THE VIRTUE TRIANGLE: PRACTICAL REASON, EXCELLENCE, AND NATURAL TELEOLOGY IN THE RECENT NEO-ARISTOTELIANS

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT: Recent Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists such as Philippa Foot and John McDowell, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Alasdair MacIntyre agree that the good person is the virtuous person and that virtues are good for humans. They disagree about whether is virtue "natural" to humans because we are rational animals (unlike others) or because we are animals like all others in the evolutionary tree of life?

Foot emphasizes the natural, biological aspect of virtue ethics (where virtue and vice is "natural goodness" and natural "defect"); John McDowell emphasizes the normative, rational aspect, where virtues are intersubjective, cultural forms of knowledge. The conversation has run aground of this difficult matter because, as Julia Annas explains, it reflects a broader perennial question about the relationship between normativity and nature, or between ethics and science.

My dissertation systematically analyzes a set of related concepts: nature, virtue, practical reason, and teleology. In brief, I argue that virtue is the excellence of rational practices and practical reasoning that enables and partly constitutes the realization of one's human life form. I defend a conception of virtue according to which virtuous traits are rational practices and emotions, and practical reasoning is the process of identifying the good. On this view of virtue, the definitive criterion by which to judge human beings is our success or failure in acquiring virtues such as moderation and tolerance, and our overall success in the pursuit of the good life for humans.

KEYWORDS: virtue, practical reason, teleology, neo-Aristotelianism, ethical naturalism

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For Lindsay Elizabeth, the life-bearer

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γένοι᾽ οἷος ἐσσὶ μαθών.

—Pindar, *Pythian* 2, line 72.

Chapter 1

Introduction

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

I. Nature and Normativity

Recent neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists are up to something fascinating: a unified account of the natural and the normative. In their writings, the anti-dualist impulse behind both American pragmatists and Anglo-American metaphysical naturalism (from Thomas Nagel) receives full expression. Yet at the same time the morally realist impulse behind the new wave of metaethical realists such as Russ Shafer-Landau, Terrence Cuneo, and David Enoch is fully represented too. And both find remarkable friendship in the recent revival of interest in the virtue tradition (both its Hellenistic and non-Hellenistic sources). Some have found this cocktail of philosophical impulses and interests a bit bemusing.

Early metaethical theorizing (read: G. E. Moore) predicated a sharp division between the natural and the normative, between the descriptive and prescriptive, the meta-

physical and the ethical. Subsequent philosophers tended to accept the division between "is and ought". However, they tended to react in one of two ways: nature is non-normative or normativity is non-natural. For example, the prescriptivists, emotivists, and expressivists take the first way. These assume nature is "bald" and descriptive and so explain away moral language as a natural (read: descriptive) event occuring in the brains and words of moral beings. Moral realists of various stripes tended to quietly accept the claim (insult?) that they were "non-naturalists" about value, though they valiently defended the possibility of cognitivist moral assertions, moral perception, and moral knowledge.

On this way of framing the debate, the primary objection for ethical naturalists to overcome was the challenge of **Bald Nature**. Bald Nature arises on behalf of an allegedly scientific conception of nature that excludes teleology and other normativity from nature. I should call this the "Laplacian" picture.[1] Plantinga explains that the bald, disenchanted picture of nature that excludes all consciousness – both divine and human – should not be pinned on Newton, who was a pious Christian, but fits better with Pierre-Simon Laplace. Normative realists think Bald Nature cannot be overcome, and so do not try to fit normativity into nature. Normative anti-realists think it cannot be overcome, and so try to eliminate normativity or reduce it to the descriptive.

This way of framing the debate is not some deliverance from on high. There might be other ways. Indeed, some philosophers after the middle of the last century, such as MacIntyre and Murdoch, rose up to challenge the very assumptions on which the conversation had been predicated. Philippa Foot's achievement was to sidestep many of these metaethical landmines and propose an ethical theory that was both philosophically cogent and intellectually clear. She combined careful attention to Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, with a robust normative theory commending the virtues with a sophisticated metaethical theory

1. Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 84.

grounding moral realism in the normativity of nature.

Not everyone is impressed, of course. Although far too few professional philosophers have confronted the radical challenge of her philosophical ethics, some have proferred criticisms. I would suggest that many of her critics have underestimated the stakes of her view and hence given only superficial criticisms such as that she is "unclear."[2] John McDowell is one critic who fully appreciates the depth and significance of Foot's contributions. Like her, he denies supernaturalism and dualism as a matter of principle. Like her, he denies moral non-cognitivism and subjectivism because its plausibility withers under philosophical scrutiny, not to mention common sense. Like her, he defends a version of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism against its rivals.

However, McDowell is a critic of a mistake he calls "philistine scientism". At first blush, the problem of philistine scientism is the problem of demanding that ethical thinking prove itself before the tribunal of empirical scientific findings and methods. If best ethical thinking cannot be derived from nor squared with a particular dogma of crass empiricsm, so much the worse for crass empiricism. He almost, but not quite, says Foot is guilty of this mistake. I think McDowell is careful to distinguish his objection to philistine scientism from his objection to Foot, which is a bit more complex than that. For he *is* an empiricist about natural science.

His objection is that Foot perhaps has not fully accounted for the role that the human evaluator plays in identifying (or constructing) objective values. McDowell's "naturalism of second nature" represents a second sort of neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism live and well in the conversation. This sort of naturalism is not rooted in biology but in rationality.

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2. For example, James Lenman says: "Neo-Aristotelian naturalism is articulated at length and along mutually similar lines in two recent monographs, Foot's Natural Goodness and Hursthouse's On Virtue Ethics. I will focus on Hursthouse whose account is the clearer and more detailed of the two." James Lenman, "Moral Naturalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014.

And since rationality is at least in part social (and perhaps essentially social), insofar as we learn our first language and initial inventory of concepts and beliefs from our family and culture, so far is McDowell's ethical naturalism a kind of "cultural" naturalism. Moral virtue is a way of seeing things inculcated in the young by their parents and teachers and pastors and mentors. Moral virtue is an "outlook" acquired by sharing with others a single "form of life."[3]

What are we to make of this criticism of Foot's "first nature" naturalism rooted in the physical and organic world? And how does McDowell's "second nature" naturalism compare?

My view is that the neo-Aristotelians are united on some points but divided on others. Start with agreement:

Neo-Aristotelians are united on the idea that the human life form can bridge the gap between nature and normativity. Or rather, human nature, properly understood, can defy the opposition between is and ought, fact and value, descriptivity and normativity. For "the human being" is an organism exhibiting capacities not only for motion and action but for rational reflection. When we describe, say, the characteristic activities of the human life form as acquiring language, conversing with other humans, and acquiring knowledge – if that is a genuinely human norm, then someone who is willfully ignorant, or willfully mute, or willfully antisocial, is to some degree defective qua human. If someone is mute, ignorant, or suffers from an antisocial mental disorder by bad fortune, say by being born with genetic problems or being born into a circumstance wherein they are deprived of resources to acquire knowledge, study, grow, experiment, that person would be pitiable and not well-off, due to no fault of their own. By contrast, someone who is wilfully in pursuit of knowledge would be admirable. Maybe not *morally* admirable yet, but admirable in exemplifying their human life form and doing the kind of things *humans do*. The way that ducks

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

fly south for winter, human beings pursue and acquire and amass and transmit knowledge. Thus, philosophers as diverse as Thompson, Hursthouse, Foot, McDowell, MacIntyre, and Brown are united in the thought that some facts of nature are also inherently normative – namely, formal or teleological facts about human beings. These might be Hursthouse's "characteristic activities", or Thompson's "life-form"[4] or McDowell's "form of life"[5], or the somewhat archaic-sounding "human nature".

What is the disagreement? They are divided on whether the human life form can undercut the is-ought gap in virtue of being an instance of an organic life form like any other or in virtue of being a unique, rational life form endowed with the capacity for society, culture, rationality, or practical agency.

These two strategies represent two different kinds of potential normativity: biological or rational, animal or cultural, teleonomic or teleological, organic or social.[6]

These two strategies go under many names.[7] The basic difference between the two

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

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

6. Cf. Larry Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics: A Defense of Biological Teleology Against Biological Nihilism," *Politics and the Life Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1988): pp. 173–229. Arnhart explains the difference between various kinds of natural functions, including those that are candidates for genuinely *teleological* functionality.

7. For example, Christopher Toner distinguishes between the "biological naturalism" of Thompson and Foot (and later MacIntyre) from the "second naturalism" or "excellence naturalism" or 'culturalism' of McDowell and (early) MacIntyre. Julia Annas distinguishes between the sort of naturalism that builds on the *biological* nature of humanity (at the expense of the odd normativity of our rationality) the sort that builds on the *rational* nature of humanity (at the expense of the mundane descriptivity of biology).(Cf. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?" in Stephen Mark Gardiner, *Virtue Ethics, Old and New* (Cornell University Press, 2005).) Furthermore, there exists a third, even more ambitious strategy. I should at least mention it here. That is to defend the view that *all* of nature is normative, even inorganic matter. Call this cosmic teleology. Cosmic teleology is the notion that everything – including stars and rocks – "has a purpose", as if the cosmos were somehow organized and *going somewhere*. Such natural normativity in the form of natural teleology does have its recent defenders. For atheistic version of cosmic teleology, see Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (Oxford University Press, 2012); for non-human centered versions see John Leslie, *Universes* (Psychology Press, 1996) and Tim Mulgan, *Purpose*

is pretty clear. Either natural normativity is intrinsic to human life insofar as we live in cultures or to all organisms insofar as they are alive.

My preferred terms to distinguish these two strategies are "Organic" and "Social" or "Practical" normativity. Each strategy has its challenges and attractions, which deserve a careful review.

Social normativity states that typical human life is naturally and intrinsically end-directed. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre defends social teleology against its more biological, organic alternative. He emphasizes "second nature" far more than primary nature. That is, he finds a ground of normativity not in our life-form but in us: in our social identities, our culture, our rationality. For example, he announces that his account of virtue is "happily not Aristotelian… although this account of the virtues is teleological, it does not require any allegiance to Aristotle's metaphysical biology."[8] The "metaphysical biology" MacIntyre refers to here is the metaphysically realist view that formal and final causes inhere (and in fact constitute) biological species. Though he denies Aristotle's form of ethics based on the normativity of human biology, MacIntyre does most emphatically argue for teleological ethics based on the normativity of *human society and rationality*. He grounds teleology not in non-human nature but in "human nature," specifically our practical, social nature, which he calls "social teleology."

The social normativity strategy is followed by McDowell, Hursthouse, and the early MacIntyre. Even Iris Murdoch assumed that human life has "no external point or τελος", but that it has a point *from within.*[9] It is impossible, in other words, to bring our own human

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in the Universe: The Moral and Metaphysical Case for Ananthropocentric Purposivism (Oxford University Press, 2015). For Thomistic versions, see Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld Publications, 2009); and Peter Kreeft, *Summa Philosophica* (St. Augustine, 2012).

8. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 197.

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

life, without remainder, under the concept of an *event.* Human life is an event too, but it must be brought under the concept of an intentional action or practice aiming at a goal.

The strength of this strategy is that we observe that human beings define themselves, think about the world, set goals, and pursue them. We do not act randomly, except when we are physically or mentally ill, drunk, asleep, or in some other disturbed state of mind. Rather, we act on reasons: Jane arises from bed *in order to* head to work; John works his job *in order to* contribute to society and retire comfortably; congress meets to deliberate about what *laws are to be passed*, and so on. Even on a modest view of personal responsibility and free will, a typical human life is a set of intentional practices undertaken by the agent. So perhaps one of the natural functions of rationality is to construct goals for itself and legislate laws for itself.[10] On this view, ethical conclusions are irreducibly based upon human facts such as human rationality, human culture, or human excellence.

So much for McDowellian second nature naturalism. What about the Footian alternative?

Organic normativity states that even natural states and properties like "being alive" or "being healthy" are inherently normative. To be alive is to be in danger of dying; to be healthy is to be in danger of becoming sick. At the level of individual organisms, one of the functions of *being alive at all* is that plants, animals, insects, and microbes perform whatever movements are necessary for them to survive, grow, and develop into the state of species-specific maturity.

Patterns of organic normativity obtain not only in particular species or ecosystems, but the entire global network of organic life. The importance if seeing organisms in a synop-

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

tic view can be read off the deliverances of biological sciences. So the conditions or states of affairs in which these movements and this development does not happen are instances of a kind of natural badness for those species or ecosystems. At the level of interconnected systems of organisms such as ecosystems, rainforests, and coral reefs need certain things to survive and thrive. The sense of "need" here is not a pragmatic or utilitarian one but a formal and teleological sense.

Organic naturalism is simply the interpretation that the complex biological system on earth cannot be exhaustively and scientifically described without normative concepts and terms. Organic naturalism is the belief that all living organisms have ineliminable, irreducible, normative properties. As Thomas Nagel puts it, with the existence of life in the cosmos arises the existence of beings "for which things can be good or bad."[11] If you like, the order of objective value is the order of biological life.

Organic Teleology is the preferred strategy of Foot, Thompson, and the later MacIntyre. It seems to have won over Annas, Brown, and Barham, and a host of other philosophers and scientists.[12]

The cost of organic naturalism seems to be a "non-scientific" picture of nature. Are "natural norms" natural objects like other natural objects? How do we know them – through normal scientific methods or not? The cost of social naturalism is incorrigible cultural relativism and an undesirable nature/human dualism.

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

12. Keith Ward, "Kant's Teleological Ethics," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 85 (1971): 337–51; Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics"; Monte Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Philippe Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose: From Comparative Anatomy to the 'Adventure of Reason'," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2006): 649–74; Mariska Leunissen, *Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Science of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a detailed exposition of the full menu of philosophical options, cf.Mark Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," *The Monist* 87, no. 1 (2004): 3–51.

II. The Virtue Triangle

In the spirit of devil-may-care adventure seeking, I find it preferable to pursue the more ambitious strategy of defending natural normativity in all of organic nature, not just human beings. In my view, the costs of organic naturalism are not so great as they first appear. For, other ethical naturalists like Richard Boyd and Peter Railton would be quick to observe, at this juncture, that natural kinds themselves are part of the vocabulary of natural science.[13] And indeed, part of my strategy for defending the truth and scientific credentials of Footian naturalism is to appeal to generic truths about natural kinds.

Furthermore, the costs of social naturalism are greater than they first appear. For teleology is a respectable, natural, scientific phenomenon, or can be plausibly defended as *a* respectable scientific phenomenon that can be accepted into our scientific worldview. As Stephen Brown, for instance, says that "naturalized virtue ethics assumes that living things have ends in reference to which they can be evaluated… a neo-Aristotelian account of teleology is plausible both from the view of common sense and from a more scientific vantage point."[14] So in the end, organic naturalism makes a stronger case.

In particular, I defend the thesis that virtue is the acquirable excellence of rational practices and practical reasoning that enables and partly constitutes the realization of one's human life form. Virtuous traits are rational practices and emotions, and practical reasoning is the process of identifying the good. On this view of virtue, the definitive criterion by which to judge human beings is our success or failure in acquiring virtues such as moderation and tolerance, and our overall success in the pursuit of the good life for humans.

13. Cf. Richard Boyd, "Realism, Anti-Foundationalism and the Enthusiasm for Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Studies* 61, no. 1 (1991): 127–48; Richard Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," *Contemporary Materialism*, 1988, 307; Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95, no. 2 (1986).

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

I also provide an outline of a secular, humanistic conception of flourishing according to which becoming wise is the natural telos of practical rational animals, even though they may individually die and (one day) go extinct.

My hope in making these arguments is to offer arguments to both virtue ethicists and metaethical naturalists. That is, I aim to persuade scientific naturalists to consider virtue ethics, and to persuade virtue ethicists to consider that the empirical sciences may have something to contribute to ethics.

My view may be seen as a conceptual linkage between practical reasoning (which, I argue, defines humanity), moral and intellectual virtues, and natural teleology. These three concepts may be graphed on a triangle. They also capture a crucial insight from Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. There, he persuasively argues that there are three necessary "elements" to morality:[15] namely, a goal, a starting point, and the means from the starting point to the goal.

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

The point of this simple reflection is that we ought to demand that any moral theory supply all three elements. MacIntyre explains that, in morality, the first element is "untutored human nature" (as it is). The second element is the moral human, humanity as it

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

could be and should be. The third element is the set of traits, actions, emotions, habits, etc., needed to move from the first to the second points. Understanding "human-nature-as-it-is"[16] is a task for philosophers, as well as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. This would include a conception of the human species as rational animals as it is *prior* to deep self-reflection or moral effort. Understanding human nature "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos"[17] was "the whole point of ethics." This third conception of some human flourishing or telos we can and *ought* to realize. Moral rules or admirable character traits are the *content* of morality; but the telos of humanity is the *context* of morality. Telos makes morality make sense.

The project of rehabilitating natural teleology may seem overly optimistic.[18] It may be felt, for instance, that teleology has simply been debunked by modern science and therefore has no place in a scientific worldview, that Francis Bacon was right that the search for final causes "defiled philosophy" and so that any attempt to revive teleological virtue talk is antiquarian and nostalgic.

This objection is a serious one, and will receive a reply in chapter 2. For now, I would like to highlight the stakes of the question. The differences between teleological nihilism and teleological realism have significant ramifications for morality. For MacIntyre, the hypothesis that we ought to reject telos is the chief error of Enlightenment moralities. He explains why in his discussion of the three elements of morality which I have called "the virtue triangle." It is difficult to understate the importance of this point about the self. Edward Oakes describes the removal of telos from our worldview as "perhaps the greatest category mistake ever made in the history of philosophy."

16. Ibid., 55.
17. Ibid., 55.
18. Arthur Ward's recent dissertation argues that the sort of teleological naturalism being pursued here is not a good foundation for ethics. Arthur Ward, "Against Natural Teleology and Its Application in Ethical Theory" (PhD thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2013).

> That word "teleological" is the key to MacIntyre's solution, the loss of which is the cause of the catastrophe described in his science-fiction parable. Teleology is the study of final causes, goals, purposes, and aims: a style of explanation that saturates Aristotle's philosophy. After the combined impact of Newton and Darwin, however, this type of explanation seems mostly 'quaint' and once Aristotle's science seemed quaint, his ethics soon followed: when Newton demonstrated how motion can be better explained as resulting from the outcome of mechanical laws, and when Darwin posited natural selection as the "mechanism" for explaining an organ's functionality, the use of teleology in ethics was doomed…Emptying moral discourse of teleological concepts because of the perceived impact of Newton and Darwin has been for MacIntyre the catastrophe of our times.[19]

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

> Where Aristotle understood man as a creature with a definite function which he might fulfill or deny, modern morality sees man simply as a rational agent who has no true or definable purpose independent of his own will… By appealing to a telos, Aristotle was able to distinguish between the way we actually are and the way we should be. His conception of human beings as having a specific telos brought with it the possibility that we might fall short of the ideal… But with the rejection of Aristotelianism gain the rejection of any such distinction between what we are and what we should be. Post-Enlightenment man is seen as governed, not by a telos external to him, but simply by the dictates of his own inner reason… Thus the abandonment of an Aristotelian conception of the good has not only left us without standards by which to evaluate our moral arguments, it is also cast us adrift in the moral world.[20]

These reflections suggest that at least our conception of ethics needs to be teleological. As we have seen above, there are several ways to achieve this conception. Foot argues that teleology is genuinely natural to all living organisms; McDowell argues that it is not natural

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

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

to all organisms but that it is to humans. Even MacIntyre's project is not *Aristotelian* but "neo-Aristotelian" in that he contrasts with Aristotle's project on several points.[21]

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

III. Outline of Chapters

The dissertation is divided into several chapters. Chapter 2 argues that at least the organic parts of nature are intrinsically normative. Chapter 3 argues that since humans are natural organisms, human nature is normative. Chapter 4 argues that human virtues of rational practice and practical reasoning are the natural excellences of human nature. Chapter 5 argues that practical reasoning is, in fact, a natural process for organisms like us by which we aim to identify and pursue human flourishing and the means thereto, including food, companionship, virtue, and wisdom. Chapter 6 argues that this process is naturalistically respectable.

21. For instance, MacIntyre denies that Greek virtues are so timeless, abstract, and generically human as Aristotle would make them appear; they are partly indexed to fourth century, upper-class, educated Athenian culture. He also rejects Aristotle's metaphysics of nature. Nevertheless, he argues, the loss of a concept of telos is dramatic.

Chapter 2

Organic Normativity

> Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes.
>
> —Mark Perlman, "The Modern Resurrection of Teleology in Biology,"6.

I. Introduction

This chapter argues that there are such things as natural norms; at least *some* normativity is discoverable in natural life forms and functions themselves, and is not projected or invented in human evaluators. These natural formal and teleological facts are just as real as other familiar, scientific facts.

The major alternatives to naturalistic normative realism are normative anti-realism or reductionism. Although I shall here exclude non-naturalisic normative realism ex hypothesi, both normative non-naturalism and normative anti-realism are motivated by *the is-ought gap*. The is-ought gap begins with the belief that nature consists only of descriptive facts.[1] It follows that normative facts must either be real (but non-natural) or else not

1. The a picture of nature as a manifold of purely descriptive and non-normative

real at all. If putative natural norms are not real, anti-realists argue they are either reducible to non-normative facts or else simply projected onto nature by humans – be they scientists or philosophers or regular folk. The controversy over normativity is an old one and is not likely to be settled here. My goal, instead, is to present a plausible case that is both intelligible to normative anti-realists and normative non-naturalists and that is persuasive to the undecided.

There are three sections in this chapter that build to my conclusion that there are real, natural, irreducible norms. The first section distinguishes the two kinds of is-ought gap that philosophers have taken to render ethical naturalism impossible. It explains how some notion of natural normativity makes ethical naturalism at least possible. The second section begins with a summary of Philippa Foot and Michael Thomspon's case for natural norms of two types: formal and functional norms. This section also includes a novel case for what I call "organic normativity", on the basis of generic propositions, that organisms have a real life form and a natural teleological process. The third section considers and rebuts anti-realist or reductionist interpretations of these natural phenomena. Admittedly, these phenomena can be acknowledged by both the realist and anti-realist. The anti-realist would want to offer a roundabout explanation of them, while the realist accepts the straightforward explanation.

The upshot of these considerations is this: if there are some natural norms governing organisms, then there might be natural *human* norms governing humans. The neo-Aristotelian might be able to explain ethical norms as extensions of, or tokens of, natural

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facts, entities, properties, and laws is what McDowell calls "bald nature". A better term would be "Laplacian nature," since the notion that the cosmos is coldly factual, bald of values, and disenchanted from any supernatural esoterica, aligns more closely with Pierre-Simon Laplace's mathematical picture of nature. Laplace pictured nature as a set of cold, abstract, and necessary relations. Realism about natural normativity is incompatible with the Laplacian picture. But his picture is, I would dare to say, unscientific. At the very least, it is not *the only* scientific picture. Regardless, Laplacian nature emphatically does not include natural norms.

norms, which are both binding on human beings as practical rational animals and not merely invented by human individuals or human cultures. These norms would be natural without being crassly biological; they would be both biological and practical. Or so I shall argue.

II. The Is-Ought Gap Challenge

Rosalind Hursthouse says that ethical evaluations of humans and non-ethical evaluations of plants and animals "both depend upon our identifying what is characteristic of the species in question."[2] In other words, the normative evaluation depends on the descriptive facts of the species: its activities, its life form, and so on. Evaluating things on the basis of what they are is central to the kind of neo-Aristotelian naturalism.

For example, consider a few pretty uncontroversial normative propositions: '*you ought to be wise*' or *'It is good to be tolerant of people with different views'* or *'It is bad to bring a gun to school and start shooting people'*. Supposing these are true, *why* are they true? The non-naturalist has a good explanation (they pick out fundamental, non-natural, moral facts) and the naturalist anti-realist also has a good explanation (express the speaker's individual and cultural norms). The ethical naturalist's explanation is a bit trickier. He or she must show how such statements relate to the *natural* facts. The most straightforward path would be to argue that "you ought to be wise" is a normative truth derivable from some other fact that is natural. In general, ethical naturalism states that some ethical facts are grounded in natural facts or are identifiable with natural facts.

Insofar as neo-Aristotelians like Hursthouse and Foot proffer a form of ethical naturalism, a challenge must be stated. Philosophers have challenged to the very possibility of such ethical naturalism in this form:

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

1. If ethical naturalism is possibly true, then descriptive statements can serve as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
2. But descriptive statements cannot serve as premises in arguments with normative conclusions.
3. Therefore, ethical naturalism is not possibly true.

If this challenge cannot be met, then ethical naturalism is futile. And it is difficult to imagine how the challenge could be met. Consider, for example, a candidate natural fact, such as the apparent goodness of pleasure. Perhaps, if pleasure *is* universally pursued, pleasure *ought* to be pursued. Hume is often credited with (or blamed for) insisting that an 'ought' can never be derived from an 'is.'[3] He says:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence."[4]

The point is that when it comes to human evaluations, 'is' statements may be interesting but they seem useless for practical purposes. A few simple examples: Just because "most men wear tuxedos to the Oscars" does not necessitate that, undecided men automatically know they ought to to wear a tux to the Oscars – (not without a prior normative premise that "One ought to do whatever most others do.") Just because all cultures have farmers or hunters does not mean that any one person ought to become a farmer or hunt. Likewise, even if all human beings and cultures exemplify a range of common facts or express range of common evaluative attitudes, the result would not necessarily be a normative ethics as much

3. Arnhart and MacIntyre argue that Hume himself allows for a kind of inference from "is" to "ought" in other places. (Cf. Larry Arnhart, "The New Darwinian Naturalism in Political Theory," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 02 (1995): 389–400; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Hume on Is and Ought," *The Philosophical Review*, 1959, 451–68) I think Moore is the one to blame (or to give the credit).

4. *A Treatise of Human Nature* book III, part I, section I.

as a "descriptive ethics." (Descriptive ethics builds on and adds to evolutionary biology, psychology, sociology, human ethology, and anthropology by empirically studying what such-and-such a person or culture deems worthwhile or worthless and compares it to other persons or cultures or to other generations of the same culture.) The results of descriptive ethics might be a detailed and scientific description of human behaviors in their consistency and variation. It would not be a plan for how to live one's life. At least, it would not be a plan *without supplementary interpretation from normative ethics* prescribing that one should comply with the norms one's own culture, or prescribing that one should criticize the norms of one's culture, or prescribing some other response.

We should not overestimate the cultural variance. Even though habits and attitudes toward drinking alcohol vary dramatically from culture to culture and generation to generation, there seems to be a cross-cultural disapprobation for continual drunkenness, in even cultures (like the Bolivian Camba) that drink regularly and drink heavily. Thus, anthropologist Dwight Heath says: "It is important to realize that drinking problems are virtually unknown in most of the world's cultures, including many where drinking is commonplace and occasional drunkenness is accepted."[5] Insights about universal norms might be quite interesting. Nevertheless, their practical significance is not given; they can be put to use in more than one way.

So the first premise of the is-ought challenge sets out a criterion for ethical naturalism: the normative propositions that features as conclusions of ethical arguments must be derived from descriptive premises. The second premise seems to render hopeless the thought that we can evaluate things on the basis of what they are. Is neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism a non-starter?

