurdist philosophers are not my primary audience, I simply lay the issue aside.

66. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 6.

Reduce

The second path is to accept natural teleonomic behavior and even the appearance of natural teleology, natural functions, etc., but to *reduce* these phenomena to less spooky (read: more mechanistic) terms consistent with a concpetion of bald nature.

Now, arguing for or against teleoreductionism has become a cottage industry.[67] It is impossible to do justice to the complexity of the dialectic here. I will content myself to note, and critique, two popular forms of reduction: the first reduces biological functions to causal contributions to a system and the second reduces teleonomic biological functions to naturally selected effects. A proponent of the first reduction is Donald Davidson. A proponent of the second is Ruth Millikan. For example, Ruth Millikan argues that an organism's proper function simply cannot be "read off" its capacities at present but must be known via empirical history. Her theory entails the unpalatable conclusion that an organ that is otherwise physically identical to, say, a heart, that was magically apparated into existence would not have a "proper function". She bites the bullet on this.

James Barham argues that neither of these forms of reduction is very promising. Neither alternative is coherent, in his view. The problem with the "causal-role" reduction of teleonomic phenomena is that in order to even posit a hypothesis about how some parts of a system contribute to the achievement of its end or purpose, we must identify *in advance* which parts of the organism play a role in bringing about the end or purpose. But if we already know the causal contribution of those parts, what more could we learn by positing the causal-role theory?[68]

As regards the second form, things are no more promising. While Millikan's theory of "proper function" might be ingenius and might be true of the historical or "etiological" history of present-day functional attributes of organisms, it is irrelevant. The question is not "how historically did present-day function X come to be?" but "is present-day X a function?" One cannot go looking for the etiological history of a functioning organism if one does not already know, in advance, that

67. Cf. ibid., sec. III; and Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," chap. 3.
68. Cf. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., chapter 3.

the organism in question is functioning.

Michael Thompson, too, insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past."[69] James Barham points out that the problem with Aristotle's views of biology (say, believing that the seat of perception was not in the brain) was not that he lacked knowledge of evolution, but that he lacked adequate knowledge of physiology.

Accept as is

The third option is to accept that some natural facts are intrinsically normative, irreducible, natural facts. Although the very word 'teleology' is liable to sound quaint to modern ears, Barham has argued that 'teleological realism' is a rationally permissible view to take on biology. Indeed, it is making a come-back. For instance, Arnhart persuasively argues that teleology is assumed in medicine.[70] Zammito clarifies ongoing relevance in biology, since organisms seem to be intrinsically purposeful.[71]

Thomas Nagel has offered one of the most recent defenses of scientific, natural teleology.[72] Michael Chorost's review of *Mind and Cosmos* reminds readers that natural teleology is not so scientifically heretical as it might first seem. He says:

> Natural teleology is unorthodox, but it has a long and honorable history. For example, in 1953 the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley argued that it's in the nature of nature to get more advanced over time. "If we take a snapshot view, improve-

69. Cf. Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 293. Christopher Toner adds that judgments about natural teleological facts are made true regardless of the origin of the facts, "whether about creation or natural selection.", Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 223. This seems right to me. It does not matter for present purposes *how* the function came to be, just whether or not it really *is* at present.

70. Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics."

71. John Zammito, "Teleology Then and Now: The Question of Kant's Relevance for Contemporary Controversies over Function in Biology," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part* 37, no. 4 (2006): 748–70.

72. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*.

> ment eludes us," he wrote. "But as soon as we introduce time, we see trends of improvement."…[73]

If scientists can countenance natural normativity via natural teleology as respectable, we philosophers not do the same? Philosophers of various schools (metaphysicians and ethicists) would do well to dialogue with biologists and cosmologists to come to grips with the possibility that our best evidence suggests that there are normative natural life forms and natural ends.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to meet the **Bald Nature Challenge** to Ethical Naturalism stated above. The challenge, recall, was this:

1. If ethical naturalism is possibly true, then some facts are genuinely both natural and normative.
2. But no facts are genuinely both natural and normative.
3. Therefore ethical naturalism is not possibly true.

The conclusion we have drawn is that indeed *some* facts – especially facts about living things – are both natural and irredicubily normative. These are natural formal and functional facts about organic beings and their parts and operations. Such facts are expressed in perfectly respectable scientific judgments we have called "generics" but may also be called "Aristotelian categoricals", "natural-historical judgements", "norms", "bare plurals", etc. Generics like these render it at least *possible* to conclude the the scientific picture of nature includes normativity in the form of natural

73. Michael Chorost, "Where Thomas Nagel Went Wrong," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2013. Chorost argues that Nagel did not "go wrong" in his thesis but in presenting it philosophically without engaging the support from relevant scientific literature. He continues with a few more examples: "paleontologist Simon Conway Morris, at the University of Cambridge, has argued that natural structures such as eyes, neurons, brains, and hands are so beneficial that they will get invented over and over again. They are, in effect, attractors in an abstract biological space that pull life in their direction. Contingency and catastrophe will delay them but cannot stop them. Conway Morris sees this as evidence that not only life but human life, and humanlike minds, will emerge naturally from the cosmos:"If we humans had not evolved, then something more or less identical would have emerged sooner or later."

teleology. If true generics could be stated about human beings, then it is conceivable we can use them as a basis for ethical theory.

Of course, I have not yet tried to show *which* true generics about humans can serve as the basis for ethical theory. All I have tried to show is that *some* of these generics are true. By denying the consequent, we are not necessarily affirming the antecedent. That affirmation requires another step, namely, to apply the above argument to human beings. 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.[74]

Despite such legitimate worries, we have followed Foot in trying 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, '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 [as opposed to chemicals which are only acted upon]. 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.[75]

74. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.
75. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 217.

The task in discovering true generics about human beings is capturing what is common between us and other animals and what is unique about rational animals. The argument that will help us transition from generics about the biological world in general to generics about human beings and which may provide the basis of normative *ethics* is this:

Human Normativity

1. On ethical naturalism, generics about natural entitities are both descriptive and normative (they are natural norms), and hence can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
2. Humans are natural entities, (there are some *human* natural norms).
3. Therefore, generics about humans are both descriptive and normative, and hence can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.

Establishing premise 1 has been our task in this chapter. Establishing premise 2 is the task for the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Normativity of Human Nature: Philistine Scientism versus the Practical Point of View

"Human nature is normative, such that to be morally good is to fulfill one's nature." – Chris Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism", 221.

I. Introduction

Recall Hursthouse's earlier statement that ethical evaluations of *human beings* "depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question." It is now clear that the success of our endeavor depends on finding true generic propositions about 'the human being' qua natural kind. Is this a hopeful search?

1. It is possible to express in generic propositions scientific knowledge about the life form and natural teleology of natural organisms. (Scientific realism)
2. Humans are natural organisms. (Naturalism)
3. Therefore, it is possible to express in generic propositions scientific knowledge about the life form and natural teleology of human beings. (Ethical naturalism)

The last chapter argued premise 1. Premise 2 seems to be an innocent truism: humans are natural organisms, aren't they? We exist here in nature. We are at least partly material; we eat food grown

on earth; drink water from this ecosystem; are born from fellow humans, die and disintegrate into the earth like every other living thing. So it seems reasonable to assume that humans are natural entities importantly similar to animals, plants, and other living organisms, even though they are also importantly different in exhibiting features like language and society.

However, we cannot assume premise 2 too quickly. Natural kinds exhibit relatively stable features; human rationality frees us to vary our nature. Perhaps Stephen Brown's paradox is true: "Human nature is variability itself."[1] Hursthouse explains:

> 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. And 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?[2]

While the desired generics cannot *ignore* or *contradict* our status as physical, living, animals, they also cannot be *merely* descriptions of our genes, organ systems, 30 billion brain neurons, and so on. They must also capture what is ethical or potentially ethical about human beings as rational creatures. As an example, "humans are language-using primates" is the kind of generic we must defend as *both* "objective" and scientific *and* practical and ethical.

The task of this chapter is to provide a conception of human nature that is both accurately descriptive and normative. We must first uncover, if possible, a set of scientific generics about humanity, specifying what kind of natural creature human beings are and what kind of characteristic life they live – what kind of life they live "by nature". Such generics, it is hoped, will give us initial insight into the concept and content of virtue, excellence, wisdom, and flourishing, which are our main themes.

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1. Donald E. Brown, "Human Nature and History," *History and Theory* 38, no. 4 (1999): 138–57, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2678062.

2. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 222.

II. Human Nature: Generic Truths about Humans

Let's first assemble a sample of scientific generics about humanity. What can we – by careful observation and inductive generalization – confidently say about genetically modern humans without much scientific controversy? Examining ourselves "from the outside" as it were, from an external, objective, cool, scientific view point, what is a *homo sapiens sapiens*? In contemporary classificatory scheme, we can locate ourselves as animals in the phylum chordata, the class mammalia, the order of primates, the suborder haplorhini, the familiy hominidae, the genus homo, the species homo sapiens.

Suppose that the earth was formed about 4.5 billion years ago; that life arose on earth 3.5 billion years ago; and that anatomically modern humans arose on the earth about 200,000 years ago or in the "Late Pleistocene of 120,000 years ago."[3] The first among our species lived in Africa. They emigrated from that landmass and settled in various parts of the globe. Humans' heights range from 4'7" to 6'3" (plus or minus) and weights range from 120-180 pounds (plus or minus). They have 23 chromosomes in each somatic cell, with about 22,000 total genes. They are mammals that reproduce sexually, gestate in utero, and give live birth. Unlike other mammals, females go through menopause. They tend to thrive best in climates averaging between 42-80 degrees farenheit[4], but can survive in extreme cold. Humans have 32 teeth and an extremely diverse diet of carbohydrates, fats, fiber, minerals, proteins, vitamins, and water: they eat vegetables, red meat, fish, nuts, seeds, berries, fruits, mushroom, mollusks, herbs, and more. Genetically modern humans don't just hunt and gather but farm, store, combine, ferment, and cook food. They have opposable thumbs, are bipedal, and walk upright. They have large brains relative to other primates, with a neocortex and prefrontal cortex that correlate with abstract thinking, problem solving, society, and culture. And indeed, humans live in cultures and societies. They are language-users, communicating in

3. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 102.

4. Yuming Guo et al., "Global Variation in the Effects of Ambient Temperature on Mortality: A Systematic Evaluation," *Epidemiology (Cambridge, Mass.)* 25, no. 6 (2014): 781.

signs and symbols. Their language is an extremely complex, open-ended system which is both recursive (able to nest propositions within propositions) and productive (able to create sentences by potentially limitless combinations of words). In virtue of language and their opposable thumbs, they are creative; they don't just live on the ground or under ground, but build houses and shelters, sometimes in new places, such as caves, trees, hills, mountains, etc. Also, they are self-reflective and moral. They establish social relations upon biological grounds (some children growing up with natural parents) and upon normative grounds (some orphans growing up in orphanages created by philanthropists).

Is there anything of potential ethical significance in this collection of commonplaces? I think so. Indeed, this collection admits of patterns. If we had to gather up the individual features into categories, we could capture most of them under two categories: animal (of a particular sort) and rational. Even the upright posture, opposable thumbs, and large neocortex of genetically modern humans are intimately tied to our language use, symbol use, creativity, science, and sociality. Without the hands that we have, we could not create nearly as much as we do. Without the brains that we have, we could not think, speak, organize into language-groups and create culture.

Physical, Alive, Animal, Rational, Practical

That a given object exemplifies the property of being an 'animal', as I argued in the previous chapter, analytically entails that it exemplifies other formal and functional properties, such as organization, metabolisis, growing, working to survive. Such properties we have also called natural formal and teleological facts. As Michael Mautner explains, all living things (on earth at least) share common ancestors and even share genetic material. He says:

> …phylogenetic trees indicate that all terrestrial life can be traced to a common ancestor. Organisms as different from us as yeasts share half; mice, over 90%, chimpanzees, over 95%, and different human individuals share over 99% of our genome. These scientific insights give a deeper meaning to the unity of all Life. Our complex molecular patterns are common to all organic gene/protein life and distinguish us

> from any other phenomena of nature.[5]

This also entails the notion of *potential*. Even single celled organisms have the potential to reproduce and develop. As Mautner continues:

> Life is a process whose outcome is the self-reproduction of complex molecular patterns'. Importantly, Life is then a process that requires a onstant flow of information, matter and energy.[6]

Mammals begin life as tiny cells and progress through gestation to infancy, maturation, and adulthood, at which point they typically reproduce themselves before dying. All of these phases we notice in human animals as well. Attempts 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.

However, the concept of 'rationality' is new. We use terms like 'reason' and ratio as abstractions to describe a set of capacities we notice in ourselves. For example, activities that get called 'rational' are activities such as to observe, perceive as, create, reflect, decide, determine, abstract, infer, explain, deduce, remember, predict, criticize, praise, blame, admonish, and so on.

What are our rational capacities? First, speech.[7] Aristotle observed that, "Man alone of the animals possesses speech."[8] Though other animals have speech and communication, nothing in modern science has superceded or contradicted the observation (obvious to anyone) that human speech is different. Other animals that communicate use non-grammatical closed systems with a

5. Mautner, "Life-Centered Ethics, and the Human Future in Space," 434–5.
6. Ibid., 435.
7. Terrence W Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (WW Norton & Company, 1998).
8. *Politics*, 1.1253a.

small, finite set of symbols.[9] Our language is unique: it is grammatical, open-ended, recursive, and productive.

We are animals who speak. Through our animality comes a sensitivity to our surroundings, the ability to see the sun and moon which are millions (or hundreds of thousands) of miles away, to hear our fellow creatures, and to "take in" the whole cosmos into consciousness. Through speech comes a whole second cosmos of culture. Through speech comes intentionality in all its forms. Through speech comes communication ("pass the salt"), distinct languages and cultures (about 5,000 distinct languages), self-consciousness ("who am I?"), abstraction ("all grass is green"), science, philosophy, religion, mythology, technology and more. Perhaps even art and music arise from the rational capacity to direct our actions to create not only what instinct demands but whatever the imagination can invent.[10]

Rational capacities are identified by the actions of rational creatures. As Haldane says, quoting the medieval scholastics, "acting follows being" and "things are specified by their power."[11] We just do deliberate, explain, propose theories, judge truth and falsity, wonder, inquire, and so on.

Rationality is also the capacity to judge true and false, to affirm and deny. This is the view of Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians (among others).

While I shall have to say more about practical rationality in a later chapter, here I need only to specify that our nature as rational animals *includes* the notion that we are *practical* rational animals. That is, we do not just act but act on reasons. Micah Lott says: "Human form is characterized by practical reason. This is the capacity to act in light of an awareness of the ground of our actions,

9. Communication systems used by other animals such as 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.

10. Gordon H. Orians, "Nature & Human Nature," *Daedalus* 137, no. 2 (2008): 39–48. Orians says that "Americans spend more money on music than on sex or prescription drugs."

11. John Haldane, "A Return to Form in the Philosophy of Mind," *Ratio* 11, no. 3 (1998): 262.

to recognize and respond to practical reasons."[12] 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.)

And the property of being potentially rational encompasses a range of psychological, intellectual, and cultural facts that obtain in each normal human being.

More specifically, all of these activities are (a) actions or practices consciously performed or conducted by an agent, that (b) aim to know what is true, what the world is like, and what to do about it, and (c) are essential social activities in that they are essentially linguistic and language is acquired only with a social context (such as family or culture).

Rationality 3

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MacIntyre's later view is a helpful synthesis of the biological and rational aspects of human nature I am aiming for. 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 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.

12. Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form."

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.[13]

The point, I take it, is that rational animals is *what we are*. The point I take it, is that Macintyre is endorsing what I have called the generic truth that we are rational animals. That is your nature. 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 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 depen-

13. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.

dence." 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.[14]

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.[15] 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.

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."[16] Not only individual human beings, but entire communities, institutions, and nations

14. Ibid., 8.

15. 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)

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

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.

Hypothesis

The generic we were looking for at the beginning needed to be *relevant*, *ethical* (or potentially ethical), and needed to go beyond its legitimate rival – the McDowellian objection that rational, social teleology is all that is needed for a grounding of virtue.

The hypothesis we have discovered is simply this: 'human beings are practical, rational animals'. There is, it seems, a great deal of truth to the old formula, that to be human is to be a rational animal. Or, if you prefer to dress up the matter in more detailed and scientific terminology, we might say that our species is an intentional primate, the only language-using semiotic, self-concious, intentional, primates.

If human beings *really are* rational animals, we may initially hypothesize that that an *irrational* human is ipso facto defective.[17] (As above, I do not here intend to discuss mental illness, disability, birth defect, chromosomal disorders, and other such exceptions to 'normal' functional humans.) Initially, then, we should expect that the qualities that count as virtues for practical rational animals are those that enable us to actualize our life form and fulill our natural functions.

Hans Fink agrees with my hypothesis:

> The nature of x is both what is special about this x and what makes this x one of the x's as opposed to the y's. When x is defined per genus et differentiam both the genus and the differentiating characteristic and their combination could be taken to express what is the nature of x…. Human nature is what differentiates us from the animals and the plants. By nature we are rational beings. Our human nature, however, is also

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

> that in virtue of which we belong to the animal kingdom and to the living organisms. By nature we are mammals. We may thus use the concept of nature to differentiate rather than include, but also to include rather than differentiate. And we may use the concept of nature to express that differentiation and inclusion should not be seen as incompatible.[18]

In the old classificatory schemes, philosophers provided a genus and a differentia.

Potential

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.

This helps to rebut a playful jab from Bertrand Russell, who says: "Man is a rational animal —- so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life I have been looked diligently for evidence in favour of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it."[19] Part of the skepticism from analytic philosophers to the neo-Aristotelian project stems, I think, from this worry. Nevertheless, the concept of nature being deployed here is of the appeal of the neo-Aristotelian project is a clear concept of nature that applies to both humans and other animals.

A nature is an abstract property. It is a set of capacities delimiting the range of potentialities of a given object or living being. Natures are in this sense empirically discovered and inductively generalized set of potentialities latent in a species, captured in generics. Accordingly, human nature is a set of potentialities to realize our animal and intellectual activities, including reproduction,

18. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 207.
19. Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (2009), p. 45 %%

metabolisis, rational choice, abstract reflection, and so on. This is the solution to Russell's playful jab. Not all people — not most, perhaps not even many people — fulfill their rational potential by becoming thoroughly rational people, free of the banes of intellectual life: ignorance, intellectual laziness, illogical inferences, the distractions of irrational psychological factors, attachment to prejudice and bias, the commission of informal fallacies, and so on. Rather, overcoming all these banes would exemplify the fulfillment of human nature.

There is a monstrous thought that people who are not rational are not fully human. And on uncharitable critic might accuse me of presenting that monstrous thought. On the contrary, the fact that humans are practical rational animals is a generic, one of its strengths is that it blocks the immorality resulting from this kind of monstrous thought. For someone in a coma, someone who is merely an infant or pre-born child, someone who has suffered a debilitating brain injury, or who has severe mental illness, is still human because they share the life form of all humans. The tragedy is that they cannot fully participate in their own life form; they cannot engage in characteristic activities. We must be able to capture the thought that mental illness is abnormal, and that infants and pre-born children are undeveloped, are immature, without slipping into the monstrous thought that they are not *human*. If people in comas, or the mentally ill, the genetically defective, are not just even human then it would seem to be permissible to do all sorts of inhumanities. Peter Singer is someone, who might take to have fallen for this temptation to monstrosity end in humanity. Robert P. George makes this point well:

> The general problem regarding the ground of moral status can be expressed as follows. It seems that it is morally permissible to use some living things, to consume them, or to experiment on them for our own benefit (without their consent, or perhaps when they are unable to give or withhold consent), but that it is not morally permissible to treat other beings in this way. The question is: where do we draw the line between those two sorts of beings? By what criterion do we draw that line? … Various criteria for where the line should be drawn have been proposed: sentience, consciousness, self-awareness, rationality, or being a moral agent (the last two come to the same thing). We will argue that the criterion is: having a rational nature, that is, having the natural capacity to reason and make free choices, a capacity it ordinarily takes months, or even years, to actualize, and which various impediments might

> prevent from being brought to full actualization, at least in this life. Thus, every human being has full moral worth or dignity, for every human being possesses such a rational nature.[20]

Generics as a Basis for Virtue

Someone might be wondering: What does all of this have to do with virtue? Peter Geach says "Men need virtues as bees need stings."[21] Philippa Foot echoes Geach's statement about "need" and "necessity" as well. Alasdair MacIntyre subtitled his most recent monograph: "human beings need the virtues."[22] 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 species, each member of which exemplifies the same human nature of being a potentially practical, rational animals.

As we saw in the previous chapter:

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

Michael Thompson summarizes:

> "… we may view this line of thought as beginning with the idea… that will and practical reason are on the face of it just two more faculties or powers a living being may bear, on a level with the powers of sight and hearing an memory. The second crucial thought is that an individual instance of any of the latter powers — sight, hearing, memory — is intuitively to be judged as defective or sound, good or

20. Adam Schulman, *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics* (Government Printing Office, 2008), chap. 16, Chapter16: The Nature and Basis of Human Dignity.

21. Peter Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 17.

22. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

> bad, well-working or ill-working, by reference to its bearer's life-form or kind or species."[23]

Something changes when we examine human beings compared to all other animals or all other natural kinds.[24] 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*.

And this is how virtues appear, in general. Rosalind Hursthouse says that: "The concept of a virtue is the concept of something that makes its possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as she should. These are commonly accepted truisms."[25] These truisms encompass our everyday moral judgments about who is admirable much more broadly than our judgments about who is morally upstanding or who avoids being morally despicable. There is more to being an admirable person than *avoiding* transgressions. Nicholas Gier's memorable image of the "couch potato" illustrates this point. The Couch Potato works a mindless job which he is able adequately to perform while watching television (and today we can add, checking his Facebook and Twitter feeds); he rarely rises except to receive himself and microwave his dinners; he is even religious, watching his favorite preachers on Sunday morning television and tithing regularly. Yet the couch potato is by my standards living a wasted life and pitiable life. (I am counting on your similar intuition.) We do not want to imprison him for being such a failure; but we certainly do not admire how he lives. By contrast, admirable people command our respect for being morally upstanding, and so much more. We admire them for their brains, their guts, their strength, their rare talents, their outstanding achievements, their unimaginable creativity, their wit and eloquence. Some people are remarkable for *what they are given* (great beauty, great intelligence, and so on). But the admirable person is remarkable not just for good fortune. In fact, admirable people are often admirable for overcoming extraordinarily bad fortune.

23. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 29.

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

25. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics."

We truly admire *what they do* with *what they are given*. In a word, we admire how they live.

Hursthouse points out that we do not just admire those who survive but who exemplify a *human* form of life: "The human virtues make their possessor good qua human being, one who is as ordinarily well fitted as a human being can be in not merely physical respects to live well, to flourish – in a characteristically human way."[26]

Micah Lott says: >Rather it must embody a normatively significant understanding of human life and action. For any conception of human form is a natural-historical account of 'how the human lives.' As with 'the tiger' or 'the mayfly,' a natural-history of 'the human' provides an interpretation of the characteristic and non-defective life-cycle of the species. And as both Aristotelians and their critics emphasize, humans possess a faculty of practical reason.[27]

The practical animal "takes up" all that is intrinsic to being an animal – hungers, thirsts, sleepiness, sexual urges, a desire for shelter and comfort – and lives a life with them. A practical animal takes up all that is given in the natural lottery – strengths, weaknesses, defects, injuries, sicknesses, and talents – and must put it to use in living a life.

While we may admire "winners" of the natural lottery, we admire more the person who uses the attributes they were given well, who makes an investment of them that pays dividends. Compare, for example, the crowds cheering for Olympic runner Derek Redmond when he is winning the gold medal with the crowds cheering for Derek Redmond finishing last after his hamstring tore and his father helped him to cross the finish line. There have been many gold medal winning races that millions of people have witnessed and forgotten. But this race, when an otherwise naturally talented and well-trained athlete finished *last* that remains forever etched in the memory of millions more. It's not just the unbridled emotion Redmond displayed in that moment which so touches viewers; it's the obvious love from his father shown in supporting his son's commitment to finish the race, even dead last.

26. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 208.
27. Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form," 770–1.

The same principle applies to the various aspects of being a practical, rational animal we can mention. Aristotle taught that "affability" was a virtue, where many of us might chuckle to imagine that naturally phlegmatic people are morally better than their melancholic counterparts. Surely something so little under one's control is not a basis for evaluation? We should first remember that the "moral" virtues are not, for Aristotle, obedience to categorical imperatives or divine commands but simply ways of developing one's emotions into the likeness of a true human being. In this light, it does seem to me common for people to judge their fellows on the basis of *wilfully chosen* habits of relating to others – the cold, unfeeling, humorless, or self-absorbed person is not being judged for losing any natural lottery but for allowing him or herself to become a poor companion. The warm-hearted, empathetic, cheerful, and outwardly-focused person is rightly judged for cultivating sociable attitudes and habits. While not everyone needs to be entertaining or well-connected,basic levels of relating to other persons in family and social situations is not an optional part of human life but part of our very nature. And like Derek Redmond, somone who is naturally disposed to be soliarty, melancholic, cynical, bitter, or otherwise negative is all the more admirable when he or she becomes and remains affable against the odds.

Hursthouse captures up the good specimen of a practical rational animal, in this way:

> So, summing up, a good social animal (of one of the more sophisticated species) is one that is well fitted or endowed with respect to (i) its parts, (ii) its operations, (iii) its actions, and (iv) its desires and emotions; whether it is thus well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve (1) its individual survival, (2) the continuance of its species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, and (4) the good functioning of its social group–in the ways characteristic of the species.[28]

This is pretty well comprehensive. The only points I would add have to do with adding specification to the "good functioning" or flourishing of individuals and social groups, which I will do in a later chapter.

28. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 202.

III. No Human Nature Objection

Now I would like to consider a few objections. The first objection is simply that there is no human nature and hence there can be no true generics about humanity. Even the singular noun phrase "human nature" is liable to sound mystical, like a platonic universal underlying all human beings. Bernard Williams summarizes the antiquated worldview 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.[29]

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.

Along similar lines, evolutionary biology tells us that genetically modern humankind is the latest in a series of species. This is prima facie in tension with the notion of fixed, stable human nature. Ernst Mayr puts the alleged tension between the flexibility of evolutionary species and a fixed human nature in this way:

> The concepts of unchanging essences and of complete discontinuities between every *eidos* (type) and all others make genuine evolutionary thinking impossible. I agree with those who claim that the essentialist philosophies of Aristotle and Plato are incompatible with evolutionary thinking.[30]

Like Williams' worry that we can no longer believe in an "appropriate way… to behave" that is "inherent in each natural kind of thing", Mayr's worry is that there may not even be natural kinds.

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

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

No Human Nature Objection

Obstacles

The obstacles to this task are from two quite different quarters. The first obstacle is from those critics (such as Bernard Williams and Tim Lewens) who are pessimistic about the prospects of teleological ethics, are likely to be underwhelmed by the arguments of the previous chapter. This first sort of critic might deny on the one hand that there are any objective properties obtaining in each and every human which can be known from the objective, external, scientific point of view; or, on the other hand, that they might give bite to the is-ought gap again and argue that such objective properties are value-neutral and hence useless for normative purposes.

The second obstacle is from those critics (such as McDowell and Hursthouse) who are, in general, optimistic about the prospects for teleological ethics, but think such teleology can only be grounded in what we have called "social teleology." In other words, they share with the first sort of critic a skepticism about appeal to biology, instead urging us to look no further than human rationality. These objections, and response to them, will occupy us for this chapter.

These objections are important tools for framing this project.

Transition

One worry mentioned above is that human nature is a mess. For all we can tell (without the benefit of divine revelation) humanity is an anomaly. Our origin is shrouded in mystery, our destiny undecided. Our evolutionary history has bestowed upon us what Bernard Williams calls "ill-sorted bricolage of powers and instincts":

> The second and more general reason lies not in the particular ways in which human beings may have evolved, but simply in the fact that they have evolved, and by natural selection… On that [evolutionary] view it must be the deepest desire—-need?—-purpose?–satisfaction?–of human beings to live in the way that is in this objective sense appropriate to them (the fact that modern words break up into these

> alternatives expresses the modern break□up of Aristotle's view). Other naturalistic views, Marxist and some which indeed call themselves 'evolutionary', have often proclaimed themselves free from any such picture, but it is basically very hard for them to avoid some appeal to an implicit teleology, an order in relation to which there could be an existence which would satisfy all the most basic human needs at once. The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way into ethical thought.[31]

The response of Hursthouse, Foot, Brown, etc., is that natural teleology is indeed compatible with Darwinism and does indeed provide a "an appropriate way to behave" (or we might add, *ways*) that is "inherent in each natural kind of thing."This is Fitzpatrick's main worry, not that we have evolved poorly, but that we evolved at all.[32] He argues that evolved organisms have a telos to reproduce, not to "flourish".

That said, natural teleology is certainly incompatible with a teleological nihilism distinctive of (certain brands) of metaphysical reductionism. But it is not incompatabile with evolution.

Strictly speaking, evolutionary theory may be summarized in five theses explaining the current multiplicity and shape of terrestrial life.[Cf. Plantinga[33] 8-9. 1. The earth is very old; 2. Life has progressed from relatively simple to relatively complex forms; 3. Through slow and gradual changes, all the modern forms of live have appeared; 4. All of life originated from one original place and species; 5. Some mechanism such as natural selection drives the process of descent with modification.] Each separately and all together they explain biological processes of genetic mutation, reproduction, preservation, and proliferation. A sixth, not *necessarily* related Strictly speaking, about teleology, it says absolutely nothing.[34] As for those brands of metaphysical

31. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Taylor & Francis, 2011), 44.

32. William FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2016 (`http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/morality-biology/`, 2016).

33. *Where the Conflict Really Lies*.

34. Cf. ibid., 8–10. A sixth thesis, often appended to the first five, is that the process of natural selection is unguided. But regardless of its popularity among biologists this is, strictly speaking, a philosophical claim, not a biological one.

reductionism that are incompatible with natural teleology, if our knowledge of natural teleology is well-grounded enough then so much the worse for metaphysical reductionism.

While Hursthouse is quick to assure the reader that her goal is not the production of a "scientific" ethics, by this she means only that ethical evaluations cannot be made from "outside" the ethical outlook itself: ethics is not to become a branch of biology. She emphatically *does* mean to make evaluations of human beings can be made in a way analogous to the way we evaluate cacti or deer.

In each case we rely on the notion of natural kinds and their appropriate way of behaving:

> [I]n relation to which they are evaluated as good or defective. The evaluations do not—as they might in a post□Darwinian age—evaluate members of species of living things simply as good, or not so good, or downright defective, as replicators of their genes.[35]

Hursthouse's primary response to Williams is that his worry is not actually rooted in the progress of modern science. He himself admits that "many of course have come to that conclusion before" (the conclusion that "human beings are to some degree a mess… for whom no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially.")[36] Rather, Hursthouse points out, his worry is an expression of moral nihilism and despair.[37] Williams believes human nature is a mess *because* he believes no form of life is completely satisfactory for everyone. But that blade cuts the other way. If one has hope that some form of life is or may be at least mostly satisfactory for at least some people, it makes sense to believe human nature is not completely a mess. And Hursthouse movingly praises hope as a virtue.

> Alternatively (or perhaps as well) we could stick with what we have—those facts about human nature and the way human life goes that support the claim that the virtues on the standard list benefit their possessor, and the reading of human history that ascribes our persisting failure to achieve *eudaimonia* in anything but very small

35. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 257–8.
36. Ibid., 261, quoting from Williams.
37. I shall take up the topic of rational despair again in a later chapter.

> patches to our vices. True, it is not easy to hold on to them sometimes; despair and misanthropy are temptations. But we should.[38]

I should not like to deny that human society and many, many human individuals are "a mess" in the sense that corruption is a real feature of human life. A selected list of the dark side of our species: War, oppression, disease, genetic defect, injury, hatred, vice, a large and growing list of different kinds of injustice. These, also, are empirical facts of anthropology and psychology. I should not like to deny that *things are bad*. I should only like to make space for the possibility that things *are not all bad*. The universal optimist is obliged unrealistically to deny all the dark side of our existence. But the universal pessimist is obliged unrealistically to deny all the light side: peace and freedom, glowing health, genetic order, beauty that persists into old age, love, virtue, and the halting but admirable efforts toward justice and social harmony.

Below I shall make the case that ethical conclusions can be derived from natural facts about human beings. Here I only wish to make room for the possibility that our data set of such facts cannot with integrity include all light and sweetness nor all dank and dark cynicism.

As for the second worry, some will say that humans are mere mammals, and that is the end of it. As Andrew Bailey says, "we are animals."[39] Stephen Brown argues that ethics is a descriptive discipline in the end; even virtue ethics, after being appropriately "naturalized", does not *commend* the virtues so much as *detail* the traits which happen to be adaptive for creatures like us to survive and propagate our genotype.[40] Although the "characteristic form of life" of human beings involves highly rarified neurological and cognitive processes we do not observe in other animals, nevertheless, nature only reveals one kind of biological concept of nature: a species. And species aim to survive and reproduce.

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38. Ibid., 265.
39. Bailey, "Animalism."
40. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*; Stephen Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue," *Ethica* 4 (2005): 7–22.

Response 2

My reply is that to say that humans are mammals is an empirical assertion; we exhibit quite a sufficient number of tell-tale properties shared by other mammals: a neocortex, hair, mammary glands, and hearts of a particular form and function. But to say that humans are *merely* mammals is a profoundly anti-empirical assertion. I even would tendentiously label it profoundly *anti-scientific*. For what we observe of ourselves both "from inside" and "from outside" we exhibit a range of properties not shared by other mammals: grammar and language, fire-making, cooking, sex for pleasure, abstract reasoning, science, philosophy, religion, mythology, agriculture. Of course, slippery spatial analogies like "inside" and "outside" admit of multiple senses: "inside" can and often does mean what can be known via introspection (e.g., the way I know what it feels like to be slighted or to be praised, the way I remember the color of my grandmother's house) and what can be known from accepting limitations of a first-personal or second-personal human point of view more generally (e.g., it appears that the sun orbits the earth rather than the other way around; and I know when my mother is upset because I just "know" that look). Looking at things from the "outside" might mean what can be known via sensory perception or what can be known – if anything – by pretending to a neutral, objective, third-person, God's eye view.[41] We can posit counterfactuals, as for example when we speculate what intelligent extraterrestrials would think of humans if they observed and studied our species, with fresh eyes, alongside every other. All that matters for my purposes now is that our species exhibits a range of peculiar activities that distinguish us from mammals, from animals more broadly, and from any other known natural entity in the cosmos – and that recognizing as much is an *empirical* matter. To deny our uniqueness is possible, after a long inquiry. But to be blind to our uniqueness from the outset is to be subject, in all likelihood, to philistine reductionism that has no more to do with genuine science than does belief in extraterrestrial life.

41. Whether we can know anything outside of time and space (such as platonic universals) is of course a large question I don't wish to enter into here.

IV. Irrelevance Objection

We need to turn now to the second major objection. McDowell urges that the is-ought gap is indeed a real problem, in so far as the "is" side of the gap (the biological side) is irrelevant to morality. He objects to the over-zealous application of empirical methods to ethics.

The other side of the same coin is the objection that if there is such thing as "human nature", it is nothing more or less than our biological and physiological makeup. Tim Lewens argues that "the only biologically respectable notion of human nature that remains is an extremely permissive one that names the reliable dispositions of the human species as a whole. This conception offers no ethical guidance…"[42] On Lewens' view, the only talk about our "nature" that would be scientific would be an indeterminate series of complicated stories about our genetics, evolutionary history, and neurophysiology, perhaps even including cultural, geographical, and ecological settings. The problem, of course, 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*.[43] Likewise, Arthur Ward argues that "naturalists should reject the idea of "human nature," and indeed should reject that any organism or its parts or operations has a nature, purpose, proper function, or the like."[44]

Even if "natural norms" such as those argued for in the previous chapter existed, this objection says, they would be irrelevant from the practical point of view.[45] For if objective norms may be known from an external, scientific point of view, even so, they are impractical; human rationality allows us to reflect upon them and decide whether or not to allow them to count as reasons for action. Alternately, if norms of practical reason are knowable from within the practical (subjective,

42. Tim Lewens, "Human Nature: The Very Idea," *Philosophy & Technology* 25, no. 4 (2012): 459–74.

43. Cf. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 10; Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, chap. 5; Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory."

44. Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory," 1.

45. Frey, "The Will and the Good." Her dissertation is a full-scale rebuttal of this objection. I shall review her arguments in a later chapter.

internal, non-scientific) point of view, then they the objective facts of our nature are irrelevant. If by being practical reasoners we are free of the tyranny of biology, then biology is irrelevant to morality. Hursthouse assumes that knowledge of humanity "from the outside" is useless or futile. She says, "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[46] Hursthouse and McDowell's alternative is to base ethical considerations on our nature as rational agents. This is still loosely naturalistic, in that we are talking about "human nature" or "second nature". However, it grounds ethical norms in the intrinsic ends that belong to practical reasoning creatures.

In response to this worry, Rosalind Hursthouse's response 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."[47] Nevertheless, she *does* endorse the project of grounding ethical evaluations in human nature. So how is this to be done?

This objection McDowell shares with non-naturalist realists, subjectivists, and moral anti-realists. On the other hand, he does not think that goodness is *purely* subjective, originating in moral evaluators and projected outward by them onto the world. I will try, in this section, to get a clear handle on this paradoxical view. An initial quotation from McDowell expresses his relation to Foot:

> Philippa Foot has long urged the attractions of ethical naturalism. I applaud the negative part of her point, which is to reject various sorts of subjectivism and super-naturalist 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.[48]

46. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* especially chapter 10.
47. Ibid. especially chapter 10.
48. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 167.

As this quotation makes clear, McDowell shares Foot's rejection of "subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism" but he disputes her "concept of nature". McDowell's classifies his own view as a "sort of naturalism" – namely "relaxed naturalism."[49] Farreira calls McDowell-type views "excellence naturalism" and Foot-type views "empirical naturalism". McDowell 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."[50] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

What is his objection to Foot's view? She thinks that normative facts are response-independent features of nature. He says that the naive realist view (that moral values are response-independent) is "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[51] The first reason McDowell can't "take naive realism seriously" is that he finds one sort of motivational internalism absurd. He points to a "worry about how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[52] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie: the "central doctrine of European moral philosophy" is a mistake;[53] it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are. (McDowell's worry is akin to Mackie's bewilderment over the notion that "to-be-pursuedness" is built into things.) A second worry is that the doctrine of objective value, where normative facts are primary qualities of nature, has been discredited or outmoded by modern science. The modern scientific picture of nature is "disenchanted"

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

50. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.

51. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds. (Blackwell, 2007), 137.

52. Ibid., 143.

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

from such instrinsic values as meaning and morality. He says, "The most striking occurence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science."[54] This objection McDowell shares with Gibbard and Blackburn.

Yet McDowell does not conclude (as many do), that therefore values are merely subjective; he does not conclude that there is no such thing as natural normativity. McDowell's anti-dualist position here (as elswhere!) is liable to puzzle or frustrate some philosophers. He is not a realist; but he is not an anti-realist. He is an "anti-anti-realist". McDowell is always fighting on two fronts, attacking a position without thereby supporting its apparent opposite. (Similarly, in *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism and "Rampont Platonism".) It may be worthwhile to make the contextual observation that McDowell's position here reflects his broader project of *dissolving dualisms*. He says he is influenced by two main sources: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[55] From the Socratic tradition he draws a way of thinking in which dualisms do not even arise. And from the later Wittgenstein he draws a way of doing "therapeutic" philosophy[56] – philosophy that 'leaves everything as it is'[57]. That is, McDowell believes many philosophical puzzles arise not from puzzling reality but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": dualisms need to be *exorcized*.

It makes sense that McDowell disputes both Foot's brand of moral realism and also its apparent opposite, subjectivism and anti-realism. But what is the alternative to the apparently exhaustive dualism of seeing values (or norms) as *either* facts of nature like primary qualities *or* unreal, illusory, and purely subjective. His answer is that values are "secondary qualities" or "dispositional properties" of nature. His essay "Values and Secondary Qualities" argues that values are like colors and unlike shapes.[58] We might paraphrase this thesis by saying that "natural normativities" are

54. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 174.

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

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

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

58. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds., "Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology" (Blackwell, 2007), 137–45. I shall cite this anthology. The essay is also printed in McDowell, *Mind,*

qualities *in the world* (not just in our heads) but they are not Lockean "primary qualities." They are, rather, Lockean secondary qualities.

Yet McDowell also disagrees with the opposite extreme of Foot's view, as represented by those (such as J.L. Mackie, Alan Gibbard, and Simon Blackburn) who believe that normativity is "projected" by philosophers and scientists onto the natural facts. Mackie's error theory gets right the common sense view that "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[59] Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[60] 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."[61]

He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[62] 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

Value, and Reality, chapter 7.

59. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 137.
60. Ibid., 139.
61. Ibid., 139.
62. Ibid., 138.

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.

Goodness, badness, and other values are therefore grounded in "second nature."[63] The space of reasons in which our rational capacities operate makes us sensibile to those dispositional properties of primary nature which become, for us, values such as goodness and badness. We will explore McDowell's view of second nature a bit more in a later chapter. Suffice it for now that "second nature" is a distinctly human phenomenon. We partially re-enchant nature by bringing primary facts into the space of reasons when they weren't there before.

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 deny 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*).[64]

McDowell's fundamental solution to the mind-body problem in general is that the world given in experience is engaging both receptive and spontaneous capacities. We have to wonder about the implications of the "new interpretation of human experience"—and the location of the rational being within nature. McDowell does wonder about this, introducing the concept of second nature. Nature (we presume) is disenchanted. Human beings are natural—they exist within the disenchanted space of law. Yet, ex hypothesi the human being has (simultaneously) the capacity

63. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 188 and following.
64. Bildung=formation, education; bild=form, image.

for spontaneous answerability to rational relations, which exist in a sui generis space of reason. These seem irreconcilable. 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."[65] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

Practical wisdom is a virtue that the young human being does not have, and the ethical demands of practical wisdom are not even perceptible to her. But she has the potential (within her nature) to develop the answerability to them. And ethical thinking is inculcated in a young person, and then later examined, but only examined from within ethical thinking. Human beings are intelligibly initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing (Bildung) which instills the appropriate shape in their lives. So initiated, practically wise behavior is not just a new kind of behavior but the maturation and development of a new kind of faculty in the human animal. The circularity of this inculcation and new second natural faculty is not accidental: Since practical wisdom is responsive to reasons, it becomes a prototype "for the…faculty that enables us to recognize and create … intelligibility."[66] "[The ethical demands of reason] are essentially within reach of human beings. So practical wisdom is second nature to its possessors."[67]

Response

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

Nevertheless, I think McDowell's ingenious alternative to "empirical naturalism" or "strict naturalism" is flawed. So, before I defend my own version of Footian realism, I would like to point out two or three aspects of the inadequacy of McDowell's constructivist alternative.

65. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.
66. Ibid., 79.
67. Ibid., 84.

Dilemma Unrestricted or Restricted 'nature'?

McDowell faces a dilemma. He must choose between two incompatible definitions of nature, and he wants both. On the one hand, he wants the term 'nature' to analytically exclude anything falling under the description of 'supernatural'; on the other hand, he most emphatically does *not* want to exclude "second nature" of human thought and experience in the space of reasons. But he can't have what he wants, at least, not without further argumentation. He has merely asserted (but not earned the conceptual rights) to his conception of nature. Fink[68] expertly exposes McDowell's sleight of hand on this issue. To draw out the critique of McDowell that Fink and I share in common, I will have to present the details of his article.

The first point, from Fink, picks up McDowell's statement that "Mrs Foot's writings do not pay much attention to the concept of nature in its own right". The conversations about 'two sorts of naturalism' or different kinds of 'ethical naturalism' are, after all, conversations about nature. What is 'nature?' Some might be impatient with such digressions, insisting that we can resolve this sticky business by stipulation. But Fink disagrees:

> This is a terminological issue, but it is not easy to resolve simply by choosing one's definition of 'nature' and then sticking to it. No account of naturalism should forget the fact that 'nature' is, as Raymond Williams puts it, 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (Williams 1981: 184), or as Hume puts it, a word 'than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal' (THN: III.I.II.). In this section I shall try to give a somewhat systematic overview of some of this complexity that simply cannot be reduced by philosophical fiat…Indeed, it is a deep root of ambiguity that we can talk about the nature of art, law, language, culture, morality, normativity, history, civilization, spirit, mind, God, or nothingness even if we otherwise regard these as non-natural, that is, as not belonging to nature as a realm. There is no contradiction in talking about the nature of the unnatural, the super-natural, or the non-natural, just as it is an open question what the nature of the natural is.[69]

And Fink is right. If the error of Foot's critics lies in a deeply-held, barely articulated belief that

68. "Three Sorts of Naturalism."
69. Ibid., 206.

some concept "nature" cannot include any normative content, then the only thing for it is to thematize the concept of nature, make such beliefs explicit, and subject them to scrutiny.

