Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form

> PHEIDIPPIDES: Consider, again, the animal kingdom—cockerels, for example—where offspring *fight* their fathers. And what difference is there between them and us, except that they don't move resolutions in assemblies?
> STREPSIADES: Well if you're so keen on the life of a cockerel, why don't you go the whole way and eat manure and sleep on a perch?[1]

1. Human Good and the Knowledge Thereof

According to Aristotelian naturalism, human goodness is both similar to the goodness of other living things, and importantly different.[2] Like other living things, human beings have a good specific to their life form.[3] And individual human goodness—including goodness in action and choice—is determined by the good of "the human." In this respect, there is a shared conceptual structure between the evaluation of human action and the evaluation of excellence and defect in other living things, including plants and animals. In each case, the goodness of parts and activities in an individual living thing is understood in relation to its good as defined by its life form—in relation to a particular plant-good or animal-good, in the one case, and in relation to human good in the other. Thus the moral virtues—states of character that lead one to act well qua human being—are analogous to deep roots in an oak or swiftness in a deer. Moral virtue is a special type of *natural goodness*, and vice a natural defect.

However, human good is crucially different from other kinds of plant-

[1]Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, trans. Alan Sommerstein (London: Penguin Books, 2002), pp. 126-27.

[2]For a representative statement of Aristotelian naturalism, see Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[3]We understand individual living things *as living* by viewing them in light of the life form that they instantiate. In order to see something as living, we must identify some happenings as vital processes of an organism. However, there is nothing within an individual thing considered in isolation that will determine the vital description for a part of the process in question. In order to grasp what is going on here and now with a living thing, we must draw on some understanding of the life form of the organism in question. For an extended argument along these lines, and a detailed account of life form judgments, see Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), part I.

good and animal-good, because human good requires that an individual possess an *understanding* of the very life form she bears. A virtuous person does not act from blind instinct, but according to an understanding of the good. And since what determines goodness in human action and choice is human form, the virtuous person must have some understanding of her own form. Simply put: the virtuous person has a grasp of human good, and her virtuous action springs from this grasp. Here we encounter a difference between the human case and other life forms, for while there is such a thing as oak-good, it is no part of the life of an oak to form a conception of its own life form, and the realization of oak-good does not depend on an oak's understanding of its own form. In contrast, it belongs to the life of a human being to live *in light of* some understanding of what "the human" is, and a human acts well *in virtue of* having such an understanding. Human good is *essentially known*.

How, then, do we come to have knowledge of human form, and what substantive account of "the human" should we accept? These are important questions, but it is precisely here that many believe Aristotelianism fails, for it is claimed that our most complete knowledge of human form must come, like our knowledge of other life forms, from research in the biological and social sciences. And such research reveals that the traits that belong to human form are inconsistent with substantive Aristotelian virtues. As Elijah Millgram says:

> Now, when natural historians do take a close look at humanity, what they find is not necessarily justice: for instance, it has been argued … that human females are fine-tuned by natural selection to murder their infants in a suitable range of circumstances … that human males are fine-tuned by natural selection to rape women in a suitable range of circumstances … that humans value occupying dominant positions in hierarchies to a degree not compatible with justice of any kind.[4]

So if we accept the claim that moral goodness is the goodness proper to human form, we seem to run into what Millgram has called "the Pollyanna Problem"—that it is naïvely optimistic, and contrary to empirical research, to suppose that virtues like justice and benevolence are naturally good and vices like injustice and selfishness are naturally defective.

This is a very influential objection to Aristotelian naturalism, and it has not been sufficiently addressed by Aristotelians. In the next section of this paper, I defend Aristotelianism against the so-called Pollyanna Problem. The objection fails, I argue, because it depends upon what I call the *empirical science assumption*—the mistaken belief that our knowledge of the human goodness in action and choice must come from natural science, just as our knowledge of goodness in the roots of oaks or in

[4]Elijah Millgram, "Critical Notice of *Life and Action*," *Analysis* 69 (2009): 557-64, pp. 561-62.

human kidneys does. In fact, unlike our knowledge of oaks and kidneys, our knowledge of human action and character depends upon a practical understanding that cannot be given by natural scientific research. This understanding is possessed by someone not qua scientist but qua practically wise person.

Aristotelian naturalism has seemed vulnerable to the Pollyanna Problem in large part because prominent Aristotelians, such as Philippa Foot, have been interpreted as making a "two-stage argument" to ground the moral virtues in a pre-moral conception of human nature. After answering the Pollyanna Problem, I show that Aristotelianism does not require the two-stage argument, and I offer my own argument against the two-stage approach *on Aristotelian grounds*. In this way, I aim both to remove the motivation behind the Pollyanna Problem, and to clarify the shape that Aristotelian naturalism should take.

In the third part of the paper, I make a positive argument about our knowledge of human form. I argue that a person with moral virtue possesses a knowledge of human form that has a different character from the knowledge provided by the empirical sciences. It is knowledge of human form that comes from knowing what one ought to do. I spell out some key features of this knowledge of human form, including its relation to practical reasons and its similarity to the "know how" of crafts-persons.

My account of virtue as knowledge of human form sheds light on the Aristotelian thesis that humans live according to an understanding of their own form. My account also clarifies a kinship between Aristotelian and Kantian ethics—a kinship some Aristotelians and Kantians have overlooked. In the final section, I show how Aristotelianism and Kantianism are each ways of appealing to form in ethics. The deep divergence between them concerns what the most important form for ethics is—whether human form, or the form of pure practical reason.

Throughout this essay, my understanding of Aristotelian naturalism builds on the work of Philippa Foot, along with the work of Michael Thompson, on which Foot herself draws. Foot's work, however, does not contain a sustained treatment of our knowledge of human form and its relation to good human action. In my view, this is a serious gap in her account. Moreover, this gap has exposed her view to numerous criticisms. My goal in this essay is both to defend Foot-Thompson naturalism against critics like Millgram, and to further the development of such naturalism by contributing to an account of our knowledge of human form. Moreover, to the extent that Foot (or any other Aristotelians) are attempting to make the "two-stage argument," this essay is also an attempt to correct that mistake, in a sympathetic spirit.