The is-ought gap is fatal to *some* forms of ethical naturalism. Namely, those that

5. Dwight B Heath, "Sociocultural Variants in Alcoholism," *Encyclopedic Handbook of Alcoholism*, 1982, 426–40.

assume the bald picture of nature as purely descriptive. There is, however a second path.

The is-ought gap can be undercut in a different way by neo-Aristotelians. We can deny the assumption that nature is purely descriptive. For example, it might be that some normative propositions such as "you ought to be wise" are brutely normative *natural* facts. It sounds rather odd to say that an 'ought' can be a brutely normative natural fact. In a later chapter, I will more fully explain how the purely descriptive concept of nature is problematic.

The point for now is to understand how, in general, one might undercut the is-ought gap: start with basic, scientifically respectable natural norms. From these, derive further ethical norms. If these were possible, the result would be both ethical and naturalistic.

In order to explicate this option, begin with Philippa Foot's notion of "natural normativity". Some features of nature are properties, she says, are instances of 'natural goodness' or 'natural defect.' About such qualities, she says:

> …we might equally have been thinking in terms of, say, strength and weakness or health and disease, or again about an individual plant or animal being or not being as it should be, or ought to be, in this respect or that. Let us call the conceptual patterns found there, patterns of natural normativity.[6]

Natural normativity is an indeterminate concept. It might include a variety of different kinds of normativity that are not obviously moral normativity, such as the proper, the healthy, the advantageous, the adaptive, the mature, and so on. This indeterminacy is a strength rather than a weakness. When Foot uses the term 'natural normativity' she means that normativity exists wherever organic life is found. Wherever evaluative properties like health and disease appear, there are real instances of natural goodness and natural defect, then some evaluative properties are *primary qualities of nature* just like weight, color, size, relations of time and space, and so on.

6. Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 38.

There is another sense in which 'natural normativity' is used by neo-Aristotelians like John McDowell. The neo-Aristotelians are of two minds about which sense is a more promising foundation for ethics. Where they agree, though, is in thinking that natural norms overcome or rather undercut the is-ought gap. Call this the **Bald Nature Challenge**:

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

This argument like the first one sets out a criterion that ethical naturalism must satisfy. Namely, ethical naturalism must offer an account of some natural norms that are both real and brutely natural, not derived from other (descriptive) facts. The second premise says that all norms are non-natural and all nature is non-normative. So it seems to be impossible to be an ethical naturalist.

Everything depends on whether or not nature consists of merely non-normative facts. I will grant that nature consists of merely *natural* facts. That nature consists of no non-natural facts is, of course, a tautology. I grant the tautology. I do not grant, without argument, that all such facts are descriptive and not normative; that would be to allow my opponent to beg the question. My opponent might likewise complain that if he or she allows me to stipulate that there *are* natural norms, this stipulation would beg the question in my favor. The only thing for it is for me to *argue* from agreed upon premises that there are such things as natural norms. Having done so, it is fair of me to request an argument to the contrary. If the critic merely insists on reaffirming that all nature is non-normative, that would be mere question-begging.

So our first task is to supply an adequate defense of the existence of natural norms. Even if such a notion can be defended philosophically and scientifically, we should remember that all that logically follows is that ethical naturalism is possibly true. What we need,

beyond mere possibility, is to defend in general natural normativity and then to apply patterns of natural normativity and how these form binding ethical normative structures.

III. The Case for Natural, Organic Norms

The burden of proof is on the neo-Aristotelian to furnish examples of natural norms that would undercut the is-ought gap. As it turns out, there are several plausible ones. The two candidates for natural normative facts I shall defend are life forms or natural kinds, and teleological facts or natural function. Although these two kinds of facts are related, it is helpful to distinguish between formal and teleological normativity, between morphology and physiology, between structures and their functions – between what things *are* and what they *do*.

Nature is full of kinds; sunflowers are not oxygen; stars are not organisms; lead is not gold; water is not soil; and so on. Kind concepts allow us to both distinguish x from y and to gather together all the x's. Zebras and horses are both Equidae; lead and gold are both elements; ice and the sea and steam are all water. Thinking in kind categories is intuitive and natural.[7] Thinking in categories is probably a constitutive feature of thought.

Nature is also full of end-directed activity. Each thing does its own thing: sunflowers grow toward the sun, wolves hunt deer and deer flee wolves; hearts pump blood and eyes see; the sun warms the planet; phytoplankton oxygenates the atmosphere. Such processes are non-intentional end-directed processes. Non-intentional processes are sometimes called 'teleonomic.'[8] Teleonomic phenomena do not have a *director* but they do have a *direction.*

7. Susan A Gelman and Lawrence A Hirschfeld, "How Biological Is Essentialism," *Folkbiology* 9 (1999): 403–46; Stefan Linquist et al., "Exploring the Folkbiological Conception of Human Nature," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences* 366, no. 1563 (2011): 444–53.

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

Kinds and their ends can be conceptually distinguished but not very far. Forms and functions, structures and activities, are two aspects of one thing. Is the hip bone shape adaptive for a purpose or is the purpose conducive to the development of such-and-such shape? It is better to allow that the structure and function of natural organisms and at least some of their parts are an inseparable whole. Indeed, Lewens summarizes the folk biological conception of a "kind" by mashing together the concept of a life form or "essence" with the concept of a function or "telos": a kind is a "teleo-essence", a thing with an end.

My initial hypothesis, which will be explicated further, is that formal facts (natural kinds and their natural properties) and teleological facts (natural functions) are both instances of natural norms. We have not yet said anything about human ethical norms, which is our ultimate aim. Human ethical norms, if they can be said to be natural, will turn out to be formal and teleological facts about our life form identifiable as instances of a broader pattern of natural normativity. But the argument must proceed in stages; the goal for now is simply to defend natural normativity.

What are we to make of kinds and their teleonomic behaviors? The explanations may be either realist, reductionist, or anti-realist. Realist explanations argue that kinds and their ends are what they seem to be: fundamental facts of nature. Reductionist or anti-realist explanations argue that kinds and their ends are not what they seem. The nihilist argues that kinds don't exist, there is only one thing; ends don't exist, there is only one mechanical kind of process. The reductionist argues that *some* kinds exist, but they do not correspond to our initial scientific categorization; and *some* end-directed teleonomic processes are real but it is reducible to non-end-directed processes. Before discussing these options in full, let's explore the neo-Aristotelian treatment of natural normativity in more detail.

Foot's Case for Natural Normativity

Philippa Foot argues that human virtues are instances of a broader class of natural properties: 'natural goodness.'[9] Foot is well aware that her offering is likely to offend the ears of some listeners. Her defense is the thought (drawn from Wittgenstein) that crude beginnings are often a necessary first step on the way to something refined. To earn an audience for her argument, her first chapter (which she call a "fresh start") clears away some shaky assumptions inherited from Hume and Moore. Many modern ethicists treat human valuations as unprecedented, almost miraculous, new appearance in the cosmos. Instead, we should expand the scope of our inquiry to examine the status of humans as natural entities.

Moore assumed that, in philosophical ethics, 'good' is the ultimate predicate under review. This is one of the "shaky assumptions" Foot wishes to clear. She argues that statements like "pleasure is good" are not good paradigms for philosophical reflection. Evaluation of human creatures and evaluation of plants and animals follow *the same logical pattern*. In such evaluations, good is good *for*. Contrast 'good' with other predicates like 'red' or 'beautiful.' In a statement such as 'the house is beautiful', the predicate 'beautiful' doesn't need a complement. The house is *beautiful* – full stop. But 'good' has a different logical function. 'Good' is more like 'useful.' The phrase 'The house is useful' *does* need a complement. When we say 'the house is useful' we must specify what it is useful for – *for a mom of six, or useful for an artist,* or what have you. Likewise, 'good' always means *good for someone* or *for something.* 'Good' always needs a complement. If this crude beginning is anywhere near to correct, we can distance ourselves from Moore's starting point and build on another starting point: the life-form of human beings.

In this Foot agrees with Thompson's groundbreaking work.[10] Thompson argues

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

10. Michael Thompson, "The Representation of Life," in *Virtues and Reasons*, ed.

that the concept of "life" is not, as it may seem to some, a property of some beings where *being* is the fundamental concept; rather "life" is a fundamental concept.[11] He says, "Vital description of individual organisms is itself the primitive expression of a conception of things in terms of 'life-form' or 'species', and if we want to understand these categories in philosophy we must bring them back to that form of description."[12] When we observe and examine living things we rightly employ some shared categories and our conclusions rightly share a logical structure.

What is that common structure? Thompson reviews and refutes a variety of crude definitions of life such as that anything that is alive reproduces, grows, metabolizes, etc. Such properties may be co-extensive with the property of being alive, but they are wildly insufficient for the task of *defining* life because such properties depend on a prior understanding of life. Thompson's alternative is that life is a fundamental concept. We recognize things as alive before we learn about their shared traits; indeed, we can only ascribe a set of traits *living things* share if we are already in possession (absent that set of traits) of a concept of living things under which we gather a sample.

On these considerations, it is most reasonable to hypothesize that life is a fundamental concept, along with 'being', 'quantity' and others. Once we accept that intuitive conclusion, then the argument gets interesting. For every individual living being is a member of a species or life-form. And living beings are not just *acted upon*; they *act*. Species have characteristic actions. Thompson says "action in this sense is a specific form of *life process*."[13]. Since each particular species engages in its own characteristic activities: beavers build dams, and robins build nests. There are, then, life-form specific *successes* and *failures* to act. Each life-form is subject to its own normative appraisals: something would be

Lawrence Hursthouse Rosalind and Warren Quinn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 247–96. Thompson works out the arguments of this article more fully in his 2008 monograph.

11. Thompson, *Life and Action*, chapter 1.
12. Ibid., 57.
13. Ibid., 27.

wrong with beaver that built a tiny nest or a robin that tried to build a massive dam.

By introducing the term 'natural normativity', Foot is insisting on a point that is both interesting and controversial. If evaluative properties like health and disease are really instances of natural goodness and natural defect, then some evaluative properties are *primary qualities of nature*.

McDowell and others will object to this characterization of natural normativity. They think it "queer" that nature should exhibit such properties, and they find it easier to judge that human beings are the only evaluators. It might be that terms like 'good' and 'bad' are sui generis evaluative terms, and that evaluative properties are "in people's heads" as it were. But Foot's analysis of language about plants and animals indicates that such a conclusion is not the natural presumption.

A much more natural starting point is that to assume that such terms are used relative to natural kinds – and especially life-forms and their activities or functions. The natural goodness under discussion is not just a human ascription but seems to be something humans *recognize* in all living things. Certainly, some properties are human ascriptions only. Other properties are in the world and only show up in human ascriptions insofar as we accurately reflect the facts. Foot's point is that *some* instances of natural goodness seem much more plausibly instances of this latter kind. Despite For, there is "no change in the meaning of 'good' between the word as it appears in 'good roots' and as it appears in 'good dispositions of the human will.'[14] The identification of what is *good for* a non-human organism is sometimes identical to the identification of what is *good for* a human being. Foot's theory explains this in the simplest way. Foot concludes that this point holds about"goodness and badness, and therefore about evaluation in its most general form."

By contrast, McDowell and those who would draw a sharp contrast between "moral" and "non-moral" uses of the term must give long and sophisticated explanations for why

14. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 39.

it makes sense to describe a healthy plant and a moral person both as "doing well." The plant is not just doing well *for my garden* but doing well as itself. It is doing what such plants are supposed to live. The human being is not just living well *for a westerner* or *for a Californian* but doing well as what human beings are supposed to live. Rosalind Hursthouse articulates Foot's insight in this way:

> The starting point is an idea that she has never lost sight of, and which figures in her early attack on Hare. It is the idea that 'good', like 'small', is an attributive adjective. What that entails is that, although you can evaluate and choose things according to almost any criteria you like, you must select the noun or noun phrase you use to describe the thing you are calling good advisedly, for it determines the criteria of goodness that are appropriate. Hare can call a cactus a good one on the grounds that it is diseased and dying, and choose it for that reason, but what he must not do is describe it as a good cactus, for a cactus is a living thing. He can describe it as a good 'decorative object for my windowsill' or 'present to give my detestable mother□in□law', but not as a good cactus.[15]

There are two qualifications I should make about the scope of my thesis here. First, the 'good' in question here is a good-of-a-kind, the way that typical robins are blue-of-a-kind. The good-of-a-kind analysis works for all organisms and all biological species, which are most plausibly understood as natural kinds, rather than social groups, which are not. Folk ontology does tend to group nationalities and ethnicities as natural kinds along with leopards and bears; but my analysis trades on the concepts used in biology. Secondly, it would be a natural leap to assume that the good-for-us is an instance of the good simpliciter, but this is a different question altogether. Blackman argues that there *is* no good other than goods of kinds.[16] Others would argue that the good-of-a-kind is an instance of the good simpliciter. I wish to remain agnostic on this issue. While my thesis identifies what is good for us as

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

16. Reid D. Blackman, "Meta-Ethical Realism with Good of a Kind," *European Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2015): 273–92. Blackman also disputes the kind of biological foundation of ethics I am trying to defend here. Nevertheless, his article is a good introduction into the sort of "kindism" being discussed.

an instance of something *truly good,* it remains agnostic about the broader metaphysical or cosmic significance of the fact. These are both interesting and important questions but they would take us too far afield of the main point.

A Novel Case

A defense of natural normativity would render ethical naturalism possible. A defense of natural normativity would have to furnish instances of natural norms from widely agreed upon premises from common sense and science. My case for natural normativity depends on two notions: the first is a minimal scientific realism.[17] The second basic notion is a little-utilized feature of language called "generic propositions," which I shall explain below. The case in brief is this:

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

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

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

The Special Logic of Generics

Michael Thompson is one of the first to work out "the special logic of judgments we make about living things, and then to indicate its application to ethics." Such judgments have a variety of names in the recent neo-Aristotelian literature: the most common are "Aristotelian categoricals"[18] and "natural-historical judgements,"[19]; less common are "norms,"[20] or "bare plurals."[21] I prefer the shorter and less adorned term *'generic.'*[22]

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

18. Foot, *Natural Goodness*.

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

20. Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19

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

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

further articulated (in a later chapter) to indicate which traits are virtues or vices for human beings.

Generics are neither universal nor particular

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

> Start with this sentence: 'Buddhists are way into meditation'. This first sentence is, let us suppose, true. So far so good. But is it equivalent to 'for every x, if x is a Buddhist, x is way into meditation'? It does not appear to be. For the second sentence might be false (some Buddhists might not be way into meditation) even if the first sentence is, as we have supposed, true. The first sentence could be true, somehow, even if not all Buddhists are way into meditation (similarly, 'ducks lay eggs' may be true even if not all ducks lay eggs, 'mosquitos carry dengue fever' may be true even if only a very few mosquitos carry that virus, and so on). We are now positioned to observe one curious property of generics: they admit of exceptions.[23]

Thus, generics are statements of the form "S is F" or "S has or does F" where S is not an individual but a class or natural kind. The logical form of "all S's φ" does not predicate φ-ing to all members of the category S without exception, nor does it simply assert that some "S's φ", which is true but uninteresting. For example, consider the true statement, "wolves hunt in packs" as opposed to the clearly false statements "every particular wolf that has ever existed has hunted or will hunt in a pack." Rabid wolves hunt alone, and injured, or very old wolves don't hunt at all. Furthermore, it is true but trivial that *a large number of wolves hunt in packs*. The generic proposition is a unique logical expression, neither universal nor particular.

23. Bailey, "Animalism," 869.

A generic is interesting because it is, or we treat it as, a truth about forms, or species. The subject of the statement is not all S's nor merely some S's, but the "infima species."[24] In this way, generics pick out what we might call formal facts, facts about the life form in question. Thus Sarah Leslie: "It is widely accepted that [definite] generics are singular statements which predicate properties directly of kinds. For example, "tigers are extinct" predicates the property of being extinct directly of the kind Panthera tigris, and would be true just in case Panthera tigris had the property of being extinct."[25]

Generics are not merely statistical regularities. The members of extinct species do not exhibit any properties at all, yet it is still true in some sense that members of the species exhibit properties.[26] Likewise, all the living members of a species might fail to exemplify its formal attributes. Consider the fact that "California condors can fly for hours without resting."[27] In 1987 there were only 27 known condors alive. One could easily imagine a scenario in which every living member of such an endangered species were too injured, old, or diseased to exemplify this attribute. It would be strictly false of the individual condors that any of them could fly for hours; nevertheless the generic would still be true that "condors" (as a class) *can* fly for hours.

McDowell thinks that such exceptions are a "logical weakness" in deriving ethical conclusions from generics about human beings. He cites the example from Anscombe (and Aristotle) that "humans have 32 teeth", saying "there is a truth we can state in those terms, but from that truth, together with the fact that I am a human being, it does not follow that I

24. Christopher Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism: Requirements for a Successful Theory," *Metaphilosophy* 39, no. 2 (2008): 222. "Infima species" is the narrowest cut in a genus-species tree, or the most determinate determinable.

25. Leslie, "Generics," sec. 1.

26. We might say that at time t1 the species exhibited properties A and B, while at time t2 the species exhibits no properties.

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

have 32 teeth. (In fact it is false)."[28] McDowell accepts that generics are generally true. His objection to their application seems to be that the relation between a normative expectation and reality fails to reach deductive certainty. If this is his objection, it rather misses the point. Aristotelian-categoricals are not half-hearted universal judgments; they are not universes with widely-acknowledge counterexamples. They are judgments of a logically different kind. Far from being a logical weakness, generics are what enable us to capture truths about natural kinds that help explain statistical variation and inconsistency.

Prasada says that, "Much of our conceptual knowledge consists of generic knowledge — knowledge about kinds of things and their properties."[29] We can approach generics through a "formal, quantificational" semantics or through "principled connections". Principled connections support formal explanations, normative expectations, and a statistical expectation of prevalence. In other words, we explain that the dog has four legs *because* it is a dog (formal explanation); we expect that Fido should have four legs *unless something is wrong* (normative expectations); and we expect that if we counted up a population of dogs, *most* dogs would in fact turn out to have four legs (statistical expectation).

Generic truths, once discovered, set a normative expectation by which we evaluate individual members on how well or badly they exemplify their life form.[30] The normative expectation cannot, it seems, be reduced to statistical correlations. Rather, statistical correlations can be a sign of (or can be an illusion of) a principled connection.

There is much to be learned about the linguistic features of generics, but none of the unexplored frontiers render generics useless for applications in neo-Aristotelian ethics. A few examples of what needs to be learned include the correlation between statistical prevalence and normative identity; many generic truths describe what is statistically prevalent

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

29. Sandeep Prasada et al., "Conceptual Distinctions Amongst Generics," *Cognition* 126, no. 3 (2013): 405.

30. Ibid., 3.

but not all. What is the difference? Is one reducible to the other? Furthermore, Leslie distinguishes between indefinite generics such as “tigers are striped” which admits of the specification “that tiger over there is striped” and definite generics such as “domestic cats are common” which does not admit of specification, “that domestic cat is common”. What is the difference here? Finally, indefinite generics are trickier: “Ducks lay eggs” is a true generic while “ducks are female” is false one, even though only female ducks lay eggs. And “mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus” is true even though less than one percent of mosquitoes carry the virus while “books are paperbacks” is false even though more than eighty percent of books are paper backs.[31] How do we sort through these correlations between generic connection and statistical prevalance?

These unexplored frontiers represent fascinating puzzles but do not render generics unsuitable for use in normative and ethical arguments. Nor should the presence of outstanding questions lead one to believe generic propositions are confusing or confused. Rather, their normal acquisition and usage is a very familiar, and perhaps inevitable.

Generic truths are acquired via a normal scientific means of empirical observation, rational reflection, and discussion.To use a silly example, suppose that someone from a warm and landlocked country has never heard of penguins before. This person visits a zoo and sees penguins for the first time. He notices that these astonishing creatures are called ‘penguins’, and appear to be birds (for they have beaks, feathers, lay eggs, emit squawks, etc.). He reflects that most – if not all birds – have many of these macro features. Fascinated, he consults encyclopedias, biology or zoology textbooks, and consult zoologist friends. All these sources confirm the categorization. Although I am not aware of when the first penguin was studied by a modern naturalist, we can easily imagine that it was from observations and reflections such as these that penguins long ago earned an entry in the annals of scientific knowledge. The biological community gave them a scientific name

31. Leslie, “Generics.”

('sphenisciformes') and began to fill in gaps with a detailed description of their evolutionary history, characteristics, genetics, environments, diet, predators, and so on. The scientific conclusion, upon initial observation, bolstered by reflection, underwrites the initial hypothesis: penguins are indeed birds. This familiar scientific process may not be easy or free of dangers, but it is at least *a familiar scientific process*. Scientists are continually correcting formerly established generics (the notion that all mammals give live birth was thrown into crisis by the platypus). Scientists also work to distinguish between the (statistically) normal and (statistically) abnormal traits of a species, and within abnormal traits distinguish good from defective traits.

This familiar process is certainly revisable. For example, an ethologist who discovers a wolf hunting along may have a normative expectation that the wolf is not healthy. But she cannot know certainly in advance that this is so. She must test the hypothesis. A few reasonable interpretations are available: perhaps the lone wolf is unhealthy; perhaps the initial generic that 'wolves hunt in packs' was false; or perhaps this wolf is actually a new species of wolf. As it happens, in the case of wolves, no known species of wolf hunts alone so there is very strong reason to conclude that a lone wolf is rabid. But the point more generally is that generics are acquired and modified by a familiar, if complicated, process of scientific reasoning. Michael Thompson points out that: there is a "general and thoroughgoing reciprocal mutual interdependence of vital description of the individual and natural historical judgment about the form or kind."[32] Put differently, Micah Lott says:

> At each stage of an empirical investigation, our observations are mediated by our current understanding of the life form whose members we are observing. At the same time, our observations of those individual members will in turn improve our understanding of the life form itself, which then makes possible even more accurate and extensive future observations.[33]

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

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

Again, the fact that generic truths are revisable is not a weakness but a strength of the case I am building. It may be, for all we know, that penguins can fly (in the air), that some species of penguin can fly, or that all penguins are really just defective birds. But the most reasonable belief thus far is the generic truth that penguins don't fly; that they are excellent swimmers, not defective flyers; and that these truths hold of penguins *as a kind* – a biologist or zoologist who discovered the first flying penguin would become (justifiably) famous because we would all be (justifiably) surprised. The surprise would not originate merely from something out of the ordinary — new and extraordinary creatures, both living and extinct, are discovered every year. The surprise would originate from the upending of a firmly established scientific fact.

Generics are teleological

The first kind of natural normativity I am defending is the mere idea of a life-form. Knowing what a thing is, knowing about its species or life-form, is to know something descriptive and something normative about any member of that species. Knowing what a thing is, furthermore, licenses a range of normative expectations. But we can make the case for natural normativity stronger. There is another, related kind of normativity in the natural teleological features of life-forms. Such natural teleology can also be captured in generic propositions.

To see this second kind of natural normativity, begin with the concept of a function. Eyes perform the function (in an organism) of seeing, hemlock trees perform the function (in an ecosystem) of shading rivers, and so on. Thompson, for example, cites the scientific observation that "flowers have blossoms of such-and-such type in order that such-and-such insects should be attracted and spread their pollen about."[34]

While some philosophers of science have thought that teleological normativity could

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

be explained in terms of function, I would suggest that the reverse is rather true: the structure of a function is teleological. There are many senses of the term 'function', but the kind of biological functions under review are teleological, or least teleonomic, in that it is an arrangement of parts toward a particular purpose or end.

A functional process is not necessarily *willfully* undertaken. But it does have a beginning, an end (in time), and an end (telos). Clarifying that functions need not be intentional, we can understand the natural functions of organisms and organic systems as instances of natural teleology. James Barham explains the notion of natural teleology in this way:

> By "teleology," I have in mind such words and concepts as "purpose," "end," "goal," "function," "control," and "regulation," as well as the real-world biological phenomena to which these words and concepts refer. This means that the word "teleology" should always be construed here in its internal or "immanent" sense—purposiveness existing in living beings themselves—and never in its external or "transcendent" sense of an overarching cosmic principle.[35]

Ernst Mayr (following Colin Pittendridgh) calls a process "teleonomic" if it is not a process of intentional purposes.[36] He says, "I have therefore refrained from using anthropomorphic language, Particularly the terms of purpose and intention, when explaining teleonomic phenomena in animals and plants."[37]

Mayr further distinguishes between teleological (purpose-driven end-directed processes), teleonomical (non-intentional end-directed processes in living things) and "teleomatic" (non-intentional processes in non-living things). A teleomatic process is an "automatic" process governed by natural law:

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

36. Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology." Cf. Colin S. Pittendridgh, "Adaptation, Natural Selection, and Behavior" in Anne Roe and George Gaylord Simpsons (eds.), *Behavior and Evolution* (New Haven, 1958), 390-416.

37. Ibid., 123.

> All objects of the physical world are endowed with the capacity to change their state, and these changes strictly obey natural laws. They are end-directed only in a passive, automatic way, regulated by external forces or conditions… All teleomatic processes come to an end when the potential is used up (as in the cooling of a heated piece of iron) or when the process is stopped by encountering an external impediment (as when a falling object hits the ground). The law of gravity and the second law of thermodynamics are among the natural laws which most frequently govern teleomatic processes.[38]

For my purposes, however, even teleonomic programs would count as instances of natural normativity insofar as the development of an organism at one time is incomplete but will be complete in future. As Waddington puts it, "the end state of the process is determined by its properties at the beginning."[39] Normative, in my sense, is not the antonym of "descriptive"; normative is the antonym of descriptive *at present*. "The egg is not a chicken" is true at present. But "chickens start their life as eggs" is also generically true. Hence "the egg is a chicken" is a kind of teleological judgment about what it may, under proper conditions, become. As Chris Toner says, "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[40]

Taken broadly, then, the first point is to realize that talk about functions and ends is just as scientific as talk about life-forms, species, and natural health or disease. Mayr quickly rebuts many of the common objections (I should rather say prejudices) against teleonomic processes. For instance, teleological statements and explanations, he says, do not "imply the endorsement of unverifiable theological or metaphysical doctrines in science."[41] Rather,

As Mark Perlman says:

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38. Ibid., 125.

39. Conrad Hal Waddington and others, *The Strategy of the Genes. a Discussion of Some Aspects of Theoretical Biology.* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1957).

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

41. Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," 122.

> Many objects in the world have functions. Some of the objects with functions are organs or parts of living organisms… Hearts are for pumping blood. Eyes are for seeing. Countless works in biology explain the "Form, Function, and Evolution of …" everything from bee dances to elephant tusks to pandas' 'thumbs'. Many scientific explanations, in areas as diverse as psychology, sociology, economics, medical research, and neuroscience, rest on appeals to the function and/or malfunction of things or systems.[42]

Mayr's highly suggestive alternative to conscious purposes is natural "programs". A program is "coded or prearranged information" that regulates an organism's behavior or development up to a pre-defined end-point.[43] Mayr's examples include the development of bones, organs, and shapes that come with physiological maturity, migration. Programs are "the result of natural selection". However, they contain information: "not only blueprints of the goal but also the instructions of how to use the information of the blue print."[44] The concept of a program, he assures us, is similar to concepts deployed by geneticists and computer programmers. The point is that the telos is not some mysterious spirit hovering above the organism, beckoning it to reach its full potential but coded into the organism from the beginning.