To see the dilemma McDowell faces, consider that there are at least two kinds of conceptions of nature: (1) "Restricted nature" picks out some subset of all things that are natural, leaving everything else 'non-natural', unnatural, or supernatural. Fink provides a list of eight different intuitive ways of contrasting (a restricted conception of) nature with what is non-natural. For instance, 'nature' could mean the world unaffected by human intervention (e.g., the arrangement of trees in the Yukon is natural) or "the empirical world as opposed to the intelligible world of the abstract, logical, or mathematical" (e.g., formal sciences contrast with sciences of nature.) All of these eight contrast with the (2) unrestricted nature. "Unrestricted nature" is just a multisyllabic synonym for "all." It leaves nothing out. This is the ninth option Fink summarizes as follows:

> Such a ninth conception of nature would be an unrestricted conception. It would express the idea that there is one world only, and that that world is the realm of nature, which is taken to include the cultural, artificial, mental, abstract and whatever else there may prove to be. There are no realms above or beyond nature. To be is to be in nature and to be in continuity with everything else in nature. Even the greatest and deepest differences are differences within nature rather than differences between nature and something else.[70]

With these distinctions in hand, we can observe a crucial point that no one philosophical view has copyright on the term 'naturalism.' For example, classical materialism is perhaps a paradigmatic form of 'naturalism.'[71] By Fink's lights, classical materialism is a form a restricted naturalism for it affirms that whatever is material is part of nature, and so that the label 'not-natural' applies to whatever is not material (or not obviously material, such as ghosts, souls, and fairies). But classical materialism is not the *only* form of restricted nature. Rather, *the idealist, too, can rightly lay claim to the title of naturalism* – and not in a "Pickwickian" sense.

70. Ibid., 206.

71. Roy Wood Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism?" *The Philosophical Review* 36, no. 3 (1927): 216–25.

To see why idealism is a form of restricted naturalism, Fink takes a highly informative detour to analyze Plato's *Laws*. There he finds a Greek trichotomy between events that come about by nature (*physis*), chance, and art. 'Nature' and 'chance' explain why plants grow, why the sun moves, and so on. 'Art' explains why houses have roofs, why humans wear clothes, and anything else that we do and that nature and chance could *not* have done. The "natural" pair in this trichotomy consists of the first two: that which comes about, so to speak, on its own, *prior to* and *independent of* intelligent intervenion from humans or gods. This conception of nature excludes not only the supernatural but also the cultural, the fictional or imaginative, and so on. The Athenian does not accept this "dangerous" conception of nature. Rather, he argues that "soul is necessarily prior in origin to things which belong to body, seeing that soul is older than body."[72] Fink comments on this passage:

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

The Athenian proves his desired point – that soul is "older than" and prior to body – by first defining 'soul' as self-movement, and the cause of motion in other things. Material bodies either do not move at all or they are moved by something else. Since all material things are either moved (by another moving thing) or unmoved, material things cannot be the first principles of motion. But since soul *is self-motion*, it is the first principle of motion. Or rather, the first *ensouled* body is able to move itself, and therefore to move other material things.

Fink's comment is that "This, I take it, is pretty rampant Platonism but clearly presented as an account of the soul as natural becaus eprimary in existence… mind is prior to world."[73] This

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

brings us back around to idealism as naturalism. If soul is the primary sense of nature, then body is "second nature"! Mind is the primary thing, the first thing, the paradigmatic thing, against which mere body is contrasted.

We can now see the crucial point about 'naturalism.' Idealism and materialism turn out to be *identical* in one respect: they offer a "restricted conception of nature" and relegate to a "secondary" status everything that is not "natural" in the privileged sense. Idealism and materialism of course *contrast* – indeed, *compete* – in that they fight each other for the right to call *their* preferred side of the matter-form divide the *first* and *natural* side. Fink bolsters this point with a quotation from Aristotle showing that Aristotle is aware of the competition between the matter-form divide. "Some identify the nature or substance of a natural object with the immediate constituent… e.g., wood is the 'nature' of the bed… [others] that 'nature' is the shape or form."[74] His comment on this passage is:

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

The point of these reflections is that McDowell has argued persuasively that we must return return to the unrestricted conception of nature.

Neither restricted sort of nature

The restricted conceptions of nature (materialism and idealism) are in ideological battle; some philosophers are willing to pick a side and battle it out with the other side. The idealist can be guilty of presenting the spiritual or conceptual version of nature as absolute. McDowell sees the same question-begging in what he calls "philistine scientism."[75] As Fink summarizes:

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

75. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 346.

> McDowell has convincingly shown that what Bernard Williams calls the absolute conception of reality is merely restricted, bald naturalism ideologically presented as absolute (MVR: 112–31, esp. sect. 5).[76]

Not unrestricted

Nevertheless, McDowell is of two minds. He rejects the restricted conceptions of nature offered him by the philistine scientism and by Kantian idealism. The only remaining route is an unrestricted conception of nature. Fink continues:

> Nothing less than a naturalism that deserves to be presented as absolute could help break the spell of bald naturalism without merely replacing one restricted sort of naturalism with another and thus keeping the oscillations going.[ibid.[77] 219}

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

> Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations. It is the business of those who are concerned with the theory of the earth, geographers and geologists, to make this fact evident, in its various implications. The theorist who would deal philosophically with fine art has a like task to accomplish. (Dewey 1958: 3–4, italics in original) On this conception the aesthetical (and the ethical) are not independent of nature, but they are not somehow based on nature or supervening on it either; rather, they simply are nature in some of its manifest operations. To think otherwise is both to mystify the aesthetical (and ethical) and to trivialize nature. The man- made, the artificial, the cultural, the historical, the ethical, the normative, the mental, the logical, the abstract, the mysterious, the extraordinary, are all examples of ways of being natural rather than examples of ways of being non- natural. Nature is never *mere* nature. That which is *more* than *mere* is nature, too.[78]

Where the materialist and idealist are fighting over the definition of primary nature, the unrestricted conception refuses to fight, instead embracing both body and mind, brain and consciousness, matter

76. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 219.
77.
78. Ibid., 217.

and form, in a comprehensive view. While this has its attractions, the cost, however, is that one no longer has the right to criticize opponents on the basis of their positing something real over and above nature – such a criticism is meaningless once we have defined 'real over and above nature' as a contradiction in terms. This cost McDowell does not wish to pay.

McDowell must pick sides, but he has not allowed himself to pick sides. He rejects one sort of idealism[79] and rejects one sort of empiricism. Therefore, by default, it is a necessary consequence that he embraces the unrestricted conception of nature.

Instead of explicitly admitting that he embraces the unrestricted conception without qualification, he puts the ball in one cup and then moves it around to the other side, pretending the ball was in the other cup all along. He keeps his conception of nature restricted (anti-supernatural) while *calling* in unrestricted (neither idealist nor physicalist). McDowell as a hero of anti-dualism has allowed himself merely to *name and claim* an unrestricted conception of nature while fully developing and endorsing a restricted conception of nature.

Sellars Example

To make the point even more clear, compare McDowell's refusal to pick sides with Sellars' example of the same. Sellars provides a specimen of such doublespeak in almost platonic purity:

> I mean that naturalism takes nature in a definite way as identical with reality, as self-sufficient and as the whole of reality. And by nature is meant the space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed.[80]

The first sentence explicitly endorses an unrestricted conception of nature. The second sentence invisibly and secretly slides the ball into the other cup, explictly endorsing an incompatible restricted conception of nature. The second sentence merely *assumes* that the "space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed" is "identical with reality".

79. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*. He wants to dissolve the prejudice that we must be either Kantian transcendental idealists or reductive empiricists.

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

The second sentence asserts: "Nature is all there is!" with an exclamation point and a loud voice. But nobody (not idealists or supernaturalists) dispute that "Nature (unrestricted nature) is all there is"; they only dispute the implicit assumption, that the space-time-causal-system is all there is.

Conclusion

I conclude that, despite their differences, McDowell shares with Mackie and other subjectivists radically reductive, disenchanted, Laplacian picture of material nature as a manifold of bald descriptive facts. The richer – and more scientific – unrestricted conception of nature is the one Foot (and MacIntyre) can help us to recover. McDowell merely asserts, without additional argument, the common prejudice that "modern science" somehow disenchants nature, when in fact the "partial re-enchantment" he himself endeavors to recover is already present *within modern science*.

James Barham captures the dualism into which McDowell unwitting falls:

> the philosophical literature tends to work with a scientifically outdated image of living things as rigid "machines." This results in a picture in which only human beings (or at most the higher animals) can be properly ascribed purposes and agency in the full normative sense. From this perspective, we appear to be faced with an unappealing choice between eliminating teleology and normativity from our picture of nature altogether and understanding these phenomena as they are manifested in our own human form of life as floating free from any grounding in the natural world.[81]

Values as primary qualities

A second critique is that McDowell himself *does* allow that "values" can be primary qualities in nature. The theory of danger also helps McDowell in his conclusion deny that his view is a variant of "projectivism." The "epistemology of danger" that arises from McDowell's "theory of danger"[82] helps explain moral epistemology. This is McDowell's own example but he does not seem to notice that it can be used against his thesis. If "danger" is a Lockean primary quality, then "desirable"

81. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 1.
82. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 142–3.

might be as well. His theory of "danger" is this: Just as there is *something* about red things *themselves* that makes them give us redness experiences, likwise there is something about the dangerous animal itself that gives us fear experiences. That quality may not be *the form of red* or *the form of danger*, but it is also not *nothing*. The "theory of danger" is intended to capture this "something" with the important notion of *merit*. Red objects *just appear as red* to us under the proper circumstances. They *just do* dispose us to have red experiences. But dangerous objects *merit* appearing fearful and dangerous. They *merit* that we have a fear experience. To describe a bear (say) as "dangerous" to rabbits is to say something about bears and about rabbits in their context on planet earth. The rabbit need not engage in concept-use or perceptual judgment – seeing the bear *as dangerous* – rather the rabbit merely needs the instincts and perceptial capacities to see the bear. His response is not reducible to a response to the bear's size or fur or any other obvious empirical quality; the rabbit is responding to the danger. Likewise, when we see certain kinds of food as "disgusting" (rotten banana peels, say) we need to assume that we are projecting disgust onto the food; it is more plausible, by McDowell's own lights, that we are being sensitive to what such foods *merit*, given the kind of foods they are and the kind of animals we are.

Scientific realism?

McDowell wants to denigrate one kind of scientific realism (say, realism about evaluative judgments of health and sickness) while endorsing another kind of scientific realism (about shapes, sizes, weights, and other primary qualities.) That is, he denigrates the desire to find goodness in (primary) nature as a kind of neurosis or anxiety arising from the philosophical vertigo we experience upon becoming inculcated with "the scientific worldview." But if there is such a thing as "the scientific worldview" – the best thinking about the best deliverances of our best sciences – then it includes the deliverances of biology. It is hard to be asked to reject "science" (scientific knowledge from biology) on behalf of "science" (scientific knowledge from physics). One begins to suspect that the request is that we reject genuienly scientific knowledge from biology on behalf

of philosphical materialism, which wields the word 'science' as a bludgeon with which to beat its ideological opponents. McDowell acknowledges that his critics will criticize him for failing to live up to "philistene scientism" and yet criticizes the Footian picture for philistene scientism.

V. Successful Naturalism, Chris Toner

Annas distinguishes two sorts of naturalism, one that emphasizes the biological nature of humanity (at the expense of the odd normativity of reason) and another that emphasizes the rational nature of humanity (at the expense of the mundane descriptivity of biology).[83]

Christopher Toner distinguishes between the "biological naturalism" of Thompson and Foot (and Hursthouse) on the one hand from the "second naturalism" or "excellence naturalism" or 'culturalism' of McDowell and MacIntyre, each of which has its strengths and problems.

Christopher Toner attempts to draw out the distinction between the kinds of naturalism.[84] Toner agrees with Hursthouse that the term 'Aristotelian naturalism' "implies that human nature is normative, such that to be morally good is to fulfill one's nature."[85] McDowell too believes that it is possible to "formulate a conception of reason that is, in one sense, naturalistic: a formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside."[86]

However, Toner himself argues that the brands of naturalism espoused by Thompson, Hursthouse, and Foot cannot adequately respond to a criticism McDowell (among others) have pressed. Toner presents four criteria that "naturalism must deliver if it is to support a revived Aristotelian virtue ethics…"[87]

1. Natural norms must be intrinsically able to motivate the bearer of the nature. □

83. Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in Gardiner, *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*.
84. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism."
85. Ibid., 221.
86. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
87. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.

2. Natural norms must be intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of the nature.
3. Natural norms must be anchored in and express universal human nature.
4. First and second nature must be related so that the second is a natural outgrowth of the first, and so that that in our given makeup is (first) natural which does tend toward an ethically mature second nature.

The last of these four criteria is the one I shall attempt to defend in a later chapter.

Hursthouse

Toner interprets Hursthouse as endorsing a modified type of egoism:

> Dualism of this sort is hardly new — it is characteristic of standard Kantian and consequentialist moral psychologies — but it is a bit unusual for a virtue ethics claiming allegiance to Aristotle to embrace it. Indeed, it seems to raise the rather un-Aristotelian question about how to handle a conflict between fundamental practical commitments. Much that Hursthouse says hints that self-interest has priority: virtue ethics "offers a distinctively unfamiliar version of the view that morality is a form of enlightened self-interest" (1999, 190). Also, she seems to recognize the McDowellian point that Aristotelian categoricals about how an evolved species as a matter of fact propagates itself through time may have little normative claim on a reflective agent. Her response is to insist that the life of virtue does in fact tend to promote the welfare of the virtuous agent, so that the commitment to one's well-being seems more basic than, and a necessary ground of, the commitment to one's functioning as a species member (see especially 1999, 259–60). This move both highlights the power of McDowell's critique of the Thompsonian form of Aristotelian naturalism and illustrates how tempting it is, for naturalists equipped with only a disenchanted nature, to allow eudaimonism to collapse into egoism.9 Hursthouse comes close to this collapse; Arnhart will come closer still.[88] If generics are supposed to pick out natural properties of human beings, and if all such natural properties belong to disenchanted nature, then the ethical conclusions we draw will "collapse into egoism." Eudaimonia will get a very "disenchanted" definition (pleasure, reproductive success.)

MacIntyrean Naturalism

Toner argues that a naturalistic theory must satisfy four requirements:

88. Ibid., 230.

1. Natural norms must be intrinsically able to motivate the bearer of the nature.

The "natural norm" must be intrinsically able to motivate: desires that *do* motivate us satisfy this requirement. However, unless there is some "supervising principle" that coordinates desires (suppressing some, elevating others) the desires themselves seem to lead us to a sub-moral life; and the addition of such a supervising principle makes the theory no longer naturalistic.

2. Natural norms must be intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of the nature.

The natural norm must be something that justifies itself, either to all rational agents as such or to all moral agents. The norm need not, Toner admits, automatically persuade a Callicles to repent of his wickedness. However, it must be able to motivate.

> This is why I say "intrinsically able to motivate or justify" rather than "intrinsically motivating or justifying": the natural norm is such that it can motivate or convince persons, provided they are not in too dysfunctional a state. In the same way a rose is such as to be intrinsically able to convince us of its being red. Its failure actually to do so in my case because I am color-blind or jaundiced does not impugn this intrinsic ability. Natural norms can motivate and convince because they are neither "mere facts" about the way a given species does go on nor "brute desires" a given species happens to have as a result of its evolutionary history.[89]

Micah Lott calls this the "authority-of-nature challenge"[90]. "The challenge depends on an apparent gap between what naturally good for us qua human beings (=the normal) and what has a claim upon our reason (=the normative)." Natural norms are either "normal" (i.e., natural) or "normative" (i.e., binding, authoritative, etc.)

3. Natural norms must be anchored in and express universal human nature.

> If we want a naturalistic virtue ethics that is self-standing, natural norms must be capable not only of expressing the commitments of this or that culture but also of justifying that one, criticizing this one, and so forth.

89. Ibid., 235.
90. In Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form. 770

But what sort of thing is this universal human nature to be, if we are to avoid the problems of Thompson and Arnhart? It is to be, as Thompson said, "what was formerly called an infima species," the representation of which expresses "one's interpretation or understanding of the life-form shared by the members of that class" (1995, 288). This view runs into the troubles catalogued above if (and only if) we understand "one's interpretation or understanding" to be that provided by modern "value-free" science, a list of categoricals or natural desires supplied by anthropology and evolutionary psychology. Suppose instead this understanding of nature were supplied from the standpoint of a second nature seeking to understand its own development, so that the "universal nature" of (3) would be at its core our shared tendency to become and then to be and act as certain kinds of people. First nature on this interpretation would be that in all of us which points toward and calls for the development of second nature, and second nature would be that which perfects and completes first nature. Another way of putting this is:

4. First and second nature must be related so that the second is a natural outgrowth of the first, and so that that in our given makeup is (first) natural which does tend toward an ethically mature second nature.

> Alasdair MacIntyre writes that we can rightly understand the goods, harms, needs, and vulnerabilities of a certain species only by appeal to a notion of what it is for its members to flourish (MacIntyre 1999, 63–65). Now, for a living being to flourish it must develop its powers, especially those distinctive of it as a member of its species (there is more to flourishing than that, he allows, but this is at its core), and whether an individual or group is flourishing "is in itself a question of fact, even though the question of what it is to flourish has to be answered in part through evaluative and conceptual enquiry" (1999, 64). MacIntyre exemplifies the end-first approach sketched above, and it is worth quoting him at some length to see this: As a question of fact it [what it is to flourish] receives answers in a variety of scientific contexts. Distinguishing between environments in which members of some particular species flourish and environments in which they fail to flourish and distinguishing within some particular population those individuals or groups of a particular species that are flourishing from those that are not is a necessary preliminary to framing certain types of explanatory question which we provided with answers by the biological and ecological sciences. Drawing these distinctions successfully involves identifying the various characteristics that an individual or population of some particular species needs in order to flourish in this or that particular environment, at this or

> that particular stage of development. (1999, 64–65)

> We start with a revisable account of what it is for an animal to flourish (for example, being a good pack hunter) and then ask scientific questions about what sort of environment, the development of which distinctive powers, and so forth, the animal needs. Now, the power most distinctive of human beings as a species is, of course, rationality. We know this in part because were it not, it would not be the case that we, and only we, were asking questions about the powers distinctive of species. Also, writes MacIntyre, "the question 'Why should I do this rather than that?' becomes from an early age inescapable and it is characteristic of human beings, that their replies to this question can themselves always be put in question. . . . Human beings need to learn to understand themselves as practical reasoners about goods, about what on particular occasions it is best for them to do and about how it is best for them to live out their lives" (1999, 67). So we know, says MacIntyre, that a flourishing human being is one who reasons well about how to live his or her life, is what he will call an "independent practical reasoner." That is our infima species or form of life. From this initial conception of flourishing, we can reason back to our needs, vulnerabilities, goods, and salient first-natural developmental tendencies.

> Much of the detailed argument must be passed over, but let us crystallize the point MacIntyre is making: membership in networks of giving and receiving is essential to human flourishing, and the exercise of the virtues is essential to the maintenance of such networks, and therefore to flourishing. And essential not just as instrumental to but as constitutive means of flourishingFvirtues are expressed in practical reasoning, and sustained and effective practical reasoning takes place only within net- works of giving and receiving.

The task

Toner summarizes the task in this way:

> Although I have tried to anticipate and turn aside some important objections, whether the MacIntyrean sort of naturalism is acceptable ultimately depends on answers to some rather large questions involving the nature of rationality (for example, whether it is tradition-constituted in something like the way MacIntyre says), moral psychology (for example, whether McDowell and MacIntyre are right in rejecting the "hydraulic" psychology of neo-Humeans like Arnhart), and even metaphysics (for example, whether and how moral philosophy is related to theology). But such interdependences are what we must expect for an ethic purporting to be based on a true understanding of human nature.

In a later chapter, I shall take up one of Toner's challenges: to defend a notion of practical reason as importantly constituted by "tradition" — that is, by particular cultural methods, facts, doctrines, and emphases transmitted within a particular people group over time.

VI. Conclusion

The sort of naturalism(s) represented by Foot, Hursthouse, and McDowell aim to ground evaluations of a member of a species on the life form of that species. The generic that 'a human being is a practical, rational animal' captures the life form of the species in a manner that is accessible to an "alien anthropologist" observing humanity from the "outside", from outside the practical point of view. The presence in humanity of such generically animal behaviors such as birthing, reproducing sexually, eating, sleeping, and dying betray a common root and identity with the animal kingdom and with the biological world as a whole; yet other human behaviors, especially language, deliberation, reflection, and intentional action betray a curious difference. As such, those qualities that enable human beings to be practical, rational animals are liable to turn out to be virtues. Those qualities of natural excellence enable the member of the species to actuate the potentials inherent in such a life form. Showing how such qualities as show up on "normal" catalog of virtues, and how perhaps even others, fall under the concept of natural excellence, is the task for the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Virtue and Reason in the Neo-Aristotelians

"Men need virtues as bees need stings."

–Peter Geach, *The Virtues*

Introduction

In this chapter, I shall explicate in detail the accounts of virtue and reason from Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre. I assess various objections to each account individually before comparing and contrasting the accounts as a set. In short, each account exposes the importance for morality of our nature as the *practical, rational animals* that we are. The "third sort" of naturalism we have been defending that stresses the continuity of rationality and biology comes to light even more clearly here, where the excellence of the rational will (Foot) is formed into a perceptual sensitivity to what situations require (McDowell) by one's tradition-constituted rationality (McDowell). The conclusions of this chapter introduce the next chapter, which is explictly devoted to practical reason's place in our overall neo-Aristotelian account. We shall begin with Philippa Foot.

I. Foot: Excellence of Will

Foot argues that virtue is excellence of the rational will.[1] Even Foot will expand her concept of will beyond its typical meaning to include intentions (see below). Since now is not the place to distinguish the two concepts, I shall herein treat her 'rational will' as identical to my 'practical rationality'.

We saw above that virtues are, for Foot, examples of 'natural goodness.' That is, the concept of goodness being deployed in appellations such as a 'good person' is structurally the same as the concept of goodness in 'a good oak' or 'a good wolf.' A good person exemplifies those good-making features shared by all exemplary members of a natural species. What exactly can we say about such good-making features of rational animals?

Foot's best account of the virtue argues that: (1) virtues are beneficial, to self and others, while vices are bad for self and others; (2) virtues are distinct from skills (such as strength, keen eyesight, reliable memory, etc.) because such excellences are not excellence of will or practical reason; (3) virtues are corrective of some tempting vice; and (4) virtues are only 'operative' toward good ends.[2] Let's examine each of these propositions in turn.

Virtue is beneficial

First, virtues are beneficial. She says, "Human beings do not get on well without them. Nobody can get on well if he lacks courage, and does not have some measure of temperance and wisdom, while communities where justice and charity are lacking are apt to be wretched places to live, as

1. I have hitherto avoided the word 'will' because it is not a cross-cultural concept. Cf. David Bradshaw, "The Mind and the Heart in the Christian East and West," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 5 (2009): 576–98. There Bradshaw distinguishes the cluster of concepts such as heart, mind, and will, and shows that Aristotle and others did not have a concept of a distinct, sub-rational faculty for choosing.

2. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Russia was under the Stalinist terror."[3]

But whom is benefited? Does a person possessing a virtue benefit the virtuous person or the society in which the virtuous person lives? For some virtues, the answer is more clearly *both*. For example, moderation with alcohol benefits oneself, one's family, one's community and so on. For other virtues, such as justice or charity, the answer is less clear. She says, "It is a reasonable opinion that on the whole a man is better off for being charitable and just, but this is not to say that circumstances may not arise in which he will have to sacrifice everything for charity or justice."[4] Even so, she finds the alleged paradox between what we might wish to call "selfish" and "altruistic" virtues overblown. Certainly, sometimes life presents us with the opportunity to pursue only one of two contradicting or apparently irreconcilable goods; my own good *versus* your good. Sometimes, however, the cases in which virtuous deeds necessitate the loss of other goods are not so devastating as they might appear. It might be that, on occasion, it is better (say) for my family that I sacrifice my health in working hard to earn higher wages; while on other occasions it is better for my family that I sacrifice higher wages keep myself healthy. Even when there is a clear, irresolvable tension between my good and the good of the group (as when, say, I must sacrifice my life), we can make sense of the demand of morality by appealing to what is necessary *for humans* in general. As Geach says, "An individual bee may perish from stinging, all the same bees need stings; an individual man may perish by being brave or justice, but all the same, men need courage and justice."[5] Geach further points out that the clear contrast between my "inclinations" (e.g., to self preservation) is largely an artifact of philosophical thinking; many people are *inclined* both to self-preservation *and* inclined to obey the moral law.

Foot says: "let us say then, leaving unsolved problems behind us, that virtues are in general beneficial characteristics, and indeed ones that a human being needs to have, for his own sake and

3. Ibid., 2–3.
4. Ibid., 3.
5. Geach, *The Virtues*, 17.

that of his fellows."[6] We cannot ignore the notorious tensions between altruism and egoism, but we must move on in the pursuit of a definition of virtue.

More than strength

The next — and more interesting question is how to distinguish moral virtue from a great memory, keen eyesight, or other admirable qualities we do not intuitively classify as virtuous.

Even defining virtues are "beneficial characteristics… a human being needs to have", she admits that, "This will not, however, take us far towards a definition of a virtue, since there are many other qualities of a man that may be similarly beneficial, as for instance bodily characteristics such as health and physical strength, and mental powers such as those of memory and concentration.[7] And this is no small matter. In the first line of Plato's *Meno*, Meno asks Socrates a question"whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way¿'[8] And moral philosophers have continued to try to answer for the last 2,400 years. A recent volume edited by Mark Alfano[9] discusses the range of which positive traits count as virtues.

What distinguishes virtue from strength? At first glance, the answer seems to be something about the *will*; Foot thinks virtues are revealed not only by a person's abilities but by his or her *intentions.* But what are intentions? Foot argues that the 'will' must be understood in its broadest sense, "to cover what is wished for as well as what is sought."[10] Intentions are not the *only* thing we judge, for a well-intentioned nincompoop who always harms when "helping" is rightly judged as deficient in virtue. Neither do we only judge the result of a person's action, for we sometimes exculpate a failing performance in part because the person *meant well*, though it also perhaps it the

6. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 4.
7. Ibid., 4.
8. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato*, *Meno* 70a.
9. Mark Alfano, *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Mark Alfano (Routledge, 2015).
10. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 5.

exculpation is called for because circumstances were not favorable, chances of success were low, etc.

Foot attempts to capture the point that we admire someone who not only does the right thing but who has conditioned himself to do the right thing fluently and almost instantly. She quotes from John Hersey's novel *A Single Pebble* in which the narrator relates watching a man save a boy from drowning:

> It was the head tracker's marvelous swift response that captured my admiration at first, his split second solicitousness when he heard a cry of pain, his finding in mid□air, as it were, the only way to save the injured boy. But there was more to it than that. His action, which could not have been mulled over in his mind, showed a deep, instinctive love of life, a compassion, an optimism, which made me feel very good.

Foot's comment on this passage is this:

> What this suggests is that a man's virtue may be judged by his innermost desires as well as by his intentions; and this fits with our idea that a virtue such as generosity lies as much in someone's attitudes as in his actions. Pleasure in the good fortune of others is, one thinks, the sign of a generous spirit; and small reactions of pleasure and displeasure often the surest signs of a man's moral disposition.[11]

I find this analysis convincing. The outward behavior (the swift response) discloses not only the savior's intentions and attitudes, but something even deeper; settled dispositions that can be betrayed in the smallest facial expressions or the most "instinctive" gut reactions.[12]

If virtuous dispositions are "multi-track,"[13] is it necessary that good intentions and attitudes

11. Ibid., 5.

12. Robert Adams's concept of 'being for' is helpful in this connection. We intuitively (and correctly) judge that one must *be for* the good in the most general sense of orienting oneself – in thoughts, deeds, words, intentions, and wishes – toward the good.

13. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*: "A virtue such as honesty or generosity is not just a tendency to do what is honest or generous, nor is it to be helpfully specified as a 'desirable' or 'morally valuable' character trait. It is, indeed a character trait—that is, a disposition which is well entrenched in its possessor, something that, as we say 'goes all the way down', unlike a habit such as being a tea-drinker—but the disposition in question, far from being a single track disposition to do honest actions, or even honest actions for certain reasons, is multi-track. It is concerned

be effective in good action? If so, it seems that virtues become skills. But as we saw comparing virtue with strength, there seems to be something flat about calling the virtuous person *merely* skillful.[14] The worry here is that we don't want to call skills morally valuable when they do not seem to have any moral import. Is a contractor who excels at hammering 16d nails into wooden frames to be admired for his *virtue*? Is the quarterback who can make accurate throws under pressure virtuous? This seems to us moderns to smack too much of the "Homeric" sense of virtue as *any* admirable quality.

What, if anything, differentiates virtues from skills? Foot's solution is an interpretation of the line from Aristotle that "in the matter of arts and skills… voluntary error is preferable to involuntary error, while in the matter of virtues… it is the reverse."[15] While this might be a bit baffling, the thought seems to be that deliberately erring in an art or skill is compatible with mastery; the teacher can err on purpose in order to instruct students. By contrast, deliberately erring in morality is still an error. One ought not steal to demonstrate to children that stealing is wrong.

Corrective

Foot also argues that virtues are "corrective". That is, each one stands "at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or deficiency of motivation to be made good."[16] In this discussion, she is illuminating a statement of Aristotle that "virtues are about what is difficult for men" and also objecting to a statement of Kant that *only* "actions done out of a sense of duty" have moral worth. In this connection, she discusses Kant's problem of the happy philanthropist. This problem is the troubling and dissonant conclusion that if a very generous philanthropist gets great pleasure out of

with many other actions as well, with emotions and emotional reactions, choices, values, desires, perceptions, attitudes, interests, expectations and sensibilities. To possess a virtue is to be a certain sort of person with a certain complex mindset. (Hence the extreme recklessness of attributing a virtue on the basis of a single action.)".

14. Julia Annas's argument that virtues are skills of a particular type takes advantage of the intuitive similarity between virtue and skill. Cf. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*.

15. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 7.

16. Ibid., 8.

helping others then such actions display no moral worth. Surely a commonsense moral judgment would accord moral worth to the very fact that the philanthropist *enjoys* doing what is good (which Aristotle builds into the definition of a virtuous person); he doesn't just grit his teeth and do good (which Aristotle would call mere *continence*).

Kant's error, according to Foot, is in failing to distinguish that which is "in accord" with virtue from that which is *virtuous* full stop. It may be, for example, that a novice tennis player makes an expert shot while remaining merely a novice. The hit is "in accord" with excellence but is not, in this case, an instance of excellence – only beginner's luck. In her self-love example, Foot points out that there is no virtue required to eat one's breakfast and avoid life-threatening danger, but there may sometimes be cases where self-love is a duty – even a difficult, painful duty. She says, "sometimes it is what is owed to others that should keep a man from destroying himself, and then he may act out of a sense of duty."[17] So the solution to the happy philanthropist problem is that if he really does have such a character as to be delighted helping others, he is morally praiseworthy *because he has worked to achieve that character*. As she says:

> For charity is, as we said, a virtue of attachment as well as action, and the sympathy that makes it easier to act with charity is part of the virtue. The man who acts charitably out of a sense of duty is not to be undervalued, but it is the other who most shows virtue and therefore to the other that most moral worth is attributed.[foot2002virtues 14]

Since charity is a "virtue of attachment" (I should say "affection"), the feelings of the philanthropist count in favor of proving the presence of a virtue.

Of course, commonsense judges that a philanthropist who persists in virtue even when he does not enjoy giving is also praiseworthy. Foot explains this too. She allows that it may take greater virtue for a man to *persist* in his philanthropy *even when* it brings him no delight.

> Only a detail of Kant's presentation of the case of the dutiful philanthropist tells on the other side. For what he actually said was that this man felt no sympathy and took

17. Ibid., 13.

> no pleasure in the good of others because 'his mind was clouded by some sorrow of his own', and this is the kind of circumstance that increases the virtue that is needed if a man is to act well.

For someone who has acquired a kind of immunity to some kinds of temptation is through sustained effort and in many small victories is, ipso facto, especially admirable. Virtues are indeed corrective of tempting vices and tempting moral errors. However, the presence of temptation is not a necessary condition for the presence of a virtue.

Operative toward good ends

Can virtue enable the more efficient achievement of ignoble aims? On the one hand, examples are easy to furnish: a prude might display moderation; a thief might display courage. It seems commonsensical that whatever attributes we designate as 'courageous' can be found in agents pursuing bad ends. On the other hand, the Aristotelian line excludes such a possibility by definition. Jonathan Sanford's recent monograph, *Before Virtue*, argues that Aristotle's doctrine is "ethics insists it is impossible to exercise any virtue, with the exception of technical skill, wrongly."[18] Foot attempts to do justice to both these concerns. The analogy is to poisons or solvents:

> It is quite natural to say on occasion 'P does not act as a poison here' though P is a poison and it is P that is acting here. Similarly courage is not operating as a virtue when the murderer turns his courage, which is a virtue, to bad ends. Not surprisingly the resistance that some of us registered was not to the expression 'the courage of the murderer' or to the assertion that what he did 'took courage' but rather to the description of that action as an act of courage or a courageous act. It is not that the action could not be so described, but that the fact that courage does not here have its characteristic operation is a reason for finding the description strange.[19]

An agent's commission of an otherwise virtuous action may be a mistake *for that agent* at that time. This may seem ad hoc, but we must remember that Foot is attempting to make space for the

18. Jonathan Sanford, *Before Virtue:Assessing Contemporary Virtue Ethics* (The Catholic University of American Press, 2015), 163.

19. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 16.

"commonsense" observation that some good traits operate to bad ends *within* the philosophically rigorous definition of virtue as beneficial.

One objection Foot responds to is the worry some might have that she is saying *only* those who are completely virtuous are virtuous at all. She has two responses. The first response is that there is one virtue, at least, that always operates as a virtue, namely, wisdom. While it might make some sense to speak of "foolish courage" (recklessness) or "foolish moderation" (prudishness) it makes no sense to speak of "foolish wisdom". Since wisdom always operates as a virtue, we admire wisdom perhaps most of all. As we shall see in John McDowell's discussion of the virtuous person's perceptual capacities, it might be that when we admire a person's courage or moderation,we are often admiring the *wisdom in* the courage and the moderation.

A second response, though, is that we do admire some who have only a subset of all the virtues:

> There are some people who do possess all these virtues and who are loved and admired by all the world, as Pope John XXIII was loved and admired. Yet the fact is that many of us look up to some people whose chaotic lives contain rather little of wisdom or temperance, rather than to some others who possess these virtues. And while it may be that this is just romantic nonsense I suspect that it is not.[20]

Even those whose overall life is a mishmash of virtues and vices are admirable. My interpretation of this sentiment is that such are admirable insofar as they demonstrate some excellent qualities.

II. MacIntyre: Rational Tradition

Foot's definition of virtue is excellence of the rational will; McDowell's definition of the sensitivity to values (qua secondary qualities) which are conducive to the virtuous life.

MacIntyre's robust concept of virtue he derives from a careful study of the history of the concept within the broader western tradition. In order to capture all of the (sometimes opposing) features of virtue from Homer to Jane Austen, MacIntyre's account includes three concentric stages:

20. Ibid., 17.

the first is virtues relative to "practices." The second is virtues relative to the whole of an integrated human life. The third phase is virtue related to tradition and rationality. MacIntyre's definition of virtue is acquired human qualities that enable their possessors to succeed in practices, to live a successful whole life, and to sustain and improve traditions. MacIntyre's account bears obvious similarities to Foot and McDowell but introduces a new element: namely, tradition.[21]

Initial account

The first stage of MacIntyre's definition is that virtues are "acquired human qualities that enable their possessor to achieve those goods which are internal to practices."[22] This is perhaps a puzzling definition. Let's examine it a bit more closely.

First, virtues are acquired *human* qualities. Presumably, human qualities are opposed to analogous qualities of non-human animals. The flexible flagellum of a bacterium, the swiftness of a deer – formal or functional biological features that enable an animal to survive and thrive – are excluded from the class of virtues by definition. MacIntyre's later *Dependent Rational Animals* retracts the assumed divide between human and non-human animals. (But here, virtues do not arise from nor depend on biology. In this, MacIntyre's initial formulation disagrees with Foot but agrees with McDowell.)

Secondly, virtues are *acquired* human qualities. This is an important point and relates to the first, for natural biological features are inborn. Virtues, rather, are acquired. That is not to say that virtues are not *natural* in the sense that natural attributes such as hair color are 'automatic'. But they are natural in the sense that they are proper to human beings, such as singing and telling jokes is *the kind of thing we do*. In this, he agrees with Aristotle that virtue is *in accordance with* nature but not *by nature*. Rather, virtuous traits are a "normal" psychological outgrowth of cultivating

21. For MacIntyre "tradition" is almost synonymous with "rationality". He calls it "tradition-constituted rationality" We will examine his notion of tradition-constituted rationality in a later chapter.

22. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

excellence within particular human practices.

Thirdly, virtues enable their possessor to achieve particular *goods.* This clause assumes that virtues are beneficial. A virtuous trait *cannot* be directed at achieving ills. This assumption will bring some trouble for MacIntyre's initial definition in *After Virtue*. As we saw with Foot, it seems quite possible that people who have particular virtues can be, overall, wicked. (Can't the thief be courageous, the dictator magnanimous, the glutton affable?) It certainly seems that the answer is yes. Even indexing virtues to practices does not solve the problem; can practices be wicked? For McDowell, this problem does not arise, since he builds *knowledge* into his definition of virtue. I shall discuss this problem a bit more in the next sub-sections.

Fourthly, since virtues "enable their possessor to achieve … goods", it may seem that virtue are mere *instruments* to goods, not goods themselves. This would be a grave misunderstanding. Virtues *are* instrumental for MacIntyre, but they are not *merely* instrumental. They are both instrumental (to the achievement of certain goods) and also *partly constitutive of those goods.* Virtues are both means to an end and also ends in themselves. Now, this conflation of means and ends is liable to worry some critics. The worry is not trivial. However, for the sake of completing my presentation of virtue, I must set it aside for now.

First Stage: Practice

What are "*practices*"? Practice is a key term of art; to misunderstand it would be to misunderstand MacIntyre. A practice is a social activity aimed at defined ends. (We commonly speak of "practicing" medicine in this sense.) MacIntyre mentions farming, chess, and political activity, among other examples. A practice is not merely a reflexive action (like scratching an itch) nor merely a single, discrete, intelligible action (like pulling a weed); it is an intelligible set of actions.

For example, a farmer is engaged in a series of activities, from tilling, sowing, watering, protecting, harvesting, storing, etc., all of which are embedded within a social context and organized around a particular goal. Each practice has a history, a set of practitioners, a common set of

standards, and a common goal. And virtues are those qualities that enable their possessor to excel in practices. Leading MacIntyre scholar, Christopher Lutz, highlights four aspects of MacIntyre's famous definition of practice. A practice is:

> [1] a complex social activity that [2] enables participants to gain goods internal to the practice. [3] Participants achieve excellence in practices by gaining the internal goods. When participants achieve excellence, [4] the social understandings of excellence in the practice, of the goods of the practice, and of the possibility of achieving excellence in the practice are systematically extended.[23]

Let's consider an example of a practice in a bit more detail: teaching. A secondary school teacher, say, is engaged in a series of activities, in order to give children the basic knowledge and skills they need to transition to functional adults in society, whether by getting a job, starting a business, or advancing to higher stages of education.[24] Secondary education in the U.S. is a practice with a history (or a set of histories) from the present time back to when Americans completing high school (rather than beginning work on a farm or in town by the age of 16) was the exception rather than the rule. It has standards, both legal standards and "best practices" passed from mentor to student teacher. It pretty obviously has standards of excellence according to which most educators are average, some poor, and some excellent. An educator who wants to join that profession will be enculturated with that history, taught those standards, and given a chance (usually by trial and error) to become a good teacher. Lutz' first condition is met, since [1] teaching is an inherently complex *social* activity, in that teachers cannot be teachers without students, and (usually) do not teach in isolation but in community with colleagues and administrators and parents. [2] Secondary education qua practice enables teachers to gain the goods "internal to the practice", namely students

23. Christopher Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre" (Web; Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015).

24. Secondary education has other (perhaps de facto) purposes, like to socialize young people in a community of peers and authorities, and to afford them opportunities for recreation, art, clubs, to give parents a break, and so on. For the sake of simplicity, I shall focus on what seems to me the primary goal of education, which is education (in knowledge) and training (in skills) needed for becoming a legal adult.

who are educated enough to be ready for legal adulthood – for a job or college. [3] Good teachers are those that demonstrate the ability reliably to produce educated students, sometimes in the face of incredible obstacles. And [4] good schools and good teachers usually have a *history* and social context that is being "extended" across generations. Good schools recruit and train good teachers, good teachers train the next generation of good teachers, and so on.

I've spoken of the goods of teaching. But MacIntyre defines virtues with reference to goods *"internal to"* practices. What does he mean by employing the internal/external relation here? MacIntyre later refashions the contrast between 'internal' and 'external' goods into one between 'goods of excellence' and 'goods of effectiveness.' (I prefer the latter terminology. But the point is, I think, clear.) The goods of excellence just are those that necessarily contribute to success within a given practice. In secondary education, success is defined by, say, graduation rates, retention of information, high test scores, acceptance to good colleges, low drug use, and so on. The profession-specific virtues needed include understanding (to stay patient with struggling students), affability (to keep rapport), articulateness (to present material effectively), and so on. More general virtues needed include honesty, integrity, courage, faithfulness, and so on. Without these, *teaching* may be possible but *teaching well* is impossible.

By contrast, goods of effectiveness are those that might fit with the practice but are not *necessary* for achieving the end of that practice: high pay, an excellent teacher lounge, a short commute to work, and so on. Mere efficiency in attaining such external goods does not entail the presence of a virtue. In fact, the desire to pursue such goods *instead of* the goods of excellence is not a neutral desire — it is a *temptation.* Virtues are needed to overcome those temptations and to succeed according to the standards of the practice itself.[25]

25. To illustrate the temptation goods of effectiveness might pose, we need only think about political activity. Some (I suppose) become politicians *in order to bring about* the survival, security, and prosperity of the *polis*; others engage in order merely to satisfy their own ambition or achieve fame. Often we see American politicians running for office only one apparent aim: book sales.

Second Stage: Whole Life

The second stage depends on the notions of a complete human life, the sum of all the practices of one's life.[26] He says that "without an overriding conception of the telos of a whole human life, conceived as a unity, our conception of certain individual virtues has to remain partial and incomplete."[27] The example given shows how justice demands an ordering of the various goods of excellence within each practice. MacIntyre undermines the notion that the virtues which enable success in practices can be sufficient for an account of virtue in general. He argues that we need to "envisage each human life as a whole, as a unity, whose character provides the virtues with an adequate telos."[28]

Despite the obstacles to such a vision, it is possible. The obstacles MacIntyre cites are both "social and philosophical." The social obstacle is the fragmentation of modern life: "work is divided from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal. So both childhood and old age have been wrenched away from the rest of human life and made over into distinct realms."[29] Just as the temporal segments of life are fragmented into bits (one thinks of the inherently patronizing talk of "senior citizens" compared from the older, inherently reverent talk of "elders"), so also the various projects and pursuits of life are partitioned, labelled, and cordoned off. On this fragmented view of life, the self's social roles are so many conventions masking the "true" underlying nature of the self. This presents a puzzle: how could virtues arise to the level of excellent dispositions for *humans as such*? They would have to be dispositions applicable in personal, private, business, spheres, in young and middle and old age, etc.

The second and philosophical obstacle is the tendency to atomize "complex actions… in terms of simple components."[30] MacIntyre's argument here is highly significant. He begins by

26. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 15.
27. Ibid., 202.
28. Ibid., 204.
29. Ibid., 204.
30. Ibid., 204.

analyzing the way we might answer a simple question such as: "what is he doing?"

> One and the same segment of human behavior may be correctly characterized in a number of different ways. To the question 'What is he doing?' the answers may with equal truth and appropriateness be 'Digging', 'Gardening', 'Taking exercise', 'Preparing for winter' or 'Pleasing his wife.'[31]

The first fact to notice is that each of these answers picks out different aspects of the agent's action: intentions, intended consequences, unintended consequences, etc. And, importantly, each of these answers places the simple atomic action within a narrative history: situated in an "annual cycle of domestic activity", in a hobby, in a marriage, and so on – each with its own history and "setting." The second fact to notice is that the answers to a similarly simple question "Why is he writing a sentence?" might be situated in different time horizons: immediately, he is writing to finish his book; but also he is contributing to a philosophical debate; but also he is trying to get tenure.[32] The upshot of these reflections is that individual actions, abstracted from their context are only intelligible if they are "ordered both causally and temporally… the correct identification of the agent's beliefs will be an essential constituent of this task."[33] MacIntyre's astonishing conclusion from these innocuous premises is this: "there is no such thing as 'behavior', to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs and settings… Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions."[34] MacIntyre scholar Stanley Hauerwas explains the significance of this conclusion: "the central contention in *After Virtue* is his remark that "the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action."[35]

The actions one performs in practices find their intelligibility not only in practices but in the narrative of a whole human life. The same is true for verbal contributions to a conversation.

