Chapter 4

What We Are

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

The previous chapter laid out the criteria a naturalistic account of virtue would have to satisfy. Just as excellent specimens of any natural organism reflect an inherent natural normativity, excellent human beings would reflect an inherent "human" normativity that arises from our nature as practical, rational primates. Human norms must be *animal* since we are primates but human norms cannot be *merely* animal since we are practical primates with a peculiar form of life.

Modified: My thesis in this chapter a normative one: virtues for practical rational primates are excellent rational practices and practical reasoning – while irrational practices and practical irrationality are natural vices. To put a fine point on it, the description of a fully virtuous agent is a more accurate of 'the human being' than any mere statistical generalization. Virtue and practical wisdom is *who we are*. The task of the moral life is to become who we are.

My purpose is to defend this paradoxical notion by building on the normative virtue

theories of Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre.[1] These neo-Aristotelians show how it is possible to evaluate the kind of life one is actually living with reference to the normatively human. I also discuss and critique their accounts. The result is a unified view according to which virtues are excellences of rational practice and practical reasoning, while vices are constituted by irrational practices and defective practical reasoning.

Section 1 draws from Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre to develop a concept of virtue: firstly, virtues benefit humankind (including but not limited to their possessor) while vices harm. This point breaks down the putative divide between altruistic or other-regarding and self-regarding virtues.

Section 2 argues that virtues constitute excellent human *functioning* and that they are especially beneficial in that they are corrective of tempting vices.

Section 3 virtues are not just any positive traits such as those given by luck, nor are they necessarily even *acquired* at all – rather, virtues are in principle *acquirable*.

Section 4 argues that some virtues are excellences of "rational practicing" while others are excellences of practical reasoning about one's whole life.

Section 5 argues that virtues are excellences of "social reasoning" in that they enable the health and progress of societies and traditions.

1. I derive their views from a variety of sources. Foot's concept of virtue and practical reason I derive not only from *Natural Goodness* but from her "Virtues and Vices" essay. For MacIntyre, I draw from *After Virtue*, where he builds his three stage account of virtue (relating to practice, then life, then tradition) from a careful study of the history of the concept within the broader western tradition. But I also draw from *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, and *Dependent Rational Animals*. McDowell's writings on virtue and reason span several essays and books, such as *Mind, Value and Reality*. I especially draw from "Virtue and Reason" and "Values as Secondary Qualities."

1. Virtue as Natural Goodness

Foot, MacIntyre, and McDowell each offer detailed accounts of virtue and its relation to reason and nature. For example, Philippa Foot argues that virtues are the acquirable, beneficial, corrective excellences of practical reason.[2] Alasdair MacIntyre argues that virtues are "acquired human qualities" that enable the virtuous person to succeed in individual practices, in life, and in traditions.[3] John McDowell argues that virtue is a kind of perceptual sensitivity to what is required to live well.[4] My goal in this section is to articulate a fairly comprehensive treatment of virtue, drawn what these three three writers agree on, but sensitive to what they disagree on. I shall first state eight points about virtue and the vices that bring these ethical concepts into clear light.

The first point about virtue is that virtues are beneficial to their possessor. Hursthouse calls this "Plato's requirement" on the virtues: "The concept of a virtue is the concept of something that makes its possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as she should. These are commonly accepted truisms."[5] While virtues may come with a cost, there is something counterintuitive about the notion that X is a virtue that could, in the end, ultimately be a detriment its possessor.

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2. Her exact words are that virtue is excellence of "the rational will." After expanding the concept of 'will' beyond its typical meaning to include intentions, it is clear her 'rational will' is identical to my 'practical rationality.' I want to avoid the word will because it might be a narrowly western way of viewing the capacity for practical reasoning. David Bradshaw distinguishes the cluster of concepts such as heart, mind, and will, and shows that Aristotle and others did not have a concept of a distinct, sub-rational faculty for choosing. Cf. David Bradshaw, "The Mind and the Heart in the Christian East and West," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 5 (2009): 576–98.

3. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

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

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

As we have seen, this requirement fits Foot's account of natural normativity. As some traits make a 'good oak' or a 'good wolf,' a good person exemplifies those good-making traits shared by all exemplary members of a natural species. Virtues are good-of-a-kind for creatures like us, namely, practical rational primates.

MacIntyre agrees. For MacIntyre, virtues are "acquired *human* qualities."[6] Such human qualities enable their possessor to achieve particular *goods.* MacIntyre's second clause assumes that virtues are beneficial. For MacIntyre, a virtuous trait *cannot* be directed at achieving ills.

Modified: Assuming that virtues cannot go bad will bring some trouble for MacIntyre's initial definition in *After Virtue*. It seems quite possible that people who have particular virtues can be, overall, wicked. Can't the thief be courageous, the dictator magnanimous, the glutton affable, the prude moderate? MacIntyre indexes virtues to the *goods* internal to practices, but can't practices themselves be wicked? We might say this is this the problem of *when virtues go bad.*

Modified: I should explore three possible responses to this problem before offering my own solution. The first response is to stipulate away the possibility that virtues can go bad. For example, Jonathan Sanford's recent monograph, *Before Virtue*, argues that Aristotle's doctrine is "ethics insists it is impossible to exercise any virtue, with the exception of technical skill, wrongly."[7] On this response, virtues are always good, such that if a particular action or trait turns out to be bad, then it must not be a virtuous action or trait. The

6. Presumably, the point of specifying that virtues are *human* qualities here is to contrast human excellence with analogous formal or functional biological features that enable non-human animals to survive and thrive (e.g., the flexible flagellum of a bacterium, the swiftness of a deer. For MacIntyre's initial formulation here, such biological features are excluded from the class of virtues by definition; his later *Dependent Rational Animals* retracts the assumed divide between human and non-human animals.

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

danger of this response is that it seems like an ad hoc "No True Scotsman" fallacy.[8]

It seems to me Foot argues that virtues cannot go bad while trying to do justice to the worry that the stipulation is ad hoc. Her solution is, I think, ingenious. She makes an analogy to poisons and solvents:

> It is quite natural to say on occasion 'P does not act as a poison here' though P is a poison and it is P that is acting here. Similarly courage is not operating as a virtue when the murderer turns his courage, which is a virtue, to bad ends. Not surprisingly the resistance that some of us registered was not to the expression 'the courage of the murderer' or to the assertion that what he did 'took courage' but rather to the description of that action as an act of courage or a courageous act. It is not that the action could not be so described, but that the fact that courage does not here have its characteristic operation is a reason for finding the description strange.[9]

An agent's commission of an otherwise virtuous action may be a mistake *for that agent* at that time.

Modified: A second, slightly different response is that to allow that some virtues can go bad under certain conditions; and so individual virtues although *usually* or *typically* operating toward good ends *can* be corrupted in the absence of a higher-order executive virtue that coordinates virtues toward their proper ends and recognizes if and when a particular virtue has limits. That executive virtue is usually taken to be practical wisdom. An apparently courageous act may serve depraved ends if we allow that the apparently courageous person acted unwisely *in this case*. On this second response, all the virtues depend for their successful execution on the coordinating management of practical wisdom. We might categorize John McDowell's account as an example of this type. In "Virtue and Reason", he argues that all virtues are, in the end, examples of practical wisdom. And since

8. For example, Smith: All Scotsmen love haggis. Jones: But McDougal over there is a Scotsman, and he hates haggis. Smith: That just goes to show McDougal is no *true* Scotsman. Cf. Antony Flew, *Thinking About Thinking: Or, Do I Sincerely Want to Be Right?* (Fontana/Collins, 1975)

9. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 16.

practical wisdom, by definition, cannot go bad, the problem of *virtues going bad* does not arise. "Virtues" benefit their possessor since they amount to the kind of wisdom by which one is able to live a good life. (I shall dispute McDowell's conflation of all virtues with practical wisdom in chapter 5.)

Modified: A third response is to expose a hidden assumption in the problem. There are admittedly putative cases of virtues going bad; the critic alleges that *any* traditional virtue might turn out to be bad in some circumstance. To assert that *no traits* are always good would be to beg the question in favor of moral nihilism or relativism.

Modified: It seems to me the safest course is to insist on the following minimal stipulation: almost all virtues almost always benefit their possessor. By this stipulation, any theory of virtue according to which virtues turn out to harm their possessor *overall* is simply ruled out. At the same time, the stipulation has three strengths. First, it allows us to take seriously cases wherein a seeming virtue seems to harm its possessor or others; perhaps, if a trait is not beneficial, then we have simply misjudged it as a virtue. Secondly, it allows us to concede the intuitive objection that some virtues (honesty) might be corruptible by the presence of overwhelming vices (such as cruelty) or that individual virtues (such as courage) may be *costly* and so cause their possessor pain or discomfort – many a just politician has passed up personal wealth by refusing bribes. Thirdly, this minimal stipulation agrees with Foot that at least one virtue – practical wisdom – is *always* operative to good ends. I shall discuss this problem a bit more below. For now, I conclude that almost all virtues, if they are truly virtues, are almost always beneficial.

Plato's requirement is that virtues benefit their possessor. I have allowed that they may cause their possessor to lose out on money, fame, or comfort. A related query is whether virtues are supposed benefit *others* as well or only their possessor. For some virtues, the answer is clearly *both*. Still, aren't some individual virtues *more* beneficial to one party, possibly at the expense of the other?

Modified: The answer is difficult to state systematically. By hypothesis, virtues are beneficial to *human beings* as a kind, not just this or that individual. One can approach the thesis that virtues are beneficial to human beings qua human from two angles. Consider moderation with respect alcohol. Such moderation benefits one's family, one's community and so on. The ravages of alcoholism on marriages, children, and extended families are widely known. So it would seem to be altruistic not to over-drink. Nevertheless, moderation with alcohol also benefits oneself. Indeed, parsing up the benefit seems foolhardy. (Who benefits more, your children or your liver?)

For virtues such as justice or charity, the answer might be less clear, but the lack of clarity does not damage the account. Foot says, "It is a reasonable opinion that on the whole a man is better off for being charitable and just, but this is not to say that circumstances may not arise in which he will have to sacrifice everything for charity or justice."[10] Even so, she finds the alleged paradox between what we might wish to call "selfish" and "altruistic" virtues overblown.

Certainly, sometimes life presents us with the opportunity to pursue only one of two contradicting or apparently irreconcilable goods; my own good *versus* your good. Sometimes, however, the cases in which virtuous deeds necessitate the loss of other goods are not so devastating as they might appear. It might be that, on occasion, it is better (say) for my family that I sacrifice my health in working hard to earn higher wages; while on other occasions it is better for my family that I sacrifice higher wages to keep myself healthy. Even when there is a clear, irresolvable tension between my good and the good of the group (as when, say, I must sacrifice my life), we can make sense of the demand of morality by appealing to what is necessary *for humans* in general. As Geach says: "Men need virtues as bees need stings. An individual bee may perish from stinging, all the same bees need stings; an individual man may perish by being brave or justice, but all the same, men need courage

10. Ibid., 3.

and justice."[11] Geach further points out that the clear contrast between my "inclinations" (e.g., to self preservation) is largely an artifact of philosophical thinking; many people are *inclined* both to preserve themselves *and* to obey the moral law.

Some critics have posed an objection to the effect that virtues are what Kant would call "hypothetical imperatives" – that we only need virtue *if* we want to be happy. On the contrary, the acquisition of virtue is a formal necessity for all members of the human race. As the gestating bee needs to develop its sting in order even to be what it is, we need virtues *to be human*. If this is right, then everyone has an obligation to develop virtuous traits such as being moderate, tolerant, and wise. Consider only practical wisdom for the moment: the obligation to become practically wise stems not from the agent's prior commitment to happiness but simply from one's finding oneself to be a human, and hence subject to a particular form of practical life which, as it turns out, is perfected or realized by practical wisdom.

Modified: A somewhat different critic might accept the analogy between human virtues and bee stings but point out that, in fact, some bees *don't* need stings. For example, considering the common honey bee, only females, including the queen, have stings; male drones do not. By the same analogy, could there be humans that don't need some virtues? MacIntyre illustrates this objection with respect to promise-breaking. He asks us to imagine a complex, social species who each perform some function on behalf of the survival of the whole. However, the society also includes "free riders" who do not perform any function. He says:

> Such a society would suffer from a natural defect if there were too many free riders, but the existence of some free riders would not be a defect, and the free-riders are themselves not necessarily defective members of the species. For their existence might have the important function of making other members of their society and species more vigilant in sustaining the practices necessary for the society's and species' survival and functioning. So it might

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

perhaps be for human beings with promise breakers.[12]

Modified: This objection brings out an important distinction between 'the human' qua a biological species bearing a common life form and humans qua members of society playing various social roles. I cannot fully explore the distinction here. Suffice it to say that the existence of various social roles with accompanying, role-specific virtues is compatible with virtues accompanying a universally distributed life form. As Foot argues: "Human beings do not get on well without [virtues]. Nobody can get on well if he lacks courage, and does not have some measure of temperance and wisdom, while communities where justice and charity are lacking are apt to be wretched places to live, as Russia was under the Stalinist terror."[13] Notice the generic form of her statements: "humans" do not get on well. This is compatible with saying that courage is *especially* necessary for a soldier or a firefighter. Even so, plumbers, parents, and professors need a basic level of human courage. And, again, practical wisdom is needed by all who are physically and mentally capable of acquiring it. MacIntyre's example shows how a (virtuous) society *can* sustain the presence of vice-ridden members without being utterly destroyed; it even supports the surprising notion that a virtuous society can retain or augment its virtues by supporting vice-ridden members. It does not do anything to justify the suggestion that vice-ridden members are ipso facto necessary. For even if the presence of free-riders were a net benefit to the imagined society, it is possible for others to play that role, such as the young, the critically injured, and so on.

Another critic might accept all this and ask: if people *need* the virtues, and if even "altruistic" or other-regarding virtues benefit their possessor, is it then egoistic and "selfish" to pursue virtue? Not at all. Acquiring one's own virtue is no more selfish than eating one's own food and getting one's own sleep. The pursuit of virtue is beneficial to the self, but not

12. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Virtues in Foot and Geach," *Philosophical Quarterly*, no. 52 (2002): 621–31.

13. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 2–3.

selfish in the pejorative sense that usually implies neglect of proper sensitivity to the needs of others. Furthermore, the charge of egoism assumes that in every case what is *good for me* is ipso facto *bad for someone else*. We need not assume this. It may be established, upon reflection, that in some cases what might be good for me turns out to be bad for someone else, or for humanity in general, but this must established case by case. For it may turn out that what is good for humanity in general is ipso facto good for me as a human. Take an example: I would argue that various simple pleasures of life arising from cooking and eating good food, or strolling through natural beauty, chatting with an old friend, are on balance good parts of life. But they are not *the only* goods. If they were the only goods, one might go in for those pleasures and those pleasures alone. One might construct one's whole life around them. But having moderation is a good as well. So a person who enjoys both the moderate pleasures of life and the moderation of pleasure and pain is both a better fellow and better person.

In this connection, we should recall the brief argument above that virtues are intrinsic goods. They are not just traits that *lead to good consequences* for organisms like us (that too). The recent revival of virtue consequentialism defines virtues as instrumental goods useful because they secure other, intrinsic goods.[14] Rather, virtues are themselves good for us. Alasdair MacIntyre is careful to distinguish between intrinsic and instrumental goods; he says that virtues "enable their possessor to achieve … goods" of practices, which might sound as if he means virtues are mere *instruments* to goods. but they are not *merely* instrumental. They are both instrumental (to the achievement of certain goods) and also *partly constitutive of those goods.* I end up agreeing with Hurka's later view that virtues have "recursive" value; they are both good as means to (other) intrinsically good ends, and also have some intrinsic goodness in themselves.[15]

14. Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2003).
15. Ibid., chap. 1.

Modified: To use a well-worn example, is fairly uncontroversial that friendship is a good for practically rational, social animals. Suppose that one's *having friends* depends, in part, on one's *being friendly*. What does it mean to 'be friendly'? Being affable is not enough; one must have some of the traits that make one a good friend: e.g., being a good listener, showing genuine concern for others, rejoicing when a friend's life is going well, empathizing when it is not. Such traits are not commendable *merely* because they happen to help one to have friends. Rather, they are commendable because such traits, in part, make one a good human being. It so happens that, when two people have such traits, they will be good friends to each other. Good humans make good friends. And it is better, on balance, to have those traits whether or not friends are forthcoming. Fortune may place one in a lonely setting: military posts, solitary jobs, and so on. But as Judith Thomson says, a virtue is a trait such that, "whatever else is true of those among whom we live, it is better if they have it."[16] Likewise, Philippa Foot says: "let us say then, leaving unsolved problems behind us, that virtues are in general beneficial characteristics, and indeed ones that a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows."[17] While we cannot pretend to have resolved the notorious tensions between altruism and egoism, we must move on in the pursuit of a definition of virtue.

2. Excellent and Corrective Traits

Modified: The second point about virtue is that virtues cause and partly constitute the excellent functioning of a human being. What is 'excellence'? The concept of excellence is relative to an object's nature and function. The common example is that the function of a knife is to cut, so an excellent knife *cuts well*. More complex beings have more complex

16. Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Right and the Good," *The Journal of Philosophy* 94, no. 6 (1997): 273–98.

17. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 4.

functions and therefore a more complex kind of excellence. An excellent guard dog is one that barks loudly, is hostile to strangers, but remains gentle with friends, and so on. Artifacts receive their function by design, but even a natural entity such as a dog receives an artificial function (guarding) by design. It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that *all* functions are artificial objects of human invention. On this view, natural organisms (trees, dogs, humans) have no *inherent* function, and no function at all unless one is imposed upon it by an agent from the outside.

As I have argued, however, natural organisms have natural functions, namely to develop fully into what they are. Even without knowing the full details of its origin, we can empirically discover the telos of an organism by observing it grow in proper conditions, and discerning between exemplary and non-exemplary members of the kind. We can learn that an acorn is a *Quercus alba* (white oak) only by observing and reflecting upon its development from embryonic stages to maturity, and by observing the characteristic activities exhibited by mature, typical members of the species. Likewise, the use of dogs in guarding roles is not *only* artificial; even before breeding, some dogs are not at all suited to the task, while others are well suited. We observe that the natural behavior of some full-grown, healthy dogs is to be more alert, protective, fierce, or what have you. Breeders and trainers then augment these natural ends and direct them toward human ends.

Modified: A natural inference to draw would be that human beings have a "function", howsoever complex, and that a detailed knowledge of this function is necessary for defining human excellence. I am persuaded by Geach that it is not necessary to be able to specify in great detail, in advance, our function. He says:

> in that way of thinking it makes good sense to ask 'What are men for?' We may not be so ready with an answer, even a partial answer, as when we ask 'What are hearts for?… But there's always right to my mind in desiderating an answer – the success in bringing men's partial organs and activities under a teleological account should encourage us to think that some answer maybe found. Not as quickly as Aristotle thought it does not show straight off what

> men are for if we know that men and men only are capable of theoretical discourse… Consider the fact that people of different religions or of no religion at all can agree to build and rent a hospital, and agree broadly and what shall be done in the hospital. There will of course be marginal policy disagreements… But there can be an agreement on fighting disease, because disease impedes men's efforts towards most goals.[18]

Modified: Geach goes on, later in the same book, to argue for a quite particular conception of the function or telos of humanity. For my purposes, I remain content to hypothesize a quite general function in accord with the pattern above. The function of a practical rational primate is, at least, to become a fully mature practical rational primate – to become, as Pindar recommends, what we are, having learned what that is. This quite general function should not be interpreted to mean that virtuous human beings just sit around "being human" all day; they perform "characteristic action" typical of the species, whatever that turns out to be. Just as we cannot define a priori how tall redwoods grow or the lifespan of an red-toothed shrew, we should not expect that we could define, a priori, how wise a human specimen can become. Instead, we should preserve a healthy agnosticism that is open to new possibilities. Wisdom, like knowledge, is expansive; how many languages can one person learn? 10 – 25 – 100? How widespread can competence with the basics of quantum physics become? Similarly, how much practical wisdom can one person acquire in a lifetime? How much practical wisdom can a society accumulate in a hundred generations? It seems to me that these questions admit of no obvious, in principle limits.

Modified: Still, readers could rightly demand more details. People and societies disagree; does my account offer any judgment on who is right, or who is close? My goal here is to lay the foundations, not to build the whole structure. Nor should we be dismayed at wide and often stubborn disagreement between varying traditions as to which exemplars best represent fully mature, practically wise human beings. The inquiry is a difficult one, and perhaps requires that the inquirer attain to practical wisdom before being able to prop-

18. Geach, *The Virtues*, 12–13.

erly judge the merits of each case. I only insist, here, that we do not need to specify at the outset anything more than that the characteristic actions of practical rational primates will involve the kinds virtuous actions and excellent practical reasoning that I am developing.

That said, it is much easier to spot weak and sickly specimens of a species. In plants, a well-trained botanist can diagnose *something wrong* with even an unfamiliar species via tell-tale signs such as spots, colors, and sickly shapes. Similarly, a competent adult can diagnose *something wrong* with a hopelessly addicted drug-user whose habit is ruining his or her life, or with an incorrigible fool whose life is tragically cut short by his or her own recklessness.

A related point is that virtues are corrective. As Foot argues, become urgent in life at the same moment as common, tempting, human evils: they stands "at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or deficiency of motivation to be made good."[19]

It might seem odd that "evil" could be tempting. But examples are all too easy to supply. Obesity and malnutrition or starvation are both bad for human beings. The obvious difference is that malnutrition is usually involuntary while obesity is usually voluntary – few people (though some) starve themselves but many people (though not all) gain weight by electing to eat too much when the high calorie foods are available. Habitually going in for overeating is an example of immoderation. Immoderation with respect to eating is bad for oneself. So at the point where the temptation to embrace the bad comes in, the possibility of virtue comes in as well.

Foot's discussion of Kant on this point is instructive here. She paradoxically objects to a statement of Kant that *only* "actions done out of a sense of duty" have moral worth and at the same time agrees with Aristotle that "virtues are about what is difficult for men." How can we make sense of this paradox?

Consider Kant's problem of the happy philanthropist. This problem is the troubling

19. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 8.

and dissonant conclusion that if a very generous philanthropist gets great pleasure out of helping others then such actions display no moral worth. Surely a commonsense moral judgment would accord moral worth to the very fact that the philanthropist *enjoys* doing what is good. The philanthropist doesn't grit his teeth and do good. Gritting one's teeth and doing good is what Aristotle would call mere *continence*; the virtuous philanthropist enjoys the activity in accord with virtue. Ease or fluency in performing virtuous activity is baked in to the definition of the virtuous person.

Kant's error, according to Foot, is in failing to distinguish that which is "in accord" with virtue from that which is *virtuous* full stop. It may be, for example, that a novice tennis player makes an expert shot while remaining merely a novice. The hit is "in accord" with excellence but is not, in this case, an instance of excellence – only beginner's luck. In her self-love example, Foot points out that there is no virtue required to eat one's breakfast and avoid life-threatening danger, but there may sometimes be cases where self-love is a duty – even a difficult, painful duty. She says, "sometimes it is what is owed to others that should keep a man from destroying himself, and then he may act out of a sense of duty."[20] So the solution to the happy philanthropist problem is that if he really does have such a character as to be delighted helping others, he is morally praiseworthy *because he has worked to achieve that character*. As Foot says:

> For charity is, as we said, a virtue of attachment as well as action, and the sympathy that makes it easier to act with charity is part of the virtue. The man who acts charitably out of a sense of duty is not to be undervalued, but it is the other who most shows virtue and therefore to the other that most moral worth is attributed.[21]

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

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20. Ibid., 13.
21. Ibid., 14.

