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CRITICAL STUDY

VIRTUES IN FOOT AND GEACH

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Natural Goodness. By Philippa Foot. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. Pp. 125. Price £15.99.)
Truth and Hope. By Peter Geach. (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2001. Pp. vii + 103. Price $24.00.)

Both Philippa Foot and Peter Geach have put us in their philosophical debt to an unusual extent over an unusual length of time. From their first published articles – Geach's on designation and truth in *Analysis* in 1948, Foot's on whether morality needs or can have a philosophical justification in *Philosophy* in 1952 – both made their mark as among the few whose work is always not just worth reading, but necessary reading. Foot's contributions have been almost exclusively within moral philosophy, while Geach's have ranged more widely: on multifarious issues in logic and the philosophy of logic, on McTaggart, Aquinas, Hobbes and Frege, on mental acts, on the virtues, and on providence and evil, not to speak of his excellent translations.

Their new books reflect this difference. The question that Foot addresses returns to long-standing concerns with the moral evaluation of human actions: what kind of evaluation is *that*? In the course of arriving at and defending her answer to this question against alternative views, she engages with various issues about which she had written earlier. But these discussions are subordinated to a single central purpose. Geach by contrast has a more varied subject-matter. Six of his seven essays are revised versions of the Fürst Franz Joseph and Fürstin Gina Lectures delivered at the International Academy of Philosophy in Liechtenstein, while the seventh was a talk on 'Prophecy' to the boys of Shrewsbury School. Every one is impressive, both as argument and as writing. All of them make one ask for more; but what is remarkable is how much Geach succeeds in saying within so brief a compass. Because so much has been compressed into so short a space, and because therefore Geach has on occasion left it to his readers to spell out his argument further and to consider further objections, those who want to quarrel with his conclusions (and they

will be many) may be deceived into thinking their task easier than it is. These are essays that point beyond themselves, provoking continuing thought at many points.

The first essay, on 'Truth, Love and Immortality', has the same title as Geach's admirable book on McTaggart, but whereas Geach's principal concern in the book was to make the best case that could fairly be made for McTaggart's arguments and positions, here his aim is to separate out what is true in McTaggart's teaching from what is false. Of the other essays, three are about truth and cognate matters, one has the title 'What is Man?', and the final essay is on the goodness of God. But it would be wrong to conclude that, while Foot's book has a genuine unity, Geach's does not. It is rather that the unity of Geach's book is of a different kind.

What Geach presents is an account of our common human nature and its prospects, and each of his treatments of particular questions brings out some feature of that account. He is most of all concerned with the place of truth in human life, and time and again he returns to the importance of hope. Over twenty years ago in his Stanton Lectures (*The Virtues*, Cambridge UP, 1977), Geach argued both that human beings need hope and that there is no hope for them, either individually or corporately, except from God's promise of new life after this life in the kingdom that is to come. And the same theological view is taken in these present lectures. Here as elsewhere Geach draws insightfully upon resources provided by his Catholic faith, but he is always scrupulous in distinguishing conclusions that depend upon some article of faith from those that are matter for reason alone.

He begins his discussion of the harm of inconsistency by noting that, just as minor vices may save us from major harms (the lazy servant of a tyrant may engage in much less wickedness than one who is assiduous), so inconsistency may save the inconsistent 'from going the full length in drawing conclusions from false premises' (p. 37). But inconsistency is none the less a serious threat: 'inconsistent history will somewhere be factually false' (p. 38), inconsistent instructions cannot all be implemented, and an inconsistent moral code will prescribe morally objectionable conduct. So we need to form mental habits that will make us less liable to this kind of error. What is most important about inconsistency is that it condemns us to false judgement. It matters, because truth matters.

