Chapter 1
Virtue, 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
"Men need virtues as bees need stings." –Peter Geach, *The Virtues*

Introduction

Neo-Aristotelians identify moral facts with natural facts about some aspect of humanity. As Rosalind Hursthouse says, "Virtue ethics, or at least any form of it that takes its inspiration from Aristotle, is usually taken to be a form of ethical naturalism – broadly, the enterprise of basing ethics in some way on consideration of human nature, on what is involved with being good *qua* human being."[1] 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.

A bit of philosophical taxonomy: 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"[2] or any other anti-realist conception. These views vary, but each of them acknowledges the "purported objectivity"[3] of morality but aims to "debunk it"[4] in various ways. I shall return to this sense of naturalism in a later chapter.

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, bind-

1. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 192.
2. Richard Boyd, "Finite Beings, Finite Goods: The Semantics, Metaphysics and Ethics of Naturalist Consequentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66, no. 3 (2003): 504.
3. Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 287.
4. Ibid., 154.

ingness, 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."[5] 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 the kinds of beings humans are. What is common is that human beings need certain qualities *because of who and what they are*, including a particular natural kind of flourishing defined by the natural normativity relevant to the species. Theorists vary on whether they identify natural facts or properties with broader biological properties (Foot), the human life form (Thompson), our rational form of life (McDowell), the characteristic way of life (Hursthouse), or something else.

While neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism has many rivals, but 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,[6] business and accounting,[7] bioethics, public health ethics,[8] education,[9] 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

5. 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).

6. Bernardo Brown, "Configurations of the Ethical," *Current Anthropology* 57, no. 2 (2016): 240–41.

7. Andrew West, "The Ethics of Professional Accountants: An Aristotelian Perspective," *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, 2016.

8. 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.

9. David Carr and Jan Steutel, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (Routledge, 2005).

> 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."[10]

There are several brands of such neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism.

Three Sorts of Ethical Naturalism

Philippa 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."[11] 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.[12]

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 by social and developmental psychologists, experimental economists, neuroscientists, geneticists, primatologists, anthropologists, comparative ethologists, and evolutionary biologists."[13] 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.

Yet Foot's brand is by no means uncontroversial. Stephen Brown summarizes a "charge… frequently levelled at ethical naturalism, *viz.* that it seeks to 'reduce' ethics to something else, perhaps

10. Amanda Maull, "A Deweyan Defense of Ethical Naturalism," *Society* 50, no. 6 (2013): 577.

11. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 45.

12. Jennifer Ann Frey, "The Will and the Good" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 5.

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

biology, perhaps to something even more 'fundamental' like physics."[14] John McDowell levels such a charge. While not *quite* accussing Foot of this mistake, 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"[15] – roughly, the notion that some conceptual content (including ethical norms) can be just *given*, for free, in perceptual experience.

While criticizing Foot, McDowell is himself 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? For McDowell, moral values are part of the "space of reasons", or "second nature."[16] "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.[17] 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."[18] One is not perceptually sensitive to a primary natural fact, but to a dispositional property – a property that is partly natural and partly constituted by the rational appraisal of the moral agent (i.e., "second nature").

McDowell and Foot both lay claim to the title of 'neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism', since neither wishes to completely debunk morality but neither wishes to accept a source that is supernatural or non-natural.

But, as we can see, McDowell and Foot represent two very different "sorts of naturalism."[19] These internecine controversies are more than a war of words. A heuristic oversimplification might

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

15. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996). 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

16. McDowell, *Mind and World*.

17. 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.

18. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50.

19. 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.

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 natural teleological facts are live candidates; McDowell does not.

Other neo-Aristotelians had to take sides or to find ways to synthesize the two sides. 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."[20]

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?

Thesis

In this dissertation, my overall aim is to "sell" virtue ethics to scientific naturalists who might have various objections to it, and to "sell" the notion that science has something to support and contribute to ethics to virtue theorists and other ethical naturalists. Hence, I defend a "third sort" of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism that aims to provide a naturalistic, even scientific, foundation for normative virtue ethics. As proof of concept, I advance the project a few steps by offering related accounts of virtue, reason, and flourishing.

Specifically, I shall defend the following thesis: **the plurality of virtues consists of 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 components of this thesis are virtue ('acquirable excellent character traits') human nature ('practical, rational animals'), human flourishing, and the notion of natural normativity

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

('naturally necessary').

As we shall see, approach to ethics I shall defend appeals to natural teleology to find a common root between human rationality and human biology. I defend (against McDowell) the Footian conception of nature as instrinsically normative while finding room for McDowell's (and MacIntyre's) emphasis on the intersubjectivity of practical reason. The contrast between Foot's and McDowell's sorts of naturalism might be unified 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. Positing such a union draws a close, perhaps inseparable, connection between the concept of species, health, and flourishing.

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."

The Virtue Triangle

Why are the concepts of virtue, humanity, and flourishing *together* greater than the sum of their parts? In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre persuasively argues that there are three necessary "elements" to morality:[21] 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"[22] is a task for philosophers, as well

21. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 54 ff.
22. Ibid., 55.

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"[23] was "the whole point of ethics." This third conception of some human flourishing or telos we can and *ought* to realize. Moral rules or admirable character traits are the *content* of morality; but the telos of humanity is the *context* of morality. Telos makes morality make sense.

A moral theory cannot simply offer one or two out of the three, and neglect the third. It needs *some* conception of individual or social well-being, *some* conception of what it means to be 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."[24] Objections fired at neo-Aristotelian ethical theories often hit a bullseye but on the wrong target.[25] 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.

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23. Ibid., 55.

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

25. 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.[26] 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"[27] 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."[28] It is difficult to understate the importance of this point about the self. Edward Oakes describes the removal of telos from our worldview as "perhaps the greatest category mistake ever made in the history of philosophy."

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

26. 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).

27. 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."

28. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 54ff.

