Chapter 1

Wisdom: Virtue in Excellent, Practically Reasoning, Social Animals

Quotation *"It is evident that it is impossible to be practically wise without being good."* (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a, 36–37).

I. Introduction

The theme of this dissertation is virtue in relation to practical reason and natural teleology. But my thesis throughout has depended on the *formal* requirement that any account of one of these three must be presented in terms of the other two. (I.e., One cannot define virtue, strictly speaking, absent an understanding of practical reason; one cannot define practical reason absent an understanding of virtue; furthermore, one cannot understand the natural teleology of humanity without both.) For these reasons, the importance of these chapters is building as the account grows. The foundation in natural teleology (in chapter 2) allowed us to speculate about human nature (in chapter 3). The account given of human nature allowed us to specify criteria that any account of virtue ought to satisfy, and we began constructing such an account (in chapter 4). Now I must make good on my claim that the same account cannot be completed without an account of practical reason. Then, in

a later chapter, we will crown the project with a detailed account of human teleology that will, we may hope, will be plausible in its own right and render more plausible what has come before.

The Centrality of Practical Reason

Practical reason (or practical rationality, which I shall use synonymously)[1] occupies a place of importance in the theories of many virtue ethicists. Specifically, the neo-Aristotelians have each thematized practical reason in their own way.[2] Why? What is practical reason and what is excellence in regard to it?

This chapter presents a theory of practical reason – what it is, what it's worth, and whether it is objective, subjective, or intersubjective.

Questions in Brief

I. What is practical reason? 1. Are moral reasons one type of practical reason? 2. Is morality only about how we treat others? 3. Can practical reason motivate? 4. Is practical reason about means only or means and ends? 5. Is it one or many?

II. What is the excellence of practical reason? 1. Is practical wisdom a moral or intellectual virtue? Yes, it is both 2. Is practical wisdom the only virtue? No, but it corrects other virtues.

III. Is practical reason and value objective? 1. **Subjectivity Puzzle**. Are values subjective? Are there as many rationalities as there are reasoners? Is practical reason subjective or expressivistic, like taste? 2. **Intersubjectivity Puzzle**. If values are not subjective, are they inter-

1. Warren Quinn uses 'practical reason' to mean the faculty and 'practical rationality' to mean the excellence use of the faculty. I prefer to treat 'practical reason' and 'practical rationality' as synonymous, contrasting them 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

2. Cf. Especially Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 4; John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50; @ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

subjective or objective? Is practical rationality culturally relative? In other words, although there is one human nature, expressed variously in different cultures, languages, customs, and thoughts – are we forced to give up on the idea of *one human rationality*, albeit expressed variously? Is there, at bottom, a plurality of *rationalities*? Is practical reason intersubjective, like etiquette? 3. **Rationality/Nature Criterion**. What is the relationship between reasons for action and nature? Or are reasons only "in here" in us, psychological and rational, in which case humans are not natural? Or are reasons for acting "out there" in the world, not physical and not natural, in which case nature is normative? If so, is this naturalism? Is this view objective idealism? Is practical reason natural?

Answers in brief

1. According to my account, practical reason is the human capacity for resolving generally how to live and specifically what to do, and for reflecting on action, and evaluating good and bad. Practical reason is the capacity for thinking about *practical reasons*, that is, reasons to ϕ or nto
2. The phrase 'moral reasons' is ambiguous: In one sense, moral reasons (i.e., facts about what is good for others) are simply one type of practical reason; but in another sense, *any* practical reason (i.e., objective normative and evaluative facts about what is worth pursuing and worth avoiding) are "moral reasons".
3. Practical reasons can and do sometimes motivate us, even absent other psychological phenomena such as desires or plans.
4. We practically reason about means *and* ends.
5. The excellence of practical reason is practical wisdom.
6. Practical wisdom is a moral and intellectual virtue.
7. Practical wisdom is not the only virtue but it is the master virtue, an executive and a necessary condition of the other moral virtues and a gateway to further intellectual virtues.
8. Practical wisdom and practical reasons are not subjective. I shall contend that there is one rationality, although it is a one-over-many concept that is capacious. This practical reason is most likely not subjective. My case for this very difficult conclusion rests on the belief, virtually incorrigible, that practical reason is *important*. It is of unquestionable intrinsic value to human beings. Furthermore, insofar as virtue is relative to rationality, rationality itself must be fixed to preserve moral realism. 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.

9. Practical wisdom is extremely valuable, both intersubjective and objective. And since discussions *about* rationality are only undertaken *within* rationality, there are complications having to do with the self-referential or iterative nature of the discussion. These complications should lead us to predict that conceptions of rationality will differ more than other difficult concepts. If two parties share an identical conception of rationality, then a long and arduous debate is not necessary; if two parties enjoy differing conceptions that differ in a sufficient number of respects, a long and arduous debate is not likely to resolve the difference. As the Greek proverb asks, "if we choke on food, we drink water to wash it down. If water chokes us, what shall we drink?" And indeed, MacIntyre especially gives us a recursive theory of rationality adequate (or almost adequate) to the task of both capturing what is common in differing conceptions of rationality and helping to enhance the possibility of resolving disagreements.
10. Furthermore, practical wisdom is 'naturalistic' in a broad sense. The above conclusions, by themselves, may or may not sound plausible to the reader. The case for these conclusions below may or may not be persuasive to the reader. If they are not persuasive, the resistance is likely to arise from a commitment to *naturalism* combined with the belief that the "objective normativity" of practical rationality is somehow not consonant with naturalism. Nature consists of descriptive facts while objective normativity posits evaluative and normative facts "out there" in the world. The reader may notice that this alleged contrast – between nature and normativity – is the same contrast we attempted to dismantle above. The dilemma of ethical naturalism rises again: if ethics is normative, how is it natural? If it is natural, how is it normative? So in this chapter we will return to it and do what we can to diffuse the worry. My answer will be that this form of naturalism is more adequate to the scientific facts, and is non-dualistic in a desirable way. I call this neo-Stoic naturalism, or Recursive Naturalism, since 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 to become more practically reasonable.

II. What is Practical Reason? Situating Practical Reason withing Neo-Aristotelia

The difficulty in defining practical reason is an iteration of the difficulty which I have stated above. Is practical reason practical? If so, it doesn't seem rational. But is practical reason rational? If so, it doesn't seem practical. So in a very real sense, the primary challenge of this chapter is to *defend the very concept of practical reason*.

I argued above (in chapter 3) that rationality in part defines our nature. We are animals of a particular sort: rational animals. We identify ourselves (scientifically, philosophically, religiously,

anthropologically, psychologically) as creatures normally capable of language, abstract thought, argumentation, mathematics, philosophy, natural science, and so on. But we are not merely rational; we are also practical: we *practice*. One can conceive of rational creatures (gods, martians, angelic intelligences, artificial intelligences) that are not also "practical" creatures – that do not practice anything. Douglas Adams's computer character Deep Thought is a *knower* with nothing to do. Hence the problem of practical reason is the problem of human nature: These are the two sides of the same paradox about our human nature. We are "embodied minds in action"[3] or "psychological animals."[4]

Are moral reasons one type of practical reason? No

Is 'morality' (or 'ethics') one type of requirement that can bear on human action, or is morality nothing more or less than Requirements on Human Action? Are moral reasons *one type* of practical reasons, or does any practical reason count as a "moral" reason (broadly construed)?

Jay Wallace defines practical reason generally enough for us to use his definition as a starting point: "Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do."[5]

Although it seems that moral reasoning is the process of judging actions as right or wrong, or resolving moral dilemmas, or identifying a special property "goodness", moral reasoning is the business of pursuing what is worthwhile, appraising action decide what to do.

I argue that (a) practical reason is the capacity for identifying and complying with requirements on human action, and that (in one sense) it is proper to call all practical reasons moral reasons. In another very common sense of the word "moral", "moral reasons" refers to the type of practical

3. Robert Hanna and Michelle Maiese, *Embodied Minds in Action* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

4. Andrew M Bailey, "Animalism," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 12 (2015): 867–83.

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

requirement that concerns my obligations to others and their obligations to me. I shall call this "second-personal morality."

Let's argue the first point first.

"How is it then that moral evaluation seems to most philosophers nowadays to be a very special subject, that may have to be understood in terms of the expression of special mental states such as approval, or mental acts such as endorsing?"[6]

The word "ethical" is sometimes taken to have a broader connotation than the narrow "moral," but I think such distinctions etymologically suspect. As MacIntyre summarizes:

> 'Moral' is the etymological descendant of 'moralis'. But 'moralis', like its Greek predecessor ethikos — I 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.[7]

The early uses of 'moral' did not contrast with " 'prudential' or 'self interested' " nor with " 'legal or 'religious' ". MacIntyre concludes: "The word to which it is closest in meaning is perhaps most simply 'practical'."

As MacIntyre scholar, Jack Weinstein puts it: '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."[8] If we take philosophical ethics to be reflection on morality as a whole then, on this view, philosophical ethics is reflection on practical rationality. Practical rationality is simply the process of deciding what to do. It is the process of thinking through what to do. Or, in Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, it is "thinking how to live."[9]

6. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 67.
7. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 38.
8. Jack Russell Weinstein, *On MacIntyre* (Wadsworth, 2003), 60–61.
9. Allan Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

Foot argues, I think rightly, that qualities such as benevolence and generosity we tend to call human "moral goodness" are of a type with a broader category of goodness. She says: "I want to show that judgments usually considered to be the special subject of moral philosophy should really be seen as belonging to a wider class of evaluations of conduct with which they share a common conceptual structure."[10]

The argument is simple: We act on reasons. We pursue what is good, or what seems good. There are various types of good; hence there are various types of reasons. But we do not act *only* on one type of reason (moral reasons). Rather, we weigh and balance *all* the salient reasons we are aware of at the time when we deliberate and make decisions. In making a business transaction, the entrepreneur may allow considerations of justice to outweigh considerations of profit; or, he may allow considerations about loyalty to a friend outweighs considerations of justice. These two paths are not, respectively, "the moral" path and the immoral path. They are both moral and both practical; they both weigh and attempt to negotiate the best reasons to act in this way rather than that, all things considered.

MacIntyre puts a similar point in different terms. 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 significance 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."[11] The significance of moral judgments is that "they enable us to solve problems of appraisal

10. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 66–67.

11. 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*.

and of action." That 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.

MacIntyre's point is that moral judgments are not *simply* useful in moral dilemmas or quandaries. They 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 meaningful.

Practicality as a whole domain was sub-divided. The conventional distinction that "morality" is a special sub-division pertaining to right and wrong behavior toward others traces to the 1700s, where "immorality" meant sexual misbehavior. The conventional separation of "moral" from "non-moral" considerations traces to John Stuart Mill who divided the former domain as concerned with duties to benefit and to not harm others.

> 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. It is for this reason that, of the four ancient cardinal virtues of justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom, only the first now seems to belong wholly to 'morality'. The other three virtues are recognized as necessary for the practice of 'morality' but are now thought of as having part of their exercise 'outside morality' in 'self-regarding' pursuits, 'moral' and 'prudential' considerations being contrasted in a way that was alien to Plato or Aristotle.4 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.'[12]

As Jack Weinsten puts it: '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."[13] If we take philosophical ethics to be reflection on morality as a whole then, on this view, philosophical ethics is reflection on practical rationality. Practical rationality is simply the process of deciding what to do. It is the process of thinking through what to do. Or, in Gibbard's unforgettable phrasing, it is "thinking how to live."[14]

Rosalind Hursthouse likewise says that: "The concept of a virtue is the concept of something that makes its possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as she should. These are commonly accepted truisms."[15] These truisms encompass our everyday moral judgments about who is admirable much more broadly than our judgments about who is morally upstanding or who avoids being morally despicable. There is more to being an admirable person than *avoiding* transgressions. Nicholas Gier's memorable image of the "couch potato" illustrates this point. The Couch Potato works a mindless job which he is able adequately to perform while watching television (and today we can add, checking his Facebook and Twitter feeds); he rarely rises except to receive himself and microwave his dinners; he is even religious, watching his favorite preachers on Sunday morning television and tithing regularly. Yet the couch potato is by my standards living a wasted life and pitiable life. (I am counting on your

12. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 68.
13. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 60–61.
14. Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*.
15. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2013.

similar intuition.) We do not want to imprison him for being such a failure; but we certainly do not admire how he lives.