2. Does Aristotle Have a Pollyanna Problem?

2.1. Vice, empirical research, and human form

Versions of the Pollyanna Problem, aimed at the work of Philippa Foot and Michael Thompson, have been put forward by Chrisoula Andreou, Elijah Millgram, and Scott Woodcock.[5] In each case, the critics claim that *empirical research* in the biological and social sciences suggests that what is naturally good for humans includes actions and dispositions that are immoral and vicious—actions such as sex-selective infanticide, and dispositions to deceive or rape. It is important to see that these critics do not challenge the basic Aristotelian framework of life forms and natural norms.[6] According to that framework, our understanding of any living thing *as living* depends upon viewing it in light of the life form that it bears. And our conception of a given life form can be articulated in a system of life form judgments. These judgments—expressed as statements of Aristotelian categoricals—include such things as "the tiger has four legs" and "deer escape predators by running." Aristotelian categoricals specify the *function* of different parts and activities in the life of the species: "they articulate the relations of dependence among the various elements and aspects and phases of a given kind of life."[7] Aristotelian categoricals capture what something is *for* in the life-cycle of the species.[8] And our understanding of a life form determines species-specific norms, or standards of goodness, for individuals who bear that life form. When an Aristotelian categorical fails to hold for a particular plant or animal, then there is an instance of natural defect. From "the tiger has four legs," and "*this* tiger has only three legs," we can conclude straightaway that this tiger is *missing* a leg.[9]

The critics who formulate the Pollyanna Problem accept this basic framework, and they accept further that Aristotelian natural normativity can be applied to the human will—that we can speak of natural norms for rational action, and natural excellence and defect in dispositions to choose. The Pollyanna Problem arises when, having accepted the Aristotelian account of life form normativity, we then investigate actual human

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[5]Chrisoula Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," *Social Theory and Practice* 32 (2006): 61-73; Elijah Millgram, "Reasonably Virtuous," in *Ethics Done Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 133-67; Scott Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics has an Achilles' Heel," *Dialogue* 45 (2006): 445-68.

[6]For a defense of Aristotelian natural normativity in the case of plants and animals, in response to evolution-based criticisms, see my "Have Elephant Seals Refuted Aristotle? Nature, Function, and Moral Goodness," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 9 (2012), in press.

[7]Thompson, *Life and Action*, p. 78.

[8]Here, as elsewhere, I use the terms "life form" and "species" interchangeably.

[9]See Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chapters 2-4, and Thompson, *Life and Action*, part I.

beings in order to formulate true Aristotelian categoricals about "the human." Research shows (it is claimed) that actions which are selfish, unjust, and even murderous are part of how "the human" maintains and reproduces itself.[10] Moreover, the critics stress that empirical research is *not* simply making statistical claims about how humans act.[11] Rather, the research reveals a *function* to certain vices in human life, and given the Aristotelian framework, such vices must be counted as naturally good.[12]

In her essay criticizing Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness*, Andreou articulates the Pollyanna Problem in terms of two possibilities concerning human nature, which, Andreou claims, the Aristotelian view overlooks. The first possibility is that virtue and vice are instances of "multiple naturally sound types," in which case *both* virtue and vice (e.g., both justice and injustice) are forms of natural goodness. The second possibility is of "mixed naturally sound types," in which case what is naturally sound is *neither* a traditional virtue nor a vice, but a trait that mixes the two—for example, a trait combining both compassionate and uncompassionate responses, depending on the circumstances. With each possibility, Andreou pursues the same strategy: she attributes to Foot an argument to demonstrate that the moral virtues are forms of natural goodness, and she shows that Foot's argument works as well for traits that are vices, or a mixture of virtue and vice. Thus according to the Aristotelian's own framework of natural normativity, vices and mixed traits have equal claim to be forms of natural goodness.

As an example of multiple naturally sound types in the animal world, Andreou discusses a species of moth that lays broods of caterpillars in both the spring and the fall. Those born in the spring feed on a different type of food from those born in the fall, and they each develop to resemble the food they eat. Individual caterpillars are born with genetic programming for *either* sort of development in appearance, and each has survival value as camouflage. And perhaps justice and injustice are both naturally sound types for human beings. We can accept Foot's derivation of justice as a kind of natural goodness, based in its function in human

[10]See also Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics," pp. 456-60.

[11]Aristotelian categoricals are not claims about what is *statistically common* among members of a life form. For example, it may be that only a few mosquitoes live their characteristic life-cycle, out of thousands of eggs laid. But the various troubles that befall the majority of mosquitoes are not part of mosquito-form; they play no part in the characteristic life of "the mosquito." Rather, the troubles are interruptions of mosquito life, no matter how common they are. See Thompson, *Life and Action*, pp. 68-73.

[12]As Millgram says, "Hrdy [a researcher] and the rest are making claims that are not in the first place statistical, but rather about how the species *works*: that is, they mean to be advancing claims of just the type that is at issue, supported by just the right type of evidence for such claims" ("Critical Notice," p. 562). For emphasis on the *function* of vice, see also Andreou, "Getting on in aVaried World," p. 71.

life. But perhaps *injustice* has a function as well. As Andreou says: "Even if justice plays a crucial role in human survival and reproduction, it does not follow that injustice is a defect in humans. For injustice may also play a crucial role in human survival and reproduction, in which case both justice and injustice are naturally sound in humans."[13] And Andreou suggests that individuals deemed immoral, such as sociopaths or neglectful mothers, may turn out to be exhibiting naturally sound behavior in response to particular circumstances.

To illustrate mixed naturally sound types, Andreou points to species of birds that exhibit behavior "neither purely maternal nor purely unmaternal."[14] With a first-hatched chick, the mother bird will fight off predators. With a last-hatched chick, the mother will stand by as it is killed by an older sibling. Thus, taking "maternal" to mean "nurturing and protective," the characteristic behavior of these birds is neither strictly maternal nor unmaternal, but a trait that is a "mix" of both. And perhaps it is the same with justice and injustice in human beings. Andreou protests that Foot fails to show that mixed traits, incorporating elements of virtue and vice, lack a function in human life: "There is, indeed, no reason to accept that human survival and reproduction calls for pure moral types. Quite the contrary; given our varied world, the reasonable default view is that being a mixed moral type is naturally sound (not just typical) for humans."[15] And empirical research finds that "natural soundness sometimes supports behaviors, traits, or strategies that conflict with (any ideal that can plausibly be called) moral goodness."[16]

2.2. Against the Pollyanna Problem

Despite initial appearances, the Pollyanna Problem is not a problem for Aristotelian naturalism. To understand why, let us begin with a general point about life form judgments:

General Point about Life Forms: The parts and activities that belong to the form of any living thing are those that enable it to live *in the way* characteristic of the life form.

To see this point, imagine a polar bear that is exceptionally timid, and refuses to defend itself in the way characteristic of polar bears. Perhaps a group of hunters, having killed other bears, notice this bear's timidity and take it to the circus. Although this bear's timidity may have led to its

[13]Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," p. 71.
[14]Ibid., p. 68.
[15]Ibid., p. 71.
[16]Ibid., p. 73.

survival, such timidity is not for that reason part of the form of "the polar bear."[17] For timidity is not *how* "the polar bear" defends itself and survives. Rather what is *defective* by the standard of polar bear form has, in this case, turned out to have survival value. Thus if empirical research in the human case is to show that vice is proper to human form—that vice has a function in the life of "the human"—then that research must show that vice is part of *how* the human being realizes its characteristic life. It will not be enough to show that some trait enabled some individuals in some circumstances to survive and reproduce.