The essay on 'Truth, Truthfulness and Trust' begins by identifying the indispensable part that testimony plays 'as a foundation for the house of knowledge' (p. 50). We generally have to rely on the truthfulness of others, and lying and fraud tend to unravel the fabric of our relationships and of our lives. But there are, of course, particular lies that do no harm. What attitude should we take to them? Geach contrasts promise-breaking with lying. There are types of circumstance in which promise-breaking is unqualifiedly justifiable. But lying 'is always something to feel some shame and sorrow for. Even someone who lies in an emergency for his neighbour's necessity ought to reflect that, if he had not accustomed himself to telling little lies under no pressure at all, he would very likely have had it given to him ... to devise a way of escape without lying' (p. 64), perhaps by equivocation, something that Geach rightly regards as justified in some circumstances.

Why ought we always to feel some shame and sorrow even for small and harmless lies? Partly because those who allow themselves to tell small lies will under

pressure find themselves telling big lies, but partly because small lies are themselves bad. Geach follows Aquinas' view that lying consists in speaking contrary to one's own mind. Although one's mind is not a measure of truth, everyone (Geach adds 'unless he is exceptionally corrupt') 'desires to orient his mind to truth' (p. 57).

This natural desire for truth is expressed in the high value that many who reject the Christian revelation or any other religious view of things set upon the pursuit of truth; but the natural desire for truth may be perverted, and among the influences that may assist in perverting it are false philosophical theories of truth. How then should we think about truth? Geach rejects both pragmatist and correspondence theories. He develops briefly, but illuminatingly, an account of indicative sentences according to which 'A free-standing sentence is dual to its logical contradictory' and 'sentences that occur as integral parts of longer ones' are 'dual to their contradictories' (pp. 72–3). All sentences capable of truth or falsity are dual to their negations, and just because this is so, we do not need to follow Frege in thinking that false sentences have to be understood as relating to the False, a counterpart to the True. All indicative sentences purport to be orientated to the True. True sentences are in fact orientated to the True, while false sentences fail to be orientated as they purport to be. The view that indicative sentences are orientated to the True, that they are, as it were, signposts pointing to the True, is to be distinguished from Frege's thesis that such sentences designate the True (or, in Frege's view, the False). Frege failed to recognize that 'The semantic role of an indicative sentence is utterly different from that of a name or again of a complex designation' (p. 74). Geach then suggests, and it is a compelling suggestion, that the difference between *designating* and *being orientated towards* is implicitly acknowledged by anyone who recognizes what makes a *logos*, in Aristotle's word, *apophantikos*, and that he is able to use the metaphor of orientation to make explicit what they recognize. This claim, like some others in this book, badly needs expanding, both in order for us to understand it better and because it is central to an account of truth which has this unusual merit: it not only proposes solutions to some of the central philosophical problems about truth, but does so in a way that enables us to understand better the place that truth has in human life.

Geach's greatest debt in developing his account of truth is to Anselm's *De Veritate*, and he notes that if 'we can show that there is a God, then we can hardly conceive of his needing to orient his thought to a Truth distinct from himself.... Rather God must be conceived as constituting all truth'; and, as knowing it in constituting it, 'Only so could God be worthy of our total worship' (p. 77). Therefore we must reject any view of God that is incompatible with the identity of God and Truth.

In focusing attention on what Geach says about truth I do not want to suggest that this is the only valuable part of his book. On the contrary, there are some equally splendid discussions of other topics. But the discussion of truth has a peculiar importance for philosophy now. And aspects of that importance can be brought out by considering its relevance to Philippa Foot's new book. Yet since that ambitious book has its own distinctive importance, attempting, as it does, to give a new direction to the enquiries of moral philosophy, I need first to consider at adequate length how Foot's overall argument proceeds.