Nussbaum paraphrases the question "how do specifically moral ends and commitments figure among the ends that [a moral agent] pursues?" in this way: "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 other for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[16] Nussbaum's paraphrase makes clear that our narrowed sense of 'moral' means simply obligations to others.

By contrast, admirable people command our respect for being morally upstanding, and so much more. We admire them for their brains, their guts, their strength, their rare talents, their outstanding achievements, their unimaginable creativity, their wit and eloquence. Some people are remarkable for *what they are given* (great beauty, great intelligence, and so on). But the admirable person is remarkable not just for good fortune. In fact, admirable people are often admirable for overcoming extraordinarily bad fortune. We truly admire *what they do* with *what they are given*. In a word, we admire how they live.

Julia Annas' presentation of virtue as as a skill illuminates this same point, I think, beautifully. She says, "I should develop an account of virtue in which I show have central to the idea that the practical reasoning of the virtuous person is analogous in important ways… to the practical reasoning of someone who's exercising a practical skill."[17]. What she calls the "skill analogy" might be taken as problematic since it drains the peculiarly *moral* quality out of virtue; but we might reverse this worry. The skill analogy colors even living one's daily life with the moral quality of virtue. The virtuous person is *good at* and not just *good* — good at helping others, good at thinking ahead, good

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

17. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

at human life. The vicious person, by contrast, is not just bad but *bad at* the essential elements of human life. Of course, being born with a paucity of natural talents is not a matter of immorality.

Is morality only about how we treat others?

Is practical reason egoistic or can we undermine the distinction between 'self-regarding' and 'other-regarding' virtues[18], between self-love and conscience?[19]

Although it seems "morality" is narrowly about how we treat others, the whole practical domain is about self- and other-regarding virtues, and identifying what is intrinsically good and admirable in itself.

The first point is that 'morality' may be taken as synonymous with the whole practical domain.

In order to further defend the point, it may be helpful to explain why, for many of us, morality is a special domain contrasted with or even opposed to domains of prudence, etc.

How did this broad sense of 'morality' narrow?

First, moral meant any particular way of life — something like idiosyncrasy, habit, character. Second, it meant any practical lesson — something like the "moral of the story", the point, that to be acted on, the rule, the maxim. Third, it came to mean a domain of rules of conduct that are "neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic"[20]

Anscombe notes:

> 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,

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

19. 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.

20. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 39.

> 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."[21]

Nussbaum paraphrases the question "how do specifically moral ends and commitments figure among the ends that [a moral agent] pursues?" in this way: "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 other for their own sake play in here scheme of ends? What role does political justice play in her scheme of ends? And so forth."[22] Nussbaum's paraphrase makes clear that our narrowed sense of 'moral' means simply obligations to others.

"Character Ethics"

Edmund Pincoffs distinguishes two broad conceptions of philosophical ethics he calls "Quandary Ethics" and "Character Ethics." 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; character ethics is focused on the long-term goal of living well by executing worthwhile goals in every day life. The Quandary ethicists are those Pincoffs quotes at the beginning of his article (such as Hare, Toulon, Brandt). They 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 pri-

21. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19.
22. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 174.

marily 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."[23]

By contrast, Aristotle is an example of a Character Ethicist.

> [Aristotle] as is well known, 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 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.[24]

How do we live *well*? This is the first question of life that human beings, upon arriving at the age of reflection, ask. It is also the first question of ethical philosophers. The goal is broad, to understand virtue, wisdom, and happiness with an eye to becoming virtuous, wise, and happy in spite of the odds and in spite of the temptations to vice and the inevitable distractions and obstacles of chance.

Non-distinctive virtue ethics Nussbaum

Nussbaum rightly observes that the three features of "common ground" between a wide variety of "virtue ethicists" also include Kant and Mill and Sidgwick. Her three features are the notions that moral philosophy is (a) about the agent (not just individual choices or actions), (b) about motives, emotions, and settled character traits, and (c) the whole of life.[25] "Even though a concern for motive, intention, character, and the whole course of life was not in principle alien to Kantian and Utilitarian philosophy, it was certainly alien to most British and American Kantians and Utilitarians of the period."[26] Martha Nussbaum argues that the "common ground" between even diverging

23. Edmund Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics," *Mind*, 1971, 552.
24. Ibid., 553–4.
25. Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics," 170.
26. Ibid., 173.

views is that we cannot construct a complete ethical theory by discussing only "isolated moments of choice."[27]

This "common ground" explains why virtue theorists often discuss examples from literature and why many virtue theorists are female philosophers or feminists. For "literary narratives display longterm patterns of character, action, and commitment" and females have "more often been encouraged by society to attend to, cultivate, and label their emotions."[28]

The "common ground" does not imply the rejection of theorizing, nor of moral rules. Ancient and contemporary virtue theorists employ both. Nor does the "common ground" imply the apotheosis of local custom and moral tradition. Reflective morality is supposed to rise above the raw material of one's maxims and habits to trim and add. Nor does the "common ground" imply that emotion and the sub-rational forces of tradition (she mentions "traditional pedagogues and astrologists and religious leaders and magicians") are to be preferred to rational morality.

The remaining virtue theorists, Nussbaum thinks, fall into two diverse groups: the first consists of characteristically "anti-Utilitarians" who want reason to play a much larger role than Mill (or the typical Utilitarian) would have it do; the second consists of characteristically "anti-Kantians" and want sub-rational psychological states to play a much larger role than Kant (or the typical Kantian) would have them do. The first group defend the plurality of goods, rationality's role in deliberating about which ends to pursue and its role in organizing, ranking, and harmonizing that plurality of goods, the rational character of some emotions, and the need for a rational critique of the broader social and political setting in which "defective passions and judgments" are formed.[29]

On the notion that values are plural, the anti-Utilitarians are united. Virtues are "an organized way of cherishing a particular end that has intrinsic value. Taken together, the virtues, and their orderly arrangement, represent a set of commitments to cherish all the valuable things,

27. Ibid., 174.
28. Ibid., 176.
29. Ibid., 180.

and to organize them all together, insofar as one can."[30] The "insofar" clause there is not insignificant. Religiously, the Greeks were deeply persuaded of the sometimes tragic and impossible task of pleasing all the gods. Ethically, they were likewise sensitive the sometimes tragic and impossible demand to pursue all intrinsic goods. One of the tasks of rational deliberation, Nussbaum, argues, is to organize this plurality of goods into a coherent set or to specify indeterminate ends into clear and pursuable ones. Ethicists who have supported this notion include Murdoch, McDowell and Sherman. While giving room to the passions, such Aristotelians elevate reason to a role that can have influence in shaping passions. She says they are "highly theoretical rationalists who would like reason to do much more than it currently does in perfecting our moral and political lives."[31] These are playfully chided as "Prussian" moralists who would not bathe in the sun without deliberating first whether doing so would be in accord with duty.

One possible response here would be to make an analogy to parenting. Different parents discharge their duty to raise children in vastly different ways. Upper and middle-class and lower-class parents in the U.S. exhibit a vast range all by themselves, not to mention the parenting habits of various classes of various first-, second-, and third-world countries. One plausible underlying unity, however, is the thought that parents (and guardians more generally) treat children as sub-rational. From the ages of 0-1, children do not respond to speech; from 1-5 their speech is limited, and from 5-12 children are fully able to understand basic speech but are most often swept about by emotion, impulse, desire, and social instinct. Parenting habits may be roughly graphed then on a scale of more or less "Prussian" according to how strictly a parent schedules the time for the child's day. Some parents impose rigid form on a child's day, allowing pockets of "play time" in between dressing, eating, learning, practicing instruments, and so on; some parents allow children to run about freely throughout the day, only imposing small pockets of rigid time (at meals, before bed, etc.). We might plausibly suppose that the role of reason is more like that of a parent managing

30. Ibid., 183.
31. Ibid., 187.

sub-rational children than it is like that of a monarch ruling a polis.

The other "anti-Kantians" want reason to play *less* of a role – or at least a different role – in the moral life. Bernard Williams, she says, appreciated the Greek poets far more than he appreciated the Greek philosophers. Aristotle was excessively rationalistic and optimistic about subjecting the raw materials of our ethical thinking to abstract reflection by the construction of organized theories.

By this distinction, my view is much more clearly "anti-utilitarian" than anti-Kantian. The emotions, desires, motivations, passions – the numerous variegated non-rational or sub-rational mental states of normal human psychology – can be made rational and/or can be accommodated within a life of reason. That is, any kind of plant can be part of a garden with a clear, purposeful, even beautiful blueprint, even if dead leaves and rotten petals may sometimes dot the floor.

Nussbaum thinks that Foot's "heavily biologized" version of Aristotle is "not closer to but further from the views of practical reason characteristic of the neo-Aristotelians."[32] I'm not so sure Nussbaum is right here, since the biological nature of practical reason is, by any account, a deep mystery more suitable for a dissertation on the philosophy of mind. All I want to commit myself to here is the postulate that human reason (including practical reason) and human biology (physiology and neurophysiology) have a unitary root. And, I do not want to commit myself to either of two (ostensibly but not necessarily exhaustive) disjuncts: either the that root is the physical (but not rational) or the rational (but not physical). I remain agnostic, or suppose that both have a third, neutral root. Blackburn's faint praise of reason as having "independent authority" over "human nature" is the precise view I am working against. If our rationality is not our nature itself, then the neo-Aristotelian project I am conceiving is doomed.

Nussbaum summarizes Baier as an anti-theory theorist who "understands virtue ethics as an alternative to the 'rationalist, law-fixated tradition in moral philosophy", who praises the voice of culture in moral thinking as often or more than she praises critical voice of philosophy over-and-

32. Ibid., 192.

above culture.[33] Though she later tempered this thesis to call for the "harmony" of justice and care. Her critics among the neo-Humeans and neo-Aristotelians are less comfortable deferring to existing community standards. Regardless, the neo-Humeans are concerned to reduce "reason's exorbitant demands and pretensions to authority; it is a way of grounding morality in other features of human nature."[34]

MacIntyre also is more willing to countenance existing social practices, if they are sound. "For MacIntyre, appeals to reason never in fact resolve ethical disagreements."[35] This is not right. For MacIntyre, one appeal to reason in one moral tradition will resolve one ethical disagreement, while another appeal to (another!) reason in another moral tradition will resolve another ethical disagreement; and neither will resolve the other. To deny that appeals to reason can resolve disagreements *across* traditions is a far cry from denying that such appeals can resolve disagreements *within* a tradition. Nussbaum ascribes to MacIntyre the monstrous suggestion that "we need to get this functional order through some sort of political authority" who will dole out a "well-assigned role or function" by "authority and tradition" to each person who then "internalizes" that role. In ascribing this view to him, Nussbaum helps herself to a conception of reason MacIntyre has spent more than one book problematizing. MacIntyre's actual views undercut the very use of the terms "reason" and "tradition" Nussbaum deploys in her critique. In other words, she has not responded to him as well, but responded to a quite different view that might be expressed in the same, multiply ambiguous, terms.

Nussbaum's conclusion is that "virtue ethics" is a misleading category and represents multiple pluralities of views across more than one axis. "These views have widely different consequences for the role of the professional philosopher in society, for the criticism of existing habits of greed and anger, for the whole project of placing our hope in reason. What I have called the"common ground" is significant: but it can be pursued within Kantianism, within Utilitarianism, and within

33. Ibid., 194.
34. Ibid., 195.
35. Ibid., 196.

neo-Aristotelian and neo-Humean projects of many different sorts."[36]

So I conclude that the domain of morality is, if anything at all, the sub-domain of practical reason concerned with obligations, duties, rights, goods, and harms that might obtain between one member of society to another. This way of putting the classification clearly connects "morality" with politics, family life, education, and so on. However, it paints in bright and burning colors the distinction between morality as a part of practical reason and practice itself. We are, first, and foremost, practical creatures, not merely moral or moralizing ones.

We can add to these arguments a sort of Moorean shift: instead of defending the domain of practical reason, we can ask: why do we moderns *assume* that there is a special domain of the moral? The ancient and medieval philosophers in the west thought of the domain of practical reason as a natural unit: all that is voluntary or under our control may be done well or badly. Our goal in living well is to to identify what to think, what to do, and what to make. As a corollary, we must identify what not to think, what not to do, and what not to make. But shrinking the whole domain of practical reason down to the domain of a few absolute prohibitions on harming others is a modern innovation. If it is right, then it is a modern invention. If it is wrong, it is a modern ignorance. Either way, its proponent needs, I think, to offer some account of why such a shrinking amounts to progress rather than regress in moral theorizing.