31. Ibid., 206.
32. Ibid., 207.
33. Ibid., 208.
34. Ibid., 208.
35. Ibid., 209.

Each turn people take in speaking to each other contributes to an unfolding narrative with a history and a telos, without which statements are random and unintelligible. MacIntyre continues:

> But if this is true of conversations, it is true also *mutatis mutandis* of battles, chess games, courtships, philosophy seminars, families at the dinner table, businessmen negotiating contracts- that is, of human transactions in general. For conversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general. Conversational behavior is not a special sort or aspect of human behavior, even though the forms of language-using and of human life are such that the deeds of others speak for them as much as do their words. For that is possible only because they are the deeds of those who have words.[36]

Hauerwas continues:

> This may seem a small philosophical point, but much revolves around it: His understandings of the centrality of practical reason, the significance of the body for agency, why the teleological character of our lives must be displayed through narrative, the character of rationality, the nature of the virtues, why training in a craft is paradigmatic of learning to think as well as live, his understanding of why the Enlightenment project had to fail, his particular way of being a historicist, and why the plain person is the necessary subject of philosophy.[37]

Clearly these are weighty matters. MacIntyre's discussion of narrative is highly interesting but can be left aside.[38] For we have arrived at a the supports needed for building the second stage of his account of virtue: the unity of many practices into a single whole. He says: "The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest."[39]

Naturally, to be on a quest is to strive for a goal, even if one fails to reach the goal. The goal, he says, is to quest for "*the* good" (as one understands it at the beginning of the quest). But the conception of *the* good can grow or morph along the way. How do the virtues relate to this quest?

36. Ibid., 211.

37. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, 2007.

38. Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 216. Consider such fascinating statements as: "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' "

39. Ibid., 219.

> The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices. but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good. by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalogue of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good.[40]

In the first stage, virtues enabled success in practices. In this second stage, virtues enable us to coordinate various practices and pursuits – including relationships with friends, family, fellow citizens, and strangers – into a coherent quest to live our lives well.

Third stage: Tradition

MacIntyre's third stage of his virtue account situates what has come before in a broader social and historical context. That context he simply calls 'tradition.' What is a MacIntyrean tradition? He calls it a "historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[41] In this third stage, virtues are qualities that enable the health and persistence of traditions.

> Lack of justice, lack of truthfulness. lack of courage. lack of the relevant intellectual virtues–these corrupt traditions, just as they do those institutions and practices which derive their life from the traditions of which they are the contemporary embodiments.[42]

We shall pick up MacIntyre's highly contentious concept of tradition in a later chapter. For now, let it suffice that a tradition is an extended argument, in part about the goods that constitute that tradition and the terms of that argument. Virtues as related to practices are individual but not individualistic, since practices themselves are social activities. Virtues as related to the whole of

40. Ibid., 220.
41. Ibid., 222.
42. Ibid., 223.

life are cultural but not culturally relativistic, for every culture ought to provide for its members some minimal goods.

We should note that the very concept of virtue MacIntyre defends exemplifies his method of working within a tradition. He derives his account of virtue from a careful study of the history of the concept within the broader western tradition, but does not limit himself to what has come before.

There is much more to say about tradition, and we shall say some of it in a later chapter. But this is all we shall say about tradition here. For MacIntyre, rationality itself is tradition-constituted. So insofar as practical rationality is the differentium of human nature, and insofar as virtues all depend for their effective operation on the coordinating management of practical reason, tradition will again become an essential concept.

III. Discussion

How do these writers satisfy, or fail to satisfy, the criteria defended in the previous chapter?

For Foot, virtues are those beneficial qualities that we need qua human beings in order to safely navigate the normal human temptations to corrupt oneself and others. They are beneficial These qualities are what Hursthouse calls multi-track, embroiling our whole psychology as it is directed by what might call the 'will' or 'practical rationality', including intentions, attitudes, deliberative choices, and habits. Virtuous traits are only 'operative' toward good ends, and so we need the tutelage practical wisdom in order to attain virtues, and even once acquired, virtues stand in need of the governance of practical wisdom.

Foot's account of virtue satisfies all of these: For virtues are operative only toward good and are beneficial to humans as a species (benefiting the group and also, usually, benefiting the individual), which satisfies criterion (1); virtues are more than strength or skill in engaging all the motives, intentions, habits, and so on that fall under the broadest appelation of the rational will,

which satisfies criterion (3); they are corrective of typical temptations to vice, which satisfies (1) and (2); and genuine virtues are operative only to good ends, which satisfies (1) as well.

McDowell argues that rational virtue is a kind of knowledge — a kind of sensitivity — against the objection that rational virtue is either a type of universalizable, objective, deductive logic or else non-cognitive. His rebuttal is to deny that deductive reasoning is so objective. Rather, deductive reasoning is not rule-following, except in that we follow a vague collection of rules associated by our common forms of life. We only know deduction, too, from within. So moral reasoning, he avers, we also know from within, by doing it, while doing it, because of our common forms of life. He does not much advance a view of virtue beyond the Aristotelian notion that virtues are qualities of reliable good-choosing, good-acting. He does however limit Aristotle's optimism about the metaphysical realist assumptions underlying an understanding of deductive reason and practical reason. McDowell's account of virtue is especially strong in satisfying (1), since for him not only evaluative practical reasoning but all reasoning derives from a shared form of life – the "congruence of subjectivities."[43] His account, likewise, satisfies (3) by emphasizing the role of reason (both theoretical and practical) in constructing one's view of a life worth living. McDowell's account is less adequate with regard to (2). He simply takes it for granted that the virtuous person (with a virtuous outlook) will notice what is morally salient, without giving any further suggestion as to what details might be morally salient. He mentions a morally salient fact (a friend in trouble) but does not seem to acknowledge that "trouble" is not just a feature of human animals. A mother lioness can notice that her cub is in trouble; a cardinal can be in trouble, even if no human or animal notices. While positing the moral outlook as something unique to humans, McDowell has estranged the non-human world. And, finally, McDowell's view takes a disastrous misstep in attempting to ground all our ethical thinking in a groundless human form of life. While he grants that "incorrect" evaluations can be corrected piecemeal, like the ship of Neurath, he denies that they can be corrected against external reality. We cannot match up – or fail to match up – our

43. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 339.

moral judgments with the moral facts. By arguing (rightly I think) that the moral outlook can only be ratified from *within the moral outlook*, McDowell has cut off a range of reasonable supports to the moral outlook that can be drawn from "outside." We *can* draw from other natural objects (via generics or Aristotelian categoricals) notions such as "health" and "sickness", "exemplary" and "defective". Just as disastrously, McDowell makes the same point about theoretical reason. This is his capitulation to Kantian idealism. He accusses those who think his view irrational of "longing" for some "comfort" by external validation from without, when really my accusation has nothing to do with feelings. His view helps itself to the correspondance theory of truth even while denying that there is any truth to which our judgments may correspond. I shall return to this objection in a later chapter.

MacIntyre argues that virtues are those acquired human qualities that enable the achievement of goods of excellence in one's whole life, in traditions, and in practices. MacIntyre, like McDowell, is strongest on the social and practical criteria but less strong on the biological criterion. His biggest insight is to conceptually link individual virtue with tradition, and to link tradition with rationality itself. Virtues, as we shall argue, cannot be defined as "moral" traits and severed from intellectual traits (such as sensitivity, perceptiveness, proactivity, judgment). But our intellectual traits cannot be acquired in isolation; we initially acquire our thoughts and tools for thinking such as we possess from the culture in which we are raised and the tradition in which we are educated. As for biology and animality, the *After Virtue* account is inadequate but it is much corrected by the *Dependent Rational Animals* account. Our remaining task, then, is to discuss the unity of animality and rationality, or biology and tradition.

Foot's account is lacking in some respects that McDowell and MacIntyre can supply. What Foot is missing is an account of human virtue and rationality *in society and tradition*. The virtues are not just beneficial to human beings tout court, unmediated by tradition. The human experience unmediated by tradition does not exist. To be a human being is, as McDowell rightly says, to participate in *Bildung*, a process of formation in which a person with language, thoughts, beliefs,

desires, evaluative judgments, etc. are (at least initially) the product. What MacIntyre is missing is a full account of humanity as not just a social being but a biological being. We are animals. We are *rational* animals, to be sure – but animals just the same. Similarly, McDowell is missing a clear accounting of the relation between second nature and nature. (Rationality will be the main theme in a later chapter.) By locating the activity of evaluating solely in human nature's inhabitation of the space of reasons, he has divorced humanity from the world. As Julia Annas summarizes, non-reductive naturalisms risk trivializing moral or normative facts by implausibly cordoning them within humans: "Non-naturalistic accounts of ethical terms assume that their function, prominently their normativity, is something that arises with humans, or is produced by humans, in a way which owes nothing to the nature which we share with other living things."[44] That link is supplied by Foot (and Thompson et. al.) As Annas continues:

> What is so helpful for ethics from this kind of biological naturalism is that we find that the normativity of our ethical discourse is not something which emerges mysteriously with humans and can only be projected back, in an anthropomorphic way, onto trees and their roots. Rather, we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already. It is part of the great merit of the work of Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse to have stressed this point. Like many important philosophical points, it is obvious once pointed out…[45]

If one knows the natural function of an organism, evaluations as to its excellence or defect are not purely subjective impositions of the evaluator's preferences or opinions, nor are they mere "facts" given by the situation. Rather, the evaluator must judge the function of the thing and judge how well its performance matches up or fails to match up to that function.

An intuitive inference to make would be that moral virtues are qualities that enable a human being to achieve his or her natural function. But, as soon as the inference is stated, it sounds odd. Do human beings have a function? Surely each of us has a "function" within our family system (son, daughter, the responsible one, the funny one, peacemaker) or within society (teacher, student,

44. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics, Old and New," ed. Stephen Gardiner (Cornell University Press, 2005), 12.

45. Ibid.

parent, voter). But does it even make sense to speak of singular natural functions qua living thing? Even if there were such a thing as a "human function," would it be the same function (e.g., 'to think') for all human beings as such or would there be an unlimited set of functions (e.g., to do and become whatever we want, whatever that might be)? Or perhaps is there some definite plurality of functions (e.g., to survive, to reproduce, to enjoy ourselves, and to reason)?

IV. Conclusion

The accounts of virtue summarized here support and give detail to that presented above. What each account lacks is more detail what practical reason is, and how it supplements or completes a neo-Aristotelian account of morality.

Chapter 5

Virtue and Vice for Rational Animals

"If riches are desirable in life, what is richer than Wisdom, who produces all things? … She teaches moderation and prudence, righteousness and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful than these."

Wisdom 8:5-7

Introduction

My thesis in this chapter is the thesis of the dissertation as a whole: **virtue is the plurality of acquirable excellent character traits (such as moderation, tolerance, and wisdom) that are necessary for practical, rational animals because virtue partly constitutes natural human flourishing.**

This builds on the argument of the last chapter that human beings are rational animals, and hence experience life as a process of maturation toward an intrinsic life form. At the beginning of life, vulnerable human animals need many practical and physical necessities if they are to survive to maturity. Then, as they mature, the need for particular virtues and for virtue in general increases, especially for traits that enable one to engage in successful practical reasoning.

Once acquired, traits dispose the mature practical rational animal to do well at accomplishing the universal projects of human life (such as sustaining friendships) and to react well to the universal challenges of human life (such as the death of loved ones). The absence of virtues, and the presence of vices, corrupt practical reasoning and stultify the realization of our natural flourishing. Vices dispose us to succomb to common temptations and to fail at universal projects.

In this chapter, I present my own synthesis. I shall defend the resulting synthesis against various objections.

I. Excellence and Imperfection

Our prediction from the last chapter was that virtues would pertain to the three aspects of our nature identified in the generic: "humans are practical, rational animals." As animals we are inherently mortal, biological, beings whose life consists of a process of maturation, homeostatic maturity, aging, and death. Human being as rational *animals* by nature need to breathe, eat, sleep, and stay warm, deal with the urgings of our sexual nature, and so on. So our account of virtue will have to show how by reflection and deliberation, the virtuous person takes up his own biology and psychology into a space of reasons and construct a "pattern that, given the human situation, is likely to lead a good life."[1] As practical, rational animals, we are inherently conscious and self-conscious beings who speak, interpret, and create in the context of a linguistic community such as a family, society, and culture. Although we are pushed about by our biological instincts and by social pressures, we do not *simply* stumble around through life, but, in general, also sometimes act on reasons. We deliberate about future actions, and reflect on past actions. The success of our actions is not guaranteed, and the reasonableness of our reasons is not guaranteed. So, we may tentatively hypothesize that the qualities that enable us to pursue our ends *well* would be excellent qualities. The practical, rational agents who consistently succeed at pursuing and achieving their

1. John Kekes, "Wisdom," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1983): 280.

ends would be models of virtue. I shall have much more to say below about what ends people *have* or *ought to have* and about the indeterminate concept of a human telos.[2]

Recall the criteria that are guiding our construction of an account of the excellence of rational animals: (1) Rationality is social, verbal, and symbolic (we learn to speak, to think, and to interpret from our family and community and culture). (2) Animality is social, physical, chemical, embodied (we must always care for the needs of nutrition, exercise, sleep, and our sexual nature). (3) Practical rationality is our active and proactive self-governance, including over all our thoughts and actions (we can affect but not choose the appearance, strength, size, etc. we start out with).

The excellences and imperfections intrinsic to our life form are likely to relate to these three attributes. Excellences would be those character traits that rational animals *need*, tout court. They need them to *become* rational animals, to actuate the form. Imperfections, by contrast, would be those that rational animals *need to avoid*, traits that partially inhibit or wholly prevent the actuation of human life. While I will discuss in detail the natural human telos in a later chapter, here I only assert that actualizing the potential latent in human nature is necessarily good for us.[3]

We can predict that evaluative features of a human being will be either beautific or miserable along these lines. (We are not yet speaking of moral blame, just evaluation-of-a-kind). A maximally miserable human being is one who has for whatever reason not become what human beings potentially can be and are by nature. He or she will be (a) physically imperfect (sick, weak, undeveloped, diseased), (b) rationally imperfect (ignorant, stupid, overly credulous and overly skeptical, unperceptive, angry) and (b) practically and socially imperfect (solitary, foolish, rash, unteachable, immoderate, highly valuing worthless things and disregarding the most valuable things). The maximally beautified human being is one who has for whatever reason become what human beings potentially can be and are by nature. He or she will be (a) physically excellent (healthy, strong,

2. Eudaimonists believe our telos to be human flourishing or happiness. Others believe it is something else, such as genetic proliferation, the creation of the self, or what have you. We shall return to this in a later chapter

3. Paul Bloomfield, "Virtue and Happiness," ed. Rachana Kamtekar, 2012.

developed, well); (b) rationally excellent in knowledge, society (knowledgable, smart, properly trusting and properly critical, perceptive, calm) and practice (sociable, wise, patient, teachable, moderate, valuing each thing according to its worth).

Of course, such a prediction has some serious problems.

For now, we are trying to get clear on the idea that the human life form fixes natural excellence and defect or imperfection. (I like "imperfection" because it connotes immaturity as well as defect.) The concept of 'excellence' is relative to an object's nature and function; an excellent knife is one that *cuts well*; but an excellent guard dog is one that barks loudly, is hostile to strangers, and so on. Artifacts receive their function by design, and even natural entities (such as dogs) have artificial functions insofar a they are trained by human users. It is tempting to assume that all functions are imposed on objects and that natural organisms (trees, dogs, humans) have no *inherent* function. Nevertheless, natural entities such as organisms have natural functions as well, as we have argued above. And, we argued, the teleological facts obtaining in organisms can be empirically discovered even remaining agnostic about its mechanistic or divine origin. That is, we can learn what acorns are by observing and reflecting upon their development from embryonic stages to maturity and the activities mature, typical members of the species exhibit.

Similarly, we can hypothesis that the "function" of a practical rational animal is to become a fully mature practical rational animal, and perform all of the activities characteristic of typical members of the species. Not all practical rational animals fully actuate the human life form. Such failures to realize one's life form may still be tragic even if they are not that rational animal's *fault*. For example, in extreme cases when a person's set of potentialities for rational activity (such as speech and abstract thought) is not realized because of genetic disorder, injury, or mental or physical illness, we still have no trouble identifying that are *a human being* by virtue of having a *human nature*.

Natural Flourishing

'Telos' picks out the Greek concept of an end, purpose, direction, limit, fulfillment, destination. It is pretty clear that human beings set ends for themselves, undertake projects, chart courses in a particular direction, and so on. To say that there is a "given" telos for humanity is to suggest that there is at least one or a set of ends "built in."[4] Put crudely, there are some goals we *ought* to have regardless of our other goals; or perhaps more accurately, the concept of inbuilt teleology suggests that there are some ends we *simply have* by virtue of being human. The question then becomes how to coordinate our chosen ends and our "given" ends. This question is by no means easy. However, I shall take a stab at it.

One way that moral philosophers (divine command theorists and Kantians, for instance) answer the question of the relation between our inbuilt ends and our chosen ends is to suggest that our inbuilt ends are "categorical imperatives" — that is, imperatives that are obligatory and authoritatively binding regardless of our chosen ends. The divine command theorist sees laws of God being objectively binding on all human beings. The Kantian substitutes a divine law for an autonomous, self-given law that each rational agent necessarily imposes upon oneself. However, each of these theories makes the law a brute obligation, a necessity without further conditions.

The virtue theorists I am discussing — and in some cases defending — take a different approach. Rather than treating the moral law as a divine "positive law" or a law of practical reason as such, they treat moral laws such as they are as laws of nature. Of course, these are not "descriptive" laws of nature, like the law of universal gravitation. It is a brute prescriptive law arising from the nature of humans as such. Now, since humans are (as I shall argue) rational animals, my view aligns rather closely with Kant's. However, I take a different line of argument on the controversy Kant had with Reinhold and others about whether or not one can freely choose to disobey the moral law. Kant thought one could not, since he defined "freedom" as conformity to the moral law (rather

4. Geach, *The Virtues*, chap. 1.

than conformity to natural, selfish, law of inclination or egoism). My view is closer to Reinhold's on this point, in that I think that our natural law is objectively prescriptive and binding, and in some sense defines who we *already are*, but that it is given to us to fulfill. We must align our chosen end with our given end. Failing to achieve our given end is, by definition, human misery. So even if I am "successful" in achieving my chosen ends, I shall be necessarily miserable if my chosen ends are radically opposed to my given ends.

> According to Thomson, it is a moral defect not to care about justice. It might be objected that someone might still ask, "Why should I care about justice?" We need to give that person a reason to care and it doesn't seem to be enough to say that lacking justice is a moral defect. However, the same problem arises in any view. Why should I care about what's wrong? Why should I care about what I ought to do? Why should I care about what I have most reasons to do? In fact, why should I care about what I should care about? No view seems immune from this sort of worry.[5]

Acquirable

There are two corollaries to this initial, formal definition of virtues as those traits human beings as practical reasoners need.

First, I would like to underscore the importance of the term 'acquirable'. Virtues are the acquirable traits needed by creatures like us, by social rational animals. Since, for the first decade or two of life, we are not primarily responsible for our own traits, the first corollary is high importance of moral and intellectual education. In many respects, our individuality depends on fate and luck. But in some very key respects, the acquisition of virtues and vices with which we begin adult life depends upon our education.[6] The beginning of human life, like the beginning of any organic life, is the foundation for all that follows. When a mother drinks heavily or uses cocaine while pregnant,

5. Gilbert Harman, "Judith Jarvis Thomson's Normativity," *Philosophical Studies* 154, no. 3 (2011): 441.

6. W. Jay Wood, "Prudence," in *Virtues and Their Vices*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Craig A Boyd (Oxford University Press, 2014).

the child is going to suffer the negative consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is abused – emotionally, verbally, physically, or sexually – by her parents, the psychological cost is meted out across the entire life and across generations. By the same token, when a mother eats healthily and takes her vitamins while pregnant, the child is going to reap the positive consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is given love, approval, empowerment, discipline, by her parents, the psychological gains are meted out across the entire life and across generations. The original source of most people's life maxims are not their ethics professors, favorite novels, Holy Bibles, or therapists, but their parents or other guardians. This corollary might be obvious but we must never forget it. It is important to the argument because we should never give into the temptation to think that the cultivation of virtue is simply a business for adults (least of all adult professional academics) to argue for and against. It is the business of societies and families to do or fail to do every day.

Unified Plurality

The second corollary is that excellences of our practical rationality and even of our animality have a common foundation in practical reason. This is a partial solution to the age-old conundrum about the unity of virtues. Are there many virtues or just one? And if there are many, are they unified or a fundamental plurality? We should expect, on the basis of our nature as rational animals, that all virtues will be united in our rationality, and that our various concepts of virtue will be united in an appropriate concept of rationality. This is just what we will defend in a later chapter. If human nature is as "rational animals" then the unity of virtues as each depending on practical reason.[7]

II. Initial Objections

Our dialectic thus far has defended two major claims: first, that some natural facts are normative facts; and secondly, that some such facts are natural human facts. These natural norms are express-

7. Ibid.

ible in generic propositions of the familiar sort, such as 'acorns become oak trees' and 'human beings are practical rational animals'. The "nature" – or set of in-built potentialiaties – of genetically modern humans is fixed enough to justify such generics. The current task is to see whether any of this has genuinely ethical significance for us.

Moral Luck

First, it does not distinguish between different kinds of excellence. Some of our attributes and actions may fail to be excellent without being our *fault*. So our account must allow us distinguish between various kinds of excellence. Consider the broadest set of things labelled 'good for humans'. All of the good things of human life enable the realization of a fully human life. But not all good things are subject to our control. The virtues are among those good things under our control – good dispositions we each choose to cultivate or fail to cultivate. Unlike other goods (say, wealth), virtues become *what we are*. On this point, Foot cautions against several species of terminological misunderstanding: *αρετή* for the Greeks refers "also to arts, and even to excellences of the speculative intellect whose domain is theory rather than practice"[8]. We should like to distinguish beauty, raw talent, strength, and other excellences that are not at all under our control from virtues – which are under our control, either partially or completely. Furthermore, even their list of "moral virtues" (*arete ethikai* or *virtues morales*) do not correspond precisely to *our* "moral virtues". The traditional list of cardinal "moral virtues" (including courage, moderation, practical wisdom, and justice) includes positive traits we might classify as "self-regarding" (e.g., moderation) as well as "other-regarding" (e.g., justice), and includes practical wisdom (*phronesis/prudentia*) which, if we mentioned it all, we would be inclined to classify as an intellectual virtue. Finally, not all of the items on our list of positive qualities (e.g., unselfishness) obviously correspond to one of the classical virtues. So, we ought not to assume that the terms 'excellence' or even 'moral excellence' can be a short-cut for understanding the concept of virtue. We must, instead, construct our account

8. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 2; Cf. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."

with care and attention.

Elitism,

Secondly, such a prediction sounds awfully elitist. It does nothing, thus far, to correct the suggestion that those who are natively intelligent are *morally* superior to those who are natively unintelligent; and it does nothing to correct the suggestion that those who are trained and educated in various excellences are morally superior to those who lack such good fortune. I think such corrections can be made, however; we are still remaining true to Anscombe's directive of avoiding the concepts of "moral fault" and "moral superiority" for now. And while even after such corrections, there may be natural differences between people's excellence and imperfection there is nothing about the *very facts* of the human life form that is elitist or unjustly hierarchical – nature produces people with a wide diversity of physical attributes (height, weight, size, color) and will continue to do so.

Polyanna Objection

The major obstacle for this chapter is what Micah Lott calls the "Polyanna Problem."[9] To see this problem, supposing that the other two objections have been overcome: human norms are discoverable and demonstrable both practical and relevant. Still are such norms merely "protonormative"[10] or fully *ethical*? Are we obligated to fulfill all such norms? Just some? How are they to be distinguished from unethical, vile behaviors also statistically common among human behaviors? Empirically, some acorns become fully grown, mature oaks, but other acorns become stulted, sickly specimens. Most acorns never become anything other than acorns before they disintegrate into dust in the soil. So statistical majorities will not do the trick. Likewise, norms can be discovered for both good and evil: Some animals protect their young while other animals abandon or even con-

9. Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form."
10. Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory," chap. 2.

sume their young. Some humans are kind and gentle while others are vicious and cruel. Anscombe anticipates this worry when she says:

> The search for "norms" might lead someone to look for laws of nature, as if the universe were a legislator; but in the present day this is not likely to lead to good results: it might lead one to eat the weaker according to the laws of nature, but would hardly lead anyone nowadays to notions of justice.[11]

Can we move from vague statements such as "human beings are language users" to particular moral statements: 'Human beings make and keep promises'?

The Polyanna Problem is the temptation to wink at the evils of human behavior in the effort to paint a portrait that is falsely full of sweetness and light. Put differently, even if human norms are discoverable, will they be *good*? Will they not be a mixed bag of good and apparently evil norms? Will we not need something else, such as conscience, or divine revelation, over and above these human laws, by which to judge which ones are normative for us?

Empty Definition Objection

Another objection is that the very definition of virtue as a *beneficial* or "positive" character trait is circular and therefore empty. To see the problem, suppose we define "boldness" as *doing hard things* and "courage" as doing hard things when it is good. Boldness is, so to speak, value neutral. One can be bold in wrongdoing or bold in doing well. If courage is just boldness in doing good, is this a trivial truth? An analytic truth? The affirmation that 'courage (doing hard things when it is good) is good' would appear to amount to the life-altering revelation that 'good things are good'.

Virtue is Optional Objection

Another objection is that virtues are good but not obligatory. They are not "perfect duties" in Kant's sense. Since clearly not all ethicists are virtue ethicists, it would seem a bit overreaching to assert

11. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 14.

that the pursuit of virtue is obligatory on every ethicist. Also, since not all people are westerners or neo-Aristotelians, it would seem cultural imperialism to assert that the pursuit of virtue is obligatory on everyone in the world.

Relativism Objection

Another objection has various expressions. One is that virtues (which are defined as good) can be used for evil, as when a criminal requires great courage to undertake his or her vile derring-do. Another expression is that "virtues" can only be defined by each cultural group within their own terms, and that there is no way for us to judge the conflicting "virtues" of another group. So Aristotele and Nietzsche (despite their other differences) both seem to agree in finding magnanimity a virtue and humility or meekness a vice where St. Paul and Aquinas agree in finding humility or meekness a great virtue.

III. Response to Objections

Response to Polyanna Objection

The response to the Polyanna Objection is that virtue ethicists do not *ignore* vice, the dark side of human nature, or human evil. Rather to the contrary, the whole project of identifying virtues and successful, virtuous agents, is the process of sifting through the various examples of human lives in hopes of finding a pattern that is recognizably *good*.

Thomson explains that normativity consists in evaluations and directives. Evaluations say that "There is such a property of being a good K if and only if K is a goodness-fixing kind."[12] Directives say that "For it to be the case that A ought to V is for it to be the case that there is a directive kind K such that: A is a K, and if a K doesn't V, then it is a defective K."[13]

12. Thomson, 21-22 %
13. Thomson 209 %

Virtues are just those traits needed by our goodness-fixing kind.

How do we sort through and filter out the kinds of lives that are miserable, pitiable, undesirable? In some cases, it is easy. In other cases, it is quite as difficult to know who is living a successful life as it is to live one's own life well. Hursthouse provides some clear thinking on this difficult topic. Sometimes, we have to find out what a virtuous person does to know what is right. And while we can't be guaranteed that our assessment of who is a virtuous person is infallibly correct, it is sometimes the best we can do:

> In response, it is worth pointing out that, if I know that I am far from perfect, and am quite unclear what a virtuous agent would do in the circumstances in which I find myself, the obvious thing to do is to go and ask one, should this be possible. This is far from being a trivial point, for it gives a straightforward explanation of an important aspect of our moral life, namely the fact that we do not always act as 'autonomous', utterly self□determining agents, but quite often seek moral guidance from people we think are morally better than ourselves. When I am looking for an excuse to do something I have a horrid suspicion is wrong, I ask my moral inferiors (or peers if I am bad enough), 'Wouldn't you do such□and□such if you were in my shoes?' But when I am anxious to do what is right, and do not see my way clear, I go to people I respect and admire: people who I think are kinder, more honest, more just, wiser, than I am myself, and ask them what they would do in my circumstances. How, or indeed whether, utilitarianism and deontology can explain this fact, I do not know, but, as I said, the explanation within the terms of virtue ethics is straightforward. If you want to do what is right, and doing what is right is doing what the virtuous agent would do in the circumstances, then you should find out what she would do if you do not already know.[14]

One real problem that the Polyanna Objection hits upon is the surprising preponderance of discussion of virtue, rather than vice, in virtue ethics. (Rebecca DeYoung is a shining exception.)[15] Surely the topics are of equal importance?

This imbalance reflects, I fear, an uncomfortable willingness of ethicists to assume that *they* are exemplary specimens of virtue. I myself hold no such illusion. There is no such thing as "the virtue of unearned moral superiority." Rather, there is probably some virtue – and certainly some

14. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 35.

15. Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Brazos Press, 2009).

good psychological wholesome – in cataloging one's vices, through (a) a detailed knowledge of the conceptual catalog of virtues and vices; and (b) a careful examination of which negative traits appear in one's own character. One cannot be too careful in distrusting one's own self-assessments. The assessments of trusted advisors and close loved ones are far more reliable.

The project of transforming oneself from mere biological and psychological adulthood to virtue and wisdom is difficult and long. It requires certain minimum virtues to even make progress in acquiring more virtues. For example, it may require that one be able to honestly self-assess one's vices. Twelve Step recovery groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous speak about making a "moral inventory." Identifying the repugnant traits in one's own psychology is a noxious task for most people. So noxious, in fact, that many people (ironically) would prefer the vices they have to the identification of the same.

Other specific strategies are likely to be needed. How is honesty acquired, for instance? How are particular virtues and vices kept track of? What do we do when we get off track in the pursuit of a virtue?

Response to Empty Definition Objection

Another objection was that virtues are defined as beneficial traits. This is an important objection but at the same time, it misses the point. It is a synthetic truth discoverable only by reflection that humans have a nature, a species-specific kind of flourishing, and that some character traits are conducive to the realization of our life form while others are conducive to our stultification. Peter Geach argues that just because an ethical conclusion is virtually un-revisable doesn't mean it is content-less.[16] All truths are true, in part, in virtue of the words used. But not all truths by definition are empty and content-less; rather, the stuff of life from which we derive our conceptual definitions or which we must fit into our conceptual definitions is a contentfull task. Let's consider this objection in another way.

16. Geach, *The Virtues*, Chapter 1.

Some ethical propositions are widely believed to be true.[17] Some philosophers argue that this widespread, near universal belief is a sign that these propositions are self-evidently true:[18]

> It seems to me self-evident that, other things equal, it is wrong to take pleasure in another's pain, to taunt and threaten the vulnerable, to prosecute and punish those known to be innocent, and to sell another's secrets solely for personal gain.

Saying "it is good to be good" is a tautology. And most (if not all) tautologies are trivial. But these ethical propositions are not tautologous but are so widely and commonly accepted as to be easily mistaken for tautologies. Of course, if we define "kindness" simply as "a good disposition to treat others well" then it appears that "it is good to be kind" amounts to the same tautologous proposition "it is good to be good." But kindness is *not* best defined simply as *something good*. Kindness, it seems to me, and to many others upon reflection, is a special sort of quality we can recognize and name but not ultimately define. Cruelty, likewise, we "know it when we see it." There is more to our recognition of cruelty than the arbitrary application of "a bad disposition to hurt others." We know that a troubled child who takes to torturing animals for fun is acting cruelly. We try to help him or her to satisfy curiosity (or get attention, or whatever) through other means. We help them stop nursing a disposition to cruelty.

Another way of putting what is perhaps the same point is to call these propositions "quasi-analytic":

> Indeed, many fundamental scientific laws (as well as some scientific tru- isms) and many fundamental moral principles have the property which we might call quasi-analyticity (see, e.g., Putnam 1962). Because of their con- ceptual and methodological centrality, even when we know that their justifi- cation is a posteriori rather

17. It is good to be kind; cruelty is bad. Pleasure is good. Wise people make good leaders. I ought to keep my promises. A just society is desirable. Fools are ridiculous and the wise are admirable. "Do good and avoid evil" (called the first principles of practical reason). Moderation is good (called the foundation of all ethics). "Drunkenness" or alcoholism are shameful. The Golden Rule (called the only objective rule in both religious and atheistic moralities). Injustice is bad. We ought to care for children and respect elders. Generosity is admirable.

18. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4 (Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 11.

> than a priori, we find it extremely difficult to envision circumstances under which they would be disconfirmed. For as long as they occupy so central a conceptual and methodological role, they are immune from empirical revision, and principles incompatible with them are ineligiblefor empirical confirmation (let's call them quasi-analyticallyineli- gible). As Putnam indicates, quasi-analyticity and quasi-analytic ineligibility can be altered only by pretty serious conceptual and theoretical "revolutions," whose directions are all but impossible to anticipate prior to the innovations or crises which precipitate them. The principle that torturing children is wicked and the fundamental laws of quantum mechanics are both candidates for quasi-analyticity.[19]

These ethical propositions do not seem to be tautologies. Call these non-tautologous but basic ethical propositions Platitudes. Some Platitudes are small, others great. "It is polite to say please" is a Platitude. But "treat others as you would wish to be treated" is a Great Platitude.

The core principles of "common morality" that have acheived an astonishingly wide consensus in bioethical discussions are good examples of Great Platitudes.[20]

Debunkers and Defenders

Some philosophers take their task to be to debunk the Great Platitudes. They wish to explain them away, to explain *why* they are false and *how so many people fall in for them*. The platitudes are either *false* ("know your place" taken as a justification of socio-economic or gender inequality is false) or as trivial; *of course* "murder is unjust" is true because, 'murder' is defined as 'unjust killing.'

Other philosophers take their task to be to *underwrite* the great platitudes. They wish to explain them, to explain why they are true and how it is we learn them, preserve them, and (most crucially) live well by taking them as sound practical advice. Both philosophers are sophisticated;

19. Richard Boyd, "Finite Beings, Finite Goods: The Semantics, Metaphysics and Ethics of Naturalist Consequentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66, no. 3 (2003): 520.

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

but one is sophisticated in attacking and explaining away the Great Platitudes while the other is sophisticated in defending and explaining them.

As examples of the Debunkers, consider J. L. Mackie and Alan Gibbard. Mackie claims to be running counter to the great tradition of European moral philosophy.[21] Gibbard's metaethical works aim to capture our common sense belief that morality is objective but without the Platonism. He says, "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…"[22]

As examples of Defenders, consider G. E. Moore, Robert Adams, and Frank Jackson. Moore's grandiloquent denouncements of moral philosophy are not, as one might expect, the harbingers of a revolutionary transvaluation of values; by the end of *Principia Ethica* he has given a sophisticated 300 page articulation of the yawningly common judgment that beauty, friendship, and knowledge are goods. Robert Adams' metaethical work aims to capture the common sense belief that morality is objective… by providing a systematic defense of Platonism. Plato sees goodness as becoming like god: "Fleeing [evil] is becoming like god so far as one can, and to become like god is to become just and pious with wisdom.[23] And Adams defends this resemblance relation as well. But not all Defenders are non-naturalists. Frank Jackson's influential account of functionalism[24] aims to naturalize "mature folk morality" without necessarily invalidating all of it.

It does no good to object that the Great Platitudes are *evil* or *oppressive*, binding women to social subjugation or condemning the poor to poverty. Rather, the corrections to the errors of Euro-

21. Mackie, *Ethics*.

22. Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 155.

23. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato Statesman* 176a5-b2; John M Armstrong, "After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming Like God," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2004): 171–83.

24. Frank Jackson, "From Metaphysics to Ethics" (Clarendon Press, 1998).

pean (and more broadly, western) moral philosophy are contained *within the resources* of western moral philosophy. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" tells more powerfully against sexism or classism than any revolutionary ideal.

Virtue not Optional Response

Another objection was the virtues are either optional or intolerant. This objection, as stated, misses the point. By arguing that virtues – whatever they may turn out to be – are those qualities needed by practical reasoners, we are not arguing about the *concept* of virtue but that *very qualities themselves*. Any culture, business, family, civilization, will thrive insofar as it is virtuous and disintegrate insofar as it fails. Virtue is necessary because it is human. Justice, prudence, and courage are "needed in any human-scale enterprise"[25], from motherhood, to a successful career, to farming.

Put negatively, the thesis of this chapter is that vices necessarily contribute to misery, unhappiness, and human stultification and stagnation. Human nature is the starting point, flourishing is the goal, and the moral and intellectual virtues are the means by which we move from start to goal. Vices are those qualities that partly constitute human misery. Many kinds of living conditions are miserable; excessive cold or heat; starvation; illness; mental handicap; injury; extreme isolation and loneliness, and so on. But these kinds of circumstances are not *always* and *necessarily* miserable. Rather, being a lying, treacherous, scheming, envious, whining, daydreaming moral agent is truly miserable, even such happens to have a comfortable bed to sleep in and enough money to get through life. Such a person is despicable, a worthy specimen of human failure.

Some vices, especially intellectual vices, are especially despicable. Not everyone has equal amounts of intelligence conceived as raw mental horsepower. Some children even at a young age excel at doing "mental math" or memorizing geographical names, while others never acquire the knack for it. However, not all unintelligent people are stupid in the deplorable sense: stubborn, unteachable, slow to learn and resenting every bit, arrogant, smug, self-satisfied, and willfully

25. Geach, *The Virtues*.

ignorant. Such persons demonstrate intellectual vices noxious to all their fellows except those equally debased, and especially noxious to those unfortunate enough to be their teachers, parents, or guardians. And such intellectual vices are in a special way exemplary of human failing.

Response to Beneficial by Definition

The second objection, building on the above response, is about the very definition of virtue as a *beneficial* or "positive" character trait. To see the problem, suppose we define "boldness" as *doing hard things* and "courage" as doing hard things when it is good. Boldness is, so to speak, value neutral. One can be bold in wrongdoing or bold in doing well. If courage is just boldness in doing good, is this a trivial truth? An analytic truth? The affirmation that 'courage (doing hard things when it is good) is good' would appear to amount to the life-altering revelation that 'good things are good'.

This is an important objection but also misses the point. It is a synthetic truth discoverable only by reflection that humans have a nature, a telos, and that some character traits are conducive to the realization of our telos while others are conducive to our stultification. Peter Geach argues that just because an ethical conclusion is virtually un-revisable doesn't mean it is content-less.[26] All truths are true, in part, in virtue of the words used. But not all truths by definition are empty and content-less; rather, the stuff of life from which we derive our conceptual definitions or which we must fit into our conceptual definitions is a contentfull task. Let's consider this objection in another way.

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26. Ibid., Chapter 1.

good and avoid evil" (called the first principles of practical reason). Moderation is good (called the foundation of all ethics). "Drunkenness" or alcoholism are shameful. The Golden Rule (called the only objective rule in both religious and atheistic moralities). Injustice is bad. We ought to care for children and respect elders. Generosity is admirable.

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It does no good to object that the Great Platitudes are *evil* or *oppressive*, binding women to social subjugation or condemning the poor to poverty. Rather, the corrections to the errors of European (and more broadly, western) moral philosophy are contained *within the resources* of western moral philosophy. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" tells more powerfully against sexism or classism than any revolutionary ideal.

27. Mackie, *Ethics*.
28. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 155.
29. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato Statesman* 176a5-b2; Armstrong, "After the Ascent."
30. Jackson, "From Metaphysics to Ethics."

Objection: Are virtues inborn?

I have emphasized throughout that virtues are acquired. I would like to state an objection to this part of the thesis. My response will be to concede some ground before holding the line.

To state the objection, first distinguish between what is "given" and what is under the control of a normal, functional, adult human being. Simply put, one's nature is given, and one's choices throughout life are controllable. But what is given in the life of a child includes (at least) one's genetic identity, one's time and place in history, one's culture and tradition, one's parents or guardians. If virtues are first inculcated in a child by tradition and only later acquired by an individual's own initiative, then it seems the dichotomy breaks down. It seems, in short, that the virtues one acquires or fails to acquire are part of the Given. For example, suppose Chivo grows up on a poor farm in rural Mexico in a large, Catholic household with pious parents. He learns not to lie, not to steal, to work hard on the farm, to be kind to his siblings and to have a good time with them. He is inculcated with honesty, respect for property, industry, gentleness, and affability. Perhaps Krishna does not attend school, or only does for a few years. But he learns from his famiily the social and trade skills needed to become a fully functioning member of his rural community. What effect would practical reasoning have on Krishna's life? It seems the answer is 'not much'. Socially, he is poor enough that he is not obligated to make many decisions about travel or entertainment. Religiously, he cannot choose (for many years at least) whether or not to join in the religious rituals of his family. Intellectually, he cannot choose to read many books or write ethical treatises, for farming occupies him for virtually all the daylight hours.

Compare Chivo with June. June grows up in a wealthy urban skyrise in Los Angeles with two secular parents and no siblings. She is taught not to lie, not to steal, and to do well in school, to respect her parents and friends but not to be too frivolous. She is inculcated with honesty, respect for property, studiousness, seriousness, and dignity. She becomes successful in grade school, high school, and college, and becomes a successful lawyer with enough disposable income to travel the

world, enjoy aesthetic pleasures and a thriving social life. What effect would practical reasoning have on June's life? It seems the answer is 'a great deal.' She is a member of the "creative class" who earns her wages with her expertise in legal history, ratiocination, and rhetoric.

The moral differences between Chivo and June, such as they are, are given by their parents and cultures and socio-economic statuses and genders, etc. It seems that virtues can be defined as qualities that are not acquired *by the individual*'s effort but are *inculcated* by the individual's tradition.

Answer

The cardinal virtues are especially important because they are necessary for success in any worthwhile human endeavor. Chivo and June do not need the same professional skills since they do not perform the same social function; but they both need the "moral skills" of relating to their friends and family, cultivating their talents, and striving self-actualization. Most people in the world will not write books or even read many books; however, every human being in the world has biological parents and hence has family. Every living human being belongs to a community; even orphans and street urchins live in a community.

These traits are indeed acquirable and obligatory. Not everyone has equal opportunity to acquire them — moral education is helpful; virtuous parents and teachers are helpful; social conditions wherein vice will not be gratuitously rewarded or virtues gratuitously punished are helpful. Yet every human being has equal responsibility to acquire them.

One of the points we must concede is that farmers, socialites, and lawyers etc. need different levels of theoretical knowledge. Not everyone needs to be "learned." But the concession proves a deeper point: It takes practical wisdom to decide whether or not one can and should – in one's own circumstances – pursue theoretical knowledge. I shall return to this below.

Objection: Is the pursuit of virtue egoistic?

Supposing that virtues *benefit their possessor*, is it then egoistic or selfish to pursue virtue? Although it seems we only need virtue if we want to be happy, everyone has an obligation to develop virtuous traits because virtues help us become who we are. Such a pursuit is not selfish in the pejorative sense of the word; it is not 'egoism' for the charge of egoism assumes that the good for men is not *the good* per se. But we need not assume this. It may be that the good for men is the good. Pleasure is not the good, though it is *a* good. Moderation is a good as well. and a person who enjoys both the moderate pleasures of life and the moderation of pleasure and pain

IV. How Many Virtues? Two Examples: Moderation and Tolerance

Objections: How many virtues?

Virtues are those excellent traits that humans as practical reasoners need to realize our natural telos. And, we have argued, human nature is an intelligibly determinate concept: rational animals. Still, we might wonder how many virtues there are? It seems that our neo-Aristotelian writers vary widely on this point, from one, to a limited set, to a virtually unlimited set.

Foot and Geach use as examples the four "cardinal" virtues which are delivered by tradition. (Hursthouse also defends the "theological virtue" of hope and Geach defends even a kind of faith as non-theological virtues. Nevertheless, Geach argues that love can only be a religious virtue.)[31]

McDowell's account makes it seem like there is only one virtue (knowledge). Each individual virtue is "a sort of perceptual capacity", a "specialized sensitivity" to a particular range of reasons for action (say, the feelings of others), and all virtue is sensitivity to reasons. There is only one "moral outlook."[32]

31. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 11; Geach, *The Virtues*, chap. 4.
32. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 332.

MacIntyre, by contrast, not only includes in his broad historical list the virtues of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, the Greek tragic poets, the New Testament, Aquinas, Jane Austen, Benjamin Franklin, and Jane Austin, but he adds (apparently ad lib) new virtues like "integrity or constancy"[33] and "an adequate sense of tradition"[34]

Aristotle's list of virtues includes twelve moral virtues, each of which is defined by a moderate state between two possible extremes with respect to a given feature of human life, such as fear, pleasure, or wealth.[35] He builds into the definition of some of the virtues (e.g., magnanimity) the notion that not *all* human beings as such require it (since not all are extremely wealthy public servants).