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

> Only a detail of Kant's presentation of the case of the dutiful philanthropist tells on the other side. For what he actually said was that this man felt no sympathy and took no pleasure in the good of others because 'his mind was clouded by some sorrow of his own', and this is the kind of circumstance that increases the virtue that is needed if a man is to act well.[22]

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

I would like to respond to two possible worries some readers may have. The first worry is that defining virtue as "beneficial" or "positive" by definition is circular and therefore empty. Suppose we define "boldness" as *doing hard things* and "courage" as doing hard things when it is good. Boldness is, so to speak, value neutral. One can be bold in wrongdoing or bold in doing well. If courage is just boldness in doing good, then affirmation that 'courage (doing hard things when it is good) is good' would appear to amount to the trivial revelation that 'good things are good.' And most (if not all) tautologies are trivial.

This is an important objection, but it misses the point. These ethical propositions are not tautologous but are so widely and commonly accepted as to be easily mistaken for tautologies. If we define "kindness" simply as "a disposition of treating others *in a good way*" then it appears that "it is good to be kind" amounts to the same tautologous proposition "it is good to be good." But kindness is *not* best defined simply as *something good*. Instead, we must realize that some ethical propositions are synthetic, yet so widely believed and

22. Ibid., 14.

so widely affirmed that they appear to be tautologous. Some philosophers argue that this widespread, near universal belief is a sign that these propositions are self-evidently true. For instance, Russ Shafer-Landau says:

> It seems to me self-evident that, other things equal, it is wrong to take pleasure in another's pain, to taunt and threaten the vulnerable, to prosecute and punish those known to be innocent…[23]

Peter Geach argues that just because an ethical conclusion is virtually un-revisable doesn't mean it is a content-less tautology.[24] That kindness is good is rather a hard-won, practically reasonable insight. Only by reflection can we known that humans have a nature and a species-specific kind of flourishing. Only by reflection can we learn which some character traits are conducive to the realization of our life form while others are conducive to its stultification. (I return to this issue in chapter 5.)

A second worry is that this account of virtue sets the bar for virtue too high. I agree with Foot on this point. She denies the suggestion that *only* those who are completely virtuous are virtuous at all. There is at least one virtue that always operates as a virtue, namely, practical wisdom. While it might make some sense to speak of "foolish courage" (recklessness) or "foolish moderation" (prudishness) it makes no sense to speak of "foolish wisdom." Knowledge may and does contribute to wicked actions, but wisdom (by definition) entails a proper application of knowledge. Since wisdom always operates as a virtue, we admire wisdom perhaps most of all.[25] Secondly, we do admire virtues when they all appear in a remarkably virtuous person and when only one or two appear in a partially virtuous person. Foot says:

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23. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, chap. 11.
24. Geach, *The Virtues*, Chapter 1.
25. As we shall see in McDowell's discussion of virtue-as-knowledge in chapter 5, it might be that when we admire a person's courage or moderation, we are often admiring the wisdom *in* the courage and the wisdom *in* the moderation.

> There are some people who do possess all these virtues and who are loved and admired by all the world, as Pope John XXIII was loved and admired. Yet the fact is that many of us look up to some people whose chaotic lives contain rather little of wisdom or temperance, rather than to some others who possess these virtues. And while it may be that this is just romantic nonsense I suspect that it is not.[26]

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

3. Acquirable Modified:

A fourth attribute of virtues is that they are acquirable. MacIntyre above defined virtues are *acquired* human qualities. (I would only modify this definition to "acquirable", because not everyone has all the virtues and some people never acquire some virtues.) *How* virtue is to be acquired is an age-old theme.[27] Even without stating *how* virtues are acquired, it is still essential to see that they must be *acquirable.*

Modified: On my view, we are ultimately responsible for our 'moral' traits. We can voluntarily lose them or attain them by sustained intentional effort. For example, Foot thinks virtues are revealed not only by a person's abilities but by his or her *intentions*. What are intentions? She argues that the 'will' or practical reason must be understood in its broadest sense, "to cover what is wished for as well as what is sought."[28] Considered thus

26. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 17.

27. In the first line of Plato's *Meno*, Meno asks Socrates a question "whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?", John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997), *Meno* 70a. While Plato gives hints as to his answer, Socrates himself punts on the question of how virtue is acquired and directs Meno to what virtue is. Moral philosophers have continued to try to answer this question for the last 2,400 years. That said, my goal here is not to address *how* virtue is acquired. My only goal here is to argue that a trait must be *acquirable* to be a virtue.

28. Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 5.

broadly, practical reason (or the will) contrasts with one's fortune and luck. Call "fortune" all those features of one's life and character that are fixed prior to or independent of practical reasoning. Most basically, all of us are practical rational primates by fortune. We all exist in a time and place in history, with a genetic identity derived from our parents, and grow up in a culture and tradition we receive from our parents, guardians, friends, and so on. As we become adults, we become gradually more responsible for our own character, our decisions, and our habits. So perhaps practical reasoning is the process of deciding what to do what one's fortune: what long-term projects to pursue and which objects are worthwhile to obtain, and how to react to the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."[29] We ultimately decide whether to become – or not to become – fully human.

Saying that virtues are acquirable by intentional effort is not sufficient. We do not judge a person to be virtuous even if they are a well-intentioned nincompoop who always harms when "helping." Neither do we only judge the result of a person's action, for we sometimes exculpate a failing performance in part because the person *meant well* – the exculpation might be called for when circumstances were not favorable, chances of success were low, etc. Instead, a virtuous action is one that aims at the right thing in the right way, and flows out of a person's acquired character. Foot attempts to capture the point that we admire someone who not only does the right thing but who has conditioned himself to do the right thing fluently and almost instantly. She quotes from John Hersey's novel *A Single Pebble* in which the narrator relates watching a man save a boy from drowning:

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

29. *Hamlet* III.1

Foot's comment is this:

> What this suggests is that a man's virtue may be judged by his innermost desires as well as by his intentions; and this fits with our idea that a virtue such as generosity lies as much in someone's attitudes as in his actions. Pleasure in the good fortune of others is, one thinks, the sign of a generous spirit; and small reactions of pleasure and displeasure are often the surest signs of a man's moral disposition.[30]

I find this analysis convincing. The outward behavior (the swift response) discloses not only the savior's intentions and attitudes, but something even deeper; settled dispositions that can be betrayed in the smallest facial expressions or the most "instinctive" gut reactions. To capture a similar point in a slightly different way, consider Hursthouse's argument that virtuous dispositions are "multi-track" dispositions. She says:

> A virtue such as honesty or generosity is not just a tendency to do what is honest or generous, nor is it to be helpfully specified as a "desirable" or "morally valuable" character trait. It is, indeed a character trait – that is, a disposition which is well entrenched in its possessor, something that, as we say "goes all the way down", unlike a habit such as being a tea-drinker – but the disposition in question, far from being a single track disposition to do honest actions, or even honest actions for certain reasons, is multi-track. It is concerned with many other actions as well, with emotions and emotional reactions, choices, values, desires, perceptions, attitudes, interests, expectations and sensibilities. To possess a virtue is to be a certain sort of person with a certain complex mindset. (Hence the extreme recklessness of attributing a virtue on the basis of a single action.)[31]

There is a clear similarity, I think, between Hursthouse's notion of a multi-track disposition and McDowell's notion of perceptual sensitivity. To be sensitive to a range of requirements for action involves one's emotions, beliefs, habits, and so on. Virtue is the excellence of rational practice and practical reasoning. Practical reasoning is the process of acquiring new traits one does not have but potentially can have (or of shedding old traits one has but can potentially lose).

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30. Ibid., 5.
31. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*.

Modified: To assert that virtues are in principle acquirable for human beings presents us with numerous puzzles. For example, some skills are acquirable but do not seem to be moral virtues. And some excellences seem to be instances of non-moral natural goodness but are not acquirable. How then can we distinguish moral excellence from skill or strength (which are mostly acquirable rather than inborn) as well as from physical beauty or natural intelligence (which are mostly inborn rather than acquirable)?

Modified: One reason these puzzles arise is that there exists a terminological disconnect between the older understanding of morality and the usual modern understanding. (I shall attempt to disentangle the various senses of the term 'moral' in chapter 5.) On the one hand, as Foot explains, *ἀρετή* (excellence) for the Greeks refers "also to arts, and even to excellences of the speculative intellect whose domain is theory rather than practice."[32] Likewise, MacIntyre says, "The word *arete*, which later comes to be translated as 'virtue', is in the Homeric poems used for excellence of any kind; a fast runner displays the arete of his feet (*Iliad* 20. 411) and a son excels his father in every kind of arete-as athlete, as soldier and in mind (*Iliad* 15. 642)."[33] There are many traits (we might call them *skills*) that are beneficial to their possessor and others. Even if we grant that skills are goods-of-a-kind and that a virtue is a good of a kind, skills do not seem to us particularly *moral*.[34] On the other hand, even the traditional list of "moral virtues" (Greek: *arete ethikai*; Latin: *virtues morales*) do not correspond precisely to *our* "moral virtues." The traditional list of cardinal "moral virtues" (including courage, moderation, practical wisdom, and justice) includes positive traits we might classify as "self-regarding" (e.g., moderation) as well as "other-regarding" (e.g., justice), and includes practical wisdom (*phronesis/prudentia*) which, if we mentioned it at all, we would be inclined to classify as an intellectual virtue. Finally, not all of the items

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

33. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 122.

34. Julia Annas's argument that virtues are skills of a particular type takes advantage of the intuitive similarity between virtue and skill. Cf. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

on a comprehensive list of positive qualities (e.g., unselfishness) obviously correspond to one of the classical virtues. So, we ought not to assume that the terms 'excellence' or even 'moral excellence' can be a short-cut for understanding the concept of virtue.

Modified: The first step toward untangling this puzzle is to observe that skills are indexed to practices and social roles. Virtues are indexed to our life form. Skills are only needed by those who undertake those practices, but virtues are need by all. A quick wit is necessary for being a comedian; courage is needed for being a human being. Keen eyesight and reliable memory may contribute to a pleasant life and success in various pursuits, but the cardinal virtues are necessary for success in *any* worthwhile human endeavor.

Modified: This response poses a new problem: Suppose Smith and Jones have grown up in very different cultures with very different kinds of parents and very different opportunities. Both are, so to speak, front-loaded with with virtuous or vicious habits. Do they then have no chance to acquire new virtues or shed vices? Or even if traits that are initially inculcated in a child by parenting, education, and tradition may be modified later, doesn't their initial reception break down the dichotomy between what is in one or out of one's control?

Modified: It is true that for the first decade (or two?) we are not primarily responsible for our own training and formation. However, unless illness or injury interrupt it, part of the normal process of childhood development is the gradual transferring of responsibility from caretakers to child. Without having to pin down exactly when one becomes an adult fully responsible for oneself, we can put it this way: one is morally responsible for the character and mind one has *by the end* of life, rather than the beginning. Virtues and vices are first inculcated in a child by fortune and tradition and only later modified by that individual's own initiative. On a related note, MacIntyre agrees with Aristotle that virtues are "natural" for humans. More exactly, Aristotle taught that virtue is *in accordance with* nature but not *by nature*. That is, virtues are not *natural* in the sense that natural attributes

such as hair color are 'automatic' but they are natural in the sense that they are *proper* to human beings, they are formal features of practical, rational animals. Virtuous traits are a normal psychological result of cultivating excellence within particular human practices.

Modified: It is quite possible that Smith received many of the benefits of good fortune while Jones suffered terrible fortune. Let us grant that the earlier point they do not need the same set of skills if they won't perform the same social function and that they both need the same "moral skills" essential to any human life, such as relating to their friends and family, cultivating their talents, facing challenges bravely and negotiating difficult decisions with wisdom. Are they equally responsible to acquire all the same virtues? As a matter of fact, few people acquire all or even many of the virtues. But all who are capable of practical reason can and must acquire some. Still, are all virtues acquirable by all? I think an adequate answer to begin with the motto, *as many as possible and as much as possible.*

Modified: Let me unpack this. It is not necessarily the case that every person can acquire every virtue equally. Aristotle taught that "affability" was a virtue. Modern readers might be inclined to smile at the notion that inborn friendliness and cordiality make one somehow *morally* better than their melancholic counterparts. I do not think he was completely wrong in judging this trait to be humanly important. Social interactions are an optional part of most human lives, and even if we do not typically classify affability as a *moral* virtue we do tend to admire those who have a proper amount of affability and blame those who are excessively aloof or excessively cloying. If affability is indeed a human norm, are some human norms are merely commendable but not obligatory – not "perfect duties" in Kant's sense?

Modified: The answer requires some sensitivity to circumstance. The way an unfortunate family suffering from undernourishment needs to practice moderation is going to be very different from the way a wealthy family needs to practice it. Nevertheless, if it is possible to discover fundamental human virtues (like moderation and practical wisdom),

then it is possible to discover virtues the acquisition of which is incumbent upon everyone regardless of their circumstances. Indeed, practical wisdom is needed by all to help identify which virtues and skills are needed in their circumstances. It would be practical folly to take adverse circumstances as an excuse not to acquire any particular virtues.

Modified: Relatedly, I want to preempt the suggestion that those who are, say, natively affable or intelligent are *morally* superior to those who are natively solitary or unintelligent. Just as some are natively more physically healthy than others, we can affirm that nature distributes a diversity of gifts. There is no "fault" in being less fortunate. We have to remember the lesson that Anscombe taught us: the peculiarly "ought" in virtue ethics is not the same as the verdictive, divine law "ought."[35] We ought to become as virtuous and wise as possible because that is our natural end. The failure to do so is a natural evil. For neo-Aristotelians, virtues are not obedience to categorical imperatives or divine commands; they are ways of developing one's emotions into the likeness of a true human being.

Modified: But again, at some point of natural maturation we become responsible for acquiring whatever virtues we lack, even within the limitations of our own aptitudes. And most people in the world will not write books, and so the excellence intrinsic to academic practices are not necessarily *human* virtues; however, every human being in the world is a practical, rational primate and has biological parents and so needs the excellence intrinsic to the practice of human life. Even orphans and street urchins live in some form of community.

Modified: I must return to the problem of Smith and Jones above. Smith's good fortune consists not only in the enjoyment of positive external circumstances but the acquisition of some moral virtues from a young age. Jones is less virtuous even before they both reach an age of self-responsibility. How is this fair? First, fortune is certainly not fair. This kind of unfairness cannot be totally eradicated. Secondly, even if some of good traits may be inculcated at a young age, rational adults must take responsibility for rendering them

35. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."

secure. Likewise, even if some negative traits may be inculcated at a young age, rational adults must take responsibility for changing them.

We may praise or appreciate those who enjoy good fortune; but we *admire* those who have taken what gifts of fortune they have and put them to good use. We especially admire those who have overcome misfortune to acquire excellence and wisdom against the odds. Compare, for example, the crowds cheering for Olympic runner Derek Redmond when he is winning the gold medal with the crowds cheering for Derek Redmond finishing last after his hamstring tore and his father helped him to cross the finish line. There have been many gold medal winning races that millions of people have witnessed and forgotten. But this race, when an otherwise naturally talented and well-trained athlete finished *last* that remains forever etched in the memory of millions more. It's not just the unbridled emotion Redmond displayed in that moment which so touches viewers; it's the obvious love from his father shown in supporting his son's commitment to finish the race, even dead last. Likewise for Smith and Jones. Suppose that by the time Smith comes of age or or she is moderate, courageous, and relatively wise while Jones is one is immoderate, cowardly, and foolish. At some point, both agents take their own character in hand and practically reason about how to live. Jones would be all the more admirable if he or she became virtous against the odds.

We can make a final comment about a case like Smith and Jones where their respective levels of virtue and vice are unequal even from a young age. Rather than resolving us of responsibility for our own character, this possibility underscores the importance of moral and intellectual education. In some very key respects, the acquisition of virtues and vices with which we begin adult life depends upon our education.[36] The beginning of human life, like the beginning of any organic life, is the foundation for all that follows. When a mother

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

drinks heavily or uses cocaine while pregnant, the child is going to suffer the negative consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is abused – emotionally, verbally, physically, or sexually – by her parents, the psychological cost is meted out across the entire life and across generations. By the same token, when a mother eats healthily and follows all the doctor's orders while pregnant, the child is going to reap the positive consequences for the remainder of his life. When a child is given love, approval, empowerment, discipline, by her parents, the psychological gains are meted out across the entire life and even across generations. We should never give into the temptation to think that the cultivation of virtue is simply a business for adults (least of all adult professional academics) to argue for and against. It is the business of societies and families to do or fail to do every day.

In summary, in calling virtues *acquirable* I mean to argue that certain fundamental moral and intellectual virtues as obligatory on all adequately mature and functional human adults – such as those given emphasis by the Aristotelian tradition, such as courage, justice, moderation or self-control, and practical wisdom. But my account makes space for the commonsense thought some traits (say, affability) are not obligatory for *everyone* to acquire equally. Furthermore, it may very well be that particular virtues – like skills – are especially necessary (or especially optional) for people in particular social roles or stages of life. Nevertheless, practical wisdom is one virtue that is especially important, because it is obligatory on all potentially practical rational primates – namely, all human beings – and because practical wisdom enables one to adjudicate which and to what extent the other virtues are needful in one's own case.

4. Rational and Practical

The fourth attribute I would like to discuss is this: virtues are those traits that enable excellence in rational practices and practical reasoning. The remainder of this chapter focuses

on these two related concepts. In this pursuit, I shall first summarize MacIntyre's notion of "practice," which is both an interesting concept in its own right and also crucial to MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue*.

What is a practice, for MacIntyre? A practice is a social activity aimed at defined ends. For example, MacIntyre mentions farming, chess, and political activity, among other examples. (We commonly speak of "practicing" medicine in this sense.) A practice is not merely a reflexive action such as scratching an itch, nor merely a single, discrete, intelligible action such as pulling a weed. It is, rather, an intelligible set of actions undertaken in pursuit of a pre-determined end. Practices not only have pre-determined ends, but embodied histories. Leading MacIntyre scholar, Christopher Lutz, highlights four aspects of MacIntyre's famous definition of practice. A practice is:

> [1] a complex social activity that [2] enables participants to gain goods internal to the practice. [3] Participants achieve excellence in practices by gaining the internal goods. When participants achieve excellence, [4] the social understandings of excellence in the practice, of the goods of the practice, and of the possibility of achieving excellence in the practice are systematically extended.[37]

We could use any number of illustrations of practices to unpack these four aspects. I shall use a practice in which I have personal experience: secondary school education. The practice of educating young people a complex social activity, aimed a certain goods, with a particular history and standards of excellence. A secondary school teacher is engaged in a series of activities aimed at giving children a body of knowledge and skills they need to become functional adults in society, whether by getting a job, starting a business, or advancing to higher stages of education. Secondary education might have other *de facto* purposes as well. Many parents send their children to school to socialize them in a community of peers and authorities, or to afford them opportunities for recreation, art, clubs, or simply to

37. Christopher Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015.

get a break from parenting. For the sake of simplicity, I shall focus on what seems to me the primary goal of education, which is education (in knowledge) and training (in skills) needed for becoming a functional, legal adult.

Secondary education in the U.S. is a practice. It has a history (or a set of histories) dating back to the colonial era, with a significant shift in the 1910-1940s when secondary schooling became the rule rather than the exception. The practice has its own standards, both legal and "best practices" passed from mentor to student teacher. It pretty obviously has standards of excellence according to which most educators are average, some poor, and some excellent. An educator who wants to join that profession will be enculturated with that history, taught those standards, and given a chance (usually by trial and error) to become a good teacher.

Lutz' first condition is met, since [1] teaching is an inherently complex *social* activity, in that teachers cannot be teachers without students, and (usually) do not teach in isolation but in community with colleagues and administrators and parents. [2] Secondary education qua practice enables teachers to gain the goods "internal to the practice", namely students who are educated enough to be ready for legal adulthood – for a job or college. [3] Good teachers are those that demonstrate the ability reliably to produce educated students, sometimes in the face of incredible obstacles. And [4] good schools and good teachers usually have a *history* and social context that is being "extended" across generations. Good schools recruit and train good teachers, good teachers train the next generation of good teachers, and so on.

One other feature of MacIntyre's concept of practice deserves comment. He defined virtues with reference to goods *"internal to"* practices, and later refashions the contrast between 'internal' and 'external' goods into one between 'goods of excellence' and 'goods of effectiveness.'[38] What is the point of this distinction?

38. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Macintyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (University of Notre

The "goods of excellence" of a practice are those that *necessarily* contribute to success within a given practice. In secondary education, success is defined by, say, graduation rates, retention of information, high test scores, acceptance to good colleges, low drug use, and so on. The profession-specific virtues needed include understanding (to stay patient with struggling students), affability (to keep rapport), articulateness (to present material effectively), and so on. More general virtues needed include honesty, integrity, courage, faithfulness, and so on. Without these, *teaching* may be possible but *teaching well* is impossible.

By contrast, goods of effectiveness are those that might fit with the practice but are not *necessary* for achieving the end of that practice: high pay, an excellent teacher lounge, a short commute to work, and so on. Mere efficiency in attaining such external goods does not entail the presence of a virtue. In fact, the desire to pursue such goods *instead of* the goods of excellence is not a neutral desire — it is a *temptation.* Virtues are needed to overcome those temptations and to succeed according to the standards of the practice itself.[39]

It is important to hold in mind both *practices* and *practical reasoning*. The virtuous agent does not merely act well (without reasoning) nor merely reason well (without acting). I would suggest that McDowell is wrong to assert that *all* of virtue is by definition a kind of practical knowledge or disposition. Rather, *some* virtues are excellences in practical reasoning but others are excellences in rational practice. (I offer a full critique McDowell's conception of moral and practical reasoning in chapters 5 and 6.) We might express the point in this way: Acting takes a moment of time; the cultivation and maintenance of habits takes a longer period of time; but living a good life takes a lifetime. So it is impossible

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Dame, 1998), 55.

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

to give an adequate account of virtue without considering one's life as a whole. Practical reasoning is the name we give to that whole complex process by which we undertake to direct our own lives.

Turning again to *After Virtue*, MacIntyre's first stage defined virtue in relation to practices. His second stage goes further to include the whole of life.[40] He says that "without an overriding conception of the telos of a whole human life, conceived as a unity, our conception of certain individual virtues has to remain partial and incomplete."[41] MacIntyre undermines the notion that the virtues which enable success in practices can be sufficient for an account of virtue in general. He argues that we need to "envisage each human life as a whole, as a unity, whose character provides the virtues with an adequate telos."[42]

Envisaging human life in this way faces serious obstacles. Answering them requires doing a bit of philosophy of action. The two kinds of obstacles MacIntyre cites are (a) social and (b) philosophical. The social obstacle is the fragmentation of modern life: "work is divided from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal. So both childhood and old age have been wrenched away from the rest of human life and made over into distinct realms."[43] Just as the temporal segments of life are fragmented into bits (one thinks of the inherently patronizing talk of "senior citizens" compared from the older, inherently reverent talk of "elders"), so also the various projects and pursuits of life are partitioned, labeled, and cordoned off. On this fragmented view of life, the self's social roles are so many conventions masking the "true" underlying nature of the self. This presents a puzzle: how could virtues arise to the level of excellent dispositions for *humans as such*? They would have to be dispositions applicable in personal, private, business, spheres, in young and middle and old age, etc.