Foot begins by insisting that we should not 'tie moral judgement too closely to action' (p. 18). Someone may indeed have a good reason to perform some action in virtue of the truth of some moral judgement, but may fail to perform it from ignorance or weakness of will or shamelessness. Moreover, when a moral judgement has provided an agent with a motivating reason to act, this need not be because his feelings, passions or desires have provided him with a goal. What moves that agent may be simply his recognition of a reason for action, a recognition which itself gives a rational agent a goal. By these two denials Foot separates herself from any neo-Humean account of moral judgement. What then are moral judgements? To say of an act that it is vicious is to say of its agent that he suffers from some form of natural defect. What does Foot mean by 'natural defect'?

It is the kind of defect which a plant or a non-human animal exhibits when it fails to be what as a member of its particular species it needs to be. 'The way an individual *should be* is determined by what is needed for development, self-maintenance and reproduction: in most species involving defence, and in some the rearing of the young' (p. 33). Foot draws on Michael Thompson's work in order to argue that an understanding of the life-form of any species must be in terms of the norms that specify what is required for such needs to be met. When we evaluate individuals by reference to those norms, we use the expressions 'good' and 'bad', and we do so in a way that has nothing to do with their relationship to us or our attitudes to them.

The goodness that we ascribe in this way Foot calls 'natural goodness'. And natural goodness is a concept that has application not only to plants and to non-human animals, but also to human beings. The diversity of human goods does not make it impossible that 'the concept of good human life plays the same part in determining goodness of human characteristics and operations that the concept of flourishing plays in the determination of goodness in plants and animals' (p. 44). Foot goes on to argue that 'human beings are defective as human beings unless they do what is needed for human good, including such things as refraining from murder and keeping promises' (p. 52). This raises two questions.

The first is: what reason has any individual human being for caring about whether or not he is defective as a human being? Foot answers that we all have good reason to care about this. She begins from Davidson's distinction between what someone should do relative to a certain consideration and what one should do all things considered, developing a view of practical reasoning in support of the conclusion that to act badly is to act against reason. She follows Warren Quinn in holding that the concept of practical rationality has to be spelt out in terms of some prior notion of good. It is just because some action is a good thing to do, or achieves some good, that we have a reason to perform it. So the sceptic who asks whether we as individuals have reason to act as good human beings makes a mistake about reasons. Foot recognizes that the sceptic may have in mind someone with dangerous desires who is not motivated to act as reason requires. But 'the fact that we might hunt around for something that has a chance of affecting his actions' (p. 69) does not in the least undermine this account of practical reasoning.

Everything for Foot's overall argument turns, then, on her claims about the nature of human goodness, and this in two related respects. First, in speaking of

human actions as good, we are, on her view, speaking of natural goodness. So it has to be shown that in taking some types of action to be incontrovertibly good we are ascribing this kind of goodness to them. Secondly, we have to ask what it is about good actions that makes them good. In addressing both these questions Foot rejects as irrelevant any distinction between other-regarding and self-regarding actions. The goodness or badness of an action may be as much a matter of self-regarding prudence as of other-regarding justice. But it always has to do with what is in some way voluntary, a matter of the will. Someone may, of course, act badly on the basis of inadequate information or misinformation. But if the agent's ignorance concerns facts that he could and should have known, then 'ignorance may be imputed to his will' (p. 70).

What then makes an act good? It is good by not being in any respect bad. Foot follows Aquinas in holding that while any one defect is sufficient to make an action bad, freedom from all defect is required to make it good. What are the types of defect which may deprive an action of goodness? They are threefold. First, there are kinds of action that are bad just because they are of that kind. Secondly, the end for which an action is done may make an action bad, even if it is otherwise good, as when a blackmailer saves the life of his victim only in order to continue deriving an income from him. Thirdly, to act in a way other than as one believes to be right is to act badly. It does not of course follow that to believe that one acts rightly is to act well. Foot again follows Aquinas in holding both that an erroneous conscience does not excuse and that to act against one's conscience is always wrong.