Closely related to the General Point is the following about our evaluation of livings things: We grasp *what* is going on here-and-now with an organism by viewing it under some conception of its life form, and that conception governs whether what we find here-and-now is an instance of natural goodness or natural defect.[18] For example, suppose that we see a deer crouching in the bushes, rather than fleeing, when a predator appears. To so much as see what is happening as "crouching" is to offer a vital description of what is before us, and thus to draw on a life form conception and to represent the individual before us a bearer of that life form.[19] Further, it *might* be that what we observe is an instance of natural defect—for example, that this deer is overly timid. *Or* it might be that *the characteristic way* for this species of deer to escape predators is by crouching in the bushes. *Or* it might be that this species of deer characteristically eludes predators both by fleeing and by crouching—perhaps each deer doing these at different times, or perhaps some doing one and some doing the other (Andreou's multiple and mixed sound types). Whatever the case, the answer to the question of what is going on with *this* deer, and whether it counts as excellence or defect, depends upon what is true about the species to which this deer belongs.

Of course, figuring out what belongs to a given species of plant or animal requires observation. If this observation goes well, it yields judgments about the vital processes in the specific individuals observed, as well as a more complete understanding of their life form—including, perhaps, revisions to our previous beliefs about the life form. However, this does not undermine the point that to see any particular happening *as* a vital process is already to draw on a (perhaps very inchoate) conception

[17]Likewise, a naturally good trait may in certain circumstances have harmful results for the individual: "by chance it may sometimes be that the fastest deer fleeing from one predator is the very one that gets caught in a trap." Foot, *Natural Goodness*, p. 34.

[18]For help in clarifying this point and its relevance to my argument, I thank an anonymous reviewer for *Social Theory and Practice*.

[19]For a developed explanation and defense of this claim, see Thompson, *Life and Action*, part I. Since this claim is not being challenged by proponents of the Pollyanna Problem, I do not re-state the argument for the claim here.

of the individual's life form. Rather, as Michael Thompson has stated, there is a "general and thoroughgoing reciprocal mutual interdependence of *vital description of the individual* and *natural historical judgment about the form or kind.*"[20] 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.

Now, our understanding of any life form also includes an understanding of the conditions required to realize its life-cycle. For example, it is true of tigers that "the tiger cub learns to hunt"—and of course, to hunt certain animals in a certain way. However, a particular tiger cub will learn to hunt as tigers do only if she is raised in a certain way. If *this* tiger is left to fend for herself, rather than being cared for and taught to hunt by her mother, then she may not learn to hunt at all. But being raised by another tiger is not something *accidental* in the life of a tiger cub. It is not merely one circumstance among others that might befall the cub. Rather, being raised by another tiger is a condition presupposed by the natural historical account of the life-cycle of "the tiger." The way "the tiger" rears its young is not by leaving them to fend for themselves, or giving them away to be raised by another species (though we could imagine a life form that did this). And the presupposing of certain conditions within a natural history gives sense to the idea of *normal* circumstances, as opposed to abnormal ones. Normal circumstances are ones presupposed in our account of the life form, and abnormal circumstances are those that qualify as alien disruptions of the life-cycle.[21]

At this point, we can make an initial challenge to the way that the critics of Aristotelianism claim support from empirical studies, for at least some of these studies represent humans in situations that we immediately recognize as *abnormal*. In the case of the sociopath, Andreou suggests that sociopathic behavior might be triggered in infancy by environmental cues, such as a "neglectful" parent. To speak of a *neglectful* parent, however, is already to register the child's circumstance as defective according to a standard internal to our conception of "the human."[22] In the same

[20]Michael Thompson, "Apprehending Human Form," in Anthony O'Hear (ed.), *Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 47-74, at p. 52. For a response to a related charge that Aristotelian ascriptions of function are bound to be viciously circular, see section 3.2 of my "Have Elephant Seals Refuted Aristotle?"

[21]See Thompson, *Life and Action*, pp. 78-79.

[22]While Andreou considers the idea of an "abnormal environment," she fails to appreciate the Thompsonian point I have just summarized—that a conception of a proper, or normal, environment is *built into* our understanding of the form of a living thing.

way, putting a dog into a cage may cause it to tear out its fur. Even if tearing out its fur serves some purpose here—for example, releasing anxiety—this does not show that "tearing out its fur" is one of several "multiple sound types" of behavior for the dog! On the contrary, we register this as defective dog behavior, brought about by improper conditions. Likewise, rather than accepting the sociopath as one of several "multiple sound types" in the human, we see conditions that trigger sociopathology as improper for the human. In this case, the research provides no evidence for the conclusion that a sociopathic response is an alternative expression of sound human behavior.

In response to this challenge, the proponent of the Pollyanna Problem might insist that (as the Aristotelian recognizes) empirical observation can provide grounds to revise our previous conception of a life form, and that the relevant studies of human behavior are just such a case. So rather than looking at the sociopath's behavior and declaring it to be an intelligible, but defective, kind of human activity, the critic insists that we have instead discovered a new sound type for "the human" (even though this sound type is "vicious" by traditional standards).[23] How, then, are we to say if this is the correct interpretation of the empirical evidence? More generally: how are we to discover what belongs to "the human" with respect to goodness in action and choice?

This question goes to the heart of the dispute between Aristotelian naturalism and the proponents of the Pollyanna Problem. Happily for Aristotelianism, the answer to this question gives us compelling reason to reject the Pollyanna Problem. To bring this question into better view, and to answer it, we may add a specific point about the characteristic human life:

Specific Point about Humans: Human form is characterized by *practical reason*. This is the capacity to act in light of an awareness of the ground of our actions, to recognize and respond to practical reasons.

The capacity of practical reason gives to human life a dimension not found in the life of oaks or worms. This is the dimension of the rational will, manifested in action and character.[24] There is a physiological aspect to human good, with corresponding Aristotelian categoricals—for example, "the human has one heart that pumps blood." And there is also an aspect of human good concerning rational choice and activity, with corresponding Aristotelian categoricals. In saying this, I have not yet said

[23] In this case, we might also need to revise our description of the mother as "neglectful" (which implies defect), and say instead that this way of mothering is one of several sound types in human beings.

[24] I mean to include here both choice and emotional response.

anything controversial for the proponents the Pollyanna Problem. On the contrary, that problem depends on the idea that there are Aristotelian categoricals pertaining to the rational will, since it claims that some of the true categoricals are contrary to virtues such as justice.

At this point, we can ask: How do we acquire our knowledge of this aspect of human form—of the goodness of the rational will? In answering this question, the Pollyanna Problem relies on the following crucial assumption:

Empirical Science Assumption: In formulating Aristotelian categoricals about the human will, we must rely on the same type of procedures and considerations we rely on in formulating categoricals about other life forms in the natural, or empirical, sciences.