Is there any sense to be made here? If human nature is stable, yet human reason is flexible enough to admit of variation (both progressive and regressive), then we ought to expect a stable set of qualities that count as virtues that is flexible enough to admit of variation.

The 'cardinal' or classical virtues to which those in the Aristotelian tradition (including recent neo-Aristotelians) give preeminent place are courage, justice, moderation, and practical wisdom. The four cardinal virtues are not only "delivered by tradition" but can be most easily ratified by anyone willing to do the critical analysis.

Roughly, justice is every member of the community doing their business and each person giving and receiving his due. Since every human being exists in society, the presence or absence of justice in the members of the community will sustain or destroy that community.

Courage is the proper boldness in doing the right thing despite opposition. Courage is not

33. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 203. "There is at least one virtue recognized by the [Aristotelian] tradition which cannot be specified at all except with reference to the wholeness of a human life – the virtue of integrity or constancy."

34. Ibid., 223.

35. 1. Courage in the face of fear; 2. Temperance in the face of pleasure and pain; 3. Liberality with wealth and possessions; 4. Magnificence with great wealth and possessions; 5. Magnanimity with great honor; 6. Proper ambition with normal honors; 7. Patience in the face of irritation; 8. Truthfulness with self-expression; 9. Wittiness in conversation; 10. Friendliness in social conduct; 11. Modesty in the face of shame or shamelessness; 12. Righteous indignation. He adds five intellectual virtues.

simply a military virtue appropriate to police officers, firefighters, telephone wire repairmen, etc.

Moderation is pursuing the right amount of pleasure in the right way at the right time, and avoiding the wrong amount and the wrong way and the wrong time. The dangers to health and happiness of excessive pleasure are obvious to anyone who has had the (mis)fortune to earn or inherit enough time and money to overindulge. Many celebrities who have worked their way to the top of the entertainment industry find that they lack the moderation by which to successful navigate the temptations associated with wealth and time.

Practical wisdom is excellence in knowing what to do in a given situation. Practical wisdom is I think rightly the most important virtue in the sense that it is a hub from which the other virtues emerge as spokes. Even the theoretical or intellectual virtues Zagzebski writes about depend for their cultivation on a person willing to invest the time and energy into theoretical learning.[36] But I shall return to this theme in a later chapter.

Beyond these, our definition of virtue is flexible enough to include a variety of positive character traits. Strictly speaking, however, the core virtues are those *all human beings need* since they benefit people along the lowest common denominator. We might call 'virtues' those positive traits that are appropriate for various life stations, ages, genders, professions, social roles, and so on. But if we are being strict such traits (regardless of how we label them) will be sharply distinguished from the cardinal virtues. They are the base of a triangle.

V. Moderation and Tolerance

Consider two test cases: moderation is one of the classical virtues. Is the specific content of this virtue compatible with, even supported by, my account thus far?

Begin with Aristotle's justly famous statement of virtue as a mean between extremes:

36. Cf. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry Into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

> Let us consider this, that it is the nature of such things to be destroyed by defect and excess, as we see in the case of strength and of health (for to gain light on things imperceptible we must use the evidence of sensible things); both excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it. So too is it, then, in the case of temperance and courage and the other virtues. For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible; temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean.[37]

(The first sentence appeals to a fact about "the nature of such things", presumably, the general features of living beings. This is Aristotle's positing of natural normativity.) To be immoderate is to eat or drink so much or so little that it destroy's one's health. Specifically, indulging in "every pleasure and abstaining from none" is a defective choice or defective habit for creatures like us. We can even venture, with the help of health science, a rough approximation of the number of calories (1700-2600) human beings formally need, and an ideal diet of the kinds of foods and drinks through which to intake those calories (variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, fats, nuts, legumes, and so on).

Aristotle continues in the same section:

> We must take as a sign of states of character the pleasure or pain that ensues on acts; for the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent…

VI. Conclusion 1

This chapter attempted to define virtues as those acquirable traits that are excellent for practical, rational animals like us. Our nature is normative, such that fulfilling it is morally good. We distinguished various kinds of excellence that are emphatically *not* within the purview of one's practical

37. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Nic. Ethics* Book II.2.

reasoning. Vices are those traits that we are either given through bad upbringing and bad education and (more to the point) those traits that we acquire ourselves. Virtues are those traits that we are given through good upbringing and education and that we acquire with moral effort, sometimes great moral effort. It remains to give a few examples of various virtues, to block the looming worry about cultural relativism, and to explain how they are unified in a concept of practical reason. That is the task for the next chapter.

Conclusion 2

Virtues are excellent character traits all rational animals need. The virtuous person takes up all that is given and puts it to good use in the resistance to evils and the pursuit of and sustainance of goods, both in individual life and communal life. The virtuous person discriminates between what is morally significant and insignificant, discriminating in what is significant between what is beneficial and harmful to the actualization of rational animals like us.

Vices are corruptions of life that are all-too-common. They are negative or destructive traits to which one is tempted somewhere in the common course of human life. Pleasures tempt us to immoderation; the urges to do favors for friends or to slight enemies tempt us to injustice; danger, difficulty, and other kinds of resistance tempt us to cowardice and *acedia*; laziness, arrogance, and culpable ignorance tempt us to practical foolishness.

Even if this account of neo-Aristotelian virtue is plausible, several questions remain. Let us to queue up the questions to be addressed in a later chapter.

Setting up Remaining Chapters

1. **What is our telos?**. The first point is that virtues bring about (and partly constitute a "pre-payment" on) human flourishing. So we would need to say more about our telos and what it would be like to have it realized. Although it seems to be merely pleasure or worldly success, and though I shall define it more later, I mean generally "well-being", true happiness, human success as such.

2. **Can virtues be put to bad use?** Virtues are necessarily good for human beings as such. But some of the qualities the moral tradition picks out as virtues can be conceived as being put to bad use. So can virtues remain virtues while in bad use? Although it seems that virtuous traits cannot be put to bad use, some virtues admit of misuse since the absence of practical wisdom renders traits (like moderation) that really are virtues ineffective at the realization of our human telos. This will require a discussion of practical wisdom.
3. **Are the virtues human or cultural?** Virtues must be derived from human nature and exemplify excellence in human nature. But still must all such human actions and excellence be mediated by culture, by "second nature"? Although it seems they are cultural, they are 'human traits' in that they express human nature. MacIntyre does not basis virtue enough in metaphysical biology; Foot bases it too much in metaphysical biology; McDowell bases virtue in reason but does not explain the relation of reason to metaphysical biology. Foot is closest to my view, but I supplement her view with arguments to the effect that normativity (including teleology) is built-in to nature as a whole, not just humanity.
4. **Can the virtuous person be irrational?** Relatedly, virtues are supposed to be actions "in accord" with reason and in accord with human nature. This suggests that the virtuous person cannot be irrational. Although it seems that the virtuous person can be irrational, the virtuous person is by definition rational either (in the primary sense) by reflectively endorsing their own reasons for action in every or almost every significant life pursuit or (in a derivative but no less real sense) by acting in accordance with good reasons, either on good advice from another or on their own, unreflective, habitual, reasons. Practical wisdom, then, has pride of place. There are other virtues besides practical wisdom; Socrates was wrong there. And Maggie Little is wrong to suggest that virtue is knowledge *and nothing more*.[38] But it is correct that wisdom has pride of place. Courage without wisdom ceases even to be courage. This will also require a discussion of practical wisdom. And to that task we now turn.

38. Margaret Olivia Little, "Virtue as Knowledge: Objections from the Philosophy of Mind," in *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo (Blackwell, 2007), 252–64 It is not totally clear to me from this essay whether she means to suggest this point or not; but the suggestion is there and she does nothing to counteract it.

Chapter 6

Virtue in Excellent, Practically Reasoning, Social Animals

"This is the first precept of [practical reason], that 'good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.' "

–Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIa. Q.94. Art. 2.

"There could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live."

–Jennifer Frey, *The Will to Do Good*, 79.

I. Introduction

The three themes of this dissertation have been the three points on the "virtue triangle": virtue in relation to practical reason, and both in relation to natural teleology. But my thesis throughout has depended on the *formal* requirement that any account of one of these three must be presented in terms of the other two. In other words, I have maintained that one cannot adequately define virtue absent a definition of practical reason; one cannot understand the natural teleology of humanity without both.

For these reasons, my cumulative case puts growing importance on later chapters. The foundation in natural teleology (in chapter 3) allowed us to hypothesize that human nature is to be a practical, rational animal (in chapter 4). The account given of human nature allowed us to specify criteria that any account of virtue ought to satisfy (in chapter 5), and we began detailing such an account from the neo-Aristotelians (in chapter 6).

The neo-Aristotelian view of virtue, as we saw, is intrinsically related to reason at many points. So now I must make good on my claim that the same account cannot be completed without an account of practical reason. Then, in a later chapter, we will crown the project with a detailed account of human teleology that will, we may hope, will be plausible in its own right and render more plausible what has come before.

The Centrality of Practical Reason

Practical reason (or practical rationality, which I shall use synonymously)[1] occupies a place of importance in the theories of many virtue ethicists. Specifically, the neo-Aristotelians have each thematized practical reason in their own way.[2] Why? What is practical reason and what is excellence in regard to it?

This chapter defends a particular view of the place of practical reason in ethics – what it is, what it's worth, and whether it is objective and significant. I draw significantly from the recent work of Jennifer Frey.[3]

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1. Warren Quinn uses 'practical reason' to mean the faculty and 'practical rationality' to mean the excellence use of the faculty. I prefer to treat 'practical reason' and 'practical rationality' as synonymous, contrasting them with 'practical wisdom', which is the excellence thereof. Cf. Warren Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9, no. 02 (1992): 81–95

2. Cf. Especially Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 4; McDowell, "Virtue and Reason"; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

3. Frey, "The Will and the Good."

Questions in Brief

Three sets of questions will occupy us:

I. What is practical reason?

1. Are moral reasons one type of practical reason?
2. Is morality only about how we treat others?
3. Can practical reason motivate?
4. Is practical reason about means only or means and ends?
5. Is it one or many?

II. What is the excellence of practical reason?

1. Is practical wisdom a moral or intellectual virtue? Yes, it is both
2. Is practical wisdom the only virtue? No, but it corrects other virtues.

III. Is practical reason and value objective?

1. **Subjectivity Puzzle**. Are values subjective? Are there as many rationalities as there are reasoners? Is practical reason subjective or expressivistic, like taste?
2. **Intersubjectivity Puzzle**. If values are not subjective, are they intersubjective or objective? Is practical rationality culturally relative? In other words, although there is one human nature, expressed variously in different cultures, languages, customs, and thoughts – are we forced to give up on the idea of *one human rationality*, albeit expressed variously? Is there, at bottom, a plurality of *rationalities*? Is practical reason intersubjective, like etiquette?
3. **Rationality/Nature Criterion**. What is the relationship between reasons for action and nature? Or are reasons only "in here" in us, psychological and rational, in which case humans are not natural? Or are reasons for acting "out there" in the world, not physical and not natural, in which case nature is normative? If so, is this naturalism? Is this view objective idealism? Is practical reason natural?

Answers in brief

1. According to my account, practical reason is the human capacity for resolving generally how to live and specifically what to do, and for reflecting on action, and evaluating good and bad. Practical reason is the capacity for thinking about *practical reasons*, that is, reasons to φ or not to φ.

2. The phrase 'moral reasons' is ambiguous: In one sense, moral reasons (i.e., facts about what is good for others) are simply one type of practical reason; but in another sense, *any* practical reason (i.e., objective normative and evaluative facts about what is worth pursuing and worth avoiding) are "moral reasons".
3. Practical reasons can and do sometimes motivate us, even absent other psychological phenomena such as desires, endorsements, or plans.
4. We practically reason about both means *and* ends.
5. The excellence of practical reason is practical wisdom.
6. Practical wisdom is a moral and intellectual virtue.
7. Practical wisdom is not the only virtue but it is the master virtue, an executive and a necessary condition of the other moral virtues and a gateway to further intellectual virtues.
8. Practical wisdom and practical reasons are not subjective. I shall contend that there is one rationality, although it is a one-over-many concept that is capacious. This practical reason is most likely not subjective. My case for this very difficult conclusion rests on the belief, virtually incorrigible, that practical reason is *important*. It is of unquestionable intrinsic value to human beings. Furthermore, insofar as virtue is relative to rationality, rationality itself must be fixed to preserve moral realism. A practical reason can and does motivate one, all by itself; in conjunction with or absent other immediate inclinations or desires. Practical reason, furthermore, motivates when one judges that a course of action or an outcome is good in itself, that it is *desirable* in the sense that it is to be desired whether one presently desires it or not.
9. Practical wisdom is not only extremely valuable; it is both intersubjective and objective. And since discussions *about* rationality are only undertaken *within* rationality, there are complications having to do with the self-referential or iterative nature of the discussion. These complications should lead us to predict that conceptions of rationality will differ more than other difficult concepts. If two parties share an identical conception of rationality, then a long and arduous debate is not necessary; if two parties enjoy differing conceptions that differ in a sufficient number of respects, a long and arduous debate is not likely to resolve the difference. As the Greek proverb asks, "if we choke on food, we drink water to wash it down. If water chokes us, what shall we drink?" And indeed, MacIntyre especially gives us a recursive theory of rationality adequate (or almost adequate) to the task of both capturing what is common in differing conceptions of rationality and helping to enhance the possibility of resolving disagreements.
10. Furthermore, practical wisdom is 'naturalistic' in a broad sense. The above conclusions, by themselves, may or may not sound plausible to the reader. The case for these conclusions below may or may not be persuasive to the reader. If they are not persuasive, the resistance is likely to arise from a commitment to *naturalism* combined with the belief that the "objective normativity" of practical rationality is somehow not consonant with naturalism. Nature consists of descriptive facts while objective normativity posits evaluative and normative facts "out there" in the world. The reader may notice that this alleged contrast – between nature and normativity – is the same contrast we attempted to dismantle above. The dilemma of ethical naturalism rises again: if ethics is norma-

> tive, how is it natural? If it is natural, how is it normative? So in this chapter we will return to it and do what we can to diffuse the worry. My answer will be that this form of naturalism is more adequate to the scientific facts, and is non-dualistic in a desirable way. I call this neo-Stoic naturalism, or Recursive Naturalism, since it is recursive in two ways: first, the normativity of human rationality is both an *instance* of nature and is *about* nature, including about itself. Second, the object of practical reason is both to discover *the thing to do* and to become more practically reasonable.

II. What is Practical Reason? Situating Practical Reason withing Neo-Aristotelianism

Jay Wallace defines practical reason generally enough for us to use his definition as a starting point: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[4]

The difficulty in defining practical reason is an iteration of the difficulty which I have stated above. Is practical reason practical? If so, it doesn't seem rational. But is practical reason rational? If so, it doesn't seem practical. So in a very real sense, the primary challenge of this chapter is to *defend the very concept of practical reason*.

I argued above (in chapter 3) that rationality in part defines our nature. We are animals of a particular sort: rational animals. We identify ourselves (scientifically, philosophically, religiously, anthropologically, psychologically) as creatures normally capable of language, abstract thought, argumentation, mathematics, philosophy, natural science, and so on. But we are not merely rational; we are also practical: we *practice*. One can conceive of rational creatures (gods, martians, angelic intelligences, artificial intelligences) that are not also "practical" creatures – that do not practice anything. Douglas Adams's computer character Deep Thought is a *knower* with nothing to do. Hence the problem of practical reason is the problem of human nature: These are the two sides of the same paradox about our human nature. We are "embodied minds in action"[5] or "psychological

4. R. Jay Wallace, "Practical Reason," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014.

5. Robert Hanna and Michelle Maiese, *Embodied Minds in Action* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

animals."[6]

Are moral reasons one type of practical reason?

The first question to be asked is whether, according to neo-Aristotelians, moral reasons are *one type* of practical reason, or does any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed)?[7] The question receives its urgency from two quarters: the first is the familiar Kantian distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives. Kant (or the stereotypical figure in the literature whom people call "Kant") assumed that one is naturally, selfishly inclined to one's happiness or well-being; the moral law provided reasons to do one's duty, sometimes in accord with, but often against one's inclinations. The second is the familiar modern assumption that the philosophical ethics is to resolve ethical dilemmas.

Edmund Pincoffs distinguishes two broad conceptions of philosophical ethics he calls "Quandary Ethics" and "Character Ethics." Quandary ethics is focused on the short-term resolution of immediate moral problems, either by dissolving moral perplexity or giving some (hopefully rational) basis for a particular decision or course of action. The Quandary ethicists are those Pincoffs quotes at the beginning of his article (such as Hare, Toulon, Brandt). They think that:

> The business of ethics is to clarify and solve "problems", i.e. situations in which it is difficult to know what one should do; that the ultimate beneficiary of ethical analysis is the person who, in one of these situations, seeks rational ground for the decision he must make; that ethics is therefore primarily concerned to find such grounds, often conceived of as moral rules and the principles from which they can be derived; and that meta-ethics consists in the analysis of the terms, claims, and arguments which come into play in moral disputation, deliberation, and justification in problematic contexts.[8]

6. Bailey, "Animalism."

7. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, chap. 13, "Are Moral Reasons Overriding?"; Cf. also John McDowell and IG McFetridge, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 52 (1978): 13–42.

8. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513.

By contrast, character ethics is focused on the long-term goal of living well by executing worthwhile goals in every day life. Aristotle is an example of a Character Ethicist. Aristotle:

> …thought of ethics as a branch of politics, which in turn he thought of as a very wide-ranging subject having to do generally with the planning of human life so that it could be lived as well as possible. Moral problems are given their due but are by no means stage-centre. The question is not so much how we should resolve perplexities as how we should live.[9]

These two broad conceptions correlate to two conceptions of moral reasons. It might seem that moral reasons are distinct from non-moral reasons (such as prudential, aesthetic, egoistic reasons etc.).

Let the Quandary ethicist represent the view of moral reasons as special, perhaps overriding, kinds of reasons pertaining to the rights, obligations, or duties of one individual in relation to others. Even in asking the "how do I live?" question, a Quandary ethicist is likely assuming that the answer will include a set of moral reasons weighed against or in opposition to non-moral reasons (such as prudential reasons). As Martha Nussbaum points out, a Quandary ethicist might ask "how do specifically moral ends and commitments figure among the ends that [a moral agent] pursues?" But she clarifies:

> This question is posed in a characteristically modern way, presupposing a distinction between the moral and the non-moral that is not drawn, as such, by the Greek thinkers. But if one objects to that characterization, one can rephrase it: for example, What role does concern for others for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[10]

Foot makes a similar point in distinguishing our sense of 'moral' from the older sense.

> Many if not most moral philosophers in modern times see their subject as having to do exclusively with relations between individuals or between an individual and society, and so with such things as obligations, duties, and charitable acts… 'moral'

9. Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," 553–4.

10. Martha C Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?" *The Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1999): 174.

> and 'prudential' considerations [are] contrasted in a way that was alien to Plato or Aristotle.[11]

There is a powerful social and psychological force to the distinction between moral and prudential, other-regarding and self-regarding,[12] altruistic and egoistic[13], benevolent and selfish, conscience and self-love.[14] It results in a bifurcation between two kinds of reason. And certainly considerations about myself are conceptually distinct from considerations about my family, my friend, my society, or my species. The question is: is the difference between self-regarding reasons and other-regarding reasons the difference between "moral" and prudential? Not necessarily.

How did this distinction between moral and non-moral reasons arise in western thought? Foot cites Mill as an early proponent of the distinction:

> J. S. Mill, for instance, expresses this modern point of view quite explicitly, saying in his essay *On Liberty* that 'A person who shows rashness, obstinacy, self□conceit . . . who cannot restrain himself from harmful indulgences' shows faults (Mill calls them 'self□regarding faults') which 'are not properly immoralities' and while they 'may be proofs of any amount of folly . . . are only a subject of moral reprobation when they involve a breach of duty to others, for whose sake the individual is bound to have care for himself.'[15]

Mill distinguishes folly from immorality, where folly is failure to provide goods for oneself. MacIntyre further summarizes the conceptual roots of the terms 'moral' and 'ethical'.

> 'Moral' is the etymological descendant of 'moralis'. But 'moralis', like its Greek predecessor *ethikos* – Cicero invented 'moralis' to translate the Greek word in the *De Fato* – means 'pertaining to character' where a man's character is nothing other

11. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

12. Michael Slote, "Agent-Based Virtue Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (1995): 83–101.

13. Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton University Press, 1978).

14. Julia Annas, "Morality and Self Interest," ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–21; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Egoism and Altruism," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York, Macmillan, 1967), 462; Bloomfield, "Virtue and Happiness"; Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2010): 651–92.

15. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

> than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead on particular kind of life… The early uses of 'moral' did not contrast with " 'prudential' or 'self interested' " nor with " 'legal or 'religious'… The word to which it is closest in meaning is perhaps most simply 'practical'."[16]

This conceptual history illuminates that moral and non-moral reasons each exemplify, in their own ways, a broader conceptual structure of practicality. We identify *reasons to act*.

This point is not merely of historical or etymological interest (though of course, the narrow sense of the word 'moral' in discourse today is clear enough). The point is that qualities such as benevolence and generosity we tend to call human "moral goodness" are of a type with a *broader category of goodness*. Foot explains: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[17]

In the story of the word 'moral' we can trace the history of the concept of practical reason. The domain of practicality is the domain of practical reasons (objective values in the world) identifiedy by the practical reason (of an agent). That domain was subdivided into narrower fields: First, it meant a particular way of life, habit, or character. Then, it meant 'maxim', a practical lesson, like the "moral of the story", the point, that to be acted on, the rule. Third, it came to mean a domain of rules of conduct that are "neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic."[18] Finally, in the 1700s, it meant a particular kind of conduct, especially sexual conduct.

The distinction between moral and non-moral *reasons* shows up in a similar distinction between two different kinds of 'ought' or 'should'. Elizabeth Anscombe had observed in 1958 that a similar distinction (between moral and non-moral) runs betweeen two senses of 'ought':

> The terms "should" or "ought" or "needs" relate to good and bad: e.g. machinery needs oil, or should or ought to be oiled, in that running without oil is bad for it, or it runs badly without oil. According to this conception, of course, "should" and "ought" are not used in a special "moral" sense when one says that a man should

16. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 38.
17. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.
18. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 39.

> not bilk. (In Aristotle's sense of the term "moral" [ήθικός], they are being used in connection with a moral subject□matter: namely that of human passions and [non□technical] actions.) But they have now acquired a special so□called "moral" sense-□i.e. a sense in which they imply some absolute verdict (like one of guilty/not guilty on a man) on what is described in the "ought" sentences used in certain types of context: not merely the contexts that Aristotle would call "moral"□-passions and actions□-but also some of the contexts that he would call "intellectual."[19]

The peculiarly *moral* 'ought' means, for some, a final, verdictive ought – like the kind of "thou shalt" language used in the Ten Commandments. But *this* kind of ought, Anscombe thinks, only makes sense in the mouth of a believer in divine law. I should prefer rather to reserve the final, verdictive ought for what Foot (following Davidson) calls what someone should do "all things considered."[20]

What would happen if we re-opened our focus and looked at practical reasons as a whole? That is exactly what the broader "Character ethics" conception of practical reasons does. Julia Annas' presentation of virtue as as a skill illuminates this same point, I think, beautifully. She says, "I should develop an account of virtue in which I show have central to the idea that the practical reasoning of the virtuous person is analogous in important ways… to the practical reasoning of someone who's exercising a practical skill."[21]. What she calls the "skill analogy" might be taken as problematic since it drains the peculiarly *moral* quality out of virtue. The opposite is true: The skill analogy fills the projec of living daily life with the potential for virtue. The virtuous person is *good at* and not just *good* — good at helping others, good at thinking ahead, good at human life. The vicious person, by contrast, is not just bad but *bad at* the essential elements of human life. Of course, being born with a paucity of natural talents is not a matter of immorality; but making good use of one's fortune is admirable.

MacIntyre's earliest ethical work distinguished the significance of moral judgments compared to other kinds of judgments. In a careful critique of both intuitionists such as Moore and

19. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."
20. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.
21. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, 3.

emotivists such as Stevenson, MacIntyre concluded that both (mistakenly) assume that moral judgments and moral terms have significance only in their referential meaning. The intuitionists, of course, concluded that moral terms refer to a non-natural property, while the emotivists concluded that moral terms do not refer to such a property and so do not refer at all. (Naturalists, later in the 20th century, argue that moral terms refer to natural properties.) MacIntyre's alternative denies the assumption entirely; moral judgments "have their own kind of logic" and their significance, like other kinds of judgments, comes from "exhibiting the logic of their usage."[22] The significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action." Solving problems of evaluation (we might say) and action is their place in "a pattern of language and action…" He continues:

> Above all they arise out of the way in which we see the world and the way in which our language allows us to see the world. We cannot sufficiently emphasize the direction given to our appraisals by the language which happens to be available for our descriptions. It is as we see the facts that we judge the world.

MacIntyre's point is that moral judgments are not *simply* useful in moral dilemmas or quandaries. They appear, at the earliest stages of childhood development, in a pattern of usage that is inextricable from the human activities of reasoning, acting, and appraising. Evaluative judgments appear in the widest imaginable spread of human activities, from politics to playgrounds, from sociology to social life, from the practices of law and medicine to the professions of journalism and psychology, from the sciences to the arts. Even if this point be granted, moral dilemmas are not *unreal*. Moral dilemmas are a special version of our general "problems of appraisal and action." They may be particularly vexing, but they are no different from the general problems of how to live, how to be happy, what kinds of public policies to pursue, what apparently meaningful types of life are really meaningful.

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22. Mark C. Murphy, in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 118, quoting p. 73 of MacIntyre's master's thesis *The Significance of Moral Judgments*.

That is not to say that practical reason does not include the domain of "concern for others". It is only to argue that other-regarding qualities such as benevolence and generosity (which are easily thought of under the description human "moral goodness") are *of a type* with a broader category of goodness. She says: "judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[23]

That said, concern for others I call "2nd-personal morality". That is, my duties to you and to others. This would include obligations, values, and virtues as well as broader social or political ones. I suggest that the dominant virtue here is not only justice but love — I.e., a strong regard for the other, a charitable orientation to promoting the good of others, refusing to harm them, and committing to protect them from harm. But the rest of the practical domain I call 1st-personal and 3rd-personal. The entire set is the domain of practicality — what one ought to do or ought to think, say, etc. The three sub-domains are defined by the object with regard to which one ought to do and not do this or that.

The domain of 1st-person morality is proper respect and care for one's self — self-love or enlightened self-interest. This is what Mill called the domain of "prudence". It includes the virtues that benefit both oneself and others (moderation and courage) but especially practical wisdom, without which none of the other virtues do me much good.

The domain of 3rd-person morality is proper respect and care for everything that is not you or me — animals and plants, pets and work animals, our possessions, our earth and environment, and perhaps even our solar system. The primary virtue of this domain is justice, a respect for the whole and the proper arrangement of all the parts.[24]

Considering practical reason as a whole in this way helps us to understand Aristotle and the

23. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

24. If God exists, then 3rd-personal morality would require piety to him or her, since on most theisms God is not strictly speaking "one of us" but still demands our allegiance, sacrifice, or what have you.

neo-Aristotelians. Jack Weinstein says: 'The term practical rationality is derived from Aristotle's *phronesis*. It is to be distinguished from *sophia*, a more technical form of reasoning. Practical rationality leads to more approximate conclusions; it takes context and relative facts into account, and it usually leads to moral or political conclusions."[25] If we take philosophical ethics to be reflection on morality as a whole then, on this view, philosophical ethics is reflection on practical rationality. Practical rationality is simply the process of deciding what to do. It is the process of thinking through what to do. Or, in Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, it is "thinking how to live."[26]

The argument is simple: We act on reasons. We pursue what is good, or what seems good. There are various types of good; hence there are various types of reasons. But we do not act *only* on one type of reason (moral reasons). Rather, we weigh and balance *all* the salient reasons we are aware of at the time when we deliberate and make decisions. In making a business transaction, the entrepreneur may allow considerations of justice to outweigh considerations of profit; or, he may allow considerations about loyalty to a friend outweighs considerations of justice. These two paths are not, respectively, "the moral" path and the immoral path. They are both moral and both practical; they both weigh and attempt to negotiate the best reasons to act in this way rather than that, all things considered.

So I conclude that the domain of morality is, if anything at all, the sub-domain of practical reason concerned with obligations, duties, rights, goods, and harms that might obtain between one member of society to another. This way of putting the classification clearly connects "morality" with politics, family life, education, and so on. However, it paints in bright and burning colors the distinction between morality as a part of practical reason and practice itself. We are, first, and foremost, practical creatures, not merely moral or moralizing ones.

We can add to these arguments a sort of Moorean shift: instead of defending the domain of practical reason, we can ask: why do we moderns *assume* that there is a special domain of the

25. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 60–61.
26. Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

moral? The ancient and medieval philosophers in the west thought of the domain of practical reason as a natural unit: all that is voluntary or under our control may be done well or badly. Our goal in living well is to to identify what to think, what to do, and what to make. As a corollary, we must identify what not to think, what not to do, and what not to make. But shrinking the whole domain of practical reason down to the domain of a few absolute prohibitions on harming others is a modern innovation. If it is right, then it is a modern invention. If it is wrong, it is a modern ignorance. Either way, its proponent needs, I think, to offer some account of why such a shrinking amounts to progress rather than regress in moral theorizing.

Can practical reasons motivate?

Seen in this light, it is obvious that practical reasons can and do motivate us. There might be reasons to φ that I am not aware of and thus am not motivated by. Perhaps it is true that one ought to save for retirement, but I may fail to do so. The internalist urges that reasons *for me* must connect up with my motivational structure. Defined widely enough, I can agree to this way of stating things. If by "my motivational structure" we simply mean my overall disposition toward the good. I am oriented to pursue good things, and avoid bad things. Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description of 'good' I will, ipso facto, be oriented toward (whether I pursue it or merely approve of it and admire it). Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description 'bad' I will, ipso facto, oriented away from it (whether I avoid it or merely disapprobate it).

Apparent counterexamples that one might furnish to disprove the point actually serve, with sufficient clarification, to reinforce it. For example, someone might say, "It's ridiculous to think that I always pursue the good, because I sometimes do wrong." Of course, sometimes we do the wrong thing. The proper response is that we perceive the bad as the good. Someone might say, "But sometimes I perceive the bad *as bad* and pursue it anyway." The response is that we sometimes take a bad or dismotivating reason into an overall reason to do something, all things considered.

My view shares common features with motivational internalism; however, I do not wish to

deny what is plausible in motivational externalism, that there are reasons "out there" that *would* motivate me if I knew about them but which I do not know about. However, I find the internalism/externalism labels unhelpful and shall attempt to make my case plausible not by naming my positions but by characterizing what I mean as clearly as possible. The concept of a practical reason is the concept of *what to do*, which has its "practical" or motivational component "built-in" so to speak. And while it often happens that one's practical reasons conflict or are indeterminate, nevertheless, a set of practical reasons can constitute the *overriding* practical reason: *the thing to do*, all things considered.

Motivation thoughts

Although it seems that reason cannot motivate, practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of "motive"; other psychological states *move* me to act but only reasons *motivate* me to act, since motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state.

Although it seems that reason cannot motivate, practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of motive. Other psychological states *move* me to act but only reasons *motivate* me to act, since motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state.

My view is that practical reason is the general human capacity for deciding, through reflection and sensitivity to practical principles, what to do, and for evaluating one's own actions and those of others. Although we can by verbal sleight of hand define practical reasons as 'desires', the judgment of what to do is a distinct mental state from desiring, wanting, wishing, or instinctual attraction. Hence, practical reasons can (and most often do) motivate, all by themselves, even in the absence of desires (etc.); however, desires can (and often do) function as reasons for action.

There are many reasons for action. But the concept of a reason for action is the concept of pursuing what is good or what is best, all things considered. Practical reason runs into quandaries because there are so many reasons for action, and they sometimes conflict. Some have to do with what is best for me, what is best for others, what is best for me and what is best for me later, what is

permissible and what is required, etc. Although we may want to reserve the word 'moral' for other-regarding reasons, it is important to keep in mind that our goal of living well demands sensitivity to a whole range of reasons, regarding self, other, world, and (perhaps) God.

> I entertain the unfriendly suspicion that those who feel they *must* seek more than [the Aristotelian view of practical reason] provides want a scientific theory of rationality not so much for a passion for science, even where there can be no science, but because they hope and desire, by some conceptual alchemy, to turn such a theory into a regulative or normative discipline, or into a system of rules by which to spare themselves some of the agony of thinking and all the torment of feeling and understanding that is actually involved in reasoned deliberation.[27]

There are two specific normative conclusions I would like to make. I want to avoid the accusation that practical wisdom, as the argument stands at present, is an empty formality devoid of moral substance. As we saw in an earlier chapter, it might seem that the injunction: "pursue practical wisdom!" amounts to a truism that wisdom (which is a good) is a good.

The first particular normative conclusion is that truth is valuable. Often times one hears "education" praised as a panacea. Education, we are told, without any further definition to the term, is supposed to solve American economic problems, lift people out of poverty, reduce crime in inner cities, enrich students personally, lead to technological advances and medical breakthroughs, subvert and correct systematic gender inequalities, and more. But unless the education a student receives consists in *knowledge* of *truth*, we can hardly expect that these exaggerated hopes be fulfilled.

A second particular normative conclusion is that young people in particular should not engage in conjugal activity outside of the bonds of legal marriage. Conjugal activity is a powerful part of life and part of the human experience. There are moral, prudential, legal, psychological, economic, social, and biological reasons to keep such a powerful force within safe bounds. Morally, moral authorities from Moses, Cicero, Socrates, St. Paul, Confucius, Epicurus, Thomas Aquinas,

27. David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76 (1975): 29–51.

and many more urge chastity and conjugal fidelity. The Mosaic law condemns adulterers to death but if an unmarried man sleeps with an unmarried woman they are not to be punished; they are to marry.

Is practical reason aimed at the good or is it merely instrumental?

David Enoch's recent volume *Taking Morality Seriously* builds a case for moral realism on the basis that moral realism is the best explanation for the moral earnestness which most of us *cannot but help feel*.[28] Similarly, Foot is persuaded that we must assume a definition of practical reasoning that is substantive, rather than merely procedural. Practical reasoning does not just aim at means to ends, nor does it merely aim at "ends"; it aims at *the apparent good*.

> This now seems to me to be the correct way of meeting the challenge that I myself issued in 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' and at that time despaired of meeting: namely, to show the rationality of acting, even against desire and self-interest, on a demand of morality. The argument depends on the change of direction that Quinn suggested: seeing goodness as setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part-determinant of the thing itself. Nor is this a quite unfamiliar way of arguing. Many of us are willing to reject a 'present desire' theory of reasons for action because we think that someone who knowingly puts his future health at risk for a trivial pleasure is behaving foolishly, and therefore not well. Seeing his will as defective, we therefore say that he is doing what he has reason not to do. Being unable to fit the supposed 'reason' into some preconceived present-desire-based theory of reasons for action, we do not query whether it really is a foolish way to behave, but rather hang on to the evaluation and shape our theory of reasons accordingly. And it is exactly a generalization of this presumption about the direction of the argument on which I am now insisting. For what, we may ask, is so special about prudence that it alone among the virtues should be reasonably thought to relate to practical rationality in such a way?[29]

If goodness is a "necessary condition of practical rationality" then we are already committed to a substantive view of practical reason, rather than a merely procedural neo-Humean view.

28. David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

29. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

Foot identifies an argument for the importance of practical rationality on the basis that *we cannot help but value it*. Foot follows Quinn's lead in criticising a view of reason that makes the goal "the maximal satisfaction of an agent's desires and preferences, suitably corrected for the effects of misinformation, wishful thinking, and the like."'[30] The trouble, Foot says, is that we *cannot consistently believe this view.*

> He pointed out that by this account, practical reason, which would concern only the relation of means to ends, would therefore be indifferent to nastiness or even disgracefulness in an agent's purposes. And Quinn asked, in the crucial sentence of the article, *what then would be so important about practical rationality?* In effect he is pointing to our taken□for□granted, barely noticed assumption that practical rationality has the status of a kind of master virtue, in order to show that we cannot in consistency with ourselves think that the Humean account of it is true.[31]

Reasoning about ends may be a difficult and messy business. But we do it. Reasoning – indeed, disagreeing and debating – about ultimate ends is an empirical fact. Suppose Betty says to her friend, "I'm concerned about you. You haven't returned my calls. I heard you lost your job and your spouse left. Now I see you're gaining weight. What's wrong?" It would be no consolation for her friend to respond, "Nothing's wrong. Yes, yes, all that is true: I'm destitute, alone, and unhealthy. But that's what I was *aiming* for." Betty would rightly think, "Well, then… you are a fool." Betty would rightly wonder "what is wrong such that you have taken as your aims such unhealthy and ridiculous goals?"

Jay Wallace rebuts the charge that if reasoning about ends is not a mathematically-precise procedure, then it must not really be rational:

> Practical deliberation about ends is not an easy or well-defined activity. There are no straightforward criteria for success in this kind of reflection, and it is often unclear when it has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. These considerations encourage the Humean assumption—especially widespread in the social sciences—that there is no reasoning about final ends. On the other hand, how is one supposed to clarify one's largest and most important ends, if not by reasoning about them in

30. Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," from the abstract.%.
31. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 62.

> some way? Rather than exclude such reflection because it does not conform to a narrowly scientific paradigm of reason, perhaps we should expand our conception of practical reason to make room for clarificatory reflection about the ends of action.[32]

As for John McDowell, we saw in the last chapter his view of practical reason. He agrees that it is really a mode of *reason* (though neither reason nor practical reason are "objective" in the sense that they can hope for a sideways-on view of ourselves or a truly universal "view from nowhere" of the world). Furthermore, the judgments about what to do in this or that particular situation are inseparable from the overall "moral outlook" by which one lives and reflects upon the all-important question of "Character Ethics": "How should one live?"[33] Ethical reflection is *reflection* about *practice* – ethical reflection simply is practical reasoning.

Wallace and McDowell both help us to see the importance of identifying our human telos, which will be explored in a later chapter. As Hursthouse puts it:

> These aspects coalesce in the description of the practically wise as those who understand what is truly worthwhile, truly important, and thereby truly advantageous in life, who know, in short, how to live well. In the Aristotelian "eudaimonist" tradition, this is expressed in the claim that they have a true grasp of eudaimonia.[34]

III. Is Practical Reason Intersubjective/Culturally Relative, like Etiquette?

> I do not presume to have achieved anything in the neighborhood of a demonstration of MacIntyre's, or even of a broadly MacIntyrean, naturalism. I have tried only to show what an Aristotelian naturalism, which takes human nature as normative (such that to be morally good isto perfect one's nature), would need to say; and to show that, among the main forms of "updated" Aristotelian naturalism on offer, something along the lines articulated by MacIntyre comes closest to saying it. Although I have tried to anticipate and turn aside some important objections, whether the MacIntyrean sort of naturalism is acceptable ultimately depends on answers to

32. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 6.
33. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.
34. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," sec. 2.

> some rather large questions involvingthe nature of rationality (for example, whether it is tradition-constitutedin something like the way MacIntyre says).[35]

How do we keep reason objective but liberal, plural but not anarchic?

Although it seems that practical reason is universal and objective like logic; it is intersubjective like logic; nevertheless, it is objective; it can be universal across cultures and traditions. McDowell helps us to see that practical *reason is a form of reason.* The objectivity of one stands or falls with the objectivity of the other.

Consider a quotion from R. Jay Wallace explaining the distinct approach of constructivism about practical reason:

> constructivism (Korsgaard 1997, Street 2008, Street 2010). This approach denies that practical reason is a capacity for reflection about an objective domain of independent normative facts; but it equally rejects the expressivist's naturalistic suspicion of normativity. According to the constructivist, practical reason is governed by genuine normative constraints, but what makes these constraints normative is precisely their relation to the will of the agents whose decisions they govern. The principles of practical reason are constitutive principles of rational agency, binding on us insofar as we necessarily commit ourselves to complying with them in willing anything at all. The realm of the normative, on this approach, is not pictured as a body of truths or facts that are prior to and independent of the will; rather, it is taken to be 'constructed' by agents through their own volitional activity.[36]

MacIntyre's theory may be considered a kind of cultural constructivism. This poses for us the question of %

Relativity Criterion. Is practical rationality culturally relative? In other worse, although there is one human nature, expressed variously in different cultures, languages, customs, and thoughts – are we forced to give up on the idea of *one human rationality*, albeit expressed variously? Is there, at bottom, a plurality of *rationalities*?

Practical reason is supposed by some to resolve possible worries about cultural relativism with regard to virtue.

35. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 248.
36. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 2.

2. It seems to not be objective because it arises only in community.

Tradition-constituted rationality was supposed to explain why practices can vary between people and traditions that both claim to be rational and believe the rival to be irrational; the process of switching between traditions explains, from within a tradition, one can rationally adjudicate these disagreements. This is why *practical rationality* is so important for MacIntyre's theory of *virtue.*[37]

Nevertheless, worries about relativism may linger. For MacIntyre, virtues are relative to practices; practices are relative to traditions; traditions are relative to conceptions of rationality. His answer to this worry is, I believe, the crux of his whole theory of ethics. It appeals to two concepts that are, for him, intimately bound up with each other. The two concepts are practical reason and human nature. *Dependent Rational Animals* is the capstone to address lingering worries about relativism.

MacIntyre on Tradition-Constituted Reason

To solve the problem at the center of this labrynth, we shall turn to MacIntyre. Arguably, the primary theme of MacIntyre's work has not been virtue but practical rationality.[38] For MacIntyre – as for Bernard Williams[39] – morality should not be seen as a special domain of practical life but the whole practical domain.[40] But 'rationality' is something we are raised in, and is constituted by our tradition.

As we saw above, one of MacIntyre's enduring themes is that we all inhabit a "tradition." The concept is liable to fatal misunderstanding. I should be cutting off the Hydra's immortal head if I were to explain it here. What does it mean to assert that "we all inhabit a tradition"? Most

37. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* treat rationality as the ground of ethical reasoning, while *After Virtue* and *Dependent Rational Animals* treat ethical reasoning as practical reasoning.

38. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 60.

39. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* Chater 1.

40. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* treat rationality as the ground of ethical reasoning, while *After Virtue* and *Dependent Rational Animals* treat ethical reasoning as practical reasoning.

trivially, it means each of us are embodied, live in a time, place, and social setting, and speak a given language.

More interestingly, it means that each of us (intellectuals at least) owe our conceptual resources to a tradition. What is a tradition? "A living tradition . . . is an historically extended, socially embodied argument…"[41]. The content of a tradition is partly self-reflexive: it is "… an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition." Traditions derive from a source text and continue across generations via normal sociological channels (schools, friendships, political institutions, etc.). So, by MacIntyre's lights, history-writing is a tradition. It is rooted in source texts such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Gibbon and extending through Europe and the western world, consisting of a series of historical and historiographical arguments over not just "what happened" but how to conduct historical enquiry.

As MacIntyre says, "We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of enquiry, extending the history of that enquiry into the present …"[42] The tradition of enquiry we inhabit gives us not only abstract standards of reasoning but also facts, connections, concepts, and the very language we speak. Rationality, for MacIntyre, is inclusive of all the resources by which we judge true and false. Rationality itself as tradition-constituted and tradition-constituting. The resources I receive from my tradition are resources I may prune, discard, modify, or add to. What tradition we are a part of makes a great deal of difference to how we conduct moral inquiry.

Tradition and rationality are bound up together. He discovered this partially through his study of ethics. As a young philosopher, he was troubled about emotivism in particular and modern metaethics in general. Emotivists, intuitionists, naturalists, and error theorists all seemed to assume that moral terms are *referential.* If moral terms within moral judgments are supposed to pick out

41. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.
42. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 401.

a property in the world, then either we must identify that property or (if we cannot) conclude that moral terms are literally meaningless. He argued that this assumption is a mistake. Instead, he concluded that the significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action."[43] Instead of referring (or failing to refer) to a special 'moral property', all evaluative reasoning is practical reasoning. We employ moral judgments when we must evaluate something or when we must reason about what to do. Moral reasoning is not a special, mystical discipline divorced from prudential, instrumental, and other kinds of practical reasoning. Hence, there can be no adequate theory of ethics apart from a theory of (practical) rationality.

In regards to relativism, tradition-constituted rationality was supposed to explain why practices can vary between people and traditions that both claim to be rational and believe the rival to be irrational; the process of switching between traditions explains, from within a tradition, one can rationally adjudicate these disagreements. This is why *practical rationality* is so important for MacIntyre's theory of *virtue.* For MacIntyre, virtues are relative to practices; practices are relative to traditions; traditions are relative to conceptions of rationality. His answer to this worry is, I believe, the crux of his whole theory of ethics.