Three Dimensions of Practical Reason

Now, the domain of duties and obligations pertaining to others is a real domain and a legitimate division. But the division is not between morality and non-morality but between different types of morality or sub-domains. I shall call this domain "2nd-personal morality", that is, my duties to you or to you all. This domain is vast. But there are other domains for the 1st-person and 3rd-person.

The entire set is the domain of practicality — what one ought to do or ought to think, say, etc. The three sub-domains are defined by the object with regard to which one ought to do and not

36. Ibid., 201.

do this or that.

The domain of 1st-person morality is proper respect and care for one's self — self-love or enlightened self-interest. This is what Mill called the domain of "prudence". It includes the virtues that benefit both oneself and others (moderation and courage) but especially practical wisdom, without which none of the other virtues do me much good.

The domain of 3rd-person morality is proper respect and care for everything that is not you or me — animals and plants, pets and work animals, our possessions, our earth and environment, and perhaps even our solar system. The primary virtue of this domain is justice, a respect for the whole and the proper arrangement of all the parts. If God exists, then 3rd-personal morality would require piety to him or her, since on most theisms God is not strictly speaking "one of us" but still demands our allegiance, sacrifice, or what have you.

The domain of 2nd-person morality, I said, is vast. It includes interpersonal moral obligations, values, and virtues as well as broader social or political ones. I suggest that the dominant virtue here is not only justice but love — I.e., a strong regard for the other, a charitable orientation to promoting the good of others, refusing to harm them, and committing to protect them from harm.

Can practical reasons motivate?

Seen in this light, it is obvious that practical reasons can and do motivate us. There might be reasons to ϕ that I am not aware of and thus am not motivated by. Perhaps it is true that one ought to save for retirement, but I may fail to do so. The internalist urges that reasons *for me* must connect up with my motivational structure. Defined widely enough, I can agree to this way of stating things. If by "my motivational structure" we simply mean my overall disposition toward the good. I am 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 disapprobate it).

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." Of course, 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.

My view shares common features with motivational internalism; however, I do not wish to deny what is plausible in motivational externalism, that there are reasons "out there" that *would* motivate me if I knew about them but which I do not know about. However, I find the internalism/externalism labels unhelpful and shall attempt to make my case plausible not by naming my positions but by characterizing what I mean as clearly as possible. The concept of a practical reason is the concept of *what to do*, which has its "practical" or motivational component "built-in" so to speak. And while it often happens that one's practical reasons conflict or are indeterminate, nevertheless, a set of practical reasons can constitute the *overriding* practical reason: *the thing to do*, all things considered.

Although it seems that reason cannot motivate, practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of "motive"; other psychological states *move* me to act but only reasons *motivate* me to act, since motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state.

Although it seems that reason cannot motivate, practical reasons are the *primary* meaning of motive. Other psychological states *move* me to act but only reasons *motivate* me to act, since motivation is (I argue) a fundamentally rational state.

My view is that practical reason is the general human capacity for deciding, through reflection and sensitivity to practical principles, what to do, and for evaluating one's own actions and those of others. Although we can by verbal sleight of hand define practical reasons as 'desires', the judgment of what to do is a distinct mental state from desiring, wanting, wishing, or instinctual

attraction. Hence, practical reasons can (and most often do) motivate, all by themselves, even in the absence of desires (etc.); however, desires can (and often do) function as reasons for action.

There are many reasons for action. But the concept of a reason for action is the concept of pursuing what is good or what is best, all things considered. 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 (perhaps) God.

> 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.[37]

There are two specific normative conclusions I would like to make. I want to avoid the accusation that practical wisdom, as the argument stands at present, is an empty formality devoid of moral substance. As we saw in an earlier chapter, it might seem that the injunction: "pursue practical wisdom!" amounts to a truism that wisdom (which is a good) is a good.

The first particular normative conclusion is that truth is valuable. Often times one hears "education" praised as a panacea. Education, we are told, without any further definition to the term, is supposed to solve American economic problems, lift people out of poverty, reduce crime in inner cities, enrich students personally, lead to technological advances and medical breakthroughs, subvert and correct systematic gender inequalities, and more. But unless the education a student receives consists in *knowledge* of *truth*, we can hardly expect that these exaggerated hopes be fulfilled.

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

A second particular normative conclusion is that young people in particular should not engage in conjugal activity outside of the bonds of legal marriage. Conjugal activity is a powerful part of life and part of the human experience. There are moral, prudential, legal, psychological, economic, social, and biological reasons to keep such a powerful force within safe bounds. Morally, moral authorities from Moses, Cicero, Socrates, St. Paul, Confucius, Epicurus, Thomas Aquinas, and many more urge chastity and conjugal fidelity. The Mosaic law condemns adulterers to death but if an unmarried man sleeps with an unmarried woman they are not to be punished; they are to marry.

Is practical reason aimed at the good or is it merely instrumental?

David Enoch's recent volume *Taking Morality Seriously* builds a case for moral realism on the basis that moral realism is the best explanation for the moral earnestness which most of us *cannot but help feel*.[38] Similarly, Foot is persuaded that we must assume a definition of practical reasoning that is substantive, rather than merely procedural. Practical reasoning does not just aim at means to ends, nor does it merely aim at "ends"; it aims at *the apparent good*.

> 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. 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

38. David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

> 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?[39]

If goodness is a "necessary condition of practical rationality" then we are already committed to a substantive view of practical reason, rather than a merely procedural neo-Humean view.

Foot identifies an argument for the importance of practical rationality on the basis that *we cannot help but value it*. Foot follows Quinn's lead in criticising a view of reason that makes the goal "the maximal satisfaction of an agent's desires and preferences, suitably corrected for the effects of misinformation, wishful thinking, and the like."'[40] The trouble, Foot says, is that we *cannot consistently believe this view.*

> He pointed out that by this account, practical reason, which would concern only the relation of means to ends, would therefore be indifferent to nastiness or even disgracefulness in an agent's purposes. And Quinn asked, in the crucial sentence of the article, *what then would be so important about practical rationality?* In effect he is pointing to our taken-for-granted, barely noticed assumption that practical rationality has the status of a kind of master virtue, in order to show that we cannot in consistency with ourselves think that the Humean account of it is true.[41]

Reasoning about ends may be a difficult and messy business. But we do it. Reasoning – indeed, disagreeing and debating – about ultimate ends is an empirical fact. 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:

39. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 63.
40. Quinn, "Rationality and the Human Good," from the abstract.%.
41. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 62.

> 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 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.[42]

As for John McDowell, we saw in the last chapter his view of practical reason. He agrees that it is really a mode of *reason* (though neither reason nor practical reason are "objective" in the sense that they can hope for a sideways-on view of ourselves or a truly universal "view from nowhere" of the world). Furthermore, the judgments about what to do in this or that particular situation are inseparable from the overall "moral outlook" by which one lives and reflects upon the all-important question of "Character Ethics": "How should one live?"[43] Ethical reflection is *reflection* about *practice* – ethical reflection simply is practical reasoning.

Wallace and McDowell both help us to see the importance of identifying our human telos, which will be explored in a later chapter. As Hursthouse puts it:

> These aspects coalesce in the description of the practically wise as those who understand what is truly worthwhile, truly important, and thereby truly advantageous in life, who know, in short, how to live well. In the Aristotelian "eudaimonist" tradition, this is expressed in the claim that they have a true grasp of eudaimonia.[44]

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42. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 6.
43. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 331.
44. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," sec. 2.

III. Wisdom: The Excellence of Practical Reasoning

Is practical wisdom the excellence of practical reason?

I have tried to show above the close connection of human nature to human excellence – the connection of form to function. We *are* practical, rational animals by nature. The practical wise among us are *excellent* human beings.

The virtue of practical reason is, not surprisingly, practical wisdom. *Yet practical wisdom is strange and likely to be misunderstand: it is both theoretical (aiming at knowing what's true) and practical (aiming at what to do). To co-opt a phrase from Alan Gibbard:*[45] *our activity of practical reasoning is "thinking how to live."*[46] *So practical wisdom is knowing how to live, and* really knowing* it. Stated this way, it is easy to see why some have argued that practical wisdom is the *only* virtue. If one knows exactly how to live, in each circumstance, in each challenge, according to proper reasons, and for proper motives, what more to virtue could there be? Maggie Little[47] argues that virtue is a species of knowledge; John McDowell[48] argues something similar.* So why bother dividing up various virtues?

I do not think Aristotle himself was perfectly clear on this point. Though he divides up intellectual virtues into prudence, science, intellect, judgment, understanding, deliberation, and so on (Greek: phronesis, sophia, nous, gnome, sunesis, eubolia respectively), and though he says that

45. I'm not sure Gibbard would appreciate my use of the phrase.

46. Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*. I take the activity of thinking what to do in a far more realist direction than Gibbard. However, I have noticed with pleasure that Gibbard himself has become more open to realism in the recent years. He asks us to suppose that "normative realists are right about how normative concepts act" (xii), and only wishes to establish the possibility of the truth of his hypothesis that "the meaning of this phrase 'the thing to do' is explained expressionistically: if I assert 'Fleeing is the thing to do', I thereby express a state of mind, deciding to flee." (8) He says he is a "naturalist about humanity, about human thinking and planning, but in a sense I end up a non-naturalist about *oughts*. Much of what non-naturalists say is right, I conclude—but this needn't be mysterious to any naturalist." (xii).

47. Margaret Olivia Little, "Virtue as Knowledge: Objections from the Philosophy of Mind," in *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo (Blackwell, 2007), 252–64.

48. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason."

prudence (knowledge about changing particulars) is inferior to wisdom (science about unchanging universals), nevertheless he says the absence of prudence ruins all other aspiring virtues.[49]

Our human nature as dependent practical reasoners demonstrates why prudence or *phronesis* is the master virtue. For *Phronesis* complements every other moral virtue. MacIntyre defends Aristotle's conception of the practical syllogism. For example, *I ought to do (the courageous thing of) resisting a student's attempt to bribe me for a higher grade. This student is attempting to bribe me for a higher grade. Therefore, in this case, I ought to do (the courageous thing of) resisting this student's attempt to bribe me.* The major premise here is an evaluative judgment about a virtue or action-type; the minor premise is a factuaion judgment about a situation or action-token; the conclusion is a *maxim*. It is a judgment but not merely a judgment; it is *an action*. Each piece of the practical syllogism is needed for the whole to function in practice. For without moral virtues, prudence may be knowledge of what one ought to do but it does not entail that one is in the habit of actually doing it. And, more crucially, without prudence, the moral virtues are simply skills – skills that might be serviceable to bad ends. Without prudence, one might be skilled in achieving *what is not to be done*.

The mastery of prudence over other virtues also unifies the other virtues. *Dependent Rational Animals* supplies a necessary unifying base for MacIntyre's virtue theory in three ways: it unifies intellectual and moral virtues, unifies various moral virtues, and unifies the various stages of the narrative of *human* life.

Is practical wisdom a moral virtue or intellectual virtue?

The one indisputable virtue is practical wisdom. Everyone has reason to be wise. And if one is not wise at present, if one lacks wisdom in some respect, the reason to be wise entails a reason to *become* wise. Not everyone has reason to become an "academic" – god forbid!

A fourth, and potentially confusing, reason is that practical wisdom is both a "moral virtue" and an "intellectual virtue". As Foot points out, out of the four Greek cardinal virtues (moderation,

49. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2014) NE, VI.

courage, justice, practical wisdom) only justice is obviously "moral" in our usual sense of "other-regarding" traits. Moderation, courage, and practical wisdom more smoothly fit into the "self-regarding" category; practical wisdom fits most smoothly of all into the category of virtues of mind. While there is a growing branch of intellectual virtue ethics within the budding virtue ethics tree, practical wisdom seems to partake of both qualities. The dual nature of practical wisdom is likely to be even easier to misunderstand than other traditional virtues.

Furthermore, practical wisdom is both an intellectual and moral virtue; it is admirable as a means to further virtues and other kinds of goods but also admirable in and of itself; an essential part of other moral virtues and a gateway to other intellectual virtues.