As Millgram says,

> [W]hat Aristotelian categoricals are true of human beings is an empirical question (the sort of question that is assessed not by counting heads—remember that Aristotelian categoricals need be true of no member of the species—but by going and looking, in just the way natural historians do).[25]

We should reject the Empirical Science Assumption.[26] Indeed, our grasp of goodness in human action and character *cannot* come from natural scientific investigation. Instead, our account of what belongs to "the human" in this dimension of human life depends upon a type of understanding that lies outside the distinctive domain of natural science. It depends upon our normative practical understanding of how humans should

[25]Millgram, "Critical Notice," p. 561.

[26]In "Apprehending Human Form," Michael Thompson argues that humans can come to know general facts about human form in a way that is not derived from observation. Thompson's argument is: (1) We have nonobservational, first-person knowledge of certain facts about ourselves, such as that we are in pain, or hungry, or thinking, or doing something intentionally. (2) "Individual states and episodes coming under the general types *pain*, *hunger*, *conceptual thought* and *intentional action* must always be realization of a *capacity* that is characteristic of the life form of the pained or hungering or thinking or intentionally acting individual organism." (3) Thus, from the nonobservational knowledge of these states and episodes in my own case, I can conclude that it belongs to the form I bear that it has certain capacities. So I can, as a human, come to know general facts about human form "by reflection on the logical conditions of particular facts about myself which are not themselves matters of observation" (pp. 71-72). Millgram acknowledges this argument by Thompson. He insists, however, that beliefs we arrive at nonobservationally must be answerable to evidence about humans from the natural sciences: "That you think you are not a bigot does not override observation showing you to be a bigot; that we think that we as a species are just does not override observation showing that we are not" ("Critical Notice," p. 562). My argument in this section is designed to show that Millgram is wrong to think that the kind of observation found in the natural sciences could tell us what is proper to the human will.

act. My argument against the Empirical Science Assumption, and by extension the Pollyanna Problem, comes in six steps:

(1) Practical reason is a capacity of the human being, manifested in choice, action, and emotion, and in dispositions of character that issue in choice and action and emotion.

(2) What is *characteristic* of "the human" is properly functioning practical reason. Those choices/actions/dispositions that are proper to human life are those that manifest a properly functioning practical reason—that is, those that are *practically rational*, in the positive evaluative sense of "rational."

(3) What is rationally excellent for a human being is a matter of giving due consideration to a variety of factors and weighing them appropriately. Thus an action will not count as practically rational if the considerations do not justify going for this thing in these circumstances, even if the action is done for a genuine good. For example, the pleasure of eating ice-cream may be a real good, and a pro tanto reason to get ice-cream. But it does not justify a journey that seriously endangers one's family. Choosing such a journey to get ice-cream displays a lack of practical rationality.

(4) We cannot say what counts as properly functioning practical reason apart from substantive judgments about what is a good reason for what. We have no access to judging that an action or trait is rationally excellent for humans apart from the claim that humans have all-things-considered *reason* to act and choose in a certain way.

(5) Empirical research *as such* cannot establish that an action is rationally justified or a trait manifests practical rational excellence. The empirical studies cited by critics are interesting because they reveal some *point* to the behavior in question. That is, they show that there is some recognizable good that persons are going for in immoral actions. These goods make their actions intelligible (in a way, perhaps, not understood before the research), and they may even "speak in favor" of the action to some extent. It is this feature of these studies, I believe, that inclines people to suppose that they form the basis for Aristotelian categoricals about the rational will.

However, even if we acknowledge a rational intelligibility in the immoral actions described, the empirical research has not shown that this is the *right way* to pursue these goods. And no sociobiological investigation *could* establish this. For whatever empirical studies reveal to be intelligible about vice, and whatever they show humans to be "fine-tuned" to do, we can always respond: "Yes, that is how we are inclined. And yes, there is even some good at stake there. But should we follow that inclination? And does *that* consideration really justify doing *this* in such situations?"

To answer these questions, we require something different from knowledge about how humans are inclined or fine-tuned to act, for any

such knowledge about inclination will invite the same question again. We require a judgment about how a person *acts well* in choosing to do a certain thing for certain reasons in a certain situation. And such judgments depend on our substantive grasp of what is a reason for what—what activities/relationships/projects are worthwhile, and what they justify us in doing. Moreover, to the extent that we make such judgments, we have stepped outside the special province of the empirical sciences, which are purposively neutral on questions of all-things-considered reasons for acting. We have stepped into the province of the practically wise person.

We can bring out the point this way: In locating goods at stake that make an action intelligible, the empirical researcher highlights something that can be recognized as desirable by virtuous and vicious alike (e.g., safety for oneself, freedom from pain). But to make a claim about human form is to make a judgment about *how* these goods should be pursued, in what circumstances and for what reasons. And judging correctly about *that* issue requires more than what is shared by virtuous and vicious alike: to judge correctly one must have a proper sensitivity to various ends and values, and this sensitivity is what distinguishes the virtuous from the vicious.

(6) Empirical research, then, cannot tell us what belongs to human life with respect to the dimension of action and choice. So it cannot tell us that certain vices rather than virtues are naturally good for human beings. Since the Pollyanna Problem depends on empirical science for its claims about human goodness, the Pollyanna Problem fails.[27]

2.3. Against the two-stage argument

I have been arguing that our fundamental understanding of human goodness in action and character cannot come from empirical scientific research.[28] This point has been obscured by a tendency, among proponents and critics alike, to think of Aristotelian naturalism as attempting a "two-stage" argument to ground the moral virtues. The two-stage argument makes it seem as if the Aristotelian view is indeed vulnerable to the Pollyanna Problem.

The goal of the two-stage argument is to demonstrate, using the for-

[27]At this point, we might wonder: Is it possible, or desirable, to develop an Aristotelian natural science of the human being that is not purposively neutral on questions of all-things-considered reasons for action? I do not address this question here. My point is only about the empirical sciences as they are now practiced and as relevant to the Pollyanna Problem.

[28]This does not mean, of course, that empirical research is entirely irrelevant to ethics. For example, in reflecting on good human action, we need to know what is possible for human beings, both physically and psychologically. Empirical research can shed light on this. Likewise, knowing how humans tend to respond in various situations can alter our judgments about what to do. For example, knowing how humans react to traumatic situations can inform the evaluation and treatment of individuals who have experienced trauma.

mal framework of natural goodness, that certain substantive virtues are indeed naturally good, while certain vices are naturally bad. In the first stage, we identify "human life" or "human good" *apart from any substantive conception of the practical virtues,* defined in terms of survival and reproduction. In the second stage, we show that virtues like justice are necessary for realizing good human lives so defined, and thus that those virtues are naturally good.