Rival traditions, rival rationalities

By presenting rationality and tradition as almost the same concept, MacIntyre both elevates the concept of tradition and threatens the concept of rationality. Since traditions vary, is there any way to avoid the conclusion that rationalities vary – and do so without hope of reconciliation?

MacIntyre's answer is that we can rationally adjudicate between traditions (from within a tradition). We can justify or "switch" from our primary tradition. The means we have of "switching" traditions are these: first, one undergoes an epistemological crisis in which one identifies the inadequacies of a primary tradition; and secondly, to "exercise… a capacity for philosophical imag-

43. Murphy, 118, quoting MacIntyre's master's thesis *The Significance of Moral Judgments* p. 73.

ination"[44] and identify the resources of a rival tradition. We must empathetically engage with our rivals as if we are learning a "second first language." He says:

> For each of us, therefore, the question now is: To what issues does that particular history bring us in contemporary debate? What resources does our particular tradition afford in this situation? Can we by means of those resources understand the achievements and successes, and the failures and sterilities, of rival traditions more adequately than their own adherents can? More adequately by our own standards? More adequately also by theirs? It is insofar as the histories narrated in this book lead on to answers to these questions that they also hold promise of answering the questions: Whose justice? Which rationality?"[45]

Three rival versions

MacIntyre picks up the theme of tradition-constituted rationality. His most thorough treatment of the theme of rival traditions is the (1990) Gifford Lectures.[46] There he presents 'genealogy,' 'encyclopedia', and a third version he simply calls 'tradition' but I will call 'Thomism.' These three rivals are defined by their respective attitudes toward the past. Genealogists (such as Nietzsche and Foucault) use the past to subvert and "debunk" the present. Stephen Lutz summarizes the three uses the "Nietzschean research program" has for history:

> (1) to reduce academic history to a projection of the concerns of modern historians, (2) to dissipate the identity of the historian into a collection of inherited cultural influences, and (3) to undermine the notion of "progress towards truth and reason" (3RV, pp. 49-50). In short, genealogy denies the teleology of human enquiry by denying (1) that historical enquiry has been fruitful, (2) that the enquiring person has a real identity, and (3) that enquiry has a real goal. MacIntyre finds this mode of enquiry incoherent.[47]

44. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* .
45. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 402.
46. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).
47. Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre."

By contrast, encyclopedists use the present to denigrate and "debunk" the past. The encyclopedist par excellence is the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, about which one reviewer said:

> The *Britannica* represents the idea of an impersonal, universal, tradition-free conception of rational enquiry into morals, telling a story of the progress of reason in philosophy and the sciences through an appeal to timeless, universal principles of rationality. The encyclopedic tradition holds moral enquiry to be about an autonomous, distinct realm of human life, which can and must be understood solely in its own terms.

Genealogists think, in advance, that no one in the future will use the present as a foundation.Encyclopedists think, in advance, that no one in the future will ever be able to transcend the present; they think we have *arrived*. Now, modernity is an encyclopedic tradition. It was the tradition MacIntyre was raised in. It is the tradition I was raised in, as (I presume) were my readers. So, by MacIntyre's lights, we are "encyclopedists." Our source texts are Hume, Kant, Newton, Locke, and others. Ours is an argument extended through time and socially embedded in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and parts of western Europe.[48]

MacIntyre followed his own advice. As a member of the modern tradition, he reflected on it. He gradually discovered its inadequacies and searched for resources from his rivals. His attempt to trace the root of the mistake about moral judgments lead him to a mistake at the heart of Enlightenment modernity. As a social, political, and moral project, the Enlightenment has been, MacIntyre argues, a failure by its own standards. Not only is moral discourse largely devoted to moral disagreement, but it is largely soaked in despair of ever reaching agreement. Moral discourse with its interminable moral disagreement retains the rhetorical *trappings* of rationality and objectivity while denying rationality and objectivity. Neither side wants to give up the *appearance* of

48. Modernity has political, scientific, religious, and philosophical aspects; it is indeed *encyclopedic*. The intellectual tradition of modernity arises alongside the rise of the modern state. We do well to remember that almost all the luminaries of Enlightenment philosophy also wrote on politics: Mill's ethical writings are almost always written with an eye to reforming civil law; Kant wrote the three *Critiques* but also the *Perpetual Peace*; John Locke wrote about perception and understanding but also treatises on government.

having a dialectical case for its value theory. One of his most memorable and oft-cited images compares modern moral discourse to the hypothetical state of scientific discourse in a post-apocalyptic catastrophe. Only decaying fragments of intelligible moral discourse survive.[49] The picture here captures the state of moral discourse. But an obvious symptom of the decay of moral discourse and social unity is interminable ethical disagreement.[50] An explanation of this disagreement is that we are trying to get by using the scraps of a previous and whole moral tradition. MacIntyre thinks this version of rational enquiry, like genealogy, incoherent by its own standards. Nevertheless "it still exercises an extraordinary influence on contemporary thought and on university curricula."[51] The problem with modernity is not merely academic. The social and political fabric is woven from the thread of morality, so many of the ills of modern life can be traced to our inability to share a substantive conception of the good and the good life.

There are many modern philosophers who have gone into similar crises and become distrustful thought, language, and rationality itself; they join the "masters of suspicion."[52] MacIntyre took a surprising course. Moved by Thomas Kuhn's influential work on the structure of revolution

49. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1: "Imagine that the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe…Widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all that they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance… all these fragments are reembodied in a set of practices which go under the revived names of physics, chemistry and biology. Adults argue with each other about the respective merits of relativity theory, evolutionary theory and phlogiston theory, although they possess only a very partial knowledge of each. Children learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid. Nobody, or almost nobody, realizes that what they are doing is not natural science in any proper sense at all."

50. Ibid., 6.

51. Terry Pinkard, "Review of Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry, by Alasdair MacIntyre," *Ethics* 102, no. 1 (1991): 162–64.

52. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. D (Savage (Yale University Press, 1970). "Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzche, and Freud."

between various paradigms in the natural sciences[53] he speculated that a similar structure might obtain in moral revolutions?[54] This in turn lead MacIntyre to recover the tradition of virtues. But virtues are not free-floating moral concepts; they are embedded in a specific, living, moral tradition – the Aristotelian tradition. And the Aristotelian tradition includes a particular notion of practical rationality.

Is tradition-constituted rationality coherent?

First, is MacIntyre's concept of tradition-constituted rationality even coherent? Suppose some traditions are truly incommensurable to each other, and that MacIntyre himself is truly situated within a tradition. It follows it is not possible to write a book (like *After Virtue*?) from a universal, objective, view-from-nowhere. But MacIntyre wrote such books and defending such theories. This amounts to a performative contradiction.

MacIntyre would have us believe that 'rationality' is not a disembodied set of timeless and universal procedures of thinking. My rationality includes whatever standards of reasoning I accept, and all the other resources (facts, authorities, memories) I use to judge true and false. I already responded to worries presented above about whether rationalities are ultimately incommensurable. The fact that people can, and do, identify inconsistencies with their own tradition, identify the resources of rival traditions, and switch traditions.

Even after clarifying MacIntyre's optimism about the possibility of ethical truth, his answer to relativism is sufficient but still somehow indeterminate. This indeterminacy is partly due, as I have suggested, to his appeal to practical rationality. While this appeal seems to me to solve some problems, there is one lingering problem it does not solve. From my perspective (or my tradition),

53. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1975).

54. His 1977 essay on epistemological crises was his own version of Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – we might call this essay MacIntyre's "Structure of Ethical Revolutions". Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist*, 1977, 453–72

every legitimate tradition affirms the law of non-contradiction. But that is just to say that if Walt Whitman or Nagarjuna denies the law of non contradiction, then I will necessarily judge them to be irrational.[55] But I wish to go further and say that this strand of Buddhism *really is irrational*. That is, I wish to affirm that they are irrational – full stop. I am not sure MacIntyre's theory allows me to affirm that. Unless I am missing something crucial here, this seems to me a limitation of the theory.

Perhaps a qualified acceptance of MacIntyre's claim about tradition-constituted rationality is that when a tradition does not *seem* share this standard of rationality (the value of logical consistency) I should not be too quick to judge that I have really understood their meaning. Perhaps when I ask them if they affirm (S is P and S is not P) they have a slightly different concept in mind for "not" or for "and." Or perhaps they are speaking of an entity instantiating a property and not instantiating that same property at the same time but in ever so slightly different respects. Walt Whitman may be saying he contradicts himself in ever so slightly different respects in order to grasp apparently paradoxical truths that can be predicated of a transcendental modern man. Or perhaps they are denying both P and not P in favor of some other, different articulation of the predicates a given subject instantiates. In the case of any of these alternatives, the principle of charity recommends I extend my interlocutor the benefit of the doubt before concluding that the appearance of irrationality reflects real irrationality.

Is tradition-constituted rationality clear?

Even if his concept is coherent, is it *clear* enough to be an indispensable feature of an ethical theory? What constitutes a tradition? MacIntyre's examples sometimes lead us to believe that a tradition

55. Laurence R. Horn, "Contradiction," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2014, 2014. "Do I contradict myself? / Very well, then, I contradict myself. / (I am large, I contain multitudes.) (Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself');"Everything is real and not real. / Both real and not real. / Neither real nor not real. / That is Lord Buddha's teaching." (Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā 18:8), quoted in Garfield (1995: 102).

can be anything from a religion (Judaism) to a discipline (moral inquiry) to a philosophical school (Thomism).

What exactly is a tradition? MacIntyre's account is not clear. John Haldane (among others) questions MacIntyre's ability coherently to identify what a tradition is. What is tradition A? How do we differentiate it from B? Are two traditions separate and hence identifiable only if they are *incommensurable*? How much difference constitutes separation? How much overlap is compatible with difference? Jewish and Christian traditions share a common origin and bear considerable overlap in authorities, scriptures, and doctrines.

MacIntyre's definition makes answering these questions difficult. He characterizes a tradition as "separate and unified when its members or texts have a core set of shared commitments to beliefs, when the tradition is situated in a particular context in a particular set of institutions and when the tradition has an identifiable linguistic difference when compared to other traditions."[56] But is there any universal procedure for identifying such linguistic and institutional differences?

The right response to this call for clarification, I think, comes from Weinstein. We should not expect, by MacIntyre's lights, that there is an automatically objective, view-from-nowhere by which we can define tradition itself. Rather, MacIntyre concludes that "the concept of a tradition, together with the criteria for its use and application, is itself one developed from within one particular tradition-based standpoint. This does not preclude its application to the very tradition within which it was developed."[57] MacIntyre grants that his self-definition of his own tradition arises, in part, from his criteria of that tradition. Traditions change over time. They progress (according to their own unchanging standards) toward unchanging goals or else they abandon old standards. This is liable to frustrate some readers. But the alternative is worse. The alternative is a denial of pluralism that liberalism holds dear. For it is intellectual imperialism to assume that I have the *real* scoop on every other tradition. It assumes I have the right to define and critique all other traditions

56. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 83.

57. John Horton and Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 295.

in my own terms. Even though MacIntyre thinks his own tradition correct, and others incorrect, this is not imperialistic. For he is willing to reflect on his own tradition, examine its resources and inadequacies, and engage through philosophical imagination with rivals.

In short, by MacIntyre's lights he does not need a definition of tradition that is any more cut and dry than it is. Forcefully to disagree with this conclusion requires his interlocutor to produce an alternative theory of practical rationality. But that alternative will either aim to be *not* tradition-constituted but universal (which is the encyclopedic tradition) or it will admit is tradition-constituted but the "best so far" (which is MacIntyre's own view).

We can think of this worry about MacIntyre's theory more generally as a problem of thinking about thinking. MacIntyre is a theorist of virtue and practical rationality. Hence rationally to assess his theory requires thinking through our own theory of rationality. The errors we make in *thinking things through* are not likely to be solved by *thinking them through*. The Greek proverb is: "If water chokes us, what shall we drink?" The Latin proverb (from a very different context) is "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" — who will guard the guards themselves? I believe the answer to the rhetorical question is *no one at all* can guard the guards; if water chokes us, there is *nothing at all we can drink to wash it down*. Likewise, if something is deeply wrong with the way we think, how can theorizing about rationality right the wrong?

Some of the errors MacIntyre diagnoses in thinkers who belong to encyclopedic tradition will be invisible to those thinkers unless they themselves earnestly examine the problems of the tradition. Even if MacIntyre's diagnosis is *correct* – especially if it is correct – the readers who especially need to hear it will find the diagnosis unintelligible, even irrational. Insofar as the "patient" finds any parts of his theory intelligible, they will seem radical, disastrous in their social implications, and destructive of the very nature and purpose of education. The reason these appearances will be insuperable to MacIntyre's patient is because the patient is, by his lights, self-deceived. He or she simply denies being part of a tradition, and hence denies having a particular (rather than universal) tradition-bound conception of rationality, and hence denies having a particular, tradition-

bound conception of the good (perhaps the good is unbounded freedom to follow the moral law, or to pursue happiness,, and justice unfettered equality). Modernity is the "tradition-less tradition" and hence *must* deny tradition to be consistent with itself.

The solution to this paradox is not to browbeat people into admitting that they inhabit a tradition. Rather, he directs the arguments (of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) and others at interlocutors who are already undergoing epistemological crisis. This "patient" comes to MacIntyre with manifesting symptoms. MacIntyre offers one possible diagnosis, and the patient's job is to investigate further. The patient needs philosophical imagination to even *consider* the possibility of another truth. The patient needs patience, intellectual courage, and self-reflection. The patient needs to sit in front of the proverbial mirror and mouth the words, (a) "I am part of a tradition" and (b) "my tradition might be inadequate," and (c) "that other tradition might have the resources more adequately to address the intellectual and practical problems that I now see are insuperable to my tradition." The critic who would escape the battery is more likely to flee rather than engage; but the critic who would escape by engaging and overcoming is liable to meet her match.

Is tradition-constituted rationality relativistic?

Once the concept of tradition is clarified, how can MacIntyre avoid the charge of relativism at this level? According to MacIntyre's account, members of traditions can leave their primary tradition after undergoing an epistemological crisis. Remember that varying traditions can disagree about a proposition P. Perhaps tradition A finds P true and B finds it false, on best evidence and sufficient reflection. But incommensurable traditions disagree about the standards (say, S1 and S2) by which to judge the truth and even the rationality of other traditions. So A finds P true and rational (by S1) while B finds P false and irrational (by S2). They genuinely disagree. And A judges B to be irrational (since they deny that P) while B returns the favor (since A affirms that P).

Let's put these abstractions into an example. Consider Annabelle. Annabelle is a member of tradition A. Suppose that by A's standards of rationality, S1 contradictory propositions cannot

both be true in the same sense. And suppose that A teaches that P. Finally, suppose that P entails both (Q and ~Q). Annabelle discovers a problem with her tradition. She cannot deny P nor can she affirm the contradiction. After some searching about, she concludes she cannot solve the problem and cannot even discover the rational resources with which to solve them. Being passingly familiar with tradition B, she becomes curious why her friends who belong to that tradition deny P and exercises her philosophical imagination to begin to see B "from within." Tradition B is compelling, since it denies that P. She "converts" traditions. However, there is a problem with tradition B, and that is that the standard of rationality of B (S2) allows its adherents to affirm a contradiction. So now, even though Annabelle left A to avoid having to affirm a contradiction (by her standard of rationality S1) now that she has joined B she no longer sees it as irrational to affirm the contradiction (by her new standard of rationality S2). This is surely an odd conclusion.

A second variation on the same problem is this: how would a born-and-raised member of tradition B, affirming S2, ever come to epistemological crisis? Discontentment with contradictions is not available to B members *ex hypothesi*. They do not see affirming a contradiction as irrational. Their tradition can bear a hundred instances of (Q and ~Q).

The odd conclusion of this thought experiment is a dilemma: either such nonsense is possible, or embracing the law of non-contradiction is a universal standard of rationality in every tradition. The latter option seems to indicate that traditions A and B are *not* actually incommensurable, since they share one rather substantial presupposition. The flow of members from one to the other is intelligible. The former option allows A and B to be incommensurable, but seems to freeze members in their own tradition. Members of A would have no (rational) justification for joining B, while members of B would have no (rational) justification for leaving B. So either all traditions are the same (in which case MacIntyre's definition is unclear) or some people are in principle locked in their own tradition (in which case one kind of relativism is final).

While "tradition" and "tradition-constituted rationality" were supposed to solve the conundrums MacIntyre faced, the cure may have been worse than the disease.

MacIntyre's denial of relativism boils down to two claims: the first is that even enquirers situated within a tradition can achieve *truth*, because truth is distinct from *rationality*; the second claim, which is related, is that enquirers can overcome the rational limitations of their tradition.

MacIntyre accepts – indeed, argues for – a certain truth within relativism. That truth is that every enquirer seeks the conclusion of the enquiry at a particular time and place, within a particular social setting, within a language, and within a tradition. Following Lutz, we can say that MacIntyre accepts "relativity". Relativity (a term borrowed from Michael Krausz[58]) is a thesis about *the condition of enquiry.* It is not a thesis about the *conclusion of enquiry.* Lutz approves of Mark Colby's statement that "argumentative situatedness is inescapable."[59] However such relative situatedness is compatible with objective or absolute or mind-independent or tradition-independent *truth*.

Returning to Rorty's claim, we can say that MacIntyre agrees that "nothing can be said about… rationality" except what is taken as rational in a given society and tradition; where he disagrees is in equating rationality with *truth.* From the historically- and socially-situated position of enquiry, a philosopher (he argues) may indeed find truth. It is impossible to achieve objective or absolute or tradition-independent *rationality* but it is possible – indeed, it is the hope and telos of enquiry – to achieve objective *truth.* This may seem a paradox.

The primary kind of truth we seek in enquiry is "the adequation of the mind to reality."[60] This is the understanding of truth inherent in the Aristotelian tradition.[61] Aristotle says, "To say of

58. Michael Krausz, "Relativism and Foundationalism: Some Distinctions and Strategies," *The Monist*, 1984, 395–404.

59. Christopher Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Lexington Books, 2004), 89.

60. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1200 Q.16 and *De Veritate* Q.1, A.1-3. "Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus."

61. On the correspondence theory of truth, Marian David says: "The main positive argument given by advocates of the correspondence theory of truth is its obviousness. Descartes: 'I have never had any doubts about truth, because it seems a notion so transcendentally clear that nobody can be ignorant of it…the word "truth", in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object' (1639, AT II 597). Even philosophers whose overall views may well lead one to expect

what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."[62] Aquinas calls this the adequation of the intellect to the object.

However, 'truth' is ambiguous across at least two senses: a metaphysical, substantive sense and an epistemological, logical sense. The metaphysical sense of truth is simply reality. "Truth" is being itself. The logical sense of truth (which MacIntyre alludes to here) is the adequation of the intellect to those beings. Logical "truth" is knowing the (metaphysical) truth.[63]

If we understand MacIntyre to be arguing or assuming that (logical) truth is adequation of mind to reality, we can make sense of his endorsement of "relativity". Rationality is something more pragmatic than truth, something more like "warranted assertability."[64] That is, the theories we rationally construct are, for us, the "best theory so far."[65] It is no contradiction or paradox to assert that our rationality is the best thus far but that others in the future (or the past, or in rival traditions) might be *closer* to the truth.

The second point is that enquirers from within various traditions can (and often do) come to realize that their tradition is incoherent by its own standards and from this epistemological crisis come to find the resources of a rival tradition superior to their own; Aristotelian (and specifically Thomist) moral enquiry is, he argues, more rationally justified than encyclopedic or genealogical enquiry *by their standards* and *by its own standards*.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes (one iteration) of the charge of relativism. The truth can be known from within the confines of our tradition and perspective. This answer, of course, puts

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otherwise tend to agree. Kant: 'The nominal definition of truth, that it is the agreement of [a cognition] with its object, is assumed as granted' (1787, B82). William James: 'Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their "agreement", as falsity means their disagreement, with "reality" ' (1907, p. 96). Indeed, The Oxford English Dictionary tells us:"Truth, n. Conformity with fact; agreement with reality'".

62. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Metaphysics* 1011b25.

63. The third semantic sense of 'truth' would, naturally, be the accurate relation between the content of one's assertions and the beings about which one is making assertions. Semantic "truth" would be veridical statements about the metaphysical truth.

64. John Dewey, "Propositions, Warranted Assertibility, and Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1941, 169.

65. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

pressure on his definition of "tradition." We shall return to this concern below.

Another worry about relativism was this: Are there evil practices? If so, it seemed that MacIntyre's theory would allow "virtues" to serve wicked ends. The rebuttal to this charge depends on the unity of virtue.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre explicitly retracts his earlier belief that virtues exist without a unity under prudence.[66] The consequences of this retraction, Lutz argues, are crucial to refuting the charge of relativism. If virtues are unified, then even though virtues exist only in the context of practices, "no genuine practice can be inherently evil."[67] Rather, practical reason can judge *apparent goods* as genuine goods. The qualities needed for achieving the spurious goods internal to that "practice" would not be virtues but only *apparent virtues*.

Now, such a definition certainly seems ad hoc. But Lutz provides a persuasive illustration: eugenics. Eugenics certainly seems to bear the markings of a genuine practice. Its apparent good is the purification of the gene pool for future generations. However, genuine virtues militate *against* the achievement of that goal. For example, Lutz cites a story of a doctor who had the virtue of compassion found himself unable to pursue the program of euthanizing mentally-disabled children.[68] We might also recall Huck Finn's internal struggle with his "conscience" in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck decides to turn Jim in to the slave owners. He writes a letter outing Jim, and says: "I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now." Yet for all that, after vividly confronting Jim's humanity and goodness, he feels the loyalty of their friendship and wavers:

> It was a difficult situation. I picked up the letter, and held it in my hand. I was trembling, because I knew had to make a choice between two things, and the outcome of my decision would last forever. I thought about it a minute while I held my breath. And then I said to myself: "All right, then, I'll GO to hell"—and tore it up.[69]

66. Ibid. preface, p. x.
67. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 102.
68. Léon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate: The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe* (Schocken Books, 1979), 186–7.
69. Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Lathifa, 2014), Chapter 31.

The humor of this passage arises, in large part, because of the tension between the *apparent good* of treating Jim as legal property and the *actual good* of treating Jim as an end in himself, as a free man just like any other. Huck's virtue (in this case, loyalty or friendship) *cannot* be put to use in the service of a corrupting practice like slave-trading. Just as vice subverts institutions and their worthy practices, virtue "subverts" vicious institutions and unworthy practices. Virtue marks the difference between the coward who disobeys his commanding officer's orders because the obedience would put him at risk of painful death and the courageous person who disobeys his commanding officer's order because obedience would require wrongdoing. Without prudence to discriminate between the two cases, we lack any resources by which to discriminate courage and cowardice, between a virtuous resistance and vicious resistance.

Some might worry that the distinction between apparent goods and actual goods brings with it more problems than it solves. It is certainly a distinction that leaves many questions unanswered. My first reply is that such a distinction is inevitable and necessary in our practical reasoning. Assume for a reductio that "there is no real distinction between apparent and real goods." Then either *nothing* is "actually good" (everything that appears good is just an apparent good) or that *nothing* is "actually bad though it appears good" (everything that appears good is a real good). But I take it as axiomatic and irrefutable that some things are actually good (life, pleasure, happiness, friendship). And some things that appear good are not good: obeying unjust laws, enjoying the misfortune of an enemy, etc. Therefore there is a real distinction between apparent and real goods.

A second reply, however, requires conceding that MacIntyre's theory leaves us unsatisfied. That is, it might be that the unsatisfying aspects of his theory track those aspects of morality that are unsatisfying. The admitted indeterminacy of MacIntyre's account reflects the real indeterminacy of our moral lives. Consider two phenomena: some individuals and cultures persist in behaviors (that I believe) are wicked and unjustifiable – slavery, child prostitution, ritual human sacrifice, or what have you. It needs to be explained, from within my tradition, how it could be that otherwise decent and normal human beings could persist in such vileness. The other phenomena is this: some

individuals and cultures repent and change (what I believe are) their wicked ways. Some make moral progress. The paradox is that while we cannot expect magical linear moral progression from wicked to good everywhere, neither can we despair of any person or culture making moral progress. It just seems a brute datum of observation that some are stubbornly stuck in their wicked ways, and some are admirably firm in their benevolent resolve. How do we explain this paradoxical phenomenon?

MacIntyre's account offers an explanation of why vices sometimes persist within pseudo-practices, institutions, and traditions from generation to generation; on the other hand, it explains why practice-enabling virtues sometimes emerge to disrupt a pseudo-practice, a wicked institution, and a corrupt or at least incomplete tradition. The fact is that "many kinds of activities can be, and in fact are considered to be, practices. Some of these may conflict radically, owing to errors and insufficiencies in rationality."[70] Errors in rationality explain errors in traditions and hence false ascriptions of the title 'virtue.' Rationality answers to truth, to the world as it is, not merely to the pragmatic truth to "dialectical success."[71] Hence, virtues answer to *what is really good*. They do not merely answer to "what-counts-as-good-for-us", which property is relative to each tradition.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes this iteration of the charge of relativism, while still explaining why rival traditions differ – and sometimes radically differ – in their evaluations and opinions. Incomplete traditions can, and do, undergo crisis. Particular persons within that tradition discover and asseverate on inadequacies within the tradition, leading to an epistemological crisis. In response, others within the same tradition may become willing to examine the resources of rival traditions and either quit their primary tradition or re-fashion it, re-make it, update it, and make real moral and intellectual progress.

70. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 103.
71. Ibid., 104.

A third reply is in order here. D'andrea[72] points out a critique Philippa Foot has leveled against MacIntyre: after all the informative and wide-ranging historical analysis, MacIntyre's account does not solve the "problem posed by Plato, and never solved … that of showing the rationality, for any man, of a thorough-going acceptance of the restraints of justice."[73] The challenge of a Nietzsche or Callicles or Thrasymachus lies in their acceptance that the good life for humans *requires* some virtues or requires virtue in some sense but their rejection of the "robust concept of justice with its corresponding constraints on action."[74]

One response is this: the question "why be moral?" is never asked in the abstract. For example, in describing the "self of the heroic age" MacIntyre says, "In heroic society there is no 'outside' except that of the stranger. A man who tried to withdraw himself from his given position in heroic society would be engaged in the enterprise of trying to make himself disappear."[75] Even though virtues in twenty-first century North America are not what the same as Homer's day, there is a parallel to be drawn.

Philosophers often ask "why be moral?" hypothetically. They ask it *as if* speaking on the skeptic's behalf, or as if *they* were skeptics. But hypothetical moral skeptics will not do. We must consider a concrete character, real or fictional. Once we look for a real or fictional skeptic, a problem arises. By MacIntyre's lights, sincere "why be moral?" skeptics are political or social outcasts. For millions of people who are full-fledged members of their tradition, the "why be moral?" question will not usually arise. Parents, teachers, religious leaders, politicians, businesses, and non-profit organizations all have a hand in giving each member of the community the tradition out of which the community arises and within which abstract philosophical or pseudo-philosophical worries such as "What does it all mean?" do not arise because they are satisfactorily answered.

72. Thomas D D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006).

73. Philippa Foot, "Review of After Virtue," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1981, 1 097. This is the "problem of immoralism" she tries to address in the final chapter of her *Natural Goodness*.

74. D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*, 430.

75. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 126.

By contrast, the emergence of the doubt as to whether one should be moral, and the crystallization of the doubt into an articulate challenge, is *a political failure*. The *polis* to which the moral skeptic belongs has failed him. The moral skeptic, likewise, has failed the *polis* which belongs to him or her. So MacIntyre's theory makes room for people who are not actually skeptical (to whom an answer to Foot's challenge is not required) and people who are actually skeptical but do not belong to their society (to whom an answer to Foot's challenge would be meaningless).

MacIntyre's theory makes room for one more group: moral skeptics *are* members of their own tradition but are seeing the problems within their own tradition and who are troubled by a "border tradition". This type of skeptic sees the resources of a rival tradition and compares such favorably with the resources of his own tradition. The skeptic is, in a word, entering epistemological crisis.

Specifically, it might be that the moral skeptic has been raised outside of the Aristotelian tradition and is noticing the inadequacies of his or her own tradition, and is entering epistemological crisis. MacIntyre's response is to invite him or her to do the hard work of resolving that crisis by examining, from within the context of a primary tradition *and* a "second first" tradition, the problems at hand and the available solutions, working toward an ever greater understanding of the truth.

In short, MacIntyre's theory gives an account of two contradictory phenomena. It explains how a moral skeptic might arise within a community and how that skeptic might be moved to a more adequate grasp of the truth; and it explains why, in healthy, unified, moral societies, *so few people become moral skeptics*. ### Tradition-constituted rationality objections

One family of objections pertain to the way MacIntyre's ethical theory appeals to tradition-constituted rationality. MacIntyre argues that we should return to the Aristotelian tradition of virtue and practical reason.

We must beware one misunderstanding. Any talk of "returning" is liable to sound nostalgic. At the risk of sounding paradoxical, we might put it this way: MacIntyre's positive ethical positions

are *traditional* but not *nostalgic.* In fact, his definition of tradition is *progressive*. Tradition is an ongoing, socially-embedded argument over time, which necessarily entails that moral enquiry is dynamic – even *modern*. To be traditional is not to be past-oriented; to be traditional is to be staunchly future-oriented, since the business of life is not only the pursuit of our telos but the transmission of everything valuable and precious to the next generation.

One critic who misunderstands MacIntyre along these lines is Martha Nussbaum.[76] She begins her review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* with an age-old dilemma between the social stability afforded by tradition (with its danger of hidebound error) and the social volatility endemic to critical reflection (with its opportunity of progress toward truth). She alludes to this dilemma as articulated by Aristotle:

> In the second book of the Politics, Aristotle asks whether it is a good thing to encourage changes in society. Should people be offered rewards for inventing some change in the traditional laws? No, he writes, because this would lead to instability and unnecessary tampering with what is working well. Should we, on the other hand, listen to those who wish to keep ancestral traditions fixed and immune from criticism? No again—for if we reason well we can make progress in lawmaking, just as we do in other arts and sciences.[77]

Aristotle's solution is that it should be *hard but not impossible* to change societal structures. Of course, we don't have to pick just one or the other. But one necessary feature of every society is a particular level of difficulty in making social changes. Should one err on the side of difficulty or ease?

Putting it starkly, of the two it is better to gamble for progress toward truth at the risk of instability than to gamble for stability at the risk hidebound error.

Secondly, tradition is not rival to reason and critical reflection. Rather, one learns to reason – to critically reflect – within a MacIntyrean tradition. It is a truism that one learns one's first language within a culture. But it is equally true that one learns facts and methods of reasoning

76. Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason," *The New York Review of Books* 36, no. 19 (1989): 36–41.

77. Ibid.

within a tradition, conceived as a community of thinkers who share not only a common tongue but common concepts and a repertoire of facts, beliefs, customs, etc.

So, rather than tradition being opposed to reason, tradition is the first source of our reasoning. And rather than tradition being opposed to critical reflection, tradition is the first source of the habit of critically reflecting. The very ability to expand the repertoire of facts or modify the methods of thinking depends upon the awareness that one inhabits a tradition. This awareness MacIntyre even elevates to the level of a virtue, saying it is "one whose importance is perhaps most obvious when it is least present." What is that virtue?

> the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one. This virtue is not to be confused with any form of conservative antiquarianism; I am not praising those who choose the conventional conservative role of *laudator temporis act*. It is rather the case that an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present. Living traditions, just because they continue a not-yet-completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past.[78]

Strangely, Nussbaum takes MacIntyre to be reversing Aristotle's balance. She thinks MacIntyre is urging for betting on social stability even if it means sticking closer to existing tradition (and hence surpassing or intentionally avoiding critical reflection) than is compatible with unfettered progress.

This is not an objection to MacIntyre — it is a misreading. MacIntyre explicitly rejects any kind of conservative traditionalism that amounts to fideistic belief in the rightness of one's own traidtion. Indeed, he anticipates this misreading of his theory. He says:

> We are apt to be misled here by the ideological uses to which the concept of a tradition has been put by conservative political theorists. Characteristically such theorists have followed Burke in contrasting tradition with reason and the stability of tradition with conflict. Both contrasts obfuscate.[79]

In short, tradition cannot be a name for the impulse to resist change or to fear political tension

78. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.
79. Ibid., 222.

and turmoil. Quite the contrary: political tensions of a particular character and expression are intrinsic to MacIntyre tradition. As he defines tradition, the internal conflict about the "goods which constitute that tradition" is a necessary feature.

A more plausible interpretation of MacIntyre is to side with Aristotle that the risk of complacent error is greater than the risk of instability. For hidebound error is likely to perpetuate itself across generations, while the instability arising from a cacophony of disagreement is likely to be short-lived.

Nussbaum does not see that MacIntyre's proposed solution is not a sort of *anti-progressive* longing for the past. It is radically progressive. His solution is not to reverse progress but to replace the Enlightenment's standard of progress with a more tenable alternative. Ironically, it appears to me that Nussbaum is too conservative in her defense of the Enlightenment's standard of progress; MacIntyre is the progressive here. Rather than accusing MacIntyre of being too conservative, Nussbaum should focus on his critique of the Enlightenment. MacIntyre's critique may be wrong, but it is with that critique that she should take issue. She should not accuse him of failing to "make progress… [in] arts and sciences" but of "tampering with what is working well." MacIntyre's theory of rationality may be wrong, but it is not wrong along the lines that Nussbaum attacks.

Criticizing 'tradition' or defending 'tradition' is almost always ill-advised for the simple reason that 'tradition' says different things. While Enlightenment thinkers used 'tradition' as a catch-all word for people who disagreed with them, the Enlightenment tradition itself represents a commitment to experimentation, thinking for oneself, natural science, adn so on. The practice of using experiment to test the theories of physical science is a tradition of scientists and "natural philosophers", dating back at least to the 13th century: "From this objection — should you care to try / You can be set free by experiment / Which is the source for the rivers of your arts."[80]

80. Dante, *Paradiso* Canto II, lines 94-96

Chapter 7

Wisdom: Excellent Practical Reasoning

"It is evident that it is impossible to be practically wise without being good."

–Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a, 36–37.

"I have given you the power of choice, and you only alternate / Between futile speculation and unconsidered action."

– T. S. Eliot, *The Rock*

I. Introduction

I have tried to show above the close connection of human nature to human excellence – the connection of form to function. We *are* practical, rational animals by nature. The practical wise among us are *excellent* human beings.

The virtue of practical reason is, not surprisingly, practical wisdom*. Yet practical wisdom is strange and likely to be misunderstand: it is both theoretical (aiming at knowing what's true) and practical (aiming at what to do). To co-opt a phrase from Alan Gibbard:*[1] *our activity of practical reasoning is "thinking how to live."*[2] *So practical wisdom is knowing how to live, and* really

1. I'm not sure Gibbard would appreciate my use of the phrase.

2. Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*. I take the activity of thinking what to do in a far more realist direction than Gibbard. However, I have noticed with pleasure that Gibbard himself has

knowing* it. Stated this way, it is easy to see why some have argued that practical wisdom is the *only* virtue. If one knows exactly how to live, in each circumstance, in each challenge, according to proper reasons, and for proper motives, what more to virtue could there be? Maggie Little[3] argues that virtue is a species of knowledge; John McDowell[4] argues something similar.* So why bother dividing up various virtues?

I do not think Aristotle himself was perfectly clear on this point. Though he divides up intellectual virtues into prudence, science, intellect, judgment, understanding, deliberation, and so on (Greek: phronesis, sophia, nous, gnome, sunesis, eubolia respectively), and though he says that prudence (knowledge about changing particulars) is inferior to wisdom (science about unchanging universals), nevertheless he says the absence of prudence ruins all other aspiring virtues.[5]

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Our human nature as dependent practical reasoners demonstrates why prudence or *phronesis* is the master virtue. For *Phronesis* complements every other moral virtue. MacIntyre defends Aristotle's conception of the practical syllogism. For example, *I ought to do (the courageous thing of) resisting a student's attempt to bribe me for a higher grade. This student is attempting to bribe me for a higher grade. Therefore, in this case, I ought to do (the courageous thing of) resisting this student's attempt to bribe me.* The major premise here is an evaluative judgment about a virtue or action-type; the minor premise is a factuaion judgment about a situation or action-token; the conclusion is a *maxim*. It is a judgment but not merely a judgment; it is *an action*. Each piece of the practical

become more open to realism in the recent years. He asks us to suppose that "normative realists are right about how normative concepts act" (xii), and only wishes to establish the possibility of the truth of his hypothesis that "the meaning of this phrase 'the thing to do' is explained expressionistically: if I assert 'Fleeing is the thing to do', I thereby express a state of mind, deciding to flee." (8) He says he is a "naturalist about humanity, about human thinking and planning, but in a sense I end up a non-naturalist about *oughts*. Much of what non-naturalists say is right, I conclude—but this needn't be mysterious to any naturalist." (xii).

3. Little, "Virtue as Knowledge."
4. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason."
5. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* NE, VI.

syllogism is needed for the whole to function in practice. For without moral virtues, prudence may be knowledge of what one ought to do but it does not entail that one is in the habit of actually doing it. And, more crucially, without prudence, the moral virtues are simply skills – skills that might be serviceable to bad ends. Without prudence, one might be skilled in achieving *what is not to be done*.

The mastery of prudence over other virtues also unifies the other virtues. *Dependent Rational Animals* supplies a necessary unifying base for MacIntyre's virtue theory in three ways: it unifies intellectual and moral virtues, unifies various moral virtues, and unifies the various stages of the narrative of *human* life.

Is practical wisdom a moral virtue or intellectual virtue?

The one indisputable virtue is practical wisdom. Everyone has reason to be wise. And if one is not wise at present, if one lacks wisdom in some respect, the reason to be wise entails a reason to *become* wise. Not everyone has reason to become an "academic" – god forbid!

A fourth, and potentially confusing, reason is that practical wisdom is both a "moral virtue" and an "intellectual virtue". As Foot points out, out of the four Greek cardinal virtues (moderation, courage, justice, practical wisdom) only justice is obviously "moral" in our usual sense of "other-regarding" traits. Moderation, courage, and practical wisdom more smoothly fit into the "self-regarding" category; practical wisdom fits most smoothly of all into the category of virtues of mind. While there is a growing branch of intellectual virtue ethics within the budding virtue ethics tree, practical wisdom seems to partake of both qualities. The dual nature of practical wisdom is likely to be even easier to misunderstand than other traditional virtues.

Furthermore, practical wisdom is both an intellectual and moral virtue; it is admirable as a means to further virtues and other kinds of goods but also admirable in and of itself; an essential part of other moral virtues and a gateway to other intellectual virtues.

As Rosalind Hursthouse says:

> Aristotle makes a number of specific remarks about phronesis that are the subject of much scholarly debate, but the (related) modern concept is best understood by thinking of what the virtuous morally mature adult has that nice children, including nice adolescents, lack. Both the virtuous adult and the nice child have good intentions, but the child is much more prone to mess things up because he is ignorant of what he needs to know in order to do what he intends.[6]

Practical wisdom is not easy to characterize. But Hursthouse's contrast between "nice children" and adults highlights the intuitive point that practical wisdom depends, in some respect, on time. She continues:

> Amongst the morally relevant features of a situation may be the likely consequences, for the people involved, of a certain action, and this is something that adolescents are notoriously clueless about precisely because they are inexperienced. It is part of practical wisdom to be wise about human beings and human life. (It should go without saying that the virtuous are mindful of the consequences of possible actions. How could they fail to be reckless, thoughtless and short-sighted if they were not?)[7]

Even though this process of reasoning is not as clear as might be hoped, it is clear enough to defend. The lack of clarity in the account is simply a reflection of the lack of clarity in humanity and our moral lives.

The equation between moral and intellectual excellence is not obvious for us. The notion that morality has to do with absolute verdicts is not obvious to Aristotle — nor to contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists.

Kant admits the apparent inconsistency in radically dividing speculative or theoretical reason from practical reason: >Here first is explained the enigma of the critical philosophy, viz. :how we deny objective reality to the supersensible use of the categories in speculation and yet admit this reality with respect to the objects of pure practical reason. This must at first seem inconsistent as long as this practical use is only nominally known.[8]

6. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," sec. 2.

7. Ibid., sec. 2.

8. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S Pluhar (Hackett Publishing, 2002).

Is practical wisdom the only virtue?

Although it seems that there are no other virtues because all virtue is knowledge, there are other virtues related to other cognitive and affective features of human nature, each of which, nevertheless, depends on and enhances practical reason.

McDowell already began this account by arguing that virtues are perceptual capacities that helps us pick out – from the blooming, buzzing confusion – morally salient facts. Knowledge is not the *only* virtue. Habits moderating pleasure or spending can be "programmed" into our psychological such that they are practiced without conscious thought. But knowledge is a necessary part, for most people, of discovering which habits are worth acquiring and going about acquiring them.

A third reason is, also alluded to, is that practical wisdom provides a needed corrective not only to folly but even to the possible excesses or misapplications of other virtues. The negative version of the same reason is the intuitive claim that (practical) folly has the potential to ruin otherwise admirable lives.

II. What is the Worth of Practical Reason? Objective and Natural

The good is true but even first we pursue truth because it is good. Truth is valuable. We pursue truth because it is good. We do not pursue goodness because it is true.

Is practical reason subjective or expressivistic, like taste?

Can moral reasons satisfy the "practical requirement" with regard to morality? Expressivism is motivated in large part by the attempt to satisfy the *practical* dimension of practical reason (at the cost of the "rational" part).

> Expressivism in this form suggests a naturalistic interpretation of practical reason, one that may seem appropriate to the enlightened commitments of the modern sci-

> entific world view. It is naturalistic metaphysically, insofar as it makes no commitment to the objective existence in the world of such allegedly questionable entities as values, norms, or reasons for action.[9]

> The basic commitment of realism in this domain is the idea that there are facts of the matter about what we have reason to do that are prior to and independent of our deliberations, to which those deliberations are ultimately answerable. Realists picture practical reason as a capacity for reflection about an objective body of normative truths regarding action (Parfit 2011, Scanlon 2014).[10]

Thomas Nagel takes "the realist position… that our responses try to reflect the evaluative truth and can be correct or incorrect by reference to it."[11] The case for the objectivity of practical reason is one Nagel has been polishing for decades.

It begans by observing that moral realism is our default view. Pre-reflectiviely, most of us have no objection to the seeming fact that some reasons for acting are good reasons, and others bad. Some primary normative facts, such as that is wrong torture animals have a very strong, "quasi-analytic" force to them.[12] If moral realism is a "defeasible presumption"[13] then the burden of proof lies with its opponents.

The alternative to moral realism is "subjectivism,"[14] which is placeholder term for expressivisms, quasi-realism, moral nihilism, constructivism, and any view that makes "evaluative and moral truth depend on our motivational dispositions and responses."[15]

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9. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

10. Ibid., sec. 2.

11. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 98–99; cf. Thomas Nagel, "Ethics as an Autonomous Theoretical Subject," in *Morality as a Biological Phenomenon: The Pre-Suppositions of Sociobiological Research*, ed. Gunther S. (ed.) Stent (University of California Press, 1980), 196–205.

12. Cf. Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist., quoting Putnam

13. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 143.

14. Cf. Mackie, *Ethics*. Mackie's famous "Subjectivity of Values" concedes that objective values, such as the notion that pain is not just *something we avoid* but really *to be avoided*, is part of the mainstream of European moral philosophy. Nevertheless, he shoulders the heavy burdon of proof and attempts to given reason to think values are, after all, dependent on the subject.

15. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 98–99.

Mackie value is subjective

John Mackie's classic essay argues that "there are no objective values" (13).[16] Mackie admits that "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" accepts objective moral values. He admits that moral thought and language assumes it. Appearances suggest that values are indeed part of the "fabric of the world"; that they are categorically obligating and motivating; and that being a moral person in part is constituted by the recognition and proper response to such values. The objectivity of (some) moral values is, in short, a "defeasible presumption."[17] In spite of all this, Mackie thinks it is possible and needful to debunk objective morality and to show that values are subjective. His two arguments aim to bear the burdon of proof on subjectivism. Values like goodness, rightness, wrongness, and also beauty or ugliness are "not part of the fabric of the world" (13). This claim has two parts. The ontological part is that objective values simply do not exist. Put differently, there is no "categorically imperative element" to moral oughts (15). There are no entities in the world such that I ought to do X or not do Y regardless of my desires, contingent wants and needs. The epistemological part is that, even if they did, our epistemic access to them would require the existence of a *sui generis* mysterious faculty of moral perception. Since no such faculty exists, we are justified in rejection the existence of objective values. Furthermore, disagreement about objective value and "queerness" of putatively objective values renders their existence less likely. It is more likely that *we* "objectify" our valuings onto the world by our thought and language. Hence, right and wrong are invented.

16. All page citations in this paper refer to Mackie's essay "The Subjectivity of Values" in Shafer-Landau and Cuneo (eds). *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology.* Blackwell, 2007. The original essay appears in Mackie, *Ethics*.

17. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*.

Disagreement

The first positive argument for Mackie's thesis is the argument from relativity (which I shall call the argument from disagreement). The argument from relativity or disagreement is this: moral codes vary between societies at a time and within a society across time. (For example, one society endorses polygamy, another condemns it; one society endorses human sacrifice, another condemns it; one endorses revenge killing, another condemns it.) An explanation of the wide variation and instability of these endorsements and condemnations, as well as the accompanying attitudes of approval, disgust, honor, is that there are no objective values at work. The moral code of a society is not a map of what is "really" morally lawful, but a map of that societies attitudes, endorsements, and condemnations. I will summarize Mackie's own discussion of the argument from relativity below.

Mackie provides one reply to the argument from relativity or disagreement: Perhaps varying moral codes "express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values" (18). (Call this the *Distorted Moral Perception* reply.) People and societies vary on evaluative matters in the same way and for the same reason that people and societies vary on scientific, historical, legal, and other matters. Perhaps the disagreements between people and societies — the varieties of moral codes — are similar to scientific or historical disagreements. Scientific disagreements arise between people offering different "speculative inferences or explanatory hypotheses based on inadequate evidence" (18). I think Mackie is suggesting that two people might dispute a particular point (is Pluto a planet?) because neither of them has fully accurate knowledge and both are doing the best they can with the available evidence, though future evidence may be forthcoming.

But the Distorted Moral Perception reply is, Mackie thinks, false. He denies that objective values are the kinds of entities about which more evidence may be forthcoming. The analogy to scientific or historical disagreements, then, does not hold.

Mackie is seriously misguided here. The argument from disagreement has been so often deployed and so widely misunderstood it is hard to know where to start.[18] There are two possible challenges, and I think both are justified.[19] The first is to deny that disagreement is so widespread as to be a massive problem for moral realism. The second is that even if there *were* widespread variation in moral codes between people and societies, that we should not necessarily take that as reason to be skeptical about moral values.

Let's take each of these challenges in turn. First, moral disagreement is not good reason to be skeptical about the objectivity moral values because such disagreement is saliently identical to scientific and philosophical disagreement; and scientific and philosophical disagreements are not good reason to be skeptical about scientific and philosophical realities. Therefore moral disagreement is not a good reason to be skeptical about moral realities. Let's call this the Scientific/Philosophical Disagreement Reply.

Mackie's reply is that scientific disputes are the result of speculation and (unlike moral ones) are subject to further empirical evidence. But this is not always true. Some scientific disputes will probably never be resolved with reference to new empirical data: what happened seconds before the Big Bang? What is the necessary and sufficient condition for a discipline to be considered a science?

The case of philosophical disagreement is even more clear. Some philosophical disputes certainly will never be resolved by adequate empirical evidence: Is idealism or empiricism or platonism true, or something else? The persistance of adherents to all three schools of thought for the last 2000 years (at least) shows that such disputes are ongoing and not likely to be resolved. The dilemma is that if ideological disagreement is evidence that there is no fact of the matter —

18. David Enoch, "How Is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?" *The Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2009): 15–50. Enoch summarizes no less than ten possible interpretations of the inference from disagreement to moral anti-reaslim. Most of them are non-sequitors, some beg the question against realism, and some offer real challenges that can and have been met.

19. Richard Joyce, "Moral Anti-Realism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015.

no objective truth — then perhaps Mackie can use moral disagreement as evidence that there is no objective value. But if he allows, say, that platonism is false and empiricism true (despite the enduring existence of platonists), then he has to allow that (say) societies that endorse slavery are morally mistaken while those who reject it are accurately assessing the relevant objective values.

A further buttress to this reply is that moral disagreement is evidence that some values are objective. People don't argue over what is truly subjective and known to be so ("I feel sick." "No, you feel don't, you feel quite well!").[20] People only argue over what is objective and difficult to answer (like is the center of the earth liquid or solid?)

Second, moral disagreement is not as widespread as often assumed, Mackie himself offers an objection to the argument from relativity: perhaps some very broad moral principles *are* universally recognized. For example, isn't it universally recognized that (say) it is good to promote the general happiness? Perhaps these broad moral principles are agreed upon in a way that renders moral disagreement less puzzling and the existence of objective values more plausible. Call this the Moral Agreement reply.

I think the Moral Agreement reply is a serious problem for the would-be subjectivist. But Mackie's reasons for rejecting it are puzzling. First, he complains that arguing that broad, elevated moral principles are objective entails that specific, practical moral principles are contingent. He says, "if things had been otherwise, quite different sorts of actions would have been right" (19). What is the substance of this reply? It is eminently true that "if things had been otherwise, quite different sorts of actions would have been right" — if for instance humans could breath underwater, then waterboarding would not be wrong because it would not be torturous and therefore cruel. If Bob's society was communist then amassing capital for his own personal use would be selfish and illegal and therefore antisocial. These counterfactuals are just what we would predict if general moral principles reflected universal, objective values.

20. I borrow this cheeky example from Peter Kreeft. Cf. Kreeft, *Summa Philosophica* Question 7, Article 1

Second, Mackie suggests that most people's moral lives and moral judgments do not actually operate by specifying "general principles." Rather, people seem to make moral judgments and live their moral lives according to certain "immediate responses" and "basic moral judgments".

Thankfully, Mackie does not spend too much time elaborating on this paper thin reply and moves on to the argument from queerness. We can concede the point. It is true that we make immediate responses more often than thoughtful moral judgments. What is that supposed to prove? For example, perhaps we hear a news story about a woman beating, scalding, suffocating, and finally murdering her children before storing their corpses in a freezer.[^3] That immediately strikes us as cruel, sick, degraded, disgusting, and wrong. Whether this response is the logical extension of a moral principle I reflectively endorse (such as "parents should care for their children") or merely a pre-reflectively, visceral attitude is irrelevant to whether the moral judgment accurately reflects the objective value of parental love.

A third point that makes the Moral Agreement Reply even stronger: Some moral codes (both general and specific) are well-nigh universal. For instance, the universal prohibition on incestuous relationships, the universal censure on immoderation (drunkenness or alcoholism are condemned in every society in the world), the universal approbation of justice and compassion, specifically caring for the poor, the abandoned, the orphans, and many more.[21] These moral laws are not general but rather specific; they are not parochial but appear in dramatically different cultures at all known historical periods. The best explanation for such widespread, profound moral agreement is that all parties are apprised of the same objective values.

Another point about disagreement

The question of how to live, and of how to resolve pressing moral disputes and dramatic moral conundrums, is not easy. There are various answers. People disagree.

21. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: How Education Develops Man's Sense of Morality* (Macmillan, 1947), "Appendix I: Illustrations of the Tao." Lewis, a literary scholar, compiles a list of agreeing moral codes from a variety of ancient, medieval, and modern codes.

Anyone who has long engaged in dialectical disputes over the various answer to the normative question of how to live well eventually comes to ask a secondary question: is there even any truth to be found? Are there any 'right answers' in ethics? Is there anything to all this discussion besides gas? Some worry that ethics has no 'right answers' because it is all just intuition-pumping. Some people view ethics as too easy because it is only a discussion of one's opinion.

We must admit that normative ethical conclusions — whatever conclusions satisfy us at the end of a long philosophical discussion about what is good and right — are different from conclusions in paleontology, medicine, or calculus. What does the difference amount to? Why is ethics *as a discipline* so different from, say, natural sciences?

There are two sorts of interpretations of ethics as a discipline in light of the diversity of answers to the question about how to live well. The first is Hume's answer, that ethics is "easy" (while metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and philosophical anthropology are presumably difficult).

The second is Aristotle's, that ethics is *a different sort of science* because it has a *different subject matter* to which it must correspond. He says, "For a well schooled man is wanting searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits: is obviously just as foolish to accept arguments of probability from a mathematician has to demand strict demonstrations from an orator."[22]

By the traditional classification, ethics is a form of philosophy. Russ Shafer-Landau persuasively argues this simple equation in defense of moral realism[23] but the point has broader import. If ethics is *not* a species of philosophy, it is something else entirely. Perhaps it is a species of psychology, politics, or evolutionary anthrpology. Such a categorization assumes, at the outset, that power prevails over truth. But to concede that there are no right answers in ethics, that ethical philosophers have no hope of finding any ethical truth is to give up on ethics as a discipline.

So suppose ethics is a species of philosophy. The indirect answer is another question: Are

22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.3.
23. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo ethics.

there 'right answers' in philosophy? Isn't the relation of philosophy in general to ethics in particular the relation of genus to species? This is the relation Russ Shafer-Landau argues for.[24] So the fate of ethical claims or ethical theories hangs on the fate of philosophical claims and theories as a whole. If we are philosophical optimists at all — if we are not total skeptics or nihilists — then we can be ethical optimists.

So what species of philosophy is ethics? If philosophy is its genus, what is its differentia? As I have been arguing, ethics is the discipline of practical reason. There are 'right answers' in ethics since there are right ways to live one's life, there are wells to live well and ways to live poorly; things can go well or badly for us. One of the fundamental governing assumptions of this work is that there is no special domain of the moral. Value theory is a whole package. There is at bottom no intelligible distinction between morality and prudence.

Queerness

The second positive argument is the argument from queerness. The argument from queerness builds on the sense that "if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (19). Objective values would be esoterica, akin to non-natural qualities, Plato's transcendent Form of Good. They would be (like divine commands from heaven) authoritatively prescriptive yet empirically unverifiable. (Mackie is as poetic as possible in making the descriptive seem mundane and the prescriptive seem mystical.) What's more, their power of categorical commendation, of obligating us to act in certain ways irrespective of our desires, is utterly unique. The reasoning seems to be that we assume the world is a unified whole, and we know a lot about spatio-temporal, physical entities, include evolved animals like ourselves who are language-users, concept-users, and evaluators. We know that we are motivated by our desires, preferences, by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. So it

24. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

seems more reasonable "To ask no more of the world than we already know is there—the ordinary features of things on the basis of which we make decisions about them, like or dislike them, fear them and avoid them, desire them and seek them out. It asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it."[25] It does not seem necessary to posit abstract, non-physical entities that have no intrinsic relation to our other psychological states such as our desires and approvals.

The famed argument from queerness Mackie calls "even more important… and certainly more generally applicable" than the argument from disagreement. I do not think it fares any better.

The first reply to the argument from queerness that Mackie considers is this: perhaps objective values are not so strange (in that they are like essences, numbers, substances, necessity and possibility, causation, etc.) even though they are *are* unlike descriptive facts. (Call this the Partners in Crime reply.)

But Mackie thinks the Partners in Crime reply would be ultimately impotent if we could show that we can "on empiricist foundations…we construct an account of the ideas and beliefs and knowledge that we have of all these matters" (19). He does not try here to construct such an account. But even if an empiricist foundation could *not* be given, he doubles down: that failure would tell *against* the existence of essences, numbers, and so on.

The success of the objection that objective values are not saliently different from other unobjectionable abstract entities or concepts like necessity or causation depends on the details. Russ Shafer-Landau[26], Terence Cuneo[27], David Enoch[28] have each recently provided these details and shown (though I shall not try to show it here) that indeed objective values are not any more objectionable than other kinds of abstract objects. For example, Cuneo argues that whatever "objectionable features" moral norms display are also displayed *inter alia* by epistemic norms. If Mackie is an 'epistemic skeptic' then he must deny the intrinsic, categorical, reason-giving force of such

25. Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford University Press, 1985).
26. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*.
27. Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
28. Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*.

epistemic value judgments as *you ought to believe whatever proposition is supported by the best evidence.* But to deny such epistemic reasons is absurd.

The epistemological part of the argument from queerness is that objective values, if they existed, would be known through an utterly unique and correspondingly queer faculty (19). He doesn't just mean they would be unverifiable empirically (that too). He means that it is difficult to imagine how something like Plato's Form of the Good could be such that "knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it… the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it" (20). But, Mackie thinks, Hume has successfully argued that reasons (instances of knowing that p) cannot be "reasons" (instances of motivating to act). The notion that values and disvalues intrinsically influence the will to pursue and avoid them postulates "value-features of quite a different order from anything else with which we are acquainted, and of a corresponding faculty with which to detect them" (20).

To further underscore the weirdness of objective value, Mackie poses the question of how we are to suppose moral qualities relate to natural facts. Even if we argue that the moral quality of wrongness "supervenes" on or "is entailed by" the natural facts (say, on the fact that the children are lighting the cat on fire), we deserve an account of the alleged supervenient or entailed quality. More likely than that we are able to "just see" the "wrongness" in the natural state of affairs, it seems more likely to Mackie that we are recognizing ordinary qualities such as that the action is socially condemned, and that we disprove.

The argument from queerness does not tell much — if at all — against the existence of objective moral standards. Mackie's argument has been called, and rightly so, an fallacy of the appeal to personal incredulity. The argument from personal incredulity has something of the form of "If on my assumptions or background beliefs p is hard for me to believe, then p is false." My (admittedly ironic) summary Mackie's allegedly "more important" goes like this: *To someone who shares my hidebound scientistic ideology, abstract objective values with intrinsically motivating*

features seem weird. Therefore, objective values don't exist.

Now this reply is certainly too pugnacious. Mackie's argument is influential and expresses, in compressed form, some widespread beliefs that he defends at greater length elsewhere, and that others defended. But it is true that objective values seem incommensurate with metaphysical naturalism, or physicalism, or scientism. My point is that if both parties express personal incredulity, the result is a philosophical stalemate. One who is firmly convinced of scientism might express (as Mackie does) a dismay at the possibility of objective value; but one who is firmly convinced of objective value might express dismay at the hypothesis of scientism. Absent further support for the belief that all of the universe is *nothing more* than a manifold of physical objects, these two are expressions of dismay are equally valid and therefore equally useless.

Christine Korsgaard offers a different substantive reply to the argument from queerness. She concedes that categorically-obligating entities are *different* from other entities, but denies the suggestion that they therefore do not exist. She says: "It's true that they are queer sorts of entities and that knowing them isn't like anything else. But that doesn't mean that they don't exist…. For it is the most familiar fact of human life that the world contains entities that can tell us what to do and make us do it. They are people, and the other animals."[29] This reply seems to me right.

Finally, Mark Timmons has clarified one part of Mackie's argument to be the worry that the supervenience of moral properties on non-moral properties (such as biological or psychological ones) is somehow mysterious.[30] In response, Russ Shafer-Landau has offered compelling arguments that such supervenience is no more or less objectionable than the supervenience of higher-order natural properties (like life) on lower-order natural properties (like certain cellular or molecular structures).[31] (Shafer-Landau also critiques the Humean theory of psychology that underlies part of Mackie's worry about queerness.[32])

29. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 166.

30. Mark Timmons, *Morality Without Foundations: A Defense of Ethical Contextualism* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

31. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, chap. 4.

32. ibid., , chapter 5.

In short, though the argument from queerness raises interesting and important questions, these questions do not amount to objections to the existence of objective value but rather they are invitations to investigate questions in metaphysics, psychology, and epistemology surrounding objective value.

Projectivism

Mackie's third argument depends for its force on the success of the other two. *If* and only if values are subjective, then the question "Why do we tend to objectify values?" is an interesting question. If values are not subjective, of course, then this question is fallacious, for it presupposes the conclusion it might be supposed to support (which is a *petitio principi*) and assumes that identifying the *origin* of a belief can disprove the belief (which is a genetic fallacy). If, however, values are objective, then the answer to the question "Why do we tend to project them on the world?" is "we don't."

Mackie clarifies that all the psychological activities of wanting, preferring, valuing, praising, blaming and so on are *subjective* in the sense that *subjects* perform them, but that to concede this is not does not entail that there are no objective values. Rather, even though *subjects* want, prefer, value, praise, and blame, it has been thought that subjects attempt to do so *in appropriate response to* objective values. Objective values so to speak obligate* certain responses (such as respect for elders, and hatred of evil) and categorically provide reason for certain actions (such as doing your duty or avoiding cruelty). It has been the "main tradition of European moral philosophy includes [the claim] that there are objective values of just the sort I have denied" (15).[33] These values are assumed or argued to exist as part of the "fabric of the world" and to be knowable.

33. The doctrine of objective value that is indeed widely assumed. C. S. Lewis puts this way: "This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike… is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are… I myself do not enjoy the society of small children: because I speak from within the Tao I recognize this as a defect in myself — just as a man may have to recognize that he is tone deaf or colour blind." Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*.

Surprisingly, Mackie sets himself to subvert not only the "main tradition" of moral philosophy but to subvert that which has "a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even in the meanings of moral terms" (16). He admits that ordinary moral judgments and ordinary moral emotions (we might simply call them *ordinary emotions*) are only intelligible on the assumption that objective moral values exist. Confirmation comes from the admitted psychological cost of the denial of objective values, which is "an extreme emotional reaction, a feeling that nothing matters at all, that life has lost its purpose" (17). And confirmation seems to come from the cost of denying that our moral terms refer, which is the need to provide a comprehensive non-cognitivist or non-descriptivist theory of the pragmatics of moral talk (16). Mackie thinks the cost of these subversions, though high, ought to be paid.

Response from Nagel

According to Nagel, subjectivism derives what plausibility it has from two contentions, neither of which is enough to render it more plausible than realism: first, subjectivists contend that value judgments with objective purport are *really* just masks for subjective psychological states. Nagel concedes that some "pockets of… subjectivity" seem objective but can be "unmasked", such as grammar and etiquette.[34] However, we cannot justifiably explain these unmaskings by assuming that *all* seemingly objective judgments are *really* subjective. Instead, such unmaskings ought to be accommodated within an overall view of objectivity.

Second, subjectivists observe that our motives, attitudes, desires, approvals, and rationalizations are all simply features of our psychology. Nagel concedes that the psychological states are the *starting* point of practical reasoning. However, it is always in order to ask (a variation of Moore's Open Question): *Ought I be motivated by these psychological states?* Ethics begins with psychological states but then subjects these states "to examination, codification, questioning, criticism, and so on."

34. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 155.

While Nagel allows that he has not *refuted* skepticism, nevertheless, the defeasible presumption of moral objectivity has not been dislodged. In a closing diatribe I find persuasive, he says:

> I remain convinced that pain is really bad, and not just something we hate, and that pleasure is really good, and not just something we like. That is just how they glaringly seem to me, however hard I try to imagine the contrary, and I suspect the same is true of most people… the scientific credentials of Darwinism… are not enough to dislodge the immediate conviction that objectivity is not an illusion with respect to basic judgments of value.[35]

Many philosophers persist in denying the appearances. Their worry stems from a naturalistic commitment. As Simon Blackburn summarizes, natuarlism asks:

> … No more of the world than we already know is there—the ordinary features of things on the basis of which we make decisions about them, like or dislike them, fear them and avoid them, desire them and seek them out. It asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it.[36]

I shall return to this objection below.

MacIntyre's solution to relativism and disagreement is to defend rational virtues.

Conclusion Draft 1

Human beings need oxygen and food by nature. These are biological necessities. Biologically, we are animals evolved from simpler animals.[37] But we are also social and practical-reasoning animals by nature. Our advanced practical reasoning sets us apart. We have the burden and responsibility to set the course for our own lives, and to care for the dependent among us who are not yet practical reasoners, who are temporarily disabled, or who are permanently infirm. Any tradition that does not do justice to these realities will be defective. Any practices that militate against our distinctively human life are bad practices. Whatever virtues are included on the list had better not exclude virtues

35. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 110.
36. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*.
37. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* x.

that make human life possible; it had better not exclude (as Aristotle did) women and manual workers from the very possibility of developing virtues. Tradition and rationality are not ultimately at the mercy of perspective but can be rationally adjudicated.

MacIntyre thinks that "human beings need the virtues" because they are intrinsically good and useful for transforming communities and persons.[38] He began by defining virtue in reference to practice. But moral enquiry itself is a practice that takes place within a tradition. At the practical level of daily life, a small community (such as a family or town or university) does well to organize themselves around a common vision of what is good and a common conception of what qualities will help everyone to attain that good. It can and should be undertaken by regular folk, not just specialists in philosophy. And the goal of such enquiry is discovering what is really admirable and pursuing it, becoming more admirable moral agents through the acquisition of virtues. Virtues are acquired traits that enable the achievement of goods internal to the practices, those traits that sustain traditions, and those traits by which we overcome perennial temptations to lead lives that are divided, deviant, or contrary to our true nature. Furthermore, at the theoretical level of philosophical ethics, the concepts of virtue, practical wisdom, and happiness supply for moral theory what many modern moralities have not: a clear, coherent, useful, and justifiable theory that grounds a rational pursuit of the good life and resolvable moral disagreements.

Other objections I may or may not touch on

What about *akrasia*?

What is foolishness?

III. Is practical reason natural?

This question ought not to be ignored.

38. Ibid.

Although it seems practical reason is not natural, it is part of human nature (whether as endemic to human *nature*, not merely second nature, not necessarily supernatural, but primary nature because primary nature is logical or rational will be addressed later). Christopher Toner provides at least the outline of a goo danswer.

> I argue that Aquinas provides an account of the teleology of practical reasoning according to which its starting points are basic human goods, which the human will is naturally inclined to seek. In this way, Aquinas thinks that all practical reasoning is ultimately reasoning for the sake of attaining or maintaining these ends. Consequently, all practical reasoning is ultimately for the sake of living the sort of life that pertains to man. Indeed for Aquinas, there could be no practical teleology without natural teleology, since there would be nothing to reason towards if the will were not by nature inclined towards the exemplification of human form.[39]

IV. Rationality/Nature Criterion

Rationality/Nature Criterion. What is the relationship between reasons for action and nature? Or are reasons only "in here" in us, psychological and rational, in which case humans are not natural? Or are reasons for acting "out there" in the world, not physical and not natural, in which case nature is normative? If so, is this naturalism? Is this view objective idealism?

> "Whether or not we accept a consequentialist framework, questions in the theory of value would seem to be an important focus for practical reflection. Many philosophers are attracted to the idea that reasons for action are ultimately provided by the values that can be realized through action (Raz 1999). If this is right, and if we assume as well a realist or at least non-subjectivist conception of value, then a different way of thinking about the task of practical reason comes into view. This may be thought of not primarily as a matter of maximizing the satisfaction of the agent's given ends, nor of specifying ends that are still inchoate, but rather as the task of mapping the landscape of value."[40]

Morality has provided an especially fertile source of examples and problems for the theory of practical reason. A defining question of moral philosophy is the question of the rational authority of

39. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 66.
40. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 6.

moral norms: to what extent, and under what conditions, do people have compelling reasons to comply with the demands of conventional morality? (Alternatively: to what extent, and under what conditions, are people rationally required to comply with those demands?) R. Jay Wallace, "Practical Reason"

'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions' (Hume 1978, 415).

The first reason, argued above, is that rationality in part defines our nature. We are animals of a particular sort: practical, rational animals. We identify ourselves as creatures about human generic truths obtain (though with exceptions), such as that we have rational capacities. We our identify ourselves in this way whether scientifically, philosophically, religiously, anthropologically, psychologically, or what have you. And our 'rational capacities' include language, abstract thought, argumentation, mathematics, philosophy, natural science, and so on.

A second reason is that we are not merely rational but also practical: we *practice*. One can conceive of rational creatures (gods, martians, angelic intelligences, artificial intelligences) that are not also "practical" creatures – that do not practice anything. Deep Thought, the computer from Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide*, is a mere *knower*.

A third reason is, also alluded to, is that practical wisdom provides a needed corrective not only to folly but even to the possible excesses or misapplications of other virtues. The negative version of the same reason is the intuitive claim that (practical) folly has the potential to ruin otherwise admirable lives.

A fourth, and potentially confusing, reason is that practical wisdom is both a "moral virtue" and an "intellectual virtue". As Foot points out, out of the four Greek cardinal virtues (moderation, courage, justice, practical wisdom) only justice is obviously "moral" in our usual sense of "other-regarding" traits. Moderation, courage, and practical wisdom more smoothly fit into the "self-regarding" category; practical wisdom fits most smoothly of all into the category of virtues of mind. While there is a growing branch of intellectual virtue ethics within the budding virtue ethics tree, practical wisdom seems to partake of both qualities. The dual nature of practical wisdom is

likely to be even easier to misunderstand than other traditional virtues.

> Now as "being" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so "good" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that "good is that which all things seek after." Hence this is the first precept of law, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided."[41]

Moral Awe

Another solution to the problem of moral relativism. I call this phenomenon moral awe. Moral awe is the feeling that arises upon witnessing someone exhibiting heroic virtue. It is something beyond moral approval or admiration, which one may feel even for "small victories" such as, say, when a child decides (against all odds) to share a toy on their on volition. Moral approval is not, on the whole, a destabilizing emotion. One can experience moral approvals and disapprovals by the dozens throughout a day without being "shaken up." Moral awe leaves one feeling "shaken up". Watching a documentary about Mother Theresa's activities in Calcultta, how she held and touched and kissed young children who were so sick – and so disgusting – that not even nurses had touched them for months, may be deeply affecting. Witnessing a father bow before his wife and children in order to ask for their forgiveness may be deeply affecting.

Moral awe can "break through" one's conventional beliefs. It can shock and amaze one, almost in spite of oneself.

John Kekes Wisdom

John Kekes argues that wisdom is a kind of interpretive knowledge of basic facts. Descriptive knowledge of basic facts is almost universally distributed. But interpretive knowledge of those basic facts – understanding the signficance of those facts – is less common.

41. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIa. Q.94. Art. 2.

What are “basic facts”? Basic facts are things like the fact that man is mortal, since the fact is that animals are born, live, and die and we are animals. Humans have a limited time.

1. Basic facts are known by everyone.
2. Knowing significance of basic facts.
3. Understanding is only possible by depth and breadth; breadth covers the range of facts known while depth refers to the significance and meaning of such facts.
4. What a wise man knows is how to construct a pattern that, given the situation, is likely to lead a good life.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBrFrCDxhJI these moments reflect criminal stupidity. But also just a lack of wisdom.

Chapter 8

Eudaimonia: Virtues as Realizing our Natural Human Telos

Quotation. "γένοι' οἷος ἐσσὶ μαθών" ("Become such as you are, having learned what that is") Pindar, *Pythian* 2, line 72.

Quotation *"What use would it be if a man had the wisdom of Nestor and wanted the necessaries of life, food and drink and clothes and the like? Where would be the advantage of wisdom then?" Eryxias (attributed to Plato)*

Quotation "Secular morality has lost a sense of the final importance of a good death for salvation. There is no guiding vision of the normatively human." – Tristram H. Engelhardt, *Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, xii.

Quotation *"The organic body sang together..."* – Charles Williams, "The Vision of the Empire", *Taliesson Through Logres.*

I. Introduction: Destiny and Destination

Thesis: Virtue partially constitutes human flourishing (the realization of our human telos); there is a human telos, and virtue partially constitutes it. It *only partially* constitutes it.

Summary: Virtues as partly constituting the realization of our natural human telos. This chapter presents an account of human teleology as partly achievable through the virtues. I distinguish various senses of telos and consider several potential specifications of this indeterminate concept. There is traditionally some link between virtues and the human telos whether eudaimonia, flourishing, thriving, welfare, etc.[1] Bentham and Nietzsche, among others, mock this alleged role.[2] The questions I am to answer are: What is our telos and how do virtues relate to it?[3] If virtues to bring about happiness, again, is that just egoism?[4] Is there even a telos for humanity, or is there no sense in speaking of a *human function*?[5] How relevant to ethics is human "metaphysical biology"?[6] Is ethics partly dependent on our animal nature[7] or solely on our rationality?[8] Are virtues necessary for true or "deep happiness"[9] or are they necessary and sufficient?[10] Is it possible to be virtuous and miserable? What is misery? Can we know happiness without knowing whether or not there is an after life? Virtue partly constitutes human flourishing but does not completely constitute it, because luck and fortune out of our control have a real impact on our happiness and our objective flourishing.

1. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature* is not a eudaimonist, but alleges that virtues do contribute to the realization of the human telos of reproduction.

2. Cf. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*.

3. Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford University Press, 1993); Robert M. Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Clarendon Press, 2006), chap. 4; John McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics'," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (University of California Press, 1980), 359–76.

4. Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics."

5. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*; Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, chap. 2; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 5.

6. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, chap. 3 and 4; McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

7. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*; Bailey, "Animalism"; Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology."

8. McDowell, *Mind and World*; Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

9. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 6.

10. Annas, "Virtue Ethics, Old and New."

A Dim Future

Suppose the year is 8,000 AD, and a lone spaceship is hovering over the planet formerly known as earth. All the greenery hewn away by human industry has regrown, and the impossibly high towers have toppled. Whether the climate changed beyond the tipping point, or nuclear war made farming impossible, or disease ravaged the race – no living humans remain on earth. Perhaps they voluntarily gave themselves up for extinction, preferring to end their millenia-long reign as the king of the food chain.

Would it have been worthwhile? Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all? These questions are not science fiction, but have a pressing hypothetical import. For they impact our reasons for being moral *now*.

Geach says that we do not need to know our natural teleology in detail in order to pursue it. Perhaps well-begun is half done.

The problems addressed in this chapter

The theme if our present chapter is to puzzle through some of the most difficult ethical questions.

1. Why be good? If the conclusions from the previous inquiry were on the mark, then we can rephrase this question without a change of meaning: why is virtue (especially practical wisdom) necessary for human flourishing? This is the same question, since, "virtue" (especially practical wisdom) is what *good* is for creatures like us; and "human flourishing" is a name for, ex hypothesis, that indeterminate concept of the one thing worth pursuing. The question "why be good?" or "why be virtuous?" should not be taken as the irrational question in the vicinity: "why do anything at all? Why be motivate?" Such a question is practical irrationality unadulterated, as we saw with Melville's Bartleby. The preference not to do anything — or the lack of preference to do anything — is inhuman "madness" or mental illness.

> Now this can easily be made to seem a strange worry. The thought that virtue is sufficient for happiness or flourishing is apt to produce Aristotle's response: you can't be serious. But if you accept that a flourishing life isn't just one in which you have lots of stuff, or one in which you get success by any means – if, that is, you accept that wicked or selfish people do not in fact flourish, so that only those who

> live virtuously have a chance of flourishing – then a problem does emerge as to why virtue is not sufficient for flourishing. For it is up to me whether I live virtuously, or at least try to, but Aristotelian theories accept that even if I do the best I can I may still be deprived of happiness by factors that are beyond my control. For Aristotle, happiness is a hybrid combination of living virtuously and of achieving a measure of success in worldly terms. The latter is not under my control, and cannot be guaranteed.[11]

2. Is realizing our telos a human goal or somehow supernatural? Surely teleology is not natural after all, but only psychological, intentional?
3. By my definition of virtue, it is virtuous to pursue happiness – but is it *morally good* to pursue happiness? The worry here arise from the fact that, as we draw closer to the concept of telos (from human nature to virtue or human excellence, and from virtue to practical wisdom) the stakes are raised. If one gets one's virtue concepts wrong, it may plausibly have a negative impact on one's life. If one get's one's concept of practical rationality itself wrong, one may have many virtues but still, sadly, end up a fool. If one gets one's concept of happiness wrong, however, and *actually achieves that happiness* this would be even worse than being a fool. One would, after long years, and perhaps decades of effort, achieve one's goal, only to find that the goal is somehow flawed. One would be pursuing happiness all along and achieve only objective misery. This is even worse than being a fool, I say, since it might conceivably be possible that one could be a fool – practically irrational in many respects – who still by some confluence of lucky factors or benevolent friends, ends up enjoying well-being in some respects. But by definition one cannot be objectively happy and objectively miserable. This reflection upon the "raising stakes" makes sense of the importance of this chapter.
4. Objective List Theory of Well-being. We might *know* a series of good things as good for us, without knowing *why* they are so good (without reflection). We might even mistake what is good, and mistake why it is good or not.[12]

II. Introduction 2

III. Objections and Details Part II: Telos

My aim is to discuss a bit more about the details of the human telos. I shall assume that Aristotle and Annas are right that happiness is a good enough name for that thing or set of things, whatever

11. Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in Gardiner, *Virtue Ethics, Old and New*.

12. Brad Hooker, in *How Should One Live?*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 1996).

it is/they are, that constitute our telos. So this is a discussion of happiness.

Is there telos like happiness for humanity? Destiny and destination

I would like to begin a discussion of happiness by distinguishing between two concepts: destiny and destination.

Roughly, a destiny is an inevitable end. A destination is an *avoidable* end; it is a *chosen* end. Destiny does not contain within it (at least not necessarily) any intentionality. An asteroid many light years away from the moon (let's say) has a destiny of hitting the moon in 180,000 years. It's trajectory, and the coincidental perfect timing of the absence of any intervening objects, makes contact inevitable.

A destination is different. When I told my mother I was moving to Kentucky *to get a PhD in philosophy* I was not describing my inevitable destiny, but describing my chosen destination. Many intervening factors could prevent me (car trouble, illness, etc.) – and what's more, many factors could *dissuade me* (lack of jobs, money trouble, etc.).

Happiness is our human destination. It is not, sadly, our human destiny.

There is no one factor that seems to capture our destiny except biological death. The major candidates for a hoped-for destiny are not universal: Health, reproduction, and survival. Not all living things are healthy, not all successfully reproduce, and in the end none survive.

But is there a universal human destination? If so, is it merely biological or something more – perhaps neurophysiological, psychological, or spiritual?

All living things *strive* for health, survival, reproduction and genetic propagation. But all living things, in the end, die. Individuals die when their metabolism stops, when if they have brains all brain functions stop, when they stop moving, and so on. Species "die" when they go extinct.

Socrates is mortal. All men are mortal, and Socrates is man. But so are you and I "men" (the species, not the sex). So our destiny is biological death.

What is our destination? Survival? The avoidance of death? Eternal life? Salvation? Evolution? Pleasure? "Permanent human happiness?"[13] Peace and nonviolence? Knowledge? The vision of God? Freedom from the wheel of reincarnation? Each of these guesses has something to commend it.

1. The avoidance of death by medical science and/or evolution. This is the transhumanist project of Ray Kurzweil, Google's Calico, and Nick Bostrom.
2. The avoidance of death by salvation from God as a free gift, or through faith or holiness or both. This is the Christian vision of
3. The achievement of pleasure while life lasts. This is formalized despair. There is no happiness, therefore eat drink and be "happy" with scare quotes in bold. Our destiny is all we have, so we have no destination. Enjoy the journey until the journey dumps you into the trash compactor.
4. The vision of God. This is the peculiarly Christian vision.
5. Freedom from the wheel of reincarnation.

One major distinction can be drawn between these various views along the question of how long human life lasts. Is human life (ideally) about 80 years, or more as medical science advances? Or is the human life countless millennia? This is a factual question that, of course, bears on the question of our telos.

Is there any one conception of happiness that can coordinate these two views? If not, then no discussion of happiness can proceed before either proving or assuming an answer about the length of human life.

Clearly, proving an answer to the satisfaction of all is a fool's errand. It is a massive, contentious question. One can formulate it in terms of human personhood, the "immortality of the soul," and so on. Andrew Bailey's recent paper calls this the "persistence question": Do human animals have strictly biological persistence conditions?

> Most contemporary animalists also say 'yes' to the persistence question. According to these animalists, a human animal lasts across an interval just in the case that its 'purely animal functions – metabolism, the capacity to breathe and circulate one's blood, and the like – continue' across that interval. We may, following Eric Olson,

13. The Dalai Lama proposed this formulation.

call this theory about the persistence of animals the 'Biological Approach'.

If so, what criteria would such a view have to satisfy?

Given that human beings are rational animals that live either approximately 80 years or forever, what is our destination? The disjunction embedded in the question opens up a discouragingly wide range of possible answers. Nevertheless, let us try to answer it

If there is any *one* thing that animals seek, it is determined by their nature. In my terms, their nature provides a "destiny". But our rational nature makes our way of life variable and hence pluralizes our destiny until death consolidates all those differences again. Hence if there is any *one* thing that rational animals seek, it is determined by the nature of rationality itself. Clearly, different people and cultures vary in believing and valuing particular objects. But variance is compatible with a single telos or single *plurality* of teloi.

Variance is compatible with error.

Is there anything rationality seeks by nature? Knowledge. What about practical rationality? Goodness. That is, knowing things *is what reason does*, and pursuing good things *is what practical reason does*; reason also avoid false things, and practical reason avoids evil.

Happiness, the destination of every human being, is to know truth and to attain as much goodness as possible – whether in the span of 80-90 years (barring illness, injury, and) until biological death or for the rest of time.

That this is our telos is possible to know even without knowing whether, in fact, our existence persists beyond biological death.

According to Sartre, we must despair. According to Russel we must despair. According to these two, despair is the rational emotion, the emotion that makes most sense given the facts; the emotion that "fits" reality.

I think despair is a rational emotion if we are animals who amass goods for 80 years or so and then die, and if our species will eventually go extinct and all habitable planets in the cosmos will become uninhabitable. However, like Russel, the pursuit of knowledge is still worthwhile. It

is our human "ideals of goodness and knowledge" (I paraphrase Russel) that remain worthwhile pursuits even under the shadow of despair cast by that great reality of death.

Russell on Doom

Objection: We don't know our nature

Someone might respond to the question of what is human nature by saying: we don't know. For all we can tell (without the benefit of divine revelation) humanity is an anomaly. Our origin is shrouded in mystery, our destiny undecided.

Above, I mentioned the worry that human nature is a fundamental mystery.

We do not know our origins or destiny. As far as we know, without the benefit of divine revelation, is the story we are told in biology and anthropology textbooks: 200,000 years ago, hominids somehow developed new cognitive abilities sufficient to justify calling one or a set of these creatures "the first humans." Our earliest direct, archaeological evidence of our ancestors is that they were artists: paintings adorn the caves of France.

The evidence of recorded histories from Babylon, China, and Egypt tell a story of humanity already busied with architecture, science, imperial politics, and bustling with trade, culture, language, and art. The student of human nature ought to be a historian. To pursue my theme, we must move on.

If our deep origins are shrouded in mystery, our future destiny is relatively clear. By any account, our species is doomed. The science fiction dream of off-world colonies is most likely just a dream: no livable other planet has been discovered within our solar system or any of the surrounding regions. Even if one were discovered further out, along concentric circles each light years in diameter, the practical limitations on space travel for large numbers across unimaginable distances render off-world colonization virtually impossible. The only possibility left, itself highly impracticable, seems to me that scientific technology advances to a point that we can conceivably

create an atmosphere on a planet that does not currently have one.

Regardless of these dreams, if our current planet does not go into an ice age, or a dust bowl, or become a nuclear wasteland, or if a volcanic canopy does not eliminate conditions for organic life, then *eventually* the running down of our sun will condemn our species to the same fate of 99% of all species that have existed up until now: extinction.

Bertrand Russell's famous essay "Free Man's Worship" poetically describes the cold, hard, reality of the natural destiny of the human species:

> That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins–all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

Russell sees two possible structure that can be built on the "firm foundation of unyielding despair." The first is to worship power (which is the choice of slaves) and the second is, even in the face of death and annihilation, to worship ideals of truth and goodness (which is the choice of the free). The freedom and nobility of humanity lies in our cognition, even our recognition that we are slaves. He continues:

> The life of Man, viewed outwardly, is but a small thing in comparison with the forces of Nature. The slave is doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour. But, great as they are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendour, is greater still. And such thought makes us free men… To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things–this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship.

Russell points to the noble impulse to cultivate our rational capacities in the light of our impending doom.

IV. Neo-Aristotelians on Eudaimonia

Foot on Deep Happiness

Foot argues that happiness is "deep satisfaction." This is compatible with, say, an extremely uncomfortable and even tragic life, like Wittgenstein's. It is not compatible with superficial satisfaction, the froth of pleasure and tittering mirth that floats on a shallow waters. It must be "deep", by which I suppose she means that it stands up to our own reflections in a sober hour.

Hursthouse

> But what could this fifth end be? Tradition offers us a few alternatives. We might say that the fifth end was the preparation of our souls for the life hereafter, or that it was contemplation—the good functioning of the theoretical intellect. But to adopt the first is to go beyond naturalism towards supernaturalism, and even philosophers have baulked at following Aristotle and endorsing the second. I am not in a position to assert that there is no fifth end peculiarly appropriate to our rationality, but no plausible candidate suggests itself and I will suggest instead that the genuinely transforming effect of our rationality on the basic structure adequately registers the 'huge gap' that exists between us and the other animals.[14]

McDowell on Eudaimonia as the Noblest Life

McDowell takes the old Stoic line that virtues just *are* eudaimonia. There is nothing more "external" to it, certainly nothing external.

Eudaimonia is a finite good, it is not simply "well-being". It is the highest kind of well-being, a noble kind.

14. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 218.

MacIntyre on Telos as becoming independent practical reasoners

After Virtue

MacIntyre is retiring and coy about what he thinks our telos might be. All he will say is the minimal definition: we ought to be free to pursue our telos. Virtue enables this. What more our telos might consist in I do not know that he cares to speculate.

Dependent Rational Animals

Dependent Rational Animals is a more ambitious book in some respects. MacIntyre aims to build a broader account of virtues by attending to not only our independence but our dependence. Much of our dependence on each other stems from our animality: periods of gestation, infancy, old age, and illness all make us dependent on our fellow creatures.

> Happiness" in this sense concerns what benefits a person, is good for her, makes her better off, serves her interests, or is desirable for her for her sake. To be high in well-being is to be faring well, doing well, fortunate, or in an enviable condition. Ill-being, or doing badly, may call for sympathy or pity, whereas we envy or rejoice in the good fortune of others, and feel gratitude for our own. Being good for someone differs from simply being good, period: perhaps it is always good, period, for you to be honest; yet it may not always be good for you, as when it entails self-sacrifice. Not coincidentally, the word 'happiness' derives from the term for good fortune, or "good hap," and indeed the terms used to translate it in other languages have similar roots. In this sense of the term—call it the "well-being sense"—happiness refers to a life of well-being or flourishing: a life that goes well for you.[15]

MacIntyre's provisional conception of our human telos is this: "The good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is."[16] Our telos is to be free to pursue our telos. MacIntyre is not a straightforward eudaemonist; this conception of the

15. Dan Haybron, "Happiness," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2011.

16. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 210.

human telos is more vague than Aristotle's. Whatever the human telos turns out to be, it minimally includes the freedom to explore "what else" the telos might be.

V. Discussion: Our Natural Telos

VI. Objections and Details Part II: Telos

My aim is to discuss a bit more about the details of the human telos. I shall assume that Aristotle and Annas are right that happiness is a good enough name for that thing or set of things, whatever it is/they are, that constitute our telos. So this is a discussion of happiness.

Is there telos like happiness for humanity? Destiny and destination

I would like to begin a discussion of happiness by distinguishing between two concepts: destiny and destination.

Roughly, a destiny is an inevitable end. A destination is an *avoidable* end; it is a *chosen* end. Destiny does not contain within it (at least not necessarily) any intentionality. An asteroid many light years away from the moon (let's say) has a destiny of hitting the moon in 180,000 years. It's trajectory, and the coincidental perfect timing of the absence of any intervening objects, makes contact inevitable.

A destination is different. When I told my mother I was moving to Kentucky *to get a PhD in philosophy* I was not describing my inevitable destiny, but describing my chosen destination. Many intervening factors could prevent me (car trouble, illness, etc.) – and what's more, many factors could *dissuade me* (lack of jobs, money trouble, etc.).

Happiness is our human destination. It is not, sadly, our human destiny.

There is no one factor that seems to capture our destiny except biological death. The major candidates for a hoped-for destiny are not universal: Health, reproduction, and survival. Not all living things are healthy, not all successfully reproduce, and in the end none survive.

But is there a universal human destination? If so, is it merely biological or something more – perhaps neurophysiological, psychological, or spiritual?

All living things *strive* for health, survival, reproduction and genetic propagation. But all living things, in the end, die. Individuals die when their metabolism stops, when if they have brains all brain functions stop, when they stop moving, and so on. Species "die" when they go extinct.

Socrates is mortal. All men are mortal, and Socrates is man. But so are you and I "men" (the species, not the sex). So our destiny is biological death.

What is our destination? Survival? The avoidance of death? Eternal life? Salvation? Evolution? Pleasure? "Permanent human happiness?"[17] Peace and nonviolence? Knowledge? The vision of God? Freedom from the wheel of reincarnation? Each of these guesses has something to commend it.

1. The avoidance of death by medical science and/or evolution. This is the transhumanist project of Ray Kurzweil, Google's Calico, and Nick Bostrom.
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3. The achievement of pleasure while life lasts. This is formalized despair. There is no happiness, therefore eat drink and be "happy" with scare quotes in bold. Our destiny is all we have, so we have no destination. Enjoy the journey until the journey dumps you into the trash compactor.
4. The vision of God. This is the peculiarly Christian vision.
5. Freedom from the wheel of reincarnation.

One major distinction can be drawn between these various views along the question of how long human life lasts. Is human life (ideally) about 80 years, or more as medical science advances? Or is the human life countless millennia? This is a factual question that, of course, bears on the question of our telos.

Is there any one conception of happiness that can coordinate these two views? If not, then no discussion of happiness can proceed before either proving or assuming an answer about the length of human life.