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40. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 15.
41. Ibid., 202.
42. Ibid., 204.
43. Ibid., 204.

The philosophical obstacle is the tendency to atomize "complex actions… in terms of simple components."[44] MacIntyre's argument here is highly significant. He begins by analyzing the way we might answer a simple question such as: "what is he doing?"

> One and the same segment of human behavior may be correctly characterized in a number of different ways. To the question 'What is he doing?' the answers may with equal truth and appropriateness be 'Digging', 'Gardening', 'Taking exercise', 'Preparing for winter' or 'Pleasing his wife.'[45]

The first fact to notice is that each of these answers picks out different aspects of the agent's action: intentions, intended consequences, unintended consequences, etc. And, importantly, each of these answers places the simple atomic action within a narrative history: situated in an "annual cycle of domestic activity", in a hobby, in a marriage, and so on – each with its own history and "setting."

The second fact to notice is that the answers to a similarly simple question "Why is he writing a sentence?" might be situated in different time horizons: immediately, he is writing to finish his book; but also he is contributing to a philosophical debate; but also he is trying to get tenure.[46] The upshot of these reflections is that individual actions abstracted from their context are only intelligible if they are "ordered both causally and temporally… the correct identification of the agent's beliefs will be an essential constituent of this task."[47] MacIntyre's astonishing conclusion from these innocuous premises is this: "there is no such thing as 'behavior', to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs and settings… Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions."[48] MacIntyre scholar Stanley Hauerwas argues that the central point in *After Virtue* is "the concept of an intelligible action is a more

44. Ibid., 204.
45. Ibid., 206.
46. Ibid., 207.
47. Ibid., 208.
48. Ibid., 208.

fundamental concept than that of an action."[49] This is such a significant insight because it shows how individual actions, like individual words, are intelligible in the context of larger discrete units of action, such as practices and projects. And, in some sense, the actions one performs within a practice find their intelligibility not only in practices but in the narrative of a whole human life. The same is true for verbal contributions to a conversation: Each word and sentence and speech within the conversation contributes to an unfolding narrative with a history and a telos, without which statements are random and unintelligible. MacIntyre continues:

> But if this is true of conversations, it is true also *mutatis mutandis* of battles, chess games, courtships, philosophy seminars, families at the dinner table, businessmen negotiating contracts – that is, of human transactions in general. For conversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general. Conversational behavior is not a special sort or aspect of human behavior, even though the forms of language-using and of human life are such that the deeds of others speak for them as much as do their words. For that is possible only because they are the deeds of those who have words.[50]

Clearly these are weighty matters. Though more could be said, we have arrived at the supports needed for building the second stage of his account of virtue: the unity of many practices into a single whole. He says: "The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest."[51]

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

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49. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," *First Things*, (2007). Web. The quotation is from citing MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 209.

50. Ibid., 211.

51. Ibid., 219.

> The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices. but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalog of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good.[52]

The virtuous person is sustained by his or her virtues on the quest toward the good. Vices not only render difficult or impossible the achievement of the good; vices can obscure one's assessment of what is good and what is evil.

Modified: I can concede that the "quest" of a Stalin or a bin Ladin began with good intentions. It is even important to note that the wicked tyrant cannot achieve the most horrifying evils could not come about without the presence of auxiliary virtues, such as courage and resolve. Just as a den of thieves cannot survive without at least some honor, a wicked regime cannot survive without at least some loyalty and patriotism. Socrates says that the same foolishness and vice that is laughable in the weak is dreadful in the powerful. The more thoroughly vicious characters cause less damage because their evil remains petty.

5. Traditional and Social Modified:

The fifth and final attribute of virtue is this: virtues enable the health and progress of whole social traditions. In other words, virtues are personal but not individualistic. Rather, virtues natural goodness for *humans*, and humans is naturally social. This is just what we should expect if, as I argued in chapter 3, the practical rationality that characterizes the human primate is defined in part by sociality: humans are born into families and learn to speak the

52. Ibid., 220.

language of their society. Making this case will require a detailed discussion of MacIntyre's concept of tradition and practical reasoning.

MacIntyre's crucial third stage of his *After Virtue* account situates what has come before in a broader social and historical context. For MacIntyre, a tradition is, roughly, a "historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[53] I have argued that practical rationality is the differentia of human nature. Insofar as virtues all depend for their effective operation on the coordinating management of practical reason, it is of utmost importance that an individual learn how to practically reason well. This happens, or fails to happen, in traditions.

Human beings develop their capacity to recognize practical reasons within a family and society with its own idiosyncratic political, religious, and philosophical worldview. So, quite plausibly, our initial de facto set of beliefs, desires, and dispositions reflect the substantive commitments of our group. As MacIntyre says:

> We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of enquiry, extending the history of that enquiry into the present …"[54]

The tradition of enquiry we inhabit gives us not only abstract standards of reasoning but also facts, connections, concepts, and the very language we speak. Rationality, for MacIntyre, is inclusive of all the resources by which we judge true and false. Rationality itself as tradition-constituted and tradition-constituting. The resources I receive from my tradition are resources I may prune, discard, modify, or add to. What tradition we are a part of makes a great deal of difference to how we conduct moral inquiry.

We can make initial sense of the notion that virtues enable the health and progress of traditions by saying that vices weigh down a whole tradition and virtues correct and

53. Ibid., 222.
54. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 401.

potentially elevate it. MacIntyre says:

> Lack of justice, lack of truthfulness, lack of courage, lack of the relevant intellectual virtues – these corrupt traditions, just as they do those institutions and practices which derive their life from the traditions of which they are the contemporary embodiments.[55]

Thats said, even if we accept, in outline, the thesis that virtues sustain and even correct traditions, the problem of relativism rises. What counts as virtuous is at least partially related to one's culture, for every culture purports to provide for its members some minimal goods. The correct identification of these goods requires practical wisdom. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre explicitly retracts his earlier belief that virtues exist without a unity under prudence or practical wisdom.[56] Christopher Lutz argues that the consequences of this retraction are crucial to refuting the charge of relativism.

> …the relativism of *After Virtue* cannot be overcome unless its definitions of the virtues are extended to embrace the Aristotelian and Thomistic doctrine of the unity of virtue. MacIntyre's rejection of the unity of virtue in *After Virtue* has grave implications for the rest of his virtue theory because the rejection of the unity of virtue divorces the intellectual moral virtue of prudence from the passional moral virtues of courage, temperence, and justice… Prudence becomes cleverness…The strength of MacIntyre's account of practices is that the pursuit of excellence in a practice entails the pursuit of virtue, but if practices can be evil, and virtues can 'enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to' such an evil practice, and virtues can be anything at all.[57]

By contrast, if virtues are unified, then even though virtues exist only in the context of practices, "no genuine practice can be inherently evil."[58] Rather, we can make practical rational mistakes in judging *apparent goods* as genuine goods. The qualities needed for achieving the spurious goods internal to that "practice" would not be virtues but only *apparent virtues*.

55. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.

56. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* preface, p. x.

57. Christopher Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Lexington Books, 2004), 98–101.

58. Ibid., 102.

One pointed illustration is eugenics. Eugenics certainly seems to bear the markings of a genuine practice. Its apparent good is the purification of the gene pool for future generations. However, genuine virtues militate *against* the achievement of that goal. For example, Lutz cites a story of a doctor who had the virtue of compassion found himself unable to pursue the program of euthanizing mentally-disabled children.[59] We might also recall Huck Finn's internal struggle with his "conscience" in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck decides to turn Jim in to the slave owners. He writes a letter outing Jim, and says: "I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now." Yet for all that, after vividly confronting Jim's humanity and goodness, he feels the loyalty of their friendship and wavers:

> It was a difficult situation. I picked up the letter, and held it in my hand. I was trembling, because I knew had to make a choice between two things, and the outcome of my decision would last forever. I thought about it a minute while I held my breath. And then I said to myself: "All right, then, I'll GO to hell" – and tore it up.[60]

The humor of this passage stems from the tension between the *apparent good* of treating Jim as legal property and the *actual good* of treating Jim as an end in himself, as a free man just like any other. Huck's virtue (in this case, loyalty or friendship) *cannot* be put to use in the service of a corrupting practice like slave-trading. Just as vice subverts institutions and their worthy practices, virtue "subverts" vicious institutions and unworthy practices. Virtue marks the difference between the coward who disobeys his commanding officer's orders because the obedience would put him at risk of painful death and the courageous person who disobeys his commanding officer's order because obedience would require wrongdoing. Without prudence to discriminate between the two cases, we lack any resources by which to discriminate courage and cowardice, between a virtuous resistance and vicious resistance.

59. Léon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate: The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe* (Schocken Books, 1979), 186–7.

60. Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Lathifa, 2014), Chapter 31.

Still, the threat of cultural relativism is not fully absolved by arguing that individual virtues and subvert the errors in a tradition. What if one's tradition is deeply flawed? What if one's tradition is fundamentally mistaken that its vices and errors undermine the possibility that individual virtues can get a foothold?

Modified: This question requires more reflection on the notion of practical reasoning. In the next chapter, I offer a full account. Here, I must dispense with one common view that I believe is mistaken. That common view sets up an opposition between tradition and and rational criticism. On this view, one is either a conventionalist or a subversive. (Define a subversive as one who goes against (a particular society's) standard, traditional, ideology – the "default" view.) The danger of militating against one's tradition is that the default view is plausible to most people, excluding a minority who maintain objections to the consensus of the tradition. On this opposition between tradition and critical reflection, philosophers are often stereotyped as the subversive type. Philosophers are not necessarily all subversives; but many subversives have been philosophers. Nevertheless, I think this whole way of considering the matter is a mistake.

Modified: The first reason is that a tradition is not opposed to rational or critical reflection – rather a member of a tradition cannot reason without the resources of that tradition. When we criticize our own tradition from within, we use what good we enjoy to increase the good. Secondly, it is idle to speak being "for tradition" or "against tradition", for tradition says contradictory things. Social Group Alpha passes along belief A from generation to generation. If A is false, then rational reflection will turn a philosopher into an anti-traditional subversive; but if successful, the philosopher might persuade Group Alpha to believe B instead, and culturally unify with Social Group Beta. In this case, B will be passed along from one generation to the next. So the very same philosopher will become a traditionalist. These labels are about as helpful as asserting that one is a "newspaperist" who believes whatever is written "in the newspaper." The question is, *which one*? Traditions,

like newspapers, are a medium, not a message. The only thing to do, then, is to examine the message — the content of the tradition.

Modified: Still, how is it possible that virtues can sustain what is good in tradition and enable the successful pruning and improving of the same? MacIntyre's answer is that we can rationally adjudicate between traditions (from within a tradition). We can rational criticize our own tradition with the resources available to us. The result may be that we endorse the truth of the fundamentals thereof, or "switch" from our primary tradition to a rival.

Modified: The means we have of "switching" traditions are these: first, one undergoes an epistemological crisis in which one identifies the inadequacies of a primary tradition. MacIntyre derived this lesson from his own experience. As a member of the modern tradition of inquiry, he reflected on it. He gradually discovered its inadequacies and searched for resources from his rivals. His attempt to trace the root of the mistake about moral judgments lead him to a mistake at the heart of Enlightenment modernity. As a social, political, and moral project, the Enlightenment has been, MacIntyre argues, a failure by its own standards. Not only is moral discourse largely devoted to moral disagreement, but it is largely soaked in despair of ever reaching agreement. Moral discourse with its interminable moral disagreement retains the rhetorical *trappings* of rationality and objectivity while denying rationality and objectivity. Neither side wants to give up the *appearance* of having a dialectical case for its value theory.

Modified: One of his most memorable and oft-cited images compares modern moral discourse to the hypothetical state of scientific discourse in a post-apocalyptic catastrophe where decaying fragments of intelligible moral discourse survive, none of which (in isolation) suffices for the rebuilding of the original, vital discourse.

Modified: There are many modern philosophers who have gone into similar crises and become distrustful thought, language, and rationality itself; they join the "masters of

suspicion." The term comes, I believe, from Ricoeur, who said: "Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud."[61] Rather than join the school of suspicion, MacIntyre took a surprising course. Moved by Thomas Kuhn's influential work on the structure of revolution between various paradigms in the natural sciences[62] he speculated that a similar structure might obtain in moral revolutions?[63]

Modified: After recognizing the failures of one's own tradition, MacIntyre points to a second step: to "exercise… a capacity for philosophical imagination"[64] and identify the resources of a rival tradition. We must empathetically engage with our rivals as if we are learning a "second first language." He says:

> For each of us, therefore, the question now is: To what issues does that particular history bring us in contemporary debate? What resources does our particular tradition afford in this situation? Can we by means of those resources understand the achievements and successes, and the failures and sterilities, of rival traditions more adequately than their own adherents can? More adequately by our own standards? More adequately also by theirs?[65]

Modified: This step of learning a second tradition as a "second first language" in turn lead MacIntyre to recover the tradition of virtues. But virtues are not free-floating moral concepts; they are embedded in a specific, living, moral tradition – the Aristotelian tradition. And the Aristotelian tradition includes a particular notion of practical rationality.

Modified: MacIntyre argues that we should "return" to the Aristotelian tradition of

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61. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. D (Savage (Yale University Press, 1970).

62. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1975).

63. His 1977 essay on epistemological crises was his own version of Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – we might call this essay MacIntyre's "Structure of Ethical Revolutions." Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist*, 1977, 453–72

64. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* .

65. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 402.

virtue and practical reason because it is more adequate than its rivals. We must beware one misunderstanding. Any talk of "returning" is liable to sound nostalgic. Martha Nussbaum misunderstands MacIntyre's argument along these lines.[66] In her review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, she cites with an age-old dilemma between the social stability afforded by tradition and critical reflection:

> In the second book of the *Politics*, Aristotle asks whether it is a good thing to encourage changes in society. Should people be offered rewards for inventing some change in the traditional laws? No, he writes, because this would lead to instability and unnecessary tampering with what is working well. Should we, on the other hand, listen to those who wish to keep ancestral traditions fixed and immune from criticism? No again – for if we reason well we can make progress in lawmaking, just as we do in other arts and sciences.[67]

Aristotle's solution is that it should be *hard but not impossible* to change societal structures. Strangely, Nussbaum takes MacIntyre to be reversing Aristotle's balance. She thinks MacIntyre is emphasizing social stability at the cost of "recoiling from reason." But MacIntyre is emphatically not defending "traditionalism" per se. His definition of tradition is *progressive*. Tradition is an ongoing, socially-embedded argument over time, which necessarily entails that moral enquiry is dynamic – even *modern*. To be traditional is not to be past-oriented; to be traditional is to be staunchly future-oriented, since the business of life is not only the pursuit of our telos but the transmission of everything valuable and precious to the next generation.

MacIntyre elevates the ability to critical reflect on one's own tradition and make necessary changes to the level of a virtue, the importance of which "is perhaps most obvious when it is least present." What is that virtue?

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66. Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason," *The New York Review of Books* 36, no. 19 (1989): 36–41.

67. Ibid.

> [It is] the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one. This virtue is not to be confused with any form of conservative antiquarianism; I am not praising those who choose the conventional conservative role of *laudator temporis act*. It is rather the case that an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present. Living traditions, just because they continue a not-yet-completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past.[68]

None of this so far has gone to answer the question: what if one's tradition is wrong? How could I, a member of an embodied tradition, ever get far enough "outside" it to criticize it? This question is notoriously difficult. The explanation for the difficulty, if not the solution, is this: We can only think *about* rationality *with* rationality. We can only reflection upon our thinking process by observing rationality *from outside* from *within* rationality. The matter is so complicated because any argument is self-referential or iterative. When two parties share an identical conception of rationality, then arduous debate is unnecessary; when two parties do not share identical conceptions, arduous debate about a particular issue is liable to shipwreck on the rocks of metaphilosophical disagreement. As the Greek proverb asks, "if we choke on food, we drink water to wash it down. If water chokes us, what shall we drink?"

Modified: There can be no quick, ready-made answer to the question of how to acquire practical wisdom. Answering it is inextricably bound up in the slow and dangerous process of acquiring the virtue of practical wisdom. We must be alert to the contours of our own tradition and bold in considering its weaknesses and failures. We must also exercise philosophical imagination in learning the contours of rival traditions. Success is not impossible, but neither is it guaranteed. The only hope is to practically reason, and to take care to do it well.

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68. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.

6. Conclusion

Thus far, virtues have come to light as excellent traits belonging to a fully mature and exemplary practical, rational primate. The virtuous person does not necessarily enjoy all the blessings of good fortune, but he or she does take up all that is given in one's fate and put it to the best possible use. Virtuous people's lives are remarkable not for what they are given – any celebrity or cad might be born wealthy or physically attractive or talented – but for what they do with what they are given. And practical reasoning is not a simple process different from other kinds of reasoning or practice; it is the whole complex process by which we undertake to direct our own lives.

Hursthouse points out that we do not just admire those who survive, but those who exemplify a *human* form of life: "The human virtues make their possessor good qua human being, one who is as ordinarily well fitted as a human being can be in not merely physical respects to live well, to flourish – in a characteristically human way."[69] This seems right. The exemplary human being avoids the common and tempting traps one faces along the way of a normal human life, taking up up all the intrinsic and natural urges of animality (hunger, thirst, the sexual drive, desires for shelter, comfort, and companionship) into practices that make sense. He or she works to acquire those traits that benefit human beings, both oneself and others, and that enable him or her to engage in such practices as make sense for human beings. The definition of "making sense" is admittedly variable according a person or tradition's conception of practical reason. And the notorious difficulty of adjudicating conflicting conceptions has been briefly noted. While I do not pretend to have offered a resolution of that difficulty, I have offered two responses: first, an explanation of why it is difficult; and second, a formula from MacIntyre that might promise to help a practical reasoner resolve it by carefully working out a comparison between one's own conception

69. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 208.

(with its resources and flaws) and a rival conception (with *its* resources and flaws). The virtuous and wise person also navigates his or her tradition, both sustaining its goods and correcting its flaws. The virtuous person also takes care pro-actively cultivating virtues in others when appropriate but without unduly short circuiting their own practical reasoning. On the account thus far developed, these generics pick out what we are; our moral task is to *become* what we are.

We flagged three problems but did not fully address them above: (1) What, if anything, is the human function (ergon)? (2) I said McDowell mistakes the relation between virtue qua knowledge and virtue qua rational organization of one's psychology – including emotions, bodily urges, physical situation, unthinking habits, and so on – so what is the relation between practical reasoning and rational practice? (3) Can virtue go bad? It seems that, without further guidance, otherwise virtuous traits might operate towards wicked ends, or co-exist with vices inside an (overall) miserable and vicious person. The solution to each of these problems requires a clearer account of practical reasoning. That is our next task.

Chapter 5

Practical Reasoning

> There could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live.
>
> —Jennifer Frey, *The Will to Do Good*, 79.

"How should one live?" This question is central to neo-Aristotelian writers such as Bernard Williams, Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, John McDowell, and others. The question is so important, I think, for at least four reasons: First, the question implies that the questioner is aware of a dichotomy or distinction between *the way one is in fact living* and *the way one might live*. As a matter of fact, every capable adult is already living in a particular way. I take it for granted that most people learn to live in a particular way from their culture and family of origin, while also trying to satisfy more or less their own idiosyncratic preferences. But a normal part of human life is pausing to reflect on one's own motives, methods, means, and ends. A crisis can trigger such reflection: what is wrong with my way of life, my values, my choices? And exposure to other people – be they friends, fictional characters, or historical figures – who seem extraordinarily happy can trigger such reflection: what do they know that I do not? What are they doing that I am not?

Secondly, the "how should one live?" question assumes that there are good human lives and bad human lives. I hope that it is uncontroversial to point out that some of the members of our race are fools. (I leave it to the reader to supply illustrations.) If there are ways one *definitely should not live*, then there is at least way or set of ways one *should* live. Even if it is difficult to answer the question of how one should live, we should not be fully skeptical that there is an answer (or a set of answers).

Thirdly, the question implies that the questioner is at the age of reflection. Young children do not wonder how to live. And, according to my account, practical reasoning is an essential part of maturation from child, to competent adult, to practically wise human being.

Fourthly, the question calls for a *certain kind of answer*, namely, a practically reasonable answer. Recall Jay Wallace's general definition of practical reasoning as "the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[1] Although sometimes we reflexively act without thinking, and other times contemplate without acting, ("four and four makes eight"), it seems obvious, on the face, that deliberation and resolute action are not like this. One resolves what to do by considering practical reasons. When a child asks a "how?" question about, say, how to open a jar, we offer a practical instruction: *hold the base tightly, grip the lid and twist to the left.* As adults, we ask "how?" questions about large, multifaceted projects: How to manage a company merger? How to save for retirement? How to raise a child? The "instructions" for such answers will be complex. The "how should I live?" question is simply our most complex long-term project. The answer or answers cannot be an overly vague resolution (e.g., "help to improve the world"), nor mere specific platitudes (e.g., "do no harm"). Rather, a good answer will distinguish between overall good ways and overall bad ways to live and include a set of practical reasons, some general enough to give a trajectory to one's whole life, others specific enough

1. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

to provide guidance through the day-to-day matters of human life.

In short, an answer to the "how should one live?" question requires practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is unique among virtues in several ways. First, it is perhaps the one *clearly non-optional* virtue. Everyone has the obligation to become practically wise, regardless of circumstances, social roles, aptitudes, cultures, and so on. The universality of the obligation arises from the mere fact that one is a practical, rational primate. Secondly, practical wisdom is also unique in that it enables one to acquire other virtues, such as courage or moderation, by providing its possessor with the insight and moral skill to develop specific good habits in the varied circumstances of normal life. Thirdly, practical wisdom is recursive: the practically wise person is the most well-equipped to root out folly and become more practically wise.

The neo-Aristotelian framework for doing ethics views ethical reasoning as a holistic process that must be sensitive to the whole range of practical reasons. According to such thinkers, there can be no adequate theory of ethics without a theory of practical rationality. According to the arguments of the last chapter, virtues are traits that enable one to live a distinctly human life, and that partly constitute that life. In this chapter, I shall argue that the practically wise person is engaged in "mapping the landscape of value"[2] – that is, developing the knowledge and good intentions needed to pursue what is truly worthwhile and avoid what may seem worthwhile but is actually worthless. If successful, I shall be lending support to age-old view that the skill of engaging practical reasoning – reliably and successfully – is the virtue of practical wisdom. The practically wise person is one who *knows* the answer or answers, if there are any such answers. The one who answers this question poorly lives foolishly and, ipso facto, badly. He or she acts on bad reasons and fails to act on good reasons. The one who answers it well lives wisely, and ispo facto, well. Hence, it is essential to virtue that one be practically wise. Or so I shall argue.

2. Ibid.

Section 1 breaks ground on this complex matter through a sustained discussion of John McDowell's "Virtue and Reason" essay. I offer a qualified defense of his thesis that virtue is a form of practical knowledge, including an initial perceptual sensitivity to the salient facts of a situation with the skill to do what is required by those facts.

Section 2 highlights an ambiguity in McDowell's contrast between 'moral' and 'practical' reasons. He confuses the genus 'practical reasoning' for one species, 'moral reasoning' about one's obligations to others. I attempt to remedy this confusion by putting in historical context the relationship between 'moral' and 'practical' reasons. McDowell confuses two frameworks for approaching ethics: the 'quandary frame' and the 'character frame.'