Regardless of the details of Mayr's proposal for explaining teleonomic processes, the mere fact that natural processes occur is indisputable. And (to return to the main point) such behaviors are expressed in generic propositions.

Generic propositions usefully capture the functional or teleological properties of natural organisms. As Chris Toner says, "natural-historical judgments readily admit of combination into teleological judgments."[45] This kind of combination of generic truths is very familiar. No sooner have I learned the formal facts about a penguin (that it is a bird, that it can swim, that it has a countershaded white belly and dark back etc.) do I learn that

42. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology," 1–4.
43. Mayr, "The Idea of Teleology," 127–8.
44. Ibid., 128.
45. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 222.

penguins are countershaded in order to avoid predators from above and below.[46] Since an individual penguin may fail to be countershaded in the way that expresses its form, it would be defective. This defect is not a judgment made by scientists and "imposed" as it were, from the outside, on the penguin. It is rather a normative fact about the penguin. As Hursthouse says, "Wolves hunt in packs; a 'free□rider' wolf that doesn't join in the hunt fails to act well and is thereby defective."[47]

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

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

There is one objection that is easy to forestall. Someone might point out that genetic drift results in species evolving every which way, including the emergence of adaptive, maladaptive, and adaptation-neutral traits. This is true, so far as it goes, but not really an objection. Two replies are, I think, sufficient. First, it is an inextricable part of the scientific process to reason out which traits are instances of natural goodness and which

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

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

are not. Just because one hundred percent of organisms eventually die doesn't mean that death is naturally good for them. Just because a high statistical number of organisms have a particular feature – a stripe or a scale or whathave you – doesn't necessarily mean that the feature is a formal one of the species. Rather, one must keep an eye open to larger samples, possible counterexamples, and one must keep one's generics tentative until they are very well grounded. Similarly, part of the scientific process is reasoning out which traits are *adaptive*. Even the way the objection is phrased assumpes that some traits are adaptive – that is adaptive *survival and reproduction.* Allowing even this minimal sense of normativity concedes my point that the normativity is discovered by the scientist rather than purely ascribed by him or her. A second response is that the generics under discussion are not about species-qua-fluid-across-millenia but about species-qua-fixed or apparently fixed within a given period. The fluidity of species over time, like a slow-motion film with thousands of frames, requires countless generations. For all we can observe of most species in the course of a human lifetime (say) or even since the birth of modern science in the 16th century, the species-at-present are fixed enough.

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

IV. Three Paths Forward

I have made a case for normative realism that identifies some normative properties (such as formal and teleological properties of organisms) as respectable natural properties. I call this normativity 'organic normativity' and the resulting naturalism 'organic naturalism'. This label distinguishes my view from an "enchanted" view of nature wherein even rocks, chemicals, and stars instantiate normative properties.

While my case is disputable, the natural phenomena in question are indisputable: first, that organisms *very strongly appear* to exist in natural kinds (birds are not bacteria and crystals are not organisms at all); secondly that organisms exhibit "teleonomic" or *apparently teleological* phenomena such as striving to reproduce.

My point has been that realism about kinds and teleological phenomena is the simplest explanation of these phenomena. There are three paths forward. The first, and most plausible, path is that we can simply accept normative realism.

Reject

The second, and least plausible, path is that we could embrace full-scale normative anti-realism and deny the objective reality of any such norms in nature (and indeed, even in human beings). This path requires us to explain away not only natural kind, teleonomic phenomena in nature, but the apparently teleological actions of human beings.

For example, we would have to deny that animals, plants, insects, all living things (and even ecosystems) exhibit end-directed or teleonomic behavior: eyes see, hemlock trees offer shade to fish, stomachs digest, deer leap to avoid predators. This denial is almost incredible. If all generics are false (or only conventionally true) then it is in some important sense false that 'wolves hunt in packs' and false even that 'penguins are birds'. It is false not only that "eyes see" but even that "humans are primates". Such denials are, I think,

absurdities.[ˆ25.] Even when Kant denies natural teleology – the biological theory that the form of an organism causes the parts to grow and relate to each other in a particular way – he admits we *cannot help thinking so*.[48] To categorically reject *all truths* about natural kinds and natural functions, I contend, is untenable. And some generics are, it seems, necessarily normative propositions.

If we accept the truth of at least some generics, then Perlman's surprise is well founded: "It is surprising that analytic philosophers, with their strong focus on science, would reject a notion that is so central to some areas of science, most notably, biology and engineering sciences… Biology cannot, or at least in practice does not, eliminate functions and purposes."[49] One might suppose that Perlman's qualification "or at least in practice does not" leaves open space for the normative anti-realist. I welcome the critic who would try to show that biology *can* eliminate functions; what I have tried to suggest, and what Barham argues in great detail, is that the attempt has been made and has failed. A few failed attempts at reduction does not prove that reduction is impossible. But it does make the more plausible view, teleological realism, a better candidate for the default view.

Despite my inability to see the plausibility of global normative anti-realism, I must acknowledge that it has impressive defenders who deserve a fuller response than I can give here. Since anti-realism is not likely to appeal to the scientific naturalists in my intended audience, I must let these comments suffice.

Reduce

The third path, and the most plausible rival to realism, is to develop a reductionistic account of apparently natural norms. This path accepts the appearance of such things as natural kinds, natural teleology, natural functions, etc., but *reduces* these phenomena to less spooky

48. Huneman, "Naturalising Purpose..
49. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology. 6.

(read: more mechanistic) phenomena consistent with a conception of bald nature. For this section, I ignore natural kinds and focus simply on teleological normativity. So we can call reductionism of such natural norms "teleological reductionism" or "teleoreduction", following James Barham.[50] Arguing for or against teleoreductionism has become a cottage industry.[51]

I do not think that teleological reductionism is as plausibility as teleological realism; I do not think it is very plausible in its own right. Nevertheless, the arguments for teleoreductionism are sophisticated ones and some of its proponents hold out hope for even better arguments to come. More to the point, some of its proponents affirm reductionism because of operating background belief that, globally, reductive physicalism is a victorious view, despite ongoing local skirmishes. My objections to teleological reductionism amount to the accusation of a non-sequitor. But I do not think these objections are likely to overturn someone's background beliefs. Since I agree pretty well with Barham's analysis, I will summarize his view of the dialectic:

> If someone were comfortable with a purely physicalist worldview that had no place in it anywhere for teleology in any form, then nothing I will say here would do much to discomfort that individual. All I claim is that, if one is already convinced of the rationality of taking at face value at least some of the teleological concepts that we employ both in everyday life and in biological discourse, then one is not required to relinquish that conviction on the basis of the notion that molecular biology and the theory of natural selection, either severally or jointly, have already settled the matter by providing us with a successful means of eliminating such concepts from biology.[52]

This seems right to me. I am content to defend the claim that naturalistic teleological realism (and more broadly normative realism) is a live option even for the non-reductive scientific

50. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology. chapter 3. My discussion will closely follow this chapter; however, Barham's discussion is far too rich to be summarized.

51. Cf. Perlman, "The Modern Philosophical Resurrection of Teleology., section III; and Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., chapter 3.

52. ibid., 110.

naturalist. Hence, the remainder of this chapter will examine some reasons for preferring realism to reductionism when considering normative realism in isolation, even if these reasons are not enough to overcome someone's background commitment to the contrary.

First, what does would it mean to "reduce" teleology? Barham's definition of teleoreduction, which I find adequate to my purpose, is this:

> To reduce a putative teleological phenomenon is to give an account of the phenomenon that is both empirically and theoretically adequate and that neither employs any teleological concepts nor presupposes any other teleological phenomena.[53]

The two primary candidates for teleoreduction are causal-role reductions and natural selection reductions. Causal-role or causal-contribution explanations (endorsed by Donald Davidson, Robert Cummins and others) reduce teleological relations such as "in order to" and "for" and "to the end of" to bare cause-effect relations. For example, the function of the heart is defined in reference to its role in the oxygenation of a vertebrate's blood. Slightly differently, natural selection stories (endorsed by Ruth Millikan and others) provide a causal-history explanation of a present day teleonomic function. Similarly, purely mechanistic natural selection pressures may result in the construction of a genetic "program" or action that has some adaptive or useful otucome without consisting of teleological process.

Both of these reductionistic efforts are subject to worries that, to my mind, render them less plausible than simply accepting the appearances. While philosophers may be able to patch up these accounts or offer fresh reductionistic alternatives in the future, for now, it seems that we should side with the most overall plausible explanation of natural phenomena of teleological normativity.

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53. Ibid., 109.

Causal-Role Reduction

Barham summarizes the causal-role positions in the recent literature on teleological and natural functions:

> The first position, stemming from a seminal article by Cummins (1975), views being a function fundamentally as making a causal contribution (in the efficient-causal sense) to the maintenance of a larger system of which the function in question is a component part.[54]

In that seminal article, Cummins attacks the assumptions that "(A) The point of functional characterization in science is to explain the presence of the item (organ, mechanism, process or whatever) that is functionally characterized" and "(B) For something to perform its function is for it to have certain effects on a containing system, which effects contribute to the performance of some activity of, or the maintenance of some condition in, that containing system."[55]Essentially, this path explains a natural function as a relation between parts and wholes.

The natural function is not reducible to just any relation, nor even to any *causal* relation, for there are many part-whole relations that are obviously not functions. For example, the heart is not just the heart pumping part of the human body; it may also be correctly described as the "thumping sound" part of the human body. Obviously, making thumping sounds is not the function of the heart (it is at best a side-effect of its performing its function). Yet "heartsounds" and circulation are both effects of the heart's beat. So the question is how one can determine *before identifying the function* exactly which part-whole relation is the functional one?

It does no good to assert that part A has a causal role witin organism B *after one has already presupposed an irreducibly functional analysis*. The teleoreductionist is obliged

54. ibid., 111.

55. Robert Cummins, "Functional Analysis," *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 20 (1975): 741–65 741.

rather to show how one can distinguish teleological and non-teleological part-whole relations in absence of or prior to such presuppositions. The teleological realist also affirms that hearts, say, play a causal role in the vertebrate's body. The teleological realist's point is that the heart is a part of the body with an irreducibly functional part – it pumps *in order to* circulate blood. It is *the blood pump* of the body. The teleological realist is free to identify the function of a particular body part, and then to characterize the part-whole relation in irreducibly functional terms; the teleological reductionist cannot do likewise. Relatedly, we should note that the notion of a "role" seems to be teleological. The proposition that 'the heart plays a role within the organism's circulatory system' seems, on the face, synonymous with the proposition that 'the heart *has a function* within the circulatory system.'

Natural Selection Reduction

One alternative (or perhaps supplement) to the causal-role answer is by appealing to the historical genesis of the organ in question.

One strategy is to show how natural selection itself is a teleonomic or quasi-teleological process that can produce organisms with functional properties. So, to put the picture simply: define survival and reproduction as the goal-state of organisms (however this came to be); then, distinguish effects that tend toward the organism's survival and reproduction from those that do not or those that are irrelevant to that end. Circulation contributes to survival and hence is a more plausible candidate for the heart's function than making heartsounds. Simply put, we can describe the present state of the heart (including its causal-role in bodies) by referring to its historical genesis: the heart evolved *because* it tended to the survival of certain kinds of organisms.

The question is whether natural selection is even the right kind of explanation for, say, the pumping of the heart. Natural selection is not really a *selection* at all in the sense that *no one* is doing the selecting. Instead, natural selection is a scientific description of the

process by which present day populations were preserved while others died out. So much is clear in outline, but the details matter. Specifically, natural selection explains heritable traits that (i) varied in the past and which (ii) played a role in the reproductive rates of the population.[56] It does not (and is not even supposed to) explain the bare existence of an initial organism or population of organisms. Rather, the initial organism or populatuion is taken for granted, along with its complete set of reproductive and other traits. Natural selection comes in to show how the organism varies, passes on heritable traits, and gives rise to new phenotypes. Thus Barham says:

> …the functionally coordinated organism must already exist before it can be selected. On this view, we assume that the functional coordination of the organism is *prima facie* evidence of teleological determination, and since that functional coordination is presupposed by the theory of natural selection, the theory is in no position to reduce the apparent teleology in biology to mechanism.[57]

The worry is that the process natural selection is not the *right kind* of explanation to serve as a candidate for the reduction of apparently teleological activity within individual organisms.

When we are wondering how or why it is that the heart seems to have a definite function (to circulate blood) that is discernable from other side-effects (to make heartsounds), the question is about organismic behavior in general. Chemicals and compounds do not grow and develop and perform characteristic activities in the structured way that organisms do. My answer is that such normativity is a fundamental natural feature of organic life, a kind of brute natural law discovered a posteriori by the scientific method. The natural

56. Thus Godfrey-Smith's summary: Evolution by natural selection is change in a population due to: (i) variation in the characteristics of members of the population, (ii) which causes different rates of reproduction, and (iii) which is inherited. (Peter Godfrey-Smith, "Conditions for Evolution by Natural Selection," *The Journal of Philosophy* 104, no. 10 (2007): 489–516 515). This is only one of Godfrey-Smith's two descriptions: the more general description excludes particular real organisms in exchange for a useful degree of generality.

57. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology. 125.

selection reductionist's answer that the the teleonomic function of hearts emerged out of a long history of phenotypic variation. My question is: so what? Mechanistic forces that are taking place between a population and its environment (droughts, famines) or within a population's genetics (genetic drift, normal reproduction) are compatible with a parallel teleological forces. Indeed, Barham suggests that the burgeoning field of evolutionary developmental biology might be able to supply some of the connections between these two kinds of process. He calls "phenotypic accommodation" the distinct process of "inherent compensatory or adaptive capacity of organisms" – or simply homeostasis.[58] The scientific hypothesis some are investigating[59] seems to be that these two processes are separately necessary but only jointly sufficient causes to explain the presence of a trait (like pumping hearts) in a population.

Another proponent of natural selection reduction strategies is Ruth Millikan.[60] Barham arues that: "a present trait's being a function to be equivalent to its having been naturally selected due to the fitness advantage conferred on an organism by the physical effects of the ancestral trait of the same type from which the present trait-token is descended."[61]

The idea here is that ancestral organisms had such-and-such phenotypes which, after many generations of reproduction, conferred hearts upon present-day vertebrates. A consequence of Millikan's view is that an organism's "proper function" simply cannot be read off its present capacities; we can't just observe that hearts *seem to be for circulating blood* and infer from this observation that they are, indeed, for circulating blood. Rather, the proper function of a (present-day) heart can only be identified by its empirical history.

Two implausible corollaries are that if we discovered two heart-like organisms (sup-

58. ibid., 131.

59. James A Shapiro, "Revisiting the Central Dogma in the 21st Century," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1178, no. 1 (2009): 6–28.

60. Ruth Garrett Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science*, 1989, 288–302.

61. Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., 9.

pose one is extraterrestrial) with distinct evolutionary parentages, then they would have to be classified as having different functions despite both circulating blood. More hypothetically, "Swampman" arguments press a similar point. Suppose an exact material replica of Donald Davidson spontaneously emerged from a swamp; on Millikan's theory, even though the Swampman is equipped with a heart and lungs and legs and eyelids, none of these has *any* "proper function". Millikan bites the bullet on both of these implausible corollaries.

The point of these examples is not to challenge the details of empirical origin stories but to separate the *concept* of having a (present day) functional capacity from the *concept* of having an empirical, evolutionary history. These concepts come apart in several ways: Useless vestigial organs have an empirical history but no present day functional capacity; spandrals have a present-day functional capacity with no direct, primary selection history; the language capacities in say, the right hemisphere of the brain brain *can* be taken over by the left hemisphere in the case of injury or lobotomy, presumably because the brain is (present-day) adaptible and not because the brain function redudancy was selected for in every individual case. These counterexamples demonstrate *at least* function and history conceptually can come apart.

What is the alternative? In Barham's view, functions are "essentially modal, not historical, concepts"[62]. He quotes Fodor's vivid statement that: "my heart's function has less to do with its evolutionary origins than with the current truth of such counterfactuals as that if it were to stop pumping my blood, I'd be dead."[63] If we made contact with extraterrestrials whose blood-like liquid was circulated by a pump-like organ, how could we discern whether it was a heart? We could query about the historical genesis of the organ on that planet, but we would first rightly query: *what would happen if that organ stopped*

62. ibid., , 139.

63. Jerry A Fodor, *The Mind Doesn't Work That Way: The Scope and Limits of Computational Psychology* (MIT press, 2001), 86-7; cited in Barham, "Teleological Realism in Biology., 138.

pumping? If the Alpha Centaurians, too, would die without the beating of that organ, we would justifiably call the organ a 'heart' even though it had a very different history.

Barham cautions against, "imagining that 'selection history' could confer normative value on a biological function in the same way that pedigree confers value on a horse, or provenance on a painting."[64] "History" is not a special power but is simply the set of physical interactions over time. The question about which set of physical interactions over time that produced X might be (and I think is) intimately related to questions about the function of X; the point is that they are two different questions. Michael Thompson, too, insists that judgments about natural teleology are made true from the form of life under question, not from "hypotheses about the past."[65] This seems right to me. It does not matter for present purposes *how* the function came to be, just whether or not it really *is* at present.] Barham is right to point out that the problem with Aristotle's views of biology (say, believing that the seat of perception was not in the brain) was not that he lacked knowledge of evolution, but that he lacked an adequate knowledge of physiology.

I can only conlude from this brief discussion that these reductionistic strategies are not very promising. 'Not very promising' is a far cry from 'hopeless'. There may one day be a successful reduction of teleonomic phenomena "that is both empirically and theoretically adequate and that neither employs any teleological concepts nor presupposes any other teleological phenomena." But today is not that day. The scientific perspective of empirical biology conforms most closely to the commonsense perspective that hearts are for pumping blood.

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64. Ibid., 140.

65. Cf. Thompson, "The Representation of Life. 293. Christopher Toner adds that judgments about natural teleological facts are made true regardless of the origin of the facts, "whether about creation or natural selection." (Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism. 223.)

Coming to terms with teleology

The three paths I mentioned above are to accept, reduce, or reject natural normativity. I cited reasons to think rejecting and reducing are not promising paths. In closing, I would like to offer some reassurance to those who might be anxious about the prospect of accepting normative realism whole clothe. My reassurance boils down to the belief that appeal to natural normativity is a live *scientific* belief. While natural teleological realism is still controversial, it is not a controversy between science and philosophy but a controversy *within science*.

Thomas Nagel took a lot of heat for his recent philosophical defense of scientific, Darwinian, natural teleology.[66] However, Michael Chorost does not accuse Nagel of obscurantism but chastises him for *failing to cite the science*. He says:

> Natural teleology is unorthodox, but it has a long and honorable history. For example, in 1953 the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley argued that it's in the nature of nature to get more advanced over time. "If we take a snapshot view, improvement eludes us," he wrote. "But as soon as we introduce time, we see trends of improvement…"[67]

Teleological realism in biology fell into disfavor with Francis Bacon's superstitious belief that the search for final causes corrupted science.[68] The proper reply to Bacon is that the teleological nihilism hypothesis has been tried and found wanting.

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66. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*.

67. Michael Chorost, "Where Thomas Nagel Went Wrong," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2013.

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

Modern science is no less teleological than it was in the 16th century; perhaps even more so. Arnhart persuasively argues that teleology is irreplacably assumed in medicine.[69] Zammito clarifies its ongoing relevance in biology, since organisms seem to be intrinsically purposeful.[70] Fitzpatrick says that, "While neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory does soundly reject any appeal to teleology in the process of evolution itself, there is a large literature in contemporary philosophy of biology defending the legitimacy of employing teleological concepts in connection with adaptations."[71] Darwin himself might have been a teleologist.[72] Whether Darwin's theory of natural selection *undermines* and debunks or *underwrites* and justifies the teleological view at least debatable.

V. Conclusion

While I conceded that the **Is-Ought Gap** could not be overcome, I suggested that it could be undercut. The goal of this chapter has been to meet the **Bald Nature Challenge** by proposing examples of scientifically respectable natural norms. The conclusion we have drawn is that indeed *some* facts – especially facts about living things – are both natural and (it is rationally defensible) irreducibly normative.

The natural formal and functional facts about organic beings and their parts and operations are expressed in perfectly respectable scientific judgments we have called "generics" but may also be called "Aristotelian categoricals", "natural-historical judgements", "norms", "bare plurals", etc. Generics like these render it at least *possible* to conclude

69. Arnhart, "Aristotle's Biopolitics."

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

71. William FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2016, 2016.

72. James G Lennox, "Darwin Was a Teleologist," *Biology and Philosophy* 8, no. 4 (1993): 409–21; James G Lennox, "Teleology," *Keywords in Evolutionary Biology*, 1992, 324–33.

the the scientific picture of nature includes normativity in the form of natural teleology. If true generics could be stated about human beings, then it is conceivable we can use them as a basis for ethical theory.

J. L. Mackie exploits the apparent silliness of the notion that "to-be-pursuedness" is built into things. We should not confuse ourselves with loaded rhetoric. We should not think of natural norms in explicitly contradictory or paradoxical terms. Instead, we should think of other perfectly ordinary natural relations such as causation. A natural norm is not a one-place predicate things but a relation between things. For example, one type of natural norm might be a relation between a living thing and another object, such as food, shade, or a predator. Given the kind of thing snakes are, and the kind of thing mice are, a mouse is to be eaten by the snake and the snake is to be fled by the mouse.

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

Chapter 3

Practical Primates

> When we are investigating what the good life is... and how living virtuously might achieve it, we are aided by investigating our human nature. This in turn we do by seeing how we humans are a part, though a distinctive part, to the world that the sciences tell us about.
>
> —Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics: What Kind of Naturalism?", 11.

I. Introduction

The last chapter defended the very possibility of an ethical naturalism, this chapter must go further and defend its plausibility. In order to show how moral norms are instances of natural norms, we had to defend the notion of natural normativity in general. This chapter extends the discussion of natural normativity to include "human norms".

The strategy is fairly simple. We must first uncover certain generic propositions about human beings are both scientifically true *and* normatively or ethically significant. First and foremost, what is a human being? All else depends on the life form of our species. Also, what kinds of activities does "the human" being do? What kind of life does it live? What is its natural end, if it has one – or what are they? The Aristotelian Categoricals or

generics that answer these questions would be human norms. Human norms would provide prima facie normative bindingness; if I am a human being by nature, it would be initially binding upon me to *do what humans do* and *become what humans become*. These human norms, I will suggest, give us insight into the concepts of virtue, excellence, wisdom, and flourishing.

The main thesis of this chapter is that to be human is to be a practical rational primate. Section 2 builds to this conclusion by developing the intuitive observation that human beings are natural organisms. That is, we are *animals* enjoying the properties common to the entire tree of life but also enjoying other, more peculiar, properties relating to our speaking, innovating, deliberating, and so on. All of the natural norms of animal organisms, such as the value of life and survival and reproduction, obtain in human beings as well.

Section 3 supplements the notion of being a primate with the notion of being 'practically rational'. What cluster of concepts is meant by the activity of 'practical reasoning'? I argue that there are at least four: a practical primate is one who engages in speaking, rational practicing, social living, and innovating. Hence, the human being is a primate (animal) who engages in such practices: a practical primate. This conception of human nature that is seamlessly both normative and descriptive. Human beings find themselves in a nexus of normativity that is both "natural" (i.e., automatic, default, not created by us) and normative (i.e., binding, non-optional). I point out that observing human behaviors both from "within" and "without" the human point of view allows us to see what is unique about human beings, their capacities, and ends. If, even with these differences, humans fit the larger pattern of natural normativity defended in chapter 2. By comparison to the human life form, evaluations of individual human beings is possible.

Section 4 responds to a few critical objections. I attempt to sympathetically articulate and provide a response to a series of worries philosophers have about the neo-Aristotelian project of grounding ethical evalutions in some normatively loaded conception

of human nature. For example, some think that there are no such things as the sort of "natures" as I have described; others think that there are natures but that there is no human nature; others think that human nature comes with no built in teleological boundaries; others think that human nature comes with a few built in teleological boundaries are the ends of reproduction and survival. Each of these receives an initial rebuttal, though a few of them will require further comment in a later chapter. I concede that human norms are only a beginning, however. Because humans are in control of their actions, the generic truths about "the human" seems to be variable. Perhaps human norms are irrelevant to how you or I or any individual *ought* to live. If so, more work is needed to justify even putatively universal natural human norms.

Section 5 begins to apply the foregoing account of human nature and natural human norms to ethics. Specifically, I shall argue that as practical, rational animals, a a basic human norm is that one *is to become a fully mature human being*. Practical primates have prima facie normative obligation to be what they are (to respect the conditions and criteria of their life form) and a prima facie obligation to become fully mature practical primates.

II. Animals of a Peculiar Sort

The previous chapter drew substantially from Philippa Foot to argue that *any* animal exists within a nexus of natural normativity. Since humans are animals, it would seem to follow that humans are subject to natural norms. Foot is well aware that the derivation of normativity from brute nature is likely to seem absurd, especially when it comes to human beings. She says:

> The idea that any features and operations of humans could be evaluated in the same way as those of plants and animals may provoke instant opposition. For to say that this is possible is to imply that some at least of our judgements of goodness and badness in human beings are given truth or falsity by the conditions of human life. And even if it is allowed that certain

> evaluations of this kind are possible—-those vaguely thought of perhaps as 'merely biological'—-there is bound to be skepticism about the possibility that 'moral evaluation' could be like this.[1]

Despite such legitimate worries, we have followed Foot in trying to earn a hearing for this notion by arguing that the "meaning of 'good' in so-called 'moral contexts' " does not have a special logic of its own. Rather, 'good' and 'defective' pick out natural properties of living things. The goodness of a cactus is relative to its cactus nature; likewise, we should expect that the goodness of human beings is relative to their human nature.

Are human beings natural organisms? On its face, calling human beings organisms or animals or primates appears to be an innocent truism. *Of course* humans share properties in common with every other organism: they enjoy a particular evolutionary history; they move about the earth engaging in activities such as reproducing, sleeping, feeding, dying, and so on. But some of objected to the suggestion that human beings are *mere* animals. We are different from other animals, and the significance of this difference is a matter of some controversy. Certainly, humans exhibit a range of actions such as language and complex social systems that other animals do not. As Hursthouse summarizes:

> When we moved from the evaluations of other social animals to ethical evaluations of ourselves, there was an obvious addition to the list of aspects which are evaluated. The other animals act [as opposed to chemicals which are only acted upon.]. So do we occasionally, but mostly we act from reason, as they do not, and it is primarily in virtue of our actions from reason that we are ethically good or bad human beings. So that is one difference that our being rational makes.[2]

In light of the difference of being rational, the task in discovering true generics about human beings is capturing what is common, and what is unique, about humans.

My view is that human beings are animals of a peculiar sort where the peculiarities do not erase the commonalities. The traditional formula that humans are "rational animals"

1. Foot, *Natural Goodness* 38.
2. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* 217.

is close to correct. As such, both the *animal* part of that formula is essential and the *rational* part. To see why, let's first consider in a bit more detail what it means to be an animal, and why it matters. Then we will look at what it means to be the peculiar sort of animal we are.