> 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.[29]

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.[30]

These reflections suggest that at least our conception of ethics needs to be teleological. As we have seen above, there are several ways to achieve this conception. Foot argues that teleology is genuinely natural to all living organisms; McDowell argues that it is not natural to all organisms but that it is to humans. Even MacIntyre's project is not *Aristotelian* but "neo-Aristotelian" in that he contrasts with Aristotle's project on several points.[31]

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

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

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

31. 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.

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.

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 or the human life form and of nature in general. The second part defines and defends a particular conception of virtue, reason, and human flourishing.

Part One

1. Introduction
2. Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism
3. Normativity of Nature
4. 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-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism

"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 and reason and so places this dissertation squarely within contemporary analytic virtue ethics. That said, there are many strands or branches of analytic virtue ethics.[1] As Martha Nussbaum and others have pointed out, self-styled 'virtue ethicists' can differ as much as any other two ethicists. (Is there a tent big enough to include Plato, St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas, and Benjamin Franklin?).[2] While I shall not devote excessive time to comparing my 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.

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 is 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 these chapters.

Neo-Aristotelianism

My thesis attempts to address issues that arise from the recent neo-Aristotelians. Who are the neo-Aristotelian virtue theorists? Rosalind Hursthouse provides an authoritative list: Anscombe,[3] Geach,[4] Foot,[5] McDowell,[6] MacIntyre,[7] Hursthouse,[8] Nussbaum,[9] and Thompson.[10] I would only add the great Julia Annas[11] (who is of course a scholar of ancient philosophy but whose recent work has been largely devoted to contemporary ethics), and some more recent players in the movement such as Christopher Toner[12], Stephen Brown[13], Jennifer Frey[14], James Barham[15], Allison Postell[16], and Arthur Ward[17].

One could certainly construct a worthwhile project analyzing all or some subset of authors.

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. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

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

7. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

8. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics and Human Nature," *Hume Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 67–82.

9. Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, ed. J.E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86–131; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (September 1988): 32–53; Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics.

10. 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.

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

13. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*; Stephen Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue," *Ethica* 4 (2005): 7–22.

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

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."

I interact regularly with a broader set of virtue ethicists:[18] For example, the early writings of Peter Geach, Bernard Williams, and Iris Murdoch are responsible for gathering the kindling and setting the spark for contemporary discussions of virtue.

Nevertheless, my main sources are Philippa Foot, John McDowell, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Alasdair MacIntyre. These three defend views that share enough similarities to illuminate many important themes while contrasting enough to motivate rich discussion. For example, they all address (in their own way) all three elements of "the virtue triangle."[19]

The recent rise of virtue ethics

It is difficult to read any "old books" without noticing that virtue talk (in a great variety of theories and contexts) was once a normal part of cultural and intellectual life, in the west and beyond.[20] But it is equally difficult not to notice that virtue talk had receded to the background or disappeared from academic discussions for two or three centuries. Its resurgence in the last 60 years has been 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' –

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. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason. 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.

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).

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. Perhaps, for instance, as science turned toward the external cosmos (to the exclusion of the inwardly human), ethics and politics turned inward toward the human (to the exclusion of external cosmic), perhaps it was inevitable that some would fall into the kind of Nietzschean subjectivism where no political or religious authority can correct the great person, while others would fall into Hobbesian legalism, where no great person can correct the political and religious authorities.

Anscombe takes the interpretation that something has gone wrong with modern moral philosophy. She diagnoses all forms of consequentialism as morally depraved just after arguing that all the "English-speaking ethicists" from Sidgwick forward were are consequentialists. 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. He argues that the fracturing of social and political bonds in modernity derives from the loss of a shared understanding of the good. 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.

Regardless of the varying details, this first intrepretation pits virtue theories against their consequentialist and Kantian alternatives. It finds in the flexibility of Aristotle and the humanism of Confucius a refreshing alternative to the stolid rationalism of Kant or Mill.[23]

22. David Bourget and David J Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?" *Philosophical Studies* 170, no. 3 (2014): 465–500.

23. This interpretation, of course, is a substantive moral thesis couched in the language of a historical thesis. So it is debatable whether this story is even true *as history*. I shall try to remain neutral about the history and discuss the substantive theory.

Hursthouse and Nussbaum offer a second interpretation, namely, that virtue ethicists in the early to mid 20th century presented their view as a *rival* in order to fight for a position at the table of respectable ethical theories. And it worked. Now that virtue ethics has earned its place as one of the "major moral philosophies" at the table, continuing to present it as a rival to other theories is needlessly combative. 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."[24] On this interpretation, virtue concepts can augment, rather than replace, other theories. After all, Kant himself had a theory of virtue.[25] Some theorists have been working to articulate a theory they call "virtue consequentialism" or "character consequentialism."[26] Even more broadly, philosophers have even found room for virtue talk in Humean[27] and Nietzschean[28] ethics.

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."[29] At the same time, certain features of the modern Enlightenment tradition – especially advances in modern science and changes in modern politics – can correct errors or update contingencies in the Aristotelian tradition.

I would like to say a bit more about these mutal "corrections" (if they are corrections).[30] Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, Bernard Williams, Iris Murdoch and others have done philosophical

24. Rosalind Hursthouse, "How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues," ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 1996), 19–33.

25. Anne Margaret Baxley, *Kant's Theory of Virtue: The Value of Autocracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

26. 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).

27. Michael Slote, "Sentimentalist Virtue and Moral Judgement Outline of a Project," *Metaphilosophy*, 2003, 131–43.

28. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*.

29. 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.

30. I shall attempt to justify some of these assertions in a later chapter.

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."[31] 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. MacIntyre scholar Stanley Hauerwas believes 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."[32] 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."[33] We shall return to these themes in a later chapter.

The whole person: The second myopic tendency is that of focussing on one aspect of moral psychology (such as motive, or emotion, or character traits) to the exclusion of others. Continuing with Nussbaum's "common ground", she says, "Even though a concern for motive, intention, character, and the whole course of life was not in principle alien to Kantian and Utilitarian philosophy, it was certainly alien to most British and American Kantians and Utilitarians of the period."[34] The correction to this tendency is to include a role for both reason and the passions,

31. Ibid., 174.

32. 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.