There are passages in *Natural Goodness* that suggest such a two-stage argument. As Foot presents it, the second stage relies on a type of argument made by Elizabeth Anscombe. These Anscombe-style arguments combine two elements: (1) the identification of some parts of human good, and (2) a story about what humans can and cannot do. Foot discusses an example concerning promise-keeping. First, we recognize that much good depends on our ability to bind each other's wills without physical force. Second, we realize that because of our limitations, promise-keeping is *necessary* for such binding of another's will. Humans do not have another feasible way to do this. Thus if we are to realize our good, it is necessary for us to make and keep promises, and so one acts badly if, absent special circumstances, one breaks a promise.[29]

Andreou takes Foot to be making the following two-stage argument:

(1) A trait counts as a virtue (=as a good exercise of the human will) in case humans cannot "get on" without it—that is, if human survival and reproduction depend on it.
(2) Humans cannot get on without justice, or indeed without morality in general; this includes traditional virtues like benevolence, honesty, fidelity, and so on. And therefore
(3) The traditional virtues are forms of natural goodness; propositions like "humans are benevolent" are true Aristotelian categoricals. And therefore
(4) Immorality is a natural defect in human beings.

Andreou's case of multiple sound types is meant to show that the inference from premise 3 to premise 4 is invalid, because injustice might *also* be something without which (some) humans cannot "get on." The case of

[29]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, pp. 45-46. Other passages in *Natural Goodness* suggest the two-stage argument as well. For example, she says that "[a]nyone who thinks about it can see that for human beings the teaching and following of morality is something necessary. We can't get on without it" (pp. 16-17). She then says that this point is the "nub of the proper answer" to the question of why it is rational to follow morality in a way it is not to follow dueling rules or silly rules of etiquette. It appears, then, that the Footian strategy is to begin with a minimal sense of "getting on"—with a notion of human good defined *apart* from the activity of specific virtues—and then show (using Anscombe-style arguments) that realizing this human good depends on some traditional virtues, such as justice and benevolence.

mixed sound types is a challenge to premise 2, because mixed traits, rather than traditional virtues, might be what humans require to "get on."

Both proponents and critics of the two-stage argument assume that a two-stage argument could in principle succeed in giving us a *substantive* account of human practical virtues. The critics, however, charge that when we actually "go and look" at humans, the substantive account that emerges includes vice as well as virtue. In contrast to both groups, I believe we have reason to *reject* the two-stage argument, independent of the results of social scientific research.

The two-stage argument faces a dilemma. Either the minimal account of the "the human" that the argument begins with includes some conception of the practical virtues or it does not. If it does, then we have *already* begun to spell out *how* humans achieve their ends—what sort of reasoning and acting is required for human good. In this case the argument is not giving any "grounding" for the virtues that is "prior to" a conception of the virtuous life. And since giving such a grounding is the goal of the two-stage argument, the argument has failed.

On the other hand, suppose that the initial description of "the human" is neutral with respect to the practical virtues. It refers to some general ends, such as survival and reproduction, but it does not include a conception of *how* the human achieves these ends. In this case, whichever traits may contribute to human life so conceived, this contribution cannot qualify these traits as naturally good for "the human." A trait could be naturally good only if it belongs to the characteristic life of human beings, and *that* life is constituted by activities manifesting rational excellence. If the sense of human life the two-stage argument begins with is a "minimal" one, stripped of any conception of the practical virtues, then we do not yet have the characteristic life of the human in view. And thus whatever contribution a trait makes to human life conceived *this* way, that contribution cannot qualify such a trait as naturally good.

To see this point, consider an analogous case of the two-stage argument applied to tigers. Suppose we began with some "neutral" conception of tigers, defined in terms of generic ends—survival, reproduction, a life of movement and perception—but *independent* of any conception of *how* tigers characteristically realize these ends. Now suppose that we find a group of tigers with only one eye and three legs, and these tigers subsist and reproduce by scavenging for dead animals. Their way of doing things allows them to meet the generic ends of our "minimal" conception of tiger life. But this would not show—as the two-stage argument suggests it would—that having either three or four legs was a "multiple-sound" type in tigers!

Of course, we can imagine another animal, similar to a tiger but with three legs and one eye, that scavenged for food. What is naturally defective

in a tiger would be naturally sound in such an animal. But what counts as naturally good for a given life form cannot be "built up" from just any parts and operations that are conducive to some generic ends of living things. And that is why a two-stage argument cannot establish what is proper to a life form. With plants and nonhuman animals, no one thinks to make a two-stage argument, and we quickly see how misguided it is.[30] In just the same way a two-stage argument for human virtues cannot succeed.

The Aristotelian view does not require such an argument. The virtues are naturally good because humans are practical reasoners and the virtues lead humans to reason well with respect to action and choice.[31] In light of this, it is fine to talk about the "necessity" of the virtues for achieving human good. But in speaking this way, we should take ourselves to be making a claim *within* a conception of "the human good" that is already informed by an understanding of the virtues. We should not think of Anscombe-style arguments as attempts to argue our way *into* a substantive account of the virtues, beginning with "mere life."[32] Rather Anscombe-style arguments bring out the relations among the different aspects of human good, and our grasp of human good is always informed by our understanding of what count as good reasons.

So it is no problem for Aristotelianism if certain morally bad qualities sometimes contribute to survival and reproduction. A sociopath's total disregard for the welfare of others may help him to survive. But "getting on" as the sociopath does is not the *way* humans need to survive if they are to realize their good. Human good involves giving due consideration to the welfare of others, and insofar as the sociopath fails to do this he acts badly qua human being.

3. Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form

I have been arguing that our knowledge of human form with respect to the will cannot be derived from the empirical sciences. On my view, humans characteristically acquire knowledge of human form through acquiring practical wisdom—an understanding of what is good and bad to do in various spheres and situations of human life. This clam, however,

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[30]What is true, as discussed in section 2.2, is that our descriptions of individual organisms depend upon natural historical judgments about form, and we improve and expand our judgments about form through observation of individuals bearing that form.

[31]I mean this here as a *formal* point, compatible with competing substantive conceptions of the virtues.

[32]Many critics of Aristotelian naturalism seem to assume that such arguments *must* be what Aristotelians want and need to provide. See, for example, Millgram's complaint about the "missing argumentation" in *Natural Goodness* for Foot's substantive ethics. "Reasonably Virtuous," p. 157 n. 3.

might arouse suspicion: "Isn't there something odd about the idea of knowing what our form *is* by making practical judgments about how we *should* live? Practical judgments about what to do seem very different from claims about human form. And how is it that we learn about plants and animals in one way, through empirical science, but learn about our own form in another way?"

In this section, I aim to show that my claim about our knowledge of human form is not mysterious. In fact, it follows from some familiar and plausible points about moral virtue. I will begin by reflecting on the idea of a moral virtue, and explain how features of moral virtues imply that the virtuous person possesses a knowledge of human form. My argumentative strategy is to show that *if* you already accept some familiar and plausible features of moral virtue, then you should accept a special kind of knowledge of human form. And in discussing moral virtue, I hope to shed some light on the nature of this knowledge—a knowledge of how a human should live that comes from knowing how to live as a human.