17. The Dalai Lama proposed this formulation.

Clearly, proving an answer to the satisfaction of all is a fool's errand. It is a massive, contentious question. One can formulate it in terms of human personhood, the "immortality of the soul," and so on. Andrew Bailey's recent paper calls this the "persistence question": Do human animals have strictly biological persistence conditions?

> Most contemporary animalists also say 'yes' to the persistence question. According to these animalists, a human animal lasts across an interval just in the case that its 'purely animal functions – metabolism, the capacity to breathe and circulate one's blood, and the like – continue' across that interval. We may, following Eric Olson, call this theory about the persistence of animals the 'Biological Approach'.

If so, what criteria would such a view have to satisfy?

Given that human beings are rational animals that live either approximately 80 years or forever, what is our destination? The disjunction embedded in the question opens up a discouragingly wide range of possible answers. Nevertheless, let us try to answer it

If there is any *one* thing that animals seek, it is determined by their nature. In my terms, their nature provides a "destiny". But our rational nature makes our way of life variable and hence pluralizes our destiny until death consolidates all those differences again. Hence if there is any *one* thing that rational animals seek, it is determined by the nature of rationality itself. Clearly, different people and cultures vary in believing and valuing particular objects. But variance is compatible with a single telos or single *plurality* of teloi.

Variance is compatible with error.

Is there anything rationality seeks by nature? Knowledge. What about practical rationality? Goodness. That is, knowing things *is what reason does*, and pursuing good things *is what practical reason does*; reason also avoid false things, and practical reason avoids evil.

Happiness, the destination of every human being, is to know truth and to attain as much goodness as possible – whether in the span of 80-90 years (barring illness, injury, and) until biological death or for the rest of time.

That this is our telos is possible to know even without knowing whether, in fact, our existence persists beyond biological death.

According to Sartre, we must despair. According to Russel we must despair. According to these two, despair is the rational emotion, the emotion that makes most sense given the facts; the emotion that "fits" reality.

I think despair is a rational emotion if we are animals who amass goods for 80 years or so and then die, and if our species will eventually go extinct and all habitable planets in the cosmos will become uninhabitable. However, like Russel, the pursuit of knowledge is still worthwhile. It is our human "ideals of goodness and knowledge" (I paraphrase Russel) that remain worthwhile pursuits even under the shadow of despair cast by that great reality of death.

My view Synthesize, Compare

Some points

Flourishing– minimally, social and individual learning, knowledge, pleasure, survival, pleasure, and maximally eternal life and glory. It is not intolerant

Teleology– our natural end is flourishing. It is not supernatural. It is not merely animal. It is second natural.

The importance of telos

That teleology is important has been one of the central contentions of this dissertation.

Three characters, one successful, one virtuous, one both successful and virtuous

The first character I should like to keep before our imagination is the Successful Man: wealthy, powerful, influential, well-connected, owning lots of land, designer clothes, and jets. This is Bruce Wayne, Donald Trump, or Hilary Clinton. We can playfully imagine them furthermore in the peak

of life in beauty, health, and vigor. Whether or not this person is virtuous seems to be beside the point: they are Successful. They may not be wise but they enjoy the richness of the "aesthetic life."

The second character is the Scrappy Sage: even though these wise, unyielding in principle, scrupulous, discerning, practical, reliable, beneficent, large-minded, generous, unflappable, just, undeceived and undeceivable, undistracted by petty pleasures, and far-sighted regarding the affairs of this life. This is Diogenes, Symeon Stylites, or John the Baptist who were despised for their lack of Success but admired and sought out for their Sagacity. They are ascetic sages but rejecting the aesthetic and embracing the "ethical life."

The third is a combination of worldly success and virtuous sagacity: wealthy but wise, powerful but unyielding in principle, influential but scrupulous, well-connected by discerning, full of possessions but practical. This is King Solomon, Cato the Younger, or St. Katherine of Sienna.

The question 'why be good?' is asked by someone who is earnestly in doubt as to whether it is better to be more like Solomon or St. Katherine than like Donald Trump or Hilary Clinton. They might agree that virtue and success together are better than virtue and no success; they are earnestly in doubt as to whether it would be better to have success without virtue or virtue without success. So the question "why be good?" is not the question "Why be motivated at all?" but "why not be motivated, after all, by success with or without virtue?'.

This question is echoed by Eryxias: even supposing someone were as wise as Nestor, wouldn't such a person be miserable without food and drink and clothes and the like? What *advantage* is wisdom? The assumption here is that the meaning of "advantage" is advantage for *us* here and now, not just abstract admirable qualities.

If virtues is partly constitutive of flourishing (even "success"), then the question 'why be virtuous?' is close — if not identical — to the irrational question 'why do what is worth doing?'. It is a conceptual confusion. However, if virtue is not constitutive of flourishing, then the question of whether *I* really ought to let virtue be the over overriding practical consideration instead of the alluring temptations of wealth, riches, sex, and power in however great of quantities I can achieve.

So my first thesis in this chapter, is this: virtue causes human flourishing but also partly constitutes it. This is my first step toward solving the problem of why be good.

Many neo-Aristotelians use "flourishing" to translate the untranslatable "eudaimonia."

Eudaimonia is the human telos. telos is, of course, Greek for "end". The word is bursting with dizzying array of possible meanings, including "definite point", "goal", "purpose," "cessation," "order," "prize," "highest point", "realization", "decision", and "services."[18] There are at least two kinds of teleology we can distinguish between: natural and social.[19] Natural teleology is not *intentional*. Social teleology is. The type of teleology the Aristotelian tradition takes for granted is natural teleology, of which social teleology is an instance in human rational creatures.

So our telos is eudaimonia. What is eudaimonia? Answering this question is treacherously difficult. "Religious" pagans like Aristotle thought it was the intellectual life of an (Athenian) gentlemen. Christians like Aquinas think it is the beatific vision of God after this life is over, including the time after a bodily resurrection. Atheists and other noble secularists such as Russell and Murdoch think that eudaimonia is a particular kind of virtuous and wise life here and now, despite the coming darkness. (Less noble secularists opt for cocaine, sex, whisky, heroine.) These are different reactions, but both are reactions to formalized despair. On a happier note, or perhaps equally anxious note, Ray Kurzweil and other transhumanists think that even this life can be extended, perhaps a little, perhaps a lot, which would afford more time to explore just what eudaimonia might be. I do not here bother to mention theories of reincarnation Is there any way to coordinate these views?

Virtues play some important part in happiness, unless the immoralist consents to the despairing notion that if death ends all, then life is meaningless and so eat drink and be merry.

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18. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Harper & Brothers, 1896) compare with Strong's 5056: "telos tel'-os from a primary *tello* (to set out for a definite point or goal); properly, the point aimed at as a limit, i.e. (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state (termination (literally, figuratively or indefinitely), result (immediate, ultimate or prophetic), purpose); specially, an impost or levy (as paid); continual, custom, end(-ing), finally, uttermost."

19. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology."

The old Stoic line was the noble belief that virtue is *all* of eudaimonia. There is nothing more to be desired but virtue; "virtue is it's own reward." The Aristotelian line was, not surprisingly, a bit more human. The life of virtuous activity is necessary but not sufficient for eudaimonia. Also needed are money, friends, and some good fortune. In a sense, the fully virtuous man or woman could be a victim to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and lose all. But this is just a way of saying that tragedies can indeed happen. Socrates would, with superhuman stubbornness, deny it. *Nothing* can harm the good man; and nothing save the bad one.

Minimal and Maximal Conceptions

I would also like to distinguish between minimal conceptions and maximal conceptions of happiness. A minimal conception includes a necessary condition or set of necessary conditions the absence of which plausible constitutes *misery*. Peter Geach alludes to this kind of conception when he argues that only a broad basis of ethical agreement is needed for two groups to work together on building a hospital or running a university.[20] Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of telos in *After Virtue* is what I have called "minimal". A maximal conception of happiness is more imaginative, certainly, but more divisive. A maximal conception imagines what state of affairs or what human activity constitutes *full and completely satisfying human life* — fulfillment to the highest imaginable degree. Boethius pretty clearly aims for this kind of conception when he argues that the good of man is complete self-sufficiency and hence cannot but any "false happiness" such as wealth, power, or pleasure but must be participation in God himself.[21]

Natural law theorists like to talk about 'perfections' of nature, and happiness as 'perfect' or complete. I prefer the term 'maximal' to 'perfective' for two reasons. First, the concept of maximum is relative to circumstances; one should aim to be as happy as possible *given the limitations of time*. This clause includes theist and atheists in the conversation since they may disagree on just

20. Geach, *The Virtues*.
21. *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III.

what the limitations of time are but agree that we should aim to be as happy as possible. Secondly, the notion of perfection implies that human nature has natural limits of happiness, a terminus. I'm not sure this is true. It might be that, so long as one lives well, and so long as the average lifespan of western industrial peoples continues to increase. Is there a natural limit, for instance, to how many languages one can learn? I know three languages. With enough time before my biological end, couldn't I learn ten? Someone more gifted with languages already knows ten and could learn twenty. If they lived 200 years, couldn't they learn thirty languages? Is there a natural limit to wisdom? Can one become fully wise and then stop? Continuing the discussion using the notion of relative maximum keeps the case open on this issue.

//%>"What is the relation of the list theory to perfectionism? Perfectionism is a sub□species of the list theory. Perfectionism differs from other kinds of list theory in claiming that we ascertain what gets on the list by considering essential, distinctive, or characteristic human capacities or activities. That is, other kinds of list theory would reject the idea that your having or exercising X constitutes a benefit to you if and only if X is an essential, distinctive, or characteristic human capacity or activity."[22] >One premiss of this argument is that the most plausible versions of the list theory will have achievement on the list. The other premiss is that living a truly moral life is an achievement. From these premisses it follows that moral virtue gets on the list because being morally virtuous is a kind of achievement. Call this the argument from achievement.16

Evolution and Telos

> For these reasons, a welfare-based conception of natural functions and ends is problematic. Suppose, as suggested above, that an organism's teleological profile is indeed shaped by the facts of the evolutionary history that ultimately explain how it was put together as the organized functional system it is. In that case, organisms will be teleologically organized ultimately and generally toward the end (roughly) of passing along germ-line copies of their genes as well as or better than rival conspecifics (this being the unifying effect non-incidentally promoted by all of the or-

22. Hooker, 145–6.

ganism's proper-functional traits)—rather than toward the end of flourishing as such in any richer, intuitive sense. Since this has little to do with what we would think of as ultimately and generally relevant to ethical normativity when applied to the human case, it seems doubtful that the normative framework provided by natural teleology can be of any help in thinking about the normative framework of ethics (FitzPatrick 2000; on the other side, see Casebeer 2003 for a defense of such an approach, and Lott 2012 for a defense of Foot and Thomson against FitzPatrick's objections).

Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.[23]

23. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Nic. Ethics* Book II.1.

Chapter 9

Appendix: Natural Teleology Revisited

I. Objections and Details Part II: Telos

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human life lasts. Is human life (ideally) about 80 years, or more as medical science advances? Or is the human life countless millennia? This is a factual question that, of course, bears on the question of our telos.

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Teleology in nature

What if there are no ends in nature?

One powerful objection to the recovery of telos is that there is no teleology in nature. There are no *ends* (τελοι). Call this position *teleological nihilism.* There are two forms of teleological nihilism: extreme and moderate. Extreme teleological nihilism we may call the view that there are no "purposes" or natural ends anywhere in the world *including* in human actions. Even our practices, behaviors, and lives are purposeless, even to ourselves. Moderate teleological nihilism we may call the view that there are no natural purposes *except* those in human actions, intentions, and

societies, etc. On moderate teleological nihilism, human purposes are not instances of a broader category that includes the tendency of an acorn to become an oak and the tendency of deer to survive and reproduce; human purposes are sui generis phenomena that spontaneously emerge out of our brains at a certain level of complexity. Final causation thinking is then projected out onto the world by us; we observe that the beaver gathered wood and that the beaver built a dam and we say "the beaver gathered wood *in order to* build the dam." But really the beaver did no such thing. This is what philosopher of biology Ernst Mayr calls "teleonomic" natural behavior, but not genuinely teleological.[2]

Teleological nihilism claims as its evidence *modern science* as a whole. Natural sciences have dismissed the notion of final causation for three or four centuries now and have gotten along well without it. In fact, natural sciences and the experimental, empirical methods that advance them have progressed far more than anyone could have dreamed. In part, this success is the result of giving up magical thinking.

Teleology

[% out of order]

That nature is normative and some norms are natural is the best explanation of two phenomena: (1) human cognitive and and practical behaviors are inherently end-directed or teleological: John goes to the gym *in order to get fit for his film role*; Jane practices her speech *to win the Iowa primaries*; and (2) animals, plants, and all living things exhibit end-directed or teleonomic behavior: eyes see, hemlock trees offers shade to fish, stomachs digest, deer leap. The first of these phenomena is less controversial: pretty clearly, humans *act on reasons* and in pursuit of ends. The second is more controversial and more interesting – is the appearance of teleology "just" teleonomy or teleology indeed?

2. Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology."

Call the view that there are no natural end-directed behaviors *teleological nihilism*.[3] 'Strong nihilism' can refer to the belief (of say determinists) that not even human practices are teleological. 'Weak nihilism' can refer to the belief that *only* human behaviors are end-directed, but nothing else. For example, Kant's explanation of natural purpose denies the biological theory that the form of an organism causes the parts to grow and relate to each other in a particular way, but he admits we *cannot help thinking so*.[4] If the "nature is normative" thesis is true, both forms of teleological nihilism are false.

What if ends are reducible?

Teleoreductionism has taken one of two popular forms: the first reduces 'teleonomic' (that is, apparently teleological) biological functions to causal contributions to a system and the second reduces teleonomic biological functions to naturally selected effects. A proponent of the first reduction is Donald Davidson; a proponent of the second is Ruth Millikan.

Reducible reply

Neither forms of 'teleoreduction' can account for the normativity of the biological function in question. If it is a fundamental truth not only that hearts cause blood to be pumped but that hearts *are for* pumping blood — that is their natural function — then teleoreduction comes to light as an unnecessary and sadly desperate attempt to preserve a philosophical dogma in the face of scientific fact.

James Barham elaborates:

> I was aware of well-known criticisms of both of the then-current reductionist accounts of function: the "causal-role" theory and the Darwin-inspired "selected-effects" theory. In a nutshell, the problem is that neither theory can explain the normative character of biological processes in a coherent manner. (Biological processes are

3. Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics."
4. Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose."

> "normative" in the sense that they may either succeed or fail in fulfilling their functions.) With respect to the "causal-role" theory, there is no way to distinguish between functional and non-functional parts of a biological system without presupposing the normative character of the overall system as a whole – which begs the question at issue. With respect to the "selected-effects" theory, the problem is that selection history is conceptually irrelevant to the identification of function. True, it has a role to play in explaining how present-day functions have come to exist. But selection history cannot possibly explain what it is about a biological process that constitutes it as a function. This is a logical point that Darwinists simply miss. The reason is that our concept of function in no way depends on evolutionary history. If it did, then biologists like Aristotle, Galen, Harvey, and innumerable others who lived long before Darwin would not have had the means to identify the functions of organs, which they of course did. Sometimes, they got it wrong, as when Aristotle placed the seat of perception and thought in the heart, instead of the brain (though some of his predecessors got it right). But Aristotle's mistake was due to his inadequate knowledge of physiology, not to his ignorance of evolution.

Millikan bites the bullet on this objection. She isn't trying to do "conceptual analysis" of the term 'function.' She is willing to admit that her concept of proper function only applies to functional objects with histories and that hypothetical counterexamples involving functional objects without histories prove that two objects with one and the same "*mark* of purposiveness" can have different functions.[

Biological Teleology

Teleological realism in biology is making a come-back. There are those who protest teleological nihilism. Arnhart persuasively argues that teleology is assumed in medicine.[5] Zammito clarifies ongoing relevance in biology, since organisms seem to be intrinsically purposeful.[6]

> In a series of important articles and books over the past decade or so, Bedau (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1993), Cameron (2004), Christensen & Bickhard (2002), Jacobs (1986), Manning (1997), Maund (2000), McLaughlin (2001, 2009), Mossio et al. (2009), Mundale & Bechtel (1996), Nanay (2010), Nissen (1997), Perovic (2007), Walsh (2006), and Zammito (2006) have cast grave doubt on the coherence of any reductive analysis of function. Some of these authors (e.g., Jacobs, Maund, Zammito)

5. Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics."
6. Zammito, "Teleology Then and Now."

> call explicitly for a reconsideration of the possibility that teleological phenomena in biology might be both objectively real and irreducible.

The very word 'teleology' is liable to sound quaint to modern ears. Barham clarifies the range of terms that denote identical or similar concepts:

> "By "teleology," I have in mind such words and concepts as "purpose," "end," "goal," "function," "control," and "regulation," as well as the real- world biological phenomena to which these words and concepts refer. This means that the word "teleology" should always be construed here in its internal or "immanent" sense—purposiveness existing in living beings themselves—and never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle" (Barham 1). For a similar distinction, see Lennox (1992) and Brown (2001).

We can add "purposive" and "goal-directed" to the constellation of concepts in the offing.

Ruth Millikan's objection

Millikan argues that an organism's proper function cannot be read off its capacities but must be known via empirical history. Both Barham and Thompson dispute this (influential) definition of "proper function."

Other writers on natural teleology

Kevin Kelly, wired editor, what technology wants. Robert Right nonzero. Christian de Duve Robert OUsan? Our telos.

> Natural teleology is unorthodox, but it has a long and honorable history. For example, in 1953 the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley argued that it's in the nature of nature to get more advanced over time. "If we take a snapshot view, improvement eludes us," he wrote. "But as soon as we introduce time, we see trends of improvement."

> More recently, Kevin Kelly, founding editor of *Wired*, made the case for teleology as clearly as could be in his book *What Technology Wants:* "Evolution … has an inherent direction, shaped by the nature of matter and energy." That is, there may

be laws of nature that push the universe toward the creation of life and mind. Not a supernatural god, but laws as basic and fundamental as those of thermodynamics. Robert Wright said much the same in *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny:* "This book is a full-throated argument for destiny in the sense of direction." Those books prompted discussion among the literati but little backlash from evolutionary biologists. Ruse thinks that's because the authors are science writers, not scientists: "At a certain level, it's their job either to give the science or to put forward provocative hypotheses, and nobody takes it personally."

The paleontologist Simon Conway Morris, at the University of Cambridge, has argued that natural structures such as eyes, neurons, brains, and hands are so beneficial that they will get invented over and over again. They are, in effect, attractors in an abstract biological space that pull life in their direction. Contingency and catastrophe will delay them but cannot stop them. Conway Morris sees this as evidence that not only life but human life, and humanlike minds, will emerge naturally from the cosmos: "If we humans had not evolved, then something more or less identical would have emerged sooner or later."

Stuart Kauffman, of the Santa Fe Institute, who argues that the universe gives us "order for free." Kauffman has spent decades on origin-of-life research, aiming to show that the transition from chemistry to metabolism is as inevitable as a ball rolling down a slope. Molecules on the early earth, he suggests, inevitably began to catalyze themselves in self-sustaining reactions ("autocatalytic networks"), converting energy and raw materials into increasingly complex structures that eventually crossed the boundary between nonliving and living.

Other biologists are proposing laws that would explain evolutionary ascent in fundamental terms. Daniel McShea and Robert Brandon, a biologist and a philosopher of science, respectively, at Duke University, have argued for what they call a "zero-force evolutionary law," which posits that diversity and complexity will necessarily increase even without environmental change. The chemist Addy Pross, at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in Israel, argues that life exhibits "dynamic kinetic stability," in which self-replicating systems become more stable through becoming more complex—and are therefore inherently driven to do so.

Still other scientists have asked how we could measure increases in complexity without being biased by our human-centric perspective. Robert Hazen, working with the Nobel Prize winner Jack Szostak, has proposed a metric he calls "functional information," which measures the number of functions and relationships an organism has

> relative to its environment. The Harvard astrophysicist Eric Chaisson has proposed measuring a quantity that he calls "energy-rate density": how much energy flows through one gram of a system per second. He argues that when he plots energy-rate density against the emergence of new species, the clear result is an overall increase in complexity over time.
>
> But Nagel's goal was valid: to point out that fundamental questions of origins, evolution, and intelligence remain unanswered, and to question whether current ways of thinking are up to the task. A really good book on this subject would need to be both scientific and philosophical: scientific to show what is known, philosophical to show how to go beyond what is known. (A better term might be "metascientific," that is, talking about the science and about how to make new sciences.)
>
> The pieces of this book are scattered about the landscape, in a thousand scraps of ideas from biologists, physicists, physicians, chemists, mathematicians, journalists, public intellectuals, and philosophers. But no book has yet emerged that is mighty enough to shove aside the current order, persuading scientists and nonscientists alike, sparking new experiments, changing syllabi, rejiggering budget priorities, spawning new departments, and changing human language and ways of thought forever. On the Origin of Species did it in 1859. We await the next Darwin.[7]

Three characters, one successful, one virtuous, one both successful and virtuous

The first character I should like to keep before our imagination is the Successful Man: wealthy, powerful, influential, well-connected, owning lots of land, designer clothes, and jets. This is Bruce Wayne, Donald Trump, or Hilary Clinton. We can playfully imagine them furthermore in the peak of life in beauty, health, and vigor. Whether or not this person is virtuous seems to be beside the point: they are Successful. They may not be wise but they enjoy the richness of the "aesthetic life."

The second character is the Scrappy Sage: even though these wise, unyielding in principle, scrupulous, discerning, practical, reliable, beneficent, large-minded, generous, unflappable, just, undeceived and undeceivable, undistracted by petty pleasures, and far-sighted regarding the affairs

7. Michael Chorost is the author of Rebuilt: How Becoming Part Computer Made Me More Human (Houghton Mifflin, 2005) and World Wide Mind: The Coming Integration of Humanity, Machines, and the Internet (Free Press, 2011).

of this life. This is Diogenes, Symeon Stylites, or John the Baptist who were despised for their lack of Success but admired and sought out for their Sagacity. They are ascetic sages but rejecting the aesthetic and embracing the "ethical life."

The third is a combination of worldly success and virtuous sagacity: wealthy but wise, powerful but unyielding in principle, influential but scrupulous, well-connected by discerning, full of possessions but practical. This is King Solomon, Cato the Younger, or St. Katherine of Sienna.

The question 'why be good?' is asked by someone who is earnestly in doubt as to whether it is better to be more like Solomon or St. Katherine than like Donald Trump or Hilary Clinton. They might agree that virtue and success together are better than virtue and no success; they are earnestly in doubt as to whether it would be better to have success without virtue or virtue without success. So the question "why be good?" is not the question "Why be motivated at all?" but "why not be motivated, after all, by success with or without virtue?'.

This question is echoed by Eryxias: even supposing someone were as wise as Nestor, wouldn't such a person be miserable without food and drink and clothes and the like? What *advantage* is wisdom? The assumption here is that the meaning of "advantage" is advantage for *us* here and now, not just abstract admirable qualities.

If virtues is partly constitutive of flourishing (even "success"), then the question 'why be virtuous?' is close — if not identical — to the irrational question 'why do what is worth doing?'. It is a conceptual confusion. However, if virtue is not constitutive of flourishing, then the question of whether *I* really ought to let virtue be the over overriding practical consideration instead of the alluring temptations of wealth, riches, sex, and power in however great of quantities I can achieve.

So my first thesis in this chapter, is this: virtue causes human flourishing but also partly constitutes it. This is my first step toward solving the problem of why be good.

Many neo-Aristotelians use "flourishing" to translate the untranslatable "eudaimonia." Eudaimonia is the human telos. telos is, of course, Greek for "end". The word is bursting with dizzying array of possible meanings, including "definite point", "goal", "purpose," "cessation," "order,"

"prize," "highest point", "realization", "decision", and "services."[8] There are at least two kinds of teleology we can distinguish between: natural and social.[9] Natural teleology is not *intentional*. Social teleology is. The type of teleology the Aristotelian tradition takes for granted is natural teleology, of which social teleology is an instance in human rational creatures.

So our telos is eudaimonia. What is eudaimonia? Answering this question is treacherously difficult. "Religious" pagans like Aristotle thought it was the intellectual life of an (Athenian) gentlemen. Christians like Aquinas think it is the beatific vision of God after this life is over, including the time after a bodily resurrection. Atheists and other noble secularists such as Russell and Murdoch think that eudaimonia is a particular kind of virtuous and wise life here and now, despite the coming darkness. (Less noble secularists opt for cocaine, sex, whisky, heroine.) These are different reactions, but both are reactions to formalized despair. On a happier note, or perhaps equally anxious note, Ray Kurzweil and other transhumanists think that even this life can be extended, perhaps a little, perhaps a lot, which would afford more time to explore just what eudaimonia might be. I do not here bother to mention theories of reincarnation Is there any way to coordinate these views?

Virtues play some important part in happiness, unless the immoralist consents to the despairing notion that if death ends all, then life is meaningless and so eat drink and be merry.

The old Stoic line was the noble belief that virtue is *all* of eudaimonia. There is nothing more to be desired but virtue; "virtue is it's own reward." The Aristotelian line was, not surprisingly, a bit more human. The life of virtuous activity is necessary but not sufficient for eudaimonia. Also needed are money, friends, and some good fortune. In a sense, the fully virtuous man or woman could be a victim to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and lose all. But this is just a way of saying that tragedies can indeed happen. Socrates would, with superhuman stubbornness, deny

8. Liddell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* compare with Strong's 5056: "telos tel'-os from a primary *tello* (to set out for a definite point or goal); properly, the point aimed at as a limit, i.e. (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state (termination (literally, figuratively or indefinitely), result (immediate, ultimate or prophetic), purpose); specially, an impost or levy (as paid); continual, custom, end(-ing), finally, uttermost."

9. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology."

it. *Nothing* can harm the good man; and nothing save the bad one.

Minimal and Maximal Conceptions

I would also like to distinguish between minimal conceptions and maximal conceptions of happiness. A minimal conception includes a necessary condition or set of necessary conditions the absence of which plausible constitutes *misery*. Peter Geach alludes to this kind of conception when he argues that only a broad basis of ethical agreement is needed for two groups to work together on building a hospital or running a university.[10] Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of telos in *After Virtue* is what I have called "minimal". A maximal conception of happiness is more imaginative, certainly, but more divisive. A maximal conception imagines what state of affairs or what human activity constitutes *full and completely satisfying human life* — fulfillment to the highest imaginable degree. Boethius pretty clearly aims for this kind of conception when he argues that the good of man is complete self-sufficiency and hence cannot but any "false happiness" such as wealth, power, or pleasure but must be participation in God himself.[11]

Natural law theorists like to talk about 'perfections' of nature, and happiness as 'perfect' or complete. I prefer the term 'maximal' to 'perfective' for two reasons. First, the concept of maximum is relative to circumstances; one should aim to be as happy as possible *given the limitations of time*. This clause includes theist and atheists in the conversation since they may disagree on just what the limitations of time are but agree that we should aim to be as happy as possible. Secondly, the notion of perfection implies that human nature has natural limits of happiness, a terminus. I'm not sure this is true. It might be that, so long as one lives well, and so long as the average lifespan of western industrial peoples continues to increase. Is there a natural limit, for instance, to how many languages one can learn? I know three languages. With enough time before my biological end, couldn't I learn ten? Someone more gifted with languages already knows ten and could learn

10. Geach, *The Virtues*.
11. *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III.

twenty. If they lived 200 years, couldn't they learn thirty languages? Is there a natural limit to wisdom? Can one become fully wise and then stop? Continuing the discussion using the notion of relative maximum keeps the case open on this issue.

II. Telos objections

One family of objections pertains to teleology. If MacIntyre's suggestion that we need to recover the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues is to be taken as a serious plan, then we must recover telos, for without a clear telos even a high moral earnestness attached to virtues devolves into an unintelligible set of rules or traditions. Virtue without telos literally has no point.[12] This constellation of objections is, I think, most potentially disastrous for MacIntyre's theory, and the objections are powerful. In addition to the real philosophical difficulty of the matter, the prejudices and misconceptions surrounding teleology are so thick one would need several chapters to dig through the muck and mire. I think an adequate response can, ultimately, be made.

In this section I shall present three objections from teleology that are especially problematic for MacIntyre's narrative. The first objection regarding teleology is to deny MacIntyre's historical narrative. Oakes above eloquently summarized MacIntyre's criticism of the loss of telos in modern moral philosophy, natural science, psychology, and ethics. But perhaps modern moral philosophy is not so anti-teleological as all that. Kant's categorical imperative, much vaunted for its austere duty for the sake of duty, is actually aimed at perfection.[13] Keith Ward argued with some impatience almost 40 years ago (10 years before *After Virtue*'s first edition) that Kant should not be interpreted as commending duty as some abstract, context-free obligation. He says:

12. A society that enforces chaste behavior and honors chastity as a virtue but does so without any understanding of how such chastity fits into the fulfilled life of a fully virtuous human being and a fully virtuous community will be open to the criticism that such behaviors and virtues are prohibiting a whole range of pleasurable activities.

13. Ward, "Kant's Teleological Ethics."

> Kant's position is not merely that one must conceive oneself as setting up a purposive order of Nature, according to universal laws, as though one could arbitrarily choose anything whatsoever as one's purpose. One can see this if one takes Kant's list of examples of moral duties in the *Metaphysic of Morals* [sic]. Masturbation is against the *purposes of Nature*, in forming the sexual organs; suicide contravenes *Nature's purpose* in establishing self-love in order to preserve life… Finally, "holiness of will" must be pursued, as this expresses the absolute worth of the human person, in its freedom from sensuous impulses and its transcendence of Nature.[14]

These quotes from the allegedly dour-faced deontologist certainly sound awfully similar to Aristotle (not to mention St. Paul). Along similar lines, Kantian ethicist David Cummiskey has argued that Kant can be understood as a consequentialist of sorts.[15] The proposal is that Kant's *justification* for moral normative principles was a brute, formal, categorical imperative, but the *content* of such normative principles included agents and the goods they aim to attain. Happiness can be valued as an imperfect duty, though rational agency must be valued as a perfect duty. Without entering into all the interesting details at this juncture, the thought is that perhaps a (thoroughly modern) moral philosophy like deontology can be synthesized with natural teleology.

The other putatively modern moral philosophy that comes in for criticism for MacIntyre, Anscombe, et. al., is Mill's utilitarianism. But isn't consequentialism teleological in the proper sense of telos. Clearly, consequences are *ends* of actions – I go to work *in order to* earn a paycheck at the end of the month; the consequence (my paycheck) is the goal or purpose or point of the action (going to work). For consequentialism, the great intrinsic value is happiness, or pleasure. On the surface, this sounds like a kind of Aristotelian eudaimonism. But Aristotle's eudaimonia is the necessary end of all action and all practical reasoning. The proof that we pursue eudaimonia (something vague) is as robust as the proof that we pursue *anything at all*.[16] Similarly, all that Mill can say to the enquirer who wants to hear about *why* happiness is desirable is that people desire it.[17] So perhaps virtue ethics can be synthesized with consequentialism.

14. Ibid., 341.
15. David Cummiskey, *Kantian Consequentialism* (Oxford University Press, 1996).
16. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.1.
17. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 1861, chap. 4. *Of what sort of Proof the Principle of*

A second objection regarding teleology grants MacIntyre's pessimistic narrative. Ethics can get along well enough without intrinsic *teloi*. We cannot accept natural teleology since this notion has been exorcised from natural science (and from all rational philosophy) by Darwin and Newton. Bernard Williams summarizes this feeling well:

> It seems to me that a correct understanding of evolution is relevant to projects of this kind, but that the effect of that understanding is largely discouraging to them… the idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is 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… The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way fully into ethical thought.[18]

Williams' objection is a general objection from metaphysical naturalism to *any* form of naturalistic ethics. Rosalind Hursthouse says that, "From early on, Williams has expressed pessimism about the project of Aristotelian naturalism on the grounds that Aristotle's conception of nature, and thereby human nature, was normative, and that, in a scientific age, this is not a conception that we can take on board."[19] His objection is ostensibly against the notion of natural teleology but also against a realist notion of human nature as well. If humanity as it is today is a more or less jumbled "bricolage" of adaptive parts, it is hardly a secure enough entity to ground ethical obligations.

Thankfully, morality can function without it. The moral law *by itself* guides or forms our actions without a natural telos performing that function. For example, Christine Korsgaard[20] builds

Utility is Susceptible. He says, "The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible, is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing could ever convince any person that it was so. No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness."

18. Williams.
19. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 256.
20. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*.

a case that human autonomy – the ability to be a law to oneself – is the source of normative authority. How does this work? My own identity as a human being obligates me to behave morally. She argues that "autonomy is the source of obligation" and that "we have *moral* obligations… to humanity as such."[21] Because I am self-reflective, I am accountable for what I do. Also because I am self-reflective, I have a self-conception. She says the "thinking self" regulates the "acting self." Korsgaard's notion of practical identity is that we assume identities such as human being, child, parent, teacher, etc. Each identity is functional; it grounds obligations. If I am really to be a teacher, I must show up for class. If I really am to be a parent, I must feed and educate my child. Practical identities may be more or less contingent. All of us are children; not all of us educators. At least one practical identity is necessary. That is our practical identity *as humans*. Humans "need to have practical conceptions of our identity in order to act and live."[22] The fact is, we do act and live. Therefore we do have a moral identity. Put another way, she says: "Rational action is possible only if human beings find their own humanity to be valuable."[23] The moral identity is one in which I take up a viewpoint as a member of the "Kingdom of Ends", the community of those who also have a moral identity. So the moral law delivers content-full moral duties derived from my own autonomously legislated rules prescribed by my valuing humanity; these rules are not teleological in that they require any future fulfillment of an end to validate them.

The point of these objections is to push back on MacIntyre's narrative in which our modern liberal tradition excised telos. Either we did not do so, or (even if we did) we could get along without it.

These three objections – about relativism, tradition-constituted rationality, and teleology – are some of the most telling against MacIntyre's theory. In the discussion section I shall attempt to answer each one.

21. Ibid., 93.
22. Ibid., 106.
23. Ibid., 106.

> It has often been suggested – by J. L. Austin, for example – that either we can admit the existence of rival and contingently incompatible goods which make incompatible claims to our practical allegiance or we can believe in some determinate conception of the good life for man, but that these are mutually exclusive alternatives. No one can consistently hold both these views. What this contention is blind to is that there may be better or worse ways for individuals to live through the tragic confrontation of good with good. And that to know what the good life for man is may require knowing what are the better and what are the worse ways of living in and through such situations. Nothing a priori rules out this possibility; and this suggests that within a view such as Austin's there is concealed an unacknowledged empirical premise about the character of tragic situations.[24]

Telos is needed

One objection above stated that telos is indeed a necessary part of morality, but that it can be found in modern morality, for instance, in Kantian or consequentialist morality. If the sense of teleology we are using here is merely social and not natural, then MacIntyre would respond, "so much the better for Kant." Moral rules are unintelligible without an understanding of the *internal* or *necessary* relation between some actions and some outcomes. Kant himself, perhaps, understood this better than many of his contemporary readers give him credit.

Telos is not needed

Consequentialism, however, cannot be made to be "teleological" in the Aristotelian or the MacIntyrean sense. The first reason is that, For Mill, happiness is something too specific: pleasure, or freedom from pain. He offers precious little justification for this. Mill's definition of happiness cannot be that thing we all necessarily pursue whenever we act, because then moral rules (guiding us toward the happiness of the greatest number) would be unnecessary. We would all, already, pursue happiness.

24. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223–4.

The second reason is more important: The reason is that Mill and others define "consequences" so as to be always contingent. Mill, like Moore, sees the relation between the end (happiness) and the means (actions that bring about happiness) as statistical, contingent, and probable. There is no internal relation between some actions (such as virtues) and the proper end of human life.

Take as a few examples this statement from G.E. Moore:

> What ought we to do? The answering of this question constitutes the third great division of ethical enquiry; and its nature was briefly explained in Chap. I (§§ 15—17). It introduces into Ethics, as was there pointed out, an entirely new question—the question what things are related as *causes* to that which is good in itself; and this question can only be answered by an entirely new method—the method of empirical investigation; by means of which causes are discovered in the other sciences. *To ask what kind of actions we ought to perform, or what kind of conduct is right, is to ask what kind of effects such action and conduct will produce.* Not a single question in practical Ethics can be answered except by a causal generalization. All such questions do, indeed, also involve an ethical judgment proper—the judgment that certain effects are better, in themselves, than others. But they do assert that these better things are effects—are causally connected with the actions in question. Every judgment in practical Ethics may be reduced to the form: This is a cause of that good thing.[25]

Moore is explicit here that there are no acts that have intrinsic value (qua duty or qua virtuous deed); acts only have value insofar as they cause good effects. This good effects are, for Moore, aesthetic enjoyments, knowledge, and friendships.[26]

The refusal to treat the means/end distinction as clean and absolute is liable to cause critics to misunderstand the neo-Aristotelian position. Charles Taylor endorses the notion that "the place accorded the virtues [is] a kind of litmus test for discriminating Aristotelian from modern ethical theory."[27] He explains this feature of modern moral theories:

25. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903) Chapter 5, Section 89, my emphasis.

26. Ibid. Chapter 6.

27. Charles Taylor, "Justice After Virtue," in *After MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 25.

> …They cannot abide this kind of relation, in which one element is both cause and constituent of another. It is a central demand of one influential construal of modern reason that one clearly sort out means from ends. For utilitarians, the good is happiness, and virtues can only be good instrumentally… If the basic point of morality is to do the right actions, then the virtues must be seen as purely executive. They cannot also be seen as part of the end, because the end is not defined that way.[28]

What could this mean? Behind the means/end distinction is a peculiarly modern assumption that formal and final causes are either not related or not *necessarily* related. But the assumption is unreasonable. Exercise *causes* (efficient causes) health; but it is partly constitutive of health. In other words, exercise *causes* (formal causes) health. The relation between a formal cause and a final cause is an internal, natural, and necessary relation. In biology, the distinction between form and function is a real one but the two are related.[29] The relation between the species *gorilla gorilla* as instantiated in an infant gorilla and a fully grown, mature one is an internal and natural and (given the proper circumstances) a necessary relation. To deny that there are formal causes, or to deny that there are final causes, is simply to beg the question against teleological ethics.

For these reasons, consequentialism of the typical sort that *reduces* the question of what actions, rules, or character traits are good to a question that cannot "be answered except by a causal generalization" is not teleological in the required sense. The character traits that tend to bring about happiness must also be, in a sense, pre-payments on that happiness.

Section conclusion

In sum, the rebuttal of the "no teleology objection" is that the sort of teleology we need is defensible: social teleology. Social teleology does not *necessarily* offend against Darwinian biology, evolu-

28. Ibid., 25.

29. Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose.. Huneman summarizes the "two poles" in the history of biology: "the concept of form and the concept of function." For Huneman, anatomy studies form and physiology studies function. He explains how Kant understood both poles and tried to give due weight to the mechanistic understanding of organisms *and* to the distinctive features of organic life. Humean, Kant, and evolutionary biologists are obliged to explain both form and function as real without reducing one to the other.

tionary psychology, or metaphysical naturalism, but can (and must) be accommodated by them. Furthermore, Kantian philosophy may be able to accommodate social teleology, and so would escape the brunt of MacIntyre's criticism laid out in his narrative. On the other hand, the rebuttal of consequentialism, is that it has not often been taken to allow for a necessary relation between some means and their ends. Virtuous action both *causes* and *partly constitutes* virtuous character. Virtuous character traits both *cause* and *partly constitute* the kind of achievement of our human telos that makes life worth living.

Objection: Our telos is gene propogation

Stephen Brown's Darwinian objection that "happiness" of our species is gene propagation, which seems to transform ethics into a descriptive discipline;

Notes

Julia Driver puts the distinction well: "While it is true that virtue must lead to human flourishing, virtue is not concerned solely with human flourishing. Kindness directed towards a dog is still a moral virtue, even though it contributes to human flourishing not one whit."[30]

The human good is not "flourishing" conceived as an external, contingent consequence to be discovered (in part) and designed (in part). The human good is *to be human*, including all of the particular content entailed by that life form. Humanity is not a merely formal concept, as some have thought (Kant is often attributed this). For Kant, humanity is an end in itself. "Humanity is nothing other than the capacity freely to set particular ends."[31] But merely to be free is not sufficient for humanity. To be free to be human is necessary; but to be human to be free is a paltry, empty, and possibly miserable state.

30. Julia Driver, "Response to My Critics," *Utilitas* 16, no. 01 (2004): 33–41.

31. Paul Guyer, "Ends of Reason and Ends of Nature: The Place of Teleology in Kant's Ethics," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2002): 162.

Chapter 10

Neo-Aristotelianism: Normative Ethics and Metaethics

"The most striking occurrence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science."

– John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism" in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 174.

I. Introduction

My thesis is about virtue, human nature, and natural flourishing. These themes are squarely within contemporary analytic virtue ethics. That said, there are many strands or branches of analytic virtue ethics.[1] As Martha Nussbaum and others have pointed out, self-styled 'virtue ethicists' can differ as much as any other two ethicists. (Is there a tent big enough to include Plato, St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas, and Benjamin Franklin?).[2] While I shall not devote excessive time to comparing my

1. McDowell, Foot, and MacIntyre are each, in their own way, rather idiosyncratic exemplars of the "analytic philosophy".

2. Nussbaum argues that a more helpful taxonomy would distinguish between neo-Humean, neo-Kantian, and neo-Aristotelian theories; an even more fruitful path would be simply to debate the substantive issues, such as the role of reason in morality as compared to the role of emotions and desires and other sub-rational psychological phenomena. Cf. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics.. Pretty clear, neo-Humean virtue theory is an underexplored but exciting sub-field I shall unfortunately not

offering to those of other recent virtue ethicists, it is important to state, up front, that I see the best hope in neo-Aristotelian theories.

Neo-Aristotelianism

My thesis attempts to address issues that arise from the recent neo-Aristotelians. Who are the neo-Aristotelian virtue theorists? Rosalind Hursthouse provides an authoritative list: Anscombe,[3] Geach,[4] Foot,[5] McDowell,[6] MacIntyre,[7] Hursthouse,[8] Nussbaum,[9] and Thompson.[10] I would only add the great Julia Annas[11] (who is of course a scholar of ancient philosophy but whose recent work has been largely devoted to contemporary ethics), and some more recent players in the movement such as Christopher Toner[12], Stephen Brown[13], Jennifer Frey[14], James Barham[15], Allison Postell[16],

explore. Neo-Kantian virtue theory is discussed by Foot and McDowell and so receives passing attention in these chapters.

3. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"; G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Harvard University Press, 1957).

4. Geach, *The Virtues*, 1956.

5. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

6. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*; McDowell, *Mind and World*.

7. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

8. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics and Human Nature," *Hume Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 67–82.

9. Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, ed. J.E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86–131; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September 1988): 32–53; Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics.

10. Thompson, "The Representation of Life.

11. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*; Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*; Annas, "Morality and Self Interest"; Julia Annas, "The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory," ed. David Copp (Oxford University Press, 2006), 515–36; Julia Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing," in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 2004, 61–75.

12. Christopher Hugh Toner, "Flourishing and Self-Interest in Virtue Ethics" (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame; Dissertation, 2003).

13. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*; Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue."

14. Frey, "The Will and the Good."

15. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology."

16. Allison Ann Postell, "What Comes Naturally? The Metaethical Foundations of Virtue Ethics" (PhD thesis, University of Dallas, 2013).

and Arthur Ward[17].

One could certainly construct a worthwhile project analyzing all or some subset of authors. I interact regularly with a broader set of virtue ethicists:[18] For example, the early writings of Peter Geach, Bernard Williams, and Iris Murdoch are responsible for gathering the kindling and setting the spark for contemporary discussions of virtue.

Nevertheless, my main sources are Philippa Foot, John McDowell, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Alasdair MacIntyre. These three defend views that share enough similarities to illuminate many important themes while contrasting enough to motivate rich discussion. For example, they all address (in their own way) all three elements of "the virtue triangle."[19]

The recent rise of virtue ethics

It is difficult to read any "old books" without noticing that virtue talk (in a great variety of theories and contexts) was once a normal part of cultural and intellectual life, in the west and beyond.[20] But it is equally difficult not to notice that virtue talk had receded to the background or disappeared from academic discussions for two or three centuries. Its resurgence in the last 60 years has been

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

18. The broader set includes Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*; Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Clarendon Press, 2003); Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 1992); Paul Bloomfield, *Moral Reality* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Richard Kraut, Robert Adams, Gopal Sreenivasan, Rachana Kamtekar, Talbot Brewer, and R. Scott Smith. Also, in Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Normativity* (Open Court, 2008), Thomson provides a neo-Aristotelian account of normativity.