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

34. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 173.

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.[35] 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 non-rational or sub-rational mental states of normal human psychology – can be made rational and/or can be accommodated within a life of reason. That is, any kind of plant can be part of a garden with a clear, purposeful, and rational blueprint, even if some dead leaves and rotten petals dot the floor.

The whole life: A third myopic tendency is that of philosophizing about individual moral situations (especially moral dilemmas!) instead of the whole of life. We need to refocus our arguments in philosophical ethics from looking just at individual choices or actions (viewed from the outside, like a moral critic) to looking at the whole of life (viewed from the inside, like a moral agent). 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?" Asking this question is not optional for normal, reflective, adults. This question is one every person who comes to major crossroads in life must ask. "Character ethics," rather than mere "quandary ethics" is what is really needed in the vast majority of circumstances.[36] That is not to say that moral quandaries are unimportant in life or unimportant in theory; quite the contrary, often times the moral quandary is the exceptional case that can provide a cutting counterexample to a nonsensical view. And 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*). But for all this, 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

35. Ibid., 180.

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

or out of state near friends? Invest in this friendship or spend much-needed time alone?)

The whole history: A fourth myopic tendency that these virtue ethicists have corrected, I think, is an *ahistorical* approach that had become fashionable in analytic ethics during the apex and aftermath of logical positivism. Many had such a passion for mathematically clear, abstract, lucid and timeless articulations of their philosophy such that if an ethical theory could not be so articulated, it could be ignored. Furthermore, such philosophers easily fell for the temptation of regarding the contingencies of the present fashion as unquestionable timeless truths.

The correction to this tendency is to allow that ethical norms are typically bound up with social norms, and so to allow that ethical norms have a history; and that the social and ethical norms of the present day may be little more than fashion. Many neo-Aristotelians and others 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"[37], 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.[38] MacIntyre argues that we can only responsibly use and evaluate practical concepts such as self, practice, telos, or virtue when we know our own history. Since *we ourselves* inhabit a tradition, we must know ourselves *as* inhabitants of a tradition with a past. We will return to these themes in later chapters.

These are corrections that virtue ethics can offer to other modern moral philosophies. But the modern world is not the ancient world. Modern science, philosophy, and culture are not the same as their pre-modern counterparts. It is imperative that contemporary virtue ethicists pay due respect to what *has* changed. What corrections can modernity offer to virtue ethics? As McDowell suggests in the quotation with which I began above, the initial answer (however vague) is that virtue ethics needs to be updated in light of modern science.

And that is the project of the recent neo-Aristotelians: creating or re-creating an Aristotelian ethics that is genuinely scientific and genuinely normative.^[By 'normativity', I mean 'ought' talk and facts to which 'ought' talk might refer.[39] As Alan Gibbard says: "[Part] of what's special about

37. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 38.
38. Ibid., chap. 4.
39. Cf. Peter Schaber, "Normative Facts," *Studies into the Foundations of an Integral Theory of*

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'."[40] Theirs is a view that is agnostic or atheistic in that it does not depend upon any particular religious ethic; it is action-guiding in that it commends very specific virtues, such as moderation, tolerance, and practical wisdom; and it is (or at least Foot's and MacIntyre's brand is) scientific in that it draws on the latest research in ethology, anthropology, evolutionary biology, sociology and so on.

II. Four Goals

To put the matter simply: the Neo-Aristotelian naturalism of the sort I am discussing strives to be ethical, naturalistic, secular,[41] and scientific. To understate the point, this project is difficult. It is attended by difficulties on all sides. I would like to say a bit more about each of these four goals.

Ethical

The recent neo-Aristotelians offer what we might call a complete philosophical ethics. That is, neo-Aristotelians such as Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre write about and defend views that combine normative ethical and metaethical claims. 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

Practice and Cognition, 2005, 107–22

40. Allan Gibbard, "Normative Properties," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2003): 141–57 321

41. By 'secular' I do not mean 'non-religious', but rather not *necessarily* religious, as I explain below.

> makes clear, this is very much the official metaethical theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics.[42]

Lenman seems bemused with neo-Aristotelian naturalism. When he says that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is "the official metaethical theory of the main current in contemporary virtue ethics" he seems to betray a lurking metaphilosophical confusion. For when Foot, Hursthouse, McDowell are classified as virtue ethicists (a normative theory) *and* neo-Aristotelians (a metaethical theory), we might object. Aren't these two different projects? The answer in short is: not necessarily. Explaining this answer requires a short discursus.

One legacy of G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* has been the tendency to sharply distinguish primary ethical questions (about what things are good) from metaethical questions (about what 'good' as an evaluative predicate *means*). The first asks about what things are good; the second about the word 'good' itself. The first is a substantive question about which items fall under a category. The second is a conceptual question about how to define that category.

Moore valiantly took it upon himself to indict all previous ethical philosophers for failing to resolve their disputes for a failure to define their terms. (Of course, the questions that concern modern metaethicists were posed and discussed by prior thinkers. However, the *Principia* gave a distinctive form to these questions and suggested a distinctive range of possible answers.) Moore argued (or according to some critics, *assumed*) that 'goodness' was indefinable.[43] 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. Moore had a preferred name for this error – if it is an error – but mentioning it would just muddy the waters.[44]

The neo-Aristotelians are pretty universally critical of Moore's argument, as we shall see.[45]

Lenman's confusion reflects the widely-held belief that normative ethics and metaethics can "come apart". But this is not *necessarily* true. Alan Gibbard, no opponent of metaethics, explains

42. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism." Lenman acknowledges that Thomson might need to be subtracted from this list and that John McDowell might need to be added.