3.1. Moral virtue and knowing what to do

The moral virtues are excellences of the human will, and a given moral virtue is distinguished by a characteristic response to a given type of consideration. Thus the virtue of courage is distinguished by a response of boldness, or steadfastness, in the face of things recognized as dangerous, while the virtue of benevolence involves perceiving the needs of others and taking those needs as a reason to help. The virtuous person is distinguished from the vicious by the *reasons* for which she acts. The responses of the moral virtues embody distinctive patterns of practical inference. The premises for such inference are considerations present in the situation, and the conclusions are the actions that those considerations justified. Thus a virtue involves: (1) seeing situations in light of salient normative considerations (e.g., "there is someone who needs some help"), and (2) drawing certain practical conclusions from those considerations (e.g., "so I'll help him!").

For example, the virtue of gratitude requires that (1) you recognize when another has given you an undeserved good, and (2) you regard this as a reason to express your thanks to that person by doing something to please or benefit her. In addition, the practical reasoning of virtue culminates in a particular action, and this means that the virtuous take into account various factors in determining what is right to do *here and now*. The virtue of gratitude, then, leads a person to express her thanks in a way that responds to particular features of the situation, including considerations relevant to the other virtues. (Thus, she will not steal something to give to another as an expression of thanks, since stealing is a

violation of justice). An example of the grateful person's reasoning can be represented thus:

(1) Joan helped me out so much with that project, when she really didn't have to.
(2) So I'll express my thanks by doing something nice for Joan!
(3) A good way to express my thanks is getting her that novel she wants to read.
(4) So I'll get Joan the novel!

So it is part of virtue that one reasons well in a way that culminates in action—that one correctly grasps what one ought to do and does it.[33] And what the virtuous know they ought to do are actions in accord with the virtues. It is part of a virtue, then, that one knows which actions accord with virtue and which are against it. At the same time, the virtues are also the practical excellences of human beings considered as such. That is, they describe what counts as *acting well* for us as human beings. A virtue's distinctive response characterizes human goodness and not goodness with respect to some more particular or local identity—for example, goodness qua American, or qua guitarist. So if the virtuous person knows what she ought to do and this accords with virtue, and if the virtues characterize goodness in human action, then the virtuous person also knows what a human being ought to do. To possess a virtue is to know *how a human should act*. However, to know how a human should act is to know what counts as living and acting well for a human being. And knowledge of how the human lives well *just is* knowledge of a characteristically human life—that is, knowledge of human form—with respect to the sphere of human life at issue. Thus to possess a virtue is also to possess, to some extent, an understanding of human form. And since one does not come to possess the moral virtues through empirical scientific investigation, it follows that human beings characteristically possess a knowledge of human form that is not acquired through empirical science.[34]

What is distinctive about the virtuous person's knowledge is not only the object known—which actions are required by virtue—but the *way* this is known. The virtuous person's knowledge comes *through* her disposition toward virtuous actions and away from vicious ones. Consider a person with the virtue of justice who recognizes the fact of a debt as a reason to repay it. Her reasoning can be represented as follows:

[33] I am simplifying somewhat. It is also part of virtue that one has the proper *affective* response to situations. And reasoning well may culminate in acting well even when there is not specific action performed—e.g., in refraining from doing anything.

[34] This is not to deny that acquiring the virtues requires some experience of the world and human life.

(1) Roger has loaned me some money.
(2) The time has come to repay. I have the means to repay, and a good time is Tuesday.
(3) So I'll repay on Tuesday!

If you were to ask the just person what action was in accord with justice here, she would be able to tell you—for example, repaying the debt on Tuesday, when she usually sees Roger. She could also tell you the means to do this—for example, with a check, and not a wheelbarrow full of nickels. In addition, the just person could tell you which actions would be against justice—for example, lying to Roger and telling him she doesn't have the money. She *knows* which actions accord with justice, and which are against it. However, she knows what the just action is *through* her perception of the situation and what it requires—via her recognition that the fact of the debt owed is a good reason to repay it, and that there is good reason to repay it at this time, in this manner, and so on. She perceives the situation in light of certain salient considerations, and she recognizes that those considerations have a claim on her actions.[35] That she does so is part of having the virtue of justice. She knows *that* a particular action is just through her understanding of *what she ought to do*.

Even though a virtuous person knows which actions accord with that virtue, it is not necessary for a virtue term to figure into her practical reasoning. In particular, the *goal* of her action need not be preserving her virtue or becoming more virtuous.[36] As in the example above, "being a grateful person" is not a goal that the grateful person is trying to achieve with her action. Rather, her gratitude consists in the fact that she perceives and acts in accordance with a certain type of reasoning, and she does so from a settled state of character.

What, then, about the idea that the virtuous person does an action *because* it is virtuous, or chooses virtuous actions *for their own sake*? The virtuous person chooses these actions for their own sake in this sense: She regards acting this way in these circumstances to be a way of acting well, something that there is decisive reason to do, and she pursues her

[35]Which is to say, she recognizes the validity of a form of practical inference, and she recognizes it in a practical way—she *draws* the inference *by* acting. On the idea of drawing an inference in a practical way, see Anselm Müller, "Acting Well," in O'Hear (ed.), *Modern Moral Philosophy*, pp. 25-46.

[36]The idea that the virtuous person acts with the intention, or purpose, of "being virtuous" is sometimes attributed to Aristotle. For example, Richard Sorabji says, interpreting Aristotle's picture of the virtuous person: "Presumably, then, he can be said to choose his courageous act as the means to retaining his courageous character." See "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue," in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), chap. 12, p. 203. Whether or not this is Aristotle's view, we should not accept it.

course of action as a way of acting well. There is some description of what she is doing that the agent accepts and that explains how her conduct is a way of acting well.[37] This description may involve a virtue term—for example, "I am returning the check, because doing anything else would have been dishonest." Or it may not—for example, "I am leading the charge, because the townspeople are in danger."

Typically, a virtuous action will have a specific goal that the person is trying to achieve, some result or change to be brought about. Being done in accordance with virtue is a matter of how and why a person pursues *this* goal, in *these* circumstances, and in *this* way. For example, suppose that Don is trying to fix Peggy's bicycle tire. Don acts virtuously because of his motivation for acting—he has chosen to fix the tire to help Peggy, his friend, who needs her bicycle to get to work—and because of the manner in which he pursues the goal—he has not stolen tools to use, he is not abandoning a more pressing duty, and so on. In contrast, Pete chooses to fix Peggy's bicycle tire for a different reason—so that it will be easier to steal. The actions of Don and Pete have the same immediate goal of fixing the tire. Their actions can be evaluated with respect to their success or failure in actually fixing the tire. At the same time, their actions can also be evaluated with respect to their motivations in pursuing this goal, and the manner in which they do so. For this evaluation, the virtues provide the standard. The goodness or badness of their actions at this level is not a matter of success or failure in fixing the tire, but their reasons for doing so. Even if Don fails to fix the tire, he acts well in attempting to do so. Even if Pete succeeds in fixing it, he acts badly in doing what he does.