Foot completes her argument by considering how human good is related to human happiness. What she calls 'deep happiness' has as its objects 'things that are basic in human life, such as home, and family, and work, and friendship' (p. 88), and for some, the search for truth or artistic creation or the achievement of an explorer's goals. The connection between deep happiness and virtue is complex. Someone very bad can certainly be contented with his life, but perhaps there is that in happiness that he cannot attain. And very good people may find that by acting as they should they will make it impossible for themselves to achieve the deep happiness that they had hoped for, as did those who sacrificed their lives by opposing the Nazi evil. But such happiness could not have been achieved by co-operating with the Nazis. For this co-operation too would have deprived them of happiness. 'The suggestion is, then, that humanity's good can be thought of as happiness, and yet in such a way that combining it with wickedness is *a priori* ruled out' (p. 96).

Foot's overall argument is now complete. She has a final chapter on Nietzsche's challenge to her central thesis, about which I shall say something later. But she has laid out her grounds for her conclusion, that moral evaluation concerns the goodness or badness of agents and of their voluntary actions, and that what makes agents and actions good or bad is the presence or absence of natural defect. Human goodness is natural goodness, natural just as the goodness of non-human species is natural. How should we respond to this thesis and to the arguments with which she supports this claim? I begin with her account of why we need the virtues.

Foot quotes from the first of Geach's Stanton lectures: 'Men need virtues as bees need stings' (*The Virtues*, p. 16). For what do men need the virtues? On Geach's view,

they need them in order to achieve the ends proper to a man; but in order to show that the virtues are needed, we do not first have to determine what those ends are. For the four cardinal virtues 'are needed for any large-scale worthy enterprise, just as health and sanity are needed'. Foot slightly rewords Geach's thesis: 'virtues play a necessary part in the life of a human being as do stings in the life of bees' (p. 35). Yet later she asks 'And given the diversity of human lives can we really think of a *species-wide* notion of human good at all?', and she expresses doubts about a possibility which she seemed earlier to be entertaining seriously, that of using the word 'flourishing' of human beings as we use it of plants and animals (pp. 92–3). Her subsequent discussion of 'benefit' does not seem to respond to these doubts.

We are therefore left with only one clear central claim: human beings need the virtues if they are not to suffer from some natural defect, something that renders them defective with reference to the norms for their species, as bees without stings would be defective. What are specific to human beings are their natural powers, especially the power to reason both speculatively and practically. Foot's brief remarks about these powers seem to me to leave open too many questions about the place of language and rationality in specifically human life. In so doing, they contribute to an indefiniteness in her conception of natural goodness and natural defect that leaves it unclear just how this notion is to be applied in the case of human beings.

I shall consider in this light one of Foot's examples, that of why it is bad to break a promise on those occasions when it is bad. (There are of course some occasions in which it is right to break some particular promise, and a shared understanding of when this is right is part of our shared understanding of promising. This is a qualification that I shall take for granted from now on.) Foot follows Elizabeth Anscombe, who argued in her essay 'On Promising and its Justice' that because the procedure of promise-making and promise-keeping 'has the role of an instrument in people's attainment of so many of the goods of common life', someone who does not give undertakings and act in conformity with them acts badly (*Ethics, Religion and Politics*, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1981, pp. 18–19). Anscombe spoke here of 'a necessity': 'it is the necessity that Aristotle spoke of, by which something is called necessary if without it good cannot be attained'.

Anscombe's argument is sound. But what it shows is that promise-making and promise-keeping are required for achieving a great many goods, not that those goods are judged good by the standard of natural goodness, as Foot understands it. And of course human beings can survive and even flourish to some extent without the institution of promise-making, as the example of the traditional indigenous culture of the Tonga Islands seems to show (see F. Korn and S.R.D. Korn, 'Where People Don't Promise', *Ethics*, 93 (1983), pp. 445–50). So what then would we have to add, in order to exhibit promise-breaking as an example of natural defect?