Section 3 offers a more coherent alternative. It reprises the argument that human beings are practical reasoning animals by placing our distinctive activity in context of the general inclination of all living things to their own life and health. In this light, practical reasoning is a necessarily substantive form of reasoning about ends, rather than a merely instrumental one about means, because in order to have any reasons at all one must have a first principle of practical reason, namely, a general evaluative conception of what is to be pursued and hence how to live.

Section 4 addresses some serious objections to my way of framing ethical reasoning. For example, how, exactly, is a *rational* calculative process central to *moral* virtue? Three objections challenge the notion that successful practical reasoning is essential to human virtue.

1. Virtue as Practical Reasoning

John McDowell's "Virtue and Reason" argues, among other things, that virtue is a particular kind of practical knowledge. Practical reasoning is both a rational process and also an initial,

perceptual sensitivity that makes visible to us practical reasons. Even though he allows that practical reasons are ultimately intersubjective features of our social world, he argues that they are no more and no less objective than theoretical reasons. In this section, I trace his discussion in some detail, including his statements of various objections and responses to them.

What kind of knowledge is virtue, according to McDowell? It is a practical and dispositional *what to do*. It is not simply propositional. Rather, it is a non-codifiable perceptual sensitivity to salient facts along with a disposition that leads the virtuous knower to act properly – so long as no countervailing psychological factors interfere. Some objections to his thesis will be addressed as we proceed.

How does it make sense to conceive of virtue as practical knowledge? Consider a platitudinous value such as kindness. Suppose kindness is really a virtue. What does it mean to predicate kindness of someone? We cannot ascribe a virtue to someone who acts kindly once or twice, or who does so (even consistently) by pure luck. Justifying the ascription of a *virtue* requires that a person "has a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behavior" and such "deliverances of a reliable sensitivity are cases of knowledge."[3] McDowell is gesturing toward three or four plausible criteria for the ascription of a virtue: *reliability* means the kind person must be *regularly* or *habitually* disposed to kind thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; *sensitivity* means that the kind person demonstrates an alertness to the fact that a friend is in need, a child is sad, an elderly parent is lonely; *practical knowledge* means the kind person knows what to do in such situations; and *intentional behavior* means that the person correctly feels the imposition to avoid cruel and indifferent behavior and to act on what the situation requires.

McDowell has made it plausible that sensitivity to reasons for behavior is at least necessary for virtue. But is it sufficient? He offers two answers: The first is that the pres-

3. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 332.

ence of a virtue in someone exhaustively explains his or her behavior. For example, when the kind person sees that a situation requires kindness, that "requirement imposed by the situation" must "exhaust his reason for acting as he does."[4] An ulterior interest (say, in a mercenary reward) would disqualify the action as a example of kindness. The kind person's action is explained by the simple fact that it would be a kind action.

Now, the kindness is not the only reason for action. There are many reasons for action and many situations where no single overriding reason is obvious. Rather, the question of what to do seems to generalize into a question of what is good or advisable, all things considered. McDowell concedes the point. He illustrates it with the example of a parent who is overly indulgent to a child out of kindness. Certainly, the parent is sensitive to what kindness requires but not *sensitive enough* to fairness or to considerations of the child's health, and so on.

To accommodate this observation, McDowell generalizes this point to encompass all of virtue:

> Thus the particular virtues are not a batch of independent sensitivities. Rather, we use the concepts of the particular virtues to mark similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a single sensitivity which is what virtue, in general, is: an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose on one's behavior. It is a single complex sensitivity of the sort which we are aiming to instill when we aim to inculcate a moral outlook.[5]

McDowell is saying that if the kind person's behavior arises from a response to the salient facts he is sensitive to, then the virtuous person's behavior *in general* is explained by just the fact that it is virtuous. The virtuous person's behavior, then, arises from a general sensitivity to *what situations require.* If virtue is a "single complex sensitivity" that constitutes an entire "a moral outlook", then virtue seems to be not just a perceptual capacity to notice

4. Ibid., 332.
5. Ibid., 333.

what is required but also a meta-cognitive capacity to reflect upon, rank, and order, the various requirements imposed by a situation before acting accordingly.

I have a complaint about McDowell's clarification here, which I shall explain in full below. In brief, it seems wrong to call the single sensitivity "virtue" when it includes considerations that do not seem intuitively moral at all, such as prudential considerations. For now, I must examine McDowell's response to the non-cognitivist critic who challenges the notion that practical reasoning can, by itself, motivate one to action.

2. Reason, Practice, and Motivation

The first challenge to his own thesis that McDowell addresses comes from moral anti-realism, specifically, expressivism. Expressivists are among the chief contemporary proponents of an alternative, Humean, model of practical reasoning which denies that practical reason is "a capacity for reflection about an objective body of normative truths regarding action."[6]

Modified: Thus far, it is fairly clear that I have been assuming a kind of realism. While defending the assumption would take us too far afield, I should point out that it is not viciously circular. Most of us have no pre-analytic objection to the seeming fact that some reasons for acting are good reasons, and others bad. Some brute norms (such that it is wrong torture animals, or that one is not to use ineffective means to achieve one's ends) have a quasi-analytic force to them. Realism about practical reasons is what Nagel calls a "defeasible presumption."[7] Even anti-realism's most sophisticated advocates concede the that realism is the default view. Mackie admits that moral thought and language assumes objectivity, for the notion of objective value has "a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even

6. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 2. Wallace cites Parfit (2011) and Scanlon (2014).

7. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 143.

in the meanings of moral terms."[8] Gibbard goes so far as to suggest that Platonism about reasons is *common sense*.[9]

Modified: Nevertheless, anti-realism has a serious challenge to the defeasible presumption. Subjectivism is motivated by considering a problem about the status of practical reasons within (a broadly-construed) naturalism. The anti-realist worries that the "defeasible presumption" lying at the center of "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" commits one to non-natural norms and a corresponding non-naturalistic human capacity to intuit them. Philosophers such as Gibbard insists: "Nothing in a plausible, naturalistic picture of our place in the universe requires … non-natural facts and these powers of non-sensory apprehension."[10]

Modified: The anti-realist alternatives aim either to debunk the objective purport of moral reasoning or to reclaim it within the confines of a respectable naturalism.

Modified: The Humean model of practical reasoning asserts that "cognition and volition are distinct."[11] Practical reasons cannot motivate, at least not by themselves.[12] If this were so, moral reasoning could not satisfy the "practical requirement" – it could neither move us to action nor explain *why* we acted. Indeed, a large part of the appeal of expressivism is that it can satisfy the *practical* dimension of practical reason (though at the

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8. Compare with Terence Cuneo, *Speech and Morality* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

9. "It might be thought that ordinary conceptions of rationality are Platonistic or intuitionistic. On the Platonistic picture, among the facts of the world are facts of what is rational and what is not. A person of normal mental powers can discern these facts. Judgments of rationality are thus straightforward apprehensions of fact, not through sense perception but through a mental faculty analogous to sense perception. When a person claims authority to pronounce on what is rational, he must base his claim on this power of apprehension."

10. Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 154.

11. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 335.

12. He says: "Reason is the discovery of truth and falsehood." (*Treatise of Human Nature*, Part I.1.)

cost of the *rational* dimension).

Hence, non-cognitivist critic would be quick to respond to McDowell with a counterexample of two persons in the same situation who are sensitive to an identical range of reasons for action but respond differently. If such a situation were to obtain, it would disconfirm McDowell's thesis that virtue is practical knowledge.

The expressivist has a neat explanation of reasoning, action, and motivation. If reasons cannot motivate by themselves, then practical reasoners act when reasons co-exist with a conative mental state (such as a desire, interest, or attraction).[13] Practical reasoners do not simply enjoy a "single complex sensitivity" to what situations require. Instead, the cognitive bit judges an object, while the conative state provides the movement toward the object. For example, one is aware that one's friend is in trouble and that the friend is able to be comforted (the cognitive bit) and a desire (or motivation or inclination or settled passion) for helping one's friends (the non-cognitive bit). The expressivist would say that surely these two *together* – and neither in isolation – explains the behavior.

This challenge presents a pair of twin challenges: First, is virtue-knowledge *practical* – and if so, wouldn't it be impossible for an agent to perceive what a situation requires and still do wrong? Secondly, is virtue-knowledge *rational* – and if so, mustn't it be codifiable and consistent? The very notion of a unitary "practical reasoning" is a paradox.

13. We all exhibit various dispositions to act in certain ways, to rank and organize our various motivations, to pursue certain things, or to make certain decisions rather than others. Such dispositions are clearly practical. They have the right kind of action-guiding force to explain why we act the way we do. On the other hand, there are dispositions. The term 'disposition' gets used in various ways: one can be disposed (say) to repay one's debts (a moral commitment), or disposed to shout when angry (a temperament), or disposed to travel abroad every summer (an interest). But is a "disposition" a form of knowledge?

2.1 Is Practical Reasoning *Practical*?

McDowell's response to the expressivist critic is this: one must already be sensitive to a particular range of requirements for action in order to even notice the salient facts (e.g., that one's friend is in trouble). It is quite plausible to interpret the difference between the vicious and virtuous person as lying not just in their psychological reactions to what they notice about the world but *in the noticing itself*.[14] The morally calloused person does not notice the fact that his or her actions are causing others pain. Better, the morally calloused person does not notice the fact *as morally salient*.

This response from McDowell is not conclusive, but it is a good start. It highlights, but does not alleviate, the deep disagreement between the Humean and the Aristotelian camps. He concedes the conditional that *if* two people are identically sensitive to a morally salient fact but act differently *then* virtue cannot simply be a sensitivity. But, for McDowell, one person's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens.* So if virtue is to be identified with a single complex sensitivity, then a supposed situation in which two persons perceive a situation and its practical requirements identically but act differently cannot obtain.[15] Is there any way to bridge the divide without begging the question in either direction? McDowell suggests we look to Aristotle.

Aristotle allowed that sometimes the "appreciation of what [a virtuous person] observes is clouded, or unfocused, by the impact of a desire to do otherwise."[16] It is possible that a person correctly perceives what a situation requires (and hence has the relevant virtue) but fails to act correctly due to interference from other psychological factors. Desires, fears, etc. might cause a "distortion in one's appreciation" of the relevant reasons.[17]

14. See also Margaret Olivia Little, "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology," *Hypatia* 10, no. 3 (1995): 117–37.
15. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 333.
16. Ibid., 334.
17. Ibid., 334.

Modified: This Aristotelian reply is also not conclusive. McDowell cites an objection from Donald Davidson to the effect that a person might fail to perform the resultant right action *even without such clouded appreciation.* McDowell concedes. But Davidson's move changes the subject slightly, from virtue and vice to continence and incontinence. For Aristotle, continence (or self-control) is not a virtue. If one can only do the right thing by gritting one's teeth and bearing it, one has not fully attained the relevant virtue. Continence is still *comparatively better* than incontinence, but not as good as virtue.

Modified: The continent person is able to perform the right action because he recognizes it as right, *despite* countervailing pressures (from desires, say) to do the wrong action. Since the possession of a full virtue includes possession of the proper motivation as well, continence is only needed in the absence of a fully developed virtue. Put differently, the virtuous person is not just one who "balances" reasons to φ against countervailing reasons to π. The virtuous person is the one for whom simply identifying the appropriate or reasons to act silences countervailing reasons. For example, *in this situation, courage requires that I run into danger.* The virtuous persons acknowledges the danger (and feels rightly apprehensive) but also sees that courageous action in the face of this danger is required; the latter perception, according to McDowell, "silences" other pressures.[18] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently *acts* on the best reason.

Modified: In my view, McDowell's reply to Davidson's objection is not quite adequate. Fully explaining the common occurrence that we judge what is to be done but fail to do it would require a lengthier discussion. I have argued in chapter 4 that some virtues are excellent rational *practices*. The fullness of virtue is not merely the sensitivity to what is required – which an incontinent person might have – but also a well-ordered psychology (including emotions) and a set of rational habits that empower the agent to follow through on doing what is required. Unlike the continent person, the virtuous agent has overcome the

18. Ibid., 335.

psychological or other factors that cloud the appreciation of what is required. And unlike the incontinent person, the virtuous agent has cleared away psychological or other factors that interrupt the execution of the thing to do. Once the fullness of a virtue is attained, the possessor does not need to stop and "weigh." He sees what is required and acts. (I shall comment a bit more on moral motivation below.)

2.2 Is Practical Reasoning *Rational*?

McDowell's case that practical knowledge can motivate the virtuous person required addressing twin challenges. We have addressed one side of the paradox which challenges the practicality of virtue-knowledge. The other side of the paradox challenged its *rational* credentials. Pretty clearly, the paradigmatic case of knowledge is theoretical knowledge, i.e., *knowledge that p*. Such knowledge is categorical, propositional, and codifiable into a deductive logical system. McDowell's critic then poses the following argument: knowledge is codifiable. However, virtue-knowledge is practical knowledge or 'knowing-what-to-do', which is not codifiable. Therefore, virtue must not be knowledge.

The error in this objection, McDowell thinks, is not an error in moral theory but a "deep-rooted prejudice" that rationality is a rule-following procedure. If rationality is a rule-following procedure, then it follows that *either* practical rationality and morality are likewise rule-following procedures *or* that practical rationality and morality are not, ultimately, sufficiently *rational*. Some Humean philosophers (but not necessarily Hume) think that morality is a non-rational domain of sentiments, desires, commitments, approvals, and so on. Other Kantian philosophers (but not necessarily Kant) think that morality is a rational domain and hence must be a matter of identifying first principles and applying them to particular situations. What both parties share is a belief that "rationality must be explicable in terms of being guided by a formulable universal principle."[19] This common belief

19. Ibid., 337. MacIntyre, similarly, denies the assumption that normative ethical

McDowell wishes to refute.

Modified: McDowell's argument here (drawing on Wittgenstein and Kripke[20]) is that even apparently obvious cases where the rational thing to do seems to require following an objective rule turn out to be cases of a much messier process in which there is no such objective rule we can appeal to. For example, take the objective rule of extending a series of numbers two at a time. Suppose Smith instructs Jones to "add 2" to a number and continue applying the rule indefinitely. We are confident (as is Smith) that Jones will "churn out the appropriate behavior with the sort of reliability which a physical mechanism, say a piece of clockwork, might have." We tend to expect that Jones will produce "2, 4, 6, 8," etc. McDowell thinks this confidence is based on postulating a "psychological mechanism, underlying his behavior, by an inference analogous to that whereby one might hypothesize a physical structure underlying the observable motions of some inanimate object."[21] The postulate of a psychological mechanism is mistaken because, as it turns, out, the rule being followed is not so simple as "add 2 indefinitely." It is logically possible that Jones interpreted Smith's instruction as a different rule that happened to produce the same result. The attempt to stamp out this possibility by adding new meta-rules or sub-rules iterates the problem. It is still logically possible that Jones follows a *different* meta-rule or sub-rule that happens to produce the same result. Wittgeinstein's conclusion is that even apparently simple rules, successfully followed, cannot be exhaustively described.

Modified: McDowell's conclusion is that the true "ground and nature of our confidence" is our participation with Jones in a common form of life. What is a 'form of life?' This is a term of art, also drawn from Wittgenstein and quoted with approval from Stanley

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rules can be derived from universal ethical principles the way we "apply" universal logical truths to particular logical conclusions via a middle term. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513.

20. Saul A Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Harvard University Press, 1982).

21. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 337.

Cavell. It refers to the shared result of acculturation or formation. For example, how do we learn reliably to use words and expressions in our native language? There is no clear mechanistic process that explains exactly when a child learns to make exclamations – such as a pained "ow!" or an excited "ooh!". There is no clear mechanistic process by which we learn when to laugh at jokes or when to cry in pity. Instead of a mechanistic process, McDowell suggests that children learn words and behaviors by "bildung" or formation. The result is a "congruence of subjectivities."[22] Jones is able to follow Smith's rule (and we are confident that we know what his instruction meant) even though it is not stated exhaustively because we all share a common practice of, say, adding or producing series of numbers. More generally, all of our shared rationality is not grounded in "external" objective rules but in a shared form of life.

Modified: It is disconcerting to many to consider that nothing keeps rationality "on the rails" but a congruence of subjectivities. McDowell admits this is a disconcerting hypothesis; it induces "vertigo." But, he says, our response to such vertigo should not be to embrace a "consoling myth". That "consoling myth" consists of two notions: (a) that rational rule-following is enabled by a psychological mechanism that guarantees consistency; and (b) that there exist objective facts of the matter over and above the congruence of subjectivities. If we abandon these two notions and embrace the model of deductive rationality as grounded only in our intersubjective form of life, then the corresponding model of practical rationality will become tenable.

Modified: I think McDowell concedes too much here, as I shall explain below. Nevertheless, my purpose here is to agree with McDowell that both forms of rationality – the practical and the theoretical – are on a par and stand or fall together. Either they are both intersubjective or both objective. Practical reasoning may be relatively less codifiable than theoretical reasoning, but each is equally a form of knowledge.

22. Ibid., 339.

McDowell asks a related query: what, if anything, guarantees that the moral person's behavior is intelligibly the same from case to case? If moral knowledge were formulable as a universal principle, then it would be consistent from case to case and situation to situation; but if, as McDowell has been arguing, both deductive reasoning and practical reasoning are not merely rule-following mechanisms, then how do we explain the virtuous person's reliably correct behavior? His answer invokes Aristotle's notion of a practical syllogism. The 'practical syllogism' takes the following shape:

1. X is good to do, desirable, worthwhile, etc. (E.g., it is good to instantiate justice in the classroom).
2. Z would be X. (E.g., giving everyone a chance to re-take a quiz that was unavailable due to technical problems would instantiate justice in my classroom.)
3. Therefore, Z would be good to do, desirable, worthwhile, etc.

On the strictly deductive logical model, the role of the major premise is to provide solid universal ethical principles from which it is possible to derive a codified set of particular moral duties. McDowell resists this model. The strictly non-cognitivist alternative is that there must be no universal ethical principles at all – only universal psychological states, such as consistent desires, plans, values, or norms. McDowell also resists this model. Instead, the role of the major premise is to articulate a "certain conception of how to live… [namely] the *virtuous person's conception* of the sort of life a human being should lead."[23] What kind of life should a human being lead? The answer "cannot be definitively written down."[24]

If the kind of conception of a good life that the virtuous person has is approximate and non-codifiable, it becomes hard to see why we are bothering to fit moral reasoning into syllogistic pattern at all. McDowell's response is that understanding virtue-knowledge within a practical syllogism *does* a good job of providing a plausible explanation of moral motivation (reasons one might act in some way) and moral behavior (reasons one acted that way). To paraphrase McDowell: "Explanations of judgments about what to do are also

23. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
24. Ibid., 343.

explanations of actions."[25] I can explain your behavior by understanding that you were concerned for your friend's welfare and so offered to help. Likewise, you can explain your decision to help simply by citing the fact that your friend was in need. So the general structure of the practical syllogism is useful.

Modified: What's more, McDowell concedes that there is a kind of circularity to his account: "the rationality of virtue… is not demonstrable from an external standpoint."[26] And: "Any attempt to capture it in words will recapitulate the character of the teaching whereby it might be instilled: generalizations will be approximate at best…"[27] The virtuous person's conception of how to live is itself conditioned by the moral outlook. That conception of how to live, in turn, conditions what particular saliences are noticed (what minor premises) and generates practical conclusions about what is to be done. The upshot of the combination of non-codifiability with a practical syllogistic form is that the virtuous person takes for a rule of life some conception of how to live but that this conception is part of what it means to be a virtuous person – and thus ensues a certain circularity.

Modified: McDowell bites the bullet on the incorrigible intersubjectivity of theoretical and practical reasoning. I think he does so because he fails to grasp Foot's insight that objective, natural, normative facts are able to "keep us on the rails." I am not motivated to think this out of a desire to be "consoled." In any case, the presence or absence of a frightening vertigo in the arguer is irrelevant to the argument. I think that notion that all practical and deductive deductive is is ultimately answerable to the world is a more adequate explanation. As I have argued in chapter 2, both scientific reasoning and ethical reasoning can conform or fail to conform to the relevant range of normative facts. I shall criticize McDowell's intersubjective notion a bit more in the next chapter.

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25. Ibid., 342. Verbatim: "The explanations, so far treated as explanations of judgments about what to do, are equally explanations of actions."

26. Ibid., 346.

27. Ibid., 343.

In sum, McDowell thinks virtue is a kind of knowledge or sensitivity to salient facts which call for a certain response and which – absent interfering passions – intrinsically motivates the virtuous person to respond in that way. The hypothetical counterexample presented by his Humean critic is one wherein two agents are "sensitive to" or "notice" identical reasons for action but do not act identically. McDowell's response is that while noticing a requirement for action is necessarily motivating *to some extent*, other psychological factors may interfere with the resulting correct action. Furthermore, the kind of "knowledge" that virtue amounts to is uncodifiable, but that does no harm to the account. Virtue-knowledge is rather a broad conception of how to live and a series of specific sensitivities to a range of specific practical reasons. Practical reasoning is *consistent*, moreover, but not by being "objective" (in the sense that even McDowell admits would be desirable) but by being rooted in our communal form of life – precisely the same way in which logical reasoning is. Both are "intersubjective" and rooted in our form of life, but both are as objective as need be.

2.3 Moral and Practical Reasoning

While I shall discuss what I think McDowell gets wrong below, on my view, he gets this much right: practical reasoning is indeed by definition a form of *reasoning*. It is like theoretical reasoning in that it is normative.

Broadly, we can say that theoretical reasoning is a process by which I aim to determine *what to believe* – to answer the question "What should I believe?" When I assess evidence for and against some proposition p, I am looking for *reasons* to believe p is true or false. The successful conclusion of a rational argument is the judgment that p or not-p. (Or I may not have enough evidence to judge either way, in which case I may withhold judgment.) Similarly, when I consider a scientific hypothesis, I suppose that p and then conduct an experiment that will reveal reasons that confirm or disconfirm the supposition. To fail to believe p upon coming to know good evidence for it, or to believe p in spite of good

evidence against it, is to make an intellectual error. If q entails p and I already know and affirm that q, then I *ought* to affirm that p. Similarly, if some reason to π entails a decisive reason to φ, and I already know and am committed to π, then I ought to φ.

So far as we know, all theoretical reasoners are also practical reasoners. We can imagine creatures such as angels, Artificial Intelligences, and intelligent aliens who might think without acting; but so far as we know, to be a reasoner at all is to be responsive to what Sellars called the "space of reasons", including both practical and theoretical reasons. This consideration is part of the reason why, in chapter 3, I insisted that practical reasoning, and *not* abstract theoretical reasoning, defines human nature. If this is right, then the burden of proof lies with those who would artificially separate the *knowing* and the *practicing*.

Modified: That said, my complaint against McDowell's account is that he confuses moral and practical reasons. Suppose Jane who can pretty well diagnose a car engine by listening to the way it whines or hums or clicks. All John hears is noise. By McDowell's lights, Jane is "sensitive to a range of requirements for action" and knows what to do – e.g., a new timing belt – and is "virtuous." Even if we introduce a requirement that practical knowledge must be concerned with requirements pertaining to other people, similar analogies arise in other contexts. An American football kicker is sensitive to the salient facts of what is required to score a field goal; a general contractor is sensitive to the salient facts of what is required to build a structure up to code, and so on. It strains common sense to call any and all such sensitivities "virtues."