To say that Don chooses the action "for its own sake" means that he considers what he does—fixing the tire so that Peggy can get to work—to be choiceworthy, without considering some *further* gain toward which this action is instrumentally valuable. Insofar as Don acts from virtue, his action in helping Peggy manifests his acceptance of a general pattern of reasoning, and it expresses his conception of what is valuable, what is a reason for what, and how one ought to act and live. In this respect, to say that he does the action "for its own sake" marks off his action from something done either akratically or thoughtlessly.

3.2. What the merely clever (don't) know

In contrast to the virtuous, a merely clever person may also know that a certain action accords with virtue, but he knows it in a different way. By "merely clever," I have in mind a person who does not accept the virtu-

[37]On this point, I believe I am in agreement with Christine Korsgaard's remarks on choice in "Aristotle's Function Argument," in *The Constitution of Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 129-50.

ous person's understanding of what acting well requires.[38] To see the difference between the knowledge of the virtuous and knowledge of the merely clever, let us return to the case of a debt owed. The merely clever man can also know that repaying the debt will count as just. But we cannot represent him coming to this knowledge as the virtuous does, through the recognition of the fact of the debt as a straightforward reason to repay, for the fact that he does *not* reason that way is part of his being merely clever and not just. The clever man can recognize that repaying the debt is the just action, and that other options are unjust ones, but this will be because he understands how the concept of "justice" works, and not because he recognizes considerations of justice as having a direct claim on how he should act. Thus the merely clever man can recognize that an action would be just or unjust, and he can see that fact as practically relevant, but how this fact figures into his reasoning differs from the just person. We can imagine him reasoning:

(1) Roger has loaned me some money.
(2) Not repaying your debts counts as unjust.
(3) People look down on unjust actions, punishing the unjust with social ostracism.
(4) I want to avoid social ostracism.
(5) So I'll repay the debt!

Here, the fact that an action is just figures into the reasoning of the merely clever person. But the fact is of instrumental significance, and that is part of his being merely clever and not just.

However, insofar as he is not acting akratically or thoughtlessly, the choice of the merely clever person also manifests his conception of what is worthwhile. In this sense, the merely clever person also chooses his action "for its own sake," as something there is decisive reason to do given his situation. But his understanding of what *makes* this an instance of acting well distinguishes him from the virtuous. His actions manifest a nonvirtuous understanding of what is a reason for what, what activities are choiceworthy, what ends are worth pursuing, and so on. And for this reason, the merely clever person's knowledge of what actions accord with virtue does not provide him with knowledge of human form. He does not *take* virtuous activity to be a way of acting well as a human; at most he regards it as having instrumental significance for acting well. So what is actually proper to human form he does not *believe* to be proper to human form. Thus insofar

[38]The clever person I am imagining is not a depressed person, who accepts an account of acting well like the virtuous but for whom the account has little motivational force. Nor is he the shameless person, who accepts an account of acting well like the virtuous but then says, "So what? I want to do something else."

as he lacks virtue, he does not have knowledge of "the human," since he accepts a *false* conception of how human beings live well.

In one sense, both the virtuous person and the merely clever person choose to repay the debt. Both also choose their respective action for its own sake, and thus they each differ from someone who acts akratically or thoughtlessly. In another sense, however, only the virtuous person chooses to repay the debt for its own sake, since only she takes "repaying the debt" to be a description of what is decisively worthwhile in the action. In contrast, for the merely clever what is choiceworthy here is not "repaying the debt" itself but avoiding social ostracism, and repaying the debt is chosen only for that purpose and not for its own sake.[39]

3.3. Illustrative comparison with craft knowledge

We may better grasp the virtuous person's knowledge of human form by comparing this knowledge with the knowledge of the craftsperson. In talking about the virtuous person's knowledge of what virtue requires, I have emphasized what we can call the *mode of recognition*: the virtuous know what acting well requires through their perception of the situation in terms of salient features that call for a specific response. In the same way, the craftsperson registers certain features of situations as making *practical demands* on him. As the potter throws a pot on a wheel, he recognizes: "Now the walls are too thick, I should make them thinner" or "Now the clay is too dry, I should add water." The features of the situation—the thickness of the walls, the dryness of the clay—are perceived as practically significant, and the potter knows *what to do* next by seeing these features as grounds for a particular action (=drawing up the clay, adding water).[40] To have a trained perceptual capacity is an essential part of knowing how to pot, and in the making pots, one's actions are guided by one's trained perceptions.

If asked about his actions at any point, the potter can explain his conduct in terms of the features of the situation and what they call for. In offering such an explanation, the potter also makes clear *what he is doing* at a particular time—what sub-activity he is engaged in as part of the overall activity of making pots. Now he is pushing the clay down as a way of centering it; now he is pressing in as a way of opening the top of the bowl-to-be; now he is pulling up the sides to shape the walls, etc. It is because of what he is doing at a given time that the particular considerations he rec-

[39]The virtuous person could also be said to choose the action "for justice's sake," or "to make the world a better place," or "to live the life I want to live." But repaying the debt is not instrumental to any of these ends in the way it is instrumental to the ends of the merely clever person.

[40]I do not mean to say that the craftsperson must consciously think such thoughts.

ognizes have their specific practical significance. And they have an immediate, nonaccidental connection to his will because he is engaged in pottery-making. If pressed further to justify his actions, the potter can explain why doing these activities is necessary to making the pot he is in the process of making, and why doing them this way is part of the craft of pottery.

In the case of moral virtue, there is no product that the virtuous person aims to bring about analogous to the potter's pots or the carpenter's houses. However, if pressed to explain some particular choice or action, the virtuous person can also explain what she is doing in terms of some larger activity in which she is engaged, or in light of some more general ends—"keeping a promise"; "helping my neighbor"; "doing my part for this family." Taken to a high level of generality, such explanations become a reflective picture of human good. In particular actions, the virtuous person need not have an explicit conception of human good in mind. But if prompted, she is able to provide a more general, reflective account of human life. And there may be times when the virtuous need to consult such a general account explicitly—for example, when encountering an alternative conception of human good, or when faced with an unfamiliar choice, or upon discovering an apparent contradiction in one's own account of acting well.[41]

Even though it is general, a human being's reflective account of human good is also *practical* and not merely theoretical, for in formulating such an account a human being characterizes the very activity she is engaged in—living a human life. Just as the potter qua potter is "in the business" of making pots, so the human being qua human being is "in the business" of living a human life. And thus the potter's reflective judgments about the craft of pottery, as well as the human's reflective judgments about human form, are both practical. In each case the person formulates a judgment in which her own actions are implicated.