Promise-breaking would indeed be such, if goods that are specifically human, goods without which the specific end or ends of human life, whatever they are, could not be achieved in the absence of promise-keeping. What goods might these be? Foot has a useful catalogue of specifically human needs and of corresponding deprivations. Human beings and human societies need the physical and mental

capacities required for language-learning, the powers of imagination that enable us to tell and to understand stories, the ability to join in songs and dances and to make and laugh at jokes, the capacity in mothers for maternal affection, and the ability in some individuals at least to explore, to create works of art, and to give leadership (pp. 33–4). And it is not difficult to understand why the lack of some of these in an individual and of others of these in a society is a deprivation of a good specific to our human nature. So the absence from a society of any widely practised system of promise-making and promise-keeping would also be just such a deprivation. It might plausibly be argued that the limitations of the older culture of the Tonga Islands are evidence for this.

Yet what a society needs is a widely, not a universally, practised system of promise-making and promise-keeping. This is compatible with at least some individuals refusing to make promises, and others making promises but breaking them, provided promise-breaking does not occur too often. Of those individuals we may ask: of what, if anything, are they as individuals deprived, so that we may speak justly of their suffering from some natural defect? They are of course, as Anscombe showed, acting badly, but the question is: is their badness natural badness? It is in asking and trying to answer this question that the indefiniteness of Foot's account of natural goodness becomes important.

For it may well seem that what makes it bad for a society not to have an adequate system of promise-making and promise-keeping is one thing, while what makes it bad for an individual to break a promise is another. The former badness is indeed a defect in any human society, on Foot's account a natural defect. The latter badness is the badness of someone who does not act for the sake of the common good. But does Foot give us adequate grounds for holding that this too is a natural defect?

Imagine a society of some sufficiently complex species, whose members are systematically differentiated into a large class of those who do whatever is required for the survival and flourishing of the society and more generally of the species, and a much smaller class of free-riders. Such a society would suffer from natural defect if there were too many free-riders, but the existence of some free-riders would not be a defect, and the free-riders themselves are not necessarily defective members of the species. For their existence might have the important function of making other members of their society and species more vigilant in sustaining the practices necessary for the society's and the species' survival and functioning. So it might perhaps be for human beings with promise-breakers. So long as there is a relatively small number of them, their existence might be beneficial in that it makes the other members of their society and species more vigilant in upholding the practice of promise-making and promise-keeping than they would otherwise be. And if this higher degree of vigilance is necessary to sustain promise-making and promise-keeping, then the existence of some promise-breakers in such a society would not be a natural defect, and the promise-breakers themselves, although acting badly in not acting for the common good, would not have the badness of those who are naturally defective.

If this is a possible scenario, it seems to put Foot's central claim in question. For not all moral evaluation would be a matter of natural goodness or badness. But this

consequence can be avoided by providing an alternative account of the goods specific to human beings, and therefore of what natural goodness is. Foot herself comes close to providing just such an account. She describes the transition from non-human animals to human beings as 'from subrational to rational beings' (p. 41). I noted earlier that she gives a high place in her list of human powers to those of language-using and reason-giving. And in endorsing Warren Quinn's account of the relationship of goods to reasons for acting, she praises him for 'pointing to our taken-for-granted, barely noticed assumption that practical rationality has the status of a kind of master virtue' (p. 62). Indeed, on the view shared by Quinn and Foot, it is surely the case that to say of something that it is good is always to say, although not only to say, that it gives some class of agents a reason for action. And nothing other than a good, I take it, gives us a reason for action. (If this is part of the view, as I am supposing it to be, then it will also be part of the view that, if someone acts from desire, he only has reason so to act, if the satisfaction of that desire will achieve some good.)