Relatedly, McDowell admits that one might potentially need to rank, order, and weigh a dozen different kinds of reasons (kindness, fairness, appropriateness, prudence, etc.) before one resolved what to do. He seems to switch from talking about moral reasons to talking about *any* practical reason without any mention of the switch. By failing to render a clear distinction between moral and other practical reasons, I believe McDowell falls prey to a habitual way of framing moral discussions that is a subtle mistake.

The habitual way of framing moral discussions we may call the "quandary frame," borrowing the term from a classic article by Edmund Pincoff. Pincoff contrasts "quandary ethics" with another way of framing ethical discussions which he calls "character" ethics. On this frame, 'moral' considerations contrast with prudence and any other kind of practical consideration. 'Moral' considerations most commonly refer to "other-regarding" considerations (opposed to self-regarding ones), altruistic (as opposed to egoistic), considerations of benevolence (as opposed to selfishness), or conscience (as opposed to self-love).[28]

The contrast between moral and all other practical reasons gives rise to a distinctive way of approaching ethics. On quandary ethics:

> The business of ethics is to clarify and solve "problems", i.e. situations in which it is difficult to know what one should do; that the ultimate beneficiary of ethical analysis is the person who, in one of these situations, seeks rational ground for the decision he must make; that ethics is therefore primarily concerned to find such grounds, often conceived of as moral rules and the principles from which they can be derived; and that meta-ethics consists in the analysis of the terms, claims, and arguments which come into play in moral disputation, deliberation, and justification in problematic contexts.[Edmund Pincoffs[29] 552. Pincoffs cites Hare, Toulon, and Brandt as quandary ethicists. MacIntyre offers a similar criticism to that of Pincoffs in MacIntyre[30]"]

According to Philippa Foot, the quandary frame is the most way most modern philosophers approach ethics. She says:

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28. The relation between virtue and happiness or self-regard is an expansive one: For fuller treatments, one might begin with: Alasdair MacIntyre, "Egoism and Altruism," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York, Macmillan, 1967), 462. Michael Slote, "Agent-Based Virtue Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (1995): 83–101. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism," in *Morality and Self Interest*, ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–21 Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2010): 651–92, and Paul Bloomfield, "Eudaimonia and Practical Rationality," in *Virtue and Happiness*, ed. Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford University Press, 2012).

29. "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552–71.

30. "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?"

> Many if not most moral philosophers in modern times see their subject as having to do exclusively with relations between individuals or between an individual and society, and so with such things as obligations, duties, and charitable acts… 'moral' and 'prudential' considerations [are] contrasted in a way that was alien to Plato or Aristotle.[31]

Relatedly, Martha Nussbaum says:

> This question [of how 'moral' ends figure among other ends] is posed in a characteristically modern way, presupposing a distinction between the moral and the non-moral that is not drawn, as such, by the Greek thinkers. But if one objects to that characterization, one can rephrase it: for example, What role does concern for others for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[32]

Modified: Kant and Hume agree on the quandary frame, despite their significant substantive disagreements. They both present morality as a kind of crisis strategy. On any given normal day, agents are free to pursue their own self-interested inclinations – get a good job, save for retirement, eat healthy foods, exercise, make friends, and so on – so long as they commit no wrong. So long as life presents no moral dilemmas, moral reasoning is idle.

The alternative type of ethics is what Pincoff calls "character" ethics (of which I take neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to be a token). Such ethics is focused on the long-term project of living well by executing worthwhile goals in every day life. Aristotle is the premiere example of a character ethicist because he thought of ethics as a branch the whole practical enterprise:

> …[ethics and politics] is a very wide-ranging subject having to do generally with the planning of human life so that it could be lived as well as possible. Moral problems are given their due but are by no means stage-centre. The question is not so much how we should resolve perplexities as how we should live.[33]

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31. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

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

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

The Greek way of framing moral questions viewed *all* practical ends as 'moral.' MacIntyre provides the clearest summary of the older use of 'moral':

> 'Moral' is the etymological descendant of 'moralis'. But 'moralis', like its Greek predecessor *ethikos* – Cicero invented 'moralis' to translate the Greek word in the *De Fato* – means 'pertaining to character' where a man's character is nothing other than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead on particular kind of life… The early uses of 'moral' did not contrast with 'prudential' or 'self interested"' nor with 'legal or 'religious'… The word to which it is closest in meaning is perhaps most simply 'practical.'[34]

Modified: MacIntyre's point is not merely etymological; it is conceptual. When quandary ethicists conceive of 'moral reasons' as a special overriding type of practical reason concerned with duties to others (contrasted with self-regarding prudential reasons), they fall under the illusion that moral reasons may not be practical and that practical reasons may not be moral. By contrast, the character ethicist views life as presenting the variety of possible ends that could clash or harmonize that all need to be accounted for.

Modified: It is helpful to observe that, at some point in the history of western moral philosophy, the topic of the "moral" began to separate off from the broader topic of the practical. Foot cites Mill as an early proponent of the distinction:

> J. S. Mill, for instance, expresses this modern point of view quite explicitly, saying in his essay *On Liberty* that 'A person who shows rashness, obstinacy, self-conceit . . . who cannot restrain himself from harmful indulgences' shows faults (Mill calls them 'self-regarding faults') which 'are not properly immoralities' and while they 'may be proofs of any amount of folly . . . are only a subject of moral reprobation when they involve a breach of duty to others, for whose sake the individual is bound to have care for himself.'[35]

Mill distinguishes folly from immorality by treating folly as a failure to provide goods for oneself. He treats imprudence as "bad" but not *morally bad.* **Modified**: While I don't

34. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 38.
35. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

intend to suggest that there is something automatically laudable about the older Aristotelian emphasis, my contention is that the modern emphasis on "relations between individuals or between an individual and society" fails to capture much of what is interesting about the "how should one live?" question. The modern distinction obscures the real ethical situation.

Modified: To return to McDowell, I can now put my complaint in clearer relief: is he a quandary ethicist or character ethicist? In my view, McDowell's view represents a mixture (indeed, a confusion) of the two. Like the character ethicist, he emphasizes the "how should I live?" question and invokes practical knowledge as an important part of the answer. However, like the quandary ethicist, he represents moral considerations pertaining to the rights, obligations, or duties to others (such as kindness) as a special, perhaps overriding, kind of reason. He does not seem to notice that broadening the virtuous person's perceptual sensitivity to what *any* situation requires renders his account ambiguous. Are moral reasons *one type* of practical reason, or can any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed).[36]

3. Practical Reasoning as Pursuing the Human Good

The remedy for this confusion is to return to and defend a more consistent account of practical reasons. Happily, this account will reinforce what we have argued above about the natural normativity in the human life form and all organic life. This section builds on the work of Philippa Foot and on Jennifer Frey's recent discussions of Anscombe and Aquinas.[37]

On the Aristotelian account, as developed by Aquinas, practical reasoning is by

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

37. Foot says: "It is my opinion that the *Summa Theologica* is one of the best sources we have for moral philosophy, and moreover that St. Thomas's ethical writings are as useful to the atheist as to the Catholic or other Christian believer." (*Virtues and Vices*, 2.)

definition an end-oriented activity that aims at the perceived good of one's form of life. The primary question is not "why should one respond to moral reasons instead of prudential ones?" but "why do we act at all?" and "how can we act well?" Asking this question, and answering it, is a practically rational activity that defines the human life form. Certainly, as Foot says, some practical reasons have to do with "obligations, duties, and charitable acts" to others; but others pertain to what is required for oneself and even for third-person objects such as the environment, possessions, and perhaps even abstract objects.

Considered thus broadly, the normativity of practical reasoning is clear: some reasons for acting are good while others are bad. Errors of morality, then, belong to a wider class of practical errors. As Foot says: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[38] On this frame, any reason to φ or not to φ is a practical reason, and successfully sorting through all such reasons is a virtue, namely practical wisdom. Unsuccessfully doing so is the vice of imprudence or practical folly, which inhibits one's ability to live a human life.

Defending the Aristotelian account requires us to revisit in more detail some of what was argued above in chapter 2. Recall the observation that all organisms act toward ends, with or without reflection. Frey summarizes Aquinas in this way:

> All living things are a self-sustaining system of powers that functions to bring the living thing into being and to sustain its being. The movement of any part of a living thing, at any particular moment, is necessarily explained by reference to the movement of the whole thing towards a single end: the coming to be, maintenance, or reproduction of that very form of life.[39]

As I argued above, all living things exhibit teleological movement. In proper circumstances, they grow into maturity, which is the exemplification of their form of life. This form of life

38. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

39. Jennifer Ann Frey, "The Will and the Good" (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 68.

is what Aquinas calls a thing's "nature": wolf hunts in packs by nature, trees extend roots into the ground by nature, reptiles warm themselves in the sun by nature, and so on.

The sunflower has no consciousness incline toward sunlight. But, to quote John Haldane, "things are specified by their power."[40] When it comes to higher organisms, insects and mammals and so on, organisms have "appetite." They demonstrate the capacity to sense and to move consciously toward or away from certain objects: The antelope pursues healthy grass and flees a lion. The animal can only experience what is good or bad for it as a particular object.

Modified: While natural norms are features of all living beings, human beings are distinct in being also aware of such norms. Humans grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences like other animals and also *know* that they do so. Obviously, plants and animals do not "naturally incline" toward their good by reflecting or choosing it. Frey points out:

> Aquinas would agree with us that it is a category mistake to say that a sunflower wants to grow towards the light, if by this we mean that the flower somehow registers a positive feeling or has an inner impression towards the light, which "causes" it to move toward the light. The plant does not apprehend or desire anything; thus Aquinas is very careful to say that it does not have a power of appetite. In fact, Aquinas is at pains to note that a plant has no window onto the world at all – it just has conditions in which it characteristically comes into being, maintains, and reproduces itself.[41]

Lower organisms naturally incline toward their own good. Higher organisms perceive objects but do not perceive them *as* falling under universal categories. By contrast, a human being can recognize universals. Human beings are specified by their "power" – their capacity to engage in cognitive and deliberative activities. While animals can not only sense but *perceive*, humans have the capacity of "intellection," the power of abstracting formal properties from what is perceived. An animal can *sense* an informed, organized object; an

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

41. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 69–70.

animal can be affected by the object. But the human animal can *acquire information* from the organized object. Animals may perceive something *as* dangerous or *as* desirable. Human beings perceive *that* the dangerous thing is a predator or the desirable thing *is food*.[42]

The extra ability to perceive under universal categories brings with it the human capacity for taking up natural inclinations or aversions in a deliberative act. Natural inclinations may be underwritten or overridden. Confronted with a delicious and healthy salad sitting on someone else's plate, I recognize it *as not mine* and hence choose not to reach for it. Confronted with a lion in a zoo, I choose not to flee, for I recognize it *as not dangerous*. Frey summarizes:

> Rational animals, like any animal, have a natural inclination towards their good as a whole, and like lower animals this power is actualized through their apprehension of things in the world. But Aquinas argues that a rational animal relates to the world through the application of universal concepts, and thus it is inclined to pursue or avoid things under an intellectual, universal apprehension of them. Thus, Aquinas says that the will is inclined towards its objects under the formality of the "universal good," rather than the particular good.[43]

Modified: By the same token, human beings are capable of an extra ability to err. The conclusion that all living things move toward their own natural ends is compatible with the biological judgment that some specimens are defective just as it is compatible with the ethical judgment that some agents – such as Dostoevsky's Underground Man – are practically irrational in failing to pursue their own natural ends. Human beings are supposed to practically reason well. When they do not, the defect that arises is more than merely animal. Any animals might be inflicted by sickness or injury; only human animals can inflict themselves with new sicknesses and new injuries.

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42. John Haldane, "On Coming Home to (Metaphysical) Realism," *Philosophy* 71, no. 276 (1996): 287–96.

43. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 75.

We have been speaking of the human capacity for recognizing and pursuing particular ends as good. As we saw in chapter 4, a full conception of virtue demands that we expand our scope to include the whole of life, the conception of our human good that constitutes the answer to the "how to live?" question. McDowell gets this part right in his discussion of the practical syllogism. Every rational practice is undertaken in pursuit of some particular end *in context* of a total conception of what is good in general. Frey continues:

> Consequently, we can say that rational animals have an understanding of different levels of ends, and at least a vague sense of how they are supposed to hang together as a whole. This conception of how it all hangs together is what Aquinas calls the ultimate end – a rational animal's general, conceptual understanding of how to live or go on. Aquinas thinks that any sane, mature adult will necessarily have cobbled together some such conception. Aquinas calls this conception "the universal good", and he argues that it is the will's proper object. Everything that is willed is willed under this rational aspect of good, as to be pursued because *in accord with my general conception of the good.* In fact, Aquinas thinks there could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good, and thus a general sense of how to live.[44]

Frey's argument here is that the question of 'how to live' is a question about my good as a human being; answering that question requires the human activity of practically reasoning. And since every "sane, mature adult" engages in this activity, every sane mature adult has a general notion about the answer. The crucial insight is that without such a general notion, we *would not engage in rational action at all*. Frey continues:

> No human action is intelligible without attributing to the agent herself some conception of this end, no matter how inarticulate, unsystematic, or unreflective it might be. Aquinas takes it for granted that in coming to be a human being – i.e., being raised in a community of other human beings, coming into the possession of concepts, a language, and coming to have a world – one comes into some such conception, and thus comes to act voluntarily.[45]

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44. Ibid., 78–79, italics in original.
45. Ibid., 87.

Human beings act. And all intelligible actions are undertaken in pursuit of some end. Therefore, all intelligible actions of humans are undertaken in pursuit of some end. This conclusion can accommodate the commonsense observation that not *every* move we make counts as an intelligible action. Aquinas makes a helpful distinction between the "actions of a human" and "human actions." The action of a human is any motion, such as mumbling in your sleep, scratching an itch, or idly tapping a foot. But a *human action* is by definition an action in pursuit of a goal which is perceived as a good. A human being without any practical reasons would not do immoral deeds; he or she would not do anything at all. Like Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener, the person who does not engage in practical reasoning or identify any practical reasons would simply waste away and die.[46]

Aquinas' distinction between human actions and the actions of a human can also go to explain some compulsive or addictive behaviors. Someone in the overwhelming grip of, say, a heroine addiction, might be injecting themselves with the drug against their own evaluations of what should be done. However, in extreme cases of addiction, the action hardly falls under the description of a human action. Heroine is so highly addictive that one or two uses can create a dependency that lasts a lifetime. The addict's initial decision to use the drug can still fall under the description of a human action, perhaps aimed at some perceived good such as pleasure or joining in a social group. But just as one is free to choose to slide into a muddy hole in the ground but not necessarily free to climb back out, one is free to use a habit-forming drug but not necessarily free, even with firm resolve never to use again, to stop feeling the overwhelming compulsion.

If all action aims at some good, then where does the process begin? How can one pursue ends *before* actualizing the natural ability to practically reason? We can again compare practical reasoning with demonstrative or theoretical reasoning. Aquinas puts the comparison this way:

46. Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (Best Classic Books, 1966).

> …as "being" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so "good" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that "good is that which all things seek after." Hence this is the first precept of practical reason, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.[47]

Aquinas points out that the first thing human beings apprehend as theoretical reasoners is simply "existence" or "being" – infants perceive that some things are there and others not there. They eventually come to perceive objects *as* objects, as individual objects, and to name and categorize them with language acquired in a social setting. Likewise, the first thing human beings apprehend as practical reasoners is simply the "good" or "desirable." The use of 'good' here, it bears repeating, is not a special moral sense of good, but simply means 'desirable' or 'to be pursued.' An entity is 'good' when it is considered as an object of inclination. Hence, infants perceive that some things are to be pursued and others avoided. To be *theoretically* rational is to judge a proposition p as true or false, as best one can, according to the rational assessment of the reasons for affirming or denying p. Similarly, to be *practically* rational is to judge a practical reason φ to be pursued or avoided, in accord with the rational assessment of the reasons for pursuing or avoiding φ. Without a general principle in either case, practical reasoning and rational practice are unintelligible.

Given this basic and abstract formulation of the structure of practical reasoning, we can further specify good ends. Just as the basic structure of reasoning begins with the apprehension of being in general and grows to include apprehension of particular beings, concepts, and categories, practical reason begins with the apprehension of good in general and then determines particular goods.

> Practical reason is the movement of thought towards, rather than away from, material particulars…. practical reasoning is a movement from general knowledge of what is good and how to live, towards the production of the kind of

47. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, n.d. IIa. Q.94. Art. 2.

> life that is essentially characterized by such knowledge. When it is done well, what is understood is the same as what is produced: human form or human life.[48]

Such basic goods are apprehended as contributing to a distinctively human life form.

> For practical reason, the starting points are the most primitive human goods that the will is naturally inclined to seek: life, knowledge, family, friendship, play, political community, and so on. These are the ends that all human beings want for their own sake, as intrinsically valuable to them. And they want these things in a rational way – viz., because they have a conceptual apprehension that they are constitutive of their general good.[49]

Modified: Having said this, we should make two clarifications. First, I think Frey is asserting a generic truth when she says "these are the ends that all human beings want"; the truth admits of exceptions. Whatever the causes of psychopathy, some people seem insensitive to the obvious draw of natural ends. Such people don't want knowledge, don't care to have friends, don't like to play, detach from their families, and in some cases show careless disregard for life, their own and that of others. The important point is not that "primitive human goods" are pursued by all without exception – though indeed they are pursued by the vast statistical majority. The important point is that without some notion of primitive human goods, we could not identify disorders like psychopathy. Social behavior is not merely statistically normal but normative.

Modified: Secondly, some readers might object that this account equates "pursuing the good" with "pursuing the human good", including such "primitive goods" as life, knowledge, friendship, and so on. Might there be goods that are *good simpliciter* that one ought to pursue, *regardless* of their bearing any internal relation to the human life form? Iris Murdoch argues along these lines that the starting point of ethical training must be aesthetic training.[50] One must cultivate the ability to see intrinsic value by first learning seeing

48. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 2.
49. Ibid., 88.
50. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*, 90.

intrinsic beauty in art and nature, learning to appreciate it dispassionately. Just as the dispassionate pursuit of knowledge aims at knowledge of external realities (physical objects, animals, chemicals) and not just at knowledge of knowers, might not the pursuit of the good aim at external goods?

Modified: McDowell takes Murdoch's thesis in a different direction. He argues that "the remoteness of the Form of the Good is a metaphorical version of the thesis that value is not in the world… The point of the metaphor is the colossal difficulty of attaining a capacity to cope clear-sightedly with the ethical reality which is part of our world."[51] For McDowell, this recognizing the difficulty of ethical training can benefit one "negatively, by inducing humility, and positively, by an inspiring effect akin to that of a religious conversion." For McDowell, then, ethical (and aesthetic) training is not progress toward the *discovery* of objective value but toward the unfolding of one's subjective or intersubjective values.

Modified: I am content to remain neutral with respect to these two options. *Minimally*, practical reasoning is the ability to judge the good of the human life form. This minimal ability is compatible with the paradoxical thought that what is good for humans is not *merely* the human good. What is good for humans might be the good simpliciter. It is needful, before examining this further issues, to defend the notion of basic, human goods. That is my aim here. Jennifer Frey summarizes:

> all practical reasoning is ultimately reasoning for the sake of attaining or maintaining these ends [i.e, basic human goods]. Consequently, all practical reasoning is ultimately for the sake of living the sort of life that pertains to man. Indeed for Aquinas, there could be no practical teleology without natural teleology, since there would be nothing to reason towards if the will were not by nature inclined towards the exemplification of human form.[52]

To sum up the account thus far, all organisms incline toward the good of their life form, including those basic goods that enable the full actualization thereof. Various organisms ex-

51. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 347.
52. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 66.

press this inclination in various ways. For lower organisms, consciousness plays no part in this process; for higher organisms, consciousness does play a part. For humans, the essential difference is a sensitivity to the space of reasons, both evidential and practical. 'Practical reasoning' is the name for the whole complex process of perceiving certain salient facts as reasons to pursue or avoid some course of action, and comparing and ranking competing reasons in light of an overall conception of a good human life, and acting accordingly. None of this is intended to deny that evaluative practical reasoning arises in a normal process of socialization. Rather, that our conception of how to live would arise that way is what we would predict for rational primates who speak and live in society.

4. Objections

We are now in a position to state and respond to three objections.

1. Procedural Reasoning: One challenge is the familiar notion that practical reasoning is a value-neutral procedure by which we line up means to our ends.[53] On this view, moral reasoning is about the morally good and bad while practical reasoning is about something else entirely, such as the prudent or imprudent, the advisable or ill-advised. So how could an *intellectual* exercise be essential to *moral* virtue?

2. Reason, Practice, and Motivation: Another challenge comes from non-cognitivism (especially expressivism).[54] The worry is that practical reasons by themselves can't motivate us to act (without complementary psychological attitudes such as desires), while motivations to act cannot be rationally evaluated as true or false. This is really a pair of twin challenges: Is practical reasoning really *rational*? And if so, is it really *practical*? It seems

53. For a discussion of this distinction, see: Brad Hooker and Bart Streumer, "Procedural and Substantive Practical Rationality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 57–74.

54. Non-cognitivism is motivated by metaphysical naturalism, which objects to normative realism about practical reasons. I shall address that objection in chapter 6.

to be either one or the other.

3. Overriding Reasons: A third challenge is a familiar distinction between "moral reasons" on the one hand and "prudential reasons" on the other, where moral reasons are overriding reasons. On this distinction, one can be *foolish* by failing to act on some considerations, but one is immoral by failing to act on relevant overriding moral reasons. If practical reasoning is a process of identifying or inventing what is advisable or ill-advised (but not ultimately binding), then how does this process relate to an appropriate sensitivity to what is morally permissible or impermissible (which is ultimately binding)?

4.1 On Procedural Reasoning

According to the **Procedural Reasoning** objection, reasoning is not about ends but only about means. Practical reasoning is a procedural or instrumental process. The critic alleges that one may only criticize Smith as "irrational" when Smith fails to use the necessary means to his or her own ends, but one may not criticize Smith's *ends themselves* as irrational. For example, if we define practical reasoning as the process by which one adjudicates the means to *one's own health*, then *any* unhealthy action (e.g., eating delicious but less-than-healthy food) would be ipso facto irrational. Isn't it problematic to build into the definition of rationality any specific, ready-made ends?

The first response to this challenge is that, even on the procedural view, practical reasoning *must necessarily have a certain intelligible structure*. The advocate of the procedural view, no less than the advocate of the substantive view, needs a sufficiently general starting point for procedural reasoning to even get off the ground. Frey's candidate for that starting point is the maximally general conception that "good is to be done and evil avoided" or that "one must pursue one's own good." Her argument was that by definition when practical reasoners act at all, they act in pursuit of a particular object falling under a universal category. In order to construct *any* practical syllogisms as we do, one needs a sufficiently

broad "major premise."

A second response is that Frey's view does not build in very *specific* ends. The built-in end is quite general: it is some conception of how to live in the way (or set of ways) that is good for practical, rational primates like us. This substantive good or set of goods is general enough to accommodate a variety of controversial details about what one ought to do or not do. In other words, the substantive view of practical reasoning allows for the possibility that, in a disagreement, both parties are basically rational, while one party may be be more accurately identifying what is to be pursued or avoided.