To be an animal is to belong to the "tree of life" — and to have a location in the broader story of life on earth.[3] That story begins 3.5 billion years ago with the first living organisms, and our own part begins about 200,000 years ago with the emergence of anatomically modern humans. In contemporary classificatory scheme, we can locate humans within the phylum chordata, the class mammalia, the order of primates, the suborder haplorhini, the familiy hominidae, the genus homo, the species homo sapiens.

Does this matter ethically? I think it can be demonstrated that the common history of living organisms (including humans) is not ethically irrelevant. At the very least, the bundle of properties intrinsic to our animality serves as a condition of our ethical life. At the most, our animality is (sometimes) a *criterion* of our ethical life.

One example that will suffice to illustrate the point is mortality. As a matter of plain scientific fact, we are finite and mortal like every other living organism or species. All life on earth undergoes a process from a humble beginnings in a single cell through infancy, maturation, and adulthood, at which point it may reproduce itself before dying. All of these phases we notice in human animals as well. The human life cycle is characterized by various phases, including growth, language acquisition, puberty, physical maturity and characteristic activities, aging, and death.

Now, all that is good in life depends on the prior state of being alive at all. Although death is "normal" at the end of the life cycle, it is a very basic normative fact that being alive is a good. This is a plausible candidate to explain, in part, what is so morally horrendous about murder. Where theft robs one of this or that particular good, murder robs one of life which is the condition of all other goods. In this way, mortality is a condition of ethical life;

3. 30

prima facie, one ought not behave in such a way as to make others die (or to put others at risk of dying) before their life cycle is complete.

My point is not that the status of mortality is uncontroversial. Whether mortality is condition or criterion of ethical life is a live controversy in bioethics: should we attempt (if possible) to overcome mortality?[4] Would doing so be a morally innocent intervention like body-building or a morally loaded intervention like genetically modifying embryos? My point is that being mortal creatures whose very life is a fragile homeostasis is *at least* a condition that must be taken into account when living life or constructign an ethical theory.

What other conditions of animality are possible criteria of ethics? The whole range facts that characterize a human being and a human pattern of life. When I say "pattern of life" I do not just mean the crudely biological features of life; I mean the whole range of biological and neurophysiological facts by which a human being undergoes the process of living from birth to death.

We cannot, except via abstraction, describe the human species adequately without describing biology, ethology, psychology, and sociology. For example, it might seem a purely descriptive biological trivium that humans have 23 chromosomes in each somatic cell. But genetic defects in a person have enormous effects on that person's quality of life and on the community in which he or she lives. Apparently innocent "descriptions" of human animals are inseparable from ethological and anthropological descriptions, which which are both descriptive *and* normative.

Furthermore, a scientific account of humanity cannot leave out that humans have large brains relative to other primates, with a neocortex and prefrontal cortex that correlate with abstract thinking, problem solving, society, and culture. A scientific account cannot leave out that humans don't just suffer physiological responses like fear and excitement or

4. Nick Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30 (2005): 3–14; Nick Bostrom, "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity," *Bioethics* 19, no. 3 (2005): 202–14.

arousal, they wilfully seek out such emotions for themselves through art and entertainment and wilfully cause them in others. Presumably, even an alien anthropologist who knew nothing of human language or "what it is like to be a human" would be able to notice, upon examination, that a human's laugh or cry is different from a hyena's laugh or a crocodile's tears.

Part of the alien anthropologist's examination would be to examine the body, brain, and hands of human beings. One of the first things we can imagine they would notice is that humans live in cultures and societies. They are not merely "social animals" like apes; they are language-users, communicating in signs and symbols. Their language is an extremely complex, open-ended system which is both recursive (able to nest propositions within propositions) and productive (able to create sentences by potentially limitless combinations of words). In virtue of language and their opposable thumbs, they are creative; they don't just live on the ground or under ground, but build houses and shelters, sometimes in new places, such as caves, trees, hills, mountains, etc. Also, they are self-reflective. They establish social relations upon biological grounds (some children growing up with natural parents) and upon normative grounds (some orphans growing up in orphanages created by philanthropists).

Even before introducing the "human" point of view, we can describe "the human" form of life in some detail. My hope is that these generics are plausibly knowable from an "objective" or third-person point of view of scientific exploration, data gathering, inductive generalization. They seem to have at least *potential* ethical significance; even so, the most ethically significant fact about us is the peculiar differentiam of our species: practical rationality.

Peculiarities

This section attempts to explain what it means to ascribe 'practical rationality' of an organism.[5] Practical reason occupies a place of importance in the theories of many virtue ethicists. For example, Foot, McDowell, and MacIntyre have each treated the theme.[6] Chapter 5 focuses on the neo-Aristotelian accounts of practical reasoning in some detail. For now, I shall only offer an initial exploration. Jay Wallace gives an adequate general definition of practical reason: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[7]

When we take a wide view and observe human behavior in context of other animal behavior, observing ourselves both "from inside" and "from outside" the human perspective, we notice a range of properties not shared by other mammals: grammar and language, fire-making, cooking, sexual union for pleasure, abstract reasoning, science, philosophy, religion, mythology, agriculture. Is there any way to collect these idiosyncracies into one or a few generic categories? All of them depend, in one way or another, on activities we call "rational".

Predicating rationality is not just based, as Russell flippantly suggests, on the fact that "some people can do sums"[8] Rather, we predicate rationality on the basis of observing a range of activities such as: to observe, reflect, and perceive; to remember, predict, and

5. I shall use 'practical rationality' and 'practical reason' as synonymous. Warren Quinn uses 'practical reason' to mean the faculty and 'practical rationality' to mean the excellence use of the faculty. In a later chapter, I will contrast the faculty with 'practical wisdom', which is the excellence thereof. Cf. Warren Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9, no. 02 (1992): 81–95.

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

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

8. Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell, 1903-1959* (Psychology Press, 1992), 73.

categorize; to decide, determine, and pursue; to abstract, explain, and infer; to criticize, blame, and praise; to admonish, prohibit, and command; and so on. Abstracting to what all these disparate activities have in common gives us a sense of what the generic activity of practical reasoning is.

Practical reasoning is the process of self-determining, of taking our actions "into our own hands" so to speak. Some of the above rational activities are intrinsically aimed at action, while others are not. But even the theoretical activities (like reflection) can be and are put to use in practice. Hence, on my view, practical reason is constituted by at least four capacities that in turn constitute human nature: the capacity to speak, to live in society, to engage in rational practices, and to create or innovate. Let's consider each of these four properties in turn.

First, take speech. Aristotle observed that, "Man alone of the animals possesses speech."[9] Nothing in modern science has superseded or contradicted the observation (obvious to anyone) that human speech is different from other animal noises. Other animals have speech and communication. The difference between non-human and human speech is not obvious to infant humans, who learn words by imitation just as well as they learn tweets, barks, and growls. Upon reflection, researchers have observed that animals communicate with non-grammatical closed systems with a small, finite set of symbols. Communication systems used by other animals such as bees or apes are closed systems that consist of a finite, usually very limited, number of possible ideas that can be expressed. In contrast, human language is open-ended and productive, meaning that it allows humans to produce a vast range of utterances from a finite set of elements, and to create new words and sentences. Our language is unique: it is grammatical, open-ended, recursive, and productive. We are animals who use signs and symbols to communicate self-reflective and abstract thought.[10]

9. *Politics*, 1.1253a. Obviously, Aristotle and the the translator use 'man' in the gender inclusive sense.

10. Terrence W Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and*

Speech is inseparable from self-reflectivity and sociality. Through our animal senses comes a sensitivity to our surroundings, the ability to see the world, ourselves, the sun and stars, to hear our fellow creatures, and to take the whole cosmos into consciousness. But through speech comes a whole second cosmos of culture. Through speech comes intentionality in all its forms. Through speech comes communication ("pass the salt"), distinct languages and cultures (about 5,000 distinct languages), self-consciousness ("who am I?"), abstraction ("all grass is green"), science, philosophy, religion, mythology, technology and more. Perhaps even art and music arise from the rational capacity to direct our actions to create not only what instinct demands but whatever the imagination can invent.[11]

The second constituitive feature of practical reason is sociality. When Aristotle asserted that "Humans are political animals," he did not mean the facile point that human beings prefer to reside in groups or enjoy "getting involved in politics". We ought to interpret this assertion as a generic truth. Human beings are formally constituted by being animals in political or communal settings. This truth is best viewed in light of our animality and speech: for to be a human being is to be a creature produced by the sexual union of two other human gametes, and to be able to speak is to be enculturated in a particular natural language in a time in human history and a place on the globe. We shall return to the importance of sociality in our discussion of traditions in chapter 7'.

The third feature of practical reason is the ability to engage in rational practices. All organisms initiate *action* in the most general sense that they move about and do things. And all higher mammals engage in complex (and often social) practices, such as communal hunting, grooming, and building. Humans exhibit unique behaviors: We do not act merely, but act *on reasons*. We are the only creatures that set goals, on purpose, far in advance

the Brain (WW Norton & Company, 1998).

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

of their fulfilment. We are the only creatures who undertake long, complicated sets of actions in order to achieve those goals. Micah Lott says: "Human form is characterized by practical reason. This is the capacity to act in light of an awareness of the ground of our actions, to recognize and respond to practical reasons."[12] Goal-setting and recognizing practical reasons are inextricably tied. Practical reasons include our assessments of what is worthwhile. We also reflect on past actions and evalute them to decide whether it is advisable to do the same thing again or try something else. Practical reasoning includes not just deliberating about what to do but weighing the apparent reasons for and against a particular course of action. Hence, as I shall explain more later, it is under the category of 'rational practice' that I will include everything unique about humans having to do with morality.

The fourth feature is rational creation or innovation. The concept of 'creativity' is not metaphysically distinct from rational practice, but since it is conceptually distinct, it deserves some mention. Our speech and grammatical systems allow us to create new words, propositions, phrases, and to tell stories or write philosophy papers. Our social identity within a social order allows us to create living spaces, utensils, farming implements, and so on as well as to create new social orders themselves. And one of the forms practical reasoning takes is that we *innovate* — we create and design and plan actions, new behaviors, new games, new languages, new activities, and so on.

The human differentiam of 'practical rationality' entails not only abstract reasoning but speech, sociality, rational practice, and creation. Such norms are not *only* accessible to us, but would be accessible to an "alien anthropologist" observing humanity from the "outside". The alien anthropologist, if indeed it had enough of its own rationality to be able to have anthropological science, could observe these actions and infer the existence of the property of rationality.

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

III. Objections

I must now clear up a few possible misunderstandings and address a few objections. The first misunderstanding that we should avoid is a misunderstanding about the concept of a nature. Chris Toner's epigraph states that *human nature is normative.* I don't instist on the term 'nature', as some object to it on aesthetic grounds; we could equally say that genetically modern homo sapiens sapiens are potentially a practical, rational primates. The important thing is not the term 'nature' or 'human nature' but the concept of a nature. What do I mean by a nature or life form?

In the old classificatory schemes, philosophers provided a genus and a differentiam to pick out the unique "nature" of any life form or natural kind. Not every kind-concept corresponds to a real nature: *the set of medium sized objects immediately to my left* is not a natural kind, nor is *All human beings born in Ireland.* The kind-concepts under review are not just any generalizations but scientific and biological kinds that arise from inquiry and on which inquiry depends. We start out knowing nothing about an organism (say, some species of beatle) and come to discover not only that they exist but a whole set of properties: their genetic traits, their evolutionary history, their natural habitats, diet, predators, lifespans, and so on. In this way, a nature is a species, or a homeostatic set of properties, or a natural kind.

When such a kind-concept corresponds to a real natural kind or "nature", that nature is potentially discernible both by contrasting it with other kinds of things and by comparing it with instances of the same kind. Hans Fink explains:

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

> mammals. We may thus use the concept of nature to differentiate rather than include, but also to include rather than differentiate. And we may use the concept of nature to express that differentiation and inclusion should not be seen as incompatible."[13]

As Fink points out, the concept of a nature gathers and divides. It gathers up all the members or putative members of a kind and divides the kind from other kinds. With this definition in view, we can see what the point of the old formula was, that man was a rational animal, or a featherless biped. There are many animals, but few (if any) other rational ones. There may even be other rational creatures who are not animals (artificial intelligences, gods, intelligent Alpha Centurions, or what have you), but so far as we know, we are the only rational animals in the cosmos.

Hence, I think this formula, slightly modified, is still the best way of reflecting on ourselves as members of the organic kingdom, as organisms within the evolutionary tree of life, and as physical objects in the cosmos: a human being is (potentially) a practical, rational primate. This simple, generic proposition is astonishingly rich. It captures the facts of our life form and can be demonstrated to be true from within the human point of view, and from outside it; an alien anthropologist studying human beings from its own non-human point of view could discover that humans are practical, rational primates.

A second misunderstanding has to do with the predication of 'rationality.' Some unwittingly interpret "rationality" to mean only speculative reasoning – i.e., mathematical, logical, or otherwise abstract thinking. This kind of abstract thinking Aristotle would call *theoria* or contemplative science. I do not think the best way to understand the old formula of "rational animals" is to take "rational" to mean "abstract thought" because a nature should capture *all* non-dysfunctional members of a species and only a relatively small minority of humans engage in that kind of abstract reflection that characterizes science, theology, math-

13. Hans Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (August 2006): 207.

ematics, metaphysics, ethics, and so on. Practical reasoning is a better candidate because all normal, functioning adult humans, regardless of cultures, intelligence quotients, or walk of life, engage in practical reasoning and deliberation. I want to make it indelibly clear that I am not supposing human nature to be rationality per se but practical rationality. It is not merely *thought* but *thoughtful action* that I would like to emphasize. (That practical reasoning is indeed a form of reasoning, and the difference, if any, between theoretical and speculative reasononing, is a theme of chapter 5.) That said, the capacity for abstract or "theoretical reason" is certainly an important feature of human nature and stands out from the capacities of other organisms. While other members of the animal kingdom "think" in one sense of that term, as far as we know, no other animal constructs theories about, say, the cognitive capacities of the animal kingdom. My only point is to challenge the unwitting interpretation of "rationality" to mean abstract reasoning to the exclusion of any other capacity.

A third possible misunderstanding has to do with exceptions to the truth that human beings are practical rational primates. Certainly, not every human being is 'rational'. Bertrand Russell quipped that "Man is a rational animal — so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life I have been looked diligently for evidence in favour of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it."[14] The joke is funny because it turns on an ambiguitiy in the predication of 'rationality'. If by 'rational' we mean *successfully thinking* – the ability to think well, and to do so *reliably*, avoiding all ruinous fallacies, then the posession of rationality would be rare indeed. Children, the uneducated, the foolish, and many philosophers are not rational by this high standard. If, however, by 'rational' we simply mean the *potential* to become successfully rational, then every normal human has it.

A second misunderstanding, more dangerous than the first, is to think that someone

14. Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell, 1903-1959*, 72.

who cannot successfully think rationally is not even human. What about anacephalic babies, the genetically defective, the comatose, the mentally ill? Are they not really human? An uncharitable critic might accuse me of insinuating so. I deny the charge. In fact, it is a strength of my argument that I can make sense of exceptions.

Generics describe a life form well only when the sample includes exemplary instances of the species — not the young, immature, ill, injured, genetically defective, radiation poisoned, comatose, mentally ill, and so on. However, such are still recognizably members of the species. Anacephalic babies will never exemplify their natural potential for practical reasoning, for they lack the subvenient brain structure necessary for rational consciousness. They are recognizably *human* (they are not opossums), just defectively so. Similarly, we may call humans "bipedal" by nature but recognize that a war veteran is still human even after he or she is no longer bipedal.[15]

A final possible misunderstanding needs a response here. Someone might observe that terms such as "exemplary" or "normal" or "mature" are normative terms and hence charge that I am "smuggling" evaluations in to a process of objective, scientific description. I welcome the observation, but deny the charge. The discernment between ordinary, unusual (but not defective), and abnormal (and defective) is certainly an evaluative discernment. My point has been that such evaluative discernment is part and parcel of the objective, scientific generic predication.

15. In describing what gives human beings special dignity, Robert George articulates a similar point. He asks what is the line to draw between humans and other animals: "sentience, consciousness, self-awareness, rationality, or being a moral agent (the last two come to the same thing). We will argue that the criterion is: having a rational nature, that is, having the natural capacity to reason and make free choices, a capacity it ordinarily takes months, or even years, to actualize, and which various impediments might prevent from being brought to full actualization, at least in this life. Thus, every human being has full moral worth or dignity, for every human being possesses such a rational nature." Adam Schulman, *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics* (Government Printing Office, 2008) chapter 16, "The Nature and Basis of Human Dignity".

Researchers do not judge the characteristics of a newly discovered species of beatle by examining its young. They might, at first, mistake the initial specimen for a fully mature adult; but the correction would come from a further application of scientific methods. The capture of a larger beatle that appears to be *of the same kind* would suggest that the initial specimen was either a child or a runt. After collecting a sufficient sample of specimens (say, a dozen or preferably more) the researchers would be in the position to make justifiable fundamentally normative judgments about *which of these individual beatles is exemplary of the species.*

We can draw the same conclusion with a hypothetical situation in which humans are the newly discovered species. Suppose an alien anthropologist were to stumble across earth and study humans. Suppose that the initial specimen was a 12-year-old boy or girl. If that was the anthropologist's *only* sample, the alien race would come to all sorts of incorrect conclusions about humanity in general. If, instead, they studied mature, healthy, human beings of both sexes, in the "prime" of life, they would be closer to identifying "the human". My contention is that they would be best served not by examining foolish humans but practically wise ones.

I conclude that the ascription of practical reason to human beings is indeed true generically of the human life form, species, or nature. The rarity of successful realization of a capacity for practical reasoning does not tell against the truth of the generic, and neither does the existence of persons who may never actualize the capacity. Such exceptions rather support the thesis, for how else could we judge that a *genetic defect* except by reference to the genetic norm?

No Organic Natures

There are a few other objections a reader might have at this juncture. The first objection is simply that we cannot identify "human nature" with any scientific accuracy because there

is no human nature. This objection has three iterations.

The first sort of critic might deny that there is any such thing as a human life form because there are no life forms at all. This is an objection to the very concept of a nature. Perhaps, instead of real life forms and natural kinds, we should be nominalist about divisions between various branches of the tree of life.

One iteration of this criticism is an alleged tension between the flexibility of species (as represented in evolutionary biology) and a fixed notion of human nature. In a seminal paper on natural teleology, Ernst Mayr says:

> The concepts of unchanging essences and of complete discontinuities between every *eidos* (type) and all others make genuine evolutionary thinking impossible. I agree with those who claim that the essentialist philosophies of Aristotle and Plato are incompatible with evolutionary thinking.[16]

Arthur Ward is a recent critic who agrees with Mayr on this point. Ward argues that "naturalists should reject the idea of 'human nature,' and indeed should reject that any organism or its parts or operations has a nature, purpose, proper function, or the like."[17] I have already pointed out that rejecting all organic natures and purposes is not necessarily the only rational, scientific option; indeed, such a rejection seems to me to be motivated by philosophical materialism far more than it is motivated by any respect for actual biological science.

Nevertheless, I cannot insist that accepting organic natures and purposes is the *only* rational, scientific option. Rather, to the idea that there are no natural kinds, I can only give a general and unsatisfactory response. This dissertation cannot chase down the (justifiably important) dispute about the status of natural kinds. However, the arguments of the previous chapter, built on the assumption of a minimal scientific realism, is enough to secure a fairly solid grounding for the notion of natural kinds.

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

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

No Natural Teleology

A second sort of critic accepts natural kinds but denies that these kinds have teleological features. For example, Bernard Williams asserts that: "The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way into ethical thought."[18]

He says elsewhere:

> The idea of a naturalistic ethics was born of a deeply teleological outlook, and its best expression, in many ways, is still to be found in Aristotle's philosophy, a philosophy according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave.[19]

This sort of critic thinks that there are natures or natural kinds and stable species with objective properties, but is underwhelmed by the arguments of the previous chapter to the effect that functional or teleological properties feature in purely biological descriptions of organisms.

My response is this: Williams voices a common opinion when he alleges an incompatibility between Darwinism and teleological realism. The response of Hursthouse, Foot, Brown, etc., is that natural teleology is indeed compatible with Darwinism and does indeed provide a "an appropriate way to behave" (or we might add, *ways*) that is "inherent in each natural kind of thing." Such a view is not incompatible with evolutionary theory.

Strictly speaking, evolutionary theory is a set of theses explaining the current multiplicity and shape of terrestrial life. It says absolutely nothing about teleological causes

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

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

or properties.[20] There is room, in other words, within evolutionary theory for discussions about the evidence for or against non-mechanical teleological causation. Thomas Nagel is one who recently presented such a naturalistic theory of Darwinian natural selection combined with teleological causation.[21] I do not wish here to defend Nagel's view so much as to point out that teleological realism is compatible with evolutionary theory. Asserting that teleological realism about biology is incompatible with Darwinism does not make it so. Naturalistic teleological realism is certainly incompatible with a teleological nihilism distinctive of (certain brands) of metaphysical reductionism. If our knowledge of natural teleology is well-grounded enough then so much the worse for metaphysical reductionism.]

There is another point to make. Williams despairs of finding human nature, including human telos because he thinks such despair is demanded by biological science. Rosalind Hursthouse correctly points out that Williams' worry is not actually rooted in the progress of modern science. Williams himself admits that "many of course have come to that conclusion before… that human beings are to some degree a mess… for whom no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially."[22] If many have come to that (philosophical) conclusion before, without the benefit of modern science, why cite modern science as evidence for the philosophical conclusion? Hursthouse points out that

20. The biological claims include the following: The earth, which is very old, has given rise to simple life forms which have become over slow and gradual changes given rise to myriad life forms, some of which are very complex. The driving mechanism of this process is natural selecting acting on the genetic mutations of a given population. All of life originated from one original place and species. A philosophical claim, often appended to the biological ones, is that the process of natural selection is *unguided by any causes but material-efficient mechanical ones.* But this claim is a philosophical belief, not a biological one. Polemicists will sometimes cite the popularity of the philosophical belief among biologists as proof that it is a "biological" claim. But we do not determine truth by vote. If belief in God was popular among biologists of a certain era, it does not follow that theological claims are strictly biological claims.

21. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*. Briefly, he suggests that while physical laws work impersonally on entities at a given time, teleological laws might work impersonally on the same entities over time.

22. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 261, quoting from Williams.

we should interpret Williams' worry as an expression of moral nihilism and despair. It may be a rational despair, but the rationality or irrationality cannot simply be read off the biological facts. It is a non sequitur to amass scientific evidence for p and then to assert that q.

Williams believes that human nature is a complete mess because he believes no form of life is satisfactory. We might reverse the point and suggest that some human beings have exemplary lives and so human nature is not a complete mess. I do not wish to deny that human society is a repository of what Bertrand Russell calls "curelty, persecution, and supersition."[23] I do not wish to deny that all human beings eventually die. I only wish to point out that part of my task is to distinguish between general tendencies from genuine normative facts. My thesis in this section is that there are some genuine normative facts, some universal characteristics of human nature that can be hypothesized and confirmed. Below I shall make the case that specific ethical conclusions can be derived from natural facts about human beings. Here I only wish to make room for the possibility that our data set of such facts cannot with integrity include all light and sweetness nor all dank and dark cynicism.

Only Biological Nature

A third iteration of the "no human nature" objection is that if there is such thing as "human nature", it is nothing more or less than our biological and physiological makeup. Tim Lewens argues that "the only biologically respectable notion of human nature that remains is an extremely permissive one that names the reliable dispositions of the human species as a whole. This conception offers no ethical guidance…"[24]

23. Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell, 1903-1959*, 72.

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

On Lewens' view, the only talk about our "nature" that would be scientific would be an indeterminate series of complicated stories about our genetics, evolutionary history, and neurophysiology, perhaps even including cultural, geographical, and ecological settings. The problem, as we have seen, is that an empirical "scientific" conception of human nature has nothing to do with *ethics*. All of the complicated stories we could tell – if they are genuinely scientific – would be purely *descriptive*.[25]

Bernard Williams expresses a similar point. He says that nature has bestowed upon us an "ill-sorted bricolage of powers and instincts":

> [the problem] lies not in the particular ways in which human beings may have evolved, but simply in the fact that they have evolved, and by natural selection… On that [evolutionary] view it must be the deepest desire — need? – purpose? – satisfaction? – of human beings to live in the way that is in this objective sense appropriate to them (the fact that modern words break up into these alternatives expresses the modern break□up of Aristotle's view).

Williams objects that norms bestowed by the process of evolution would be those that lead us to survive and reproduce. Along similar lines, Fitzpatrick articulates a worry that evolution has bestowed upon is a very specific, ordered power but it is not the power to flourish but the power to reproduce. He says:

> If, however, natural functions and ends in living things are structured by special relations established through the process of evolution through natural selection, i.e., non-incidental relations between traits and a special subset of their effects that figured into the selection process, then natural teleology will not ultimately or generally be about the welfare or flourishing of organisms.[26]

On Fitzpatrick's worry, the fact that there might exist natural human norms to reproduce is irrelevant to whether or not wilfully conforming to such norms would contribute to our

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

26. FitzPatrick, "Morality and Evolutionary Biology." Cf. William Joseph FitzPatrick, *Teleology and the Norms of Nature* (Taylor & Francis, 2000).

welfare.

A third proponent of this worry is Stephen R. Brown. Brown's defense of virtue ethics is ambivalent. He seems to *wish* he could make the account genuinely normative but concedes that it is, in the end, merely descriptive discipline.[27] Even virtue ethics, after being appropriately "naturalized", does not *commend* the virtues so much as *detail* the traits which happen to be adaptive for creatures like us to survive and propagate our genotype.[28] Brown thinks that human beings do have a characteristic form of life involving highly rarefied neurological and cognitive processes we do not observe in other animals; but, nevertheless, he thinks that biology reveals that species are the only natural kind, and species aim to survive and reproduce.

This objection is certainly relevant. Despite the varying details, what Lewens, Fitzpatrick, and Brown agree upon is that if such a thing as human nature or the human life form exists, and if such a thing as a natural teleological norm for humanity exists, then it is the norm to reproduce and propagate one's genotype.

My response is that human norms arise from our nature as practical, rational primates not just from our nature as primates. All three objectors commit a subtle fallacy by presuming that the norms that apply to all organisms apply to humans *and nothing else*. I can agree that, prima facie, human beings as a species are endowed by evolution with a natural norm binding them to reproduce. But I deny that *that is all*. The only way they can sneak in the view that *that is all* is by begging the question. My view, by contrast, is based on empirical observations.

I have been at pains to articulate the way in which we are animals – but animals of a peculiar sort: That is, practical, rational primates. If this generic about our life form is correct, it suggests a teleological combination like the ones expressed in chapter 2: an

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

embryonic mammal *is to become* a fully grown mammal. A practical primate *is to become* a fully mature practical primate. In other words, one of the "norms" of practical rationality, we can venture, is that we *ought to be successfully practically rational*.