Since human beings are by their specific nature reason-givers, then to act against reason or without considering adequately what reasons there are for acting, when one is capable of acting rationally, will be to suffer from a natural defect. This is a defect that only those capable of voluntary action can suffer from, since those not so capable, either because they are children or because they suffer from some mental or physical defect, are only potential reason-givers whose potentiality has not yet been actualized, or whose potentiality cannot be actualized as a result of causes that are outside their control. As such, they are not defective in the way a mature adult who flouts rationality is. So the key place that Foot gives to voluntariness in moral evaluation is preserved in this revised account.

On this account, to say of an action that it is bad is to say more than that it is not in accord with reason. It is to say that by failing to accord with reason it exhibits defective humanity. Foot's account of the three ways in which an action may be defective – in respect of the kind of action that it is, in respect of the end for the sake of which it is performed, or in respect of its inconsistency with the agent's convictions – fits easily into this revised account. For these are three ways in which someone may have reason not to perform some action. It may be of course that Foot would reject this attempt at an alternative version of her account, perhaps because she believes that the diversity of human powers and human goods, on which she lays so much emphasis, cannot be captured in so seemingly simple-minded a fashion. Yet in the opening pages of her discussion of practical reasoning she seems to accept the capacity for giving and evaluating reasons as *the* specifically human capacity.

This is, however, one part of her book where the brevity of the expositions and the tendency to move on to another topic just when the reader has been provoked into questioning is especially frustrating. But it does seem that what her overall argument needs is development in directions suggested by Geach, and this in three respects. First, by his greater emphasis upon how language-using and reasoning are the central and distinctive aspects of human beings, differentiating them from all other animal species, Geach makes it clear why the goods of human beings must be goods about which we can speak and argue with one another, and goods which can

provide us with reasons for action which we can make intelligible to each other. But for this kind of shared discourse and life to be possible, human beings must be able to trust one another to a remarkable degree. And the second great strength of Geach's account is his recognition of trustworthiness as a central virtue.

It is not just that we cannot but rely on testimony for so many of our beliefs and that we need the co-operation of others in so many of our enterprises. It is also that the loss of our credit and our credibility is one of the worst losses that anyone can suffer. This is highly relevant to Foot's account of the value of promising as an institution. For we should note that Anscombe, in arguing (p. 18) that breaking a promise is bad because it is an offence against the common good, characterized the institution of promising as a way of 'getting one another to do things without the application of physical force'. It is so, just because promises give agents good reason to act in one way rather than in another. I who make a promise now have good reason to keep it. You to whom I made the promise can now reason on the basis of my expected actions. So to break a promise is to act against reason by undermining the trust required for rational action.

This connection between trustworthiness and rationality has been insufficiently remarked. And it is a third great merit of Geach's account that it brings out the crucial relationship between trustworthiness and truth-telling. When I make an assertion, I cannot but claim truth for what I say, and I cannot but present myself as telling the truth. By my acts of assertion I present myself as trustworthy and give others to understand that, in determining what reasons they have for acting in this way rather than that, they can rely both on what I assert and on me. It follows that, if I lie, my act will always be in both these respects defective. It is against reason to lie, for the same reason as that it is against reason to break promises. Is it then possible for it ever to be right to tell a lie? Here Geach and Foot give, or seem to give, significantly different answers.

Geach, as I noted earlier, allows that there may indeed be occasions when in an emergency people find no alternative to lying, if they are to act as they should towards their neighbour. But even on such occasions they should 'feel some shame and sorrow' that they had not prepared themselves better for this kind of emergency. Foot, however, denies that lying is among those actions that should be 'held to be such as to rule out circumstances in which it could ever be right to perform them' (p. 77). She adds 'I think it especially ludicrous to suggest, for instance, that those fighting with the Resistance against the Nazis should not if necessary have lied through their teeth to protect themselves or their comrades' (pp. 77–8). What Foot is saying here is not entirely clear, since a good deal turns on what she means by 'if necessary'. On one reading of that expression she would be closer to Geach then I take her to be. But a plain reading of what she says suggests that she believes that there is nothing at all wrong about those lies told by Resistance fighters, and that they provide no reason for shame or sorrow on the part of the liar.