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

44. If absolutely necessary, I shall only call Moore's version "The Fallacy That Shall Not Be Named."

45. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chap. 1, "A Fresh Start?"; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 2, "The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism".

how one's substantive ethical views largely determine one's view of the relation between questions of substance and those of meaning:

> Moore stressed the distinction in ethics between questions of meaning and questions of substance, and thereby gave rise to a tradition in analytic philosophy of separating the two parts of ethical theory: the metatheory and the substantive, normative part. Some philosophers have rejected the distinction; some Kantians, for instance, think that if you get the metatheory right, substantive ethical conclusions fall out as some kind of consequence, so that metaethics and substantive ethics are not really separate. Then too, anyone who rejects Sidgwick's and Moore's indefinability claim and thinks that ethical terms can be given analytic, naturalistic definitions thinks that the two putative subdivisions are not really separate. Those who reject any systematic distinction between questions of meaning and questions of substance might likewise reject a sharp, separate subject of metaethics.[46]

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."[47]

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." While the formal and material aspects of neo-Aristotelian ethics might be *distinct*, they are not *separable*.

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

A second response is possible. Even if a procedural, non-substantive approach to metaethics can be made neutral with respect to normative ethics, it is still admirably ambitious to construct a theory that pays attention to both. Stephen Darwall agrees, arguing that:

> …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.[48]

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?)

Naturalistic

A point of philosophical taxonomy: My thesis is a species of 'ethical naturalism', which is a kind of moral realism that attempts to define moral facts (or more broadly evaluative facts) as natural facts. Yet Hursthouse calls neo-Aristotelian an "odd sort" of ethical naturalism.[49] Why? Some critics of neo-Aristotelianism in particular exploit one or more horns of a dilemma,[50] questioning whether it is possible to construct a neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism that is both (a) genuinely *ethical* (i.e., normative and action-guiding)[51] and (b) genuinely *naturalistic*.[52]

48. 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.

49. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism," *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2013.

50. 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.

51. Brown, "Really Naturalizing Virtue. concludes that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is really naturalistic but is less ethical (i.e., normative) than might be wished.

52. 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

On the former horn, if neo-Aristotelians succeed in naturalizing ethics, then it seems that normative categories such as virtue, vice, flourishing, human goodness, will be reduced to descriptive facts (.eg., virtuous people are statistically likely to flourish, flourishing is psychological health, etc.). But this seems hardly normative at all. On the latter horn, if ethics remains truly normative, then we end up concluding that flourishing is the kind of state we *ought* to pursue whether or not we actually reach it — whether or not, in fact *anyone* has actually reached it. Virtues are those qualities that are acquirable and that we *ought* to acquire, whether or not anyone does or ever has acquired them.

This sounds hardly naturalistic at all. Now, on the one hand, questioning a theory's "naturalism" is pointless without further stipulation, for there are many types of naturalism. The word 'nature' – like its cognates 'natural' and 'naturalism' – is perhaps the most ambiguous, 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.

As I shall explain in a later chapter, the fault line between neo-Aristotelians and their critics (who sometimes include other ethical naturalists) is a real one. Each represents an understanding of the difference between nature and normativity, between "facts and values."[53] 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."[54] 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? Certainly, some critics will insist that normativity is not natural. I ask them to consider the alternative, as I shall consider both, and examine the case I make in a later chapter. We must aim first for clarity before agreement. We cannot let a deeply-held assumption stand without scrutiny. That is just what we shall do in a later chapter.

For now, let me stipulate my sense of 'naturalism.' Mine is an ethical naturalism in at least

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.

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

54. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."

the following senses:

1. My thesis is naturalistic according to what Hans Fink calls an "unrestricted conception of nature."[55] 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."[56]

2. 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.
3. 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.

I should specify that I am remaining *agnostic*. One of my limiting goals has been to construct a theory that allows both possibilities. I aim to allow 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. But I also aim to allow that human life is 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."[57] 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.[58]

In this way, my project may be seen as building on Philippa Foot's work to advance a kind

55. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 210.

56. Ibid., 210.

57. 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).

58. 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.

of secular natural law theory.[59]

This kind of "natural law" may also be seen as a kind of neo-Stoicism. Elizabeth Anscombe says:

> One might be inclined to think that a law conception of ethics could arise only among people who accepted an allegedly divine positive law; that this is not so is shown by the example of the Stoics, who also thought that whatever was involved in conformity to human virtues was required by divine law.[60]

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.[61] 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. Just as the Droste Effect[62] 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.

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59. 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

60. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 5.

61. 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.

62. Which is a painting on a box of cocoa of the dutch girl holding a box of cocoa (which shows a painting of a dutch girl holding a box of cocoa, etc.)

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)."[63] Quine thought (or claimed he thought) that "naturalistic philosophy is continuous with natural science"[64] 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.[65]

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.[66] Ruse's famous expression is that "morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes."[67] Others – such as Wielenberg and Thomas Nagel – find evolutionary theory either irrelevant to morality or a possible source of *vindication* of moral realism.[68] 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

63. David Papineau, "Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015.

64. (1995a), 256–7, see also 1969, 126–7.

65. David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (MIT Press, 2005).

66. Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (2006): 109–66.

67. Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Blackwell, 1986), 253.

68. 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.

monistic or at least non-dualistic. Though not all are so confident,[69] 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."[70]

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.

The case presented in these chapters aim to show how it might be done, and to begin doing it. The conclusion I shall defend is a growing consensus that natural teleology 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."[71]

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69. John Dupré, "The Miracle of Monism," in *Naturalism in Question*, ed. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (Harvard University Press, 2004), 36–58.

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

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

III. Why neo-Aristotelianism matters

Virtue ethics is, on my view, a very useful guide to action,[72] in personal life, political life, bioethics,[73] business,[74] and education.[75] 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."[76]

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

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

74. Ron Beadle, in *Handbook of Virtue Ethics in Business and Management* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2015), 1–9.

75. Carr and Steutel, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education*.

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

Chapter 3
The Normativity of Nature: Organic and Practical Teleology

"Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."
–Mark Perlman, "The Modern Resurrection of Teleology in Biology", 6.
"The organic body sang together…"
– Charles Williams, "The Vision of the Empire", *Taliesson Through Logres.*

The Is-Ought Gap and Bald Nature

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] In other words, *normative* evaluations depend on *descriptive* facts about a species. If true, this notion would be momentous: "is" statements would underwrite "ought" statements.