Above, I asked the innocuous question: 'Are human beings natural organisms?" One sort of reader believes that human beings are *merely* natural; under the guise of merely asserting an innocent truism, this reader would insist that humans are machines made of meat, or "heaps of glorified clockwork"[29] in the same sense that all of Laplacian nature is a heap of glorified clockwork and all its myriad variegated objects are just parts of the heap. This first sort of reader can acknowledge that the human brain exhibits rarefied neurocognitive processes we do not observe anywhere else but would deny that human beings are different in kind.

A second sort of reader believes that humans are natural organisms and something more; under the guise of asserting an innocent truism, this reader would insist that human beings are organisms of an altogether different kind. A religious philosopher might argue that human beings are endowed with the *Imago Dei* that makes us exceptional. But even non-religious philosophers might argue that human rational activities and pursuits represent a qualitative break in the animal kingdom. This sort of reader can acknowledge that the human body is a material organism like many others but would insist that the mind is something of a different order.

Rather than pick sides on this issue, I recommend a health agnosticism. If human beings were *merely* animals, and subject to *merely animal* natural norms, how would we know that? We would have to exercise our practical rationality (the same practical rationality that distinguishes us from the other animals). If we were animals of a peculiar sort, how would we know *that*? We could only justify such an assertion by appealing to observations

29. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (Penguin, 2003).

of our peculiar behaviors. And that appeal is just what I have been making: humans are the only ones who speak, who associate in such complex societies, who plan their actions like this, and who innovate and create. Those observations are enough to render it plain, I think, that our natural telos is not likely to be restricted to only the animal nature we share with the rest of the living world.

If this is correct, then the insights of Lewens and Brown and Williams can be accommodated. For example, reproduction is certainly *one* of our natural ends. "Human beings reproduce" is an instance of a broader natural generic truth we can articulate by saying: "organisms survive and reproduce." Human reproduction as a generic pattern is compatible with exceptions: The celibate, the pre-pubescent, the single, the infertile couple, the homosexual couple, and others do not themselves reproduce. Nevertheless it may be true that humans reproduce (like every other organism). It seems to me that if, *as a species*, we ceased to reproduce, something would have gone wrong.[30] That any particula individual does not reproduce is not an automatic sign of defect.

Knowing from Inside

There is one further objection that requires full treatment in a later chapter. I will mention it here. The objection that human nature is *merely* animal and hence the human telos is *merely* survival and propogation of the genotype was supposed to tell against the organic teleology I have been defending. My response is that, in practical rational creatures like us, our biological norms are joined with other norms. In one sense, these critics agree with me,

30. The "Voluntary Human Extinction Movement" is an example of a group who find the reasons for reproduction *as a species* to be on balance outweighed by the reasons for ceasing to reproduce. Two comments: first, on first impression, VHEMT strikes most people as satire. It is a laughable movement. It is not necessarily mistaken, but it is certainly laughable. Secondly, VHEMT acknowledges the prima facie force of the need to reproduce. They argue that that need is outweighed. So in that they think species-wide reproduction is a default natural norm, we agree.

because they think it is "obvious" that reproduction is not our *only* norm and so the merely "natural" or "biological" norm must be supplemented with the practical point of view – the point of view from within human subjectivity. Their worry is that once we introduce the practical point of view we will leave biological naturalism behind. This is sometimes called "the Irrelevance Objection". I offer a fuller response to the Irrelevance Objection in chapter 6.

Our Nature is Unknown

A final objection might come from someone who simply urged that human nature is mysterious. For all we can tell without the benefit of divine revelation, humanity is an anomaly. Our origin is shrouded in mystery, our destiny undecided.

I concede the point. My thesis is not that we know everything about humanity that we will ever need to know. My thesis is that observing our nature as practical primates is a minimal starting point of knowledge upon which to build. Knowing that snakes are legless reptiles is not an end to the scientific inquiry, but a beginning. Indeed, one cannot know about snakes unless one knows, roughly, what snakes are. So capturing the genus and differentiam of a kind of organism is in fact necessary for creating a conceptual placeholder *on which to attach new knowledge*. Knowing what human beings are, however roughly, gives us a concept-category within which to fill in the depth and breadth of facts and information.

The main thesis of this chapter has been that the following generic is true: "human beings are practical, rational primates." This generic, I have argued, is defensible both philosophically and scientifically. It is discoverable both by humans examining our species from "within" the human point of view and by alien anthropologists examining our species from "outside" the human point of view (so long as they too were intelligent and rational). This generic picks out a property or set of properties we might describe as 'human nature.' If this is anywhere near to correct, then human nature is not a complete mystery. We know

enough about it to build a neo-Aristotelian theory of ethics grounded in evaluations of human beings by reference to the human life form.

IV. Natural Norms, Human Norms

If the argument has been successful thus far, then best evidence suggests that human beings are practical, rational primates. This generic captures a set of truths about the human life form and natural telos in the same manner as other respectable scientific statements, such as 'the platypus is an egg-laying mammal' and 'the baby chick becomes a rooster'. What is the ethical significance of this proposition? The remainder of the chapter fills out the details of the picture.

As natural organisms, humans pursue certain basic goods: food, water, rest, shelter, comfort, survival, reproduction. There is every reason to affirm the truth of generics such as "human beings eat food" or "human beings sleep daily." We should hypothesize that deviation from these prima facie norms would be prima facie defective. And that turns out to be the case. Anorexia, starvation, insomnia, and so on are disorders. Importantly, such disorders would plausibly be recognizable by an alien anthropologist. Just as a scientist may evaluate a particular wolf by reference to its life form, an alient anthropologist could evaluate a particular human's life and actions by reference to its life form. So much applies to both humans and other organisms.

Things get really interesting – and much more tricky – when we consider humans as reasoners. I have used the term 'practical primate' to encompass all the ways in which human beings distinguish themselves by being scientists, moral agents, planners, creative writers, deliberators, speakers, political agents, and so on. As mammals, human beings pursue mammalian goods. As practical rational agents, human beings also pursue practical rational goods: wisdom, friendship, world travel, education, entertainment. These seem

categorically different. Are they so different as to ruin the pattern of naturalistic evaluation? Michael Thompson thinks not:

> … will and practical reason are on the face of it just two more faculties or powers a living being may bear, on a level with the powers of sight and hearing an memory. The second crucial thought is that an individual instance of any of the latter powers — sight, hearing, memory — is intuitively to be judged as defective or sound, good or bad, well-working or ill-working, by reference to its bearer's life-form or kind or species.[31]

Naturalistic evaluation of human beings on the basis of practical rational activities follows the same pattern as before. Every animal's nature or life form has genus and differentiam. For human beings, our differentiam is that we can engage in practical reasoning. Hence, our animality and our rationality both count. Being a primate entails that we are alive and share properties in common with all organic nature. Being a practical reasoning primate includes a set of capacities, including abstract thought but also more: speech, sociality, rational practice, and creativity. I also argued that the generic truth about humanity holds good in the face of important objections to the effect that we have no nature, or that our only nature is biological. I have not yet fully articulated what effect rationality has on our animal nature and rebutted the objection that it renders irrelevant all the prima facie natural norms arising from our animal or biological nature. But I have argued that there is good reason to affirm a kind of prima facie natural normativity binding on human beings.

The new natural criteria by which to judge the human organism includes reference to its practical life form. For example, consider generics such as these: "The human being acts upon reflection"; "the human being speaks a language"; "the human being lives in society", and so on. These natural human norms are well on the way to being genuinely ethical. Deviations from them represent genuinely *human* defects. Folk morality recognizes something wrong with the jolly fool who willfully acts before deliberating, or the blowhard who

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

willfully speaks without restraint, or the paranoid hermit who willfully avoids all human society. Naturalistic evaluation explains *what exactly* is wrong. Such persons are not living up to their own human life form.

There is a second ethical upshot. If acorns are (potential) oak trees, then it seems to follow that an acorn *is to become* an oak tree. I won't insist on using the word 'ought' (the acorn *ought to* become an oak) because 'ought' strongly suggests agency, which is absurd. But I will insist on the *natural normativity* of that statement. The individual acorn that fails to become an oak *never* fully realized its nature. Likewise, if human beings are practical rational primates then it follows that human beings *are to become practical rational primates*. This normative generic proposition is rooted in the thought that humans *are* practical rational primates. But it goes further to suggest a teleological end: we are to become fully what we already are.

Furthermore, if our nature is to be practical, rational primates, then we have some vague notion of our natural "function." I shall not go in for the Aristotelian view that the natural work (Greek: *ergon*) of human beings is contemplative science, an activity by reference to which success and failure may be judged. Rather, I shall be more ecumenical: the telos of every life form is, at the very least, to do all the activities that constitute its mature flourishing. So we should predict quite generally that the human telos is to become *fully mature* practical, rational primates. The conceptions of human nature (as practical reasoning animals) must be defined in relation to virtue (the excellences of rational practice and practical reason) and to human nature as it could be, our natural telos (to be excellent and mature practical, rational primates).

Becoming fully or fully actualized practical rational animals requires the actualization not only of our animal nature (through growth, maturity, reproduction) but our rational potential (through intellectual growth and knowledge, and practical wisdom that sublimates all of one's emotions and bodily desires and physical settings into a good life). In other

words: Humans are to become practical, rational animals.

The third ethical upshot has to do with excellence. Suppose that the excellence of species X is a quality that both constitutes being an X and enables an individual to realize X-hood. Having a bill or being able to swim is both constitutive of being a penguin and also enables the young penguin to develop into maturity and realize its nature. Now apply that same pattern of evalution to a human being. What are the excellences that are both intrinsic goods-of-a-kind for creatures like us and also instrumental to realizing our natural telos? Virtues.

Virtues enable one to be a practical, rational primate, but they are more than instrumentally valuable. Virtues on my account will turn out to be *constitutive* of humanity in the sense that having them is both a path to realizing one's life form and also part of the definition of expressing that life form. It may seem to odd to categorize essential properties of humanity as morally praiseworthy traits. But the point is essential to my case. Virtues are not just "morally praiseworthy" qualities; they are *the human* qualities. Virtues are examples of *humanness* in its exemplary form.

I grant that the notion that virtues are "the human" qualities is a reversal on the all-too-common mistake that "human" qualities are neutral with respect to moral praise or blame. The reason for this reversal of, as I tried to argue above, is that all life forms discovered by scientific investigation and articulated in generic propositions are inherently normative. Hence, the concept of human nature cannot and should not be value-neutral. Rather, as Micah Lott points out, the concept of human nature:

> …must embody a normatively significant understanding of human life and action. For any conception of human form is a natural-historical account of 'how the human lives.' As with 'the tiger' or 'the mayfly,' a natural-history of 'the human' provides an interpretation of the characteristic and non-defective life-cycle of the species.[32]

32. Lott, "Moral Virtue as Knowledge of Human Form," 770–1.

Virtues on my account will turn out to be qualities that enable one to be fully become a primate (and animal and organism more generally): as mortal creatures and animals, our biological life consists of a process of maturation, nutrition, rest, exercise, homeostatic maturity, reproduction, characteristic activities, aging, and death. Many human goods enable this process, from oxygen, food, sleep, and so on. Virtues may not be material things but are likely to relate to such material and emotional parts of a normal human life.

Human virtues would also be those qualities that enable one to perform characteristically rational activities such as speaking, socializing, thoughtful acting, and creating. By nature, we are inherently self-aware language-users who grow up and live in a language-community with a history and tradition, and who are curious to know what is true about ourselves and our world. We are also extravagantly innovative, creating myriad tools, forms of art, and other products for our use and enjoyment. We are inherently conscious and self-conscious beings who speak, interpret, and create in the context of a linguistic community such as a family, society, and culture. And as *practical* rational animals, we are inherently goal-oriented and self-determining beings who are to some degree able to acquire new traits or lose them, able to achieve our natural ends or fail to achieve them, able to become aware of the "givenness" of our biology and work with or against it, and are able to treat an entire biological life not only as an event but as a project. Although we are pushed about by our biological instincts and by social pressures, we do not *simply* stumble around through life; at times we also act on *reasons*. That is, we deliberate about future actions, and reflect on past actions, and become puzzled about what is called for in the present. The success of our actions is not guaranteed, and the reasonableness of our justifications is not guaranteed. Rather, we muddle through on the best evidence we have.

The criteria of a definition of virtue, then, is that the excellences intrinsic to our life form are those qualities that practical rational animals per se *need* to be what they are and to live life in such a way as to become what they can potentially become.

Just as importantly, *natural badness* would be the property or set of properties that practical rational animals *need to avoid*. The category of natural evils is expansive: hunger, exposure to predators or extreme temperatures, disease, accidental injury, and premature death. In some sense, each of these frustrates one's development toward the natural end of being a fully mature practical reasoner and hence partly constitute species-specific misery. But the sub-set of natural evils we should call 'vices' would be those acquirable qualities that we inflict upon ourselves and others.

Hursthouse points out that we do not just admire those who survive but who exemplify a *human* form of life: "The human virtues make their possessor good qua human being, one who is as ordinarily well fitted as a human being can be in not merely physical respects to live well, to flourish – in a characteristically human way."[33]

V. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that human beings are practical, rational animals. I addressed and responded to several objections, and tried to bridge the connection between the descriptive/normative generic that sets the standard for our life form, and also show how specific ethical obligations fall out of that normative foundation: there is a prima facie obligation to eat or sleep and keep oneself alive, or to become fully practically rational over time.

And, as I shall argue more fully in the next chapter, I sketched how the specific qualities of excellence for practical rational animals are moral and intellectual virtues, including moderation and immoderation, justice and injustice, practical wisdom and foolishness, and so on.

The hypothesis is that virtues are a specific type of quality belonging to creatures like us. Virtues are the human specific goods-of-a-kind. The virtues constitue a set of

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

normative constraints on what one can/should be and can/should become arising from one's nature as a practical primate. The acquisition, then, of virtues both causes and constitutes the actualization of our life form as practical rational primates. Truly exemplifying our life form constitutes our species-specific flourishing. Virtues are commonly supposed to be "excellences" of human beings. Relative to what is such a quality excellent? The answer can only be that virtues are excellences relative to our nature or life form. They are the traits or qualities that enable us to actualize our life form, to fully express in a life what we are by nature. If what we are by nature is practical, rational primates, then virtues (we can further predict) will be traits pertaining to practical reason and animality.

Chapter 4

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.

I. Introduction: Virtue and Reason

The goal of acquiring virtues is to live a distinctively human life. Virtues are those qualities that constitute a human life, and so the person who has them is expressing the general form of life that is desirable for any and all human beings.

I have argued in chapter 2 that at least the biological parts of nature are normative. In chapter 3, I argued that human nature is normative – specifically, I defended the view that our life form is to be practical, rational animals. In that chapter, I briefly introduced the concept of practical reason to explain what behaviors and capacities distinguish our species from others, according to the perspectives of both common sense and a more reflective, scientific thinking.

The concepts of virtue and reason cannot be disentangled. I began this dissertation with the picture of the virtue triangle to bring into clear view the necessary relation between virtue as excellent rational practice, human nature as practical reasoners, and flourishing as practical wisdom. Virtue (excellent practical reasoning and rational practice) for human beings (practical reasoners) causes and partly constitutes flourishing (to be fully mature, practical reasoners).

The goal of this chapter, and the subsequent chapters, is to explain what notion of practical reason must be operative in neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism.

I approach this task through the question about how to live: "how should one live?" is one of central importance for neo-Aristotelian writers such as Bernard Williams, John McDowell, MacIntyre, Foot, and Hursthouse. I center on this question because answering it requires both a kind of moral commitment and a kind of knowledge. It is both ethical and intellectual. Presumably, an answer to the "how should one live?" question will invoke *reasons*. What kind of reasons? Practical reasons. It would also seem that the moral person will invoke moral reasons. Hence, we ask questions about how one should live *by practically reasoning* and we answer them by identifying *practical reasons* and perhaps *moral reasons*. Our task is to offer an account of practical reason that shows how the virtuous person asks and answers the question of how to live.

In section 2, I explain the puzzle of practical reason: is practical reasoning – i.e., is it practical or rational or both? Can practical reasoning motivate one without the presence of other psychological states such as desires, inclinations, instincts, or prior commitments? I then explain, in outline, my solution, which I call the "thinking how to live" solution. On this solution, thinking how to live is intrinsically practical and rational.

In section 3, I explore in detail John McDowell's view of practical reason and offer a substantive criticism. McDowell is correct that virtue is a practical, rational disposition but he confuses the "sensitivity to what a situation requires" with *virtue* in general. To remedy

his account requires a fresh re-thinking of practical reasons.

In section 4, I re-think the distinction between moral reasons and practical reasons. I argue that 'practical reasoning' is best contrasted against theoretical reasoning rather than 'moral reasoning'. For practical reasons, most broadly construed, encompass both 'self-regarding' and 'other-regarding' reasons. Furthermore, I argue that practical reasoning aims at the apparent good; that to be a practical agent who acts at all means that one is oriented toward the good, or desirable, or pursuable. I also suggest that the neo-Aristotelian account of practical reason resolves a dispute about moral motivation.

In section 5, I address three challenges. Does this view of practical reason beg the question against "procedural" accounts in favor of a "substantive" account? Does it define away the possibility of immorality? And does it of practical reason beg the question against subjectivism in favor of realism about practical reasons? I answer that a substantive view of practical reasoning (the process) and realist or at least intersubjectivist view about practical reasons is more plausible than both of these rivals both on independent grounds and also in light of the foregoing account.

II. Practice and Reason

My account of virtue has thus far depended quite a bit on intuitive notions about the nature of practical reasoning and rational practice. My aim now is to give a clear and plausible account of these notions that is sensitive to objections and can overcome them.

Perhaps the simplest way to state the problematic is like this: Is practical reason both *practical* and *rational*? If practical reason is really practical, then how is it rational? And if it is rational, how is it really practical? By some common assumptions, "rational practice" should be a contradiction in terms.

To see why, suppose that successful practical reasoning results by definition in a

kind of knowledge. Knowledge is "theoretical" or "speculative" or "contemplative" in that successful knowers grasp *what is true*. But knowledge of what is true does not seem to be the kind of thing that can motivate one to act. Affirming the proposition, *The complete works of Plato is lying on the table* does not lead one to read Plato without some intervening state, such as *I've been wanting to read Plato for awhile but could not find my complete works*. So the first problem is that theoretical knowledge cannot (by itself) motivate to action, and practical reasoning results in such knowledge, so practical reasoning cannot motivate to action. It cannot be *practical*.

Alternately, suppose that practical reasoning is by definition a kind of disposition oneself to act in certain ways, to rank and organize one's various motivations, to pursue certain things, or to make certain decisions rather than others. Such a disposition would clearly be practical. It would have the right kind of action-guiding force to explain why we act the way we do. But then a "disposition" is not a form of knowledge. We use the term 'disposition' in a variety of ways: one can be disposed (say) to repay one's debts, or disposed to shout when angry, or disposed to travel out of the country every summer. These dispositions seem better described as moral commitments, temperaments, or interests – not knowledge.

So either practical reasoning is not *practical* (action-guiding) or it is not *reasonable*. As McDowell discusses below, this dilemma rests on the familiar belief that cognition and volition are distinct. If "practical reason" is the name for a single capacity that is both cognitive and volitional, then in a very real sense, the challenge is to *defend the concept of practical reason itself*.

The Solution: Thinking How to Live

The solution to this problem can be approached via the question "how should one live?" The neo-Aristotelians, from Bernard Williams to Alasdair MacIntyre to more recent writers

have almost universally fixed on this question as a crucial starting point for ethics. For example, John McDowell says that the whole "point of engaging in ethical reflection… lies in the interest of the question 'How should one live'?"[1]

The reason it is such a recurring theme in the neo-Aristotelian conversation is that it appears quite plausible that no mature adult can avoid asking this question. And, I shall argue, we approach the practical answers to practical questions by practical reasoning.

Recall Jay Wallace's general definition: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[2] My suggestion is that the capacity for resolving what to do is the source of "how?" questions and also the source of their answers. The answer to "how?" questions is an item of knowledge. For example, imagine that a child exercises practical reasoning when he asks: "How do I unscrew the light bulb?" The answer is an instruction ("twist left") or set of instructions, ("first, grip the light bulb; then twist left until it comes loose."). The instruction need not be put in the imperative mood: "twisting left unscrews a light bulb" is in the indicative mood (indeed, it is a generic proposition). The answer to a "how?" question is not just a proposition (that too) but an action, or rather an "actionable" proposition. The action and the abstract thought can be conceptually divided, but they are not divided *when we practically reason and live our lives*.

Similarly, the answer to the "how should one live?" question will be a plan, an actionable proposition. It will not just be a "philosophy" but a *life*. The virtuous person, McDowell argues, knows what to do. Hence, virtue is a kind of practical knowledge. So McDowell argues that the virtues are various "sensitivities" to the salient facts about how to live. Virtue is a kind of knowledge, namely *practical knowledge* (a "disposition to act well"). The answer to the question of how to live will be not just a proposition but a plan.

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1. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.
2. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

What is the process of resolving what to do? Practical reasoning taken broadly can potentially include a variety of related deliberative processes: (a) considering future actions to be done, (b) reflecting on past actions already done, and (c) evaluating events or objects as desirable or undesirable. What all these have in common is the the attempt to identify (or create) reasons to φ or not to φ. Practical reason is the process of identifying or coming up with *practical reasons*. Hence, the answer or answers to the "how to live?" question(s) will be a *practical* answer or set of answers, that is both an item of knowledge and also a plan or guide to living in the way specified by that knowledge.

Narrowly, we engage in such practical reasoning about very specific circumstances ("should I stay or should I go?"). More generally, we engage in practical reasoning about quite general matters ("how should one live?"). Much of one's daily life does not consist in practical reasoning. With a general plan for how to live in place, and with no deep dilemmas, one can coast through a typical day by resting on habits, responding to stimuli such as hunger and thirst, and so on. Being asked to give a reason why one has that habit, however, will elicit a practical reason. Question: "Why are you going to that building?" Answer: "That's where I work." A proper answer need not cite one's desires or motivations; simply being the place where one works is sufficient (practical) reason to go inside.

This process is *practical* 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 it.

This process is practical *reasoning* by definition. Practical reasoning is thus like theoretical reasoning in at least one important respect: it is normative. Theoretical reasoning is a process by which I aim to determine *what to 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 that 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 reason to φ, and I already know and am committed to π, then I ought to φ.

My contention is that our default view of practical reasoning creatures ought to be that practical reason is both rational and practical, a kind of knowledge that is, absent any other psychological state, motivating. If this is right, then the burden of proof lies with those who would artificially divide and separate the *knowing* and the *practicing*.

Another pre-analytic sign that there need not be a divide between knowing and practicing is the linguistic parity between π-type reasons and Q-type reasons. Both are a species of ""*reasons*"", though they differ in their use. For example, Philippa Foot says that reasons of type (A) are "Reasons for acting, which we may call practical reasons" and type (B) are "Reasons for believing, which we may call evidential or demonstrative reasons." She continues:

> As philosophers, and therefore theoreticians, our job is of course to give the second type of reason, arguing for or against the truth of a variety of propositions that seem to involve special problems—like those, for instance, about personal identity or the existence of an external world. But among these many 'philosophical' subjects we find that of the nature of practical reasons, and in this special case we shall have to give reasons of type B for theses about reasons of type A.[3].

The difference between the two kinds of reasons is not obliterated by noticing their essential parity. Practical reasoning is essentially practical.

3. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 64–65.

I should clarify one thing I am *not* saying: I am *not* saying that only practical reasoning is *active*. Both theoretical and practical reasoning are active in the sense that both require intentional effort and both light up the brain on an MRI scan. The difference between theoretical and practical reasoning is that where theoretical reasoning results in belief, judgment, speculation, and so on, practical reasoning *results in action*. And, I would suggest, this distinction must be built in to our definition of practical reasoning.

One does not practically reason about what to do *and then decide* to do it; there is no gap between the conclusion of a deliberation and a decision. To borrow Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, practical reasoning is "thinking how to live."[4]

In the case of practical reasoning, then, reason and practice are not divisible. And so far as we know, there are no other purely theoretical reasoners. We can imagine angels, Artificial Intelligences, and Alpha Centaurians who think but do not act; but so far as we know, to be a reasoner at all is to be responsive to Sellars' "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.

Without being clear on the very notion of practical reason, one cannot understand any of what the neo-Aristotelians are up to. Practical reasoning is not a value-neutral procedure, as I shall argue below. It is inextricably bound up in the moral life. Jack Weinstein explains the relation between practical reasoning and morality in this way:

> The term practical rationality is derived from Aristotle's *phronesis*. It is to be distinguished from *sophia*, a more technical form of reasoning. Practical rationality leads to more approximate conclusions; it takes context and relative facts into account, and it usually leads to moral or political conclusions.[5]

Phronesis guides one in "answering" questions (or providing a range of strategies) to solve

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

problems of action and appraisal. The difficulty separating "moral" and "non-moral" problems is no fault of the account, as I shall argue below. And the relative fuzziness of practical reasoning is no fault either. But this is to get ahead of the argument a bit.

III. McDowell on Thinking How to Live

With these basics in hand, let us turn to McDowell's argument that virtue is practical knowledge. First, I will summarize his argument about the nature of deductive (theoretical) reasoning and practical reasoning. Then, I will point out two weaknesses in his account that need supplementing. Third, I will attempt to provide what is lacking. My solution requires a historical and linguistic analysis of the words "moral" and "practical", a comparison of two putative kinds of practical reasons: "prudential" and "moral".

McDowell aims to support his own rendition of the old Socratic thesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge. Namely, virtue as a whole is a perceptual sensitivity to salient facts and what to do about them. And particular virtues are particular manifestations of that perceptual sensitivity.

To see why it makes sense to conceive of virtue as practical knowledge, suppose that some platitudinous value (say, kindness) is really a virtue. The kind person is reliably kind and is kind *on purpose*. A person who merely happens to be kind or who commits acts of kindness resulting from blind instinct does not seem to merit the ascription of a virtue. A person who is kind once, or even every now and then, likewise does not seem to merit the ascription of a virtue. Rather, a kind person is one who is regularly sensitive to a range of reasons for behaving in a particular way. The kind person, McDowell adduces, "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."[6] The kind person

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

knows what is called for, is intentional about avoiding cruel or indifferent behavior, and so on.

McDowell grants that there are a variety of reasons for action. Rather obviously, the question of what to do is in many cases not simply a question of what is the kind, or fair, or just thing to do, but what is advisable *overall*. For it might be that one is sensitive to what another would feel but still fail to act rightly. He gives the example of an overindulgent parent who is far *too* sensitive to the feelings of the child, or rather *not sensitive enough* to other considerations, like the considerations of fairness or child's health. McDowell has supported the notion that this kind of knowledge ("sensitivity to reasons") is necessary for virtue, but not that it is sufficient. So how does the moral knowledge that is virtue combine with other forms of knowledge or other motivations?

He gives two answers: the first is that the when a virtuous person is sensitive to the "requirement imposed by the situation" that requirement must exhaust his reason for acting as he does."[7] It would disqualify the act as a candidate for an example of kindness if the agent performed it *because* it was kind *and because good repute was likely to follow*. If we run the same calculus on each particular virtue, we can hypothesize that virtuous agents' behavior in each case is explained by their sensitivity to those particular kinds of reasons. In turn, their behavior in general (when virtuous) is explained by their sensitivity in general. He concludes:

> 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.[8]

In other words, the virtuous person is sensitive to a whole range of reasons; since reason

7. Ibid., 332.
8. Ibid., 333.

A and reason B might commend different acts, part of virtue must be the meta-cognitive capacity to reflect upon all those reasons available to one, to rank and order them.