Our reflective accounts of human good, although general, cannot come from the empirical sciences, for even this general account originates in virtuous activity: the perspectives given by the virtues provide the material from which the reflective picture is constructed. In this way, the reflective account is a generalization of the practical standpoint, not a departure from it. And in formulating a reflective account, we require precisely the sort of judgments that the empirical sciences purposively avoid—judgments about the actions worthwhile for human beings and the ends that we have all-things-considered reason to adopt.

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[41]For an interesting discussion of our reflective account of human good, see a pair of essays by Alasdair MacIntyre: "Rival Aristotles: Aristotle against some Renaissance Aristotelians," and "Rival Aristotles: Aristotle against some Modern Aristotelians," in his *Ethics and Politics*: *Selected Essays Volume Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 3-40.

4. Conclusion: Human Form and the Form of Pure Practical Reason

In order to defend Aristotelian naturalism against the Pollyanna Problem, I argued that knowledge of human form, with respect to the rational will, cannot come from empirical scientific investigation. I then argued that human beings characteristically possess a knowledge of their own form that is not derived from empirical science, but instead comes through virtue. A virtuous human knows what a good human life is by knowing how to live well as a human being.

In conclusion, I want to consider a question that arises in response to my argument. Granting that a person with practical virtue will know how to live as a human, what *makes it the case* that this is how a human being should live? What are the ultimate *grounds* of the virtuous agent's practical knowledge of how to live? I want to describe two kinds of answer that one might give to this question. I will not attempt to decide between them. But seeing the difference between them reveals what is distinctive of Aristotelian naturalism, and how it differs from a Kantian view.

The first kind of answer yields a resolute Aristotelian naturalism. On this view, our most basic account of acting well for a human being must make *ineliminable* reference to our specifically *human* nature. This sort of view is embraced by Philippa Foot. A version of the resolute Aristotelian view is also found in John Finnis's *Natural Law and Natural Rights*. Finnis argues that what counts as acting well for a human is grounded in a set of basic normative principles that govern human "practical reasonableness." The basic requirements of practical reasonableness each express some aspect of moral goodness. These requirements are fundamental, underived, and irreducible. It belongs to the human capacity for rational agency to grasp these requirements and to act in accordance with them. Furthermore, these requirements of practical reasonableness are themselves defined with reference to basic human goods. For example, the seventh requirement is that "one should not choose to do any act which *of itself does nothing but* damage or impede a realization or participation of any one or more of the basic forms of human good."[42] The basic forms of human good include such things as knowledge, friendship, and aesthetic experience. Like the basic requirements of practical reasonableness, the basic forms of human good are fundamental, underived, and irreducible.

What interests me here is that Finnis, like Foot, takes the basic forms of good, and the basic requirements of practical reasonableness, to be *specifically human*. A human life devoid of any one of these basic goods would lack something necessary for human flourishing. A human being who did not recognize these basic goods *as* good, or who failed to

[42]John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 118.

acknowledge any of the basic requirements of practical reasonableness, would be defective qua human agent. However, so far as Finnis's account goes, there might be *different* forms of good that are basic to the well-being of different life forms. And there might be *different* requirements of practical reasonableness that apply to other sorts of rational beings.[43]

In contrast to the resolute Aristotelian answer, a second kind of answer yields a Kantian position. The Kantian can agree that the virtuous person has practical knowledge of how a human should act. But what makes it the case that a human being should act in a certain way is ultimately a matter of a person's nature as a finite rational agent, rather than her specifically human form. For the Kantian, the specifically human is important for determining goodness in human action, but it enters only when we apply norms that belong to finite rational agency as such. At the most basic level, the form that grounds the goodness of virtuous action is not human form, but the form of pure practical reason. The principle that the virtuous person grasps, and which thereby determines her action, applies to all finite rational agents. Virtue is "the strength of a human being's maxims in fulfilling his duty"[44] and the ultimate ground of duty is the form of pure practical reason.

On the Kantian view, the virtuous person can be said to act well qua human being, and virtue can be regarded as that which makes us good qua human beings. But this is true only because human nature is defined by the form of pure practical reason. The norm that determines acting well for humans is ultimately the norm of finite *rational* nature. Thus according to the Kantian view, it is not the case that the basic norm of moral goodness applies to human beings *as such*, as if different moral norms might apply to different life forms:

> [A] law, if it is to hold morally, that is, as a ground of an obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the command 'thou shalt not lie' does not hold only for human beings, as if other rational beings did not have to heed it, and so with all other moral laws properly so called; that, therefore, the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of the human being or in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in concepts of pure reason.[45]

For the Kantian, the virtuous person can be said to know human form, because she grasps how the human should live. But this knowledge must

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[43]In *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Finnis does not discuss the possibility that other rational life forms might have different basic goods and different basic requirements of practical reasonableness. But this possibility is left open by the fact that his account of practical reasonableness makes fundamental reference to the specifically human.

[44]Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:394.

[45] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4:389.

be analyzed into two "moments." The first moment is a cognition of the moral law, and this is a law that applies to every finite rational agent. In the second moment, there is the understanding of how the moral law *applies* to the specific conditions of human life. This includes an understanding of maxims that govern the actions of beings with our specific needs and capacities. The virtuous agent—who knows what is good to do—will see concrete situations in light of these maxims, and she will act accordingly, even in the face of competing natural tendencies. So the virtuous agent has a knowledge of how the human should act, and hence of human form, although this is based in a more basic cognition of a principle that determines how *any* finite rational agent should act.[46]

If human beings had very different capacities for memory, or different vulnerabilities to physical harm, then the virtues of truthfulness and courage might require a different set of specific actions. However, the ground of the fundamental choiceworthiness of virtuous action—the categorical imperative—would remain the same. For this reason, there is something misleading about Foot's evaluation of Kant when she says: "[Kant] seems to have gone wrong, however, in thinking that an abstract idea of practical reason applicable to rational beings as such could take us all the way to anything like our moral code. For the evaluation of human action depends also on essential features of specifically human life."[47] This statement misses the fact that Kant can allow features of specifically human life to enter into the justification of our particular, human moral code. The specifically human, however, enters only at the level of the application of a more fundamental principle of practical goodness. So the Kantian position cannot be dispensed with as quickly as Foot suggests. The real difference between Kant and the Aristotelian naturalist concerns whether or not Kant can succeed in giving an account of moral goodness in terms of demands internal to the form of pure practical reason, which are then applied to the human case—or if instead our accounts of practical rationality and moral goodness must make some ineliminable reference to the specifically human at a more basic level than Kant allows.[48]

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[46]To be more precise, the categorical imperative is a norm for finite agents in whom *reason itself* is practical. On this point, see Kant's footnote to the notion of "personality" in *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason*, 6:26.

[47]Foot, *Natural Goodness*, p. 14.

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