The notion that natural, descriptive propositions can serve as premises in arguments with normative conclusions is central to the project of ethical naturalism. Is this notion even intelligible? This chapter addresses and challenges the widespread prejudice against scientific teleology. I invoke the help of sciences – especially life sciences such as biology and medicine – which indicate that teleological nihilism and teleoreductionism are by no means "*the* scientific doctrines". Rather, if teleological realism is a scientifically respectable position, then nature is normative. And if nature is normative, it is at least possible that *human nature* is normative, even though humans are a unique kind of animal.

Many have posed an obvious challenge to this notion. We can put the challenge in this form:

Is-Ought Gap Challenge

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

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] For example, suppose your friend Jim will be attending his first Oscar ceremony, but doesn't know what to wear. Suppose we observe that *most male celebrities wear black ties to the Oscars.* It simply does not follow from the premise that most men in fact wear black ties that *Jim ought to wear a black tie to the Oscars*. At least, it does not follow without additional, brutely normative premise such as that *He ought to wear whatever most people are wearing*. Even if we supply *that* normative premise, where did it come from? "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" is a normative command, not something supplied by *observation*.

In ethics, the is-ought gap seems devastating. For even supposing we gathered a whole collection of reliable scientific truths about human bodies, cognitive-behavioral patterns and so on – from anthropology, psychology, sociology, and also biology, chemstry, physics – we would not 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 identify universal moral approbations and disapprobations. For example, while habits and attitudes toward drinking alcohol vary dramatically from culture to culture, there seems to be a universal (cross-cultural) disapprobation for continual drunkenness, even among cultures (like the Bolivian Camba) that drink regularly and drink heavily.[3] Such

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 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

findings might be 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] We can put the 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 in that 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 so, then it follows that normativity is either real but *non-natural* (or supernatural) 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.)

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,

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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.

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

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 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]

I. Teleology: Biological or Social?

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. For example, Annas distinguishes two sorts of naturalism, one that emphasizes the biological nature of humanity (at the expense of the odd normativity of reason) and another that emphasizes the rational nature of humanity (at the expense of the mundane descriptivity of biology).[11] 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.[12]

The basic difference is between those who discover natural normativity in *human nature* – culture, or rationality, or practical agency – and those who hope to find natural normativity more generally in all organic life. As Thomas Nagel puts it, with the existence of life in the cosmos arises the existence of "beings of the kind.. for which things can be good or bad."[13] (The third group defends the view that natural normativity is intrinsic to the whole cosmos.) Let's examine each one a bit more.[14]

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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

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

10. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 20.

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

12. Cf. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism.; Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism.; 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.

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

14. Though I shall not pursue it, I should at least mention the most ambitious and most risky sort of strategy: to defend the view that *all* of nature is teleological. But it is the notion that everything

The second option is the normative notion of humanity. On this option, 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.[15] 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 "Social" or "Rational" or "Practical Teleology."[16] Pretty clearly, human cognitive and and practical behaviors are inherently end-directed or teleological: John goes to the gym *in order to get fit for his film role*; Jane practices her speech *to win the Iowa primary*. Humans *act on reasons* and in pursuit of ends.[17] 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.[18]

Alasdair MacIntyre's position on natural normativity has shifted over the decades. His earlier view (defending social teleology) is closer to that of McDowell than that of Foot. In *After Virtue*, he emphasizes "second nature" far more than primary nature. That is, he finds a ground of norma-

– including stars and rocks – "has a purpose", as if the cosmos were somehow organized and *going somewhere*. Call this Cosmic Teleology. Though such natural normativity in the form of natural teleology has 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, cf. Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld Publications, 2009); and Peter Kreeft, *Summa Philosophica* (St. Augustine, 2012).

15. 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.

16. Cf. Marinus Farreira, "Reasons from Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism," 2011. Ferreira calls this "excellence naturalism" as opposed.

17. 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.

18. Hursthouse appears to me to affirm both Foot's sort of naturalism and McDowell's. Jennifer Frey observes this as well: "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.

tivity 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."[19] The "metaphysical biology" MacIntyre refers to here is that metaphysically realist view that formal and final causes inhere (and in fact constitute) biological species.[20] That said, MacIntyre does most emphatically argue for a teleological form of ethics based on the normativity of *human* nature. He grounds teleology not in non-human nature but in human nature, specifically our practical, social nature. He calls this notion "social teleology."

The notion of social teleology builds on the apparently obvious truth that *human society is teleological.* That is, we do not just act randomly. We do not only act according to the promptings of instinct (that too). Rather, we act *on reasons,* both individually and in groups. We act to achieve goals. Whether we arise from bed *in order to* give a talk, or drive to work *in order to* do a good job, or pursue a career *for* satisfaction and a profitable retirement, we are directing ourselves toward ends. In groups, too, we pursue shared goals, deliberate about *what is to be done*: Congress aims to pass just and beneficial laws. The school board aims to increase enrollment and balance the budget. Expanding our focus from individual actions or projects, we can put the point more strongly: all of human life is a practice. It can be brought under the concept of either one, unified, whole practice or pluralistic set of practices.

Even when Iris Murdoch assumed[21] 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.[22] But the point

19. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 197.

20. 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

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

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

here is that, since we act in groups and for reasons, teleology is a real feature of our social nature. They cannot be understood without teleology. So if the critic of natural normativity rejects natural teleological in biology (as did the early MacIntyre), she will still have a hard time rejecting social teleology.

The second strategy is more ambitious and more risky. It is to defend the view that other parts of nature (such as living creatures) are naturally and inherently teleological. For example, perhaps one of the functions of *being alive at all* is that plants, animals, insects, and microbes perform whatever movements are necessary for them to survive, grow, and develop into the state of species-specific maturity. And not just animals, but all organic life: "Molecular biology shows that all organic cellular life share a common feature, self-reproduction through gene/protein protein cycles."[23]

Hence, at least some natural entities – that is, all living organisms – have ineliminable, irreducible, normative properties. Call this view Natural Teleology. Natural 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 biological scientists.[24]]

Initial Objections

Each of these two predominant strategies faces its major challenge. For example, fven if the first strategy of *human* natural normativity could pre-emptively undercut the is-ought gap, the major worry is no such thing as a universal human nature from which we might derive normative conclusions. Even the singular noun phrase "human nature" is liable to sound mystical, like a platonic universal underlying all human beings.