This thesis that virtue as the sensitivity or set of sensitivities to requirements for action is not liable to persuade some. An objection familiarly attributed to Hume says that practical reasons by themselves cannot motivate, at least not by themselves. If this were so, moral reasons could not satisfy the "practical requirement". Expressivists are among the chief contemporary proponents of this objection. Expressivism is motivated in large part by the attempt to satisfy the *practical* dimension of practical reason (at the cost of the "rational" part). Wallace explains:

> Expressivism in this form suggests a naturalistic interpretation of practical reason, one that may seem appropriate to the enlightened commitments of the modern scientific world view. It is naturalistic metaphysically, insofar as it makes no commitment to the objective existence in the world of such allegedly questionable entities as values, norms, or reasons for action.[9]

On this familiar view, "cognition and volition are distinct." Practical reasoners do not simply enjoy a "single complex sensitivity" to what a situation requires; they also need the presence of a conative mental state (such as a desire) as well. In McDowell's 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). Surely these two *together* and neither in isolation explains the behavior. For suppose that two persons in the same situation are equipped with identical perceptual capacities and so sensitive to the same range of reasons for action, but only one of them does the right thing. If such a supposed situation were to obtain, it would disconfirm McDowell's conclusion.

McDowell's criticism of this objection is this: in order to even notice the salient facts (that one's friend is in trouble) one must already be sensitive to a particular range of

9. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

requirements for action. The difference between the vicious and virtuous person lies not just in their desires and reactions to what they notice about the world but in the noticing itself. The morally calloused chauvinist does not notice the fact that his or her actions are causing others pain. Better, the calloused person does not notice it *as morally salient* fact.

This response from McDowell is not conclusive, but it is a good start. For it highlights the deep fault line between the Humean and the Aristotelian camps. It is true that if two people are identically sensitive to a morally salient fact but act differently that virtue cannot simply be that sensitivity. But 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.[10]

Is there anyway to bridge the divide without begging the question in either direction? McDowell suggests we look to Aristotle. Aristotle allowed that "appreciation of what [a virtuous person] observes is clouded, or unfocused, by the impact of a desire to do otherwise."[11] The point of such an allowances is that the break between the sensitivity to reasons (which is virtue) and a resultant wrong action occurs when other psychological factors interfere. What interference? McDowell mentions desires and also a "distortion in one's appreciation" of the relevant reasons.[12]

This reply from McDowell is *an* answer but it too is not conclusive. For Donald Davidson argues to the effect that a person might fail to perform the resultant right action *even without such interfering factors.* McDowell responds that the point is true, but it is not an objection. Aristotle's account of continence details that continence is not a virtue. Continence is better than incontinence, but not as good as virtue. The continent person is able to perform the right action because he recognizes it as right, *despite* countervailing

10. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 333.
11. Ibid., 334.
12. Ibid., 334.

pressures (from desires, say) to do the wrong action. Since a fully developed virtue definitionally includes having the proper motivation as well, continence is only needed in the absence of a fully developed virtue. Furthermore, the virtuous person is not always one who "balances" reasons for X against countervailing reasons for Y. The virtuous person is the one for whom simply identifying a reason ("in this situation, courage requires that I run into danger") silences countervailing reasons. The virtuous persons sees the danger (and perhaps feels rightly apprehensive) but also sees that courage in the face of this danger is required; the latter perception, according to McDowell, "silences" other pressures.[13] The merely continent person has to "weigh" reasons; the virtuous person fluently and instantly *acts* on the best reason.

So McDowell's thesis is that virtue is a kind of knowledge, namely, a perceptual sensitivity to a range of facts that are conceptually defined as reasons for action. 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 actually *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. Nevertheless, the case is not yet settled.

Making the case more plausible requires a second, deeper look at reasoning in general. Before I offer my response, I need to take this second look. The paradigmatic case of knowledge is theoretical knowledge, knowledge that P. But theoretical knowledge is deductive, categorical, and propositional. Deductive logic examines and codifies the necessary relations that obtain between such propositions. So one objection states that if virtue is knowledge, and the paradigmatic kind of knowledge codifiable, then it would seem to be necessary that virtue knowledge is codifiable. However, practical knowledge or 'knowing-what-to-do' is not codifiable. Therefore, virtue must not be knowledge. (The non-cognitivist critic

13. Ibid., 335.

also assumes this deductive model of practical reasoning.)

The problem with this objection, McDowell thinks, is not so much a problem with our moral theory but a problem with our conception of rationality. The problem stems from 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 is not, ultimately, sufficiently *rational*. Some philosophers (often followers of Hume but not necessarily Hume himself) think that morality is a not rational domain but a domain of sentiments, desires, commitments, approvals, and so on. Other philosophers (often followers of Kant) think that morality is a rational domain and hence must be a matter of identifying first principles and "applying" them to particular situations. But what they share in common is a belief that "rationality must be explicable in terms of being guided by a formulable universal principle."[14] This common belief McDowell wishes to refute. MacIntyre, similarly, denies the assumption that normative ethical rules can be derived from universal ethical principles the way we "apply" universal logical truths to particular logical conclusions via a middle term.[15]

McDowell's discussion here (drawing on Wittgenstein and others) is hard to follow. The point seems to be that even apparently obvious cases where the rational thing to do is to follow an objective rule (say, by extending a series of numbers) turn out to be cases of a much messier process in which there is no such objective rule by appeal to which we can explain rational thoughts or behaviors. If Bob instructs Charlie to "add 2" to a number and continue applying the rule indefinitely, we tend to be confident Charlie will produce "2, 4, 6, 8," etc., which will "churn out the appropriate behavior with the sort of reliability which a physical mechanism, say a piece of clockwork, might have." We postulate a "psychological

14. Ibid., 337.

15. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist* 67, no. 4 (1984): 498–513.

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."[16] The "ground and nature of our confidence" that we will reliably apply rules is not but a common form of life. The 'form of life' is a term of art here from Wittgenstein (and quoted with approval from Stanley Cavell) that refers to that difficult-to-define process by which we learn how reliably to use words in our native language, how to make exclamations like a pained "ow!" or an excited "ooh!", when to laugh at jokes, and when to cry in pity. Our shared rationality, McDowell suggests, is not grounded in "external" objective rules but in a shared form of life or what he calls a "congruence of subjectivities."[17] McDowell admits this is a disconcerting hypothesis; it induces "vertigo." But, our response to such vertigo should not be to embrace a "consoling myth". That myth he says is the two notions that (a) rule-following is a psychological mechanism that — absent mistakes — guarantees consistency, and 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.

Although McDowell argues that virtue is not codifiable, still it is a kind of knowledge. But if virtue knowledge is not codifiable then how is it *consistent*? What guarantees that the moral person's behavior is intelligibly the same from case to case? On the one hand, if moral knowledge is rational then it is 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 consistent by being like a rule-following machine or computer, how do we explain the virtuous person's reliably correct behavior? He answers this question by way of Aristotle's practical syllogisms.

16. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 337.
17. Ibid., 339.

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 be 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 rock solid universal ethical principles from which to derive particular moral duties. But McDowell resists this model. On the strictly non-cognitivist model, without universal ethical principles we are left with universal psychological states (consistent desires, plans, values, or norms). McDowell also resists this. On the non-codifiable model, what does the major premise do? Its role, he says, is to state a "certain conception of how to live… [namely] the *virtuous person's conception* of the sort of life a human being should lead."[18] It is clear upon reflection that this account is a sort of circular reasoning. For the virtuous person's conception of how to live is itself conditioned by what he called earlier '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. What kind of life should a human being lead? The answer "cannot be definitively written down."[19] Furthermore, "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…"[20] 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. (Hence the vertigo.)

We might wonder why we are bothering about formal syllogistic reasoning at this point. But this way of understanding the practical syllogism *does* do good job of provid-

18. Ibid., 343. Emphasis added.
19. Ibid., 343.
20. Ibid., 343.

ing 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 explanations of actions."[21] I can explain your behavior by understanding that you were concerned for your friend's welfare and reached out to help. Likewise, you can explain your decision to help by assuring me that you are concerned for your friend's welfare. For McDowell, the general structure of the practical syllogism is useful. He says "the rationality of virtue… is not demonstrable from an external standpoint."[22]

In sum, McDowell thinks virtue is a kind of knowledge or sensitivity to salient facts which call for a certain response and which intrinsically motivate a suitably sensitive (read: virtuous) person to respond in that way, at least in the absence of interfering passions. 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 in precisely the same way logical reasoning is.

While I find McDowell's view here illuminating on some points, it leaves much to be desired. My complaints are two: first, McDowell broadens the definition of "requirements for action" so broadly that it begins to strain common sense to call all these sensitivities "virtues." I have a friend who can pretty well diagnose a car engine by listening to the way it whines or hums or clicks. All I hear is noise. This friend is sensitive to a range of requirements for action that I am not sensitive to. He even knows what to do (oil change, new timing belt, etc.). Is his practical knowledge a virtue? A second and related complaint is that McDowell seems to switch from talking about moral reasons to talking about *any*

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

22. Ibid., 346.

practical reason without any mention of the switch. For example, he admits that virtue knowledge cannot be reduced to any one sensitivity to a range of requirements for action but the requirements of kindness (say) must be balanced against others. Kindness is not the whole of virtue, and knowing the kind thing is the thing to be done requires more than just the awareness of another's need. Rather, one might need to rank, order, and weigh three different kinds of reasons (kindness, fairness, appropriateness) or ten or fifteen before one resolved what to do. Is this overall process of weighing and ranking *moral reasoning*? He seems to be assuming that "moral reasons" is a name for the overriding sort of practical reasons. I wish to argue that this is a subtle mistake.

In order to supply some of what is missing, what is required is a step back to examine the natural of practical reasons themselves and how they relate to practical reasoning in general. I would like to return to the "how should one live?" question to argue that there is only one genus of reasons for action: practical reasons. There are many *species* of practical reason, but proper distinction is not between "moral" and "non-moral" but between *various kinds of practical reasons.*

IV. Why Does One Act at All?

The question "how should one live?" assumes a distinction between the ways one *should* live and the ways one *in fact* lives already. The first task is to step back from this distinction and ask an even more fundamental question: Why do we act at all? Why do we live? Why do we pursue anything? Why do we wake up in the morning in pursuit of some end? The familiar frame is inadequate to answering this question. My alternative will be more adequate.

The familiar way of framing the "how should one live?" question is this: There are two sorts of motives that drive everyone: prudential reasons and moral reasons. Prudential

reasons incline one to look out for oneself. One is naturally, selfishly inclined to pursue one's own happiness or well-being. On the other hand, moral reasons drive one to look out for others. One is morally constrained to do one's duty, sometimes in accord with, but often against one's inclinations. Kant (or the stereotypical figure in the literature whom people call "Kant") presents morality as a particular set of reasons (all deriving from the moral law) that obligate one to do what is right, whether or not it is prudential. Otherwise, so long as one is doing one's duty, one can answer the "how should one live?" question with a list of prudential considerations: get a good job, save for retirement, eat healthy foods, exercise, make friends, and so on.

The familiar frame invokes a pair of reasons: prudential and moral reasons. The familiar frame also sometimes associates one of the pair with emotion and the other with reason. Hume, for example, might associate morality with emotions and sentiments and associate prudence with rationality. It is "rational" for me to cheat you out of your cash, but my sentiments of guilt and brotherly affection don't let me. But prudence is not necessarily linked with rationality. Kant would flip the pair and associate morality with rationality and prudence with emotion and self-love. The prudential movements arise from emotional, non-rational aspects of our psychology. Hursthouse explains this aspect of Kant's moral theory:

> And there is indeed much in Kant to suggest that, although he shares with Aristotle the view that we have not just one, but two principles of movement, in other respects his philosophical psychology is Humean. He seems committed to the view that our emotions or inclinations are no part of our rationality. They come from the nonrational, animal side of our nature; if they happen to prompt us to act in accordance with the judgements of reason about what ought to be done we are lucky; if they incline us against them we find life difficult, but their prompting us in the right direction is no mark or indication of their rationality. The emotions are not rational in any way.[23]

Within this familiar frame, one's morality lives and dies at the intersection of two competing

23. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 109.

kinds of reasons. The immoral person is the one who gives into prudential reasons while the moral person is the one who elevates moral reasons. But, on this view, when life does not present a moral dilemma, when the two kinds of reasons do not compete, morality is idle. One is free to live one's life in response to prudential considerations which are neither (morally) good nor (morally) bad.

The alternative to the familiar frame is that all practical reasons are properly in the domain of "morality". A classic article from Edmund Pincoff explains the two different views of ethics: "Quandary ethics" views morality as solving moral dilemmas while "Character ethics" views morality as resolving how to live.

Quandary ethics is focused on the short-term resolution of immediate moral problems, either by dissolving moral perplexity or giving some (hopefully rational) basis for a particular decision or course of action. His examples are philosophers such as Hare, Toulon, and Brandt. These think that:

> The business of ethics is to clarify and solve "problems", i.e. situations in which it is difficult to know what one should do; that the ultimate beneficiary of ethical analysis is the person who, in one of these situations, seeks rational ground for the decision he must make; that ethics is therefore primarily concerned to find such grounds, often conceived of as moral rules and the principles from which they can be derived; and that meta-ethics consists in the analysis of the terms, claims, and arguments which come into play in moral disputation, deliberation, and justification in problematic contexts.[24]

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

> …thought of ethics as a branch of politics, which in turn he thought of as a very wide-ranging subject having to do generally with the planning of human life so that it could be lived as well as possible. Moral problems are given

24. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552. Cf. MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?.

> 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.[25]

As Martha Nussbaum points out, a Quandary ethicist might ask "how do specifically moral ends and commitments figure among the ends that [a moral agent] pursues?" Nussbaum clarifies:

> This question is posed in a characteristically modern way, presupposing a distinction between the moral and the non-moral that is not drawn, as such, by the Greek thinkers. But if one objects to that characterization, one can rephrase it: for example, What role does concern for others for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[26]

Foot makes a similar point:

> 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.[27]

Let's return to McDowell. It might seem that McDowell is clearly an exmaple of Pincoff's character ethicist. But it is not so clear. Like the Quandary ethicist, McDowell represents the view of moral reasons as special, perhaps overriding, kinds of reasons pertaining to the rights, obligations, or duties of one individual in relation to others. Even in asking the "how do I live?" question, a Quandary ethicist is likely assuming that the answer will include a set of moral reasons weighed against or in opposition to non-moral reasons (such as prudential

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

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

27. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.

reasons). McDowell remains unclear on whether moral reasons are *one type* of practical reason, or whether any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed).[28]

My alternative is this: there is only one kind of reason for action: practical reasons. And though there are distinctions between various kinds of practical reasons, the proper distinction is not between "moral" and "non-moral" or "prudential" ones. Certainly considerations about myself are conceptually distinct from considerations about my family, my friend, my society, or my species. And certainly there is a powerful social and psychological force to the distinction between moral and prudential, other-regarding and self-regarding,[29] altruistic and egoistic[30], benevolent and selfish, conscience and self-love.[31] But getting the distinction right is crucial to understanding the kind of knowledge that virtue is.

The proper distinction, as Foot points out, is that some practical reasons have to do with "obligations, duties, and charitable acts" to others while some practical reasons have to do with obligations to oneself or to third-person objects such as the environment or abstract objects.

MacIntyre can help to articulate this insight. His earliest ethical work distinguished the significance of moral judgments compared to other kinds of judgments. In a careful critique of both intuitionists such as Moore and emotivists such as Stevenson, MacIntyre concluded that both (mistakenly) assume that moral judgments and moral terms have signif-

28. Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2002) chapter 13, "Are Moral Reasons Overriding?"; Cf. also John McDowell and IG McFetridge, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 52 (1978): 13–42

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

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

31. Julia Annas, "Morality and Self Interest," ed. Paul Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, 2009), 205–21; Alasdair MacIntyre, "Egoism and Altruism," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York, Macmillan, 1967), 462; Paul Bloomfield, "Virtue and Happiness," ed. Rachana Kamtekar, 2012; Yong Huang, "The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2010): 651–92.

icance only in their referential meaning. The intuitionists, of course, concluded that moral terms refer to a non-natural property, while the emotivists concluded that moral terms do not refer to such a property and so do not refer at all. (Naturalists, later in the 20th century, argue that moral terms refer to natural properties.) MacIntyre's alternative denies the assumption entirely; moral judgments "have their own kind of logic" and their significance, like other kinds of judgments, comes from "exhibiting the logic of their usage."[32] The significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action." Solving problems of evaluation (we might say) and action is their place in "a pattern of language and action…" He continues:

> Above all they arise out of the way in which we see the world and the way in which our language allows us to see the world. We cannot sufficiently emphasize the direction given to our appraisals by the language which happens to be available for our descriptions. It is as we see the facts that we judge the world.[33]

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

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

33. Ibid.

meaningful.

We can state the picture in this way: evaluative judgments are the product of a process of evalutive reasoning. Evaluatve reasoning is *about* evaluative features of the world, even though evaluative reasoning simultaneously colors our appraisal of the world.

In my reading, MacIntyre's insight about evaluative reasoning and "moral judgments" is identical to my thesis that practical reasoning and practical judgments are not narrowly "moral" if by "moral" we mean only that which has to do with other-regarding duties. Instead of segregating "moral" judgments from a broader class of practical judgments, we ought to view all practical judgments together. Instead of puzzling over the illusory problem of how a special class of moral judgments function, we should simply reflect on the whole class of practical judgments that explain *why we act at all.*

MacIntyre came to the same conclusion, partially through his study of ethics. As a young philosopher, he was troubled about emotivism in particular and modern metaethics in general. Emotivists, intuitionists, naturalists, and error theorists all seemed to assume that moral terms are *referential.* If moral terms within moral judgments are supposed to pick out a property in the world, then either we must identify that property or (if we cannot) conclude that moral terms are literally meaningless. He argued that this assumption is a mistake. Instead, he concluded that the significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal and of action."[34] Instead of referring (or failing to refer) to a special 'moral property', all evaluative reasoning is practical reasoning. We employ moral judgments when we must evaluate something or when we must reason about what to do. Moral reasoning is not a special, mystical discipline divorced from prudential, instrumental, and other kinds of practical reasoning. Hence, there can be no adequate theory of ethics apart from a theory of (practical) rationality.

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

The point about this tangled relationship between practical reasons and moral reasons is not merely of historical or etymological interest (though of course, the narrow sense of the word 'moral' in discourse today is clear enough). The point is that qualities such as benevolence and generosity we tend to call human "moral goodness" are of a type with a *broader category of goodness*. Foot explains: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[35]

A Brief History of the Error

To make the distinction between "moral" and "non-moral" prudential or practical reasons more clear, it will be helpful to tell the story of how the distinction became muddled.

As Nussbaum and others highlighted above, the Greek way of thinking did not sharply divide *ethos* from rhetoric, politics, or theoretical philosophy. 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.'[36]

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.* The same distinction shows

35. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.
36. Ibid., 68.

up not only in distinctions between good and bad, but between a whole host of normative terms such as 'need' and 'ought' and 'should'. Elizabeth Anscombe explains:

> The terms "should" or "ought" or "needs" relate to good and bad: e.g. machinery needs oil, or should or ought to be oiled, in that running without oil is bad for it, or it runs badly without oil. According to this conception, of course, "should" and "ought" are not used in a special "moral" sense when one says that a man should not bilk. (In Aristotle's sense of the term "moral" [ήθικός], they are being used in connection with a moral subject□matter: namely that of human passions and [non-technical] actions.) But they have now acquired a special so□called "moral" sense – i.e. a sense in which they imply some absolute verdict (like one of guilty/not guilty on a man) on what is described in the "ought" sentences used in certain types of context: not merely the contexts that Aristotle would call "moral" – passions and actions – but also some of the contexts that he would call "intellectual."[37]

The peculiarly *moral* 'ought' means came to mean a final, verdictive ought – like the kind of "thou shalt" language used in the Ten Commandments. But *this* kind of ought, Anscombe thinks, only makes sense in the mouth of a believer in divine law.

MacIntyre's summary of the conceptual roots of the terms 'moral' and 'ethical' puts the issue most clearly:

> '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'."[38]

The term 'moral' can of course be used without confusion to distinguish between self-regarding and other-regarding reasons. But if we are to be clear, we must disentangle *that* use of moral from other acceptable uses. To sum up, we have two distinctions that some-

37. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."
38. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 38.

times go under the same label of 'moral' reasons. Self-regarding reasons (versus other-regarding reasons); final, verdictive reasons (versus non-verdictive reasons). Regardless of what we call these various kinds of reasons, the error is to confuse them for one and the same distinction.

In my view, the safest way to think about practical reasons is to distinguish them from theoretical or speculative reasons, reasons to believe P rather than reasons to do φ. From there, it is best to take a general view: practical can be self-regarding or other-regarding, verdictive or non-verdictive.

With this terminological and conceptual confusion resolved, let us return to McDowell's response to the Humean critic who is not satisfied that moral reasons are intrinsically motivating.

McDowell admitted that the virtuous person is not just sensitive to one or two sorts of requirement for action as final verdicts; the virtuous person is sensitive to *the broad range of practical reasons*. This admission was correct, in my view. The virtuous person is sensitive to *often competing reasons.* These must be therefore ranked and weighed before a final, verdictive reason emerges.

However, this verdictive reason is *the thing to do*, all things considered – including the consideration of "non-moral" reasons. McDowell is incorrect to persist in labeling the broader sensitivity as "virtue". Calling this sensitivity to a broad range of (even prudential) reasons 'virtue' suggests that one is only considering "moral reasons" in the narrower sense of that term. This subtle mistake leaves McDowell's case open to the hypothetical counterexample that an immoral person might be sensitive to a wide range of reasons, including narrowly "moral" reasons (read as one's duty to others), while doing the wrong thing or doing nothing at all.

How can we fill in the gaps in his account? The alternative that is needed is to recapture the holistic view of practical reasoning as the activity that defines human life form.

Gladly, this account of practical reason is plausible in its own right and reinforces what we have argued above about the generics that describe all organisms and human beings.

For help, I will turn to Foot, as well as to Jennifer Frey's recent discussions of Anscombe and Aquinas. On the Aristotelian-Thomistic account, practical reasoning is an end-oriented activity that aims at the perceived good of one's form of life. As Frey stated in the epigraph above, "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."

Practical Reasoning as Willing the Good

The first point in this case is that all organisms act toward ends, albeit unreflectively. 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]

We have argued above that the growth into maturity of an organism is growth into the exemplification of its form of life. This form of life is what Aquinas calls a thing's nature. Hence, a 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.

In plants and animals, the "natural inclination" toward their good is not reflective or intentional, and Aquinas did not make this mistake. Frey says:"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

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

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.[40]

Plants merely grow and reproduce; while animals grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences, such as sensory perceptions of material objects and of their own hungers, thirsts, pains, and so on. When it comes to human beings, however, we observe a difference. Human beings grow, reproduce, and enjoy conscious experiences like other animals but human beings also *know* that they do so. To quote John Haldane again, "things are specified by their power."[41] And we observe our "power" or capacity to engage in cognitive and deliberative activities. Simply put, we are able to reason, to reason theoretically and practically.

Practical reasoning is the distinctly human activity. While animals can not only sense but *perceive*, humans have the capacity of "intellection," the power of abstracting the forms themselves from percepts. An animal can *sense* an informed, organized object; an animal can be affected by the object. But the human animal can *acquire information* from the organized object. The ability to perceive something *as*, or even to perceive something big and brown with a smudge on its nose, does not imply the ability to perceive that thing as a cat.[42]

When it comes to inclination or "appetite", animals pursue and avoid 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. Animals incline toward their own good. They also have sensory perception of beings. But animals do not perceive beings *as* falling under

40. Ibid., 69–70.

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

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

universal categories.

By contrast, a human being can recognize universals and hence can take up its natural inclinations to pursue or flee as reasons in a deliberative act. The natural inclinations may be underwritten or overridden. Confronted with a bit of healthy food on someone else's plat, I may choose not to eat it, for I recognize it as *not mine*. Confronted with a lion in a zoo, I may 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]

We have been speaking of the human capacity for recognizing and pursuing particular ends as good. We need to expand our scope to include the whole of life, the conception of our human good that constitutes the answer to the question "how should one live?" McDowell gets this part right — every rational practice is undertaking in pursuit of some particular end *in context* of a total conception of what is good in general. Frey says:

> 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

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

> 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 practically reasoning, which is a distinctively human activity. And since every "sane, mature adult" engages in this activity, every sane mature adult has a general notion about the answer. Without it, one would not act at all. Frey points out:

> 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]

Every practical rational primate of sufficient age and maturity has some conception of their own human good which is, if you like, the ultimate practical reason answering the question of how to live. That is not to deny, that the answer arises in part due to the 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.

Consider again the analogy to theoretical reasoning: to be rational is to judge a proposition p as true and false, as best one can, in accord with the rational assessment of the reasons for affirming or denying p. Similarly, to be practically rationally is to judge a practical reason φ as good or bad, in accord with the rational assessment of the reasons for pursuing or avoiding φ.

The young human being is *potentially* a practical, rational animal. How does the process begin? It must start somewhere. Aquinas points out that the first thing rational beings apprehend is simply "existence" or "being" – infants perceive that things are there.

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

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 practical rational animals like us apprehend is "good." Aquinas says:

> Now as "being" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so "good" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that "good is that which all things seek after." Hence this is the first precept of practical reason, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided."[46]

The use of 'good' here, it bears repeating, not a special moral sense of good, but a general sense of desirableness. Good means 'to be pursued'. An entity is 'good' when it is considered as an object of inclination. Without such a general principle, practical reasoning and rational practice are unintelligible.

Practical Reasons and Motivation

There is a large and complex body of literature on moral motivation, especially the debate between internalism and externalism. I would like to briefly situate the neo-Aristotelian account in this debate.

The motivational internalist argues that any practical reasons "out there" that are practical reasons *for me* necessarily connect up with my motivational structure.[47] Internalism seems to allow that the amoralist who is *not motivated* to be moral is off the hook. The externalist, by contrast, argues that there might be practical reasons "out there" such that I *ought* to be motivated by them, even if I am currently not. The immoralist has *reasons* to φ even if he or she has no (current) *motivation* to φ.

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

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

On my view, what motivational internalism gets right is the affirmation that one necessarily acts on what one judges is the thing to do. Defined widely enough, I can agree to this way of stating things. If by "my motivational structure" we simply mean *my overall practical disposition toward the worthwhile, desirable, and goood*, then it is quite uncontroversial to assert that one only goes in for φ-ing when φ-ing seems to be worthwhile, for I argued with Aquinas that to be a practical agent just means to be oriented to pursue good things, and avoid bad things. Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description of 'good' I will, ipso facto, be oriented toward (whether I pursue it or merely approve of it and admire it). Whatever may appear to me to fall under the description 'bad' I will, ipso facto, oriented away from it (whether I avoid it or merely disapprove of it).

