Chapter 1

The Virtue Triangle: Virtue, Practical Reason, and Natural Teleology

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

I. 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 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; the 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."

II. The Virtue Triangle

Why are the concepts of virtue, human rationality, 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

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

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 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.

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.

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 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

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."

"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 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

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.

to humans. Even MacIntyre's project is not *Aristotelian* but "neo-Aristotelian" in that he contrasts with Aristotle's project on several points.[10]

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.

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

III. 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.

Part One

1. Introduction
2. Neo-Aristotelianism
3. The Normativity of Nature
4. The Normativity of Human Nature
5. Virtue and Vice for Rational Animals

Part Two

6. Virtue and Reason in Neo-Aristotelianism
7. Practical Reason
8. Practical Wisdom
9. Flourishing
10. Conclusions

Chapter 2 places my project in context and makes explicit my assumptions, aims, and source texts. My three goals are to establish a foundation for virtue ethics that is scientific, naturalistic, and normative. I address the broader question of whether the kind of neo-Aristotelian naturalism I have defended is compatible with 'naturalism' in any of the typical senses of the word. I argue that it is, and I suggest as a name for my theory 'Recursive Naturalism'. Recursive naturalism aims to capture the fact that nature recurs within nature. In other words, one part of nature (human beings) can think about nature (the whole cosmos), including that part of nature that doing the thinking (human beings). We know nature, where "nature" includes us knowing nature, and so on ad infinitum.

Chapter 3 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 4 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 5 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 6 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 7 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 8 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 9 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 achievement 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 10 draws conclusions and makes suggestions for further reasearch.

Chapter 2

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

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. Martha C Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?" *The Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1999): 163–201. Pretty clear, neo-Humean virtue theory is an underexplored but exciting sub-field I shall unfortunately not explore. Neo-Kantian virtue theory is discussed by Foot and McDowell and so receives passing attention in

my 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

these chapters.

3. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19; G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Harvard University Press, 1957).

4. Peter Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1956.

5. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

6. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998); John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

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

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

11. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*; Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford University Press, 1993); Julia Annas, "Morality and Self Interest," ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–21; 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.

such as Christopher Toner[12], Stephen Brown[13], Jennifer Frey[14], James Barham[15], Allison Postell[16], 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]

12. Christopher Hugh Toner, "Flourishing and Self-Interest in Virtue Ethics" (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame; Dissertation, 2003).

13. R. Stephen Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature: A Defense of Ethical Naturalism* (Continuum, 2008); Stephen Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue," *Ethica* 4 (2005): 7–22.

14. Jennifer Ann Frey, "The Will and the Good" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012).

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

16. Allison Ann Postell, "What Comes Naturally? The Metaethical Foundations of Virtue Ethics" (PhD thesis, University of Dallas, 2013).

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

18. The broader set includes Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts* (Mouette Press, 1998); 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. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50 and 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; Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002) 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.

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 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

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.

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.

Individiaul, while others would fall for Hobbesian legalism, where no individuall can correct the political and religious authorities.

Anscombe takes the interpretation that something has gone wrong with modern moral philosophy. 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.[23] 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.

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.[24]

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

23. Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chapter 1, "A Disquieting Suggestion."

24. 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.

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] 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

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).

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).

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.

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 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

31. I shall attempt to justify some of these assertions in a later chapter.
32. Ibid., 174.

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 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

33. Ibid., 173.
34. Ibid., 180.

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 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

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

36. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 123.

37. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552–71; Cf. also Gregory Trianosky, "What Is Virtue Ethics All About?" *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1990, 335–44.

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 studied 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?

38. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 38.
39. Ibid., chap. 4.

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]

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.

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.

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.

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 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*.

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43. Richard Boyd, "Finite Beings, Finite Goods: The Semantics, Metaphysics and Ethics of Naturalist Consequentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66, no. 3 (2003): 504.

44. Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 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. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4 (Oxford University Press, 2003).

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. 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

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.

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 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

48. William K Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," *Mind*, 1939, 464–77. Frankena's classic essay makes this point best.

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".

> 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.

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

51. Gibbard, "Normative Properties," 320.
52. Richard N Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," *Contemporary Materialism*, 1988, 505–6.

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]

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

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.

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 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, primatolo-

54. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 192.
55. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 45.
56. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 5.

gists, 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 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'

57. Richard Joyce, "Ethics and Evolution," *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory, 2nd Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2013)*, 2013, 1.

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.

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 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 supernat-

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

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." Georg W. F. Hegel and Allen W Wood, *Hegel: Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) 195.

67. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason."

ural 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 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.

68. John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 202–21. Both of these articles will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

69. Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact / Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

70. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."

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 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

71. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8.
72. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 210.
73. Ibid., 210.

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 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

74. I hope in future to research the relationship between virtue theory and religion, especially 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

> 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] 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.

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 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.

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 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

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.

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 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]

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 and David Macarthur (Harvard University Press, 2004), 36–58.

86. Margaret Atkins, "Morality Without God?" *The Heythrop Journal* 46, no. 1 (2005): 65–71.

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 ethical 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 "natural-

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.

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.

ism" 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, multi-significant 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.

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]

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91. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* Section 124).

92. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 1.

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

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. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997) *Republic* 450b.

Chapter 3

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 organic teleology. There is a widespread opposition against scientific teleology; some parts of this

1. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, chap. 10, abstract.

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 of reliable

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). Hume is often credited (or blamed) for this notion. Arnhart says Hume himself allows for a kind of inference

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" from an "is".

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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.

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 natural formal or teleological facts – whether that is Hursthouse's "characteristic", or a "life-form"[8] or "form of

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.

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

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]

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.

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

10. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 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 Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism.; 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).

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 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]

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.

15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 197.

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.

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

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. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*.

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

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 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.

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

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. Frey, "The Will and the Good. 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. But more of these things later.

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; Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist.; Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95, no. 2 (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.

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 some shaky assumptions inherited from Hume and Moore. Instead of treating human valuations as sui generis, a miraculous new appearance in the cosmos that only appears with the existence of humans, hat we should expand our scope to examine our status as natural entities. She is well aware that her offering is likely to offend the ears of some

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. Foot, *Natural Goodness*; cf. Sanford S Levy, "Philippa Foot's Theory of Natural Goodness," in *Forum Philosophicum*, vol. 14, 1, 2009, 1–15.

listeners. Her defense is the thought (drawn from Wittgenstein) that crude beginnings are often a necessary first step on the way something refined.

The kind of "shaky assumption" she means is this: Moore assumed that "good" was the ultimate ethical predicate under review. By contrast, she argues that statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection. Evaluation of human creatures and evaluation of plants and animals follow *the same logical pattern*. In such evaluations, good is good *for*. Contrast 'good' with other predicates like 'red' or 'beautiful.' In a statement such as 'the house is beautiful', the predicate 'beautiful' doesn't need a complement. The house is *beautiful* – full stop. But 'good' 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 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

29. Thompson, "The Representation of Life." Thompson works out the arguments of this article more fully in his 2008 monograph.

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

31. Ibid., 57.

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 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

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

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. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy. 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 badly they exemplify their life form.[48]

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. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 171–2.

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

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 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

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.

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 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)

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.

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]

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

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. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 1.

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

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

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*.

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;

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.

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 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]

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."

62. Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose."

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 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,

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 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.

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.

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

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

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 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.

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68. Cf. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., chapter 3.

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.

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, improvement 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

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*.

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."

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 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]

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.

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