As Rosalind Hursthouse says:

> Aristotle makes a number of specific remarks about phronesis that are the subject of much scholarly debate, but the (related) modern concept is best understood by thinking of what the virtuous morally mature adult has that nice children, including nice adolescents, lack. Both the virtuous adult and the nice child have good intentions, but the child is much more prone to mess things up because he is ignorant of what he needs to know in order to do what he intends.[50]

Practical wisdom is not easy to characterize. But Hursthouse's contrast between "nice children" and adults highlights the intuitive point that practical wisdom depends, in some respect, on time. She continues:

> Amongst the morally relevant features of a situation may be the likely consequences, for the people involved, of a certain action, and this is something that adolescents are notoriously clueless about precisely because they are inexperienced. It is part of practical wisdom to be wise about human beings and human life. (It should go without saying that the virtuous are mindful of the consequences of possible actions. How could they fail to be reckless, thoughtless and short-sighted if they were not?)[51]

Even though this process of reasoning is not as clear as might be hoped, it is clear enough to defend. The lack of clarity in the account is simply a reflection of the lack of clarity in humanity and our

50. Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," sec. 2.
51. Ibid., sec. 2.

moral lives.

The equation between moral and intellectual excellence is not obvious for us. The notion that morality has to do with absolute verdicts is not obvious to Aristotle — nor to contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists.

Kant admits the apparent inconsistency in radically dividing speculative or theoretical reason from practical reason: >Here first is explained the enigma of the critical philosophy, viz. :how we deny objective reality to the supersensible use of the categories in speculation and yet admit this reality with respect to the objects of pure practical reason. This must at first seem inconsistent as long as this practical use is only nominally known.[52]

Is practical wisdom the only virtue?

Although it seems that there are no other virtues because all virtue is knowledge, there are other virtues related to other cognitive and affective features of human nature, each of which, nevertheless, depends on and enhances practical reason.

McDowell already began this account by arguing that virtues are perceptual capacities that helps us pick out – from the blooming, buzzing confusion – morally salient facts. Knowledge is not the *only* virtue. Habits moderating pleasure or spending can be "programmed" into our psychological such that they are practiced without conscious thought. But knowledge is a necessary part, for most people, of discovering which habits are worth acquiring and going about acquiring them.

A third reason is, also alluded to, is that practical wisdom provides a needed corrective not only to folly but even to the possible excesses or misapplications of other virtues. The negative version of the same reason is the intuitive claim that (practical) folly has the potential to ruin otherwise admirable lives.

52. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S Pluhar (Hackett Publishing, 2002).

IV. What is the Worth of Practical Reason? Objective and Natural

The good is true but even first we pursue truth because it is good. Truth is valuable. We pursue truth because it is good. We do not pursue goodness because it is true.

Is practical reason subjective or expressivistic, like taste?

Can moral reasons satisfy the "practical requirement" with regard to morality?

> 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).[53]

Thomas Nagel takes "the realist position… that our responses try to reflect the evaluative truth and can be correct or incorrect by reference to it."[54] The case for the objectivity of practical reason is one Nagel has been polishing for decades.

It begans by observing that moral realism is our default view. Pre-reflectiviely, most of us have no objection to the seeming fact that some reasons for acting are good reasons, and others bad. Some primary normative facts, such as that is wrong torture animals have a very strong, "quasi-analytic" force to them.[55] If moral realism is a "defeasible presumption"[56] then the burden of proof lies with its opponents.

53. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 2.

54. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 98–99; cf. Thomas Nagel, "Ethics as an Autonomous Theoretical Subject," in *Morality as a Biological Phenomenon: The Pre-Suppositions of Socio-biological Research*, ed. Gunther S. (ed.) Stent (University of California Press, 1980), 196–205.

55. Cf. Richard N Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," *Contemporary Materialism*, 1988, 307, quoting Putnam

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

The alternative to moral realism is "subjectivism,"[57] which is placeholder term for expressivisms, quasi-realism, moral nihilism, constructivism, and any view that makes "evaluative and moral truth depend on our motivational dispositions and responses."[58]

Mackie value is subjective

John Mackie's classic essay argues that "there are no objective values" (13).[59] Mackie admits that "the main tradition of European moral philosophy" accepts objective moral values. He admits that moral thought and language assumes it. Appearances suggest that values are indeed part of the "fabric of the world"; that they are categorically obligating and motivating; and that being a moral person in part is constituted by the recognition and proper response to such values. The objectivity of (some) moral values is, in short, a "defeasible presumption."[60] In spite of all this, Mackie thinks it is possible and needful to debunk objective morality and to show that values are subjective. His two arguments aim to bear the burdon of proof on subjectivism. Values like goodness, rightness, wrongness, and also beauty or ugliness are "not part of the fabric of the world" (13). This claim has two parts. The ontological part is that objective values simply do not exist. Put differently, there is no "categorically imperative element" to moral oughts (15). There are no entities in the world such that I ought to do X or not do Y regardless of my desires, contingent wants and needs. The epistemological part is that, even if they did, our epistemic access to them would require the existence of a *sui generis* mysterious faculty of moral perception. Since no such faculty exists, we are justified in rejection the existence of objective values. Furthermore, disagreement about objective

57. Cf. John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin UK, 1977). Mackie's famous "Subjectivity of Values" concedes that objective values, such as the notion that pain is not just *something we avoid* but really *to be avoided*, is part of the mainstream of European moral philosophy. Nevertheless, he shoulders the heavy burdon of proof and attempts to given reason to think values are, after all, dependent on the subject.

58. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 98–99.

59. All page citations in this paper refer to Mackie's essay "The Subjectivity of Values" in Shafer-Landau and Cuneo (eds). *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology.* Blackwell, 2007. The original essay appears in Mackie, *Ethics*.

60. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*.

value and "queerness" of putatively objective values renders their existence less likely. It is more likely that *we* "objectify" our valuings onto the world by our thought and language. Hence, right and wrong are invented.

The first positive argument for Mackie's thesis is the argument from relativity (which I shall call the argument from disagreement). The argument from relativity or disagreement is this: moral codes vary between societies at a time and within a society across time. (For example, one society endorses polygamy, another condemns it; one society endorses human sacrifice, another condemns it; one endorses revenge killing, another condemns it.) An explanation of the wide variation and instability of these endorsements and condemnations, as well as the accompanying attitudes of approval, disgust, honor, is that there are no objective values at work. The moral code of a society is not a map of what is "really" morally lawful, but a map of that societies attitudes, endorsements, and condemnations. I will summarize Mackie's own discussion of the argument from relativity below.

Mackie provides one reply to the argument from relativity or disagreement: Perhaps varying moral codes "express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values" (18). (Call this the *Distorted Moral Perception* reply.) People and societies vary on evaluative matters in the same way and for the same reason that people and societies vary on scientific, historical, legal, and other matters. Perhaps the disagreements between people and societies — the varieties of moral codes — are similar to scientific or historical disagreements. Scientific disagreements arise between people offering different "speculative inferences or explanatory hypotheses based on inadequate evidence" (18). I think Mackie is suggesting that two people might dispute a particular point (is Pluto a planet?) because neither of them has fully accurate knowledge and both are doing the best they can with the available evidence, though future evidence may be forthcoming.

But the Distorted Moral Perception reply is, Mackie thinks, false. He denies that objective values are the kinds of entities about which more evidence may be forthcoming. The analogy to scientific or historical disagreements, then, does not hold.

Mackie is seriously misguided here. The argument from disagreement has been so often deployed and so widely misunderstood it is hard to know where to start.[61] There are two possible challenges, and I think both are justified.[62] The first is to deny that disagreement is so widespread as to be a massive problem for moral realism. The second is that even if there *were* widespread variation in moral codes between people and societies, that we should not necessarily take that as reason to be skeptical about moral values.

Let's take each of these challenges in turn. First, moral disagreement is not good reason to be skeptical about the objectivity moral values because such disagreement is saliently identical to scientific and philosophical disagreement; and scientific and philosophical disagreements are not good reason to be skeptical about scientific and philosophical realities. Therefore moral disagreement is not a good reason to be skeptical about moral realities. Let's call this the Scientific/Philosophical Disagreement Reply.

Mackie's reply is that scientific disputes are the result of speculation and (unlike moral ones) are subject to further empirical evidence. But this is not always true. Some scientific disputes will probably never be resolved with reference to new empirical data: what happened seconds before the Big Bang? What is the necessary and sufficient condition for a discipline to be considered a science?

The case of philosophical disagreement is even more clear. Some philosophical disputes certainly will never be resolved by adequate empirical evidence: Is idealism or empiricism or platonism true, or something else? The persistance of adherents to all three schools of thought for the last 2000 years (at least) shows that such disputes are ongoing and not likely to be resolved. The dilemma is that if ideological disagreement is evidence that there is no fact of the matter — no objective truth

61. David Enoch, "How Is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?" *The Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 1 (2009): 15–50. Enoch summarizes no less than ten possible interpretations of the inference from disagreement to moral anti-reaslim. Most of them are non-sequitors, some beg the question against realism, and some offer real challenges that can and have been met.

62. Richard Joyce, "Moral Anti-Realism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2015.

— then perhaps Mackie can use moral disagreement as evidence that there is no objective value. But if he allows, say, that platonism is false and empiricism true (despite the enduring existence of platonists), then he has to allow that (say) societies that endorse slavery are morally mistaken while those who reject it are accurately assessing the relevant objective values.

A further buttress to this reply is that moral disagreement is evidence that some values are objective. People don't argue over what is truly subjective and known to be so ("I feel sick." "No, you feel don't, you feel quite well!").[63] People only argue over what is objective and difficult to answer (like is the center of the earth liquid or solid?)

Second, moral disagreement is not as widespread as often assumed, Mackie himself offers an objection to the argument from relativity: perhaps some very broad moral principles *are* universally recognized. For example, isn't it universally recognized that (say) it is good to promote the general happiness? Perhaps these broad moral principles are agreed upon in a way that renders moral disagreement less puzzling and the existence of objective values more plausible. Call this the Moral Agreement reply.

I think the Moral Agreement reply is a serious problem for the would-be subjectivist. But Mackie's reasons for rejecting it are puzzling. First, he complains that arguing that broad, elevated moral principles are objective entails that specific, practical moral principles are contingent. He says, "if things had been otherwise, quite different sorts of actions would have been right" (19). What is the substance of this reply? It is eminently true that "if things had been otherwise, quite different sorts of actions would have been right" — if for instance humans could breath underwater, then waterboarding would not be wrong because it would not be torturous and therefore cruel. If Bob's society was communist then amassing capital for his own personal use would be selfish and illegal and therefore antisocial. These counterfactuals are just what we would predict if general moral principles reflected universal, objective values.

63. I borrow this cheeky example from Peter Kreeft. Cf. Peter Kreeft, *Summa Philosophica* (St. Augustine, 2012) Question 7, Article 1

Second, Mackie suggests that most people's moral lives and moral judgments do not actually operate by specifying "general principles." Rather, people seem to make moral judgments and live their moral lives according to certain "immediate responses" and "basic moral judgments".

Thankfully, Mackie does not spend too much time elaborating on this paper thin reply and moves on to the argument from queerness. We can concede the point. It is true that we make immediate responses more often than thoughtful moral judgments. What is that supposed to prove? For example, perhaps we hear a news story about a woman beating, scalding, suffocating, and finally murdering her children before storing their corpses in a freezer.[^3] That immediately strikes us as cruel, sick, degraded, disgusting, and wrong. Whether this response is the logical extension of a moral principle I reflectively endorse (such as "parents should care for their children") or merely a pre-reflectively, visceral attitude is irrelevant to whether the moral judgment accurately reflects the objective value of parental love.

A third point that makes the Moral Agreement Reply even stronger: Some moral codes (both general and specific) are well-nigh universal. For instance, the universal prohibition on incestuous relationships, the universal censure on immoderation (drunkenness or alcoholism are condemned in every society in the world), the universal approbation of justice and compassion, specifically caring for the poor, the abandoned, the orphans, and many more.[64] These moral laws are not general but rather specific; they are not parochial but appear in dramatically different cultures at all known historical periods. The best explanation for such widespread, profound moral agreement is that all parties are apprised of the same objective values.

The question of how to live, and of how to resolve pressing moral disputes and dramatic moral conundrums, is not easy. There are various answers. People disagree.

64. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: How Education Develops Man's Sense of Morality* (Macmillan, 1947), "Appendix I: Illustrations of the Tao." Lewis, a literary scholar, compiles a list of agreeing moral codes from a variety of ancient, medieval, and modern codes.

Anyone who has long engaged in dialectical disputes over the various answer to the normative question of how to live well eventually comes to ask a secondary question: is there even any truth to be found? Are there any 'right answers' in ethics? Is there anything to all this discussion besides gas? Some worry that ethics has no 'right answers' because it is all just intuition-pumping. Some people view ethics as too easy because it is only a discussion of one's opinion.