Bernard Williams summarizes the antiquated worldview that many are suspicious of:

> The idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is still to be found in Aristotle's philosophy, a philosophy

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

24. 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.Bill Cosby, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *The Monist* 87, no. 1 (2004): 3–51.

> according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave.[25]

The problem, of course, is that if human beings are a "mess" (as Williams puts it) then the normative conclusions to be derived would be equally messy. Humans are occasionally irrational and always variable. Human beings posit themselves, create themselves, define their values, chart their destinies, and all in different ways.

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

> The concepts of unchanging essences and of complete discontinuities between every *eidos* (type) and all others make genuine evolutionary thinking impossible. I agree with those who claim that the essentialist philosophies of Aristotle and Plato are incompatible with evolutionary thinking.[26]

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

A second, related, objection is that if there is such thing as "human nature", it is nothing more or less than our biological and physiological makeup. Tim Lewens argues that:

> …the only biologically respectable notion of human nature that remains is an extremely permissive one that names the reliable dispositions of the human species as a whole. This conception offers no ethical guidance…[27]

On Lewens' view, the only scientific talk about our "nature" is an indetermiante series of complicated stories about our genetics, evolutionary history, and neurophysiology, perhaps even including cultural, geographical, and ecological settings. The problem, of course, is that an empirical "scientific" conception of human nature has nothing to do with *ethics*. All of the complicated stories we could tell – if they are genuinely scientific – would be purely *descriptive*. In response to this worry, Rosalind Hursthouse's response is to reassure us that: "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[28] Nevertheless,

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

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

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

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

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

Bald Nature Objection

I shall return to the problems regarding a normative conception of human nature in a later chapter. Here I must address the objections to the Organic or Natural Teleology strategy. This second strategy has its own, even bigger, problems; not even all the neo-Aristotelians are optimistic about the strategy of grounding human ethics in natural normativity.

Even if natural normativity in the form of teleology in the non-human world *could possibly* underwrite normative conclusions about human ethics, how would we confirm the hypothesis that there is such a thing as natural normativity? Is the hypothesis scientific or not? For many, scientific naturalism just is the commitment to believe all and only the best deliverances of all the sciences.[29] But suffice many scientific naturalists do indeed think that the scientific conception of nature is incompatible with the kind of natural normativity found in Foot's brand of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism. They think that the scientific picture of nature is the picture of "bald nature" (McDowell's phrase for non-normative nature) or the "Laplacian" picture.[30] Call "teleological nihilism" the view that there are no natural purposes *except* those in human actions, intentions, and societies, etc. On teleological nihilism, *social teleology* is not instances of a broader category that includes the tendency of an acorn to become an oak and the tendency of deer to survive and reproduce; human purposes are sui generis phenomena that spontaneously emerge out of our brains at a certain level of complexity. Final causation thinking is then projected out onto the world by us; we observe that the beaver gathered wood and that the beaver built a dam and we say "the beaver gathered wood *in order to* build the dam." But really the beaver did no such thing. This is what philosopher of biology Ernst Mayr calls "teleonomic" natural behavior, but not genuinely teleological.[31]

29. 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.

30. 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.

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

II. An Initial Case for Natural Normativity

So what are we to make of these challenges? On the one hand, I think both strategies (social teleology and natural teleology) would work, and wish to defend them against ethical non-naturalists or ethical naturalists of different sorts.[32] On the other hand, I think natural teleology is the stronger of the two and is less subject to objections from cultural relativism. Hence, 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.

However, in a later chapter I will more thoroughly examine the notion human (and only human) teleology is the source of natural normativity. (In the end, I do not think these two notions of normativity are *contradictory*. A "third type" of naturalism could even perhaps combine them.)[33] To those for whom the concept of natural teleology might have been completely unpalettable, I hope to render it not only conceivable but plausible. For those who do not find it plausible, human teleology is a kind of fail-safe. The facts of social or practical teleology are enough to ground the theory of virtue I develop in a later chapter. Although I feel confident that social teleology is a sufficient ground for ethics, I shall caution that the cost of rejecting natural teleology is an incorrigible cultural relativism: While objective morality may be realized intersubjectively, intersubjective morality is not objective.

For now, I shall respond to the Bald Nature Objection and pursue the strategy according to which natural normativity in the form of natural teleology is sufficient to ground a theory of ethics in observations about human nature as practical, rational animals. This is to defend the Foot/Thompson strategy of Natural Teleology as preferable over McDowell's strategy of Social or Practical Teleology. In doing so, I shall summarize and bolster her arguments, offering a more rigorous argument for the fundamental premise that some natural facts are brutely normative, teleological facts.

117–35.

32. Such as functionalists and the Cornell realists just mentioned.

33. 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.

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.'[34] 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 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' (like 'useful') has a different logical function. 'The house is useful' does need a complement – the house is useful *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Similarly, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* 'Good' always needs a complement. If this crude beginning is anywhere near to correct, we can distance ourselves from Moore's starting point and build on another starting point: the life-form of human beings.

In this Foot agrees with Thompson's groundbreaking *Representation of Life*. There, he argues that the concept of "life" is not, as it may seem to some, a property of some beings where *being* is the fundamental concept; rather "life" is a fundamental concept.[35] Thompson reviews and refutes a variety of biological definitions of life such as reproduction, growth, metabolisis, etc., for these properties depend on a prior understanding of life. He says, "Vital description of individual organisms is itself the primitive expression of a conception of things in terms of 'life-form' or 'species', and if we want to understand these categories in philosophy we must bring them back to that form of description."[36] When we observe and examine living things we rightly employ some shared categories and our conclusions rightly share a logical structure. What is that common structure? Every individual living being is a member of a species or life-form. And different life-forms are subject to different

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

35. Thompson, "The Representation of Life."

36. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 57.

normative appraisals.