Foot offers two additional considerations that support this Aristotelian account. When she wrote her famous "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives", she argued that moral reasons are not overriding, categorical imperatives contrasted with every other kind of reason. She explains that, at the time, she had not discovered a way of showing "the rationality of acting, even against desire and self-interest, on the demand of morality."[55] What changed her mind was an argument from Warren Quinn to the effect that if practical reasoning is to be important at all it must be *by definition* the pursuit of some good. Quinn says:

> Practical thought, like any other thought, requires a subject matter. And for human beings the subject matter that distinguishes thought as practical is, in the first instance, human ends and action insofar as they are good or bad in themselves… Practical thought deploys a master set of non-instrumental evaluative notions: that of a good or bad human act, a good or bad human life, a good or bad human agent, and a good or bad human action. Practical reason is, on this view, the faculty that applies these fundamental evaluative concepts.[56]

What Foot found so compelling is the change to "seeing goodness as setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part-determinant of [practical

55. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

56. Warren Quinn and Philippa Foot, *Morality and Action* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 223.

rationality]] itself." To one who objects, she points out that:

> Many of us are willing to reject a 'present desire' theory of reasons for action because we think that someone who knowingly puts his future health at risk for a trivial pleasure is behaving foolishly, and therefore not well. Seeing his will as defective, we therefore say that he is doing what he has reason not to do. Being unable to fit the supposed 'reason' into some preconceived present-desire-based theory of reasons for action, we do not query whether it really is a foolish way to behave, but rather hang on to the evaluation and shape our theory of reasons accordingly. And it is exactly a generalization of this presumption about the direction of the argument on which I am now insisting. For what, we may ask, is so special about prudence that it alone among the virtues should be reasonably thought to relate to practical rationality in such a way?[57]

Quinn, Foot, and Frey are arguing that goodness is a "necessary condition of practical rationality." Rational action is action in pursuit of some end, where "some end" is not merely an end (such as food, friendship, or knowledge) that is intrinsically desirable for practical rational primates like us. Identifying and pursuing such ends *as desirable or undesirable* is already a substantive evaluative judgment. Therefore, any rational action necessarily includes a substantive evaluative judgment.

If we accept this point, and I do not see how to avoid it, then we are already committed to a minimally substantive view of practical reason, rather than a merely procedural one. The alternative to aiming at the apparent good is not aiming at some value-neutral "end" or goal; the alternative to aiming at the apparent good is *not acting at all*.

4.2 On Motivation

While I gave McDowell's reply above to the Humean critic, I would like to return to the subject of motivation here. It will be useful to briefly situate my neo-Aristotelian account within the debate between motivational internalists and externalists, even if I cannot adequately engage the vast body of literature here.

57. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.

In brief, the motivational internalist argues that any practical reasons "out there" must necessarily connect up with my motivational structure if they are to move me to action.[58] The motivational externalist, by contrast, argues it is possible for there to be practical reasons "out there" such that I *ought* to be motivated by them, even if I am currently not. Indeed, the existence of binding practical reasons that I am ignoring or failing to act on is the prime explanation of immorality.

The danger of internalism is that it seems to allow that the amoralist who is *not motivated* to be moral is off the hook. By contrast, the externalist argues that the immoralist has *reasons* to φ even if he or she has no (current) *motivation* to φ.

On my view, motivational internalism gets this much right: one is motivated to pursue something that falls under a category that, within the existing motivational structure, one *already judges* to be desirable. However, the internalist too narrowly defines a "motivational structure." If by "motivational structure" we mean my present set of broad psychological inclinations, then it is possible that we may not have the right motivational structure that would lead to moral action. But if by that we simply mean *my overall practical disposition toward the worthwhile, desirable, and good*, then it is quite uncontroversial to assert that one only goes in for φ-ing when φ-ing seems to be worthwhile, because to be a practical agent just means to be oriented to pursue the good and avoid the bad. Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description of 'good' I will, ipso facto, be oriented toward (whether I pursue it or merely approve of it and admire it). Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description 'bad' I will, ipso facto, oriented away from (whether I disapprove of it, or avoid it, or both).

What motivational externalism gets right is that there might be reasons to φ that I am not aware of and (hence) am not motivated by. For example, perhaps it is true that one

58. Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau, 2007, 292–98.

ought to save for retirement, but I may fail to do so because I am unaware of that reason or am ignoring it in my attention to other reasons.

Seen in this light, it is obvious that on my neo-Aristotelian account practical reasons can and do motivate us. We can put the matter more strongly: According to Frey's argument above, practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of the term 'motive.' Motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state. It is true that sub-rational animals, plants, and insects are moved about by impulses such as hungers, thirsts, loves, fears, etc. And it is true that human animals are likewise moved about by such impulses. But for rational animals, there is an additional source of motion, namely practical reasons.

Modified: Hence, my contention is that our default view of practical reasoning creatures ought to be that practical reason is intrinsically capable of motivating. The whole process of discerning practical reasons is not only The process satisfies the practicality requirement by definition. Practical reasoning is not something one does *before* resolving what to do, as one picks up an item in a store *before* purchasing it. Practical reasoning is the name we give to the process of *resolving what to do*, as checking out from the store is the process of purchasing. If there is no gap between the conclusion of a deliberation and a decision, then (to co-opt Gibbard's unforgettable phrase) practical reasoning is "thinking how to live."[59]

Modified: At the same time, there are goods we may not be pursuing (but ought to be) and evils we may not be avoiding (but ought to be). We acquire new motivations only when we successfully make new evaluative judgments about what is to be pursued and avoided. Our fundamental motivation is to pursue the good and avoid evil. We acquire *new* motivations when we come to identify and affirm new practical reasons. These practical reasons only motivate because they link up with the initial, existing motivation.

59. Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

4.3 On Overriding Reasons

Modified: A final challenge that needs a response is this: moral reasons are sometimes treated as "overriding" or "verdictive" reasons that settle the question of what to do. Given the choice between, say, making a bit of easy money by fraud or making the same amount through honest but hard work, the prohibition against fraud is supposed to settle the matter. On my account, do prudential practical reasons weigh just as heavily as moral ones?

Modified: My answer is that the practical consideration that one ought never commit fraud is, in such a case, certainly overriding. However, sometimes prudential considerations are overriding, too. To take a different example, suppose Smith comes into a bit of money from an inheritance, and thus has a choice between spending it (innocently) on world travels or allocating it to a solid retirement plan. Even if Smith clearly needs more money in his retirement, the quandary ethicist would have no *moral* recommendation, because neither choice is obviously immoral in the sense that it violates one's duties to others. The character ethicist would: the practically wise person takes the longer-term benefit of saving over the short-term benefit of traveling to be overriding.

Modified: A normal human life presents practical reasoners with many situations in which reasons pertaining to moral virtue (narrowly defined) play little or no part. One must be sensitive not only to such reasons but to the broad range of practical reasons. All practical reasons must be ranked and weighed before a final, verdictive reason emerges. Any *reason to φ* is a practical reason that can feature in an overall account of *what to do*. What Anscombe calls "the verdictive ought" is simply what Foot calls the thing to do "all things considered."[60] It often happens that one's individual practical reasons conflict. McDowell is incorrect to persist in labeling the broader process of adjudicating such conflicts "virtue." He ought to call it practical wisdom. The practically wise person is the one who coordinates

60. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.

all other virtues and executes them to good ends.

Modified: I should respond here to one final objection a reader might have. Has my neo-Aristotelian view of practical reason defined away the possibility of immorality? If everyone who acts is "aiming at the good", doesn't this exculpate an agent's apparently immoral motives or ends? For example, someone might say, 'It's ridiculous to think that I always pursue the good, because I sometimes do wrong.' This objection misses the point. Of course practical reasoners sometimes do the wrong thing. The proper response is that we perceive the bad *as overall worthwhile.* If the immoral person acts wrongly, then he or she has misjudged the good. On the neo-Aristotelian view I am developing, immoral acts are rational mistakes.

Modified: But it remains true that if the immoral person *acts at all* then, according to the argument, he or she must by definition be pursuing some apparent good. To be practical rational necessarily means to pursue something *as good*, as desirable. Just as an epistemic agent might hold a false belief p without affirming the false *as false*, a practical agent might pursue a bad thing without pursuing it *as bad*. Rather, the immoral person fails in their practical reasoning to correctly rank and order specific goods. The imprudent person, for example, judges that it would be better to eat, drink, and be merry today rather than plan to avoid future ills. The cruel person judges that it would be better to cause suffering than to be kind.

Modified: Someone might say, "But sometimes I perceive the bad *as bad* and pursue it anyway." My view is that we are able to sometimes include an end we know to be bad into an overall set of practical reasons, which we still judge is the thing to do, all things considered. One might judge, for example, that smoking cigarettes is bad and still start if one judges (with some conflict) that the potential pleasures overrule. (Having become addicted to nicotine, the smoker's judgment that the potential pleasures *are not worth it* may not necessarily mean the smoker quits.)

I do not wish to suggest that identifying the thing to do is a smooth and easy project. It is no more or less difficult than the project of identifying what to believe is true.

Modified: The defendant of the procedural view is liable to point out that reasoning about ends is even messier than such theoretical reasoning. Indeed it is. But we must do it. People regularly argue, debate, and reason about ultimate ends. Suppose Smith says to Jones, "I'm concerned about you. You haven't returned my calls. You lost your job, and you are not eating. What's wrong?" It would be no consolation for Jones to respond, "Nothing's *wrong*. I'm destitute, alone, and unhealthy, but that is what I am *aiming* for." Smith would rightly judge that something had gone wrong such that Jones adopt such unhealthy and ridiculous aims.

Practical wisdom is the paramount virtue of practical rational animals. The upshot is that the foolish person – the habitually, incorrigibly foolish person responsible for his or her own folly – is, ipso facto, a bad practical rational primate. He or she is failing to do *the thing to do*.

What is good in this sense for human beings is specific to our species. The primary good of a kind for us is the human life form. The derivative goods for us are any and all things necessarily related to the human life form. In virtue of what we are, it is good for us to achieve humanity, to become fully human. We aim to become what we are. That is, we aim to become in actuality what we we already are potentially. Some of these goods are basic human goods toward which we are naturally inclined: food, shelter, companionship, knowledge, etc. They are starting points without which human beings would not be motivated to do anything at all.

I should clarify that a thing's status as a basic good is revisable. The normal process of practical reasoning about what to do can and sometimes does overrule the basic inclination toward a basic good in pursuit of some alternative good. The point is that this overruling judgment is not something over-and-above the practical pursuit toward the good

but another expression of the same pursuit. For example, some people overrule their inclination toward the basic good of human companionship by becoming a solitary monastic but they only do so in pursuit of *other* goods judged to be *better*.

Practical reasoning is the process whereby we determine the "sort of life that pertains" to creatures like us, then all particular practical reasonings about what to do in a given situation come to light as parts of this whole. This fits with the account of virtue defended above. There we saw that excellence in practical reasoning and rational practice aims at doing well with one's whole life. In other words, every short-term choice fits into a broader context of life projects such as what career to pursue, whether or not to marry, what friendships to maintain, and so on. And every long-term project fits into a broader context of one's answer to the maximally general question "how should one live?"

5. Conclusion

This chapter has defended in detail a neo-Aristotelian conception of practical reasoning. It is an intrinsically normative and evaluative process that defines the life form of practical, rational primates. On my account, the structure of practical reasoning is akin to theoretical reasoning. Whereas theoretical reasoning is by definition a normative process in which the true is to be believed and the false to be disbelieved, practical reasoning is by definition a normative process in which good is to be pursued while evil is to be avoided. These "first principles" are known by all functioning human adults. And while particular rational inquiries aim at identifying good reasons to believe or disbelieve a claim, particular particular practical inquires are aimed at identifying basic goods intrinsic to human life. I argued that the procedural view of practical reasoning is itself committed to certain substantive normative judgments, such as that one ought to do whatever will bring about one's chosen ends; but more to the point, I argued that the substantive view of practical reasoning is more

plausible: we reason about apparent goods and bads and act accordingly. Nevertheless, my account leaves room for the commonsense insight that success in practical reasoning (like theoretical reasoning) is by no means guaranteed.

Success in identifying how to live and what to do requires a complex process of adjudicating between all the available goods known to one, sorting them, ranking them with care and wisdom, and forming them into a complete life plan. The virtuous person knows what to do. Hence, contra McDowell, practical wisdom is a kind of *practical knowledge* (a "disposition to act well") while other virtues (as discussed in chapter 4) can include rational practices and habits formed over time that conduce to the realization of one's life form. When practical reasoning is well-functioning, it constitutes part of the natural excellence of creatures like us. The vicious person is hindered by practical error — or perhaps ignorance — of what to do. Success or failure along these lines has a major influence on one's other character traits. So practical wisdom an essential part of living a fully human life. A good answer to the question "how should one live?" will be not just a proposition but a plan. Even more exactly, the virtuous person does not simply *have a good plan* but *enacts* a good life plan. The appropriate answer to the question "how should one live?" is not just a philosophy but a life.

Chapter 6

Natural Reasoning

> Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations.
>
> —John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 3-4.

Is humanity just another instance of biological organism, subject to the same sort of evaluation as chimpanzees and dolphins, or is it a different type of organism on account of exemplifying sui generis powers of rational practice and practical reasoning? This question asks the reader to give an account not only of the relation between humans and other animals but an account of the relation between *nature* and *reason*. The precise relation between nature and reason is an almost intractable philosophical problem. Every major tradition – from Platonic rationalism, Humean empiricism, Hegelian objective idealism, to Jamesean neutral monism – presents a sophisticated stance on this relation.

The neo-Aristotelian account I have been developed aims to demonstrate how human natural norms are instances of a broader category of natural norms. These human norms are, for us, practical reasons. Human norms are objective in that they provide normative guidance on how to live, regardless of one's awareness of or endorsement of them.

Such norms become *for the practical reasoner* when he or she correctly identifies them as norms *for him or her*. Unless tragedy, injury, defect, and illness interrupt the process, a young human being naturally matures into the sort of practical rational primate has at least *one* practical reason: to do good and avoid evil. And every practical reasoner naturally strives to acquire new practical reasons by asking the "how to live?" question, thus adding to a growing stock of practical reasons.

The human norms I explored in the previous chapter – what Frey called "primitive goods" – are perceptible by any human being who has grown into adulthood and undergone a normal social process of formation. Namely, the obligation to acquire traditional virtues such as courage, moderation, and practical wisdom. These virtues represent good answers to the question of how to live; one ought to develop such virtues in oneself. Insofar as people acquires virtues, they overcomes the common temptations to vice and practical folly to benefit themselves and others; insofar as they succumb to vice and fall into practical irrationality, they fail to realize their own life form and suffer the intrinsic detriments thereof.

The account thus far developed has striven to be both *ethical* and *naturalistic*. Recalling the dispute between Foot and McDowell, I have argued that her sort of 'organic naturalism' is genuinely naturalistic in a way that social naturalism argues is impossible. The (apparently unique) ethical and rational norms intrinsic to living a human life are of a piece with the kinds of norms intrinsic to a wolf or white oak. Hans Fink points out that an ethical naturalist is "someone who insists on a fundamental continuity between the ethical and the natural."[1] Just how that continuity is to be cashed out is the focal point of the dispute between Foot's organic naturalism and McDowell's social naturalism.

One of the attractions of the Footian sort of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism is that it provides a unified account of nature and human nature. Foot's concept of natural

1. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 203.

normativity – intrinsic to life forms and natural ends – is a satisfying way of showing that continuity. For Foot, normativity is not exclusive to practically reasoning creatures like us. Every organism pursues its own goods – survival, reproduction, the exemplification of its proper life form. Julia Annas says:

> What is so helpful for ethics from this kind of biological naturalism is that we find that the normativity of our ethical discourse is not something which emerges mysteriously with humans and can only be projected back, in an anthropomorphic way, onto trees and their roots. Rather, we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already. It is part of the great merit of the work of Philippa Foot… to have stressed this point. Like many important philosophical points, it is obvious once pointed out…[2]

Nevertheless, Foot's organic naturalism is far from "obvious" to some. One of the alleged drawbacks, according to John McDowell, John Hacker-Wright, and others, is that "Foot's naturalism draws on a picture of the biological world at odds with the view embraced by most scientists and philosophers."[3] McDowell endorses bald naturalism when it comes to the "realm of law" that the natural sciences study. Are natural norms – including human norms of practical reasoning – simply outmoded by modern science? Though I have tried to diffuse this worry chapter 2, it is quite likely that something like this concern remains. For the self-reflective nature of human life creates special philosophical problems for the sort of naturalism I have developed. Humans are aware of and partially in control their own life form and natural, normative ends. Other organisms are not. Furthermore, when we scientifically reason about other organisms, it is commonly thought, we mostly describe. When we practically reason about ourselves, we also evaluate. So how could practical reasoning be fundamentally the same as descriptive, natural reasoning? The purpose of this chapter is to put questions like this in a broader philosophical context and offer a fuller response.

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2. Annas, "Virtue Ethics."
3. Hacker-Wright, "What Is Natural About Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" 308.

Section 1 sets up the discussion by presenting Chris Toner's four requirements that a successful neo-Aristotelian naturalism must meet if it is to overcome the sort of criticisms McDowell poses. I provide further details on how my account thus far has already satisfied three of the four.

Section 2 argues that McDowell's alternative to Footian naturalism fails to satisfy Toner's fourth requirement. I detail McDowell's concepts of first and second natures. Since his paradoxical views have caused some consternation among his philosophical readers, I first offer an explanation of his beguiling metaphilosophical project. I then explain how he deploys these concepts in his ethical project.

Section 3 brings multiple charges of inconsistency against McDowell's account of nature. First, he seems to both deny and affirm that some relational properties (such as *meriting*) are part of primary nature. Secondly, drawing from Hans Fink to distinguish different concepts of nature and scientific reasoning, I argue that McDowell's conception affirms two conflicting concepts. On either of two plausible conceptions of nature and the natural, my account demonstrates that practical reasoning is natural reasoning. Thirdly, McDowell's account unwittingly falls into the very sort of undesirable nature/human dualism he emphatically wishes to avoid. Fourthly, McDowell's intersubjective notions of both scientific and ethical reasoning lead to an incorrigible relativism. For each inconsistency, I show how my accounts of virtue and practical reason (developed in chapters 4 and 5) are more adequate to the task of meeting Toner's fourth requirement. I suggest "recursive naturalism" as an appropriate name for my view, since human beings are natural organisms able to practically reason about nature, about themselves, and about practical reasoning itself.

1. Four Requirements

A recent article by Chris Toner argues that neo-Aristotelians (such as Foot and Michael Thompson) have not yet adequately responded to McDowell's objections and satisfied four requirements "naturalism must deliver if it is to support a revived Aristotelian virtue ethics…"[4] Fortunately, our account thus far has satisfied three of the four.

The first requirement is that *natural norms must be intrinsically able to motivate the bearer of the nature.* Put differently, the natural human norms pertaining to our nature must be, for us, practical reasons. In chapter 5, I argued that practical reasons, by definition, motivate us. Practical reasoning is not simply one of many ways we can be motivated; it is the very capacity to be motivated by reasons. Practical reasoning is, of course, not the only way we can be *moved*. Plants and animals are inclined or moved to their good by unreasoning genetic "programs", instinct, fear, irrational appetite and so on. They are moved but have no further capacity to take these sources of movement *as* practical reasons. Humans are inclined toward their good *both* by the same impulses (instinct, emotion, desire, etc.) *and* by practical reason. I also argued that the first object of human practical reasoning is a quite general conception of what is to be done and pursued (the good) and what is to be avoided (evil). By 'good' we did not mean a non-natural entity or property apprehended theoretically but any natural entity or property apprehended *as* choice-worthy, desirable, or to-be-pursued. As Frey clarifies:

> Although natural inclinations depend upon conceptual apprehension, we should not be tempted to think that they are objects of contemplation. These goods, as first principles of practical reason, are apprehended as ends – as objects of pursuit rather than as objects of contemplative knowledge.[5]

The objects of pursuit are many: friendship, knowledge, money, pleasure, and so on. I did

4. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.
5. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 88.

not attempt to give a complete objective list. I rather argued that the natural human norms pertaining to our life form are on on the list. While there are many actions of humans, there is only one kind of human action: the unique process of taking natural inclinations and natural norms as prima facie practical reasons, reflecting on them, and organizing them all into a rational plan for what to do, all things considered.

Modified: This conclusion goes a long way to solving what Jennifer Frey calls the "Irrelevance Problem." She says:

> [Irrelevance] is a more sophisticated presentation of the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy.' But rather than crudely rejecting any move from 'is' to 'ought', it merely blocks the inference at one crucial juncture—the inference from the 'is' of the species, to the 'ought' that governs the rational will.[6]

Modified: As we saw in chapter 5, McDowell argues that – granting the existence of natural human norms to seek food, shelter, comfort, survival, society, and so on – these norms are not necessarily binding. His discussion of the "rational wolf" illustrates the objection.[7] Although a wolf is "supposed to" hunt in packs because that is a formal property of its nature, if a wolf were endowed with *logos* it would be just as free as human beings are to step back from such natural norms and either endorse or reject them. Nevertheless, even this higher order adjudication is subject to natural norms of practical reasoning. A practical rational primate ought to order his or her natural inclinations according to what is, all things considered, good for human beings. Even though I find within myself the desire, say, to eat good food, such norms direct me to eat certain things at certain times and in certain ways. A habitual glutton might feel a craving to overeat between meals, but decide that, all things considered, it is better to be moderate. Or an anorexic might feel psychological pressures to eat too little, but decide that, all things considered, it is better to eat a sufficient amount.

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6. Ibid., 14.
7. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

Toner's second requirement is this: *natural norms must be intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of the nature.* Natural human norms must not be merely given; they must somehow justify themselves. Reflection must reveal that the norms are *good* practical reasons to all rational agents. The norms need not, Toner admits, *automatically* persuade a Callicles to repent of his wickedness. However, they must be *able to* become justifiable motivations under normal circumstances. He says:

> …I say "intrinsically able to motivate or justify" rather than "intrinsically motivating or justifying": the natural norm is such that it can motivate or convince persons, provided they are not in too dysfunctional a state. In the same way a rose is such as to be intrinsically able to convince us of its being red. Its failure actually to do so in my case because I am color-blind or jaundiced does not impugn this intrinsic ability. Natural norms can motivate and convince because they are neither "mere facts" about the way a given species does go on nor "brute desires" a given species happens to have as a result of its evolutionary history.[8]

Modified: It is true that mere general descriptive facts do not motivate and that simple brute desires to behave in a certain way are not necessarily overriding motivators. However, as I have argued in chapters 2 and 3, natural norms are not reducible to either mere facts or brute desires. Rather, natural norms both characterize what traits count as virtues for practical rational creatures like us, and are intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of that nature.

Modified: This requirement affords the opportunity to respond to what Elijah Millgram calls the "Pollyanna problem", according to which any honest, empirical assessment of human natural norms would include vicious norms as well as virtuous ones because justice and injustice are both statistically "normal."[9] Anscombe anticipates this worry when

8. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 235.