We must admit that normative ethical conclusions — whatever conclusions satisfy us at the end of a long philosophical discussion about what is good and right — are different from conclusions in paleontology, medicine, or calculus. What does the difference amount to? Why is ethics *as a discipline* so different from, say, natural sciences?

There are two sorts of interpretations of ethics as a discipline in light of the diversity of answers to the question about how to live well. The first is Hume's answer, that ethics is "easy" (while metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and philosophical anthropology are presumably difficult).

The second is Aristotle's, that ethics is *a different sort of science* because it has a *different subject matter* to which it must correspond. He says, "For a well schooled man is wanting searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits: is obviously just as foolish to accept arguments of probability from a mathematician has to demand strict demonstrations from an orator."[65]

By the traditional classification, ethics is a form of philosophy. Russ Shafer-Landau persuasively argues this simple equation in defense of moral realism[66] but the point has broader import. If ethics is *not* a species of philosophy, it is something else entirely. Perhaps it is a species of psychology, politics, or evolutionary anthrpology. Such a categorization assumes, at the outset, that power prevails over truth. But to concede that there are no right answers in ethics, that ethical philosophers have no hope of finding any ethical truth is to give up on ethics as a discipline.

So suppose ethics is a species of philosophy. The indirect answer is another question: Are

65. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.3.

66. Russ Shaffer-Landeau and Terence Cuneo, eds., *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 2007) ethics.

there 'right answers' in philosophy? Isn't the relation of philosophy in general to ethics in particular the relation of genus to species? This is the relation Russ Shafer-Landau argues for.[67] So the fate of ethical claims or ethical theories hangs on the fate of philosophical claims and theories as a whole. If we are philosophical optimists at all — if we are not total skeptics or nihilists — then we can be ethical optimists.

So what species of philosophy is ethics? If philosophy is its genus, what is its differentia? As I have been arguing, ethics is the discipline of practical reason. There are 'right answers' in ethics since there are right ways to live one's life, there are wells to live well and ways to live poorly; things can go well or badly for us. One of the fundamental governing assumptions of this work is that there is no special domain of the moral. Value theory is a whole package. There is at bottom no intelligible distinction between morality and prudence.

The second positive argument is the argument from queerness. The argument from queerness builds on the sense that "if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (19). Objective values would be esoterica, akin to non-natural qualities, Plato's transcendent Form of Good. They would be (like divine commands from heaven) authoritatively prescriptive yet empirically unverifiable. (Mackie is as poetic as possible in making the descriptive seem mundane and the prescriptive seem mystical.) What's more, their power of categorical commendation, of obligating us to act in certain ways irrespective of our desires, is utterly unique. The reasoning seems to be that we assume the world is a unified whole, and we know a lot about spatio-temporal, physical entities, include evolved animals like ourselves who are language-users, concept-users, and evaluators. We know that we are motivated by our desires, preferences, by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. So it seems more reasonable "To ask 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,

67. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

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."[68] It does not seem necessary to posit abstract, non-physical entities that have no intrinsic relation to our other psychological states such as our desires and approvals.

The famed argument from queerness Mackie calls "even more important… and certainly more generally applicable" than the argument from disagreement. I do not think it fares any better.

The first reply to the argument from queerness that Mackie considers is this: perhaps objective values are not so strange (in that they are like essences, numbers, substances, necessity and possibility, causation, etc.) even though they are *are* unlike descriptive facts. (Call this the Partners in Crime reply.)

But Mackie thinks the Partners in Crime reply would be ultimately impotent if we could show that we can "on empiricist foundations…we construct an account of the ideas and beliefs and knowledge that we have of all these matters" (19). He does not try here to construct such an account. But even if an empiricist foundation could *not* be given, he doubles down: that failure would tell *against* the existence of essences, numbers, and so on.

The success of the objection that objective values are not saliently different from other unobjectionable abstract entities or concepts like necessity or causation depends on the details. Russ Shafer-Landau[69], Terence Cuneo[70], David Enoch[71] have each recently provided these details and shown (though I shall not try to show it here) that indeed objective values are not any more objectionable than other kinds of abstract objects. For example, Cuneo argues that whatever "objectionable features" moral norms display are also displayed *inter alia* by epistemic norms. If Mackie is an 'epistemic skeptic' then he must deny the intrinsic, categorical, reason-giving force of such epistemic value judgments as *you ought to believe whatever proposition is supported by the best evidence.* But to deny such epistemic reasons is absurd.

68. Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford University Press, 1985).
69. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, 4 (Oxford University Press, 2003).
70. Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
71. Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*.

The epistemological part of the argument from queerness is that objective values, if they existed, would be known through an utterly unique and correspondingly queer faculty (19). He doesn't just mean they would be unverifiable empirically (that too). He means that it is difficult to imagine how something like Plato's Form of the Good could be such that "knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it… the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it" (20). But, Mackie thinks, Hume has successfully argued that reasons (instances of knowing that p) cannot be "reasons" (instances of motivating to act). The notion that values and disvalues intrinsically influence the will to pursue and avoid them postulates "value-features of quite a different order from anything else with which we are acquainted, and of a corresponding faculty with which to detect them" (20).

To further underscore the weirdness of objective value, Mackie poses the question of how we are to suppose moral qualities relate to natural facts. Even if we argue that the moral quality of wrongness "supervenes" on or "is entailed by" the natural facts (say, on the fact that the children are lighting the cat on fire), we deserve an account of the alleged supervenient or entailed quality. More likely than that we are able to "just see" the "wrongness" in the natural state of affairs, it seems more likely to Mackie that we are recognizing ordinary qualities such as that the action is socially condemned, and that we disprove.

The argument from queerness does not tell much — if at all — against the existence of objective moral standards. Mackie's argument has been called, and rightly so, an fallacy of the appeal to personal incredulity. The argument from personal incredulity has something of the form of "If on my assumptions or background beliefs p is hard for me to believe, then p is false." My (admittedly ironic) summary Mackie's allegedly "more important" goes like this: *To someone who shares my hidebound scientistic ideology, abstract objective values with intrinsically motivating features seem weird. Therefore, objective values don't exist.*

Now this reply is certainly too pugnacious. Mackie's argument is influential and expresses,

in compressed form, some widespread beliefs that he defends at greater length elsewhere, and that others defended. But it is true that objective values seem incommensurate with metaphysical naturalism, or physicalism, or scientism. My point is that if both parties express personal incredulity, the result is a philosophical stalemate. One who is firmly convinced of scientism might express (as Mackie does) a dismay at the possibility of objective value; but one who is firmly convinced of objective value might express dismay at the hypothesis of scientism. Absent further support for the belief that all of the universe is *nothing more* than a manifold of physical objects, these two are expressions of dismay are equally valid and therefore equally useless.

Christine Korsgaard offers a different substantive reply to the argument from queerness. She concedes that categorically-obligating entities are *different* from other entities, but denies the suggestion that they therefore do not exist. She says: "It's true that they are queer sorts of entities and that knowing them isn't like anything else. But that doesn't mean that they don't exist…. For it is the most familiar fact of human life that the world contains entities that can tell us what to do and make us do it. They are people, and the other animals."[72] This reply seems to me right.

Finally, Mark Timmons has clarified one part of Mackie's argument to be the worry that the supervenience of moral properties on non-moral properties (such as biological or psychological ones) is somehow mysterious.[73] In response, Russ Shafer-Landau has offered compelling arguments that such supervenience is no more or less objectionable than the supervenience of higher-order natural properties (like life) on lower-order natural properties (like certain cellular or molecular structures).[74] (Shafer-Landau also critiques the Humean theory of psychology that underlies part of Mackie's worry about queerness.[75])

In short, though the argument from queerness raises interesting and important questions,

72. Christine M Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166.

73. Mark Timmons, *Morality Without Foundations: A Defense of Ethical Contextualism* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

74. Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, chap. 4.

75. ibid., , chapter 5.

these questions do not amount to objections to the existence of objective value but rather they are invitations to investigate questions in metaphysics, psychology, and epistemology surrounding objective value.

Mackie's third argument depends for its force on the success of the other two. *If* and only if values are subjective, then the question "Why do we tend to objectify values?" is an interesting question. If values are not subjective, of course, then this question is fallacious, for it presupposes the conclusion it might be supposed to support (which is a *petitio principi*) and assumes that identifying the *origin* of a belief can disprove the belief (which is a genetic fallacy). If, however, values are objective, then the answer to the question "Why do we tend to project them on the world?" is "we don't."

Mackie clarifies that all the psychological activities of wanting, preferring, valuing, praising, blaming and so on are *subjective* in the sense that *subjects* perform them, but that to concede this is not does not entail that there are no objective values. Rather, even though *subjects* want, prefer, value, praise, and blame, it has been thought that subjects attempt to do so *in appropriate response to* objective values. Objective values so to speak obligate* certain responses (such as respect for elders, and hatred of evil) and categorically provide reason for certain actions (such as doing your duty or avoiding cruelty). It has been the "main tradition of European moral philosophy includes [the claim] that there are objective values of just the sort I have denied" (15).[76] These values are assumed or argued to exist as part of the "fabric of the world" and to be knowable.

Surprisingly, Mackie sets himself to subvert not only the "main tradition" of moral philosophy but to subvert that which has "a firm basis in ordinary thought, and even in the meanings of moral terms" (16). He admits that ordinary moral judgments and ordinary moral emotions (we might simply call them *ordinary emotions*) are only intelligible on the assumption that objective moral

76. The doctrine of objective value that is indeed widely assumed. C. S. Lewis puts this way: "This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike… is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are… I myself do not enjoy the society of small children: because I speak from within the Tao I recognize this as a defect in myself — just as a man may have to recognize that he is tone deaf or colour blind." Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*.

values exist. Confirmation comes from the admitted psychological cost of the denial of objective values, which is "an extreme emotional reaction, a feeling that nothing matters at all, that life has lost its purpose" (17). And confirmation seems to come from the cost of denying that our moral terms refer, which is the need to provide a comprehensive non-cognitivist or non-descriptivist theory of the pragmatics of moral talk (16). Mackie thinks the cost of these subversions, though high, ought to be paid.

Response from Nagel

According to Nagel, subjectivism derives what plausibility it has from two contentions, neither of which is enough to render it more plausible than realism: first, subjectivists contend that value judgments with objective purport are *really* just masks for subjective psychological states. Nagel concedes that some "pockets of… subjectivity" seem objective but can be "unmasked", such as grammar and etiquette.[77] However, we cannot justifiably explain these unmaskings by assuming that *all* seemingly objective judgments are *really* subjective. Instead, such unmaskings ought to be accommodated within an overall view of objectivity.

Second, subjectivists observe that our motives, attitudes, desires, approvals, and rationalizations are all simply features of our psychology. Nagel concedes that the psychological states are the *starting* point of practical reasoning. However, it is always in order to ask (a variation of Moore's Open Question): *Ought I be motivated by these psychological states?* Ethics begins with psychological states but then subjects these states "to examination, codification, questioning, criticism, and so on."

While Nagel allows that he has not *refuted* skepticism, nevertheless, the defeasible presumption of moral objectivity has not been dislodged. In a closing diatribe I find persuasive, he says:

> I remain convinced that pain is really bad, and not just something we hate, and that pleasure is really good, and not just something we like. That is just how they glaringly seem to me, however hard I try to imagine the contrary, and I suspect the same is true of most people… the scientific credentials of Darwinism… are not enough to

77. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 155.

> dislodge the immediate conviction that objectivity is not an illusion with respect to basic judgments of value.[78]

Many philosophers persist in denying the appearances. Their worry stems from a naturalistic commitment. As Simon Blackburn summarizes, natuarlism 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.[79]

I shall return to this objection below.

MacIntyre's solution to relativism and disagreement is to defend rational virtues.

V. Is Practical Reason Intersubjective/Culturally Relative, like Etiquette?

How do we keep reason objective but liberal, plural but not anarchic?

Although it seems that practical reason is universal and objective like logic; it is intersubjective like logic; nevertheless, it is objective; it can be universal across cultures and traditions. McDowell helps us to see that practical *reason is a form of reason.* The objectivity of one stands or falls with the objectivity of the other.