I am puzzled by why she should hold this, for two reasons. First, Foot does agree that there are some types of action that are unqualifiedly prohibited. The example that she gives is that of torture. 'If the frequently unchallengeable description "torture" applies to an action, then, whatever the circumstances, it is in my firm

opinion morally "out"' (p. 78). She cites two reasons for her view in a footnote, quoting Ronald Dworkin's judgement: 'He sees the ban on torture as a barrier to the power of a tyrannical ruler'. Foot then adds 'One might also see torture as the ultimate negation of the impulse humans have to come to each other's aid' (I am not sure what to make of 'might' in that sentence).

Suppose a group of Resistance fighters can only frustrate a Nazi intention to torture and massacre their comrades by themselves torturing a suspect whom they know to possess vital information. Foot sees no objection to their performing the normally bad act of lying in this type of situation. But why then is it wrong for them to perform the normally bad act of torture? On such an occasion this particular act of torture will after all prevent tyrants from imposing their will, and in so far as it negates what Foot calls 'the instinct' to come to each other's aid, it resembles the lie which negates everything that makes us value truth. So we need to hear more from Foot about the differences between torture and lying.

Moreover, Foot, as I remarked earlier, agrees with Aquinas that an act is good by not being in any way bad, and she catalogues three ways in which an act can be bad. So on occasions when it is right, on her view, to lie, that lie presumably cannot be bad in any way. It follows that lying as such, lying as the kind of action that it is, is not bad, and it follows from this, together with Foot's catalogue of the ways in which an act can be bad, that a lie told from benevolent motives with no harmful consequences by an agent whose conscience approved his acts would never be bad. But is this really Foot's view?

If it is, then we need arguments to show that Geach's view of the good of truth and of its place in human discourse and life is mistaken. If it is not, then we once again need further clarification. What is lacking in Foot's overall argument is an adequate characterization of the precise relationship between saying of agents that they are or are not naturally good, and saying of them that they told the truth or lied, that they kept or broke promises, that they engaged in or refused to engage in torture. Geach has told us clearly and trenchantly why he takes it that in wilfully departing from the truth we are violating norms required of us by our nature as rational animals. Foot does not make it similarly clear why the goodness or badness she ascribes to certain types of act is natural goodness or badness. This unclarity makes her response to Nietzsche less compelling than it might otherwise be.

Foot concentrates attention on two Nietzschean theses: that pity is bad for those who feel it, by enervating and weakening them; and that actions are not to be judged as good or bad in themselves, but only as they strengthen or weaken the agents who perform them. Pitiless acts of plunder, murder and rape are not to be condemned from the standpoint of those whose strength is exhibited in and reinforced by them. And, we may add, since the strong human being is a predator by nature, such acts are, on Nietzsche's view, expressions of the natural goodness of the strong.

Foot has two rejoinders to Nietzsche. The first is that we have no reason to accept the underlying psychology of the will to power. About this I take her to be incontrovertibly right. Her second response is to assert (p. 113) that 'there is nothing human beings need more than protection from those who would harm and oppress

them'. What she does not notice is how little Nietzsche would have disagreed. He would have inserted the words 'the vast majority of' before 'human beings', and remarked that the weak do indeed need such protection in order to remain weak and to disguise their weakness from themselves. But the needs of the strong are quite different. What Foot has to show against Nietzsche, and what her argument does not yet sufficiently show, is that there are natural needs of human beings as such, providing a standard by which claims about the needs of the strong and the needs of the weak can be evaluated. It has been my claim that here as elsewhere Geach's essays point in the direction she needs to take.

Natural Goodness is an exciting and provoking book, more interesting than most books in moral philosophy. If I have been largely critical, it is only because so much hangs on whether Foot can provide the grounds that her central claims require. What she has given us both in this book and elsewhere deserves nothing but intellectual and moral gratitude.

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