19. For example, McDowell, Foot, and MacIntyre can be seen using this schema: Cf. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason. and McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics'.; Foot, *Virtues and Vices* and Foot, *Natural Goodness*; MacIntyre, *After Virtue* and MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*. All three themes are, of course, important to Aristotle as well. But I shall reference historical sources such as Aristotle or Aquinas only occasionally and only for convenience; my primary purpose is not historical.

20. The Google Books Ngram viewer quantifies the use of the term 'Virtue' (with a capital V) and 'virtue' (lowercase v): 'Virtue' peaked in 1750 at 0.01%, meaning that 1 in every 1000 words in books published that year were the word "Virtue". For comparison, "the" is 5% of words, or about 50 in every thousand. "Virtue" fell by 1900 back down to 1600 levels (0.0001%, one in every million). The lowercase "virtue" likewise has dropped steadily since the 1790s.

well documented.[21] Not everyone is impressed by the alleged benefits accruing to 'virtue ethics', of course – Nussbaum is not the only one to find the designation unhelpful. Nevertheless, it would have amazed Elizabeth Anscombe if, more than 60 years ago, she could have known that in 2014 as many professional academic philosophers would identify as 'virtue ethicists' as identify as 'deontologists' – about 1/5th each.[22] So how might we explain the resurgance of a category of virtue ethics, however loosely defined?

There are a few reasonable options. Considering them will help frame my project. The first interpretation is that something went profoundly wrong in the development of modern moral philosophy. The Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers turned away from tradition and religion in order to venture a universal, abstract, public, rational theory of morality. But perhaps something essential was lost as our ethical thinking had to adjust to advancements in modern science and changes in modern politics. As science turned outward to the external cosmos (often excluding the human), ethics and politics turned inward (often excluding the external cosmos.) Perhaps these imbalances made it inevitable that there would be equal and opposite errors: some would fall for the kind of Nietzschean subjectivism where no political or religious authority can correct the Great Individiaul, while others would fall for Hobbesian legalism, where no individual can correct the political and religious authorities. This first intrepretation of the rise of virtue ethics presents virtue concepts as corrective of some modern imbalance. Hence, it pits virtue theories against their consequentialist and Kantian alternatives. It finds in the flexibility of Aristotle and the humanism of Confucius a refreshing alternative to the stolid rationalism of Kant or Mill.[23]

Anscombe takes the interpretation that something has gone wrong with modern moral phi-

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

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

23. This interpretation, of course, is a substantive moral thesis couched in the language of a historical thesis. So it is debatable whether this story is even true *as history*. I shall try to remain neutral about the history and discuss the substantive theory.

losophy. She diagnoses all the "English-speaking ethicists" from Sidgwick forward as "consequentialists" and diagnoses all forms of consequentialism as morally depraved. She argues that any secular theorists (such as Kantians) who appeal to an absolute, verdictive moral 'ought' are borrowing from a medieval divine law conception of ethics which is incoherent without the corresponding belief in a divine lawgiver. The alterative, she offers, is the Aristotelian 'ought' which critiques vice without blame and commends virtue without 'the moral ought'. In her view, virtue talk allows non-religious moderns to retain evaluative talk without a divine law by making it something closer to aesthetic talk.

MacIntyre is another who takes this interpretation. His famous "Disquieting Suggestion" pictures modernity as a post-apocalyptic, fractured moral and social world grasping at pieces of a prior shared understanding of the good.[24] Though he is often classified as a 'virtue ethicist', McIntyre himself rejects the label for not even modern virtue ethics goes far enough to restore the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition which he advocates.

Rosalind Hursthouse and Martha Nussbaum offer a second interpretation that is less combative. While they concede that virtue ethicists in the early 20th century presented their view as a *rival*, they think such rhetoric was necessary to fight for a position at the table of respectable ethical theories. And it worked. So it would be needlessly combative to continue with the "rivalry" presentation now that virtue ethics has earned its place as one of the "major moral philosophies" at the table. On this interpretation, virtue concepts can augment, rather than replace, other moral concepts. Nussbaum elaborates: " 'virtue ethics' so-called does not figure as a normative rival to utilitarian and deontological ethics; rather, its (fairly) recent revival is seen as having served the useful purpose of reminding moral philosophers that the elaboration of a normative theory may fall short of giving a full account of our moral life."[25] After all, Kant himself had a theory of virtue.[26]

24. Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chapter 1, "A Disquieting Suggestion."

25. Rosalind Hursthouse, "How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues," ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 1996), 19–33.

26. Anne Margaret Baxley, *Kant's Theory of Virtue: The Value of Autocracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Some theorists have been working to articulate a theory they call "virtue consequentialism" or "character consequentialism."[27] Even more broadly, philosophers have even found room for virtue talk in Humean[28] and Nietzschean[29] virtue theory.

In my view, there is some truth to each of these interpretations. While it is true that virtue talk is flexible enough to enhance non-Aristotelian theories, there is an identifiable core of western virtue theory. That core is part-and-parcel of a larger Aristotelian tradition that is in competition – or at least in tension – with the Enlightenment tradition. The core of an Aristotelian tradition I have in mind corresponds roughly to Nussbaums "common ground" underlying a wide variety of "virtue ethicists."[30] At the same time, certain features of the modern Enlightenment tradition – especially advances in modern science and changes in modern politics – can correct errors or update contingencies in the Aristotelian tradition.

I would like to say a bit more about these mutal "corrections" (if they are corrections).[31] Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, Bernard Williams, Iris Murdoch and others have done philosophical ethics a valuable service by correcting certain myopic tendencies.

The whole action: The first myopic tendency of modern philosophical ethics is a undue fixation on evauating discrete, particular actions. This is the kind of ethics that only knows how to

27. Ben Bradley, "Virtue Consequentialism," *Utilitas* 17, no. 03 (2005): 282–98; Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2003). Copp and Sobol say: There has never been any doubt that consequentialist theories could accord to the virtues a derivative or indirect moral significance. If we begin with a simple direct form of consequentialism, we could add to it the thesis that the virtues are the states of character such that, if people generally possessed them, more good would result than if people generally had other states of character. On such an account, the virtues would be instrumentally of value." (David Copp and David Sobel, "Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics*," *Ethics* 114, no. 3 (2004): 514–54 515).

28. Michael Slote, "Sentimentalist Virtue and Moral Judgement Outline of a Project," *Metaphilosophy*, 2003, 131–43.

29. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*.

30. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 170. One difference is that Nussbaum's "common ground" includes Kant and Mill and Sidgwick, whereas neo-Aristotelians critique Kant and Mill's ethics along the lines I shall elaborate below: they are not holistic enough about action, human personhood, and human life.

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

ask "Is X wrong?" (substituting for X some particular moral action, such as abortion, or lying, or nuclear proliferation). If morality is about individual acts or even about kinds of action, it seems to be the case that either moral rules are to be followed for their own sake or else they do not matter (for only consequences matter). If, on the other hand, the obligation to be virtuous is only one point on the virtue triangle, then the other two points provide much needed context. If we know who and what we are prior to acquiring virtues, and we have some picture of who and what we have the potential to be, then it becomes more likely that we will not see moral rules as arbitrary impositions or as unaccountable – like bolts of lightning from a clear sky. The neo-Aristotelians are insistant on this point. Martha Nussbaum argues we cannot construct an ethical theory by discussing only "isolated moments of choice."[32] The correction is to ethically examine *whole actions* – such as cooking a meal, earning a degree, raising up a disadvantaged people group – where whole actions are conceptually united bundles of individual actions. We shall return to these themes in a later chapter.

The whole person: The second myopic tendency is that of focussing on one aspect of moral psychology (such as motive, or emotion, or character traits) to the exclusion of others. Continuing with Nussbaum's "common ground", she says, "Even though a concern for motive, intention, character, and the whole course of life was not in principle alien to Kantian and Utilitarian philosophy, it was certainly alien to most British and American Kantians and Utilitarians of the period."[33] The correction to this tendency is to include a role for both reason and the passions, and to specify those roles. However, two groups display very different strategies in including the whole person. For Nussbaum, the first group consists of characteristically "anti-Utilitarians" who want reason to play a much larger role than Mill (or the typical Utilitarian) would wish; the second consists of characteristically "anti-Kantians" and want sub-rational psychological states to play a much larger role than Kant (or the typical Kantian) would wish. The first group defend the plurality of goods, rationality's

32. Ibid., 174.
33. Ibid., 173.

role in deliberating about which ends to pursue and its role in organizing, ranking, and harmonizing that plurality of goods, the rational character of some emotions, and the need for a rational critique of the broader social and political setting in which "defective passions and judgments" are formed.[34] This is an oversimplification but a helpful one. (I return to the relation between emotion and rationality in a later chapter.) By this distinction, it will be plain that my thesis is much more clearly "anti-utilitarian" than anti-Kantian. The emotions, desires, motivations, passions – the numerous variegated sub-rational mental states of normal human psychology – can be made rational and/or can be accommodated within a rational pattern of life, the same way a garden of plants can exhibit a "rational pattern" (i.e., flowers in squares or rows) that has clear purpose and order, even though the plants themselves are obviously not thinking beings.

The whole life: A third myopic tendency is that of philosophizing about individual moral dilemmas instead of the whole of life. Virtue ethicists have tended to reframe arguments to look not just at individual choices or actions (viewed from the outside, like a moral critic) but to look at the whole of life (viewed from the inside, like a moral agent). For example, Elizabeth Anscombe and Bernard Williams have done as much as anyone to remind moral philosophers that questions of what is wrong are posterior to, and often less troublesome than, the question "How ought I to live?" The 'how to live?' question is not optional for normal, reflective, adults. Of course, the two questions are related. But if the relation between individual actions and the whole of life is the relation between parts and their whole, then the intelligible whole must be grasped first. MacIntyre scholar Stanley Hauerwas argues that "the central contention in *After Virtue* is his remark that "the concept of an intelligible action is a more fundamental concept than that of an action."[35] Similarly, Jennifer

34. Ibid., 180.

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

Frey (following Anscombe) argues that"no part of an intentional action is independently intelligible as a part, aside from an exercise of practical knowledge of the action as a whole."[36] That is not to say that moral quandaries are unimportant in life or unimportant in theory. Philosophical nonsense can often be exposed with a cutting counterexample, even a wildly hypothetical one. In life, moral dilemmas are real, if blessedly rare – at least the kind of great moral dilemmas encountered in great works of fiction (*Othello*, *War and Peace*, *Gilead*). The point is that the more specific 'what to do?' question that arises in times of moral crisis or crossroads is less common than the general 'how to live?' "Character ethics," rather than mere "quandary ethics" is what is really needed in the vast majority of circumstances.[37] Ninety-nine parts of any given day have no great dilemmas or great temptations to do evil. Rather, ninety-nine parts of any given day are filled with habits, long-held goals, and small choices between competing or conflicting goods that all seem worthwhile but cannot all be pursued. (Check email or grade papers? Use a spare hour to write more or read more? Apply to jobs in state near family or out of state near friends? Invest in this friendship or spend much-needed time alone?) Hence, philosophical ethics can and should return to such practical questions.

The whole history: A fourth myopic tendency that these virtue ethicists have corrected, I think, is an *ahistorical* approach that had become fashionable in analytic ethics during the apex and aftermath of logical positivism. Many had such a passion for mathematically clear, abstract, lucid and timeless articulations of their philosophy such that if an ethical theory could not be so articulated, it could be ignored. Furthermore, such philosophers easily fell for the temptation of regarding the contingencies of the present fashion as unquestionable timeless truths.

The correction to this tendency is to allow that ethical norms are typically bound up with social norms, and so to allow that ethical norms have a history; and that the social and ethical norms of the present day may be little more than fashion. Many neo-Aristotelians and others stud-

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

37. Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics"; Cf. also Gregory Trianosky, "What Is Virtue Ethics All About?" *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1990, 335–44.

ied classics or history in addition to ethics, or prior to ethics. Long familiarity with cultures, places, and times other than one's own has a salubrious effect of helping one to see one's own culture and time. (For many people, "culture shock" occurs not when leaving one's home country, but when returning home from a very different foreign country.) Likewise, philosophers who have spent long hours conversing with Aristotle or Aquinas are likely to notice more easily the assumptions, biases, strengths, and weaknesses of our own modern context. Jack Weinstein observes that Alasdair Macintyre did for ethics what John Rawls did for political philosophy: where Rawls re-invigorated political philosophy, "inaugurating the dominance of late twentieth-century liberalism"[38], MacIntyre helped to re-invigorate analytic ethical philosophy (especially the ascendancy of late twentieth-century virtue ethics) by freshly examining ethical concepts in light of history.[39] MacIntyre argues that we can only responsibly use and evaluate practical concepts such as self, practice, telos, or virtue when we know our own history. Since *we ourselves* inhabit a tradition, we must know ourselves *as* inhabitants of a tradition with a past. We will return to these themes in later chapters.

These are corrections that virtue ethics can offer to other modern moral philosophies. But the modern world is not the ancient world. Modern science, philosophy, and culture are not the same as their pre-modern counterparts. It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists pay due respect to what *has* changed. What corrections can modernity offer to virtue ethics?

As McDowell suggests in the quotation above, an admittedly vague initial answer is that Aristotelian virtue ethics needs to be modified to match with modern science.[40]

38. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 38.

39. Ibid., chap. 4.

40. A second possibility is that virtue ethics needs to be put in conversation with modern liberal social and political thought. Is virtue ethics intrinsically classist, or sexist? MacIntyre thinks not. In so far as he discusses these matters, *some* such conversation will be touched on in a later chapter. A full treatment is, of course, outside the scope of this dissertation.

II. Three Goals

To put the matter simply: the Neo-Aristotelian virtue theory of the sort I am discussing has three goals: to be normatively ethical, naturalistic, and appropriately scientific. Each of these goals is difficult.

Ethics is "normally" taken to be normative, in that it commends specific virtues, such as moderation, tolerance, and practical wisdom, but normativity is no easy concept. As Alan Gibbard says: "[Part] of what's special about morality is that it operates in the 'space of reasons;' it concerns justification and oughts. The term 'normative' is central to much current philosophical discussion. There's no agreement on what this technical term in our discipline is to mean, but it involves, in a phrase drawn from Sellars, being somehow 'fraught with ought'."[41] So by 'normative' throughought I shall mean 'ought' talk and those facts to which 'ought' talk might refer.[42] Ethical naturalism is typically agnostic or atheistic in that it does not depend upon any particular religious ethic, but there various sorts of naturalism, as I shall explain below. And modern virtue ethics has the opportunity to draw on the latest scientific research in ethology, anthropology, evolutionary biology, sociology and so on. But should it? What does empirical science have to do with ethics?

This brief review indicates that the neo-Aristotelian project is attended by difficulties on all sides. I would like to say a bit more about each of these three goals.

Philosophical Ethics

The recent neo-Aristotelians offer what we might call a complete philosophical ethics. In general, 'ethical naturalism' is a name for any view of ethics that accords with metaphysical naturalism. In this sense, ethical naturalism includes a wide variety views, many of which are "deflationary

41. Allan Gibbard, "Normative Properties," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2003): 141–57 321

42. Cf. Peter Schaber, "Normative Facts," *Studies into the Foundations of an Integral Theory of Practice and Cognition*, 2005, 107–22. Schaber defends normative realism – the view that there are normative facts – but his realism is non-naturalistic.

conceptions" of ethics such as the "non-cognitivist, prescriptivist, projectivist, relativist"[43] or any other anti-realist conception. These views vary, but each of them acknowledges the "purported objectivity"[44] of morality but aims to "debunk it"[45] in various ways.

In a narrower sense, however, 'ethical naturalism' is name for some types of moral realism. Moral realism is the view that the objective purport of morality – its apparent importance, bindingness, and so on – are to be explained but not explained away. In this sense, ethical naturalism is one way of *explaining moral reality*. The ethical naturalist, as James Lemnan puts it, affirms that "there are objective moral facts and properties and that these facts and properties are natural facts and properties."[46] Ethical naturalism's rivals are supernaturalism (wherein moral facts are real and somehow divine), non-naturalism (wherein moral facts are *real* but not identifiable with any natural facts), and anti-realism (wherein there are no moral facts).

The Neo-Aristotelian theories I am introducing here are examples of moral or ethical naturalism in this narrower sense. They think the apparent importance of morality is to be explained, and can be explained with reference to what attributes or goods human beings need *because of who and what they are*.

Neo-Aristotelians such as Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre converse about normative ethical and metaethical claims, often in the same book. Put differently, their theories have aimed to provide a normative ethics (detailed content about the kind of life one ought to live and the kinds of traits one ought to acquire) as well as a ground of morality in moral metaphysics, moral psychology, moral epistemology, etc.

This combination of sub-disciplines is a source of worries about taxonomical confusion.

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43. Boyd, "Finite Beings, Finite Goods," 504.
44. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 287.
45. Ibid., 154.
46. James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014. Alternatively, Russ Shafer-Landau's moral realism is not a metaphysical but an epistemological thesis: moral facts *can be known* apart from knowing natural facts. Some moral truths are self-evident. Cf. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*.

James Lenman's summary of neo-Aristotelianism is a good example of this worry:

> One important school of thought … [is] work is inspired by that of Aristotle. This view has its roots in the writings of G. E. M. Anscombe, P. T. Geach and the early Philippa Foot among others. Its contemporary representatives include the later Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, Martha Nussbaum and Judith Jarvis Thomson. As this list makes clear, this is very much the official metaethical theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics.[47]

Lenman seems bemused with neo-Aristotelian naturalism. When he says that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is "the official metaethical theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics" he seems to betray a lurking metaphilosophical confusion. For when Foot, Hursthouse, McDowell are classified as virtue ethicists (a normative theory) *and* neo-Aristotelians (a metaethical theory), we might object. Aren't these two different projects? The answer in short is: not necessarily. Explaining this answer requires a short discursus.

One legacy of G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* has been the tendency to sharply distinguish primary ethical questions (about what things are good) from metaethical questions (about what 'good' as an evaluative predicate *means*). The first asks about what things are good; the second about the word 'good' itself. The first is a substantive question about which items fall under a category. The second is a conceptual question about how to define that category.

Moore valiantly took it upon himself to indict all previous ethical philosophers for failing to resolve their disputes for a failure to define their terms. (Of course, the questions that concern modern metaethicists were posed and discussed by prior thinkers. However, the *Principia* gave a distinctive form to these questions and suggested a distinctive range of possible answers.) Moore argued (or according to some critics, *assumed*) that 'goodness' was indefinable.[48] That is, the good could not be defined in terms of any other property. It is false that 'goodness is pleasure' for our

47. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism." Lenman acknowledges that Thomson might need to be subtracted from this list and that John McDowell might need to be added.

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

pursuit pleasure is a psychological fact, not an ethical one; it is false that 'goodness is whatever is most real' for something's reality is a metaphysical fact, not an ethical one.

Now, it is tautologous that if goodness really is indefinable, then any attempt to define it will fail. Any attempt to reduce the concept to a concept of lesser intension, or to translate it, will fail. But is there something necessarily erroneous about inferring "ought" statements from "is" statements?[49] I will address his worry in a later chapter (chapter 3).

Lenman's confusion reflects Moore's belief that questions of moral language and questions of substance can "come apart." But this is not *necessarily* true. The neo-Aristotelians are pretty universally critical of Moore's starting point, as we shall see.[50] Furthermore, Alan Gibbard, who is no opponent of metaethics in general, is well aware that one's substantive ethical views can determine one's view of the relation between questions of substance and those of meaning:

> Moore stressed the distinction in ethics between questions of meaning and questions of substance, and thereby gave rise to a tradition in analytic philosophy of separating the two parts of ethical theory: the metatheory and the substantive, normative part. Some philosophers have rejected the distinction; some Kantians, for instance, think that if you get the metatheory right, substantive ethical conclusions fall out as some kind of consequence, so that metaethics and substantive ethics are not really separate. Then too, anyone who rejects Sidgwick's and Moore's indefinability claim and thinks that ethical terms can be given analytic, naturalistic definitions thinks that the two putative subdivisions are not really separate. Those who reject any systematic distinction between questions of meaning and questions of substance might likewise reject a sharp, separate subject of metaethics.[51]

I think Gibbard is right, here. One's substantive views will affect one's preferred philosophical taxonomy. Kantians and (some kinds of) naturalists will deny the strict separation. To allow the seemingly innocuous separation of formal from material aspects of a topic might just unwittingly beg the question against a range of acceptable views on that topic.

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49. Moore had a preferred name for this error – if it is an error – but mentioning it would just muddy the waters. If absolutely necessary, I shall only call Moore's version "The Fallacy That Shall Not Be Named."

50. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 1, "A Fresh Start?"; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 2, "The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism".

51. Gibbard, "Normative Properties," 320.

As evidence, notice the conspicuous pattern that advocates of a neutral, procedural, formal metaethics seem to endorse first-order consequentialism. Moore himself, though non-naturalist, was a consequentialist as well, so we ought to expect that he separate the formal metatheory from the substantive moral theory. Not only Moore, but theorists as different from each other as J.L. Mackie, Frank Jackson, Richard Boyd, Peter Railton, Simon Blackburn, and Alan Gibbard all endorse some form of consequentialism. To echo Lenman, we can say that the view that metaethics is separable from normative ethics is very much the official theory of a main current in contemporary consequentialism. Richard Boyd makes much the same point:

> …although nothing like entailment between these positions obtains, the idea that moral questions are questions about how we can help each other flourish seems central to contemporary naturalist moral realism. In a certain sense, some version of consequentialism seems to be the *natural* position for naturalist moral realists.[52]

This is the first response to Lenman's worry about fusing ethics and metaethics in one theory. Neo-Aristotelianism, like Kantianism, is a view wherein ethics and metaethics cannot and do not "come apart." They are, rather, procedural and substantive aspects of the same thing; they are formal and material aspects of the same thing. They might be *distinguishable* in thought, but they are not *separable*.

A second response is possible. Even if the formal aspects can be made neutral with respect to the normative, material aspects, it is still admirably ambitious to construct a theory that pays attention to both. In support of this notion, Stephen Darwall points out that normativity is at the heart of both ethics and metaethics:

> …although metaethics and normative ethics are properly focused on different issues, they need to be brought into dynamic relation with one another in order to produce a systematic and defensible philosophical ethics. This mutual dependence is owing to the fact that issues of normativity are at the center of the concerns of both metaethics and normative ethics.[53]

52. Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," 505–6.

53. Stephen Darwall, "How Should Ethics Relate to (the Rest of) Philosophy?: Moore's Legacy," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2003): 1–20.

Hence, my thesis is squarely an ethical argument concerning what character traits are worth pursuing (e.g, moral and intellectual virtues) and what traits count as virtues (e.g., moderation, practical wisdom). However, an adequate defense of this thesis requires assessment of foundational metaethical considerations (e.g., is the human life form a sufficient grounding of moral facts? How do we know what to do?)

As neo-Aristotelianism is a species of ethical naturalism, it is a species of moral realism. But 'moral realism' refers to a wide range of views. Do I expect that my argument will persuade a moral anti-realist? It depends on the anti-realist; one whose real objections causes him or her to suffer a worrisome despair about ethics may be persauded by sufficiently cogent arguments about objective value. But another who poses only hypothetical objections and demands that ethical considerations satisfy an impossibly high standard for epistemic consent is not likely to find in this argument what they desire.

Three Sorts of Naturalism

In what sense is neo-Aristotelianism naturalistic? There is a general and a specific answer to that question. Genearlly, neo-Aristotelians identify moral facts with natural facts about *some* aspect of humanity. As Rosalind Hursthouse says, "Virtue ethics, or at least any form of it that takes its inspiration from Aristotle, is usually taken to be a form of ethical naturalism – broadly, the enterprise of basing ethics in some way on consideration of human nature, on what is involved with being good *qua* human being."[54] The hope is that if we can say what a *good human being* is, we shall be well on the way to describing what kinds of actions are right and wrong, or what kind of character traits are admirable or blameworthy.

More specifically, there are several brands of such neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism: Are the natural facts or properties in question biological properties (Foot), our shared human life form

54. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 192.

itself (Thompson), shared rationality (McDowell), a characteristic way of life (Hursthouse), or something else? Three sorts concern us here.

The first is Philippa Foot's. Foot's sort of neo-Aristotelianism aims to discover that "the status of certain dispositions as virtues should be determined by quite general facts about human beings."[55] She goes further than just basing evaluative properties on "considerations of human nature"; she identifies goodness and badness with the *natural properties of organisms in general* (such as health, functionality, and disease). Humans are one type of natural organism, so perhaps morality is one type of natural goodness.

Jennifer Frey summarizes the "master thought" of Foot's brand of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism:

> The ethical naturalist's master thought is this: man needs the virtues just as much as a bee needs its sting. Such a thought is intriguing insofar as it takes the ethereal and elusive 'moral ought' and brings it back down to earth, by locating it within a wider structure of evaluation we already readily grasp and acknowledge as objectively valid.[56]

One of the potential attractions of Foot's type of ethical naturalism is that, by bringing the 'moral ought' into closer contact with empirical disciplines, ethicists can more fully avail themselves of the fruits of modern science. As Joyce points out: "Key contributions can be made [in ethics] by social and developmental psychologists, experimental economists, neuroscientists, geneticists, primatologists, anthropologists, comparative ethologists, and evolutionary biologists."[57] Mark Murphy calls Foot's hypothesis a type of "secular natural law theory". It aims to apply to ethics natural normative notions such as 'necessity', 'ought', and 'health', which are already in use in biological and other sciences.

Indeed, although neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism has many rivals, it has proven to have

55. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 45.

56. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 5.

57. Richard Joyce, "Ethics and Evolution," *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory, 2nd Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2013)*, 2013, 1.

a surprisingly broad appeal. It has appealed not only to philosophers but to specialists in other academic fields, such as sociology, anthropology,[58] business and accounting,[59] bioethics, public health ethics,[60] education,[61] and others. For example, sociologist Amanda Maull summarizing the issue like this:

> Drawing upon the works of philosophers such as Philippa Foot, Richard Kraut, and Martha Nussbaum, the claim is made that there are moral properties and facts that are natural (rather than occult or supernatural), which are derived from certain innate dispositions and capacities of living things (i.e., those associated with growth and self-maintenance as opposed to destruction or harm). Human beings have evolved as social creatures with special capacities for speech and reason such that specification of "human flourishing" is more complex and problematic than it is for plants or animals. For the human being, the idea of the "good life" goes beyond biological survival and pertains to potentially ambiguous concepts such as virtue, happiness, and "well-being."[62]

Yet Foot's view is by no means the default view. Certain objections are commonly raised. Stephen Brown summarizes a "charge… frequently levelled at ethical naturalism, *viz.* that it seeks to 'reduce' ethics to something else, perhaps biology, perhaps to something even more 'fundamental' like physics."[63] John McDowell doesn't *quite* accuse Foot of this mistake; nevertheless, he thinks her theory is dangerously close to the kind of mistake that would "biologize" ethical theory, turning *normative* ethics into a merely *empirical* discipline. His criticism of such a mistake is that it falls prey to the "Myth of the Given"[64] – roughly, the notion that some conceptual content (including

58. Bernardo Brown, "Configurations of the Ethical," *Current Anthropology* 57, no. 2 (2016): 240–41.

59. Andrew West, "The Ethics of Professional Accountants: An Aristotelian Perspective," *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, 2016.

60. Leonard W Ortmann et al., "Public Health Ethics: Global Cases, Practice, and Context," in *Public Health Ethics: Cases Spanning the Globe* (Springer, 2016), 3–35.

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

62. Amanda Maull, "A Deweyan Defense of Ethical Naturalism," *Society* 50, no. 6 (2013): 577.

63. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 5.

64. McDowell, *Mind and World*. McDowell borrows this phrase from Sellars. Cf. Wilfrid Sellars and others, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 1, no. 19 (1956): 253–329

ethical norms) can be just *given*, for free, in perceptual experience.

While criticizing Foot, McDowell is also a neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalist in the narrower sense described above: he thinks moral values are real, yet he denies that they are parts of the empirical world of bald nature and denies that they are part of some other, non-natural realm. What is the alternative? This is the second sort to be discussed.

For McDowell, moral values are part of the "space of reasons", or "second nature."[65] "Second nature" is for McDowell our own rational consciousness in so far as it is enculturated by language, custom, evaluation, habit, and a way of seeing the world.[66] McDowell's "second nature" is inherently rational but also social, and depends on our intersubjective "form of life." Hence, values are "secondary qualities" of nature, partially constituted by the mental act of the observer. Human virtue, on this account, is a sort of perceptual sensitivity to "what a situation requires."[67] One is not perceptually sensitive to a primary natural fact, but to a dispositional property – a property that is partly natural and partly constituted by the rational appraisal of the moral agent (i.e., "second nature").

McDowell and Foot both lay claim to the title of 'neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism', since neither wishes to completely debunk morality but neither wishes to accept a source that is supernatural or non-natural.

But, as we can see, McDowell and Foot represent two very different "sorts of naturalism."[68] These internecine controversies are more than a war of words. A heuristic oversimplification might be that one finds a grounding for real moral values in the context of rationality (that is, the conscious, the subjective, the cultural or intersubjective) while other finds it in a broader context of biological

65. McDowell, *Mind and World*.

66. Compare with Hegel: "The habit of the ethical appears as a second nature which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is all pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence." G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. Allen W Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1991) 195.

67. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason."

68. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism"; Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism." Both of these articles will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

functionality (that is, the physical, the scientific, and the objective). would be to say that one sort emphasizes biology while the other sort emphasizes rationality). Both see the importance of grounding ethical facts in natural facts, but Foot thinks that scientifically accessible natural teleological facts are live candidates; McDowell does not.

The fault line here is a real one. Each represents an understanding of the difference between nature and normativity, between "facts and values."[69] This dilemma, I think, explains the innocent confusion from Lenman and others about who actually deserves the title of "naturalists". Lenman points out in a footnote that Thomson probably shouldn't be on this list and that John McDowell probably should. He says "McDowell is certainly pervasively inspired by Aristotle and he describes himself as a naturalist. See especially his 1995. But I suspect many philosophers would find his use of the term 'naturalist' here somewhat Pickwickian."[70] Such confusion arises from Lenman's assumption that nature is purely descriptive, with no "ought". Moore and those influenced by him, both naturalists and non-naturalists, have agreed with the underlying assumption that "nature" is strictly non-normative. But what if this assumption is mistaken? Putting the contrast in this way highlights the broader implications of this debate. At stake are the very concepts of 'nature', 'science', and 'human nature' which have been thematized in other important philosophical debates in metaphysics, the philosophy of science, philosophical anthropology, and others.

Because of the deep fault lines between Foot and McDowell's sorts of naturalism, other neo-Aristotelians have also weighed in. They have either taken sides or aimed to find a third alternative that synthesizes the other two. For example, Rosalind Hursthouse's landmark monograph, *On Virtue Ethics*, picks and chooses: she builds on Foot's account in many ways, even though she agrees with McDowell in rejecting the search for an "external", objective, scientific foundation for virtue ethics. Alasdair MacIntyre's influential book, *After Virtue*, aligns more with McDowell in rejecting "Aristotle's metaphysical biology", but his later writings align more with Foot in arguing

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

70. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."

that "human identity is primarily, even if not only, bodily and therefore animal identity and it is by reference to that identity that the continuities of our relationships to others are partly defined."[71]

Between Foot's and McDowell's sorts of ethical naturalism, who has the upper hand? Is there any hope for a "third sort" of naturalism that draws from or synthesizes the other two? Can one unite "second nature" with "primary nature" – unite, that is, the *rational/cultural/intersubjective* aspect of ethics with the *empirical/biological/objective* aspect of the same? I think the third sort is the best bet, as I shall argue in the chapters that follow.

For now, let me stipulate my sense of 'naturalism.' Mine is an ethical naturalism in at least the following senses:

1. My thesis is naturalistic according to what Hans Fink calls an "unrestricted conception of nature."[72] This conception expresses the idea, he continues, that "there is one world only, and that that world is the realm of nature, which is taken to include the cultural, artificial, mental, abstract and whatever else there may prove to be."[73]
2. It is naturalistic in that I propose to use only the resources of human experience and the methods of philosophy and the natural sciences in identifying my initial premises and advancing my claims.
3. It is naturalistic in that I argue that such philosophical and scientific methods applied to the world – including to the biological world and to humanity – are sufficient to derive my normative ethical conclusions.

I would like to specify that while I am adopting methodological agnosticism about the existence of a God or gods, I am not adopting atheism. The importance of the difference will become clear in a later chapter. For now I will say that one of my limiting conditions is to to allow both that a monotheistic God might be directing all affairs to his purposes and guiding human beings by his commands and that, to (paraphrase Augustine), our hearts are restless until they rest in him; and to allow that human life might be a brief and beautiful flash of consciousness in an otherwise cold, pitiless, and dead cosmos, and that even so we ought to pursue all the virtues before we go extinct – whether we do or "do not go gentle into that good night."[74] There is no clear consensus among

71. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8.
72. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 210.
73. Ibid., 210.
74. I hope in future to research the relationship between virtue theory and religion, especially

neo-Aristotelians about the role of religion in ethics; this diversity seems to me a strength. It gives some merit to the notion that one can evaluate virtue ethics grounded in natural normativity like one can evaluate electrons, integers, or evolution: these is *compatible* with the existence of a god but it does not *require* or *entail* the existence of a god.[75] In this way, my project may be seen as building on Philippa Foot's work to advance a kind of secular natural law theory.[76] This kind of "natural law" may also be seen as a kind of neo-Stoicism. Elizabeth Anscombe says:

> One might be inclined to think that a law conception of ethics could arise only among people who accepted an allegedly divine positive law; that this is not so is shown by the example of the Stoics, who also thought that whatever was involved in conformity to human virtues was required by divine law.[77]

While I shall concede that normative ethics cannot survive some philosophical environments – such as aggressively reductive or eliminative physicalism – I shall for present purposes remain neutral as to whether the natural norms discoverable in nature have a further, divine origin.

My suggested name for this type of relaxed or liberal naturalism is Recursive Naturalism.[78]

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in Michael Sherwin, Michael Austin and others. Cf. Michael S Sherwin, *By Knowledge & by Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (CUA Press, 2005); Michael W Austin, *Virtues in Action: New Essays in Applied Virtue Ethics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

75. Compare with H Tristram Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics* (Oxford University Press, 1996). Engelhardt is a religious philosopher exploring the scope and limits of secular philosophy. While I shall end up agreeing with Engelhardt that secular moral philosophy (in the form of virtue ethics) remains fundamentally — and perhaps dangerously — pluralistic, I am a bit more optimistic than he about how far natural morality can go. Noah was not a Christian or a Jew was nevertheless "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God." (Gen 6:9) Even Abel somehow knew what sacrifice would be acceptable, perhaps because, as Paul says, he was "doing by nature the things contained in the law." Rom 2.14.

76. Murphy: "The paradigmatic natural law view [e.g., Thomistic natural law] holds that (1) the natural law is given by God; (2) it is naturally authoritative over all human beings; and (3) it is naturally knowable by all human beings… Recently there have been nontheistic writers in the natural law tradition, who deny (1): see, for example, the work of Michael Moore (1982, 1996) and Philippa Foot (2001)." Cf. Mark Murphy, "The Natural 'Law Tradition in Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2011, 2011

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

78. I do not find this term anywhere in the literature. The only place I can find it is an obscure chapter of an obscure book about democracy: Ali Errishi, in *Problems for Democracy*, vol. 181 (Rodopi, 2006). Errishi's nice little paper uses the term 'recursive naturalism' to mean something

By this epithet, I aim to capture several facts. First, though human beings are natural and continuous with the rest of nature, human beings can hold nature in consciousness. With human beings comes into the cosmos intentionality or "aboutness." And one of the things that human beings can be conscious about is themselves, or all of the cosmos including themselves. The human mind contemplating nature is like the Droste Effect. Droste is a cocoa brand whose package features a painting of the girl holding a box of cocoa (which shows a painting of a girl holding a box of cocoa, ad infinitum.) Likewise, the human mind can know even that part of nature that is *the human mind consciously thinking about nature*. Nature recurs within nature, that one part of nature (us) knows nature (the cosmos) including that part of nature that we are. Secondly, my definition of virtue is recursive, since virtues are defined (in part) as those qualities that enable a moral agent to acquire more virtues. Thirdly, my definition of practical wisdom is recursive, since practical wisdom is defined (in part) as the know-how one needs to acquire more wisdom. Fourthly, my definition of human flourishing is recursive, since flourishing is defined (in part) as the state in which a human being is becoming more virtuous, becoming more practically wise, and discovering more detail about the definition of human flourishing.

Scientific

It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists clarify the relationship of their theories to modern science. This was the thrust of the original "naturalism" that became dominant in America in the early 1900s. As David Papineau summarizes, "The self-proclaimed "naturalists" from that period included John Dewey, Ernest Nagel, Sidney Hook and Roy Wood Sellars. These philosophers aimed to ally philosophy more closely with science. They urged that reality is exhausted by nature, containing nothing "supernatural", and that the scientific method should be used to investigate

quite different than I am do here. He means something like "unquestionable completeness and adequacy", a vicious belief that one no longer need be open to criticism.

all areas of reality, including the "human spirit" (Krikorian 1944; Kim 2003)."[79] Quine thought (or claimed he thought) that "naturalistic philosophy is continuous with natural science"[80] but we should not forget that this continuity cuts both ways. It might be taken to mean that philosophy should be or can be more "scientific" (i.e., empirical and material); but it also might be taken to mean that science should be or can be more "philosophical" (i.e., abstract and formal).

More broadly, 'naturalism' has become a kind of banner for a variety of views that are not supernaturalistic and place a high value on natural sciences. Such a broad definition is rightly seen to be almost infinitely inclusive: it does not exclude Spinozistic pantheism or panpsychism.[81]

Without further determination, therefore, the relationship between naturalism and morality is somewhat unclear. For example, some philosophers – such as Michael Ruse and Sharon Street – find in modern evolutionary theory incompatible with moral realism.[82] Ruse's famous expression is that "morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes."[83] Others – such as Wielenberg and Thomas Nagel – find evolutionary theory either irrelevant to morality or a possible source of *vindication* of moral realism.[84] Given this indeterminacy, the attempt to capture all that is good in both the Aristotelian and modern traditions leads me to neo-Aristotelian naturalism. How can neo-Aristotelianism help, if at all, clarify the relationship between science and morality in particular, and (more generally) between facts and values, between 'is' and 'ought'?

The modern "scientific" point of view (if there is *one* such view) is commonly supposed to be monistic or at least non-dualistic. Though not all are so confident,[85] there is a widespread

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

80. (1995a), 256–7, see also 1969, 126–7.

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

82. Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (2006): 109–66.

83. Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Blackwell, 1986), 253.

84. Erik Wielenberg, "On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality," *Ethics* 120, no. 3 (2010): 441–64; Erik Wielenberg, "In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2009): 23–41.

85. John Dupré, "The Miracle of Monism," in *Naturalism in Question*, ed. Mario De Caro

preference – whenever it is possible – for ontological simplicity, epistemological parsimony, and aesthetic elegance. Non-dualism may have an ontological aim, or an epistemological one, or both.

For example, eliminative physicalism is radically monistic but is unsatisfying in that it provides a clean explanation of "everything" only by leaving out some of the most important things (i.e., consciousness). The epistemological naturalism (of, say, John Shook) sees experience, reason, and science (together) as constituting the single method for acquiring knowledge of the world and ourselves. The neo-Aristotelian project takes this corrective to ethics and typically aims to avoid dualisms. It aims, rather, at a holistic picture of nature that includes humans and all living things within the cosmos and includes all parts of a human being (reason, emotion, desire, etc.). Margaret Atkins eloquently summarizes the holistic vision of these thinkers: "Anglo-American moral philosophy [has moved] beyond the limitations not only of A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson, but also of Hume's focus on sentiment, on the one hand, and Kant's focus on reason on the other. Contemporary ethics is about the whole human being, seen as biological, social and cultural, emotional and reflective."[86]

A Dilemma for Ethical Naturalists

I have said that my aim is to defend a genuinely normative ethical thesis about virtue that is nonetheless naturalistic. To some, ethical naturalism sounds like an contradiction in terms, like "weirdly normal" or "efficient DMV". Indeed, Hursthouse calls neo-Aristotelian an "odd sort" of ethical naturalism.[87] Why? Some critics of neo-Aristotelianism push the following dilemma:[88] Either eth-

and David Macarthur (Harvard University Press, 2004), 36–58.

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

87. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism," *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2013.

88. Frey, "The Will and the Good" describes the dilemma excellently in chapter 4. Cf. also Bernard Mauser, "The Ontological Foundations for Natural Law Theory and Contemporary Ethical Naturalism" (PhD thesis, Marquette University, 2011); and Scott Woodcock, "Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism and the Indeterminacy Objection," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015): 20–41.

ical naturalism will not be genuinely *ethical* (i.e., normative and action-guiding)[89] or it will not be genuinely *naturalistic*.[90]

On the former horn, if neo-Aristotelians succeed in naturalizing ethics, then it seems that normative categories such as virtue, vice, flourishing, human goodness, will be reduced to descriptive facts (.eg., virtuous people are statistically likely to flourish, flourishing is psychological health, etc.). But this seems hardly normative at all. On the latter horn, if ethics remains truly normative, then we end up concluding that flourishing is the kind of state we *ought* to pursue whether or not we actually reach it — whether or not, in fact *anyone* has actually reached it. Virtues are those qualities that are acquirable and that we *ought* to acquire, whether or not anyone does or ever has acquired them.

This sounds hardly naturalistic at all. Now, on the one hand, questioning a theory's "naturalism" is pointless without further stipulation, for there are many types of naturalism. The word 'nature' – like its cognates 'natural' and 'naturalism' – is perhaps the most ambiguous, multisignificant word in our language. It seems that the only thing to be done is to stipulate a meaning and move on. On the other hand, though, the question of "naturalism" is tangled up with real, substantive issues. In the next two chapters, I shall attempt to untangle these issues and defend a conception of nature within which ethical evaluations are neither unnatural nor unreal.

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89. Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue. concludes that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is really naturalistic but is less ethical (i.e., normative) than might be wished.

90. Cf. William Rehg and Darin Davis, "Conceptual Gerrymandering? The Alignment of Hursthouse's Naturalistic Virtue Ethics with Neo-Kantian Non-Naturalism," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2003): 583–600 . Rehg et. al., conclude that neo-Aristotelian naturalism is really ethical but not sufficiently naturalistic. Cf. also John Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" *Ratio* 22, no. 3 (2009): 308–21; John Hacker-Wright, "Human Nature, Personhood, and Ethical Naturalism," *Philosophy* 84, no. 03 (2009): 413–27.

III. Conclusion

By taking advantage of the expansive definition of scientific naturalism, neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism defends a view of nature as normative in that it is (at least in some part) teleological. As difficult as it is to consider seriously the project of restoring natural teleology to its proper place and using it as a basis for ethical theory that is tenable and useful, I am optimistic it can be done. Many are on the project – biologists, cosmologists, philosophers of science, mathematicians – but philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition are uniquely situated to make advances. That tradition promises the resources with which to construct an ethical system including all three elements of MacIntyre's schema while rehabilitating a form of natural teleology that is not only tenable in light of modern beliefs, but rationally commends itself in light of all we now know.

These chapters aim to show how it might be done, and to begin doing it. The thesis of the present work is that Foot undermines the cultural and social mediation of human goodness, while McDowell (and to a less extent, MacIntyre) undermine the physical and biological grounding of human goodness. The correct view is in between, both accepting the biological limitations on culture and accepting that culture supervenes on biology. My view is naturalistic in that it unites humans and nonhuman nature but does not commit itself to a reductive analysis of human things. (Certainly, this definition needs further comment. It will come in a later chapter.) It is anti-dualist without explicitly committing itself to physicalism on the one hand (with all the implausible reduction that physicalism entails) or rationalism on the other (with all the implausible idealism that rationalism entails). The conclusion I defend is a growing consensus that natural teleology upon which humanistic ethics may be grounded is no more mysterious or magical than biological life, or consciousness, or rationality. And hence, the pursuit of virtues is no more obsolete than any other human activity, such as farming, or laughing, or studying astronomy. As Wittgeinstein said: "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as

walking, eating, drinking, playing."[91]

Virtue ethics is, on my view, a very useful guide to action,[92] in personal life, political life, bioethics,[93] business,[94] and education.[95] It would be an improvement to almost any area of human life if we were aware of our own vices and worked to expunge them, and if we understood the virtues and pursued them. Yet many obstacles from philosophical and social tradition stand in the way. My dissertation is part of an attempt to remove such obstacles and, in their absence, render not only palatable but desirable the pursuit and acquisition of virtues.

Virtue, practical reason, and flourishing are age-old themes, and no worse for wear. Their recurrance in so many different cultures and places and times is a sign of their enduring significance. Treating them adequately may well be too much for one dissertation; as Glaucon said to Socrates, "The measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life."[96]

91. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* Section 124).
92. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 1.
93. Beauchamp and Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*.
94. Ron Beadle, in *Handbook of Virtue Ethics in Business and Management* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2015), 1–9.
95. Carr and Steutel, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education*.
96. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato Republic* 450b.