Consider a quotion from R. Jay Wallace explaining the distinct approach of constructivism about practical reason:

> constructivism (Korsgaard 1997, Street 2008, Street 2010). This approach denies that practical reason is a capacity for reflection about an objective domain of independent normative facts; but it equally rejects the expressivist's naturalistic suspicion of normativity. According to the constructivist, practical reason is governed by genuine normative constraints, but what makes these constraints normative is precisely their relation to the will of the agents whose decisions they govern. The principles of practical reason are constitutive principles of rational agency, binding on us insofar as we necessarily commit ourselves to complying with them in willing anything at all. The realm of the normative, on this approach, is not pictured as a body of

78. Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 110.
79. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*.

> truths or facts that are prior to and independent of the will; rather, it is taken to be 'constructed' by agents through their own volitional activity.[80]

MacIntyre's theory may be considered a kind of cultural constructivism. This poses for us the question of %

Relativity Criterion. Is practical rationality culturally relative? In other worse, although there is one human nature, expressed variously in different cultures, languages, customs, and thoughts – are we forced to give up on the idea of *one human rationality*, albeit expressed variously? Is there, at bottom, a plurality of *rationalities*?

Practical reason is supposed by some to resolve possible worries about cultural relativism with regard to virtue.

2. It seems to not be objective because it arises only in community.

Tradition-constituted rationality was supposed to explain why practices can vary between people and traditions that both claim to be rational and believe the rival to be irrational; the process of switching between traditions explains, from within a tradition, one can rationally adjudicate these disagreements. This is why *practical rationality* is so important for MacIntyre's theory of *virtue.*[81]

Nevertheless, worries about relativism may linger. For MacIntyre, virtues are relative to practices; practices are relative to traditions; traditions are relative to conceptions of rationality. His answer to this worry is, I believe, the crux of his whole theory of ethics. It appeals to two concepts that are, for him, intimately bound up with each other. The two concepts are practical reason and human nature. *Dependent Rational Animals* is the capstone to address lingering worries about relativism.

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80. Wallace, "Practical Reason," sec. 2.

81. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* treat rationality as the ground of ethical reasoning, while *After Virtue* and *Dependent Rational Animals* treat ethical reasoning as practical reasoning.

MacIntyre on Tradition-Constituted Reason

To solve the problem at the center of this labrynth, we shall turn to MacIntyre. Arguably, the primary theme of MacIntyre's work has not been virtue but practical rationality.[82] For MacIntyre – as for Bernard Williams[83] – morality should not be seen as a special domain of practical life but the whole practical domain.[84] But 'rationality' is something we are raised in, and is constituted by our tradition.

As we saw above, one of MacIntyre's enduring themes is that we all inhabit a "tradition." The concept is liable to fatal misunderstanding. I should be cutting off the Hydra's immortal head if I were to explain it here. What does it mean to assert that "we all inhabit a tradition"? Most trivially, it means each of us are embodied, live in a time, place, and social setting, and speak a given language.

More interestingly, it means that each of us (intellectuals at least) owe our conceptual resources to a tradition. What is a tradition? "A living tradition . . . is an historically extended, socially embodied argument…"[85]. The content of a tradition is partly self-reflexive: it is "… an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition." Traditions derive from a source text and continue across generations via normal sociological channels (schools, friendships, political institutions, etc.). So, by MacIntyre's lights, history-writing is a tradition. It is rooted in source texts such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Gibbon and extending through Europe and the western world, consisting of a series of historical and historiographical arguments over not just "what happened" but how to conduct historical enquiry.

As MacIntyre says, "We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point

82. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 60.

83. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Taylor & Francis, 2011) Chater 1.

84. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* treat rationality as the ground of ethical reasoning, while *After Virtue* and *Dependent Rational Animals* treat ethical reasoning as practical reasoning.

85. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of enquiry, extending the history of that enquiry into the present …"[86] The tradition of enquiry we inhabit gives us not only abstract standards of reasoning but also facts, connections, concepts, and the very language we speak. Rationality, for MacIntyre, is inclusive of all the resources by which we judge true and false. Rationality itself as tradition-constituted and tradition-constituting. The resources I receive from my tradition are resources I may prune, discard, modify, or add to. What tradition we are a part of makes a great deal of difference to how we conduct moral inquiry.

Tradition and rationality are bound up together. He discovered this 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."[87] 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.

In regards to relativism, tradition-constituted rationality was supposed to explain why practices can vary between people and traditions that both claim to be rational and believe the rival to be irrational; the process of switching between traditions explains, from within a tradition, one can rationally adjudicate these disagreements. This is why *practical rationality* is so important for Mac-

86. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 401.
87. Murphy, 118, quoting MacIntyre's master's thesis *The Significance of Moral Judgments* p. 73.

Intyre's theory of *virtue.* For MacIntyre, virtues are relative to practices; practices are relative to traditions; traditions are relative to conceptions of rationality. His answer to this worry is, I believe, the crux of his whole theory of ethics.

Rival traditions, rival rationalities

By presenting rationality and tradition as almost the same concept, MacIntyre both elevates the concept of tradition and threatens the concept of rationality. Since traditions vary, is there any way to avoid the conclusion that rationalities vary – and do so without hope of reconciliation?

MacIntyre's answer is that we can rationally adjudicate between traditions (from within a tradition). We can justify or "switch" from our primary tradition. The means we have of "switching" traditions are these: first, one undergoes an epistemological crisis in which one identifies the inadequacies of a primary tradition; and secondly, to "exercise… a capacity for philosophical imagination"[88] and identify the resources of a rival tradition. We must empathetically engage with our rivals as if we are learning a "second first language." He says:

> For each of us, therefore, the question now is: To what issues does that particular history bring us in contemporary debate? What resources does our particular tradition afford in this situation? Can we by means of those resources understand the achievements and successes, and the failures and sterilities, of rival traditions more adequately than their own adherents can? More adequately by our own standards? More adequately also by theirs? It is insofar as the histories narrated in this book lead on to answers to these questions that they also hold promise of answering the questions: Whose justice? Which rationality?"[89]

Three rival versions

MacIntyre picks up the theme of tradition-constituted rationality. His most thorough treatment of the theme of rival traditions is the (1990) Gifford Lectures.[90] There he presents 'genealogy,'

88. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* .

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

90. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

'encyclopedia', and a third version he simply calls 'tradition' but I will call 'Thomism.' These three rivals are defined by their respective attitudes toward the past. Genealogists (such as Nietzsche and Foucault) use the past to subvert and "debunk" the present. Stephen Lutz summarizes the three uses the "Nietzschean research program" has for history:

> (1) to reduce academic history to a projection of the concerns of modern historians, (2) to dissipate the identity of the historian into a collection of inherited cultural influences, and (3) to undermine the notion of "progress towards truth and reason" (3RV, pp. 49-50). In short, genealogy denies the teleology of human enquiry by denying (1) that historical enquiry has been fruitful, (2) that the enquiring person has a real identity, and (3) that enquiry has a real goal. MacIntyre finds this mode of enquiry incoherent.[91]

By contrast, encyclopedists use the present to denigrate and "debunk" the past. The encyclopedist par excellence is the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, about which one reviewer said:

> The *Britannica* represents the idea of an impersonal, universal, tradition-free conception of rational enquiry into morals, telling a story of the progress of reason in philosophy and the sciences through an appeal to timeless, universal principles of rationality. The encyclopedic tradition holds moral enquiry to be about an autonomous, distinct realm of human life, which can and must be understood solely in its own terms.

Genealogists think, in advance, that no one in the future will use the present as a foundation.Encyclopedists think, in advance, that no one in the future will ever be able to transcend the present; they think we have *arrived*. Now, modernity is an encyclopedic tradition. It was the tradition MacIntyre was raised in. It is the tradition I was raised in, as (I presume) were my readers. So, by MacIntyre's lights, we are "encyclopedists." Our source texts are Hume, Kant, Newton, Locke, and others. Ours is an argument extended through time and socially embedded in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and parts of western Europe.[92]

91. Christopher Lutz, "Alasdair MacIntyre" (Web; Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015).

92. Modernity has political, scientific, religious, and philosophical aspects; it is indeed *encyclopedic*. The intellectual tradition of modernity arises alongside the rise of the modern state. We do

MacIntyre followed his own advice. As a member of the modern tradition, he reflected on it. He gradually discovered its inadequacies and searched for resources from his rivals. His attempt to trace the root of the mistake about moral judgments lead him to a mistake at the heart of Enlightenment modernity. As a social, political, and moral project, the Enlightenment has been, MacIntyre argues, a failure by its own standards. Not only is moral discourse largely devoted to moral disagreement, but it is largely soaked in despair of ever reaching agreement. Moral discourse with its interminable moral disagreement retains the rhetorical *trappings* of rationality and objectivity while denying rationality and objectivity. Neither side wants to give up the *appearance* of having a dialectical case for its value theory. One of his most memorable and oft-cited images compares modern moral discourse to the hypothetical state of scientific discourse in a post-apocalyptic catastrophe. Only decaying fragments of intelligible moral discourse survive.[93] The picture here captures the state of moral discourse. But an obvious symptom of the decay of moral discourse and social unity is interminable ethical disagreement.[94] An explanation of this disagreement is that we are trying to get by using the scraps of a previous and whole moral tradition. MacIntyre thinks this version of rational enquiry, like genealogy, incoherent by its own standards. Nevertheless "it still exercises

well to remember that almost all the luminaries of Enlightenment philosophy also wrote on politics: Mill's ethical writings are almost always written with an eye to reforming civil law; Kant wrote the three *Critiques* but also the *Perpetual Peace*; John Locke wrote about perception and understanding but also treatises on government.

93. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1: "Imagine that the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe…Widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all that they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance… all these fragments are reembodied in a set of practices which go under the revived names of physics, chemistry and biology. Adults argue with each other about the respective merits of relativity theory, evolutionary theory and phlogiston theory, although they possess only a very partial knowledge of each. Children learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid. Nobody, or almost nobody, realizes that what they are doing is not natural science in any proper sense at all."

94. Ibid., 6.

an extraordinary influence on contemporary thought and on university curricula."[95] The problem with modernity is not merely academic. The social and political fabric is woven from the thread of morality, so many of the ills of modern life can be traced to our inability to share a substantive conception of the good and the good life.

There are many modern philosophers who have gone into similar crises and become distrustful thought, language, and rationality itself; they join the "masters of suspicion."[96] MacIntyre took a surprising course. Moved by Thomas Kuhn's influential work on the structure of revolution between various paradigms in the natural sciences[97] he speculated that a similar structure might obtain in moral revolutions?[98] This in turn lead MacIntyre to recover the tradition of virtues. But virtues are not free-floating moral concepts; they are embedded in a specific, living, moral tradition – the Aristotelian tradition. And the Aristotelian tradition includes a particular notion of practical rationality.

Is tradition-constituted rationality coherent?

First, is MacIntyre's concept of tradition-constituted rationality even coherent? Suppose some traditions are truly incommensurable to each other, and that MacIntyre himself is truly situated within a tradition. It follows it is not possible to write a book (like *After Virtue*?) from a universal, objective, view-from-nowhere. But MacIntyre wrote such books and defending such theories. This amounts to a performative contradiction.

95. Terry Pinkard, "Review of Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry, by Alasdair MacIntyre," *Ethics* 102, no. 1 (1991): 162–64.

96. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. D (Savage (Yale University Press, 1970). "Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzche, and Freud."

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

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

MacIntyre would have us believe that 'rationality' is not a disembodied set of timeless and universal procedures of thinking. My rationality includes whatever standards of reasoning I accept, and all the other resources (facts, authorities, memories) I use to judge true and false. I already responded to worries presented above about whether rationalities are ultimately incommensurable. The fact that people can, and do, identify inconsistencies with their own tradition, identify the resources of rival traditions, and switch traditions.

Even after clarifying MacIntyre's optimism about the possibility of ethical truth, his answer to relativism is sufficient but still somehow indeterminate. This indeterminacy is partly due, as I have suggested, to his appeal to practical rationality. While this appeal seems to me to solve some problems, there is one lingering problem it does not solve. From my perspective (or my tradition), *every legitimate tradition* affirms the law of non-contradiction. But that is just to say that if Walt Whitman or Nagarjuna denies the law of non contradiction, then I will necessarily judge them to be irrational.[99] But I wish to go further and say that this strand of Buddhism *really is irrational*. That is, I wish to affirm that they are irrational – full stop. I am not sure MacIntyre's theory allows me to affirm that. Unless I am missing something crucial here, this seems to me a limitation of the theory.