That said, what motivational externalism gets right, that there are reasons "out there" that *would* motivate one if one knew about them. 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 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.

It seems to me that much of the debate over the question of whether reasons "out there" can or cannot motivate one turns on a fatal ambiguity in the phrase 'moral reasons'. As I have clarified above, the Quandary ethicist's sense of 'moral reasons' (i.e., facts about what is good for others) are simply one species of practical reason. In the broader, and I think more proper sense, *any* practical reason (i.e., objective normative and evaluative facts about what is worth pursuing and worth avoiding) can be seen as a "moral reason".

It is a safer and clearer strategy to avoid this terminological mess altogether and recapture the simple insight that any *reason to φ* is a practical reason that can feature in an overall account of *what to do, all things considered*. The practical wise person and the virtuous person is the one who does what should be done, all things considered. While it often happens that one's individual practical reasons conflict, nevertheless, a set of practical

reasons can constitute the *overriding* practical reason: *the thing to do*, all things considered. So, the final or verdictive ought belongs only to the ought that is the conclusion of the total process of practical reasoning.

Seen in this light, it is obvious that practical reasons can and do motivate us. Seen in this light, practical reasons *are the only thing that motivate*. Practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of the term 'motive'. Other psychological states such as hungers, thirsts, loves, fears, *move* me to action the same way that such states move non-rational organisms. For rational animals, only reasons *motivate* me to act, since motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state. Aquinas distinguishes 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.[48]

V. Objections

Substantive Reasoning?

It is plain by now that I am employing a "substantive" or structural conception of practical reason as opposed to a "procedural" or instrumental one.[49] The procedural or instrumental view sees practical reasoning as a value-neutral process of adjudicating the means to one's chosen ends, whatever those may be. I may criticize Smith for being "irrational" – that is,

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

49. 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.

for not using the necessary means to his or her own ends – but I may not criticise Smith's ends. The substantive view makes some *ends themselves* "rational" or "irrational." Some philosophers object to the substantive conception as problematically building into the definition of "reasonable" controversial ends. For an example, if I defined practical reasoning as the process by which one adjudicates the means to *one's own health*, then any sort of action that makes me unhealthy (e.g., eating some delicious but less-than-healthy food) would be ipso facto irrational. What is needed, the advocate of the procedural view points out, is a broader conception.

Two responses are appropriate at this juncture: first, the argument so far is that practical reasoning as a procedure *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 poing is the maximally general conception that "good is to be done and evil avoided", or that "one must pursue the human good". Secondly, I have not yet argued, in great detail, what the substantive good of practical reasoning is other than a conception of how to live given that one is a practical, rational primate. This substantive good is general enough to accommodate a variety of controversial views about what, in particular, one ought to do or not do.

What further evidence can the neo-Aristotelian bring to indicate that practical reasoning is indeed better thought of as substantive? What reason is there to think that practical reasoning does not just aim at *proper means to any end*, nor does it merely aim at "ends" in the abstract but at *the apparent good*? Philippa Foot offers two considerations as further evidence.

The first is that the substantive conception is needed to show how both prudential (self-regarding) and moral (other-regarding) reasons can be rational:[50]

50. Compare with Terence Cuneo, *Speech and Morality* (Oxford University Press,

> The argument depends on the change of direction that Quinn suggested: seeing goodness as setting a necessary condition of practical rationality and therefore as at least a part□determinant of the thing itself. Nor is this a quite unfamiliar way of arguing. Many of us are willing to reject a 'present desire' theory of reasons for action because we think that someone who knowingly puts his future health at risk for a trivial pleasure is behaving foolishly, and therefore not well. Seeing his will as defective, we therefore say that he is doing what he has reason not to do. Being unable to fit the supposed 'reason' into some preconceived present□desire□based theory of reasons for action, we do not query whether it really is a foolish way to behave, but rather hang on to the evaluation and shape our theory of reasons accordingly. And it is exactly a generalization of this presumption about the direction of the argument on which I am now insisting. For what, we may ask, is so special about prudence that it alone among the virtues should be reasonably thought to relate to practical rationality in such a way?[51]

[52]. Thus she says: This now seems to me to be the correct way of meeting the challenge that I myself issued in 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' and at that time despaired of meeting: namely, to show the rationality of acting, even against desire and self□interest, on a demand of morality." Foot[53] 63.

Foot's point here is that goodness is a "necessary condition of practical rationality". This point is similar to Frey's: "there could be no reasons unless a rational animal has a general conception of its own good." 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*.

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 then on to particular beings, concepts, and categories,

2014).

51. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.
52. Compare with Cuneo, *Speech and Morality*.
53. *Natural Goodness*.

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 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.[54]

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.[55]

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

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

> Practical deliberation about ends is not an easy or well-defined activity. There are no straightforward criteria for success in this kind of reflection, and it is often unclear when it has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. These

54. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 2.
55. Ibid., 88.

> considerations encourage the Humean assumption—especially widespread in the social sciences—that there is no reasoning about final ends. On the other hand, how is one supposed to clarify one's largest and most important ends, if not by reasoning about them in some way? Rather than exclude such reflection because it does not conform to a narrowly scientific paradigm of reason, perhaps we should expand our conception of practical reason to make room for clarificatory reflection about the ends of action.[56]

Warren Quinn, likewise argues that we reason about goods:

> 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.[57]

There are many different individual reasons for action. But the concept of a practical reason is the concept of a thing to be done. Practical reason runs into quandaries because there are so many reasons for action, and they sometimes conflict. Some have to do with what is best for me, what is best for others, what is best for me and what is best for me later, what is permissible and what is required, etc. Although we may want to reserve the word 'moral' for other-regarding reasons, it is important to keep in mind that our goal of living well demands sensitivity to a whole range of reasons, regarding self, other, world, and so on.

Although this process is messy, it is fundamentally so. Any attempt to configure the process by subjecting to a set of ready-made rules or criteria will make it easier to understand only at the cost of losing grasp of the process. Wiggins suggests that there are psychological, not philosophical, reasons behind the attempt to reduce the process of practical reasoning to something mathematical and formal:

56. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 6.

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

> I entertain the unfriendly suspicion that those who feel they *must* seek more than [the Aristotelian view of practical reason] provides want a scientific theory of rationality not so much for a passion for science, even where there can be no science, but because they hope and desire, by some conceptual alchemy, to turn such a theory into a regulative or normative discipline, or into a system of rules by which to spare themselves some of the agony of thinking and all the torment of feeling and understanding that is actually involved in reasoned deliberation.[58]

What About Immorality?

Some might object that this view of practical reason as a process that is oriented by definition at the apparent good defines away the possibility of immorality. Does "aiming at the good" exculpate an agent's apparently immoral motives or ends? Not at all. Yet the objection requires an important clarification. First, if the immoral person *acts at all* then, according to the argument, he or she must be pursuing some apparent good by definition. To be practical rational necessarily means to pursue something *as good*, as desirable. Secondly, 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. 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.

In summary, to be a practical, rational animal is to have the capacity for *rational action*. Rational action is not simply motion or pursuit of some good – even insects and fungi do that. Rational action is the inclination to pursue or avoid in accordance with one's

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

judgments about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Practical reasoning is a very broad term to encompass a range of activities by which we form a plan for how to live – including processes by which we identify, assess, collate, and rank various practical reasons in favor of and against possible actions or ways of life.

The upshot of these reflections is this: If a person does anything at all, then that person is engaging in practical reasoning. The "final verdict" and the verdictive ought is simply what Foot calls the thing to do "all things considered."[59] Apparent counterexamples that one might furnish to disprove the point actually serve, with sufficient clarification, to reinforce it. For example, someone might say, 'It's ridiculous to think that I always pursue the good, because I sometimes do wrong." Sometimes we do the wrong thing. The proper response is that we perceive the bad as the good. Someone might say, "But sometimes I perceive the bad *as bad* and pursue it anyway." The response is that we sometimes take a bad or dismotivating reason into an overall reason to do something, all things considered.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter has argued in more detail for a conception of practical reason as the set of capacities that defines human beings as practical reasoning animals and the well-functioning of which thereby constitues part of the natural excellence of creatures like us.

I first captured both the *practicality* and *rationality* of practical reasoning by defining it as the human capacity to resolve what to do and how to live by identifying practical reasons. I agreed with McDowell that the virtuous person is sensitive to practical reasons, i.e., the salient facts of what is required in a given situation. But I disagreed with McDowell that so resolving the "how should one live?" question is not just what virtuous people do, but what all mature, functional adults do because the whole range of practical reasons is

59. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 57.

broader than just "moral reasons" (narrowly construed).

I gave a historical perspective on the notion of "moral" that shows how the older sense of the term included considerations beyond simply "other-regarding" reasons. Instead, 'practical reasoning' is an acceptable term for *any* reason in favor of an action. I also argued that practical reasons are intrinsically capable of motivating. Nevertheless, there are many practical reasons calling for action, and they sometimes conflict. So 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. Success is defined as practical knowledge of what to do; failure is defined as practical error — or perhaps ignorance — of what to do. 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.

This account of practical reason must do two kinds of work for my general argument. First, it must show the genuinely *moral* significance for virtue ethics of rational practice and practical reasoning. One cannot be "moral" without exercising fully the potential for practical reasoning. And secondly, it must show the genuinely *natural* position of reasoning withing naturalism. The mere capacity to reflect on our natural inclinations is a "natural power" of human nature. We are practical rational animals by definition. Or rather, we have the potential to become such with time (no infants have this capacity). The first principle of practical reason, that good is to be done and pursued while evil is to be avoided, is known by all functioning human adults. And some more particular practical reasons are obvious enough to be known by all or almost all. My account leaves room for the commonsense insight that our potential to become successful practical reasoners is greatly helped by education. While there is much more to be said to fully defend this account against rea-

sonable objections, I believe I have provided the outlines of a theory of practical rationality that can potentially do these two kinds of work.

Two important challenges are possible. They are both related to naturalism. The first is the "Irrelevance Objection", which I mentioned above. The Irrelevance Objection accepts (or entertains the hypothesis that) there are natural human norms, but argues that they are irrelevant to what we should do and how we should live because, as practical reasoners, we can pick and choose which natural norms to follow. Clearly, this objection arises from an emphasis on the importance of practical reasoning.

The second challenge is practical reasons anti-realism. Anti-realism broadly construed comes in a variety of forms: non-cognitivist subjectivism, cognitivist subjectivism, constructivism, and so on. What each of these quite disparate views share in common is a denial of robust realism. Jay Wallace explains such realism as follows:

> The basic commitment of realism in this domain is the idea that there are facts of the matter about what we have reason to do that are prior to and independent of our deliberations, to which those deliberations are ultimately answerable. Realists picture practical reason as a capacity for reflection about an objective body of normative truths regarding action (Parfit 2011, Scanlon 2014).[60]

Pretty clearly, I have been assuming a kind of realism. Assuming so is not vicious. Realism about practical reasons is what Nagel calls a "defeasible presumption."[61]

Pre-reflectively, most of us have no objection to the seeming fact that some reasons for acting are good reasons, and others bad. Some brute norms (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. And even anti-realism's most sophisticated advocates concede the that realism is the default view. For example, John Mackie admits that "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" accepts objective values. He even admits that moral thought and language

60. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 2.
61. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 143.

assumes it: the notion of objective value has "a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even in the meanings of moral terms."[62] Alan Gibbard likewise says, "Normative language does involve claims to objectivity in some sense—that seems clear enough."[63] Gibbard goes so far as to say that platonism about reasons is common sense.[64]

Nevertheless, subjectivism has a serious challenge to the presumptive Subjectivism is motivated by considering a problem about the status of practical reasons within (a broadly-construed) naturalism. As Simon Blackburn summarizes, naturalism asks:

> … No more of the world than we already know is there—the ordinary features of things on the basis of which we make decisions about them, like or dislike them, fear them and avoid them, desire them and seek them out. It asks no more than this: a natural world, and patterns of reaction to it.[65]

One currently popular approach is non-cognitivist (or non-descriptivist) expressivism:

> Expressivism in this form suggests a naturalistic interpretation of practical reason, one that may seem appropriate to the enlightened commitments of the modern scientific world view. It is naturalistic metaphysically, insofar as it makes no commitment to the objective existence in the world of such allegedly questionable entities as values, norms, or reasons for action.[66]

Expressivism's biggest proponent argues along the same lines as Blackburn, that, "Nothing in a plausible, naturalistic picture of our place in the universe requires … non-natural facts and these powers of non-sensory apprehension"[67]

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62. Compare with Cuneo, *Speech and Morality*.

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

64. "It might be thought that ordinary conceptions of rationality are Pla¬ tonistic 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 per- ception 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."

65. Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

66. Wallace, "Practical Reason."

67. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 154.

Hence, the neo-Aristotelian account of practical reason I have been developing needs to show if practical reasons can be mind-independently real, and if they are real, how they can be natural. To that task we now turn.

Chapter 5

Natural Reasoning

> The most striking occurrence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science.
>
> —John McDowell, ”Two Sorts of Naturalism”, 174.

I. Introduction: Three Problems

Human beings are fascinated by the attempt to understand practical reasoning in light of our animal nature and our place in the biological and physical order. Either humans are just another instance of biological organisms, like chimpanzees and dolphins, subject to evaluation by the same patterns of normativity or they are a different, even sui generis, type of organism on account of exemplifying (apparently sui generis) powers of rational practice and practical reasoning.

The relation between nature and reason is an almost intractable problem not only for philosophers but also for natural scientists, social scientists, and others. Every major

philosophical tradition – from Platonic rationalism, to Humean empiricism, to Hegelian objective idealism – has an important and sophisticated stance on this relation.

The neo-Aristotelians are divided on their answer.[1] Organic naturalists (such as Foot) admit a fundamental distinction between living and non-living entities, where humankind shares with other living species a distinctive set of powers and potentialities that constitute natural normativity. Social naturalists (such as McDowell) only admit a fundamental distinction between living rational entities and living non-rational entities, where humankind's distinctive rational powers is the root of all "second nature" natural normativity.

Put differently, the ethical naturalists are split as to "how we can reconcile two seemingly opposed forms of teleology —- that of life, on the one hand, and that of rational choice on the other."[2] The organic naturalist says that the space of reasons is the whole space of natural organisms; the social naturalist says that the space of reasons what Allen Thompson calls "an acquired and normatively autonomous second nature"[3] belonging to human beings alone. The organic naturalist thinks that natural norms can be discovered and articulated (by scientists and philosophers) as part of the normal scientific enterprise. The social naturalist thinks that natural norms are beyond the pale of scientific enterprise and can only be known "from within" the subjective point of view; that is, natural norms are inherently tied to the very scientific enterprise which is undertaken by scientists and philosophers.

It is difficult to see, on naturalism, how to make either of these work, and it is more difficult to reconcile these apparently exhaustive strategies.

THe last chapter's theme was practical reason. This chapter's theme is nature and *natural reasoning*. My account of practical reason brought back two problems with a

1. I am speaking of naturalists. Some neo-Aristotelians certainly go in for non-naturalism.

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

3. Allen Thompson, "Reconciling Themes in Neo-Aristotelian Meta-Ethics," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (2007): 245.

vengeance: The first problem was "subjectivism" which was motivated by a commitment to metaphysical naturalism. The second was "Irrelevance". I hope it is clear that both of these are related to this general problem of the relation between reason and nature.[4] Since all have been put most forcefully by John McDowell, this chapter amounts to a criticism of McDowell's sort of naturalism and defense of Foot's. The challenge of this chapter is to overcome all three of these while preserving the ethical import of practical reason we have established thus far. While there is no consensus as to *the* neo-Aristotelian solution to these problems, I shall add to some recent work from Micah Lott, Jennifer Frey, and Christopher Toner has revealed *a* potentially satisfying solution.

Section 2 explains the problems in more detail and lays out four requirements a successful answer must meet in order to overcome McDowell's objections.

Section 3 presents in detail McDowell's account of "first" and "second nature" and offers a new criticism: namely, his account contains a contradiction in that he denies dualism at one moment but affirms it at another.

Section 4 presents for an alternative solution that escapes the pincer. That solution consists of two interrelated claims, one about what "natures" are and another about how such natures can be discerned. The first claim is that nature refers in an unrestricted way to anything that is, rather than in a restricted way to only a subset of things that are (such as spatiotemporal material things). The second claim is that we can discern the very same formal nature of a thing in two complementary ways; both from "within" the practical point of view of rational reflection and from "outside" such a view, in a more external, objective sense. Both kinds of knowledge lay hold of identical facts. And both kinds of knowledge are broadly scientific, unless we employ an unjustly narrow concept of science that excludes formal disciplines such as mathematics, logic, computer science, and so on.

4. There is a third problem to address as well, the "Pollyanna problem".

II. The Problems and its Requirements

Irrelevance states that the natural norms are *ethically* irrelevant or at least not definitive. Jennifer Frey places this objection in context of the is-ought gap: "The irrelevancy objection 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."[5] McDowell is one philosopher who articulates the Irrelevance objection. For McDowell, the 'is-ought' gap is a real problem insofar as biology seems irrelevant to particular moral obligation. McDowell concedes, if only hypothetically, the existence of the sort of natural norms posited by the organic naturalist. Each organism pursues its own species specific goods, such as food, shelter, comfort, survival, and reproduction. But when it comes to rational animals, such norms are not binding upon us. As animals, people find themselves subject to hunger, thirst. These merely biological urges are morally neutral with respect to the question of whether I should eat or not. Morality impinges on me to eat certain things at certain times and in ways. A vegetarian might feel an ethical obligation not to eat meat even if the look and smell of it is appetizing; a glutton might feel an ethical obligation not to snack between meals even if he or she feels hungry. His discussion of the "rational wolf" illustrates this point. A wolf is "supposed to" hunt in packs because that is a formal property of its life form or nature. But a rational wolf, a wolf endowed with *logos*, would be just as free as human beings are to step back from such natural norms and either endorse or reject them.

The organic naturalist's attempt to collapse genuinely normative obligations into natural norms seems to him a commitment to "philistine scientism", that is, an over-zealous application of empirical methods to ethical matters. He would strenuously object to sen-

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

timents like that expressed by E.O. Wilson: "the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologicized" (Wilson 1975, 562). Instead of such crass scientism, what McDowell thinks is needed is the kind of self-reflection discussed above. We must understand the good of human life, commit to pursuing it, and resist temptations to deviate from that pursuit. This self-reflective practical reasoning may not stay within the lines of orthodox "empiricism" but, McDowell would say, so much the worse for empiricism.

A related objection has been leveled against Foot's and Michael Thompson's sort of organic naturalism by Chrisoula Andrea, Elijah Milligram, and Scott Woodcock.[6] The objection states that an empirical assessment of human natural norms would have to include norms that are rather obviously vicious.

When I built my inductive case for the generic that "the human being" is a practical rational animal, perhaps I was winking at the dark side of human nature. After all, human beings lie, murder, cheat, steal, rape, wage unjust war, and so on. Parents abandon or abuse their children. If we gather a robust sample of such behaviors and count them all as natural norms. Are we obligated to fulfill all such norms? Just some? Anscombe anticipates this worry when she says:

> The search for "norms" might lead someone to look for laws of nature, as if the universe were a legislator; but in the present day this is not likely to lead to good results: it might lead one to eat the weaker according to the laws of nature, but would hardly lead anyone nowadays to notions of justice.[7]

Expanding the scope of observation to include plants and non-human animals makes matters even worse: Empirically, some acorns become fully grown, mature oaks, but other acorns

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

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

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.

On the one hand, to ignore all instances of human vileness could only reflect a prior bias in favor of the light and sweet and sympathetic side of humanity. And where would this bias come from? It could only come from prior *ethical* beliefs, beliefs that are already normatively loaded. I presented the search for generics as "scientific" and objective and open to all the evidence. On the other hand, to include these phenomena in the inductive sample of "human" behaviors leads to a deeper problem. Selfish traits such as cruelty and deception sometimes secure good outcomes for their possessors: the unjust person may "play a crucial role in human survival and reproduction."[8] So some traits that are clearly vices from an ethical standpoint would turn out to be instances of natural goodness. After all, my presentation of human nature was supposed to provide an objective basis for showing how instances of natural goodness are virtues. If some putative vices are instances of natural goodness, then, absurdly, they too would be virtues.

These objections together constitute pincer problem. The teleology of life (organic teleology) seems to force us to categorize injustice as a virtue or else to appeal to the practical, evaluative point of view; but the teleology of rational choice (social teleology) seems to force us to abandon the relevance of the teleology of life. Caught in this pincer, neo-Aristotelians must either bite the bullet and abandon organic naturalism, or embrace the absurd (or patently immoral) conclusion that some vices are good for us. Is there any way to escape the dilemma, or reconcile it?

The attempt to reconcile the two can twist one into knots: Rosalind Hursthouse seems to vacillate between the two. She explicitly endorse's Foot's naturalism (of first nature) but also seems to endorse McDowell's "naturalism of second nature." She says,

8. Andreou, "Getting on in a Varied World," 71.

"Ethical naturalism is not to be construed as the attempt to ground ethical evaluations in a scientific account of human nature."[9] She claims that her account is, like McDowell's, still loosely naturalistic. She still bases ethical considerations on our nature as rational agents, i.e., "human nature" or "second nature". But then hasn't she thereby rejected Foot's view? 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.[10]

Julia Annas says, of Foot's view:

> What is so helpful for ethics from this kind of biological naturalism is that we find that the normativity of our ethical discourse is not something which emerges mysteriously with humans and can only be projected back, in an anthropomorphic way, onto trees and their roots. Rather, we find normativity in the realm of living things, plants and animals, already. It is part of the great merit of the work of Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse to have stressed this point. Like many important philosophical points, it is obvious once pointed out…[11]

It seems that the pincer forces us to give up what is "so helpful for ethics" about Foot's naturalism and either take recourse to McDowell's sort or else give up on naturalism altogether.

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

10. Cf. Frey, "The Will and the Good. 44, footnote 55.

11. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics, Old and New," ed. Stephen Gardiner (Cornell University Press, 2005), 13.

Requirements for an Answer

In his (2008) article,[12] Chris Toner argues that those neo-Aristotelians who agree with Foot and 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…"[13] Gladly, our account thus far has satisfied three of the four. Let us list the four criteria for a successful neo-Aristotelian naturalism and comment on each one.

(1) *Natural norms must be intrinsically able to motivate the bearer of the nature.* The "natural norm" must be intrinsically able to motivate. The natural human norms pertaining to our nature are examples of practical reasons. And I have already presented an argument above that practical reasons are, by definition, able to motivate us. The process of practical reasoning (about practical reasons) is the process of adjudicating between various norms, desires, inclinations, urges, and so on.

(2) *Natural norms must be intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of the nature.* The natural norm must be something that justifies itself, either to all rational agents as such or to all moral agents. The norm need not, Toner admits, automatically persuade a Callicles to repent of his wickedness. However, it must be able to motivate. 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.[14]

We have argued above that virtues are intrinsically able to justify themselves to the bearer of a practical rational nature. Toner mentions that "The requirements of the virtues can be

12. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism."
13. Ibid., 222.
14. Ibid., 235.

articulated into what Hursthouse calls"v-rules" (do what is just, what is courageous, and so forth)."[15]

(3) *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 (whatever that turns out to mean) is an example of a norm "anchored in" and expressing this 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.[16]

(4) *First and second nature must be related so that the second is a natural outgrowth of the first, and so that that in our given makeup is (first) natural which does tend toward an ethically mature second nature.* This fourth criterion is the aim here. Even though McDowell is critical of Foot's biological or organic naturalism, he does not wish to fall into a dualism between biology and rationality. Rather, he believes that it is possible to "formulate a conception of reason that is, in one sense, naturalistic: a formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside."[17] Note that he links the epistemological point with the metaphysical one: the dictates of practical reason come from "inside" one's rational point of view; yet reason is "naturalistic" in the sense that it expresses one's nature.

The problem with McDowell's view is not just that it fails to be "naturalistic", as some have alleged. Rather, the problem is that McDowell vacillates between two contradictory concepts of 'nature': an unrestricted monistic one and a restricted dualistic one. Both concepts of nature have their conceptual costs; both have their defenders; and both are certainly defensible. Nevertheless, one must choose on or the other. McDowell, instead, defends the restricted, dualistic view of nature while insisting that his concept of nature is the unrestricted, monistic one. The resulting concept of nature is incoherent.

15. Ibid., 242.
16. Ibid., 242.
17. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."

A second problem corresponds to the first: McDowell's concept of science is too restrictive; although he disputes the "philistine scientism" of his opponents, he seems to me to endorse just enough philistine scientism to deserve his own criticism. He is a scientific realist on one page and anti-realist on another. A third problem is that, even by McDowell's lights, there *do* seem to be primary qualities of nature such as "danger" and "safe" that are relational and actionable like moral qualities such as good and bad.

III. McDowell's First and Second Natures

In this section, I will first summarize McDowell's view of the relation between reason and nature in his ethical and other writings. McDowell's paradoxical views have caused some consternation among his philosophical readers, so I will not only try to summarize McDowell's view of nature, practical reason, and the scientific picture of the world, but explain why it is so beguiling. On the one hand, McDowell shares agrees with non-naturalist realists, naturalistic subjectivists, and moral anti-realists that practical reasons, norms, or instances of natural goodness are not "out there" in the objective world. On the other hand, as we shall see, he shares with Foot an opinion that practical reasons are not supernatural nor merely subjective. Secondly, I offer what I take to be a devastating set of objections to McDowell's view. This will clear the space to present my own view in the next section.

An initial quotation from McDowell expresses his precise objection to Foot's organic naturalism:

> Philippa Foot has long urged the attractions of ethical naturalism. I applaud the negative part of her point, which is to reject various sorts of subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism. But I doubt whether we can understand a positive naturalism in the right way without first rectifying a constriction that the concept of nature is liable to undergo in our thinking. Without such preliminaries, what we make of ethical naturalism will not be the radical and satisfying alternative to Mrs Foot's targets that naturalism can be. Mrs Foot's writings do not pay much attention to the concept of nature in its own right,

> and this leaves a risk that her naturalism may seem to belong to this less satisfying variety. I hope an attempt to explain this will be an appropriate token of friendship and admiration.[18]

As this quotation makes clear, McDowell shares Foot's rejection of "subjectivism and supernaturalist rationalism". The key point is that he disputes her "concept of nature". McDowell's classifies his own view as a "sort of naturalism" – namely "relaxed naturalism."[19] McDowell invokes Aristotle's notion of ethics, by which he hopes to rethink our conception of human nature and nature as a whole. He says, "the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[20] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing.

For McDowell, nature consists of Lockean primary qualities, which are response-independent as well as dispositional properties which are response-dependent. "Values" are the latter sort. 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 finds this view impossible to entertain. He says that naive realism about value is "impossible – at least on reflection – to take seriously…"[21] The first reason McDowell can't take naive realism seriously is the impossibility of explaining "how something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility."[22] In this McDowell agrees with Mackie: the "central doc-

18. John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 167.

19. This distinction is by now familiar. For the sake of completeness, I will mention a few of McDowell's other names for his view: 'liberal' naturalism' (John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996) 89, 98); 'acceptable naturalism' (McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* 197). Like Thomas Nagel, he also finds friends in Plato and Aristotle, calling his view 'Greek naturalism' (McDowell, *Mind and World* 174), 'Aristotelian naturalism' (ibid., 196), 'naturalism of second nature' (ibid., 86), or 'naturalized platonism' (ibid., 91). Cf. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism. 204; and Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008).