9. Chrisoula Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," *Social Theory and Practice* 32, no. 1 (2006): 61–73; Elijah Millgram, "Reasonably Virtuous," in *Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as a Foundation for Moral Theory (Cambridge University Press)*, 2005, 133–67; Scott Woodcock, "Philippa Foot's Virtue Ethics Has an Achilles' Heel," *Dialogue* 45, no. 03 (2006): 445–68.

she says:

> The search for "norms" might lead someone to look for laws of nature, as if the universe were a legislator; but in the present day this is not likely to lead to good results: it might lead one to eat the weaker according to the laws of nature, but would hardly lead anyone nowadays to notions of justice.[10]

Modified: Millgram et. al., might object that I was winking at the dark side of human nature when I built my inductive case for the generic that the human beings are practical rational primates. After all, empirical sociology can establish the truth of such generics as: politicians lie, sociopaths murder, businesses cheat, criminals steal, countries wage unjust war, parents abuse their children, and so on. Likewise, empirical biology shows that some acorns become fully grown, mature oaks, but other acorns become stultified, sickly specimens. (Most acorns never become anything other than acorns before they disintegrate into dust in the soil.) Some animals protect their young while other animals abandon or even consume their young. Are we supposed to allow, then, that "Human beings abandon their young" is a generic truth, indicative of the human life form? Are we obligated to fulfill all such norms? Just some? Which ones?

Modified: I think this problem, while important, is ultimately specious. In order to even pose the objection, Millgram et. al. have to discriminate between good and bad norms. Millgram cites such traits such as dishonesty, infidelity, and cruelty that are statistically prevalent but obviously immoral. The neo-Aristotelian can agree with his evaluation. Furthermore, good norms are not mere statistical generalizations. When we examine the behaviors of organisms, we make begin with generalizations. Even constructing scientific accounts of organisms, we do not stop there, but sift through them. Some remain mere generalizations about how some creatures happen to behave, while others are classified as essential or natural to how that creature behaves. The latter are natural norms. I have already argued that a good example of such natural norms is that humans are practical rational

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

primates who mature into practically wise and virtuous agents. But I do not mean that every such example is easy. How should criminals be punished? What kinds of sexual practices are acceptable? How should societies relate to one another? Aristotle points out that raiding neighboring tribes is a near-universal form of wealth-acquisition and concludes that it is natural – i.e., morally acceptable. I would object that mutual respect or arms-length trading (which are also statistically common) are morally acceptable. The point here is not that every natural human norm is easy to identify. But disputable cases are disputes over the very question of which behaviors are essential and which unnatural.

Furthermore, we do not need to concede a fundamental discontinuity between the kind of discrimination between good and bad norms essential to ethical reasoning and the kind of discrimination between normal and pathological that is essential to biological and other scientific reasoning. Rather, the process of sifting between various generalizations is one and the same, whether in scientific or ethical accounts. Moral and rational defects can be overwhelmingly common. Regardless of how statistically common the failure to conform to such norms, the discernment between virtuous and vicious is akin to the discernment between healthy specimens and unhealthy ones, normal animals and pathological ones. Indeed, part of having a properly-formed mind is that one can distinguish between natural norms and mere generalizations.

For example, the *National Geographic* narrates how a sloth bear in Washington D.C. gave birth in captivity to three cubs. The first one was immediately killed and eaten by the mother, but the second were nurtured and cared for. The zookeepers were appalled. When, after a week of caring for the remaining cubs, the mother killed and ate another, they intervened to save the third.[11] This event posed the question: is something wrong with the

11. Virginia Morell (2014, March 28). "Why Do Animals Sometimes Kill Their Babies?" *National Geographic* (March 28, 2014). Accessed online. http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/03/140328-sloth-bear-zoo-infanticide-chimps-bonobos-animals/

mother bear? First, the zookeepers observed the facts: the mother ate one cub and nurtured (temporarily) the other two. Then they made two quite different generalizations: (1) mother bears care for their young, and (2) mother bears kill and eat their young. The contradiction demands sifting. The zookeepers then discerned which is the natural norm. University of Southern California primatologist Craig Stanford points out that the consensus among biologists is to affirm the generic truth: a mother cares for her young. As a normative generic, we can say without a change in meaning that a mother bear is *supposed* to care for her young, and hence that infanticide is pathological. New data can confirm or disconfirm this evaluative judgment. For instance, the third cub of the sloth bear whom the zookeepers intervened to save turned out to suffer an elevated white blood cell count. It is possible that the other cubs were sick as well. The zookeepers speculated that the mother somehow knew this and so killed the ailing cubs. If this were true, it would give rise to a new normative generic: a mother cares for her healthy young. If it turned out that the two other cubs were *not* in fact ailing, the mother's behavior would be classified as pathological.

Similarly for humans and other primates.[12] Psychologist Christine Lawson narrates the horrifying story of when a mother drowned her two young children in order to ingratiate herself to a man she was dating who said, offhandedly, that he did not want children:

> [In 1992,] Susan Smith drove to a lake near Union, South Carolina, and parked her car at the top of a boat ramp. She stepped out of the car, released the parking break, and let the car roll into the water with her babies strapped inside. Covering her ears with her hands so she could not hear their screams, she ran up the ramp as the car rolled toward the lake. It too six minutes for the car to sink, drifting away from the ramp, bobbing nose first into the water.[13]

The father of the children and Susan's ex-husband shared his recollection:

12. Jane Goodall, "Infant Killing and Cannibalism in Free-Living Chimpanzees," *Folia Primatologica* 28, no. 4 (1977): 259–82

13. Christine Ann Lawson, *Understanding the Borderline Mother* (Jason Aronson, Incorporated, 2000), 122.

> There were some troubling things that I learned in the aftermath of the killings… There's only one conclusion I could make. Susan watched the car as it sank. This was too awful, too terrible to imagine. Susan waiting, seeing Michael and Alex die. If that were true, there is no doubt something truly evil in Susan's character, something unspeakable.[14]

Statistically, the vast majority of human parents do an adequate job, but we do not posit "parents care for their children" as a mere statistical likelihood that admits of exceptions. Rather, psychologists correctly judge such exceptional cases of parental indifference and cruelty as normative errors. This particular parent was not merely a statistical anomaly but an example of a psychological disorder (in this case, Borderline Personality Disorder). Understanding and labeling her disorder should not lead us to soften the normative evaluation of her actions. (Many Borderline parents manage their disorder and do an adequate job in spite of it.) Susan Smith's behavior was criminal, but it was also pathological and – as David Smith said, truly evil. Lawson explains that "Susan Smith sacrifice of her children in order not to be abandoned by her boyfriend, the wealthy heir to the town's largest industry."[15] To take a significant other's offhand comment about not wanting children *as a reason* to murder one's own is a devastating error in practical reasoning. The correct practical reasoning is almost too obvious to need stating: There is *good reason* to take care of one's child. Parents are *supposed to* care for their young, even when doing so is difficult or costly. These natural norms seem to me excellent examples of the sort of natural norms that are intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of human nature.

The same pattern holds when constructing norms pertaining to a whole host of virtues. As Toner mentions, "The requirements of the virtues can be articulated into what Hursthouse calls v-rules (do what is just, what is courageous, and so forth)."[16] I would articulate such norms or "v-rules" in the form of generics: human beings do what is just,

14. Ibid., 122.
15. Ibid., 123.
16. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 242.

what is wise, etc. The generic picks out what human beings naturally do; the failure to it is, accordingly, a defect.

Toner's third requirement is this: *natural norms must be anchored in and express universal human nature.* In chapter 3 I defended a definition of "universal human nature," that we are practical rational primates. And I argued that the natural norm that one ought to become a fully mature practical rational primate (as represented by virtuous and wise exemplars) is successfully "anchored in" that nature. More specifically, all the virtues of rational practice and practical reasoning are examples of such norms. For, as Toner says:

> … the possession and exercise of the virtues is essential to human flourishing as dependent rational animals. Thus natural norms or the requirements of the virtues, in articulating what we need (to have, to be, to do) to flourish, are anchored in and express universal human nature.[17]

There are many examples of natural norms that philosophers plausibly take to be intrinsically justifying to human beings. I mentioned in chapter 4 a few examples from Russ Shafer-Landau, such as that "it is wrong to take pleasure in another's pain, to taunt and threaten the vulnerable, to prosecute and punish those known to be innocent, and to sell another's secrets solely for personal gain."[18] Richard Boyd follows Hilary Putnam in calling such norms "quasi-analytic":

> Indeed, many fundamental scientific laws (as well as some scientific truisms) and many fundamental moral principles have the property which we might call quasi-analyticity (see, e.g., Putnam 1962). Because of their conceptual and methodological centrality, even when we know that their justification is a posteriori rather than a priori, we find it extremely difficult to envision circumstances under which they would be disconfirmed. For as long as they occupy so central a conceptual and methodological role, they are immune from empirical revision, and principles incompatible with them are ineligible for empirical confirmation (let's call them quasi-analytically ineligible). As Putnam indicates, quasi-analyticity and quasi-analytic ineligibility can be altered only by pretty serious conceptual and theoretical "revolutions,"

17. Ibid., 242.
18. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, chap. 11.

> whose directions are all but impossible to anticipate prior to the innovations or crises which precipitate them. The principle that torturing children is wicked and the fundamental laws of quantum mechanics are both candidates for quasi-analyticity.[19]

(**Modified**:) I think Boyd and Putnam are correct here. Some ethical laws are on a par with some scientific laws in being pretty well incorrigible. While the west has undergone "conceptual revolutions" that have overturned deeply-held traditions such as, say, slavery or the torture of prisoners, we can point to even deeper quasi-analytic principles that have never undergone revolution in the west or (to my knowledge) anywhere in the world: the importance of caring for children, the value of truth. One can find persons and societies that *in fact* violate these norms, but not that *in principle* believe children should be corrupted and that everyone should deceive themselves and others.

Modified: If quasi-analytic ethical laws indeed exist, the question is how to explain this. Recalling Frey's discussion of Aquinas "first principle of practical reason" can help us to draw the proper relation between these norms of morality and norms of practical reason. That fundamental normative principle was that good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided. This principle provides that major premise for a practical syllogism behind every rational action, where the minor premise is some virtually unrevisable evaluative judgment: e.g., evil is to be avoided, and torturing children is evil, therefore torturing children is to be avoided; good is to be pursued, loyalty is good, therefore loyalty is to be pursued. Practical irrationality does not arise when one judges that good is to be avoided and evil pursued but when one makes a fundamental mistake about what is good or evil and, hence, judges it to be the thing to do.

Toner's fourth requirement is this: *first and second nature must be related so that the second is a natural outgrowth of the first, and so that that in our given makeup is (first) natural which does tend toward an ethically mature second nature.* While McDowell believes

19. Boyd, "Finite Beings, Finite Goods," 520.

that his own alternative to Footian naturalism more adequately meets this requirement, I believe that a consistent reading can show that his account falls short.

2. First and Second Nature

Recall the quotation from chapter 1 that explains McDowell's objection to Foot's organic naturalism. He says:

> I doubt whether we can understand a positive naturalism in the right way without first rectifying a constriction that the concept of nature is liable to undergo in our thinking. Without such preliminaries, what we make of ethical naturalism will not be the radical and satisfying alternative to Mrs Foot's targets that naturalism can be. Mrs Foot's writings do not pay much attention to the concept of nature in its own right, and this leaves a risk that her naturalism may seem to belong to this less satisfying variety.[20]

McDowell makes clear that his dispute with Foot concerns her "concept of nature." McDowell's picture of the relation between nature and reason appeals to "second nature." He says he aims to "formulate a conception of reason that is, in one sense, naturalistic: a formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside."[21] McDowell is an ethical naturalist in that he also insists on a "fundamental continuity" between the ethical and the natural. It is clear that he does not wish to fall into a dualism between biology and rationality. Nevertheless, it seems to me, he sets up another equally pernicious dualism.

In order to make good on this criticism, it would be prudent to first put McDowell's ethical project in metaphilosophical context. McDowell is a proponent of "therapeutic philosophy." He says he is influenced by two main sources: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[22] From the Socratic tradition he draws a way of thinking in which dualisms

20. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 167.
21. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
22. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, preface.

do not even arise. And from the later Wittgenstein he draws a way of doing "therapeutic" philosophy – philosophy that 'leaves everything as it is.'[23] McDowell believes many philosophical puzzles arise not from the puzzling nature of reality itself but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": dualisms need to be *exorcised*. He is both an anti-realist and an *anti*-anti-realist. He is therefore always fighting on two fronts, attacking a position while trying to avoid supporting its apparent opposite.

This feature of his thought is liable to puzzle and even frustrate some philosophers.[24] A bit of context can help make his project comprehensible in both its ethical and metaphysical expressions. For example, consider his philosophy of mind. In *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism (compare with: Footian organic naturalism) and "Rampant Platonism" (compare with: non-naturalism) by arguing that even primary qualities are not given to us in experience without the involvement of spontaneous conceptual capacities. He wants to accept the modern scientific picture of nature as "bald nature", a mechanical "realm of law", disenchanted from values, norms, ends, and reasons. But he does not want to accept that human rationality is likewise mechanical. Instead, he argues that humanity exists in a space of reasons where we recognize reasons for belief and reasons for action.

Even in *Mind and World*, his solution depends on a neo-Aristotelian conception of human beings as practical reasoners. Understanding human reasoning in contrast to nature "requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[25] In that book, he deploys the concept of "second nature" to describe the way human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing by *Bildung* – that is, by education, formation, or cultivation.[26] Practical wisdom is one example of a virtue that the young human being

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

24. For examples of both puzzlement and genuine frustration, see: Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Macdonald, *McDowell and His Critics* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

25. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 77.

26. Bildung (German): formation, education; from *bild*: form, image.

does not have but that may be developed by formation. At first, the ethical demands of practical wisdom are not even perceptible to the young. They have the natural potential to become aware of, and answerable to, the demands of practical wisdom. Slowly, that potential is actualized or inculcated and a moral outlook is attained. Human beings are initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing (Bildung) which instills the appropriate shape in their lives. So initiated, practically wise behavior is not just a new kind of behavior but the maturation and development of a new kind of faculty in the human animal. He says that "[The ethical demands of reason] are essentially within reach of human beings. So practical wisdom is second nature to its possessors."[27] In this sense, a mature human being can be rightly described as "doing what comes naturally" when he or she engages in certain rational activities that have been deeply habituated.

McDowell's ethical writings employ the same solution expressed in almost the same terms. For example, "Values as Secondary Qualities" argues against both anti-realism and anti-anti-realism, but instead of opposing a vacillation between empirical realism and rampant Platonism, he opposes a vacillation between Footian naturalism and pure subjectivism. Instead of arguing that even primary qualities involve spontaneous conceptual capacities, McDowell argues that even the identification of values involves the subjective or intersubjective capacity to create value.

Subjectivists such as Mackie, Allan Gibbard, and Simon Blackburn believe that normativity is "projected" by philosophers and scientists onto the natural facts. McDowell grants that Mackie et. al. are right to assert that values, like secondary qualities, cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states."[28] There is no such thing as "to-be-pursuedness" existing as a Lockean primary quality in first nature. Whereas Foot thinks that normative facts are response-independent features of (first) nature, McDowell

27. Ibid., 84.

28. John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 139.

dismisses this possibility out of hand. He says that naive realism about value is "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[29] In considering the notion of intrinsically normative natural facts impossible to take seriously, McDowell agrees with Mackie: the "central doctrine of European moral philosophy" is a mistake;[30] it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are.

A reader unfamiliar with McDowell's metaphilosophical project might conclude that he must think values are not objective features of nature and hence that they are purely subjective. But it does not necessarily follow that values are illusory projections onto the world. A secondary quality is not "a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[31] The problem with subjectivism is that it misses the way in which "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[32]

McDowell's alternative presents first nature as consisting of both Lockean primary qualities, which are response-independent, and Lockean secondary qualities, which are response-dependent dispositional properties. Colors and values are natural in the sense that they are dispositional properties. Color-properties must be defined partly by their "objective" or response-independent aspects and partly phenomenologically. It makes no sense to speak of what *redness is* apart from perceptions of red *in perceivers*. Similarly, he argues, it makes no sense to speak of "dangerousness" apart from a subject who is potentially vulnerable or "rightness" apart from a subject who potentially judges the value of a thing. Even so the property of "being such as to look red" may or may not *have ever been perceived as red* by any observer (if, for example, the appropriate conditions have never obtained). So a Lockean secondary quality may be response-independent in some sense, but it is not *redness as such*. It is the dispositional property that is disposed to present us with an appearance of

29. Ibid., 132.
30. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).
31. McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," 136.
32. Ibid., 131.

a particular phenomenal character. In the same way, goodness, badness, and other values are grounded in "second nature."[33] The space of reasons in which our rational capacities operate makes us sensible to those dispositional properties of primary nature which become, for us, values such as goodness and badness. And, as we saw in chapter 5, he thinks that the normativity of theoretical and practical reasoning is merely grounded in our shared form of life.

3. Inconsistencies

McDowell's view is, I think, ingenious, but vulnerable to a four criticisms. First, McDowell thinks that treating practical reasons as primary qualities of nature is "impossible to take seriously" because he wonders "how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[34] Is this really so hard to imagine? We can find an example of this mundane relation in his own article.

To illustrate his point about human responsiveness to value, he presents an analogue in the animal kingdom which he (somewhat playfully) labels his "theory of danger." His theory of danger is that there is something about predators, say, that is really dangerous to their prey. The immanent presence of a bear does not just cause fear in a rabbit but *merits* it. To describe a bear as dangerous to rabbits is to assert something about both bears, about rabbits, and about their place in the animal kingdom on our planet. The rabbit does not need to use concepts or make rational judgments to see the bear as dangerous; it merely needs its natural perceptual capacities and its instincts. When a prey observes a predator, it feels fear; but the fear-response is not obviously reducible to a perception of some purely descriptive property, such as the bear's fur (other non-predators have fur) or its size (other non-predators are just as large or larger). Nor is "dangerousness" something projected by

33. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 188 and following.
34. McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," 132.

the rabbit onto the bear. Rather, the fear arises in response to the danger, or perhaps the bear-as-dangerous. Likewise, to describe a particular food as disgusting (say, rotten fruit) is to assert something about humans, about rotten fruit, and about the relation between the two. Given the kinds of beings we are, and given the natural properties of rotten food, the fact that we ought not to eat it seems to be a straightforward, natural normative fact. The brute presence of a bear stands in an internal relation to the exercise of the rabbit's natural sensibility: it had better run. In humans, the brute fact that parents have a child stands in an internal relation to the exercise of our natural, rational sensibility: they had better care for the child.

3.1 Restricted or Unrestricted?

Secondly, McDowell thinks the Footian sort of naturalism (which he called "naive realism") is impossible to take seriously because he thinks the view of that nature consist of both descriptive and some normative primary qualities is inconsistent with modern science. He says, "The most striking occurrence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science."[35] Although he thinks Aristotle provides the right cues, the modern scientific picture of nature is "disenchanted" from intrinsic moral values or human norms.

In *Mind and World*, he expresses his view by saying that human beings "partially re-enchant" nature. Perhaps this is why some have objected to McDowell's account of the relation between nature and reason as being insufficiently naturalistic. For example, James Lenman 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."[36] The 'many philoso-

35. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 174.
36. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," sec. 4.1, footnote 18.

phers' Lenman alludes to are probably physicalists or materialists. Physicalism is indeed a paradigmatic sort of naturalism, and McDowell a firm critic of physicalism. Nevertheless, I shall try to show that McDowell's view also has rightful claim to that title. McDowell's flaw is not an idiosyncratic definition of 'nature' but an inconsistent one.

Modified: Before we consider McDowell's definition of 'nature, we should ask: how do philosophers commonly deploy the term? Russ Shafer-Landau does an adequate job of exposing the flaws in a variety of common ways of stipulating what 'natural' means:

> Something is natural just in case, necessarily, it is . . . what? It isn't such as to be touchable, or tangible. Being a species isn't touchable. Neither is being a quark. Being natural is not the same as being non-conventional: moral properties, if non-naturalists are right, are certainly that. It isn't the feature of being material: certain physical fields, or vacuums, are natural in anyone's book, and yet not composed of matter. It isn't the feature of being causally efficacious: being such that everything is either red or not, being divisible by itself, and being self-identical are causally inert natural properties. Being natural is not the same as being a feature of the world prior to, or considered apart from, the presence of humans. For being human, or a human artefact, is a natural feature. Nor can we define a natural property as any property that is not evaluative. For moral properties are evaluative on anyone's reckoning, and so we would, by definitional fiat, thereby rule ethical naturalism out of court. It can't be got rid of as easily as that.[37]

Modified: Some readers may object to the level of detail at which I attempt to capture a definition of 'nature.' They might insist we must simply stipulate our definition of 'nature' and move on. I rather think it is a scandal that so many writers pass over such weighty matters with pithy, commonplaces rather than rigorous definitions. Shafer-Landau's discussion of nature and naturalism is exceptionally thorough, he is still forced to settle on a "disciplinary" definition of the natural: "Naturalism… claims that all real properties are those that would figure ineliminably in perfected versions of the natural and social sciences. Since we don't have any of those versions in hand, we can't be absolutely sure about our

37. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 58–59.

naturalistic inventory."[38] The indeterminacy of such a disciplinary definition of the natural is unsatisfactory for someone defending the 'naturalism' of a theory against the accusation of 'non-naturalism.' When it comes to such important and highly ambiguous concepts as nature and science, much more is needed. Hans Fink says:

> This is a terminological issue, but it is not easy to resolve simply by choosing one's definition of 'nature' and then sticking to it. No account of naturalism should forget the fact that 'nature' is, as Raymond Williams puts it, 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (Williams 1981: 184), or as Hume puts it, a word 'than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal' (THN: III.I.II.)…Indeed, it is a deep root of ambiguity that we can talk about the nature of art, law, language, culture, morality, normativity, history, civilization, spirit, mind, God, or nothingness even if we otherwise regard these as non-natural, that is, as not belonging to nature as a realm. There is no contradiction in talking about the nature of the unnatural, the supernatural, or the non-natural, just as it is an open question what the nature of the natural is.[39]

Modified: In short, the concept of nature is treacherously ambiguous. For the remainder of this section, I shall summarize the key details of Hans Fink's essay on the topic, which clears up much of this ambiguity. Then I shall then show how McDowell embraces two mutually incompatible options.

Fink begins by pointing out that there are at least two broad kinds of conceptions of nature: The first is "Unrestricted nature" a conception which leaves nothing out. Fink explains the unrestricted conception in this way:

> [The term 'unrestricted nature'] would express the idea that there is one world only, and that that world is the realm of nature, which is taken to include the cultural, artificial, mental, abstract and whatever else there may prove to be. There are no realms above or beyond nature. To be is to be in nature and to be in continuity with everything else in nature. Even the greatest and deepest differences are differences within nature rather than differences between nature and something else.[40]

38. Ibid., 59.
39. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 206.
40. Ibid., 206.

The alternative to unrestricted nature is (2) "restricted nature." Restricted nature picks out some subset of things as natural, exclusive of anything 'non-natural,' unnatural, or super-natural. Unrestricted naturalism is ecumenical. Restricted naturalism is parsimonious. Unrestricted naturalism is simple. Restricted naturalisms are legion. For example, Fink lists eight different conceptions by which one can use 'natural' to distinguish from the non-natural: the world unaffected by intelligent intervention (e.g., the arrangement of trees in the Yukon) is natural as opposed to the world so affected (a rows of trees along a city street). Or, as Fink says, 'nature' could refer to "the empirical world as opposed to the intelligible world of the abstract, logical, or mathematical". And there are several other ways in which the restricted conception can be cashed out.