Perhaps a qualified acceptance of MacIntyre's claim about tradition-constituted rationality is that when a tradition does not *seem* share this standard of rationality (the value of logical consistency) I should not be too quick to judge that I have really understood their meaning. Perhaps when I ask them if they affirm (S is P and S is not P) they have a slightly different concept in mind for "not" or for "and." Or perhaps they are speaking of an entity instantiating a property and not instantiating that same property at the same time but in ever so slightly different respects. Walt Whitman may be saying he contradicts himself in ever so slightly different respects in order to grasp

99. Laurence R. Horn, "Contradiction," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2014, 2014. "Do I contradict myself? / Very well, then, I contradict myself. / (I am large, I contain multitudes.) (Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself');"Everything is real and not real. / Both real and not real. / Neither real nor not real. / That is Lord Buddha's teaching." (Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā 18:8), quoted in Garfield (1995: 102).

apparently paradoxical truths that can be predicated of a transcendental modern man. Or perhaps they are denying both P and not P in favor of some other, different articulation of the predicates a given subject instantiates. In the case of any of these alternatives, the principle of charity recommends I extend my interlocutor the benefit of the doubt before concluding that the appearance of irrationality reflects real irrationality.

Is tradition-constituted rationality clear?

Even if his concept is coherent, is it *clear* enough to be an indispensable feature of an ethical theory? What constitutes a tradition? MacIntyre's examples sometimes lead us to believe that a tradition can be anything from a religion (Judaism) to a discipline (moral inquiry) to a philosophical school (Thomism).

What exactly is a tradition? MacIntyre's account is not clear. John Haldane (among others) questions MacIntyre's ability coherently to identify what a tradition is. What is tradition A? How do we differentiate it from B? Are two traditions separate and hence identifiable only if they are *incommensurable*? How much difference constitutes separation? How much overlap is compatible with difference? Jewish and Christian traditions share a common origin and bear considerable overlap in authorities, scriptures, and doctrines.

MacIntyre's definition makes answering these questions difficult. He characterizes a tradition as "separate and unified when its members or texts have a core set of shared commitments to beliefs, when the tradition is situated in a particular context in a particular set of institutions and when the tradition has an identifiable linguistic difference when compared to other traditions."[100] But is there any universal procedure for identifying such linguistic and institutional differences?

The right response to this call for clarification, I think, comes from Weinstein. We should not expect, by MacIntyre's lights, that there is an automatically objective, view-from-nowhere by which we can define tradition itself. Rather, MacIntyre concludes that "the concept of a tradition,

100. Weinstein, *On MacIntyre*, 83.

together with the criteria for its use and application, is itself one developed from within one particular tradition-based standpoint. This does not preclude its application to the very tradition within which it was developed."[101] MacIntyre grants that his self-definition of his own tradition arises, in part, from his criteria of that tradition. Traditions change over time. They progress (according to their own unchanging standards) toward unchanging goals or else they abandon old standards. This is liable to frustrate some readers. But the alternative is worse. The alternative is a denial of pluralism that liberalism holds dear. For it is intellectual imperialism to assume that I have the *real* scoop on every other tradition. It assumes I have the right to define and critique all other traditions *in my own terms.* Even though MacIntyre thinks his own tradition correct, and others incorrect, this is not imperialistic. For he is willing to reflect on his own tradition, examine its resources and inadequacies, and engage through philosophical imagination with rivals.

In short, by MacIntyre's lights he does not need a definition of tradition that is any more cut and dry than it is. Forcefully to disagree with this conclusion requires his interlocutor to produce an alternative theory of practical rationality. But that alternative will either aim to be *not* tradition-constituted but universal (which is the encyclopedic tradition) or it will admit is tradition-constituted but the "best so far" (which is MacIntyre's own view).

We can think of this worry about MacIntyre's theory more generally as a problem of thinking about thinking. MacIntyre is a theorist of virtue and practical rationality. Hence rationally to assess his theory requires thinking through our own theory of rationality. The errors we make in *thinking things through* are not likely to be solved by *thinking them through*. The Greek proverb is: "If water chokes us, what shall we drink?" The Latin proverb (from a very different context) is "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" — who will guard the guards themselves? I believe the answer to the rhetorical question is *no one at all* can guard the guards; if water chokes us, there is *nothing at all we can drink to wash it down*. Likewise, if something is deeply wrong with the way we think, how can theorizing about rationality

101. John Horton and Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 295.

right the wrong?

Some of the errors MacIntyre diagnoses in thinkers who belong to encyclopedic tradition will be invisible to those thinkers unless they themselves earnestly examine the problems of the tradition. Even if MacIntyre's diagnosis is *correct* – especially if it is correct – the readers who especially need to hear it will find the diagnosis unintelligible, even irrational. Insofar as the "patient" finds any parts of his theory intelligible, they will seem radical, disastrous in their social implications, and destructive of the very nature and purpose of education. The reason these appearances will be insuperable to MacIntyre's patient is because the patient is, by his lights, self-deceived. He or she simply denies being part of a tradition, and hence denies having a particular (rather than universal) tradition-bound conception of rationality, and hence denies having a particular, tradition-bound conception of the good (perhaps the good is unbounded freedom to follow the moral law, or to pursue happiness,, and justice unfettered equality). Modernity is the "tradition-less tradition" and hence *must* deny tradition to be consistent with itself.

The solution to this paradox is not to browbeat people into admitting that they inhabit a tradition. Rather, he directs the arguments (of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) and others at interlocutors who are already undergoing epistemological crisis. This "patient" comes to MacIntyre with manifesting symptoms. MacIntyre offers one possible diagnosis, and the patient's job is to investigate further. The patient needs philosophical imagination to even *consider* the possibility of another truth. The patient needs patience, intellectual courage, and self-reflection. The patient needs to sit in front of the proverbial mirror and mouth the words, (a) "I am part of a tradition" and (b) "my tradition might be inadequate," and (c) "that other tradition might have the resources more adequately to address the intellectual and practical problems that I now see are insuperable to my tradition." The critic who would escape the battery is more likely to flee rather than engage; but the critic who would escape by engaging and overcoming is liable to meet her match.

Is tradition-constituted rationality relativistic?

Once the concept of tradition is clarified, how can MacIntyre avoid the charge of relativism at this level? According to MacIntyre's account, members of traditions can leave their primary tradition after undergoing an epistemological crisis. Remember that varying traditions can disagree about a proposition P. Perhaps tradition A finds P true and B finds it false, on best evidence and sufficient reflection. But incommensurable traditions disagree about the standards (say, S1 and S2) by which to judge the truth and even the rationality of other traditions. So A finds P true and rational (by S1) while B finds P false and irrational (by S2). They genuinely disagree. And A judges B to be irrational (since they deny that P) while B returns the favor (since A affirms that P).

Let's put these abstractions into an example. Consider Annabelle. Annabelle is a member of tradition A. Suppose that by A's standards of rationality, S1 contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense. And suppose that A teaches that P. Finally, suppose that P entails both (Q and ~Q). Annabelle discovers a problem with her tradition. She cannot deny P nor can she affirm the contradiction. After some searching about, she concludes she cannot solve the problem and cannot even discover the rational resources with which to solve them. Being passingly familiar with tradition B, she becomes curious why her friends who belong to that tradition deny P and exercises her philosophical imagination to begin to see B "from within." Tradition B is compelling, since it denies that P. She "converts" traditions. However, there is a problem with tradition B, and that is that the standard of rationality of B (S2) allows its adherents to affirm a contradiction. So now, even though Annabelle left A to avoid having to affirm a contradiction (by her standard of rationality S1) now that she has joined B she no longer sees it as irrational to affirm the contradiction (by her new standard of rationality S2). This is surely an odd conclusion.

A second variation on the same problem is this: how would a born-and-raised member of tradition B, affirming S2, ever come to epistemological crisis? Discontentment with contradictions is not available to B members *ex hypothesi*. They do not see affirming a contradiction as irrational.

Their tradition can bear a hundred instances of (Q and ~Q).

The odd conclusion of this thought experiment is a dilemma: either such nonsense is possible, or embracing the law of non-contradiction is a universal standard of rationality in every tradition. The latter option seems to indicate that traditions A and B are *not* actually incommensurable, since they share one rather substantial presupposition. The flow of members from one to the other is intelligible. The former option allows A and B to be incommensurable, but seems to freeze members in their own tradition. Members of A would have no (rational) justification for joining B, while members of B would have no (rational) justification for leaving B. So either all traditions are the same (in which case MacIntyre's definition is unclear) or some people are in principle locked in their own tradition (in which case one kind of relativism is final).

While "tradition" and "tradition-constituted rationality" were supposed to solve the conundrums MacIntyre faced, the cure may have been worse than the disease.

MacIntyre's denial of relativism boils down to two claims: the first is that even enquirers situated within a tradition can achieve *truth*, because truth is distinct from *rationality*; the second claim, which is related, is that enquirers can overcome the rational limitations of their tradition.

MacIntyre accepts – indeed, argues for – a certain truth within relativism. That truth is that every enquirer seeks the conclusion of the enquiry at a particular time and place, within a particular social setting, within a language, and within a tradition. Following Lutz, we can say that MacIntyre accepts "relativity". Relativity (a term borrowed from Michael Krausz[102]) is a thesis about *the condition of enquiry.* It is not a thesis about the *conclusion of enquiry.* Lutz approves of Mark Colby's statement that "argumentative situatedness is inescapable."[103] However such relative situatedness is compatible with objective or absolute or mind-independent or tradition-independent *truth.*

Returning to Rorty's claim, we can say that MacIntyre agrees that "nothing can be said about… rationality" except what is taken as rational in a given society and tradition; where he

102. Michael Krausz, "Relativism and Foundationalism: Some Distinctions and Strategies," *The Monist*, 1984, 395–404.

103. Christopher Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Lexington Books, 2004), 89.

disagrees is in equating rationality with *truth.* From the historically- and socially-situated position of enquiry, a philosopher (he argues) may indeed find truth. It is impossible to achieve objective or absolute or tradition-independent *rationality* but it is possible – indeed, it is the hope and telos of enquiry – to achieve objective *truth.* This may seem a paradox.

The primary kind of truth we seek in enquiry is "the adequation of the mind to reality."[104] This is the understanding of truth inherent in the Aristotelian tradition.[105] Aristotle says, "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."[106] Aquinas calls this the adequation of the intellect to the object.

However, 'truth' is ambiguous across at least two senses: a metaphysical, substantive sense and an epistemological, logical sense. The metaphysical sense of truth is simply reality. "Truth" is being itself. The logical sense of truth (which MacIntyre alludes to here) is the adequation of the intellect to those beings. Logical "truth" is knowing the (metaphysical) truth.[107]

If we understand MacIntyre to be arguing or assuming that (logical) truth is adequation of mind to reality, we can make sense of his endorsement of "relativity". Rationality is something more pragmatic than truth, something more like "warranted assertability."[108] That is, the theories

104. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1200 Q.16 and *De Veritate* Q.1, A.1-3. "Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus."

105. On the correspondence theory of truth, Marian David says: "The main positive argument given by advocates of the correspondence theory of truth is its obviousness. Descartes: 'I have never had any doubts about truth, because it seems a notion so transcendentally clear that nobody can be ignorant of it…the word "truth", in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object' (1639, AT II 597). Even philosophers whose overall views may well lead one to expect otherwise tend to agree. Kant: 'The nominal definition of truth, that it is the agreement of [a cognition] with its object, is assumed as granted' (1787, B82). William James: 'Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their "agreement", as falsity means their disagreement, with "reality" ' (1907, p. 96). Indeed, The Oxford English Dictionary tells us:"Truth, n. Conformity with fact; agreement with reality"".

106. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Metaphysics* 1011b25.

107. The third semantic sense of 'truth' would, naturally, be the accurate relation between the content of one's assertions and the beings about which one is making assertions. Semantic "truth" would be veridical statements about the metaphysical truth.

108. John Dewey, "Propositions, Warranted Assertibility, and Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1941, 169.

we rationally construct are, for us, the "best theory so far."[109] It is no contradiction or paradox to assert that our rationality is the best thus far but that others in the future (or the past, or in rival traditions) might be *closer* to the truth.

The second point is that enquirers from within various traditions can (and often do) come to realize that their tradition is incoherent by its own standards and from this epistemological crisis come to find the resources of a rival tradition superior to their own; Aristotelian (and specifically Thomist) moral enquiry is, he argues, more rationally justified than encyclopedic or genealogical enquiry *by their standards* and *by its own standards*.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes (one iteration) of the charge of relativism. The truth can be known from within the confines of our tradition and perspective. This answer, of course, puts pressure on his definition of "tradition." We shall return to this concern below.