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

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

22. Ibid., 143.

trine of European moral philosophy" is a mistake;[23] it is wrong to think that some things *merit* certain responses by virtue of what they are and what we are. A second worry is that the doctrine of objective value, where normative facts are primary qualities of nature, has been discredited or outmoded by modern science. The modern scientific picture of nature is "disenchanted" from such intrinsic values as meaning and morality. He says, "The most striking occurrence in the history of thought between Aristotle and ourselves is the rise of modern science."[24]

If McDowell is right that the modern scientific worldview prohibits believing that values are objective primary qualities, a natural move would be to embrace a form of error theory or expressivism or subjectivism. Subjectivists of the sort discussed above (such as Mackie, Alan Gibbard, and Simon Blackburn) believe that normativity is "projected" by philosophers and scientists onto the natural facts. But McDowell resists this move. He says that Mackie's error theory gets right the common sense view that "ordinary evaluative thought [is] a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world."[25] Secondary qualities are "subjective" in that they cannot be adequately conceived "except in terms of certain subjective states"[26] but not in that they are therefore illusory. A secondary quality is not "a mere figment of the subjective state that purports to be an experience of it."[27]

What is the alternative to the apparently exhaustive dualism of seeing values (or norms) as *either* facts of nature like primary qualities *or* unreal, illusory, and purely subjective. His answer is that values are "secondary qualities" or "dispositional properties" of nature. His essay "Values and Secondary Qualities" argues that values are like colors and unlike shapes.[28] We might paraphrase this thesis by saying that natural norms are qualities

23. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977).
24. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 174.
25. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 137.
26. Ibid., 139.
27. Ibid., 139.
28. John McDowell, "Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology," ed. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo (Blackwell, 2007), 137–45. I shall cite this anthology. The

in the world (not just in our heads) but they are not Lockean "primary qualities." They are, rather, Lockean secondary qualities. Knowledge of such qualities is intersubjective, grounded in a form of life, grounded in our communal rationality itself. He says a secondary property ascription is true "in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance."[29] Experience of secondary qualities is a (sense) perceptual experience. This is a Lockean doctrine. Redness is not *merely* a microscopic texture property (say, the texture that scatters all light waves except red ones) because microscopic textures don't *look red* and things that *look red* appear so to observers with no knowledge of such textures.

Colors are response-dependent, while other properties (say, 'squareness') are response-independent. Color-properties must be defined partly by their "objective" or response-independent aspects and partly phenomenologically. Shape-properties, by contrast, can be defined by their objective or mind-independent aspects. It makes no sense to speak of what *redness is* apart from perceptions of red *in perceivers*. Similarly, it makes no sense to speak of "dangerousness" apart from a subject who is potentially vulnerable. So, perhaps, it also makes no sense to speak of "rightness" apart from a subject who potentially judges the value of a thing.

Yet by the same token right and wrong are not *purely* invented. The property of "being such as to look red" may or may not be *have ever been perceived as red* by any observer (if, for example, the appropriate conditions have never obtained). So a Lockean secondary quality may be response-independent in some sense, but it is not *redness as such*. It is the dispositional property that is disposed to present us with a appearance of a particular phenomenal character. So values (like colors) are dispositional properties.

Goodness, badness, and other values are therefore grounded in "second nature."[30]

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essay is also printed in McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, chapter 7.

29. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 138.

30. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," 188 and following.

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. We will explore McDowell's view of second nature a bit more in a later chapter. Suffice it for now that "second nature" is a distinctly human phenomenon. We partially re-enchant nature by bringing primary facts into the space of reasons when they weren't there before.

Discursus on McDowell's project

McDowell's anti-dualist position is liable to puzzle or frustrate some philosophers here. He is neither a *realist nor an anti-realist* – what else is there?

To make his view here more comprehensible, it is advisable to briefly give some context on McDowell's metaphilosophy. McDowell is a proponent of "therapeutic philosophy." He says he is influenced by two main sources: the "Socratic tradition" and Wittgenstein.[31] From the Socratic tradition he draws a way of thinking in which dualisms do not even arise. And from the later Wittgenstein he draws a way of doing "therapeutic" philosophy[32] – philosophy that 'leaves everything as it is'[33]. That is, McDowell believes many philosophical puzzles arise not from puzzling reality but from errors in *our own thinking*, so we need "therapy": dualisms need to be *exorcized*. He is an "anti-anti-realist". He is always fighting on two fronts, attacking a position without thereby supporting its apparent opposite.

With this in mind, we can more readily see how his objection to Foot and his quasi-subjectivist alternative is consistent with his solution to the mind-body problem. In *Mind and World* he attempts to dissolve the "vacillation" between naive empirical realism and "Rampant Platonism" by arguing that even primary qualities are not given to us in experi-

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

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

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

ence 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, teloi, and other esoterica. 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.

McDowell here invokes Aristotle's notion of ethics, by which he hopes to rethink our conception of human nature and nature as a whole. He says, "the rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature."[34] Second nature is that space in which human beings are initiated into particular ways of behaving and knowing by *Bildung* — that is, by education, formation, or cultivation.[35] Practical wisdom is one example of a virtue that the young human being 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. That moral outlook may be later examined, but only from within the moral outlook. The circularity of this inculcation and new second natural faculty is not accidental: Since practical wisdom is responsive to reasons, it becomes a prototype "for the…faculty that enables us to recognize and create … intelligibility."[36] "[The ethical demands of reason] are essentially within reach of human beings. So practical wisdom is second nature to its possessors."[37]

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34. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 77.
35. Bildung=formation, education; bild=form, image.
36. Ibid., 79.
37. Ibid., 84.

As in *Mind and World*, so in his discussion of secondary values or dispositional properties. I think McDowell's position is comprehensible. Indeed, we should expect that he would dispute both Foot's brand of moral realism and also its apparent opposite, subjectivism and anti-realism. But it is vulnerable to a couple of criticisms.

Objections to McDowell's Solution

Some have objected to McDowell's view of mind and world as being insufficiently naturalistic. James Lenman is one example: "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."[38] I think McDowell's ingenious alternative to "strict naturalism" is flawed, but the flaw is not an idiosyncratic definition of naturalism. The flaw is a contradiction by sleight of hand. This section attempts to demonstrate that the problems with McDowell's ingenious alternative to empirical naturalism is not that it ends up being a form of non-naturalistic idealism but that it incoherently both affirms and denies empirical naturalism. Fink[39] expertly exposes McDowell's sleight of hand here, so this section will trace his argument in some detail.

To see the dilemma McDowell faces, consider that there are at least two kinds of conceptions of nature: (1) "Restricted nature" picks out some subset of all things that are natural, leaving everything else 'non-natural', unnatural, or supernatural. Fink provides a list of eight different intuitive ways of contrasting (a restricted conception of) nature with what is non-natural. For instance, 'nature' could mean the world unaffected by intelligent intervention (e.g., the arrangement of trees in the Yukon is natural where the rows of trees in the Huntington Library is not) or "the empirical world as opposed to the intelligible world of

38. Lenman, "Moral Naturalism."
39. "Three Sorts of Naturalism."

the abstract, logical, or mathematical" (natural sciences of physics and biology are natural where formal sciences such as calculus and geometry are not).

Fink's ninth conception of nature is the unrestricted conception. All the other eight contrast a concept of nature where 'nature', by definition, leaves nothing out. Is just a multisyllabic synonym for "all." As Fink says:

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

The question for McDowell is whether nature is best understood as some subset of reality or reality itself. Now, 'nature' is ambiguous and some will insist that we can clear up this mare's nest by stipulation. But Fink disagrees:

> This is a terminological issue, but it is not easy to resolve simply by choosing one's definition of 'nature' and then sticking to it. No account of naturalism should forget the fact that 'nature' is, as Raymond Williams puts it, 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (Williams 1981: 184), or as Hume puts it, a word 'than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal' (THN: III.I.II.). In this section I shall try to give a somewhat systematic overview of some of this complexity that simply cannot be reduced by philosophical fiat…Indeed, it is a deep root of ambiguity that we can talk about the nature of art, law, language, culture, morality, normativity, history, civilization, spirit, mind, God, or nothingness even if we otherwise regard these as non-natural, that is, as not belonging to nature as a realm. There is no contradiction in talking about the nature of the unnatural, the super-natural, or the non-natural, just as it is an open question what the nature of the natural is.[41]

Both idealism and empiricism are forms of restricted naturalism. Calling idealism a form of naturalism may sound outrageous to the more empirically minded. But the argument is

40. Ibid., 206.
41. Ibid., 206.

sound. Fink first derives Plato's *Laws* a Greek trichotomy from between events that come about by nature (*physis*), chance, and art. 'Nature' and 'chance' explain why plants grow, why the sun moves, and so on. 'Art' explains why houses have roofs, why humans wear clothes, and anything else that we do and that nature and chance could *not* have done. The "natural" pair in this trichotomy consists of the first two: that which comes about, so to speak, on its own, *prior to* and *independent of* intelligent intervention from humans or gods. This conception of nature excludes not only the supernatural but also the cultural, the fictional or imaginative, and so on. The Athenian does not accept this "dangerous" conception of nature. Rather, he argues that "soul is necessarily prior in origin to things which belong to body, seeing that soul is older than body."[42] Fink comments on this passage:

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

It is highly interesting that the Athenian stranger rejects this definition of nature. He tries to prove that soul is "older than" and prior to body – by first defining 'soul' as self-movement, and the cause of motion in other things. Material bodies either do not move at all or they are moved by something else. Since all material things are either moved (by another moving thing) or unmoved, material things cannot be the first principles of motion. But since soul *is self-motion*, it is the first principle of motion. Or rather, the first *ensouled* body is able to move itself, and therefore to move other material things. Regardless of the merits of this argument, Fink's point is that both sides are grabbing for the rights to the conception of nature. He says: "This, I take it, is pretty rampant Platonism but clearly presented as an

42. John Cooper, *Complete Works of Plato* (Hackett, 1997), *Laws* 891cff.

account of the soul as natural because primary in existence… mind is prior to world."[43] If soul is the primary sense of nature, then body is "second nature". Mind is the primary thing, the first thing, the paradigmatic thing, against which mere body is contrasted.

As Fink points out, Aristotle confirms that the issue between materialists and idealists is a disagreement about nature. Aristotle says: "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."[44] 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.[45]

We can now see the crucial point about a term like 'naturalism.' Whatever one claims is the "inner source or cause" of a thing, the immediate constituent matter or the shape, one can be a 'naturalist.' These are two competing sense of naturalism, but both are naturalism.

Classical materialism is one paradigmatic form of 'naturalism.'[46] By Fink's lights, classical materialism is a form a restricted naturalism for it affirms that whatever is material is part of nature, and so that the label 'not-natural' applies to whatever is not material (or not obviously material, such as ghosts, souls, and fairies). But *the idealist, too, can rightly lay claim to the title of naturalism* – and not in a "Pickwickian" sense. Idealism and materialism turn out to be *identical* in one respect: they offer a "restricted conception of nature" and relegate to a "secondary" status everything that is not "natural" in the privileged sense. Idealism and materialism of course *contrast* – indeed, *compete* – in that they fight each other

43. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 215.

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

45. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 216.

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

for the right to call *their* preferred side of the matter-form divide the *first* and *natural* side. No single philosophical view has automatic copyright on the terms 'nature' and 'naturalism.' Indeed, the age-old ideological struggle between materialism and idealism is a struggle over such a copyright.

The struggle cannot be settled by presumption. But it seems that the temptation is overwhelming, on both sides, to presume their own view and hence to accuse the other side 'non-naturalism'. Some restricted naturalists beg the question by defining nature as material, spatiotemporal, causal system studied by (natural) science. The materialist presumption is what McDowell calls "philistine scientism."[47] 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 (MVR: 112–31, esp. sect. 5)."[48] Wilfred Sellars provides a pure specimen of such 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."[49] Note that the first sentence explicitly endorses an unrestricted conception of nature while the next sentence secretly slides the ball into the other cup, explicitly endorsing an incompatible restricted conception of nature. The second sentence merely *assumes* that the "space-time-causal system which is studied by science and in which our lives are passed" is "identical with reality". But that is the question at hand. One cannot assert one's answer with exclamation points ("nature is the space-time-causal-system!") and pretend to have delivered an argument. Or rather, one cannot assert an answer that, so phrased, idealists and supernaturalists would accept just as easily. 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.

47. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 346.
48. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 219.
49. Sellars, "Why Naturalism and Not Materialism?" 217.

Other restricted naturalists beg the question by defining nature as the formal, immaterial, ideal world. My point here is not to criticize one or the other view. My point is that the only remaining route is to return to the unrestricted conception of nature.

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."[50] Culture, art, rationality, intelligent intervention, and so on are part of the all. Fink quotes Dewey to make this point:

> Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations. It is the business of those who are concerned with the theory of the earth, geographers and geologists, to make this fact evident, in its various implications. The theorist who would deal philosophically with fine art has a like task to accomplish. (Dewey 1958: 3–4, italics in original)

Fink's comment 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.[51]

Where the materialist and idealist are fighting over the definition of primary nature, the unrestricted conception refuses to fight. Instead, it embraces both body and mind, brain and consciousness, matter and form, as existing on a single continuum. That continuum is, ex hypothesis, neither material nor formal, neither mental nor physical. Unrestricted

50. Fink, "Three Sorts of Naturalism," 219.
51. Ibid., 217.

naturalism has this great attraction, that one can bow out of the materialist/idealist struggle over the conception of nature. Unrestricted naturalism has a great cost: one can no longer use "non-naturalism" talk as a weapon against one's opponents. While such triumphalist rhetoric makes sense within philistine materialism, it will not do when we have expanded our conceptions of nature and science to mean all of knowledge about all that is real. It makes no sense to criticize opponents for positing something real "over and above" nature when we have defined "natural" as "real" and hence "non-natural" as unreal by definition.

McDowell does reject the restricted conceptions of nature offered him by the philistine scientism and by Kantian idealism.[52] He even rejects the equation of this picture with "science", allowing that the practical point of view of humans in the space of reasons can and does feature in the scientific worldview. Therefore, it seems he has chosen the unrestricted definition of nature by default. Nevertheless, he is of two minds. Like the materialist, he still wants to wield "supernaturalism" as a rhetorical weapon against some opponents; like the idealist, he wants to wield "philistine scientism" as a rhetorical weapon against others. McDowelleian relaxed naturalism is compatible with agnosticism or with theism, but not with dogmatic atheism.

Instead of explicitly admitting that he embraces the unrestricted conception without qualification, he puts the ball in one cup and then moves it around to the other side, pretending the ball was in the other cup all along. He keeps his conception of nature restricted (anti-supernatural) while *calling* in unrestricted (neither idealist nor physicalist). McDowell as a hero of anti-dualism has allowed himself merely to *claim* he is using an unrestricted conception of nature while fully endorsing a restricted conception of nature. He has not earned the conceptual rights to his definition of nature. McDowellian nature is both restricted and unrestricted. It is, in a word, incoherent.

Perhaps I am being too hard on McDowell, when what he wants to do is show the

52. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*.

inadequacies of each view and not replace them. Perhaps he means, in a sense, that 'nature' is an indefinable mystery. Nature is like an enormous box and we don't know its contents. Even then, we cannot exclude *in advance* any hypotheses about what will or will not appear in the box.

Practical Reasons as Primary Qualities

The second problem facing McDowell's alternative is that even by McDowell's lights, there *do* seem to be primary qualities of nature such as "danger" and "safe" that are relational and actionable like natural goodness and natural defect.

McDowell summarizes a common worry as to how "something that is brutely *there* could nevertheless stand in an internal relation to some exercise of human sensibility." But is this really so hard to imagine? For the rabbit, the brutely *there* presence of a wolf with sharp teeth and fast feet stands in an internal relation to an exercise of its rabbit sensibility. It had better run.

Indeed, McDowell himself supplies this example. Elsewhere in his article, he playfully presents an "epistemology of danger" or a "theory of danger."[53] This moral epistemology helps explain why his view is not a variant of "projectivism."

His theory of "danger" is this: Just as there is *something* about red things *themselves* that makes them give us redness experiences, likewise there is something about the dangerous animal itself that gives us fear experiences. That quality may not be *the form of red* or *the form of danger*, but it is also not *nothing.* The "theory of danger" is intended to capture this "something" with the important notion of *merit*. Red objects *just appear as red* to us under the proper circumstances. They *just do* dispose us to have red experiences. But dangerous objects *merit* appearing fearful and dangerous. They *merit* that we have a fear experience. To describe a bear (say) as "dangerous" to rabbits is to say something

53. Shaffer-Landeau and Cuneo, 142–3.

about bears and about rabbits in their context on planet earth. The rabbit need not engage in concept-use or perceptual judgment – seeing the bear *as dangerous* – rather the rabbit merely needs the instincts and perceptual capacities to see the bear. His response is not reducible to a response to the bear's size or fur or any other obvious empirical quality; the rabbit is responding to the danger. Likewise, when we see certain kinds of food as "disgusting" (rotten banana peels, say) we need not assume that we are projecting disgust onto the food; it is more plausible, by McDowell's own lights, that we are coming to discover an internal relation that certain kinds of decaying substances stand in to animals like us.

This is McDowell's own example but he does not seem to notice that it can be used against his thesis. If "danger" is a Lockean primary quality, then "desirable" might be as well. Practical reasons for human beings include facts such as human natural norms and also relational facts obtaining.

Science and Secondary qualities

A third problem corresponds to the first; McDowell's concept of science is too restrictive. Or rather, it is inconsistent. Call the two conceptions of science "restricted" and "unrestricted". Restricted science is what McDowell calls "philistine scientism", an overzealous attachment to the empirical methods of inquiry that ignores or denies the formal methods (logical, mathematically, computational, etc.).

McDowell wants to denigrate one kind of scientific realism (say, realism about evaluative judgments of health and sickness) while endorsing another kind of scientific realism (about shapes, sizes, weights, and other primary qualities.) That is, he denigrates the desire to find goodness in (primary) nature as a kind of neurosis or anxiety arising from the philosophical vertigo we experience upon becoming inculcated with "the scientific worldview."

I would suggest that "the scientific worldview" is capacious, including the best deliverances of our best sciences, including the deliverances of biology, logic, and so on. It is

hard to be asked to reject "science" (scientific knowledge from biology) on behalf of "science" (scientific knowledge from physics). One begins to suspect, as John Dupre argues, that the request is that we reject genuinely scientific hypothesis from biology on behalf of philosophical materialism. Just because such materialism "dresses itself in the mantle of science" does not mean that a restricted conception of science can enjoy, undisputed, trademark on the concept.

James Barham captures the dualism into which 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.[54]

Neither of these unappealing choices should be taken. Rather, we should take Foot's lead in allowing normativity into our picture of nature at the organic level as a whole, with human beings included as natural organisms.

IV. An Alternative Solution

So far, I have defended an unrestricted conception of both 'nature' and its corresponding concept 'science'. How does this solve the Irrelevance and Pollyanna problems?

Recall that Irrelevance states that natural norms exist but do not matter for practical rational animals because we are free to reflect upon them and either endorse or reject them according to moral norms, which would not be natural norms. Relatedly, Pollyanna states that a total set of natural norms includes both good and bad norms. So either we have to accept that some natural defects are also virtues, or we stand in need of specifically moral

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

normativity to sift out vices, which again raises the problem of the irrelevance of natural norms.

Frey puts the dilemma succinctly: "The problem our dilemma poses is how we can reconcile what on the surface appear to be quite different sorts of teleology: natural and practical."[55] The solution, in brief, relies on the account of practical reason defended above. Practical reasoning allows us to apprehend one and the same identical object apprehended in two different ways. That is, our natural human life form as practical rational animals, including the natural norms binding on us, can be apprehended both "externally" by the alien anthropologist who does not bear that life form and "internally" by human beings who do bear that life form.

If both forms of knowledge grasp the same object, then the dilemma between reason and nature is solved. The knowledge of natural norms is not irrelevant to ethics, and the special sifting process whereby we classify some behaviors as accidental to or contrary to our human good is a natural process.

Frey provides a summary:

> the ethical naturalist must be able to show how these two seemingly opposed teleologies (the natural teleology of life and the practical teleology of action) and 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 situation, can take the form of a practical inference whose conclusion is an action that exemplifies that very same form of life.[56]

I argued above that practical reasoning is not one of many ways of being motivated but is the very capacity to be motivated by reasons. Plants and animals are inclined or motivated

55. Frey, "The Will and the Good," 63.
56. Ibid., 65.

to their good by instinct or irrational appetite. They cannot pause to reflect on whether they should follow through on the instinctual flight from predators or pursuit of food and shelter. Humans are inclined by their good *both* by instinct (and emotion, desire, etc.) *and* by reason.

I also argued above that the object of human practical reasoning is a quite general conception of what is good. By 'good' we don't mean a non-natural property apprehended theoretically but the something intrinsically practical: the choiceworthy, the desirable, the 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.[57]

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.

Their status as basic goods is not to be interpreted as unrevisable. 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 incli-

57. Ibid., 88.

nation toward the basic good of human companship by becoming a solitary monastic but they only do so in pursuit of *other* goods judged to be *better*.

As Frey says:

> all practical reasoning is ultimately reasoning for the sake of attaining or maintaining these ends. Consequently, all practical reasoning is ultimately for the sake of living the sort of life that pertains to man. Indeed for Aquinas, there could be no practical teleology without natural teleology, since there would be nothing to reason towards if the will were not by nature inclined towards the exemplification of human form.[58]

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?"

Vice

The natural inclination toward the good in general and a few basic goods does not guarantee success or exclude the possibility of mistakenly pursuing bad things. For we do not *know* a priori what we are by nature. The human life form must be discovered; basic goods for human beings must be discovered – and they usually are at some point in the course of a normal life. More particular or less basic goods must be discovered with great effort. Mistakes are possible. However, correction of such mistakes is also possible. Once we

58. Ibid., 66.

have a well-supported hypothesis about our form of life, we can begin to sift through many available natural objects, traits, states of affair, and so on to see which, if any, actuate it.

I said that mistakes are *possible*. It is better to say that the possibility of mistaking something bad for humans as good is essential to a correct neo-Aristotelian account of practical rational animals. Two sorts of error would exclude the possibility: First, we might make the mistake of concluding that whatever human beings happen to do, whatever behaviors can be empirically observed, are characteristic "human" behaviors. Second, we might make the mistake of concluding that nothing human beings do is characteristic human behavior; wearing clothes, building houses, working for social justice, and educating young people would all be rendered accidental to human nature.

To put the point differently, if we hypothesize that all people automatically have detailed knowledge of what is good for them, it becomes impossible to explain why many of us have vices, are ignorant of how to live, and sometimes wilfully create for ourselves truly miserable lives. On the other hand, if we hypothesize that no one has any knowledge of any goods, even a general conception of how to live, then it becomes impossible to explain why some people are so intuitively judged to be virtuous.

An adequate account must allow for Hesiod's insight: "Vice in abundance is easy to get; / The road is smooth and begins beside you, / But the gods have put sweat between us and virtue."[59] Many people are irrational. Many people are not virtuous. But that is just to say that many people are imperfectly human, and not just by bad luck or misfortune; they are imperfectly actuating the human life form by making bad choices, being ill-informed, being lazy, being greedy.

59. *Works and Days* 287-9, quoted in *Republic* II, 364c.

Natural Discernment

The first part of my solution to the Irrelevance problem showed how natural human norms function for us as practical norms. Now I must reaffirm how practical norms are naturalistic, according to the conception of nature already defended.

McDowell aims for this conception of practical reason when he says it is possible to "formulate a conception of reason that is, in one sense, naturalistic: a formed state of practical reason is one's second nature, not something that dictates to one's nature from outside."[60] But, as I have argued, that he does not quite succeed in achieving it. The reason is that McDowell shares with non-cognitivists an implicit nature/human dualism whereby human rationality (in the space of reasons) is entirely of a different order than organic and inorganic nature (in the realm of law). The alternative I have been defending dissolves this dualism.

Toner says: "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)."[61] This view is more adequate because, as Toner explains:

> 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. So… MacIntyre links first and second natures much more closely than does McDowell.[toner2008sorts 243]

Human beings are *animals* after all, with animal sensations and emotions and urges, the "sharp separation" between biology and rationality not only cuts humans apart from the rest of the cosmos, but cuts human beings down the middle. McDowell's concept of human nature is not that we are practical rational animals; his unwitting concept of human nature

60. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism."
61. Toner, "Sorts of Naturalism," 243.

is we are *practical reasoners* full stop. This error infects his definition of virtue as well. He believes that all virtues pertain to practical reasoning (or "sensitivity") where I argued that some virtues pertaining to practical *reasoning* while others pertain to rational *practice.*

This form of ethical naturalism is satisfyingly adequate to the task. It captures the normativity of ethical reasons and aligns these reasons with the facts of nature.

If my view needs a name, I should like to call it Recursive Naturalism. It is recursive in two ways: first, the normativity of human rationality is both an *instance* of nature and is *about* nature, including about itself. Second, the object of practical reason is both to discover *the thing to do* and, recursively, to become more practically reasonable. Practical reasoning, when successful, sifts between excellent and defective expressions of our life form and correctly judges the kind of person one ought to become.

V. Conclusion

My account of virtue, thus far, argued that virtue is excellence in rational practice and practical reasoning. Insofar as virtue is necessarily related to practical rationality, an account of practical reason was needed. I argued that practical reasoning is the capacity for identifying and acting on practical reasons. As practical reasoners, we observe some facts as practical reasons. I briefly argued that "practical reasons" are simply facts viewed by practical reasoners as desirable or undesirable, as good or bad. Just as speculative reason is by definition the faculty for judging true and false, practical reason by definition judges worth or its absence. A practical reason can and does motivate one, all by itself; in conjunction with or absent other immediate inclinations or desires. Practical reason, furthermore, motivates when one judges that a course of action or an outcome is good in itself, that it is *desirable* in the sense that it is to be desired whether one presently desires it or not.

I also, briefly argued that this capacity *really* gets at worth, at what some "objective

value." (While I do not think this term expresses my view charitably, it is a common term.) A better way of phrasing it would be to ask whether there is any reason to do anything at all. Put this way, it is more clear that every sufficiently matured human organism naturally has reasons to do some things, to pursue some ends, and reasons not to do some things, to avoid other ends. I also defended the defeasible presumption that practical reason is *important*. It is of unquestionable intrinsic value to human beings.

A two corollaries of this solution to the Irrelevance problem is that the early stages of human life are especially important for creating the conditions in which eventual human success is possible and even likely. The evidence we already have from tradition and social science confirms this corollary. Just as health leads to more health (a healthy organism can eat, digest, and exercise better than its sick counterpart), virtue leads to more virtue, vice leads to more vice. A diligent person is liable to develop patience and moderation; a lazy young person is liable to become impatient and immoderate. We ought to take care, at the earliest ages, to diligantly cultivate virtues in ourselves and others. The earlier we invest in virtue, the greater leverage we have in reaping maximal dividends across a whole lifetime and even across generations.