The advantage of the unrestricted conception is that it does not try, in advance, to stipulate what is and is not real. This can do the trick of resolving disputes about what is natural. As Fink puts it, "Nothing less than a naturalism that deserves to be presented as absolute could help break the spell of bald naturalism without merely replacing one restricted sort of naturalism with another and thus keeping the oscillations going."[41] On unrestricted naturalism, even culture, art, rationality, intelligent intervention, and so on are part of the all. Fink's comment on the John Dewey passage in the epigraph above is this:

> On this conception the aesthetical (and the ethical) are not independent of nature, but they are not somehow based on nature or supervening on it either; rather, they simply are nature in some of its manifest operations. To think otherwise is both to mystify the aesthetical (and ethical) and to trivialize nature. The man-made, the artificial, the cultural, the historical, the ethical, the normative, the mental, the logical, the abstract, the mysterious, the extraordinary, are all examples of ways of being natural rather than examples of ways of being non-natural. Nature is never *mere* nature. That which is *more* than *mere* is nature, too.[42]

The disadvantage of the unrestricted conception is that it is tautologous: one can no longer

41. Ibid., 219.
42. Ibid., 217.

use the accusation of "non-naturalism" as a weapon against opponents with a competing ontology. It obviously makes no sense to criticize someone for positing entities "over and above" nature after defining "natural" as "real" and hence "non-natural" as "unreal" by definition. As Stephen Brown says, "If by 'nature' we mean 'everything that is,' then of course there is nothing outside nature."[43]

Modified: The advantage and disadvantage of the restricted conception is the same: on the one hand, we can classify some entities as non-natural in advance, and exclude or bracket them; on the other hand, we are obligated to provide a principled justification for the classification of unfavored entities that doesn't, at the same time, exclude some favored entities. Fink's discussion of Plato's *Laws* shows how tricky this classification can be. In the *Laws*, the Athenian distinguishes three kinds of events and three corresponding kinds of causal explanation. First, the growth of plants and the orbit of the sun etc., come about by nature (*physis*). Second, anything that does not come about by nature or art comes about by chance, e.g., leaves fall into this or that pattern and mountain ranges form into this or that shape, etc.. Third, houses have roofs and humans wear clothes by art.

The Athenian then asks, which of these three types of events are "natural"? The first hypothesis, which he eventually rejects, is that the first two are natural – namely, nature and chance. They are natural because they come about prior to and independent of intervention from humans or gods. By this classification, however, the natural excludes not only the supernatural but the cultural, the fictional, the aesthetic, and so on. The Athenian calls this conception of nature "dangerous", because it makes everything having to do with intelligence non-natural.

The second hypothesis, which the Athenian defends, is that the third kind of event (art) is the natural kind. He tries to prove that "soul is necessarily prior in origin to things

43. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature*, 2.

which belong to body, seeing that soul is older than body."[44] He first defines 'soul' as self-movement, and the cause of motion in other things, and 'body' as the things moved. Regardless of the merits of the Athenian's argument, it should be plain that the two hypotheses agree that the "natural" kind of event and cause is the *primary* one. Fink calls the Athenian's thesis " pretty rampant Platonism" but points out that it is "clearly presented as an account of the soul as natural because primary in existence… mind is prior to world."[45] To illustrate the point, he shows how Aristotle defends a similar priority of form over matter: "Some identify the nature or substance of a natural object with the immediate constituent… e.g., wood is the 'nature' of the bed… [others] that 'nature' is the shape or form."[46] Fink's comment is:

> Like in Plato, we find here both a definition of the word 'nature' (an inner source or cause of being moved and being at rest) and two competing conceptions of what that source is, namely matter and form (the material and the formal cause in Aristotle's sense). Aristotle himself finds it most satisfying to regard the formal (and the teleological or final) cause as the nature of x.[47]

If soul is the primary sense of nature, then body is "second nature." Mind (art, intelligence, reason) is the paradigmatic, primary thing against which mere body is contrasted. A final quotation from Fink puts the stakes clearly:

> The Athenian doesn't just leave the concept physis to the 'men of science'. He does not first accept their conception of nature and then confront them with the claim that there is something extra-natural – the soul or the gods – which they have disregarded and which is in fact prior to nature. No. Like McDowell the Athenian is eager to have nature on his side. He therefore challenges the scientists' right to restrict the term 'nature' to the soulless, partly necessary and partly accidental combinations of the elements.[48]

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44. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato*, *Laws* 891cff.
45. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 215.
46. Ibid., 216, quoting from Aristotle, *Physics*, 2014 2, 1 (192b7ff).
47. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 216.
48. Ibid., 214.

Fink's distinction between unrestricted and restricted conceptions of nature illuminates a surprising fact about the ideological struggle between bald naturalism and non-naturalistic idealism: both are forms of restricted naturalism. Classical materialism (bald naturalism) is one paradigmatic form of naturalism. But the idealist, too, can rightly lay claim to the title of naturalism – and not in a "Pickwickian" sense. Whatever one holds to be the "inner source or cause" of a thing, the immediate constituent matter or the shape, one is a 'naturalist.' Each account lays claim to the title 'naturalism', and impugns its rival as 'non-naturalistic'.

McDowell I think rightly sees that bald naturalistic materialism and non-naturalistic idealism merely presume their preferred conception of restricted nature and accuse the other side of 'non-naturalism.' For example, some restricted naturalists simply beg the question against idealism by defining nature as a material, spatio-temporal, causal system studied by natural scientific methods. Other restricted naturalists beg the question against materialism by defining nature as the formal, immaterial, ideal order studied by rational or practical methods. My point is not to defend either one but to suggest that logical consistency demands we choose one or the other restricted conception of nature (or else resort to the unrestricted conception).

Modified: We can now more exactly pose the challenge to McDowell's account: is he employing an unrestricted conception of nature or a restricted one? If a restricted conception of nature, which? On one hand, McDowell rejects the restricted conception of nature offered him by classical materialism. He variously impugns this cluster of views as bald naturalism, philistine scientism, naive realism, etc. On the other hand, he also explicitly rejects the restricted naturalisms of rampant Platonism or Kantian idealism.[49] It would seem, then, that he has selected the unrestricted view of nature by default.

Instead of explicitly embracing the unrestricted conception without qualification, he puts the ball in one cup and then moves it around to the other side, pretending the ball

49. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*. Chapter 6

was in the other cup all along. He keeps his conception of nature restricted (anti-platonist, anti-supernatural) while *calling* it unrestricted (neither idealist nor physicalist). Like the materialist, he still wants to wield "non-naturalism" as a rhetorical weapon against some; but like the idealist, he wants to wield "philistine scientism" as a rhetorical weapon against others. McDowell claims to deny dualism by employing an unrestricted conception of nature while fully endorsing a restricted conception of nature. The McDowellian picture of nature is simultaneously restricted and unrestricted.

My view, by contrast, is that organisms (including human beings) are part of the natural order – and that organic norms (including human norms) are natural. It is clear that, on unrestricted naturalism, this way of stating things poses no problems. If organisms and organic norms can exist in the scientific account of the world, then they are "natural" by definition.

Modified: What about the various restricted naturalisms? I think the only position excluded by my argument is bald naturalism or classical materialism. Like McDowell, I think the restricted, mechanical conception of nature is refuted by the existence of practical rational primates like ourselves. As Fink says, "McDowell has convincingly shown that what Bernard Williams calls the absolute conception of reality is merely restricted, bald naturalism ideologically presented as absolute."[50] Unlike McDowell, I think bald naturalism misunderstands all living organisms. James Barham captures the dualism into which

50. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism. 219, quoting *Mind, Value, and Reality* 112-31, especially section 5. Roy Wood Sellars provides a pure specimen of such ideological question-begging: "I mean that naturalism takes nature in a definite way as identical with reality, as self-sufficient and as the whole of reality. And by nature is meant the space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed." (Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism? 217) Note that the first sentence explicitly endorses an unrestricted conception of nature while the next sentence secretly slides the ball into the other cup, overtly stipulating that the "space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed" is "identical with reality." Whether that stipulation is true is the very question at hand. No one disputes that unrestricted nature is all there is; but some do dispute the implicit assumption that the space-time-causal-system is all there is.

McDowell unwittingly falls:

> …the philosophical literature tends to work with a scientifically outdated image of living things as rigid "machines." This results in a picture in which only human beings (or at most the higher animals) can be properly ascribed purposes and agency in the full normative sense. From this perspective, we appear to be faced with an unappealing choice between eliminating teleology and normativity from our picture of nature altogether and understanding these phenomena as they are manifested in our own human form of life as floating free from any grounding in the natural world.[51]

Modified: I have problemetized the reductive picture of nature as a mathematical order excluding not only reasoning but fundamental categories such as organic life in chapter 2. Even on some restricted forms of naturalism, the best evidence from biology suggests that there are such things as natural norms. We cannot build a scientific account of any organism without them. The picture of nature that emerges is one in which the natural and normative worlds coincide at the level of biological life. So, as long as the restricted form of naturalism includes both descriptive facts studied in sciences such as physics and normative facts studied in sciences like biology, then it would be consistent with my view.

3.2 Nature/Human Dualism

The inconsistency in McDowell's account causes other problems. For example, he falls prey to the very kind of dualism he explicitly aims to avoid. Namely, despite *calling* exercises of human practical reasoning (aimed at becoming virtuous and practically wise) "second nature", it is clear that he thinks such exercises belong only to human nature, not to the (first) natural world. The result is a nature/human dualism that cuts human beings apart from the non-rational (organic) natural world. As Julia Annas summarizes, non-reductive naturalism risk trivializing moral or normative facts by relegating them to humans alone: "Non-naturalistic accounts of ethical terms assume that their function, prominently their

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

normativity, is something that arises with humans, or is produced by humans, in a way which owes nothing to the nature which we share with other living things."[52]

What's worse, McDowell's unwitting sort of reason/body dualism cuts human beings down the middle. Human beings are also animals, with animal sensations and emotions. We might express the contrast by saying that McDowell presents human as *practical rational agents* full stop, where I presented humans as practical rational *primates*. I suggested in chapter 4 that this error leads him into the corresponding error of concluding that successful practical reasoning is virtue as a whole; by contrast, I argued that practical wisdom is a virtue of practical reasoning, while other virtues (such as moderation) are virtues of rational practice. McDowell ignores that even "non-rational" phenomena such as emotions and even the human body can be made "rational" in two senses: first, one can and must take these into account when reasoning about what to do; and secondly, one can and must direct one's body, emotions, and desires toward good ends.

The attraction of my view is that one can see one's own nature as a practical rational primate in continuity with non-human nature. The natural human norms inherent in human practical reasoning are of a piece with the natural non-human norms of all organic life. As Annas said above, "we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already." The exercise of practical reasoning is part of the same natural order as our biological life form and function. That we practically reason *is* the natural fact that defines our life form and what we practically reason *about* are the natural facts that already obtain for human beings. Chris Toner argues that, on this view, "the virtues are seen as acquired traits that fit human beings for the exercise of practical rationality toward which their shared nature directs them (thereby rejecting McDowell's sharp separation of first and second natures)."[53] This view is more adequate because, as Toner continues:

52. Annas, "Virtue Ethics," 12.
53. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 243.

> The acquisition of the virtues not only prevents emotions from interfering with practical reasoning but also, in McDowellian terms, "opens our eyes" to new sorts of reasons for action, not visible to the immature, that make the good of others part of our good.[54]

In chapter 5, I endorsed McDowell's view that part of successful practical reasoning is the initial perceptual sensitivity to certain facts about what is required. However, the facts to which the virtuous person becomes sensitive are not a sui generis set of "second natural" facts but the same natural facts that animals are sensitive to without reflection. By allowing normativity into our picture of nature at the organic level as a whole, human powers of theoretical and practical reasoning come to light as the *awareness* of that normativity, rather than its invention.

3.3 Inside/Outside

As I briefly mentioned in chapter 5, another major disadvantage of McDowell's intersubjective anti-anti-realism is an incorrigible relativism about practical reasoning (and, for that matter, all reasoning). Despite his allegiance to "modern science", McDowell rejects the putative superiority of scientific knowledge over ethical knowledge, namely, that scientific knowledge is answerable to the world. Rather than scientific and ethical inquiry being answerable to the facts of the world, they are partly responsible to the world while ultimately partly responsible only to ourselves. This position not only renders scientific knowledge somewhat more shaky than, I presume, he would wish, it leaves ethical traditions at the mercy of their own ability to rebuild Neurath's boat while at sea.

McDowell is clear that even when a practically wise person actualizes their nature to acquire the moral outlook, any possible examination of that moral outlook will be done from *within the moral outlook* itself. The circularity of this inculcation and new second natural faculty is not accidental to his account. He says that practical wisdom is responsive

54. Ibid., 243.

to reasons and so becomes a prototype "for the…faculty that enables us to recognize and create … intelligibility."[55]

By contrast, Foot's account aligns more closely with the commonsense commitment to the objective purport of both morality and rationality. Our efforts to attain practical wisdom are not *merely* answerable to the shared form of life of the other practical reasoners with whom we find ourselves in community; they are also answerable to the natural norms of our own nature.

I believe Rosalind Hursthouse's account of neo-Aristotelianism falls prey to the same criticism as that I have leveled against McDowell's. Even though she draws heavily on Foot's work, she seems to vacillate between McDowell's and Foot's naturalisms when she says, "Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[56] She claims that her account is, like McDowell's, still loosely naturalistic in that it is based on "human nature" or "second nature." But then hasn't she thereby rejected Footian naturalism? Jennifer Frey also observes:

> 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.[57]

My view emphatically *does* aim to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature; where I disagree with Hursthouse, mostly, is that I reject the assumption that "scientific" has to mean "non-normative."

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55. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 79.
56. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* especially chapter 10.
57. Cf. Frey, "The Will and the Good. 44, footnote 55.

My conception of nature retains a distinction between human beings (as practical reasoners aware of normativity) and the rest of organic nature (which is normative but doesn't know it). The fundamental distinction to be made is not between rational and non-rational natural entities, but between living and non-living entities, where humankind shares with other living species a distinctive set of rational potentialities that constitute natural normativity. To paraphrase Thomas Nagel, the existence of objective value is coextensive and co-terminal with the existence of living things.[58] I think the common term 'objective value' is an unfortunate way to express the notion of natural normativity. My preferred expression is natural norms which are, for us, natural practical reasons. The question is not how human beings perceive or create "value" but why they act at all. Put this way, it is clear that every sufficiently matured human organism naturally has reasons to pursue some ends, and reasons to avoid other ends. My picture of nature is one in which the class of natural facts includes both descriptive facts and such natural norms.

The corresponding picture of reasoning and knowledge underscores why the irrelevance problem (mentioned above) is not a problem for my view. The reason McDowell saw natural norms as irrelevant to practical reasoning is that he simultaneously endorsed bald naturalism (about organisms) and social naturalism (about humans). This dualism makes the practical, normative dimension of nature appear detached from the theoretical, descriptive dimension, when they are more adequately understood as dimensions of one and the same world. Jennifer Frey says:

> …the ethical naturalist must be able to show how … these two seemingly different senses of good (the good we can derive from an account of what simply is and the good as practical goal) can be unified into one and the same account. That is, we need an account of natural normativity that will show us how the relation between a general judgment articulating some fact about a life form (a judgment about a fact that is potentially known from the outside) and a judgment concerning a particular bearer of that form in a particular

58. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 117.

> situation, can take the form of a practical inference whose conclusion is an action that exemplifies that very same form of life.[59]

The Footian solution is to insist that the two forms of judgment are different ways of apprehending the same fact. The zoo keeper can apprehend the life form of a sloth bear only "externally"; and the sloth bear, not being endowed with logos, cannot apprehend its own life form internally. When it comes to human beings, we can apprehend both ways. For example, a rational alien who did not share our life form could only apprehend the life form (practical rational primates) externally just as scientists can apprehend our life form externally. But a rational human being can *also* apprehend the selfsame life form "internally" by reflecting on who and what we are. The facts do not change when we alternate between the two points of view. Since practical reasoning *does* contribute to the process of deciding on a course of action, we can see how norms which are perceived as objective and external become recognized as relevant and binding.

If both practical and theoretical forms of knowledge grasp the same object, then the putative opposition between natural facts and practical reasons is dissolved. General judgments about a life form unite with practical inferences that are to be acted upon. Scientific reasoning includes both the external, descriptive point of view and the internal, normative point of view. Or rather, the normative point of view simply is one of the scientific points of view. Theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning are both, broadly, scientific.[60] Despite McDowell's concession to bald naturalism that the modern scientific picture excludes the space of reasons, on my account, natural scientific reasoning is no less evaluative than any other expression of reasoning. Hence, the scientific worldview is capacious enough to include practical primates and all that they reason about: chemicals, quarks, mathemati-

59. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 65.

60. I take my view to be similar to those defended, especially in "Miracle of Monism" and "The Inseparability of Science and Values" by John Dupre. *Processes of Life: Essays in the Philosophy of Biology.* (Oxford University Press; 2012).

cal models, biological life forms, or functions. Natural, organic norms (including those of human beings) are part of the modern scientific worldview.

4. Conclusion

This chapter laid out four requirements that neo-Aristotelian must meet. I critiqued McDowell's recourse to a distinction between "first" and "second nature" which does not explain but mystifies the place of human norms within the natural order. By contrast, I defended the Footian alternative which illuminates human norms as instances of natural norms obtaining in all organisms. If we take an unrestricted view of nature that absorbs the aesthetic, the ethical, the logical and so on, then it is merely tautologous to call it 'natural' when human beings engage in normative practical reasoning and reason about normativity. But even if we take a restricted view of nature to exclude *some* sorts of entities as non-natural, the kind of natural normativity that includes human practical reasoning should be included as natural. Since human beings are natural organisms, and practical reasoning is natural to our life form, practical reasoning is natural reasoning.

If I were pressed to coin a new term to describe my Footian organic naturalism, I would call it "recursive naturalism." Nature "recurs" within itself. Defining human beings as practical rational primates entails that we are the one natural organism who reasons about natural organisms. We can observe the pattern of recursion in each element of the argument: Humans engage in natural reasoning about all sorts of things, including natural reasoning itself. We practically reason about practical reasoning. One of our (basic) natural functions is to discover (in greater detail) what our natural function is. Having a virtue (in part) enables us to become more virtuous. Being practically wise enables us to discern when and how to pursue more practical wisdom.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

> Not everything that is last claims to be an end, but only that which is best.
>
> —Aristotle, *Physics* 194a.

In this chapter, I think it advisable to take stock of the main argument of this dissertation. I shall then examine its broader significance, and briefly mention a few connections to other philosophical problems.

The main argument of this dissertation has been that human beings are best understood as practical, rational primates whose natural ends include the acquisition of the traditional list of virtues and (especially) practical wisdom. Since we are by nature practical reasoning animals, we have a natural obligation to acquire practical wisdom and any other trait that the practically wise person has.

In outline, I defended this argument by first laying the metanormative foundation in chapter 2. I developed a novel case for the Footian view I have labeled 'organic naturalism'. In chapter 3, building on this foundation, I made explicit some of the natural norms that pertain to human organisms. I argued that our best understanding – if only partial understanding – of our life form can be expressed in the same sort of normative/descriptive generics by

which biologists and other scientists identify the life forms of any organism. In chapter 4, I then showed how the traditional concept of virtue in the Aristotelian tradition falls under the description of 'natural human norms': the virtuous person is the person described in generic statements such as 'human beings are courageous and wise' etc. Virtues are those practices that are beneficial to creatures like us, and that are acquirable under the management of excellent practical reasoning. Virtue and practical wisdom enable us to actuate our life life form and become what we are. In chapter 5, I returned to the theme of practical reasoning to show how the process is best understood as necessarily involving substantive commitments to pursue good and avoid evil. Some of the mundane facts of nature are, for us, practical reasons that can motivate us to live a certain kind of life. Evaluative mistakes are certainly possible, but my account showed how such mistakes are failures in the attempt to be practically wise. Chapter 6 attempted to rebut the dual charges of bald naturalism and non-naturalism by breaking down the putative contrast between scientific reasoning (about nature) and ethical, practical reasoning (about norms). I suggested that there is indeed a proper distinction between theoretical reasoning (whether scientific or ethical) and practical reasoning (whether scientific or ethical). But the hard line is not between normative and non-normative reasoning, for all reasoning is normative in the relevant respects.

The primary criticism to my sort of Footian naturalism, expressed in various forms by dozens of writers, is that nature (defined in terms of what the sciences study) and science (defined as the study of nature) are fundamentally different from norms, reasons, and ethics. In an effort to dismantle what I take to be an unreflective prejudice, I criticized the picture of organic nature as merely bald or non-normative. On both the unrestricted picture of nature and my version of the restricted conception, norms come to light as natural. I offered 'recursive naturalism' as a new name for my view. On recursive naturalism, parts of nature recur within nature: natural organisms (namely, humans) reason about natural organisms; humans reason about humans; practical reasoners think about practical reasoning. Rather

than shying away from our best scientific picture of the world – including biological and human phenomena – recursive naturalism whole-heartedly embraces that picture. Indeed, affirming recursive naturalism makes it possible to affirm both moral and scientific realism; denying recursive naturalism seems to require denying both moral realism and scientific realism.

1. Remaining Issues

My account cannot pretend to have addressed every incisive objection or cover every crucial topic. I have aimed my argument, throughout, at the scientific naturalist who is in some sense already committed to scientific realism. Hence, I have attempted to clarify how my Footian sort of ethical naturalism can be compatible with a plausible version of scientific naturalism. But one possible shortcoming is the quick manner with which I have had to deal with delicate matters of epistemology and (especially) the philosophy of science. Scientific realism is by no means the only reasonable view, and there are many brands of scientific realism.

Another possible shortcoming is the absence of a discussion about the relation between virtue ethics and religious morality. Virtue ethics is often associated with Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or Taoist religious philosophy. Nevertheless, I have defended (especially) Foot's version of what Murphy calls a "secular natural law theory." Foot, McDowell and others are non-religious philosophers find in Aristotle a secular alternative that is neutral with respect to these issues. My hope is to play some part in showing the plausibility and practicality of the notion that even "we modern knowers, we godless anti-metaphysicians" have every reason to pursue virtue and wisdom.[1]

A second possible shortcoming is a fuller discussion of social reasoning. While

1. Frederich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 344.

'homo sapiens sapiens' is a biological concept that purports to range over all genetically modern humans, the variety and contrast between the ways various cultures conceive of and pursue 'the good life for humans' is daunting. If, as MacIntyre has argued, we learn to reason within a social tradition, the problem of cultural relativism about rationality looms large. A fuller discussion would have to engage thoroughly with recent anthropological and sociobiological literature.

2. Ethics and Metaethics

My overall aim has been to show how a neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism can provide mutually re-enforcing notions of virtue, practical reason, nature and human nature. These concepts together form an interlocking whole that has the potential to solve problems in both ethics and metaethics.

Virtue ethics is, on my view, a very useful guide to action, in personal life, political life, bioethics,[2] business,[3] and education.[4] 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. Studying the virtue ethical writings of other cultures and other times promises to correct lopsided ethical developments in our own time.

Yet 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 a pursuit of virtues.

Virtue, practical reason, and nature are age-old themes which demand more work than I can claim to have done here to treat adequately. As Glaucon said to Socrates, "The

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

3. Ron Beadle, "MacIntyre's Influence on Business Ethics," in *Handbook of Virtue Ethics in Business and Management* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2015), 1–9.

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

measure of listening to such discussions is the whole of life."[5]

5. Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato*, *Republic* 450b.

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