Humans are certainly a unique *kind* of living being with a unique life-form. And we shall examine below what difference the differences make. As a preview, morality is (correctly) thought to be action-guiding. Hume and Moore (correctly) argue that moral principles cannot be merely descriptive; they must motivate us to act or refrain from acting. (Furthermore, moral theories must be able to explain retroactively *why* one acted or refrained from acting). and help us to evaluate actions or abstentions, in ourselves and others.) Call this the Practicality Requirement. But, the argument will be, the position that moral reasons are inextricably tied to conative psychological states is not the best way to meet the Practicality Requirement. Rather, the action-guiding facts in the case of natural goodness are facts humans as practical, rational creatures, and facts about our relation to objects in the world. But more on this below.

Foot concludes that:

> …goodness and badness, and therefore about evaluation in its most general form; but we might equally have been thinking in terms of, say, strength and weakness or health and disease, or again about an individual plant or animal being or not being as it should be, or ought to be, in this respect or that. Let us call the conceptual patterns found there, patterns of natural normativity.[37]

Another way of putting this point is that some properties we can call 'goodness' are primary qualities of nature. McDowell and others will worry that this picture of nature is not "the scientific picture" of nature, and that even if it were, such a picture is not necessary since social normativity is a sufficient grounding for ethics.

III. 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 a minimal scientific realism and on a little-utilized feature of language and conceptualization called "generic propositions" – or simply "generics." 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."

37. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.

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 "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 are neither universal nor particular

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

38. Ibid.

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: [all ducks lay eggs.] This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is it equivalent to 'for every x, if x is a [duck], x [lays eggs]? 'ducks lay eggs' may be true even if not all ducks lay eggs, 'mosquitos carry dengue fever' may be true even if only a very few mosquitos carry that virus, and so on). We are now positioned to observe one curious property of generics: they admit of exceptions.[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.

Consider the statement "all wolves hunt in packs." Logically, the proposition expressed in this statement is neither strictly universal nor strictly particular. It is not a strictly true universal judgment (for some actual wolves hunt alone, and some don't hunt at all). Furthermore, it is true but trivial that *some wolves hunt in packs*. Confining ourselves to particular judgments like "Some reptiles lay eggs" would be radically unambitious science. We want to know – and can know – what is true of the class as a whole. If a biologist discovers an exception to the proposition "All reptiles lay eggs", then either it turns out that not all reptiles lay eggs *or* she has discovered a new species of reptile that does not lay eggs.

Generics refer to natural kinds

Generics do not refer *distributively to all* members of a category nor merely to *some* but to the category itself; they are statements about natural kinds. In this way, generics pick out what we might call formal facts, facts about the life form in question.

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*. 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."[44] As Leslie says:

> It is widely accepted that [definite] generics are singular statements which predicate properties directly of kinds. For example, "tigers are extinct" predicates the property of being extinct directly of the kind Panthera tigris, and would be true just in case Panthera tigris had the property of being extinct (Krifka et al. 1995).

43. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.
44. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222, quoting Thompson.

Generics are not statistical

As Leslie's point shows, 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."[45] 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 calls this a "logical weakness" of generics, as if Aristotelian-categoricals were aiming for deductive certainty but falling short. 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)."[46] McDowell rather misses the point. Generics are not half-hearted universal judgments; they are judgments of a logically different kind. That we do not know deductively whether any particular wolf hunts in a pack is rather a strength than a weakness; the generic truth that wolves hunt in packs sets in us a normative expectation we then bring to any particular wolf and by which we can judge whether it is exemplifying its life form.[47] Similarly, while anthropological generics such as "human beings wear clothes" admit of exceptions, they might, if true, set normative expectations.

Generics are familiar

While there is much to be learned about the linguistic features of generics,[48] still, their use and acquisition is actually very familiar. Michael Thompson points out that: there is a "general and thoroughgoing reciprocal mutual interdependence of vital description of the individual and natural

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

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

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

48. 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.

historical judgment about the form or kind."[49] Micah Lott's comment on this same point is that:

> 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.[50]

Generic truths are acquired via a normal scientific means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion.[51] 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.

Generics are teleological

While there is a kind of normativity in the mere idea of a life-form, we can make the case stronger. There is a related kind of normativity in the idea of the natural teleology of life-forms. And generics also illuminate natural, normative, teleological facts. I shall take the idea of a real, natural function to be roughly synonymous with a real, natural teleology. As 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

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

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

51. 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.

> …" 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.[52]

Barham clarifies the range of terms that denote identical or similar concepts:

> By "teleology," I have in mind such words and concepts as "purpose," "end," "goal," "function," "control," and "regulation," as well as the real-world biological phenomena to which these words and concepts refer. This means that the word "teleology" should always be construed here in its internal or "immanent" sense—purposiveness existing in living beings themselves—and never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle.[53]

With these concepts in hand, we can see why Chris Toner says that "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[54] 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."[55]

This kind of combination of generic truths is very familiar. No sooner have I learned the formal facts about a penguin (that it is a bird, that it can swim, that it has a countershaded white belly and dark back etc.) do I learn that *penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.* 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. 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."[56] We might add that some formal features *of a normal, mature* animal exist merely potentially before full maturation. For example, a female reptile that cannot lay eggs might be injured, ill, or simply young. Eyes that cannot see might be injured, ill, or simply developing. Eyes (that have had enough time to develop) see. 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, etc. It's not just that hearts are *for* pumping blood; hearts *are* pumps – hearts *pump blood*.

52. Cosby, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 1–4.
53. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 1.
54. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.
55. Thompson, *Life and Action*, 293–94.
56. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 201.

IV. 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. Recall, that challenge asserted that no facts are genuinely both natural and normative. Generics are both genuinely natural and normative: natural, in that a large percentage of scientific knowledge consists of scientists predicating generic truths of natural kinds; normative, in that the life-form in question is one which an individual may or may not "live up" to, and in that *some* generics pick out natural functional or teleological facts about life forms (that penguins are counter-shaded *to avoid* predators, that hearts are *for* pumping blood, etc.). On my view, accepting the straightforward, generic truths delivered by such sciences about forms and functions is quite simply the respectable thing to do. But it seems to me there are three paths forward: reject, reduce, or accept Natural 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.[57] 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.[58] 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.