Another worry about relativism was this: Are there evil practices? If so, it seemed that MacIntyre's theory would allow "virtues" to serve wicked ends. The rebuttal to this charge depends on the unity of virtue.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre explicitly retracts his earlier belief that virtues exist without a unity under prudence.[110] The consequences of this retraction, Lutz argues, are crucial to refuting the charge of relativism. If virtues are unified, then even though virtues exist only in the context of practices, "no genuine practice can be inherently evil."[111] Rather, practical reason can judge *apparent goods* as genuine goods. The qualities needed for achieving the spurious goods internal to that "practice" would not be virtues but only *apparent virtues*.

Now, such a definition certainly seems ad hoc. But Lutz provides a persuasive illustration: eugenics. Eugenics certainly seems to bear the markings of a genuine practice. Its apparent good is the purification of the gene pool for future generations. However, genuine virtues militate *against* the achievement of that goal. For example, Lutz cites a story of a doctor who had the virtue of com-

109. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*
110. Ibid. preface, p. x.
111. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 102.

passion found himself unable to pursue the program of euthanizing mentally-disabled children.[112] We might also recall Huck Finn's internal struggle with his "conscience" in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck decides to turn Jim in to the slave owners. He writes a letter outing Jim, and says: "I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now." Yet for all that, after vividly confronting Jim's humanity and goodness, he feels the loyalty of their friendship and wavers:

> It was a difficult situation. I picked up the letter, and held it in my hand. I was trembling, because I knew had to make a choice between two things, and the outcome of my decision would last forever. I thought about it a minute while I held my breath. And then I said to myself: "All right, then, I'll GO to hell"—and tore it up.[113]

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

Some might worry that the distinction between apparent goods and actual goods brings with it more problems than it solves. It is certainly a distinction that leaves many questions unanswered. My first reply is that such a distinction is inevitable and necessary in our practical reasoning. Assume for a reductio that "there is no real distinction between apparent and real goods." Then either *nothing* is "actually good" (everything that appears good is just an apparent good) or that *nothing* is "actually

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

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

bad though it appears good" (everything that appears good is a real good). But I take it as axiomatic and irrefutable that some things are actually good (life, pleasure, happiness, friendship). And some things that appear good are not good: obeying unjust laws, enjoying the misfortune of an enemy, etc. Therefore there is a real distinction between apparent and real goods.

A second reply, however, requires conceding that MacIntyre's theory leaves us unsatisfied. That is, it might be that the unsatisfying aspects of his theory track those aspects of morality that are unsatisfying. The admitted indeterminacy of MacIntyre's account reflects the real indeterminacy of our moral lives. Consider two phenomena: some individuals and cultures persist in behaviors (that I believe) are wicked and unjustifiable – slavery, child prostitution, ritual human sacrifice, or what have you. It needs to be explained, from within my tradition, how it could be that otherwise decent and normal human beings could persist in such vileness. The other phenomena is this: some individuals and cultures repent and change (what I believe are) their wicked ways. Some make moral progress. The paradox is that while we cannot expect magical linear moral progression from wicked to good everywhere, neither can we despair of any person or culture making moral progress. It just seems a brute datum of observation that some are stubbornly stuck in their wicked ways, and some are admirably firm in their benevolent resolve. How do we explain this paradoxical phenomenon?

MacIntyre's account offers an explanation of why vices sometimes persist within pseudo-practices, institutions, and traditions from generation to generation; on the other hand, it explains why practice-enabling virtues sometimes emerge to disrupt a pseudo-practice, a wicked institution, and a corrupt or at least incomplete tradition. The fact is that "many kinds of activities can be, and in fact are considered to be, practices. Some of these may conflict radically, owing to errors and insufficiencies in rationality."[114] Errors in rationality explain errors in traditions and hence false ascriptions of the title 'virtue.' Rationality answers to truth, to the world as it is, not merely to the pragmatic truth to "dialectical success."[115] Hence, virtues answer to *what is really good*. They do not

114. Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre*, 103.
115. Ibid., 104.

merely answer to "what-counts-as-good-for-us", which property is relative to each tradition.

In this way, MacIntyre escapes this iteration of the charge of relativism, while still explaining why rival traditions differ – and sometimes radically differ – in their evaluations and opinions. Incomplete traditions can, and do, undergo crisis. Particular persons within that tradition discover and asseverate on inadequacies within the tradition, leading to an epistemological crisis. In response, others within the same tradition may become willing to examine the resources of rival traditions and either quit their primary tradition or re-fashion it, re-make it, update it, and make real moral and intellectual progress.

A third reply is in order here. D'andrea[116] points out a critique Philippa Foot has leveled against MacIntyre: after all the informative and wide-ranging historical analysis, MacIntyre's account does not solve the "problem posed by Plato, and never solved … that of showing the rationality, for any man, of a thorough-going acceptance of the restraints of justice."[117] The challenge of a Nietzsche or Callicles or Thrasymachus lies in their acceptance that the good life for humans *requires* some virtues or requires virtue in some sense but their rejection of the "robust concept of justice with its corresponding constraints on action."[118]

One response is this: the question "why be moral?" is never asked in the abstract. For example, in describing the "self of the heroic age" MacIntyre says, "In heroic society there is no 'outside' except that of the stranger. A man who tried to withdraw himself from his given position in heroic society would be engaged in the enterprise of trying to make himself disappear."[119] Even though virtues in twenty-first century North America are not what the same as Homer's day, there is a parallel to be drawn.

Philosophers often ask "why be moral?" hypothetically. They ask it *as if* speaking on the

116. Thomas D D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006).

117. Philippa Foot, "Review of After Virtue," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1981, 1 097. This is the "problem of immoralism" she tries to address in the final chapter of her *Natural Goodness*.

118. D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue*, 430.

119. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 126.

skeptic's behalf, or as if *they* were skeptics. But hypothetical moral skeptics will not do. We must consider a concrete character, real or fictional. Once we look for a real or fictional skeptic, a problem arises. By MacIntyre's lights, sincere "why be moral?" skeptics are political or social outcasts. For millions of people who are full-fledged members of their tradition, the "why be moral?" question will not usually arise. Parents, teachers, religious leaders, politicians, businesses, and non-profit organizations all have a hand in giving each member of the community the tradition out of which the community arises and within which abstract philosophical or pseudo-philosophical worries such as "What does it all mean?" do not arise because they are satisfactorily answered.

By contrast, the emergence of the doubt as to whether one should be moral, and the crystallization of the doubt into an articulate challenge, is *a political failure*. The *polis* to which the moral skeptic belongs has failed him. The moral skeptic, likewise, has failed the *polis* which belongs to him or her. So MacIntyre's theory makes room for people who are not actually skeptical (to whom an answer to Foot's challenge is not required) and people who are actually skeptical but do not belong to their society (to whom an answer to Foot's challenge would be meaningless).

MacIntyre's theory makes room for one more group: moral skeptics *are* members of their own tradition but are seeing the problems within their own tradition and who are troubled by a "border tradition". This type of skeptic sees the resources of a rival tradition and compares such favorably with the resources of his own tradition. The skeptic is, in a word, entering epistemological crisis.

Specifically, it might be that the moral skeptic has been raised outside of the Aristotelian tradition and is noticing the inadequacies of his or her own tradition, and is entering epistemological crisis. MacIntyre's response is to invite him or her to do the hard work of resolving that crisis by examining, from within the context of a primary tradition *and* a "second first" tradition, the problems at hand and the available solutions, working toward an ever greater understanding of the truth.

In short, MacIntyre's theory gives an account of two contradictory phenomena. It explains

how a moral skeptic might arise within a community and how that skeptic might be moved to a more adequate grasp of the truth; and it explains why, in healthy, unified, moral societies, *so few people become moral skeptics*.

Conclusion Draft 1

Human beings need oxygen and food by nature. These are biological necessities. Biologically, we are animals evolved from simpler animals.[120] But we are also social and practical-reasoning animals by nature. Our advanced practical reasoning sets us apart. We have the burden and responsibility to set the course for our own lives, and to care for the dependent among us who are not yet practical reasoners, who are temporarily disabled, or who are permanently infirm. Any tradition that does not do justice to these realities will be defective. Any practices that militate against our distinctively human life are bad practices. Whatever virtues are included on the list had better not exclude virtues that make human life possible; it had better not exclude (as Aristotle did) women and manual workers from the very possibility of developing virtues. Tradition and rationality are not ultimately at the mercy of perspective but can be rationally adjudicated.

MacIntyre thinks that "human beings need the virtues" because they are intrinsically good and useful for transforming communities and persons.[121] He began by defining virtue in reference to practice. But moral enquiry itself is a practice that takes place within a tradition. At the practical level of daily life, a small community (such as a family or town or university) does well to organize themselves around a common vision of what is good and a common conception of what qualities will help everyone to attain that good. It can and should be undertaken by regular folk, not just specialists in philosophy. And the goal of such enquiry is discovering what is really admirable and pursuing it, becoming more admirable moral agents through the acquisition of virtues. Virtues are acquired traits that enable the achievement of goods internal to the practices, those traits that sustain

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

121. Ibid.

traditions, and those traits by which we overcome perennial temptations to lead lives that are divided, deviant, or contrary to our true nature. Furthermore, at the theoretical level of philosophical ethics, the concepts of virtue, practical wisdom, and happiness supply for moral theory what many modern moralities have not: a clear, coherent, useful, and justifiable theory that grounds a rational pursuit of the good life and resolvable moral disagreements.

Other objections I may or may not touch on

What about *akrasia*?

What is foolishness?

VI. Is practical reason natural?

This question ought not to be ignored.

Although it seems practical reason is not natural, it is part of human nature (whether as endemic to human *nature*, not merely second nature, not necessarily supernatural, but primary nature because primary nature is logical or rational will be addressed later). Christopher Toner provides at least the outline of a goo danswer.

VII. Rationality/Nature Criterion

Rationality/Nature Criterion. What is the relationship between reasons for action and nature? Or are reasons only "in here" in us, psychological and rational, in which case humans are not natural? Or are reasons for acting "out there" in the world, not physical and not natural, in which case nature is normative? If so, is this naturalism? Is this view objective idealism?

> "Whether or not we accept a consequentialist framework, questions in the theory of value would seem to be an important focus for practical reflection. Many philosophers are attracted to the idea that reasons for action are ultimately provided by the values that can be realized through action (Raz 1999). If this is right, and if we assume as well a realist or at least non-subjectivist conception of value, then a different

> way of thinking about the task of practical reason comes into view. This may be thought of not primarily as a matter of maximizing the satisfaction of the agent's given ends, nor of specifying ends that are still inchoate, but rather as the task of mapping the landscape of value."[122]

Morality has provided an especially fertile source of examples and problems for the theory of practical reason. A defining question of moral philosophy is the question of the rational authority of moral norms: to what extent, and under what conditions, do people have compelling reasons to comply with the demands of conventional morality? (Alternatively: to what extent, and under what conditions, are people rationally required to comply with those demands?) R. Jay Wallace, "Practical Reason"

'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions' (Hume 1978, 415).

The first reason, argued above, is that rationality in part defines our nature. We are animals of a particular sort: practical, rational animals. We identify ourselves (scientifically, philosophically, religiously, anthropologically, psychologically) as creatures normally capable of language, abstract thought, argumentation, mathematics, philosophy, natural science, and so on.

A second reason is that we are not merely rational but also practical: we *practice*. One can conceive of rational creatures (gods, martians, angelic intelligences, artificial intelligences) that are not also "practical" creatures – that do not practice anything. Douglas Adams's computer character Deep Thought is a *knower* with nothing to do.

A third reason is, also alluded to, is that practical wisdom provides a needed corrective not only to folly but even to the possible excesses or misapplications of other virtues. The negative version of the same reason is the intuitive claim that (practical) folly has the potential to ruin otherwise admirable lives.

A fourth, and potentially confusing, reason is that practical wisdom is both a "moral virtue" and an "intellectual virtue". As Foot points out, out of the four Greek cardinal virtues (moderation, courage, justice, practical wisdom) only justice is obviously "moral" in our usual sense of "other-regarding" traits. Moderation, courage, and practical wisdom more smoothly fit into the "self-

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

regarding" category; practical wisdom fits most smoothly of all into the category of virtues of mind. While there is a growing branch of intellectual virtue ethics within the budding virtue ethics tree, practical wisdom seems to partake of both qualities. The dual nature of practical wisdom is likely to be even easier to misunderstand than other traditional virtues.