Reply to Teleological Nihilism

Nevertheless, let's suppose for *reductio* that no generic statements are true. Then it would be false in some important sense false that 'wolves hunt in packs', and false that 'condors can fly for hours', false even that 'penguins are birds'. It is false, furthermore, that eyes see and humans are mammals. But such denials are, I think, absurdities.[59]

57. Also called teleological eliminativism.

58. 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."

59. 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 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*.[60]

By all means, let us be scientific. But let us be careful not to become anti-scientific in the *name* of science. 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.

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.

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.[61]) 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. Compare with Thomas Nagel's point that some "laws of nature would apply directly to the relation between the present and the

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.

60. Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose."

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

future."[62]

Hence, to reject *all truths* about natural kinds, I contend, is to reject the best scientific deliverances of our best scientific evidence. As Perlman says, "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."[63] The great cost of throwing out generics *as a class* threatens to throw out a huge percentage of scientific statements in biology, organic chemistry, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, anatomy, and medicine.[64]

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 intimidating, mechanical, Laplacian terms.

Arguing for or against teleoreductionism has become a cottage industry.[65] It is impossible to do justice to the complexity of the dialectic here. I will content myself to note, and critique, two popular forms of reduction: the first reduces biological functions to causal contributions to a system and the second reduces teleonomic biological functions to naturally selected effects. A proponent of the first reduction is Donald Davidson. A proponent of the second is Ruth Millikan. For example, Ruth Millikan argues that an organism's proper function simply cannot be "read off" its capacities at present but must be known via empirical history. Her theory entails the unpalatable conclusion that an organ that is otherwise physically identical to, say, a heart, that was magically apparated into existence would not have a "proper function". She bites the bullet on this.

Reply

James Barham argues that neither of these forms of reduction is very promising: "In a nutshell, the problem is that neither theory can explain the normative character of biological processes in a coherent manner."[66] 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

62. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 93.

63. Cosby, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 6.

64. We must not forget that the term 'science' is an abstraction. The only real thing is scientists and their statements. Scientists disagree, and some of their statements are proven false by the research of other scientists.

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

66. James Barham, "Confessions of an Atheist Darwin-Doubter" (Web; Evolution News, 2012), `http://www.evolutionnews.org/2012/05/confessions_of059861.html`.

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? James Barham elaborates:

> With respect to the "causal-role" theory, there is no way to distinguish between functional and non-functional parts of a biological system without presupposing the normative character of the overall system as a whole – which begs the question at issue.

As regards the second form, Thompson insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past."[67] Barham agrees. He says:

> With respect to the "selected-effects" theory, the problem is that selection history is conceptually irrelevant to the identification of function. True, it has a role to play in explaining how present-day functions have come to exist. But selection history cannot possibly explain what it is about a biological process that constitutes it as a function… The reason is that our concept of function in no way depends on evolutionary history. If it did, then biologists like Aristotle, Galen, Harvey, and innumerable others who lived long before Darwin would not have had the means to identify the functions of organs, which they of course did. Sometimes, they got it wrong, as when Aristotle placed the seat of perception and thought in the heart, instead of the brain (though some of his predecessors got it right). But Aristotle's mistake was due to his inadequate knowledge of physiology, not to his ignorance of evolution.

If neither forms of 'teleoreduction' are likely to account for the normativity of the biological function in question, then it is a fundamental truth not only that hearts cause blood to be pumped but that hearts *are for* pumping blood – that is their natural function. And that is just the hypothesis Barham argues is the most likely:

> In a series of important articles and books over the past decade or so [many authors] have cast grave doubt on the coherence of any reductive analysis of function. Some of these authors (e.g., Jacobs, Maund, Zammito) call explicitly for a reconsideration of the possibility that teleological phenomena in biology might be both objectively real and irreducible.[68]

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67. Cf. Thompson, "The Representation of Life," 293. 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.

68. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology," 10. Barham cites: Bedau (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1993), Cameron (2004), Christensen & Bickhard (2002), Jacobs (1986), Manning (1997), Maund (2000), McLaughlin (2001, 2009), Mossio et al. (2009), Mundale & Bechtel (1996), Nanay (2010), Nissen (1997), Perovic (2007), Walsh (2006).

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.[69] Teleological realism in biology 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 is a third who has followed out the argument for natural teleology from a much broader, cosmic perspective, though he too denies that the cosmos is like an orchestra being played.[72] Though Nagel took a lot of heat for his argument, 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."… [the furthermore] 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."[73]

If scientists can countenance natural normativity via natural teleology as respectable, we philosophers not do the same? Certainly natural teleology is out of fashion; but the winds of intellectual fashion blow hither and yon, and we may yet discover that Aristotle was right.[74] Either way, philosophers of various schools (metaphysicians and ethicists) would do well to dialogue with biologists and

69. Ibid.

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.

74. Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*.

cosmologists to come to grips with the possibility that our best evidence suggests that nature is normative.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to meet the **Bald Nature Challenge to Ethical Naturalism** stated above, and to clear away the **Scientific Facts** and **Teleological Nihilism** objections. 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 or teleological facts about natural kinds and about living beings. 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. 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, all generics can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
2. Some true generics are about humans (there are some human natural norms).
3. Therefore, some true generics about humans can be used as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.

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

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.[75]

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, as she insists, "no change in the meaning of 'good' between the word as it appears in 'good roots' and as it appears in 'good dispositions of the human will.'[76] 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.[77]

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

> When we moved from the evaluations of other social animals to ethical evaluations of ourselves, there was an obvious addition to the list of aspects which are evaluated. The other animals act. So do we occasionally, but mostly we act from reason, as they

75. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 38.
76. Ibid., 39.
77. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 195.

> 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.[78]

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.

78. Ibid., 217.